

**A Discursive Analysis of Culturally Appropriate Food:
The conceptualization and contribution to social justice**

by

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Abstract

Recent trends from alternative food movements associated with social justice have called for the right to culturally appropriate food, despite the absence of a definition or understanding of what this concept means. This has led to a variety of perspectives and ways in which this concept has been used to define social problems, but it is not clear that culturally appropriate food fosters social justice. This research analyzed academic literature to explore the ways in which culturally appropriate food is conceptualized and found four common themes: food insecurity, cultural insecurity, cultural imperialism, and imported foods that displace local foods. A social justice framework was used to analyze the relationship between these themes and culturally appropriate food to determine how useful culturally appropriate food is in creating opportunities for social justice. The results concluded that culturally appropriate food is not particularly useful in fostering social justice, but it does provide us with a greater understanding of the social problems it has been associated with.

Keywords: culturally appropriate food, social justice, food sovereignty, food security, cultural food security, cultural imperialism, imported food

Chapter One

Introduction

The abstract system we call “a culture,” and the abstract system of meaning that is thought to typify the members of society who “share” that culture, are neither simple coefficients of each other: nor two sides of one coin; nor merely the active and passive aspect of one system. To treat them as if they were is to bypass the complex nature of any society, and to impute to its members a homogeneity of value and intentions they almost certainly lack.

-Sidney Mintz, *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom*

Within any given culture, the social, political, and environmental elements of society shape and mold the diverse experiences of each individual, and therefore, as Mintz (1996) points out, cultures are complex and diverse. While common practices and traditions may distinctively and exclusively be represented by one culture, the members of that society continue to relate to their own culture in unique and individualized ways, whether they participate in the common practices and traditions or not. In the world of food, this means that while cuisines may highlight certain culinary practices, they are experienced in fluid and heterogenous ways by the members of that culture. Yet in the effort to preserve, defend, and restore cultural food practices around the world, recent trends in food movements associated with social justice are advocating for the right to culturally appropriate food. What does it mean to have food that is “culturally appropriate”, if culture is never homogenous and who defines what is and is not appropriate? Further, can these actions be realized in a socially just way?

The recently trending call to have “culturally appropriate food” has provoked many questions, including what it might mean and how it might look in practice. But further understandings also need to include the problems which have led to the perceived need that

people have the right to “culturally appropriate food,” and in what ways are these problems related to social justice in the food system? To begin to answer these questions, there needs to be a clear understanding of how “culturally appropriate food” is defined to better establish how it should be conceptualized and realized in the vision for a just food system. Although defining “culturally appropriate food” may seem trivial, it is in fact crucial, as movements with specific agendas make claims about how the food system ought to be for all individuals. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to dig into the different ways this concept is conceptualized and to make visible the relevance of “culturally appropriate food” to social justice. These findings analyze the work of earlier researchers, by exposing multiple interpretations of “culturally appropriate food” and proposing ways in which it is more or less useful in promoting social justice.

This research aims to address the current conception of “culturally appropriate food” in food systems discourse because I want to identify the considerations that should be acknowledged when adopting this concept in order to determine its usefulness in creating social change. The inquiry demonstrated in the following chapters studies the use of “culturally appropriate food” in scholarly writing and food movements to better understand how it is conceptualized in creating social change. While several scholars have analyzed the use of this concept, this research uniquely questions the application of culturally appropriate food in relation to social justice. The remainder of this thesis is dedicated to interrogating the place of culturally appropriate food within food systems discourse.

Chapter Two introduces the history behind culturally appropriate food while providing a brief background of the movements utilizing it. I then identify why operationalizing a concept that is ill-defined with social justice as the objective, is a social problem and explain the

relevance to my research, which asks *how useful is advocacy of culturally appropriate food in creating social justice?* This question is more specifically defined by two related questions which explore problems that culturally appropriate food is being made to address and the ways that these problems relate to social justice.

In Chapter Three, I describe the positionality which has led to my interest in this research and then follow with an explanation of the methodologies used which include critical inquiry, a scoping review, and critical discourse analysis. The methods of this research follow, with an overview of the process undertaken to collect and analyze the data needed to answer each question.

Chapter Four exhibits the results and analyses of the two research questions asked which work together to articulate how useful culturally appropriate food is in promoting social justice. Lastly, I discuss the contributions this research has made in our understanding of culturally appropriate food and its relevance to social justice.

Chapter Five, concludes this thesis by summarizing the key findings and suggesting further recommendations for future works.

Chapter Two

Background and Significance

While recent trends in food movements have established a cultural element in the right to food, few discussions have evolved to elaborate on definitions and meanings of this vision. “Culturally acceptable” and “culturally appropriate” are terms that have increasingly become more prevalent within food systems discourse, with the most common phrase being “culturally appropriate food.” These phrases have primarily been used in congruence with two alternative food movements working to promote social change: community food security and food sovereignty. Despite its prevalence, the concept of culturally appropriate food remains to be clearly defined by the majority using it. While the term has acquired some criticism for its broad and often superficial utilization (Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy 2015, Sampson and Wills 2013, Anderson and Cook 1999, and Hayes-Conroy and Sweet 2015), its placement within academic literature often appears to be applied as if the definition were obvious and agreed upon.

Contrarily, the construct has likely not been defined due to its complexity and subjectivity in identifying what any one food culture might look like for a population, and even further for an individual member. After all, people with different statuses (such as those of race, class, or gender) from the same population may hold varying perspectives about what is and is not “appropriate” to their culture. Despite the rising call for food and diets to be culturally appropriate, there has been little dialogue about the considerations of invoking this concept regarding one’s social or cultural identity, nor its relationship in creating positive social change.

Therefore, to encourage further inquiry of the phrase, this research is intended to explore the dynamics of culturally appropriate food. This includes its definition and conceptualization within food systems discourse, as well as its relationship with social issues and usefulness in

creating social justice. The remainder of this chapter illustrates both why a lack of discussion about the use of cultural appropriateness is in itself a social issue and how this research can address this by adding to the body of knowledge needed to understand the complexity of culturally appropriate food.

The History of Culturally Appropriate Food in the Discourse of Alternative Food Systems

The appearance of cultural appropriateness in the food system is primarily derived from criticisms of the limitations in the food security movement. Even though the initiative of food security was developed to ensure all people have access to food, rising criticisms have pointed to the movement's disregard for the unequal distribution of power within the food system, and lack of sensitivity to the diverse social and cultural needs of people, thus giving rise to new platforms. Both the community food security movement and food sovereignty have adopted clauses of culturally appropriate food within their definition.

Food security has evolved from the primary focus of food access to address the societal barriers inhibiting such access. While the assessment of food security primarily began in the 1970s as a result of a limited food supply, this concept has since evolved to incorporate the structural dynamics influencing food security across cultures by acquiring clauses of social and cultural relevance (FAO 2003). The most recent definition identified by the World Food Summit of 2009 states that "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life" (World Food Summit 2009, 1). Accompanying this definition are four pillars of food security.

Culturally appropriate food is first demonstrated within the framework of food security as a component of acceptability, as a response to be more considerate of diverse identities. While

the first three pillars, availability, accessibility, and adequacy speak of the physical attributes of food security, acceptability takes into question social and cultural desires of acquiring food. Rocha (2007) identifies the pillar of acceptability to include “food that is culturally acceptable, produced and obtained in ways that do not compromise people’s dignity, self-respect, and human rights” (8). The addition of a “culturally acceptable diet” is driven by the need to be considerate and sensitive towards differences in social and cultural identities, particularly due to the increased risk for minority populations to be food insecure (Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy 2015, 37). Possibly as a means to avoid “universalizing measures of food security/insecurity across cultures and regions,” the development of food security has since acquired such social and cultural components. This is in congruence with a shift from global populations to individual households, thus leading to alternative frameworks such as community food security (Hayes-Conroy and Sweet 2015, 374).

The community food security movement exemplifies the use of culturally appropriate food as an abstract and ill-defined concept. The Community Food Security Coalition defines community food security as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Community Food Security Coalition 2017). Despite this definition and dedication to a community-based approach, their website contains no information about culturally appropriate food, nor does it identify how one achieves a culturally acceptable diet. Similarly, the USDA identifies a Community Food Security Assessment Toolkit as a measure for communities to assess their level of community food security. Even as they acknowledge culturally appropriate food within the definition of

community food security, none of the measures described by Cohen (2002) clearly assess culturally appropriate food.

Similarly, the food sovereignty movement also holds an element of culturally appropriate food in their definition, but there are no references to point to its purpose or definition. Like the community food security movement, driving the development of food sovereignty was the call for the relations of power to be addressed. Food sovereignty is a vision organized by La Via Campesina, which represents small farmers struggling to resist globalized agriculture (La Via Campesina 2017). The food sovereignty movement is in part developed as a precondition of food security due to the lack of focus on power politics (Patel 2009, 664-665). In 1996 La Via Campesina defined food sovereignty at the World Food Summit as the “right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (La Via Campesina 2017). Food sovereignty has since developed internationally, giving voice to many under the unifying vision to define one’s own food system. Despite the deliberate assertion of culturally appropriate food through the definition, the food sovereignty movement similarly has made no obvious attempts to clarify how this should be adopted or achieved.

In a related, yet distinctively different way, cultural appropriateness has also been introduced through the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Through the Voluntary Guidelines: to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security, which was created in 2004, this was the “first attempt by governments to interpret an economic, social and cultural right and to recommend actions to be undertaken for its realization” (FAO 2005, iii). In further publications, three elements were identified as being important to the right to food, including availability,

accessibility, and adequacy (OHCHR 2010, 2-3). Among adequate nutrient requirements, the category of adequacy also includes cultural acceptability. As an example, they write, “aid containing food that is religious or cultural taboo for the recipients or inconsistent with their eating habits would not be culturally acceptable” (OHCHR 2010 ,3). While this example remains limited and only references what would *not* be culturally acceptable, it provides a glimpse into ways in which culturally appropriate food is conceptualized.

The emerging presence of culturally appropriate food within academic literature requires a more elaborate understanding of the ways in which these movements and organizations envision the concept. Where culturally appropriate food appears in scholarly work, it is primarily within contexts of food security, community food security, and food sovereignty. However, with few examples and little guidance from these movements, scholars are left to interpret their own meanings and understandings of how the right to culturally appropriate food can be achieved. In response, it has become a sort of buzzword, similar to words such as sustainability and diversity, with no clear strategies as to what it is specifically working towards or how it should be applied. In addition to remaining broad and undefined, it often appears as if culturally appropriate food’s meaning and context was inherently obvious. Contrarily, it is unclear how literally the phrase relates to specific food products, as opposed to culinary and cultural practices of procurement and consumption. Additionally, it is not clear what specifically is culturally appropriate to whom, given that different social statuses create different cultural experiences. Nor has anyone explained who is making such decisions.

Using culturally appropriate food in a way that is broad and vague leaves room for different perspectives to suggest contrasting practices and outcomes. While words, phrases, and concepts used broadly or ambiguously have their purpose by allowing the audience to apply their

own perspectives and interpretations, this particular concept requires a more deliberate explanation, due to its relations with social and political applications. Through other disciplines, the term culturally appropriate food in and of itself could remain broad and open to interpretation while referring to ways in which groups interact with food, create cuisines, and produce cultural identities. However, through food systems discourse, culturally appropriate food has been utilized to express and assert the ways in which the food system *ought* to be, specifically in regard to people's rights to obtain culturally appropriate food. Further, the concept is being invoked by international food organizations whose primary objectives are to address political and social agendas to create a just food system. As previously mentioned, FAO stands as the only organization to have provided further explanation, yet the academic literature primarily using culturally appropriate food continues to consist mostly of discussions involving food security and food sovereignty, where few dialogues have been found to explain, define, or even question the phrase with consideration for how heterogenous culture may be.

Cultural Identities

Cultures and cuisines are often described as uniquely different from each other, but homogenous in that individuals share the same cultural identities. Food and the associated culinary practices are a reaffirmation of the cultural and social elements of an individual's identity. Belasco (2008) asserts that “*all* groups have an identifiable ‘cuisine’, a shared set of ‘protocols,’ usages, communications, behaviors, etc.” (15-16). Within cuisines there are established dishes, distinct spices, and renowned concoctions of ingredients blended together to create specific flavor profiles. Alongside the ingredients and dishes themselves lies the culture's reputable means of acquisition and preparation as well as the social norms of consumption, whether that be sitting on a cushion on the floor or in a chair, and with chopsticks in hand, by

mode of fork and knife, or through a piece of chapati, among others. Different cultures share different food practices and cuisines, and within cultures subsets of populations set apart by varying social identities such as class, gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation differentiate even further. These cultures and subsets of cultures represent the collective identities that we as social beings relate to and are accepted by. Anderson (2005) establishes that a “society is made up of individuals interacting with each other to try to satisfy their various needs. ‘Culture’ is a word used by anthropologists to refer to the rules, customs, and other shared plans and behaviors that result from this interaction” (5). Further, Kittler and Sucher (2000) define culture as “the values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices accepted by a community of individuals” (5).

But in contrast, cultural identities are complex and interconnected to many societal elements, promoting individual cultural identities, and therefore individual food cultures, through the various ways individuals interact with society. In spite of distinguishable and predictable “borders” of cultures and their cuisines, the stagnant images of what is and is not *authentic* or *traditional* to any given culture may only depict the reality of a certain time period in history or may only resemble the cultural practices of a subset of the population such as the elite class. After all, what represents cultural foods to one might be very different from another within the population given that food choices are fluid and influenced by political, social, and environmental factors. Bell (2016) explains the relationship between culture and society by stating

culture is not one thing, but an aggregate of many norms, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors that are expressed by individuals and institutions. Likewise, society is an aggregate of institutions that reproduce attitudes and values from the dominant culture, and in their cumulative interactions convey the feeling that one is living within a cohesive system that can be described as society. (97)

Similarly, food cultures are part of a collective, but are expressed by individuals. Despite the variations of cultural culinary practices within a group, these practices and preferred food products are still representative of a culture to someone and act as a component of an individual's cultural identity, as something that is culturally appropriate to that individual, but still as something they share and can relate to with others from their group.

All over the world, people share different experiences of how they relate to food, and while some are accepting of unfamiliar practices, power asymmetries between populations throughout history have demonstrated many ways in which social and cultural identities have been subjected to the universalization of a dominant group's culture or social norms. Young (1990) calls this cultural imperialism and identifies it as one of five forms of oppression (66-67). She further contends that to experience cultural imperialism is to "experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other" (66). In the case of foodways, the food products and practices of a culturally dominated group now serve as a symbol of their experience as the "other." This has historically been and continues to be demonstrated through the processes of colonization.

Another form of oppression that exhibits power relations between populations is marginalization. Young (1990) views this type of oppression as one of the most dangerous because "a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination" (63). Where material deprivation includes desired cultural food products, the ability to share an appreciation of one's cultural identity through culinary practices quickly diminishes. For instance, where

entire Indigenous foodways have been undermined by colonial forces, the ability to acquire specific foods and hold access to land and waterways where products may be procured, creates challenges in practicing individual food cultures.

Even in cases where asymmetrical power structures are not primary drivers of threatened social or cultural identities, some argue that preserving the ability to experience food culture is important for one's well-being. When discussing the importance of culturally appropriate foods for immigrants, Moffat, et al. (2017) stated that "desirable traditional foods, or foods obtained and eaten in culturally familiar ways, moreover, are important in maintaining family and community networks" (16). As foodways and cuisines are significant elements of individual cultures, it is important for people to have access to foods representative of themselves. Food goes beyond the purpose of simply providing nutrients, by carrying social significance.

Yet, it is not clear that simply invoking the right to culturally appropriate food will create an environment in which people can be free of unequal power structures and maintain cultural identities. Further, without understanding what the meaning of culturally appropriate food is, as well as how it would be applied in practice, it is not clear what it is doing at all. Therefore, in order to understand how culturally appropriate food can be used to create such equitable environments and promote socially just relations between populations, it is imperative that the phrase is not only defined but that it shares a specific understanding across food movements so that it can be mobilized in the same ways.

An Inquiry of the Conceptualizations of Culturally Appropriate Food

While some scholars have criticized the broad application of culturally appropriate food in addition to questioning the role of social justice in the community food security movement, these criticisms have not intersected to question how and why culturally appropriate food is

being used to promote social justice. Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy (2015) explore cultural acceptability within the framework of food security and demonstrate that a variety of interpretations and conceptualizations are being applied. They also criticize the Community Food Security Coalition for a lack of direction in aiming for more control and justice (40). Similarly, Anderson and Cook (1999) scrutinize the community food security movement for being ambiguous and broad despite its focus on social issues. They too, address the broadness of cultural appropriateness and recognize that “cultural acceptability is conditioned by tastes and experiences, which are not shared or equally accessible” (146). While these criticisms question the ways in which justice is being achieved through the community food security movement, they do not extend far enough to question the usefulness of asserting culturally appropriate food as a solution in creating social justice.

Others question the broad use while pointing out the superficial ways in which culturally appropriate food might more often be used. Hayes-Conroy and Sweet (2015) criticize the broad addition of culturally appropriate food, particularly due to its application under the westernized nutrient focused approach towards food, which leads to a superficial understanding of diversity where food products are simply swapped out for different “cultural” products (376). Despite these criticisms, Hayes-Conroy and Sweet (2015) expressed that providing access to culturally appropriate foods is a commendable goal without questioning the risks of assigning static food categories onto different ethnic or racial identities.

Lastly, one study uniquely analyzes the use of culturally appropriate food by moving beyond its vague utilization to question how it relates to unequal power structures. Sampson and Wills (2013) are among the few who have critically analyzed culturally appropriate food in the context of food sovereignty and propose that there is an assumption that the meaning of

culturally appropriate food is universally agreed upon and is static despite regional differences (3). Their study explores the varying interpretations of what is culturally appropriate by allowing students to capture community- or food-related photos that are culturally appropriate to them. Through interactions from an audience at a gallery viewing they set up, they witness colonial privileges exercised by a tourist who questions the authenticity of an indigenous diet due to the addition of a Pepsi in a photo, leading them to ask, “who gets to decide what and how to eat?” They realize that “what is appropriate to eat is always defined in a context of power, and almost always, unequal power” (8-10). These are among the few authors who have taken note to question the purpose of cultural appropriateness, but further interrogation of its use will aid in better understanding its relationship with the social issues embedded in the food system.

This research aims to address the current conceptualization of culturally appropriate food in food systems discourse because I want to identify the considerations that should be acknowledged when adopting this concept in order to determine its usefulness in creating social change. While there are many questions concerning the use of culturally appropriate food, I am interested in discovering how suitable the concept is in creating positive social change as it currently appears to behave as a surrogate for social justice. To adequately address this research, two questions have been articulated to more concisely understand the parameters of culturally appropriate food. The first question identifies the ways in which culturally appropriate food is discussed in academic literature to find the perceived issues it is being used to address. The second question addresses how the process in which culturally appropriate food is used as part of a solution to these issues, intersects with social justice.

The first question asks: *what social changes are meant to be achieved by utilizing culturally appropriate food?* While both movements of community food security and food

sovereignty have adopted cultural appropriateness into their definitions, neither has made it clear what specific circumstances they are attempting to address, nor does the correlating academic literature address this lack of explanation as a concern. This question is therefore intended to explore the discussions involving the phrase to discern how it is conceptualized and what issues are being addressing. By identifying perceived issues that are being “fixed” through culturally appropriate food, discussions can move forward to critique how useful culturally appropriate food is in addressing these problems. This leads to the second research question which asks: *where culturally appropriate food is used as a part of a solution to create social change, how does it relate to social justice?* The purpose of this question seeks to understand the extent to which culturally appropriate food can extend to work towards social justice. This is achieved by analyzing the relationship between culturally appropriate food and the issues identified from question one, with a social justice framework.

This framework is created from the understanding that social justice exists as both a goal and process, in which the “distribution of resources is equitable and ecologically sustainable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure, recognized, and treated with respect” and “individuals are both self-determining (able to develop their full capacities) and interdependent (capable of interacting democratically with others)” (Bell 2016, 3). From elements of this definition, I propose three categories that are interrelated and collectively work to represent a social justice framework. These include the *fair distribution of resources, self-determination, and interdependence*.

The *fair distribution of resources*, as described above, is an equitable and ecologically sustainable process from which social, economic, and environmental resources are accessible. Here, social resources include public and community spaces, education and knowledge.

Economic resources include capital, labor, and market access (as consumers and producers). Lastly, environmental resources include land, waterways, and the naturally produced resources from these spaces. Bell (2016) also includes symbolic and political resources within this category, however they have not offered examples or defining ways of understanding how this may look. Therefore, I have chosen to look at the political relationship through the *interdependence* category and leave out symbolic resources due to its possible ambiguity.

Self-determination exists when individuals are able to develop their full capacities and have full inclusion to the “power to shape the institutions, policies, and processes that affect their lives” (Bell 2016, 3). This also includes having equitable access and control over the resource listed above.

Interdependence occurs when individuals are “capable of interacting democratically with others” (Bell 2016, 3). And includes the “participation in decision making” (ibid. 3) of the resources identified above as well as the distribution of power describes in the *self-determination* category.

In addition, it is important to establish how culturally appropriate food relates to specific categories often associated with social injustices.

Social categories such as gender, race, and class are used to establish and maintain a particular kind of social order. The classifications and their specific features, meanings, and significance are socially constructed through history, politics, and culture. The specific meanings and significance were often imputed to justify the conquest, colonization, domination, and exploitation of entire groups of people, and although the specifics may have changed over time, this system of categorizing and classifying remains intact. (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2013, 12)

Therefore, while race, class, and gender are not part of a specific framework used within this thesis, I point to these social categories as they relate to culturally appropriate food and its relevance to social justice.

More than just promoting equity for all groups, I also envision that if culturally appropriate food were to further social justice, it might in some ways highlight and address oppression and the asymmetries of power that exist between global populations. Identifying the ways in which culturally appropriate food relates to social issues through these criteria provides a greater understanding of how useful it may be in addressing social justice.

In summary, this research serves to inquire about the current uses of culturally appropriate food in food systems discourse, specifically through academic literature primarily in the contexts of food security and food sovereignty. Cultural foods and the practices incorporated in associated cuisines are significant elements that interconnect with group identities. Social problems stem from where these identities are subjected to being culturally dominated and have driven concern for social and cultural well-being. This concern has in turn challenged the platform of food security, leading to the development of community food security and food sovereignty, both of which carry the clause of culturally appropriate food within their definitions. With little explanation for adopting culturally appropriate food into these movements, I aim to further engage academic literature to see how this concept relates to social justice and highlighting ways in which it may be useful. I now turn to identify how this research has been conducted through methodologies and methods.

Chapter Three

Methodology and Methods

It is important to understand the experiences that have led me to pursue this research so as to better understand my purpose and intentions just as it is essential to distinguish the path I have taken to accomplish it. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to identify my positionality and the methodologies and methods utilized within this research. After describing the personal interests which have led me to pursue research in cultural acceptability, I explain the importance of critical inquiry as well as how a scoping review and discourse analysis have shaped this study. Finally, I address the format from which this research was conducted through an explanation of each research question.

Positionality

Throughout my life, I have had the privilege to experience many different cultures and their food traditions. This has allowed me to broaden my perspective to be more open minded about the ways in which others identify with food, as well as the way in which I identify with my own. A personal academic experience I draw on is a study abroad course entitled, “History of Food in Oaxaca and Mexico,” from which I learned about colonialism in Mesoamerica and its implications which have led to present day concerns for many populations of Mexico. Two significant pieces of knowledge which have particularly driven my motivation for this research are 1) it is hypothesized that during the Spanish colonization, amaranth, a type of grain which has recently gained popularity as an “ancient grain”, was perceived as a type of “barbaric” food due to its use in indigenous sacrificial rituals and therefore banned from consumption, and 2)

insects are a common edible product in most places around the world other than Europe and the United States.

Through this knowledge, I was intrigued to further understand the ways in which power influences the abilities for populations to alter the food systems of others. The first piece of information stood out to me as example of ways in which dominant cultures can undermine and detrimentally impair the cultural relevance of food for marginalized populations. This has encouraged me to seek out the historical effects of colonialism on colonized populations to understand how we can protect cultural food traditions from the influences of dominating power asymmetries. The second grew my curiosity toward types of foods and provisioning methods unique to different people, and the ways in which we could preserve them. It also made me question how perceptions of unfamiliar foods by one group affect those who consume such products.

Naturally, the first time I saw the phrase “the right to culturally appropriate food” I was excited to learn more about how this may be realized. However, my research in this topic has since led me to realize that while it is important to address power asymmetries and effects of perceptions towards unfamiliar food products, what is and is not “culturally appropriate food” is much more complex. This topic requires analysis in relation to the topics I listed, among others, to understand if the right to culturally appropriate food *should* be realized. Thus, my experience has drawn me to be critical of both the language used within food systems discourse and the ways in which concepts actually relate to achieving social justice.

Methodologies

This research is founded in critical social science and employs critical inquiry as the primary methodology. Comstock (1994) states, “the function of critical social science is to

increase the awareness of social actors of the contradictory conditions of action which are distorted or hidden by everyday understandings” (626). Through the interrogation of culturally appropriate food, this research seeks to increase the awareness of social agents, such as scholars, advocates, and food movements, in their knowledge of creating social change through cultural constructs. This research is accomplished through an understanding of the sociohistorical constructs that have composed and continue to reconstruct society (627). Further, it “directly contribute[s] to the revitalization of moral discourse and revolutionary action by engaging its subjects in a process of active self-understanding and collective self-formation” (ibid., 626) by illustrating the need for those associated with social justice, to define culturally appropriate food as they use it.

The methodology of critical inquiry is utilized in this research not only to understand useful ways in promoting social change but to offer practical ways to apply the knowledge acquired about culturally appropriate food. Speaking of critical research, Comstock (1994) proclaims, “it is a method of *praxis* for it combines disciplined analysis with practical action. It is aimed not merely at understanding the world, but at changing it” (638). Through an analysis of culturally appropriate food, this thesis applies the methods of critical inquiry to engage with and evolve our understanding of the phrase and its applications in creating positive social change.

In identifying which social changes are perceived as being addressed by culturally appropriate food, and how it has also been important to approach this research through an analysis of the language utilized within food systems discourse, while identifying the relationship between the concept and social issues through a multidisciplinary approach. To do this, I have used a scoping review in conjunction with discourse analysis.

A scoping review was primarily utilized to collect and analyze the ways in which the concept of culturally appropriate food is applied as well as to identify the types of societal issues being addressed. As the concept of culturally appropriate food has been applied under notably different contexts and by various key players within the food system, this methodology is appropriate because “scoping reviews focus on breadth and allow for the inclusion of research from a wide array of disciplines and epistemological traditions” (Terstappen et al. 2013, 2).

For the purpose of this research it is important to be inclusive of various dialogues of culturally appropriate food. Therefore, discourse analysis was used to complement the findings of the scoping review, by exploring the language utilized in applying culturally appropriate food as a solution to societal issues. The importance of this approach is similar to the purpose of using a scoping review, in that the language of cultural appropriation is multidisciplinary and relates to different frameworks and contexts. Fairclough (2013) describes critical discourse analysis as an “analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse” (4). He further establishes that the objects or elements relating to discourse may act from different “points of entry” and are not in isolation, but rather in addition to the analysis of discourse (5). To fully understand the perception and advocacy of culturally appropriate food, it was necessary to explore its application not only from a multidisciplinary approach, but also in the context of different societal issues and lenses.

Methods

The purpose of this research is to interrogate the use of culturally appropriate food within food systems discourse, therefore I asked two questions that explore the dynamics of its application. The first question states: *what social changes are meant to be achieved by utilizing*

culturally appropriate food? The corresponding data was collected by reviewing academic literature that discusses culturally appropriate food in the context of food sovereignty and food security. This question was explored at the global scale, not only because the movements and organizations are international, but because the resulting social problems are likely to be global in scope. The academic literature was found through the EBSCO database by searching for the phrases “culturally appropriate” or “culturally acceptable” in congruence with “food security” and “food sovereignty.” By searching for both culturally appropriate and culturally acceptable, I was able to acquire more articles that might refer to this notion in regard to both food movements.

Upon collecting the articles, I reviewed each piece for ways in which the concept was described to 1) identify ways in which culturally appropriate food has been defined, and 2) for ways in which it has been used or suggested as part of a solution to a social problem. These results were organized into categories of identified issues through a narrative which explained how the concept of culturally appropriate food was defined, if there was a definition, and how it related to the problem. An analysis followed to interpret the commonalities through a narrative, which was then used to answer the following question.

Once I identified how culturally appropriate food has been conceptualized in academic literature I asked: *where culturally appropriate food is used as a part of a solution to create social change, how does it relate to social justice?* This question serves to further understand culturally appropriate food’s relationship with social change. This question is also of global significance for two reasons. First, the issues analyzed here are those identified from question one, and therefore exist as global issues, as previously mentioned, and secondly, social justice would be most effective if achieved globally. The data here were dependent on the results from

the first question, where social issues were identified, and therefore, come from the same literature collected. I used a social justice framework that consisted of three categories, described in Chapter Two, to analyze the relationship between culturally appropriate food and the social problem. Specifically, within each social issue from question one, I looked for instances that related to each category (*the fair distribution of resources, self-determination, and interdependence*), as well as ways in which each category was absent. I reported these instances and absences as results through a narrative, followed by an analysis which explored how useful culturally appropriate food was in addressing these three social justice categories.

In concluding with the analyses of both research questions, the goal was not to seek indefinite answers but to create opportunities for points of interest where critical conversations can further question how culturally appropriate food should be adopted by international movements and where it is most useful.

Throughout the course of this chapter, I have identified my personal interests in pursuing this research and have explained the importance of critical inquiry. A short discussion followed to identify the methodologies, including critical inquiry, a scoping review, and discourse analysis as the guiding approaches for this research. Lastly, I specified how this research was conducted through two research questions. The following chapter analyzes the results of these questions and considers ways in which this research contributes to the body of literature of food systems discourse as well as ways in which further research should continue.

Chapter Four

Results, Analysis, and Contribution

As food movements, activists, and scholars have increasingly incorporated the concept of culturally appropriate food into food systems discourse, it has become imperative to engage with the varying interpretations of culturally appropriate food and its relevance to social justice. While food sovereignty and community food security proclaim a right to culturally appropriate food through their definitions, the ways in which culturally appropriate food might be realized are vague, leaving scholars to develop their own perspectives of what culturally appropriate food might look like in practice. With varying interpretations circulating academic literature, the phrase culturally appropriate food is being emphasized in different ways to address numerous social issues. Further, even where criticism has been raised to question the broad and ambiguous use, the relevance of culturally appropriate food to social justice remains unclear. Without an understanding of how culturally appropriate food may relate to social justice, it is uncertain what limitations may exist in asserting the right to culturally appropriate food.

This research emphasizes the importance of questioning the conception of cultural appropriateness in food systems discourse to further our understanding of the usefulness of this concept, while acknowledging boundaries and limitations that may exist. Since culturally appropriate food is primarily presented within the context of food movements who assert their vision of a just food system, it is essential to situate culturally appropriate food within a framework of social justice, to further understand how it relates to positive social change.

My central research question asks: *how useful is advocacy for culturally appropriate food in creating social justice?* To address this question, I ask two related questions that explore the parameters of culturally appropriate food and its relationship to social justice. The first question

asks: *what social changes are meant to be achieved by utilizing the concept of culturally appropriate food?* And the second question asks *where culturally appropriate food is used as a part of a solution to create social change, how does it relate to social justice?* These questions are important in understanding how culturally appropriate food is currently perceived within food systems discourse and how its current use relates to social justice. The remainder of this chapter explains and analyzes the results of these questions and demonstrates how this research has contributed to the body of literature critiquing culturally appropriate food by adding an important understanding of the way it intersects with social issues.

Conceptualizations of Culturally Appropriate Food

Q1: What social changes are meant to be achieved by utilizing the concept of culturally appropriate food?

Through an analysis of academic literature, which was coded for “culturally appropriate” and “culturally acceptable” in combination with “food security” and “food sovereignty,” four themes emerged, revealing variations in the ways that cultural appropriateness may be discussed as contributing to social change. These themes were food insecurity, cultural food insecurity, cultural imperialism, and imported foods which displace local foods. In relationship to culturally appropriate food, these themes are the social issue, whereas the ideal outcomes envisioned vary within the literature. While these themes are mostly expressed independently within the literature, in some cases they are interrelated and converge. Issues of food insecurity primarily arose in articles found by coding for “food security” and issues of cultural imperialism and imported foods, which frequently have desired outcomes that align with values of food sovereignty, were mostly found within literature stemming from the search for “food

sovereignty”, but there are also overlapping discussions between both movements and culturally appropriate food.

Within each of these four overarching categories, there is considerable variation in the ways cultural appropriateness is mentioned and discussed. As stated in Chapter Two, there are many interpretations of culturally appropriate food, and the articles used within this research are no exception. While some authors were explicit about what culturally appropriate food meant in relation to their study, others were vague in their description, and some went no further than to simply mention the phrase. Notably, across all social issues identified, culturally appropriate food appeared to be interchangeable with traditional food in many instances. While these social issues overlap in some ways, there are obvious differences in the ways that cultural appropriateness is prescribed. For instance, where food insecurity and cultural food insecurity were the primary concerns, the physical access of specific culturally appropriate food products was discussed. In contrast, where the issues of cultural imperialism and the ways in which imported foods displace local foods were mentioned, having the right to culturally appropriate food wasn't about having physical access to specific products as much as it was about the underlying issues preventing physical access. Still, within each category, cultural appropriateness takes on different interpretations.

Food Insecurity

Within the context of food insecurity, culturally appropriate food appears to be conceptualized in similar yet ill-defined ways, and in all cases, it acts as a part of a solution to food insecurity. Of the eleven articles categorized as having used or suggested culturally appropriate food as a requirement in achieving food security, only one discusses defining culturally appropriate food by acknowledging it as a challenging concept to measure (Joassart-

Marcelli et al. 2017). However, these authors do assert that it is a necessary component of food security (ibid.) They also agree with the insights of Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy (2015), who argue that cultural acceptability is a complex *process* within the food system that cannot simply be reduced to specific food products. Still, several authors focus on access to specific food products that are identified as culturally appropriate to their research participants, (Joassart-Marcelli et al 2017, Vahabi and Damba 2013, Henderson et al. 2017, Gichunge and Kidwaro 2014, Chan et al. 2016, Grauel and Chambers 2014, and Blue Bird Jernigan et al. 2012). Where culturally appropriate foods and food groups are acknowledged, it is unclear who is determining what is culturally appropriate to whom unless the participants identify them.

Alternatively, though most authors focus on products, a few also addressed social implications in acquiring these products. While focusing on the dignity of access to specific food through charitable sectors, Wakefield et al. (2012) mention cultural appropriateness as including “culturally constructed notions of what constitutes dignified access to food” (442). In another instance, Vahabi and Damba (2013) identify a component of household food security as being able to acquire culturally appropriate food in *socially acceptable* manners (2). Vahabi and Damba (2013) also report that participants found acquiring food from food banks and charitable institutions to be *culturally unacceptable* (6). However, there is no distinction between the phrases socially acceptable and culturally acceptable, nor is the meaning of culturally appropriate food further elaborated. Thus, even within the issue of food insecurity, culturally appropriate food is applied in a variety of ways.

A central theme from scholars engaging with food security was to identify ways in which people do and do not have access to culturally appropriate food. This was anticipated because, as discussed in Chapter Two, the primary purpose of addressing food insecurity is the acquisition of

nutritionally adequate food. Most frequently, the populations studied and perceived to be at risk in accessing culturally appropriate food, and therefore food security, were immigrants and refugees (Joassart-Marcelli et al. 2017, Vahabi and Damba 2013, Henderson et al. 2017, Gichunge and Kidwaro 2014, Chan et al. 2016, and Grauel and Chambers 2014), though some also addressed low- income populations (Hossfeld et al. 2017, Potchukuchi 2004, and Wakefield et al. 2012), Indigenous communities (Blue Bird Jernigan et al. 2012), and rural communities (Mader and Busse 2011). These publications demonstrated that while limited access to culturally appropriate food was a barrier in achieving food security, the ways in which culturally appropriate food was limiting varied between populations.

Where access to culturally appropriate food was found to be limited, several scholars identified barriers unique to newcomers, such as immigrants and refugees, who were in new and unfamiliar territories. This included the unfamiliarity with supermarkets (Joassart-Marcelli et al 2017 and Henderson et al. 2017), as well as language barriers where asking for specific foods or reading labels was challenging (Vahabi and Bamba 2013). Vahabi and Bamba (2013) also call for food banks to address food insecurity by offering culturally appropriate foods following interviews with immigrants suggesting that food banks often provided culturally inappropriate and limiting foods, such as unfamiliar products that participants didn't know what to do with (8). Additionally, while investigating the barriers to acquire food from food retailers through the experiences of migrant and seasonal farmworkers (MSFW), Grauel and Chambers (2014) conclude that "access to culturally appropriate food is especially problematic for MSFW due to factors including transitory residence, geographic isolation, language barriers, availability, quality, and price, all of which increase the likelihood of food insecurity" (230).

The most common issues identified for immigrants and refugees in acquiring culturally appropriate food were the availability, affordability, and poorer quality of foods (Joassart-Marcelli et al. 2017, Vahabi and Damba 2013, Henderson et al. 2017, Gichunge and Kidwaro 2014, Chan et al. 2016, and Grauel and Chambers 2014). For instance, when interviewing immigrants and refugees in Canada, Henderson et al. (2017) identify specific traditional products, such as certain varieties of sweet potato, fruits and, fish that participants could not find but would have preferred (5). Participants also described finding certain products, like bamboo, in specialized stores but these were often more expensive and of lesser quality than they had from home (ibid. ,5). Similarly, in another study of refugees and immigrants in Canada, where Vahabi and Damba (2013) assert that “the ability to freely access culturally preferred foods” is an essential part of food security, participants complained that specific fruits, vegetables, and meats were difficult to find and often were of a poorer, blander quality than from their homeland (7). It appears that where there were equivalent products, participants did not find them to be adequate.

In contrast, some studies illustrated ways in which immigrants and refugees could overcome these barriers to acquire culturally appropriate food. While studying the role of gardens for resettled African refugees, Gichunge and Kidwaro (2014) proclaim that interactions with new food environments influence nutrition and health but found that gardening offered easily accessible and affordable means of procuring culturally acceptable foods. Likewise, Chan et al. (2016) also address community gardens as opportunities to acquire culturally appropriate foods when they would otherwise be hard to find, unaffordable, or of poor quality (855). Additionally, Joassart-Marcelli et al. (2017) emphasize the importance of considering ethnic markets in food security assessments because ethnic markets behave as important food

provisioning spaces for immigrants and refugees (1643) and participants of a study analyzing the food security of refugees and immigrants in Canada, previously mentioned, also noted that ethnic stores helped to be “*connected to home type food*” (Vahabi and Damba 2013, 8, italicized in source). While there are barriers to accessing culturally appropriate food and achieving food security, gardens and ethnic markets offer alternatives for immigrants and refugees.

Though some have mentioned the need to be more inclusive and sensitive towards other cultures, there aren't clear suggestions about how retailers, food banks, and other places of food acquisition can know what types of foods they should offer for their customers. For instance, while exploring barriers of acquiring culturally appropriate food from a variety of establishments, Henderson et al. (2017) called for sensitivity and cultural awareness in creating culturally appropriate programs and resources to better enable access to traditional foods. However, there are no suggestions about how this might look in practice (12), or who is defining culturally appropriate food for whom.

In addition to refugees and immigrants, a limited number of studies that analyzed access of food by low income populations (Hossfeld et al. 2017, Pothukuchi 2004, Wakefield et al. 2012) describe cultural appropriateness as an important concept in addressing food security. Hossfeld et al. (2017) acknowledge culturally appropriate food as an element of the food sovereignty movement definition and within the mission of an organization from Southeastern North Carolina called Feast Down East, who build connections between low income consumers and farmers to “provide access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods” (447). Despite this recognition, neither the authors nor the Feast Down East website offered any further explanation of what culturally appropriate food is presumed to be for low-income consumers. Additionally, the Feast Down East website did not appear to have any statement about access to

culturally appropriate food in their vision at all. Similarly, Pothukuchi (2004) discusses the framework of community food security, which incorporates culturally appropriate food, and then further describes that charitable sectors may not be able to sustain culturally appropriate diets for low income populations but does not explain what any of this might look like. Wakefield et al. (2012) also explores the charitable sector to reveal that representatives of organizations expressed that cultural appropriateness is an important element to be considered beyond simply having access to food, however, there were no further discussions to see if any of these organizations were doing anything in particular to accomplish this.

Another focal group who experience limited access to culturally appropriate food and increased risks of food insecurity are rural communities. One study examining rural communities living in food deserts proclaims that community food systems that are “culturally appropriate, locally driven, and meaningful to stakeholders can create healthy rural food environments” (Mader and Busse 2011, 50). Their conceptualization of a community food system is defined by Feenstra (2002) as “a collaborative network that integrates sustainable food production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste management in order to enhance the environmental, economic and social health of a particular place” (101). Mader and Busse (2011) also identify food environments to be “defined by the characteristics of the places in which we live, work, and play, encompassing the type, quantity, and quality of foods available; their cost; where they are available, and their cultural appropriateness” (46). Despite their emphasis on cultural appropriateness, this research does not suggest what a culturally appropriate community food system might look like, even though they go on to describe the importance of being locally driven and meaningful to stakeholders. Further, the primary concern for food is to increase

access to healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables, particularly in food deserts, but it is not clear for whom this is culturally appropriate.

Though other social issues later discussed also focus on Indigenous communities, the primary focus of culturally appropriate food for Blue Bird Jernigan et al. (2012) was to assess food security and barriers of access in Indigenous communities. The results of their research provided support for a community program to bring traditional and culturally appropriate food to a local grocery store in an Indigenous community which previously only carried highly processed foods. They also worked to bridge ways to access culturally appropriate food at farmers markets. Beyond stating that the grocery store would incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables, no specific foods were identified as being traditional or culturally appropriate for the specific population studied.

Cultural Imperialism

While varying articles discussed within the other identified social issues also illustrate evidence of cultural imperialism, these data specifically focused on ways in which social groups are subjugated to experiencing their culture as inferior to the dominant culture. Young (1990) identifies cultural imperialism as one of five forms of oppression which a social group may experience. Her work is not related to food systems but is relevant in understanding the ways in which culturally appropriate food is described here. She further contends that to experience cultural imperialism is to “experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other” (66). This section is comprised of articles that demonstrate a universalization of western practices where “often without noticing they do so, the dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such” (Young 1990, 66).

However, the majority of articles refer to culturally appropriate food in the context of colonialism, where the dominant culture has not only marked out the populations of each study as the other by deeming western culture superior but has done so through historic and systemic marginalization and purposeful displacement of power and control.

With diverse scenarios of culturally imperialism, there are variations in the ways culturally appropriate food is described and defined. While culturally appropriate food is sometimes referencing specific food products, in all cases it is within the context of knowledge and practices encompassing such foods. Additionally, culturally appropriate food is often interchangeably used with “traditional foods”. While most describe a broader process, there is still a lack of defining culturally appropriate food. One exception is from the research of Towns et al. (2013) who explore how a community in Niger identifies their own culturally appropriate foods resulting with nine factors including taste, health and medicinal properties, economics, snacks and staples, storability, seasonal availability, celebrations, abundance/availability, and cultural identity (176-79). This is utilized to suggest that wild foods, cultural traditions, and preferences should be taken into consideration when nutrition and agricultural programs are implemented for undernourished and impoverished populations (170-71), rather than to impose the westernized focus on nutrients. Additionally, it was noted that the sex and age of their participants brought about different conceptualizations of their local diet (180) and therefore what culturally appropriate food means to them.

Culturally appropriate food and traditional foods are often interchangeable and interconnected to the ways of life that have been marginalized through the cultural imperialistic ways of colonialism. Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) used the phrase “culturally appropriate” to describe their research engagement with Indigenous populations as they acquired knowledge and

information about their food system in the context of needs and priorities of Indigenous communities. They also referred to traditional foods and implied that access to these systems were important for Indigenous populations to maintain food security. Kamal et al. (2015) also use culturally appropriate food and traditional food interchangeably and emphasize wild food harvesting as a form of culturally appropriate food (563) while discussing cultural knowledge and having connection with the land as significant components of culturally appropriate food. Lowitt et al. (2008) also note that efforts to acquire and maintain community food security for Indigenous communities are increasingly becoming more focused on the ability to harvest, share, and consume traditional foods, including “wild-harvested fish, game, birds, berries, and other plants,” and identify this as a component of “cultural food security” (175). Cultural food security, which is an additional framework of food security proposed by Power (2008), is also addressed by other authors within this literature as well.

Through the displacement of Indigenous communities by means of colonialism, the acquisition and cultural practices of culturally appropriate foodways have been detrimentally altered in many ways. When describing the injustices suffered by Indigenous communities, Alkon and Norgaard (2009) identify “genocide, lack of land rights, and forced assimilation” (297) as processes that have obstructed the abilities to maintain their land for food acquisition in ways that they once had. They also point to poor river health as the reason for salmon loss, in addition to unhealthy commodity foods in a nearby grocery store instead of foods culturally appropriate to the Karuk tribe (298-99). Other scholars also point to similar instances experienced by their communities of study.

Constrained dependency on governments and dispossession of lands have displaced access to traditional and culturally relevant foods. Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) describe a

tense relationship between Northern Canada's Indigenous population and the Canadian government in which treaties meant to protect Indigenous food security have ultimately undermined their traditional food system and has promoted dependency on government assistance, which included the introduction to agricultural training and equipment despite where the reliance on farmed foods further displaced traditional methods of cultivation. Similarly, Kamal et al. (2015) assert that Canadian treaties, which were meant to provide Indigenous communities rights and access to resources, were "constructed under Canadian imperialistic politics," (560) and Lowitt et al. (2008) also describe treaties that did not entail the surrender of fishing grounds, yet Canadian regulations still restrict fishing practices and territorial management (177).

Additionally, access to cultural foodways has also been hindered by environmental degradation from industrialized practices. Kamal et al. (2015) illustrate ways that hydroelectric production in northern Canada has impeded wild food harvesting practices through the flooding caused by dams. Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) also address a different Indigenous community from the same region in Canada, who has experienced local environmental degradation due to the creation of a dam, along with mining, forestry, and hydro industries, which has substantially altered food acquisition abilities. Comparatively, Alkon and Norgaard (2009) introduce a similar experience from the Karuk tribe of northern California, who lost fishing sources with the placement of dams, due to toxic conditions and a lack of natural features that would allow salmon through (297).

Traditional foodways have further been altered through acculturation and loss of traditional knowledge. Lowitt et al. (2018) explore how Indigenous communities "derive food security benefits, including culturally appropriate and nutritious diets and sustainable livelihoods,

from fisheries within their traditional territory,” (174) and find that changes in cultural identities and inter-generational knowledge from colonialism and local schools along with fears of polluted waterways have influenced traditional fishing skills (179). Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) also identify educating youth and future generations of cultural traditions to be important to the participants of their study (1094). To counteract, some Indigenous communities have created youth programs to instill cultural values that might otherwise be lost, such as “hunting, fishing, berry picking, preparation of wild food, gardening, and education on the health benefits of different wild foods” (Kamal et al. 2015, 567).

The influences of cultural imperialism further exasperate the inequalities of traditional gender roles, where women who are expected to maintain cultural traditions, struggle to acquire culturally appropriate foods. While most articles refer to the Indigenous participants of their study as a whole, Munro et al (2014) focus on the intersectionality of indigeneity with gender. Here, they describe a very different experience through the lens of the Indigenous Garo women of Bangladesh, who face many barriers in acquiring culturally appropriate food, including the loss of traditional lands by force as well as having limited access to resources. This was further heightened by high societal expectations to maintain expensive cultural food practices for ceremonies such as holidays, funerals, weddings, and arrangements of marriage for their daughters (77).

Another way in which cultural imperialism has altered the cultural foodways of disadvantaged people is institutionalized racism. Alkon and Norgaard (2009) recognize culturally appropriateness as an element of food security and argue that institutional racism prevents black communities from acquiring the quality of food that is culturally appropriate to them. In describing the disparities between the number of white farmers vs African American

farmers as well as the increased experiences of African Americans to live in food deserts, Alkon and Norgaard (2009) assert that “not only have African Americans been stripped of their abilities to produce healthy, culturally appropriate food, they are also unable to purchase similar items” (295).

Cultural Food Insecurity

Cultural food insecurity, is a concept proposed by Power (2008), who uses it to explain the significance of “country/traditional” food for Indigenous people because it has “symbolic and spiritual value, and is central to personal identity and the maintenance of culture” and therefore access is “integral to cultural health” (96). Here, Power (2008) has created this concept as an indicator of cultural well-being specific for Indigenous people and argues that this is unique to these populations. However, I argue that while Indigenous populations in some ways share unique political and social experiences with other populations which have challenged their abilities to maintain cultural food security, this concept is very applicable to non-indigenous people as well, who have similarly become limited in access to foods (“traditional” or otherwise) that were central to their personal identities. Having access to culturally appropriate food, as well as the abilities to perform cultural provisioning methods, aids in maintaining individual cultural identities and psychological wellbeing, demonstrating that food goes beyond the nutrient requirements of food security to be a part of mental health. It includes the feeling of belonging, both socially and psychologically, in a way that connects to one’s cultural identity.

Cultural food insecurity was a theme primarily identified in the literature regarding immigrants and refugees, within contexts of food insecurity, as well as in conversations of Indigenous populations who experienced colonialism. Where it was discussed alongside food security, the goal was not to maintain access to specific products for the purpose of nourishing

the body, but rather to maintain access to culturally relevant foods that can aid in nourishing the mind. Where it was discussed in the context of Indigenous populations, it was about more than just access to specific foods, but also access to the lands and waterways where they were acquired.

Though the discussions within the context of food security are limited, a select few scholars explain that culturally appropriate food is an important component in the wellbeing of immigrants and refugees. Joassart-Marcelli et al. (2017) claim that ethnic markets are places where racial and ethnic identities can prosper, Gichunge and Kidwaro (2014) and Chan et al. (2016) said likewise for gardens. Gichunge and Kidwaro (2014) conclude that gardens are not only important in maintaining health but also to uphold cultural identities (270) and Chan et al. (2016) shared that they acted as places to reproduce “collective social-ecological memories” of cultural practices and environmental knowledge (854), as well as a place of belonging (856). In addition, Grauel and Chambers (2014) suggest that “the availability of traditional foods is vital for the cultural maintenance and health of immigrant and MSFW communities” (229). Lastly, Henderson et al. (2017) identified traditional foods as being a significant component in maintaining cultural identity and in passing on traditions while also concluding that acculturation and other barriers to preserving cultural food practices is often associated with a poorer health status (11).

The importance of maintaining individual cultural identities was also demonstrated within contexts of cultural imperialism, and specifically where colonialism has undermined and marginalized Indigenous foodways by polluting the land and waterways. Kamal et al. (2015) proclaim that “cultural, social and physical well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada are deeply integrated with their food system” (563). More specifically, Lowitt et al. (2008) describes

how essential fishing is to the cultural identities of their participants who have limited access due to imperialistic legislation and polluted water systems. In contrast, Munro et al. (2014) describe the cultural traditions Garo women were expected to uphold, due to the woman's role as "keepers of tradition" (79), despite the inability to sustainably do so, because they had limited financial and environmental resources to acquire foods used in such practices.

Imported Foods Displace Local Foods

This limited body of literature places cultural appropriateness as a part of a solution to defining one's own food system and achieving food sovereignty against the globalized influences of imported foods. The primary focus is not acquiring culturally appropriate food products themselves, but rather on the livelihoods of individuals who cannot make a living on their cultural foods and who have become dependent on imported foods. In some cases, specific foods are identified as being culturally appropriate but further definitions of the phrase are nonexistent.

Where populations become dependent on imported foods, culturally appropriate foods and associated practices are displaced. Menezes (2001) challenges the notions of the World Food Summit, World Bank, and World Trade Organization for promoting imported foods as a means of achieving food security in developing countries noting that this risks "becoming dependent on foods that are culturally inappropriate" (31). Menezes (2001) then expresses further concern about protecting people's nutritional culture from imposed globalized eating standards which alter the traditions and customs of societies and undermine their food sovereignty. More importantly, he then emphasizes that these imposed standards are experienced differently by social class, where the poorest are the most vulnerable (32). While culturally appropriate food is not explicitly defined, it seems clear that imported foods and those which either impair nutritional cultures or undermine one's food sovereignty are not appropriate. Despite

acknowledging that standards may be experienced differently by class, the use of culture by Menezes (2001) appears homogenous, as he states, “it is vital that rural societies – which best express this nutritional culture – should be acknowledged and preserved” (33).

In another scenario, where imported foods are a dominant product and consumed regularly by the local population, Ragone et al. (2016) recognize breadfruit as an essential crop to be reestablished in Hawaii. This is because it is “an attractive, delicious, nutritious, abundant, affordable, and culturally appropriate food which addresses Hawaii’s food security issues” (215). There appear to be many benefits of reintroducing breadfruit to Hawaii, including its utilization as a staple crop in place of expensive imported products as well as less nutritious foods and the economic impact that would occur for those growing and selling breadfruit (Ibid.) However, it is not clear how breadfruit is “culturally appropriate” to the modern-day individuals of Hawaii as it is treated as a piece of traditional Hawaiian culture that is not only no longer predominantly cultivated but is also unrecognized.

Scholars also claim that imported foods displace livelihoods where cheaper versions of local, or culturally appropriate, foods sell at competitive prices. Although Finnis et al. (2013) refer to specific food products deemed culturally appropriate to the locals of a rural community of Paraguay, including mandioca (aka cassava) and its milled counterparts: *almidon* and farina (169), their discussion about the acquisition of such foods illustrates a much deeper implication of food sovereignty and the struggles to define one’s own food system. In the case of Paraguay, access of mandioca, *almidon*, and farina is not of concern, instead the cause of tension lies in the ability for local farmers to hold agricultural livelihoods through the production of such crops while the same imported products behave as cheap competition (170). Finnis et al. (2013) maintain that by growing mandioca, these farmers are engaging with constituents of food

sovereignty, specifically “the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food” (La Via Campesina). But when it comes to the milled equivalent, if one doesn’t have access to a mill the imported version might be the only accessible option. “While *almidon* is a key ingredient in culturally appropriate and important dishes, the question for participants becomes one of whether purchased *almidon* remains appropriate, satisfying, and healthy” (179).

Alternatively, while imported foods compete with local food prices, the primary issue affecting livelihoods is the difference in culturally appropriate foods between social hierarchies. While previous articles addressed the livelihoods of peasants in general, Steckley (2016) realizes the importance of understanding the race-class social hierarchies as it relates to cultural foods. Steckley (2016) asserts that food sovereignty-based peasant movements in Haiti must move beyond land reform and trade policies to address the social inequalities and prejudices exacerbated through imported foods. Through the exploration of race-class social hierarchies in Haitian food culture, Steckley (2016) argues that the dependence of imported foods which have displaced traditional foods is not only caused by undercutting prices of local foods but is also due to the cultural perceptions and preferences of imported foods. These preferences are influenced by aggressive foreign marketing and “cultural tendencies to internalize inferiority and to emulate the elite” (556). Therefore, what is culturally appropriate (and most often locally grown) to the peasant community is seen as inferior to much of the Haitian society while the elite prefer imported foods.

The Emergence of Four Social Issues

Throughout this set of data, the construct of culturally appropriate food has been conceptualized through a variety of contexts, and in most cases, it has been ambiguous and ill-defined. While a few have attempted to define or describe what culturally appropriate food

means (Joassart-Marcelli et al. 2017 and Towns et al. 2013), these perspectives, though comparable, were not the same, and most others had only identified products that were culturally appropriate to the specific participants of their study. Through the four themes that emerged, culturally appropriate food was contextualized in various ways, from products to processes, and there were inconsistencies in the way the concept was used both within these categories and between them. Yet, across all categories, apart from a few cases, the concept of “culture” was discussed homogeneously.

Where culturally appropriate food was discussed within the context of the food security movement, the objective was to achieve and sustain food security by acquiring nutritious and culturally appropriate food products. However, this conceptualization appears to be limiting for two reasons. First, the westernized focus of nutrients in food products disregards the non-nutrient based values of food consumption practiced throughout the world by presenting expectations of nutritional requirements. As Hayes-Conroy and Sweet (2014) state, “the casual addition of cultural appropriateness to food policy rhetoric can reinforce commodity and nutritional reductionism (of food) by bolstering the notion that adequacy is simply a matter of finding the right mix of tradable, nutrient rich foodstuffs” (376). In other words, foods with similar nutrient values would simply be available to be swapped out for “culturally appropriate” options, without regard to the practices and cultural processes relevant to different products that relate it to one’s cultural identity. Secondly, culturally appropriate foods are not inherently nutritious and in many of the studies discussed, a common focus was of culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables. Yet much of the conversations regarding the maintenance of cultural identities were interrelated to conversations of food security, even though it is not necessarily the case that preferred cultural foods are going to be nutritious.

In contrast, while culturally appropriate food was referencing specific food products, in discussions of cultural imperialism and the displacement of local foods with imported foods, the context involved the complexity of food systems, with regards to acquisition, consumption, and knowledge. Further, the objective was not to be fulfilled by acquiring culturally appropriate foods. Rather, individuals have the right to culturally appropriate foods and these rights are realized when populations are not being subjected to domination by other cultures and cheap imported commodities that compete with their local products.

Across all themes, culturally appropriate food was interchangeably used with traditional foods and traditional food systems as well as for multiple populations. In the context of Indigenous peoples, Kuhnlein and Chan (2000) describe traditional food systems as

all of the food species that are available to a particular culture from local natural resources and the accepted patterns for their use within that culture. This term also embraces an understanding of the sociocultural meanings given to these foods, their acquisition, and their processing; the chemical composition of these foods; the way each food is used by age and gender groups within a selected culture; and the nutrition and health consequences of all of these factors for those who consume these foods. (596)

While there is a clear case for Indigenous communities to have access to the foods, practices, and traditions that have been traumatically undermined and marginalized, and which may be considered traditional in this sense, it is not clear that what is culturally appropriate to Indigenous populations is inherently traditional. For instance, while processed and commercialized foods have clearly displaced freshly grown and locally harvested products in detrimental ways, arguably for most populations, many cultures have also incorporated these products into their day to day lives and might consider them a part of their culture.

Though traditional processes may appear unchanging, cultural appropriateness is not consistent across generations. Indeed, while many articles referencing colonialism discussed the disdain from elders for the loss of cultural knowledge and food practices through the acculturation of their youth (Lowitt et al. 2008, Rudolph and McLachlan 2013, and Kamal et al. 2015), what these adolescents deem culturally appropriate may be rather different from the elders' perspectives. This is in no way asserting that the outcomes of colonialism and experiences of acculturation are acceptable, but rather, as cultures evolve through environmental, political, and social changes, the experiences of what is and is not culturally acceptable also change over time. Further, any general assertions of what is culturally appropriate to Indigenous people by a nonindigenous individual further demonstrates imperialistic notions of how they think Indigenous communities ought to live.

While in some ways, the substitution of traditional foods applies to other populations with the same regards of Indigenous communities, it is not clear how it applies to all populations described. In addition to indigenous communities, traditional foods were also discussed in the context of immigrants, refugees, migrants and seasonal farmworkers, and as ancestral foods to the modern-day population of Hawaii. The word traditional, which is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as “handed down from age to age” and as “adhering to past practices or established conventions,” conveys images of ancient techniques and practices established by ancestors. Yet this notion of traditional disregards the experiences of different social identities from which these “traditional” practices stemmed from. Traditional gender roles, for instance, place much of the labor involved in food provisioning on women and preserving these practices from past histories would further engage in such inequalities.

Conflicting perceptions of what is and is not culturally appropriate are exhibited by social hierarchies. In contrast to the homogenizing tendencies through which culture is so often described, Steckley (2016) depicted a stark contrast of what culturally appropriate food means through the inequalities of class and race for the people of Haiti. In this instance, what would be considered “traditional” is inferior to what the elite social identities prescribe as adequate. Additionally, these contrasting experiences of what culturally appropriate foods might look like are likely to be further exacerbated where the gaps between gender, race, and class inequalities are widened and intensified. Steckley’s (2016) research stands out as a clear example of the heterogenous implications of culture and food cultures, and further demonstrates the structures of society that influence them. In addition, it demonstrates that imported foods are culturally appropriate somewhere to someone, yet this causes social tensions and perpetuates inequalities. This demonstrates that what is culturally appropriate is not inherently just.

Contrasting experiences of cultural appropriateness are further demonstrated in discussions of immigrants and refugees as newcomers. Though the access of culturally appropriate food for immigrants and refugees offer ways to maintain a connection with cultural identity and a feeling of belonging, it has not been established that access to such products is an inherent right, in a foreign, but newly established home. While access to solely unfamiliar foods can pose further risk of food insecurity if an individual does not know how to utilize such foods, it is not clear that stores and markets should be required to provide foods that are culturally appropriate or how they would determine what products would be appropriate. Nor is it clear that such actions would be ecologically sustainable. For instance, while an individual might cherish the practices and consumption of a locally sourced food in one region, acquiring and marketing this product across the globe may encourage environmentally unfavorable methods to achieve it.

Food banks and charitable services are also places identified where culturally appropriate food is often absent. Many studies have suggested that the quality of food through community-based assistance programs are often poor because these products are typically processed. While efforts can be made to provide fresher produce, it would be difficult to determine specific culturally appropriate foods to provide through these services. Similarly, where they are made available, they would likely be canned or packaged versions as well.

Through the investigation of ways in which culturally appropriate food acts as part of a solution in promoting social change, four categories of social issues emerge. These include food insecurity, cultural food insecurity, cultural imperialism, and the displacement of local products through international trade. While the application of culturally appropriate food was used to refer to food products themselves throughout all social issues in some ways, this was more predominantly exemplified within discussions of food insecurity and cultural food insecurity, where the primary focus was to acquire culturally appropriate food products. In contrast, discussions of cultural imperialism and imported foods were more focused around self-determination and the livelihoods of individuals and their communities. In this way, the concept of culturally appropriate food was referred to as more of a process that was acquired along the way instead of behaving as the solution. Additionally, the concepts of culturally appropriate food and traditional food are used interchangeably in several cases, which poses questions about preserving cultural practices and the inequalities that persist among traditional gender roles. Lastly, across all issues identified, culture was described homogeneously, despite the social hierarchies that situate culture differently across gender, race, and class. This is further explored through a framework of social justice, identified in the following question.

Culturally Appropriate Food in a Social Justice Framework

Q2: Where culturally appropriate food is used as a part of a solution to create social change, how does it relate to social justice?

By using a social justice framework to analyze the instances from question one, in which culturally appropriate food has been used in part as a solution to creating social change, these data illustrate that the usefulness in advocating for cultural appropriateness lies on a spectrum. In review, the instances stemming from question one were 1) access to culturally appropriate food is an essential part of achieving food security, 2) access to culturally appropriate food helps to maintain psychological well-being, 3) where populations are not subjugated to cultural dominance, culturally appropriate food is a part of sustaining foodways , and 4) without the competition of imported foods, culturally appropriate foods can help to maintain livelihoods of farmers. Each of these instances demonstrate ways in which social justice can be partially achieved as well as ways in which more appropriate methods would be better suited to achieve social change in a just manner. However, the usefulness of cultural appropriateness is not binary, but rather is more practical in some cases than in others.

The social justice framework extracted from Bell's (2016) definition of social justice, which was further described in Chapter Two, is broken down into three categories with which these instances were analyzed. The first category is the fair distribution of resources, which consists of social, economic, and environmental resources that are distributed in equitable and ecologically sustainable ways. The second category is self-determination, where individuals have "the power to shape the institutions policies, and processes that affect their lives" (Bell 2016, 3), and the third is interdependence, or the capacity to interact democratically and have full inclusion of participation in decision making. The results of this question are organized by the

social issues, rather than by the categories of social justice, to better illustrate each issue as it relates to social justice as a whole.

Food Insecurity

Throughout the discussions of food insecurity, the primary premise was: to achieve food security, individuals should have access to food that is not only nutritious, but that is culturally acceptable. Within this set of literature conversations are primarily focused on barriers to the access of social and economic resources while providing limited examples of ways in which environmental resources are utilized to acquire culturally appropriate foods. However, in the issue of food insecurity, self-determination and interdependence are primarily absent.

In regard to the fair distribution of resources, social resources were often identified as limiting. The primary concerns were about using community-based programs, in particular, where individuals did not have the knowledge of the resources available or where some didn't exist (Vahabi and Damba 2013, Henderson et al. 2017). Henderson et al. (2017) discusses how educational community resources about food would be useful to newcomers, such as cooking course and nutrition education if there were more available (9). Additionally, where the community-based resources were government assistance programs, some individuals did not feel it was socially acceptable to use these resources and found that culturally appropriate foods were often limited in these locations anyways (Vahabi and Damba 2013, 8).

In contrast, however, social resources can be restructured and made more available in ways that promote culturally appropriate food systems. Through a multi-level approach, Mader and Busse (2011) describe ways to improve communities so they have better resources to strengthen their culturally appropriate, local food systems. This study suggested ways to support food policy councils and public transportation at the policy level, and public facilities, such as

markets and community gardens, at the community level. The organizational level included school, youth agriculture, work, and hospital-based projects, and the individual and family level included community-shared agriculture shares and backyard gardens. By restructuring these social resources, they argue that rural food environments can be locally driven and culturally appropriate.

Community gardens were also identified as social spaces that enabled access to culturally appropriate food and in addition, offered ways to distribute access to other resources as well. Both Gichunge and Kidwaro (2014) and Chan et al. (2016) discuss ways in which access to gardens provide spaces for immigrants and refugees to cultivate culturally appropriate food in ways that are affordable and accessible when economic and environmental resources are limited. Outside of literature discussing community and personal gardens, acknowledging equitable access to environmental resources was absent from this set of discussions.

Poor access to economic resources, including financial assets and markets, were commonly demonstrated through the food security literature and acted as a barrier in accessing culturally appropriate food. In conversations regarding the food security status of immigrants and refugees, all studies found most of their participants to be economically challenged by limited financial resources (Joassart-Marcelli et al. 2017, Vahabi and Damba 2013, Henderson et al. 2017, Gichunge and Kidwaro 2014, Chan et al. 2016, and Grauel and Chambers 2014). Additionally, Henderson et al. (2017) identified that some programs who aim to increase access to nutritious and affordable foods, aren't offering foods that refugees or immigrants consume (6) and Joassart-Marcelli et al. (2017) suggest that ethnic populations would be better served by having access to ethnic markets.

In contrast, some programs have responded by providing ways for culturally appropriate food to be accessed for low-income populations. Hossfeld et al. (2017) describe a program dedicated to making sure individuals have access to their local farmers market, regardless of economic status, by integrating the EBT program into the market. The EBT program was also similarly applied to a farmer's market through a project partnership, within the study of Blue Bird Jernigan et al. (2011). This allowed the local Indigenous community to have more access to fresh produce and in addition, their preferred culturally appropriate foods were added to the market as well.

Cultural Food Insecurity

Similar to food security, cultural food security is achieved through the access of culturally appropriate food products, though preferably, in ways that align with cultural provisioning methods. As these discussions were brief to begin with, there were few references to relate to the categories of social justice. Where there is mention, they primarily include social and environmental resources, in addition to self-determination.

Access to community gardens acted as social spaces to maintain cultural food security, not only by acquiring culturally appropriate food but also by practicing shared communal and social experiences with others who share similar cultural identities. Chan et al. (2016) describe community gardens as communal spaces to “reconnect with a practice and landscape associated with their personal history and cultural identity” (848) as well as to build social networks when urban settings feel isolating (850).

Limited access to environmental resources have adversely affected the cultural identities of Indigenous communities. Lowitt et al. (2008) identify barriers of fishing practices, an

important part of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, and illustrate how Indigenous communities struggle to sustain their livelihoods due to the colonial relations with the state.

Cultural Imperialism

Literature within the theme of cultural imperialism primarily referenced the colonization of Indigenous populations, and saw culturally appropriate food and related practices, as something that could be more accessible through decolonizing processes. This process was discussed in relation to the social justice framework across all categories, most often to acknowledge that these were not being equitably achieved.

Through the process of acculturation by Indigenous communities into western society, traditional knowledge has dissipated across generations. The participants involved in research by Lowitt et al. (2008) share concerns about the loss of cultural knowledge related to fishing from their youth and suggest a youth mentorship program to instill fishing skills and knowledge (179). Similarly, kamal et al (2015) describe a program which empowers youth by providing classes on knowledge of culture and traditions due to the same concerns.

The asymmetrical power of environmental resources has also hindered abilities to sustain cultural foodways for Indigenous populations. Some scholars point to direct political power relations including imperialistically centered treaties (Rudolph and McLachlan 2013 and Kamal et al. 2015), restrictions to access farm land (Rudolph and McLachlan 2013, 1082) and limiting fishing regulations (Lowitt et al. 2008), all of which have detrimentally impaired the rights and abilities to acquire and control land and waterways through equitable means. Others, point to indirect ways such as the placement of dams (Alkon and Norgaard 2009) and the anthropogenic environmental degradation and pollution of land and waterways, as sources that have restricted the abilities for Indigenous communities to use the environment to harvest wild food and fish

(Lowitt et al. 2008, Alkon and Norgaard 2009, Rudolph and McLachlan 2013, Kamal et al. 2015).

Limited environmental resources are even more of a barrier for women in cultures where land is passed down to daughters. Munro et al. (2014) describe the experiences of a group of Indigenous women in Bangladesh, who likewise, have lost the ability to cultivate culturally appropriate and traditional foods, through forced land dispossession. In addition, “traditionally, property was passed from mother to daughter; however, due to land dispossession, this practice has declined” (Munro et al. 2014, 77). Despite being landless, women are still pressured to maintain cultural practices, which include acquiring culturally appropriate foods for ceremonies and traditions, though, while landless, they have limited resources to grow these foods or acquire capital.

The distribution of economic resources, such as capital, also plays a role in the ways that marginalized societies acquire culturally appropriate food. Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) criticize colonial activity that has displaced the traditional food systems of Indigenous peoples with one that aligns with the capitalistic priorities of the dominant society. In participation, local economic opportunities primarily exist through industries that contradict Indigenous values, such as “hydro, mining forestry, or even agriculture” (ibid., 1092). Relatedly, Lowitt et al. (2017) identify, “low prices for fish, inconsistent market access, inadequate infrastructure, rising fishing costs and difficulties in recruiting labour” (180) as barriers to acquiring capital through the use of fisheries.

Further conversations of cultural imperialism reflect inequitable economic access due to institutional racism. Alkon and Norgaard (2009) emphasize that institutional racism has impacted the ability for African Americans to maintain livelihoods through farming due to historical

assistance that enabled white farmers. “Discrimination against black farmers created an agricultural sector dominated by whites and deprived African Americans of a source of wealth and access to economic and environmental benefits” (295). Additionally, as consumers, African Americans more often live within food deserts, with low access to grocery stores and markets offering healthy foods (ibid., 295).

Program initiatives designed to help impoverished populations to meet nutritional requirements need to combine these efforts with ways that can encourage their economic accumulation. Towns et al. (2013) included economics as one of nine categories that define culturally appropriate food and further asserted that policymakers need to consider what is culturally appropriate when implementing nutrition programs to impoverished populations. In other words, while policymakers need to consider what types of foods and practices are specifically beneficial to the individuals of that community, there should also be consideration for the types of foods that would be appropriate for them to sell at local markets.

In addition, nutrition programs also need to be inclusive of the population’s preferences. Town et al. (2013) explain that it is important to establish an understanding of and be inclusive to food cultures and traditions, where nutritional programs are implemented. This improves interdependence and can promote self-determination.

Interdependence and self-determination cannot be realized in the current political environment created through the processes of colonization. Kamal et al. (2015) argue Indigenous peoples have limited abilities to practice self-determination and interdependence in the current state where, through colonization, universal rights have been imposed on Indigenous peoples. They acknowledge that universal rights are not inherently bad, but “when it is used to undermine cultural distinctions and remove rights established to protect these distinctions, it becomes

problematic” (565), and further that “achieving food sovereignty for Indigenous people requires the inclusion of Indigenous cultural values in state policies and Indigenous participation in the economy” (565).

Accessing culturally appropriate food is much more about the ability to make equitable decisions regarding the institutions, policies, and processes that affect Indigenous communities rather than simply acquiring physical products. Munro et al. (2014) further describes the intersection of indigeneity and gender to reveal that cultural marginalization and asymmetrical political powers have exacerbated the food insecurity and injustice experienced by the ultrapoor Garo women of Bangladesh.

Imported Foods Displace Local Foods

The social issue created by imported foods is that small farmers are unable to compete with the cheap commodities produced and traded internationally, by selling their locally grown, culturally appropriate foods. Through this process again, access to culturally appropriate food is not the objective, but rather having fair access to the market is. With fair access, culturally appropriate food can be used to sustain their livelihoods. These discussions related to the social justice framework, primarily through economic resources and self-determination. Social and environmental resources, as well as interdependence, were primarily absent topics within this set of literature.

In some regions of the world, cheap imported foods have saturated the local markets, undermining the livelihoods of local farmers in their abilities to sell culturally relevant foods. Finnis et al. (2013) describe the detrimental realities international trade has brought to small farmers in rural regions of Paraguay, who can no longer maintain their agricultural livelihoods by selling specific cultural foods because equivalent imported products have undermined their

local markets. Participants of their study also suspect mills, used to process local crops into another culturally appropriate product, have been shut down due to government decisions related to international trade that adversely affected small farmers (169). When speaking of the participants in their study, Finnis et al. (2013) states, “they understand themselves as being positioned as outsiders in the development of policies that shape national agricultural systems and that in turn shape their access to foods they want to eat” (179). Menezes (2001) also points to the hardships for small farmers as he illustrates the economic effects of globalization on class, where small farmers struggle to compete with the marketing strategies and resources of larger corporations (32). Additionally, he describes food as an “economic weapon” where “mechanisms such as blockades, embargoes or even certain types of blackmail imposed by potential imperialists on countries opting for other economic models” (33).

Where the livelihoods of small farmers have been undermined by imported foods, some scholars point to social hierarchies which have further exacerbated these hardships. Steckley (2015) describes the social racial hierarchies of Haiti which create perceptions of economic status that further promote inequality. She further implores activists, who advocate for traditional and local diets as well as self-determination for local farmers to have access in markets, to move beyond issues of trade to also address the social inequalities that have perpetuated this.

In studies where challenging the competition of imported foods could result in the increase of farmer’s livelihoods, there were few discussions on the role of having access to environmental resources. Menezes (2001) for instance, discusses how the “take-over of natural resources, particularly land, water, and seeds” is threatening the food sovereignty of nations (as so was the inability to preserve nutritional cultures) (32), but further discussions mostly focus on access to economic resources or only address basic aspects of environmental resources. For

example, Ragone et al. (2016) explain the economic benefits to the local economy by reintroducing breadfruit to Hawaii, where most of their foods are imported. To implement these plans, Ragone et al. (2016) identified landowners with experience in agricultural practices, however, further questioning of equitable access to land ownership is absent.

The Contribution of Culturally Appropriate Food to Social Justice

The ways in which culturally appropriate food is applied as part of a solution to address the social issues of food insecurity, cultural food insecurity, cultural imperialism, and imported foods that displace local foods, varied in relevance to social justice. Food insecurity and cultural food insecurity appeared to be the most limiting in the ways culturally appropriate food was conceptualized as a solution, while the relation between culturally appropriate food and both cultural imperialism and the issue imported foods were more relevant to social justice. This parallels the findings of research question one, in which the conceptualization of culturally appropriate food, in the context of food insecurity and cultural food insecurity, was limited to specific food products, rather than as a part of traditions, practices, and systems.

The relationship between cultural food insecurity and culturally appropriate food was the most restricted in the way it relates to social justice, though in some ways simply due to the limited number of discussions. Through the contexts of immigrants and refugees, some authors found that community gardens offer social and environmental resources. However, while this may offer a promising way to acquire foods through personal preference, given the climate, this does not address the issues of access to and control over land. Similarly, though individuals are able to grow their own produce, we cannot know how this plays into the ability to have self-determination and interdependence, without further research.

For Indigenous communities, cultural food insecurity appears to exist as a result of colonization, where access to foods through lands and waterways have been restricted through dispossession. While, all articles discussing Indigenous populations, addressed the adverse effects of colonization, and some discuss the need for culturally appropriate foodways to maintain cultural identities, only one addresses an actual connection. Therefore, this was also limiting and only briefly included environmental resources and the inability to sustain livelihoods through fisheries.

Cultural food security might be achievable in a socially just way, however it does not appear that achieving it would promote social justice. In other words, the process to which cultural food security can be realized can be socially just, if individuals can acquire the resources to do so equitably, and through a way that enables their abilities of self-determination and to be included in decisions of power. But, achieving cultural food security by acquiring access to culturally appropriate food is not inherently just. Particularly, because not all food practices or food traditions are inherently just, themselves. For instance, what one practice provides for one individual, in terms of maintaining cultural wellbeing, might unjustly affect another. Cultural food security is a commendable goal; but it seems that, along with access to culturally appropriate food, it is an aspect of culture that would be acquired if social justice were to be achieved, and not the other way around.

Similarly, achieving food security through access of nutritious, culturally appropriate food, was also limited in the way it intersected with the categories of social justice. Though specific resources were addressed, including social, economic, and very briefly, environmental, they only just begin to touch on the issues of each resource. Additionally, the categories of self-determination and interdependence were not recognized.

While discussions involving social resources offered promising suggestions, the brief dialogue of social, environmental, and economic resources demonstrate the limitations to fully address social justice. Social resources mentioned included a community-based approach as well as innovative programs working to provide food for low-income populations. The multi-level approach to create a community system was integrated into many sectors of society (Mader and Busse, 2011) and could be used to integrate other categories of social justice. The projects described by Hossfeld et al. (2017) and Blue Bird Jernigan et al. (2011), which worked to bring the EBT program to a local farmers market, were also promising ways to incorporate access to foods for low-income populations. However, while this provides access to culturally appropriate foods in unique ways, it doesn't address the underlying issues of inequitable access to economic resources.

Where economic resources are limiting the ability to acquire foods, the issue becomes more than just access to food, but about the access to and distribution of capital in equitable ways. In regard to market access for consumers, some authors have suggested a broader recognition of different types of food-based locations. Joassart-Marcelli et al. (2017) suggested that food deserts are not always adequately assessed and may often include ethnic markets that contribute to the food security of minority populations. Similarly, environmental resources were also understood to be a method of procuring culturally appropriate food where there might not otherwise be options. While community gardens offer spaces to achieve this, these gardens restrict the space to small amounts of food and therefore one would not be able to use this type of land to sell products for the purpose of gaining capital.

Like cultural food security, achieving food security can be done in unjust ways, but in achieving social justice, achieving food security should follow. Simply having access to

nutritious, culturally appropriate food is useful in achieving biological and possibly psychological goals, however it ignores the social issues that drive inadequate access to these foods. Further, while immigrant and refugees were acknowledged to have higher risks of food insecurity, in relation to accessing culturally appropriate food, the social identities of class, race, and gender should also be questioned, as each intersects with society differently and therefore perceives cultural acceptability differently.

The social issues of cultural imperialism address ways in which social justice can be realized through a variety of discussions. Cultural imperialism was mentioned among three different contexts, including the implementation of nutrition programs, colonization, and institutionalized racism. Through these discussions, culturally appropriate food and associated foodways were not seen as a solution to cultural imperialism but rather as an outcome to addressing these issues. In addition, all three categories of social justice were recognized and were interrelated.

In order for there to be a fair distribution of resources for Indigenous populations, they must be able to practice self-determination and interdependence. Many authors recognized that when Indigenous populations did not have equitable access to environmental, economic, and social resources, they were unable to define and practice their own food systems. In addition, this meant that they did not have the inclusive power to participate with the state government in ways that would reestablish these inequalities.

Acknowledging inequitable access to resources also means addressing the power structures involved with these resources. Research that mentioned social, economic, and environmental resources further addressed these to acknowledge the related issues of access and control, as well as the barriers to acquiring them. Limited access to economic resources included

access to markets, the restrictions in acquiring capital, and the realization that most employable industries were those contributing to the destruction of their local environment. Others duly pointed to power structures affecting access and ownership to land, including Indigenous women who had specific cultural obligations they were expected to meet, despite the lack of resources to do so (Munro et al. 2014). Similarly, Alkon and Norgaard (2009) described the inequalities of black farmers in acquiring farm land and capital by pointing to the power structures of institutionalized racism. In contrast, some scholars offered solutions to achieve self-determination and interdependence, which included Indigenous food sovereignty. Through solutions of decolonization, social justice would be addressed, and access to culturally appropriate food could be realized.

In addition, cultural imperialism exists in the food system where dominant groups assert their food cultures onto others. Although, the research of Towns et al. (2013) was focused on identifying specific foods that were useful and culturally appropriate to their participants, their concluding thoughts profoundly address why it is important to understand how “culturally appropriate food” is perceived by the individuals who prefer it. Not only does this provide bridges to create interdependent relationships, but by implementing nutrition programs that consider culturally appropriate food, cultural practices, and preferences, these programs can move beyond providing nutrients to growing livelihoods.

Cultural imperialism has the capacity to be addressed in ways that promote social justice. This has been primarily discussed through conversations of decolonization, but these set of examples, describe ways in which the inequitable access of resources should be addressed. Where the categories of social justice are achieved, equitable access to cultural foods should follow. However, access to culturally appropriate food and culturally relevant practices is not

necessarily a demonstration that social justice is being realized, nor is it a relatable solution. For instance, programs offering EBT at the farmers market, which were meant to serve local Indigenous communities with culturally appropriate food, do not address the categories of social justice. This access does not address the limitations of self-determination and interdependence, nor does it recognize the power relations of resources.

Where imported foods have displaced local foods, the objective has been to question the fairness of the power relations within the market, so that small farmers can participate by selling local, culturally appropriate foods. As previously mentioned, like cultural imperialism, this is not about access to culturally appropriate food, but to the access to markets, in a way that culturally appropriate food can contribute to the livelihoods of small farmers. Therefore, this set of literature was primarily focused on economic resources, though specific to market access, and self-determination. However, by leaving social and environmental resources out of these discussions, there is little understanding of the ways in which access to land and community resources play a role in using culturally appropriate foods as a source of income.

With fair access to the market, culturally appropriate food can be used to practice self-determination. Theoretically, where people have access to markets in an equitable and sustainable way, culturally appropriate food can be used to sustain individual livelihoods and practice self-determination. This theory is limited though, as it does not consider the social hierarchies, which are proposed by Steckley (2015). Though the example in Haiti demonstrates a stark contrast between class and racial hierarchies (*ibid.*), this is possible, in one degree or another, in every society.

Culturally appropriate food does not play a significant role in creating or achieving social justice but may be useful in understanding these social issues. Throughout these four issues, I

have analyzed the relationships they hold with culturally appropriate food to determine how useful this concept might be in creating social justice. Culturally appropriate food does not appear all that useful in promoting social justice, and in some ways may encourage unjust relations, however our new understanding of culturally appropriate food can still be applicable in the way we address these social problems.

Access to culturally appropriate food does not negate that food security has been achieved. However, sustainable access to nutritional products that happen to be culturally appropriate can aid in achieving cultural food security. While neither of these adequately address social justice, it is useful through these issues, to understand how culturally appropriate food can play a role in the psychological and social well-being of individuals. In addition, culturally appropriate food, and practices, are a product of sustained foodways that are not subjected to cultural imperialism. While access to culturally appropriate food can occur under cultural imperialistic power structures, sustainable access to such products, and in addition to such practices and provisioning activities, can be an identifiable way to determine what categories of social justice are being achieved or addressed. For instance, where equitable access to resources exist, individuals should be able to sustainably acquire preferred foods. Lastly, culturally appropriate food can be useful in the practice of self-determination. Where social justice addresses the forms of oppression and inequitable circumstances of social hierarchies, culturally appropriate food can be the source with which individuals can use to sustain their livelihoods.

To summarize these findings, through the results of research question one, I illustrate different ways in which culturally appropriate food has been conceptualized in food systems discourse and I identified four social issues that have been discussed within the context of culturally appropriate food. These included food insecurity, cultural food insecurity, cultural

imperialism, and imported foods that displace local foods. The ways in which these social issues intersect with culturally appropriate food were then analyzed through question two with a social justice framework composed of three categories: the fair distribution of food, self-determination, and interdependence. Each social issue from question articulated with the social justice framework in different ways, and while culturally appropriate food can be useful in understanding these social issues, it was not found to be particularly useful in promoting social justice. In contrast, this information is helpful in recognizing the ways that culturally appropriate food may be applied as a surrogate for social justice while doing little to actually promote positive social change.

Contribution

This research aimed to address the current conceptualization of culturally appropriate food in food systems discourse because I wanted to identify the considerations that should be acknowledged when adopting this concept in order to determine its usefulness in creating social change. By demonstrating that culturally appropriate food is conceptualized in a variety of ways, this thesis has demonstrated the importance in understanding the ways words and phrases are used to promote social justice. While culturally appropriate food has been frequently used to assert notions of a just food system, through this analysis of literature, I have established that culturally appropriate food is not exceptionally useful in promoting social justice, at least in relation to the specific social problems I have addressed. However, it can be useful in other ways, such as by broadening our understanding of these social issues. Though it does not directly behave as a solution to these issues, it can provide new ways to consider them. For instance, due to the heterogeneity of culture, an intersectional analysis of cultural food identities with social identities (such as race, class, and gender) can further expand our knowledge of these social

identities in relation to the issues previously discussed to better understand how to create positive social change in the most equitable way. Finally, this work also calls for food movements associated with social justice, to more clearly articulate the elements of their mission, so as to bring activists, scholars, and organizations together under the same conceptualization.

Conclusion

Within academic literature, culturally appropriate food has been conceptualized as part of a solution or as something that is acquired by achieving social change. In my first research question, I identified four issues including food insecurity, cultural food insecurity, cultural imperialism, and imported foods which have displaced local foods. The processes in which culturally appropriate food applies to these issues were then analyzed through question two, within a social justice framework. From this, I concluded that culturally appropriate food is not particularly useful in promoting social justice but can be useful in our understanding of the social issues oriented around it. Lastly, I explained how this contributes to our knowledge of social change and how future research can contribute. The following chapter concludes this thesis by summarizing this research and addressing future work that should be addressed.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Recent trends in food systems discourse have illustrated an image of a just, culturally appropriate food system. Primarily associated with the movements of food security and food sovereignty, culturally appropriate food has been used in broad and vague ways to describe social problems where they are culturally *inappropriate* as well as how they can become culturally appropriate. The absence of a clear definition has created various conceptualization of culturally appropriate food, which I point to as a social problem. Here, culturally appropriate food has been used to assert what a just food system should look like, despite being ill-defined, making it available to be misinterpreted or used inappropriately.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to identify the different ways in which culturally appropriate food has been used in academic literature and to understand how it is being conceptualized as a tool for social justice. In addition, I proposed a social justice framework to see how useful culturally appropriate food was in fostering social justice through these conceptualizations.

Through this analysis, I revealed four social issues that are articulated with culturally appropriate food in academic literature. These included food insecurity, cultural food insecurity, cultural imperialism, and imported foods that displace local food. Within each of these four categories, there was considerable variation in the ways culturally appropriate food was conceptualized, but still with few definitions.

In some ways, culturally appropriate food acts as part of a solution to a social problem. For instance, food security can be achieved through access of nutritious, culturally appropriate

food and similarly, cultural food security is maintained through access of cultural foods provisioned by culturally relevant practices and traditions.

In contrast, culturally appropriate food can also be part of the outcome rather than as part of the solution. Through the specific issues involved in cultural imperialism, such as colonization and institutional racism, resolving these social problems also addressed the barriers to experiencing culturally appropriate foodways. But access to these foodways did not solve the issues of colonization and racism. Similarly, where imported foods displaced local foods, small farmers had access to culturally appropriate food but could not use it to maintain their livelihoods while competing with cheap international commodities.

While the relationships between culturally appropriate food and these four social issues are informative of the social problem, they are not an indication of how social justice is being created. To understand how useful culturally appropriate food is in fostering social justice through these social issues, I analyzed each relationship with a social justice framework composed of three categories. These included the fair distribution of resources (social, economic, and environmental), self-determination, and interdependence.

Through the social justice framework, I concluded that culturally appropriate food is not particularly useful in fostering social justice. Within the contexts of food security and cultural food security, using culturally appropriate food as the solution disregards and distracts from underlying issues that have created these issues from the beginning. Similarly, culturally appropriate food is an outcome where power is redistributed, and cultural imperialism dismantled, but social justice comes through this process, and therefore culturally appropriate food is a result of social justice. In contrast, there is some usefulness in using culturally appropriate food where imported foods have displaced local foods, because it can be used as the

source for small farmers to sustain their livelihoods. While this first requires the fair distribution of market access and is still limited by the influences of social hierarchies. It is useful in that it can promote opportunities to create social justice.

Lastly, culture is heterogenous, and so too is culturally appropriate food, to any given culture. This research highlighted some instances in which food cultures were collectively imposed onto one population, while also pointing to others that demonstrate the unique barriers some face due to their social identities. Drawing from this study, future work should address the intersectionalities between cultural identities and social identities to gather a better understanding of the ways culture relates to social issues. It is important to understand the unique ways in which people identify with their culture so that practical solutions, such as the implementation of nutrition programs, can be realized in equitable and considerate ways. More importantly, a broad overview of any individual culture is not enough to understand the ways in which people relate to their cultures through society. To ignore the individual experiences would be to “bypass the complex nature of any society, and to impute to its members a homogeneity of value and intentions they almost certainly lack” (Mintz 1996, 23).

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