"Choosing" Wisely

Paralleling Food Sovereignty and Reproductive Justice

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OUTLINING THE PARALLEL

I recently came across a reusable cloth shopping bag in the window of a local storefront in Kansas. The bag sported an image of a tree followed by the phrase "I'm saving plastic and the planet. What are you doing?" I chuckled to myself, recalling activist Derrick Jensen's "Forget Shorter Showers," in which he argues, "Consumer culture and the capitalist mindset have taught us to substitute acts of personal consumption (or enlightenment) for organized political resistance."[1] My thoughts were torn by a classic environmental conundrum. On the one hand, greater education and awareness are central to efforts toward justice and change. On the other hand, given my research in waste politics and industrialized commodity flows, I couldn't help but view the message as another extension of ethical consumerist trends in environmental activism, wherein individual consumption remains at the center of popular environmentalisms, while systemic, highly profitable industrial models go unquestioned, even protected, by the state.[2] In like manner, questions of food politics, sustainability and healthier diet currently at the forefront of popular food politics endeavors are often portrayed as matters of good, or more ethical, lifestyle "choices" that people consciously make daily. This embeds what scholar Abby Ferber refers to as a form of color-blind, post-feminist, abstract liberalist discourse rooted in an absence of intersectionality and premised upon right choice making; or, as the title of this article suggests, presumptions of "choosing wisely."[3]

Similarly, tempestuous political debates over reproductive health in the United States are often couched in rhetoric pertaining to good or bad, right or wrong "choices" rather than as extensions of environmental and socioeconomic constraint or healthcare limitations, including accessible, reliable, or even simply available resources.[4] Such matters are constructed through the prism of the "right" kinds of lifestyle shifts, or a bootstrap lens of individual purchasing power, rather than as systemic and systematic environmental

inequities. No comparative icon embodies my point more than the welfare queen stereotype born from President Reagan's 1976 presidential campaign, an icon persistently shamed as a system cheat and public burden and utilized as a straw-person for rationalizing funding cuts to robust public services. As a legacy of the Reagan campaign trail, reproductive historian Ricki Solinger references the term *welfare queen* to discuss how the icon absorbs and reflects social, cultural, and political ambivalence "toward women in trouble [and] poor mothers receiving public assistance money from the mid-1960s onward." The racialized icon of the assistance-needy WQ centers upon hostility over the inability to pull oneself up by one's own bootstraps to become "legitimate consumers" and "blocks our ability to imagine the social and economic forces that have created hardship, especially intractable poverty for millions of women and children in the United States."[5]

Reproductive justice (RJ) activists have long worked to highlight tensions between rights-based versus justice-centric understandings, drawing attention to the underlying racial, ethnic, class, and nation-based inequities that mainstream reproductive rights movements at times failed to incorporate, on topics ranging from birth control access to eugenics, sexuality education, adoption, childcare, medical informed consent, and more. Sociologist Zakiya Luna underscores such tensions in public shaming via her analysis of rights versus justice frameworks in social organizing: "While abortion was a concern, another part of [Sistersong] members' experiences not felt by middle-class white women was that the media has continually represented their choices to become mothers as irresponsible and pathological, as seen in debates around welfare reform and other controversial issues."[6] Similarly, scholar Andrea Smith critically examines gaps in pro-choice/pro-life rhetoric to engage other intersecting needs in indigenous communities, like "Fighting for life and self-determination of their communities. The criminalization of abortion may or may not be a strategy for pursuing that goal."[7] Thus reproductive justice exposes the ways in which choice rhetoric fails to encompass the intersecting issues affecting communities with less class, racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, or national privilege.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy's 2012 *Draft Principles for Food Justice* similarly underscores the right "to produce, process, distribute, access, and eat good food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community."[8] The focus in a justice-centric model, therefore, is not simply that all have the same legally recognized rights but that some "may need different things to achieve them based on our intersectional location in life—our race, class, gender, sexual orientation and immigration status."[9] Though not always successful, food justice movements are

attempting to ask parallel questions: to interweave histories of privilege, colonialism, imperial land grabs, or genocide and intersecting identities into the forefront of contemporary food discourse and practices. This differs from some mainstream food movements, representing largely white, middle-class participants centered on agribusiness and tending to "mobilize around localism and sustainability."[10]

Drawing together these two seemingly disparate points and utilizing an environmental feminist theoretical framework, this article engages the ways in which choice rhetoric in food parallels reproductive politics. I bring the two realms into critical conversation, as a means of arguing for more nuanced conversations in community food politics centered on food sovereignty, or the right to determine one's own food needs and systems.[11] I promote thinking about food in the same ways we need to think about reproductive justice: as an integral part of our immediate environments; as a core human need rather than the product of correct choices or consumer spending; and as a complex intersection of other socioeconomic factors and identities in the same way that reproductive justice advocates press for "the ability of a woman to determine her reproductive destiny [to be recognized as] directly tied to conditions in her community."[12] Feminist environmental thought places importance on the relationship "between social inequalities and environmental problems" and on extending understanding of the term *environment*.[13] If we imagine where we "live, work or play" as environments, thinking of environmentalism more expansively as inclusive of our immediate surroundings and community conditions affecting access to resources like food, potable water, and basic health care for all bodies and identities (inclusive of sex education, contraception, and childcare), then we begin the hard work of recognizing systemic inequalities.

Critical analysis throughout this article prioritizes and envisions our immediate environments as more accessible, crucially *public,* potential foodscapes: as sites for small-scale, local models of shared public food sources. As Ioway food justice activist Brett Ramey reminds us: "[The Ioway tribe] was relocated to the other side of [the] Missouri River, where we now reside today . . . [and it's full of diverse wild foods]. Some of the first European immigrants . . . took note in their journals about all the different wild plums and cherries, grapes, hazelnuts and all these things that were growing in abundance. [Those] were our first community gardens [before] the term community garden was even necessary because the underlying assumption was that everything was for the community. We didn't have to clarify in the way that we often do now."[14] Food is essential to life and it is a fundamental form of human health care. Therefore, it is crucial to rethink foodways in terms of equity

and accessibility over a highly problematic capitalist-centric "choice" rhetoric. I write this having grown up in a river valley controlled by big ag with no organic options or farmer's market until a few years ago. The earliest drafts of this article were written with immediate and extended kin utilizing public aid and supplemental nutritional access and without the safety net of health insurance, with years between check-ups, a nagging fear of being overly careful of my body in the world, and a generational understanding of the lengths to which we might have to go (or travel) to access care. By engaging the parallels in choice rhetoric across food and reproduction and theoretically couching analysis within intersectional feminist environmental thought, I suggest that intersectional feminism is already and must continue to be at the forefront of critical developments in food politics by resisting color-blind, post-feminist, "right" lifestyle–driven choice messaging. Rather, we need to center the importance of body sovereignty over the problematics of choice by drawing upon the central dimensions of both reproductive and food justice models.

SITUATING FEMINIST ENVIRONMENTAL CURRENTS

In my broader research, I have been particularly dependent upon Noel Sturgeon's analytical approach, which argues for a "global feminist environmental justice analysis" situated as "an intersectional approach (seeing . . . relationship among inequalities of gender, race, sexuality, class, and nation) and revealing connections between social inequalities and environmental problems to uncover the systems of power that continue to generate the complex problems we face."[15] Sturgeon yokes this concept to the umbrella term *contemporary radical environmentalisms*, situating "a relationship between social inequalities and environmental problems."[16] Feminist environmentalism is a useful lens for engaging the choice-centric discourse implications of food politics and reproductive justice, given the field's historical dedication to environmental topics as relational to social justice endeavors, and as interconnected to human *and* non-human existences including seeds, water, wildlife, trees, domesticated animals, insects, and soil.

The field of environmental feminism has its roots in the ecofeminist movements of the mid-1970s and early 1980s, which broadly merged feminist critiques of patriarchy with discussions of environmental degradation, usurpation of natural resources, and population control.[17] Stated in response to the growing divisions between ecofeminism and what scholar Bina Awargal first dubbed "environmental feminism" in 1992, Awargal's sensitivity to intersections of race, class, and gender greatly shaped the field by pinpointing crucial differentiations among some ecofeminists and giving a name to what Awargal

saw as differing directions of scholarly inquiry.[18] Author Joni Seager suggests that understanding essentialist, hetero-normative divides in the field serves as a reminder of the diverse ways in which feminists have merged discussions of humans, non-humans, and environments. In "Rachel Carson Died of Breast Cancer" Seager notes, "Ecofeminism put spirituality, earth goddesses, nature/culture identities, and debates about essentialism, antiessentialism, and maternalism on the feminist front burner."[19]

Specifically working intersectionally on justice-centered environmentalist frameworks in a contemporary context, Giovanna di Chiro underscores racism, class, and heterosexism when she argues against what she calls "polluted politics," which "reassert the normalized body and the naturalized environment," asking instead for "coalitions that [forge] a critical normative environmental politics (we all should live in a clean environment; we all should have the right to healthy bodies) that resist appeals to normativity."[20] More specific to questions of pairing feminisms and food sovereignty, Carolyn Sachs's 2013 paper "Feminist Food Sovereignty: Crafting a New Vision" outlines gender dimensions of food security and food sovereignty to call upon an expanded feminist food justice model rooted in aspects of both. Sachs proposes eight specific components to strengthen this model, among which are a number of helpful overlapping points connected to the examples analyzed in this article, such as rethinking unequal "heteronormative household models"; valuing "social reproduction work with food," like breastfeeding or meal preparation; and recognizing the importance of intersectionalism and legacies of land dispossession.[21]

Specifically addressing the rise of eco-normativity as it relates to classed and gendered consumer trends and choice rhetoric, both Catriona Sandilands' 1993 article "On 'Green' Consumerism" and Alexandra Nutter Smith's 2010 article "The Ecofetish" are here helpful for engaging the problematic ways in which women are often expressly targeted by green consumer trends in, as Nutter suggests, "a surge [of] green commercialism primarily [targeting] women who are now expected to take responsibility for addressing environmental problems that are largely the result of patriarchal capitalist expansion." Sandilands importantly situates such consumer tendencies within conservative family values narratives; and both scholars underscore critical unraveling of the gendered privatization and "[depoliticization] of environmental problems."[22] Drawing from these specific feminist environmental critiques of food justice, eco-normativity, and privatized, consumer-centric choice rhetoric will prove a useful lens onto example parallels of choice within and across food and reproductive politics, which I now move to analyze in detail. I first address recent uses of choice narratives in political debate over food security in

the Farm Bill and as the bill connects to Planned Parenthood funding. I then examine the ways in which choice discourse is utilized within calls for alternative food politics by mainstream voices such as Alice Waters, Jamie Oliver, and Joel Salatin. Finally, I return to reimagining choice parallels in food politics through analysis of sovereignty-centric models emphasizing the importance of pairing reproductive justice insights with food justice work. Intersectional feminist environmental work paired with food and body-sovereignty centricity help underscore the crucial ways in which choice-centered narratives often fail to center historical legacy and self-determination.

SECURING FOOD: CHOICE WITHIN LANDSCAPES OF UNCERTAINTY

> Cutting apart the farm bill was one of the most brutal [choices], even in the short history of the House's domination by the Tea Party.[23]

In September 2015 Kansas senators Pat Roberts and Jerry Moran split their votes on the heated continuing resolution concerning budgetary spending through December 2015. Moran voted against the resolution due to its continued fiscal support of Planned Parenthood. Roberts, in contrast, also representing the Senate Agriculture Committee as chairman (as well as known denouncer of Planned Parenthood), announced to the US public that the best way to protect Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to more than 40 million recipients in the midst of possible government shutdown was by supporting the resolution. Although my state's two senators split their votes, both vowed to oppose vehemently further federal funding to Planned Parenthood beyond December. While Moran chose to wager food access to SNAP recipients due to his strong anti–Planned Parenthood agenda, Roberts chose to bide his time. The potential shutdown and the debates over federal funding to Planned Parenthood underscore the precarity of and the linkages between accessible, adequate reproductive health care and food access.

In the summer of 2013 the US House of Representatives voted to slash 40 billion dollars from the Farm Bill, overturning a decades-long bundling of SNAP with agricultural insurance and subsidy programs. This initial proposal resisted by President Obama (though supported by Senator Roberts) later amounted to "only" $8.6 billion in total cuts to the SNAP program, lowering the daily food allowance to millions and constructing what some argue to be an urban-rural divide in farm bill representation, while ignoring the most blatantly available food security data.[24] Early amendment discussion engaged

possible work requirements for SNAP eligibility as well, a fact that Rutgers political scientist Stacy Dean reminds media outlets was luckily avoided by many states: "Republicans wanted to impose new work requirements on food stamp recipients; allow states to require drug testing for food stamps beneficiaries; ban ex-felons from ever receiving nutrition aid; and award states financial incentives to kick people off the program. None of those measures were in the final legislation."[25] Nonetheless, millions were cut from the program, and plenty of renewed "anti-loophole" measures will be put into place for single, able-bodied recipients in some states. All of this despite the fact that 2014 USDA statistics suggested 14% of US households were food insecure, defined as individuals of a household experiencing "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways." [26] These annual numbers reflect highly classed, gendered, and racialized food security dynamics, highlighting links between economic and reproductive justice in that households living below the federal poverty line and/or single-parent households, particularly those headed by women of color, are documented as experiencing insecurity at much higher rates.[27] If we include data on US homelessness; if we engage disenfranchisement of homeless youth, particularly queer-identified youth experiencing homelessness at exacerbated rates; if we begin to include very new data on gender identity and sexuality as it affects food security and access; if we consider issues of migration and labor documentation, then these numbers are not only much higher but are also telling of the ways in which social position affects food accessibility and security.[28] The fact that the originally proposed (and ultimately finalized) SNAP slashes are justified as a bootstrap, close-the-loopholes anti-fraud crackdown fails to encompass systemic complexities effecting food access, further solidifying a patriarchal understanding of resource dispersal centered on non/deserving citizenship.[29]

The very nature of political conceptualizations of food security have shifted multiple times, as noted by anthropologist Johan Pottier, from the early 1970s concerns over "global supply problems" and "[market] price stability," and early 1980s concerns over "physical and economic accessibility," to the 1996 Rome Declaration's focus on the multiple causes and effects of food insecurity.[30] Critical engagement of sovereignty and sustainability proved key concepts of the 1996 World Food Summit and the People's Food Sovereignty declaration of 2001. Authors Mustafa Koc, Rupen Das, and Carey Jernigan argue that the "4 A's of food security" need to include: Availability, Accessibility, Adequacy—that is, "food that is nutritious, safe, and produced in environmentally sustainable ways"—and Acceptability. Sovereignty is presumed

a complementary addition to the definition of security.[31] Just as RJ advocates have encouraged critical understandings of economic stability as a central factor of health decisions, economic self-sufficiency remains key to understanding food security. Zakiya Luna similarly suggests, "In the cases of the women with less class and/or racial privilege, achievement of specific rights around reproduction cannot be achieved until other human rights (such as economic rights) are achieved."[32]

Another way in which choice discourse is used to delineate links between food and reproductive moralism in a manner that intersectionally fails is with regard to DIY bootstraps narratives outlining better lifestyle habits. In line with the critiques on gender, class, and green consumerism made by both Sandilands and Nutter Smith, Peggy Ornstein's *New York Times* review of Shannon Hayes's book *Radical Homemakers: Reclaiming Domesticity from Consumer Culture* constructed a more middle-class, gendered understanding of farming and food production as hobby-centered, noting, "All of these gals—these chicks with chicks—are stay-at-home moms, highly educated women who left the work force to care for kith and kin. . . . The *Omnivore's Dilemma* has provided an unexpected out from the feminist predicament, a way for women to embrace homemaking without becoming Betty Draper."[33] In response, commentator Laura Flanders challenged Ornstein's use of an old stereotype of the "predicament" women face between choice of homemaking or labor outside of the home: "The [global dilemma] we need to be talking about isn't what will it take to make status symbol farming satisfying, it's how do we empower the world's women farmers. Raising chickens isn't the key to feminist liberation. But women's security just might be key to ending hunger."[34] Not only does Flanders challenge construction of a choice-centric "predicament" between professional and familial fulfillment—a highly classed and racialized historical inaccuracy of women and labor; she forces the question of economic justice, exemplifying paramount undercurrents between and across food and reproductive justice.

Furthermore, in her critique of an October 2011 *New York Times* article entitled "Back to the Land, Reluctantly," author Emily Matchar deftly writes about the trend from another angle: "Ever since the recession began, we've been seeing a certain kind of story pop up all over the media. Call it the Tale of the Heroic Recession Homemaker. It's a person (usually a woman, often a mom) who pulls herself up by her bootstraps via intensive domestic work or neo-homesteading—sewing her own curtains, growing her own veggies, baking her own bread."[35] Contrastingly, I turn to scholar bell hooks's infamous argument, "The willingness to see feminism as a lifestyle choice rather than a political commitment reflects the class nature of the movement."[36] This is not

to say that lifestyle changes and purchasing power have no role in food and environmental activism; yet, as Matchar notes, "It's when neo-homesteading [is presented] as a genuine solution for poverty that I start having questions."[37] The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) designated 2012 the year of gender in global agriculture, highlighting *systemic* inequalities among global farmers. Given the current gendered, classed, and racialized landscape of food insecurity and hunger within the United States alone, movements must prioritize sustainable foodways through a more intersectional focus on dismantling systemic inequalities, underscoring Carolyn Sachs's eight points toward a feminist food justice model, as well as the crux of Janet Poppendieck's argument in *Sweet Charity*: "The popular response to poverty and hunger in America is 'kinder but less just'" as a result of more than two decades of funding cuts to robust social services where "charity replaces entitlements and charitable endeavor replaces politics."[38] DIY narratives embedding this notion of correct or wise "choices" frame themselves around an individualist discourse. They often presume an equal playing field and/or disregard the centrality of history or legacy, centering instead upon the ways in which one might can one's way to food access, or home-grow one's foods in spite of inequities.

The very nature of food security is likewise entwined with geographic location dependent upon the availability of reliable, healthy foods. This of course shakes up the popular idea that healthy foods are a lifestyle decision dependent upon consumer choice, which has remained a common aspect of mainstream food movement discussions for some time. Thus conceptualizations of food that push back on choice-centric participation strike me as especially relevant in this particular political and economic moment of defunding; heightened anxiety over global foodways; a context of high US food insecurity levels and simultaneous surplus food waste; as well as a record US reliance on food stamps—1 in 8 Americans or roughly 38 million people, 6 million of whom report no other income—and a record number of "criminal" food stamp sales.[39]

Evidence of racial and class disparities in agriculture and land ownership are also a telling aspect of food security dynamics and central to this analysis of an oppression-blind choice rhetoric, which fails to embed intersectional legacies of disenfranchisement. One news source, *Black Farmers in America*, documented some of the disparities: "By 2003, African-American farmers accounted for less than 1 percent of the nation's farmers and cultivated less than .003 percent of the farmland. Today, battling the onslaught of globalization, changing technology, an aging workforce, racist lending policies, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture itself, black farmers number below 18,000,

and they till fewer than 3 million acres."[40] Common stereotypes of farmers as white and male, for instance, are equally enlightening. Data on farm operators suggest that 1.83 million of 2.2 million operators surveyed were white males. Since the 2002 census, racial and ethnic diversity in operators has increased, with a nearly 30% increase in sex-based diversification, though no information on marital status, household, or orientation was provided.[41] This information is, however, specific to *farm operators* and mainstream agricultural understandings, differing from the makeup of *farm workers* (or other cultural food gathering methods), estimated at 78% foreign born (75% Mexican), 90% male, and consisting of 53% unauthorized laborers.[42] Beyond the gender and race dynamics of US food insecurity statistics, as well as farm operator-laborer demographics, the *global* dimensions speak yet another truth, which is that women remain central to global food production, generating over 50% of the world's total food supply—60–80% of the food in developing nations alone.[43] As the UN suggests, if we fundamentally see food as a human right, not as a privilege based on access to special resources, justice-centric paradigm shifts must lie at the heart of food movements.[44] I move to analyze the discourse of key mainstream food politics examples that both harness *and* resist the language of choice in food. I do this to pinpoint the ways in which choice narratives continue to be regularly utilized, which I then problematize by overlapping a necessarily intersectional, sovereignty-centric lens rooted in the core principles of reproductive justice.

EATING THE "RIGHT" FOODS: CHOICE-BASED, CONSUMER-CENTRIC FOOD POLITICS

> We're all in the middle of a recession, like we're all going to start buying expensive organic food and running to the green market. There's something very Khmer Rouge about Alice Waters that has become unrealistic. I'm not crazy about [America's] obsession with corn or ethanol . . . but I'm [uncomfortable] with legislating good eating habits.[45]

Examples of the link between moralized consumerism and ideal citizenship abound in mainstream food movement discourse. There is an inundation of focus on green living, energy reduction, recycling, and individual-centered environmental action, recapitulated with a long line of ads for increased expenditure—soy candles, vegan shoes, energy-efficient light bulbs, and the list continues. American Studies scholar Warren Belasco writes of environment and diet, "Corporate power is rarely mentioned in discussions of health

and diet. Despite the growing sophistication of global environmental analysis, the overwhelming motivation for dietary change is personal, not political or planetary."[46] Noel Sturgeon similarly suggests:

> The new environmentalist consumer wave has the potential to move far beyond the utopian hopes of the "back to nature" desires of the sixties or the purist biocentrism of much of the mainstream environmentalist movement, because it is more sophisticated, more technologically adept, more realistic, and more situated in global contexts. But it must move beyond individual modifications of ways of living to address the systematic, institutionalized structures that maintain inequality and promote environmental devastation.[47]

To further this point, consider the buzz surrounding Alice Waters, whose 2009 guest appearance on *60 Minutes* reiterates Slow Food's local, farmer-centric philosophy, with increased demand for food in education, such as implementation of the "edible schoolyard."[48] Waters states, "I feel that good food should be a right and not a privilege and it needs to be without pesticides and herbicides and everybody deserves this food. That's not elitist."[49] When challenged as to food inaccessibility due to the high cost of organic grapes at a farmer's market venue, though, Waters notes, "Some people buy Nike shoes—two pairs. Some people buy grapes to nourish themselves. I pay a little extra but it's what I want." Fresh, whole, local, organic foods are at once deemed a human right, necessarily accessible to all without special resources; yet also the product of good consumer choices—a point that intends access to and interest in consumer possibility. Other recent food narratives take up similar food concerns, many addressing individual lifestyle or "what to eat" above systemically produced food insecurity, conflict- or climate-induced migration, or food-land accessibility related to genocide, homelessness, poverty, or economic and geographic disenfranchisement.[50]

In September 2014 *Mother Earth News* contributor, activist, and farmer-owner of Polyface Farms Joel Salatin critiqued Amanda Marcotte's piece for *Slate* on the gender and class dynamics of home-cooking, titled "Let's Stop Idealizing the Home-Cooked Family Dinner." Marcotte was likewise criticized by the *Federalist*'s Paul Rowan Brian in his response, "Complaining About Home-Cooked Meals Is Oppressive."[51] However, both Salatin and Brian's critiques missed the mark in my view. Rather than generating constructive conversations inclusive of a variety of perspectives and life experiences on crucial dilemmas plaguing food movements, such as barriers to food participation outlined in the sociological work that Marcotte examines, both authors shut down reflection on new, much-needed ethnographic data of gendered

barriers to the very thing Salatin and Brian claim to hold so dear, namely home-cooked meals. They take a patronizing, moralizing tone without direct discussion of the research cited. Both critiques rely upon loaded terms like *complaining*, *whining*, *personal choice*, *male oppression*, and *social values* to dismiss rather than ponder the extensive North Carolina State University ethnographic research cited. Salatin challenges, "Since when are women the only ones who are supposed to shoulder the burden for integrity food?" Brian argues that "of course wives, mothers, and women . . . shouldn't shoulder [the] burden of preparing good food." Yet the research represents 150 interviews with racially diverse low-income and poor families, including more than 250 hours of fieldwork. It does, in fact, delve in detail into work economies, unpaid labor, the legacy of food and sexed cultural values, and time constraints. If anything, Marcotte's piece and the referenced data don't go far enough intersectionally beyond sex and class. Insights provided as to low-income consumers could nonetheless prove invaluable to activists open to a variety of intersecting sociopolitical barriers to food preparation. That is, *if* the point of challenging the value of homemade meals and food system problems is not just about getting people to eat the "right" foods but to change conditions systemically.

One way to interpret Salatin and Brian's push for everybody to *just get in the kitchen* is to read these as pragmatic calls to action. Yet rather than repeating the same "Where are you spending your money" narrative we've heard a million times in fraud crackdown and anti-welfare circles, the critics might have taken seriously the barriers people took the time to document with researchers. Simply restating why the home-cooked meal is valuable does not work for many people's conditions, means, or personal tastes and desires. Countering with language about "whining" and "male oppression" only reflects an inability to recognize differing resources, barriers, or life circumstances. Not least, it moralizes the "correct" consumer choices and leaves little room for taste and self-determined preference, a point to which I return in the next section.

In the documentary *Food, Inc*. Stoneybrooke Farm CEO Gary Hirshberg notes, "When we run an item past the supermarket scanner, we're voting for local or not, organic or not."[52] If access to "good food is a right not a privilege," and yet some of the most prominent proposals and the most widely recognized "faces" of food tend to push "voting with the wallet" and lifestyle shifts—just buy organic grapes at the farmer's market rather than Nike shoes, as Alice Waters notes on *60 Minutes* and in the *New York Times;* just slow down, return to the land, eat locally, and can your own tomatoes, as Barbara Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* suggests; purchase, cook, and prioritize whole foods rather than processed foods (and for god's sake bury your

Fry Daddy), as Jamie Oliver argues in *Food Revolution*—the issues remain within an under-represented realm for the food-insecure, urban, and land-poor communities or otherwise economically limited people.[53] I do not suggest that these ideas are all bad or that consumers of diverse socioeconomic positionalities have no agency. Rather, that going back to the land (or back to the kitchen) might be a direct action solution for some, yet prove uninteresting, or prove to be a completely impractical impossibility for others, given the time, labor, and spatial necessities. A body-sovereignty-centric model of doing foodways that draws intersectionally from work in reproductive justice, centering itself around self-determination and an understanding of health as context specific, as culturally appropriate in varied ways, and as reflective of legacies of (dis)privilege has the potential to capture this more expansively. In "Against the Commodification of Everything," Jeremy Gilbert argues, "What really constitutes the basis for a radical democratic opposition to neoliberalism is . . . that it does so by imposing a singular model on every social scene irrespective of the desires, wishes or actions of those inhabiting it. [It's] not the assumption that the very existence of markets and commodities is bad per se, but that the imposition of marketization and commodification, especially at the expense of more democratic forms of social organization, is."[54] The very radicalization of choice-centric strategizing about food within the confines of capital exchange and purchasing power slowly constructs a narrowly moralizing as well as an ideal standard of food participation that may prove unobtainable, undesirable, or culturally inappropriate. Drawing from a reproductive justice angle to generate a parallel conversation of the aforementioned examples then, sovereignty-centric models center intersectionalism as a framework of choice rooted in the needs and desires of bodies and communities rather than in right-consumerism.

TAKE ME TO YOUR KITCHEN

> They made seed bombs to lob over barbed wire fences onto the tightly cropped lawns of military installations and corporate headquarters. Packed with the seeds of native flowers, the bombs would take root and grow. Little clumps of vegetative anarchy.[55]

Global "alternative" food economies include farmer's markets, community-supported agriculture, buying groups, community and home gardening, wild foraging, and seed-saving practices, functioning as resistance to key aspects of globalization like patents, privatization, or perceived homogenization.[56] In

Slow Food: A Case for Taste founder Carlo Petrini suggests, "Slow food was born in Italy in opposition to the fast food that landed on our shores and tried to take over."[57] Similarly, ecofeminist Vandana Shiva contends, "A virtuous globalization [should be] based on localization first [because] food unlike anything else needs the soil, the biodiversity, the water, and unless we conserve those we are never ever going to have virtuous production. Secondly, if we cannot maintain farmers on the land and guarantee livelihoods through robust local economies, we're not going to have virtuous trade.[58] Just as the epigraph to this segment suggests, then, doing food on smaller scales serves as an expression of resistance. Binaries of mainstream food movements are persistently balanced between (1) challenging transnational industrial agricultural practices, government subsidy of surplus commodity crops, and public health concerns over obesity, and (2) popularly countering these by supporting small-scale, localized organic agricultural practices.

Yet underlying class and cultural tensions of this binary also emerge, for instance, when Bill Maher spouts in his interview with Waters, "Somehow eating right got to be elitist. Didn't it? [That] astounds me that eating the right food [is] something that a lot of this country looks on as very suspect [democratic] politics—shopping at Whole Foods [audience laughter], whole paycheck. . . . Everybody says that and I'm sick of it."[59] The proposition of eating products considered morally good, as Maher dubs it, versus, say, what chef Anthony Bourdain argues to be the realities of socioeconomic difference further exposes this common binary: "When we [chefs] talk about the joys of all these great foods, we [should] also recognize [that] Tuesday night at Popeye's Fried Chicken they're lined up for an hour and a half for that 99 cent chicken leg. And they're not lined up there because it's a cruelty free chicken, or because it's organic, or even because it's delicious. They're lining up because it's 99 fucking cents."[60] Waters's response attempted to engage the ways in which policy directly affects market prices, forcing local organic producers to compete against heavily subsidized conventional products (to the tune of 25 billion dollars a year).[61] Clearly these arguments represent over-simplifications of complex food subsidy trends. Yet the comments also illuminate the social divisions associated with food and consumption. Maher's sardonic reference to Whole Foods as Whole Paycheck garnered peels of audience laughter, but critical debate regarding the high costs of organic fare, or the risks of fetishizing the right foods over conventional foods, is often the laughable stuff of naysayers and neoliberals, merely being protective of the cheap, unequal, genetically modified, industrialized commodities that have come quintessentially to define US foodways and trade policy. Yet these responses also represent oversimplifications of conceptualizing choice and taste in terms of morality over

self-determination. Drawing from work in reproductive justice, what happens when disinterest or tastes veer from what one local chef in Kansas refers to as "honest foods" representing "good parenting intentions"?[62] In much the same way that activists and scholars suggest that all bodies deserve medically accurate health care beyond moralizing rhetoric about what to do with or to our own bodies, what space is there in such examples for tastes that move away from the "right" choices in foods?

For Waters and many others, the proper response to the *real* food dilemma is returning to the kitchen: "McDonald's is never the answer . . . because there are so many beautiful things to cook. We just have to learn how to cook them again."[63] Chef-activist Jamie Oliver has responded to the dilemma with measures such as promoting healthy school lunch options available in public schools, food theatres, online anti-obesity fundraising, and establishing community kitchens as featured on his ABC reality television series and national campaign *Jamie's Food Revolution*. Clearly, what Oliver and Waters have to say about food is gaining popular momentum, as Oliver won the 2010 TED Award, among other media accolades, for his *Food Revolution Campaign*.[64] A particular trend in popular food discourse is obesity, specifically the targeted focus on fat itself, fought through consumption of better foods, exercise, and food education; though sometimes this trend comes at the expense of critical engagement of systemic disparities at the root of food and health.

Pushing back on the trend of anti-obesity centered rhetoric in the work of food scholars, Community Studies scholar Julie Guthman counters, "Entirely absent from the pages of the recent popular [food] books is any authorial reflection on how obesity talk further stigmatizes those who are fat, or on how this social scolding might work at cross-purposes to health and well-being. . . . [If] junk food is everywhere and people are naturally drawn to it, those who resist it must have heightened powers."[65] Feminist and corporeal studies scholars have steadily addressed centralizing public discussions around obesity as problematic. Guthman notes, "At best, fat people are seen as victims of food, genetic codes, or metabolism; at worst, they are slovenly, stupid, or without resolve." Author Kathleen LeBesco similarly argues, "Many thin people can indulge in all manner of unhealthy behaviors without being called to account for their body size. In other words, fat people are imbued with little subjectivity [while] thin people are imbued with heightened subjectivity."[66] Scholar Anna Kirkland attempts to redirect trends in the targeting of fatness and food, arguing for reorientation of goals toward anti-discrimination and conditions of inequity in resources like transport, food access, and poverty as opposed to obesity:

> [The] environmental approach to obesity has been sold as a progressive, structurally focused alternative to stigmatization, but it actually embeds

> and reproduces a persistent tension in feminist approaches to social problems: well-meant efforts to improve poor women's living conditions at a collective level often end up as intrusive, moralizing, and punitive direction of their lives [and] redounds to a micropolitics of food choice dominated by elite norms of consumption and movement.[67]

The ensuing result of such trends in mainstream food movements is both a pertinent environmental emphasis on obesity as public health issue but also an increasingly problematic moralizing, anti-fat, popular discourse that centralizes upon obesity and weight loss, perhaps, over intersectional, structurally healthier conditions, or resource equality *regardless of size*.[68]

The distinct moral tug-of-war here reflects Guthman's aforementioned point—due to resource differentiations, some foods and eaters are touted as "ideal" while others are constructed as problematic. As Kirkland points out, "Proper practices of food, eating, and exercise have been raised to the status of absolutely correct rules for good health rather than simple features of human cultural variety. A baguette is not junk food, but sliced white bread is [for example]."[69] Currently food acts as a medium not only for social change but also for participation in that change. I recognize movements as attempts to gain more knowledge and autonomy in food. However, regenerating autonomy and knowledge about food must also complicate the use of food as a form of right food/right choice posturing, instead centering diverse needs, bodies, legacies, and experiences.

Just such work is already and has long been centered in reproductive justice movements and thus provides excellent parallel models for application in terms of centering sovereignty in food. For instance, Dine midwife Nicolle Gonzales has founded and will soon be opening the first Native American birth center in the United States. When questioned about her work as a certified nurse midwife she notes, "I . . . talked to my family and my elders about birth and what it used to look like before Indian Health Services came in the 1950s. This very rich history revealed . . . [that] we as Native women have been purposefully separated from our traditional knowledge about our bodies and about motherhood and about birthing."[70] Gonzales's point centers both the impact of genocidal and racist legacies on health disparities and the midwifery traditions already a part of her Navajo culture. This work combines the body sovereignty principles of the midwife model of care with reproductive justice aspects of placing import on centering indigenous voices and traditions—from music and song to stories, foods, language, among many other factors in birth experiences. Through such an example, we can see the importance of the failed intersectionalism so often emerging from choice-centered discourse

in food and in reproductive health. While the political importance of choice is undisputable, choice-centric narratives need to ground themselves in intersectionality, as they frequently fail to capture diverse voices, fail to center the importance of sovereignty, or fail to embed the role of history in questions of accessibility and food politics goals, as so any of the examples analyzed in this article reveal.

RE-VISITING PARALLELS IN FOOD AND REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Because we are so used to the capitalist construct, it doesn't occur to us that we have a human right to eat; because if you don't eat you will die, it's not complicated. So, if there is a price tag to eating, then there is a price on your head. . . . I could set up a thousand charities that will feed a bunch of people. The question is, do I as a human being in this society, or in this life, have a right to eat.[71]

"There's an enormous amount of wisdom [. . . and cultural authority] contained in a cuisine."[72]

During her interview with geographer Nik Heynan, ex–Black Panther Elaine Brown places hunger within the brutality of capitalist contexts. How is it possible to capitalize on something as necessary as food or water? This question Brown raises of the *right* to eat is crucial to formulating sovereignty-centered food landscapes; and, I would argue, to do so in a way that embeds and centers the voices of people experiencing barriers. As Ai Hirashiki argues in her interview with *Growing Food & Justice for All*'s Spoken Word Initiative, "The most important thing in dismantling racism is to make sure that all these multiple voices are represented. . . . And once there's a better representation of who's involved in the food system, [and] what the impact and some of the injustices are that some people in different groups are facing in the food system."[73] I can agree with many food movement assessments of rethinking food systems, and the above epigram by Michael Pollan suggests that specifically revaluing the cultural knowledge embedded in cuisine is one way of rethinking food authority, of which he has so famously written. However, Hirashiki and Brown likewise extend this point of authority much further and much more intersectionally. One of *the* central looming dilemmas in US food movements is bridging the gap in this economic divide that separates lifestyle change, policy change, and the day-to-day material realities of institutionalized inequalities. This is a question of expanded representations within food movements, which can only happen with persistent redirection of targeted movement goals *away*

from virtuous, right choice/wise choice spending ideals and *onto* systemic discussions of the social and economic factors that generate unequal health differences and disparities—and, in fact, in many cases a recognition that there *are* health disparities, a point which is continually overlooked by returns to choice discourse in spite of factors like income, access, or legacy. A case in point is the previously outlined instance when Waters is faced with the high costs of organic grapes and responds with rethinking the allocation of one's spending on non-consumables like Nike shoes; or, as one local Kansas chef glosses entirely over food access and class factors in a recent editorial piece on local foods by countering with discussion of poor shopping choices rather than acknowledgment of the potential absence of access, resource options, or interest.[74] As many activists and scholars know, we are not talking solely about matters of consumer choice; thus, resisting the urge to couch food activism in terms of a virtuous spending paradigm is paramount.

In problematizing such currents I do not question the logic in "[shopping] the perimeter of the supermarket" when possible *and* desirable; or "Creat[ing] a farm on a city lot, sell[ing] produce on a corner, show[ing] urban kids where eggs come from. Plant[ing] in the cracks of the city," as urban farmer Novella Carpenter argues.[75] But let's not forget that resources matter in environmental movements, and that is what is so unsettling, because food is required, not optional. Food movements that do intersectional work to center diverse experiences, voices, and needs; that respect and embed the importance of history; that underscore the necessity of body sovereignty just as reproductive justice activists have modeled make space for the possibility of engaging food just as we might envision equitable health care—as accessible, necessary, diverse, culturally appropriate, and medically accurate. This also cultivates diverse perspectives about taste and appropriateness, so that a self-determined model neither dictates what to eat nor links good citizenship ideologies with narrow understandings of choice, right consumption, or right reproduction.

In raising such points for critical consideration, I conjure something scholar-activist Angela Davis argues: "Feminism helps us to inhabit contradictions. With it, we can understand being critical and supportive at the same time."[76] "'Choosing' Wisely" is my small attempt to engage a persistent and parallel discourse of choice in mainstream food discourses; one that obscures unequal realities, self-determination, and the centrality of history in food and health disparities. Placing reproductive justice understandings of body sovereignty in dialogue with food justice possibilities opens meaningful dialogue about the complexities of choice language, while also acknowledging its political salience in reproductive health and policy. Likewise, drawing upon feminist environmental scholarship to place in dialogue with these same

choice parallels permits extended understandings of environment and environmentalisms, as well as intersectional identity politics, bringing the body-as-environment and bodily usurpation in environmentalisms into central focus. By analyzing the parallels of right choice or wise choice discourse trends across food and reproductive justice, I underscore the model that reproductive justice work might serve and likewise underscore food and reproductive health together as extensions of one another for basic human rights for a dignified life. Both are linked within the complex social dynamics of food access and security. Their similarly persistent framing within paradigms of choice and individual consumerism are troubling and ill-suited to people's lived realities.

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