



Anti-racist Practice and the Work of Community Food Organizations

Rachel Slocum

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Saint Cloud State University,
St Cloud, MN, USA;
rachel_slocum@hotmail.com

Whiteness enables the coherence of an alliance organized to promote community food security and sustainable farming. This unnamed presence shapes a discourse identifying the focus of struggle as well as resource allocation, conference form and content, list serv discussions, staffing and programming. Unacknowledged white privilege gives the lie to the movement's rhetoric of justice, good intentions and sustainability. And yet it is clear that racism is an organizing process in the food system: people of color disproportionately experience food insecurity, lose their farms and face the dangerous work of food processing and agricultural labor. Critical analyses of social movements argue that a failure to confront difference undermines progressive change efforts. The paper provides evidence of how the community food movement reproduces white privilege and proposes ways it might engage with anti-racism.

Introduction

The urgency and intricacy of negotiating racialized difference in social justice alliances is a compelling question for scholars of cultural politics (eg Bystydzienski and Schacht 2001; Grossman 2003; Narayan 1988; Pulido 2002; Reagon 1983; Twine and Blee 2001). The article contributes to this literature by exploring anti-racist practice as a framework for meaningful alliance across difference in the context of nonprofit work to promote community food systems. By focusing on race, I add to work on other aspects of difference in community food politics (see P Allen 2004; Guthman 2004; Qazi and Scholten 2005; Trauger 2004).

Community food work promotes fair prices and sustainable practices in farming as well as accessible, affordable, culturally appropriate nutritious food for all. Practicing anti-racism requires an analysis that recognizes intersecting forms of power, privilege cognizance and specific ways of working in alliance. Ruth Wilson Gilmore has pointed out that "we are trying to understand racism here" because it "gives us the foothold we desire" to show that one of the critical aspects of difference is the fatalities it produces. Researchers need to ask "what is the rationality or integument that keeps this insanity intact?" (Gilmore 2005). The paper attempts to reveal parts of this rationality in community food work.

I draw on my experience attempting to organize a community food coalition in Central New York, which involved participant observation at a variety of meetings as well as 26 interviews. I also rely on participant observation from the standpoint of being a member of the Outreach and Diversity Committee (ODC), a committee formed within the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) to promote anti-racist analysis and practice in the movement. I use threads from the comfood list serv, to which many CFSC coalition members subscribe, and my attendance at two CFSC conferences. The article is also based on 10 interviews in New York and Massachusetts that I conducted to test an interview instrument used in research that considers the negotiation of difference in community food work (Slocum 2004). The respondents I cite throughout the paper are long time community food advocates who serve or served as directors (EDs) or program leaders (PLs) within community food organizations. I use pseudonyms of first names to refer to these respondents.

First I introduce the community food movement. I then use three examples to illustrate the work of white privilege, a form of racism, in community food efforts. Finally, I explore how anti-racism might be practiced in this context.

Community Food Work: Definitions and Programs

The Community Food Security Coalition is a non-profit umbrella organization that facilitates community food efforts across the US. The organization dedicates itself to food security, food self-reliance and a food system that is “regionally based and grounded in the principles of justice, democracy, and sustainability”.¹ The community food movement exists through the CFSC, its list serv, conferences, and other networks of which its members are a part (eg the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture). I use the term community food broadly to indicate both the food security and sustainable farming elements of this network.

Food security exists when people have access to affordable, nutritious, culturally appropriate and personally acceptable food without the need to resort to emergency food or other coping strategies (Anderson and Cook 1999; Toronto Food Policy Council 1994). Food insecurity is present when people cannot obtain foods in sufficient quantity and quality to sustain health, well being and culture, yet they have easier access to foods that promote obesity and related illnesses (see also Poppendieck 1998).

Community food advocates critique the modern food system as a force destructive of local, sustainable and smaller-scale farming, local economies and ecological, public and animal health (Allen et al 1991, 1993; Allen et al 2003; Clancy 1997). The movement seeks to connect

people to the land and to food through urban gardening, farmers' markets, youth gardening, new immigrant farming projects and community-supported agriculture (Cone and Myhre 2000; Feenstra and Campbell 1998; Witt 2004).

The phenomenon of obesity and poor nutrition co-existing disproportionately among low-income children and adults in American Indian, Latino and African American communities is now widely acknowledged (Pothukuchi and Kaufman 1999). Research supports the thesis that race and class inequality play a significant role in who becomes obese (Drewnowski and Specter 2004). Community food organizations tend to respond to this phenomenon through nutrition education via cooking classes and recipe distribution. Other responses include eliminating vending machines from schools, changing lunch menus, establishing farmers markets in low-income areas and enabling the use of food stamps, WIC and senior coupons at farmers' markets (Winne 1998).

Some organizations address the widespread availability of processed foods that contain high levels of fat, refined sugar and salt and the relative lack of access to fresh, culturally appropriate and affordable food. One study found that predominantly black neighborhoods have 2.4 fast food restaurants per square mile compared with 1.5 in mainly white neighborhoods (Block, Scribner and DeSalvo 2004). Nonprofits do price, store location and transit analyses to show that there are "food deserts" in economically oppressed and/or of color neighborhoods (Sustainable Food Center 1995). In response, The X Main Street funds a shuttle to the grocery store in its Springfield, MA neighborhood because the mass transit system does not provide direct access for residents to area grocery stores. The Food Trust secured state funding for the development of grocery stores in under-served areas and Farm to City and East New York Farms, among others, work to establish farmers' markets in low-income areas of Philadelphia and Brooklyn, respectively.

Community food organizations also use urban and rural agriculture as a means to promote community economic development, cultural pride, health, and survival. Urban gardens are a means to provide employment, build job skills, generate income, educate youth and adults about nutritious food, and in some cases, bring people together across difference (Evans 2002). For one Massachusetts organization, Fertile Ground, the aim of coming together across difference is the goal whereas food is the means (C Sands, ED, interview, 15 November 2004). Building pride and strengthening the capacity of youth and adults in communities of color is an important part of some community food projects such as Nuestras Raices, Cultivating Community, Lots to Gardens, Revision House, Added Value and East New York Farms. Finally, members of the Ma'O community

and the Tohono O'odham,² Hopi and Wisconsin Oneida³ Nations are working to preserve culture, generate economic power and improve the well being of communities through their community food projects (Ma'O Initiative 2003; Nahaonhoya and the Natwani Coalition 2004; Tiller 2005; ver Voort 2004).

The movement extends a promise that social and economic justice is part of its work (H Herrera, facilitated discussion, Milwaukee, WI, 16 October 2004). It is not unreasonable to expect anti-racist practice in a movement that did not form specifically around racism and that involves program-oriented nonprofits (see Scott 2000). The next section shows how community food organizations do not connect the dots among white privilege, institutionalized racism, their community food work and the larger food system.

Why are all the White Kids Sitting Together? Privilege in the Movement

Many community food organizations remain unaware or closed to the ways that racism works in the food system and the community food movement. For instance, privilege factors in the whiteness of staff and particularly leadership. Of the 13 organizations in the North East with a staff of 10–35, the leadership positions are 84% white to 16% people of color⁴ and their board members are 11% people of color and 89% white.⁵ Those who experience food insecurity—American Indians, Latinas and African Americans, disproportionate to their numbers in the population, single women heads of households and people working for unlivable wages—tend to be “on the table rather than at it”⁶—the objects of the work but not the leaders of it. This is an argument against objectification and for building power rather than one that claims whites should not provide leadership in a Latino or black organization (Winant 1997). Further, many community food organizations act as service providers that answer to funders rather than as organizations that are truly accountable to and directly involved in building leadership and shifting power in the communities with which they work (see Newman and Lake 2004). Additionally, these groups extol the virtues of community and self-sufficiency in a manner that obscures the racist, classist and gendered features of the food system, past and present. Preliminary findings reveal that community food strategizing, priority making and alliance building do not recognize or act on the intersections of race, class and gender relations in the context of the food system. Though the above elements of racism's story may be, in a sense, old news, they are relevant to community food work. Both the way in which community food discourse constitutes difference, and the material exclusions that privilege enables are important.

Community food, a predominantly liberal, white, middle class social change effort, is part of the larger story of whiteness that “... never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations” (Lipsitz 1995:369 in Pulido 2000:13). Writes Laura Pulido, “[w]hite privilege thrives in highly racialized societies that espouse racial equality, but in which whites will not tolerate either being inconvenienced in order to achieve racial equality or denied the full benefits of their whiteness” (2000:15). Whites’ conviction that racism exists but is not associated with them is part of the power and tenacity of privilege (2000:15). What follows are three illustrations of how white privilege works in the community food movement.

Negotiating an Anti-racism Training for the CFSC

At the 2003 annual conference of the Community Food Security Coalition, several conference plenary speakers remarked on the persistent whiteness of the movement. The plenary moderator stated that in an attempt to diversify attendance, low-income youth of color had been given scholarships to attend the conference. The youth had not realized they were serving a purpose and were hurt and angered by the remark. The white author of these comments did not realize the damage of those words. However, the community food movement is cognizant of its “white, middle class face” (Field 2003). It is possible, even, that some community food advocates wish they could be less white. Outreach and Diversity Committee (ODC) co-chair Jim Hanna notes that the movement’s whiteness has been brought up at every annual conference (email, 25 August 2004). Indeed, the need to address racism has been recognized since the founding of the organization 11 years ago (H Joseph, conversation, 18 October 2004). However, the white face of the movement is perceived as a diversity problem rather than as a relational process embedded in society that constitutes community food.

Privilege and power are currently on the agenda of the CFSC staff and board through the persistence of members of the ODC. This committee has one yearly face-to-face meeting at the annual CFSC conference. In contrast to the whiteness of the conference, these meetings are predominantly attended by people of color. The committee does its work via monthly conference calls of 6–12 volunteers. People of color and women comprise the majority of active members. The ODC advocates for greater diversity in community food and a shift in its balance of power (resources, leadership, priorities) toward disenfranchised groups.

Over 2003–4, the ODC worked with the CFSC staff and board to organize an anti-racism training in which all three groups would

participate. Committee members researched a number of trainers and proposed Crossroads Ministry. We planned to hold the training in June 2004 at the annual retreat of the CFSC staff and board. In the late spring, the CFSC experienced funding difficulties and cancelled the retreat and the training. The news was an unexpected blow to the ODC, which learned quite suddenly in April of the turn of events. Several ODC members interpreted this change as a direct reflection of the intentions of the board and staff, that is, to avoid discussing racism. Just prior to this news we learned that several board members had expressed concern over the term “anti-racism”—finding that it was too negative a term. Others said that they had agreed to do a *diversity* training,⁷ not an anti-racism training and were worried that an anti-racism training would not cover important issues like class. We learned that a few board members felt that our request for an anti-racist training held the implicit message that some on the board were personally racist.

To resolve this conflict, the CFSC staff and board and the ODC asked Crossroads Ministry, an anti-racism training organization, to facilitate a day-long discussion in Milwaukee (just prior to the annual conference) to find common ground and to determine how to move forward. Discussion proceeded with equanimity until the trainers left. Then, board and staff participants voiced concerns that gender and particularly class relations would not be adequately dealt with in an anti-racism training. Others felt that a diversity training would reflect more closely what was needed. Some cautioned against moving too quickly, using the somewhat hyperbolic metaphor of the US rushing to war against Iraq. A few pointed out the need for more time before undertaking an expensive process of changing institutional practice. People of color and whites on the board raised uncertainties. After much discussion, the assembled group agreed to use the term anti-racism and to have an anti-racism training that would result in a longer term process to institutionalize what we had learned.

The assembled group asked the ODC to research more trainers over the course of a month and to produce a final recommendation. A few days prior to that deadline, a high level CFSC staff person recommended an organization called Visions that carries out multi-cultural training focusing on all the “isms”. The same staff person noted his greater comfort with this organization and remarked that they would “get the job done” although Visions costs were the highest of the trainers under consideration. From informal interviews with people who have attended Visions trainings, it appears that the group takes a gentler approach that avoids confrontation. To some observers, the Visions training does not go far enough. For instance, Visions has worked with one North East community food organization for four years. This organization recently raised the ire of the

members (largely people of color) of the neighborhood in which its urban branch is located for installing security cameras outside the office due to a nearby, unrelated killing. Its constituency of suburban mothers had been in favor of the cameras but the urban community (also a constituency) had not attended the meeting about camera installation. After 4 years of training, the organization might be expected to understand that surveillance apparatus has a different meaning for and racializing effect upon people of color. The cameras normalize a social violence linking blacks and crime and invite further state violence against those surveilled because of skin color.

“Let’s not Forget the Big Picture”

The community food list serv is another forum in which white privilege in the movement reveals itself. One post to the list discussed research showing that African American women in Roxbury, MA would have difficulty purchasing culturally appropriate, heart-healthy food on food stamps. Discussion centered on the term “culturally appropriate”, considered the loss of food knowledge and appealed to the ideal of self-reliance—a strong theme within community food work.

ODC member Hank Herrera, wrote in response to a point made about self reliance that “Among all of the possible solutions . . . the one that continually eludes us is the solution based on individual and family self-sufficiency. That solution requires access to the means to earn adequate income through employment or business ownership and thus strategies to overcome systemic barriers to full participation in the economic life of the community, barriers that still exclude groups of people based on race and ethnicity” (H Herrera, email to comfood listserv 5 November 2004). Peter, another list member responded, “My view is such people won’t ever have food security until they take the trouble to learn and grow their own as much as possible—or move where they can. Their grandparents did it but they’ve lost it. When you grow your own you don’t have to have ‘full participation in the economic life of the community’. When you grow your own, the plants don’t care what ethnic group you belong to” (Peter, email to comfood-l, 16 November 2004). ODC member Tiffany Golden responded to another part of Peter’s email in which he said, “. . . the biggest problem is some ethnic groups don’t have any ‘culturally appropriate’ foods that are healthy”. She wrote, “Not only is this not true, but [it does not include] the context of 1) how unhealthy foods were introduced to these communities, when and why—mainly due to colonialism, or indigenous farming practices/foods used stripped away by traumatic imperialist/industrialist movements; and 2) how violently changing a culture from a land-

based self-sustainable model to corporate dependency through force and economics is an undertone that is conveniently omitted, yet it is encouraged that African-American and Latino communities embrace a land-based self-sustainable model as if it were never a pre-existing reality. Once again, the Missionary Complex is unfolding—the ideal that there is no innate Wisdom within the culture, that it must all come from outside the group—THROUGH EDUCATION no less”. (T Golden, email to comfood listserv, 17 November 2004, her caps). The emphasis on access and education in community food rather than rights and power has been noted elsewhere (see Allen et al 2003).

The discussion continued without further reference to either Tiffany’s or Hank’s points. After 24 total posts on the subject, this thread announced that the following advertisement for a Harvard agribusiness seminar had caught the author’s eye: “... In 20 or 30 years from now, we may drive by supermarkets and wonder, Do people still buy raw food? ... Eventually, people are not going to look at the kitchen as a source of food, and kitchens will start disappearing. That would be a radical change for the food distribution system ...”. The author continued, “One man’s vision of the future and it’s being taught at the Harvard Business School. We have a lot to do. *I appreciate this listserv as a place for public discussion, debate, and dissent among subscribers, but let’s not forget the big picture out there*” (Andrea, email to comfood-l, 18 November 2004, my italics).

The message from this email, the debate around the anti-racism training for the CFSC and preliminary conclusions from interview data, indicate that the “big picture” to many involved in community food work is, as Andrea implies, corporate control of the food system. Andrea’s thread neatly and innocuously discounts the previous emails as debate and dissent outside of that big picture. Institutionalized racism is quiet, mundane and so quick that “if you blink your eyes, you miss it” (E Allen, facilitated discussion, Milwaukee, WI, 16 October 2004).

Good Intentions: Wiping Anti-racism off the Community Food Table in Central New York

As part of my participant observation of the community food movement, I attempted to organize a Central New York community food coalition. I succeeded in getting several key actors together: two members of the Onondaga Food Policy Council (1984–1994), the CNY Food Bank, Urban Delights/Jubilee Homes, the former director of New York Farms and Cornell Cooperative Extension. We agreed to build a larger coalition with roots in the various communities of the area—urban, suburban, farming, white, new immigrants and communities of color.

Anti-racism must be actively practiced or racism in an organization's work context may remain unacknowledged (see Scott 2001). Discomfort with the concept and a focus on intentionality obscures a view into staff members' own privilege and the means by which racism is institutionalized in the setting of nonprofit food work. It may be spoken as in this instance from one of the Central New York organizing committee members, but then not acted upon: "all that is encompassed within the food system is related to poverty and all is related to racism ... there is an overlay of racism everywhere in this area [Syracuse and Onondaga County, NY] and across the country" (Lisa, ED, 6 January 2004). Or it may be avoided. For example, in an interview with another organizing committee member, all my questions concerning the role of racism in food insecurity were struck from the discussion by the respondent's reply to the first question: "I'm not comfortable talking about that—let's move on" (Margaret, PL, interview, 29 March 2004). Referring to Margaret's organization, another respondent noted, "everything in this world on some level comes back to a matter of leadership, power and decision making—ie Organization X is so white that you could call the place snow. Are the employees there racist? No. Intentionally oppressive? No (mostly). It's just a matter of the manner in which they socially and culturally frame problems, responses, and solutions. Even their best laid plans to incorporate and solicit "minority" involvement [are] hindered by their skin color and social/cultural framing" (Sam, PL, email, 12 March 2004).

As a member of the coalition's planning committee, I had written a temporary statement of intent for the coalition. It and the letter of invitation to attend the first coalition meeting contained the following: "The organizers recognize that many forces shape the food system. These include the difficult economics of farming, the loss of jobs in the area, racism, class structure and gender discrimination, among others. These forces need to be carefully considered and addressed through the coalition's work". I had wanted to use the statement to signal to potential coalition members that we recognized the relevance of these processes. Yet in a rewriting of the invitation letter, Jim, another committee member, removed those two sentences. In a conversation after the letter had gone out, I asked him about the missing words and explained why I had written them in the first place. Jim replied:

I wanted to lie about changing it (pleading ignorance) but [I] realized that gets us nowhere and gives me an ulcer ... Still after [an anti-racism] workshop, I don't always feel the need to address issues in terms of racism, or power and privilege. Maybe it is a cop out but where does the learning happen most? Sometimes I think it happens

simply through experience with others without defining these issues. We know they exist. What people really need is to try and trust each other when they have to work together and defining these things puts pressure on both parties. But I do know it is exhausting for the oppressed party to always concede to the point where they would probably slug me for suggesting the above.

He noted further, “... Dismantling racism ... is not what you go to our organization for. And if you wanted us to be cognizant of that when planning, you needed [to educate] us first” (Jim, PL, email communication, 23–24 March 2004). One way to read his words is to see the ease with which people sidestep engagement with their own privilege and organizations fail to confront their role in institutionalized racism.

Jim also articulates ideas useful to anti-racist practice. He acknowledges how exhausting it is for people of color to endlessly explain the intricacies of racism to whites. His sentiment concerning trust echoes others’ desire that “first and foremost we must begin to talk more with one another” (Alcoff 2003:5). The civil rights struggle has displaced and refigured white identities such that they are now contradictory, confused and anxiety ridden, to an unprecedented extent (Alcoff 1998; Winant 1997:74). Jim obviously agonizes over his own privilege—not, perhaps, in an unproductive guilty way but in a manner that may suggest hope for alliance. But the answer to white anxiety is neither to castigate whites nor to help them feel good—both tendencies bring whites back to the center in unhelpful ways. And like the ODC assumption of negative intent on the part of the board in the first example, the focus on whiteness as solely oppressive ignores its other dimensions.

In my (“well intentioned”) efforts to “do something useful” with my time and energy, I began a process with the CNY coalition that concentrated power in established organizations rather than shifted it toward or nurtured it in marginalized communities in Syracuse. I wrote the aborted statement of intent, trying to signal from a position that could not be seen as trustworthy. I did not stop that enabling white, middle class, educated privilege from moving me to front and center because I wanted to be there. Furthermore, the form of meeting that would later launch the coalition repeated the mistakes of many white majority efforts to reach out to people of color—“we invited them but (almost) none came”. As Jim notes (above), I should have spent more time talking with him and others, yet it is equally true that all whites need to do the heavy lifting of thinking through privilege (Bailey 1998). However, whites should not imagine that they can simply learn enough anti-racist practice to do it well or to shed responsibility (see Thompson 2003).

Summary

Whiteness is one element that enables the community food network to cohere. Its potency is in the ability to find so many ways to avoid addressing an issue staring it in the face. My respondents told me, “of course racism is a problem, but . . . ” the sentence usually ends somewhere else. In the productive spaces of “yes, but . . . ” or “I/we tried . . . ” and all the other well-meaning material discursive effort that follows, is an extreme resourcefulness for creating difference and reinforcing racism.

The examples suggest that racism is understood in personal rather than relational terms, sometimes by both whites and people of color. Aside from an unwillingness to consider an uncomfortable subject, some whites may rebel against the feeling that, in a focus on race/racism, their other identities are not recognized as part of who they are. Other whites may find it more palatable to think that racism is inherent to them and their society and therefore, that there is not much that can be done (hooks 1995:266). Whites are also able to avoid action because they think that the struggle is not theirs. Finally, what Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa wrote within the context of feminist struggle is true for this example as well: “racism affects all of our lives, but it is only white women [and men] who can ‘afford’ to remain oblivious to these effects” (1981:62).

Whites may notice racism—it may even be cool to do so.⁸ They may be anxious about it or actively work against it, but ultimately holding onto the right to things that privilege enables and not recognizing that this is what we do means whites avoid an honest reckoning. Acknowledging desire for the material and social benefits that white, middle class privilege brings is necessary to productive meetings across difference (Adams 2002). The next section suggests what might be done in light of the above examples.

Toward Practicing Anti-racism in Community Food Work

It may be useful for community food advocates to actively consider that the US food system was built on a foundation of genocide, slavery and layers of racist institutions that have dispossessed racialized groups of cultural pride, land and wealth, in gender- and class-specific ways. It survives, for instance, through the work of people of color who serve, disproportionately, in the hazardous work of farm labor and food processing. Institutionalized racism intersecting with processes of colonialism, welfare ideology and gender and class oppression is also visible in the areas of food insecurity, disease and excess death.

A few statistics suffice to illustrate. In the 1980s, the number of black and white farmers declined by 30% and 6.6%, respectively. In

1999 black farmers owned less than a quarter of the land they owned a decade earlier (Flanagan and Inoyue nd). Further, American Indian nations' survival is threatened by high rates of diabetes. Fifteen percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives have diabetes.⁹ Between 1990 and 1998, the total number of young American Indians and Alaska Natives with diagnosed diabetes (most of which are type 2) increased by 71% (Acton et al 2002) and these two groups are 2.6 times more likely than the Euro-American population to have diabetes.¹⁰ Additionally, in 2003, African American and Hispanic households experienced food insecurity at double the national average (Weil 2004; see also Shields 1995). Finally, a study found that Spanish-speaking immigrants in California, Texas and Illinois were more likely to suffer from food insecurity than immigrants from other language groups (Kasper et al 2000, cited in Lee 2004:1). This land loss, food insecurity and vulnerability to excess death must be understood relative to whites' land ownership, greater food security and lesser vulnerability (see Pulido 2000). Of critical importance is that white members of the movement recognize how they benefit personally and organizationally from the work of racism in the food system, in the community food movement and in society more generally.

While I present the dire side of the food/race story, I am aware that the way social problems have been racialized has presented people of color communities as fixed and uncomplicated (Harrison 1995). These statistics risk speaking to our assumptions and adding unwittingly to the sediment holding races "in their place" in society. For instance, in nonprofit programming, a focus on poor blacks' consumption of "bad" food and their subsequent obesity may inadvertently support bootstrap ideology. In any event, the figures cited previously are only part of the picture. Equally, I do not want to reduce all aspects of the modern food system and states of food insecurity to white privilege because to do so would ignore the agency of diverse peoples of color as well as the role of class exploitation and gendered relations of power in the mix (Alcoff 2003).

Feminist and critical race theory underscores the strength, extent, persistence and perversity of racism and its manner of working differently on people who are simultaneously and differently racialized, classed and gendered (Anzaldúa 1987, 1990; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1991; Omi and Winant 1994; see also Nash 2003 on work in geography). This theoretical framework incorporates multiple axes of difference and avoids succumbing to a hierarchy of oppression that fixes power relations and identities (Collins 1998) as any location may be a site of both oppression and privilege (Collins 2000). The power of whiteness, for instance, is not spread equally across all white people (Alcoff 2003:10; see also Gallaher 2002; Jarosz and Lawson 2002). And white identity is becoming more visible and so more

susceptible to challenge (Winant 1997:74). To claim whiteness is solely destructive is not a positive enough basis for refiguring white identity or for meeting in alliance (Alcoff 1998). To judge white attachment to privilege solely on its contemptibility will not bring change: "it is possible to approach desire and attachment as inevitable, and yet not immutable if recognized in conjunction with the companion interests in justice and alliance" (Adams 2002:19).

Dismantling racism requires exposing power within all groups and recognizing differences among groups of color (Alcoff 2003). But anti-racism may require a temporary strategic focus on dismantling institutionalized systems of racializing oppression. For instance, historically marginalized groups often have to build strength in different ways (eg economic, see Grossman 2001) to meet more privileged groups on more equal terms (Collins 1990). Strategic interventions that rely on an analysis of needs within a particular context are not necessarily reducible to an essentialism that rests on monolithic, non-relational formulations of identity and difference (Larner 1995). In Larner's case, an effective site of resistance reflecting localized concerns was the decision of Maori women to articulate a Maori identity and to focus on Maori sovereignty rather than sisterhood with white women against patriarchy. However, for some community food organizations, their context, which involves working with youth positioned differently by race, nationality, sexuality, gender and class, requires them to adopt a more embracing form of anti-racist practice that acknowledges the connections among many relations of power (eg Regional Environmental Council's YouthGROW, B-Healthy, Lots to Gardens). A definition that considers these multiple intersections claims, "[a]nti racist practice involves a process of changes introduced into a wide range of social relationships within multiple hierarchical axes. [It includes] [s]truggles for maternal and child health care, religious freedom, immigrant women's rights and better working conditions for women and men in ongoing social transformations" (Romero 2001:xv).

Anti-racist practice notes how race, class and gender relations intertwine in the food system in different places that have different histories of racialization, gender relations and class struggle. These analyses might focus on land tenure, sovereignty, farm worker, food processor and food server exploitation, and/or the political economy and cultural politics of hunger and obesity. Carole Morison, ED of the Delmarva Poultry Justice Alliance, a cross race and class alliance, tells a story of increasing numbers of young Latinas employed in chicken processing and the dehumanizing techniques of the processing companies. She describes an aging population of African Americans struggling to make ends meet after becoming disabled through this work and the attempts of corporate poultry producers

to pit blacks against whites. Meetings of the alliance pull open issues of power and difference (C Morison, ED, interview, 16 September 2004). Analyses of oppression in the food system might lead to different answers to the perennial questions community food asks: How should we best promote food security? How can we keep small to mid-sized farmers in business? What is a community food system and how do we build it? Additionally, once privilege and oppression are considered, new questions might be in order as might different strategies that work from an acknowledgement of privilege and of the fatality of difference (Gilmore 2002).

This practice further involves changing organizational internal culture and the manner in which organizations establish relationships and work with disenfranchised communities. The foundation of anti-racist training is that “if an [organization] is anti-racist, it will be different in the world” and being different in the world can shift society (R A Días, ODC conference call, 4 August 2004). Being “different in the world” means that organizations with staff privileged by gender, class and/or whiteness learn how to be allies across difference in their work. Anti-racist practice would require nonprofits to know what issues are of concern to communities and then to evaluate whether these concerns are being addressed by their work. Organizations would then attempt through resource allocation, rhetorical practices, policy advocacy and so on to shift the balance of power toward historically oppressed groups in order to enable problem identification, leadership and solutions to develop within these communities. Differences in organizational operating style are shaped by race, sexuality, gender and class (Quintero 2001). Thus anti-racist practice necessitates long-term scrutiny of the organization’s internal culture. It requires different forms of decision making, perhaps through caucusing by race if people are more willing to identify first by race rather than other markers of identity. And within people of color organizations, anti-racist practice recognizes the need for leadership by youth, women and the working class and for representation of different groups of color including those who may appear white, such as members of American Indian nations, but who have been racialized nonetheless.¹¹

Last year’s co-chair of the Outreach and Diversity Committee articulated some of these points in an email sent to the comfood list serv in 2002. She challenged community food organizations to “look at our work to see if the projects and policy solutions we are developing truly challenge the racist policies and practices which have been central to the development of the industrial food system” (Mascarenhas 2002) and asked the list serv members a series of questions that remain useful and unanswered:

If we are talking about building power and taking control of the food system but the vast majority of people looked to as “leaders” in the community food security movement are white, middle-class, highly educated folks, we need to ask “WHO will take control?” and “WHO is building power?” Do the solutions we are developing speak to the issues that low-income communities and communities of color have identified as crucial (ie living wage jobs, housing, child-care, even supermarket development, etc)? What are we doing to provide people with the resources and information they need to identify their own solutions? What kinds of “leadership” are we trying to foster? ... (Mascarenhas 2002).

Nuestras Raices, a Holyoke, MA organization that runs a business incubator and gardening projects with youth and adults addresses racism “quietly and organically” through the confidence and pride that comes when community members turn a vacant lot into a garden, are elected to positions on the board, become staff of the organization and create businesses. Its anti-racist practice is evident in the organization’s habit of responding to community interests and the role of this community in setting the organization’s direction. For instance, when a group of women in the community wanted to answer questions they had about personal health, the director convinced grantors that health was within the organization’s mandate. The organization’s presence in the community means it steps forward to address the imbalance of political, social and economic power through the positions it takes at town meetings on, for instance, environmental justice issues. Anti-racist practice is clear in the questions the organizations asks of itself—is it building pride in the Latino/a community with which it works and is it directly accountable to them? Daniel, the Executive Director, pointed out that “food and agriculture lends itself to addressing [racism and power imbalances] because food is so central to communities and, if you had working communities, you’d have justice and equality ... At the heart is the element of justice”. He noted, further, that food security, as a school of thought, is problematic because “you can’t do *just* that. People are concerned about their communities, schools, about globalization and saving their farms. Food security cannot be divorced from the issues of concern to communities” (Ross, ED, interview, 2 April 2004).

Conclusions

Barriers to anti-racist cross-difference alliance persist in the failure of the white left to appreciate racism’s power and the growing complexity of US race and class identities (Kuumba 2003; Pulido 2002: 762–763). In anti-racism trainings, white progressives tend to have

greater difficulty (than, eg, working class whites) coming to terms with their role in institutionalized racism because they are convinced they are doing good work (R Luft, personal communication. People's Institute anti-racism training, Lewiston, ME, 10 October 2004). For instance, at an anti-racism training I attended, one white woman, when asked her racial identity, replied "human". Though her response confronted the essentialism present in these trainings, it was also an attempt to sidestep privilege.

Popular organizing theory has held that the best coalitions avoid conflict and organize around a lowest common denominator on which the majority can agree (Kurtz 2003). This approach was adopted, for example, by the Industrial Areas Foundation which built multi-class and multi-race coalitions but at the expense of a radical agenda (Altemose and McCarty 2001). Nonprofits engage in a similar approach when they avoid internal discussions about power and soften red flag words in the interests of getting funding, appealing to a broad group of constituents, remaining credible and, ultimately, staying in business (Quintero 2001). Though this strategy may be optimal in some contexts, it may also mean that pragmatism trumps an investigation of privilege or, worse, that such softening is a subterfuge to avoid confronting institutionalized racism.

Coalition requires heterogeneity and an affinity of differences rather than consensus through similarity (Haraway 1991; Young 1990). Cross-difference coalition, moreover, is vital to progressive politics (Poster 1995; Reagon 1983). In today's struggles for justice, alliances that show a heightened understanding of interlocking hierarchies are increasing (Kuumba 2003). Evidence from successful cross-difference networks has shown that confrontation is unavoidable (Bystydzienski and Schacht 2001). But addressing racism need not be divisive. Instead, anti-racist practice creates a space for solidarity across lines of difference—a space in which identities do not dissolve, but instead change (Jakobsen 1998). Anti-racist coalitions provide a forum for negotiation of differences within groups (Burack 2001) and it is perhaps only through the negotiation that occurs in alliance that people can become anti-racist allies (Jakobsen 1998).

Preliminary evidence reveals that organizational leaders in community food identify corporate power as the object of struggle. Their comfort level, moreover, with the concepts of class and poverty is much higher than with racism. Poverty and class were used interchangeably in interview responses and appear to mean income and/or wealth differentials. Racism seems to be treated as an epiphenomenon to class, which removes racism as a systemic process in its own right and ignores the fact that white privilege comes with benefits beyond the economic such as greater health, well-being and safety, a socially prominent history and canon and/or "a collective sense of

superiority and entitlement” (Bailey 1998). Poverty, as a concept, subsumes the living processes of oppression under a static fact—the poor. The idea of poverty is inadequate to the task of changing the food system because it is no longer derived from a critique of the structural inequalities of industrial capitalism (or for that matter, relations of race and gender), but is instead more apt to be linked to individual behavior and dependency (O’Connor 2002). In community food, the “big picture” captures small farmers as an undifferentiated unit losing ground to agribusiness. In a study of Californian sustainable farming organizations, staff understood social justice as economic equity, an idea that was not only disconnected from workers’ rights (Allen et al 2003) but was also apparently unconscious of the work of racism. With health and small farmers as the primary focus of community food, the movement as a whole did not ally with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers¹²—Latina/o and Mayan farm workers who successfully fought Taco Bell for an increase of 1 cent/pound of tomatoes that doubled worker wages.

This view of the big picture—absent an understanding of the intersections of race, class and gender—represents a more general limitation of the anti-corporate, environmentalist and local empowerment movements. Without attention to social relations, community food and similar movements will remain limited in scope no matter how welcoming or inclusive they aim to be (Z Grossman, email, 7 December 2004). These social movements are predicated on an “unraced positionality” (Wilderson 2003:229) and so fail to de-center whiteness. It is well within the scope of imagination that in future years, particularly after the CFSC’s 2005 anti-racism training and annual conference, community food advocates will announce that the movement has become more diverse, characterizing the change as an historical progression out of whiteness. This “cognitive failure” (Braun 2003:191) would erase the past and present existence of people of color in the movement in their own networks. It would also elide the fact that relational processes have constituted the movement as white and middle class and resulted in the positioning of people of color materially and discursively outside community food such that they must struggle to get in (Jakobsen 1998).

Community food work promises to build a more just food system, but it fails to act on the complicity of white middle class privilege with institutionalized racism extant in the food system and the community food alliance. I have argued that anti-racist practice is critical to building community food systems. It requires confronting the desire to keep privilege and recognizing the presence of other histories. At the organizational level, anti-racism includes changing the internal culture of community food nonprofits, their conceptual framework for and diagnosis of food system problems, their external

relationships with communities and other organizations and the manner in which grants, training and opportunity are allocated. Currently, many within the community food movement are oblivious to the work of racism, have not taken it upon themselves to learn or resist instituting practices to dismantle it. Some think they do good work as it is or at least they mean well. Others realize racism's power but do not feel compelled to act. Nonetheless, according to one observer of privilege and power in community food work, white, middle class staff and leadership are "uncovering [racism] finally, making minute changes and are not as comfortable doing the things they used to do as they used to be!" (M Moreira, personal communication, 15 April 2005).

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Zoltán Grossman, Justin Schapp, Jennifer Brewer, Bob Lake and Sharon Moran as well as to the anonymous reviewers, particularly Referee 2. I am grateful to my colleagues in the CNY Community Food Coalition for allowing me to engage them on issues of racism and community food. Equally, I thank the interview respondents from the NSF study (BCS 0417592) cited in this paper. I am indebted to long time members of the Outreach and Diversity Committee, particularly Diane Dodge, Jim Hanna, Hank Herrera, Anan Lololi, Michelle Mascarenhas and Meredith Taylor. The usual disclaimers apply.

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.foodsecurity.org>, accessed 28 November 2004.

² <http://www.tocaonline.org/Programs/Food%20System/foodsystem.htm>

³ <http://ocifs.oneidanation.org/>

⁴ The terms "people of color" and "white" are expedient but problematic. White is the somehow colorless norm; people of color, every other hue. The terms set up a binary that fails to reveal the way that groups are differently racialized. They suggest a commonality of experience and a solidarity that do not exist and they obscure the complexity of identity. I do, however, recognize that the term people of color is a strategy to unite people across difference.

⁵ Data collected September–December 2004.

⁶ <http://www.greenlining.org/academy/index.html>, accessed 10 August 2004.

⁷ Diversity training focuses on inclusion and tolerance as opposed to conflict, power, privilege and justice. Diversity training tends not to go beyond the personal and inter-group relations to the structural dimensions of racism (Shapiro 2002).

⁸ A friend's observation after the following: while we were sitting outside a bar on Nicollet Ave around 1 am, a young, white guy pointed out to us that the cops were "after the minorities again". We watched while two black men walking up the street were approached and within seconds tasered to the ground though they offered no resistance. As this unfolded, the man who had spotted the event went on to talk about having to take the bus and how disgusting it was because the bus was full of crack dealers and people who smell. The buses in Minneapolis are mostly used by people of

color during non rush hours on non-express buses. He appeared to see no connection between the two events or, among racialized people, transit space and state terrorism. My friend remarked that it appears to be hip to notice racism.

⁹ <http://diabetes.niddk.nih.gov/dm/pubs/americanindian/#23>, accessed 15 November 2004.

¹⁰ <http://cdc.gov/diabetes/pubs/factsheets/aian.htm>, accessed 15 November 2004.

¹¹ In the course of my participant observation of anti-racism work in community food, I have heard the claim that “he’s just a white Indian” meaning a white who calls himself an American Indian with the subtext, “and so he doesn’t get to talk about internalized oppression”. In other contexts, the argument has also been made that because some American Indians appear white, they do not experience racism or have not been racialized.

¹² http://www.oxfamamerica.org/newsandpublications/press_releases/press_release.2005-03-09.2587505725/?searchterm=CIW

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