

– SOWING SEEDS OF DISPLACEMENT: Gentrification and Food Justice in Oakland, CA

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Abstract

Green gentrification is the process through which the elimination of hazardous conditions or the development of green spaces is mobilized as a strategy to draw in affluent new residents and capital projects. Based on observations and interviews in Oakland, California, we argue that food justice organizations seeking to promote access to healthy food in low-income communities can unwittingly create spaces that foster this process. Despite a desire to serve long-term residents, activists embody a hip green aesthetic that is palatable to affluent whites and can be appropriated by urban boosters to promote the neighborhood. We use this process as a lens to theorize links between food and green gentrification, highlighting the importance of food to cities' efforts to brand themselves as ripe for redevelopment, and understand green gentrification as a racialized process tied to cultural foodways. We also attend to the practical stakes for food justice activism, arguing that a clear understanding of green gentrification and food justice activists' unwitting role in it can help the latter to attempt to mitigate their culpability and seek to develop broad inclusive strategies for locally led development without displacement.

Sowing seeds of displacement: gentrification and food justice in Oakland, CA

In the spring of 2014, a real estate agent released a video that she hoped would increase interest in a neighborhood she called NOBE. An acronym for North Oakland, Berkeley and Emeryville, cities in the San Francisco Bay Area, the neologism echoes other trendy neighborhoods like San Francisco's SOMA (South of Market) or New York's DUMBO (Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass). The realtor highlighted attributes like walkability, 'affordable homes' (at the time, just under half a million dollars), 'new cool bars' and 'great restaurants and cafés'—all evidence of what she called a revitalization. A moment later, she added: 'We're super psyched that there's a community garden across the street. That's definitely a bonus to this block!'. The camera then panned to the Golden Gate Community Garden, a project run by Phat Beets Produce. In doing so, it cast the garden not as a resource for the neighborhood's many food-insecure low-income residents, but as a selling point for the growing number of affluent buyers threatening to displace them.¹

Phat Beets is a food justice organization whose mission is to create a healthier, more equitable food system in their North Oakland neighborhood by providing affordable access to fresh produce, facilitating youth leadership in health and nutrition education, and connecting small farmers of color to urban communities. While it is difficult to define a relatively nascent social movement like food justice—the term has only become widely used since the mid-2000s—it can be seen as 'the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality's root causes both within and beyond the food chain' (Hislop, 2014). The movement can trace some of its roots to efforts to create more environmentally and socially sustainable alternatives to industrial food systems, especially those that build support for small organic farms through the establishment of local distribution

The authors would like to thank the activists who shared their perspectives and work with us.

1 See <https://evilleeye.com/news-commentary/commentary/realtor-responds-to-nobe-controversy/> (accessed 6 September 2018).

networks. These alternatives, as many scholars have argued, are too often available only to affluent whites, both because the cost of the produce tends to be high and because they are often economically feasible only in upscale neighborhoods (Alkon and Guthman, 2017). But food justice activists also cite roots in anti-racist movements, often invoking projects such as the Black Panther Party's free breakfast program (Alkon, 2012; Broad, 2016) and civil rights leader Fannie Lou Hamer's Freedom Farm Cooperative (White, 2017). Today's food justice movement most often works to improve access to alternative food systems (meaning local, slow, organic, etc.) and create opportunities for grassroots economic development by providing jobs for low-income people of color in the alternative food sector. However, despite missions to serve low-income communities of color, the degree to which individual organizations are authentically 'of' those communities is often cause for debate (Alkon, 2012), and the largest and best-funded organizations are predominantly white-led (Reynolds and Cohen, 2016).

Phat Beets' programs are in some ways similar to other alternative food organizations, as they emphasize the cultivation and distribution of local organic produce. But the organization's commitment to racial and economic justice is evident in every aspect of their work. They feature farmers of color through their farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (henceforth CSA) program—which lets customers pay in advance for a weekly box of produce—and work to develop local economic opportunities for food entrepreneurs and young people of color and immigrants. Although their group of largely volunteer organizers is roughly half white and a mix of long-term residents and more recent transplants, when paid work is available it goes first to people of color and long-term residents. Given these ethics, it's not surprising that Phat Beets organizers were livid at seeing their garden used to attract the kind of affluent newcomers whose arrival often signals the racialized dispossession of the land inhabited by low-income communities of color (Mele, 1996; Smith, [1982] 2008; Ocejo, 2011; Hern, 2017). Describing his opposition to the video, Max Cadji, a mixed-race man who founded the organization said: 'Our work wasn't the cause of gentrification, but our programs and our aesthetics were being used to sell land and help displace people' (Markham, 2014). Phat Beets began a campaign to have their work removed from the realtor's video, issued a public statement against gentrification and began to strategize with food justice organizations across the country to combat displacement of the community they seek to serve.

This scenario was our entry point for thinking about how gentrification affects and is affected by food justice activism. Over the past two decades, urban geographers and fellow travelers have analyzed this complex process, particularly the ways that developers and urban boosters, aided by policymakers, remake the urban landscape in the interests of elites (Harvey, 1978; Hackworth and Smith, 2001; Lees *et al.*, 2007; Smith, [1982] 2008). Scholars have also been interested in the cultural politics of gentrification, the ways that city boosters cater to the lifestyle trends of affluent, predominantly white, residents, and the role of artists, activists and other so-called creatives in both producing these tastes and shaping neighborhoods to meet them (Peck, 2005; Zukin, 2008; 2010; Ocejo, 2011). One strand of this thinking concerns green gentrification, the process through which the elimination of hazardous conditions or the development of green spaces is mobilized as a strategy to draw in affluent new residents and capital projects (Dooling, 2009; Quastel, 2009; Checker, 2011; Bryson, 2013; Gould and Lewis, 2016). Based on a year of intensive participant observation at Phat Beets, as well as interviews with other local food justice activists, social entrepreneurs and relevant city officials, we argue that food justice activism can, despite intentions to the contrary, unintentionally foster this process. Food justice activism's contribution to green gentrification is also supported by the increasing importance of food retail, particularly offbeat, funky and/or organic food, in producing distinction and cultural capital for urban places (Johnston and Baumann, 2009; Anguelovski, 2013; Martin, 2014). Food justice organizations create

spaces, including farmers' markets, community gardens, cafés and health food stores, that—despite missions to serve long-term communities—appeal to the tastes of new residents and signal to developers and other urban boosters that the neighborhood is ripe for redevelopment.

Thinking about the way that food justice can foster green gentrification expands our understanding of both concepts. Within the food justice literature, scholars have largely depicted individual farms and gardens as spaces of resistance to gentrification, from which communities can remain in place and even push back against the onslaught of urban neoliberalization (Glowa, 2017; Kressen and Brendt, 2017; Meyers, forthcoming.). Others have taken a more critical approach to the relationship between urban agriculture and development (Heynen *et al.*, 2006; McClintock, 2013; Stehlin and Tarr, 2016), but our study is the first to frame this in terms of green gentrification. It also extends this work by examining more entrepreneurial modes of food justice activism, such as a farmers' market and a cooperatively owned café, rather than the community gardens featured in this previous scholarship about alternative food and urban development. Understanding food justice activism as unwittingly implicated in green gentrification is crucial, because thriving food and restaurant scenes so often form part of how cities brand themselves to appeal to elite workers and capital investment (Hyde, 2014; Martin, 2014). In the San Francisco Bay Area, the ethics of this restaurant scene are often somewhat parallel to those of food justice organizations, including an emphasis on sustainable production methods, relationships with farmers and creating community, though who is imagined to be a part of this community often differs greatly. Moreover, the entrepreneurial modes of food justice activism—despite intentions to provide services and employment for long-term residents—create middle-class consumer destinations that new residents tend to seek out and projects become reliant on new residents' higher levels of disposable income.

After a review of the literature and an overview of our research methods, we will describe the ways that Phat Beets' programs, while designed to serve low-income long-term residents of North Oakland, nonetheless attract a racially diverse group of newly arrived young middle-class countercultural folks as volunteers. This group of early gentrifiers resembles Brown-Saracino's (2009) 'social preservationists', who seek to maintain the distinct local flavor of their new homes and provide improvements for long-term residents (see also Ocejo, 2011). However, the spaces Phat Beets has developed—including farmers' markets, community gardens and a cooperatively owned café—fit an aesthetic that was ripe to be appropriated by urban boosters as evidence of the neighborhood's so-called revitalization. We analyze these happenings in light of the small but growing body of research on green gentrification and argue that exploring food justice activism can help scholars understand this concept in new ways. We also attend to the practical stakes for food justice activism, arguing that a clear understanding of green gentrification and food justice activists' unwitting role in it can help the latter to attempt to mitigate their culpability and attempt to develop broad inclusive strategies for locally led development without displacement.

Food justice, gentrification and the cultural politics of place

Over the past few decades, support for alternative food systems has flourished, particularly in wealthy and gentrifying cities on the east and west coasts, and in college towns across the US. It is animated by an array of social and environmental concerns including opposition to corporate control of food systems, increasing awareness of the environmental costs of pesticides, and a desire for improved personal health and nutrition (Belasco, 1989; Allen, 2004; Lyson, 2004). In addition, tastemakers such as chefs and food writers have praised the flavor of local and organic produce, and its consumption has become a marker of wealth and distinction (Horton, 2003; Johnston and Baumann, 2009). Depending on the context, alternative food can connote either the

high-end cuisine associated with celebrity chefs like Alice Waters and Dan Barber, or the do-it-yourself ethic of scrappy non-profits and guerilla gardeners.

More recently, academic and activist critics have argued that alternative food systems cater largely to affluent whites, and are disproportionately informed by histories and narratives that are subtly racially coded in a variety of ways (Slocum, 2007; Guthman, 2008a; Alkon and McCullen, 2011). Critics have argued that the rhetoric these organizations use, such as invectives to ‘put your hands in the soil’, may evoke independent small-scale farming for whites while conjuring images of slavery, sharecropping and exploitation for people of color (Guthman, 2008b). As alternative foods became increasingly popular among affluent and white individuals, the ‘clustering’ of white-read bodies in spaces dedicated to their sales reinforces the association between these foods and whiteness (Slocum, 2007). While early activists reacted to critiques of elitism with a kind of normative color-blindness, arguing that the desire for alternative food should be universal (Guthman *et al.*, 2006), supporters later attempted to found community gardens, farmers’ markets and produce delivery systems in neighborhoods that lacked sufficient access to healthy food. These programs, however, often failed to understand the cultures and economic constraints of the communities in which they operated. When residents of these communities failed to attend their programs, white activists often responded by blaming communities of color for their lack of participation, arguing that they were ignorant or just didn’t care (Guthman, 2008b; Alkon, 2012; Kato and McKinney, 2015). In response, communities of color called for a food justice approach to alternative food systems led by community members and rooted in their own, and small-scale and chemical-free, food and farming traditions and foodways (Hislop, 2014). To the alternative food movement’s assertion that food systems should be more ecologically, socially and economically sustainable, the food justice movement asks the critical question ‘sustainable for whom?’ (Greenberg, 2013; Finney, 2014) and stresses that the needs of low-income and racially marginalized people must be addressed. The alternatives they have created, however, tend to be remarkably similar to those of the white activists who preceded them—market-based approaches encouraging support for farmers and local food entrepreneurs have continued to dominate, although food justice activists tend to focus specifically on farmers and entrepreneurs who are people of color (Alkon, 2012).

One feature of alternative food systems commonly described by the early scholarly literature was their ability to impart among urban dwellers a ‘sense of place’ through which individuals could develop personal relationships with both the natural world and one another (DeLind, 2002; Lyson, 2004; Andreatta, 2005; Dunlap *et al.*, 2013). Alternative food systems, according to scholar-practitioner Jack Kloppenberg (1996: 33), offer the opportunity to ‘ground ourselves in the biological and social realities of living on the land and from the land in a place we can call home’. This valuing of place was offered as a response to both the industrialization of agriculture and the hyper-rationalization of global culture, both results of corporate globalization (Ritzer, 1993; Klein, 1999). However, like sustainability more generally, place is often valorized in a way that is postpolitical and posited as a universal good (Swyngedouw, 2009). Food justice activism subverts this approach by reframing urban places as sources of potential power for low-income communities of color. Some focus on the ability of gardens and other local food systems to help communities create a sense of home in a new country and maintain connection to cultural foodways (Mares and Pena, 2011; Minkoff-Zern, 2012; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2014; Alkon and Vang, 2016). Others have attended to the more pragmatic benefits of place, emphasizing the opportunities food justice can hold for community-led economic development (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; White, 2011; Anguelovski, 2014), social network creation (Aptekar, 2015) and social movement building (Weissman, 2011; Loh and Agyeman, 2017). In a study that spans livelihoods and lived experience, Anguelovski (2014: 107) argues that urban farms and gardens

in low-income neighborhoods in Barcelona, Boston and Havana ‘have transformed neighbourhood conditions and habitat and increased residents’ quality of life [so that] environmental justice became intertwined with community development’. In this sense, food justice activism reimagines place as economically and culturally generative in ways that are specifically beneficial to low-income communities and communities of color.

Although many of these studies take place in cities undergoing rapid gentrification—Seattle, Boston, Los Angeles and New York—none of them explicitly engage with this process. Gentrification can be defined as the ‘racial and class reconfiguration of urban, working-class and communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment’ (Phillips *et al.*, nd). The omission of gentrification from food justice research is remarkable given that, while place is certainly made through the everyday lived experiences of communities, it is deeply affected and constrained by the processes of uneven urban development enacted on communities by large-scale capital projects, city development plans and urban boosters (Logan and Molotch, 1987; Blokland, 2001; 2009; Low and Smith, 2006; Lees *et al.*, 2007; Smith, [1982] 2008). In a sense, place can function as a ‘localist trap’ (Born and Purcell, 2006) for food justice activists, subverting their gaze away from the larger structural forces that shape on-the-ground realities, and creating a rift between place-based work and a broader urban left pursuing economic and racial justice and a ‘right to the city’ (Stehlin and Tarr, 2016).

Scholars have debated the causes of gentrification, with most examining the production of urban space and the role of developers, city policymakers and other elites (Smith, [1982] 2008). In contrast, a smaller number of scholars’ output and most popular writing adopts a cultural perspective highlighting the desires of middle-class residents for new urbanist design, including walkable public spaces, public transit and ‘authentic’ urban experiences (Zukin, 2010; Ocejo, 2011). While our study is among those examinations of gentrification focusing on the cultural tastes of new residents, we recognize gentrification to be a fundamentally structural process. Through gentrification, capital expands through the (re)production of urban space (Harvey, 1978; Logan and Molotch, 1987; Smith, [1982] 2008), as guided by city and regional policy (Hackworth and Smith, 2001). It is also a racialized process, not only because white residents displace people of color but also because it is predicated on the previous divestment from the urban core that characterized segregation and redlining, as well as the devastation of segregated neighborhoods through urban renewal (Lees *et al.*, 2007; Shaw, 2007). Thus this process capitalizes on racism, lowering property values and providing opportunities for subsequent investment. Displacement and violence are two of its core features; low-income communities of color are increasingly subject to police scrutiny at the behest of new residents (Ospina, 2015; Shaw, 2015) and are pushed out of their homes, at best resettling in less expensive areas and at worst becoming homeless (Newman and Wyly, 2006; Slater, 2006; Policy Link, 2016). Neighborhood organizations and retailers serving vulnerable groups, such as the ‘service hubs’ studied by Geoffrey DeVerteuil (2015), often follow not far behind (see also Sullivan and Shaw, 2011). In this context, the changing desires of the middle class for urban over suburban living, and for particular tastes and modes of consumption (including alternative food systems), are certainly a part of the gentrification process but are not its cause. As Smith (1996: 88) writes, gentrification is ‘rooted in the structure of capitalist society ... The economic, demographic, lifestyle and energy factors [of new residents] are relevant only after consideration of this basic explanation’ (see also Peck, 2005).

And yet, because cities compete to attract these predominantly white new residents, their cultural proclivities, while not the cause of gentrification, remain worthy of study—research examining the changing tastes of gentrifiers focuses on their desire for ‘authenticity’, including walkable streets, coffee shops, historic buildings, converted lofts, ‘ethnic’ and alternative food, and public art (Zukin, 2010; Ocejo, 2011). What

draws these aesthetics together is a culturally constructed notion of distinctiveness, an association with the so-called ‘creative class’ (Florida, 2002) that is considered apart from the mainstream, even as it increasingly becomes mainstream (Zukin, 2010). Both a thriving food and restaurant scene and green urban planning are increasingly a part of this aesthetic (Bryson, 2013; Hyde, 2014; Ocejo, 2017). The emergence of what Gould and Lewis (2016) call a green growth machine—a coalition of urban developers, planners and city officials who pursue green gentrification—demonstrates how essential urban sustainability has become to the gentrification process (Bryson, 2013).

Long-term residents know this as well, as epitomized in the words of John and Joice, two African Americans quoted in Hern’s (2017: 10) study of gentrification in Portland:

John: I knew Black people were fucked as soon as I saw the bike lanes. That’s when we knew Black people weren’t welcome here anymore...

Joice: And the community gardens. That’s another bad sign for the African American community. We always gardened. We always shared our gardens and our food. We didn’t need ‘community gardens’. That’s a white invention.

John and Joice read sustainable food systems and transportation as evidence of green gentrification; they see that the neighborhood is changing, and believe they will soon no longer be welcome there. The same has been noted with regard to health food retail (Anguelovski, 2014) and high-end cafés (Sullivan and Shaw, 2011). This is not only about the limited economic resources of long-term residents, but also their identity as African Americans in the context of foodways and sustainability practices associated with whiteness. The unintentional exclusionary nature of urban greening remains evident even when these practices are developed not by boosters and planners, but by early gentrifiers seeking to provide improvements for long-term residents. Despite intentions to the contrary, their presence nonetheless transforms their new neighborhoods to fit their own desires and aesthetics, and signals a readiness for increased development.

Distinguishing between the role of capital and the actions of middle-class residents is particularly important in cities like Oakland that are experiencing ‘super gentrification’, a late stage of the process in which both long-term residents and early gentrifiers like those we study are displaced by large-scale capital projects, speculators and elite workers (Lees, 2003). Oakland is the fourth-most expensive housing market in the country, with the average rent having doubled since 2010 (Renzulli, 2016). As in many other cities, gentrification in Oakland has built upon segregation and underdevelopment, creating a rent gap that investors can take advantage of through the purchase of depreciated properties. As several excellent histories of the city have described, Oakland’s longstanding status as a predominantly black low-income area with high crime rates and poor public health did not come about naturally. It was produced through a series of real estate and development decisions at local and federal level (Bagwell, 1982; Johnson, 1996; Walker, 2001; Self, 2005; McClintock, 2011). While the early twentieth century produced a racially integrated ‘garden city’, the combination of highly subsidized low-interest loans incentivizing whites to move to the suburbs and the redlining of black neighborhoods ensured overcrowded and dilapidated housing as the city’s African American population grew. After the second world war, developers and boosters encouraged the flow of industrial capital away from Oakland and into newly incorporated industrial suburbs, leaving a deindustrialized city with a declining tax base (Walker, 2001). The flatlands were additionally hamstrung by the construction of urban renewal projects in the 1960s which razed black-owned housing and businesses, displacing thousands of residents in order to construct freeways, rail lines and the city’s central post office (Self, 2005).

This divestment lowered property values sufficiently to eventually prompt investment and speculation. Though a definitive history of Oakland's redevelopment has not yet been written, recent demographic shifts have been motivated by a group of urban boosters, including developers and city officials, whose neighborhood-specific plans have attracted the construction of new housing and businesses including tech giants Pandora, Ask.com and (imminently) Uber. Speculation has made the purchase of existing homes or new condominiums almost impossible even for middle-class residents and rising rents have accompanied, and often outpaced, rising property values. Despite the existence of rent control, developers have lobbied to dilute requirements for affordable housing, and many landlords have subverted and broken these laws in pursuit of windfall profits, creating both displacement and homelessness (BondGraham, 2014). This process is a racialized one; the city has lost approximately a quarter of its African American residents while its white and Latinx populations continue to grow. It is also an economic one. Oakland's supergentrification is affecting both low-income and middle-class residents, although the latter naturally have greater recourse and more options. A recent study by the non-profit Policy Link (2016) found the number of Oakland units affordable for minimum-wage workers and entry-level teachers to be the same: zero.

The political ecology of land use in Oakland underlies the cultural and demographic shifts that have become topics of conversation as ubiquitous as the weather. Long-term residents have observed racially diverse groups of artists, activists and other countercultural types occupying former industrial buildings for decades, often creating mixed-use residential, studio and performance spaces. They have been followed by more affluent, predominantly white, residents, who have bought homes and opened businesses catering to the tastes of newcomers like themselves. Many of these businesses feature local organic food, and the city's thriving food scene commonly garners national media attention in publications such as *Bon Appétit* and *The New York Times*. Although the common narrative is that these new residents are mainly middle-class individuals and families pushed out of San Francisco by the tech industry's elite workforce, spending time in Oakland reveals new residents who have moved from all over the country, drawn by the city's temperate sunny weather, walkable neighborhoods, and thriving art and foodscapes. Indeed, many of the activists we spoke with, and both authors of this article, moved to Oakland specifically because they were interested in local food systems—and food justice.

Because alternative food systems are often essential to generating the kind of cityscape that attracts capital, affluent residents and tourists, we argue that food justice activism, despite the benefits it can offer to long-term community members, can nonetheless foster green gentrification. Activists create spaces that become part of the 'authentic' non-mainstream urban landscape that new residents seek out. Food justice organizations welcome new residents' support for their often struggling farmers' markets, CSA programs and other initiatives, which depend on these more affluent consumers to create economic value for the farmers and entrepreneurs of color who these organizations seek to support. Boosters can then point to such urban farming projects as evidence of the city's greenness, which can help to attract large-scale development. At the same time, activists are increasingly aware of the process of green gentrification, and struggle to maintain both their own economic security and commitment to long-term residents.

Methods

Quantitative research can document gentrification by measuring changing property values and demographics, but qualitative work is essential to analyze the ways that these trends inform lived experiences and communities' understandings of their circumstances. This research began when Josh Cadji engaged in a year of participant-observation with PhatBeets Produce, an organization with which he had been working

for two years prior. In this role, he attended Phat Beets meetings, their farmers' market, CSA distribution and other events. Cadji's constant presence allowed him to witness and analyze a rich diversity of interactions. He supplemented his observational data with interviews, allowing for a better understanding of how organizers and supporters make sense of their own experiences. This research was originally focused on questions of how whiteness coheres in and through discourses of healthy food at farmers' markets. However, the rapid gentrification underway in Oakland throughout the research process, including the release of the above-described NOBE video, piqued our initial interest in gentrification and its effects on food justice projects. This inductive methodology, through which the analysis shifts to fit the data, is consistent with a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1999).

Recognizing that other food justice organizations experienced similar dynamics, Alison Alkon then conducted 30 interviews with a variety of Oaklanders dedicated to food justice, including employees of non-profit organizations, restaurateurs and social entrepreneurs championing the cause. Interviews generally lasted 1–2 hours, were audio recorded using a recording app on an iPhone and then transcribed. She used a snowball sample, beginning with other community-based non-profits doing work similar to Phat Beets and with whom Phat Beets often collaborates. Following that, she widened her scope to include for-profit social enterprises and food businesses that were either mentioned by the non-profits as like-minded or who explicitly described their work as dedicated to food justice and/or community empowerment. While this sample included a few individuals raised in the greater Bay Area, the majority of those she spoke with were middle-class, educated, new residents. She stopped when she reached 'saturation', meaning that the collection of new data failed to yield additional insights (*ibid.*). Though this article uses only Phat Beets as a case study to demonstrate how food justice can unwittingly foster green gentrification, Alkon's interviews confirm that this is not a unique case.

Although this is not a study focused on gender, Cadji sought to deploy feminist ethnographic methods as suggested in earlier work by Alkon (2011; 2012). This approach avoids the notion that researchers can detach themselves from our social positionalities in order to produce an objective depiction of a social environment. Instead, feminist methodologies require researchers to reflect on our own social locations and their effects on the research process. This allows researchers to better understand, rather than seeking to neutralize, the specific historical, social and political context informing our subjectivity and the lens from which we look (Bordo, 1990). Cadji identifies as a man of Moroccan and Polish descent, Alkon as a white Jewish woman. We also share the economic and educational privilege that allows us to study others within an institutional academic setting and earn income from doing so, though Alkon's faculty position is more secure, long-term and lucrative than Cadji's role as a (now former) graduate student. In addition, both have long been involved in food justice activism. Alkon spent years working with a farmers' market in West Oakland during her dissertation research, and continues to write and teach about food justice. As a long-time organizer with Phat Beets, and the brother of its founder, Cadji shares an emic perspective with many of his peers and a much stronger sense of familiarity with activists. Indeed, readers will find Cadji quoted in this text as an activist representing Phat Beets, as he was often interviewed by popular media and asked to present on panels about food justice and gentrification. Cadji has been an essential participant in the narrative we have constructed, while Alkon offers a more etic perspective, albeit one sympathetic to activist standpoints.

Can you 'Feel the Beet'?

Phat Beets' 'Feel the Beet' farmers' market takes place on Saturday afternoons. A relatively small affair, it consists of between two and four farm stands depending on the day, and about half a dozen more tables featuring prepared foods, preserves and crafts.

The stands are simple—blue pop-up tents shade plain white folding tables, behind each of which sits a farmer, vendor or Phat Beets volunteer. Unlike other farmers' markets in the area, the vendors are all people of color. At the back of the market, Cadji and a few other volunteers distribute CSA bags—customers sign up in advance and receive a weekly array of whatever is ripe from the organization's partner farms, along with recipes and a newsletter featuring articles on food and racial justice. CSA is Phat Beets' most lucrative program and Saturday is their busiest day for collection, bringing in a steady stream of customers, many of whom examine what's in their bags and then proceed to pick up additional items from the market. In addition to the tables of seasonal, pesticide-free (though not certified organic), produce, regular offerings include honey and vinegar made by a man who recently immigrated from Costa Rica; and pickles and sauerkrauts fermented by Phat Beets Youth Pickle Company, which hires local, predominantly African American, young people to prepare and market these foods. Other options for lunch are *arepas*, stews and noodle soups made by local immigrant women from Argentina, Ethiopia and Japan, and raw vegan pizzas prepared by a young black Oakland-native who recently became a passionate advocate for healthy eating. The Feel the Beet market is held in the parking lot of the cooperatively owned Crossroads Café, which recently moved into a long-abandoned store and offers additional prepared foods: sometimes eggs and other breakfast dishes, sometimes barbeque, sometimes vegetarian sushi, depending on whose turn it is to cook. Phat Beets is a partner in the café, as are many of the farmers' market's prepared foods vendors.

Saturday is a busy day for Bay Area farmers' markets, and Phat Beets competes with two of the area's largest and most successful ones in downtown Berkeley and Lake Merritt, a wealthy Oakland neighborhood. For this reason, most customers come from the neighborhood immediately surrounding the farmers' market, arriving on foot or by bike. In addition to shopping for food, many of them stay for a weekly workshop, whose topics range from making homemade pickles to understanding the city's new Cottage Food Law that permits the selling of domestically produced food. The customers are predominantly white and in their twenties and thirties, although generally more racially diverse and younger than at other local farmers' markets, which are almost entirely white. Helen, a young white professional who serves as Phat Beets' volunteer coordinator, extols the market's diversity: 'As far as a visual space, it tends to be a diverse space. A lot of vendors of color, people there who are visiting the market, and selling stuff at the market. Having Thomas, Terrence, having Marcus, Enkopa there, having Manami there and the other Japanese ladies'. Despite her desire to promote the market's diversity, Helen's naming of particular people of color underscores what we have witnessed; most people at this farmers' market are white. Sam, a well-educated working-class Moroccan immigrant who has lived in various parts of Oakland for over 20 years, links this to the changing demographics of the neighborhood: 'I think [the farmers' market has] gotten more white over the last two years ... I won't deny it. There are exponentially more white people in the neighborhood now than two years ago'.

These new white residents, unlike many of their black neighbors, regularly show up to support the farmers' market. Francesca, a white woman who moved from San Diego to Oakland to do food justice work, describes how this occurs: 'I think Phat Beets, not intentionally, can become exclusive. There wasn't a farmers' market before, so there wasn't a culture of historic residents gathering around. Why would they start to now, especially when a bunch of people start going who they don't know and that haven't been their neighbors for long? [Long-term] residents see a bunch of foreign bodies and ask, "Is that space for me?". Similarly Rico, a Latinx Phat Beets volunteer, noted that the market does not include 'the people that are hanging out in the park or street corners ... I think it's very noticeable when they come to the markets. They ask questions about what's going on and then they leave'. Phat Beets volunteers are unanimous in their desire to include these people in the farmers' market, but have not yet determined how

to do so. Even when they offer workshops intended to connect with long-term residents, such as discussions about dismantling the prison industrial complex, addressing police brutality or offering a walking tour highlighting the neighborhood's history as the birthplace of the Black Panther Party, the attendees are overwhelmingly white.

White neighborhood residents do engage in and enjoy these workshops, as well as the farmers' market itself. Helen, for example, the white woman quoted above, describes the market as an amenity that first attracted her to the neighborhood:

As someone who is white and part of gentrification coming from San Francisco, for me the bottom line is, I was used to having the farmers' market a block from my house and was used to buying fresh fruits and veggies. Having the Phat Beets farmers' market close sealed the deal for me [to move to this neighborhood]. I'll do whatever to help support this farmers' market because it gives me access to fruits and veggies.

Sam describes this process from his perspective as a long-term resident and a person of color: 'Part of the enjoyment of the new people coming is in being close to the farmers' market ... the farmers' market is coming and bringing them new wave of things, including the people. The people can also be the locomotive for bringing more gentrification. It's a circle. New people see people at the market and then may feel safe moving there'. While Phat Beets volunteers are generally younger and more racially diverse than their customers, their well-educated, hip, countercultural aesthetic is nonetheless palatable to affluent whites who can afford to buy homes in the neighborhood.

Although Helen and Francesca are not a part of the community for whom this farmers' market was developed, it nonetheless helped to draw them to the neighborhood. Their support is certainly welcome at Phat Beets which, as a small financially lean organization, relies on individuals like them as consumers and volunteers. But Cora, a Chicana from southern California who works with Phat Beets while pursuing a PhD in environmental studies at UC Berkeley, explains how this can negatively affect the neighborhood:

By attracting young, white, liberal folks to this market, we are promoting a certain type of image about North Oakland—a North Oakland that is more hip and more concerned with issues of sustainability, which unfortunately is seen in a mainstream vision as the work of white and middle-class people.

Phat Beets does not intentionally seek to draw new residents to the farmers' market. However, the market fits neatly into the kind of lifestyle that new residents like Helen and Cora seek out. Phat Beets organizers are young, hip, progressive and racially diverse. Many come from middle-class backgrounds and code-switch fluidly between their left-leaning countercultural organization and the more mainstream tastes of their customers who have followed them to the neighborhood.

But despite Phat Beets volunteers' diversity and good intentions, the green growth machine—in this case represented by the realtor who produced the NOBE video—draws upon their bodies, aesthetics and food practices to signal an up-and-coming neighborhood to whiter and more affluent potential residents. This realtor is not the only booster to use local food systems as a selling point. For example, in a list of '35 Reasons you Need to Move to Oakland', compiled by online real estate brokerage Movoto, urban farms come in at number 19.² Titled 'Urban Farming is a Fresh Idea', the listicle depicts a pile of ripe garlic with verdant squash leaves in the background. The text reads:

2 See <https://www.movoto.com/guide/oakland-ca/moving-to-oakland/> (accessed 6 September 2018).

Was that ... a farm you just walked past? Yep. Oakland is a hotspot for urban farming, with entire communities coming together to plant and raise crops. It's not just great for community building, but it helps kids (and adults) learn the importance of nature, healthy food, and working together.

Another blog, The Matador Network, lists environmental consciousness among their '18 Reasons Everyone Cool and Creative is Moving to Oakland'.³ Their description is all about growing food.

Oakland has recently become one of the country's leaders in urban farming ... Oakland is now home to numerous grow-ops turning vacant lots into farmland. One group, City Slicker Farms, reports having grown already to 'five Community Market Farms (spaces open to the public), over 180 Backyard Gardens, a weekly Farm Stand, a greenhouse, and [numerous] Urban Farming Education programs', and there are many more just like it.

Realtors clearly view food activism as an amenity they can highlight in order to 'sell' neighborhoods to affluent newcomers. This is precisely the process of green gentrification that scholars have described (Dooling, 2009; Quastel, 2009; Checker, 2011; Bryson, 2013; Gould and Lewis, 2016).

Long-term residents who enjoy these sorts of amenities feel both appreciation and trepidation. Valerie, for example, an older black woman who was raised in North Oakland and serves as an informal advisor to Phat Beets, recognizes the role that the farmers' market, the Crossroads Café, and other Phat Beets programs play in both improving her community and attracting new residents to it. She begins her conversation with Cadji on a positive note, praising his organization's intentions.

I view Phat Beets as more of a community of people who want to do something in the community and move in to work with something that's there. The part where you're displacing—you moved in where there was nothing. You brought something, you added a contribution ... [It's] not impossible to improve without erasing ... [The farmers' market] adds to the value of the community. If NOBE takes Phat Beets and the farmers' market and co-opts it and hoards it as proof of how wonderful it is to live here, that's not Phat Beets that's gentrifying, that's the distortion of marketing.

Towards the end of the conversation, however, she concedes that if gentrification continues, all of the neighborhood's residents needing improved access to healthy food will be displaced. 'Then you won't have clientele for food justice', she concludes. 'All that will be left ... are your customers now, the middle class. Everybody else will be gone'. Valerie's comments highlight the ways that gentrification makes Phat Beets unable to fulfill its mission; the neighborhood's improved food access cannot benefit those who can no longer afford to live there.

As a participant on an urban agriculture and gentrification panel sponsored by the Oakland Food Policy Council, Cadji summarized this dynamic:

What we discovered was that while we were working to support food justice work and healthy food access for historic Oakland residents, often times the groups of people that did end up going to our farmers' market were new white residents of Oakland, which is totally great, but the problem is that the work we are trying to do is trying to support healthy food access for the historic

3 See <https://matadornetwork.com/life/18-reasons-everyone-cool-creative-moving-oakland/> (accessed 6 September 2018).

community. When our work becomes implicated in the gentrification process because of the way so many people see our farmers' market, they see our healthy food, they see our community gatherings, those are going to drive up the cost of the neighborhood because it is going to be an amenity, a resource that realtors can use in order to market the neighborhood.

Activists create spaces designed to address the rampant food insecurity among low-income, largely African American, residents, but because the spaces they create so deeply resonate with new, more affluent, transplants to the neighborhood, they become coded as white. Realtors and other professionals who comprise the green growth machine then seize upon these amenities to draw increasingly affluent residents and businesses to the area, raising property values and rents, and eventually causing displacement.

Understanding food justice as green gentrification: what's at stake?

Our analysis of food justice activism can contribute to the small but important literature on green gentrification in a number of ways. First, green gentrification is generally understood as a top-down process led by cities. Indeed, the first scholar to identify this process, Sarah Dooling (who calls it ecological gentrification), defines it as a '*planning effort* driven by ecological agendas or environmental ethics' (Dooling and Simon, 2012: 104, emphasis added). In contrast to this approach, our research joins Melissa Checker's (2011) seminal article in highlighting the role of local activists, whose attempts to improve their neighborhoods are appropriated by the green growth machine. However, unlike Checker, who studies long-term residents, the activists we observed are early gentrifiers whose work, as well as their tastes and aesthetics, fit neatly into the narrative put forward by urban boosters.

A second way our research expands scholarly understandings of green gentrification is that it is the first to analyze food activism through this lens. This relationship is significant because food is so often a central way that cities brand themselves as ripe for redevelopment, including large-scale capital investment and the luring of elite residents and tourists. Alternative food systems, which are often celebrated as anti-corporate counter-hegemonic practices embedded in face-to-face interactions with neighbors and the natural world, fit neatly into this aesthetic. For this reason, urban boosters can easily appropriate food activism to portray a neighborhood as creative, hip and green. Sociologist Sharon Zukin, whose earlier work contrasted farmers' markets with the overly commercial 'spectacular urbanism' (Zukin, 2004) of shopping malls and department stores, nonetheless conveys the role of alternative foods in constructing the authentic experience that gentrifiers seek. Zukin (2008: 724) writes that gentrifiers' 'desire for alternative foods, both gourmet and organic, and for "middle class" shopping areas, encourages a dynamic of urban redevelopment that displaces working-class and ethnic minority consumers'.

Thirdly, gentrification—green or otherwise—is most commonly understood as an economic phenomenon. The leading theorists tend to come from the Marxist tradition, framing their analyses in terms of capital shaping and reshaping the city in order to yield profits. Analyses of food that focus on its connections to cultural identity can fuse this economic approach with one that highlights the role of racialization. This goes beyond demographic analyses quantifying the numbers of black or white residents of a neighborhood to understand the process through which, as urban sociologist Bruce Haynes (2001: 40) elegantly puts it, 'race makes place, and, in doing so, place makes race'. As we see in North Oakland, neighborhoods long inhabited by communities of color, and to which these communities have often been confined through segregation, redlining and racial covenants, slowly become oriented to the tastes and aesthetics of new white residents. This is not only because of the clustering of white bodies in neighborhood gathering places such as the Feel the Beet farmers' market, but through

these bodies' proximity to material objects associated with whiteness, in this case local and organic food. For this reason, spaces created by food justice activists, even when they are intended to serve long-term community members, can appeal to new residents while becoming symbols of exclusion for long-term community members.

Lastly, we argue that activism that is entrepreneurial in nature is more likely to foster green gentrification, despite intentions towards, and material benefits for, long-term residents. New residents are often already enrolled in the kinds of green consumption practices that food justice organizations offer; they are accustomed to, and want to continue, buying local organic produce at farmers' markets. But this new customer base is simultaneously essential to and at odds with the organizations' missions. On the one hand, their consumption habits help to create enough of an economy of scale to allow food justice projects to offer produce and other products to low-income customers at subsidized rates, or even to hire low-income people to work for the organizations. On the other, reliance on selling food can also force organizations to prioritize the needs of affluent customers over long-term residents, lending credence to the perception among long-term residents that the healthy food these organizations offer is not for them. Because gentrification brings potential customers to food justice organizations, they benefit from it even as it threatens their ability to reach the long-term communities they seek to serve.

Conclusion

For all of these reasons, it is important to continue to study the relationship between food justice and green gentrification. Future work can investigate a number of questions, some of which are part of our larger project while others are beyond its scope. One set of questions concerns how various food businesses, and the meanings assigned to them, can shape the gentrifying city. For example, scholars can investigate the role of food-focused development and boosterism in attracting new residents and capital projects, and the kinds of new foodways that gentrification can produce. Another line of research concerns the effects of displacement on food security and health. Researchers can follow displaced individuals to better understand how gentrification has changed their access to healthy food. More practically minded scholars may also identify the kinds of food social entrepreneurship and activism that succeed in garnering material gains for longstanding communities. Others can continue to document the struggles of food justice organizations to maintain their own right to the city in the context of increasing rents. Lastly, we look forward to work that will analyze the circumstances under which food activists participate in anti-gentrification campaigns and the strategies they adopt in order to do so, and whether and how this leads to broader coalitions that can pursue racial, economic and environmental justice.

This last avenue for future work is particularly important, because this research analyzes who can continue to live in, work in and shape the gentrifying city. As Valerie indicated above when worrying that all of her food-insecure low-income black neighbors will eventually be displaced by Phat Beets' customer base, gentrification threatens the ability of food justice activists to fulfill their mission. Activists may successfully increase access to affordable healthy food in a particular neighborhood, but if those who lack access are simultaneously pushed out of the neighborhood, underlying environmental and health inequalities will not improve. Some food justice activists seek to address economic disparities through the creation of jobs, particularly for young people, and support for local food entrepreneurs. But as rents continue to rise, the ability of young people to stay in the neighborhood and keep these jobs, or of local entrepreneurs to afford retail or commercial kitchen space, becomes threatened as well. Food justice activists throughout Oakland have become increasingly aware of these dynamics. Some organizations have lost access to their own gardens, offices and retail spaces, while others have seen community members and employees displaced to outlying cities. Many organizations have expressed interest in working against displacement, but are less sure of how to join the struggle.

Phat Beets has been a leader in this regard. The NOBE video prompted them to recognize what is at stake and to shift their work to prioritize struggles against displacement. This has led to alliances with organizations led by low-income people and people of color, including former Black Panther Frances Moore's Self Help Hunger Program, which offers weekly meals to homeless and other individuals in a North Oakland park, and Poor Magazine, a poor-people-led grassroots arts organization. These groups have collaborated with community members to plant a memorial fruit tree orchard commemorating those who have passed away or been killed, and to prevent the city's departments of Public Works and Parks and Recreation from removing this food source. This is a very different strategy from that of scholars and activists advocating for neighborhoods that are 'just green enough' to improve the health outcomes of residents, but not so green as to attract outside interest (Wolch *et al.*, 2014). Instead, it is a form of what the activist group Movement Generation (2013) calls 'resilience-based organizing', communities coming together to meet an immediate need through physical implementation and democratic decision-making with the intention of pushing back against and challenging relevant legal and political barriers. Activists continue to green their neighborhood while working against displacement, actively sustaining alternative practices while surviving until opportunities for more transformational forms of resistance can arise (DeVerteuil and Golubchikov, 2016).

However, Phat Beets' new direction has caused rifts in the organization; some organizers and volunteers would prefer to focus any increased energy on their farmers' market, CSA program and other less controversial projects. Phat Beets' leaders have expressed anger at gentrification and, though they have been careful to blame systems rather than individuals, some customers have left, decrying the organization's more radical stand. Other Oakland food justice organizations such as the Oakland Food Policy Council and HOPE Collaborative have taken a more policy-oriented approach, working with the city to establish 'healthy development guidelines' that incorporate access to both healthy food and affordable housing. And nearly every food justice activist we've spoken to was a strong supporter of Measure JJ, which increased protections for Alameda County renters. These examples suggest that fighting gentrification may help food justice activists to create a 'transformative food politics' that can join with the broader left in advocating for racial, economic and environmental justice (Levkoe, 2011; Alkon and Guthman, 2017).

Phat Beets activists have undertaken this shift because they understand that without access to land—for long-term residents, community-based businesses and activist projects—there can be no food justice. As an organization, they have reflected on how their work attracts and serves middle-class residents, as well as the ways their aesthetics and ethics can be appropriated by urban boosters to upsell their neighborhood. Faced with the prospect of becoming another food-based amenity for new residents, they have instead chosen to advocate for resistance. In doing so, they have become a model not only of how food justice work can unintentionally foster green gentrification, but also of how activists can attempt to push back against it. We hope that this research will not just help to theorize green gentrification but also, by exposing these dynamics, prompt other food justice organizations to deepen their engagement with long-term communities and join broader struggles for racial, economic and environmental justice.

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