

TROUBLING “ACCESS”:
RHETORICAL CARTOGRAPHIES OF FOOD (IN)JUSTICE AND GENTRIFICATION

by

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Troubling “Access”: Rhetorical Cartographies of Food (In)Justice and Gentrification

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the rhetorical and spatiotemporal relationships between food politics and gentrification in the contemporary U.S. developing city foodscape. Specifically, I explore a seemingly innocent, yet incredibly powerful key term for the food movement today: “access.” The concern over adequate food access for the food insecure has become a national conversation, as everyone from governments to corporations, non-profits to grassroots advocates, have organized interventions to bring healthy food to those most in need. In rapidly developing cities, however, these politics have become particularly complicated, as new food amenities often index or contribute to gentrification, including the displacement of the very people supposedly targeted for increased food access. Often mobilized through discursive frames of deficit—the “food desert,” the “nutritional wasteland,” the “unhealthy” body, or the “blighted” neighborhood—many food policy interventions discursively construct scarce space and, therefore, conclude the solution is that these spaces need to be filled with food amenities (stores, markets, and more). The trouble, however, is in articulations of *food access*, legacies of ecological, colonial, racial, and class-based inequity are smoothed over in favor of a future that may not include many long-time residents. Further, the voices of marginalized communities most impacted, too often, are ignored. My analysis traverses relations between national, municipal, and grassroots interventions, focusing more specifically on development and environmental (in)justice in northeast Denver, Colorado. I utilize mixed-methods—including textual analysis of food access maps, public policy, and media, as well as rhetorical field methods through

participant observation and interviews—to trace discursive articulations of “access” and the imaginative politics of food systems change. Drawing on an interdisciplinary cultural studies perspective, my analysis is situated at the juncture in which U.S. food politics and gentrification collide. In addition to critiquing dominant food movement discourses, I also identify counterhegemonic organizing that resists food gentrification through constituting a relational, intersectional food justice movement. Their advocacy critically interrupts dominant discourses to organize around abundance, fosters fusion between issues and experiences of violence to hear a wider range of voices, and remaps the city in the hopes of creating a more just food future.

DEDICATION

For the food insecure and the dispossessed. For those who nourish regenerative relationships and build community power in the face of exclusionary development and environmental injustice.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction: Troubling Food “Access” in the Gentrifying City	
	Communicating Food Systems	15
	Food in Communication Studies	16
	Articulating Food and Justice	21
	Food and Environmental Justice	24
	Food and (In)Justice	26
	The Spatial Politics of Food	29
	Foodways and Foodscapes	31
	Gentrification and Racialized Green Space	36
	Voice, Food, and Politics	46
	Voice and Voicelessness	46
	My Voice	49
	“Access” as a Food Movement Key Term	53
	Methodology: Conjunctures and Rhetorical Cartographies	57
	Chapter Map	65
II.	Maps, Metaphors, and the Infrastructures of Food “Access”	69
	Contextualizing the Crisis of Food “Access”	77
	Food Access Map	84
	Iconic Codes and the Metaphors We Map By	91
	Metaphors and Territorializing	93
	Wor(l)ds, Maps, and Media	100
	Mapping Scarcity in and Beyond the Atlas	106
	Naturalizing Inequity	110
	Pacifying Community	118
	Conclusion	123
III.	Articulating “World Class” Futures and the Impurity of Food Policy	128
	From National Exigence to Municipal Interventions	136
	Developing a “World Class” City on the Horizon: The Denver Food Vision	144
	Foodscape Futures and Branding Urban Eco-Desires	154
	Gentrification and Environmental Inequities	161
	The Impure Politics of Food Policy	167
	Polyvocality and Impurity	168
	Disarticulation and Rearticulation	172
	Temporal Tensions and Contestations	180
	Conclusion	184
IV.	Critically Interrupting Food “Access” by Organizing Around Abundance	189
	Organizing Social Movements and Building Coalitional Relationships	195
	Rejecting Scarcity and Organizing Around Abundance	206
	“Gentrification is Not a Joke”: Agonistic Relations	207
	“Connect Our Movements”: Building Fusion	219
	“Relationships are Everything”: Remapping the City	228

	“Reconnect with Place and Land”: Remembering Our Roots	viii
	Conclusion	241
		246
V.	Remapping Power and Planting New Seeds of Abundance	251
	Revisiting “Access” and Maps of Power	255
	Voicing Food Justice from Margin to Center	262
	Spatio-Temporal Struggles and Food’s Politics	267
	From Food “Access” to Accessing Power	270
VI.	Bibliography	276
VII.	Appendix	313

FIGURES

1. USDA Food Access Research Atlas with Mapping Indicators	86
2. USDA Food Access Map of Denver, CO, USA	87
3. “Our Roots Inspire Our Future” Billboard	129
4. Denver Food Vision Framework	150
5. “Areas Vulnerable to Gentrification” Map	165
6. Tony Pigford Speaks at City Park	218
7. Denver Community Action Network’s Gentrification Summit	226
8. Beverly Grant Speaks at Growasis Community Garden	236

INTRODUCTION

Troubling Food “Access” in the Gentrifying City

There are many Americans who have the resources to buy healthy food and still are denied access to it. This denial of access has created “food deserts,” a term I despise but use for the sake of argument. The trouble with the term “food deserts” is that it describes lack in a way that indicates that the solution is outside of the community labeled a desert. To change our food system, we need to change the way we talk about it.¹

–LaDonna Redmond, Campaign for Food Justice Now

In the summer of 2017, Colorado based Natural Grocers erected a new store on the corner of Brighton Boulevard and 38th Street in northeast Denver. Situated between the historically divested Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods, the grocer was celebrated as it promised to provide increased food access in a food “desert.”² In a statement that controversially rebrands the area as “RiNo,”³ District 9 City Council Representative Albus Brooks affirmed the need for the new establishment: “Most of Northeast Denver, including RiNo, is a food desert; there simply aren’t enough quality food options within walking distance to the community.”⁴ The grand opening and ribbon cutting even attracted the city’s Mayor Michael Hancock, who was

¹ LaDonna Redmond, “Food is Freedom,” *The Nation*, September 2, 2009, <https://www.thenation.com/article/food-freedom/>.

² The food “desert” designation refers to an area that is both of low-income status and lacks a grocery store within one mile of its residents. These designations receive significant attention in Chapter Two of this dissertation. See: Economic Research Services, “Documentation,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, December 5, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/documentation/>.

³ Abbreviating “River North” (which references the area’s proximity to the South Platte River), the newly promoted Arts District “RiNo” cuts across Five Points, Globeville, and surrounding neighborhoods. The name has received criticism by residents in Denver who argue that it remaps their neighborhoods to support development and erases their cultural history/present. On the abbreviated neighborhood trend in Denver and beyond see: Patricia Calhoun, “What’s in a Name? Ask These Three Hot Denver Neighborhoods,” *Westword*, April 12, 2017, <http://www.westword.com/news/denvers-hottest-neighborhoods-picked-up-nicknames-along-the-way-8971121/>; Outside Contributor, “OPINION: “RiNo?” “Five Points?” Why A New Name Hurts in a Storied Neighborhood,” *Denverite*, August 23, 2017, <https://www.denverite.com/rino-five-points-denver-neighborhood-names-41393/>; Adam Allington, “If Your Neighborhood’s Name Changes, It’s Probably Gentrifying,” *MarketPlace*, July 18, 2017, <https://www.marketplace.org/2017/07/18/wealth-poverty/neighborhood-rebranding-prompts-gentrification-worries>.

⁴ Natural Grocers, “News Release: Natural Grocers’ Downtown Denver Store Relocates to RiNo Bringing Organic Produce to a Food Desert,” *Natural Grocers*, July 5, 2017, <http://investors.naturalgrocers.com/2017-07-05-Natural-Grocers-Downtown-Denver-Store-Relocates-to-RiNo-Bringing-Organic-Produce-to-a-Food-Desert>.

thrilled to see what the grocer could contribute to the area: “I think Natural Grocers is a natural fit for this area to help quite frankly add the healthier options that we all need. I am excited for what this will bring to this area of town. For all residents that live here.”⁵ Cast as a contrast to the majority fast food and corner store options historically available for nearby residents, the store was framed as a positive benefit to an area lacking healthy food options. The logic was that given the lack of proximity to a healthy grocery store, the Natural Grocers could “simply” fill a much-needed gap in the neighborhood’s ecosystem.

Despite its food “desert” status, this region of Denver was already growing—new economic investments in infrastructure, housing, transportation, and food amenities, were rapidly transforming Brighton Boulevard and the areas surrounding. Just down the street, towering new market-rate apartment buildings were being swiftly raised along the once industrial corridor and restaurants, breweries, and marijuana grow houses accompanied them. Given these changes, Natural Grocers began to garner significant criticism from many long-time residents who saw it as a symbol of gentrification. As Swansea resident and community organizer Candi CdeBaca asserted it, “It didn’t really build on anything from or for the neighborhood; it kind of just parachuted in.”⁶ Not only did she and many of her neighbors find Natural Grocers unaffordable, but it also did not carry many of the foods that they were accustomed to eating. Both of which led her to conclude that, “We knew it was not for us.”⁷ The critique by local residents challenged dominant assumptions in food access discourse, planning, and policy—critiquing that food access alone will solve food and health inequities.

⁵ Brittany Werges, “How a Grocery Store is Becoming a Symbol of Gentrification in a Denver Food Desert,” *303 Magazine*, October 25, 2017, <https://303magazine.com/2017/10/globeville-grocery-store/>.

⁶ Candi CdeBaca, Personal communication, April 28, 2018.

⁷ *Ibid.*

The contestation over the placement and prioritization of a grocery store became about much more than just solutions food insecurity—it became a debate about how tackling food “deserts” could contribute to the ongoing displacement of the very people supposedly targeted for increased food access. This attempt to promote healthy food access was experienced as a “slap in the face” for some who’d resided in the area for decades prior.⁸ As an interview in a local report captured, “When [the neighborhood] thinks about [Natural Grocers] they see it as one more thing that is not for them.”⁹ The pattern of investments coming from outside of the community, without consulting the community first, became a familiar point of contention among these residents. Fundamentally, the debate unfolded via competing visions over what it means to belong to and control the future of northeast Denver, including how the spatial designation of a food “desert” could be used to justify new development projects.

While the controversy placed northeast Denver on the map of areas wherein tensions over development, food access, and gentrification intersect, it joins a growing number of cities, neighborhoods, and street corners within which these debates have taken shape. Although the U.S. federal government has spent millions in loans, grants, and tax breaks to improve food access in food “deserts,” the threats to affordable grocers and the communities most food insecure often remain.¹⁰ From Washington D.C.¹¹ to Los Angeles,¹² Detroit¹³ to New Orleans,¹⁴

⁸ Werges, “How a Grocery Store is Becoming a Symbol of Gentrification in a Denver Food Desert.” Quote by Nola Miguel, a resident in the GES region and member of the GES Health and Housing Justice coalition.

⁹ Ibid. Quote by Maria Campos, a 30-year resident of Globeville.

¹⁰ Stephen Tucker Paulsen, “The Depressing Truth About Hipster Food Towns,” *Mother Jones*, January/February 2017, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/04/food-desert-mirage-gentrify-brooklyn-portland-groceries-snap/>.

¹¹ Vann R. Newkirk II, “Irrigating the (Food) Desert: A Tale of Gentrification in D.C.,” *Gawker*, August 11, 2014, <http://gawker.com/irrigating-the-food-desert-a-tale-of-gentrification-1617679708>.

¹² Healthy Neighborhood Market Network and the LA Food Policy Council, “Healthy Food Retail and Commercial Gentrification in Los Angeles,” *Good Food LA*, October 2015, <http://goodfoodla.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/DRAFT-Gentrification-and-Healthy-Food-Retail-EP.pdf>.

¹³ Tom Perkins, “Does Detroit’s Food Revival Leave the City’s Black Residents Behind,” *Civil Eats*, August 29, 2017, <https://civileats.com/2017/08/29/does-detroits-food-revival-leave-the-citys-black-residents-behind/>.

debates over the relationship between food and gentrification are emerging and each city and neighborhood has its unique, although related, story to tell.

For example, in 2014, the Portland African American Leadership Forum vehemently critiqued the City of Portland for attempting to subsidize a Trader Joe's in a rapidly developing area.¹⁵ They saw the rhetorical gesture of tackling food deserts as "appealing to the wealthier, incoming population" that would lead to the displacement of the neighborhood's Black residents.¹⁶ A 2017 opening of a Whole Foods in Harlem also became a fight between food access and the risk of cultural erasure. Many feared that the store would further the decline of Harlem's remaining Black and Latinx communities.¹⁷ Even white-led urban agriculture projects that offer free food, like the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative in Detroit, have consequently undercut farmers of color of their own efforts to provide local food access and contribute to food security.¹⁸ Thus some efforts to increase food access can be perceived as threatening, and even have a tendency to whiten, as they "green" space and develop new food environments.

How food becomes entangled with questions of dispossession is worth exploring, as it occurs through a host of practices and discourses, ranging from the placement of grocery stores,

¹⁴ Chris Rose, "After Hurricane Katrina, Neighborhoods Get Hit With a Rush of Wealth and Gentrification," *Take Apart*, August 17, 2015, <http://www.takepart.com/article/2015/08/17/katrina-new-orleans-bywater/>.

¹⁵ Andrew Theen, "Portland African American Leadership Forum Tries to Find Voice, Place, Amid Trader Joe's Controversy," *Oregon Live*, February 7, 2014, http://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/02/portland_african_american_lead_2.html; Casey Parks, "Trader Joe's Decision to Pull Out of NE Portland Leaves Neighbors, Opposition Dissatisfied," *Oregon Live*, February 3, 2014, https://www.oregonlive.com/portland/index.ssf/2014/02/trader_joes_decision_to_pull_o.html.

¹⁶ Portland African American Leadership Forum, "PAALF Letter," *Document Cloud*, 2013, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/929379-paalf-letter-regarding-trader-joes.html>.

¹⁷ Angela Helm, "Whole Foods, Gentrification and the Erasure of Black Harlem," *The Root*, August 3, 2017, <https://www.theroot.com/on-whole-foods-gentrification-and-the-erasure-of-black-1797444513>.

¹⁸ Tom Perkins, "On Urban Farming and 'Colonialism' in Detroit North End Neighborhood," *Metro Times*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/on-urban-farming-and-colonialism-in-detroits-north-end-neighborhood/Content?oid=7950059>.

support (or lack thereof) for different kinds of community gardens,¹⁹ institutional regulation of food sharing,²⁰ profiting from the cultural appropriation of food,²¹ upselling trendy foods,²² and so many others. The phenomenon Mikki Kendall coined #FoodGentrification can be conceptualized well beyond “the impact of traditionally low income foods becoming trendy,”²³ although this piece is often central.²⁴ Moreover, laughing off food gentrification has become popular. It’s easy for some to act jovial about Whole Food’s “accidental” six-dollar asparagus water²⁵ or the millionaire developer Tim Gurner’s scornful critique that millennials are poor because they spend all their money on avocado toast.²⁶ When it comes to understanding the role food gentrification plays in conceptions of food access, insecurity, belonging, and dispossession, however, the issues run much deeper than the growing popularity of kale—or even jokes about food trends.²⁷

As this project will show, for the food secure, food can appear to be what the food insecure need, and food alone. From this perspective, *food access* is value positive and the logic follows: those who lack food need access to food. When the problem is framed as food “deserts,” for example, food “access” becomes the answer. This discourse of addressing food insecurity

¹⁹ Mariella Segarra, “A Garden, A Redevelopment Plan, and A Fight Over Who Owns A Neighborhood in Philadelphia,” *Keystone Crossroads*, May 24, 2016, <http://crossroads.newsworks.org/index.php/local/keystone-crossroads/93756-a-garden-a-redevelopment-plan-and-a-fight-over-who-owns-a-neighborhood-in-philadelphia>

²⁰ National Coalition for the Homeless, *Share No More: The Criminalization of Efforts to Feed People in Need*, August 1, 2017, <http://nationalhomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Food-Sharing2014.pdf>.

²¹ Carolina Moreno, “Portland Burrito Cart Closes After Owners Are Accused Of Cultural Appropriation,” *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/portland-burrito-cart-closes-after-owners-are-accused-of-cultural-appropriation_us_5926ef7ee4b062f96a348181.

²² Chris Isidore, “Whole Foods Accused of Massive Overcharging,” *CNN Money*, June 25, 2015, <http://money.cnn.com/2015/06/25/news/companies/whole-foods-overcharging/index.html>.

²³ Mikki Kendal, Twitter Post, January 10, 2014, <https://twitter.com/Karnythia/status/421777395318652928>.

²⁴ Willy Staley, “When ‘Gentrification’ Isn’t About Housing,” *New York Times*, January 23, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/23/magazine/when-gentrification-isnt-about-housing.html>.

²⁵ Daniela Galarza, “Whole Foods’ \$6 Asparagus Water Is Just Water With Three Stalks of Asparagus In It [Updated],” *Eater*, August 3, 2015, <https://www.eater.com/2015/8/3/9090797/whole-foods-asparagus-water-wtf>

²⁶ Sam Levin, “Millionaire Tells Millennials: If You Want A House, Stop Buying Avocado Toast,” *The Guardian*, May 15, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/may/15/australian-millionaire-millennials-avocado-toast-house>.

²⁷ Jonathan Berr, “Kale’s Popularity May Be Outstripping Seed Supply,” *CBS News*, January 18, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/kales-popularity-may-be-outstripping-seed-supply/>.

through an emphasis on providing food or developing lush food environments may be heard in calls to develop community gardens, raise funds for children's breakfasts, support soup kitchens in the community, build grocery stores and farmers markets, open new restaurants or pop-ups, or provide financial support for food bank networks—among many other related initiatives. While not as callous as “let them eat cake,” these calls also can resonate as hollow gestures with poor understandings of how certain communities became food insecure, what burdens that precarity creates, and the types of solutions that might have more sustainable and satisfying results.

From the perspective of the food insecure, food is part of the answer. Yet, *how* and *for whom* food access is articulated remains not just a policy question, but also a rhetorical one. How places and people are referenced, and in which ways, have material consequences that are felt and contested by the communities most impacted by food insecurity. Rhetorics of food access and deficit not only shape the ways we imagine whether food is present or not within a given space, but they also influence our cultural perception of bodies, the places they inhabit, and their consumption choices. What I elaborate on as discourses of deficit have a long history rooted in assumptions that oversimplify the affordances and constraints of the food system and can often disregard the culturally contextual foodways of particular communities. While food has a long history of being leveraged as a weapon of power and colonization,²⁸ this topic speaks to the exigence of debates over affordability in and development of contemporary U.S. cities, including the ways white flight back to urban spaces contributes to economic and spatial dispossession.²⁹

In particular, this dissertation is concerned with exploring discourses of deficit and power through what has become a mobilizing key term for food movements today: access. Food

²⁸ Control over food access has long been a colonizing weapon, a prominent example being local trader Andrew Myrick's infamous declaration, “Let them eat grass” that galvanized the Dakota Uprising of 1862 wherein the U.S. Government, traders, and other settlers regulated access to food for the Dakota people to the point of starvation.

²⁹ Sam Roberts, “‘White Flight’ Has Reversed, Census Finds,” *New York Times*, September 22, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/23/nyregion/23census.html>.

access—denying access, lacking access, increasing access, providing access, giving access—is central to food politics today. The exigence for providing food access manifests in national, regional, and local food policy, the maps and language we use to describe such inequities, and discourses articulated by corporations, non-profits, and the food insecure themselves. While there is no arguing that increasing food access to all that are food insecure is critical, not all efforts to increase access are the same. Moreover, inflecting *access* as the central concern of the food movement, in some cases, risks simplifying a whole host of power relations, histories, policies, and practices that constitute and contribute to food insecurity and food-related injustices in the first place.

On one hand, it is important to recognize that inadequate food access is a dire concern, as it is estimated that 23.5 million people in the U.S. reside in federally defined food “deserts” spanning urban, suburban, and rural landscapes.³⁰ While food insecurity is on the table as a national conversation, defining the term is much more difficult to achieve. Institutions like the U.S Department of Agriculture have worked with statisticians at CNSTAT to redefine “food insecurity” as either “low food security” (once labeled “food insecurity without hunger”) or “very low food security” (once labeled “food insecurity with hunger”).³¹ Though the indicators vary, food insecurity generally marks a range of experiences—from not knowing where your next meal will come from to lacking nutrient dense, ‘healthy’ food options—which may describe both hunger and health inequity. The concern over both hunger prevention (access to food) and

³⁰ Michele Ver Ploeg, Vince Breneman, Tracey Farrigan, Karen Hamrick, David Hopkins, Phillip Kaufman, Biing-Hwan Lin, Mark Nord, Travis Smith, Ryan Williams, Kelly Kinnison, Carol Olander, Anita Singh, Elizabeth Tuckermanty, Rachel Krantz-Kent, Curtis Polen, Howard McGowan, and Stella Kim, “Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and Their Consequences: Report to Congress, *Economic Research Service*. (Washington, D.C., 2009).

³¹ Economic Research Services, “Definitions of Food Security,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx>.

health equity (access to healthy food) have galvanized myriad interventions that promise to provide food access to communities most in need.

On the other hand, in many developing cities, wherein legacies of divestment have created pockets of food insecure households, neighborhoods are also being retooled as sites of food access. Food has also become a mobilizing force for furthering new forms of economic development, like those Kenneth A. Gould and Tammy L. Lewis call “green gentrification.”³² Green gentrification refers to a range of “greening initiatives that create or restore environmental amenities” that may ultimately “draw in wealthier groups of residents and push out lower-income residents, thus creating gentrification.”³³ From the greening of parks and walkable spaces to sustainability planning and retooling the built environment, green gentrification assists in developing urban space in ways that tend to leave social inequity behind.

Much like green gentrification, we can trace the impact of food amenities on urban restructuring as well. Following and expanding Mikki Kendall, I mobilize *food gentrification* to mean the host of practices that increase food access and other food amenities—from grocery stores to gardens—that contribute to the dispossession of poor people, working class and low-income individuals, as well as many communities of color. The paradoxical concern though, is how food gentrification is becoming supported by the growing imperative to increase food access to the food insecure.

To explore this phenomenon, perhaps it is best to approach the imperative for increasing food access with caution. After all, the range of ways food access is articulated—by institutions from governments to non-profits, across scales from nations to neighborhoods, by advocates from governors to gardeners, and across media from community flyers to well-funded ad

³² Kenneth Gould and Tammy Lewis, *Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*, (New York: Routledge, 2016).

³³ *Ibid*, 23.

campaigns—is complicated. As a way to concretize these connections as existing through and beyond discourses of “access,” this project investigates the ways rhetorics of food access operate through foodscapes in cities, particularly those experiencing rapid development. Specifically, this dissertation analyzes the relationship between food access, environmental justice, and gentrification in one contemporary U.S. city, focusing the majority of my analysis on the conditions of possibility that have fostered food development, policy, controversy, and hope in the developing northeast region of Denver, Colorado.

Choosing at which scale to study foodscapes is its own rhetorical question.³⁴ Foodscapes themselves are ways of metaphorically imagining the spaces of food production, distribution, consumption, and access. They help us conceptualize the transgression of food through landscapes, highway systems, cities, towns, and neighborhoods in which we reside. My exploration traverses the rhetorical boundaries of the nation, city, and neighborhood, recognizing the ways development discourses often privilege the identity of the city over the livelihoods of the people that constitute it.³⁵ These patterns are especially palpable in gentrifying cities, where support for urban development and city branding have come to compete with voices of those vulnerable to being priced out.

While the conceptualization of food spaces is central to my work here, foodscapes can also move beyond geographic scales to help us think about the visceral and embodied politics of

³⁴ Perspectives on how to classify “foodscapes” have been nuanced by scholars in sociology, environmental planning, nutrition, and others. Although I take a rhetorical perspective on foodscapes here, I am informed by, for example, Lake et. al’s designation of a “foodscape” as the broader “food environment” which “encompasses any opportunity to obtain food and includes physical, socio-cultural, economic and policy influences at both micro and macro-levels.” I would argue that these influences are necessarily *rhetorical*, and are worth rhetorical analysis. Amelia A. Lake, Thomas Burgoine, Fiona Greenhalgh, Elaine Stamp, and Rachel Tyrrell, “The Foodscape: Classification and Field Validation of Secondary Data Sources,” *Health & Place* 16, no. 2 (2010): 666-673.

³⁵ Alberto Vanolo, *City Branding: The Ghostly Politics of Representation in Globalising Cities* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

food.³⁶ Mapping and rhetorically analyzing the organization of foodscapes requires us to interrogate these taken-for-granted divisions of place and population, food “deserts” and food access, in addition to how we understand food privilege and food (in)justice and the kinds of practices that enable each.³⁷ Ultimately, this dissertation responds to two interrelated questions: how and by whom are foodscapes rhetorically constituted and critically interrupted through competing articulations of *access*? And how do these foodscapes affect how we imagine food politics in gentrifying cities?

My interest in the rhetoric of food (in)justice and gentrification is explored at the juncture of communication (environmental, rhetorical, cultural, and organizational), critical human geography, and studies of economic and racial dispossession, locating where accounts of and responses to food (in)justices converge with these literatures. It is because food “crosses so many conceptual boundaries,” topically, theoretically, and disciplinarily, that we are provided such fertile ground for transdisciplinary, cultural inquiry.³⁸ From engagements with culture and consumption, food media, agricultural practice, and food politics, the study of food in critical communication scholarship has provided a foundation from which we can cultivate future work in our field. However, inequities in the food system, crossing rural, suburban, and urban divides, requires that we consider how food acts as a “wedge” issue, entangling questions of history, culture, environment, geography, politics, and power that move well beyond *food* itself.³⁹

³⁶ Michael K. Goodman, “Food Geography I: Relational Foodscapes and the Busy-ness of Being More-Than-Food,” *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 2 (2016): 257-266.

³⁷ I use “food privilege” and “food injustice” as an extension of Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow’s “environmental privilege” and “environmental justice,” an argument I explicate in the “Voice and Voicelessness” section of this introduction.

³⁸ Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik, *Food and Culture: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.

³⁹ Andy Opel, Josée Johnston and Richard Wilk, “Food, Culture, and The Environment: Communicating About What We Eat,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 251-254; On how food politics exceeds food, also see: Constance Gordon and Kathleen Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty: A Food Systems Agenda for Environmental Communication,” *Environmental Communication*, Advanced Online Publication: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17524032.2018.1435559>.

How food politics articulates with sustainability, for example, is worth our attention. While efforts to “green” cities like sustainable development, resilience planning, and climate adaptation initiatives are well intentioned and vital to making cities livable while managing impending growth, the risks associated with a subsequent increase in property values and influx of new residents are up for debate.⁴⁰ From rebuilding transportation infrastructure, to increasing green space, or building new developments to weather the impacts of climate change, urban greening, akin to “green growth,” merges economic growth with environmentalism and speaks to wider development trends that frame greening as a form of spatial ‘improvement’ that may ultimately contribute to social inequity.⁴¹ As emerging discursive articulations of sustainable development gain traction as an urban growth strategy, it is especially important that we pay attention to kinds of practices this language enables.⁴² While some articulations may share a common commitment to sustainability in theory, in practice the term can be leveraged by either “soft” (reformist) orientations or more “radical” (transformative) ones.⁴³ It is through an analysis of rhetoric or, in this context, what Dobson calls “contested terms” in environmental discourse—including both social justice and environmental sustainability—that we may gain a better understanding of the limits and possibilities for intervention, and especially, what kinds of intervention enable a more *just* sustainability.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Kenneth Gould and Tammy Lewis, *Green Gentrification*.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Hamil Pearsall, “Moving Out or Moving In? Resilience to Environmental Gentrification in New York City,” *Local Environment* 17, no. 9 (2012): 1013-1026; Lauren, Helper “What Is Climate Gentrification,” *GreenBiz*, August, 17, 2017, <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/what-climate-gentrification>.

⁴³ Rahul Mitra, “Sustainability and Sustainable Development,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*, eds. Craig R. Scott and Laurie K. Lewis (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

⁴⁴ Andrew Dobson, “Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability: Ne’er the Twain Shall Meet?” in *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*, ed. Julian Agyeman, Robert D. Bullard, and Bob Evans (London: EarthScan, 2012), 86; Julian Agyeman, Robert D. Bullard, and Bob Evans, *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

This project seeks to take up Alison H. Alkon and Julian Agyeman’s observation that the food movement is a polyculture, consisting of competing values as well as accounts of both *injustice* and justice alike.⁴⁵ I aim to investigate both dominant, institutionalized food-justice frames and juxtapose them with alternative voices that highlight, as Alkon and Agyeman further, the ways “food is not only linked to ecological sustainability, community, and health but also to racial, economic, and environmental justice.”⁴⁶ Given the way food becomes mobilizes through a range of complex values, I argue that food access is not just a question of policy or practice, but a question of and for rhetoric and in organizational life. Investigating food politics from a rhetorical, critical cultural, and organizational perspective, requires us to interrogate the many articulations that link and delink food with differing values, ethics, and assumptions voiced by the polyvocal food (justice) movement—including by policy makers, non-profits and corporations, community food justice organizers, and many more.⁴⁷ Thus, the need to increase and/or retool food access, in addition to the discourses that surround its exigence, differ across national interventionist strategies, in citywide food policy, and in the rhetorical and organizational practices of grassroots organizers in gentrifying cities. I engage the entangled but often competing discourses by studying these multiple forms of intervention.

Tracing the ways food access is articulated and by whom is central to understanding these efforts, as well as the ways we imagine both communities and the problems and solutions to food inequity in contemporary gentrifying U.S. cities. It also requires that we pay attention to how foodscapes are mapped rhetorically, informed by both neoliberal values and the gaze of whiteness. I build on Julie Guthman and others who have studied alternative food practices,

⁴⁵ Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁷ My understanding of “articulation” is indebted to Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Stuart Hall, which soon will be explored further.

sharing an investment in the concerns of “how whiteness perhaps crowds out the imaginings of other sorts of political projects that could indeed be more explicitly anti-racist,” particularly in progressive food justice related work.⁴⁸ Thus, to account for the various and multifaceted intersections between food politics, environmentalism, place, race, rhetoric, and organizing, I must do some mapping of my own.

To explore the rhetorical cartographies of food (in)justice and gentrification via the articulatory practices of *access*, the remaining introduction to this project unfolds as follows. First, in “Communicating Food Systems,” I explore the ways communication scholars have taken up food as a meaningful topic of inquiry, giving rise to scholarship on food cultures and identity, food media, agricultural systems, and food movements. I then offer an intervention into this scholarship, and advocate that if we are to take food (in)justices more seriously, we must better understand food *justice* as a mobilizing force for critical food movements today. I argue that established scholarship on environmental justice might provide a productive opening for future work on food justice in our field.

Second, in “The Spatial Politics of Food,” I review ways we imagine food (in)justice spatially, especially within the context of gentrifying cities. I explore literature on foodscapes (food environments) and foodways (culturally contextual consumption practices) to offer ways of think about the intimate and spatial politics of food. I then review literature on gentrification, environmentalism, and urban space, paying attention to the relationship between uneven development and the production of racialized space through cultural and economic capital. Here,

⁴⁸ Julie Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others: Investigating the Subjects of Alternative Food Practice,” *Cultural Geographies* 15, no. 4 (2008): 443; Rachel Slocum, “Anti-Racist Practice and The Work of Community Food Organizations,” *Antipode* 38, no. 2 (2006), 327-349; Alison Hope Alkon and Kari Marie Norgaard, “Breaking the Food Chains: An Investigation of Food Justice Activism,” *Sociological Inquiry* 79, no. 3 (2009): 289-305. This growing body of scholarship in critical food studies seeks to understand the difference between alternative food advocacy and food *justice* movements.

I set up my terms of engagement, to conceptualize foodways, foodscapes, and gentrification as intimately intertwined. These interdisciplinary conversations help account for why *food access* alone may not be a comprehensive solution to food inequity.

Third, in “Voice, Food, and Politics,” I trace literature on voice and voicelessness in rhetorical studies to supplement my argument that food systems are not only constructed through capitalist development spatially, but are voiced and imagined differently in ways that are informed by privilege and power. This requires that I also write myself into the following pages, as my body, whiteness, and food privilege are also implicated in this work. I then underscore how power affects the values we bring to our food (in)justice inquiries by tracing a seemingly innocent, but incredibly salient term in both food policy and food movements: access. Tracking articulations of the term and its entangled cultural values allows me to better understand how competing articulations of access both afford and constrain creative solutions to food insecurity in gentrifying U.S. cities. Centralizing *access* as an important, yet contested, food movement key term helps me emphasize the role of voice, power, privilege, and positionality in the narration of food-related problems, concerns, and advocacy.

Fourth, on methodology, I describe how a conjunctural analysis of foodscapes across national, municipal, and grassroots voices might be supplemented by rhetorical cartography, a method of tracing rhetorics across time and space. I emphasize how a rhetorical criticism of mapping and metaphors can be supplemented by textual analysis of policy, as well as and grounded fieldwork, to help me pay attention to bodies, voices, and places within these contested debates—three elements that, I argue, should be central to any related food justice inquiry. An interdisciplinary cultural studies perspective allows me to hold these commitments together and narrate a story of how interventions take place in the contemporary milieu.

Last, I map the chapters of this dissertation and how I will trace articulations of food *access* as cultural discourses that affect how food politics are imagined, mobilized, and interrupted. Each chapter moves across and through scales—from national to municipal to grassroots communities—following articulations of access along the way.⁴⁹ Through this analysis, I hope to help provide a more complicated picture of food insecurity that both pivots on food politics and exceeds food itself.

I. Communicating Food Systems

It is precisely because food crosses multiple conceptual boundaries and “challeng[es] re-conceptions of our environments, our societies, and ourselves” that we must attend to the complexity of food politics.⁵⁰ Although scholarship on food in communication studies has provided a foundation for our food-related investigations by studying food cultures and consumption, food media, agriculture, and food politics, it has an opportunity to better address the ecologies and economies that entangle, constitute, and complicate *food systems*.⁵¹ One way communication scholars can begin to investigate food systems is by emphasizing how our food-related inquiries intersect with tangential, but related, relations of power, including the ways food merges with both economic, spatial, and racial (in)justice. I hope to build off of nascent scholarship on food in communication studies, as well as use environmental justice as a productive opening to spark concern over food (in)justice as well. This approach may better help us investigate how food connects with concerns over labor, transportation, health, housing, gentrification, affordability, property, control, and so on. To set up the conversations that have

⁴⁹ I mobilize “scale” while still recognizing the relations between scales and the economic, cultural, political, and embodied scales that traverse them. I elaborate on this further in the introduction.

⁵⁰ Opel, Johnston, and Wilk, “Food, Culture, and the Environment,” 251.

⁵¹ Gordon and Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty”; By food system, I reference the nexus of practices from seed to fork, including but not limited to, food production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal, and the human and non-human relations that labor to constitute these processes.

emerged thus far, however, I now will traverse literature on food in communication studies, interdisciplinary environmental justice literature, and studies of food (in)justice.

Food in Communication Studies

I am acutely aware of the ways food operates on the “thin end of environmental awareness,”⁵² something that has challenged communication scholars, particularly environmental communication, critical/cultural, and rhetorical scholars, to ask themselves—why does, or should, food matter to communication studies? Food is fundamentally communicative: it is both ordinary and profound, signifying shared meanings and narratives, and is articulated in and through media.⁵³ Through a study of food cultures and consumption, food in popular media, agriculture, and food politics, scholars across our field have nuanced the relationship between food and communication, treating this fruitful area as a serious environmental concern and mode of ecological practice. While these areas could stand to emphasize more poignantly the entanglement of food with ecological, cultural, and economic relations that sustain our *food system*, our studies on food in communication so far have helped us consider how food operates within our intimate, mediated, and political lives. Thus, it is important to also outline where our food-related inquires have traveled thus far.

First, the study of food cultures and consumption underscores the intimacy of eating as an articulation of cultural relations and, therefore, power. What and how we eat, as well as practices of procurement and cooking, operates, as de Certeau and Giard note, “at the most necessary and the most unrespected level.”⁵⁴ However, a significant body of scholarship has rejected the

⁵² Opel, Johnston, and Wilk, “Food, Culture, and the Environment,” 251.

⁵³ Janet Muriel Cramer, Carlita P. Greene, and Lynn Marie Walters, *Food as Communication: Communication as Food*, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2011); Joshua Frye and Michael Bruner, *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, and Power*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012).

⁵⁴ Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard, “The Nourishing Arts,” in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, eds. Carole

banality of our consumption habits by exploring ties between food, culture, and identity, charting how food production, distribution, and consumption co-constitute spatial, temporal, and cultural senses of belonging.⁵⁵ Studies like these illustrate how food is rooted in a “fabric of relationships to others and to one’s self” that weaves culture and lifeways, as well as land and water.⁵⁶ Food—or its lack—plays a key role in our everyday lives, nourishing, or starving, social groups and broader cultural bonds.

In this way, eating (or not) may be imagined as a political act, connecting humans with other-than-human.⁵⁷ Producers use natural resources and consumers make dietary choices, consciously or not articulating our ethics—environmental, political, social, economic, and nutritional—with food.⁵⁸ Refraining from eating certain foods such as meat,⁵⁹ or not eating at all,⁶⁰ performs an embodied politics of everyday life. Analyses of ethical consumption, conservation, and advocacy have wedged food politics into environmental discourse, even as they illustrate the limits of consumption as a form of intervention.⁶¹ Studies of food cultures

Counihan, and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2008), 71.

⁵⁵ Danielle Barcliff Baptista, “Peixe, Patria, e Possibilidades Portuguesas: “Fish, Homeland, and Portuguese Possibilities,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2009): 60-76; Gail Tipa, “Exploring Indigenous Understandings of River Dynamics and River Flows: A Case from New Zealand,” *Environmental Communication* 3, no. 1 (2009): 95-120.

⁵⁶ de Certeau and Giard, “The Nourishing Arts,” 71.

⁵⁷ Jean P. Retzinger, “Pizza as Praxis: Bridging Nature and Culture,” *Environmental Communication* 2, no. 2 (2008): 246-255.

⁵⁸ Ruth Katz, “You Are What You Environmentally, Politically, Socially, and Economically Eat: Delivering the Sustainable Farm and Food Message,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 371-377.

⁵⁹ Linnea I. Laestadius, Roni A. Neff, Colleen L. Barry and Shannon Frattaroli, “No Meat, Less Meat, or Better Meat: Understanding NGO Messaging Choices Intended to Alter Meat Consumption,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 1 (2010): 84-103; Ross Singer, “Neoliberal Backgrounding, the Meatless Monday Campaign, and the Rhetorical Intersections of Food, Nature, and Cultural Identity,” *Communication, Culture, and Critique* 10, no. 2 (2017): 344-364.

⁶⁰ Leda Cooks, “You Are What You (Don’t) Eat: Food, Identity, and Resistance,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2009): 94-110; Patrick Anderson, *So Much Wasted: Hunger, Performance and the Morbidity of Resistance* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

⁶¹ Julie Doyle, “Celebrity Vegans and the Lifestyling of Ethical Consumption,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 777-790; Carrie Packwood Freeman, “Meat’s Place on the Campaign Menu: How US Environmental Discourse Negotiates Vegetarianism,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 255-276; Elaine Jeffreys, “Translocal Celebrity Activism: Shark Protection Campaigns in Mainland China,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 6 (2016): 763, 776.

remind us just how intimate our relations with food are, as they reflect religious pollution beliefs, gendered norms, familial traditions, health habits, and more.⁶² While not all this scholarship is contextualized in broader food *systems*, analyzing the possibilities and constraints of consumption tells us much about our cultural politics and ourselves.

Second, the study of various food media turns our attention to the ways food is articulated through written texts and cookbooks,⁶³ advertising,⁶⁴ television,⁶⁵ and both fictional and documentary films,⁶⁶ reflecting and (re)constituting eaters and media consumers. Food imagery, food shows, and food-related performances like cooking are coded by gender,⁶⁷ sediment race-based ideologies and contain/consume ethnic ‘otherness’ in problematic ways,⁶⁸ and produce new public figures such as the “public chef intellectual.”⁶⁹ Food media play a powerful role in articulating health⁷⁰ and naturalizing inequitable forms of labor and unsustainable modes of

⁶² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1966).

⁶³ Casey Ryan Kelly, “Cooking Without Women: The Rhetoric of the New Culinary Male,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 200-204; Isaac West, “Performing Resistance in/from the Kitchen: The Practice of Maternal Pacifist Politics and La WISP’s Cookbooks,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 30, no. 3 (2007): 358-383.

⁶⁴ Brian Cozen, “The Pear is a Rhetorical Tool: Food Imagery in Energy Company Advertising,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 355-370; Jessica Mudry, “Counting on Dinner: Discourses of Science and the Refiguration of Food in USDA Nutritional Guides,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 338-354; Richard A. Rogers, “Beasts, Burgers, and Hummers: Meat and the Crisis of Masculinity in Contemporary Television Advertisements,” *Environmental Communication* 2, no. 3 (2008): 281-301.

⁶⁵ Jean Retzinger, “Spectacles of Labor: Viewing Food Production Through a Television Screen,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 4 (2010): 441-460.

⁶⁶ Laura Lindenfeld, “Can Documentary Food Films Like Food Inc. Achieve Their Promise?,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 378-386; Shazia Rahman, “Land, Water, and Food: Eco-Cosmopolitan Feminist Praxis in Sabiha Sumar’s *Khamosh Pani*,” *Environmental Communication* 5, no. 2 (2011): 187-201.

⁶⁷ Fabio Parasecoli, “Looking At Men’s Tables: Food and Masculinities in Blockbuster Movies,” in *Food as Communication/Communication as Food*, eds. Janet M. Cramer, Carlita P. Green, Lynn M. Waters, (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2011): 155-175; Rebecca Swenson, “Domestic Divo? Televised Treatments of Masculinity, Femininity and Food,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 26, no. 1 (2009): 36-53.

⁶⁸ Casey Ryan Kelly, *Food Television and Otherness in the Age of Globalization* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017); Helene A. Shugart, “Sumptuous Texts: Consuming ‘Otherness’ in the Food Film Genre,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 25, no. 1 (2008): 68-99; Anjali Vats, “Cooking Up Hashtag Activism: #PaulasBestDishes and Counternarrative of Southern Food,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 209-213.

⁶⁹ Justin Eckstein and Anna M. Young, “Cooking, Celebrity Chefs, and Public Chef Intellectuals,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 205-208.

⁷⁰ Michael Bruner and Laura Hahn, “Irony and Food Politics,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 214-217; Ross Singer, “Anti-Corporate Argument and the Spectacle of the Grotesque Rhetorical Body in *Super Size Me*,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 18, no. 2 (2011): 135-152.

production. While popular documentaries, such as *Food, Inc.* and *Fresh* may mobilize the power of sustainable consumption by appeals to “voting with your fork,”⁷¹ they can also elevate individual choice over systemic environmental action, omitting more complex articulations of race, class and power in our food systems.

Third, agriculture has been a leading theme in extant food-related scholarship in environmental communication, helping us to consider the human and non-human relations of sustenance with which we participate.⁷² The ramifications of agro-industrial food production manifest in debates about genetic modification,⁷³ policies governing the transparency (or protection) of animal agriculture interests,⁷⁴ as well as the complexities of sustainable agriculture.⁷⁵ Agricultural practice can localize food system relationships, cultivating intimacy with ecosystems and each other. For example, community gardens can function as educational sites for instilling a “producer” ethic in those removed from agricultural production,⁷⁶ instigating intergenerational learning,⁷⁷ and performing powerful decolonial “geo-body politics.”⁷⁸ Spaces of distribution and consumption are latent with semiotic and somatic dynamics that can act as

⁷¹ Lindenfeld, “Can Documentary Food Films Like Food Inc. Achieve Their Promise?”; Ryanne Pilgeram and Russell Meeuf, “Good Food, Good Intentions: Where Pro-Sustainability Arguments Get Stale in US Food Documentaries,” *Environmental Communication* 9, no. 1 (2015): 100-117.

⁷² Jeff Motter and Ross Singer, “Review Essay: Cultivating a Rhetoric of Agrarianism,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 8, no. 4 (2012): 439-454.

⁷³ Kelly A. Clancy and Benjamin Clancy, “Growing Monstrous Organisms: The Construction of Anti-GM Visual Rhetoric through Digital Media,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33, no. 2 (2016): 279-292; Pieter Maesele, “On Neo-Luddites Led by Ayatollahs: The Frame Matrix of the GM Debate in Northern Belgium,” *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 277-300.

⁷⁴ Garrett M. Broad, “Animal Production, Ag-Gag Laws, and the Social Production of Ignorance: Exploring the Role of Storytelling,” *Environmental Communication* 10, no. 1 (2016): 43-61.

⁷⁵ Cindy M. Spurlock, “Performing and Sustaining (Agri)Culture and Place: The Cultivation of Environmental Subjectivity on the Piedmont Farm Tour,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2009): 5-21.

⁷⁶ Rose Hayden-Smith, “‘Soldiers of the Soil’: The Work of the United States School Garden Army during World War II,” *Applied Environmental Education and Communication* 6, no. 1 (2007): 19-29.

⁷⁷ Jolie Mayer-Smith, Oksana Bartosh and Linda Peterat, “Teaming Children and Elders to Grow Food and Environmental Consciousness,” *Applied Environmental Education and Communication* 6, no. 1 (2007): 77-85.

⁷⁸ Darrel Enck-Wanzer, “Race, Coloniality, and Geo-Body Politics: *The Garden as Latin@ Vernacular Discourse*,” *Environmental Communication* 5, no. 3 (2011): 363-371.

gathering spaces for consumer-citizens⁷⁹ or can potentially re-fetishize food production through whitewashing.⁸⁰ When we eat, we are bound up with agricultural practice, whether we direct our attention to the grocery store, industrial farm, community garden, farmers market, or other such places of production, consumption, and waste.⁸¹

Fourth, in addition to the study of food cultures, food media, and agricultural practice, the study of food orients us toward visions of more empowering food systems. Ranging from the study of individually oriented alternative food movements, such as food preservation⁸² and vegetarian advocacy,⁸³ to advocates working to link injustices across the food chain, such as farmworker justice solidarity networks,⁸⁴ this area of scholarship has seen the possibilities and constraints of food politics and activism. Other scholarship has centered voices of those critiquing and transgressing food economies, including peasant farmer protests and narratives of hunger.⁸⁵ While there can be contradictions and tensions within food movements,⁸⁶ we are reminded that the process of developing coherent messages to capture diverse political orientations can be complex. Further, the various tactics and strategies operationalized by food movements are inevitably impure, from multi-year farmworker boycotts of produce to a one day

⁷⁹ Justin Eckstein and Donovan Conley, "Spatial Affects and Rhetorical Relations at the Cherry Creek Farmers' Market," in *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, Power*, eds. Joshua J. Frye and Michael S. Bruner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012): 171-189.

⁸⁰ Alison Hope Alkon and Christie Grace McCullen, "Whiteness and Farmers Markets: Performances, Perpetuations...Contestations?," *Antipode* 43, no. 4 (2010): 937-959.

⁸¹ Wendell Berry, *What Are People For?: Essays*, (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 1990/2010).

⁸² Melissa A. Click and Ronit Ridberg, "Saving Food: Food Preservation as Alternative Food Activism," *Environmental Communication* 4, no. 3 (2010): 301-317.

⁸³ Singer, "Neoliberal Backgrounding, the Meatless Monday Campaign, and the Rhetorical Intersections of Food, Nature, and Cultural Identity."

⁸⁴ Constance Gordon, "Coming to the Table for Fair Food: Growing a Farmworker Justice Movement Through Solidarity Networks and Performative Activism" (master's thesis, Boulder, University of Colorado Boulder, 2015).

⁸⁵ Joshua Frye, "Lee Kyung Hae and the Dynamics of Social Movement Self-Sacrifice," in *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, Power*, eds. Joshua J. Frye and Michael S. Bruner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 139-154; Mohan J. Dutta, "Narratives of Hunger: Voices at the Margins of Neoliberal Development," in *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, Power*, eds. Joshua J. Frye and Michael S. Bruner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 238-253.

⁸⁶ Laura Hahn and Michael S. Bruner, "Politics On Your Plate: Building and Burning Bridges Across Organic, Vegetarian, and Vegan Discourse," in *The Rhetoric of Food: Discourse, Materiality, Power*, eds. Joshua J. Frye and Michael S. Bruner (New York, NY: Routledge, 2012), 42-57.

flash mob boycott at a liquor store, which intervene in related but different nodal points of the broader circuit of food cultures (labor, consumption, distribution, et cetera).⁸⁷

As this brief review illustrates, communication scholars have identified food as a serious topic of inquiry crossing investments in environmental, critical/cultural, and rhetorical studies. These engagements have helped develop a robust understanding of food as cultural, mediated, environmental, and political. Some have begun to think about food systemically, however, the critical and interventionist project of food-related research remains under-theorized in communication scholarship.⁸⁸ Food politics, including food system reform, justice, and sovereignty, also have gained attention in over forty years of interdisciplinary research beyond communication and cultural studies. As I turn to this relevant scholarship, it is my hope to foster cross-fertilization between communication scholars and interdisciplinary food justice studies.

Articulating Food and Justice

While food justice has become a mobilizing orientation for both food system reform and transformation, where it intersects with and diverges from other food-related investigations in and beyond environmental communication deserves attention. Moreover, the values and practices of food justice are still contested, as a range of actors in different contexts, places, and social locations articulate them with other social and environmental problems. My goal here is to trace both lines of inquiry: food justice as an emergent environmental communication term and food justice as a contextual orientation to food systems change. Although scholars have sharpened their analysis of food justice's polyvocality since Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi declared that food justice is "a relatively unformed concept subject to multiple interpretations,"

⁸⁷ Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts: The Impure Politics of Consumer-Based Advocacy in an Age of Global Ecological Crisis," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (2011): 124-145. I will return to this point in Chapter Three and the Conclusion.

⁸⁸ Katie Hunt and I argue this in "Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty."

more work needs to be done.⁸⁹ One of the risks and opportunities of engaging food justice as a conceptual category for food-related struggles is that the term is itself is contested.⁹⁰ The many different groups working under the umbrella term food justice—from fast food and farm workers to fence-free gardeners and school food advocates—often use language to describe their work that recognizes the distinct (although related) issues of social injustice. For example, issues of labor justice, economic disparities, gentrification, housing, transportation, immigration, and climate change are often essential components of a food justice critique and movement; yet, the goals, strategies, and vision of these campaigns may differ from each other.

I argue that to study *food justice* communicatively, we must pay attention to the articulatory practices that link and delink *food* with values such as sustainability, equity, justice, health, or neoliberalism (among others), in addition to underscoring how *injustice* is differently configured. Articulation theory helps me follow the communicative practices of linking and delinking elements that cohere meaning through linguistic and nonlinguistic elements of discourse.⁹¹ Struggles over what constitutes justice and injustices, including the ways both get figured and contested, is central to this project. Emphasizing particularism and contingency are critical to challenge what Clive Barnett refers to as the “universalizing registers which justice-talk always seems to bring with it.”⁹² It is precisely because food justice is not fixed ideological orientation to the food system, that we must pay attention to the ways it becomes articulated with

⁸⁹ Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 6.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, (London: Verso, 1985), 85; also see Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*, (London: New Left Books, 1977); Kevin DeLuca, “Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 32, no. 4 (1999), 334-348; See also: Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Articulating Anti-Toxic Activism to ‘Sexy’ Superstars: The Cultural Politics of A Civil Action and Erin Brockovich,” *Environmental Communication Yearbook* 3, (2006): 21-48.

⁹² Clive Barnett, “Towards A Geography of Injustice,” *Alue & Ympärisö* 41, no. 1 (2016): 111.

competing cultural values ranging from institutional reliance on neoliberalism and whiteness to grassroots anti-racist practices and liberatory social change.

Following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,⁹³ Stuart Hall,⁹⁴ and Foucauldian perspectives on the relationship between discourse and power, I conceptualize *food justice* as contingent, both affected by and an effect of discourse, culture, and power. Calls for food justice, as a seemingly coherent ideological position, have gained cultural capital as well. A necessary piece of this conversation, though, is how this call is being continuously contested, redefined, sharpened, and rearticulated. Rhetorical scholars are best equipped to interrogate food justice not just as a position to food systems change but as a particularly communicative orientation to power that gets differently articulated across spatial contexts and specific conjunctures.

Articulation theory also helps me speak to the ways food *justice* articulates with a whole range of forms and practices of (in)justice that move well beyond food, especially those that are important to theories of just sustainabilities⁹⁵ in cities experiencing rapid transformation. By bringing articulations of food justice into conversation with concerns over gentrification and displacement, I am also able to follow the ways emergent vocabularies of environmental gentrification(s)—climate gentrification, green gentrification, food gentrification for example—speak directly to environmental communication’s ethical commitment to crisis.⁹⁶ Further, as we listen to emergent discourses of abundance and relationships from the grassroots towards the end of this project, we also are reminded of environmental communication’s ethical commitment to

⁹³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

⁹⁴ Lawrence Grossberg, “On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview With Stuart Hall,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 45-60.

⁹⁵ Julian Agyeman, “Communicating ‘Just Sustainability,’” *Environmental Communication* 1, no. 2 (2007): 119-122.

⁹⁶ Robert Cox, “Nature’s ‘Crisis Discipline’: Does Environmental Communication Have An Ethical Duty,” *Environmental Communication* 1, no. 1 (2007): 5-20. See also: Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Robert Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere, Fifth Edition*, (London, Sage, 2017).

care.⁹⁷ In the brief sections that follow, I trace food (in)justice as a critical environmental justice issue that exceeds food as well, capturing the complexity of belonging, justice, and community organizing.

Food and Environmental Justice

Food justice, as a communicative and political orientation to food systems, borrows from commitments to social justice with environmental concerns. The movement for environmental justice (EJ) maintains a core commitment to the equitable distribution of the risks and benefits of environmental practices.⁹⁸ For environmental communication, EJ broadens conceptions of “environment,” emphasizes systematic exploitation of marginalized groups, and galvanizes strategies for community empowerment.⁹⁹ More than simply a parallel to environmental justice, food justice can speak to, learn with, and even diverge from the environmental justice movement.¹⁰⁰ It is because the food system has been conceptualized as “the entire set of activities and relationships that make up various food pathways from seed to table,”¹⁰¹ all of which are made up of a “terrain of agrarian struggle,”¹⁰² that we are provided with avenues for deeper intervention.

⁹⁷ Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Environment.” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication and Critical Studies*, Vol. 1, ed. Dana Cloud, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). See also: Pezzullo and Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere*.

⁹⁸ Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990); Robert D. Bullard, “Introduction,” in *Confronting Environmental Racism: Voices from the Grassroots*, ed. Robert D. Bullard, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1993), 7-13; Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*, (New York: NYU Press, 2001).

⁹⁹ Julian Agyeman, “Communicating ‘Just Sustainability,’” Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007); Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁰ Robert Gottlieb, “Where We Live, Work, Play...and Eat: Expanding the Environmental Justice Agenda,” *Environmental Justice* 2, no. 1, (2009): 7-8.

¹⁰¹ Gottlieb and Joshi, *Food Justice*, 5.

¹⁰² Eric Holt-Giménez, “Agrarian Questions and The Struggle for Land Justice in the United States,” in *Land Justice: Re-Imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*, eds. Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Giménez (Oakland, CA: Food First Press, 2017), 3.

Emphasizing the lived environment, EJ articulates the nexus of human, ecological, social, and economic systems. Just as the environment is “where we live, work, and play,” it is also very much about “where, what, and how we *eat*.”¹⁰³ Environmental justice highlights the myriad ways the environment (disparately) transects our lived conditions, including but not limited to proximity to toxics and waste, access to land and transportation, and inclusion in decision-making processes, thereby interweaving humans and non-humans, ecologies and economies, power and history. Food systems environmental communication research—of which this project is a part—can attend to these conditions through engagement with the host of relations that (re)produce and contest the ecosystems within which we are enmeshed.¹⁰⁴

By centering the experiences and voices of frontline communities, environmental justice inserted social justice into the discourse of environmentalism, connecting disparities suffered across environments from the urban, suburban, and rural alike. Cole and Foster’s metaphor of “tributaries” that “nourish”¹⁰⁵ the environmental justice movement—from Indigenous resistance to colonization, campaigns against lead paint contamination, anti-toxics movements, farm worker struggles against pesticides, and many others—link struggles across time and space through a shared commitment to health, justice, and structural change.¹⁰⁶ Mapping the various modes of inequities across food chains necessarily broadens the social justice agenda of environmental communication, thereby expanding the scope of what normatively constitutes *environmental* injustice (to include for example: food access and insecurity, labor regimes, nutrition and health, food policy and trade, sovereignty and immigration, and more).

¹⁰³ Gottlieb, “Where We Live, Work, Play...and Eat,” 7.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon and Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty.”

¹⁰⁵ Cole and Foster, *From the Ground Up*, 20.

¹⁰⁶ Cox and Pezzullo, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere, Fifth Edition*.

Finally, because EJ vigilantly contests uneven processes of environmental decision-making, such a perspective animates participatory praxis.¹⁰⁷ Proximity to hazardous waste¹⁰⁸ or exposure to other toxics sources¹⁰⁹ are not simply local injustices, but also are representative of systematic exclusion and marginalization. The environmental justice movement elevates grassroots resistance and capacity building, demonstrating the potential of local groups to stake interventions in unjust systems and policies. Oriented by EJ, food justice maintains emphasis on power and positionality in relation to the various and multifaceted discursive practices that co-construct food systems. Much like EJ challenged environmentalism to centralize race, class, gender, culture, and colonialism, food justice affords environmental communication a similar opportunity to expand our scope and foreground power in relationship to our food-related scholarship and praxis. It is important, however, that we explore more specifically what I refer to as food justice, since these engagements exceed communication scholarship and have already developed as a robust conversation in and of itself.

Food and (In)Justice

Although agricultural industrialization, the ethics of production, and food access remain key concerns of food movements and in popular culture, a food justice perspective urges us not to approach these problems in a vacuum. In other words, *food* politics spans well beyond food itself, acting as a “wedge” issue connected to concerns of social and environmental justice.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Bullard, *Dumping in Dixie*; Bullard, “Introduction”; Cole and Foster, *From the Ground Up*.

¹⁰⁸ Kevin M. DeLuca, “The Possibilities of Nature in a Postmodern Age: The Rhetorical Tactics of Environmental Justice Groups,” *Communication Theory* 9, no. 2 (1999): 189-215; Danielle Endres, “The Rhetoric of Nuclear Colonialism: Rhetorical Exclusion of American Indian Arguments in the Yucca Mountain Nuclear Waste Siting Decision,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 1 (2009): 36-90; Jennifer Peeples, “Imaging Toxins,” *Environmental Communication* 7, no 2 (2013): 191-210.

¹⁰⁹ Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*; Steve Schwartz, “Silences and Possibilities of Asbestos Activism: Stories from Libby and Beyond,” in *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism: The Social Justice Challenge to the Environmental Movement*, eds. Ronald Sandler and Phaedra C. Pezzullo (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 165-188.

¹¹⁰ Opel, Johnston, and Wilk, “Food, Culture, and the Environment,” 251.

Just as the ‘foodie’ culture of alternative food movements (AFMs) gains popularity in critical food studies, so has a body of scholarship on *food justice*, a perspective that critiques AFM’s often homogenous and reformist orientation, including their reliance on both whiteness and neoliberalism.¹¹¹ Food justice advocates connect the food movement with social justice initiatives, conceptualizing contemporary food systems as raced, classed, gendered, and colonial institutions muddled by long histories of inequities of power.

Food justice scholarship straddles orientations of both reform and transformation while challenging the food movement to better center power, history, and positionality in their advocacy.¹¹² A food justice perspective takes the position that injustices within the food system continue to disproportionately impact poor and working-class people as well as communities of color. Thus, focusing on the symptoms of these crises alone (food insecurity, nutrition, and affordability) often neglect more structural, systemic critiques, including focusing on causes such as economic injustice, systemic racism, and unequal access to decision-making and community control. In many cases—though not all, as this dissertation explores—food justice posits that unequal access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and affordable food is an issue of unequal power and makes the racism and classism inherent in the food system central to its advocacy. Due to the vast complexity of the industrial food system and both institutional and governance issues, food justice efforts must continuously negotiate how to center social justice goals while acknowledging various constraints from funding sources to autonomy and legitimacy.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*; Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others”; Julie Guthman, “‘If Only They Knew’: Color Blindness and Universalism in California Alternative Food Institutions,” *The Professional Geographer* 60, no.3 (2008): 387-397; A. Breeze Harper, *Sistah Vegan: Black Female Vegans Speak on Food, Identity, Health, and Society* (New York, NY: Lantern, 2010); Rachel Slocum, “Whiteness, Space, and Alternative Food Practices,” *Geoforum* 38, no. 3 (2007): 520-533.

¹¹² Via Campesina, “Food Justice and Food Sovereignty in USA,” *Nyeléni Newspaper*, 23,

https://viacampesina.org/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/09/2015-09-Nyeleni_Newsletter_Num_23_EN.pdf

¹¹³ Garrett Broad, *More Than Just Food: Food Justice and Community Change* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

Parallels and intersections between food justice and environmental justice present productive openings for food systems-focused environmental communication scholars to explore how power nuances the role of voice, storytelling, and positionality in narrations of food-related problems and their solutions. For example, while many food scholars can agree that industrial agriculture presents key environmental and social challenges, the voices and experiences of those on the frontlines of food system injustices—from farm workers to the food insecure—are often relegated to the margins of what has been called the “dominant food movement narrative.”¹¹⁴ Although food justice is an orientation to the food system, it is also an orientation to the people, places, non-human animals, and the economic and ecological relations by which the food system is organized.

While food justice often invokes a commitment to “communities exercising their right to grow, sell, and eat healthy food” that is “fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of land, workers, and animals,” it also can emphasize that these tenets should be led by the peoples most marginalized in the food system.¹¹⁵ A food justice perspective extends and expands the environmental justice agenda and attends to concerns that may seem to move beyond “food” and “environment,” despite both being central to the movement.¹¹⁶ For example, Kirsten Cadieux and Rachel Slocum argue that a food justice position advocates for intervention into the food system along four axes: trauma/inequity, exchange, land, and labor.¹¹⁷ How food justice is mobilized differs across communities, spaces, and time even while maintaining its emphasis on structures of power. Just as food systems are

¹¹⁴ Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 4.

¹¹⁵ Just Food, “What is Food Justice?,” Just Food, Accessed August 1, 2017, <http://justfood.org/advocacy/what-is-food-justice>; Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 4.

¹¹⁶ Gottlieb, “Where We Live, Work, Play...and Eat,” 7-8.

¹¹⁷ Kirsten V. Cadieux and Rachel Slocum, “What Does It Mean To Do Food Justice?,” *Journal of Political Ecology* 22, no 1 (2015): 1-26.

tied to natural systems, including our own bodies, the water we drink, and the air we breathe, they are also tied to ongoing legacies of colonialism, the forced labor of slaves, unprotected and often-criminalized farm labor, mass violence against non-human animals, and so many other cultural systems to which we can expand our analyses.

Of course, food justice is not immune to criticism either. Katharine Bradley and Hank Herrera notably caution that some food justice efforts and research continue to “re-inscribe white, patriarchal systems of power and privilege.”¹¹⁸ Guthman argues that some food justice advocates pathologize low-income communities and people of color through anti-obesity frames, instead of situating their advocacy alongside critiques of environmental racism and toward environmental justice.¹¹⁹ Food justice is as much about grassroots tactics, policy, and action as it is about cultural and communicative shifts needed to tackle all forms of injustice that intersect with food systems. Not only can a food justice perspective help us do the rhetorical work of “critically interrupting”¹²⁰ dominant food movement paradigms, but it also allows us to engage communities on the frontlines—from farm to food bank—in their struggles for more just futures. Some of these fights emerge within and over the contentious space of the city—wherein both neighborhoods and their food systems are becoming restructured at a rapid rate. I wish to localize food justice within these spaces, by exploring the spatial politics of food next.

II. The Spatial Politics of Food

The spatial politics of food spans urban, suburban, and rural landscapes. Remarkably food systems themselves also contributed to the construction of these very spatial designations.

¹¹⁸ Katharine Bradley and Hank Herrera, “Decolonizing Food Justice: Naming, Resisting and Researching Colonizing Forces in the Movement,” *Antipode* 48, no. 1 (2016): 97.

¹¹⁹ Julie Guthman, “Doing Justice To Bodies? Reflections on Food Justice, Race, and Biology,” *Antipode* 46, no. 3 (2014): 1153-1171.

¹²⁰ For work on “critical interruption” see: Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Performing Critical Interruptions: Stories, Rhetorical Invention, and the Environmental Justice Movement,” *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 1 (2001): 1-25.

From conquest, settlement, and the appropriation of land, to the development of agrarian capitalism and industrialized agricultural production—these histories affect our ways of imagining the commonly referenced urban/rural divide.¹²¹ Space is intricately tied to food. Not only can food cultures be organized spatially, but the uneven distribution of food also affects food cultures as well. Power entangles these complex systems, impacting food access globally. Threading together work on foodscapes and foodways, as well as uneven development and gentrification, I take up Raka Shome’s call to analyze the ways both history and politics are written into space.¹²² For Shome, spatial relations are not “backdrops” against which identity occurs, but they contribute to identity formations and cultural relations.¹²³ As I attend to cities as key sites where food access becomes both an opportunity and a struggle, therefore, I refrain from envisioning “the city” as fixed or static space, but instead one wherein cultural politics are both constituted and contested.

Food saturates the cityscape. Restaurants, cafés, bars, corner stores, food trucks, gardens, rooftops, dumpsters, and other such spaces are networked sites where cultivation, consumption, culture, labor, waste, and economies (both formal and informal) are interwoven. While cities are sites of food access, they are also sites of food lack for some residents, a category hard to conceptualize without reliance on prevalent metaphors such as food “deserts,” “swamps,”

¹²¹ Though scholarship often references the urban/rural divide, their relations between/in contrast to each other are historically constructed and differ across territory. So, because I engage problems that emerge from urban environments (i.e. cities), I don’t assume that all cities are the same and/or that they contain clean division between urban, suburban, and rural areas. Rather, we can make claims about these spaces, while still recognizing ways they are essentially contested categories. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹²² Raka Shome, “Space Matters: The Power and Practice of Space,” *Communication Theory* 13, no. 1 (2003): 39-56. Shome borrows from Foucault here on the ways politics are written into space.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 43.

“mirages,” or their converse, “oases.”¹²⁴ We make sense of this lack through maps and metaphors, motivating many to become preoccupied with how best to increase food access where there is lack. It seems simple enough, but the politics are far more complicated. Rapid and uneven development in cities also retools food systems, providing new resources for the food privileged and complicating food access for the food insecure. Thus in this section, I explore the spatial politics of food more specifically through: (1) the development of foodscapes that often compete with many marginalized communities’ culturally contextual foodways, and (2) processes of uneven development, which produce and reinforce racialized space in the city.

Foodways and Foodscapes

Food justice scholars immersed in conversations that centralize the nexus of race, class, gender, and colonialism in the food system have begun to take *space* more seriously as a mediator by which (in)justice and unequal access—to both decision making, power, and food itself—manifest. For example, Julian Agyeman and Jesse McEntee have argued that food justice can be studied through an urban political ecology lens to situate the “socioecological processes, relationships, and metabolisms, which create unjust outcomes in space.”¹²⁵ In addition, a turn to a language of “foodscapes” has allowed scholars to conceive of and explore the “processes, politics, space, and places of praxis” in which food moves.¹²⁶ This might include food availability within a given environment and the politics involved in determining who can access these food amenities and spaces. As some food justice scholars have argued, however, the sheer

¹²⁴ Though they do not refer to these designations as metaphors, the terms are explored in: Anne Short, Julie Guthman, and Samuel Raskin, “Food Deserts, Oases, or Mirages? Small Markets and Community Food Security in the San Francisco Bay Area,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 26, no. 3 (2007): 352-364.

¹²⁵ Julian Agyeman and Jesse McEntee, “Moving the Field of Food Justice Forward Through the Lens of Urban Political Ecology,” *Geography Compass* 8, no. 3 (2014): 212.

¹²⁶ Michael K. Goodman, Damian Maye, and Lewis Holloway, “Ethical Foodscapes? Premises, Promises, and Possibilities,” *Environment and Planning A* 42, no. 8 (2010): 1783; More specifically, Goodman et al explore what they call “ethical foodscapes.”

availability of food may not tell us much about how or why communities consume what they do.¹²⁷ The cultural practices and economic limits of food choice, then, affect how folks interact with foodscapes as well.

The designation of foodscapes can get quite technical; however, broadly they reference “food environments” that can consist of the spaces wherein there is an “opportunity to obtain food” including the “physical, socio-cultural, economic, and policy influences at both micro and macro-levels.”¹²⁸ Foodscapes inform foodways, but the latter helps speak more to the cultural politics of food consumption. Whereas Anna M. Young, Justin Eckstein, and Donovan Conley note the rhetoricity of foodways as encompassing “production, circulation, and access,”¹²⁹ others have emphasized that these relations are particularly spatial. Foodways are not universal for any given consumer within a space, as we know well that food consumption is not just about food availability but is also influenced by history, culture, class, and community identification. To mark these contingent specificities, foodways have also been defined as “the cultural and social practices that affect food consumption, including how and what communities eat, where and how they shop and what motivates their food preference.”¹³⁰ The spaces in which food matters are not just topographically geographic either, as David Bell and Gill Valentine note, food politics transgresses the body, home, community, city, region, nation, and world.¹³¹ Thus there are important overlaps and divergences between foodscapes and foodways, both of which complicate how and for whom food access is provided.

¹²⁷ Alison Hope Alkon, Daniel Block, Kelly Moore, Catherine Gillis, Nicole DiNuccio, and Noel Chavez, “Foodways of the Urban Poor,” *Geoforum*, 48 (2013): 126-135.

¹²⁸ Lake, et. al. “The Foodscapes,” 666.

¹²⁹ Anna M. Young, Justin Eckstein, and Donovan Conley, “Rhetoric and Foodways,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 12, no. 2 (2015): 199.

¹³⁰ Alkon, et al., “Foodways of the Urban Poor,” 127.

¹³¹ David Bell and Gill Valentine, *Consuming Geographies: We Are Where We Eat*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997).

The exigence for studying food politics at the level of city is clear, as Ana Moragues-Faus and Kevin Morgan note, “cities are becoming key transition spaces where new food governance systems are being fashioned” through food policy and multi-sector alliances. Of course, every foodscape is different and it would be impossible to engage comprehensively with foodscapes nationally, regionally, and locally in addition to across urban, rural, and suburban landscapes—of course even these scalar designations are rhetorical heuristics. However, turning to cities or what Christiana Miewald and Eugene McCann call “urban foodscapes,”¹³² is important, especially when engaging environmental and food-related concerns. These might include the city itself, but also neighborhoods within particular cities, and the ways residents whom reside in them engage food systems.

I recognize however, that urban foodscapes are intricately connected to national food policy and planning, regional and citywide economic development, as well as the grounded environments and food cultures communities participate in each and every day. These differences matter because, as Julie Sze notes of carbon emissions, “environmental problems often ‘cross’ or jump scales, and there is a ‘spatial mismatch’ that can occur in discussing an environmental problem between the scales of environmental pollution and its political regulation—across both space and time.”¹³³ Spatial scales are complex, then, and overlap each other. Studying how scales traverse space and time is also an important consideration for environmental communication inquiry, something I highlight throughout this project.

¹³² Christiana Miewald and Eugene McCann, “Foodscapes and the Geographies of Poverty: Sustenance, Strategy, and Politics in an Urban Neighborhood,” *Antipode* 46, no. 2 (2014): 541.

¹³³ Julie Sze, *Fantasy Islands: Chinese Dreams and Ecological Fears in an Age of Climate Crisis*, (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015), 8.

Similarly, I would argue that our food politics often ‘jump’ scales as well. These might include the national, region, and local or even the economic, political, social, and embodied.¹³⁴ The metaphor of “scale-jumping” tried to attend productively to the cultural power of these categories, but recognizes that scale itself is socially constructed and not politically neutral.¹³⁵ In this project, I engage U.S. food access issues—spanning national food access mapping, municipal food policy, and neighborhood-based grassroots advocates—which I recognize all face the weight of city-based, regional, and national decision making. Thus, any rhetorical tracing of *access* would benefit from thinking across scales, time, and place, including the social construction of those very designations. A rhetorical perspective allows me to challenge the static divisions between scalar designations in food policy while still granting them the power they have to inform governance and decision-making.

Foodscales are also spaces where culture is performed, enacted, and contested. Funding resources, governance structures, both private and non-profit sectors all impact foodscales, but they also materialize as inherently cultural manifestations. For example, Julie Guthman draws connections between (many, though not all) farmers’ markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives, and farm-to-school programs, often located in particularly affluent areas, that are enacted through cultural coding and performances that transform them into “white spaces.”¹³⁶ More than just spaces wherein whiteness is saturated, performed, and rewarded, spaces wherein alternative food practices operate also can appear to be “reaching out towards brownness”¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Clare Newstead, Carolina K. Reid, and Matthew Sparke, “The Cultural Geography of Scale,” in *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*, eds. Kay Anderson, Mona Domosh, Steve Pile, and Nigel Thrift, (London: Sage, 2003), 485-498.

¹³⁵ Ibid; Cultural geographers Newstead, Reid, and Sparke call this the “social construction of scale” following Sallie Marston (2000) and draw on the work of cultural studies like Stuart Hall, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, and Michel Foucault to unfix essentially contested scalar designations like “national” or “local” (485-486); For work on scale-jumping, see Neil Smith, “Author Response,” *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (2000): 271-277.

¹³⁶ Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others,” 431.

¹³⁷ Slocum, “Whiteness, Space and Alternative Food Practice,” 523.

through the latent assumption about how people of color and those who are low-income (both white and non-white) make, or should make, their consumption choices. As alternative food practices are enacted spatially, they have an impact on what kinds of food options, developments, and forms of consumption are supported in cities especially.

Foodscales are not always constructed through whiteness, though. Recent studies have spoken to, for example, how communities of color in Washington D.C. enact “Black geographies” through constructing self-reliant communities through gardening.¹³⁸ Others have emphasized how communities of color and Indigenous peoples enact foodscales by advocating for land access and community controlled foodways or self-determined food systems.¹³⁹ Thus although attention to foodscales alone is rather limited, both foodscales and foodways must be theorized together as co-constitutive and mutually contested.

It is important however, to note that my engagement with foodscales as rhetorical constructs is guided by moves in the food justice movement towards what is being called “land justice.” Land justice emphasizes the spatial politics of food from an historical perspective, recognizing that land and food justice are intimately linked. For example, as LaDonna Redmond, a prominent African American mother and food justice advocate proclaims, “The nineteenth-century narrative used by the food movement, for all the good that it has done, has ignored history. To change the trajectory of exploitation that emerges in communities of color and tribal nations, it must acknowledge that this country is founded on contested land.”¹⁴⁰ Her claim posits

¹³⁸ Ashanté M. Reese, “‘We Will Not Perish; We’re Going To Keep Flourishing’: Race, Food Access, and Geographies of Self Reliance,” *Antipode* 50, no. 2 (2018): 407-424. Reese draws on Katherine McKittrick’s work on black geographies in this essay.

¹³⁹ See Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Giménez, *Land Justice: Re-Imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*, (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2017).

¹⁴⁰ LaDonna Redmond, “The Land is Contested,” in *Land Justice: Re-Imagining Land, Food, and the Commons in the United States*, eds. Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Giménez (Oakland, CA: Food First Books, 2017), xv-xvii.

that although popular critiques of industrialized food production¹⁴¹ are informative, they refuse to engage the ongoing impacts settler colonialism. Any engagement that promises to address food spatially, therefore, would do well to attend to the contested, colonized land on which foodscapes are enacted.

Foodscales and foodways are mutually constitutive and might benefit from a deeper analysis of power, including both capitalist development and colonization. While land justice can help us think about colonization, the industrial food system, the agrarian question, and rural foodways, it can also help us think about the contestation of and over property, land, and control in urban space as well. The struggle over space, land, and power are not unique to cities, but cities are certainly distinctive spaces where the cultural politics of food is navigated. Therefore, in the next section, I elaborate on cities as sites of struggle over uneven development, gentrification, and the construction of racialized space.

Gentrification and Racialized Green Space

As cities grow at an unprecedented rate, they become critical spaces wherein neoliberalism, development, and racialization manifest. As the well-circulated argument has it, now over half of the world's population resides in cities.¹⁴² This means that although cities are sites of economic growth, they are also sites wherein the struggle over access to space and resources takes shape. How disparities manifest, however, is anything but natural. The uneven development of urban space has advanced historically as a result of capitalist expansion and its

¹⁴¹ See for example Michael Pollan's body of work.

¹⁴² United Nations, "World's Population Increasingly Urban with More than Half Living in Urban Areas," *United Nations*, July 10, 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/07/472752-more-half-worlds-population-now-living-urban-areas-un-survey-finds>; However, some geographers argue that the designation of "city" is up for debate have critiqued this theory. See for example: Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid, "The 'Urban Age' in Question," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 3 (2014): 731-755.

simultaneous production of space.¹⁴³ Of course a thorough review of the over five decades worth of literature on gentrification exceeds this chapter, but given the contested nature of a term like gentrification, it is necessary that I trace some of the theoretical developments that help to make sense of its contemporary instantiations.

Neil Smith notes that uneven development is the result of the universality of the capitalist mode of production, which takes place as a particular geography, a spatial product of the multiple contradictions of capitalism.¹⁴⁴ This spatial product, in part, manifests through the concentration of wealth, which has been exacerbated the production and growth of varying industries, commerce, and transportation systems.¹⁴⁵ As a Marxian analysis would teach us, the contradictions of capitalism affects the value of labor, land, and resources producing some labor, people, and places as valuable and others as disposable.¹⁴⁶ This production of disposability manifests not necessarily always through overt measures, but by the gradual process of gentrification, or the class (as well as gendered and racial) shift that occurs when space is restructured to support incoming, often more affluent residents, pricing out those who have resided prior.¹⁴⁷ Gentrification, then, is one way this uneven development manifests in cities, producing both vast inequities in the distribution of wealth as well as in the production of classes and racialized space.

Gentrification, a term first coined by Ruth Glass's introduction to *London: Aspects of Change* in 1964, then described the strategic production of space by developers, planners,

¹⁴³ Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capitalism, and the Production of Space, Third Edition*, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008); Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ David Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, (London: Profile Books LTD, 2014).

¹⁴⁷ Ruth Glass, "Introduction: Aspects of Change," in *London: Aspects of Change*, ed. Centre for Urban Studies, (London: MacKibbon and Key, 1964), Also see Jason Hackworth, "Postrecession Gentrification in New York City," *Urban Affairs Review* 37, no. 6 (2002): 815-843.

politicians, and others to restructure urban space in a way that would encourage new wealthier residents.¹⁴⁸ While this dynamic still holds true today, gentrification shifts over time given the cultural and historical contexts of both the nations and neighborhoods experiencing rapid change. For example, Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith argue that we can witness three distinct “waves of gentrification” in the United States—from sporadic and state-led practices of dis- and reinvestment from the 1960s to the 1970s, to its expansion and resistance through both economic and cultural practices in the 1970s and 1980s, to its pause after the late 1980s recession and reemergence in the 1990s.¹⁴⁹ For Hackworth and Smith, each wave was marked by a different set of economic investments, some initiated by the then Keynesian nation state, others by outside private investments, and some that merged the two, through entrepreneurial governance and local public-private partnerships.¹⁵⁰ While these waves do not historicize colonial expansion and the frontier logics that assisted to build American cities in the first place, they do underscore the ways in which development relies on the simultaneous devaluation of space to encourage investment in its consequent transformation.

It is important however, that any analysis of contemporary urban gentrification also underscore the ways ongoing legacies of dispossession have made urbanization possible. For example, Nicholas Blomley argues that settlement is an enactment of property that has a

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Jason Hackworth and Neil Smith, “The Changing State of Gentrification,” *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 92, no. 3 (2001): 464-477.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid; On public private partnerships and local government entrepreneurialism, also see: David Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation of Urban Governance in Late Capitalism,” *Geografiska Annaler* 71, no. 1 (1989): 3-17; Neil Smith, “Which New Urbanism? New York City and the Revanchist 1990s,” in *The Urban Moment: Cosmopolitan Essays on the Late-20th Century City*, eds. Robert A. Beauregard and Sophie Body-Gendrot (London: Sage, 1999), 185-208.

particular geographic quality to it, necessitating subsequent forms of settlement to continue.¹⁵¹

Blomley argues:

In contemporary “settler societies” the inauguration of urban space has often entailed the dispossession of indigenous populations. Contemporary processes of gentrification also threaten and deliver other dispossessions. Yet these dispossessions are often evicted from urban history, despite their continued contestation by those affected.¹⁵²

Thus while contemporary literature on gentrification has underscored the classist, racial, and gendered dynamics of space, settlement and coloniality still function to dispossess people from land, resources, belonging, and survivability despite being positioned as ‘over’ or ‘in the past.’ For Blomley, urban space is propertied space that is made possible by “rights, jural relations, ideologies, and exclusions”¹⁵³—all of which, I would argue, are enabled through a particular rhetoricity that privileges property and whiteness through economic and cultural power. It is important to keep the powerful and historical development of propertied space in mind as we traverse contemporary gentrification scholarship as well.

Much of the well-circulated literature on gentrification historicizes it through the flows of deindustrialization and suburbanization that contributed to rapid “white-flight” from U.S. cities between the 1950s to the 1970s.¹⁵⁴ These developments moved white families to the suburbs, leaving urban space to be divested from for decades. For over five decades after, cities became sites of dis- and reinvestment as people and industries moved in, through, and out of them. As scholars consider both what gentrification is and how it has changed over time, they have focused their analyses on the role of the state, shifts in neoliberalism, and the changing urban imaginaries that necessitate redevelopment. Smith argues that gentrification is indeed now a

¹⁵¹ Nicholas Blomley, *Unsettling the City: Urban Land and the Politics of Property*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, xvii.

¹⁵⁴ On this history, see for example: Loretta Lees, Elvin Wyly, and Tom Slater, *Gentrification*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008).

global urban strategy marked by an era of neoliberalism that has fused both capital and the state.¹⁵⁵ Gentrification is the result of the strategic global expansion of capitalism that is both networked and borderless; though, the results are more territorially rooted through cities and nation states that act in and on behalf of the market.¹⁵⁶ As a strategic urban expansion project, its contemporary form responds to fill a gap “left by the abandonment of twentieth-century liberal urban policy” and seeks to make such space “productive” for capitalist accumulation through “often camouflaged” state-supported means.¹⁵⁷

While much of the literature on gentrification has spoken to its particular classist dimensions, some argue that this focus has been particularly myopic. Literature attending to the gendered implications of gentrification has attempted to respond to this overreliance on an orthodox Marxian framework.¹⁵⁸ For example, Liz Bondi has argued that the fragmentation of the middle class manifests through gentrification, often pricing out many households with dependent children, including women.¹⁵⁹ Other studies have theorized gentrification’s racial dimensions, which despite their palpability, are surprisingly under researched. As Katherine McKittrick argues, the production of space is “rooted in racial condemnation,” which is intertwined with the logics of state terrorism, the plantation, and conquest.¹⁶⁰ Racial violence is

¹⁵⁵ Neil Smith, “New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy,” *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 427-450.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* Smith diverges from Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s analysis of capitalism and empire through the “multitude” (which he argues is more focused on finance capitalism) and instead considers capitalism’s territorializing power.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 446.

¹⁵⁸ On gender and gentrification, see for example: Damaris Rose, “Rethinking Gentrification: Beyond the Uneven Development of Marxist Urban Theory,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 2, no. 1 (1984): 47-74; Tim Butler and Chris Hamnett, “Gentrification, Class, and Gender: Some Comments on Wardens’ Gentrification as Consumption,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 12, no. 4 (1994): 447-493; Winifred Curran, *Gender and Gentrification*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018).

¹⁵⁹ Liz Bondi, “Gender, Class, and Gentrification: Enriching the Debate,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17, no. 3 (1999): 261-282; Liz Bondi, “Gender Divisions and Gentrification: A Critique,” *The Royal Geography Society* 16, no. 2 (1991): 190-198.

¹⁶⁰ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6.

particularly geographic in that forces many communities of color to find ways of living in the “unlivable.”¹⁶¹ Indeed, colonial geographies and racial violence manifest spatially.

Another way this violence takes shape is through the logics of property that protect and uphold whiteness as the norm. Critical race theorists Cheryl Harris and George Lipsitz also theorize whiteness through its reliance on possession through property rights, coded into law, which are “rooted in white supremacy and economic hegemony over Black and Native American people” in what might be understood as “parallel systems of domination.”¹⁶² George Lipsitz argues that whiteness is not a color but a condition that structures advantages and disadvantages not always *only* linked to racial identity, but more often through what he calls the “white spatial imaginary.”¹⁶³ The white spatial imaginary, for Lipsitz, violently constructs neighborhoods, especially within cities and suburbs where whiteness comes to define and organize “the physical contours of the places where we live, work, and play, and it is bolstered by financial rewards for whiteness.”¹⁶⁴ Whiteness shapes place through its simultaneous invisibility and universality.¹⁶⁵ For others centralizing the particularities of settler colonial violence, like Aileen Moreton Robinson, whiteness is a form of possession—a clear and visible governing force marked by territorial expansion, genocide, and cultural erasure.¹⁶⁶ Despite growing work on the colonial, racial, and gendered dimensions of space, many scholars studying the uneven development in gentrifying cities continue to leave out these forms of spatial violence.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 130.

¹⁶² Cheryl Harris, “Whiteness as Property,” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1714; Also see George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2011).

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 28.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid; Also see: Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, “Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 3 (1995): 291-309.

¹⁶⁶ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Nevertheless, a small, but growing body of scholarship on gentrification has theorized the racial dimensions of neighborhood development.¹⁶⁷ Some borrow from Michael Omi and Howard Winant's theory of racial formation, to describe how *racial projects*—or the “interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics” that “reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines”—are organized spatially.¹⁶⁸ For example, Melissa Archer Alvaré argues that gentrification is a racially inflected neoliberal project because development relies on “racially coded narratives” to support “neighborhood improvement [that] serve to rationalize and normalize the resultant subordination of long-time residents.”¹⁶⁹ Similar to patronizing articulations that blame the poor for their own poverty, gentrification manifests through a host of racialized and classist narratives of both the spaces and people that are in need of redevelopment.¹⁷⁰ These narratives are often couched in colorblind terms that promise positive urban restructuring for everyone through the production of new amenities—for example, those that are supported by new zoning ordinances or are carried out as green space, restaurants, housing, or other services said to be available to all.¹⁷¹ However, a colorblind rhetoric of ‘revitalization’ can mask the deeply rooted logics of racialization that code which bodies are

¹⁶⁷ On race and gentrification, see for example: Elizabeth Kirkland, “What’s Race Got to Do With It? Looking for the Racial Dimensions of Gentrification,” *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 32, no. 2 (2008): 18-30; Lance Freeman, *There Goes the ‘Hood: Views of Gentrification from the Ground Up*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006); Michelle Boyd, “The Downside of Racial Uplift: Meaning of Gentrification in an African American Neighborhood,” *City and Society* 17, no. 2 (2008): 265-288; Loretta Lees, “Gentrification, Race, and Ethnicity: Towards a Global Research Agenda?,” *City and Community* 15, no. 3 (2016): 208-214.

¹⁶⁸ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States, Second Edition*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015), 56; Also see: Jesse Mumm, “The Racial Fix,” *Focaal—Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 79, (2017): 102-118; Melissa Archer Alvaré, “Gentrification and Resistance: Racial Projects in the Neoliberal Order,” *Social Justice* 44, no. 2/3 (2017): 113-136.

¹⁶⁹ Alvaré, “Gentrification and Resistance,” 113.

¹⁷⁰ Alvaré draws on both Lisa Cacho and Caitlin Cahill to describe the ways “poverty is equated with laziness and criminality” (116). See: Lisa Marie Cacho, *Social Death: Racialized Rightlessness and the Criminalization of the Unprotected*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2012); Caitlin Cahill, “‘At Risk’? The Fed Up Honeys Re-Present the Gentrification of the Lower East Side,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 34, no. 1/2: 334-363.

¹⁷¹ On colorblind neoliberal development policies and their contribution to gentrification, see: Olivia Hetzler, Veronica E. Medina, and David Overfelt, “Gentrification, Displacement, and New Urbanism: The Next Racial Project,” *Socialism Today* 4, no. 2 (2006): <http://www.ncsociology.org/sociationtoday/v42/gent.htm>.

appropriate and welcome in developing spaces, while others are posited as regressive, a nuisance, or are criminalized.

Communication scholars have also begun to take the rhetorical dimensions of gentrification seriously, considering how public discourses can both contribute to urban renewal processes as well as resist them. Jenny Rice takes a “publics approach,” for example, to account for the relationship between discourse and material spaces of development.¹⁷² Candice Rai offers an analysis of the ways in which democratic ideals often conflict with the material realities of those experiencing neighborhood restructuring.¹⁷³ Others have explicitly linked gentrification to racialization and have centralized the strategic role of uneven development and capitalist accumulation. For example, in an analysis of development in Detroit and Harlem, Mary E. Triece traces neoliberalism as an economic project but also a discourse that affirms “common sense” narratives of economic development that “naturalize urban formations rooted in racist practices.”¹⁷⁴ What these scholars offer is ways of centralizing the communicative dynamics of gentrification and neighborhood change. As Triece underscores, “capitalist development does not occur without communicative efforts that coordinate and legitimate the course of growth.”¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless those resisting gentrification can engage in public protest, debate in public forums, or even engage in “narrative mapping” to challenge both neoliberalism and environmental injustice in their neighborhoods.¹⁷⁶ Thus my work builds on these salient efforts, entering discourses of environmentalism and food access into the conversation.

¹⁷² Jenny Rice, *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012): 8.

¹⁷³ Candice Rai, *Democracy's Lot: Rhetoric, Publics, and the Places of Invention*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2016).

¹⁷⁴ Mary E. Triece, *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Earth Twenty-First Century*, (London: Lexington Books, 2016): xx.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, xv.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 112.

These communicative elements of food politics and gentrification matter, especially since the cultural capital of environmental and health planning can be mobilized in favor of spatial ‘improvements’ as well. For example, Nathan McClintock advances “sustainability capitalism” as a way to describe the valorization of environmental amenities and performances that green at the same time that they whiten.¹⁷⁷ Sara Safransky calls this process “green dispossession” whereby the urban landscape becomes a frontier that erases both people and their cultural lifeways, by framing their environments as “empty” space.¹⁷⁸ Gentrification entangles both food and race as many in the dominant food movement seek to provide food for those in disinvested food “deserts” while making broad assumptions about “what food desert residents seem to want.”¹⁷⁹ These narratives are racialized as they frame both people of color and the places they reside as unhealthy and in need of external economic and environmental growth. Though as Margaret Marietta Ramirez argues, Indigenous peoples and folks of color (in her study in particular, African Americans), have a complex relationships with land, labor, and food that are rooted in both domination and resistance,¹⁸⁰ all of which are ignored through a framework of deficit. Thus gentrification is assisted through the overt support for environmental and food amenities, subtly justified through pejorative, racialized discourses.

As emerging literature on the relationships between environmental (in)justice and gentrification highlights, sustainability planning also has a tendency to whiten, by promising environmental amenities, green space, and health conscious projects (from clean parks to

¹⁷⁷ Nathan McClintock, “Cultivating (a) Sustainability Capital: Urban Agriculture, Ecogentrification, and the Uneven Valorization of Social Reproduction,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108, no. 2 (2018): 579-590; In this essay, McClintock extends both feminist political economists’ and geographers’ notion of social reproductive labor as well as Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of the symbolic capital and social space, thereby expanding the orthodox Marxian focus on the production of value only through labor.

¹⁷⁸ Sara Safransky, “Greening the Urban Frontier: Race, Property, and Resettlement in Detroit,” *Geoforum* 56 (2014): 241.

¹⁷⁹ Guthman, “Bringing Good Food to Others,” 443.

¹⁸⁰ Margaret Marietta Ramirez, “The Elusive Inclusive: Black Food Geographies and Racialized Food Spaces,” *Antipode* 47, no. 3 (2015): 748-769.

walkable spaces) in spaces perceived to be vacant or blighted.¹⁸¹ The paradox though, as Melissa Checker argues, is that residents vulnerable to gentrification must “reject environmental amenities in their neighborhoods in order to resist the gentrification that tends to follow” thereby remaining caught between both needs (health and housing) for survival.¹⁸² This is not to suggest that all green planning leads to gentrification; however, as a strategic processes, it can be one way in which space can be discursively produced to make room for outsiders—often those who are more affluent, white, and without children. What results is the devolution of communities that have struggled to stay present, as they rode out the flows dis- and reinvestment for decades. The very urban and environmental restructuring that has left them out prior, is now attempting to retool their neighborhoods—except more often these processes do not benefit, let alone include them.

Many community driven movements have attempted to fight back and assert their “right to the city” or their ability to belong in space that is continuously reimagined without them.¹⁸³ For example, efforts to remap gentrification through narrative can tell a story of displacement, but also can unite activist work to struggle against dispossession, as explored in the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project’s work on gentrification in the Bay Area.¹⁸⁴ Localized, community-based anti-gentrification work has also worked to reclaim both space and (racial and gendered)

¹⁸¹ Winifred Curran and Trina Hamilton, *Just Enough Green: Urban Development and Environmental Gentrification*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁸² Melissa Checker, “Wiped Out by the ‘Greenwave’: Environmental Gentrification and the Paradoxical Politics of Urban Sustainability,” *City and Society* 23, no. 2 (2011): 211.

¹⁸³ Isabelle Anguelovski, “Tactical Developments for Achieving Just and Sustainable Neighborhoods: The Role of Community-Based Coalitions and Bottom-to-Bottom Networks in the Street, Technical, and Funder Activism,” *Environment & Planning C: Government and Policy* 33, no. 4 (2015): 703-725; Also see David Harvey on “the right to the city” in: David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review* 53, (2008): 23-40.

¹⁸⁴ Manissa M. Maharawal and Erin McElroy, “The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project: Counter Mapping and Oral History toward Bay Area Housing Justice,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108, no. 2 (2018): 380-389.

identity in contentious environments.¹⁸⁵ Alternative models for community control, like community land trusts, are also gaining traction as a possible way to halt or stabilize gentrification.¹⁸⁶ Thus, gentrification can be resisted, transgressed, and reorganized by communities that enforce development on their own terms and without displacement.¹⁸⁷ To better understand how both food politics and gentrification are voiced (and by whom), I now turn to ongoing conversations about voice itself.

III. Voice, Food, and Politics

Voice matters to both food politics and gentrification. Both are intimate; both are complex. Critically engaging foodways demands that we emphasize the polyvocality of both *food privilege* and *food injustice*. With these terms, I extend Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow's argument of the dialectical relationships between environmental privilege and environmental justice to underscore that one cannot exist without the other.¹⁸⁸ Privilege necessitates injustice, and vice-versa. Food privilege comes with "economic, political, and cultural power."¹⁸⁹ Consequently, the narration of food-entangled problems and solutions will differ depending on whose voices are centered, marginalized, or in some cases, relegated to complete absence. In the next section, therefore, I engage the role of voice in the narration of

¹⁸⁵ See for example: Vicky Muniz, *Resisting Gentrification and Displacement: Voices of Puerto Rican Women of the Barrio*, (New York, NY: Garland Publishing, 1998).

¹⁸⁶ Myungshik Choi, Shannon Van Zandt, and David Matarrita-Cascante, "Can Community Land Trusts Slow Gentrification?" *Journal of Urban Affairs* 40, no. 3 (2018): 3.

¹⁸⁷ I borrow the language of "development without displacement" from Bay Area organization Causa Justa:: Just Cause. See: Causa Justa:: Just Cause, "Development without Displacement: Resisting Gentrification in the Bay Area," *CJ:JC*, 2014, <http://cjjc.org/en/publications/reports/item/1421-development-without-displacement-resisting-gentrification-in-the-bay-area>.

¹⁸⁸ Lisa Sun-Hee Park and David Naguib Pellow, *The Slums of Aspen: Immigrants vs. the Environment in America's Eden* (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

food-entangled problems and solutions to emphasize the role of narration, storytelling, positionality, and power in food advocacy.

Voice and Voicelessness

As I trace the voices in food policy, practice, and activism, I maintain a disposition to the texts, people, and places wherein power circulates. My project builds on the salient vein of the critical tradition in rhetorical studies, employing both rhetorical criticism and critical ethnographic practices. By focusing on the discourse of power—in McKerrow’s words, a critique of both domination and freedom—I am capable of paying closer attention to the ways power operates in everyday life, including how discourses of food access are evoked, contested, and rearticulated in food justice activism.¹⁹⁰ I employ a critical orientation to rhetoric and rhetorical criticism, in addition to utilizing critical ethnographic practices to attend to the rhetorical circulation of food justice discourses in gentrifying U.S. cities. Each affords a way to capture the rhetoricity of maps, texts, media, policy documents, voices, spaces, and places through which these debates manifest.

The polyvocality of food policy and food movements contains both dominant and vernacular discursive claims. Voice is incredibly important to movements like environmental justice but ‘voice,’ in this case, does not and should not stop at mere inclusion. As Robert Bullard writes: “Inclusion of persons of color... does not necessarily mean their voices will be heard or their cultures respected.”¹⁹¹ As a result, I want to consider the role of voice in the act of narrating food-based problems, including their entanglements with gentrification, and their

¹⁹⁰ Raymie E. McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis,” *Communication Monographs* 56, no. 2 (1989): 91-111.

¹⁹¹ Robert D. Bullard, “Introduction,” 13.

solutions. Who gets to speak, whose voices are privileged, and whose narratives about the food system gain rhetorical traction historically all matter.

Eric King Watts explicates that voice is “constitutive of both *ethical and emotional dimensions*” moving rhetorical scholars beyond conceptions of voice as emerging from a subject’s individual agency or capacity to speak.¹⁹² Instead, Watts wants us to consider voice’s pre-discursivity, its connection to embodiment, and its assertion as presence. Narration and storytelling do powerful sense-making work and are acts of rhetorical worldmaking, agency, and authority over the self. Voices can challenge universalizing narratives that become solidified historically and strategically as road maps for power. My interest in the dominant voices of the food movement (including national campaigns and citywide food policy) and those that critically interrupt them (grassroots food justice and anti-gentrification advocates) shifts focus to the ways communities are “confronting, deconstructing, and interrogating a dominant language system that denies difference and, thus, mutes ‘voice’.”¹⁹³ Thus how, and *with* whom, decisions are made about the food system affect their ethics and outcomes.

A concern over which voices are heard, however, is not merely about representation. Rather, the importance of voice is fundamentally an issue of power within food systems and decision making about them. Nick Couldry elaborates that voice matters both in terms of process and value; it is socially grounded, embodied, and relational.¹⁹⁴ Voice is relational in that it is often speaks from shared (though potentially fractured) material conditions.¹⁹⁵ Speaking to the (many) neoliberal crises that work to silence, de-value, and determine how voices are heard and

¹⁹² Eric King Watts, “‘Voice’ and ‘Voicelessness’ in Rhetorical Studies,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 2 (2001): 179-195.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 183.

¹⁹⁴ Nick Couldry, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics After Neoliberalism*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010).

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

respected (or not) in public culture, Couldry makes the argument that voices can discursively interrupt dominant systems of power, including neoliberalism's cultural and economic legitimacy. As food policy and food movements become driven and constrained by neoliberalism, those on the fringes of the food system actively engage in localized and public critiques. Communities use food to build communal agency, train grassroots leaders, and empower a connection to the land and each other in gentrifying cities. So rarely are these discourses elevated in the dominant food movement.

Thus, my project seeks to understand both the dominant food movement perspectives as well as the voices of those that challenge them. In this process, I also theorize how voicing experiences of violence and community power matters to subjectivity. For example, I underscore how the intimacy of environmental harms, acts of resistance and community building, and practices like gardening, food sharing, protest, or convening to reclaim space, can all constitute subjects in fertile ways. Though I pay close attention to voice through dialogic processes, I also move to consider the embodied, spatial, and relationally practiced ways in which voice comes to matter to regenerative food justice work. Before expanding on what this looks like in practice, I first need to situate myself within this project to give a more full account of the critical reflexivity through which I attend to situated analysis and critique.

My Voice

When I tell people that I study food justice, the responses range, but are quite typical, as my interlocutors often hear *food* and not *justice*. The conversations that follow often include discussions about their gardens, diets, favorite restaurants, food documentaries they've watched on Netflix, and their recent discovery that sugars and gluten are most certainly the so-called real enemy of the human body. As a white, middle-class vegan, born of middle-class roots in Texas,

who has spent years living in stereotypically progressive hubs like San Francisco, California, and Boulder, Colorado, these conversations are commonplace. Seemingly, however, they come with the territory. Spending my formative years in the port city and agricultural town of Stockton, California also contributed to my curiosity of how, while being surrounded by excessive and abundant food production, there were still so many living with food insecurity. Although I have never been food insecure myself, I witnessed first-hand how many close to me—from friends to classmates—had difficulty obtaining healthy, affordable food.

Being surrounded by food producers, foodie consumers, and the food insecure for much of my life, I have been challenged to approach food in its complexity, as it sheds light on so many of the cultural politics that differ, yet recur, across the suburban and urban areas in which I've resided. Whether receiving push back from my carnivorous, fast-food frequenting Texan family or being pressed for insights about how to live an 'ethical lifestyle,' I'm not naïve to the assumption that I seem like a person fit to field food-based proselytizing, and sometimes I even participate. What has become clear, however, is that no matter with whom you talk, everyone seems to have an opinion about food—what one should or shouldn't eat, how much, and when. For example, Mary Douglas' seminal work on pollution beliefs was inspired by her observations of the deeply religious food rituals two of her friends, one a Brahmin and another Jewish.¹⁹⁶

Eating is personal, rightfully so.

My varied work—academic, advocacy, community organizing, and beyond—has given me the opportunity to discuss food with all types of people. This includes foodie consumers, local food advocates, farmers, chefs, restaurant and business owners, gardeners, food policy decision-makers, school food practitioners, environmentalists, environmental justice advocates, food and farmworker justice organizers, and many others. For many whose work centralizes food, there is

¹⁹⁶ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

a taken-for-granted assumption that food brings people together; it creates community. Whether sharing a meal with family or walking through a farmers market, food is commonly positioned as the somatic material from which relationships, bodies, and communities can be nourished. While this most certainly can be true, we must also interrogate what kinds of relationships, bodies, and communities we *want* to nourish, who ‘we’ even are, in addition the types of assumptions made about the communities with whom we want to break (or feed) bread.

In addition, gentrification is complicated. Though it is often framed as something that happens *to* people, who gets positioned as the *gentrifiers* and the *gentrified* is much more complex. As Schlichtman, Patch, and Hill note of gentrification:

As city residents and students of the city ourselves, we have increasingly noticed an elephant sitting in the methodological corner: many progressive activists and academics against gentrification are actually gentrifiers themselves. Yet the same people tend to talk about gentrification from a veiled, objective distance. Why? It seems to us that ‘gentrifier’ has become a dirty word that indicts one’s very character, and thus many individuals assume that they cannot possibly be one.¹⁹⁷

Through auto-ethnographic accounts, they stress in their book, *Gentrifier*, that in many respects, those privileged enough, even like them, to intellectually engage gentrification from a distance negates their own contribution to the problem, as they are middle-class residents living in largely disenfranchised spaces in gentrifying cities. This is not to say we should not be critical of such divisions, but the embodied politics of belonging requires deeper culture, systematic, and historical analysis. The need for greater complexity was emphasized continuously from grassroots advocates whom I engaged throughout this project as well.

My own presence has taken up space in cities. And although, I was raised on foods high in calories, but low in nutrients, I have never had to worry about where my next meal would come from. I never have had to experience hunger or diet related diseases like those at the fringes of

¹⁹⁷ John Joe Schlichtman, Jason Patch, and Marc Lamont Hill, *Gentrifier*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

our food system. So, even while I've developed a criticality toward my own body in these spaces while attempting to find a cheap place to rent on a student budget, seeking out inexpensive plant-based foods, and working to support housing-rights activists, labor unions, environmental justice, and local food economies, I am not immune to criticism. We all live within the unjust cultural, economic, and environmental food systems I am writing about. No one stands outside, pure in their food politics.¹⁹⁸

I underscore this to emphasize that my voice affords and constrains that kinds of critical interventions I, myself, hope to advance throughout this project. My positionality, whiteness, body, and educational credentials allow me to enter the majority-white spaces and engage as a presumed equal with food policy analysts, business leaders, and government officials, despite maintaining a critical distance. And although I may stand in solidarity, both in theory and praxis, with housing rights advocates, grassroots food justice activists, and those most disenfranchised in the food systems, my whiteness and food privilege complicate the kinds of identification and alliance building I am able to assume, and rightfully so. It is necessary, even a survival strategy, for those on the margins of our food system to be suspicious of the food privileged (like me) who seek to learn about their struggles. However, it is possible that by engaging both dominant and marginal voices, critical interventions can take shape—especially by using my own privilege to critically interrupt the taken-for-granted status of dominant, institutional players in the food system.¹⁹⁹ Thus, my voice in this project matters insofar as it affords me the privilege to speak out against gentrification to gentrifiers as someone with food privilege myself; but it is not, and cannot be, the totalizing objective voice in the discussion. Engaging food justice activists that challenge normative food movement discourses means being willing to recognize that sometimes

¹⁹⁸ Pezzullo, "Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts."

¹⁹⁹ For work on "critical interruption" see: Pezzullo, "Performing Critical Interruptions."

the criticism is and must be directed toward me, and maybe you, as well. These are the complexities that entail engaging food justice and gentrification seriously and why voice, both for food justice and for gentrification, matters.

“Access” as a Food Movement Key Term

Although definitions of food security and justice span from advocates, institutions, and policy makers, a central concern for those invested in relieving food inequity is *access*. As I’ve argued before, articulations of food *access* (including justifications for how and why it is necessary) are voiced by many different food practitioners and advocates. Institutions like the U.S. Department of Agriculture emphasizes *food access* as a key component to both food choices and health.²⁰⁰ The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization defines food security as “when people, at all times, have physical, social, and economic *access* to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy lifestyle” (emphasis mine).²⁰¹ The Union of Concerned Scientists underscores that “poor diets and inadequate *access* to healthy food” is a dire national concern (emphasis mine).²⁰² Organizations like The Food Trust have written well-circulated documents like *Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters*, indicating that food access issues disparately impact low-income communities and communities of color.²⁰³ The list could go on. If there is any chance of consensus that our food system is broken, unequal food *access* would be a reason for which many would identify.

²⁰⁰ Economic Research Services, “Food Choices & Health,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, October 12, 2016, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-choices-health/>

²⁰¹ FOA, “Food Security Statistics,” *FAO*, Accessed August 3, 2018, <http://www.fao.org/economic/ess/ess-fs/en/>

²⁰² Union of Concerned Scientists, “Fixing Food: Fresh Solutions from Five U.S. Cities,” *Expand Healthy Food Access*, 2016, <http://www.ucsusa.org/food-agriculture/expand-healthy-food-access/fixing-food-fresh-solutions-five-us-cities-2016#.Wcm71EqGMfE>

²⁰³ Judith Bell, Gabriella Mora, Erin Hagan, Victor Rubin, Allison Karpyn, “Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters,” *The Food Trust*, 2013, http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/access-to-healthy-food.original.pdf

A critical focus on *access* tells us much about our vision of power, policy, and public culture. The term has steadily gained frequency in public discourse since the 1960s and has significantly shifted conversations in debates over health care, education, transportation, structural accommodations, and media by centralizing themes of open access, accessibility, and the role of the state.²⁰⁴ The term has also gained critical attention in disability studies as “easy to define and comprehend but difficult to create.”²⁰⁵ Scholars in this area hold that although *access* translates into well-meaning policies to reduce some physical barriers to accessibility in a space, the term has become quite narrow and can “represent a form of outsourcing, as authorities implement technological change without addressing the underlying prejudices and misconceptions.”²⁰⁶ Of course, reducing the spatial and material barriers to access, for example to bathrooms, is incredibly important for many disabled, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals. Barriers to access can even be opportunities for coalitions across difference and have the possibility to construct consubstantiality.²⁰⁷ As these conversations illustrate, however, it is both possible and necessary that we approach access critically, even if the term can do productive work to bring communities together around a common issue or be a nodal point for reform.

Attention to the ways key terms are leveraged and negotiated is important to any study on the rhetorical politics of public policy. As Robert Asen argues of the rhetorical function of words like “accountability” and “opportunity” in federal education reform, following John Murphy,

²⁰⁴ See Google Ngram Viewer for the word “access”; Jean-Baptiste Michel*, Yuan Kui Shen, Aviva Presser Aiden, Adrian Veres, Matthew K. Gray, William Brockman, The Google Books Team, Joseph P. Pickett, Dale Hoiberg, Dan Clancy, Peter Norvig, Jon Orwant, Steven Pinker, Martin A. Nowak, and Erez Lieberman Aiden*. *Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books*. Science (Published online ahead of print, 2010).

²⁰⁵ Bess Williamson, “Access,” in *Keywords in Disability Studies*, eds. Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, and David Serlin (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 15.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰⁷ Isaac West, “PISSAR’s Critically Queer and Disabled Politics,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 7, no. 2 (2010), 156-175.

they often connect the relationship between ideology and idiom.²⁰⁸ Just as Asen argues that these two terms are “key policy terms for education,” the same can be said for the word *access* in food policy and advocacy. Tracing *access* in addition to the kinds of assumptions and values and practices that it connects, can tell us much about the cultures used to make sense of spaces, bodies, and food politics rhetorically, culturally, and organizationally.

My interest in the cultural values that mediate *access* emerged due to its saturation in food policy discourse. Although the term is relatively banal and receives less critical attention in food-related scholarship to date, I am particularly drawn to its unremarkable, yet ubiquitous appearance in food policy. After spending some time with food practitioners involved in governmental, non-profit, and for-profit work, I also started to see a pattern. In academic conferences and public events alike, when I would discuss unequal food access as a feature of our current food system, audience members and peers began approaching me more frequently with varied congratulatory remarks akin to patting me on the back for publicly recognizing the importance of food access. The more I attended events, policy forums, and other spaces with food advocates, the pattern continued, and I slowly began to conclude that perhaps naming unequal access to food was, in many of these spaces, a progressive statement. “What you’re talking about—food access, the food deserts thing—it’s important stuff,” one public school teacher remarked after I gave a talk on food justice.²⁰⁹ Of course, I agreed, but this pattern began to puzzle me. As someone invested in food justice advocacy, recognizing food access issues seemed hardly a radical act; it felt like a fairly conservative, factual observation.

To me, discourses of access had already gained traction. For example, following national projects like former U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama’s *Let’s Move!* campaign, news about “food

²⁰⁸ Robert Asen, “Lyndon Baines Johnson and George W. Bush on Education Reform: Ascribing Agency and Responsibility Through Key Policy Terms,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 15, no. 2 (2012): 289-317.

²⁰⁹ Personal communication, February 10, 2017.

deserts” (or “communities, where access to affordable, quality, and nutritious food is limited”) had been placed on the national map as a key public concern.²¹⁰ These national concerns influenced cities around the country to begin adopting the language of ‘tackling food deserts’ as a salient discourse and cultural project while many corporations, businesses, non-profits, start-ups, and philanthropic endeavors emerged as champions of the cause. In 2011, even Walmart quickly developed plans to open 300 more stores (in addition to their already 218) in food deserts.²¹¹ These moves indicate that food access is becoming a market up for grabs to those who can quickly, and swiftly, move into areas to increase food access. If acknowledging food access issues is a relatively progressive declaration, yet its mass capitalization has made food deserts a profitable industry, then more work need to be done to explore this rhetorical transfer.

Some scholars argue that the term *access* itself, used widely in public policy and development discourse, is under theorized.²¹² In response to the ways *access* is configured in property access literature, Jesse C. Ribot and Nancy Lee Peluso urge us to think about the term as indexing “bundles and webs of powers that enable actors to gain, control, and maintain access” in addition to how power enables us to see the “mechanisms of access” that make up these webs.²¹³ This is interesting, especially when applied to food (in)justice literature. Currently food access is framed as something the food insecure need; but I wonder if for those galvanized to provide it, access could be refigured as a project for their increased expansion and marketization. This leaves me thinking, why might access matter not only to food, but also to space?

²¹⁰ Let’s Move!, “Healthy Communities,” *Obama White House Archives*, last updated 2016, <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/healthy-communities>

²¹¹ Ariel Schwartz, “Walmart’s Big Plan to Feed the Food Deserts of the U.S.,” *Fast Company*, July 22, 2011, <https://www.fastcompany.com/1768524/walmarts-big-plan-feed-food-deserts-us>

²¹² Jesse C. Ribot and Nancy Lee Peluso, “A Theory of Access,” *Rural Sociology* 68, no. 2 (2003):153-181.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 154-155.

The spatial inflections to discourses of access are used in our every day talk, or what the OED references as the “power, opportunity, permission, or right to come near or into contact with someone or something” or “the action of going or coming to or into a place; coming into the presence of a person, or into contact with a thing.”²¹⁴ While colloquially the term *access* can be thought of as being in reach of, or the ability to benefit from, goods and services, I find myself going back to three words that I see as most applicable to questions of food gentrification in developing cities: power, contact, and presence. These terms give me pause. What might it mean to refigure access as not just something food practitioners provide for the food insecure, but in doing so, offer food practitioners a means by which to gain access themselves, to property, place, people, and power? Perhaps, tracing articulations of *access* as a food movement key term and mobilizing exigence for food system reform, could help us engage this question even deeper.

IV. Methodology: Conjunctures and Rhetorical Cartographies

This dissertation traces the cultural politics of food access as well as how it is articulated across scales, while remaining critical of the ways these scales are rhetorically and culturally constituted. I begin my analysis with USDA food access maps and national public health policy, then move to citywide food policy through a case study in Denver, Colorado, and eventually make my way to the grassroots, exploring food justice and anti-gentrification advocacy in some of Denver’s most contested neighborhoods. In order to attend to these multiple contexts in one

²¹⁴ "access, n.". OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.colorado.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/1028?rskey=Ab0G0p&result=1> (accessed September 26, 2017).

project, though, it is critical that I take an anti-nominalist approach to the study of each as well as their relations together.²¹⁵

To trace the cultural politics of food access and its many discursive articulations, I mobilize a cultural studies perspective to explore a particular, though porous conjuncture wherein food and gentrification become entangled. This entanglement, in the space(s) of the contemporary gentrifying city, lends itself best to a *conjunctural analysis*, which provides a way of mapping the multiple articulations that bring to life social formations that are connected but nevertheless fractured across space, time, and scales.²¹⁶ A conjuncture is not a particular moment or place, but is the “accumulation/condensation that produces a particular problematic (or set of problematics)”²¹⁷—in this case, *food gentrification* and the many problems that it weaves. Conjunctural analysis, for cultural studies scholars Lawrence Grossberg and Stuart Hall, describes a way of analyzing change, articulation, and contradiction along the terrain in which a crisis emerges.²¹⁸ The crisis, in this case, is multifaceted, wherein urban development has contributed to new forms of gentrification in urban life, one that interweaves the politics of food, urban greening, and sustainability in the contemporary era.

I must be specific here, however, when I refer to “the contemporary era” because as Grossberg notes, there are always multiple layered spatial and temporal dimensions to conjunctures.²¹⁹ Though I focus on food politics that have developed, largely, since 2008 to the present, these politics are always already informed by histories prior—from colonization,

²¹⁵ I am inspired by Dr. Ted Striphas’ elaboration on anti-nominalism in cultural studies analysis, about which he explored in a multi-series lecture during a seminar on cultural studies I had the privilege of taking in graduate school.

²¹⁶ Lawrence Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 40.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.* Stuart Hall describes conjuncture as the “complex historically specific terrain of a crisis which affects—but in uneven ways—a specific national-social formation as a whole.” See: Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, (London: Verso, 1988), 127.

²¹⁹ Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*.

slavery, the rise of urbanism, racist housing policy instituted in the 1930s, to massive urban restructuring through state-based Keynesian intervention, to the rise of the entrepreneurial city, and neoliberalism since the 1970s. In the contemporary instantiation, wherein white flight back to urban spaces has given way to massive, strategic, and rapid urban restructuring, the crisis of the current moment yields important considerations for food politics in densely populated cities. A conjunctural analysis allows me to study how the contemporary crisis of food gentrification manifests, though I do not claim that these manifestations are totalizing. They are, notes Grossberg, “always temporary, complex, and fragile” but can nevertheless be studied through an analysis of the cultural and discursive work which brings them to life in their particularities.²²⁰ A particularity, in my case, can be as small as a map, as complex as city policy, or as complicated as a fight over gentrification in a region of a city. Cultural studies offers a way of tracing and connecting *contexts*, which are part of the broader conjuncture (a social formation born of crisis). Contexts for Grossberg, following feminist cultural geographer Doreen Massey, are both spatial and relational. Contexts describe spatio-temporal relations, but they also attend to how these relations are fundamentally cultural and communicative—contexts are narrated, performed, embodied, and are also ecological.²²¹

Studying conjunctures, for this project, requires the utilization of mixed methods—of textual analysis, for example, of maps and public policy documents, as well as field methods through participant observation and interviews—to explore how food access is articulated in national, city, and grassroots advocacy. Since cultural studies is not only interested in how dominant articulations cohere, but is also concerned with “the possibilities of survival, struggle, resistance, and change,” in this project I explore both dominant and counterhegemonic efforts to

²²⁰ Ibid, 41.

²²¹ Ibid, 30. Also see: Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).

organize a just food politic.²²² Engaging mixed-methods is consistent with scholars in the environmental humanities and environmental cultural studies that wish to trace culture through its discursive and material articulations. For example, Stephanie LeMenager adopts a method of narrative and “critical regionalism” to study cultures of oil as they live and thrive in “fictions, nonfictions, poetry, performance, and testimony” as well as the media, places, and materials in which we are all immersed.²²³ I do not ‘choose’ what contexts to study haphazardly; after all, they can be connected through similar politics and cultural assumptions, and all that I have chosen voice food *access* as an opportunity and struggle.

How then, do I trace the conjuncture? Though it is important to perform radical contextualization in my analysis, contexts can be traced and followed by “drawing lines and mapping connections.”²²⁴ One way mapping rhetorical connections across spatio-temporal relations has taken shape is through what Ronald Walter Green and Kevin Kuswa call “rhetorical cartography” that is at once both an object and method of analysis to trace regional rhetorics across time and place.²²⁵ To elaborate, rhetorical scholars have turned to mapping as a methodological practice of tracing discourses across time and space through what has been referred to as the practice of rhetorical cartography.²²⁶ Responding to the exigence of the 2011 “Arab Spring” uprisings, Greene and Kuswa explicate rhetorical cartography as a way to map emergent protests—including “places, people, and practices”—into what they, following

²²² Ibid, 8.

²²³ Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*, (New York, NY: Oxford, 2014), 14.

²²⁴ Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, 21.

²²⁵ Ronald Walter Greene and Kevin Douglas Kuswa, “‘From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow’: Regional Accents and the Rhetorical Cartography of Power,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2012): 271-288.

²²⁶ Ibid.

Grossberg, call “maps of power.”²²⁷ By emphasizing a regional politics of place and the protests that emerge from them, they offer ways of reconsidering how place is “made and unmade by different maps of power” and by tracing regional accents across scales, rhetoricians might begin to (re)configure complex social relations among and between them.²²⁸ They emphasize the rhetoricity of regions—both constituted by and a product of rhetoric. “Regional accents,” they note, speak to the character and social values that emerge and get contested each within place.²²⁹ This can include, for example, the ways systems of power such as neoliberalism can “accent” regions and become a value that is contested within a space.²³⁰ Rhetorical cartography, as both an object and method of analysis, offers ways to “track the movement of these places of protest into new maps of power.”²³¹

Regional accents are contingent. Cultural values, global flows, political and economic influences, as well as forms and processes of governance inform them. Just as regions are constituted rhetorically, they can also be disrupted, critiqued, and reimagined. As Rice argues of “regional rhetorics,” they can “disrupt narratives of belonging that are framed on a national level and between individuals” to provide “alternative ways of framing our relationships and modes of belonging.”²³² With regional rhetorics, we are moved from the macro influences on regions to a focus on the practices people engage that perform belonging in a specific place. While I’m interested in a multi- and cross-scalar approach in this dissertation, regional rhetorics helps me move beyond what Rice understands to be the static mediation between the local and the global,

²²⁷ Ibid, 273; Lawrence Grossberg, *Bringing it All Back Home: Essays in Cultural Studies*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 22.

²²⁸ Ibid, 273.

²²⁹ Ibid, 273.

²³⁰ See for example, their argument that protests in Madrid and Athens attempted to “displace Europe’s neoliberal accent” from the region.

²³¹ Ibid, 273.

²³² Jenny Rice, “From Architectonic to Tectonics: Introducing Regional Rhetorics,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2012): 204.

to emphasize the interface between the two via public discourse. It is because food already challenges these distinctions, that a focus on regions, as placed and contingent, makes sense for this project. The place-based rhetorics that can contest and reaffirm place are critical to my work. They also help better emphasize ecologies of power, as Rice elucidates, following Arturo Escobar:

My push to read regional discourse as an interface slightly refigures Arturo Escobar's argument that *ecology and economy* often themselves serve as "a powerful interface for the renewal of place-based theory and practice" (144). Through participation in local conversations and movements about food politics, local economic practices, and place-appropriate land usage, people are able to reaffirm and reclaim space. Escobar's analysis is compelling, and it also provides a way to understand how rhetorical interfaces may help those same people to assess, critique, and respond to the global flows that cut through those specific local spaces. In appealing to and performing regional appeals, publics are able to address the sweeping and sometimes abstract flows of labor, food politics, migration patterns and consumption.²³³

This emphasis on place-based theory and practice, as well as the interfaces of economy and ecology that figure food policy and food justice as a critical concern, are central for me. In addition, Escobar's well-circulated critique of "sustainable development" articulated in the mid-1990s, speaks well to instantiations of 'green growth' or green gentrification as well.²³⁴ We can also see the intimate connection between global capital flows, national and citywide development discourses, and grassroots food politics, something this dissertation explores through place-based regional inflections.

While both rhetorical cartography and regional rhetorics underscore place as constituted by and an interface between public discourse and belonging, we can still nuance and expand these discussions in important ways. To develop rhetorical cartography as an object and method of study, I do not only wish to only underscore the tactic of mapping rhetorical circulation, but in

²³³ Ibid, 204.

²³⁴ Arturo Escobar, "Culture Sits in Places: Reflections on Globalism and Subaltern Strategies of Globalization," *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 139-174.

addition, return an emphasis to cartography itself. Rhetorical cartography can help us map what Chaput calls “transsituated” rhetorical circulation,²³⁵ but it can also tell us much about the rhetoric of cartographic material, mapping mechanisms, or what Rice calls the “tectonics of place.”²³⁶

As rhetoricians interested in the ways discourses circulates across places, spaces, histories, and regions, I must also simultaneously be cognizant of how those places, spaces, histories, and regions are physically mapped via rhetoric. This includes the many ways terrains of social life and specific places of dwelling are visualized, organized, and brought into being, but also includes how the very articulations of those spaces are constituted and contested, mapped and counter-mapped by institutions, organizations, grassroots advocates, and the people and things that move through them every day. To put it bluntly, rhetorical cartography as a way of mapping discursive circulation—while an inventional form of discursive tracking, linking and delinking—has left cartography, specifically the rhetoric of maps, behind. Ultimately, we cannot map the “places of protest”²³⁷ if the *places* of protests are the very thing being contested.

Building on this work, scholars like Heather Hayes have brought rhetorical scholarship and critical geography together. For example, in Hayes’s book the war on terror, rhetorical cartography offers a way to rhetorically map the “bodies, technologies, and places/spaces within a larger map of contemporary global power.”²³⁸ Hayes turns to rhetoricians interested in the role of maps, like Timothy Barney, who makes the argument that rhetoric helps us understand

²³⁵ Catherine Chaput, “Rhetorical Circulation in Late Capitalism: Neoliberalism and the Overdetermination of Affective Energy,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 43, no. 1 (2010): 1-26.

²³⁶ Rice, “From Architectonic to Tectonics,” 202; I also hope to expand on Rice’s critique of “flat data” in the first chapter of my dissertation.

²³⁷ Greene and Kevin Kuswa, “‘From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow,’” 273.

²³⁸ Heather Ashley Hayes, *Violent Subjects and Rhetorical Cartography in the Age of Terror Wars* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 49.

cartography “from its production processes to its symbolic conventions to its circulation.”²³⁹ In addition, Hayes encourages “a rupture of the very barrier between cartography and rhetoric” and utilizes rhetorical cartography to “not only embrace using maps to understand discourse” but also to use “cartographic approaches to circulation, symbolicity, and production.”²⁴⁰ This is incredibly central to my project. While I trace the regional accents of food justice discourses alongside gentrification, I also take cartography seriously not as just a method of analysis but as a rhetorically inflected object for inquiry as well.

In this project, I wish to re-center the role of mapping through a rhetorical analysis of the spatial and temporal rhetorical politics of foodscapes in addition to mapping the articulatory practices of food justice, food movements, and foodways. Building from literature on rhetorical cartography in rhetorical studies as well as critical geography, I mobilize rhetorical cartography in three ways by: (1) analyzing the rhetoric of foodscapes via literal maps, (2) tracing the ways food “access” is mobilized across space-time, and (3) articulating how Denver as a space of food gentrification and food justice movements, embodies broader food politics across regions. I aim to put rhetorical scholars’ recent advancement of rhetorical cartography in conversation with critical geographers’ emphasis on mapping and counter-mapping to better understand forms of advocacy that are based on the contestation over space, time, land, and power. This includes paying attention to where, how, and who, are drawing lines to designate resource distribution, property, and people in addition to how resources, property, and people are constituted rhetorically. It also includes how “places of protest” can be mapped together in gentrifying cities as well as how advocates do their fair share of counter-mapping the very places they protest as well. Ultimately this dissertation offers a way of mapping contexts through rhetorical

²³⁹ Timothy Barney, “Diagnosing the Third World: The ‘Map Doctor’ and Spatialized Discourses of Disease and Development in the Cold War,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 1 (2014), 5.

²⁴⁰ Hayes, 53.

cartography to make sense of the social formation, or conjuncture, of food gentrification, which has (differently) articulated food politics, environmentalism, and social justice together.

V. Chapter Map

This dissertation proceeds with three main analysis chapters, drawing on these mixed-methodological approaches to analyze the conjuncture in which food *access* intersects with food gentrification. Employing rhetorical cartography as a method of mapping, each chapter helps me speak to how various actors stake their territory as a food movement or food justice participant. By participant, I mean both the human and non-human relations that affect how we imagine foodscapes and the ecologies within them. This includes, for example, governmental leaders, food access maps, institutional policy makers, policy documents and media, food businesses and organizations, land, water, and airways, as well as grassroots food justice and anti-gentrification advocates.

In each chapter, I elaborate further on the literatures I am borrowing from and the specific texts or rhetorical artifacts and/or settings of which I perform my analysis. Along the way, we move from nation (focusing on maps and metaphors), to city (by analyzing food policy), and eventually to neighborhood (through participant observation), tracing inflections of food access and deficit along the way. As I rhetorically map inflections of access across these texts and contexts, the conjuncture that is the contemporary relationship between food and gentrification takes form. Although, of course, there is no singular or exhaustive way to map a conjuncture, each element provides me with a rich piece of the story to explain how and by whom food access is articulated.

Chapter 2, entitled “Maps, Metaphors, and the Infrastructures of Food ‘Access’” explores dominant frames of food access by analyzing the seemingly mundane, yet well

circulated USDA Food Access Research Atlas. The Atlas, a result of a national agenda to respond to the “obesity epidemic” and resolve food “deserts,” maps rates of poverty and proximity (to grocery stores) on a map of the United States to galvanize interventions into places that lack healthy, fresh affordable food. I analyze the possibilities and limitations of this map, paying close attention to how the metaphors used to conceptualize food access (food deserts, swamps, wastelands, mirages, and oases) can rhetorically naturalize food inequity and pacify the very communities targeted for increased food access. Analyzing how food access, including food deficit, are visualized through aerial mapping tools, helps me understand how people, places, and power structures are flattened in the process.²⁴¹ To explicate my analysis, I look to scholarship in rhetorical studies on the hermeneutics of metaphor, or the ways in which metaphors are put to use, in addition to scholarship in critical geography on cartography and spatial metaphors.²⁴² If tending to food “deserts” has become such a rallying call for intervention at various scales, then I aim to understand what, if at all, these interveners articulate is lacking. It is certainly food, but it is also so much more.

Chapter 3, entitled “Articulating ‘World Class’ Futures and the Impurity of Food Policy,” moves to developing cities and their foodscapes to explore efforts to intervene in favor of a more equitable food system through public policy that both enables and constrains food justice. This chapter localizes the spatial imaginary logics to trace how they operate through dominant discourses and public policy in one gentrifying city: Denver, Colorado. I analyze both the Denver Food Vision—a 50-page comprehensive food plan for food system reform, constructed in concert with the city government, residents, food businesses and practitioners, as well as the

²⁴¹ I find resonance with Jenny Rice’s claim that, “What is particularly insidious about flat data is that it smooths over the tectonics of place.”

²⁴² Susan Sontag, *Illness and Metaphor*, (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977); Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, “Grounding Metaphor: Towards A Spatialized Politics,” in *Place and the Politics of Identity*,” eds. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993).

Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council. I focus on the text itself, but also attend to the context in which it emerges in the city. As the city continues to grow, a rhetorical gesture to its “world class” dreams guides urban revitalization to link sustainability with economic development, and eco-desire with inclusivity. However, incredible environmental, racial, and economic injustices also plague the city, to which many of its most vulnerable residents are demanding response. I analyze the rhetoric of Denver’s food policy following three key themes and illustrate the impure politics involved in developing a comprehensive, equity-oriented food system in the gentrifying city.

Chapter 4 entitled, “Critically Interrupting Food ‘Access’ by Organizing Around Abundance” explores how Denver’s food justice and anti-gentrification advocates are critically interrupting “access” and the dominant frames of deficit and scarcity that are deployed by city officials and developers in the northeast region of the city. Drawing on six months of participant observation at over fifteen public protests, interviews with anti-gentrification advocates, and a tour of food justice projects in Denver, this chapter analyzes the counterhegemonic discourses and practices that seek to remap the city in favor of food justice and against gentrification. Out of this fieldwork, I explore four key events wherein the relationship between food politics and uneven development became galvanizing moments for local organizing. I theorize the place-based and relationally practiced politics of food justice and anti-gentrification organizing to explicate how advocates are attempting to “organize around abundance”²⁴³ instead of scarcity, as a way to reclaim political, economic, and cultural power in a gentrifying city.

I conclude the project with “Remapping Power and Planting New Seeds of Abundance.” This chapter revisits rhetorical cartography, the conjuncture we have mapped throughout, and

²⁴³ I mobilize “organizing around abundance” as a phrase that was uttered by Denver educator and organizer Tony Pigford during my fieldwork. This call receives significant attention throughout the chapter.

offers a way forward for food justice in an era of rising gentrification. Given the ways food “access” has been reframed through dominant and institutional efforts, grassroots food justice advocates can instead, reclaim space, power, and their culturally contextual foodways through an intersectional food justice politic. I highlight emerging metaphors that activists are using to conceptualize uneven power relations within the food system and explore the emerging potential for a liberatory, self-reliant, and anti-racist food justice movement, one that seeks to reclaim control over their own futures and right to belong in contested space. These efforts are already emerging and can be heard in calls for Indigenous food sovereignty or for self-determined, community-controlled food systems organized by primarily communities of color. By refusing narratives of scarcity based on logics of deficit, food justice advocates can (and have already begun to) draw on the legacies of their ancestors to envision a self-defined and intersectional food justice movement that includes, exceeds, and rearticulates dominant food movement politics entirely.

**CHAPTER 2:
Maps, Metaphors, and the Infrastructures of Food “Access”**

*“Desert” also makes us think of an empty, absolutely desolate place. But when we’re talking about these places, there is so much life and vibrancy and potential. Using that word runs the risk of preventing us from seeing all of those things.*²⁴⁴

–Karen Washington, *Rise and Root Farm*

*Deserts as we now understand them have been differentially interpellated as sacred or profane, as constitutive of the white masculine settler subject or as his demise.*²⁴⁵

–Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding*

The myth of food scarcity is well documented; yet, it still seems to seep into the maps we draw of the food system. There is plenty of food to feed everyone on the planet, but as the argument goes, *access* to food remains the problem. This makes sense: not everyone lives near a grocery store or market, not everyone owns a vehicle or can easily utilize public transportation to shop, and food prices shift depending on the store, nutrient content of the food, or relative location of the food source. Poverty greatly impacts communities’ ability to grow, purchase, or consume foods that may adequately nourish their bodies. Food is unevenly distributed and not all of our food developments reach folks in the most need. Our economic and social systems have produced a world wherein the price of food does not reflect the value, broadly conceived, of what it costs to cultivate it in the first place. For all the ways food industries have organized production, processing, and distribution systems to make food convenient, cheap, and available—the food system still fails many every day.

²⁴⁴ Anna Brones, “Food Apartheid: The Root of the Problem with America’s Grocery Stores,” *The Guardian*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/15/food-apartheid-food-deserts-racism-inequality-america-karen-washington-interview>.

²⁴⁵ Traci Brynne Voyles, *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 17.

All of this is true. Our food system is imperfect. It is unjust. It is vast and its organization can be quite unimaginable. For example, in a summary report outlining the findings of multiple studies on grocery store availability in the United States, areas where residents might be referred to as “low income” have twenty-five percent fewer supermarket chains than the wealthiest neighborhoods.²⁴⁶ Additionally, according to census data categories, predominantly white neighborhoods contain on average four times as many grocery stores as predominantly Black neighborhoods.²⁴⁷ And when food amenities (supermarkets, small markets, corner stores, etc.) were present in the neighborhoods lacking this food access, they were less likely to be filled with fresh, healthy food. The plethora of data on local, regional, and national levels supports this pattern which has prompted an awareness of the need to improve access to food, eliminating what have come to be called food “deserts” or places where this low availability can be mapped.

Certainly food access is an important problem into which interventions should be made. From efforts to increase food access advocated by national campaigns like *Let's Move!* started by former First Lady Michelle Obama, to local efforts that encourage corner stores to stock produce and other fresh foods, to schools pledging to build a community garden or incorporate food education into the school system, the possibilities for improvement are broad. While initiatives like those mentioned above may utilize a language of individual choice—implying that those experiencing food inequity should simply learn to adopt ‘healthy’ consumption and lifestyle practices²⁴⁸—they also represent the ways in which institutions, local businesses, or national policies have been attempting to affect food systems change. Even with their flaws, programs

²⁴⁶ Sarah Treuhaft and Allison Karpyn, “The Grocery Gap: Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters,” *The Food Trust*, 2010, http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/grocerygap.original.pdf.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ See Guthman’s *Weighing In* for a critique of “health” food and “healthy” body discourses, which can be used to pathologize low-income communities. Julie Guthman, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice, and the Limits of Capitalism*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

focused on improving health and food availability illustrate the energy behind which healthy food access has emerged as such a salient concern in public life.

The conjunctural crisis this chapter explores is one wherein food access and development collide, informed by calls to remedy the “obesity” epidemic and address food insecurity at the national level. The imperative to improve healthy food access has become such a rallying force that it may be difficult to believe that one might approach these efforts with caution. When people need access to food, it’s feasible to assume that all efforts to improve food access would be supported, celebrated, and utilized by residents in areas wherein unequal access was a visible and felt sense of lack. It may even be difficult to imagine that some communities who are the most food insecure would be skeptical of outside attempts to improve access. There is, however, a different story to be told, one that this chapter attempts to complicate, or at least clarify. More specifically, I explore how food access discourses are mobilized through and become articulated as a response to, prominent deficit metaphors such as the food “desert.” Through some uses of the food desert metaphor, the solution and problem are co-constituted: identifying ways to provide “access” becomes the solution to a lack of healthy food. Further, in these national calls for intervention, I will show how food access as a policy answer becomes articulated with a host of concerns over not just health equity, but also pathologizing discourses of “obesity” and how to best invest in so-called “blighted spaces.” By identifying the rhetorical labor of food access discourses, I hope to denaturalize contemporary food policy assumptions in order to foster more critical discussions about food politics.

This chapter invites you to a place where most contemporary literature on food access has traversed, even if briefly, in the process of building a case for increasing food access where there is lack: the USDA Food Access Research Atlas. This Atlas maps food availability by coding

census data based on income levels and proximity to large-scale food amenities on a map of the United States that outlines state borders. The map is fairly straightforward and might even be considered one of the more mundane ‘places’ to study food access—it’s not a community garden, a farmers market, a mobile food truck, or other such place where recent scholarship on food access has been critically engaged. Nevertheless, this relatively banal place matters a great deal. It’s referenced across public health literature, interdisciplinary interpretive and critical food systems research, in public policy, on the websites of companies that have made a commitment to improving food access, and elsewhere. It resides, rather unassumingly, in both United States Department of Agriculture’s website and in our footnotes. Many make reference to it when in need of understanding the data better, providing quantitative support to illustrate a point, or wanting to find out if they too “live in a food desert.”²⁴⁹ I bring your attention to this place not only because every time I visit I am prompted to “enter the map,” but also because in its attempts to map food “deserts,” or places where health food availability is unobtainable, the Atlas does significant placemaking work of its own.

While critical cartographers have much to say about the power of something so seemingly dull and descriptive, rhetoricians are well equipped to add their voice to this arena too. This chapter brings together critical cartography and rhetorical studies to better understand the maps and metaphors we use to make sense of food access. I explore the USDA Food Access Research Atlas as, following John Durham Peters, a logistical media that functions both rhetorically and cartographically to organize broader food system infrastructures and

²⁴⁹ Bill Davenhall, “Do You Live in a Food Desert?” *Huffington Post*, August 29, 2011, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/bill-davenhall/food-deserts_b_937277.html

investments.²⁵⁰ Following Peters, these maps might be imagined as logistical media that “set the terms in which everyone must operate,” and while they might appear “as neutral and given,” they ultimately work to “make environments visible.”²⁵¹ As the Atlas works to “organize and orient, to arrange people and property”²⁵² it constitutes barren space while making it visible and available for outside intervention. These media shape and are shaped by broader rhetorical assumptions and discourses used to make sense of unequal access to food and are then coded into the maps we reference as fact. Of course, as Denis Wood argues, no map is innocent.²⁵³ Most especially, I am interested in how the metaphors that so saturate food access discourse and policy—from the ways the crisis of food “deserts” are referenced, to the attempts to intervene into the problem of food “swamps” and turn them into “oases,” operate as verbal codes that give the map power.²⁵⁴ As Traci Brynne Voyles argues, “words are maps” that can become the repertoires of power relations.²⁵⁵ I trace the hermeneutical function of the metaphors and the ways they are mapped, in addition to how the map informs just how reliant on these metaphors we have become.

Though the broader project of this dissertation addresses the relationship between food access histories, environmental justice, and gentrification, it is important that I also underscore wherefrom the necessity to increase food access has been cultivated, encouraged, and promoted. I trace what I call the *food desert deficit discourses* that articulate with calls for increasing food access where it is scarce. Not all efforts to increase food access are the same, but I aim to show

²⁵⁰ There is a connection between logistical media and infrastructure(s), which in this case, I would argue is the broader food system. Peters also explicates, “infrastructuralism suggests a way of understanding the work of media as fundamentally logistical,” 37.

²⁵¹ John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Towards a Philosophy of Elemental Media*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 37-38.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 37.

²⁵³ Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, (New York: Guilford Press, 2010).

²⁵⁴ Later in the chapter, I detail what I mean by “verbal codes” within critical cartography literature.

²⁵⁵ Traci Brynne Voyles, *Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 19.

how the logics of scarcity still stain our discussions—and maps—of food access. The result is not only that we continue to envision a world wherein food is scarce, but one where spatial inequities in food access are both naturalized and can pacify communities living in these spaces in ways that might ultimately contribute to forms of exclusion and injustice—both in terms of decision-making and outcomes—which travel well beyond access to food.

To be clear, the story I tell here is not a universal one. Some living in designated food deserts might find incredible value in the term, as it can be understood to mark the very real, structural impacts that impact their experiences of food insecurity. The food desert metaphor for example, among the myriad of others—food swamps, food mirages, food oases, etc.—can give life to a phenomenon that is as much bodily and affective as it is spatial. These food access metaphors can tell a story of the ways in which food amenities have abandoned places and the people that reside in them. They can tell a story of the gravity of felt senses of lack, of being in reach of, but ultimately without. They can tell a story of growth and development or greening and beautification. And although these metaphors tell stories on their own, they also become the contexts in which other stories are told. These metaphors, these contexts, are alive in discourse and play in imagination, but they are also coded onto maps, written into policy, and used to justify the material restructuring of the places where we live, work, play, and also eat.²⁵⁶ The map, then, is the logistical media by which many of our food system infrastructures are built—it sets the stage for, and does the work of, development. Despite its banality, the maps and metaphors of food access are fundamentally infrastructural—they make and unmake worlds and communities in the process.

²⁵⁶ Adapted from Robert Gottlieb's (2009) argument that the environment is where we "live, work, and play," as environmental justice advocates have established, but also "where, what, and how we eat."

Our travels through the infrastructures of food access will proceed as follows. First, I contextualize how food access in the United States emerged as an exigence to which the nation state became compelled to respond. Although inequities in food access have long been a problem, particularly for poor peoples and many communities of color, I trace the ways food access became articulated both as a crisis of public health and a crisis of development in the 21st century. Despite food availability to feed those who are food or health insecure, food discourses becomes entangled in dominant frames of bounty and deficit in the global food system; meaning, we overproduce food, but not everyone has access to it. I explore how campaigns like the federal *Let's Move!* initiative and the creation of the USDA Food Access Research Atlas enabled a focus on the need to develop in food deserts. The food access crisis narrative, in particular the ways food access is framed as an issue of *lack* of economic development within spaces, enables governmental, corporate, and non-profit interventions to provide food access in spaces where there is perceived lack. However, not all of these efforts are welcomed by communities living in designated deserts, despite there being a pressing need for healthy, affordable food in these spaces.

Second, I trace how the food access crisis prompted the expanded circulation of a series of naturalizing spatial metaphors used to help imagine food deficits—“deserts,” “swamps,” “mirages,” “oases,” and “wastelands.” I explore the ways these metaphors not only diagnose complex problems of unequal food access, but can also become digitally (and visually) mapped, a process that makes both development and intervention possible. I review rhetorical literature on the hermeneutics of metaphor and put these discussions in conversation with critical cartography to help better understand how maps function as complex semiotic texts²⁵⁷ or forms of logistical

²⁵⁷ In Denis Wood's rhetoric of cartography, he argues there are five types of semiotic code often involved in maps: iconic, verbal, tectonic, presentational, and temporal.

media.²⁵⁸ Reviewing this literature allows me to better approach the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, as well as the discourses that both inform and are informed by it.

Third, I return to the map to analyze how the maps and metaphors of food access merge and establish particular imaginative resources for territorialization. I argue that the map's focus on proximity and poverty code scarcity into the landscape in ways that necessitate the need to develop the food desert. I advance two arguments about the map's reliance on scarcity as its imaginative resource: (1) that the map fixes food "deserts" into space, naturalizing the history of food access and flattening foodways by emphasizing their deficit, and (2) that the map and subsequent discourses that map affords, can frame those living in food deserts as passive, enabling interventions that may end up threatening their ability to live in these spaces. Both the *naturalization* of food deserts and the *pacification* of communities living in designated food deserts provides the communicative opening for interventions to come from outside communities labeled a desert. The problem is that these processes can often lack understanding of the culturally contextual foodways of some communities in addition to lacking a broader account of disinvestment that created these deserts in the first place. I argue that metaphors like food desert are the *verbal* codes that when mapped, function as *iconic* codes or "visual analogue[s], scaled down and projected, which matches the subject of the map and its visual cartography."²⁵⁹ These codes serve the function of seeing space as scarce, lacking, barren, which in turn opens that space up for development. Thus, I argue that the maps and metaphors of food access are the logistical media by which the infrastructures, to follow Peters, of our food system is enacted.

²⁵⁸ See John Durham Peters' *The Marvelous Clouds* for the relationship between logistical media and infrastructuralism.

²⁵⁹ Peter Wollen, "Mappings: Situationists and/or Conceptualists," in *Rewriting Conceptual Art*, eds. Michael Newman and Jon Bird (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 27-46.

Finally, I conclude by discussing the constraints and affordances of mapping food access. I acknowledge that while food access metaphors can provide imaginative resources to see patterns and structure in food inequity, the visual and spatial discourses can also enable differential responses to help alleviate the problem. Just as the metaphors of the food desert can enable us to conceptualize how food is unevenly distributed, they can also help prompt those in the business of food distribution to justify their access to new markets. Ultimately I argue for a cautionary approach to the metaphors and maps used to make sense of food access especially as they become more common, though differently articulated, in development discourses.

Contextualizing the Crisis of Food “Access”

As I have argued in the introduction to this dissertation, the language of food *access*, while widely referenced in public policy and development discourses, is under theorized. While there may be many ways to attend the how *access* is circulated in food discourses, I am specifically interested in the ways food access (the feasible availability of food resources in a foodscape) is bound up with notions of how we imagine the people, places, histories, and ecologies alive in these spaces. Lingering questions guide my analysis. For example, what are the dominant imaginaries that constitute food deserts and the communities that reside in them? Does acknowledging the presence of food deserts account for the foodways, cultures, and histories of those residing in these spaces? How is development enabled through mapping food deserts? How foodscapes are imagined however, travels beyond food, given the ways food access discourses entangle normative assumptions about ‘healthy’ bodies and promising spaces. Therefore, before theorizing the metaphors and maps of food access, it is important to contextualize the “crisis” that projected food access into greater public attention, instigating the need to map food deserts in the first place. First we begin with the metaphors.

Food deserts remains the most proliferated metaphor used describe food access inequities. The term was originally used in urban studies literature to reference areas in British cities where “cheap and varied food is only accessible to those who have private transport or are able to pay the costs of public transport.”²⁶⁰ Neil Wrigley describes how in the late 1990s, the metaphor “caught the imagination” as a way to conceptualize systemic interventions to advance public health. However, the initial intention of those mobilizing the term was to “put more emphasis on developing *local* solutions to solve problems of social exclusion of services” (emphasis mine).²⁶¹ When the metaphor first emerged, it offered discursive resources to imagine structural injustices in the food system, despite not accounting for the complexity of food amenities or their cost spatially.

While I focus primarily on food deserts in this chapter, since they are what animate the Atlas, additional metaphors are clustered around a similar set of logics. Food “swamps” for example, have helped us imagine areas where there is a “high-density of establishments selling high-calorie fast food and junk food, relative to healthier options.”²⁶² This term attempts to offer nuance to the food “desert” metaphor and is often positioned in relation to spaces wherein cheap, unhealthy food is plentiful.²⁶³ Food “mirages” reference spaces where food is abundant but

²⁶⁰ Neil Wrigley, “‘Food Deserts’ in British Cities: Policy Context and Research Priorities,” *Urban Studies* 39, no. 11 (2002): 2031.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2033-2034.

²⁶² Kristin Cooksey-Stowers, Marlene B. Schwartz, and Kelly D. Brownell, “Food Swamps Predict Obesity Rates Better Than Food Deserts in the United States,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 14, no. 11 (2017): 1336.

²⁶³ Food “swamp” is the second most used metaphor to describe inequities in food access, which gained some traction since 2010 (see Google Trends). Since then, it has usually been positioned in relation to food “deserts.” Academic public health literature, for example, made reference to food “swamps” as a way to understand obesity as it manifested in neighborhoods and communities particularly in cities. Studies in journals such as the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, helped thrust this term into the academic lexicon. The term is beginning to circulate in popular discourse, for example, being featured in articles published in *The Atlantic*, *Huffington Post*, and the *New York Times*, among others. Some activists also find value in this term.

inaccessible, particular because of price, to communities in the most need of affordable food.²⁶⁴ As others have pointed out, the problem with food mirages as a dominant metaphor is that, although food may be available in terms of proximity, it also may be too expensive for nearby residents or culturally alienating in terms of the kinds of food sold or made available.²⁶⁵ Finally, although the food “oasis” metaphor has yet to receive significant attention in public policy or academic discourse, references to food “oases” have been used to describe places where food availability is abundant.²⁶⁶ Food “oases” are often referenced in contrast to the food desert, but may lack specification regarding affordability or whether or not the food amenities in these spaces are culturally-appropriate or produced ethically and equitably.²⁶⁷ Thus food deserts, swamps, mirages, and oases each animate different aspects of our foodscapes, though the desert metaphor has gained the most purchase in food discourse and policy. For now, then, I return my attention to how the food desert metaphor turns food policy discourses toward and away from various challenges and solutions of food insecurity.

Efforts to increase food access have garnered national consideration, specifically within the last decade, prompting institutions to intervene in the name of public health. No other federal program worked to put healthy food access on the national agenda like the federal *Let's Move!*

²⁶⁴ Betsey Breyer and Adriana Voss-Andrae, “Food mirages: Geographic and economic barriers to healthful food access in Portland, Oregon,” *Health and Place* 24 (2013): 131-139. “Food mirages” is a term rarely used compared to other metaphors discussed here. It emerged among some food practitioners and in sociological studies to describe economic barriers to healthy food access especially in cities, but has yet to be deeply studied or adopted widely in grassroots advocacy.

²⁶⁵ Daniel Monroe Sullivan, “From Food Desert to Food Mirage: Race, Social Class, and Food Shopping in a Gentrifying Neighborhood,” *Advances in Applied Sociology* 4, 1 (2014): 31. Also see Short et. al, “Food Desert, Oases, or Mirages?”

²⁶⁶ For example, see: Renee E. Walker, Jason Block, and Ichiro Kawachi, “Do Residents of Food Deserts Express Different Food Buying Preferences Compared to Residents of Food Oases? A Mixed-Methods Analysis,” *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* 9, 41 (2012): 1-13.

²⁶⁷ “Food oases” has been used by food practitioners and public health officials to describe access to healthy food through cooking and purchasing (e.g. by Washington State’s Department of Public Health or Georgia Food Oasis) and also has been used by some non-profits and popular press articles to attract communities to nearby stores (e.g. Food Oasis LA’s digital mapping project). Its circulation is not yet as widely adopted as other metaphors; yet, it appears almost always positioned in contrast to a food “desert,” as they are converted into spaces with new food amenities.

initiative, which began with a garden. Upon the arrival of the Obama's into the White House in 2009, then First Lady Michelle Obama planted the White House Kitchen Garden on the South Lawn to "initiate a national conversation around the health and wellbeing of our nation."²⁶⁸ As the garden grew into a symbol for public health, so did *Let's Move!* officially launched in 2010, becoming the first comprehensive federal strategy to address "childhood obesity."²⁶⁹ The campaign initially was advised to have five foci, outlined in the White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress: early childhood health, empowering parents and caregivers, healthy food in schools, access to healthy and affordable food, and increasing physical activity.²⁷⁰ Each area, outlined in the Report is substantiated with recommendations for action, containing research on the socioeconomic, racial, and health disparities to which federal support for healthy food access, meal planning, and physical activity were supposed to alleviate.

With the emergence of the *Lets Move!*, the need to increase food access became firmly articulated with a concern over "obesity" as a "national health crisis" to which the nation state became compelled to respond. For example, in the opening statement of the Report to Congress entitled "The Challenge We Face," childhood obesity is articulated as a threat to the nation state, both in terms of its effect on "military readiness" and because it "imposes substantial economic costs."²⁷¹ The cost of obesity, notes the report, is one the federal government cannot tackle alone. By articulating food access as a public health crisis, *Lets Move!* galvanized broad strategies for intervention, calling on those in the public and "private sector[s], state and local leaders, [as well

²⁶⁸ Let's Move!, "Achievements," *Obama White House Archive*, 2016, <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/achievements>

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity, "Report to the President: Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation," *Obama White House Archives*, May 2010, https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/letsmove.gov/files/TaskForce_on_Childhood_Obesity_May2010_FullReport.pdf

²⁷¹ Ibid, 3.

as] parents themselves” to “help improve the health of our children.”²⁷² These strategies are supported to assist families in making better health choices, but also to address environmental factors that affect health disparities, specifically the availability of food.

The pathologizing discourses of the “obesity epidemic” have been notably critiqued by cultural geographers and health communication scholars, among others.²⁷³ It is important to note, though, that food access garnered public attention within this context, one that, as Julie Guthman has argued, is consistent with a broader neoliberal and biopolitical governance strategies.²⁷⁴ Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood further that the discourse of the “obesity epidemic” simplistically articulates health and weight together, in which case fatness then gets articulated as an economic burden on the nation itself.²⁷⁵ This language also becomes highly racialized, as imperatives to address the “obesity epidemic” are often supported by references to its disproportionate effect on African American and Latinx communities and children.²⁷⁶ Rachel Sanders, following Omi and Winant, argues that the racialization of obesity becomes a racial project when tropes circulate to rationalize discriminatory practices and uphold white, thin, normativity.²⁷⁷ Coinciding with frames that posit obesity as a threat to the nation itself—Black and Brown bodies are then articulated as the ones ‘weighing down’ the nation, which can materialize into troubling public health interventions (albeit framed as compassionate) that reinforce structural inequity.

Let’s Move! oscillates between acknowledging the broad problem and noting the need for additional contextualization. Though couched in the “obesity epidemic,” the need to increase healthy, affordable food access is understood to be a complex problem for which there may not

²⁷² White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress, 1.

²⁷³ See for example Julie Guthman’s *Weighing In* or Helene A. Shugart’s *Heavy*, among others.

²⁷⁴ Guthman, *Weighing In*.

²⁷⁵ Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood, *Biopolitics and the ‘Obesity Epidemic’: Governing Bodies*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).

²⁷⁶ Rachel Sanders, “The Color of Fat: Racializing Obesity, Recuperating Whiteness, and Reproducing Injustice,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, (2017): 1-19.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

be a “one-size-fits-all solution.”²⁷⁸ In fact, the report acknowledges the need to use creativity to assess community needs while offering federal incentives to support local efforts. With a lofty goal of “eliminate[ing] food deserts in America in seven years,” the campaign outlines six main recommendations for providing greater proximity to healthy foods:

- (1) Launch a multi-year, multi-agency Healthy Food Financing Initiative to leverage private funds to increase the availability of affordable, healthy foods in underserved urban and rural communities across the country.
- (2) Local governments should be encouraged to create incentives to attract supermarkets and grocery stores to underserved communities and improve transportation routes to healthy food retailers.
- (3) Food distribution should be encouraged to explore ways to use their existing distribution chains and systems to bring fresh and healthy foods into underserved communities.
- (4) Encourage communities to promote efforts to provide fruits and vegetables in a variety of settings and encourage the establishment and use of direct-to-consumer marketing outlets such as farmers’ markets and community supported subscriptions.
- (5) Encourage the establishment of regional, city, or county food policy councils to enhance comprehensive food system policy that improve health.
- (6) Encourage publicly and privately-managed facilities that serve children such as hospitals, afterschool programs, recreation centers, and parks (*including national parks*) to implement policies and practices, consistent with the Dietary Guidelines, to promote healthy foods and beverages and reduce or eliminate the availability of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods.²⁷⁹

In these recommendations is the idea that both public and private institutions play a role in increasing healthy food access, particularly emphasizing the lack of and need to serve communities. Local policy and planning, public and private interventions, and promoting economic incentives for supermarket profitability are all discursively positioned as acts of service. Food distributors, including supermarkets are encouraged to care about bringing healthy food to ‘underserved communities’ while at the same time turning a profit. A rhetoric of “bringing” healthy food “into underserved communities” or “serving” children to “promote” healthy food consumption provide a welcoming discursive frame that positions communities as

²⁷⁸ White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress, 52.

²⁷⁹ White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress, 54.

in need of outside intervention to promote health equity. Though the guidelines support local projects, they also provide a broad framework for intervention at multiple levels that exceeds the local community as well. The Report to Congress establishes that local governments should build relationship between private entities, among others, offering incentives to entice their presence. As act of service, promoting healthy food access is conceptualized as a largely beneficial endeavor for corporations, non-profits, and communities to which they assist.

Certainly these guidelines are well-intentioned as they recognize the need for healthy food as well as public and private partnerships to intervene at the local level. In these recommendations, however, eliminating food deserts still often requires scalable corporate intervention, including supermarket construction and reorganizing transportation systems to designated areas. Though local efforts are encouraged, financial incentives can prompt big-box retailers to shift their models toward divested spaces. The market then becomes framed as in need of retooling toward these ends, rather than the very logic that determines uneven health disparities in the first place. Food deserts, in these terms, are areas underserved because they are not profitable. The solution, then, is to make them more profitable. Without regulatory guidelines in place for what ensuring profitability might look like in practice, the fear of uneven development of and in the food desert remains.

Other recommendations follow that deal with ways the federal government might intervene, from taxing “less healthy” food to retooling the national subsidies program so as to encourage more fruit and vegetable production. Food, beverage, and restaurant industries are encouraged to develop and sell health foods.²⁸⁰ “Low-income” families are encouraged to participate in USDA sponsored efforts including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

²⁸⁰ White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress, 60.

(SNAP) and School Breakfast Programs.²⁸¹ In addition, the Report outlines areas for future research, one of which being the need to define, measure, and better understand the “consequences of food deserts on food access, diet, and weight outcomes.”²⁸² Given the imperative to better understand food access disparities, the need to measure and address food deserts was successfully launched into a robust conversation on the health of the U.S. nation state. Initial options to address food deserts were linked to supermarket or large grocery store availability. According to the report, large-scale grocery stores and markets became a focus because they often provide food at a lower cost than other retailers. And with the need to understand the relationship between food access and food deserts, the imperative of locating food deserts spatially was thrown into effect.

Food Access Map

Just a year later, the United States Department of Agriculture released the ERS (Economic Research Services) Food Desert Locator. Upon its release, the *Let’s Move!* blog reported that the “USDA is taking on the challenge of food deserts” by tackling “nutritional wastelands” across the country. The Locator’s main purpose was to help identify where food deserts are across urban and rural areas, or areas where “parents and children *simply* do not have access to a supermarket” (emphasis mine).²⁸³ The locator was one part of a larger goal instituted by the campaign, to solve the “problem of obesity within a generation.”²⁸⁴ The first step to do this was to map foodscapes spatially. The Food Desert Locator, now called the Food Access Research Atlas, maps “food desert census tracts” which are defined as “a low-income tract where

²⁸¹ White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress, 62-63.

²⁸² White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to Congress, 63

²⁸³ Ann Wright, “Interactive Web Tool Maps Food Deserts, Provides Key Data,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, May 3, 2011, <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2011/05/3/interactive-web-tool-maps-food-deserts-provides-key-data>

²⁸⁴ Let’s Move!, “Resources,” *Obama White House Archives*, 2016, <https://letsmove.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/resources>

a substantial number or substantial share of residents do not have easy *access* to a supermarket or large grocery store” (emphasis theirs).²⁸⁵

The map has undergone two iterations since its inception, one that references census data from 2010 and an updated version that is animated by census data from 2015. Food deserts in the map are located through the following three indicators of access: (1) measured distance to a store by the number of stores in an area, (2) individual-level resources that affect accessibility (including both income or vehicle availability), and (3) neighborhood-level indicators of resources (including average income, vehicle, or public transportation availability in a neighborhood).²⁸⁶ Each indicator receives elaboration via data made available through the Documentation section of the Economic Research Services website, including by defining terms like “low-income” (LI) and “low access” (LA) which are the main determining factors used to locate a food desert.²⁸⁷ The map’s technicality is its powerful function, quantifying food access through fixed indicators, clearly defined measurements, and downloadable data, almost as if to prompt others to use the data for their own purposes. The map itself is interactive, allowing viewers to visually see food deserts based on the available indicators of their choosing.

Two key themes are mobilized in the map: proximity and poverty. The first, *proximity*, mapped as the closeness a neighborhood is to a supermarket or large-scale grocery store, tracks the distance to food amenities in urban and rural areas, including mapping vehicle accessibility. For example, food deserts in urban areas are considered to be places where there is no large-scale food store within 1 mile of a neighborhood, and within 10 miles for rural areas. The second indicator, *poverty*, maps neighborhoods considered low-income. “Low-income neighborhood” designations account for tracts where poverty rates are at 20 percent or greater, or where median

²⁸⁵ Ibid, original emphasis.

²⁸⁶ Economic Research Services, “Documentation.”

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

family incomes are less than or equal to 80 percent of the state-wide median income or the greater metropolitan area.²⁸⁸ The map includes all 50 states but omits data for U.S.

“unincorporated territories,” including Guahan, Northern Mariana Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico. After being prompted to “enter the map,” one can choose which indicators become visible through the map’s interactive function, allowing one to feasible see proximity based on these three different factors (see Figure 1).

Go to the Atlas

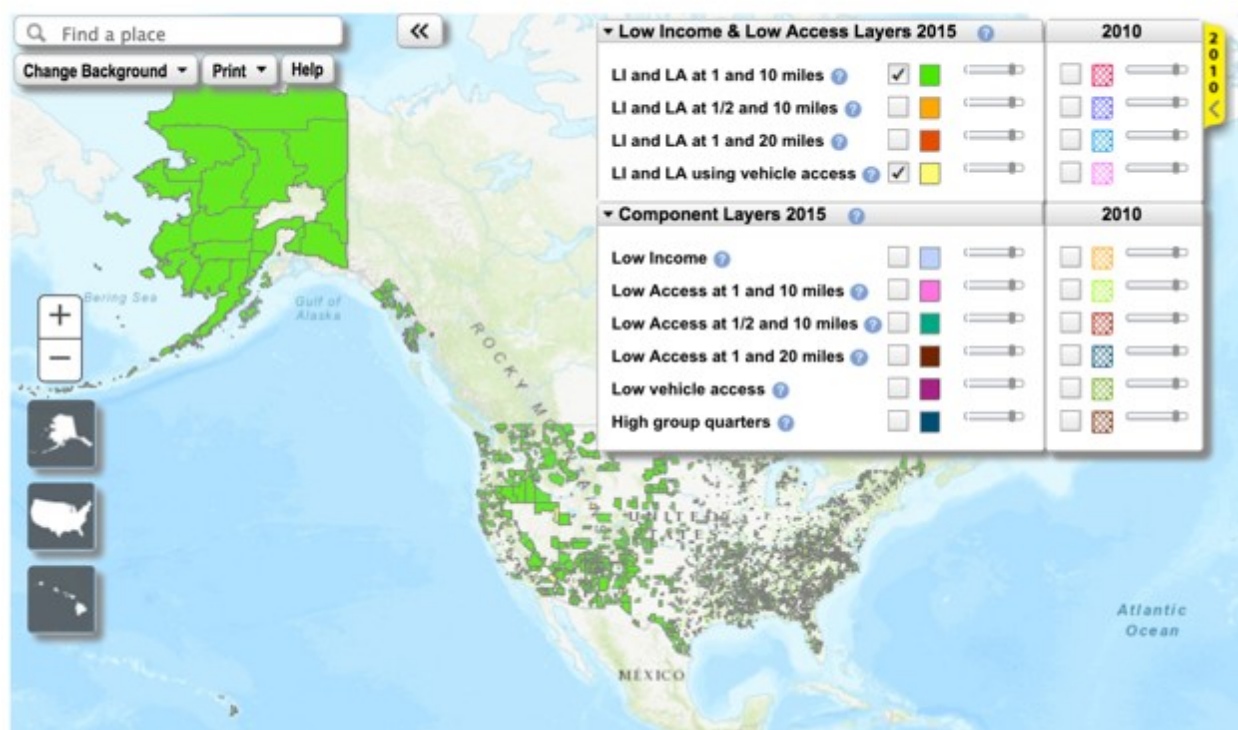


Figure 1. USDA Food Access Research Atlas with Mapping Indicators.²⁸⁹

Despite there being enough food produced to feed the nation, the premise of the map highlights how barriers like proximity (including transportation availability) and poverty are the

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Economic Research Service, “Food Access Research Atlas,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, May 18, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-access-research-atlas/>.

causes of unequal food access. The map's accessible quality, given its colorful presentation, invites stakeholders to see food deserts across the country. It invites intervention. Put in conversation with the broader context in which the map emerged, the map necessitates call for interventions to address the national crisis of public health. Thus, the imperative to save (and serve) the public from the "obesity epidemic" mobilizes the exigence of responding to food deserts. With the development of the map and the broader federal project, a rallying call for increased development in these spaces was established. Low income and low access indicators are mapped together, designating lack of food access. One can even track change over time, to see the impact of new grocers entering into designated "deserts" (see Figure 2).

Go to the Atlas

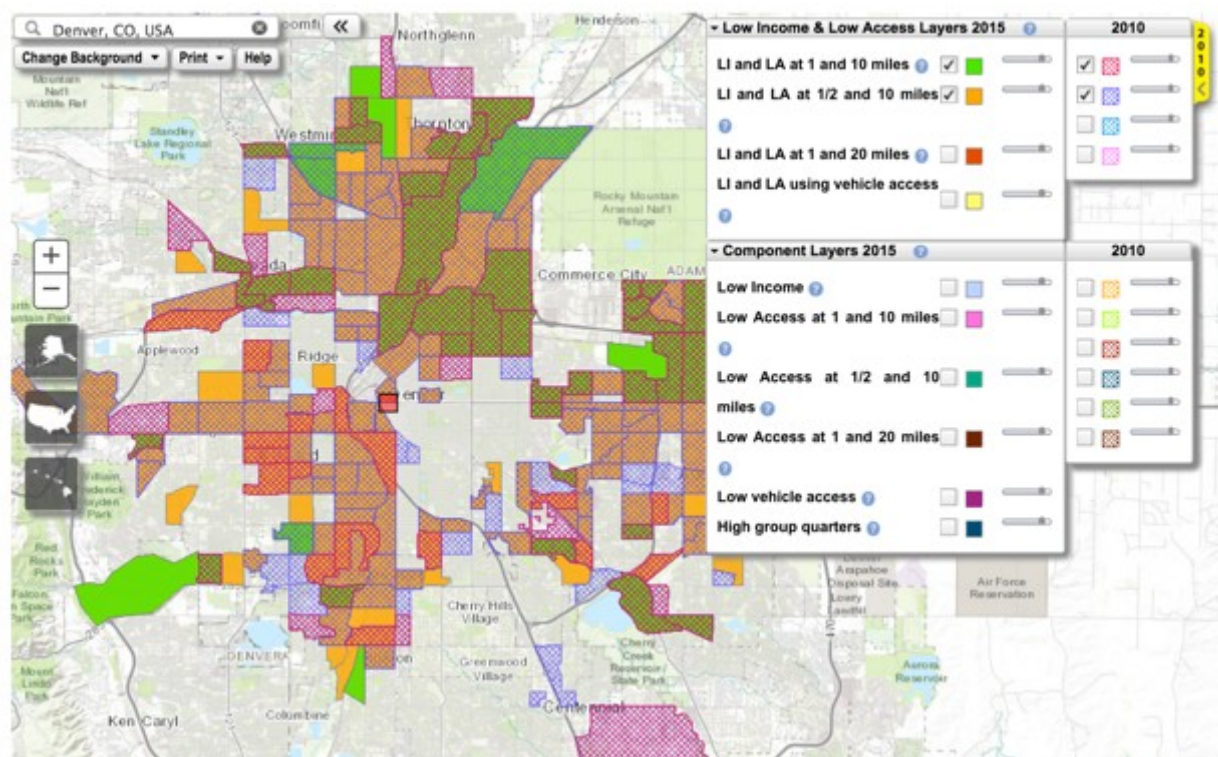


Figure 2. USDA Food Access Map of Denver, CO, USA.²⁹⁰

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

As you can see, from the USDA Food Access Map of Denver (Figure 2), the key terms represented are: income, access, vehicle access, and group quarters. Low Income (LI) and Low Access (LA) are linked as the primary two factors on the map, drawing a correlation between class and food access. The areas on which I will spend much of the remaining dissertation focusing, specifically areas in northeast Denver, are marked here as both Low Income and Low Access for both 2015 and 2010. As noted previously, part of the significance of this interpretation is how institutions then respond, locating food desert spaces through the coordinates of poverty and proximity. These responses can take many forms, though the map creates a particularly visual exigence for seeing food access spatially to assist with intervention.

One of the fastest institutional responses to maps such as this, calling for the nation to address food access came from Walmart, the multi-billion dollar retailer that in 2011 pledged their goal of developing upwards of 300 new stores to serve USDA designated food deserts within five years.²⁹¹ In their announcement came the explicit acknowledgement that the company “used the USDA Food Desert Locator to determine the number of stores that currently serve or will serve food desert areas.”²⁹² Pledging to increase multiple different types of stores, including their (at the time) newly conceived Walmart Express small format stores, the company expressed how their commitment to alleviate food deserts could merge with their larger “Walmart U.S. growth strategy” they had announced just a month prior in October of 2011.²⁹³ Of course, their commitment didn’t come without risks. Just five years later, Walmart announced the closure of

²⁹¹ Walmart, “Walmart To Open Up To 300 Stores Serving USDA Food Deserts by 2016; More than 40,000 Associates Will Work In These Stores,” *Walmart*, July 20, 2011, <https://news.walmart.com/news-archive/2011/07/20/walmart-to-open-up-to-300-stores-serving-usda-food-deserts-by-2016-more-than-40000-associates-will-work-in-these-stores>.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

154 stores across the country, which in some places, exacerbated the food desert problem they had sought to solve.²⁹⁴

Yet, Walmart wasn't the only large-scale grocer that answered the call to develop in food deserts. Whole Foods was praised for "tak[ing] a chance in one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods" instantiating an "organic oasis" in the Englewood food "desert" neighborhood along with other food amenities like Starbucks, Chipotle, and microbreweries.²⁹⁵ Former president of Trader Joe's, Doug Ranch, toyed with idea of packaging expired food for low-income communities in Boston to address access inequities.²⁹⁶ The ways in which corporate interventions use the food desert metaphor, highlights their desire to position themselves as the savior of such (perceived to be) vacant spaces. Whether providing expensive food or expired food, access for these corporate interventions is framed as a deed, an act of service, or a chance worth taking. Imagining their work as service, then, allows investments in food amenities to be framed as inarguably positive given the dire concern over food insecurity.

Many health food retailers have taken to adopting metaphors like food swamps, to highlight the need for health food availability as well. For example, Colorado-based grocer Natural Grocers used their Facebook page to instigate a conversation over the differences between food "deserts" and food "swamps" linking to an article in *The Atlantic* about the subject.²⁹⁷ The power supermarkets have to come and go can also leave communities particularly

²⁹⁴ CBS News, "Walmart shutdowns create new food deserts," *Money Watch*, January 27, 2016, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/walmart-shutdowns-create-new-food-deserts/>.

²⁹⁵ Rachel Koning Beals, "Whole Foods, Starbucks take a chance in one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods," *MarketWatch*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/whole-foods-starbucks-take-a-chance-in-one-of-chicagos-poorest-neighborhoods-2016-09-28>.

²⁹⁶ Jenna Russell and Jenn Abelson, "Putting Expired Foods to Healthy Use," *Boston Globe*, February 26, 2013, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/business/2013/02/25/former-trader-joe-executive-wants-sell-inexpensive-prepared-meals-made-from-expired-food/Cyz1TwTAEFbQnWxn0teNsN/story.html>.

²⁹⁷ Natural Grocers, Facebook Post, December 29, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/NaturalGrocers/posts/10157331066559466?comment_id=10157331334899466&comme

vulnerable too. This has been the case for many Safeway and Albertsons closures, as these establishments can place deed restrictions (restrictive covenants) on the buildings where they once stood, barring new supermarkets from being built in their place once they flee, exacerbating long-term vacancies.²⁹⁸ Although there haven't been nearly as many new supermarket developments as anticipated by the *Lets Move!* campaign,²⁹⁹ the circulation of public promises to increase food access in food deserts affects how we imagine the problem and who should be in the business of providing solutions.

It is certainly the case that another map constructed by the USDA, the Food Environment Atlas, offers additional indicators of food access beyond grocery store availability. For example, it includes indicators like SNAP or WIC authorized establishments, restaurant availability, presence of food assistance programs, food prices, proximity to farms and farmers markets, diabetes and obesity rates, proximity to recreational and fitness facilities, or other “socioeconomic characteristics” like race, age, and income-level.³⁰⁰ However, a focus on food deserts has gained the most purchase for establishments looking to increase food access.

A heavy reliance on major retailers to alleviate food deserts, or what members of the USDA have referenced as “nutritional wastelands,” has assisted the narrative that any efforts to increase food access in spaces where there is measured lack is a positive development for communities in need. The crisis of food access, bound up with the nation's desire to stop the

nt_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22R%22%7D; Olga Khazan, “Food swamps are the new food deserts,” *The Atlantic*, December 28, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2017/12/food-swamps/549275/>.

²⁹⁸ Rachel Raskin-Zrihen, “Deed restrictions can be tough on new supermarkets,” *Times Herald Online*, August 28, 2011, <http://www.timesheraldonline.com/general-news/20110928/deed-restrictions-can-be-tough-on-new-supermarkets>; Peter Balonon-Rosen and Lizzie O’Leary, “When grocery stores close, this legal phrase can prevent new ones from opening,” *Marketplace*, January 12, 2018, <https://www.marketplace.org/2018/01/12/wealth-poverty/when-grocery-stores-close-little-legal-phrase-can-prevent-new-ones-opening>.

²⁹⁹ Associated Press, “Supermarket Chains Avoid Low Income Neighborhoods, Even Though They Promised Not To,” *Mashable*, December 8, 2015, <https://mashable.com/2015/12/08/supermarkets-food-deserts/#AiOXL78fkSqY>.

³⁰⁰ Economic Research Services, “Food Environment Atlas,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, September 18, 2017, <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>.

“obesity epidemic,” has fundamentally changed how we imagine foodscapes. Not only do the metaphors we use to conceptualize food constitute how we imagine access and deficit spatially, mapping food deserts has contributed to a fairly simplistic, yet dominant narrative that holds *access* at the root of food-related inequities. It also frames providing food access as an act of service that can align with corporate desires for profitability. Before explicating the impacts of this argument, however, it is important that we explore the co-constitutive communicative role of these maps and the metaphors they mobilize in more depth.

Iconic Codes and the Metaphors We Map By

Though intervention takes many forms, the justification for the developments is, in many ways, spatial. In the last section, I’ve argued that references to access and deficit are bound up with each other and contribute significantly to the dominant food narrative of the contemporary United States. This narrative holds that both proximity to food amenities (including access to transportation) and poverty most impact food availability. This conclusion has prompted the rise in one of the more prominent metaphors used to make sense of these inequities: the food desert. The desert metaphor is typically referenced to account for uneven food access spatially and nods to some of the symptomatic conditions that give rise these disparities—specifically the ways poverty and location impact food availability for many communities. This metaphor in particular has gained salience in public life, especially as governmental entities like the USDA have codified these deserts visually in their maps and data-based documentation.³⁰¹

The need to remedy food deserts is often mobilized via calls for increasing food security (providing enough food) and promoting health equity (providing enough nutrient rich food). The differences between security and health equity have highlighted the need for additional

³⁰¹ See the USDA website on “documentation” which maps low income (li) and low access (la) as one way to define or measure food deserts.

metaphors to more specifically account for what kinds of food are available or not within a given space. For example, while a food desert takes stock of supermarket availability, metaphors like food “mirage” or food “swamp” provide additional layers to account for issues of affordability or highlight the oversaturation of unhealthy foods spatially. The need to clarify the terms by which we reference food availability has received attention in literature on public health,³⁰² geography,³⁰³ and sociology, among others. Studies like these have given us critical vocabulary to approach the common argument that supermarkets alone can address health disparities. They recognize the power of terms like food desert, swamp, or mirage, to account for (and omit) particular criteria for analysis. Critical academic engagements with food deserts suggest that availability may only partially contribute to diet quality or overall health of residents. Some emerging research has begun to suggest there is a need to move “beyond food deserts” as they do not adequately account for our foodways.³⁰⁴ Although studies like these have addressed the need for new terms to help capture the complexity of food environments, they rarely focus on the ways these terms, as metaphors, are mobilized and by whom.

Despite the many emerging arguments that suggest the food desert term is at best inaccurate, many of these studies still take the terms to signify an observable fact. Rather than concerning themselves with the metaphors’ circulation—how they are used—they focus on the

³⁰² Cooksey-Stowers, et. al, “Food Swamps Predict Obesity Rates Better Than Food Deserts in the United States”; Cynthia Gordon, Marnie Purciel-Hill, Nirupa R. Ghai, Regina Leslie Kaufman Graham and Gretchen V. Wye, “Measuring Food Deserts in New York City’s Low-Income Neighborhoods,” *Health & Place* 17, no. 2 (2011): 696-700; Brian J. Thomas, “Food Deserts and the Sociology of Space: Distance to Food Retailers and Food Insecurity in an Urban American Neighborhood,” *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology* 67, no. 7 (2010): 19-28.

³⁰³ Jerry Shannon, “Food Deserts: Governing Obesity in the Neoliberal City,” *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 2, (2014): 248-266; Hillary J. Shaw, “Food Deserts: Towards the Development of a Classification,” *Geografiska Annaler: Series B* 88, no. 2, (2006): 231-247; Jerry Shannon, “Beyond Supermarket Solutions: Linking Food Deserts, Neighborhood Context, and Everyday Mobility,” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106, no. 1 (2016): 186-202.

³⁰⁴ Jason P. Block and S. V. Subramanian, “Moving Beyond ‘Food Deserts’: Reorienting United States Policies to Reduce Disparities in Diet Quality,” *PLoS Med* 12, no. 2 (2015): 1-9; Samina Raja, Changxing Ma, and Pavan Yadav “Beyond Food Deserts: Measuring and Mapping Racial Disparities in Neighborhood Food Environments,” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 27, no. 4 (2008): 469-482.

need for reclassification. They argue that we can still see food deserts—we just aren't seeing the full picture or amenities that may be available besides supermarket chains. In many cases, the terms are not recognized as metaphors at all, but rather classificatory categories in need of re-measurement. The focus then becomes about what these terms reference, rather than how they are operationalized, in ways that both speak to and exceed food inequities. Given the ways the food desert has been mobilized in development discourses in gentrifying cities, we might be better served to conceptualize the term's power in its *use*. Therefore, I turn to rhetorical studies to better account for the rhetoricity of these metaphors, including the imaginative resources they afford, so that I may better understand how these familiar stories of developing the food “desert” are told.

Metaphors and Territorializing

Rhetorical studies on metaphor have far surpassed what once was considered a “happy extra trick” of language.³⁰⁵ Travels through the worldmaking function of metaphors have traversed philosophy, rhetorical studies, and cognitive psychology, moving us beyond viewing metaphor as simply stylistic or ornamental. These conversations have helped us consider the relationship between metaphor and truth, perception, imagination, invention, and persuasion. We make metaphors present in our legal, economic, and political discourse and in our everyday lives.³⁰⁶ Metaphors reflect and construct, inform and are informed by, cultural politics. Their imaginative function tells us as much about the world as it does about ourselves. Despite their saturation, significant research cautions that we shouldn't disregard metaphor as mere linguistic association or description either.

³⁰⁵ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1936).

³⁰⁶ Francis A. Beer and Christ'l De Landtsheer, *Metaphorical World Politics*, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2004).

Rather than focusing on only what metaphors *are*, I trace how the power of metaphor lies in its *hermeneutic* function, its use and utilization by those with the power to constitute worlds for others. For Richard D. Johnson Sheehan, a rhetorical hermeneutic account helps us approach metaphor as the foundation by which narratives about our worlds and each other are constituted.³⁰⁷ Thus, in this chapter, I draw on Sheehan’s notion that the power of metaphor operates through its use and utilization—which takes us to a focus on how metaphors work in practice. More specifically, I consider how the metaphor of the food “desert,” as one articulation of food access, pragmatically is put to use through the USDA Food Access Research Atlas to invite intervention, but also becomes a constitutive way of imagining both place and population residing in these designated spaces. First, as a brief foundation, I address what metaphors *are* as they have been approached in rhetorical studies. Then, I offer a hermeneutical account of the dominant food access metaphor, the food “desert,” as it is operationalized in the USDA map and circulates in dominant food access discourses.

Though the story of metaphor has been told many times, the fascination of its use still compels us to study its function. That metaphors “often constitute the only means in which certain topics can be verbalized” is widely accepted in rhetorical studies and speaks to language’s imaginative quality.³⁰⁸ For example, in *Vico, Metaphor and the Origin of Language*, Marcel Danesi returns to Aristotle’s *Rhetoric and Poetics*, wherein the meaning of metaphor is outlined “(meta ‘beyond’ + *pherein* ‘to carry’)” to refer to the common or comparative.³⁰⁹ In this view, metaphors carry meaning and are given psychological power through interpretation, perception, and linguistic association. Certainly an important conversation started by Vico,

³⁰⁷ Richard D. Johnson Sheehan, “Metaphor as Hermeneutic,” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 29, 2 (1999): 47-64.

³⁰⁸ Marcel Danesi, *Vico, Metaphor, and the Origin of Language Advances in Semiotics*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993): 129.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

carried forward by Nietzsche, has been metaphor's fickle relationship with truth. For Nietzsche it might have been very difficult for words to carry literal meaning, as he famously argued that truth is a "mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms."³¹⁰ His argument holds that metaphors are central to, and begin with, perception. Metaphors work to order perception, including through sensations, images, and words that are in many ways, fundamental to both imagination and truth telling.

More recently, the cognitive or psychological role of metaphor has preoccupied conversations in the social sciences since the 1950s. What some cognitive psychologists refer to as metaphorical language programming has helped to explain the ways metaphors "often constitute the only means by which topics can be verbalized" or are ways of "transform[ing] perceived experiences into conceptual domains."³¹¹ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have described how metaphors work within a broader "conceptual system" of experience that affect our lived realities.³¹² The distinction they make between conventional (e.g. temporal, directional, orientation) metaphors and ones that are more creative or imaginative, highlight how metaphors may be both ordinary and inventive. Metaphors ground experience and perception; they cohere based on collective, cultural assumptions. As they and rhetorical theorists before them like Kenneth Burke argue, however, coherence is made possible and embedded within the broader cultural values around which we have organized our conceptual systems.³¹³

It is because metaphors so saturate our conceptual engagements with reality that they are a necessary form of meaning making—metaphors are fundamentally constitutive. It is not that metaphors do not reference truth(s), but they make perceivable, and thus constitute, that which is

³¹⁰ Lawrence M. Hinman, "Nietzsche, Metaphor, Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 43, no. 2 (1982), 179-199.

³¹¹ *Vico, Metaphor and the Origin of Language*, 128-129.

³¹² George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 3.

³¹³ Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969).

difficult to capture linguistically. This capture over time can soon become what Danesi calls “frozen” wherein metaphors “become part of the surface-level system and take on an increasingly literal quality” thus “los[ing] their metaphoricity.”³¹⁴ For example, though the desert is a metaphor by which we have come to imagine the availability of food within a given place, its use and utilization by institutions such as the USDA and their corporate partners has become frozen in this way. For these interventionists, food deserts can be measured by coordinates understood to be universal in their cultural production (proximity and poverty). Food deserts are mapped similarly across territory, as if they have emerged all the same across time and space. Its institutionalized use (e.g. mobilized in the USDA Food Access Research Atlas) signals a hegemonic consent to its assumptions. In this case, food deserts then are quantified into relative fixity. The food desert, as a metaphor, coheres.

The coherence of metaphor, as Neil Smith and Cindi Katz argue, is also spatial.³¹⁵ Though spatial language has gained traction across both literary studies and the social sciences, Smith and Katz argue that we would benefit from thinking about the “interconnectedness of material and metaphoric space” to shed light on the unintended consequences of spatial metaphors.³¹⁶ Without attention to metaphoricity, spatial designations can seem to stagnate, referencing what might be considered to be “absolute space,” a conceptualization that has its roots in Western philosophy and science.³¹⁷ The problem, they note, is that in these cases space is regarded as a fixed, neutral site, open for territorialization. This conceptualization of space has been critically important for colonial and capitalist expansion, which can erase situated cultural values replacing them with hegemonic social practices through the logics of property. Similarly,

³¹⁴ Danesi, *Vico, Metaphor and the Origin of Language*, 131.

³¹⁵ Smith and Katz, “Grounding Metaphor.”

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 67.

³¹⁷ *Ibid*, 73-74.

in the Atlas, the food desert metaphor is put to use through commonsense coordinates that tell one story of desertification, while omitting others. The desert then becomes a way of “marking off territory so that it has an inside and bounding surface” or constructing food deserts as fixed and absolute.³¹⁸ Thus, spatial metaphors, in doing the work of designation or containment, simultaneously mark an absolute inside and outside in apparently natural ways.

Though in rhetorical studies our engagements with metaphor have helped us consider how metaphors constitute our perception of reality, it is important to remember that the many ways metaphor moves policy, practice, and lived experience is rarely acknowledged outside of these academic circles. Therefore, we must still approach metaphor with a criticality that allows us to see where it has achieved coherence whereby it begins to move us and the worlds we live in. No one is immune to being moved by metaphors, even the most critical among us. As Bob Ivie has argued, following I.A. Richards, “metaphor is at the base of rhetorical invention” made possible by the co-presence between a tenor (subject) and vehicle (term).³¹⁹ While vehicles reference a “system of associated common places,” the tenor acts as a filter to direct attention.³²⁰ Ivie argues that vehicles can develop pattern in our “corpus of discourse” disclosing master metaphors that reveal the terministic screens of a particular rhetoric.³²¹ Therefore, metaphors reveal and conceal while telling us much about the relationship between language, perception, and ideology.

Though metaphors saturate political discourse they contain risks associated with the oversimplification of problems and their solutions. Jeffrey Scott Mio elaborates that metaphors “screen out” information “leaving only the core ideas” and, thereby, collapsing complex

³¹⁸ Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 30.

³¹⁹ Robert L. Ivie, “Metaphor and the Rhetorical Invention of Cold War ‘Idealists,’” *Communication Monographs* 54, no. 2 (1987), 166.

³²⁰ Ibid, 166.

³²¹ Ibid 167.

considerations of a problem.³²² Rather than paying attention to the details of a form of intervention or orientation, metaphors can “entrap the rhetors who use them,” meaning rhetors often must frame or justify success based on the metaphoric terms they have offered to guide an orientation toward an issue.³²³ Thomas R. Burkholder and David Henry expand on these implications for policy, wherein the metaphors used to describe, for example, the “war on drugs” can reduce the complexity into a simplistic frame of a battle to be “won,” thereby galvanizing support for policies that support militaristic interventions and criminalization resulting in violence consequences.³²⁴

J. David Cisneros argues in his work on the metaphors of “immigrant as pollutant” in media representations that “metaphors are some of the principle tools with which dominant ideologies and prejudices are represented and reinforced.”³²⁵ Drawing from Mark Ellis and Richard Wright, Cisneros argues that metaphors connect text with context and are the “conceptual tools” that help to form relational bonds and even inform governance through public policy.³²⁶ Thus, metaphors not only inform ways of imagining public issues, but they set the terms for engagement expanding or shrinking what might be considered appropriate or necessary responses. Metaphors can move, cohere, influence, and establish the direction of institutional decision-making. They offer a terministic screen that allows us to see and celebrate (or not) some solutions over others. They can be codified into law and become the contexts in which other metaphors begin to emerge.

³²² Jeffery Scott Mio, “Metaphor, Politics, and Persuasion,” in *Metaphor: Implications and Applications*, eds. Jeffery Scott Mio and Albert N. Katz (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996), 130.

³²³ Thomas R. Burkholder and David Henry, “Criticism of Metaphor” in *Rhetorical Criticism: Perspectives in Action*, ed. Jim Kuypers (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 101.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ J. David Cisneros, “Contaminated Communities: The Metaphor of ‘Immigrant as Pollutant’ in Media Representations,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 11, no. 4 (2008), 571.

³²⁶ Ibid, 570.

Bringing us back to metaphor's hermeneutic function, we might begin to conceptualize the food "desert" metaphor as the vehicle by which our conceptualization of food access (tenor) is put to use. While the USDA Food Access Research Atlas puts the food desert metaphor to use, mapping both place and people relative to their proximity to a grocery store, it does much more than address food access. In this project, I am particularly concerned with *the ways metaphors territorialize*. More specifically, how the food desert metaphor, in its circulation and utilization prompted by the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, no longer comes to reference food availability, but becomes a way of seeing, imagining, and in turn, carving out and constituting the places and people living in these designated spaces.

Considering the ways metaphors territorialize moves us from questions regarding what metaphors *are* toward a concerns with what metaphors *do*. Sheehan argues that hermeneutics, being a combination of interpretation and understanding, require us to consider the contextuality of a metaphor, whose "understanding is always an invention of the interpreter who must mediate among her prejudices, the words of the text/speaker, and the context."³²⁷ Sheehan brings us to metaphor's *use* as the factor by which metaphor is set apart from other kinds of language. A metaphor's power is "in the way it is used by both the speaker and interpreter to invent narratives," which gives metaphors their worldmaking character.³²⁸

Although the food desert metaphor could be traced through textual analysis of speeches made by food practioners, corporations, and in public policy, I turn to the USDA Food Access Research Atlas as the guiding logistical media that orients external interventions. The map matters because it puts the metaphor to use, plotting food scarcity and quantifying potential food access interventions. In turn, the map can limit the kinds of solutions advanced to eliminate food

³²⁷ Sheehan, "Metaphor as Hermeneutic," 56.

³²⁸ Ibid, 56.

insecurity and inequities. The map, as explored more in the next section, sets the terms of engagement, limiting the complexity of food access to an issue of proximity and poverty. It also provides the technical justification for why food deserts matter—whether to be in service of the food insecure, to garner new profits in these spaces, or to do both simultaneously.

As geographers Gloria Howerton and Amy Trauger caution: “Food access exists in a world of meaning, navigated by people constantly engaging in acts of interpretation.”³²⁹ I, therefore, am less concerned with what food deserts *are* and more about how they are mapped, mobilized, used, and interpreted. This chapter, therefore, explores how their iconicity coheres and is mapped, how the desert moves us to the technical, to the imaginative, and more specifically the cartographic. Turning to the map itself, I identify how it puts the particularly salient food “desert” metaphor to use.

Wor(l)ds, Maps, and Media

This chapter is especially concerned with cases when metaphors and maps collide. Perhaps there is always an element of iconography in the process of producing boundaries, drawing distinction between inside and outside through metaphor.³³⁰ After all, metaphors ground us as much as they provide imaginative resources for interpreting our worlds. If “words are maps”³³¹ then I ask the following questions: (1) how are metaphors mapped, and (2) how does mapping metaphors impact how they are *used*? By bringing together work in critical cartography and rhetorical studies, I aim to stretch our engagements with metaphor into how they harden into iconicity, or put differently, how metaphors provide the linguistic resources (or codes) for

³²⁹ Gloria Howerton and Amy Trauger, “‘Oh Honey, Don’t You Know’: The Social Construction of Food Access in a Food Desert,” *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geography* 16, no. 4 (2017): 743.

³³⁰ For example, Denis Wood’s argues that both linguistic and iconic codes are inescapable in the process of map-making.

³³¹ Voyles, *Wastelanding*, 19.

mapping. Since if I am interested in the hermeneutic function of metaphor, how metaphors are *used*, then I am particularly interested in how maps like the USDA Food Access Research Atlas put metaphors to *use*, providing the visual resources for interpretation, that end up extending beyond the map and into broader development discourses that begin to see places, and communities, as deserted themselves and/or as sites for profit. In this construction of barren space, they designate new frontiers for urban development.³³² If maps put metaphors to use, they have tremendous power to impact how these metaphors are interpreted—maps argue, and we argue on their behalf.³³³ Before investigating the map itself, I turn to the literature on the cartographic and the mediated.

As scholars of critical cartography have taught us, maps have always been infused with power. Maps are not views from nowhere though they are often assumed to be. Neil Smith and Cindi Katz argue:

There are many ways to map a given space—none automatic, all requiring a substantive translation from the mapped to the map—and the value of such representations is traditionally measured in terms of its correspondence with a naïvely assumed ‘reality’. In so far as mapping involves exploration, selection, definition, generalization and translation of data, it assumes a range of social cum representational powers, as the military histories of geography and cartography suggest, the power to map can be closely entwined with the power of conquest and control.³³⁴

However, maps’ assumed neutrality makes them difficult to interrogate—after all the justification is often that maps are simply the visual representation of data gathered from somewhere else. The argument then follows: if you have a problem with the map, then take it up with the data. Perhaps this is why so many scholars of food systems and public health focus on what’s missing from the data to challenge the bases by which the visualization came to into

³³² Safransky, “Greening the Urban Frontier.”

³³³ Here I take from Denis Wood’s notion of *thematic* code, which is the ways a map establishes its “domain” or how the map makes an argument.

³³⁴ Smith and Katz, “Grounding Metaphor,” 69.

being. However, rhetorical scholars are keen enough to know that the map serves a purpose of its own—maps move discourse too. As Catherine Chaput argues, to study the ways discourse moves, requires an ontological shift that “takes us from the rhetorical situation as a temporally and spatially fixed site of exigence, constraints, and discourse to rhetorical circulation as a fluidity of everyday practices, affects, and uncertainties.”³³⁵ This means considering how the desert metaphor circulates and is relational too. Its intelligibility depends on the ways it gathers meaning and how this meaning informs dominant conceptualizations of the places of lack as well as the needs and desires of people that experience food scarcity.

But how do we interrogate the map? On one hand our goal can be deconstruction, which as J. B. Hartley argues “urges us to read between the lines of the map—‘in the margins of the text’—and through its tropes to discover the silences and contradictions that challenge the apparent honesty of the image.”³³⁶ On the other hand, we can also pay attention to circulation, or the ways discourse moves the map and the map moves discourse. This means tracing how the desert metaphor maps onto other development discourses in their attempts to increase economic and material access to place and to people in these ‘deserted’ spaces. And since the relation between the map and the metaphor matters, I engage both methods of critique below.

Before moving to circulation however, it is important to understand how maps work. In *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, Denis Wood argues that maps are made of codes, which can be understood as the product or relation of signs and their signifiers.³³⁷ He offers ten cartographic codes by which maps organize meaning, five being *intrasignificant* (within the map) and five *extrasignificant* (outside of the map). The latter work “at the level of myth” or are the codes that

³³⁵ Chaput, “Rhetorical Circulation in Late Capitalism,” 6.

³³⁶ J. B. Harley, “Deconstructing the Map,” *Cartographica* 26, no. 2 (1989): 1-20.

³³⁷ Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*.

contribute to the map's cultural authority.³³⁸ The first five: *iconic*, *linguistic*, *tectonic*, *temporal*, and *presentational* are the things we may visibly see in the map. *Iconic codes* are a measure of “inventory”³³⁹ or the act of representing fragmentation (e.g. *here* are where food deserts are). *Linguistic codes* are the act of classification, naming or assigning (e.g. the term “food desert” is the linguistic code that references the *here*). *Tectonic codes* reference scale (e.g. the census data that measures LI (low-income) and LA (low-access) tracts). *Temporal codes* reference tense or time, what might be called “codes of duration” (e.g. why there was a need for a 2015 Atlas to update the 2010 map). The final intrasignificant code is the *presentational code* that references the ways the map is organized, including all aesthetic choices, colors, type font, schemas, and so on that make the map visually presentable.

Maps' *extrasignificant* codes give them authority, these five for Woods's being: *thematic*, *topic* (topos), *historical*, *rhetorical*, and *utilitarian*. Now, while a rhetorician might argue that all codes do rhetorical work, there is value in breaking down their use. A map's *thematic code* is the “domain” about which the maps speaks (e.g. this map is of ‘food access,’ or this map is of ‘food deserts’). The topos, or *topic*, of a map “turns space to place,” it fixes, coupled with linguistic assignment, giving a name to a place (e.g. it is here, in this green shape, that there is a desert). The topos of a map is where we see interaction between the iconic and linguistic codes—its makes them into something real or “asserts its existence.”³⁴⁰ *Historical codes* then also depend on the temporal codes which a map references. Maps fix us in history (or in the contemporary, offering no history) to “secure [both] the place and time.”³⁴¹ *Rhetorical codes* are the contexts in which the map emerges, is interpreted, and circulates—they “orient the map in its culture (in its

³³⁸ Ibid, 80-81.

³³⁹ Ibid, 81.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 82.

³⁴¹ Ibid, 82.

set of values).”³⁴² The rhetorical code begs more attention than this mere description I offer here, especially because it was the Food Access Research Atlas’s rhetorical function that drew me to it in the first place. But it is the map’s *utilitarian code*, the ways it is mobilized, leveraged, or used, that is also what makes the map so powerful, even if referenced in benign ways.

I offer this detailed, albeit brief, reading to assert that maps are made of many decisions and each one of them matters for how we imagine space and the stories they bring to life. As this section title indicates, I am particularly interested in the iconic codes of maps, what might be considered the most mundane—but they are the lines that draw the boundaries between where the ‘desert’ exists and where it does not. As Wood elaborates of icons:

Thus to characterize iconicity as a simple matter of visual likeness (as though this *could* be a simple matter), or as a formal correspondence between expression and referent, is to mystify its explanation and divorce it entirely from cultural enterprise. Iconicity derives from our ability to transcribe arrangements in space and mark them out in conventional symbols—in other words. . . to map them.³⁴³

The iconicity of the ‘desert’ is important because it plucks the space out of their cultural contexts. The iconic code is what maps the metaphor into space—it flattens, fixes, freezes. The metaphor is no longer a creative term (vehicle) by which we make sense of food access (tenor), but it is spatial. . . it is *here*, we can *see* it, it necessitates our address. It does, what Susan Sontag refers to as the “trappings of metaphor.”³⁴⁴ In the act of seeing deserts in space, they can then be conceptualized as deserted or a new frontier for development. Often they are both.

To study how the map accrues power, though, asks that we consider the role of maps more in terms of their logistical function—their role in “organiz[ing] and orient[ing]” not only place, people, and capital, but also imagination. For John Durham Peters, maps are also media specifically because of their logistical function. They arrange relations “among people and

³⁴² Ibid, 82.

³⁴³ Ibid, 88.

³⁴⁴ Sontag, *Illness and Metaphor*, 5.

things.”³⁴⁵ In *The Marvelous Clouds*, Peters makes a case for *infrastructuralism* as a way to account for the more mundane organizing principles that shape our worlds, what he calls a “doctrine of environments” and “of things not understood that stand under our worlds.”³⁴⁶ While we might think of infrastructures as the large systems by which our world is organized—in the case of food systems that might be the transnational networks of production, processing, and distribution—infrastructuralism asks us to consider what makes these networks work. For Peters, the answer is in the mundane, the logistical, more specifically logistical media that enable their operation.

If this lengthy discussion of metaphors, codes, and logistics has left you bored, let us learn from Peters’ assertion that, “There is a politics to boredom.”³⁴⁷ He continues:

Forgetting seems a key part of the ways infrastructures work. Star notes that they are often ‘mundane to the point of boredom.’ But it all depends on what the structure is *infra* to. Infrastructure is often defined by being off the radar, below notice, or off stage. Redundancy may be boring, but the essence of robust systems is backup options.³⁴⁸

The USDA Food Access Research Atlas, in spite of all of the ways it seems unremarkable, is one of these logistical media. It’s not considered particularly powerful on its own and it is rarely the central topic of any discussion on food access. However, it enables, it assists, it “order[s] fundamental terms and units.”³⁴⁹

To review, my argument about the relationship between metaphors and maps can be thought of through four broad, interconnected claims: (1) The USDA Food Access Research Atlas is rhetorical in that it informs and is informed by discourse, in particular the metaphor of the food desert. (2) As a logistical media, the map puts the metaphor to *use*, providing the

³⁴⁵ Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 37.

³⁴⁶ Ibid, 33.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 36.

³⁴⁸ Ibid, 36.

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 37.

hermeneutical resources (codes) to see scarcity in space. (3) The iconicity of the desert on the map plucks the place out of its cultural context, flattens complexity, fixes the conditions in time, and freezes the metaphor into place. (4) The map also provides the resources for rhetorical circulation—its utilitarian function opens up space for intervention. It makes available and establishes new territories for infrastructures (supermarkets, large-scale grocers) to be built. The USDA Food Access Research Atlas mobilizes the power of the desert metaphor to move and be moved by those working to provide food access where there is perceived deficit in very different ways, sometimes hindering a comprehensive view of what communities experiencing food inequities need or desire. Thus the map encodes a particular set of values and vision of place. Now that we have a foundation from which to approach the map critically, I turn to the Atlas and the stories it tells.

Mapping Scarcity in and Beyond the Atlas

Given the logistical function of the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, I approach the map as a media that is both informed by and informs our food access discourse and policy. The primary metaphor of the food “desert” that motivates the map is made visible, which in turn invites public and private intervention. The map tells a partial, incomplete story of foodways. Its dependence on *proximity* and *poverty* narrate scarcity (of food availability, resources, and access to transportation) as the reason for inequities in food access. This narrative is particularly persuasive for supermarket chains, developers, and city officials as it is often used to attract investments, new food amenities, and other related developments. For example, since the map was released, commitments made by major retailers and businesses were thrust into action.

Working with the Partnership for a Healthier America,³⁵⁰ companies like SUPERVALU, Walgreens, Walmart, California FreshWorks Fund, Brown's Super Store, and other smaller retailers like Calhoun Grocer and Klein's Family Markets were the first to make public commitments to increase locations in designated food deserts.³⁵¹

The Associated Press reports that from 2011 to the first quarter of 2015, over seventy-five food retailers opened 10,300 new stores in designated food "deserts," though only a fraction were full-scale grocery stores (2,434).³⁵² As the food desert metaphor was put to use after the national call to address food access, differing interventions resulted, which might be categorized into three main forms. First, companies promising fresh and healthy food (e.g. Whole Foods) moved into designated food "deserts" providing food that is far too expensive for nearby food insecure residents.³⁵³ In some of these cases, what resulted was an increase in more affluent and white residents to these areas, which can mask ongoing food insecurity for poorer residents. Second, in the areas that other grocers have left behind, companies promising affordable options (e.g. Dollar General) began carrying food amenities. These interventions have been particularly palatable in rural areas where stores offering cheap goods might add food to their shelves and freezers to address food access.³⁵⁴ Such interventions, of course, raise concerns about what kinds of food a community should be able to access, as cheap food or non-perishable items do not

³⁵⁰ Founded in 2010, Partnership for a Healthier America (PHA) works in conjunction with (although separate from) the Let's Move! campaign to galvanize support in the private sector to address childhood obesity.

³⁵¹ Office of the First Lady, "First Lady Michelle Obama Announces Nationwide Commitments to Provide Millions of People Access to Healthy, Affordable Food in Underserved Communities," *Obama White House Archives*, July 20, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/07/20/first-lady-michelle-obama-announces-nationwide-commitments-provide-milli>.

³⁵² Mike Schneider, "Grocery Stores Leave Food Deserts Barren, AP Analysis Finds," *AP News*, December 7, 2015, <https://apnews.com/8bfc99c7c99646008acf25e674e378cf/grocery-chains-leave-food-deserts-barren-ap-analysis-finds>

³⁵³ Whole Foods has built a store in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood, as well as Detroit, New Orleans, Newark, among others. See for example: Kate Durocher, "Gentrification, Whole Foods, and a Food Desert," *Future of Food*, November 15, 2017, <https://futureoffood.fm/2017/11/15/gentrification-whole-foods-food-deserts/>

³⁵⁴ Mya Frazier, "Dollar General Hits a Gold Mine in Rural America," *Bloomberg Business*, October 11, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-10-11/dollar-general-hits-a-gold-mine-in-rural-america>

always correlate to nutritional variety. Third, some companies sought a middle ground, promising to provide healthy and affordable food by either opening new stores or increasing the availability of perishable items in already established stores (e.g. Walgreens, SUPERVALU, or Walmart).³⁵⁵ While big-box stores like these can certainly address food access quickly, many remain cautious about long-term effects in neighborhoods, especially what new forms of corporate dependency will be encouraged or what might result if/when their stores close.

No matter what form of intervention, big-box grocers and companies are rewarded for locating food stores in areas designated as food “deserts.” The USDA explicitly encourages these ventures, for example, offering loans through projects like the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) to help fund new developments that promise to address the issue of food deserts. Despite the HFFI’s commitment to fund independent businesses to address food deserts, as Eric Holt-Giménez argues, the loan programs are a “drop in the bucket compared to corporate cash flows” with the desire to develop in the food desert.³⁵⁶ My focus on the map then, shows that despite federal financing efforts, development in these spaces persists as a largely corporate endeavor, what has been called the “corporate ‘greening’ of America’s food deserts.”³⁵⁷ The map assists companies in locating ‘deserts’ in need of assistance and often provides them a justification to develop in these spaces—whether they are targeting food insecure families or not. The map and the subsequent discourses that the map affords contribute to the dominant social imaginary that these places are lacking, vacant, barren and in need of outside intervention. The map tells a story that begins and ends with access, largely omitting how food deserts came to be in the first place.

³⁵⁵ Rob Walker, “Walgreens Tackles Food Deserts,” *The New York Times*, November 12, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/magazine/14fob-consumed-t.html>; Ed Stych, “Supervalu to Open 250 New Stores in U.S. ‘Food Deserts,’” *Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal*, July 20, 2011, <https://www.bizjournals.com/twincities/news/2011/07/20/supervalu-open-250-save-a-lot-obama.html>.

³⁵⁶ Eric Holt-Giménez, “Walmart’s Food Deserts: Greening the Bottom Line,” *Huffington Post*, September 27, 2011, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/eric-holt-gimenez/food-desert-walmart_b_910832.html.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

As I return to the Atlas, I'm interested how the maps and metaphors of food access merge and establish particular imaginative resources for territorialization. By territorialization here, I mean to suggest that mapping food deserts provides a way of seeing, designating, and fixing space as well as those that inhabit it. Of course as cultural geographers have argued, territorialization is not always negative, but rather is a complex process that is "ongoing, uneven and contested."³⁵⁸ Territorialization is communicative, as it references the "political, cultural, economic, and social trajectories" that constitute social and spatial organization.³⁵⁹ The map's dependence on proximity and poverty tells an incomplete story desertification, locating the roots of the problem within its symptom, rather than offering a comprehensive account of legacies of disinvestment, uneven power dynamics, and historical construction of food deserts.

Thus, I am interested in how the desert metaphor, coupled with a vision of food deserts as 'nutritional wastelands' opens up scarce space visually for investments, development, and in many cases in rapidly growing cities, gentrification. I advance two arguments about the map's reliance on *scarcity* as its imaginative resource: (1) that the map fixes food "deserts" into space, naturalizing the history of food access and flattening foodways as an issue of scarcity, and (2) that the map and subsequent discourses that map affords, can frame those living in food deserts as passive, enabling interventions that may end up threatening their ability to live in these spaces. Both the *naturalization* of the food desert metaphor and the *pacification* of communities living in designated food deserts provides the communicative opening for interventions to come from outside communities labeled a desert, a process that often lacks understanding of the culturally contextual foodways of these communities as well as a broader account of disinvestment that created structural, racial, and class-based inequities to begin with.

³⁵⁸ Anthony Ince, "In the Shell of the Old: Anarchist Geographies of Territorialization," *Antipode*, 44, no. 5 (2012): 1645-1666.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 1650.

Naturalizing Inequity

Food deserts, swamps, mirages, and oases—these metaphors we use to describe food access—have an inherently naturalizing quality to them. One might argue that the food desert metaphor has received such attention because it doesn't seem to place blame on anyone. Rarely are deserts created, or if they are, public concern is not usually fixated on what caused them. The fixation is on solutions—developing (in) the food desert. Deserts are spaces untouched, available, even welcoming, being that it's a common assumption that those who are considered to have nothing, would welcome anything outsiders might offer to provide. As I have argued previously, the problem with the food desert metaphor is not that it is inherently bad, but rather that how it is *used* can put spaces at risk of developments that may not end up benefiting the communities living in these spaces.

Overwhelmingly, the corporate interventions that resulted from the *Lets Move!* campaign agree that food deserts are a problem, but largely ignore their role in contributing to their construction. There is no recognition, for example, of the history of supermarket flight to the suburbs only to leave fast-food chains and dollar stores to fill in, a process that has been occurring since at least the 1960s.³⁶⁰ Designating a space as a “desert” that simply “exists” lacks recognition that the choice of whether to construct a grocery store within a neighborhood is one often guided by profitability, speculation, and racially-biased planning (such as segregation). What we see in the post-2010 era of national food policy is how the barometer of profitability can shift. Not only can large retailers receive public funds and support to develop in food “deserts,” but they can also position themselves rhetorically as being in humble service to the blighted areas, despite having contributed to their desertification in the first place.

³⁶⁰ Elizabeth Eisenhauer, “In Poor Health: Supermarket Redlining and Urban Nutrition,” *GeoJournal* 53, no. 2 (2001): 125-133.

Although companies like Walmart also have promised to revamp their nutritional charters and to remedy the cost of eating healthier in their supply chains (a rather significant commitment), their public promises often still frame uneven distribution as natural occurrence.³⁶¹ For example, in a public presentation by Walmart, the Partnership for a Healthier America, and the *Let's Move!* Campaign, Walmart's then Senior Vice President of Sustainability Andrea Thomas proclaimed that in addition to helping educate consumers about healthier food choice Walmart will "provide solutions to address the food deserts that exist all across the country today."³⁶² Positioning food deserts as "existing," rather than being materially created, offers a comfortable platform from which the company might leverage an intervention. Thomas continues: "These are the neighborhoods in urban and rural communities where too many Americans don't eat well—because they don't have the same access to healthy foods that other Americans do."³⁶³ Walmart promises to extend its mission to "Save Money, Live Better" to what Thomas refers to as "underserved areas." Absent from this statement, though, is contextualization about how food "deserts" came to be made—they simply "exist" as places where "underserved" communities "don't eat well" because they lack access to healthy food. It's a familiar story, one that naturalizes the problem and the solution.

The naturalization or freezing of a metaphor like food desert is powerful because of the ways it provides discursive closure. As Guthman notes of terms like "obesity," the problem of meaning lies in the ways these terms experience "closure."³⁶⁴ Citing Maarten Hajer's *Politics of Environmental Discourse*, Guthman notes that the problem of closure is when "a specific definition of a problem is used to frame subsequent study of the problem's causes and

³⁶¹ Walmart, "Walmart Launches Major Initiatives to Make Food Healthier and Healthier Food More Affordable," *YouTube*, January 10, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpLV0xTdq9E>.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁴ Guthman, *Weighing In*, 15.

consequences and thus precludes alternative conceptualizations of the problem.”³⁶⁵ Much like the term “obesity” to which this quote was in reference, the desert metaphor also suffers from this problem of closure. The term has become relatively frozen in public discourse, despite the Task Force on Childhood Obesity noting the need for locally oriented contextualization. The food desert map contributes to this fixity, evidenced by USDA’s description of the problem as an issue of supermarket scarcity. The Task Force argues “These nutritional wastelands exist across America in both urban and rural communities where parents and children simply do not have access to a supermarket.”³⁶⁶ Diagnosing the problem as “simply” an issue of supermarkets access assists in this fixity: one doesn’t have to ask questions, or consider complexity when the problem is framed as simple. Thus, the tautological conclusion becomes that food deserts exist because there is a lack of access—and there is a lack of access because food deserts exist.

One reason that the food desert, as well as the metaphor of ‘nutritional wastelands’ have gained rhetorical traction is because they rely on familiar tropes of vacancy that establish new frontiers to be conquered, served, developed, and fundamentally transformed.³⁶⁷ Food deserts, for example, are meant to be *fought*—as made apparent in the language Walmart uses to celebrate new store developments.³⁶⁸ Developing in the desert is simultaneously a fight and an effort to save. As Traci Brynne Voyles argues, deserts are often “differentially interpellated as sacred or profane.”³⁶⁹ The metaphor of the desert has a long history in the contemporary environmental imaginary with its roots in nineteenth-century Western expansion and colonization. Voyles extrapolates that settlers referenced desert metaphors in ways that either

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 15.

³⁶⁶ Wright, “Interactive Web Tool Maps Food Deserts, Provides Key Data.”

³⁶⁷ Safransky, “Greening the Urban Frontier.”

³⁶⁸ Walmart, “How We’re Fighting Food Deserts,” *Walmart*, May 18, 2014, <https://blog.walmart.com/health-wellness/20140519/how-were-fighting-food-deserts>.

³⁶⁹ Voyles, *Wastlanding*, 17.

were “imagined as an environmental specter threatening the white masculine settler and the larger project of settlement itself” or they were “protectable wilderness” that became central to conservation initiatives.³⁷⁰

Similarly, protecting deserts (and those that live in them from their ‘unhealthy’ habits) is one way in which grocers mobilize the food desert metaphor as they compete for new markets. Protection comes at a cost—it is something to be conquered or saved. Articles like *The Atlantic’s* “The Great Grocery Smackdown”³⁷¹ between Walmart and Whole Foods or *The Packer’s* “Dollar General Strives to be an Oasis in Food Desert”³⁷² highlight this dichotomy. Grocers are each looking to build and fill a different niche, contribute to their profitable growth, or “add some adventure and zing to [sic] marketing”³⁷³ while entering food “desert” markets. While some stores seek out full service options (including perishables), others fill their niche by making fresh food optional or limited to basics. In public statements, grocery stores regularly provide explicit promise when supporting new food developments; however, when they close due to profitability, they are less likely to take responsibility for the communities they are leaving behind.³⁷⁴ Thus, food deserts are discursively constructed as valuable (sacred) when profitable, yet, can be left behind (profane) when the growth strategy proves undesirable.

Although Voyles in her text *Wastelanding* references the imaginary of deserts in the West, more specifically Navajo territories colonized for uranium mining, it is curious that food

³⁷⁰ Ibid, 17.

³⁷¹ Corby Kummer, “The Great Grocery Smackdown,” *The Atlantic*, March 2010, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2010/03/the-great-grocery-smackdown/307904/>.

³⁷² The Packer, “Dollar General Strives to be an Oasis in Food Desert,” *The Packer*, December 6, 2011, <https://www.thepacker.com/article/dollar-general-strives-be-oasis-food-desert>.

³⁷³ Ibid; Dollar General describes their need for “zing” in efforts to increase carry of cheap produce.

³⁷⁴ Often when grocery stores close, they create vacancies that other stores are unable to (because of the store’s restricted covenants) or do not want to fill. For example, in 2016 Walmart closed 269 small-format “Walmart Express” stores (154 in the U.S.), which were explicitly positioned as solutions to food deserts because they were not profitable at a small-scale. Other examples range from protests over a Kroger Grocers in Cincinnati, OH in 2018 to a closure of an Albertsons in Birchwood, WA, among many others.

access discourse makes similar use of both the desert and wasteland metaphors. ‘Wastelands’ are imagined as pollutable spaces.³⁷⁵ ‘Deserts’ are “environments of scarcity” that open up spaces for settlement.³⁷⁶ However Voyles cautions that the meaning of the desert is both contingent and particular:

Just so, there is nothing about the desert itself that invites disdain, even white Western disdain with its clear cultural preferences for lush and vibrant landscapes. This is precisely because that preference is culturally and historically constituted and contingent on the particularities (and peculiarities) of how white Western environmental imagination has evolved in the “New World.”³⁷⁷

Therefore it is not the metaphor itself that “invites disdain” but rather, the way it is used within the broader cultural and historical milieu. Voyles urges us to pay close attention to context when analyzing the impact of the term ‘desert’ in the American environmental imagination. In the case of food desert deficit discourses, the desert is rhetorically constructed as both a vacant space to be served, and also a territory for marketplace battles.

Thus, similar to a rhetorical hermeneutic perspective, it is the *use* of the desert metaphor that is malleable, contingent, and particular. The *use* does rhetorical work, in that its mobilization is rarely neutral. This is especially true given that it is those outside of these spaces who almost always constitute them as ‘deserts’ in the first place.³⁷⁸ Some food justice practitioners, for example from Food and Water Watch, argue that corporate chains like Walmart put the food desert metaphor to use as a way to break into urban markets that they previously were unsuccessful in reaching and to garner positive public relations.³⁷⁹ Indeed, in these scenarios, Walmart often uses its position as the “country’s largest retailer of groceries” to promote itself as

³⁷⁵ Voyles, *Wastlanding*, 19.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 17.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 16.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

³⁷⁹ Food and Water Watch, “Why Walmart Can’t Fix the Food System,” *Food and Water Watch*, February 2012, https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/sites/default/files/walmart_cant_fix_food_system_report_feb_2012.pdf

the most qualified institution to address inadequate food access *and* “job deserts” by employing nearby residents.³⁸⁰ Ironically, at the time of this commitment, Walmart had been publicly criticized for their low wages for workers, that some argued made employees depended on SNAP benefits—essentially keeping them food insecure.³⁸¹ In this context, mobilizing “food desert” as a key metaphor in Walmart’s public relations discourse justifies both market expansion and exploitative labor practices.

Though the prospect of increasing healthy food access consistently is framed as positive from government and non-governmental food institutions, criticism has emerged. One example is concern that the USDA’s “corporate-friendly” definition of a food desert supports big-box interventions over small-scale solutions.³⁸² Further, since the USDA Food Access Research Atlas uses census data (thus far only from 2010 and 2015) to map proximity and poverty, it offers only a snapshot of the present, lacking historical analysis of how food deserts came to be. There is no discursive account of legacies of disinvestment, redlining, or the racial and economic barriers that determine why food amenities have yet to maintain a presence in these spaces. There is no account of *wastelanding*, or the imaginative processes by which these spaces were relegated to marginality to begin with. To receive any account of how race, for example, impacts food availability, you must visit the Food Environment Atlas. Yet, even then, the map just makes visible demographic data—where percentages of people who identify along predetermined racial

³⁸⁰ Tres Bailey, “How We’re Fighting Food Deserts,” *Walmart Today*, May 19, 2014, <https://blog.walmart.com/health-wellness/20140519/how-were-fighting-food-deserts>.

³⁸¹ Peter Van Burden, “Walmart Wages Are the Main Reason People Depend on Food Stamps,” *The Nation*, February 16, 2016, <https://www.thenation.com/article/walmart-wages-are-the-main-reason-people-depend-on-food-stamps/>.

³⁸² Food and Water Watch, 2012; This especially the case since the USDA defines food deserts as places wherein there is no access to a supermarket or large grocery store, a scale at which usually only corporations can fulfill. For example, see an elaborated discussion on this controversy: Rachel Cernansky, “How Walmart Turned Its Weak Urban Image Into a Public Interest Campaign Against Food Deserts,” *Treehugger*, February 22, 2012, <https://www.treehugger.com/corporate-responsibility/how-walmart-turned-its-weak-urban-image-public-interest-campaign-food-deserts.html>.

categories, have different income levels, are considered youth or seniors, and so on, reside. The map lacks substantial complexity, or at least ignores the contexts that brought these realities into being. Although most maps, to some extent, lack the ability to tell complex stories insofar as they offer flat representations of a range of multi-dimensional relations, the Food Access Research Atlas in particular fixes the problem in the present, making the imaginative resources for future development palatable.

Naturalizing metaphors have a way of providing only a certain set of temporal resources for understanding problems and their solutions. The problem with only relying on the present to inform future decision making is that first, the present is never fully accounted for, and second, that without note of the historical construction of these spaces, developments may risk repeating forms of exclusion in the process. As the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the New York Law School Racial Justice Project argue, “The lack of supermarkets within low-income inner-city minority communities is not a demographic accident or a consequence of ‘natural’ settlement patterns. Rather, government policies and their resulting incentives have played a significant role in shaping the segregated landscape of American cities.”³⁸³ By situating the construction of food deserts in the historical context of the New Deal, government sanctioned redlining, restricted covenants, and racial discrimination, it becomes clear that the past is critical to the food access story. Though exacerbated by uneven development and racist housing policies, food access inequities are also the result of settler colonialism, an ongoing process that continues control over Indigenous peoples ability to cultivate food for self-determination.³⁸⁴ Thus,

³⁸³ New York Law School Racial Justice Project, “Unshared Bounty: How Structural Racism Contributes to the Creation and Persistence of Food Deserts,” *New York Law School and the American Civil Liberties Union*, June 2012, https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/racial_justice_project/3/.

³⁸⁴ Kyle Powys Whyte, “Food Sovereignty, Justice, and Indigenous Peoples: An Essay on Settler Colonialism and Collective Continuance,” in *Oxford Handbook on Food Ethics*, eds. Anne Barnhill, Tyler Doggett, and Mark Budolfson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 345-366.

choosing from where to begin the story of how food access became uneven, affects what solutions are considered most viable or not. Some may simply reform the problem, rather than call for the transformation of the food system itself.³⁸⁵

Although the USDA Food Access Research Atlas makes visible spaces that lack large-scale food amenities and resources (both income and transportation availability), the maps logistical function omits how inequities in the food system came to be. Reliance on mapping food deserts, functions rhetorically as an imaginative resource for territorialization. Mobilizing the food desert metaphor to encourage outside intervention relies on the assumption that both the places and people that reside in them are barren and in need of revitalization. As metaphors circulate and cohere, they also limit what stories and histories are made available and present to help guide food access interventions. The logical conclusion one may interpret is that since food deserts are places of scarcity, any and all efforts to increase food access are a positive improvement. Returning then to the politics of “bringing good food to others,”³⁸⁶ corporate strategies rhetorically are positioning themselves as the only (or best) means by which large-scale food access can reach communities. Their commitment to serving the deserted is their armor as they come and go still at the whim of seemingly inevitable market forces that ultimately hinder sustainable, equitable solutions. In spite of these effects, communities continue to fight back, calling out the politics of short-term, capitalist solutions that bring cheap food without foregrounding the need for comprehensive economic justice interventions.³⁸⁷ As many communities living inside designated food deserts begin to take issue with how these

³⁸⁵ Gordon and Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty.” We borrow from Eric Holt Giménez on reform vs. transformation.

³⁸⁶ Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others.”

³⁸⁷ See, for example, a debate over the placement of Dollar General in Tulsa, Oklahoma, wherein residents argued that the food “desert” discourse can “exploit impoverished, underserved communities.” Sam Bloch, “Tulsa Says No More Dollar General, Curbing Exploitation of Black Neighborhoods,” *New Food Economic*, April 12, 2018, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/tulsa-dollar-general-stores-food-insecurity/>

designations frame their homes and their neighbors, it becomes critical that we denaturalize or defrost the hegemonic food desert metaphor in favor of a more nuanced vision of food justice.

Pacifying Community

Not only do the food desert metaphor and the map that makes them visible provide rhetorical resources for conceptualizing space, they also can impact how we imagine the people residing in these areas. If the desert is constructed as scarce space, then these broader deficit frames, or assumptions about how the food insecure lack agency to support their own health, affect how those living in food deserts are referenced. As alternative food movements, corporate developments, and non-profit interventions aim to bring, as Guthman calls it, “good food to others,” they employ a whole host of suppositions about to whom who they are bringing this food.³⁸⁸ And given that “whiteness works to shape the social relations and spaces of alternative food,” we must critically analyze how power motivates efforts to develop those living in food deserts too.³⁸⁹

As I have argued previously, interventions into food deserts overwhelmingly come from *outside* areas labeled a desert. In the use of the desert metaphor, which has the ability to constitute worlds for *others*, comes a relatively common assumption that communities experiencing food inequity do not understand the impacts of their own consumption practices. Additionally, given that the ‘obesity epidemic’ is the crisis within which the need to map food deserts emerged, dominant food access narratives are saturated with paternalistic assumptions about why communities living in these spaces are unhealthy, uneducated, and require healthy food access to change their habits. Health disparities do exist among those considered low-income and for communities of color (especially for Black, Brown and Native people), but the

³⁸⁸ Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others.”

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 434.

idea that outside development and healthy food access alone can solve these structural inequities can work to frame those living in designated food deserts as passive—awaiting outside investment in whatever form it may take. By passivity, I mean that people living in food deserts are positioned without agency, living at the whim of market forces that have given rise to their lack of grocery access.

One way passivity mobilizes through metaphor is with the use of the “desert dweller” descriptor that has circulated alongside efforts to address food deserts. The term, which has made its way into economist and public health discourses, positions those living in designated food deserts as perpetrators of their own condition—uneducated, unhealthy, and unaware of their own circumstances. One U.S. News report described “desert dwellers” as “starving for a supermarket.”³⁹⁰ Other op-eds describe that “for food-desert dwellers, high-fat, low-nutrition convenience foods are the norm” which “swells obesity” and costs states and the nation billions of dollars in health funding.³⁹¹ Even when the limits of supermarket solutions are acknowledged, “desert dwellers” are subtly blamed as the problem and for not taking advantage of the healthy food available next door to them or not knowing “what to do with it.”³⁹² Though realizing the limits of food knowledge can be well intentioned, framing food insecure communities as uneducated, unresourceful, or/and passive, can rationalize the need for outside intervention, especially as these frames circulate to form dominant assumptions about food insecure people.

The discourse of the desert dweller is another articulation of this deficit discourse. While the food desert space is constituted as barren in this iteration, the people dwelling in these spaces

³⁹⁰ Andrew Soergel, “Millions of Food Desert Dwellers Struggle to Get Fresh Groceries,” *U.S. News*, December 7, 2015, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/12/07/millions-of-food-desert-dwellers-struggle-to-get-fresh-groceries>

³⁹¹ Orlando Sentinel Editorial, “Bill Can Shower Food Deserts With Nutrition: Editorial,” *Orlando Sentinel*, April 25, 2015, <http://www.orlandosentinel.com/opinion/os-ed-food-deserts-legislation-20150422-story.html>.

³⁹² Amanda Cuda, “For Those in Food Deserts, Grocery Shopping Can Be A Hassle,” *CT Post*, October 15, 2011, <https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/For-those-in-food-deserts-grocery-shopping-can-2220747.php>.

also become imagined as lacking—both in resources to provide their communities with food and knowledge of “what to do” with healthy food, even if they had access to it. Some local publications describe desert dwellers as “stranded” in “dusty deserts of nutrition” that need to be turned into oases.³⁹³ Cheeky jokes accompany these “desert” deficit discourses, such as one report stating: “Ironic. Subsidizing broccoli could save taxpayers a lot of cabbage.”³⁹⁴ In addition to the “desert dweller” being articulated as left behind stranded and struggling in a barren space, interventions to increase the availability of fresh food are consequently framed as the savior—to both the “dwellers” and the taxpayers to which they are a burden. Metaphors like these reinforce the classist power dynamics present in hegemonic food access discourses, positioning those living with food insecurity as unable to understand or advocate for their own solutions.

The ‘unaware’ desert dweller metaphor also is routinely medicalized as unhealthy—diseased, obese, or toxic. For example, Medscape has argued that “‘food desert’ dwellers” not only are more likely to not have food access, but also are at risk of developing diseases, becoming obese, adopting smoking, along with other health risks.³⁹⁵ The medicalization of obesity, as Michael Gard notes, can legitimate government-assisted interventions championed to solve public health crises.³⁹⁶ This process becomes racialized through tropes that often equate nonwhite bodies as “lazy,” “undisciplined” “deviant,” and “inferior.”³⁹⁷ I want be careful here, because I am not suggesting that structural injustices do not produce uneven health outcomes (they do), but that the discourse of the desert dweller can work to pacify those residing in these

³⁹³ Orlando Sentinel Editorial.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Marlene Busko, “‘Food Desert’ Dwellers Have Worse Heart-Disease Risk Profiles,” *Medscape*, April 5, 2016, <https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/861501>.

³⁹⁶ Michael Gard, “Friends, Enemies and the Cultural Politics of Critical Obesity Research,” in *Biopolitics and the Obesity Epidemic: Governing Bodies*, eds. Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 33.

³⁹⁷ Sanders, “The Color of Fat,” 12, 8.

spaces, framing them as unconscious and ignorant of their own condition. For many living in designated food “deserts,” it is not that intervention is not necessary, but rather it matters from where, how, and by whom intervention is enacted.

While white individuals also live in designated food deserts, the ‘desert dweller’ metaphor, especially when used to address inequities in cities—described as “urban” or “inner city” spaces, both often racialized terms in these cases—is not race neutral. The pacification of those living in food deserts is particularly provocative, given the ways medical data is used to support evidence for racial disparities.

As Laura Azzarito extrapolates:

Discourses of whiteness are implicitly sustained by researchers’ adoption of stereotypical, racialized discourses that discount historical constructions of health, diet, and the body. Researchers’ use of current evidence of the health disparities by race/ethnicity and social class to locate minorities as an economic and social burden on the national economy is the basis for a racialized discourse of ‘blaming the victim.’³⁹⁸

The racializing discourse of the ‘desert’ is subtle and often hard to detect, but it depends on constructing ‘desert dwellers’ as passive.

Moreover, in publications wherein the fear of “swell[ing] obesity” is articulated as a result and crisis of the food “desert,” residents are framed as being an economic burden to the state—often in racialized ways.³⁹⁹ Despite the fact that poor and working class white individuals receive SNAP benefits more than any other census-gathered racial group,⁴⁰⁰ the assumptions made about food insecurity are still highly racialized, continuing the stigma present in “welfare

³⁹⁸ Laura Azzarito, “The Rise of the Corporate Curriculum: Fatness, Fitness, and Whiteness,” in *Biopolitics and the Obesity Epidemic: Governing Bodies*, eds. Jan Wright and Valerie Harwood (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 188.

³⁹⁹ Orlando Sentinel Editorial.

⁴⁰⁰ Kelsey Farson Gray, Sarah Fisher, and Sarah Lauffer, “Characteristics of Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program Households: Fiscal Year 2015,” *United States Department of Agriculture*, November 2016, <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/ops/Characteristics2015.pdf>.

queen” discourses that gained salience in the 1990s.⁴⁰¹ Where the racialized piece becomes clearer is both in the ways demographic data is used to frame folks of color as ignorant of their own consumption patterns, and also in how the areas where primarily communities of color reside are framed as vacant, blighted, or left in the dust to be forgotten. Both are dependent on pacification, a discursive practice that strips all power from the people most affected by inequities in food access. In the process of advocating for healthy families, obesity is framed as the problem—extending the pathology to BMI or weight as an indicator of health. The process of “devaluing fatness,” as Sanders explains,⁴⁰² is also a process of devaluing blackness, brownness, and femininity—and thus of idealizing thinness, whiteness, and masculinity as forms and passports of privilege.⁴⁰² Upholding such an ideal body through public health planning, blames those who do not fit the norm, making them “unfit for full citizenship”⁴⁰³ while simultaneously framing them as incapable of claiming ownership over their own bodies, rendering absent a more structural account of the conditions that manifest uneven health outcomes in the first place.

Stripping power removes agency, making it even easier for outsiders to diagnose both the problems and solutions of food deserts. Unlike the process of wastelanding, one that sees resource-rich environments as exploitable space, the desert metaphor views both space and people as lacking and in need of cultivation. The production of deserted space is discursive, but its impacts manifest through the erasure of people and their lifeways.⁴⁰⁴ Pacifying those residing in food deserts makes them ripe for improvement or disposable altogether. However, improvement individualizes the problem and is rarely on the terms articulated and advanced by those living in these designated spaces. In the production of these “deserted” or wasted spaces is

⁴⁰¹ Ange-Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen*, (New York, NY: NYU Press, 2004).

⁴⁰² Sanders, “The Color of Fat,” 5.

⁴⁰³ Ibid, 6.

⁴⁰⁴ Safransky, “Greening the Urban Frontier,” 240.

the simultaneous construction of people themselves as collaterally disposable, or rather, in need or rehabilitation. Together these spaces as well as their inhabitants are articulated together as deserted, wasted, and undesirable unless redeveloped by those with cultural and economic power.⁴⁰⁵ Through the rhetorical construction of absence, both places and people are considered to be devoid of resources and agency thereby necessitating outside interventions.

Conclusion

Since the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, assisted by the *Let's Move!* national campaign, helped to guide systemic interventions into food deserts, food “access” as a key term in food systems change has been frequently articulated via frames of scarcity. The conjuncture in which the food access “crisis” emerged is connected to a lack of economic investment and the “obesity” epidemic highlights the complexity of national interventions. By focusing at the national scale on how interventions become articulated with pathologizing discourses that can naturalize inequity and pacify communities, we can better understand both the possibilities and limitations of food access interventions. Although food “access” framed through a discourse of deficit (e.g. the food “desert”) might appear natural or merely descriptive, these frames also contribute to the conditions of possibility for imagining a set of policy and corporate solutions that may not address the actual causes of food insecurity and injustices. Moreover, emphasizing how the food “desert” metaphor is put to use in the Atlas and is used by outside interveners in the conjuncture of contemporary US food policy, we can better appreciate the hermeneutic function of “desert” as signifying multiple forms of deficit in its circulation, including how problems and solutions, as well as places and people, are imagined as a result.

⁴⁰⁵ Similarly, Phaedra C. Pezzullo, following Robert R. Higgins, advances the notion of “appropriately polluted spaces” wherein both people and waste are articulated together as unnecessary and contaminable. See Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*, 5.

Once again, mapping food deserts is not inherently negative. Mapping can and has provided opportunities to see uneven food distribution, including helping to give an account of the racial and class-based inequities of our broader food system. The food desert metaphor has offered communities, policy-makers, public health practitioners, and food system researchers language to describe particular food inequities. Perhaps without this initial account, the exigence for addressing food access injustices would not have materialized. Food inequities do predominantly affect those with low-income status, including many communities of color residing in spaces that have historically lacked comprehensive economic investment. To begin and end the story with *access*, however, misses a broader, deeper account of how these injustices emerged and, therefore, a more nuanced view of how they might be prevented and/or addressed.

Couched within the ‘obesity epidemic,’ the exigence to which the nation state became compelled to respond, the dominant food access narrative entangles with broader assumptions about the people and places labeled a food desert. These frames of scarcity are mobilized through the food “desert,” as a deficit discourse, articulated by those who are often outsiders that wish to retool food access for the food insecure. The USDA Food Access Research Atlas, as a logistical media by which we can visibly see lack coded into space, organizes environments as spaces of scarcity. The verbal code of the ‘desert,’ what once was used to galvanize support for localized community-based interventions, coheres into a data point to be measured, calculated, and mapped. Proximity and poverty then becomes the dominant frames by which the food desert metaphor coheres. This coherence provides discursive closure, where alternative accounts of how deserts emerged in the first place are relegated to the margins of the public discussion. Instead, the crisis of food access becomes simplified—those without access to food, require

access to food in any way possible. They, like the spaces they occupy, are constructed as without resources, and therefore agency, to develop their own solutions and require outside assistance.

To be sure, many of those who have worked on efforts to increase food access, including many working with the USDA and the broader *Let's Move!* initiative may disagree with this assessment. They might argue that the food desert metaphor accounts for disinvestment and provides the discursive resources to address a problem that was once hard to imagine. However, as our explorations of metaphor inform us, the problem is not in the term or the metaphor itself; rather, it's its *use* that provides a more compelling account of the term's power. From a rhetorical perspective that considers the roles of circulation and interpretation, the metaphor gains traction as a form of invention that makes and unmakes worlds for others. By this, I mean that the use of the food desert metaphor constitutes some places as bountiful and other spaces as scarce—and rarely are those without food access doing the designation. It provides no other story by which to understand food access inequities other than residents' status as low-income and their proximity to a grocery store. It asks no questions about the foodways of communities residing in these spaces and provides no historical account of change or dis- and re-investment. And while the map itself does not foreclose a possibility for a more nuanced discussion, the ways the map has been used suggest that the voices of those most marginalized in the food system are secondary to the exigence of developing in the places they reside.

The logistical media that is the map is part of a broader food system infrastructure, which assists dominant narrations of how distribution patterns manifest materially. As part of these broader infrastructures, maps are the media by which the normalization of “taken-for-granted” occurs.⁴⁰⁶ This normalization of food deserts as only issues of unequal *access*, rather than unequal power, is particularly powerful because the media that make them visible are so

⁴⁰⁶ Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 33.

technical, mundane, even boring. Peters underscores that “infrastructural media are media that stand under.”⁴⁰⁷ These media make environments visible and set the terms of engagement. They inform how “basic categories and standards are formed...as ordinary.”⁴⁰⁸ The map freezes the desert metaphor and in doing so, assists in its discursive closure. It affects public discourse on food access and refocuses debate on data and reclassification, rather than prompting critical engagement with the use of the terms themselves. The problem of food deserts becomes rooted in supply-side solutions to food inequity, flattening foodways—the “cultural, social, and economic food practices, habits, and desires” of those living in these designated spaces.⁴⁰⁹ Moreover it naturalizes the history of how foodscapes came to be, and pacifies communities by framing them as unable to offer their own visions of address.

It is possible to accept that access to food remains an issue, but disagree with dominant forms of intervention to address it—namely the construction of corporate supermarkets and other food amenities initiated by those outside of communities labeled a desert. What emerging literature reveals, like Alex Hill’s work on food access in Chicago, is that communities are starting to “reject the ‘food desert’ label but accept that the ‘food access’ problems associated with ‘food deserts’ exists.”⁴¹⁰ It is not that inequities in food access don’t exist, but that the language we use to make sense of food access can quickly be capitalized on by those on the outside, who often make decisions for, and not with, communities experiencing health or food insecurity. As Hill continues, “Usage of the ‘food desert’ term reveals the unequal power relations between local food advocates and more dominant regional and national groups.”⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, 33.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, 34.

⁴⁰⁹ Alkon, et. al. “Foodways of the Urban Poor,” 126.

⁴¹⁰ Alex B. Hill, “Critical Inquiry Into Detroit’s ‘Food Desert’ Metaphor,” *Food and Foodways* 25, no. 3 (2017): 228.

⁴¹¹ Ibid, 228.

Now while the distinctions between local, regional, and national deserve more complexity than they receive here—something the next chapter discusses in more depth—the power relations of how and by whom these terms are leveraged affects how they are received and why they are often contested.

To conclude, the USDA Food Access Research Atlas is both mundane and incredibly powerful. It sets the terms of address and reduces collective imagination affecting how dominant food access narratives diagnose the problem and aim to solve it. Although federal policy contributes only partially to this dominant story, it provides the discursive resources that then get taken up and utilized by food practitioners at various scales across the nation. It is, however, important that we not end the discussion here, as other institutions and community groups like city governments and Food Policy Councils, and community members can add depth to their accounts of food access. Thus, I turn to municipal efforts, specifically in Denver, Colorado, that aim to address the problem and investigate their role in making these power structures, histories, and culturally contextual foodways present, or not, in their advocacy for a more just food system.

**CHAPTER 3:
Articulating “World Class” Futures and the Impurity of Food Policy**

I was frustrated because I don't think we're really putting people ahead of profit. I think there's this attempt to do something about creating sustainable food systems but I think we're still letting our vision get clouded by profitability [...] I feel like we need to find a way to pull the monetary value out of food. Food access should be a right.⁴¹²

–Candi CdeBaca, Denver Community Action Network

As long as race, culture, and justice concerns are overshadowed by an emphasis on environmental sustainability, then the potential exists for certain racial and cultural groups to be marginalized or excluded [...] Social justice and cultural sensitivity must be intentional and explicit goals, rather than implicit aims, for [a socially just result] to be possible.⁴¹³

–Julian Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities*

From my vantage point inside a northeast Denver coffee shop window, I read a billboard that states: “Our Roots Inspire Our Future” (see Figure 3). Erected by Denver’s Five Points Historic Cultural District, the sign towers over the outdoor patio of a bar. It’s around 3pm, and the patio benches have filled with a homogeneous-looking group (mostly white, middle aged men donning casual attire and sunglasses) of patrons drinking their beers and conversing. The wall adjacent to them reads “715” in vibrant colors against a black background. The 715 Club is a recently reopened bar, once owned by Charles Cousins, a prominent Black investor within the Five Points community. It’s relatively warm for an early March day, and I’m waiting for an interview with a lifelong resident of the Five Points neighborhood who knows a good deal about food policy, which I’ll discuss later. For now, sipping my coffee at an independent, neighborhood owned shop, I am finding myself fixated on the contradictions bursting from the intersection of Welton St. and 26th.

⁴¹² Candi CdeBaca, Personal communication, February 12, 2018.

⁴¹³ Julian Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities: Policy, Planning, and Practice*, (New York, NY: Zed Books, 2013), 71-72.



Figure 3. “Our Roots Inspire Our Future” Billboard. A Five Points Historic Cultural District billboard towers over The 715 Club on Welton and 26th in Five Points, Denver, Colorado.⁴¹⁴

After my coffee, I take a walk down Welton St., which is usually filled with construction workers on weekdays who, floor-by-floor, erect the boxy apartment buildings and condominium units along the L train tracks lining the neighborhood. Cranes hover over half-constructed buildings all over this city—I can see them from most streets down here. Walking down Welton offers a rich temporal experience, as numbered plaques mediate a self-guided walking tour that tells the story of “The Historic Heart of Denver’s African American Community” from 1910 to 1964.⁴¹⁵ Once considered the “Harlem of the West,” Five Points holds a history of jazz and blues, literature and poetry, and has historically offered affordable business and homeownership for African Americans residing in what was once was a segregated neighborhood. “Destination

⁴¹⁴ Photo by Author, March 4, 2018.

⁴¹⁵ Quotes that follow in this paragraph were all taken from various plaques, marquees, and signs along Welton St.

Five Points” reads another sign, where “We Had It All.” As Denver’s only officially designated historic cultural district, the plaques and signs along Welton narrate a past of the vibrant, yet changing neighborhood.

Despite the closure of many formerly booming businesses in the area, new restaurants and bars are popping up along the street—I notice a sour beer taproom and a retro bakery, both visibly refurbished, among others. A few Black owned restaurants and cafes remain, like the Taste of Haiti Caribbean Cuisine, Welton Street Café, and Coffee at the Point, which market affordable food and familial hospitality. Though as a 2018 Denverite article noted, many of these establishments have to rethink which products they offer to better cater to incoming white and wealthier residents or decide if they will relocate all together.⁴¹⁶ A few blocks north of Welton is the developing Larimer Street where the food and beverage offerings are abundant: health food markets, coffee shops, bistros, and other amenities line the street. One shop even offers a \$9 peanut butter and jelly sandwich, but their menu assures that, “yes... it’s worth it.” It seems as if every time I visit Five Points and the adjacent neighborhoods Curtis Park, Cole, Elyria-Swansea, and Globeville new food, business, and housing developments greet me, testing my ability to remember what was there before. Although muted compared to bustling cities like New York or Los Angeles, this particular neighborhood offers a range of experiences for those walking, talking, and indulging in public spaces.

In the summers especially, outdoor patios all over the town are filled with patrons consuming food and drink. The patio culture that has developed in Denver has even prompted

⁴¹⁶ Allan Tellis, “Welton Street Isn’t Cherry Creek Yet, But Businesses are Adjusting to a Whiter Clientele,” *Denverite*, April 14, 2018, https://www.denverite.com/welton-street-denver-changes-50399/?utm_source=Denverite&utm_campaign=6effe2290f-.

local papers and tourist websites to rank Denver's best patios.⁴¹⁷ Its food culture is a tourist selling point for visitors as well as locals who want to explore different neighborhoods and seek out new restaurants, bars, festivals, and markets. The "Best of Denver" Westword website constantly updates lists for folks to follow "Denver's Ten Hottest Dining Trends" and "Denver's Best New Restaurants," among other food-related amenities available across the city.⁴¹⁸ Like many up and coming cities, food culture is central to Denver's appeal as it is professed to be a "culinary-soaked wonderland of progressive, award-winning chefs, multi-cultural restaurants, formidable farmers' markets, the most notable craft-beer culture in the country, [with] highly regarded producers, ranchers and farmers and sensational food halls."⁴¹⁹ CNN Travel declares "9 reasons Denver is America's best beer town"⁴²⁰ and the city's Mayor Michael Hancock even made an appearance on Season 15 of the popular culinary competition *Top Chef*.⁴²¹ Other news sources marvel at how the food culture couples with the city's growing legalized marijuana industry, such as *Business Insider's* story: "What It's Like to Attend a \$125 Marijuana Pairing Dinner Where Guests Eat and Get High."⁴²² With a food system that generates \$7 billion in

⁴¹⁷ William Porter, "Denver's Outdoor Dining Guide: Who's Got The Best Patio," *The Denver Post*, June 8, 2015, <https://www.denverpost.com/2015/06/08/denver-outdoor-dining-guide-whos-got-the-best-patio/>; Visit Denver, "Outdoor and Patio Guide," *Denver.org*, Accessed March 20, 2018, <https://www.denver.org/restaurants/denver-dining/outdoor-dining/>.

⁴¹⁸ Laura Shunk, "New and Now: Denver's Ten Hottest Dining Trends," *Westword*, September 29, 2017, <http://www.westword.com/restaurants/hot-new-food-trends-in-denver-restaurants-9537840>; Westword Staff, "Denver's Best New Restaurants—Every Year for the Past Two Decades," March 28, 2018, <http://www.westword.com/slideshow/denvers-best-new-restaurant-from-1998-to-2017-10130000>.

⁴¹⁹ Visit Denver, "Top Chef Colorado Season 15 Episode Summary," *Denver.org*, Accessed March 30, 2018, <https://www.denver.org/top-chef-colorado/top-chef-recap/>.

⁴²⁰ Joel Williams, "9 Reasons Denver is America's Best Beer Town (Sorry, Portland)," *CNN Travel*, November 8, 2015, <https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/denver-beer-town/index.html>.

⁴²¹ Top Chef, "Bronco Brouhaha," Season 15, Episode 9, Bravo TV, February 1, 2018.

⁴²² Melia Robinson, "What It's Like to Attend a \$125 Marijuana Pairing Dinner Where Guests Eat and Get High," *Business Insider*, February 14, 2017, <http://www.businessinsider.com/cultivating-spirits-marijuana-pairing-dinner-2017-2>.

economic activity annually, and a population on the rise, one might assume the lifestyle marketing coupled with business development is working for Denver.⁴²³

City foodscapes like this one are becoming a key feature of many urban plans for economic growth.⁴²⁴ Food systems are a central component of development strategies in many cities worldwide. What is on the menu, the types of social experiences promised, and the publicity generated around the food culture often reflect how a city imagines itself: setting vibrant, cutting-edge trends, a blend of both health and indulgence, sustainable but also modernized, multi-cultural yet unattainable, affordable for some yet extravagant for others. Though as cities market attractive food cultures, we know incredible inequities also plague urban food systems. As I argued in the last chapter, the ways scarcity is coded into food desert maps tells us that these injustices often are consequences of strategic, uneven development across urban and rural spaces alike. These narratives of scarcity guide food policy as well and help to bolster the argument that food access alone can transform historically induced food system injustices. Given that cities are becoming important contexts for visioning food relationships, it is critical that we interrogate how contemporary food policies are being negotiated and articulated.

This chapter turns to rapidly developing cities as key sites where food policy is being imagined, developed, and contested. In particular, I analyze the Denver Food Vision, a 50-page text developed between 2015-2017 by a coalition of city officials within the Office of Economic

⁴²³ “Denver Food Vision,” *City and County of Denver*, October 6, 2017, https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/771/documents/CH/Final_FoodVision_2017.pdf; Ben Miller, “Denver County Population Now Exceeds 700,000, up from 600k in 2010,” *Denver Business Journal*, March 23, 2018, <https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2018/03/23/denver-county-population-nowexceeds-700-000-up.html>.

⁴²⁴ Ceri Jenkins, Adam Schepker, and Satya Rhodes-Conway, “Local Food and Economic Development: A Guide for Local Governments,” *Mayors Innovation Project*, March 2014, https://www.mayorsinnovation.org/images/uploads/pdf/Food_and_Economic_Development_Brief_updated.pdf; Rohit Kumar, “How Urban Agriculture is Revitalizing Local Economies,” *Huffington Post*, June 4, 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rohit-kumar/revitalizing-local-economies_b_3380472.html.

Development, the Mayor's office and newly created Manager of Food Systems Development, with consultation from the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council.⁴²⁵ This document is the result of a series of “community listening sessions,” one made available to all eleven districts in the City of Denver as well as with many food system practitioners, anti-hunger food advocates, businesses and non-profits, and other organizations who participate in the food system.⁴²⁶ The document is rhetorically rich, in that it notes what food system assets are already present, but is also invested in offering a vision of a Denver to come. This vision, while a collaborative project, also articulates to strategically brand Denver as an up-and-coming world class food destination that welcomes and has the ability to support growth for all—even when those investing in Denver's food system may participate in practices that further marginalize those who are the most insecure or are vulnerable to gentrification.

Although the document intrinsically sheds light on one city's attempt to develop a comprehensive food vision, set within the broader context of the drive for urban greening and environmental development strategies across ‘world class’ cities, the possibilities and risks of intervention become more curious. From Toronto to Mexico City, spanning Seoul to Dakar, cities are developing urban food policies to address everything from school meals to waste reduction through a multi-level governance approach.⁴²⁷ In the continental U.S., cities like Portland, Austin, as well as regions like New England, are developing comprehensive food plans, visions, and reports to speak to both assets and challenges of the broader food environment in a given place, often aiming their sites towards reform or retooling in some

⁴²⁵ “Denver Food Vision.”

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Milan Urban Food Policy Pact, *3rd Annual Gathering Brief Report*, February 2018, <http://www.milanurbanfoodpolicypact.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/3rd-MUFPP-Annual-Gathering-REPORT.pdf>.

way.⁴²⁸ While each city has, of course, a different history and plan for development of their food environments, much of these plans embrace similar goals when connected to their broader urban growth strategies—there is a desire to create a food system that is inclusive and sustainable, but also one that attracts tourists, aids development, and sees food systems as one way into building a growing, thriving environment. However, when coupled with palpable fear of gentrification, some visions ignore that there might be inherent tensions between perspectives included in their documents.

The emergence of the Denver Food Vision is complex, in that on one hand, it is a progressive attempt to include diverse voices in narrating the problems and solutions to food system inequities, and promises to address food deserts. The document provides a vision that marks sustainability and food access as integral to a thriving city. On the other hand, the Denver Food Vision also is outward facing, in that it simultaneously aids in advancing Denver’s brand as a growing, expanding city—a narrative that some of its residents feel leaves them behind. Though to analyze the food vision means taking into consideration the context in which it emerges, while critically paying attention to not only what is *present* in the document, but also what is *absent*, since in many of its absences are the stories and concerns that food and anti-gentrification advocates are striving to elevate. Following Rob Asen, the challenge with rhetorically analyzing policy is that a critic cannot focus only on the text itself, but must also simultaneously account for how “rhetors, audience, text, and context operate in cross-historical”

⁴²⁸ City of Portland, “Sustainable Food Program,” *The City of Portland Oregon*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.portlandoregon.gov/bps/41480>; City of Austin Office of Sustainability, “State of the Food System Report,” *City of Austin*, April 2015, http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Sustainability/AustinFoodReport050115_-_FINAL.pdf; Brian Donahue, Joanne Burke, Molly Anderson, Amanda Beal, Tom Kelly, Mark Lapping, Hannah Ramer, Russell Libby, Linda Berlin, “New England Food Vision: Healthy Food for All Sustainable Farming and Fishing Thriving Communities,” *Food Solutions New England*, Accessed March 12, 2018, <http://www.foodsolutionsne.org/new-england-food-vision>.

ways, including how policy mediates both rhetorical and material forces.⁴²⁹ John Ackerman furthers that public policy can be studied rhetorically, especially if we situate our analysis “between everyday life in our communities and the regional economic policies that influence them.”⁴³⁰ Therefore, in addition to analyzing the vision itself, I first take stock of how the document is received by community members. I also examine the rhetoric of development advanced by the City of Denver’s Office of Economic Development, which engages in projects spanning well beyond food policy to capture the broader vision for Denver’s future—a future many vulnerable to gentrification in the city fear does not include them.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I explore the context in which cities are becoming key sites for food and environmental governance by tracing how food policy is being fashioned in developing cities. Here I trace how the emergence of food policy councils (FPCs) have helped cities engage constituents in new ways, although each council differs in organizational structure, practice, representation, and in how they engage decision-makers in positions of power and constituents across their foodscapes. Second, I explore the creation of the Denver Food Vision within the broader context of a developing and gentrifying Denver. I both dive into the document’s four pillars promising a vision for an inclusive, healthy, vibrant, and resilient Denver as well as contextualize its emergence in the context of a green development and sustainability planning. Third, I analyze the rhetoric of Denver’s food policy following three key themes chosen for their presence and absence: (1) polyvocality and impurity, (2) disarticulation and rearticulation, and (3) temporal tensions and contestations. I conclude with a discussion on the possibilities and limitations, as well as forward the need to expand ‘food’ policy beyond ‘food’

⁴²⁹ Robert Asen, “Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2010): 125.

⁴³⁰ John M. Ackerman, “Rhetorical Engagements in the Cultural Economies of Cities,” in *The Public Work of Rhetoric: Citizen-Scholars and Civic Engagement*, eds. John M. Ackerman and David J. Coogan, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013): 81.

to assist with transforming the broader systems of power that establish food system injustices in the first place.

From National Exigence to Municipal Interventions

Recognizing that they traverse myriad scales, entangle networks of economies and ecologies that cross conceptual borders, environments, and communities—taking stock of food systems in their specificity can be quite an undertaking. Moving beyond national interventions, numerous state, regional, and local coalitions have emerged to help account for the particularities of food systems as they are built, manifest, and are contested within space. The emergence of both regional and citywide blueprints to help advance more sustainable food systems are helpful to analyze of what amenities, assets, and challenge exist within broader food environments. These efforts attempt to capture relations between links in the entire food chain, from seed to disposal, and include discussion on everything from urban and industrial agricultural production, food access, distribution systems, food assistance programs, water politics, food retailers, compost and waste, and consumption patterns, among many others. Given their complexity and regional variations, it is no wonder that national projects supported by the USDA call on other governmental institutions (i.e., states, regions, and cities) to incentivize and intervene in favor of more sustainable food systems.

National strategies to alleviate the nutrition gap have tricked into urban policy as well. For example, cities have also become sites where public health planning has tried to intervene in what Kevin Morgan and Roberta Sonnino call “obesogenic environments”⁴³¹ where the prevalence of ‘food swamps’ has taken shape. However, as I’ve argued in the previous chapter, there is a history to the construction of these ‘unhealthy’ food environments. For example, as

⁴³¹ Kevin Morgan and Roberta Sonnino, “The Urban Foodscape: World Cities and the New Food Equation,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3, no. 2 (2010): 209-224.

Chin Jou explains, since the 1960s and 1970s, when grocery stores moved out of America's urban spaces seeking suburban profits, they left a gap for fast food chains to fill in.⁴³² Even the Johnson and Nixon administrations supported fast food development in areas where predominantly low-income and communities of color resided, as they saw investments as a potential catalyst for urban revitalization.⁴³³ As the Black middle class became targets for economic development (when presented with the opportunity to own and operate a fast food franchise), the construction of the food swamp increasingly took shape.⁴³⁴ Thus, as cities become ever more concerned with sustainability as a revitalization strategy, their efforts often position those who were targeted for fast food production and consumption as in need of redevelopment as well. Meaning, instead of promoting fast food and corner stores, cities are looking to urban agriculture, farmers markets, and health food retailers to alleviate the health disparities of the past.

On a global scale, food planning has emerged more seriously in policy debates so as to respond to resiliency crises that food prices, food security, climate change, land conflicts, and rapid urbanization pose.⁴³⁵ These tensions are part in parcel of what Morgan and Sonnino call the "new food equation," wherein cities are challenged to incorporate sustainability into policy.⁴³⁶ Concerns for food system sustainability are intricate in that they are intimately tied to other forms of planning concerns, like public health, housing, air and water quality, parks and green space, business development, and others. Given the complicated nature of food systems, food planning for sustainability must juggle the multi-vocal perspectives that can often compete with

⁴³² Chin Jou, *Supersizing Urban America*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Kevin Morgan, "Feeding the City: The Challenge of Urban Food Planning," *International Planning Studies* 14, no. 4 (2009): 341-348.

⁴³⁶ Morgan and Sonnino, "The Urban Foodscape," 210.

one another. For example, debates between local food movements and some anti-hunger advocates, who argue that the price of local food is unattainable for low-income communities, reflect competing visions of sustainability. While compromises can be made (see for example the Double Up Food Bucks⁴³⁷ campaign by the Fair Food Network to allow food stamp recipients to more affordably shop at farmers markets), there is a common concern that what is sustainable for some, is not sustainable for all.

Both as a discourse and value, sustainability had been mobilized through food and environmental policy to encourage food system reform often through market-based solutions.⁴³⁸ More than ever, cities around the world are being imagined as critical sites for sustainability, and they increasingly incorporate environmental principles into governance. Food policy is one way cities are advancing sustainability in conjunction with economic growth strategies; Moragues Faus and Morgan call this approach “new food governance systems,” and they often are the result of collaborations between “civil society, private actors, and the local state.”⁴³⁹ However, the complexity of any given food system within and across urban landscapes makes it difficult to include or represent all voices in sustainability decision-making. For example, one of the main critiques offered by food justice advocates is that some food systems policy is rather reformist, instead of offering a vision for transformational change that recognizes how both power and history affect food system inequities.⁴⁴⁰ The question that lingers when approaching citywide

⁴³⁷ Fair Food Network, “How It Works,” *Double Up Food Bucks*, March 2018, <http://www.doubleupfoodbucks.org/how-it-works/>.

⁴³⁸ Minna Mikkola and Helmi Risku-Norja, “Discursive Transformations Within the Food system Towards Sustainability: Climate Change and Dairy,” *International Journal of Sustainable Development* 17, no. 1 (2014): 62-77.

⁴³⁹ Ana Moragues-Faus and Kevin Morgan, “Reframing the Foodscape: The Emergent World of Sustainable Food Policy,” *Environment and Planning A*, 47, no. 7 (2015): 1558-1559.

⁴⁴⁰ Gordon and Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty”; also see tensions between reform and transformation through sustainability frames in Mitra, “Sustainability and Sustainable Development”; as well as through food movements and regime change in Eric Holt-Giménez, “Food Security, Food Justice, and Food Sovereignty?: Crises,

urban food policy is how these varying values are articulated not only *within* policy, but how they circulate *through* broader economic development discourses.

As cities increasingly incorporate food policy into governance, many have partnered with a coalition of groups to advance food visions or food plans, that both account for and guide future decision-making about the foodscape and food environment within a city. Though food policy spans well beyond these food visions, many developing cities have drafted food plans to address both the challenges and opportunities for developing a more sustainable food system. Many of these food visions are created in collaboration with organizations like Food Policy Councils (FPCs), which have gained traction across urban and rural areas around the world since the early 1980s.⁴⁴¹ While an extensive history of FPCs moves beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to recognize how a FPCs organizational structure, coalitional partnerships, and values differ depending on who and how they engage in relationship building in the locales in which they operate.⁴⁴² For example, some FPCs work closely with local governments as advisory councils and boards, while others are more independent. These differences can drastically impact the kinds of reforms, political stances, and critiques they can offer affecting how they can impact transformative food governance changes or not.⁴⁴³

Food Movements, and Regime Change,” in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*, eds. Alison Hope Alkon and Julian Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 309-330.

⁴⁴¹ Since the first FPC was started in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1982, over 60 councils have emerged across the U.S. and Canada to address statewide and local food systems. Although most council are located in the U.S. and Canada, Food Policy Groups have expanded across Western and Central Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. Most research on FPC/FPGs only tracks the scope of official policy groups, rather than recognizing other grassroots food/farm/worker movements as Food Policy Networks notes. See Allyson Scherb, Anne Palmer, Shannon Frattaroli, Keshia Pollack, “Exploring Food System Policy: A Survey of Food Policy Councils in the United States,” *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development* 2, no. 4: 3-14; Food Policy Networks, “Food Policy Groups Around the World,” *Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future*, Accessed February 1, 2018, <http://www.foodpolicynetworks.org/fpc-map/FPC-around-the-world.html>.

⁴⁴² Scherb et al, “Exploring Food System Policy”; Laura DiGiulio, “Food Policy Councils: Is There a Best Structure,” *LivableFutureBlog*, August 1, 2017, <http://livablefutureblog.com/2017/08/food-policy-councils-best-structure>.

⁴⁴³ Scherb et al, “Exploring Food System Policy”; Alethea Harper, Annie Shattuck, Eric Holt-Giménez, Alison Alkon, and Frances Lambrich, “Food Policy Councils: Lessons Learned,” *Food First* (2009): 1-66; Michael Burgan

Despite these broad differences across councils, FPCs have been lauded as radical, grassroots responses that interrupt the top-down approach so prominent in food systems change. It is true that many board members and participants across FPCs see the flaws and failures of federal food interventions and wish to draw on local assets and engage communities more closely.⁴⁴⁴ However, as with most environmental planning, some food justice academics and advocates caution that FPCs will only succeed in advancing food system equity and justice if they become better “situated within the communities they represent and serve.”⁴⁴⁵ This criticism comes from some who are cautious of the overwhelming whiteness and class privilege prevalent on many FPCs boards, which affects these organizations’ ability to adequately account for the concerns of many poor and working class residents as well as many communities of color. Even as many seek to include diverse voices, we know mere inclusion does not necessitate being heard or incorporated into planning.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, although FPCs have been described as “diamond(s) in the rough” that are “cooperative,” and reflective of the “passion and the power [that] stays local and reflects what [local community members] care about,”⁴⁴⁷ they are both well intentioned and imperfect. Their visions for reform or transformation are shaped heavily by board representation, how they engage communities, their relations with others in positions of financial and decision-making power, and the kinds of critical voices that are either present or absent in their participatory and decision-making processes.

I highlight these differences because in order to understand food policy visions and plans that are drafted in close connection to (or at least in consultation with) FPCs, it is important not

and Mark Winne, “Doing Food Policy Councils Right: A Guide to Development and Action,” *Mark Winne Associates*, September 2012, <https://www.markwinne.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/FPC-manual.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁴ Corie Brown, “Feds Won’t Make Good Food Happen. So Cities, Armed With Food Policy Councils, Will Do It Themselves,” *The New Food Economy*, December 12, 2017, <https://newfoodeconomy.org/local-changes-to-system-food-policy-councils/>.

⁴⁴⁵ Scherb et, al, “Exploring Food System Policy,” 10.

⁴⁴⁶ Bullard, “Introduction.”

⁴⁴⁷ Brown, “Feds Won’t Make Good Food Happen.”

to approach these documents as uniformly radically democratic. Instead, orientations towards food systems change can range drastically in these visions—some adopt a more reformist or normative account of the need to retool food economies and environments, while others offer a more transformative, critical, and even anti-racist account of food systems intervention. Some are layered with the language of cooperation and inclusivity, but lack an analysis of the colonial, racial, and class-based dimensions of food systems injustices. Others explicitly advance racial and social justice within their framework. These differences matter not only for how food systems are imagined, but they also help guide interventions that may otherwise contribute to continued forms of injustice if not advanced without care and criticality.

One of the more radical or progressive food visions comes from the Oakland Food Policy Council, which centralizes *transformation* in their 75-page document to advance food-related sustainability, equity, and justice in the city.⁴⁴⁸ As a part of their food plan, the Oakland Food Policy Council partnered with the intersectional health and environmental justice organization the HOPE Collective to create a “food justice curriculum” that teaches youth about the historical development of food “deserts” as a product of redlining.⁴⁴⁹ The council also partnered with food justice oriented urban farm, City Slicker Farms, to offer the “Cultivating Resistance” urban agriculture toolkit that helps residents “grow food in Oakland as an act of independence from, and resistance to, an unjust food system that is structurally racist, economically oppressive, and environmentally toxic.”⁴⁵⁰ The language of their plan is influenced by a long history of anti-

⁴⁴⁸ Oakland Food Policy Council, “Transforming the Oakland Food System: A Plan for Action,” *Oakland Food Policy Council*, November 2010, <https://docs.google.com/file/d/0B-7qYKICGHyLSV9iMV9uVjhrbkE/edit>.

⁴⁴⁹ Oakland Food Policy Council and Hope Collaborative, “Pilot Food Justice Curriculum: Training Overview,” *Hope Collaborative*, Accessed January 29, 2018, <http://www.hopecollaborative.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Session-6-Food-Deserts-to-Food-Justice.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁰ Oakland Food Policy Council and City Slicker Farms, “Cultivating Resistance: An Urban Agriculture Toolkit to Support Oakland’s Independent Food System,” *Oakland Food Policy Council*, Accessed January 29, 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0bCVkU6r7jILUZmcGhYT0tiNjQ/viewhttp://oaklandfood.org/resources>.

racist food justice advocacy in Oakland,⁴⁵¹ as well as their FPC's partnerships with progressive research organizations like Food First. I highlight Oakland's Food Plan because it represents one of the more explicit ways food access is articulated through a lens of both power and history. Not only were they able to provide a multi-dimensional food plan, but they also underscore that in order to advance food justice, food plans must begin by centralizing diverse voices and critiques of how food system inequities came to be established as racial projects over time.

Central in debates over representation on FPCs, and in food visions across the political spectrum, is concern over how often those most marginalized in the food system—especially those who are poor, working class, houseless, racialized, or undocumented—do not participate in the same ways as their white, wealthier counterparts.⁴⁵² Christiana Miewald and Eugene McCann argue, those without racial or economic privilege in cities may have entirely different “food-place” relations than those with food privilege.⁴⁵³ Foodways—the cultural, social, and economic practices that affect consumption⁴⁵⁴—develop historically as well, and may not always resonate with new food businesses brought on by urban development. As cities integrate the need to develop vibrant and healthy food environments, those who have historically experienced food-related harms are often left out of the decision-making processes regarding new food developments or become just one of many factors in a broader desire for economic growth.

Rarely do cities centralize how food inequities came to exist, how uneven economic growth

⁴⁵¹ See the plethora of research on the history of food justice activism in Oakland, where the Black Panthers organized the Free Breakfast Program and worked in coalition with farmworkers in the United Farm Workers. For example: Mary Potorti, “‘Feeding the Revolution’: the Black Panther Party, Hunger, and Community Survival,” *Journal of African American Studies* 21, no. 1 (2017): 85-110; Ricky Pope, “Revolution for Breakfast: Intersections of Activism, Service, and Violence in the Black Panther Party’s Community Service Programs,” *Social Justice Research* 26, no. 4 (2013): 445-470; Lauren Araiza, “‘In Common Struggle Against A Common Oppression’: The United Farm Workers and the Black Panther Party, 1968-1973,” *Journal of African American History* 94, no. 2 (2009): 200-223; Broad, *More Than Just Food*.

⁴⁵² I also note undocumented individuals here because they are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits, as some food justice advocates in Denver have underscored.

⁴⁵³ Miewald and McCann, “Foodscapes and the Geographies of Poverty,” 540.

⁴⁵⁴ Alkon, et. al. *Foodways of the Urban Poor*.

contributed to the creation of food insecurity, and sparingly do they advance a transformative food justice agenda. However, how cities document and incorporate food policy into their development visions helps to provide important resources for understanding food as one component of sustainability planning and/or green development.

One of my main concerns in this chapter is over the constraints and possibilities of food policy when set within the context of green gentrification in rapidly developing cities. Where food ties into green gentrification is in the production of racialized foodscapes.⁴⁵⁵ As Rachel Slocum argues, “alternative food networks articulate white ideals of health and nutrition, offer whitened dreams of farming and gardening that erase the past and present of race” in food production and consumption.⁴⁵⁶ Alternative foodscape development also “mobiliz[es] funding to direct programming toward non-white beneficiaries, and create[s] inviting space for white people.”⁴⁵⁷ The racialization of space is seen as either harmless or is popularized through liberal values of what George Lipsitz calls the “dominant social warrant of the white spatial imaginary [that has] functioned to make the racialization of space ideologically legitimate and impregnable.”⁴⁵⁸ It is in the invisibility of whiteness and class privilege in the ‘green’ city that they are allowed to flourish. When the contemporary foodscapes and green space development are put in context with the history of supermarket redlining in urban space since the 1970s (when supermarkets left cities to seek out profits in the suburbs), the patterns of inequity become clearer.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁵ I borrow “green gentrification” from Gould and Lewis’s *Green Gentrification: Urban Sustainability and the Struggle for Environmental Justice*.

⁴⁵⁶ Rachel Slocum, “Race in the Study of Food,” *Progress in Human Geography* 35, no. 3 (2010): 314.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁴⁵⁸ Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*, 54.

⁴⁵⁹ Eisenhauer, “In Poor Health: Supermarket Redlining and Urban Nutrition.”

To assess if food policies have moved beyond these patterns and/or plan to challenge them, we need to turn to policy documents and identify the voices featured or left out. In this chapter, I analyze the Denver Food Vision document itself, supplementing my analysis through participant observation at Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council's public monthly meetings, analyzing publicly available community meeting notes and PowerPoints used during community listening sessions, and by interviewing community members concerned about gentrification in the city. Over the course of a year and a half, I attended six Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council meetings (lasting three hours each), conducted four interviews with food justice and anti-gentrification advocates, and engaged in participant observation at over fifteen community forums, protests, and summits on gentrification. Although not all of my participant observation of public actions receives attention in this chapter, they do help inform my familiarity on the context of uneven development in the city. Before diving into the context of development in Denver, however, it is important to analyze the Denver Food Vision first.

Developing a “World Class” City on the Horizon: The Denver Food Vision

In October of 2017, the City of Denver and its Mayor Michael Hancock adopted the Denver Food Vision, a 50-page document that promises to shape “elevate the world class status of Denver’s food system” for all.⁴⁶⁰ This idea that a city might become internationally recognized through its food system is notable unto itself, signifying how food is central not only to urban planning, but also to tourist economies of desire and social status in a competitive world market. To assess what this claim entails, it is worth considering how this vision was established through both processes of public participation involving local residents and the final product of the report itself. The following pages will oscillate between the two.

⁴⁶⁰ “Denver Food Vision,” 6; The document was updated in its final version online in December of 2017.

The document opens with a letter from Mayor Hancock proudly introducing the vision as a “comprehensive, collaborative, and aspirational” guide, achievable by 2030.⁴⁶¹ In his letter, Hancock references Denver’s status as Zagat’s 3rd best city for food and other accolades, noting that the city is a site where school gardens, food production, entrepreneurial education, incubators, and other food amenities flourish. His praise, however, is coupled with recognition that “numerous low- to moderate-income neighborhoods lack convenient access to grocery stores” and that rising housing costs have cut into family food budgets.⁴⁶² In these acknowledgments of the assets and challenges to Denver’s food system is the aspirational claim that “together” Denver can collaborate on building “an economically robust food system that builds a stronger Denver for today and in the future.”⁴⁶³

Beyond the Mayor’s opening statement, Denver’s Food Vision is the resulting document of collaboration between the city’s Sustainable Food Policy Council (SFPC), an interagency working group of city employees, eleven community listening sessions, and eleven other industry focus groups, involving anti-hunger advocates to restaurant owners. The city’s first ever Manager of Food Systems Development, working out of the Office of Economic Development, spearheaded the vision and played a key role in promoting public engagement. In each of the community listening sessions, food and language translation services were provided in the hopes of increasing participation. In an effort for transparency, the SFPC made the notes transcribed from community listening sessions available on their website, in addition to providing some of the PowerPoint presentations they used to facilitate these meetings.⁴⁶⁴ In each of the meetings,

⁴⁶¹ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁶² Ibid, 3.

⁴⁶³ Ibid, 3.

⁴⁶⁴ Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council, “Community Food Meetings,” *Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council*, Accessed February 20, 2018, <http://www.denversfpc.com/denver-food-vision/#a-great-city-requires-a-great-food-system>.

participation ranged from 10 to 87 people per district. Over the course of their eleven community listening sessions with residents, 385 people attended.⁴⁶⁵ Industry partners also participated in eleven additional listening sessions, that targeted representatives such as agricultural producers, processors, distributors, urban gardeners and homesteading educators, cooking and nutrition educators, and those in industries such as restaurants and food service, food trucks and catering, small/mid-sized retailers and farmers markets, and direct hunger relief organizations.⁴⁶⁶ A draft of the vision also was made available for public comment. Within the just over two years in which it was constructed, 1,052 total participants generated 6,059 comments that would inform the priorities of the vision, though a notably small fraction of Denver's over 700,000 residents.⁴⁶⁷

The Denver Food Vision praises itself as a result of its substantial community engagement, and embraces quotes from participants that proclaim food's role in supporting connections across communities, environments, and economies. "Food creates connections between generations, cultures, and neighbors," reads a community member's comment.⁴⁶⁸ "Keeping dollars local supports not only the local economy, but also local jobs and community," another proclaims.⁴⁶⁹ In addition to anecdotal endorsements, the policy underscores that the majority of residents supported earlier drafts of the vision. Ninety-four percent of participants in community listening sessions "said yes to the vision," reads bold letters popping from the background of a light gray box, and "nearly 3/4ths of those 'strongly agreed'" with the first draft version, accordingly to the document's review of its listening sessions.⁴⁷⁰ This emphasis on widespread support helps to visually substantiate that the Denver Food Vision is a shared, public

⁴⁶⁵ Numbers of participants in each listening session were available on the listening session notes.

⁴⁶⁶ SFPC, "Community Food Meetings."

⁴⁶⁷ Denver Food Vision, 10; Miller, "Denver County Population Now Exceeds 700,000."

⁴⁶⁸ "Denver Food Vision," 12.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

commitment that represents all of Denver’s community members from residents to non-profits and businesses.

The possibilities for connection and collaboration are illustrated in the text of the Denver Food Vision through reader-friendly infographics and uplifting images of community-in-action. A word cloud that accompanies the document highlights values such as “community,” “gardens,” “healthy,” “growing,” and “local.”⁴⁷¹ In contemporary, bright colors, the document outlines the benefits of a strong food system, noting that it generates \$7 billion dollars annually, bringing in \$312 million in tax revenue to the city.⁴⁷² Coupled with eye-catching charts, images, and bold text, the vision is streamlined and lively, which suggests the potential for cohesion amongst differing values across Denver’s broader food environment. The text’s palatable rhetoric envisions all members of the food system—from practitioners to consumers, seedlings to cultivated produce—as welcomed participants. The Denver Food Vision juxtaposes images of farm-to-table chefs with the work of food redistribution non-profits, includes photographs of children working in local gardens in addition to scaled greenhouse production on local farms. From its emphasis on key local growers, chefs, and produce, the document suggests the range of ways one might participate in Denver’s food system.

Enjoying the status as one of Denver’s Boards and Commissions, the SFPC assisted in the creation of the Denver Food Vision, having helped curate the city’s community engagement events and helped to edit, provide input, and support the vision through its construction. I first heard of the Denver Food Vision when I attended a public SFPC meeting about eleven months before the final version was released. As part of my fieldwork for this research project, I attended a public meeting on the day the city was welcoming feedback on an earlier, shorter draft vision

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, 12.

⁴⁷² Ibid, 9.

on Wednesday, January 18, 2017. On this day Denver’s Manager of Food Systems Development visited the SFPC to reveal the draft and discuss its progress. The group that gathered included approximately thirty people, many of them SFPC board members (who also represent various food-related non-profits, businesses, and food justice organizations) and about fifteen interested residents and community members. At this particular meeting, the group lacked equitable racial diversity to its majority white members and did not include representatives from many poor or working class communities. In subsequent meetings, however, some urged of the need for greater diverse leadership and participation—in terms of race, class, age, ability, and residential district representation—on the board and at meetings.⁴⁷³ At this first meeting I attended, we were asked to split into four groups, one to focus on each “pillar” or focus area of the document: inclusive, healthy, vibrant, and resilient. I joined the “inclusive” pillar along with three other middle-aged white men. We were the smallest group, but along with the others, we were tasked with reading a short draft of the pillar and offering our comments.

During our gathering, one of the other participants in my small break-out group showed me an image on his phone of a white board contribution that a community member had written during one of the 11 community listening sessions which read “Prohibit white people from gentrifying.” I didn’t know the participant at this time, but I was immediately struck with the idea that the sensibilities that had brought me to the meeting were being substantiated—that not

⁴⁷³ Over the course of my visits with the SFPC, the need for greater racial and especially class diversity on the board and in the meetings became points of discussion in the group. Given that SFPC meetings were held on the third Wednesday of every month between 9am-12pm, some board members argued that the time and location of the meetings were exclusionary (except for those working for businesses or non-profits whose work paid for or allowed them the flexibility to attend). Some board and community members were committed to making changes in the structure so underrepresented community members could attend. I also attended a meeting where a member conducted disability training in an effort to make the meetings, as well as their work, more inclusive (to help them think about the intersection of disability and food access as well). It was clear that many members knew they needed to be more inclusive. Many board members were open to critiques of their own representation and encouraged community members to reach out to their networks when the cycle of new board member applications approached. However, some members were cautious that members should have formal policy interest or experience (a discussion that seemed to presume that ‘diversity’ meant lack of policy expertise). Nevertheless, not all held this assumption to be true.

all members of the Denver community welcomed the desire to reform the city's food system with open arms. Here we were, I thought, in the smallest of the groups tasked to address inclusivity, while community members living in Denver's gentrifying districts held critical concerns of how food systems change could further contribute to their exclusion. It was clear to me that inclusivity could not be a goal without equity, a process that requires recognition of the structurally uneven power distribution at play in the food system and urban transformation. We shared some words about the comment and I proceeded to cross-out, reword, and line-edit the document with the shared sentiment in mind. We discussed our contributions and were thanked for participating. I left feeling a bit uneasy that my contributions were too heavy handed, after all I was newcomer compared to others in my group. However, most seemed open to letting me labor over the document—even unaffected at times. Although the SFPC had been working with the Manager of Food Systems Development closely prior to this initial meeting, many community visitors to the meeting seemed interested to learn of their feedback would be incorporated.

Almost a year later, the Denver Food Vision was finalized and published on the Denver Office of Economic Development's website. Its aesthetics highlight its outward facing appeal, as it lacks legal language or dry descriptions to offer an inviting readability. Instead its vibrant teal, green, orange, and purple text each correlate with a focus area of the food vision: *inclusive*, *healthy*, *vibrant*, and *resilient*. Each area receives a few pages of elaboration, which includes its guiding principles, priorities, and “winnable” goals.⁴⁷⁴ The document reminds readers of the intersections between these areas as well:

While separated for clarity and ease of understanding, the focus areas actually intersect significantly. A coordinated, balanced approach to optimizing results in each of the focus areas while balancing the needs of the others is the only way to efficiently and

⁴⁷⁴ “Denver Food Vision,” 43.

comprehensively support the multiple values, perspectives, and needs throughout the Denver Food System.⁴⁷⁵

This identification of four themes and then their overlap are visualized through an image (see Figure 4) and underscored in the subsequent explanations of each concept, which are worth examining one by one.



Figure 4. The Denver Food Vision Framework. This brands the city's approach around four focus areas, resonating with contemporary discursive trends across food policy.⁴⁷⁶

Inclusive Denver advances two priorities: (1) “invest in building community driven complete neighborhood food environments” and (2) “expand community food production and sharing.”⁴⁷⁷ In these priorities is a written commitment to “engage diverse community organizations, institutions, neighborhoods and residents” and support their efforts to self-define goals for their neighborhoods.⁴⁷⁸ It promises to prioritize “food deserts” and “leverage public and private investments to fill community identified gaps” which might include the construction of “retail spaces, food co-ops, gardens, food pantries, market locations, and/or nonprofit educational

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, 14-16.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, 15.

urban farms.”⁴⁷⁹ An inclusive Denver is one where food cultures can be valued and streetscapes can be improved through retooling the natural and build environment. The promise of edible landscapes, seed sharing, residential sales of fresh produce and cottage foods, donations to pantries and hunger-relief programs is coupled with supporting indicators for success, including tracking community engagement, improving transportation, enhancing complete streets, and developing community food kitchens, among others.

Healthy Denver aspires to promote improved well-being for everyone. This pillar acknowledges that many neighborhoods do not have adequate access to healthy and affordable food and promises to promote health equity through four priorities: (1) “improve access to a wide variety of healthy food retail options,” and (2) “ensure that healthy food is affordable for everyone,” (3) “promote healthy food environments and education for youth,” and (4) “increase community demand for healthy foods” by expanding “community-based, culturally relevant education to assist with shopping and cooking.”⁴⁸⁰ Pictures of students holding fresh fruit, working in gardens, and community teachers at a grocery store tour line the document, followed by supporting indicators for success, which include increasing grocery stores, farmers markets, school food options, advancing the Healthy Corner Store initiative, and supporting stores to accept electronic benefit transfers (EBT), among others.

Vibrant Denver hopes to elevate Denver’s status as a “world-class food destination” and “Denver’s brand as a destination for healthy, locally-based food and an extraordinary high quality of life.”⁴⁸¹ This Denver is economically thriving by supporting local food business and retailers in the hopes of increasing the size of Denver’s food economy by 59% in addition to

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid, 15.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid, 19-20.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 22.

adding \$100 million in new capital to food businesses in the area.⁴⁸² It forwards three priorities: (1) “develop Denver as an epicenter for the regional food economy,” (2) “support the creation, expansion, and economic strength of Denver’s food businesses,” and (3) “spur innovation and entrepreneurship across food and agricultural industries.”⁴⁸³ To support these goals, Denver plans to track the national status and ranking of its food amenities and overall business environment, increase tourist expenditures on food in the city, help to support new food businesses by removing barriers to entry, and advancing loans and incentives, among others.

Resilient Denver embraces the challenge of creating “diverse and environmentally responsible food systems” by recognizing that “food is a basic need for all people,” which is made possible by supporting the environmental health and biodiversity of the region.⁴⁸⁴ This pillar advances three priorities: (1) “expand and preserve regional food system assets and infrastructure,” (2) “promote environmentally regenerative and climate-smart food systems,” and (3) reduce the amount of food going to waste.”⁴⁸⁵ For the document, a resilient city supports their farmers, improves pollinator habitats, increases composting, assists “socially disadvantaged (such as beginning, women, veteran) farmers,” and contributes to food donations, among others.⁴⁸⁶

Subtle but striking in its simplicity, the colorful infographic depiction of these guiding principles both informs and is informed by ways of imagining what a thriving food system entails. In meetings, these principles were referred to as “pillars” suggesting that each and all were necessary and equal to uphold Denver’s world-class food system. The image representative of these principles (Figure 4), reminiscent of a Venn diagram, emphasizes each individual

⁴⁸² Ibid, 23.

⁴⁸³ Ibid, 23-24.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, 26.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid, 27-28.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, 29.

commitment while suggesting their possible overlaps or shared goals. All are exactly alike in size, each pillar supporting an equal amount of weight in a thriving food system and community. A healthy city is as important as a vibrant city. A resilient city is as vital as an inclusive city. Admittedly, suggesting that Denver's brand as a world-class city could be supported with equal weight alongside inclusive health equity policy, sounded idealistic in theory, but difficult to achieve in practice. Both the metaphor of the pillar and images like these seem to preclude the possibility of recognizing the possible frustrations or tensions between pillars.

Along with these four guiding principles, Denver's Food Vision expands on their winnable goals, encourages community involvement, and outlines that all components of a food system must be supported in order for it to thrive, including consumers, producers, processors, distributors, and retailers. In the promotion of the food vision, Denver's then Manager of Food Systems Development, underscored multiple times that the resulting vision was a community developed effort, rather than the kind of top-down strategy most policy makers deploy. The vision, notes then Manager of Food Systems in an interview with the Mile High Locavore, "is really whatever the business and residents help us craft it to be" before emphasizing the 22 listening sessions held to include resident and industry voices.⁴⁸⁷ In fact, the sheer amount of times he spoke of the plan as an "community" driven and "community" developed tells us that food practitioners are acutely aware of the barriers many residents feel when engaging with city-decision makers and that it is a value of the city to reach out more successfully for the widest amount of public participation possible.⁴⁸⁸

I will admit that my experience at the aforementioned meeting, where it became apparent that some residents feared the food plan would contribute to gentrification, originally clouded my

⁴⁸⁷ Mile High Locavore, "Building the Denver Food Plan Together with Blake Angelo," *Mile High Locavore*, May 2016, <http://www.milehighlocavore.com/ep-19-building-the-denver-food-plan-together-with-blake-angelo>.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

interactions with participants. For example, finding myself in the smallest break out session to discuss the importance of inclusivity suggested to me that although we were told each pillar held equal value, weight and importance, the natural break down of energy and motivation behind principles could, in turn, become uneven. Who would be the champions of ensuring inclusivity when it became an afterthought? What mechanisms would be in place to ensure equity in each and all projects supported by the city? Although I too supported food systems transformation, I was uncertain of what its outcomes might involve. While the food vision emphasizes the need for alignment in goals, the details of how to implement equity would matter in the end.

After subsequent meetings and conversations with SFPC board members, it became clearer that many were also aware of the difficulties associated with food system reforms and were open to develop food policy with a vision of equity in mind. Of course, constraints involved with actually implementing the vision (funding, political capital, and commitment by the city) also became concerns over time. While the food vision captures a range of perspectives, some residents expressed fears that if the plan were to be articulated with broader economic development visions, then the progressive or more radical components of the food vision would be lost. Before analyzing Denver's Food Vision in more depth, though, I want to set the context in which it emerges, in the hopes of providing a fuller account of tensions pulsing through the city's broader developing ecosystem.

Foodscape Futures and Branding Urban Eco-Desires

Following Rob Asen, I imagine policy documents as existing rhetorically betwixt and between text and context—the latter of which is multiple, overlapping, and complex.⁴⁸⁹ In fact, choosing the context in which to situate the food vision affects the kind of story it can and does

⁴⁸⁹ Asen, "Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy."

tell. Given the emphasis in Denver from marginalized communities on the relationship between food and gentrification, as well as the mayor's discourse of world-class city aspirations, I situate the food vision within the context of growing green development strategies that provide environmental justice assets and challenges. The document itself is more progressive than many of Denver's other development visions, underscoring the need to support minority owned businesses and farmers, encourages communities to define their own complete food environments, promotes culturally appropriate and affordable food, and so on. Nevertheless, many residents shared their concerns with me (or in the listening sessions) over how the document could get mobilized by the city to support growth strategies they find threatening to their way of life. They aspired for a vision of equity, but remained cautious of the ability for it to come to fruition.

Linking food with affordability, nutrition, economic goals, and/or vulnerability shapes the ways we discuss, conceptualize, and advance the values of particular foodways. Likewise, any one of those elements may become associated with or *articulated* to a range of political agendas, policies, and practices.⁴⁹⁰ The power of these articulations do not simply remain in the text (e.g. what is written in a policy document), but they accrue or deter rhetorical force through their circulation, which affects practices of living, dwelling, and consuming. Circulation is not natural or neutral, though, as Alberto Vanolo argues. Economic capital plays a substantial role in helping to produce and circulate imaginaries of the city, advancing some narratives of visions for urban life over others.⁴⁹¹ In this way, we might conceptualize sustainability as a particularly affective energy, gaining and losing intensities within the broader rhetorical circulation of urban

⁴⁹⁰ One way to think about how these contingent and malleable elements may be linked or delinked is through a process Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call "articulation," operating by "establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified." Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 105.

⁴⁹¹ Vanolo, *City Branding*.

development in the contemporary neoliberal era.⁴⁹² Thus, elements of the food vision's meaning may shift depending on the particularities from which it is voiced.

How sustainability is advanced differs across locales, though, and both affects and is affected by how cities imagine themselves in relation to other places. Compared to larger cities like New York and San Francisco, articulating Denver with "world-class" status remains aspirational. As a mid-sized city, the promise of Denver is in branding what it might become, a new beginning. The futurity of Denver's development plan is underscored in documents published by the Office of Economic Development like "Mayor Hancock's Vision for Building a World-Class City" through its "smart jobs" development strategy. As Hancock proclaims:

What we build today will create Denver's *tomorrow*. Signature development projects will strengthen our economy, create jobs, and improve neighborhoods. These major projects will long outlive us and transform our city *forever*, employing our residents today and paying dividends for our community and children for decades to come."⁴⁹³ (emphasis mine)

The "world class city" to come, promises Hancock, is a city where "everyone matters"—where employment, housing amenities, sustainability, safety, and economic growth share a common vision of equal prosperity. Repeatedly, in public speeches, interviews, and in planning documents, Mayor Hancock has voiced commitments to wanting a development that would not lead to displacement. The current growth strategy is publicly framed one that supports preserving historic districts, improving schools and housing, and encouraging new businesses to move into neighborhoods to build and support integrated communities. Hancock promises to "uplift communities of color" and (sometimes) even denounces racism, including noting the need for

⁴⁹² I borrow from Catherine Chaput's thinking here, on affective energy and neoliberalism. See Chaput, "Rhetorical Circulation in Late Capitalism."

⁴⁹³ Michael Hancock, "Smart Jobs Development: Mayor Hancock's Vision for Building a World-Class City," *Denver.gov*, Accessed March 12, 2018, <https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/690/documents/New/Smart%20Jobs%20Development.pdf>.

criminal justice reform.⁴⁹⁴ These are lofty commitments that are narrated as all encompassing—there can be growth and development, upward mobility, and safety, as all communities can thrive and flourish in the “world class” city to come. However, many residents in Denver remain unconvinced that policy outcomes will reflect the sentiment of these public promises.

The urban imaginary of the “world class” city reflects a common branding strategy that can be traced back at least to the late 1970s and 1980s. As David Harvey argues, the shift from managerial city to entrepreneurial city during this time was marked by an increase in public private partnerships, speculative planning, and the production of space for economic growth (e.g. investments in public parks, industrial parkways, and city centers, etc.).⁴⁹⁵ Urban branding involves both material and discursive relations that are articulated through public discourse, images, media, monetary investments, visions, plans, policy, and the built environment. The desire to produce a sustainable and economically productive foodscape within cities is bolstered by a particular spatio-temporality. As Noel Castree argues, “the ‘production of space’ is, then, a *necessary* aspect of normal capital circulation” (emphasis theirs).⁴⁹⁶ Although this production might be articulated with differential sets of values (economic, environmental, social, ecological, etc.), the production of space for economic growth needs to make space for capital to move through and be moved by it.

The trouble with navigating this multiplicity is that development policies directed towards futurity make some spatio-temporal relations present and others absent. In Phaedra C. Pezzullo’s terms, “presence and absence, thus, dance dialectically in between the gained and the lost, the marked and the unmarked, the spoken and the unspoken. Any discussion of one

⁴⁹⁴ Michael B. Hancock, “Text of Mayor Hancock’s 2016 State of the City Address,” *Denver.gov*, July 11, 2016, <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/mayors-office/newsroom/2016/text-of-mayor-hancocks-2016-state-of-the-city-address.html>.

⁴⁹⁵ Harvey, “From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism,” 7.

⁴⁹⁶ Noel Castree, “The Spatio-Temporality of Capitalism,” *Time and Society* 18, no.1 (2009): 49.

necessarily implicates the other.”⁴⁹⁷ Engaging this dance between presence and absence, the voiced and the silenced, and between text and context is central to my analysis. As cities brand themselves, mobilizing outward facing geographies of identification, the stories they tell about a city to come both include and exclude particular bodies, communities, and forms of organizing and living in the city. Likewise, I am invested in critically analyzing *geographies of identification*, to understand who and what are linked or mapped with greater distance—or even left off the map. For example, in green development and food visions, sustainability often gains traction through circulating visual and discursive processes of identification by mapping the presence of green spaces, urban gardens, farmers markets, and even in images of lush produce freshly picked from the earth. The presence of these elements, however, also makes absent contradictions like toxicity, inequities in access, the cost of food, business foreclosures, or the labor required to bring healthy food to our tables, among others.

Vanolo elaborates on this relationship between branding and politics, arguing that urban imaginaries “move the boundary between the visible and invisible, or between what can be heard and what cannot be heard, giving form to or denying urban problems and political issues.”⁴⁹⁸ We might put this fragmentation of imagination into conversation with Doreen Massey’s notion of the “multiplicity of spaces” that are “cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of paradox or antagonism.”⁴⁹⁹ It is in this presence and absence of voice, difference, identification, and contestation, that competing space-time orientations are most identifiable.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Touring ‘Cancer Alley,’ Louisiana: Performances of Community and Memory for Environmental Justice,” *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 23, no. 3 (2003): 230.

⁴⁹⁸ Vanolo, *City Branding*, 12.

⁴⁹⁹ Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 3. This reading is shaped by Pezzullo’s (2003) engagement with presence and absence via Massey’s work and others in *Toxic Tourism*. Pezzullo, “Touring ‘Cancer Alley’”; Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*.

⁵⁰⁰ I reference “space-time” following Doreen Massey’s use in *Space, Place, and Gender*.

As urban growth and reversal of ‘white flight’ that defined suburbia since the 1950s shift the fabric of cities in the United States, many city officials are putting emphasis on urban greening as an approach for making these spaces more livable and attractive. Urban greening strategies include a whole host of projects and investments, include revamping food systems, investing in public transportation, increasing green space and parks, building walkable spaces, supporting recycling and composting programs, and increasing energy efficiency, among others. Developers and city officials that promote these plans argue that they will increase economic growth and community development, as people are encouraged to experience the urban landscape while participating in activities that contribute to the health of the city itself. As Mary E. Triece argues, planning for city revitalization is often mobilized through a rhetoricity that promotes “neoliberal trust in growth and enterprise” that might also be framed as improvements in overall quality of life.⁵⁰¹ Food politics and urban greening also rely on similar discourses that promise to increase property values, transform land use, and improve community health.

Incorporating and developing areas of the city that are ‘untouched’ or ‘dilapidated’ into the fabric of the developed cityscape is another common theme amongst those who promote greening and sustainable development. However, as Gould and Lewis argue, going ‘green’ in cities might promote environmental and economic prosperity, but often leaves social sustainability and justice behind.⁵⁰² After all, there is a history to the ways access to nature and environmental benefits have played out along racial and classist lines spanning issues from access to green space to the sheer disparities of clean drinking water.⁵⁰³ The trouble with ‘going green’ as an approach for development is that the newly minted environmental amenities and

⁵⁰¹ Triece, *Urban Renewal and Resistance*, 69.

⁵⁰² Gould and Lewis, *Green Gentrification*.

⁵⁰³ Rachel Brahinsky, Jade Sasser, and Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern, “Race, Space, and Nature: An Introduction and Critique,” *Antipode* 46, no. 5 (2014): 1135-1152; Park and Pellow, *The Slums of Aspen*.

privileges erected in cities often lay the seeds for gentrification by increasing property values and taxes and opening spaces up for speculative investment. This process also prepares these areas for new residents who are often white and more affluent as well as businesses that cater to newcomers rather than incorporating within the historical and cultural fabric of the neighborhood.

When cities promote environmentally oriented development without centering social justice concerns, they often appear guided by what environmental justice scholar Julie Sze calls “eco-desire” wherein there is a “fusion of desire, projection, profit, and fun” enfolded into eco-development design and investment.⁵⁰⁴ Sze further suggests that although projects that promote sustainability shift across time and place, eco-desire is rooted in the wish to “have it all” which includes profitability, ecological sustainability, and building fun and cooperative communities.⁵⁰⁵ The problem, however, is that this desire to smooth over difference in favor of a cohesive, welcoming ecological city is rarely realized given the profoundly deep social, economic, and racial inequities that continue to striate spaces in favor of the most privileged.

This desire to ‘have it all’ has been vehemently critiqued by those working to slow gentrification in their neighborhoods in Denver. Some of the most predominant criticisms made by activists fighting gentrification in Denver is that the officials of the city continue to reference gentrification as the result of ‘market forces’ or the natural consequence of development. Rather than taking responsibility for promoting, subsidizing, and seeking out community partnerships to guide urban development, these organizers argue that the official position of the city tends to contradict their commitment to an inclusive and just environment. Let’s now turn to some of those voices.

⁵⁰⁴ Sze, *Fantasy Islands*, 16.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 18.

Gentrification and Environmental Inequities

Since 2000, the City and County of Denver have experienced unprecedented growth.⁵⁰⁶ Just in the last eight years, Denver’s population has increased over 100,000 people and now exceeds 700,000 residents.⁵⁰⁷ In 2016, it was ranked as the fastest growing city in the country,⁵⁰⁸ and it is estimated that average rent prices have increased 48% since 2010.⁵⁰⁹ Development in central and northeast Denver has been particularly rapid, as areas around the newly remodeled Union Station, Coors Field, “RiNo” River North Art District,⁵¹⁰ and Five Points neighborhoods have seen growth in both the construction of new housing units and in a rising population.⁵¹¹ In Denver’s downtown region, a population that has tripled since 2000, growth has been overwhelmingly homogenous: the majority of new residents are white, under forty, single, and college educated.⁵¹² In this area in particular, the average household income is over \$120,000, a staggering amount especially for those single and without children.⁵¹³

At the same time that Denver is being put on the map as an increasingly desirable city, many of its most vulnerable residents—its working class, houseless, undocumented, and many communities of color in historically segregated neighborhoods—are feeling the impact as their

⁵⁰⁶ United States Census Bureau, “Quick Facts Denver County, Colorado,” *U.S. Census Bureau*, Accessed March 10, 2018, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/denvercountycolorado/PST045216>.

⁵⁰⁷ Miller, “Denver County Population Now Exceeds 700,000.”

⁵⁰⁸ Allison Sylte, “Census: Denver Fastest Growing Large City in the U.S.,” *9 News*, June 3, 2016, <http://www.9news.com/article/news/local/census-denver-fastest-growing-large-city-in-the-us/73-205616555>.

⁵⁰⁹ This puts Denver’s rent growth in fourth place nationally, only after three cities in the San Francisco Bay Area (San Jose, Oakland, and San Francisco). See: Michael Roberts, “Denver Rent Up 48 Percent Since 2010, Only the Bay Area Is Worse,” *Westword*, April 17, 2018, <http://www.westword.com/news/denver-rent-up-48-percent-since-2010-only-the-bay-area-is-worse-10187175>.

⁵¹⁰ The “RiNo” Arts District, which cuts across Five Points and Globeville neighborhoods, has received extensive criticism by organizers in Denver who argue that it remaps their neighborhoods to support development that erases the cultural history/present of the neighborhoods. I elaborate on “RiNo” as a point of contention more in the next chapter.

⁵¹¹ Jon Murray, “Denver’s Population Has Swelled in the Last 7 Years. See How Your Neighborhood’s Growth Compares to the Rest,” *The Know, Denver Post*, September 28, 2017, <https://theknow.denverpost.com/2017/09/28/denver-neighborhoods-growth-2017/160032/>.

⁵¹² Michael Roberts, “Downtown Denver Residents: Young, White, Rich,” *Westword*, May 18, 2018, <http://www.westword.com/news/downtown-denver-residents-young-white-rich-10326086>.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

neighborhoods transform before their eyes. The palpability of gentrification has emerged as a central concern and conversation amongst these residents, and their stories have even gained traction in national and international media.⁵¹⁴ Although gentrification has been articulated as a natural result of market forces, many vulnerable residents in the city, as well as its emerging coalition of anti-gentrification advocates, argue that this language sanitizes the problem and omits the ways the city and its Mayor have encouraged and marketed uneven development.⁵¹⁵ They also argue that beyond influencing market-rate housing and business development, the city has supported a host of ordinances and decisions that systematically target and impact its poorest residents.

For example, since 2012, the city has violently enforced the “urban camping ban” which criminalizes houseless people for engaging in acts of survival in public.⁵¹⁶ Vocal advocates like Denver Homeless Out Loud have argued that the laws, property seizures, and police action taken against homeless people are guided by broader ‘revitalization’ plans that deny the public access to public space.⁵¹⁷ The city has also passed multiple anti-homeless ordinances and joins the growing number of cities that also bans and criminalizes food sharing in public spaces, making it

⁵¹⁴ See for example: Caroline Tracey, “White Privilege and Gentrification in Denver, America’s Favourite City,” *The Guardian*, July 14, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/jul/14/white-privilege-gentrification-denver-america-favourite-city>; Fawns Johnson, “Denver’s Housing Crunch Could Threaten Its Popularity With Millennials,” *The Atlantic*, September 24, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2014/09/denvers-housing-crunch-could-threaten-its-popularity-with-millennials/426198/>.

⁵¹⁵ Denver’s Mayor Michael Hancock has argued that it is “off base” and “lacks academic sense” to say that the mayor is influencing development, since market forces guide growth planning and business/residential development. Though in the same interview Hancock noted that he continues to market the city to encourage job growth. The debate over if development is the result of strategic development and/or “market forces” is long standing in Denver. See for example: Jon Murray, “Is Denver Mayor Michael Hancock Too Friendly With Developers? Here’s What He Thinks,” *The Denver Post*, December 12, 2017, <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/12/12/denver-mayor-michael-hancock-too-friendly-to-developers/>; Stephanie Wolf, “Gentrification Critics Demand To Be Heard As Denver Developers Ride the Boom,” *Colorado Public Radio*, January 16, 2018, <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/gentrification-critics-demand-to-be-heard-as-denver-developers-ride-the-boom>.

⁵¹⁶ Denver Homeless Out Loud, “Top 13 Reasons the ‘Urban Camping’ Ban is Harmful, Not Helpful,” *Denver Homeless Out Loud*, Accessed March 5, 2018, <https://denverhomelessoutloud.org/top-13-reasons-the-urban-camping-ban-does-not-work/>.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

incredibly difficult for homeless individuals to exist, unless risking a potential criminal record.⁵¹⁸

There also remains significant public outrage over the expansion of highway I-70 that would uproot many houses through eminent domain in the vulnerable Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods, both of which contain Superfund sites and designated food “deserts.”⁵¹⁹

Many vulnerable to gentrification argue that the verbal commitments to inclusion and sustainability in the city are not reflected in the material, legal, and economic practices that result from this incentivized development. The publically articulated transcripts by the city are future oriented, in that they encourage a vision of what Denver could become, if only everyone could work collaboratively. Though as James Scott argues in his canonical study of dominance and resistance, it is between the “discrepancy *between* the hidden transcripts and the public transcripts” that we can “begin to judge the impact of domination on public discourse.”⁵²⁰ The concerns that a number of residents forward is over how the city’s efforts to support food system reform might be coopted in favor of an urban imaginary that does not include them. Outward facing policy documents gain power not just through what is present intrinsically in the text, but how the texts circulate and are rearticulated over time. “[Hancock’s] words are largely a show” a resident tells me at a community summit about gentrification, “officials will talk all day about how they care about you, but their practices contradict their words.”⁵²¹ In many anti-gentrification actions I attended, critiques of the mayor were present and visceral. Although Hancock is African American, many activists of color I met referred to him as a “sell-out” and

⁵¹⁸ Tony Robinson and Allison Sickels, “No Right to Rest: Criminalizing Homelessness in Colorado,” *Colorado Public Radio*, April 4, 2015, <http://www.cpr.org/sites/default/files/homelessness-study.pdf>

⁵¹⁹ Caroline Tracey, “Redlining Returns to Denver, but with a Neoliberal Twist,” *The Nation*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/redlining-returns-to-denver-but-with-a-neoliberal-twist/>

⁵²⁰ James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

⁵²¹ Personal communication, January 13, 2018.

therefore, they remained cautious of many efforts to promote “inclusion” made by some city officials.⁵²²

In speaking with residents living in some of the most contentious neighborhoods in northeast Denver, one of the main concerns over new environmentally oriented development strategies is how they gloss over the ongoing experiences of environmental injustice these residents face. Although data on gentrification trends have not caught up with the rate of development, many neighborhoods in Denver are considered “susceptible to gentrification,” are already experiencing “early,” “ongoing” or “late stage gentrification” (see Figure 5). For example, the Globeville and Elyria-Swansea neighborhoods (what some call GES) are not just designated food “deserts” but have long been sites of toxicity, as their access to food, clean air and water, and safe soil remain significantly low when compared with other neighborhoods in the city.⁵²³ These neighborhoods, once surrounded by industrial smelting facilities and stockyards, became some of the only places where communities of color could afford housing, given their redlined status on Denver’s 1934 Residential Securities Map.⁵²⁴ The areas are also entangled in multiple freeway and railway systems, were sites for the processing of toxic heavy metals since the 1880s, and remain the most polluted in all of Denver—there are four Superfund Sites within five miles of these neighborhoods, for example.⁵²⁵ In conjunction with the fear of

⁵²² Personal communication, January 13, 2018.

⁵²³ Department of Public Health and Environment, “Health Impact Assessment,” *Denvergov.org*, Accessed March 4, 2014, <https://www.denvergov.org/content/denvergov/en/environmental-health/community-health/health-impact-assessment.html>; Aldo Svaldi, “Northeast Denver Neighborhood is Nation’s Most Polluted,” *The Denver Post*, February 16, 2017, <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/02/16/denver-most-polluted-zip-code/>; Cheyenne DeChristopher, “Globeville, Elyria and Swansea: Communities of Color with Generations of Injustice,” *Sierra Club*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.sierraclub.org/colorado/blog/2018/01/globeville-elyria-and-swanssea-communities-color-generations-violence>.

⁵²⁴ Megan Arellano, “How Can We See Redlining’s Lasting Impacts on Denver,” *Denverite*, October 24, 2016, <https://www.denverite.com/can-see-redlinings-lasting-impacts-denver-20410/>.

⁵²⁵ Kevin Beaty, “PHOTO ESSAY: Globeville and Elyria-Swansea Live with a Legacy of Pollution,” *The Denverite*, October 8, 2016, <https://www.denverite.com/air-quality-legacy-issue-elyria-swanssea-globeville-14991/>; Environmental Protection Agency, “Superfund Sites in Region 8,” *Environmental Protection Agency*, Accessed March 8, 2018, <https://www.epa.gov/region8/superfund-sites-region-8>.

how the I-70 highway expansion will both drive them out of their homes and increase rates of air pollution and cancer, residents experience higher rates of physiological illness and stress as well.

It is within these spaces, representing Denver's District 9, that some of the fears of how the Denver Food Vision would impact impending gentrification emerged.

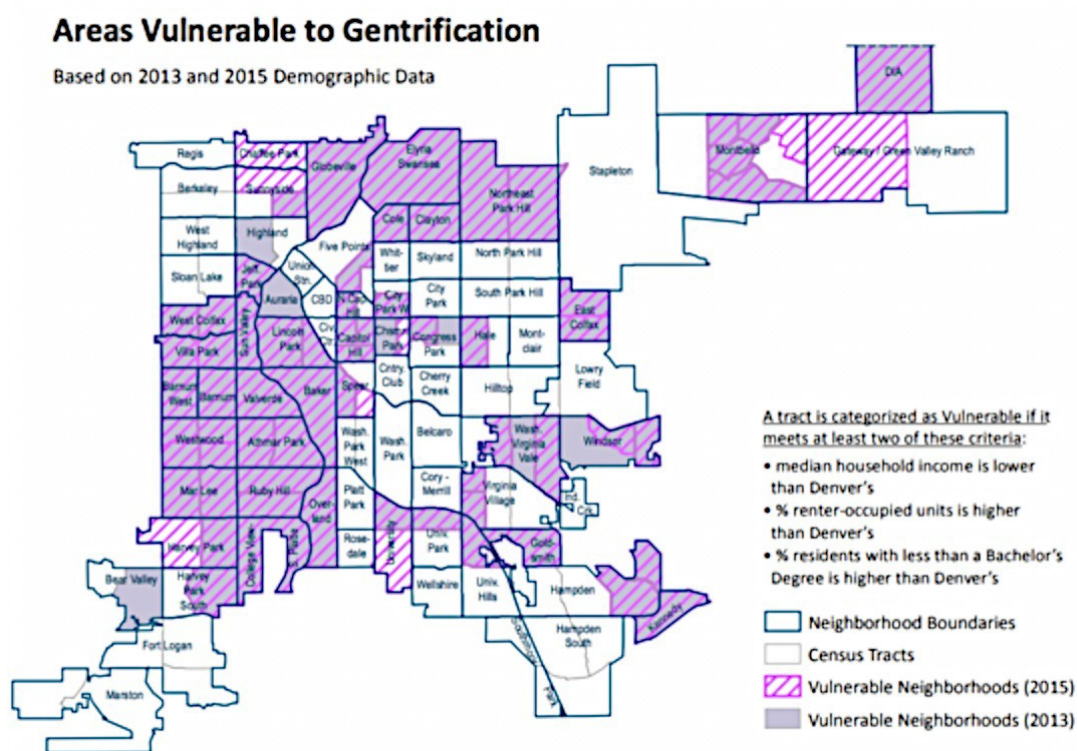


Figure 5. “Areas Vulnerable to Gentrification” Map. Compares demographic data between 2013-2015. Maps like this have been used in many public events on development facilitated by the City of Denver. These maps also became points of contention, as some anti-gentrification organizers argued that the criteria for “vulnerability” were not comprehensive or updated enough.⁵²⁶

⁵²⁶ City and County of Denver, “Areas Vulnerable to Gentrification,” *DenverGov.org*, Accessed January 13, 2018, https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/690/Reports%20and%20Studies/GentrificationAnalysis_Comparison_2013_2015_Data.pdf; Also see: Office of Economic Development, “Gentrification Study: Mitigating Involuntary Displacement,” *OED*, May 2016, <https://www.denvergov.org/content/dam/denvergov/Portals/690/Reports%20and%20Studies/GENT%20STUDY%200051816.pdf>; Some demographic data maps also became points of contention with anti-gentrification advocates in the city who argued that the data not representative of the current state of the crisis. Instead, community members living in parts of Five Points for example, are experiencing the loss of communities of color and low-income residents, despite not being listed as vulnerable on the map. Anti-gentrification advocates also argue that these maps are not up to date with the scale and accelerated rate of development in Denver yet are still being referenced in city-planning documents and meetings.

While I explore these histories more in the chapter to follow, it is important to underscore that many living in these neighborhoods approach city's supported development projects with caution since they have historically been disenfranchised from decision-making. One resident expressed that she and many of her neighbors chose not to attend the Denver Food Vision District 9 community listening session (which includes the Five Points, Globeville, Elyria-Swansea, Union Station, and Cole neighborhoods among others) because, "you know how these things go—they want to include us so they can check the box of inclusion, but they really aren't interested in our voices or critiques."⁵²⁷ Another life-long resident of Globeville elaborated that "Black and Brown people here are already cautious to attend public meetings—they come here all the time and we never see results, so why go?"⁵²⁸ Some residents argue that the city's forward-looking vision of sustainability refuses to recognize the legacies of environmental harms that have impacted areas where predominantly low-income and communities of color reside. They fear that the city's strategy of branding itself as a vibrant and sustainable ecosystem erases their ongoing struggles for food and environmental justice.

Set within the broader context of urban greening, therefore, some residents argue that developing sustainable cities and future foodscapes *now* refuses to acknowledge the past legacies of food and environmental (in)justice they have strived to make visible. As I turn back to the Denver Food Vision, I want to hold these competing visions in mind to understand how polyvocality, articulation, and temporality guide how the document is voiced, circulated, and interpreted, but also how they become points of contention.

⁵²⁷ Personal communication, January 21, 2018.

⁵²⁸ Personal communication, January 21, 2018.

The Impure Politics of Food Policy

As I attended Denver's Sustainable Food Policy Council (hereafter SFPC) meetings, learned more about their troubles engaging diverse community voices, and listened to the well-intentioned perspectives of SFPC board members, it became clear that developing comprehensive and cohesive food policy was an inherently fraught task. Of course, communities that have historically experienced divestment, suffer from health disparities, toxic air, soil, and water contamination, in addition to lacking fresh affordable food, warrant some form of policy intervention to address these inequities. The trouble though lies in how food policy is voiced, circulated, received, and implemented. A central challenge of analyzing public policy is how to approach the text in relation to the broader context in which it emerges, but not let either over determine the analysis. As Asen argues, public policy is not reducible to its material components nor is the materiality in which it emerges the sole arbiter of the document.⁵²⁹ Thus oscillating between text and context, rhetor(s) and audience(s) matters for analysis. The entangled nature between the need for increased investments in food amenities and sustainability planning is central; however, it matters how these goals are articulated over time and by whom they are advanced.

As I return to the Food Vision, therefore, I aim to highlight its possibilities as well as its limitations. I engage three interrelated themes that speak to both presence and absence in and about the vision: (1) polyvocality and impurity, (2) disarticulation and rearticulation, and (3) the temporal tensions and contestations that matter. I conclude with a discussion on the possibilities and limitations of food policy and forward the need to expand 'food' policy beyond 'food' to

⁵²⁹ Asen, "Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy."

assist with transforming the broader systems of power that establish food system injustices in the first place.

Polyvocality and Impurity

The Denver Food Vision, while a progressive attempt to revision the food system, is an inherently impure document. Following Pezzullo, I argue that many tactical choices by advocacy organizations and groups are impure, in that they host contradictions and oscillate between transformative aspirations and the pragmatics of action.⁵³⁰ Denver Food Vision, however, is especially interesting because of its polyvocality. To the credit of some members who helped orchestrate community listening sessions, there was a concerted effort to make these events accessible—there was thought put behind where the meetings would be held, at what time, that food should be served, and that language translation services should be made available. The document also underwent a series of revisions with consultation by the public and the SFPC. Through this process, community comments were translated through multiple mediums, from being voiced and expressed at community meetings, to being written in meeting notes, and then incorporated (or not) into the final vision. The perspectives present in the Vision, therefore, traverse ideological orientations of both food system reform and transformation.

Like other policy texts, the Denver Food Vision is both the result of and context in which debates about sustainable food systems are had. It navigates myriad voices in an attempt to cohere differences in favor of a common, shared vision. As the vision’s introduction explains, the document establishes goals, but will also require a “concerted and collaborative alignment of resources” and among participants across multiple industries to “be strong partners to advance

⁵³⁰ Pezzullo, “Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts”; Also see, Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992): 396; Isaac West, *Transforming Citizenship: Transgender Articulations of the Law*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2014).

the Vision.”⁵³¹ By encouraging participation through community meetings, organizers of the vision (including the SFPC and partners with the City of Denver’s Office of Economic Development) wanted to capture multiple perspectives across the entire food system, but also advance broad definitions of food itself through system-level thinking. Thus, in the document, food is articulated with a whole host of other economic and environmental needs, challenges, and assets. It also offers a glossary of terms from “equity” and “sustainability” to “community-driven” and “culturally appropriate” which become guiding definitions for its approach to food system reform.⁵³²

Across the eleven districts, those in community listening sessions shared an interest in developing community gardens, farmers markets, food affordability, increasing food access, and building community connections. Some in community listening sessions though, expressed concern over the consequences of these actions. For example, in the District 9 listening session, residents shared that “developers are not considering [their] impact on [the] city,” that there needs to be a “balance between development and food,” and that gentrification and out-of-state development were key barriers to achieving a shared vision. This input was contrasted with others across the city, which wished to see increased investment in green space and roof top gardens in new development projects. Some saw the food system as a major economic driver and job creator, while others cautioned that only jobs that offer a living wage would help improve food access to the food insecure.

The importance of culturally appropriate food was also a present thread across many of the district listening sessions; however, some articulated that diverse food cultures could be an attractive “destination” for outsiders. Additionally where healthy food should be made accessible

⁵³¹ “Denver Food Vision,” 6.

⁵³² Denver Food Vision, 46-48.

was also articulated differently—some wanted to see more healthy and affordable food in grocery store chains like King Soopers, while others urged for more local markets. Some emphasized the need to expand EBT and SNAP benefits, while others made no mention of affordability as a central concern. The translation from community concerns in the meetings into the final food vision also smooths over some of these tensions as well. While Direct Hunger Relief organizers and residents in District 9 both named gentrification as a primary barrier for implementing the food vision in an equitable and just way, explicit concerns over “gentrification” (specifically the use of the term itself) do not make their way into the finalized document.

Given the document’s polyvocality, paying attention to the values articulated around implementation is critical to understanding its complexity as well. For example on February 21, 2018, after the vision was adopted, the SFPC had a meeting to discuss one of its first Mayoral Advisory summaries regarding the support for new mobile grocery retailers in an around Denver. Promising to compliment the inclusive, healthy, and vibrant pillars of the food vision, the advisory hoped to support growth of the mobile food retailer market and even encouraged new mobile retailers to schedule stops in Denver’s designated food “deserts.” However, in a SFPC meeting about the advisory, some argued that without equitable implementation, mobile markets might end up making more stops in affluent neighborhoods that already have healthy food access, which one community participant asserted would be “redlining all over again.”⁵³³ Others argued that instead of “outsiders bringing food to people,” the advisory should support business development from and by community members already living and working in designated food “deserts.”⁵³⁴ Although some on the council argued, that its role was “not implementation,”⁵³⁵ a

⁵³³ Personal communication, Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council Meeting, February 21, 2018.

⁵³⁴ Personal communication, Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council Meeting, February 21, 2018.

few community participants articulated concern that written advisories alone may not be enough to implement the most progressive elements of the vision. The tensions between visioning and implementation—including the need for the city to allocate adequate resources towards some of the more radical goals—were consistent themes of conversation.

It is because the food vision offers a cohesive representation of differing perspectives that it both constrains and enables agency on behalf of the participants involved in these public participation processes. The Denver Food Vision underscores the need for coalition building and compromise but does not necessarily outline where divisions might arise or the role of dissent and conflict. For example, in an Appendix of definitions, a World Bank definition of “community-driven development” positions the community as responsible for implementation.⁵³⁶ While this commitment allows for the vision’s flexibility, some participants in SFPC meetings voiced their uncertainty that some of the more lofty goals of equity and justice could actually be achieved. Given the diverse perspectives represented in listening sessions and in the final food vision, one might be cautious that a ‘have-it-all’ strategy could give rise to inherent tensions when advocating for policy change. For example, in one conversation on how best to advocate for compost policy that could allow constituents from homeowners to the houseless to participate, one SPFC board member expressed, “I think things that will get emphasized are the things that aren’t the most radical.”⁵³⁷ This tension, of how best to advocate for an equity-oriented food policy, was an important consideration for many food practitioners and food justice advocates. In other meetings, the SPFC discussed the need to engage diverse voices, including the poor, working class, youth, communities of color, and those in often-unrepresented districts. It was clear that although the comprehensive vision allows for multiple competing perspectives,

⁵³⁵ Personal communication, Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council Meeting, February 21, 2018.

⁵³⁶ “Denver Food Vision,” 46.

⁵³⁷ Asia Dorsey, Interview with author, March 28, 2018.

some were cautious that their efforts would not reach or centralize those who are most marginalized in the food system. Nevertheless, many still advocated for the importance of including the most vulnerable in their advocacy.

Thus the Denver Food Vision, while progressive in many ways, is also impure. The divergent perspectives and points of contention matter, as Frank Fischer reminds us, because policymaking is “a constant discursive struggle over the definitions of problems, the boundaries of categories used to describe them, the criteria for their classification and assessment, and the meaning of ideals that guide particular actions.”⁵³⁸ The struggle over representing all voices in the food vision, is that although the document attempts to establish shared values, in practice these values often compete with one another, or advance fundamentally different epistemological orientations. As Lawrence Grossberg argues of impure politics, sometimes goals end up being mediated by the “modest politics that struggles to effect real range, that enters into the often boring challenges of strategy and compromise.”⁵³⁹ Thus, the impure politics of food policy becomes apparent: the difficulties of engaging and centering diverse voices, presenting both reformist and transformative goals, as well as ensuring what priorities are emphasized are all tensions that were and are still present in the process of building a sustainable food system. Some members on the SFPC recognized that the vision was imperfect, but nevertheless helped expand a necessary conversation.

Disarticulation and Rearticulation

Despite the polyvocality of the food vision, we can trace the articulatory practices at work that cohere and contest power both in the food vision itself and in discussions about the

⁵³⁸ Frank Fischer, *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003): 60.

⁵³⁹ Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*, 396; Pezzullo, “Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts”; West, *Transforming Citizenship*.

vision. Laclau and Mouffe argue that articulation is an unfixed, but nevertheless powerful process where a discursive link between “dissimilar elements” forms a temporary, contingent unity or a “political construction.”⁵⁴⁰ These linkages, for Stuart Hall, illuminate how elements of ideology cohere through discourse both constituting and constituted by the conjunctures in which they emerge.⁵⁴¹ As we’ve seen, food becomes articulated with a whole host of shared and divergent discourses, values, and goals that also become points of tension given the complexity of foodways and food-space relations. This struggle over the contingencies of the food vision helps tell us about its simultaneously normative yet transformative potential. While there are many values that are articulated and contested in and around the text, I focus on two primary themes that became points of concern: (1) efforts to disarticulate the document from hegemonic public health discourses, and (2) apprehensions over the document’s potential to rearticulate with neoliberal ‘green’ development. Both intersect with competing frames of food access in contested space.

First, how the document articulates health is important to its overarching vision of equity. As I explored in the last chapter, national policies that push for food systems intervention are often guided by a desire to address the ‘obesity epidemic’ so prevalent in the USDA’s emphasis on ‘food deserts.’ This language of public health often makes its way into local or regional food plans, but it also became a concern when the food vision was being edited. While not all contributors to the food vision share the same radical perspective aimed towards food systems transformation, some made a concerted effort to disarticulate food systems intervention from dominant public health discourses to rearticulate a vision of equity. Asia Dorsey, a Five Point

⁵⁴⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. DeLuca, “Articulation Theory.”

⁵⁴¹ Grossberg, “On Postmodernism and Articulation.”

resident, food justice entrepreneur, and board member of Denver’s SFPC, explained how important it was to disarticulate from the language of “obesity” in the vision:

The idea of the neoliberal body who consumes the world but doesn’t have any remnants of it? This idealization of skinny bodies...and then you have this obesity dialogue. What happens when you give people shitty food is that it shows up on their body and if they don’t have money to work it off or the class privilege to go hike or something, then what they eat is going to stick. They have bodies that tell stories. But we hate bodies that tell stories because we want bodies to be like mannequins—bodies that are dressed in things but the body underneath doesn’t matter. It’s this warped idea of health we have in this country and then all the dialogue gets channeled into this language of obesity as if it in itself is a disease. It is infuriating, because it’s not... Anytime something started with the “obesity epidemic,” I edited that shit out—I got rid of it. We don’t have an epidemic of obesity, we have an epidemic of shit food and this is the only stuff that people can afford to eat. We have an epidemic of capitalism.⁵⁴²

Here Dorsey is making a profound critique of the ways dominant public health discourses that promise to eliminate the “obesity epidemic” valorize “skinny bodies” as ideal. She criticizes how “obesity dialogue” pathologizes non-normative bodies, as if food consumption and exercise are simple choices all can engage in equally, choices that are actually informed by both race and class privilege. The hatred for “bodies that tell stories” manifests in neoliberal food policies that uphold food availability and choice as the solution to food inequity. Thus, it was important for her and the communities she works with, to advance a food vision that disarticulates from these familiar hegemonic frames. She went on to describe how food policy can, instead of focusing on the ‘obesity epidemic’ to guide interventions, attempt to tackle the power structures that created the conditions for health disparities in the first place. It was because of efforts like hers that the language of obesity is only referenced twice in the vision as diet-related disparities, rather than couching the exigence for intervention within the broader public health crisis of fat-shaming that often guides contemporary U.S. food access discourse and policy.

⁵⁴² Asia Dorsey, Personal communication, March 28, 2018.

It was important for some to de-emphasize the paternalism of food plans and instead rearticulate a vision of equity that underscores the role of community-driven, affordable, and culturally appropriate foodways. The need for culturally appropriate food access makes its way into the *healthy* pillar of the food vision too. Instead of only focusing on the availability of food in neighborhoods, some components of the food vision underscore the complexity of food cultures. Dorsey continues:

The idea of food access is multi-level because we never address epistemology. We never address thought systems about diet. The kids I work with in Elyria-Swansea, they were like, ‘we don’t want to eat this kind of food cause that’s white people food’ and I was like ‘quinoa is from the Andes’ cause I lived in Bolivia and that’s what I ate as poor people food. All these so-called ‘health’ foods, because of the whiteness, they distance themselves from it when it’s actually their traditional food. But that association between health and whiteness, it’s the psychology of diet. So of course the Food Vision can’t go far enough. These are intricate—there’s multiple levels of not only education and how to prepare foods but it’s getting the food to them and it’s also integrating that food into their specific culture so we are not colonizing with our rubbed fucking kale.⁵⁴³

For Dorsey, the relationship between food and gentrification was not only about poor people and communities of color being systematically pushed out of their neighborhoods, but was also about the rebranding and popularization of ‘health’ foods through prominent food access frames. Her criticism is in line with Mikki Kendall’s 2014 viral twitter post that argued, “When we talk about #foodgentrification we’re talking about the impact of traditionally low income food becoming trendy.”⁵⁴⁴ Here, Dorsey conveys how this trend plays out in her work with youth of color in the food “deserts” of Denver, expressing the complexity of foodways and their relationship to whiteness. By highlighting the need to address the relations of power that affect the cultural values imbued in food, food gentrification’s problematic cycle—of forcing poor people to

⁵⁴³ Asia Dorsey, Personal communication, March 28, 2018.

⁵⁴⁴ Mikki Kendal, Twitter Post, last modified January 10, 2014, <https://twitter.com/Karnythia/status/421777395318652928>

consume ‘unhealthy’ foods for centuries only to remarket their traditional foodways back to them as ‘healthy’—becomes palpable.

Thus instead of portraying food access as only an issue of accessibility (in terms of proximity) in a foodscape, Dorsey underscores that food policy must also support historically informed culturally appropriate foodways and food literacy. The *healthy* pillar does indicate the need for health food education; however, as some expressed, this education would only be successful so long as students could identify with their educators—if these educators “looked like them and came from within their community.”⁵⁴⁵ As such, the Denver Food Vision notes the need for culturally relevant food education so as to support literacy about food that is not universal or homogeneous. Some had hopes that the food vision could retool towards particularism in this way as it was supported in practice. Thus the potential to rearticulate the food vision towards equity is still very much contingent, in that it is dependent on circulation and implementation. While some are fearful that the most radical parts of the food vision will be deemphasized, they nevertheless work to advance food justice in their vision for a thriving Denver.

Second, how food can and has been articulated with economic growth also is a point of contention that some voiced both during the development of the vision and after the final version was released. For example, although the vision is described as a community-driven effort, it still opens with a letter from the Denver’s Mayor Michael Hancock, which guides how the document is framed and introduced. The letter opens with praise of Denver’s food culture as an attractive feature. Although Hancock acknowledges uneven food access and income disparities, he ends the letter with the assertion that “together we can shape an economically robust food system” rather than underscoring food equity and justice. Despite visions of a “world class” food system,

⁵⁴⁵ Personal communication, January 21, 2018.

the city had not yet committed to redistributing substantial funding to implementation of the vision either. Broadly concerns from the SFPC and residents were two-fold: (1) they were concerned the city would not redirect adequate funding to ensure implementation, and (2) that if the city did, they may focus only on economic development and leave equity and inclusivity behind.

One local food justice organizer, a self-identified African American woman, was concerned that the vision could become “too institutional” and might only end up supporting “all those industry people in their board rooms and fancy meetings who are not working with the people” in the most need.⁵⁴⁶ Another, Candi CdeBaca, a Swansea resident and community organizer discussed how the economic emphasis of the vision might override equity and inclusivity. She expressed:

I was frustrated because I don't think we're really putting people ahead of profit. I think there's this attempt to do something about creating sustainable food systems but I think we're still letting our vision get clouded by profitability [...] I feel like we need to find a way to pull the monetary value out of food. Food access should be a right.⁵⁴⁷

This frustration was not meant to deny the substance of what the food vision could offer, but to express that decisions which emerge from the vision should be held accountable to the communities targeted for redevelopment. She went on to describe her vision of equity being rooted in having communities define and organize food system interventions on their own, with support from the city or broader corporate partners that could provide discounts for residents who needed access to food or discounted water bills for those who choose to grow community gardens. The need for equity, for her, was not just in the vision, but was in implementation that focused on the communities most in need. She underscored the need for more communities of color and those who live, work, and have relationships with long-time community members to be

⁵⁴⁶ Personal communication, April 21, 2018.

⁵⁴⁷ Candi CdeBaca, Personal communication, February 12, 2018.

at the forefront of these efforts, rather than non-profits from outside of Denver or from other areas moving in to transform the neighborhood.

CdeBaca continued:

I think people thinking about [sustainable food systems] is important. And not think about it just as the neoliberal ‘we need a community garden, we need grocery stores’. I think it’s helping, but people are not focusing on the structural pieces of this. [For example] it’s not enough to be a direct service non-profit these days. We know better. We know better as a sector and direct service is only one piece of the puzzle. If we’re trying to really solve the problem, we have to be political. We have to be advocacy organizations at the same time.⁵⁴⁸

Much like the risks associates with green gentrification, CdeBaca is concerned with how focusing on individually oriented market-based solutions misses a necessary emphasis on the structural transformations needed to alter the food system. Drawing on her experience working in the non-profit sector, she argues that institutional neutrality would not result in the political power needed to advance comprehensive food and environmental justice. While CdeBaca was not speaking directly about the SFPC’s role in promoting the food vision here, others who attended SFPC meetings also expressed apprehension that its position as an advisory council could hinder the advancement of radical visions for social, food, and environmental justice. These reservations were not lost on many of the SFPC members, who shared their concerns over how, and if, equity could be established. While the Denver Food Vision might be able to retool elements of the food system toward equity, the desire for a more advocacy oriented food policy was a noteworthy concern.

Nevertheless, some anti-gentrification organizers noted that even if trepidations over uneven development and gentrification were not underscored in the final food vision, ‘planting seeds’ in public meetings is an important cautionary tool to help disarticulate food with processes of economic development that lead to displacement. For example, Kayvan Khalatbari, local

⁵⁴⁸ Candi CdeBaca, Personal communication, February 12, 2018.

business owner, organizer, and mayoral candidate argued for the importance of dissenting voices at community meetings in the city:

We are trying to plant this seed early enough in their heads so that it can't be ignored and you can say at the very least that, "no, we talked about this," and you guys chose to do nothing about it. Right now it's just not getting talked about. And I think you can look at any issue that we're dealing with in the city—you just don't have, even if it's not *dissenting* but additional perspectives invited to the table to at least plant the seed in well-intending people that are sitting on these councils and work groups to help create laws that are more equitable.⁵⁴⁹

Voicing dissent, or the process of planting seeds, then becomes a tactic to reorient food system reform toward transformative food justice—highlighting the relationship between food and entangled concerns like gentrification, housing, labor and income equity, environmental contamination, infrastructure development, and others. I was reminded here of the white board contribution shared with me prior, "Prohibit white people from gentrifying," as one such seed being planted in the session. Though the language of food *justice* is largely absent from the vision, equity does emerge throughout the document as a guiding indicator for success or failure of the vision. For example, the vision hopes to address most of its positive changes to benefit "underserved populations and/or low-income neighborhoods."⁵⁵⁰ From planting seeds and voicing critique, to struggling to ensure equitable and just implementation—the impurities of food policy assert themselves as both promises and limitations.

Thus how food is disarticulated and rearticulated with competing cultural values tells us much about how power operates in, through, and around the document and within the context of growing inequities in Denver. We can track how the food vision both disarticulates from hegemonic public health discourses to rearticulate a position of equity; though, we can also track the potential for the food vision to be rearticulated with neoliberal economic development

⁵⁴⁹ Kayvan Khalatbari, Personal communication, April 1, 2018.

⁵⁵⁰ "Denver Food Vision," 17.

strategies that continue to guide urban revitalization projects throughout the city. It is in these, what Laclau and Mouffe call “antagonisms,” that we might investigate both disarticulation and rearticulation as a discursive and ideological struggle inherent in food policy development.⁵⁵¹ As the vision itself expresses, its success is dependent on a concerted effort by community to enact and implement the vision. The question then is, how a vision of equity will be supported financially, socially, and publicly by those in positions of power to move resources in the city.

Temporal Tensions and Contestations

In addition to the polyvocality of the vision and how it is articulated, temporality matters to the way we imagine foodscapes and interventions into them. When approaching the Denver Food Vision within the context of broader city development strategies, the temporal dimensions of food policy come to matter to how cities and their food environments are storied. As many residents living in rapidly developing neighborhoods contest, the questions is not over *if* new food amenities should be built in their neighborhoods, but rather the timing of *when* these plans were offered and *for whom* they are indented to support. Bound up in these concerns is a dispute over the past, present, and future of a changing Denver. Since the spatial is inherently social, it is best that we also approach space as it is lived, imagined, and practiced in multiple, simultaneous, an often competing ways. Put into conversation with Massey’s notion of the “multiplicity of spaces” it becomes clearer how these divergent temporal relations play out as a contestation over both space and time in the cityscape.”⁵⁵² So, my concern here relies in the desire to understand how food policy affects both how we imagine space, but also time, and the challenges to developing “world class food systems” in gentrifying cities.

⁵⁵¹ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 93.

⁵⁵² Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, 3.

Folding the food vision back onto the conjuncture in which it emerges highlights that competing visions for the future of Denver are not always shared visions, despite an attempt at cohesion. The temporal dimensions of policy matter to how *solutions* to food system reforms are imagined, but they also impact how food system *problems* are located and defined as well. One concern emerged over how some community listening sessions focused discussion temporally. For example, PowerPoint presentations were used to draw “boundaries for discussion & rules of engagement” that require participants to (among other requirements) “please limit conversations to food” and “focus on the future versus the past.”⁵⁵³ As I spoke with community members who either attended the community listening sessions or chose not to participate at all, many indicated that city meetings often set up boundaries for ‘appropriate behavior’ that limit folks’ ability to draw connections between past harms they or their communities have experienced. Limiting the discussion, they found, hinders their comfortability expressing dissenting point of views, which elevates, as a few called them “yes people” instead of those offering their public critiques.

In contrast, residents of both Globeville, Swansea, and Five Points expressed why an historical perspective was necessary to any vision of futurity, especially when it came to publicly recognizing and alleviating historically produced injustices. As Candi CdeBaca argued:

We’re seeing a lot of people talk about, ‘Oh, we’ve gotta get grocery stores in these places, we’ve gotta get green spaces, we’ve gotta get community gardens—it’s all about proximity in these spaces, getting them *in* the space, making them walkable for people. But nobody is talking about well, why did they not exist in these spaces to begin with? I think that is where the historical piece comes in. Because we actually had grocery stores along 46th avenue before I-70 came in. And when I-70 came in [the 1960s], they ripped them out. Ever since that structural inequity was layered on top of already polluted land—that exacerbated the problem. And that is a historical piece that we’re not paying attention to. But they never rezoned for a grocery store and looking deeper into why that happened—is that because people are unable to afford another grocery store? Is that about the land being contaminated? What is that about? I don’t think we’re asking

⁵⁵³ Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council, “Denver Food Plan Council District 3 Community Food Discussion,” *Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council*, May 18, 2016, <http://www.denversfpc.com/denver-food-vision/#a-great-city-requires-a-great-food-system>.

enough questions about why places are food deserts to begin with. That is a symptom of something and we're not looking at what the root cause is.⁵⁵⁴

CdeBaca voices that Denver's desire to develop its food "deserts" misses an historical understanding of how they came to exist in the first place. She cautions that the contemporary exigence of increasing food access makes absent the legacies of disinvestment, contamination, and invasive infrastructure development that manifested the problem(s) to begin with. Getting grocery stores, gardens, and walkable spaces "*in the space*" only addresses the symptoms of the crisis rather than the cause—a process that could contribute to further marginalization as new food and environmental amenities cater to newcomers rather than those who have braved the ebbs and flows of structural neighborhood reformation.

As some residents indicated, historicizing both the development of historically constituted food system injustices *and* questioning the timing of city efforts is necessary for uncovering the values that guide intervention. "It's about the approach and the timing," Tony Pigford, a fourth generation Five Points resident told me about new grocery stores moving into historically divested neighborhoods.⁵⁵⁵ He argued that if grocery store chains and politicians who support health food business development "truly cared about those marginalized in the community, they would have been ahead of the issue a long time ago."⁵⁵⁶ Instead, the City of Denver both claims to promote these food and green spaces while expanding I-70, a highway that already had degraded the quality of life of this neighborhood.⁵⁵⁷

⁵⁵⁴ Candi CdeBaca, Interview with author, February 12, 2018.

⁵⁵⁵ Tony Pigford, Interview with author, March 4, 2018.

⁵⁵⁶ Tony Pigford, Interview with author, March 4, 2018.

⁵⁵⁷ Liz Gelardi, "I-70 Expansion Gets the OK to Begin Construction After Judge Denies Motion to Stop Project," *The Denver Channel*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/local-news/i-70-expansion-gets-the-ok-to-begin-construction-after-judge-denies-motion-to-stop-project>; David Sachs, "North Denver Neighbors Sound Off on CDOT I-70 Expansion as Federal Court Case Ramps Up," *Streets Denver Blog*, March 29, 2018, <https://denver.streetsblog.org/2018/03/29/north-denver-neighbors-sound-off-on-cdot-i-70-expansion-as-federal-court-case-ramps-up/>; Michelle Swenson, "Olympic Ambitions, Developers' Wishes Trump Human Health in Most Toxic U.S. Zip Code," *Huffington Post*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/colorado->

Inherent in development narratives, those that envision a city to come, is an orientation to both time and space. As Sarah Sharma argues, temporality involves both the politics of time and space and an “awareness of the power relations as they play out in time” all while considering the “multiple interdependent and relational temporalities” in the space of the city.⁵⁵⁸ This orientation is more specifically future oriented—it provides imaginative resources for visioning a future that is currently unrealized, but nevertheless a vision to strive for. The temporal dimensions of city development are often not concerned with looking backward, but recognize the needs of the present and strive towards futurity. Sharma furthers that “temporality is an invisible and unremarked relation of power.”⁵⁵⁹ Of course this vision, depending on by whom it is narrated, is fragmented and split. A future for some is not a future for all. Thus, developing a comprehensive, cohesive, and collective food vision is an inherently impure project. Consequently in the development of a world class city is the possibility that some either are not a part of this future, or are required to conform their values to a desire not of their own.

Increasingly people living in historically disinvested neighborhoods are asking—why greening *now*? Their caution towards the impact of these new projects is rooted in fears of what Isabelle Anguelovski calls “greenlining” wherein (1) historically disinvested neighborhoods are targeted for food and supermarket development, and (2) the outcome often results in a decrease in access to these new food and environmental amenities despite their abundance.⁵⁶⁰ It is not that there isn’t a need to incorporate sustainability into development, but that the temporal dimensions to food system reform tell stories of value and privilege. Looking towards the future

leaders-olympic-sized-ambitions-developers_us_59a4577ce4b0cb7715bfd7aa; Tracey, “Redlining Returns to Denver, but with a Neoliberal Twist.”

⁵⁵⁸ Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014): 4.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 13.

⁵⁶⁰ Isabelle Anguelovski, “Heathy Food Stores, Greenlining, and Food Gentrification,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 36, no. 6 (2016): 1209-1230.

of building sustainable food systems in urban space has a tendency to gloss over the lived realities of those who lack food privilege and how the inequities they experience came to be. Similar to the ways the food desert metaphor can both naturalize inequity and pacify communities, food policy's forward thinking strategy for food and cityscape transformation can make space for economic development and environmental sustainability, but may leave social justice behind.

Conclusion

Bringing readers to the conjuncture at which cities are merging commitments to sustainability and economic growth, this chapter highlights how contemporary U.S. food policies are informed by and inform the very contexts in which they emerge. A conjunctural analysis offers one way to trace food policy visions and urban change. It also helps account for the varying articulations present both in policy documents themselves and how they might be circulated or implemented with divergent rhetorical commitments in mind. While food policy is as much about recognizing the present assets and challenges within a food system, it also guides the temporal politics of how and for whom a city (and its food system) are imagined to be for. A rhetorical gesture toward futurity can attract investments, provide promise, and offer inventive solutions for present-day harms; however, it can also dissuade communities affected by histories of economic and environmental violence from voicing criticism of past policies or expressing fears about how they might recur all over again. Food policy can provide a space to envision and prioritize diverse conceptualizations of health equity and the challenges of bringing them to fruition. Food policy emerges at this conjuncture, deeply affected by temporal imaginaries of the past, present, and future of the spaces in which many food insecure communities reside.

While city-oriented food policy offers new potential for systemic intervention into the food system, articulating, visioning, and implementing such policies is also impure. Analyzing public policy, consequently, requires consideration of how meaning is created, negotiated, and challenged often by “hundreds, if not thousands” of voices necessitating our attention to “authorship, temporality, and polysemy.”⁵⁶¹ It is in the polyvocal antagonisms over spatio-temporal relations that the fissures emerge. The Denver Food Vision provides both possibilities for food system reform, yet its potential may be constrained depending on how it is circulated, received, and implemented. Notably, my research for this particular project concluded before major policy directives could be put into place that might contribute to the broader vision, so there is much to be anticipated. Certainly as the food policy council garners new members and leadership, priorities might shift and the pragmatics of action, from funding to authority, may change. The initial food vision, however, provides an additional resource for understanding the ways policies are articulated as processes or a set of choices negotiated among many voices, as well as the impurity of a have-it-all-strategy for food systems transformation.

While I spoke with many living in areas vulnerable to gentrification that expressed fear of the ways green development projects could be articulated with economic development goals that continue to put people over profit in the city, the majority expressed a hope for advancing a transformative food justice agenda. The food vision, in some ways, is difficult to reject as it coheres shared values and progressive goals of developing an equitable, accessible, culturally appropriate, and inclusive food environment for a Denver to come. The Denver Food Vision visually articulates inclusivity, health, vibrancy, and resilience as distinct, though cohesive goals. In these affirmations though are competing visions of what equity, accessibility, and inclusivity look like given the polyvocality of and about the text. However, when situated within the

⁵⁶¹ Asen, “Reflections on the Role of Rhetoric in Public Policy,” 124.

contentious relationship between green development and dispossession in the city, the tensions of producing a unified and shared vision emerge.

Taking into consideration the limits and tension of rhetorically analyzing public policy, where “rhetors, audience, text, and context operate in cross-historical” ways, it is important that the Denver Food Vision be approached with attention to its inherent polyvocality. As I became more familiar with organizations like the SFPC, which helped to construct of the food vision, it was apparent that many understood the limits of their role, but nevertheless hoped that equity could be achieved if they garnered support from the city through resources, funding, and political support. Other residents I spoke to remained cautious of all institutional efforts removed from some of Denver’s most vulnerable residents, especially those living in gentrifying neighborhoods and designated food “deserts.” Thus the impurity of food policy exceeds the policy text itself, and expands into concerns over voice, representation, commitment, and implementation.

In the competing visions of an inclusive, healthy, vibrant, and resilient Denver are the articulatory and temporal threads that nuance the stories we tell of and about the local food system. In this complexity, we find both shared and competing articulations of equity and community and their intersection with foodways. While the Denver Food Vision and others of the same genre recognize that the affective structures of food policy impact sectors beyond food, rarely do these food policy documents underscore the need for coalitions not directly in the food space—meaning, those that advance housing, racial, environmental, and economic justice. Food visions emphasize links in the food chain, including consumers, producers, processors, distributors, and retailers, but there are a whole host of other areas of interest that affect the outcomes of food systems intervention.

Importantly, researching municipal food policy also proved to be an impure task. When I first began thinking critically about how the Denver Food Vision could (or not) advance health equity and food justice, I entered public meetings and the text with a particularly critical, even suspicious orientation. I had read about and witnessed the criticisms of other food policy councils that, despite their well-intentioned efforts, could often lack commitment to centering those most marginalized in the food system in their advocacy. I also was familiar with other cities' food policy councils and practitioners who were committed to economic, racial, and environmental justice openly and publicly in their work and, admittedly, was cautious that these commitments may not be represented in the Denver Food Vision. While criticisms of representation and implementation in food policy are important and valid, as I became more immersed in the conjuncture in which food policy was emerging in major cities, I had to be critical of my own assumptions that may have over-determined my initial judgment.

Conjunctural analysis—a way of tracing and tracking the terrain upon which crises emerge—is itself a contingent process. No municipal food vision is the same, though they may share similar goals and reformist/transformational aspirations for food systems interventions. As food policy is becoming more central to urban development planning, it is critical that we attend to how it is imagined, drafted, and implemented at the local level. As it articulates with divergent rhetorical practices, from sustainability to economic development, it is important to recognize how these discourses develop as local manifestations despite their regional or national quality. An anti-nominalist approach to food policy, then, is not one where we suspend ethics or critical perspectives, but one that remains open to the research process while acknowledging that it is intimately connected to the quickly changing contingencies on the ground, within communities, and in the spaces these policies reference.

Developing a comprehensive, cohesive, and shared vision for food systems intervention through food policy organized by cities is an inherently impure project. While there are possibilities for building an economically, environmentally, and socially just food system, there are also incredible risks to those who have been and continue to be marginalized. It is only in the practice of contextualizing food-entangled harms within their broader historical, place-based context that we may begin to advance a vision of equity that centers those historically relegated to the margins the most. While those in positions of power should assist intervention, community-guided articulations of both the problems and solutions to food system inequities must be the guiding force behind these projects, even if they dissent from or critique the limitations of the project itself. Thus, in the next chapter, I trace what a community-centered food justice might look like through the coalitional politics of building fusion movements and organizing around abundance.

CHAPTER 4:
Critically Interrupting Food “Access” by Organizing Around Abundance

*We need to think at the intersection of environmental racism and displacement. We are creating a fusion movement, a global title wave. There is so much talk of scarcity—resources, ideas, knowledge—that we don’t have. We have the resources. We need to organize around abundance.*⁵⁶²

—Tony Pigford, Denver Community Action Network

The previous chapters analyzed dominant food access discourses articulated through national campaigns and citywide municipal food policy. Both offer ways of thinking about the possibilities and limits of improving foodscapes by emphasizing the need to increase food access in food “deserts” as well as through sustainability planning often articulated through eco-desire. These efforts are pragmatic insofar as they offer tools to reform the food system; however, as I’ve argued, reformist agendas rarely interrupt the systems of power that repeatedly manifest food, economic, and environmental injustices. Further, although institutional interventions strive to improve food system outcomes, their practices are constrained by a fairly limited engagement with environmentally and economically insecure residents, whether living in designated food “deserts” or not.

Throughout my fieldwork for this project, it became increasingly apparent that the City of Denver’s strategies to support healthy food access and business development did not resonate with many residents in gentrifying neighborhoods. Reactions to the newly built Natural Grocers near Globeville, a story that began this dissertation, is just one example of the growing concerns that loom through these neighborhoods. Despite superficially positive developments emerging around them, many of the areas long-time residents are increasingly convinced that these developments are not for them, and are instead for the incoming wealthier, and often whiter,

⁵⁶² Tony Pigford, Fieldnotes, December 3, 2017.

residents moving in. Thus, the question of whose voices are centered let alone included in the process of advancing plans for increasing food access still lingers. Fortunately, institutional projects like national and municipal food policy are not the only efforts to intervene into food system inequities. On the contrary, many food justice farmers, educators, and advocates are often on the frontlines of both food system (in)justices and their solutions. Community centered and organized food justice advocacy frequently attempts to challenge dominant food access discourses and assumptions. They also articulate diverse food-space relations and emphasize access to land and access to power as the foundation to achieving justice. These efforts strive to nourish collective power via food in ways that are rooted in, for, and from marginalized communities—especially Black, Brown, Indigenous, working class, and poor residents. Thus, this chapter highlights the voices often left out of both development and food access policy and planning, but those that are nevertheless vital in the process of organizing for food justice.

The struggles of frontline communities—who bear the brunt of environmental violence—often recognize the tensions between racialized foodscapes and their divergent culturally contextual foodways, as well as operate to advance different food-place relations in neighborhoods in which they live, work, play, and eat.⁵⁶³ As Teresa M. Mares and Devon G. Peña argue of grassroots food advocacy in cities:

The political economy of the city is not just an invention of top-down neo-liberal governmentality and its managerial imperatives. The struggles toward alternative use of space through place-making practices that promote self-reliance, community, and autonomy constitute spatial practices that are both counter-hegemonic and revealing of unplanning-for outcomes and uses.⁵⁶⁴

⁵⁶³ Gottlieb, “Where We Live, Work, Play...and Eat,” 7-8.

⁵⁶⁴ Teresa M. Mares and Devon G. Peña, “Urban Agriculture in the Making of Insurgent Spaces in Los Angeles and Seattle,” in *Insurgent Public Space: Guerrilla Urbanism and the Remaking of Contemporary Cities*, ed. Jeffrey Hou, (New York: Routledge, 2010): 221-254.

Although cities continuously constitute themselves through imaginaries of eco-desire, simultaneously grassroots organizers are banding together to develop alternative uses of space and organize for community solidarity and self-reliance.⁵⁶⁵ These efforts—from re-appropriating private land for public use, engaging in food sharing, redistributing nutrient rich food to the food insecure, or developing businesses from and for the communities in which they serve, among others—are ways to challenge dominant strategies that leave marginalized residents out of decision-making about both food and justice.

One way grassroots advocates challenge these narratives is by *critically interrupting* dominant conceptualizations of food access that refuse to recognize their culturally contextual foodways and their embodied experiences of food and environmental injustice. Following Phaedra C. Pezzullo, I find it useful to consider how “critical interruptions” are opportunities to articulate disagreement with dominant discourses, construct dialogue, and reinvent new narratives of communities, their problems, and their solutions.⁵⁶⁶ These processes of developing inventional resources through rhetorical appeals, symbolic action, public protest, food labor, and organizing helps to challenge dominant narratives and advance alternatives that speak more to community needs.⁵⁶⁷ Thus this chapter focuses on how communities organize to both critically interrupt food “access” and organize for food justice in ways that include, but also exceed food.

Within the context of a gentrifying city, food justice advocates are challenged to work at the intersection of myriad forms of violence that act on the bodies of those residing in

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid; I also engage “self-reliance” more in the following section, drawing on scholarship from, for example: Reese, “‘We Will Not Perish; We’re Going To Keep Flourishing’.”

⁵⁶⁶ Pezzullo, “Performing Critical Interruptions.”

⁵⁶⁷ Critical interruptions might be enacted through a host of diverse rhetorical practices, traversing the discursive, performative, material, and embodied. In terms of foodscapes, organizers also refigure and centralize their culturally contextual foodways to challenge dominant food access narratives that position food abundance alone as the solution to legacies of economic and environmental harms. See Pezzullo, “Performing Critical Interruptions”; Also see Stephen P. Depoe, “Environmental Studies in Mass Communication,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14, no. 4 (1997): 111-122.

contentious spaces. Often they must navigate the ongoing impacts of colonization and slavery, health and environmental contamination, structural dis- and reinvestment, as well as residual economic and legal barriers enforced by city governments, and/or the criminalization of the city's most food insecure residents. In Denver specifically, organizers often residing in spaces articulated as lacking or scarce—whether designated as a food “desert” or in spaces framed as dilapidated or blighted—have taken up collective strategies to organize, instead, around abundance. These efforts recognize the need for comprehensive food justice, but also organize *intersectionally* to advance their interests and rewrite the racialized and classist narratives of place deployed by those seeking to engage in outside interventions.⁵⁶⁸ Their answer does not just forward the need for organizing around *food abundance*, but also an *abundance of power*.

I led this chapter with a quote from Tony Pigford, a fourth generation Five Points resident, African American, educator, and organizer with whom I encountered throughout my fieldwork. Speaking at a local neighborhood rally, Pigford challenged community members to refuse dominant narratives of scarcity that position them as being the recipients of decisions made by outsiders who may not have their best interest in mind. In his articulation of “organizing around abundance,” Pigford urges local advocates to build coalitions, “fuse” their concerns together, and reclaim their power in the face of environmental, economic, racial, and place-based

⁵⁶⁸ By “intersectionality” here, I reference how organizers conceptualize their experiences of violence as manifesting from and entangled within multiple overlapping systems of oppression, which can become starting places for organizing in shared struggle. On intersectionality, see: Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Law School, 1989), 139-168; Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *The Nature of Private Violence*, eds. Martha Albertson Fineman and Rixanna Mykitiuk, (New York, Routledge, 1994): 93-118; On the intersection of social and environmental injustice, see: Giovanna Di Chiro, “Nature as Community: The Convergence of Environmental and Social Justice,” in *Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles for the Global Commons*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 120-143; On violence and intersectionality, see: Patricia Hill Collins, “The Tie That Binds: Race, Gender, and US Violence,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21, no. 5 (1998): 917-938. Also see Patricia Hill Collins, “On Violence, Intersectionality, and Transversal Politics,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 40, no. 9 (1997): 1460-1473; On alliances and intersectionality, see: Aimee Carrillo Rowe, *Power Lines: On the Subject of Feminist Alliances*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008).

harms. Though I expand more on what this call entails, as well as the exigence from which it was voiced, the goal of this chapter is to theorize what organizing around abundance looks like in the contested space of a gentrifying city. I theorize abundance organizing *relationally*, which can be witnessed in the advocacy of organizers, in the relationships they build with others, in the ecologies within which they live, as well as in alternative imaginaries they forward that connect the past, present, and future together.⁵⁶⁹ In doing so, I hope to contribute to Isabelle Anguelovski’s call for environmental justice scholars to not only focus on environmental “bads” or harms, but also community-based solutions advanced in relation to neighborhood place-based attachments and communities.⁵⁷⁰

This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted over six months, where I engaged in participant observation at over fifteen public protest, summits, and meetings organized by residents in gentrifying neighborhoods in Denver in addition to an educational tour of food justice projects within these neighborhoods. I focus specifically on four events during this time: (1) a protest of local coffee shop ink! Coffee;⁵⁷¹ (2) Denver CAN’s (Community Action Network) Gentrification Summit;⁵⁷² (3) the Just Seeds Tour of Food Justice Projects in a Gentrifying Denver;⁵⁷³ and (4) the 5th Annual Forward Food Summit on Food and

⁵⁶⁹ While interdependent relationality is a cornerstone of ecological thought, thinking about organizing relationality was prompted from two directions during this project: first, community members during my fieldwork emphasized the importance of relationships and, second, Dr. Karen Ashcraft has encouraged me to consider how organizing is relational which includes practices, human, and non-human elements.

⁵⁷⁰ Anguelovski argues, “neighborhoods are not neutral repositories” but are “imbued with meaning and associations connected to tradition, identification, and experiences” which communities form place-based attachments to through “networks, relations, and affective bonds.” See Isabelle Anguelovski, *Neighborhood as Refuge: Community Reconstruction, Place Remaking, and Environmental Justice in the City*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 7-8.

⁵⁷¹ The protest took place on November 25, 2018 in front of ink! Coffee’s Curtis Park location in northeast Denver, Colorado.

⁵⁷² Summit took place on January 13, 2018 at Shorter AME Community Church in the Park Hill neighborhood in northeast Denver, Colorado.

⁵⁷³ This tour was hosted by the University of Colorado Boulder Environmental Center Eco-Social Justice Team on May 21, 2018 and traversed both northeast Denver neighborhoods as well as a neighborhood in northwest Denver, Colorado.

Gentrification.⁵⁷⁴ I supplement this participant observation by drawing on primary and secondary sources of a range of textual and visual media—from brochures and fliers garnered from many of these public events, interviews with food justice advocates and three of Denver CAN’s community organizers, and local media coverage of the actions. Although additional public actions and forums as well as media help me contextualize the broader context of gentrification in Denver, a phenomenon I have followed for years prior to this project, the four main actions listed above take precedent.

I trace grassroots efforts to organize an intersectional and counterhegemonic food justice in some of northeast Denver’s most contested neighborhoods—Globeville, Elyria-Swansea, and Five Points as well as surrounding areas like Cole, Curtis Park, Park Hill, and others. Specifically, I aim to address organizing that has taken shape from November of 2017 to April of 2018 in the city. Although gentrification has been an ongoing concern among residents living in these (and other) areas, since the fall of 2017, the conversation has garnered unprecedented attention, giving rise to new forms of collective organizing. What organizers have come to call the “moment in the movement”⁵⁷⁵—when a controversial sign celebrating gentrification was placed outside of ink! Coffee in the Five Points neighborhood—assisted in the galvanization of new cross-neighborhood relationships and coalitions. In addition to analyzing this “moment in the movement” I turn my attention to subsequent organized events, to understand how community members seized the opportunity to respond by organizing intersectional networks that link both food (in)justice and gentrification together.

In an effort to draw lines of affinity and connection across the myriad public actions at the intersection of food justice and gentrification, this chapter proceeds as follows. First, I thread

⁵⁷⁴ The Forward Food Summit, hosted by the Colorado Food Rescue Network, took place on May 28, 2018 in the Whittier neighborhood of northeast Denver, Colorado.

⁵⁷⁵ Tony Pigford, Personal communication, March 4, 2018.

together literature on social movement rhetoric with critical organizational communication studies, to better understand the relationship between social movements and organizing as an emergent, coalitional, and imaginative process. Second, I contextualize the relational process of organizing around abundance that, in many different ways, critically interrupts food “access” discourses that rely on frames of scarcity or deficit. I begin with the exigence from which a multi-neighborhood coalition to build political power in Denver emerged, namely the protest of ink! Coffee’s celebratory gentrification sign in the Curtis Park neighborhood. I then explore three additional events from which conversations at the intersection of food and gentrification have taken shape. Each helps me address ways in which organizing around abundance manifests relationally: through building fusion movements, remapping grassroots food justice projects, and reorienting land, place, and community. Finally, I articulate how organizing around abundance provides both imaginative and temporal resources for conceptualizing the past, present, and future of contested neighborhoods in Denver in favor of intersectional food justice.

Organizing Social Movements and Building Coalitional Relationships

The call for scholars to engage the politics of resistance through everyday life has taken shape differently across rhetorical studies, organizational communication, and cultural studies, among other scholarly conversations. From critical rhetoric’s focus on critiques of domination and freedom, to critical organizational communication’s emphasis on power and resistance in organizational life—how power and hegemony entangle and move through us has been a key theme in these works.⁵⁷⁶ As Shiv Ganesh, Heather Zoller, and George Cheney argue, studying how collective resistance manifests requires an interdisciplinary approach to expand analyses

⁵⁷⁶ See for example: McKerrow, “Critical Rhetoric.”; Dennis K. Mumby, *Organizational Communication: A Critical Approach*, (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013).

beyond individual transgressions.⁵⁷⁷ Their call to engage myriad forms of collective resistance—from protests, to coalition building, and other organizational practices—addresses how communities critique and intervene into, for example, economic restructuring and corporate, racial capitalism as they manifest across time, space, and within particular environments.⁵⁷⁸ Contributing to this emerging line of scholarship on grassroots organizing and the transformative potential of collective resistance movements,⁵⁷⁹ I think across these conversations to focus on organizing as a process of building relational, grassroots social change. Although a thorough review of literature on organizing and social movements exceeds this chapter, I trace scholarship that assists in my analysis of how communities organize relationally, nourish coalitional politics, affirm relationships of difference, and build intersectional, fusion movements to carve out spaces of belonging in contentious space.

Admittedly, “social movement” as a term of classification in rhetorical literature has decreased in the last three decades, as scholars have “relocated” their analyses into the study of publics and counterpublics, resistance and transgression, digital networks, as well as other critical engagements with advocacy within/against neoliberal capitalism, ecologies, and environments.⁵⁸⁰ While I am not quick to refuse naming food justice and/or anti-gentrification

⁵⁷⁷ Shiv Ganesh, Heather Zoller, and George Cheney, “Transforming Resistance, Broadening Our Boundaries: Critical Organizational Communication Meets Globalization from Below,” *Communication Monographs* 72, no. 2 (2005): 169-191.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid. Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney trace both Gramscian and Foucauldian influences on studies of power and resistance in organizational communication. They argue that organizational communication’s focus on the individual, workplaces, and stakeholder models cannot adequately address collective macro-resistance nor can it speak to the power differentials between stakeholders. Although they do not denounce the utility of Foucault or Gramsci, they do recognize the limits of how they have been adopted in organizational communication scholarship as it relates to understanding movements and collective power.

⁵⁷⁹ See Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney’s use of *transformation* to “highlight attempts to effect large-scale, collective changes in the domains of state policy, corporate practice, social structure, cultural norms, and daily lived experience,” 177.

⁵⁸⁰ For an example of the ongoing discussion of this “relocation” and loss of “social movement” in rhetorical studies, see the “Whither Social Movement in Rhetorical Studies: A White Paper” that emerged from a 2015 RSA institute on social movements in rhetorical studies compiled by fifteen scholars who participated in the institute. It is my hope that my research will contribute to a rebirth of rhetorical social movement studies that is not limited to the

advocacy as social *movements*, I do find value in building on rhetorical and critical organizational communication literature that has proceeded to consider social movement in relation to cultural performances,⁵⁸¹ body rhetorics,⁵⁸² coalitional politics and alliances,⁵⁸³ space and place,⁵⁸⁴ and emergent grassroots organizing.⁵⁸⁵ Emphases like these move us to consider the role of emergent networks and performances as well as how advocates articulate a vision of transformation through shared struggle.

While rhetorical scholars have yet to dedicate substantial focus on “organizing” as a key term in the study of social movements, critical organizational communication scholarship and organization studies have both deeply theorized organizing. Their conversations help scholars analyze the communicative processes of organizing that are “ongoing, situated, and embodied process[es] whereby human and non-human agencies interpenetrate ideation and materiality toward meanings that are tangible and axial to organizational existence and organizing phenomena.”⁵⁸⁶ The turn from studying *organizations* to analyzing *organizing* helps to include both human and non-human, as well as material and symbolic, elements that entangle process-

debates of the 1980s, which Wanzer-Serrano (2015) addresses in *The New York Young Lords and the Struggle for Liberation* in his shift from his previously published *Quarterly Journal of Speech* essay to the theoretical arguments of the book.

⁵⁸¹ See: Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Resisting National Breast Cancer Awareness Month”: The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and their Cultural Performances,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (2003): 345-365.

⁵⁸² See for example: D. Soyini Madison, “Performing Theory/Embodied Writing,” *Text and Performance Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (1999): 107-124; Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*; Kevin Michael DeLuca, “Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36, no. 1 (1999): 9-21.

⁵⁸³ See for example: Karma R. Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics: Activist Rhetoric and Coalitional Possibilities*, (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013); Carrillo Rowe, *Power Lines*; West, “PISSAR’s Critically Queer and Disabled Politics.”

⁵⁸⁴ See for example: Lisa A. Flores, “Creating Discursive Space Through A Rhetoric of Difference: Chicana Feminists Craft a Homeland,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82, no. 2 (1996): 142-156; Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook, “Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (2011): 257-282; Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*.

⁵⁸⁵ See for example: Ganesh, Zoller, and Cheney, “Transforming Resistance, Broadening Our Boundaries”; Shiv Ganesh and Heather M. Zoller, “Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change,” *Communication Theory* 22, no. 1 (2012): 66-91.

⁵⁸⁶ Karen L Ashcraft, Timothy R. Kuhn, and François Cooren, “Constitutional Amendments: ‘Materializing Organizational Communication,’” *The Academy of Management Annals* 2, 1 (2009): 34.

based accounts, which are central to environmental justice advocacy.⁵⁸⁷ Additionally, I emphasize the term *organizing* because it is a part of activist vernacular, which they use to indicate the processes of establishing relationships and mobilizing communities. Organizing also includes the ways marginalized communities coalesce and advocate for macro-level interventions into, for example, the capitalist system as it manifests and moves through the contemporary social milieu.⁵⁸⁸ It might also include how organizers develop linkages between locales, activists, and issues.⁵⁸⁹ Organizing also can include how organizers draw on relations with their lived environments to advance visions of equity and ecological reciprocity. As Isabelle Huault, Véronique Perret, and André Spicer argue, the relations between “macro” and “micro” struggles may be more entangled than previously thought.⁵⁹⁰ For example, food justice advocacy can embrace systemic intervention, but is also intimately tied to the body and the bodies of others within a community—as well as nonhuman elements, such as highways, soil composition, and insect patterns.⁵⁹¹ Throughout this project, therefore, I conceptualize the intersection of food justice and anti-gentrification organizing as manifesting through discursive, embodied, spatial, material, and relational politics.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁷ Scholars in science and technology studies like Bruno Latour, Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, and others have also aided these turns to the non-human in organizational communication. However as Zoe Todd argues Euro-Western scholarship has tended to ignore Indigenous contributions that have always centralized ecological relations. See: Zoe Todd, “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take On The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2016): 4-22; I note this here, especially because as communities of color and Indigenous activists organize for food and environmental justice, they foreground decolonial relations and challenge anthropocentrism in ways that are distinct and culturally particular. For more on the marginalization of Indigenous perspectives, see: Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, (New York, NY: Zed Books, 2012).

⁵⁸⁸ See for example: Dana L. Cloud, “Laboring Under The Sign of the New Economy,” *Management Communication Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (2001): 268-278.

⁵⁸⁹ For a discussion on linkages across communication technologies and organizing, see: Shiv Ganesh and Cynthia Stohl, “Qualifying Engagement: A Study of Information and Communication Technology and the Global Social Justice Movement in Aotearoa New Zealand,” *Communication Monographs* 77, no. 1 (2010): 51-74.

⁵⁹⁰ Isabelle Huault, Véronique Perret, and André Spicer, “Beyond Macro- and Micro- Emancipation: Rethinking Emancipation in Organization Studies,” *Organization* 21, no. 1 (2014): 22-49.

⁵⁹¹ See Williams and Holt-Giménez, *Land Justice*.

⁵⁹² These rhetorical forms might be conceptualized as “intersectional rhetoric” following Enck-Wanzer in “Trashing the System.” Darrel Enck-Wanzer, “Trashing the System: Social Movements, Intersectional Rhetoric, and Collective

It is quite difficult to capture all of the unique vernacular voices or practices advanced by these residents and advocates, given just how felt and personal dispossession is to those residing in or being pushed out of contested neighborhoods. However, analyzing social movement through organizing as it emerges and develops, necessitates careful attention to how organizers articulate their grievances,⁵⁹³ develop coalitions,⁵⁹⁴ and nourish self-reliance to assert their belonging in contested space. By self-reliance, I reference how communities organize by and for themselves in the face of structural inequities, which can include the development of solidarity economies, political power, and self-determined food and land justice.⁵⁹⁵ Thus, embodied participant observation, interviews, and other forms of engaged research in “‘inventional spaces’ [wherein] meaning, identification, and community” are constituted, help to elevate the voices and practices of those often left out of dominant public discourse.⁵⁹⁶ By utilizing rhetorical field methods⁵⁹⁷ and critical ethnographic practices,⁵⁹⁸ I am able to more fully account for the voices,

Agency in the Young Lords Organization’s Garbage Offensive,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 92, no. 2 (2006): 174-201.

⁵⁹³ For example, see Ganesh and Zoller’s “Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change” for how activists use cooperative, collaborative, and/or agonistic approaches to social change.

⁵⁹⁴ On coalitions, see for example: Chávez, *Queer Migration Politics*; West, “PISSAR’s Critically Queer and Disabled Politics”; and Carrillo Rowe, *Power Lines*.

⁵⁹⁵ My use of “self-reliance” is influenced by a range of scholarship on Indigenous and Black self-determination that includes but also exceeds advocacy for environmental justice. For example, on organizing “geographies of self-reliance” for Black food justice in Washington D.C., see: Reese, “‘We Will Not Perish; We’re Going To Keep Flourishing’”; On Black self-determination and solidarity economies in Jackson, Mississippi, see: Kali Akuno and Ajamu Nangwaya, *Jackson Rising: The Struggle for Economic Democracy and Black Self-Determination in Jackson, Mississippi*, (Montreal, QC: Daraja Press, 2017); On Indigenous food sovereignty as self-determination, see: Whyte, “Food Sovereignty, Justice, and Indigenous Peoples”; Elizabeth Hoover, “From Garden Warriors to Good Seeds: Indigenizing the Local Food Movement,” *Garden Warriors to Good Seeds*, Accessed April 1, 2018, <https://gardenwarriorsgoodseeds.com/>; On food justice, food sovereignty, and land justice see Williams and Holt-Giménez, *Land Justice*.

⁵⁹⁶ Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Catalina M. de Onís, “Rethinking Rhetorical Field Methods on a Precarious Planet,” *Communication Monographs* 28, no. 1 (2018), 103-122; Also see: Catalina M. de Onís and Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “The Ethics of Embodied Engagement: Ethnographies of Environmental Justice,” in *Handbook of Environmental Justice*, eds. Ryan Holifield, Jayajit Chakraborty, and Gordon Walker, (London: Routledge, 2018): 231-240; Gerard Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

⁵⁹⁷ Michael K. Middleton, Samantha Senda-Cook, & Danielle Endres, “Articulating Rhetorical Field Methods: Challenges and Tensions,” *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (2011): 386-406; Pezzullo and de Onís, “Rethinking Rhetorical Field Methods.”

bodies, and places wherein contestations over food justice take shape. These methodological engagements explore social movement as it manifests through processes of organizing in ways that are relational, emergent, inventive, and imaginative.

Considering that food justice can be mobilized by institutional actors as well as grassroots advocates, it is important to differentiate not only how advocates understand what they are organizing for, but also how they articulate their experiences of *injustice* so as to organize against them. Not all food justice organizing is the same. As Clive Barnett argues, for example, beginning with *justice* as a universal orientation or goal achievable within a democratic framework risks missing the complex particularities from which *injustice* is experienced, felt, and named.⁵⁹⁹ Instead of approaching food *justice* as a universal orientation to food systems reform or transformation, I take a situated and particular approach, one that attends “to the relations between the situated emergence of felt senses of injustice and the processes through which these claims are processed.”⁶⁰⁰ Organizing around abundance, still, requires a common understanding of the collective injustices that link coalitions together.

As advocates articulate their grievances, they engage in dialogic processes to contest and reclaim power. Their claims can be advanced in cooperative, collaborative, or even agonistic ways.⁶⁰¹ The intentional quality of organizing around abundance can manifest both in the process of advancing agonistic claims that critique power within the city as well as through building coalitions across communities. Therefore, I also will pay attention to the ways advocates articulate how food entangled injustices manifested in the first place in addition to

⁵⁹⁸ Phaedra C. Pezzullo, “Afterword: Decentering & Regenerating the Field,” in *Text + Field: Innovations in Rhetorical Methods*, eds. Sara McKinnon, Robert Asen, Karma R. Chávez, and Robert Glenn Howard (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2016): 177-188.

⁵⁹⁹ Barnett, “Towards a Geography of Injustice.”

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 118.

⁶⁰¹ Ganesh and Zoller, “Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change.”

how these advocates organize through place-based attachments to reimagine their relations with their environments and each other. Often, though not always, their narrations critically interrupt dominant food movement frames that position *food access* as the problem, rather than *access to power*.

As I engage in analysis of the complex spaces and practices through which organizers build relationships and organize for self-reliance, I am interested in both the public advocacy articulated by organizers and the place-based, the embodied ways food justice is nourished in contentious neighborhoods, and the organization of fusion politics and coalition building. In the pages that follow, I theorize organizing around abundance as an inherently relational practice, that manifests through building power *to* and *with* other ecologies and bodies that experience similar relations of difference or social, economic, and environmental violence.

Collective identification to organize *with* others, can take shape across groups or collectives, or be formed in relation to goals, values, or knowledges and can also manifest through a shared experience of oppression or violence.⁶⁰² For environmental advocacy, identification can serve to bring grassroots communities together through the collective experience of environmental harms and can assist with advancing alternative imaginaries of their communities.⁶⁰³ For example, many food and environmental justice organizers are concerned with reimagining what constitutes ‘healthy’ environments, which might include anything from clean water, air, land and food, to places where communities are socially, economically, and culturally thriving without fear or vulnerability.

⁶⁰² George Cheney, “The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 69, no. 2 (1983), 143-258; Also see Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*.

⁶⁰³ Phaedra C. Pezzullo, *Toxic Tourism*; Also see Tarla Rai Peterson, *Sharing the Earth: The Rhetoric of Sustainable Development*, (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

How communities frame their own grassroots advocacy affects and is affected by how they imagine themselves in relation to broader systems of power. Emerging organization studies literature on spatial organizing, for example, forwards that resistance emerges from space, but also moves through space and time, wherein solidarity can be established across locales as well.⁶⁰⁴ Although collectives can struggle to develop cohesive, shared frames for involvement across these varied spaces (for example, in different neighborhoods, cities, or transnational contexts), grassroots organizing can also be achieved through building relations of trust, respect, and reciprocity.⁶⁰⁵ As I trace emerging coalitions and their counter discourses across multiple sites over a six month period in Denver, I am able to begin to “track the movement of these places of protest into new maps of power” connecting seemingly disparate struggles as they unify over time.⁶⁰⁶

Food justice organizing, however, does not just attempt to *resist* the violence manifested through the food system, but actively works to offer shared alternative imaginations of food politics, place, and community. Within the context of the contentious space of a gentrifying city, food justice organizing can also assist to critically interrupt dominant discourses and nourish alternative food-space relations to assert presence and belonging in a place otherwise restructured to exclude. Creating alternative spaces of belonging can both resist dominant conceptions of space, and also provide a means of survival wherein coalitions and alliances can

⁶⁰⁴ For scholarship on spatial organizing, see for example: Maria Daskalaki, “Organizing Solidarity Initiatives: A Socio-Spatial Conceptualization of Resistance,” *Organization Studies* 38, no. 9 (2017): 1303-1325; Martin Kornberger and Stewart R. Clegg, “Bringing Space Back In: Organizing the Generative Building,” *Organization Studies* 25, no. 7 (2004): 1095-1114; David Courpasson, Françoise Dany, and Rick Delbridge, “Politics of Place: The Meaningfulness of Resisting Places,” *Human Relations* 70, no. 2 (2016): 237-259; Timon Beyes and Chris Steyaert, “Spacing Organization: Non-Representational Theory and Performing Organizational Space,” *Organization* 19, no. 1 (2011): 45-61.

⁶⁰⁵ See for example Bennett’s discussion of “relationship building” in on and offline organizing in W. Lance Bennett, “Social Movements Beyond Borders: Understanding Two Eras of Transnational Activism,” in *Transnational Protest & Global Activism*, eds. Donatella Della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 203-226.

⁶⁰⁶ Greene and Kuswa, “From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow,” 273.

be forged. Lisa A. Flores argues that carving out discursive spaces of belonging can be achieved through embracing a “rhetoric of difference” wherein “marginalized groups establish themselves different from stereotyped perceptions and different from dominant culture” to construct “self or group autonomy.”⁶⁰⁷ This *rhetoric of difference* recasts those who have been marginalized to the center and on their own terms. It also holds the potential of imagining an ethics born of disidentification—caring not just because we identify similarly, but based on other sources of affirmation.⁶⁰⁸

“Difference” as an umbrella term for studying the relationship between power and identity has received significant attention in critical organizational communication studies as well.⁶⁰⁹ This work has helped theorize power and privilege as they manifest through/in relation to meaningful identities—race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, age, and others—and in practice. Some have offered “relations of ‘difference’” to conceptualize the politics of intersectional or non/anti-normative identities, relations, and performances at work and in organizing.⁶¹⁰ Studies like these have helped, especially critical organizational communication scholars, see identity as an organizing principle in itself.⁶¹¹ While a review of “difference” across both rhetoric and organizational communication studies (and beyond) exceeds this chapter, we might bode well to think of coalitions or alliances as a kind of *relationship* of difference as well.

⁶⁰⁷ Flores, “Creating Discursive Space Through a Rhetoric of Difference.”

⁶⁰⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex”*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994); Also see: José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

⁶⁰⁹ For example, see: Karen L. Ashcraft and Brenda J. Allen, “The Racial Foundation of Organizational Communication,” *Communication Theory* 13, no. 1 (2003): 5-38; Karen L. Ashcraft, “Knowing Work Through the Communication of Difference: A Revised Agenda for Difference Studies,” in *Reframing Difference in Organizational Communication Studies: Research, Pedagogy, Practice*, ed. Dennis K. Mumby, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 3-29; Patricia S. Parker, “Difference and Organizing,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Method*, eds. Linda L. Putnam and Denis K. Mumby, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2014), 619-643; Dennis K. Mumby, *Reframing Difference in Organizational Communication Studies: Research, Pedagogy, Practice*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011).

⁶¹⁰ James McDonald, “Organizational Communication Meets Queer Theory: Theorizing Relations of ‘Difference’ Differently,” *Communication Theory* 25, no. 3 (2015): 310-329.

⁶¹¹ Karen L. Ashcraft, “Knowing Work Through the Communication of Difference.”

Relationships of difference, then, speaks to the ways alliances can manifest around divergent, but entangled, systems of oppression as they materialize in space, in the body, and across time. As Aimee Carillo Rowe argues, “relationships [can be] organized around the theme of intersectionality” requiring us to approach “alliances that work through multiple power lines.”⁶¹² Both the rhetoric of difference and the study of difference as an organizational practice can be mobilizing forces in the process of collective organizing as well. For example, Sarah Dempsey, Patricia Parker, and Kathleen Krone argue, following Henri Lefebvre, that collectives can organize “counter-spaces” that aid in the articulation of “temporary and partial milieus to communicate and enact oppositional politics.”⁶¹³ Thus, I also theorize organizing around abundance as a kind of relationship building of, across, and through difference.

Through alliances and in enclaves, relationships of difference can emerge to carve out space in/across contentious neighborhoods and locales.⁶¹⁴ So, while spaces of resistance can entail opposition, they can also be sites of invention and imagination, allowing alternative relations of place, home, and solidarity to emerge.⁶¹⁵ In my analysis that follows, I trace organizing as a process that is relational, emergent, inventive, and imaginative. Following Robin D. G. Kelley, it is “in the poetics of struggle and lived experience, in the utterances of ordinary folk, in the cultural products of social movements, in the reflections of activists, [that] we

⁶¹² Carillo Rowe, *Power Lines*, 165.

⁶¹³ Sarah E. Dempsey, Patricia S. Parker, and Kathleen J. Krone, “Navigating Socio-Spatial Difference, Constructing Counter-Space: Insights from Transnational Feminist Praxis,” *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication* 4, no. 3 (2011): 205.

⁶¹⁴ On counterpublic enclaves, see: Karma R. Chávez, “Counter-Public Enclaves and Understanding the Function of Rhetoric in Social Movement Coalition Building,” *Communication Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2011), 3; Chávez draws on Nancy Fraser’s description of the “dual character” of counterpublics that are both “spaces of withdrawal and regroupement” and “bases and training grounds for agitation activities directed towards wider publics” adopted from: Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992): 109-142.

⁶¹⁵ See Shiv Ganesh and Heather Zoller’s work on the interpersonal and relational politics of activism for example: Ganesh and Zoller, “Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change.”

discover the many different cognitive maps of the future, of a world not yet born.”⁶¹⁶ Although residents and advocates are fighting for some of the most basic needs for survival—a living wage, affordable housing, access to food, and clean air, water, and land—organizing around abundance compels us to conceptualize these demands in the transformative imaginations in which they are voices, materialized, and embodied. It is the places of resistance and the relationships through which imagination is cultivated and nurtured, that this chapter emphasizes the most.

These inventional, imaginative places of resistance can also assist in the development of a fusion politic, or an intersectional approach to the problem and solutions of inequity and injustice. The term “fusion politics,” discussed multiple times by community advocates in Denver, refers to the need for a “new language” to motivate contemporary solidarity movements.⁶¹⁷ The term, popularized by Reverend William Barber, President of the North Carolina Chapter of the NAACP and organizer of the Poor People’s Campaign, speaks to the need to develop “fusion coalitions” that address morality and values, racial justice and diversity, and income and economic justice.⁶¹⁸ Building on and expanding what an intersectional movement might look like, fusion politics assists in developing new relationships but also advocating for change in the structures, not symptoms, of colonial, racial, economic, and environmental violence. Given this context, I turn back to Denver and its local politics that fuse consideration of food and gentrification together and explore four sites wherein the relational practice of organizing around abundance was cultivated.

⁶¹⁶ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002): 10

⁶¹⁷ William J. Barber III, “Rev. Barber: These Times Require A New Language and A New Fusion Coalition,” *Think Progress*, January 30, 2017, <https://thinkprogress.org/rev-barber-these-times-require-a-new-language-and-a-new-fusion-coalition-c741b9eb1b47/>.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Rejecting Scarcity and Organizing Around Abundance

In a city wrought with rapid development, many residents living in neighborhoods vulnerable to gentrification in Denver have taken to organizing comprehensive and intersectional movements to build economic, environmental, and political power in the city. These residents and organizers fuse their commitment to resist gentrification in the city with entangled efforts that advance food and environmental justice. However, in their articulation of food justice, they include commitments to outcomes that exceed food as well, including the need for economic and housing justice, equitable development, criminal justice reform, solidarity economies, anti-poverty policy, racial justice, and decolonial praxis, among others. They have also organized to offer new political representation that centers and addresses the needs of those who have systematically been relegated to the margins of decision-making and governance. For this project, considering the complexity of grassroots advocacy within the context of developing neighborhoods—each of which contain their own unique history of cultural production, development, and environmental contamination—I will continuously tack in and out of discourses and practices articulated by advocates and the contexts in which they emerge.

My analysis of the ways communities organize for food justice begins with what has been referred to as the “moment in the movement”⁶¹⁹ wherein hundreds of residents and organizers coalesced to protest a sign celebrating gentrification erected by local coffee shop ink! Coffee in the Curtis Park neighborhood in Denver. Although the intersection of food and gentrification was already a felt sense amongst many working and living in developing spaces, naming its explicit tension was not a significant topic of public conversation. Of course many grassroots food justice organizers underscored the relationship between inequities in food access and colonial, racial,

⁶¹⁹ Tony Pigford, Personal communication, March 4, 2018.

and classed geographies; however, as a mobilizing focus area for struggle, these issues had not been rhetorically aligned on a public platform just yet.

In the months that followed the ink! controversy, the motivation to build social, economic, and political power in the gentrifying city garnered organized support, as residents and advocates working on everything from environmental justice to criminal justice reform banded together to create a visionary politic and solidarity driven network. Thus as I turn back to Denver's efforts to think at the intersection of food access issues and inequities in power, I highlight four ways in which organizing around abundance was cultivated: (1) by engaging in agonistic relations to declare that "gentrification is not a joke," (2) by cultivating coalitions to fuse issue-based movements together, (3) by remapping grassroots food justice in the city of Denver, and (4) by advancing visions of equity rooted in land and place based relations. Each effort highlights a different aspect of "organizing around abundance" while communities continuously critically interrupt dominant narratives of food "access," of the places in which they reside, and the communities and ecologies within which they are enmeshed.

"Gentrification is Not a Joke": Agonistic Relations

In November of 2017, the coffee shop ink! Coffee erected a double-sided sign outside their Five Points location in Denver, Colorado. One side read, "Happily Gentrifying the Neighborhood Since 2014," and the other, "Nothing Says Gentrification Like Being Able to Order a Cordato." Within days, the sign garnered public outrage, going viral on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, being reposted by hundreds. The public's visceral response to the sign, especially from those living in the gentrifying Five Points and Curtis Park neighborhoods, was quickly captured across national media from the *Washington Post* and the

New York Times, to local publications like *Westword*, *The Denver Post*, and *Eater Denver*.⁶²⁰

These publication were not just responding to the sign itself, they were responding to just how quickly residents seized on the sign as representative of the broader concerns pulsing through their neighborhoods. Within a few days, ink! Coffee tweeted an apology: “Hmmm. We clearly drank too much of our own product and lost sight of what makes our community great. We sincerely apologize for our street sign. Our (bad) joke was never meant to offend our vibrant and diverse community.”⁶²¹ Apologizing for their “(bad) joke” received hundreds of replies on Twitter, some claiming “This is the ‘I’m sorry you feel that way’ of corporate apologies” or asking, “What was the joke part? Enlighten all of us.”⁶²² Others avowed, “That nobody in your company recognized it for the terrible ‘joke’ it is speaks strongly to your actual lack of commitment to diversity and your neighborhood” and “remarkable that you are so disconnected with your local community.”⁶²³ Coupled with many additional posts on other social media platforms, it became apparent just how painful gentrification was for many residents in northeast Denver.

Although many took issue with the coffee shop, their sign, and the advertising company that produced it, most residents knew well that the sign was only a symptom of ongoing patterns that threaten cultural erasure in their neighborhoods. Long before, the contentious relationship

⁶²⁰ Avi Selk, “A Coffee Shop Celebrated Gentrification—and Is Now Profusely Penitent,” *Washington Post*, modified November 25, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/25/a-coffee-shop-celebrated-gentrification-and-is-now-profusely-apologizing/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9a4271eb463e; Julie Turkewitz, “Denver Café ‘Happily Gentrifying’? Neighbors Aren’t So Happy,” November 27, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/27/us/denver-cafe-gentrification.html>; Westword Staff, “Gentrification Is No Laughing Matter—Unless You’re at Ink! Coffee,” November 22, 2017, <http://www.westword.com/restaurants/ink-coffee-triggers-neighborhood-outrage-with-gentrification-joke-9719279>; Shannon M. Hoffman, “Demonstrators Protest ink! Coffee Sign Celebrating Gentrification,” *The Denver Post*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/11/25/ink-coffee-gentrification-protest/>; Josie Sexton, “Ink! Coffee Becoming Lightning Rod for Gentrification Scandal,” *Eater Denver*, November 27, 2017, <https://denver.eater.com/2017/11/27/16703660/denver-ink-coffee-protest-gentrification>.

⁶²¹ ink! Coffee, Twitter Post, November 22, 2017, <https://twitter.com/inkcoffee/status/933467097568567296>; ink! Coffee, Twitter Post, November 22, 2017, <https://twitter.com/inkcoffee/status/933466430736965632>.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Ibid.

between new developments and many communities of color living in the historic Five Points district and adjacent Globeville, Curtis Park, Elyria-Swansea, and Cole neighborhoods (among others like Montbello and Westwood) was already budding. The concerns of many of Denver's most disenfranchised, especially many of its Black, Brown, Native, working class, and poor communities, were well established. Their critiques included grievances over Denver's rapid development, unattainable housing prices, highway expansion, superfund sites, failing criminal justice system, criminalization of homelessness, and support for neoliberal restructuring. The sign, then, became a confirmation of the jovial disregard some new businesses and residents have for those in neighborhoods into which they are moving. What was referenced as harmless joke, soon became a galvanizing moment for the movement against gentrification in Denver.

On Saturday, November 25, 2017, just days after critiques of the sign circulated online, hundreds of protesters gathered in front of ink! Coffee to protest not only the establishment, but broader patterns of displacement in the surrounding neighborhoods. The protest was promoted through a Facebook event page created by a community organizer, educator, and Five Points resident Tay Anderson entitled "WE DON'T DRINK INK." Residents appeared to trust Anderson, a 19-year-old African American organizer, because he was already deeply connected within the community. Within 48 hours, almost 3,000 people were listed as "interested" in the action and over 600 were planning to attend. The event page erupted with hundreds of comments to discuss the sign, patterns of gentrification, and to leverage criticisms of both Mayor Michael Hancock and District 9's City Council Representative Albus Brooks. It was clear that although ink! Coffee and its viral sign presented an exigence for the protest, the scope, anger, and insecurities felt by residents exceeded both the coffee shop and its sign. The Facebook event, "WE DON'T DRINK INK," outlined the intent of the protest:

...we come together outside of the 30th and Larimer ink! Coffee location to #BoycottInkCoffee and let Denver know that we will not stand for tasteless jokes about gentrification in our communities. We are not laughing. Our housing crisis is not a joke. Our neighborhoods will not be bought, divided, and sold. We will not remain silent. Our collective voice is powerful. [...] Denver's gentrification and housing crises are hurting our communities, displacing us, increasing our rents, increasing homelessness, increasing police violence against people of color and homeless folks (add more!). Gentrification has hit the Five Points, Globeville and Elyria-Swansea, and Montbello neighborhoods hard and the City of Denver has ignored the needs of the community. Let's stand together on Saturday afternoon in unity with one another, and let ink! Coffee and the City of Denver know that we will not remain complicit. That we will continue to stand up to gentrification in our city.⁶²⁴

Although organizers called for a boycott of ink! Coffee and criticized the flippancy with which new establishments approach neighborhoods, they also leveraged a broader critique of displacement, placing blame on the City of Denver and their political representatives for encouraging unchecked development to support growth, tourism, and business. The triangulation between city initiated urban restructuring, lack of political concern for the dispossessed, and incoming business development that remains uninterested in cultural emersion within their neighborhoods, became focal points for activists and residents in Denver.

Hundreds showed up to ink! Coffee holding up signs that critically interrupted the infamous ink! Coffee sign reading "Mayor Hancock: Happily Gentrifying the Neighborhood Since 2011" and "Albus Brooks: Happily Gentrifying the Neighborhood Since 2015." Others reappropriated ink!'s tagline "Coffee Above All Else" to declare instead, "People Above All Else. Gentrification Is Not A Joke." Additional signs read: "My Community Is Not For Sale," "Gentrification = Urban Colonialism," "Stop White People Gentrifying Neighborhoods Since 1621," "Down With White Supremacy," "Gentrification Is Not Inevitable. It Is Institutional Racism," "This Is What Community Looks Like," and "Denver, Where Have You Gone?" Beyond them was a visible white tag on the side of the establishment labeling it "White Coffee."

⁶²⁴ WE DON'T DRINK INK, Facebook Event Page, Accessed April 15, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/events/149997805621501/>.

Their signs articulated the relationship between gentrification, institutional racism, and colonialism, envisioning gentrification as a form of settlement. While the settler colonial context of Colorado was not a focus at the protest, advocates attempted to articulate links between contemporary urban gentrification and legacies of racialized violence.

During the ink! Coffee protests, residents, organizers, and allies voiced their objections, arguing that new developments, including food and café businesses, often approach growth through an articulation of lack—narrating what is *not* available in a neighborhood in the hopes of filling that gap. This articulation of deficit assists in visualizing both places and communities as *lacking* as well, a theme that was highlighted by numerous speakers at the protest. To this point, Justine Sandoval, a community organizer and third generation Denverite, whose family had resided in Curtis Park for over a century, proclaimed at the protest:

There is this misconception here that businesses that have come into here have suddenly brought us a neighborhood. We've even heard it from developers like Ken Wolf, who have straight up said "We have created a community." First of all, this is Denver's first neighborhood [...] you didn't bring us a community, a community has been here! And prior to businesses that have shown up here now, there have been businesses here before. There have been lots of businesses down Larimer Street. [...] You did not bring us a community. We have a community here.⁶²⁵

Her incitement of Ken Wolf was in reference to statements the developer had made while promoting the new "gourmet market" in Curtis Park where he proclaimed, "Here we're creating a neighborhood. We're creating in this core not just bars and restaurants, but other services—clothing stores and hair salons."⁶²⁶ What Sandoval goes on to describe as the "savior complex" of development, is one where outside businesses develop what they perceive to be vacant space and in the process promise to "bring" community to those dwelling in the area. Affirming "You

⁶²⁵ Brother Jeff, "Ink Coffee Protest," Uploaded November 2017, <https://vimeo.com/244508004>.

⁶²⁶ Laura Shunk, "Ken Wolf and Jeff Osaka on Denver Central Market and the Rise of RiNo," *Westword*, November 2, 2016, <http://www.westword.com/restaurants/ken-wolf-and-jeff-osaka-on-denver-central-market-and-the-rise-of-rino-8460617>.

did not bring us a community. We have a community here,” suggests that the ink! protests were not just about a sign, but instead were an opportunity for residents to reassert their presence in a space where they are perceived to be simultaneously absent and lacking.

Mirroring these concerns, Lisa Calderon the Co-Chair of the Colorado Latino Forum argued that broader patterns of renaming areas of the city in support for redevelopment and tourism are acts of defacement. Calderon elaborates:

Defacing also comes in many different ways. When you rename our historic communities Highlands, SloHi, LoHi, RiNo—you are defacing our communities. Stop erasing our history! Stop erasing our people! We want real solutions with money behind them. If you want to know what the solutions are, ask us! Don't speak for us. We are the leaders of our community!⁶²⁷

Here, Calderon references the trend of developers and city planning visions to rename historic neighborhoods to attract development, specifically calling out abbreviations that redirect attention toward focal points (like Sloan Lake, Lower Highland, and River North), rather using long-time names of the neighborhoods used by residents. Despite public criticism over these acts of renaming/defacing in local publications, at city council meetings, and within communities themselves, the names continue to be used to signify a neighborhood to come if planning continued as those in office hope it will. Naming orients, both giving value to what is pointed out while simultaneously devaluing or deflecting attention away from what is not.⁶²⁸ In the words of Five Points resident Asia Dorsey: “It’s not just a name, it’s the erasure of what was there before.”⁶²⁹ The violence of renaming, therefore, has been visceral for residents who existed long before these often celebrated new food and business redevelopments.

⁶²⁷ Brother Jeff, “Ink Coffee Protest.”

⁶²⁸ For more on naming as a rhetorical act of environmental communication, see Pezzullo and Cox, 2017, especially p. 54.

⁶²⁹ Outside Contributor, “OPINION: “RiNo?” “Five Points?” Why A New Name Hurts in a Storied Neighborhood.”

As residents of Five Points and the surrounding neighborhoods gathered in front of Ink! Coffee on Larimer Street, not only were they engaging in agonistic public critique, but they were also engaging in cultural performances to assert their presence in a space that is continuously reimaged without them.⁶³⁰ It was also an opportunity for communities of color in particular, to challenge both developers and city officials, and breathe life into their neighborhoods while defying the erasure signified by “RiNo,” a name even Ink! Coffee uses to promote its location. The protests were a symbolic cultural performance, one that invited people of color and allied residents to show up and represent the interests of their own neighborhoods. Calderon continued, speaking to this point:

[This] is about symbolic representation for people of color to come out and show support [and name] what is going wrong in neighborhoods. We have a message for our political leaders: You have failed us when it comes to economic opportunity in this neighborhood. You have failed us! You have left us out! You have left us behind! There is a boarded up business across the street—do you think that it is going to go to a minority owned business owners? Folks of color? A youth center? We know it is going to developers. We are pushing our elected official to stop lining their pockets with development money and start listening to the people.⁶³¹

In her recognition of symbolic presence, Calderon articulates the intricate relationship between development, space, and whiteness. For her and other organizers, it is not that development is inherently negative, but that support for business development does not usually place power in the hands of communities of color residing in the areas imagined to be in need of redevelopment. “Listening to the people,” then, does not only mean that political representatives should engage communities more intentionally, but is also fundamentally about the need for folks of color to reclaim economic power through Black, Brown, and Indigenous owned businesses that benefit the long-term residents who have lived through patterns of dis- and re-development in the city.

⁶³⁰ On agonism, see Ganesh and Zoller, “Dialogue, Activism, and Democratic Social Change”; On cultural performances and presence, see Phaedra C. Pezzullo’s scholarship which draws on the work on Krik W. Fuoss, Gerard Hauser, and Dwight Conquergood in: Pezzullo, “Resisting National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.”

⁶³¹ Brother Jeff, “Ink Coffee Protest.”

Although these organizers had already been working towards political reforms to halt uneven development in their city, the ink! Coffee protest galvanized new interest in developing comprehensive, intersectional coalitions. At the protest, organizers revealed their plans for seizing on public support, including announcing their efforts to build a new political coalition across Denver to address the varied impacts of gentrification in their city. Community organizer Tay Anderson announced “I am proud to say that we as a community are going to be building a coalition of people all across Denver and the metro area to make sure we are putting a curb to gentrification within our entire city.”⁶³² This coalition, what would become Denver CAN (Community Action Network) within a short month, aimed to speak directly to the power structures that manifest displacement across the city. Lisa Calderon emphasized this point, arguing that the protests were not just about the sign, but were about reclaiming power in their neighborhoods:

We know fundamentally this is about power. And power is manifested through race. Power is manifested through class. When we are getting responses from elected officials who want to take this as an opportunity to self-promote, to have photo ops, to say that the solution is to have the owners to take cultural sensitivity classes... that is no solution. You are therefore part of the problem. And that is why we are organizing a political coalition, a progressive coalition, a progressive title wave where we are going to be running our own candidates because you have failed to listen to us.⁶³³

The announcement of a new political, progressive coalition energized participants in the protest, who welcomed the opportunity not only to resist redevelopment, but to advance a vision of futurity that centralized their voices, bodies, and histories in the area. This coalition offered a platform for neighborhoods across Denver to organize in unity, responding to the differently articulated, but nevertheless intimately entangled, processes of gentrification in their neighborhoods. Within two months, Denver CAN would host its first community organized

⁶³² Ibid.

⁶³³ Ibid.

Gentrification Summit in January of 2018, which I elaborate on later in this chapter. The protests (which continued in weeks past the initial November 25th action) quickly exceeded ink! Coffee and its controversial sign, providing new hope for organizing collectively in a gentrifying Denver.

How quickly hundreds of supporters showed up at ink! Coffee on November 25th tells us that gentrification is a widespread and quickly identifiable threat facing these communities. No other gentrification-specific protest up to that point had garnered as much physical presence and mediated circulation, although many were already actively organizing against the myriad forms of violence—from police brutality, to houselessness, to environmental injustice—faced by residents throughout the city. As Tony Pigford shared, it was a “moment in the movement” that was, for him, both triggering and maddening, but also signified the possibility for new community coalitions. After the initial visceral response, he added, “I became very quickly—and because of other community folks in Denver—I became optimistic about the moment in the movement. And at how quickly community activists and wonderful people were like, this isn’t about just a sign.”⁶³⁴ He continued that the moment was emotionally complicated, recognizing that movements against gentrification often spark from a place of anger and frustration, but can also couple with a visionary response of solidarity among those most at risk of displacement and cultural erasure.

Just over a week after the ink! Coffee protest, community activists were already considering how to develop coalitional praxis across neighborhoods and issues that intersect with gentrification in the city. Still moved by the energy from the weekend prior, activists in coalition with the City Park Friends and Neighbors (CPFN) environmental advocacy group gathered at

⁶³⁴ Tony Pigford, Personal communication, March 4, 2018.

City Park to “Reclaim Our City.”⁶³⁵ Community members residing in the Whittier and Park Hill neighborhoods gathered to memorialize 261 trees that were condemned for removal in the City Park Golf Course, a decision residents argued was to support an industrial drain needed for the I-70 highway expansion. At the action, community members hung a “Hancock Wall Of Shame” listing all campaign contributions paid to elected officials by developers (see Figure 6).

Additional long black posters highlighted the faces of historic community “heroes” juxtaposed next to the faces of elected officials labeled “liar,” “insincere,” and “gentrifier.” In addition to memorializing the condemned trees, speakers at the action discussed the intersections between the protest at ink! Coffee, the I-70 highway expansion, environmental contamination, involuntary displacement, and police violence, in addition for the need to reimagine political representation for and by the people living in gentrifying neighborhoods.

The gathering brought out a multi-racial and mixed-age crowd including environmentalists, nearby residents, and organizers. Speaker after speaker declared their love for their city, admitting the crossroads of development ahead of them. One African American community elder declared, “[They are] committed to controlling the land that we live on. The whole game is a sham.” Another older white man with the CPFN shared, “We come here with a sense of loss and mourning,” drawing a connection between involuntary displacement and the forced removal of the trees. Near a banner hung from the fence: “Kiss our trees and our history goodbye.” Adjacent were signs designating the park a construction zone: “DANGER: KEEP OUT.”

Their agonistic calls that shamed public officials and their corporate donors were more than acts of resistance; they were opening up space for envisioning their community and city

⁶³⁵ Reclaim Our City, Facebook Event Page, Accessed April 20, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1552992674783811/>.

otherwise. Gathering even after all plans for tree removal were approved and underway offered a space for collective mourning, sharing stories and family histories in the neighborhood, and urging grassroots political involvement. Nearby residents and attendees knew they had lost the battle in this case, but gathered as a form of recognition of the fights still to come. Through this process emerged a public recognition of possibility, which emphasized the strength and resilience of community in the face of economic and environmental harms.

Despite this sense of loss, the energy from the ink! protest a week prior still seemed to move participants at the action. Many speakers who were highlighted at the ink! protests joined in at City Park. With them they brought critique, yet also a sense of optimism for what was to come. Tony Pigford took to the microphone to reframe the conversation:

We need to think at the intersection of environmental racism and displacement. We are creating a fusion movement, a global title wave. There is so much talk of *scarcity*—resources, ideas, knowledge—that we don't have. We have the resources. We need to organize around *abundance*.

Given the prominence of justifications for development that reuse frames of scarcity or lack, Pigford is making a profound argument here, one that critically interrupts the dominant discourse used to advance outside intervention. For Pigford, organizing around abundance meant not looking primarily to outside organizations for economic development, charity, or to be a savior. “We have to be mobilized, engaged, and participatory. [Organize the movement] grounded in shared values,” he said, “*I am because we are.*”

This phrase, “I am because we are” resonated with many local advocates working at the intersection of social and environmental justice. Adapted from the African proverb voiced by John S. Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy*, “I am because we are” has gained some traction as a principle for organizing to emphasize interconnectedness, relationality, and

individual-societal relations that constitute community across multiple scales.⁶³⁶ Other local organizers shared that the phrase was common in organizing trainings to emphasize connection between people and the Earth and was used as a metaphor for collective action and sharing responsibility for recreating a more equitable world. Organizing around abundance, as a metaphor for emphasizing a relational politic of shared care, commitment to the Earth, and community required acknowledging communal assets, history, and collective knowledge. It was in public recognition of their community’s shared strengths that imagining a different city could be brought to fruition.



Figure 6. Tony Pigford speaks at City Park. He stands in front of the “Hancock Wall of Shame,” along with members of the Denver Community Action Network and City Park Friends and Neighbors.⁶³⁷

In addition to building political power, organizing around abundance meant also cultivating shared relationships, employing an ethic of care and self-reliance, and asserting a relational politics that affirms and organizes around its difference. The process of organizing

⁶³⁶ John S. Mtibi, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989).

⁶³⁷ Photo by Author, December 3, 2017.

intersectionally, or building “fusion movements,” was articulated as another way of organizing around abundance. Building from a shared experience of dispossession, participants were encouraged to nourish coalitions to address the many interlocking issues that affect their communities. Another speaker, adopting an ecological perspective reminded the crowd, “The answers will be found in nature [...] *We* have the ability to build a resilient city.” The collective *we*—positioned against those who choose to speak for the community yet have no sustained relationship to it—was a guiding theme at both actions. That same collective *we*, marked both its difference and its strength.

In the months to come, gentrification became a forced discussion, as advocates demanded that businesses, developers, and city officials respond to their concerns. However, advocates also denounced their representatives’ acknowledgements, and instead organized to build new forms of political representation and economic power on their own terms. These efforts to organize around abundance, reject narratives that invoke scarcity as exigence for development, and instead advance a vision of self-reliance and community building from the ground up.

“Connect Our Movements”: Building Fusion

Just two months after the initial ink! protest, the emergent networked, Denver CAN (Community Action Network) hosted their first summit at the historic Shorter Community AME Church, which they called the “Gentrification Summit: Our Communities Are Not For Sale.” On January 13, 2018, over four hundred people gathered in the church pews and break out rooms to unite their movements and discuss how to curb gentrification. The newly formed Denver CAN publicized the summit as a place for community building and strategizing, to spark a political revolution in the city. Their event invite page set the stage for the summit:

If Denver is to truly be a “world-class city” it can’t be just for those who can most afford it. With displacement accelerating at lightening speed due to policies promoted by politicians indebted to wealthy developers, or businesses that are more interested in remaking neighborhoods rather than integrating into them, we need urgent solutions that will not take years to implement. We will not wait another election cycle to take back our city. The time to resist is now! This citywide summit will bring together progressive organizers, emerging leaders, and impacted residents who have actively and creatively resisted gentrification in their communities, as well as those who want to learn strategies to take back their neighborhoods. Our goal of the summit is to connect our movements including affordable housing, justice reform, transportation alternatives, environmental sustainability, food justice, educational equity, health access, and renaming/removing racist signage/symbolic initiatives through the lens of gentrification.⁶³⁸

Although many community organizers were in attendance, the crowd also consisted of residents from the nearby communities, members of the Shorter AME Church, and handful of elected officials who wanted to listen to their community.⁶³⁹ The gathering was racially diverse, and included participants young and old, houseless and house secure. The imperative to “take back our city” was a call for a multi-issue, coalitional to unite the movements, whose efforts are being exacerbated by gentrification. For summit organizers and many attendees that spoke during discussion sessions, it was impossible to speak about issues like food justice and environmental sustainability without discussing affordable housing, infrastructure development and eminent domain, or criminal justice reform, among others. This is because those who are the most food insecure, or are living in contaminated spaces, are likely the ones who are also struggling with affordability issues, houselessness, or are being disproportionately targeted by the police. The summit then was a space for movements to unite in conversation, to connect their struggles and develop a collective imagination for an equitable and just city.

Shorter AME’s Reverend, Dr. Timothy E. Tyler, opened the summit, which was held two days before MLK Jr.’s birthday. “You’ve come to the right place, at the right time [...] We are

⁶³⁸ Denver CAN, “Gentrification Summit: Our Communities Are Not For Sale,” *Eventbrite*, Accessed April 15, 2018, <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/gentrification-summit-our-communities-are-not-for-sale-tickets-41299693495?aff=efbneb#>.

⁶³⁹ Notably, Mayor Michael Hancock nor City Council Representative Albus Brooks were in personal attendance.

doing the work of Dr. King today,” he declared.⁶⁴⁰ In addition to emphasizing the necessary work to be performed in that space, Reverend Dr. Tyler explained just why the location was so meaningful. Not only was Shorter AME located on the outskirts of the gentrifying Park Hill neighborhood, it was also a Denver’s first Black church, one that has endured multiple forms of violence, including when their historic Five Points location was burned down by the KKK in 1925.⁶⁴¹ Over the course of the church’s more than 150-year history, it had to relocate five times, because primarily white communities found it threatening. Reverend Dr. Tyler elaborated:

For many of those locations, every time we ended up in a community, there were white people in those communities who were threatened by a Black church coming into their neighborhood. And because they decided that they did not want certain people in their neighborhoods, the church was forced to sell that location to move to the next location [...] You are in an apropos place to discuss gentrification. [...] Today we’re going to discuss gentrification as a social justice issue. This church has made it its business—because we were always born out of the people—we’ve always made it our business that we are a church that must always maneuver and act on behalf of the people.⁶⁴²

For Reverend Dr. Tyler, opening the Gentrification Summit with the church’s history helped to tell a story of resilience, to make present the legacies of struggle it took maintain a safe space to belong in northeast Denver. These legacies of racial violence were critical, for Reverend Dr. Tyler, to the contemporary story of gentrification in the city. The temporal shift to emphasize the *past* in the *present* while at a summit that hoped to imagine an alternative *future* represented a stark contrast to city development discourses that refused to engage the past almost entirely. Historically, cultivating spaces of refuge, protection, and community were critical to the survival for communities of color, especially in northeast Denver. For the church, hosting the

⁶⁴⁰ Quotes are from fieldnotes and are supplemented by a video of parts of the summit, which can be found at: ProgressNow Colorado, “Gentrification Summit: Our Communities Are Not For Sale,” Facebook Live Video, January 13, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/ProgressNowColorado/videos/10156351813369162/>.

⁶⁴¹ The church was first built in 1868, before Colorado was declared a state. How the church community was fighting for its place to belong in the district became an emphasized theme when its pastor, Reverend, Dr. Timothy E. Tyler, spoke at public summits and at the Gentrification summit. Shorter Community AME Church, “Shorter AME Church History,” *Shorter Community AME Church*, Accessed April 13, 2018, <http://www.shorterame.org/>.

⁶⁴² ProgressNow Colorado, “Gentrification Summit: Our Communities Are Not For Sale.”

gentrification summit was aligned with their long-held business of acting in, for, and on behalf of community especially in times of collective trauma. In this case, the trauma was felt by their constituencies as many were experiencing displacement and rapid cultural, economic, and environmental change.

Situated both in a designated food “desert” and within the throes of a gentrifying neighborhood, Shorter AME was a critical location that celebrated the past, present, and future of Denver’s Black community. To this point, Reverend Dr. Tyler elaborated:

Gentrification is a social justice issue. Whenever you have an organized plan to destroy historical communities and to drive out ordinary people in the name of progress—that’s a social justice issue! And there are many things that go into that mixture: how you police a community, how you build in that community, how you decide to attract new people into that community. [We are here to have a] discussion about how we live constructively and humanely with each other without trying to destroy each others’ past, present, or future.⁶⁴³

This call for a constructive discussion, however, would not ignore the plans for development supported by businesses, developers, and especially city officials. Rather Reverend Dr. Tyler and other speakers like Lisa Calderon, Tay Anderson, and Candi CdeBaca called out Mayor Michael Hancock for his role in supporting and being funded by developers. They also critiqued how the Mayor attempts to engage the public on the issue, by setting up Facebook “discussion” forums (or a panel of people talking on Facebook Live) in which he and others controlled the narrative safe from public dissent.⁶⁴⁴

After introducing the space, Tay Anderson, the young African American educator, student, and organizer (also a member of Shorter AME) that spearheaded the ink! protest, took to the microphone. Anderson celebrated the power of “we the people” to hold politicians

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁴ Many of Mayor Michael Hancock’s Facebook Live videos can be found on his Facebook page: Mayor Michael B. Hancock, “All Videos,” *Facebook*, last modified May 1, 2018: https://www.facebook.com/pg/5280mayor/videos/?ref=page_internal.

accountable. He welcomed the handful of elected officials who were present as well as those running for office, but reminded them who had the power in the room that day:

We are breaking our chains today to say that we won't stand up for people who don't represent us. We are breaking our chains and saying we won't let gentrification push us out. We are breaking our chains and saying, "This is our community. This is what we look like. This is *who* elects the people in the City and County of Denver and the other metropolitan areas." You showed up. It's going to be a great day. But to my politicians, you got your three seconds of fame today, now it's time for you to open up them ears and listen. And trust me, we will vote.⁶⁴⁵

Repositioning the power in the hands of the people was a central theme at the summit, as speakers and residents asserted their authority over their own experiences. Lisa Calderon also spoke at the summit, arguing, "We named ourselves Denver CAN, the Community Action Network, because we were tired of being told what we can't do. Today is about action. It is about [determining] *our* priorities, rather than being told what our priorities are *supposed* to be."⁶⁴⁶

This assertion of power refused scarcity as a model for organizing. Instead it positions the people as having the power to narrate their own lives, including how they determine both what the problems are and what solutions should be advanced. Underscoring what Denver *CAN* do, asserts the need to organize around abundance positioning those most marginalized at the center.

After the main speeches addressed to participants sitting in the congregation concluded, we were encouraged to participate in four break out sessions to discuss central themes to combat gentrification in the city: (1) promoting business social responsibility, (2) developing affordable and accessible opportunities, (3) systemic accountability and holding politicians accountable through direct democracy, and (4) cultural preservation and celebrating resistance. Each break out session was a chance to explore the problems faced by residents, but also imagine solutions, in addition to connecting and being in dialogue with others. The latter half of the summit

⁶⁴⁵ ProgressNow Colorado, "Gentrification Summit: Our Communities Are Not For Sale."

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

contained concurrent sessions and each participant could attend two. I chose to attend the sessions on business social responsibility as well as developing affordable and accessible opportunities, both of which promised to address accessibility to capital, power, land access, economic opportunity, and community development projects like inclusionary housing and zoning ordinances, banks, and land trusts to “create our own power base for wealth building” because “those who control the land have the power.”⁶⁴⁷

Creating and controlling a “power base” was critical in all participatory process at the summit that day. Participants not only were encouraged to voice their fears and frustrations with gentrification, but also to discuss, share, and imagine solutions for a more equitable city. Participants who benefitted from race or class privilege, for example, were challenged to confront their complicity and contribution to gentrification through difficult, even agonistic conversations.⁶⁴⁸ Creating a power base not only required a shift in economic and cultural values, including power distribution in the city, but also necessitated deep conversations around internalized oppression as it manifests through business practices, organizational structures, and representation and decision-making. Organizing around abundance, in this case, provided an opening for imagining new forms of collective support and power, but also required critical discussions about power and privilege for alliances against gentrification to form.

The break out sessions encouraged discussion and dialogue, as chairs were positioned into large circles around the room to encourage participants to talk with each other, draw on posters, and listen to others in their community (see Figure 7). In the first session on socially responsible business practices, local business owners who employ cooperative models, horizontal decision-making, and/or engage in profit sharing to provide employees with living

⁶⁴⁷ Quotes were taken from the Gentrification Summit paper program.

⁶⁴⁸ In one breakout session I attended, for example, a heated discussion developed between a male African American elder in the community and a middle-aged white woman over the role of unions and cooperatives.

wages, shared their successes and struggles. As community members discussed their needs, businesses affirmed that an organization could still profit by engaging in equitable and ethical practices that orient the establishment within the culture of the community it promises to serve. Moreover, residents made an explicit call for more minority owned businesses as well as the need to “hire from and within the community.” “Gentrification displaces businesses as well,” Kayvan Khalatbari, mayoral candidate and local business owner, reminded, “What we don’t need though, is those that put private money over the most marginalized.”⁶⁴⁹ Given the exigence of the summit, residents and organizers listed numerous businesses that engage in community-centered practices to encourage our patronage, including many businesses owned by people of color across Denver. Three main needs were underscored: (1) economic and community ownership, (2) representation and leadership from and by the community, and (3) active, conscious outreach and engagement with the community. All of which were described as ongoing processes, not something that can be satisfied by one community meeting or open house. These called seemed to energize participants. As one woman in my break out session affirmed, “We have to organize with the most marginalized in mind.”⁶⁵⁰

The second session on developing accessible and affordable opportunities, continued themes from the social responsibility session, but grounded them in an emphasis on housing and land access, community decision-making, and environmental justice. During this session, local organizers from 9 to 5 Colorado, Denver Homeless Out Loud, the GES (Globeville and Elyria-Swansea) Coalition for Health and Housing Justice, Colorado Homes for All, and many others shared their work. They discussed campaigns and projects that spanned to support issues like the Colorado Homeless Bill of Rights, affordable housing through community land trusts, shared

⁶⁴⁹ Fieldnotes, January 13, 2018.

⁶⁵⁰ Fieldnotes, January 13, 2018.

equity programs, and accessible public transportation infrastructure, but also discussed the need to fight for health equity and against highway expansion, toxic land, air, food, and water. For these organizers, the summit offered an opportunity to inspire involvement in projects that already engage at the intersection of economic, environmental, and social justice and helped to cultivate a vision for a collective future with them in mind.



Figure 7. Denver Community Action Network’s Gentrification Summit. Photographer, Dave Russell captioned the photo on Facebook, which read, “No band-aids at the Summit. Real conversation. I was struck by the lady in the left of the frame speaking her truth. And her power as everyone was in rapt attention.”⁶⁵¹

Importantly, not all participants agreed on ways forward. While it was clear that communal support was needed to transform the city in favor of people over profit, not all participants shared the same access to power or experience with displacement. Some nearby

⁶⁵¹ Photo used with permission by Dave Russell, Facebook, January 15, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10213105831613139&set=pcb.10213105839093326&type=3&theater>.

residents shared that they were uncomfortable with attendees who traveled from neighboring cities like Aurora, Thornton, and Englewood, distrust that itself marks the intimacy of how dispossession is experienced as a highly localized phenomenon. The stated outcomes of the summit were to share in community and to develop a collective vision for participatory justice and power redistribution. Yet, in practice, the process of navigating who is a part of “community” became an implicit concern, even amongst participants with largely similar ideological orientations toward uneven development. Where fissures arose, possibilities for fusion across difference were generated.

Despite these impurities, Denver CAN’s Gentrification Summit manifested an engaged and participatory enclave that encouraged dialogue about shared problems, but equipped residents to collectively share and imagine a future in their city. Their call was to “connect our movements” and organize through a shared and mutual struggle in the process of building fusion politics together.⁶⁵² These spaces wherein intersectional dialogue is encouraged are rare though, as Robin D. G. Kelly reminds us: “It is a testament to the legacies of oppression that opposition is so frequently contain, or that efforts to find ‘free spaces’ for articulating or even realizing our dreams are so rare or marginalized.”⁶⁵³ The space, or enclave in Chávez’s terms, was also a space for invention and imagination—to dream up new worlds while organizing in the present.⁶⁵⁴ Collectively, participants refused the narratives of scarcity that so often position their communities as the recipients of decisions made by outsiders. Rather, they were provided an opportunity to organize around abundance, underscoring the collective capacity of those most marginalized to reclaim their voices, experiences, and histories to inspire a future where they are

⁶⁵² Fieldnotes, January 13, 2018.

⁶⁵³ Kelly, *Freedom Dreams*, 10.

⁶⁵⁴ Chávez, “Counter-Public Enclaves and Understanding the Function of Rhetoric in Social Movement Coalition Building.”

at the center. “We are the experts of our own experiences,” one organizer declared, “We have to build community capacity [to organize for ourselves].”⁶⁵⁵

Reflecting on the experience in a subsequent interview, organizer Candi CdeBaca saw the event as an “opportunity to leverage that incredible people power [from the ink! protest] into work that we *have been* doing with food systems, housing systems, with all of these larger structural things. We put on the summit as an effort to link multiple groups who have been working on these issues.”⁶⁵⁶ Representing one of the many networks that link Denver CAN together, she described that, “We have essentially committed to holding leaders accountable, holding ourselves accountable for innovating and stabilizing people in our community.”⁶⁵⁷ This accountability was established through reciprocity, trust, and in the relations formed with others.

Although food justice was a part of these residents’ vision for an equitable city, the need for coalition building with issues that entangle and span beyond food took considerable focus. In months after, Denver CAN continued to imagine and organize a public platform based on what was shared at the Gentrification Summit, which they would reveal at the local Forward Food Summit’s Food and Gentrification conference. Before elaborating on the Forward Food Summit, though, I turn to the work of Denver’s food justice organizers who organize around abundance outside of formal summits, to elaborate on the relationship of difference that link them together.

“Relationships are Everything”: Remapping the City

After following Denver CAN’s work for six months, I still hoped to encounter more about their vision for organizing around abundance in favor of food justice. I was familiar with multiple grassroots food justice efforts in Denver as well, but wanted to know more about how

⁶⁵⁵ Fieldnotes, January 13, 2018.

⁶⁵⁶ Candi CdeBaca, Interview with author, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

these projects navigate, as well as potentially contribute to, gentrification in their neighborhoods. Given that each neighborhood has a unique, though shared, experience of food and environmental (in)justice, I was uncertain how food justice networks were organizing together in the midst of rapid change. Of course advocates, farmers, and residents were living through these changes, having to critically consider how they engage in greening projects, build relationships within communities, and advocate for a vision for food justice rooted in and for those most marginalized in the food system. To my excitement, however, an opportunity to learn more about these connections at the intersection of food justice and gentrification would present itself, a result of the mindful labor of the CU Eco-Social Justice Team. It was evident that folks along the Front Range were curious to learn more about this nexus as well.

On April 21, 2018, the University of Colorado Boulder's Environmental Center's Eco Social Justice Team hosted a tour entitled, "Just Seeds Tour: Food Justice Projects in a Gentrifying Denver." The full day tour offered a chance for students, in particular underrepresented students, to visit multiple different food justice projects around Denver, including gardens, greenhouses, and a pay-what-you-can café, while connecting with advocates, growers, and organizers. The tour stopped at six different locations in Denver, all in variously contested neighborhoods: Seeds of Power Unity Farm in the Cole neighborhood, Growasis Community Garden in Whittier, Metro Caring's Hunger Prevention Center and Beverly Grant's greenhouse in City Park West, the Dahlia Campus for Health and Wellbeing in Park Hill, pay-what-you-can SAME Café along the busy Colfax Street, and Sister Gardens in Aria. Given time and the weather (an early spring snow joined us that day), the tour could not trace all the projects they had wanted, but continued to invoke these spaces throughout the day as a way to make them present on the tour. For example, important sites like the Blair-Caldwell African American

Research Library (which contains an informatively rich history on Five Points) and the Woodbine Ecology Center (an indigenous ecological and educational center in Sedalia, Colorado) were continuously referenced as critical sites of learning, though we wouldn't have time to visit them. However, the tour provided a space to re-map the many food justice projects in and around Denver through the embodied experience of being present, to witness the possibilities and changes in each neighborhood.⁶⁵⁸

Through voicing, presence, and witnessing, orally tracing these spaces of nourishment and resistance was an act of countermapping, or an attempt to “render visible the landscapes, lives, and sites of resistance and dispossession elided in capitalist, colonial, and liberal topographies.”⁶⁵⁹ Countermapping in critical cartography and geography has taken place through data visualization and map-making,⁶⁶⁰ but it can also take shape through grounded practice and storytelling, as it did during our tour that day. Though the length allotted here does not allow me to fully capture each space, history, or conversation we had on that day, I focus on the moments along the tour where relationships—between people, food, and their lived environments—were emphasized as an organizing principle for anti-racist and decolonial food justice.

As we gathered in two vans, our organizer Michelle Gabrielloff-Parish, reminded us to stay present and build connections with participants with whom we were sharing the tour. Beyond her role as the Energy and Climate Justice Manager at CU Boulder's Environmental Center, Gabrielloff-Parish has rooted ties to environmental and food justice projects in and around Denver and has worked with a many different organizations like the Woodbine Ecology

⁶⁵⁸ See Phaedra C. Pezzullo's *Toxic Tourism* on embodiment, witnessing, and presence on toxic tours.

⁶⁵⁹ Maharawal and McElroy, “The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project,” 381; Tiece, *Urban Renewal and Resistance*.

⁶⁶⁰ On countermapping, see for example: Mei-Po Kwan, “Feminist Visualization: Re-Envisioning GIS as a Method in Feminist Geographic Research,” *Association of American Geographers* 92, no. 4 (2002): 645-661; Voyles, *Wastanding*; Joe Bryan and Denis Wood, *Weaponizing Maps: Indigenous Peoples and Counterinsurgency in the Americas*, (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2015).

Center, helping her cultivate deep relationships with many of whom we were set to visit. I emphasize rootedness here because one of the more prominent themes throughout the tour was the importance of relationships. Food justice, for many of the farmers and organizers we met that day, was rooted in relationships rather than being a universal or academic concept that anyone might adopt. It was in the process of nourishing relationships that a regenerative food justice movement could not only be experienced, but actively cultivated throughout the day.

Once together, we headed to Denver for our first stop, the Seeds of Power Unity Farm, a permaculture garden run by Beverly Grant, an African American woman, owner and operator of Mo' Betta Green MarketPlace, and figure in Denver's food justice community. Along our travels from Boulder to Denver, we discussed our relationships to these spaces, some familiar, others less so. Though, as we told stories that rewrote our collective encounters with the environment we found ourselves within, common sites and smells became even more estranged. As soon as we merged from I-25 onto I-70, Gabrieloff-Parish warned us of what we would encounter: "Recognize the smell as we head through this area. People know this strip of land for the smell."⁶⁶¹ Immediately the overwhelming stench, an unidentifiable combination seeped into our vehicle. "This area is often known as one of the most contaminated areas in the country," she tells us with caution.⁶⁶² We pass by the Purina pet food processing plant which towers over I-70 and can see the Suncor oil refinery nearby, both still in operation. Heading through the I-70 corridor into the Globeville neighborhood, we pass by signs disputably re-designating the area as "RiNo." I've traveled through this area many times before, often on my way to research sites, food policy council meetings, protests, and for other get-togethers with friends and colleagues. I've heard this tale of environmental contamination before, but somehow the smell hits me

⁶⁶¹ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁶² Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

harder this time. As I remember the stories, which rarely make headlines, of flairs bursting from the oil refineries,⁶⁶³ I begin to feel disappointment that maybe even I too have become accustomed to the smell.

Situating Globeville's history helps to contextualize the latent social and environmental injustice faced by many of its residents. Since 1889, Globeville has been home to immigrant workers earning minuscule wages and suffering the health consequences of toxic labor practices. Eastern European immigrants came to the then unincorporated territory in the late 1880s to work on the railroads and in other industrial manufacturing and processing plants.⁶⁶⁴ The distinctive stench has a long history in the area—from the smelting plants that processed lead and cadmium to the meatpacking industries that boiled and incinerated animal parts—leaving residents suffering from cancers, carcinogenic poisoning, asthma, and other physiological symptoms like headaches and sore throats.⁶⁶⁵ As we travel through the area, I'm reminded of a report released just two days before, on the over 8.5 tons of cyanide gas pouring into northeast Denver each year from the Suncor oil refinery.⁶⁶⁶ Since the town was eventually annexed for tax revenue as a part of Denver in 1902, Globeville's corridor to the city has been a space sought after for its economic production, but is a place where environmental and social injustices collide.⁶⁶⁷

Between the late 1940s and into the 1960s, highway expansion ripped through northeast Denver, forced communities from their homes through eminent domain, and uprooted businesses and grocers in the process.⁶⁶⁸ By this time the areas, including south adjacent neighborhood Five

⁶⁶³ I'm especially indebted to my friend and colleague, Isaac Javier Rivera, for sharing stories of the flairs that both he and his family continue to witness.

⁶⁶⁴ Natasha Gardner, "Welcome to Globeville," *5280*, November 2014, <http://www.5280.com/globeville/>.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶⁶ Bruce Finley, "Suncor Oil Refinery Spews 8.5 Tons A Year of Cyanide Gas Over Low-Income North Denver Neighborhoods, State Records Show," *Denver Post*, April 20, 2018,

<https://www.denverpost.com/2018/04/19/suncor-energy-cyanide-gas-poor-denver-neighborhoods/>.

⁶⁶⁷ Gardner, "Welcome to Globeville."

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Points, had long been home to African American and Latinx communities. As Denver's risky and low-paying industrial economy grew, the areas surrounding were redlined through the Federal Housing Administration's National Housing Act of 1934, forcing low income, immigrant, and communities of color to settle in particular regions in the city because they were impacted by racist loan lending practices.⁶⁶⁹ Despite the outward growing Denver, these areas are rarely discussed as containers of multiple superfund sites. Or if they do receive attention, rarely is it acknowledged that residents' grassroots power was at the forefront of the designation of such sites. Instead, in recent years, the neighborhoods in and surrounding the area have become a developing playground for the construction of new condominiums, restaurants, and other food and drink amenities which can mask the toxicity and history of degradation.

As I've emphasized before, the entire northeast region of Denver has become highly contested in the city's gentrification story. Each neighborhood, block, and corner all host their own history—many stories of such places would be discussed throughout the tour. As we travelled together through the area at the heart of Denver's gentrification fight, Gabrieloff-Parish reminds us that we are on Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Ute territory. "This area has seen legacies of settlement, but these are often left out of the gentrification conversation," she tells us.⁶⁷⁰ Echoing critiques of contemporary anti-gentrification movements as well as the dominant food movement narrative that begins with industrialization, rather than colonization,⁶⁷¹ Gabrieloff-Parish makes

⁶⁶⁹ Many communities of color came to the area before this time period, however, to work industrial and railroad jobs for often having to endure very low wages. Though, redlining still drastically reshaped settlement in the city in the early-to-mid 1930s and beyond. See: Robert K. Nelson, LaDale Winling, Richard Marciano, Nathan Connolly, et al., "Mapping Inequality," in *American Panorama*, ed. Robert K. Nelson and Edward L. Ayers, Accessed April 15, 2018, <https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=11/39.7105/-104.9690&opacity=0.8&sort=23&city=denver-co>.

⁶⁷⁰ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁷¹ See for example LaDonna Redmond's critique wherein she argues, "The ninetieth-century narrative used by the food movement, for all the good that it has done, has ignored history. To change the trajectory of exploitation that emerges in communities of color and tribal nations, it must acknowledge that this country is founded on contested land. This contested land is rooted in genocide." See: Redmond, "This Land Is Contested," xvi-xvii.

present the ongoing violence that still saturates these spaces. Together we are reminded that the process of designating “desirable” and “undesirable” areas has a long history, rooted in colonization and settlement.⁶⁷² The tour would continuously center the settler colonial context of the land we traversed that day in many ways forcing us to engage the presence of our own settler identities. As we traveled down the corridor, I notice Globeville’s new contested Natural Grocers to our right.

We meet Beverly Grant at our first stop, the Seeds of Power Unity Farm, a formerly unused private lot next to a home in the Cole neighborhood in an area historically designated as a food “desert.” Grant invites us into her space, a permaculture garden, too see the budding heirloom plants, chickens, and an ant farm that has existed on the lot for over a century (which she protects as if they are members of the neighborhood community). Elaborating on her mission through her farmers market Mo’ Betta Green MarketPlace, she tells us that not only did she want to provide food in a food “desert” or what she called a food “swamp,”⁶⁷³ but she wanted to build a space to grow and cook food, play music, and encourage movement. For her, integration into the community was central, emphasizing that she supports food literacy, education, environmental stewardship, and preparing food for self-reliance from and for the neighborhoods in which she works. Relying on the support of friendships she had cultivated throughout her life in Colorado, she emphasized, “relationships are everything.”⁶⁷⁴ We’d be reminded of this value throughout the day.

Our next stop was the Growasis Community Garden, located in the Whittier neighborhood. Before we arrived, a seasoned local, and Iranian gardener Faatima joined us. Both

⁶⁷² Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁷³ See for example a video on her work entitled Game Changer here: The Perennial Plate, “Game Changer,” *Vimeo*, 2017, <https://vimeo.com/183472536>.

⁶⁷⁴ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

Grant and Gabriellof-Parish sang her praises; it was clear they'd known each other for some time. At Growasis we were informed of the partnerships the garden had cultivated with Denver Urban Gardens and the Dr. Justina Ford STEM Institute, named after the first female African American physician in Denver. As we learned more about the garden's use of the Three Sisters—an indigenous practice of growing the companion species of squash, corn, and beans together—the need to cultivate rooted relations both with community partners and the earth was centralized. Growasis lacks the containment of a fence, which Grant noted, became a point of discussion (see Figure 8). She laughed when recalling that some community partners were concerned that food would be stolen from the property, to which she responded, “If someone is stealing any food, it probably means they are hungry and they need it. That's great.”⁶⁷⁵ For Grant, the garden was not just a vessel for economic production, but a space for sharing available resources cultivated by community. Though, of course she recognized the constraints of free food sharing as a solution to economic inequity.

⁶⁷⁵ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.



Figure 8. Beverly Grant Speaks at Growasis Community Garden.⁶⁷⁶

Our third stop was a greenhouse connected to the hunger relief program and food bank Metro Caring. Grant was allowed to start using their greenhouse because the food bank had come to rely mostly on donated residual commodities from grocery stores. Although food redistribution through pantries—like Food Bank of the Rockies run by the conglomerate anti-hunger organization Feeding America—are not the ideal solutions to food inequity, Grant was open to aligning missions with the organization so “more work can get done.”⁶⁷⁷ The critique she and others shared, recognized that waste redistribution could not halt overproduction, nor would it address the very real income and housing inequities faced by houseless and/or food insecure communities. Despite these criticisms, there was a possibility for her to utilize the space in a way that could ensure more reciprocity with the community for which she was providing food access.

⁶⁷⁶ Photo by Author, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁷⁷ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

After we visited the greenhouse, we made our way to the Dahlia Campus for Health and Wellbeing, located in the Park Hill neighborhood of northeast Denver. When we arrived, we gathered into a teaching kitchen in a large building adjacent to an aquaponics garden. Inside the building was a community center containing psychological services, dental care, yoga, and other facilities. We gathered in the kitchen and to our surprise, learned of the underlying history of the space in which we had gathered. Built on top of a landfill, Grant informed us about the Dahlia Square Shopping Center, one of the largest African American owned and run centers in the area that had thrived there from the 1950s to the 1970s. She tells us of the health services once available in the center, in addition to the grocery stores, library, skating rink and more. Eventually the grocer would shut down and the rest of the center would be demolished, including through a multi-year project to remove the asbestos found in the soil. “That is the story they don’t tell you. This food desert was created,” she asserts, “You would never know it was even here because there is no trace of it.”⁶⁷⁸ Grant was adamant that food deserts were not natural.

As she narrated the creation of the Park Hill food desert, Grant tells us that the original plans for the Dahlia Campus redevelopment were for it to be a mental health facility before she and others started to attend planning meetings with the site developers and one woman in particular. “I really started to assert myself up in here,” she tells us. “Why do you want to come up here? Why do you think we need that?” she asked one of the directors working on the project. Both Grant and Faatima expressed the deep mistrust many communities have towards both local government and nonprofits, as many promise to provide solutions to problems they don’t fully understand. “I hit her with the history [of this space],” Grant remarked, which gave way to amenities and leadership on the project that were more directly in line with community needs.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷⁸ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁷⁹ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

“It’s important that it not be all white faces in our spaces,” another organizer chimed in.⁶⁸⁰ Again, we were reminded that “relationships are everything,” especially when advancing grassroots projects from, for, and by the most disenfranchised residents in these neighborhoods.⁶⁸¹ Despite these concerns, it was emphasized that there is still potential to “work with each other and stand in the gaps for each other” as well.

It was time for lunch on the tour and we were taken to SAME Café on the busy Colfax artery running east and west through the city. SAME, which stands for So All May Eat, is modeled as a pay-what-you-can café, wherein if you cannot donate towards your meal, you may work a 30-minute shift in exchange for a plate. As we gathered and learned more about the café’s model, we also debriefed about our shared experience on the tour so far. The café both supports the community and is supported by the community, as ninety percent of its food is purchased from local farms; the other ten percent is donated. The unassuming location does not boast about its presence, but offers a space for shared meals and community conversation. “We are a community—we treat each other with respect and contribute to the success of the SAME Café either with our time or our money” reads a sign above the counter.⁶⁸² During our meal, we had the opportunity to hear from café volunteers who explained that many regulars prefer the pay-what-you-can model or the work exchange because it “restores dignity” and offers a healthier and warm meal that they might not find at food banks or other hunger relief organizations.⁶⁸³ After lunch, we parted ways with Faatima and Grant and made our way to the last stop.

⁶⁸⁰ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁸¹ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁸² Referenced from photograph taken by Author, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁸³ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

Our final stop took us to the northwest Denver neighborhood of Aria, towing the line near “unincorporated” Adams County.⁶⁸⁴ We gathered at Sister Gardens, a multiple acre farm and greenhouse across the way from Regis University. There we met Fatuma Emmad, the Director of Urban Farms with Groundwork Denver. Emmad showed us the multiple growing spaces of the farm and told us about the many ways they support the community and stay in business. Many different hands sustain the garden, including those of the students at Regis University. Emmad told us that they do still sell organic produce at “bourgie” markets, but use profits to support their pay-what-you-can-market and free grocery on Mondays.⁶⁸⁵ She explained that they wanted to make one of the garden’s farm stands accessible for folks who bike or walk, but realized later that biking and walking were shared “hipster values” that complicated which folks were engaging with the stand the most. However, they continue to accept EBT and try to support those who are most food insecure in their work. In these acknowledgements was the awareness that the spatial politics of food are often complicated, entangling similar yet precarious class and racial dynamics. Nevertheless, growing, sharing, and selling food were all necessary practices needed to keep the farm open and flourishing, even if they contained unexpected impurities.

Though Sister Gardens was located in a low-access area, Emmad leveraged a strong critique of the food “desert” designation. “It’s kind of a hurtful term, you know? [...] The term is an institutional term,” she argued.⁶⁸⁶ Elaborating on its utility for academics and other institutional efforts, Emmad continued that terms like “desert” do nothing to put the power back into the hands of the people. “It’s not a food desert, it’s food apartheid,” she asserted,⁶⁸⁷ a term which she found to be more useful for its emphasis on systems of power and privilege that

⁶⁸⁴ Fatuma Emmad critiqued the term “unincorporated” noting that this kind of designation usually means that residents must provide tax support for the county but may not reap the benefits of these dollars.

⁶⁸⁵ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁸⁶ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁸⁷ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

design food inequity, rather than naturalize the problem. Rearticulating a food desert through the metaphor of “food apartheid” demonstrates how residents living in these areas believe language choices matter to food policy, as well as the necessity to develop alternative ways of imagining food problems and solutions. For activists like Emmad, for example, “food apartheid” is a term that underscores the long, intertwined history of racism, hierarchy, spatial segregation, and food politics. “We have to speak the long way about problems” she tells us, which includes the need to describe how food (in)justices came to be and traversed across history.⁶⁸⁸ Later in the tour, she would remind us of the colonial history of agricultural production, linking food inequity to conquest, control, settlement, and slavery. As we gathered to conclude the tour, she stressed to us that “food tells a lot of stories” including global stories, migration stories, labor stories, and stories of violence. We left the tour reminded of where we began—entangled between the possibilities and limits of food justice by and for the people, cultivated on stolen land, bound up with complex economies of charity and justice, but nevertheless rooted in relationships of and between those at the margins of the food system.

As we headed back to Boulder, we shared stories of the most striking moments, with some participants feeling energized and others feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of the problems they had encountered that day. As we mapped food justice projects in a gentrifying Denver, we were also deconstructing systems of power and rewriting the potential of building both anti-racist and decolonial food justice. As Mishuana Goeman argues, “(re)mapping, as a powerful discursive discourse with material groundings, [can assist in] the unsettling of imperial and colonial geographies.”⁶⁸⁹ Overwhelmingly participants in the tour shared how empowering it was to witness food justice work led and organized by primarily women of color along the Front

⁶⁸⁸ Fieldnotes, April 21, 2018.

⁶⁸⁹ Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 3.

Range. Even as they were made more aware of the layered violence embedded in the land and circulating through these neighborhoods, participants recognized the labor it takes to organize for food justice. The organizers we met that day still found ways to assert power—in their ability to historicize food system problems, build relationships rooted in their difference, and to advance a vision of potentiality, of abundance, in these contested spaces. Not only did the abundance materialize in the food they grew and shared with others, but was cultivated in their relationships and in their ability to organize around their collective experiences of injustice, to ultimately envision different worlds together.

“Reconnect with Place and Land”: Remembering Our Roots

On the following Saturday, March 28, 2018, the Food Rescue Network, Groundwork Denver, and other food-centered organizations hosted the 5th annual Forward Food Summit (FFS), an “un-conference” of food justice advocates, educators, and residents to discuss the intersection of food and gentrification.⁶⁹⁰ I’d participated in the FFS before and found it to be a fruitful event to hear from other organizers on topics related to food justice.⁶⁹¹ This year, the summit was held at Columbine Elementary, and as I looked around at the speakers and participants, I couldn’t help but feel as if the summit was a culmination of the project I had set out to explore. Many of the food justice practitioners, including Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council members, organizers with Denver CAN, and the food justice advocates we had met along the tour the week prior were all in attendance. Throughout the day, the summit made a concerted effort to centralize the voices of Native organizers and advocates of color working on the frontlines of food, economic, environmental, and social injustice in the city of Denver.

⁶⁹⁰ Colorado Food Rescue Network, “Forward Food Summit,” *Forward Food Summit*, Accessed April 2018, <https://forwardfoodsummit.org/>.

⁶⁹¹ Past themes at the FFS were on the intersection of race and food insecurity, food and economy, and food and traditional knowledges.

Reverend Dr. Timothy E. Tyler, who was designated as the MC of the event that day, opened again with the story of Shorter Community AME Church and reminded us that we were building on visions advanced at the Gentrification Summit five months prior. He admitted that putting food and gentrification together in the same conversation “sounds strange” but emphasized that gentrification impacts many different struggles including those for education, criminal justice reform, environmental and health equity, and the need for food access.⁶⁹² “We are living in a crisis” he asserted, “and it’s the leaders and city officials who are [helping to] cause this mess.”⁶⁹³ Throughout the day we would hear from educators like Regis University professor and food justice advocate Dr. Damien Thompson on the entangled politics of land access, settlement, racism, and the need for a movement to reclaim the “right to the city.”⁶⁹⁴ Denver CAN organizers were also in attendance to reveal their new affordable housing and equity platform to build political power in the city. Other organizers of color working on food sharing and gardening, as well as owner and operators of cafes, coffee shops, and other food businesses, and those working at the intersection of city planning and food access both in Denver and in Colorado Springs, all shared their experiences. Together speakers highlighted their projects, shared their struggles, and advanced a vision, as one speaker put it, of organizing “rooted in love.”⁶⁹⁵

Multiple speakers also underscored the temporal dimensions of equity. We heard from farmers like Mickki Langston (Potawatomi) who reminded participants that displacement is not only contemporary, but is fundamentally an “American story” of settlement.⁶⁹⁶ “It is the *plan*. It

⁶⁹² Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁹³ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁹⁴ In Dr. Thompson’s talk, he referenced David Harvey in this call. Harvey’s advancement of the concept of the “right to the city” can be accessed here, among other works: Harvey, “The Right to the City.”

⁶⁹⁵ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁹⁶ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

is what was *intended*,” she emphasized.⁶⁹⁷ Making present the past was a central topic of conversation since, as Langston articulated, “the first strategy of oppression is forgetting.”⁶⁹⁸ Even as Denver CAN organizer Lisa Calderon recalled legacies of containment and racial injustices since the late 1880s in northeast Denver, she underscored that dispossession started long before this era, stressing “We know we are standing on Indigenous peoples’ land.”⁶⁹⁹ Though organizers did not just situate settlement in the past, but articulated its continued force, reasserting itself through multiple racial projects over time. Understanding the entangled relationship between the past, present, and future was critical to organizing coalitions on that day. These temporal threads could be heard in calls to “go back to our roots,” “not repeat history,” “learn from our successes and failures,” “reconnect with place and land,” and in the reminder that “all of [these problems] were invented by humans, so we have the opportunity to invent something different.”⁷⁰⁰

This “something different” would require collective imagination on part of both the organizers and participants. Throughout the day we were encouraged to ask questions, engage in discussion, eat together, map our neighborhoods through a participatory mapping project, and join in on the emergent networks building that day. The need for imagination, even the use of the term itself, was threaded through multiple talks that day as organizers stressed the need for intersectional grassroots mobilization and advocacy. Beyond coalitions based on their shared experience of oppression, advocates also articulated the need for “unconventional allies” while “still centering those most marginalized.”⁷⁰¹ The movement folks desired to build aimed at transformation, not reform. During a question and answer portion of Denver CAN’s talk, Lisa

⁶⁹⁷ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁹⁸ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁶⁹⁹ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁷⁰⁰ Quotes taken throughout the day from fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

⁷⁰¹ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

Calderon clarified their vision of fusion: “What we are proposing is a revolution, and it’s not new. Connecting all of us across communities in common struggles is what we saw was missing [...] We’re just saying that in order for this revolution to be successful, we’re not just tweaking things, we need to completely break the table and recreate it.”⁷⁰² Given the momentum of organizing that had taken place over the last six months, organizers felt the energy was present to galvanize life affirming and strategically positioned, grassroots fusion movements.

The trouble with the food “access” framework also became a point of conversation, as many speakers discussed the complexities of food projects that are charitable but not transformative—ones that deploy paternalistic health “choice” discourses, are not culturally appropriate, or ones that may wish for equity, but are not ultimately led by (or even employ) Black, Brown, Indigenous, working class, and poor people in their neighborhoods. Some speakers found value in the food “desert” discourse, others critically interrupted the term by using food “apartheid” instead.⁷⁰³ Some organizers critiqued racial capitalism, but many also recognized the need for building economic opportunities in their communities. These tensions may seem contradictory; however, they are indicative of the kinds of complex conversations organizers are willing to have and hold together in their process of building alliances rooted in their shared struggle for health equity, economic self-reliance, community-centered and controlled planning, access to land and clean resources, housing justice, and more ethical ecological relationships.

Although the gathering was a critical space for coalition building, the romance dominantly associated with solidarity was nuanced by organizers who shared just how much

⁷⁰² Allan Tellis, “Forward Food Summit Asks Denverites to Consider the Connections Between Food and Gentrification,” *Denverite*, April 30, 2018, <https://www.denverite.com/forward-food-summit-asks-denverites-consider-connections-food-gentrification-51204/>.

⁷⁰³ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

hard work fusing intersectional and allied movements would be. It would take not only outward facing goals and political mobilization, but a commitment to unpacking the deep ways in which we all (differently) recreate and practice oppressive behaviors in our neighborhoods, cities, and broader communities. As Mickki Langston shared, we might all collectively be inspired to organize for justice outward toward our goal; however, she believed that it was in the internal process of confronting privilege, our assumptions, and our flaws, that “it all tends to break down.”⁷⁰⁴ Although organizing around abundance is possible, it would also take a rooted effort to deconstruct, unlearn, and continuously confront the ways in which these systems of oppression are (differently) rooted in the soil, in our bodies, in our relationships with others, and in the assumptions we make about food entangled problems.

As I left, I revisited Grant’s reminder that “relationships are everything.” I began thinking about the ways the summit challenged all of us to nourish better relations with others, with ourselves, and with the land. The relationships required political and community mobilization, but more than that, they required self-love through a willingness to confront dominant assumptions made about the economically, socially, and food insecure. Relationships also take a willingness to listen, to be challenged, and to relinquish hegemonic assumptions rooted in frames of scarcity—of what a community lacks. Rather, to organize from a position of abundance means centering all the ways those marginalized in food systems often already know the solutions to the problems they face, including why food abundance alone won’t solve the systemic injustices manifested through institutional, economic, racial, and colonial politics. No doubt, organizing around abundance, nourishing relationships, building strategic coalitions, and fusing movements takes work. Ask any farmer if one can take for granted our relationship with the land. Food justice work is simultaneously internal, relational, and structural. However, as

⁷⁰⁴ Fieldnotes, April 28, 2018.

many organizers at the FFS attested, organizing around abundance can help to thread the past into the present, to organize around shared experiences of violence, in order to imagine and manifest just futures collectively.

Conclusion

Throughout the examples in this chapter of emergent grassroots efforts to cultivate relationships at the nexus of food justice and gentrification, organizers articulate the possibilities for sharing struggles for equity and justice that included, but also exceeded food. Drawing on the galvanizing “moment in the movement,” residents and organizers alike transformed a moment of pain and frustration into an opportunity to organize around abundance, rather than scarcity. Instead of organizing from a place of lack, on which dominant food movement narratives rely, organizers found momentum in mobilizing around what they do have: embodied knowledge of their environments and communities, communal resources and a shared commitment to equity, relationships they have cultivated over the course of their lifetimes, and the power to advance a vision of justice rooted in, for, and by the communities that are so consistently relegated to the margins. By asserting their ability to both define their own problems and imagine their own solutions, residents and organizers were able to encourage a shared desire to not only retool food systems, but transform them entirely.

This particular conjuncture, wherein the crisis of food gentrification assisted in galvanizing new forms of collective power in the city, is one wherein the possibility for different relationships could form. As long-time community members and food justice advocates see their home and work environments change, it was critical for them to articulate a vision of the future that was intimately connected to the past as well. In the time I conducted research in this area, the crisis of gentrification in northeast Denver and other vulnerable neighborhoods was thrust

into a public conversation in a significant way. Though gentrification was already on the mind of many residents vulnerable to cultural erasure and displacement, new spaces for public contention, conversation, and relational politics were cultivated rapidly across the city. What this chapter highlights especially is the need to conceptualize food politics and gentrification as relational—they are felt among residents as interconnected phenomena and debated in public spaces as interdependent. Further, when critically interrupted by community members who wish to cultivate a different city that posits the most marginalized at the center, this relationship is foregrounded repeatedly. Voicing concerns and building community not only occur through dialogic processes like summits and protests, but they also are deeply embodied, practiced, and developed through and in relationships with others and the environments in which they live, work, play, and eat. A practice-based orientation to food justice and anti-gentrification advocacy tells us about how subjects come into being through collective action, as they cultivate a regenerative politics with the Earth and with each other.

Though it must be underscored that although imagining alternative worlds might seem romantic, organizers knew just how complex and difficult it would be to bring these dreams to fruition. Even those living in designated food “deserts” or are experiencing food apartheid knew how complicated organizing around these issues can be. As I caught up with Candi Cdebaca after the Forward Food Summit, she reflected, “We live in a very complicated space because everyone wants to be healthy. Not everyone can afford to be healthy. But even those who are trying to be healthy in our community are still deprived of equal access—even when it’s not just grocery stores, even when we’re talking about clean land.” When I asked her what healthy food access would look like in her neighborhood, she responded:

I feel like you have to address those larger systemic issues first. You have to make sure people are not living in toxic land. No matter how healthy you’re eating or what Whole

Foods is up the street, you're still living in a toxic environment. We have to address those things first. And then we can talk about how we place value on food.⁷⁰⁵

She explained, for example, that growing food is often not an option for some living in superfund designated sites, but also requires time, energy, and capital to achieve. Although growing food is one way to cultivate self-reliance, it was important not to idealize gardening as the key to achieving equity. Those “larger systemic issues” entangle ones ability to participate in the food system simply through their own choice and will. Both residents and organizers understand the constraints of food justice advocacy, as they experience road-blocks and efforts to defeat their shared political aspirations daily. In many ways manifesting these more just worlds requires a concerted, organized, and developed effort, even a commitment to fight to garner political power. However, as organizers articulated, it would be through their ardent labor and dedication to community that these desires might materialize into achievable results.

In the months during and after my fieldwork, many of the organizers I spoke with would decide to run for local elected office, including for the Mayor of Denver and for multiple Denver City Council positions. Not only were they committed to organizing from within their neighborhoods, collectively they were able to envision coalitions across the city in the hopes of reclaiming seats from those who, they believed, refuse to recognize their lived experiences and historical roots. As I began to follow some of these campaigns, many of the same themes I witnessed throughout my fieldwork manifested in their organizing processes. Candidates organized in ways that were rooted in and for those most marginalized in gentrifying neighborhoods. They relied on long-standing relationships to nourish coalitions and build fusion across difference (both of identity and issues). They advanced intersectional advocacy and made connections between history and contemporary injustices. They emphasized ecological relations

⁷⁰⁵ Personal communication, Candi CdeBaca, April 28, 2018.

and articulated visions for food justice. Additionally, they were committed to reclaiming space and asserting their right to belong in neighborhoods that increasingly are pushing them out.

The relational politics of organizing around abundance is both about building political power, but also about reclaiming embodied knowledges and asserting the right to belong. Across the four main events discussed in this chapter, organizers centralized how their own bodies are connected to legacies of violence and to others in their communities, as well as to the land, air, and water that nourish them. For them, food justice requires critically interrupting calls for increasing food access to the food insecure by mobilizing around abundance, which includes supporting communities that are intimately connected to each other, the food they consume, and their relations with the earth. The movement draws on a range of rhetorical modes to nurture more ethical relations, including: agonistic exchanges through public protests, fostering fusion and coalitions at community summits, remapping the city through food justice tours, and remembering history through teach-ins.

While some activists still may find value in the food desert metaphor to help call attention to the uneven distribution of food amenities when addressing hegemonic institutions, their calls for addressing unequal food access exceed a reliance on metaphors of scarcity. For example, while they may use the food desert metaphor to describe lack of healthy food availability, they also emphasize a need to understand the historical development of such inequity. Whether calling attention to the settler colonial history of Denver, racist housing policy and classist development practices, or acknowledging lack of grocery stores, potent and safe soil, or other environmental harms, there is an explicit attempt to denaturalize the food desert in favor of a more deeply rooted understanding of both history and power. For many of these community members, food “desert” might be a tactical figure of speech, but it can still lack the

contextualization needed for just interventions to take shape. Moreover, as advocates like Fatuma Emmed acknowledge, the more the term gains institutional traction, the less it offers grassroots community members adequate rhetorical power to comprehensively account for their experiences of injustice.

Community members living and working in contentious neighborhoods understand that food justice, in practice, requires an acknowledgement of the deeply interconnected systems of power that entangle the food system and urban development. Organizing around abundance, as a metaphor for recentering their voices, experiences, and efforts to achieve equity in their communities, disarticulates from a discourse of scarcity that positions them as passive recipients of policy and public decision-making about their own lives. Rather, *abundance* recognizes their capacity to voice their storied histories—whether articulated as experiences of violence, community, survival and regeneration. Organizing around abundance articulates a relational politics of organizing for power *with* and power *to*. This type of intervention involves reclaiming voice, building equitable relationships, and recreating a society wherein the marginalized are able to organize for a future of their own invention.

Organizing is a relational process, rooted in connecting shared experiences of injustice and nourished through historically constituted place-based attachments. Through my analysis of how residents and organizers engage in inventional and imaginative politics together, we can gain a better appreciation for the need to build fusion movements that exceeds food as well. It is through organizing around abundance that residents and advocates promise to build intersectional fusion movements, align their missions and strategies, and ultimately advance a vision of an equitable, just community within their neighborhoods and beyond.

CONCLUSION

Remapping Power and Planting New Seeds of Abundance

*As we know, you lose diversity and it will truly end up a desert because you've never taken the time to nourish that seed, diversify that seed, and you kept doing the same thing over and over again. And you know what happens when you continue to grow in the same soil? It gets depleted of nutrients and becomes barren. That's what's going to happen to the food movement if we don't think about planting seeds of diversity, of new young blood, into the food system.*⁷⁰⁶

–Karen Washington, Rise and Root Farm

*We're trying to point to the actual root causes of why we are in the conditions that we are in... and highlight the idea that we want to do more than just 'access' to food. We want to be able to control our food systems again.*⁷⁰⁷

–Dara Cooper, National Black Food and Justice Alliance

Seeds are both fragile and resilient. From a single seed, a plant that might nourish many may grow. Seeds represent futurity, possibility, and potentiality. As any farmer knows, we cannot plant seeds, expecting a healthy crop, if the soil in which those seeds will sprout is contaminated. A plant requires light from the sun and water from rain or humans, but it also depends on nutrients from the ecosystem in which it is growing, including soil—if that soil is toxic, the plant, and the body that consumes it, will become more toxic too. As prolific food justice activist Karen Washington teaches us, we cannot “continue to grow in the same soil” with monoculture seeds or food movement either, in a home depleted of nutrients born of years of misuse and deliberate divestment.⁷⁰⁸ To address what Dara Cooper, National Organizer of the

⁷⁰⁶ Anna Brones, “Food Apartheid: The Root of the Problem with America’s Grocery Stores,” *The Guardian*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/may/15/food-apartheid-food-deserts-racism-inequality-america-karen-washington-interview>.

⁷⁰⁷ J. Ama Mantey, “Beyond Access: What the Movement for Black Lives’ Policy Says About Food,” *Civil Eats*, November 1, 2016, <http://civileats.com/2016/11/01/beyond-access-what-the-movement-for-black-lives-policy-says-about-food/>.

⁷⁰⁸ These toxics might be the systems that manifest injustice; or they might be the solutions offered by a monoculture food movement that attends to the symptoms of these crises, rather than their causes. On food movement as “monoculture” see: Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice*, 1.

National Black Food and Justice Alliance, calls “the actual root causes,” perhaps it is time that we relinquish attachments to food *access* as the exigence for intervention, and instead rethink the ecologies of power that manifest such injustices in the first place.

Throughout this dissertation, I’ve explored how and by whom foodscapes are rhetorically constituted and critically interrupted through competing articulations of *access*. I’ve been particularly critical of food access discourses that rely on frames of deficit—the “food desert,” the “nutritional wasteland,” the “unhealthy body,” the “blighted neighborhood,” or the “empty community.” These deficit discourses, of scarcity and lack, saturate contemporary food access talk and policy. They are the guiding rationalizations for interventions that promise more of the same, without uprooting the conditions that manifest unequal power in the food system and beyond. I’ve also been critical of discourses of futurity that lack an account of historical conditions of oppression and industrialization—the “world class” city, “sensational” food cultures, abundant food amenities—all of which might uphold food privilege for the food secure. Deficit discourses not only mark lack, but they provide promises for future investments, many of which do not benefit those disenfranchised the most and are critiqued by long-time residents as part of a larger, disempowering pattern of gentrification.

As a food movement key term, I have argued that *access* is both powerful and under-theorized. It is “easy to define and comprehend, but difficult to create.”⁷⁰⁹ In addition, it indexes “‘bundles’ and ‘webs’ of power”⁷¹⁰ to resources, people, and the places they dwell. Access is not just about providing food to the food insecure, but sets the stage to assert the presence of

⁷⁰⁹ Williamson, “Access,” *Keywords in Disability Studies*, 15.

⁷¹⁰ Ribot and Peluso, “A Theory of Access,” 154

outsiders, that may come in contact with these people and places as well.⁷¹¹ Whether it be “parachuting”⁷¹² a Natural Grocers into a “desert” perceived to be empty, or promising to “bring”⁷¹³ a community to a neighborhood framed as vacant, contact can be both well-intentioned and violent. The trouble with the term “access” and its assumption of scarcity is that it often upholds the power dynamics between the food privileged and the food insecure. While the term provides a way of making sense of uneven food *distribution* and perhaps even *consumption*, its circulation has constrained our ability to enact transformative change to intervene into its cultural *production* and related *representations*.⁷¹⁴ In my troubling of the term “access,” I wish not to deny the dire need for food access itself, but want to rethink ways we might more adequately account for food inequity and organize against it.

The conjuncture in which food gentrification has emerged in developing cities, is at once relational, spatial, temporal, cultural, and economic. It is also rhetorical—it is upheld and fuelled by a discourse of promise that aims to fulfil the desire for green spaces and lush food environments. This promise is not always shared, however, or at least it is framed drastically differently depending on who voices it, when, and why. In bringing together scholarship in communication (environmental, rhetorical, cultural, and organizational), critical human geography, and studies of economic and racial dispossession, this project sought to offer an interdisciplinary account of food politics and gentrification. For communication scholars, I have offered a way fuse food justice into our environmental justice commitments to crisis and care. I

⁷¹¹ In the introduction to this dissertation, I noted three works that reference “access” in every day talk: power, contact, and presence. These terms, I noted, give me pause as I consider the power dynamics at play in food access interventions. See OED Online, 2017 on “access”.

⁷¹² I borrow “parachuting” from Candi CdeBaca, who I interviewed on April 28, 2018.

⁷¹³ I borrow Justine Sandoval’s use of “bring” here, from the ink! coffee protest on November 25, 2017.

⁷¹⁴ Identifying which facets of the circuit of culture a particular politics might be intervening in or not, as Pezzullo has argued, is part of the due diligence of studying impure politics. It is more than claiming no choice is perfect; it also is an argument to become more specific in identifying what exactly is being resisted or not. Pezzullo, “Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts.”

have offered an account of the ways food politics can exceed food and traverse spatio-temporal relations that challenge static engagements with scale and territory. By providing a rhetorical cartography of how different practitioners and advocates engage food politics, I move us from a consideration of the places of protest to better consider the ways contestations emerge within and over space. This work aims to provide one way of advancing a food systems perspective in environmental communication.⁷¹⁵

In the hopes of extending food studies scholarship, I also engage the relational politics of food justice and anti-gentrification advocacy to help account for practices of organizing. A practice-based account of food justice, for example, helps contextualize advocacy as a subject-making and community-building project that occurs within neighborhoods, street corners, summits, public forums, and beyond. Throughout the project, I also have aimed to underscore the ways food justice itself is not a fixed ideological position, but one that is constituted and contested through varying articulatory practices that link and delink cultural values with food and its politics. Attention to articulatory practices offers a way to denaturalize frozen metaphors in hegemonic discourses, as well as to become more attuned to counterhegemonic interventions. As we continue to deepen our engagements with food justice, we might be better served to consider its rhetorical dynamics as they are worked out in national campaigns, municipal public policy, in grassroots advocacy, or in other such places in need of our scholarly inquiry.

For cultural geographers and interdisciplinary food studies scholars, I also have offered an account of the rhetoricity of foodscapes and other contested spaces in gentrifying cities. My engagement with the hermeneutics of metaphor provides a way of denaturalizing taken-for-granted spatial designations such as the use of the food “desert” metaphor in public policy and in corporate, non-profit, and grassroots interventions. While there is still more work to be done to

⁷¹⁵ Gordon and Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty.”

expand on the contingent forces of green gentrification, environmental decision-making, and health equity within all of our fields, it has been my hope that in these efforts, we may forge more fruitful interdisciplinary conversations to bring a more just food politic to fruition. The politics of naming and marking spaces and people remains infused with power relations and, therefore, is worthy of further attention.

As I turn back to threads drawn throughout this project, I aim to provide a rhetorical cartography of where we have traveled thus far—from the spatio-temporal dimensions of national food access maps, to the eco-desires that guide food policy, to the grassroots voices that critically interrupt dominant food access deficit discourses. It is my hope that in tracing where we have been and are in the present, we might establish a more compelling and just vision of where we might go. In this process, I am informed by the intersectional alliances emerging to reimagine a food justice movement rooted in, for, and by those who have been cast to the margins of our food system. Thus, as I trace these lines of inquiry, “track[ing] the movement of these places,” it is my hope that we might be able to draw “new maps of power” that attend to, and resist, food gentrification through alternative imaginations of what food justice can and should be.⁷¹⁶

Revisiting “Access” and Maps of Power

In this dissertation, I’ve traced both the discourse of food “access” and the cultural politics in which it is articulated across scales—the national, the municipal, and the grassroots. I’ve also argued that, following cultural geographers, these scales are not distinct or separate, but are relational; they overlap and inform each other.⁷¹⁷ Simultaneously, economic, cultural, political, and embodied scales also traverse them. The intimate patchwork of our food system is

⁷¹⁶ Green and Kuswa, “From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow,” 273.

⁷¹⁷ Newstead, Reid, and Sparke, “The Cultural Geography of Scale.”

complex in a way that requires relational thinking. This might include how space is relationally constituted, or the ways identity is constituted relationally through space. As Doreen Massey argues, “space is made through interactions at all levels” and contrary to much theorizing, there is no static division between space, place, and identity.⁷¹⁸ Nevertheless I’ve offered three contexts—including modalities to help understand the texture of food system decision-making—in which we might better understand the conjuncture of food access at work.⁷¹⁹

From the most mundane places like a map, a policy document, or a street corner, we can witness the complexity of the intertwined politics of food access and food gentrification. Food access is a problem that is hard to debate, but informs drastically divergent definitions, analyses, and interventions. Through mixed-methods, including textual analysis of maps and public policy documents, as well as field methods through participant observation and interviews, I’ve traced a rhetorical cartography of how food access is articulated in the nation, city, and in grassroots advocacy through one city specifically.

In mapping the conjuncture in which food gentrification emerges, I’ve traced access along the way, as a guiding key term that articulates with divergent sets of values and cultural, economic, and ecological concerns. By tracing articulations of access, or the linking and delinking practices that inform our ideologies in and of the food system, it has been my hope to provide ways to troubling and theorizing the term differently.⁷²⁰ What a cultural studies perspective offers is a way to suspend judgment of what access means inherently and instead to theorize how it is *used*. This includes paying attention to how related, tangential terms that articulate with food access—like the food desert metaphor, sustainability, and greening, among

⁷¹⁸ Doreen Massey, “Geographies of Responsibility,” *Geografiska Annaler* 86, no. 1 (2004): 5.

⁷¹⁹ On contexts and their modalities, see: Grossberg, *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*, 31; Grossberg notes three “logics of contextualization” that give texture to contexts: the milieu, territory, and epoch.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid*; On articulation, see: Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

others—are used as well.⁷²¹ What Andrew Dobson describes as the overused and “contested terms” in environmental discourse gain cultural power through their traction, circulation, use, and interpretation, which yield (divergent) understandings.⁷²² Much like terms such as “sustainability,” “resiliency,” “justice,” and “inclusivity,” there is promise in the demand of metaphors, but they can also become so saturated in their use that they become hollow in practice. Rather than debate reclassification of a term like “access,” we might learn more if we interrogate the multiple conditions in which it is voiced, negotiated, and contested.

I’ve also put rhetorical cartography to use, as a both an object and method of study, to assist in my tracing of the conjunctural crisis that is food gentrification.⁷²³ Maintaining a critical focus on foodscapes helps account for the ways space is “utilized, deployed, and (re)articulated” by dynamics of power from colonization to uneven development.⁷²⁴ These rearticulations operate through contingency. Rhetorical cartography allows me to map how they manifest in dominant discourses as well as how they are contested and struggled against. I’ve also argued that in order to engage what Ron Greene and Kevin Kuswa call the “rhetorical politics of place,” we must also be attentive to the ways place itself becomes the very thing that is contested.⁷²⁵ Following Raka Shome, space is not just metaphoric or a “backdrop against which the real stuff of history and politics is enacted,” but it is constituted and contested by/through cultural politics.⁷²⁶ Thus, while I mobilize rhetorical cartography as a method, I also maintain a focus on how foodscapes

⁷²¹ As Richard Sheehan argues of metaphor, it through their hermeneutic function that language is put to *use*. Sheehan, “Metaphor as Hermeneutic.”

⁷²² Dobson, “Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability,” 86.

⁷²³ On rhetorical cartography as object and method, see: Hayes, *Violent Subjects and Rhetorical Cartography in the Age of the Terror Wars*.

⁷²⁴ Shome, “Space Matters,” 41.

⁷²⁵ Green and Kuswa, “From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow,” 273.

⁷²⁶ Shome, “Space Matters,” 39.

are both imagined and become a materiality through which communication of power is enacted.⁷²⁷

In the first analysis chapter, I brought us to a relatively mundane, yet incredibly power document: the USDA Food Access Research Atlas. The atlas promises to help policy makers, corporations, non-profits, and individuals see food deserts through digital mapping. Food deserts are coded into space through two main sets of criteria: rates of poverty and proximity to a grocery store. The map is relatively dull and descriptive, but it is also quite a powerful logistical media that functions to organize food system infrastructures and investments.⁷²⁸ The map literally guides decision making about where development should occur. It is taken up by corporations such as grocers, to guide their investments in regions that are perceived to be scarce—it “organiz[es] and orient[s], to arrange people and property” in ways that articulate spaces of deficit to be filled with access.⁷²⁹ It puts the “food desert” metaphor to use. It itemizes, accounts, and designated where a desert is and assists in drawing the lines that bring the desert’s iconicity into place.⁷³⁰ Much like the “wasteland” metaphor, “deserts” are articulated as what Traci Brynne Voyles calls either “sacred or profane”⁷³¹—sites of scarcity but also sites to be saved. Metaphors, in the case of the USDA Food Access Research Atlas, are put to use in such a way that they both imaginatively and materially territorializespace. They mark neighborhoods as empty, cities as underdevelopment, and entire regions as removed from the food system. In their construction of scarcity, they provide what Sara Safransky calls a new frontier for

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*.

⁷²⁹ Ibid, 37.

⁷³⁰ Here I use Denis Wood’s use of iconicity (specifically an iconic *code*). He gives the example of a line that resembles the street being an iconic code that designated where the street is and how it moves.

⁷³¹ Voyles, *Wastlanding*, 17.

development.⁷³² Rhetorical documents such as this have historically and continue to mobilize food policies and practices around a landscape imagined as troubled with deficit.

Not all of the food amenities that develop (in) these new frontiers are welcome, however. They might provide foodscape development, while at the same time, ignore the complex foodways of their sought after consumers. After all, the exigence for the map was guided by the *Let's Move!* campaign's promise to tackle the "obesity epidemic" which was argued to have been plaguing the nation. As a racial project, the obesity crisis upholds both white and thin normativity and positions fatness and 'poor health' choice as 'weighing down' the nation.⁷³³ These discourses and the maps that materialize them, can both naturalize the problem of unequal food access and pacify the communities target for increased food access. Therefore both food desert deficit discourses and those that rely on fat shaming the working class and the poor, produce classist and racist ways of imagining both people and the places in which they reside. In addition to the politics of gentrification critiqued throughout, this pattern of racism and classism offers another reason why communication studies approaches to food studies must center questions of (in)justice. As food is intimately tied to identity, we cannot ignore how it may be mobilized in ways that oppress particular bodies and cultures.

In the second analysis chapter, I localized the national food access crisis in one particularly contentious, gentrifying city: Denver, Colorado. Much like other developing cities, the city of Denver envisions itself as a place wherein food culture is both an asset for tourism and driver for economic power. Denver is distinct in that it is a mid-sized city whose future has dominantly been articulated as on the horizon—a vision for a sustainable, thriving city to come. I focused my analysis on the newly adopted Denver Food Vision, a document that promises to

⁷³² Safransky, "Greening the Urban Frontier."

⁷³³ Sanders, "The Color of Fat."

enact an inclusive, healthy, vibrant, and resilient city. Following Rob Asen's argument that policy documents are betwixt between text and context, I also provided an analysis of the contested nature of Denver's development crisis in which the document emerged. Oscillating between text and context, rhetor(s) and audience(s) helped attend to the multivalent articulatory practices that link food and gentrification together—including those that manifest through eco-desire, sustainability planning, neoliberalism, and green growth. This analysis helps illustrate why food studies scholars must also take stock of food policy and its many discursive articulations, which contributes to the production of ideologies about foodways, foodscapes, and gentrification.

Voice was critical to this analysis, as both the document and the discourses that inform/interpret it, are varied and unequally heard. The polyvocality of policy is what makes these debates both salient but also impure.⁷³⁴ Food policy visions must negotiate between transformative, radical desires and the pragmatics of action that may lend to more reformist appeals. Although those who helped to create the document wished to include a diversity of voices, many argued that the struggle for inclusion should be a process. Both grassroots food justice and anti-gentrification advocates argued that for a just and equitable vision to be realized, intimate and ongoing interaction must be sustained and the voices of those less privileged in the food system must be at the center. In my analysis of the impurity of food policy, then, I focused on its polyvocality and the articulatory practices that work to delink the document from hegemonic health discourses, as well as those that might rearticulate with and promote neoliberal development. I also analyzed the temporal dimensions of food policy and tensions that emerge from competing visions for the city's future. There is a cost to enacting a futurity that refuses to

⁷³⁴ On impure politics, see: Pezzullo, "Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts"; Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place*; West, *Transforming Citizenship*.

acknowledge the past. This is especially true when efforts to increase food access refuse to engage why food inequity and environmental injustice were organized spatially to begin with. Thus, access gains traction here as a multivalent term that is informed by space, place, voice, and temporality. While rhetorical cartography has much to offer research of maps and places, it also provides a rich heuristic through which to study discourses and policy.

In the third analysis chapter, I elevated the voices often relegated to the margins of dominant food movements, including Denver's anti-gentrification advocates, food justice practitioners, and residents vulnerable to displacement. These residents organize in the face of massive urban restructuring and uneven development that threatens the spaces they have lived for decades. I focused specifically on neighborhoods in northeast Denver (though there are many others), because these sites have been central to the fight against gentrification in the city. Theorizing not only the rhetoric of food justice, but the way it is organized through relationships, coalition building, and fusion politics, I aimed to provide a more textured understanding of the relations that bring an intersectional movement to life.

Beginning with the "moment in the movement" wherein a multi-neighborhood coalition against gentrification emerged—namely the protest of ink! Coffee's controversial sign in northeast Denver—I highlighted how the visceral anger over looming displacement can become a mobilizing force for building new relationships, connecting struggles and issues, and can assist in developing a multi-sector response to the violence posed by development, criminalization, and dispossession in the city. I was particularly motivated by the words of local educator and activist Tony Pigford, who urged residents to refuse narratives of scarcity and instead organize around abundance—which requires rethinking the very power structures that thrive on the deficit model for development. By tracing three events wherein organizing around abundance was cultivated—

a gentrification summit, a food justice tour, and a teach-in on food and gentrification—it became clear that alliance building, cultivating relationships of difference, and asserting belonging in contested space were possibilities within reach for these residents. Community organizing is nourished by relationships that can draw on a range of temporal struggles—their pasts guide their present and inform the kinds of futures they hope to see in their neighborhoods. Organizing around abundance also asks us to think critically about the land on which we live as well as the toxicities present in the soil, water, and air that constrain temporary solutions to food inequity. Although difficult to enact, organizing around abundance also provides imaginative resources for planting new seeds and nourishing a different kind of radical politic that puts people and the environments in which they reside, above profit.

Each site, or context, provides new ways of interpreting food access, including its use as a term and its enactment as a practice, policy, and call for intervention. When a term like “access” is mobilized, it moves through the cultural politics, voices, and places in which it is articulated. The map of power we have drawn traverses the taken-for-granted divisions between national, municipal, and local scales. It challenges us to think critically about the relationship between foodscapes and foodways and highlights the conjuncture at which food politics and gentrification coalesce. However, the impacts of food gentrification are still points of contest. It matters though, who is voicing the problems and solutions to the food access crises, who is staking claim, and if/how those voices are being heard.

Voicing Food Justice from Margin to Center

No doubt, our contemporary food system denies food access to millions, and many still may wake up not knowing where or how they might obtain their next meal. Even those who have access to food may not have access to the nutrient rich density needed to nourish their bodies.

However, asking why this inequity occurs can yield very different answers. Rhetorical movements can include dominant voices and those that interrupt them, as well as offer different conceptions of space and time.⁷³⁵ The broader U.S. food movement, which includes both institutional and grassroots advocates, is polyvocal. Who and how the movement is voiced can invoke authority or seek to dismantle it at once. The visceral and embodied politics of eating and living with others requires that we think critically about both the dominant voices of the movement and those relegated to the margins.

As I've argued throughout this project, food cultures are incredibly intimate. We participate in the food system each and every day and engage in a range of practices that are impossible from which to opt out. Between the intimacy of eating and the complexity of our foodways, the values bound up with food can decidedly map different pictures about the food system and why it matters. These discourses then inform imperatives for advancing both environmentalism and social justice. For example, if food access is deemed a problem of resources distribution and affordability, then food banks make sense as solutions to hunger. If food access is mapped as an issue of lacking timely and affordable transportation, then retooling infrastructure or adding a grocery store might be perceived as a viable solution. If the problem is located in its symptom, then interventions may be more likely to address these residual effects.

Following the politics of grassroots food justice advocates I have met and environmental justice scholars, I've also argued that voice matters to both food politics and gentrification. Voice includes not only the ability to speak out and against, but is complicated by the politics of listening, of being heard. Robert Bullard reminds us that inclusion of diverse voices in environmental politics is a commendable start, but does not necessarily guarantee equity, nor

⁷³⁵ As Greene and Kuswa argue, "rhetorical movements move horizontally and vertically as well as spatially and temporally." Green and Kuswa, "From the Arab Spring to Athens, From Occupy Wall Street to Moscow," 281.

does it mean their voices will be heard in any capacity that might ultimately guide policy.⁷³⁶

Julian Agyeman forwards that even a rhetoric of inclusion assumes there in a social whole that diverse voices can be heard within.⁷³⁷ These assumptions can deny or seek to silence fundamentally different ontological relationships with food, place, land, and the body.

Giving an account of one's experience of cultural and economic violence, then, is an important vehicle for the production of alternative narratives of place and community. Though in his elaboration on voice, Nick Couldry, following Judith Butler, argues that giving an account of one's life and its condition is the very act that makes our relations (and responsibility) to each other matter.⁷³⁸ Voice is relational in that it is socially grounded and it emerges from shared (even fractured) material conditions.⁷³⁹ It is also embodied, in that it does the work of articulation from a rooted experience of the self and the world.⁷⁴⁰ Thus voice comes to matter at the conjuncture wherein food politics and gentrification collide because it assists in narrating (or foreclosing) alternative experiences of violence as well as imaginations for how we might organize otherwise.

It's important, however, that we not valorize voice's ability to critically interrupt dominant narratives that rely on food access deific discourses, since the dominant frames still direct vast amount of economic resources, policies, and incentives for intervention. Though what we can do is attempt to re-center those who have been relegated to the margins of our food system and in development decision-making as well. As Eric King Watts writes, marginal voices can confront and interrogate the very dominant language systems that "denies their difference

⁷³⁶ See Bullard, "Introduction," 13.

⁷³⁷ Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities*.

⁷³⁸ Couldry, *Why Voice Matters*; Also see; Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005).

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid.

and ‘mutes’ their voices.’⁷⁴¹ In terms of food access, marginal voices can critically interrupt the technicalities by which access is positioned as a universal goal of the food movement today. They can advocate for alternative language that speaks to their social conditions in addition to refusing to have their experiences of violence be narrated back to them as natural results of ‘market forces’ or an expected byproduct of the complex food system.

We know that the broad umbrella that is the food movement is a polyculture of diverse values, voices, and positions towards food system reform.⁷⁴² By paying attention to the articulatory practices that link and delink food with tangential values, we might better account for how discourse contributes to the production of ideology. If we rethink food justice as a contingent and contested ideological struggle, rather than a unified social movement, then perhaps we can address the fractures, division, and potential of food justice in its particularities. This might help account for division, such as what Alison Alkon and Julian Agyman have called the overwhelming whiteness and class privilege of the food movement.⁷⁴³ Despite its grandiose calls for sustainability, its homogeneity hinders the movement’s potential for transformative change. The same might be true for interventions into food access, wherein those with food privilege narrate and intervene into the lives of the food insecure, or those threatened by gentrification. Universalizing narratives of health, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumption do not always translate as shared commitments, nor do they often ‘meet communities where they are’ by acknowledging their historically and culturally informed foodways.

Therefore, positionality informs how food-based problems and their solutions are narrated. Positionality also impacts how implementation occurs and by whom. The food *justice*

⁷⁴¹ Watts, “‘Voice’ and Voicelessness in Rhetorical Studies,” 183.

⁷⁴² Alkon and Agyeman, *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and Sustainability*.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*

struggle, which often challenges the dominant food movement narratives of choice-based health and supply side-solutions, still must grapple with its own positionality and homogeneity problem as well. Even those committed to food justice offer very different visions of *injustice* and may not be willing to give up their power in the face of grassroots criticism. The imperative then becomes how to center those most marginalized in the food system both in terms of voice, embodiment, and practice, as well as in the decision-making processes about how food justice interventions can and should take shape.

Since food justice is still unformed as a singular movement, it is important not to universalize all calls for justice with what Clive Barnett calls “justice talk,” which has the tendency to give no account of particularity and contingency.⁷⁴⁴ These particulars map important histories of diverse sources of violence that manifest in cities as they develop. As I explored in the last chapter of this dissertation, communities might begin by narrating diverse experiences of injustice—from racist policing, income inequity, gentrification, toxicity and environmental racism, and cultural erasure—and then draw on these experiences to develop a common vision for their communities. Thus we must be clear about what experiences of *injustice* prompt calls for *justice* in the first place. These narrations can offer what Barnett calls a “sense of injustice” that is “affectively rich in a way that doing justice is not.”⁷⁴⁵ Organizing with a shared knowledge of injustice provides a way to establish shared experiences and relationships of difference that are “felt and necessarily particular and partial, in a way in which justice is not and is not meant to be.”⁷⁴⁶ It is in the affective bonds that relationships of difference might emerge and from them, more imaginative yet particular visions of justice can develop relationally.

⁷⁴⁴ Barnett, “Towards a Geography of Injustice,” 111.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid, 114.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid, 114.

Spatio-Temporal Struggles and Food's Politics

In my analysis of food (in)justice, I've also argued that food politics can and does exceed food. Despite emerging literature on food in communication studies that has helped theorize food's cultural, mediated, and agricultural politics, a food systems communication perspective requires interdisciplinary thinking about the cultural, economic, and ecological threads that bring the food system to life. By focusing on dominant food access discourse as well as food movements and their demands, we can see the ways in which food politics expands well beyond food. For many grassroots food justice advocates, for example, food justice is more than just the equitable distribution of food to communities in need, but necessitates interventions into labor regimes, economic disparities, gentrification, housing, transportation, immigration, and systems of power such as capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy. As these advocates articulate these complicated issues through which food politics transgresses, they balance an understanding about how power functions in its particularities as well. Even in universal calls that demand the capitalist industrial food system be dismantled, many advocates also recognize the contingencies of such regimes. They mobilize criticism through local action, guided by the place-based histories of their communities and an intuitive knowledge of how development in the present is informed by the past. These histories, including colonial logics of property, white possession, and ecological contamination, can map alternative account of their neighborhoods and reaffirm what they are collectively struggling against.⁷⁴⁷

The tensions between foodways (the cultural politics of food consumption) and foodscapes (the availability of food within an environment) must be theorized together. Especially as cities develop, food availability may not coincide with the culturally contextual

⁷⁴⁷ See Cheryl Harris, George Lipsitz, Katherine McKittrick, and Aileen Moreton Robinson on their specificities/relations.

foodways of folks who lack health equity. Even the promise of green space, farmers markets, and increased distribution of local food can become culturally and economically inaccessible for these people. Increasing the availability of food is also a form of cultural production that can whiten at the same time that it greens.⁷⁴⁸ However, foodscapes can also be rearticulated as counterhegemonic. They can assert spaces of what Ashanté M. Reese calls self-reliance or spaces for community-controlled geographies, carved out in the midst of a rapidly restructuring urban ecology.⁷⁴⁹ Asserting access to land and decision-making power is not only an act of resistance, but is a reassertion of power within the confines of a system that so frequently positions Indigenous peoples, communities of color, the working class, and the poor as *powerless*.

A guiding concern throughout this project has been how food politics and gentrification necessitate critical conversation about both space and time. This includes the ways communicative efforts encourage growth through imaginaries of the city and its futures, while simultaneously silencing and marginalizing racialized communities.⁷⁵⁰ In my analysis of the different scales of intervention—national, municipal, and grassroots—I’ve also argued that uneven development seeks to make space within which capital can move and accumulate in the present,⁷⁵¹ but it is also reliant on legacies of dispossession and settlement that make its contemporary instantiations possible. Nicholas Blomley reminds us that theorizing gentrification can acknowledge, for example, the racist housing policies of the 1930s, but must also account for how restructuring was made possible because of Indigenous dispossession. As Patrick Wolfe so

⁷⁴⁸ See Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others.”

⁷⁴⁹ “Reese, “‘We Will Not Perish; We’re Going To Keep Flourishing’.”

⁷⁵⁰ Triece, *Urban Renewal and Resistance*.

⁷⁵¹ See Neil Smith, *Uneven Development*; Alberto Vanolo, *City Branding*.

famously asserts, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”⁷⁵² The containment and control of Indigenous food systems as well as the ecologies on which they care and rely, were an incredible tool for settler colonial expansion. The very foods that were supposed to nourish them became weaponized through commodity food programs, forced relocation, planned flooding, mining, pollution, and control over food-based epistemologies and food access.⁷⁵³ These food regimes also gave rise to the plantation system, the forced labor of slaves, and the reformation of entire cultural foodways.

Given this history, it might be easy to suggest that healthy food access can remedy these inequities, which still continue today. However, many in the food justice (and food sovereignty) movements recognize that food redistribution alone will never help to regain cultural, economic, and political power.⁷⁵⁴ Instead, many critique the power structures that remain in place through a food access deficit model. Food politics then becomes a form of cultural resurgence in the face of waves of colonial and capitalist expansion. Restoring cultural foodways and garnering access to the land might even be, for some, articulated as a form of reparation for legacies of violence.⁷⁵⁵ Thus a contemporary food movement might become apolitical if it refuses to acknowledge how the past asserts itself in the present as well. Moreover, even well-intentioned calls for sustainability, might benefit from answering the question—sustainability for whom? We must also be critical of dominant green growth discourses that privilege sustainability in the

⁷⁵² Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, 4 (2006): 388.

⁷⁵³ Kyle Powys Whyte, Indigenous Food Systems, Environmental Justice, and Settler-Industrial States,” in *Global Food, Global Justice*, eds. Mary Rawlinson and Caleb Ward, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015): 143-166.

⁷⁵⁴ Food justice and food sovereignty should not be conflated, though they are often in the urban food movement. It is critical that we theorize food sovereignty within the cultural contexts that it emerged, as a struggle over governance, control, and self-determination, voiced by Indigenous agrarian communities, peasants, farmers, and other efforts (in but often outside of the North American context) to assert control over the food system. On the specificity of Indigenous food sovereignty, see: Whyte, “Food Sovereignty, Justice, and Indigenous Peoples.”

⁷⁵⁵ Julian Brave NoiseCat, “‘It’s About Taking Back What’s Ours’: Native Women Reclaim Land, Plot by Plot,” *Huffington Post*, March 22, 2018, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/native-women-oakland-land_us_5ab0f175e4b0e862383b503c.

present but ignore the uneven distribution of environmental harms that have developed as an historical project over time.⁷⁵⁶

Hope for developing a more just food system necessitates structural interventions, but it also requires a different orientation to history. Thus, struggles against food gentrification and for food justice are both spatial and temporal. They can, at times, challenge us to think critically about the politics of belonging within our food environments and consider that food access alone may not be transformative at all. Though the discursive maps these advocates provide may differ, they are rooted in a sense of place and a relation across time. They tell us about the past, present, and future—of how environmental and food system injustices came to be, and offer alternative visions for organizing otherwise. They have the ability to make present experiences of settlement and violence, yet also help to articulate a futurity that actively refuses to recreate them. Many perspectives within these movements are articulated from folks who have experienced dispossession viscerally. These same individuals, and movements, are beginning to challenge us to think *beyond access*, and instead in favor of a politic that reasserts *access to power*.

From Food “Access” to Accessing Power

One might ask—where do we go from here? If we refuse frames of scarcity, how might we account for food access differently? What language might we use to make sense of lack while still recognizing the possibility for organizing around abundance? Many grassroots advocates are already providing answers. I want to draw attention to some of these seeds being planted in the food justice movement today, which are beginning to fundamentally rearticulate naturalizing deficit discourses and the politics of food access in favor of a transformative food justice fusion

⁷⁵⁶ On the uneven distribution of environmental harms, see: Park and Pellow, *The Slums of Aspen*.

movement. The organizing taking place in Denver, Colorado, is critical, but does not stand-alone.

Much like educator and gardener Fatuma Emmad in Denver—who urged us on the food justice tour to adopt a language of “food apartheid”—these food justice advocates are considering ways to link power, equity, and access together in new ways. Organizations rooted in some of the country’s most developing cities—like Just Food in NYC,⁷⁵⁷ the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network,⁷⁵⁸ Phat Beets in Oakland,⁷⁵⁹ The Black Church Food Security Network in Baltimore,⁷⁶⁰ North Philly Peace Park in Philadelphia,⁷⁶¹ Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) in Portland,⁷⁶² Flowers and Bullets in Tucson,⁷⁶³ and many, many more—are organizing for more than just greater food *access*. Many refuse to use the language of food “desert” in their activism and choose to focus on the power dynamics that manifest inequity. For example, Reverend Dr. Herber Brown of The Black Church Food Security Network makes this rearticulation clear:

We don’t say food desert anymore because, you know, desert is a naturally occurring phenomena. And for those that God made to live in a desert, a desert is just a perfect place for them to thrive. We don’t want to scapegoat deserts as if deserts are bad things. Don’t scapegoat the desert. Let’s call it what it is: it’s apartheid. Talk about apartheid is talk about policies that keep our communities at a distance from the healthy food that we need.⁷⁶⁴

⁷⁵⁷ Just Food, “About,” *Just Food*, Accessed May 8, 2018, <http://www.justfood.org/>

⁷⁵⁸ Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, “Home,” *Detroit Food Justice Task Force*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.detroitfoodjustice.org/partners/detroit-black-community-food-security-network/>.

⁷⁵⁹ Phat Beets, “Food Justice, Youth Catering, and Restorative Economics,” *Phat Beets*, Accessed May 19, 2018, <http://www.phatbeetsproduce.org/>.

⁷⁶⁰ The Black Church Food Security Network, *Facebook Page*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/BlackChurchFSN/?fref=mentions>.

⁷⁶¹ North Philly Peace Park, *Facebook Page*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/NorthPhillyPeacePark/>.

⁷⁶² NAYA Family Center, “About,” *NayaPDX*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <http://nayapdx.org/>

⁷⁶³ Flowers and Bullets, “Our Mission,” *Flowers and Bullets*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <https://www.flowersandbullets.com/>.

⁷⁶⁴ KineticsLive, “BCFSN Herber Brown. Video Clip 1,” YouTube Video, 1:40, Posted May 15, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxuWnJ_9rMU&feature=youtu.be.

In the rearticulation of access, from food “desert” to food “apartheid,” Dr. Reverend Brown, like others, wishes to refuse the naturalization of deficit while maintaining an emphasis on power. To assert a call for food justice that relies on deficit—of the lack of food—risks missing the myriad layers to economic, racial, and colonial violence. Other food justice advocates mirror this rearticulation, as Karen Washington elaborates:

What I would rather say instead of “food desert” is “food apartheid,” because “food apartheid” looks at the whole food system, along with race, geography, faith, and economics. You say “food apartheid” and you get to the root cause of some of the problems around the food system. It brings hunger and poverty. It brings us to the more important question: What are some of the social inequalities that you see, and what are you doing to erase some of the injustices?⁷⁶⁵

Not only does Washington offer a fundamentally different way of seeing the food system and a way to “get to the root of the cause,” but she also centralizes the importance of identifying *injustices* before calling and rallying for *justice*. In this way, we are cautioned to think about how divergent, even competing positions are held in tandem in universalizing calls for justice that lack contextuality. She goes on to describe how places like food pantries and food kitchens have become a “way of life” instead of a sustained solution to food inequity.⁷⁶⁶ These models of charity maintain more of the same dynamics and hinder transformative action. So, to retool the food system, we must think beyond both emergency food assistance programs and grocery store access alone. In giving an account of how injustice manifests, food justice movements are specifying with greater texture what their visions of justice entail.

In addition to these localized efforts, national coalitions—for example, the National Black Food and Justice Alliance⁷⁶⁷ and the Indigenous Food Systems Network⁷⁶⁸—are also

⁷⁶⁵ Brones, “Food Apartheid.”

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁷ National Black Food and Justice Alliance, “About,” *Black Food Justice*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.blackfoodjustice.org/>.

aiming to transform the food system and cultivate power in, for, and by those often cast to the margins of the dominant food movement. Language has emerged to mark culturally contextual experiences of food (in)justice. For example, Indigenous advocates and transnational networks of peasant farmers like La Vía Campesina may utilize a language of “food sovereignty” in their advocacy to centralize coloniality and the need for self-determined food systems.⁷⁶⁹ While these efforts, importantly, differ from some urban food movements, it is critical that new languages be developed to offer ways of both conceptualizing contextual articulations of *injustice* that might motivate connected, though distinct, food activism. Although they center injustice in their advocacy, their calls differ from deficit discourses because they articulate a historically grounded frame to mobilize for abundance in and for their communities.

The need for food justice is now becoming articulated with struggles for racial justice, economic control, prison and immigration reform, racist policing, and many others that might have been considered far too removed from the dominant food movement before. For example, even the Movement for Black Lives Policy Platform names interventions into the food system as one way of supporting alternative community oriented financial institutions, dismantling discriminatory farmer assistance programs, retooling water systems and addressing air quality, supporting localized governance, community land trusts, food hubs, health care, affordable housing protections, and more.⁷⁷⁰ Their vision sees food as a vehicle for economic, cultural, and

⁷⁶⁸ Indigenous Food Systems Network, “About Us,” *Indigenous Food Systems*, Accessed May 13, 2018, <http://www.indigenousfoodsystems.org/about>.

⁷⁶⁹ On difference between food justice and food sovereignty, see: Gordon and Hunt, “Reform, Justice, and Sovereignty”; Cadieux and Slocum, “What Does it Mean to *Do* Food Justice”; Declaration of Nyéléni, “Declaration of Nyéléni,” *Nyeleni*, February 27, 2007, <https://nyeleni.org/IMG/pdf/DeclNyeleni-en.pdf>; Sam Grey and Raj Patel, “Food Sovereignty as Decolonization: Some Contributions from Indigenous Movements to Food System and Development Politics,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 32, no. 3 (2015): 431-444; Holt-Giménez, “Food Security, Food Justice, and Food Sovereignty”; Raj Patel, “Food Sovereignty,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 36, no. 3 (2016): 663-706; Justine M. Williams and Eric Holt-Giménez, *Land Justice*; among others.

⁷⁷⁰ The Movement for Black Lives, “Economic Justice,” *Policy M4BL*, Accessed May 3, 2018, <https://policy.m4bl.org/economic-justice/>.

political power, especially when organized by those who the food system has historically disenfranchised. Rather than access to *food*, these communities want access to *power*.

While these case studies move beyond the scope of my dissertation project, it is important to underscore that these movements are growing. There are setbacks and constraints, of course, but their vision of an equitable food system moves beyond redistributive justice, towards a participatory model that situates power back into the hands (and spaces) of the very people framed as deficient. The solutions must also support communities of color, Indigenous peoples, the working class, and the poor, to control their own foodways and gain power over their own lives. Most especially, if food justice organizing aims to “bring food” to places that have seen legacies of disinvestment, they must be rooted in and for the communities they serve.⁷⁷¹

By way of concluding, I want to leave you with some words by Dara Cooper, who was recently honored with a James Beard Foundation Leadership Award. In her acceptance speech, she storied a different food justice movement, and recognized the many giants on whose shoulders she stands—from Cesar Chavez to Fannie Lou Hamer, and Ella Baker.⁷⁷² In her acknowledgements, she names the food system as an “entire economic system rooted in the dispossession of land, attempted genocide, enslavement and a system of racial capitalism that continues to dehumanize, compromise and exploit Black and Brown bodies, labor and dignity” and boldly asserts that to develop a comprehensive, transformative food justice movement, communities must “never settle for band aids and empty solutions like so many of our ancestors

⁷⁷¹Guthman, “Bringing Good Food To Others.”

⁷⁷²Dara Cooper, “NBFJA National Organizer Acceptance Speech for James Beard Foundation Leadership Award,” *Black Food Justice*, May 5, 2018, <http://www.blackfoodjustice.org/nbfjablackfoodblog/2018/5/11/nbfja-national-organizer-acceptance-speech-for-james-beard-foundation-award>.

taught us.”⁷⁷³ Instead, she underscores the necessity of “dreaming and conjuring what we actually deserve.”⁷⁷⁴ With this call, she ends on the words of renowned Anishinaabe environmental justice activist Winona LaDuke: “We don’t want a bigger piece of the pie. We want a different pie.”⁷⁷⁵

Thus, the movement against food apartheid is already growing—and it’s not thriving as a monoculture. From street corners to neighborhood blocks, in cities and across rural landscapes, movements are calling for reclamation of power. They are cultivating food, building relationships, adopting economic models of solidarity, and are seeking to reclaim wealth, health, and power as a response to food system injustices. These food justice advocates might provide food access to the food insecure, but know well that these actions are only temporary responses to a system-level crisis. Troubling *access* might be one way to critically interrupt the dominant discourses that leave so many behind. Articulating new connections through new maps, policies, and practices might enable a more just food culture. As LaDonna Redmond asserted, whose words began this dissertation, “To change our food system, we need to change the way we talk about it.”⁷⁷⁶

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ LaDonna Redmond, “Food is Freedom.”

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APPENDIX. Brief biographies of interview and fieldwork participants.

Candi CdeBaca (she/her/hers) self-identifies as a fifth generation resident of northeast Denver and currently resides in the Swansea neighborhood in the same house her great-grandmother lived in almost 80 years ago. She was raised by a single mother and her grandparents, is a proud graduate of Manual High School, and earned a dual-degree from University of Denver's Graduate School of Social Work. As an advocate and organizer, she co-founded Project VOYCE an organization to support youth development and civic engagement. She has worked with Ditch the Ditch and Denver CAN as an advocate for housing and environmental justice. At the time of writing, she is currently running for District 9 City Council Representative in the 2019 election cycle.

Asia Dorsey (she/her/hers) self-identifies as a Black, 27-year old woman, and is a life-long resident of the Five Points neighborhood in Denver, Colorado. She spent five years traveling after graduating from New York University, where she studied sociology and food systems before returning to Five Points. She is an entrepreneur and leader of Five Points Fermentation Cooperative, a member of the Denver Sustainable Food Policy Council, and is an educator of food systems in her community.

Fatuma Emmad (she/her/hers) was born in Denver, Colorado to an immigrant family who returned to Ethiopia when she was nine years old. Her time traveling between Ethiopia and the United States impacted her understanding the power and transnational politics of food. She is currently the Director of Urban Farms at Groundwork Denver and oversees over three acres in Denver, in addition to running a pay-what-you-can farmstead and selling produce through restaurants. She is a certified agro-ecologists from the University of California Santa Cruz and is an advocate for seed saving, retention of indigenous grains and rights to food, land, and traditional farming practices.

Beverly Grant (she/her/hers) is a Denver-based food educator, gardener, and advocate. She founded Mo' Betta Green MarketPlace in 2011, which was the first farmers' market in the Five Points neighborhood of Denver. She was raised in northeast Denver and cultivated her love of growing and preparing food from working with her grandmother in the Whittier neighborhood. She contributes to food policy, food literacy, and is a well-respected member of Denver's food justice community, as she works with a number of organizations, a wellness center, gardens, her markets, and volunteers across Denver.

Kayvan Khalatbari (he/him/his) self identifies as a 34-year old male who grew up in Lincoln Nebraska. He moved to the southwest Denver neighborhood of Lincoln Park/La Alma where he has resided for fourteen years. He is a local entrepreneur and consultant who worked in the pizza business, art magazines, comedy, and cannabis in addition to working on drug reform policy. He

is affiliated with Denver CAN, and sits on numerous boards in Denver, including the Harm Reduction Action Center, Colorado Youth Symphony Orchestra, Minority Cannabis Business Association, Resource Innovation Institute, and is co-chair of the Alternative Solutions Advocacy Project among others. At the time of writing, he is currently running for the Mayor of Denver in the 2019 election cycle.

Tony Pigford (he/him/his) self-identifies as 45-year old African American, heterosexual man and is a life-long resident on the Five Points neighborhoods. He is affiliated with numerous organizations including Denver CAN and Denver African American Philanthropists. He is a fourth-generation Denverite, whose family moved to Denver to escape racism in the south in the late 1800s. He has deep roots in Denver and was raised by a family committed to community service, social justice, public education, and housing equity. He lives in a home that this grandfather purchased in the mid-1930s and remains an advocate for housing, racial, and economic justice in the neighborhood he grew up in and beyond. He is an educator and at the time of writing, he is currently running for Denver City Council At-Large.