Food Justice, Hunger and the City

Nik Heynen*
University of Georgia

Abstract

We are amidst a long-overdue increase of interest in issues related food, cities and inequality within geography. While there has certainly been significant scholarship done on the issue, this area seems to be on the verge of defining many other sub-disciplinary trajectories as opposed to the opposite which has historically been the case. In this short review essay, we hope to signal the utility of the concepts of community food security, food sovereignty and urban agriculture for conceptually linking food, justice, and cities.

Introduction

Geography, and its cognate disciplines, is taking food politics more seriously now than historically has been the case. With a long tradition of engaging with social, political and economic inequality, geographers can offer valuable insights into struggles over access to healthy food, and struggles for food justice more broadly. Inequitable access to healthy food is widely recognized as a significant facet of geographies of urban inequality (see Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Gottlieb and Fischer 1996; Wekerle 2004). In this short review essay, we hope to signal the utility of the concepts of community food security, food sovereignty and urban agriculture for conceptually linking food, justice, and cities. Each of these terms have been mobilized to grapple with the geography of urban inequality, and we suggest that they offer insights into the origins of, and possible responses to, urban hunger and food insecurity. First, we discuss the production of inequality in industrialized food systems, with a focus on urban expressions of inequality. Next, we discuss the concepts of community food security and food sovereignty, as they have been theorized and researched by geographers and others. We then situate urban agriculture, and a body of work on it, within these frameworks to suggest new approaches to researching food, justice and the city.

The Production of Inequality in the Industrial Food System

Broadly, food systems can be defined as ''[t]he set of activities and relationships that interact to determine what, how much, by what method and for whom food is produced and distributed'' (Whatmore 1995:35; also see Nestle and McIntosh 2010). The industrial food system that supplies the vast majority of food eaten in North America has come under multi-faceted critique.

State subsidies stimulate the overproduction of key agricultural commodities like corn, making them cheaper and more widely available, but glutting the market and pushing prices downward in a global market (Goodman and Watts 1997; Guthman and DuPuis 2006; McMichael 2008, 2009). Driving this overproduction are neoliberal trade regimes and the corporate monopolization of agriculture, which have contributed to the decline

of agriculture as a livelihood for millions of producers, as small and medium-size produc-
ers are squeezed out by productivist pressures and a technological treadmill (Boyd and
Watts 1997; Breitbach 2007).

While global food supply chains have made it possible to spend less money on more
calories than ever before, the form of these calories is often insufficiently nutritious, con-
tributing to both nutrient deficiencies and chronic health problems, particularly among
the urban poor (Morland and Filomena 2007; Nestle 2002). In addition, food distribution
systems make the most nutritious foods the most expensive and the least accessible, espe-
cially in urban space (see Larsen and Gilleland 2009). The last several decades have seen a
mass withdrawal of supermarkets from central cities (Becker 1992), leaving many urban
residents to shop for food at so-called convenience stores, contending with price-gauging
and poorly stocked grocery shelves (Ashman et al. 1993; Morland and Filomena 2007).
The departure of supermarkets from inner cities, coupled with the proliferation of fast
food restaurants and disinvestment, has produced unaffordable, unhealthy and unsustain-
able urban foodscapes (Curtis and McClellan 1995; Riches 1997; Schlosser 2002).

The food insecurity that results from poverty and lack of access to affordable healthy
food ironically can lead to both hunger and obesity; a contradiction long ago pointed out
within poor communities by Harrington in *The Other America* (1962; also see Guthman
2011). The proliferation of high-calorie and low nutrient industrial foods, or what
Michael Pollan refers to as ''food-like substances'' has been linked to dramatically rising
rates of obesity in the U.S. Obesity is recognized as a contributing factor for several
debilitating and costly to treat chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension (Goran
et al. 2003; Swallen et al. 2005).

Beyond the historical-geographical unevenness inherent in the North American food
system at large (see Dirks 2003; Feagin 2007; Kahn and McAlister 1997; Levenstein
1988, 1993; Patel 2007; Poppendieck 1998), stark conditions of racial, gendered and
class-based urban inequality produce significant barriers to accessing affordable and healthy
food for many inner city residents (see Alkon 2008; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Barrac-
lough 2009; Heynen 2009; Slocum 2007, 2008; Witt 1999). Under these conditions,
urban communities are often deprived of access to a wide variety of foodstuffs for politi-
cal, logistical and economic reasons exacerbated by racial, ethnic, gender, class and age
disparities (Block et al. 2004; Kramer-LeBlanc et al. 1997; Pothukuchi and Kaufman
1999; Shaw 2006; Slocum 2011). Since the 1980s, the proportion of black adolescents
who are overweight has increased 120% (Sorof et al. 2004) within U.S. inner cities, over
twice the rate of white adolescents. Disparities among racial groups in rates of obesity
implicate social structural inequalities that include disparate access to healthy food
between whites and non-whites (Kumanyika et al. 2007; Low et al. 2007; Sundquist and
Johansson 1998).

Food Justice

These multiple and overlapping forms of disparity and disempowerment are met by calls
among many political activists for food justice. Alkon and Agyeman (2011:8) draw on
struggles over environmental justice to define food justice in both distributive and proce-
dural terms. They suggest that

[t]he food justice movement mirrors … two key concerns through the concepts of *food access*
and *food sovereignty*. Food access is the ability to produce and consume healthy food. While the
environmental justice movement is primarily concerned with preventing disproportionate expo-
sure to toxic environmental burdens, the food justice movement works to ensure equal access

to the environmental benefit of healthy food. Food sovereignty is a community's "right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Via Campesina 2002). Like procedural justice, food sovereignty moves beyond the distribution of benefits and burdens to call for a greater distribution of power in the management of food and environmental systems.

However, as Gottlieb and Joshi (2010: 5) suggest, "Putting together the two words *food* and *justice* does not by itself accomplish the goal of facilitating the expansion and linkages of groups and issues. Nor does it necessarily create a clear path to advocating for changes to the food system or point to ways to bring about more just policies, economic change, or the restructuring of global, national, and community pathways." Like other empty signifiers, for *food justice* to have intellectual and political value, it must both take advantage of the robust history of food politics and then move these politics forward toward more emancipatory goals. We suggest that linking community food security to food sovereignty though urban agriculture lends shape and substance to struggles to define and realize food justice.

Community Food Security

Community food security scholars and activists have long worked to address hunger and other inequalities in the agro–industrial food system by developing and strengthening relationships between local producers and consumers (see Gottlieb and Fischer 1996). The systemically oriented concept of community food security derives from the convergence of efforts of community nutritionists, agricultural researchers and anti–hunger and community development activists and researchers. Community food security initiatives integrate efforts to address hunger, foster small-scale sustainable food production, and develop new local markets for sustainably produced food.

Conceptually, community food security derives from and moved beyond the global food security agenda of the 1970s and to the individual- or household-based approaches to food security that took prominence in the 1980s. Global food security concerned the ability "to meet aggregate food needs in a consistent way" (Andersen and Cook 1999:142); by the early 1980s, recognition that a large food supply was still unevenly accessible led to a focus on individual and household food security. Two key conceptual shifts characterize the emergence of community food security as an organizing strategy. The first is a shift from an emphasis on short-term emergency food provision, to a concern *with secure livelihoods* as a necessary condition for food security. The second is a shift from reliance on objective measures of food security (caloric intake measures, etc.) to subjective elements of food security related to the *quality of available food* and even people's *anxiety about food insecurity* (Andersen and Cook 1999). Community food security is [2] embraced by progressive nutrition scientists and food policy scholars as both a normative ideal and an analytical frame. A prevailing critique of community food security as an analytical frame, however, is that it underemphasizes cultural relationships to food, and presupposes capitalist commodification of foods (Schanbacher 2010). While it can be easy to take commodified food for granted, food sovereignty scholars and activists direct attention 'outside the box' to consider food systems built on conceptions of rights rather than on capitalist relations.

Food Sovereignty

In this view, urban hunger is understood to be a direct effect of the commodification of food (Friedmann 1993), structural inequalities produced through urban planning and

zoning (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999) and the inequitable distribution of wealth (Power 1999). Through the lens of food sovereignty, the commodification of food is central to undermining freedom and autonomy, independence and culture in the food system (Pimbert 2009: 3).

In response, the paradigm of food sovereignty has emerged to directly address, rather than obfuscate these inequitable relations. Patel (2005) argues that while proponents of food security may presuppose commodified food systems, they are agnostic about which kind of production system can guarantee access to food. Food sovereignty advocates argue that any commodification of food will lead to food insecurity, because the commodification of food drives larger volumes food production, larger markets, and scales up power and control to global institutions and firms (Lang 2003). This leads to a corresponding loss of power and agency for both producers and consumers (Goodman and Redclift 1991).

Food sovereignty demands that individuals have a right to safe, nutritious and culturally acceptable food (Pimbert 2009; Rosset 2003, 2006, 2008) and a right to determine their own food systems (Holt-Gimenez and Peabody 2008). Food sovereignty movements work to forge stronger links and break down barriers between producers and consumers, and advocate for returning power and agency within the food system to producers and consumers (Schiavoni 2009).

Food sovereignty, conceptually, has its roots in various peasant-led movements, but movements are proliferating in the developing world as well, due to the accessibility and relevance of its message. While sharing some of the aims of community food security, food sovereignty seeks to connect consumers to producers through systems of rights based on mutual aid, rather than top-down aid (for examples, see Trauger et al. 2010). Food sovereignty activists argue that without a shared political stake in the food system, both producers and consumers remain passive recipients of policy, aid and subsidy (Pimbert 2009). Food sovereignty activists see the state as impeding knowledge, action and choice in the food system, and thus claim rights at alternative scales, including the city (Patel 2009).

The Promise of Urban Agriculture

Some of the most visible responses to the loss of producer and consumer agency in the food system include organizing food production on a community scale through the establishment of urban agriculture (Kurtz 2001; Pudup 2008; Trapeze Collective 2007); the **3** re-establishment of regional scale food systems with a focus on developing ''alternative'' urban markets (Donald and Blay-Palmer 2006; Wekerle 2004); and the demand for rights in the food system via food sovereignty movements (Allen and Wilson 2008).

Lyson (2004) identifies the geographic separation between place of production and place of consumption as a source of alienation between producers and consumers. One approach to closing this gap in cities is through urban agriculture (Jarosz 2008). Urban agriculture, since it seeks to return some control over food production, works to resolve this alienation by co-locating sites of food production and consumption (Koc et al. 1999; Schiavoni 2009). The processes of co-location that urban agriculture facilitates reduces, and in many cases even erases, the distance between production and consumption. Minimizing that distance allows the means of production to be more transparent as opposed to obscured by the exchange of money (Allen and Kovach 2000). This substitution of commodities for activities is central to undermining freedom and autonomy, independence and culture in the food system (Pimbert 2009: 3).

There has been a more radical turn within some ranks of urban gardeners who see growing food in the city as a deliberately political act of direct action and a way to reclaim spaces that have become dominated through the interests of capital and other corrupting social power relations. Through these fundamental organizing relationships as they play out in urban space, we see increased ability to strive for a model of community food security and food sovereignty via the material and discursive framing and material construction of urban gardens. To this end, Shepard (2007, 2009) discusses the important connections between community organizing, democracy, urban space through the context of urban agriculture in New York, as do Chan and Sharma (2007) in Hawai'i, Carlsson (2008) in San Francisco and perhaps most persuasively these issues can be seen **4** through the actions of Will Allen in Milwaukee through his organization *Growing Power* (see Bybee 2009). These connections between justice, democracy, urban space and community are articulated by Shepard (2009: 293) who suggests ''The seeds of conviviality, of acknowledgment of difference, grow roots in such spaces [urban gardens]. Thus, at their core, campaigns for gardens…involve a struggle for democratic possibility. Without such spaces, where citizens can meet, share a moment, where citizens can act together, democratic publics dwindle. … questions about democratic engagement could well be considered within a broader framework of community organizing, playing, sharing and creating and supporting spaces for social and cultural activism and conviviality.'' In Shepard, we can imagine organizing toward community food security and food sovereignty by people in urban gardens at the same time food is being grown and exchanged to actually meet the goals of community food security and food sovereignty in cities.

Urban agriculture is not without criticism. Guthman (2008) argues, that in spite of widespread analysis of the structural inequalities that deny urban residents access to nutritious food, the focus of most alternative food movements and food system reform, often remains on food, rather than structural problems such as systemic poverty and disinvestment or zoning and planning that locates supermarkets in peri-urban spaces. The ''alternative food movement'', typically led by upper-middle class whites, are often founded upon paternalistic desires informed by the ''whitened cultural histories'' of food (Guthman 2008; see also Slocum 2007). According to Guthman (2008), the efficacy of such alternative urban food projects is also understudied. Community gardens and urban agriculture also face a variety of obstacles, including threats from urban development (Smith and Kurtz 2003), legal restrictions (Domene and Sauri 2007) and political fragmentation along class, race and gender relations within communities (Allen and Kovach 2000). Criticism and obstacles notwithstanding, many urban agriculturalists find that spaces for community interaction around the preparing, preserving and consuming of food are necessary to return sovereignty to growers and eaters alike in a food system (Levkoe 2006; Winne 2008). **5**

Conclusion

In his groundbreaking work on famine in Africa, Watts (1983: 12) suggests ''[m]ost human societies have suffered food calamities grave enough to undermine health and well being, and to cause migration, political upheaval, and occasionally human mortality on an enormous scale.'' Food crises are not just the thing of rural African contexts now, if they ever were. This brief review has referenced primarily scholarship conducted in North American cities, because we believe that parallel capitalist, patriarchal and racist logics that produce hunger and food insecurity in the developing world bear down on vulnerable people cities in advanced capitalist nations. This review suggests in the broadest possible

terms that while there has clearly been important work done to theorize and address inequality in urban foodscapes, more work is necessary.

While there are many theoretical in-roads through which to consider the connection between food, justice and the city, we propose working to better link community food security, food sovereignty and urban agriculture because not only are they historically and theoretically robust, they also have resulted from organizing struggles in food insecure scenarios and all have shown productive possibilities for addressing hunger. The theoretical frames, if realized through action, might provide gateways to more egalitarian and just cities.

Short Biography

Nik Heynen and Hilda Kurtz are Associate Professors in the Department of Geography at the University of Georgia. Amy Trauger is an Assistant Professor in the same department.

Note

* Correspondence address: Nik Heynen, GG Building, 210 Field St., Room 204,Athens, GA 30602, USA. E-mail: nheynen@uga.edu

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Hilda E. Kurtz, University of Georgia, and;
Amy Trauger, University of Georgia

USING e-ANNOTATION TOOLS FOR ELECTRONIC PROOF CORRECTION

Required software to e-Annotate PDFs: <u>Adobe Acrobat Professional</u> or <u>Adobe Reader</u> (version 8.0 or above). (Note that this document uses screenshots from <u>Adobe Reader X</u>)
The latest version of Acrobat Reader can be downloaded for free at: <u>http://get.adobe.com/reader/</u>

Once you have Acrobat Reader open on your computer, click on the Comment tab at the right of the toolbar:
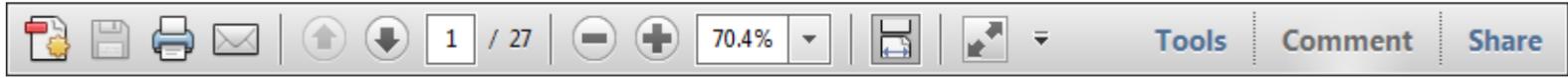
This will open up a panel down the right side of the document. The majority of tools you will use for annotating your proof will be in the Annotations section, pictured opposite. We've picked out some of these tools below:

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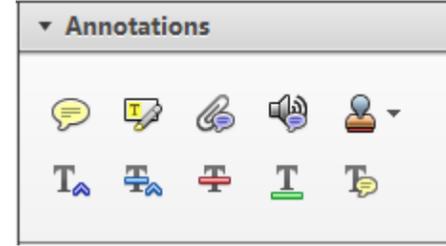
1. Replace (Ins) Tool – for replacing text.

 Strikes a line through text and opens up a text box where replacement text can be entered.

How to use it

- Highlight a word or sentence.
- Click on the Replace (Ins) icon in the Annotations section.
- Type the replacement text into the blue box that appears.

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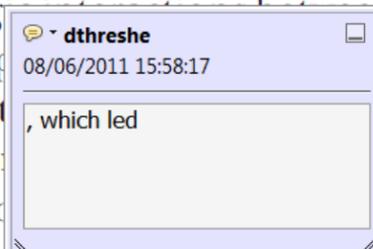
2. Strikethrough (Del) Tool – for deleting text.

 Strikes a red line through text that is to be deleted.

How to use it

- Highlight a word or sentence.
- Click on the Strikethrough (Del) icon in the Annotations section.

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3. Add note to text Tool – for highlighting a section to be changed to bold or italic.

 Highlights text in yellow and opens up a text box where comments can be entered.

How to use it

- Highlight the relevant section of text.
- Click on the Add note to text icon in the Annotations section.
- Type instruction on what should be changed regarding the text into the yellow box that appears.

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4. Add sticky note Tool – for making notes at specific points in the text.

 Marks a point in the proof where a comment needs to be highlighted.

How to use it

- Click on the Add sticky note icon in the Annotations section.
- Click at the point in the proof where the comment should be inserted.
- Type the comment into the yellow box that appears.

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## 5. Attach File Tool – for inserting large amounts of text or replacement figures.

Inserts an icon linking to the attached file in the appropriate pace in the text.

How to use it

- Click on the Attach File icon in the Annotations section.
- Click on the proof to where you'd like the attached file to be linked.
- Select the file to be attached from your computer or network.
- Select the colour and type of icon that will appear in the proof. Click OK.
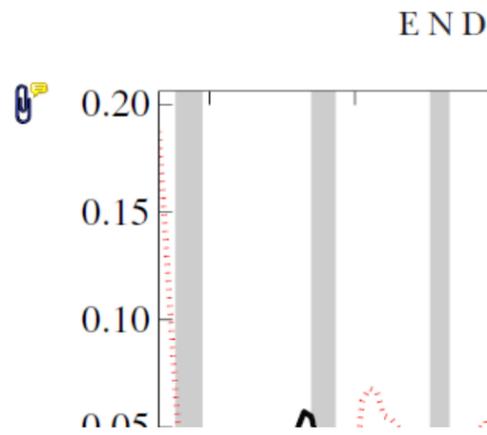
## 6. Add stamp Tool – for approving a proof if no corrections are required.
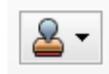
Inserts a selected stamp onto an appropriate place in the proof.

How to use it

- Click on the Add stamp icon in the Annotations section.
- Select the stamp you want to use. (The Approved stamp is usually available directly in the menu that appears).
- Click on the proof where you'd like the stamp to appear. (Where a proof is to be approved as it is, this would normally be on the first page).
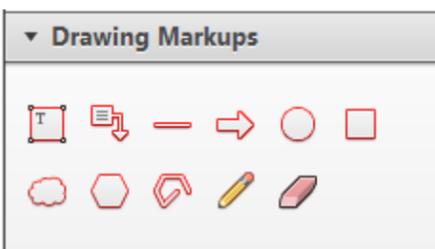
7. Drawing Markups Tools – for drawing shapes, lines and freeform annotations on proofs and commenting on these marks.

Allows shapes, lines and freeform annotations to be drawn on proofs and for comment to be made on these marks..

How to use it

- Click on one of the shapes in the Drawing Markups section.
- Click on the proof at the relevant point and draw the selected shape with the cursor.
- To add a comment to the drawn shape, move the cursor over the shape until an arrowhead appears.
- Double click on the shape and type any text in the red box that appears.
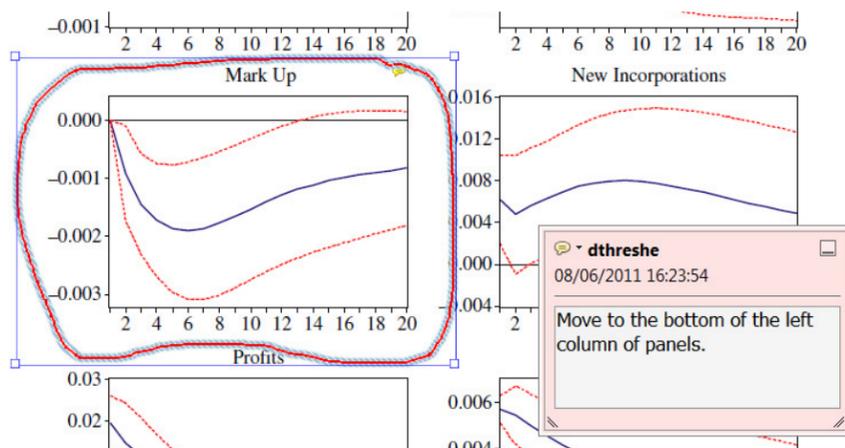
For further information on how to annotate proofs, click on the Help menu to reveal a list of further options: