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Six Questions for Food Justice

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Introduction

In July 2014 the *Food Justice: Knowing Food/Securing the Future* workshop at the University of Reading, UK brought together over 60 academic and civil society delegates to discuss the contemporary state of food justice.[1] While food is essential to the growth, development and health of human life, and to social well-being (Riches 2018), an array of contemporary challenges demonstrates that our food system does not ensure freedom from want and oppression, or environmental sustainability (Allen 2008). Indeed, when we consider the number of malnourished children that live in countries with food surpluses it becomes clear that a more equitable and healthy food system is substantively not an issue of production but, rather, of access and justice.

Justice, in the context of food, has a variety of framings, including questions of rights, anti-poverty politics, community food security, distribution, political representation and collective self-determination (Levkoe 2006, Barnhill and Doggett 2018) Consequently, 'food justice' as a concept, process, practice and outcome remains open to multiple interpretations (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010) with all the inherent dangers of being an 'empty signifier' (Heynen, Kurtz et al. 2012). Despite this, there is a utility and importance to wide, diverse engagements from a range of stakeholders in working through notions of food justice (Wekerle 2004). Indeed, this is mirrored by the number of alternative food movements across the world focusing on 'the multiple ways that racial and economic inequalities are embedded within the production, distribution, and consumption of food' (Alkon and Mares 2012: 348). These endeavour to explore the causes, symptoms, processes and outcomes of food justice and injustices (Agyeman and McEntree 2014) and recognize the need to address and challenge the socio-economic, political and ecological contexts and structures that have shaped food injustice (Alkon and Guthman 2017).

Food justice is, therefore, a critical concept both for scholars and for people's everyday lived realities. For the former, it offers a conceptual framework to understand and analyse the broader structural

[1] While we are representing the conversations, debates and discussions of the workshop, this material here remains ours and ours alone.

inequities that shape people's experiences of food systems and potentially contribute towards progressive policy development and social change (see, for example, Levkoe 2006, Sbicca 2012, Bradley and Galt 2014). For the latter, realising a more just food system means one in which everyone has 'access to sufficient, affordable, healthy, culturally appropriate food, and – very importantly – respect and self-determination' (see also Dowler and O'Connor 2012, Bradley and Galt 2014: 173). Although food justice practices generally work through principles and ideals embodied within the broader struggle for social justice, the movement is not homogenous, especially when considering US[2] experiences versus those in the UK (Food Ethics Council 2010; Kneafsey et al, this issue, Moragues-Faus 2017) and other parts of the globe (Besky 2015; Blake, this issue). The tensions and contestations reflecting the range of reformist to radical approaches, practices and rationalities (Brent, Schiavoni et al. 2015) were, and are, exemplified in our workshop and this special issue.

Recent literature demonstrates the contemporary relevance of debates around food justice.[3] Building on this foundational work and its normative politics, at the Reading workshop we wanted to take stock of these debates and ask questions about what else must and remains to be done across the scholarly and applied worlds. These concerns formed the basis of a set of dynamic interventions held during the workshop in which we—from our privileged positions—collectively considered, visualised and debated our understandings of the key contemporary challenges for food justice. All participants completed a worksheet in which they expressed their key challenge for food justice as an illustration and a short statement. These led into the development of project ideas to engage with the challenges identified and develop a set of cross-cutting common themes. A content analysis of the worksheets used deductive codes based on the latter while making space for others to inductively emerge. This iterative process grounds the six questions proposed here:

1. Is it possible to ensure fair provisioning with equitable access in food systems?
2. In what ways can we promote and enhance connections within food systems?
3. To what extent can existing collaborations and connections be built across scales?
4. How does food justice fit within wider drives towards social, economic and environmental justice?
5. How do we develop an effective critique of current food production strategies?
6. Can food justice challenge the status quo of neoliberal capitalism?

[2] And particularly Californian perspectives on food justice, e.g. Alkon and Guthman, 2017b.

[3] Particularly in the critical scholarship of Julie Guthman, Patricia Allen, Alison Hope Alkon, Justin Aygeman, Nik Heynan, Eric Holt- Giménez, Ryan Galt, Rachel Slocum, Molly Anderson, Anne Bellows, Liz Dowler, Moya Kneafsey, Melanie Bedore, Joshua Sbicca and Amy Trauger

We also include a series of statements – interspersed and offset from the text in italics – from workshop participants that, in provocative ways, illustrate the variety of perspectives allowing individual voices to be heard.

Food justice scholarship over the last 20 years has engaged with social movements and alternative practices, analysed inequalities and connected into broader areas of research and activism (Glennie and Alkon 2018). While some of the questions posed here may come as no surprise, that fact that they continue to be pertinent should alert us to both the progress that has been made and the struggles that remain ongoing and in need of critical attention. Moreover, while not exhaustive, they act as a useful 'stock take', facilitating further debate around ways to create more just food systems. While we believe that the questions and statements in this paper represent the situated knowledges and experiences of those who attended the conference, the context of the latter is critical. As Glennie and Alkon (2018: 2) reflect 'research internationally has proceeded at a different pace, and with a different emphasis, than the field of food justice in the United States'. Thus, discussions at the workshop were primarily grounded in our varied European experiences. While we hope this will help to broaden food justice debates beyond a predominantly US focus, we recognise that there are many other voices and perspectives with much to say on questions of food justice that are missing from this account. Indeed, one of the core issues that emerged from the workshop was the need to hear from, and publicly engage with, more marginal, unheard and underrepresented voices—particularly in Europe as austerity continues to deepen—many of whom face food poverty and injustice in their everyday lives:

The main food justice challenge at the moment is to alleviate the black cloud of suffering hovering over millions of families and individuals unable to afford sufficient healthy food due to poverty.

We recognize, then, that this is an 'imperfect' document that contains statements or arguments that have been subject to analysis and, indeed, extensive critique elsewhere (see Alkon and Agyeman 2011, Cadieux and Slocum 2015, Slocum and Cadieux 2015, Slocum, Cadieux et al. 2016, Alkon and Guthman 2017, Moragues-Faus 2017) and much of this echoes through this special issue. Yet their inclusion is important as our intervention seeks to air these debates in ways that facilitate closer scrutiny and promote greater engagement and understanding with the key issues. While this paper represents the deliberations of a particular set of scholars and representatives from civil society, we recognize the limits of this work in terms of those who, at this moment, are systematically - if unintentionally - excluded.

The multidisciplinary and multi-sector nature of the Reading Workshop provided a wide-ranging platform of interests, experiences and values and meant that we did not always share a common view.

However, the degree of relative consensus across this group suggests that the questions and issues raised here travel beyond disciplinary boundaries and warrant further consideration. Our hope is that the posing of questions rather than statements of aspiration will reveal new and continuing issues that have yet to be satisfactorily addressed from an alternative food movements and activism perspective. In this, our aim is to critically reflect on current literatures, bringing together cross-cutting issues to provoke further reflection on the future needs as well as the hopes, visions and potentials of food justice movements in a European and UK-focused context.

1. Is it possible to ensure fair provisioning with equitable access in food systems?

Although food justice has been defined as 'the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality's root causes both within and beyond the food chain' (Hislop, 2014: 19 in Alkon 2014), the majority of research remains centred on individuals and relatively small, collective activist groups (e.g. Alkon and Guthman, 2017b). While this reveals the circumstances and everyday realities of food injustices, arguably this must be combined with a systems analysis, recognising growing corporate power and increasing consolidation and concentration across global food systems (Clapp and Scrinis 2016, Howard 2016, International Panel of Experts on Food Systems (IPES-Food) 2017). The manufacture, distribution and availability of rising volumes of cheap, nutrient deficient, energy dense foods are a vital part of the complex picture of food justice. For, with healthier food options regarded as less profitable (Stuckler and Nestle 2012), food corporations have strong financial incentives to promote highly refined, ultra-processed products. This is a feature of the global food system today, which is responsible for driving a nutrition transition – long established in the rich (OECD) countries – throughout middle and many low-income countries. As a consequence, health experts have been drawing attention with increasing urgency to rising levels of obesity accompanied by escalating rates of non-communicable diseases (NCD). For the food insecure especially, the steadily rising price of food has significantly outpaced the growth in household earnings. According to Woodall and Shannon (2018) since 2008 real consumer food prices have risen about three times faster than typical wages, with the benefits accruing to the biggest food, beverage and retail companies.

It's not about production but access to food

Enough food is available globally, the challenge is how to ensure 'fair' allocation and avoid 'waste'

Holt-Giménez et al (2012) states that the world already produces enough food to feed 10 billion people. With the world's current population at 7.5 billion this suggests that it continues to be poverty and inequality, rather than scarcity, which causes chronic hunger for 815 million people worldwide

(HLPE 2014, FAO, IFAD et al. 2017). We say *continues* since Amartya Sen (1981: 1) commented over 30 years ago that 'starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat. It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food'. A well-documented consequence of this food supply challenge is the presence of both ends of the malnutrition spectrum – hunger and obesity – at the same time and even in the same space, a situation also labelled 'malconsumption' (Sage 2013). Consequently, as Godfray et al (2010: 2769) have observed '…we cannot be said to have a functioning global food system when one in seven people today still do not have access to sufficient food, and an equal number are over-fed'.

People's lives ruined by hunger and obesity: two sides of the same coin

Furthermore, access itself is an ecological issue, comprised of multiple, historical factors (Guthman 2012, Goodman, Carolan et al. 2014, Sage 2014). Work on 'food deserts' highlights that the contextual, structural constraints on tackling inequalities in food distribution exist in both developed and developing spaces; research on the foodways of low-income groups adds more nuanced depth to this by challenging the dominant narrative that low-income people do not have the desire, knowledge and/or means to eat healthier (Alkon, Block et al. 2013, Bowen, Elliott et al. 2014, Cairns and Johnston 2015) or to grow their own food (Kneafsey et al, this issue). There *is* significant knowledge about healthy food – growing and cooking it – amongst low income groups (Curran and Gonzalez 2011, Alkon, Block et al. 2013, Bradley and Galt 2014, Dixon 2014) but, as Dixon (2014: 178) comments, '*knowledge* of how to eat is not always sufficient for choosing to eat differently than we do'.

Getting all the food produced in the world to all the world in a warming, fuel starved world

The challenges posed by ensuring equitable access go beyond this scaled necessity to situate food justice in everyday lives and so recognise the inherent socio-cultural power relations that surround food. As the more 'radical', social justice incarnations of food justice argue, 'disparities in food access provide a window into a much larger system of race and class relations' (Brent, Schiavoni et al. 2015: 625); 'essential to the food justice movement is an analysis that recognizes the food system itself as a racial project that problematizes the influences of race and class on the production, distribution and consumption of food' (Alkon and Agyeman 2011: 5). Food justice therefore connects into broader debates and geographies of power, capital, land and labour as well as the environment (Slocum, Cadieux et al. 2016). Indeed, the issue of food waste lies at the very heart of food justice considerations, particularly at a time of anthropogenic climate change and resource depletion (Evans 2014). For example, 6-10% of greenhouse gas emissions from developed countries are produced by growing food which is never consumed, while 250km^3 of water are lost globally every year as a result

of food wastage (HLPE 2014). The problems of food waste clearly translate into issues around equity and fairness in environmental as well as socio-political arenas.

The main food justice challenge is that some people have more access to food and waste a lot, while others do not have enough

With 33% of all food globally being wasted (HLPE 2014), food waste – whether caused by a surfeit of food, consumer confusion over 'use by' dates, poor storage or a lack of post-harvest transport – is clearly a significant factor impacting on food availability and equality of access. Yet recent years have witnessed growing political recognition and popular consciousness around the issue of food waste (Campbell, Evans et al. 2017) with attitudinal shifts from an environmental managerialism designed to reduce landfill costs toward a moral solution to the scandal of wasted food. That this coincided with the era of austerity, which followed in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and was accompanied by rising food prices, is not coincidental given that more frugal domestic budgeting became the norm. However, as Campbell et al (2017) observe, food waste has become a compelling new arena of political action that is not simply morally 'bad' but one where the key culprits – the major food retailers – moved quickly to reposition themselves as the solution. This has led to the rapid growth in number and scale of food banking operations established to 'partner' with retailers in disposing of food surpluses ('waste') while simultaneously solving the scourge of food poverty (Cloke, May et al. 2017, Gaithwaite 2017). Food justice activists and scholars have consequently had to respond to – and challenge – the discourse of 'sharing', 'caring' and 'supporting' as large corporations appropriate the language of solidarity in pursuing a business model that arguably reinforces an unsustainable and unfair food system. Moreover, the charitable redistribution of food surplus serves to conceal the extent of poverty, social exclusion and injustice and demonstrates the lack of a right to food security with dignity (Kenny and Sage 2018).

Consequently, food justice is a multi-faceted issue situated within an interconnected network of social, political, economic, cultural and environmental justice challenges. While our discussion so far has been largely drawn in global terms we acknowledge that the problem of 'more just' food systems will only be achieved through concerted action across multiple scales, with the everyday and the local offering unique opportunities to (re)engage and (re)connect individuals and communities into food systems.

2. In what ways can we promote and enhance connections within food systems?

Disparities, disconnections and inequalities persist and grow

One key challenge for food justice remains connecting people into food systems; with enhanced knowledge of the production, distribution and cooking of food, the transparency and accountability of these systems are strengthened. With such knowledge, people have an informed capability to choose what and how they would like to consume, and to question and challenge the 'bads' of food systems. The key question is *how* to enhance this access and connection to food. We are not trying to privilege the local because too tight a focus on this scale can lead to overly defensive and essentialised practices and attitudes (DuPuis and Goodman 2005). Furthermore, what is commonly understood as 'local food' is, through its market positioning, targeted towards a specific, higher-income, often white demographic making local food outlets such as farmers markets and delis exclusionary (Allen 2010, Guthman 2012, Bradley and Galt 2014), a community which arguably the Reading workshop also replicated. Nor, to be clear, are we suggesting an overt responsibilisation of poor or marginal – or of any – consumers. Rather, focusing on the particular enables more tightly defined actions as people are mobilised through specific events or relations that are of significance to them and their local communities; being grounded in responding to local needs can make food justice less abstract, distant, frustrating or disempowering than working at a larger scale (Allen 2010). However, remembering that international food systems are inherently multiscalar, and the 'power geometries' (Massey 1999, Slocum, Cadieux et al. 2016) that this entails, the local must have these broader interconnections folded within it, otherwise 'food justice strategies "work around" the larger food system in small ways' (Clendenning, Dressler et al. 2016: 170).

Stop the institutionalisation of food. People should have adequate access to food which meets their social, financial and cultural needs.

Rather than specifically critiquing the industrialisation of food systems, we identified the *institutionalisation* of food as a key means through which certain values, concepts and roles have become embedded and normalised within particular socio-economic spaces or organisations. This ossification acts to exclude particular others and preclude alternative formulations, discouraging people and communities from *thinking* about or *doing* food differently. These ideas around fostering 'power from within' connect into broader drives around empowerment, although this is viewed disparagingly by food sovereignty movements (Holt-Gimenez and Wang 2011; Milner, this issue). While we do not wish to perpetuate the neoliberal logic that responsibility for welfare fundamentally rests with the individual, as seen through the examples discussed by Blake (this issue) and Alkon and Guthman (2017b), given the individualised nature of eating, people should be engaged – in

appropriate and empowering ways (see Guthman 2008a, Guthman 2008b, Hayes-Conroy 2010, Carolan 2011, Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013, Figueroa and Alkon 2017) – to think about how they connect with food in order to build broader coalitions and communities of action. This is clearly difficult but, perhaps, a certain degree of normalisation of values is necessary in order to stabilise and coalesce these coalitions. However, every discourse already contains within it the potential for resistance and it is the loss of this radical potential through the institutionalisation and control of food by particular agents, such as corporations or state bodies, in particular ways which we might challenge. This is manifest in the tension apparent in many NGOs between their need for funding and their position as a structure of resistance, with Guthman (2006) stating that such flows of neoliberal capital into food movements depoliticise them by limiting the conceivable, the arguable, the fundable and the organisable. In some ways, this is best displayed by 'the corporatisation of food poverty' (Riches and Tarasuk 2014, Riches 2018) and where anti-hunger advocates have been accused of being complicit in the industrial hunger complex through their collaboration in surplus food redistribution (Fisher 2017).

How to reconnect people to where food comes from and take ownership over the production of their own food, wherever they live?

In discussions at the workshop, the role of an experiential element in enhancing connections emerged, with a physical act demanding a more active enrolment as well as helping to develop a dynamic sense of solidarity and community (Herman 2015, Herman 2016; Kneafesey et al, this issue). The literature is full of examples of community gardens, community farms, allotment associations, and cooking groups but, again, we argue that these need to be understood within the context of people's everyday, lived realities in order to enhance participation. There may be 'quiet' ways in which people already engage with food (Smith and Jehlicka 2013) - such as how they involve their children or engage with homemade foods (Yotova, this issue) - which have had limited consideration from policymakers and academics, and that can be built upon. For example, Loo (2014) argues that how food justice is commonly defined omits recognition of the participatory inequalities in which material and distributive injustices are grounded. Therefore, personal transformations need to be related to broader political, economic, social and cultural change (Brent, Schiavoni et al. 2015). These drives need to be firmly situated within current cultural political economies, regulatory structures and relations of power. Their diversity, as well as that of alternative food initiatives themselves, must also be acknowledged.

These (re)connections cannot happen in isolation at the local scale but must contain a broader acknowledgement of the relationalities that living in a globalised world entail. Given the often-lengthy

commodity networks of food products we therefore must also support the rights and needs of the other stakeholders within these chains in order to build extensive and meaningful collaborations and consensus.

3. To what extent can existing collaborations and connections be built across scales?

All together at the table: Northern and Southern producers, business, transportation, retailing, consumers and nature!

As Allen (2010: 297) argues, '…no one would argue that food-system localization can undo the inequities created by histories of colonialism, imperialism and neoliberalization'. In order to address these bigger structures and ideologies we therefore need to combine 'locavorism' with bigger picture collective solidarity.

Getting communities affected by food poverty and austerity to speak for/by themselves and organise for power

Allen (2008: 160) notes that 'since the agrifood system is *socially* organised, problems are the product of social choices, embodied in traditions, institutions, and legal and economic structures'. Although, as mentioned above, the latter can lead to these ideas and practices becoming normalised and 'locked in', once we recognise that (in)justice is a consequence of social *forces*, we can acknowledge that we have, or can develop, the capability to 'do' otherwise (Sen 1999). This then opens up the terrain – albeit within certain socio-economic bounds and for certain powerful actors – enabling us to develop the power to see possibilities and opportunities for difference and change.

Building on individualistic, pragmatic initiatives at local scale to develop overtly political action carried out by collectives of food justice activists

However, not everyone in global food systems has the agency to make other choices. Since we recognise the interconnected nature of contemporary global food systems, this demands a holistic understanding of how injustices are experienced throughout networks and across the myriad human and more-than-human actants who engage with them. The industrialisation and institutionalisation of food has acted to fetishize our relations with it, meaning that food justice movements, at least in the US, tend to focus on local and urban issues of consumption and distribution (Clendenning, Dressler et al. 2016) rather than overtly confronting the political economies of food production (see, however, McEntree 2011, Brent, Schiavoni et al. 2015, Eaton 2017, Harrison 2017). Nonetheless, the common ground across developed and developing spaces for those marginalised in the modern food system highlights the potential opportunities for international networks and solidarity (Clendenning, Dressler et al. 2016). Recent developments in ICTs, alternative trading systems such as Fair Trade, academic

and popular 'follow the thing' discussions (Cook 2006) and engagements with food at the local scale can work together to enhance our awareness of the challenges of domination, exploitation and coercion within food systems, and make connections between the various network nodes possible.

Not just one but many worlds are at stake (framing food in ethical terms can over-write this politics of difference)

As Bradley and Galt (2014: 173) state food justice is about 'respect and self-determination in all phases of food production, exchange, and consumption'. Therefore, if we want to avoid always having a moral remainder to our food choices – good in animal welfare versus poor in food miles; locally produced and distributed versus not supporting marginalised overseas producers; cheap food versus exploited labour – then we must develop connections between the various worlds in food systems in order to build better knowledges of each other, our needs and our rights. What this suggests, then, is the need to broaden food justice movements both spatially and in terms of their political and socio-economic engagements.

Food justice is obligation, responsibility and reciprocity from grassroots to small farmers

Having positioned the necessity for global collaborations, we now turn to a more practical question: *how* can food justice be achieved? While we were all agreed that this was an essential requirement for a just food future, there was also recognition that achieving this will be neither an easy nor a straightforward task.

How do we visualise and revalorize low and unpaid work in food networks and build collective methodologies and more egalitarian movements?

Developing associational 'power with' as a collective brought together through food is challenging. Although Allen's (2008: 159) statement that 'no other public issue is as accessible to people in their daily lives as that of food justice. Everyone – regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or social class – eats. We are all involved, and we are all implicated' resonates, how do we enable all voices in food networks to be heard? The women and girls doing unpaid, subsistence work; the small farmers who cannot afford Fairtrade certification; the non-unionised food chain workers; the microbes and pathogens that influence yields; the active lives of plants and animals – all have stories even if they have no or limited capability to share them. Issues of food justice thus connect into broader social justice debates around, amongst others, power, access, household finances, gender equality, education, the valorisation of knowledge and cultural traditions and identities (as discussed by Milner and Yotova, both this issue).

To overcome injustices throughout the food chain we need to start treating people as citizens NOT consumers, and address food inequalities at various scales

Following Levkoe (2006: 90), we agree that 'food is more than just another commodity and people are more than just consumers'. However, while the rise of the citizen-consumer (Wheeler 2012) recognises citizenship as active, accountable and acknowledges that there are multiple ways in which to participate in the polity, the citizen-consumer is 'neither passive nor fully in control' (Jubas 2007: 250). Furthermore, this is grounded in the rhetoric of personal choice, requiring the citizen to have 'purchasing power', which is unevenly distributed in society and devolves responsibility down to the individual level. While this acts as a reminder that there are multiple ways of being political, demonstrating solidarity and challenging society to better itself (Barnett, Cloke et al. 2011, Guthman and Brown 2016), we need to move beyond the confines imposed by the citizen-consumer to open up alternative routes of communication and connection across the scales, recognising the translocal *and* transnational nature of food justice (Wekerle 2004, Sage 2014).

Collaborations and connections must be embedded in an expansive view of the social to establish a holistic understanding of the myriad actants and relationships underpinning the development of just food practices and systems. In Herman (2016) the forest was a key actant in supporting the resilience of Finnish farms; in Ferguson and the Northern Rivers Landed Histories Research Group (2016) soil was an important ally in struggles for sustainable food systems; and in Williams and Holt-Giménez (2017) land was central to food activism. A more-than-human approach moves food justice from being a process of individual responsibilisation to being grounded in an emergent and relational community. Therefore, rather than simply adopting consumption as the only way to engage or, indeed, completely excluding it from people's daily lives, we need to utilise multiple and diverse strategies to build connections across different contexts, requirements and motivations. How we do this in the specific context of food justice remains an ongoing and open question but must be balanced within broader social and environmental justice movements.

4. How does food justice fit within wider drives towards social, economic and environmental justice?

Food justice is about more than food, it's about linking food issues to other and broader sustainability issues.

Agyeman (2013: 59) comments that 'food has become one of the key arenas in which conflicts around justice and sustainability have played out… food has also long been a driver of social movements'. This can be seen in histories and discussions of the Black Panthers in the USA (Heynen 2009), the development of community farms (Levkoe 2006, Curran and Gonzalez 2011, Bradley and Galt 2014), race and class (Slocum and Saldanha 2013), farmers markets (Alkon and Norgaard 2009, Alkon and Mares 2012), advocacy and praxis for healthy food (Freudenberg, McDonough et al. 2011, Sbicca

2012) and food banks (Greenberg and Greenberg 2010, Tarasuk, Dachner et al. 2014, Farahbakhsh 2015, Loopstra 2015, Gonzalez-Torre and Coque 2016). With all these diverse spaces, actants and practices it is unsurprising that food justice movements have struggled to bridge the many diverse concerns within the agrifood system (Sbicca 2012), let alone the arena of social justice more broadly, and so remain open to many interpretations (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010, Brent, Schiavoni et al. 2015). Yet, as we indicated above, it is clear that justice in terms of food is co-constitutive with many other drives for justice, whether cultural, political, economic, social or environmental. Indeed, given the importance of parallel discussions in the field of sustainable consumption, questions of defining human needs and necessities for equitable well-being (Gough 2017) must involve questions of food justice.

Food justice challenge: solidarity with related social justice struggles for positive change and accountability

The particular, micro-scale nature of our own food interactions means that any changes in access, price, distribution or quality can have a direct impact on more people than other socio-economic changes. As Barnett (2010) reflects, awareness and analysis of 'justice' often comes from experiences or intuitions of 'injustice'; a specific event can mobilise individuals and communities to challenge the broader structures and relations that have triggered this change in their foodways. As such, food can build a stronger community through breaking down individualism and seclusion (Levkoe 2006). This is not to say that food is not as 'politically entrenched, networked, historically bound, and tied to nature as other resources required for human survival' but 'there is likely no other resource required for human survival that is as culturally bound…' (Agyeman and McEntree 2014: 216-217) and so has the capacity to build 'a culture of unity in diversity' (Sbicca 2012: 465).

The geographical scope of food systems – joining diverse people and places – and conceptual focus on food and the environment, health, labour, hunger, production and access (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Blake and Milner, both this issue) opens up more radical critiques of capitalism, racism, patriarchy, authority and power:

Without economic, political and social equality we can't achieve food justice.

Although there are multiple ways in which different people understand and practice eating, this degree of shared experience arguably opens up windows into others' lives that emotionally resonate with the viewer and allow us to 'become alert to structural inequities that deprive individuals of the opportunity to be adequately nourished' (Dixon 2014: 183). The concept of food justice is itself framed around the need for systemic change to address inequities within food systems and, by

tackling questions of mobilisation and strategies, it connects into broader discussions around democracy, citizenship, civil society and social movements (Wekerle 2004).

Farmers and other food workers don't get a fair wage for their work and many live in food poverty themselves

While workers are increasingly visible (see Harrison 2008, Brown and Getz 2011, Alkon 2014) the literatures on food poverty have focused largely on consumer experiences and practices with debates around food access highlighting the complexity of decision-making processes for low-income groups (Bowen, Elliott et al. 2014, Chen 2016, Daniel 2016, Baumann, Szabo et al. 2017). Further, in spite of food desert literatures, Alkon et al (2013) conclude that the key barrier to obtaining desired foods is not lack of proximity or knowledge but lack of income. Purchasing food is part of a wider nexus of choices over, amongst others, accommodation, heating, transport, clothing and healthcare. Even though the UK and others are slowly recovering from the recession caused by the 2007/08 financial crisis and continuing austerity policies, wages are stagnating (O'Connor 2014) and one in five Britons live below the official national relative poverty line (Department for Work and Pensions 2017). This is reflected in the rise in demand for foodbanks; one leading UK provider, The Trussell Trust, provided over 1.3 million emergency food supplies in 2017/18, which is a nearly four-fold increase over the last five years (The Trussell Trust 2018).

Therefore, stories of food can reveal much bigger narratives of 'dominance, exploitation, 'civilisation'…and, occasionally, it must be said, hope and difference' (Cook 2006: 659); by bringing together coalitions through particular contexts these large issues become more manageable, with individuals feeling that they can make a difference (Levkoe 2006). However, the other side to demonstrating these needs for justice is the concurrent requirement to outline both alternatives to, and pathways of transformation from, current systems, beliefs and practices in order to motivate action through providing a hopeful and different future.

5. How do we develop an effective critique of current food production strategies?

While the workshop delegates agreed that local, organic, Fair Trade and community food production systems all have their benefits, debate continues as to whether these can offer a viable means to feed the global population of 10.7 billion projected by the UN by 2075 (UN Population Division 2017). Given that the existing system already produces enough to feed 1.5 times the current global population (Holt-Gimenez, Shattuck et al. 2012), this suggests some capacity to engage with more socially and environmentally responsible alternatives. Nevertheless, availability and price continue to strongly shape food access and choices, and opponents of alternative agricultural strategies argue that these

cannot deliver across all of these challenges. However, recent studies have challenged this hegemonic wisdom (Seufort, Ramankutty et al. 2012), opening up the terrain to offer effective critiques of current food production through acknowledging that alternatives are viable options that can operate at much larger scales than currently exist.

Despite continuing debate around the relative merits of agroecology, conventional farming and smart-agriculture in the literature (Holmes 2010, Azadi, Talsma et al. 2011, Dibden, Gibbs et al. 2011), a general disquiet was felt amongst the delegates towards some of the practices of industrial agriculture with its focus on production maximisation:

Global food distribution – moves food – depletes soil – cheap food – wasted – no skills in food

Again, certain discourses of food were felt to have been institutionalised with a focus on a corporate-led model of agriculture, GMOs and profit over people leading to environmental and social degradation. Concerns around the commodification of life and relationships emphasized feelings of alienation and disconnection, with a general consideration that food needs to be recognised and understood as *a commons resource*, not just another commodity (Vivero Pol 2017). Fundamentally, this reflects a broader critique of the neoliberal capitalist, corporatist systems that have powerfully incubated and institutionalised this hegemony. While this may have become so normalised that it is difficult to think beyond (Gibson-Graham 2006), recognising that alternatives can address the global challenge of sufficient, affordable, healthy and culturally appropriate food is an important first step in considering:

How to systematically bridge the gap between 'surplus' and 'need' whilst maintaining efficient production

The idea of 'efficiency' is persistent and so, while there are many critiques of industrial agriculture, proponents can argue that it clearly does produce more than enough to feed the world despite its environmental downsides. The 'goods' and 'bads' of conventional agriculture are therefore known, defined and so understandable; as such they offer scope for improvements through research and development. In contrast, alternatives represent 'unknowns' often in terms of both their ideologies and outcomes. Therefore, the public may position itself as ethically virtuous but latent conservatism, social inertia and socio-economic inequality means that the value-knowledge-action gap remains when engaging with food injustices. Furthermore, 'much of the alternative food movement continues to be defined by white, middle-class individuals, organisations and institutions' (Agyeman and McEntree 2014: 213), and this class-based perception, and arguably reality, of the types of people who 'do food differently' potentially restricts its broader appeal (but see Figueroa and Alkon 2017).

Perceptions that doing food differently are niche and trendy (and a matter of taste?)

This remains a critical hurdle which exponents of alternative food strategies – whether reworking or revolutionising conventional agri-food systems – need to address. Arguments over the negative environmental, labour, health and social consequences of industrial agriculture have a long history but market alternatives have remained relatively niche, exclusive and 'precious' (Guthman 2003). The challenge to offering an effective critique is therefore grounded in the ongoing question of how to, as Bradley and Herrera (2016) reflect, decolonise food justice movements. Again, this emphasizes how an empirical focus on food speaks to wider social issues and so we end with a final reflection on whether food justice can be used to challenge long ingrained ideologies and structures.

6. Can food justice challenge the status quo of neoliberal capitalism?

Fundamentally, food justice comes down to questions of power and a fundamental challenge to the domination and coercion wielded by food corporations over marginalised stakeholders, i.e. those who need to buy food to live but who lack resources. How can those who experience multiple deprivations—and their cooperative allies who seek to work *with* and *be led by* them—be empowered to collectively achieve these goals (Rowlands 1997, Allen 2003, Alkon and Guthman 2017b)?

Making (global) capitalism work for me! Changing from within

In challenging such structural constraints to more equitable and just relations within food systems, food justice movements must question broader neoliberal and capitalist hegemonies. But how might they embark on these processes when food movements are critiqued for opposing neoliberalism in their discourses while embracing it through their practices of 'market-as-movement' (Alkon 2014)? Alkon (2014: 31) argues that a focus on consumption can constrain 'our collective imaginaries of what kinds of social changes can be brought about' – what avenues of change 'would be opened to us if we also saw ourselves as citizens, neighbors, or just humans' (Werkheiser and Noll 2014: 204)? Recognising food's capacity to act as a collectivising force (*ibid*) makes space to expand the 'politics of the possible'. The particularities of our engagements enables food both to bring people together through a degree of commonality while still providing powerful counter-narratives that question accepted norms:

Redistribute power from retailers toward producers

Consolidation of the food systems; inequitable capital; power distribution along the supply system; the lack of illusion of choice

Why should retailers hold a disproportionate degree of power? Would the food sector not benefit from more security and stability for all producers? What kind of alliances are possible? Consolidation

of food systems may improve efficiency but this does not necessarily translate into nutritional security. Of course, one condition that made corporate control over the global food system possible has been the emergence of the 'indifferent state'.

Declare hunger illegal!

As Riches (2018) carefully outlines, under human rights conventions and protocols governments are obliged to ensure domestic compliance to respect, protect and fulfil the right to food of their populations. Yet in practice – with broken social safety nets, regressive income distribution and an increasingly dysfunctional industrial food system – most OECD states display utter disinclination to enshrine a right to food into national law or to accept public accountability for their failings. Until such time as effective joined up public policy prevails over private philanthropy and charitable food handouts, then food justice will be overshadowed by consumer sovereignty concerns. These issues are common in debates within alternative food movements but more purchase could be achieved through explicitly utilising the moral and ethical connotations and resonances of food justice. Food is not *just* an economic conundrum, a logistical concern or a way to achieve political resonance but a very real and material issue that affects millions throughout the world on a daily basis.

Concluding Reflections

We strongly believe that food justice remains a vital political objective for millions of people, and one that offers an important axis for mobilisation within broader socio-economic and environmental justice struggles. Through these six questions – derived as they have been from our particularly European context – we have outlined some of the key challenges facing food justice movements as they seek to move forwards, which include issues around feasibility, viability, mobilisation and ethics. These highlight areas both for further research and activism, which must work together if we want to better understand different foodways, and so build stronger and more resilient connections between diverse communities. Within the research element of this, more attention needs to be paid to the continuing gaps in the US-centric literatures, which have a predominant focus on the racial and class-based inequalities experienced by consumers, a task the papers in this special issue have begun to address. More research is needed to give space to other voices – those marginalised by gender, sexuality, disability and age as well as those suffering from a lack of access, and ability to access, healthy, high quality and tasty foods – in a global and holistic view of agri-food systems, which acknowledges too the role and agency of non-human actants.

Within this we must always remember to question the power relations and contexts of food justice – *where* is it coming from? In the context of the workshop we were overwhelmingly coming from

European, white, middle-class, academic, third-sector backgrounds, which clearly shapes what we know and what we *can* know. It seems, perhaps, a little ironic that we call for a greater diversity of voices, and for those marginalised within food systems to be re-centralised, when we have not achieved this even within our workshop. Nevertheless, this points to the continuous and always *in progress* nature of such movements in search of justice and the challenges they face in terms of mobilisation and participation. Following Milner (this issue) and Loo (2014), we agree that a broader, postcolonial and participatory understanding of food justice must be cultivated in order to move beyond the local, distributive issues in which it often becomes mired; we need to make space for the broader, more-than-human connections, interactions and knowledges necessary to shape a movement that is itself 'just'. Perhaps we need to move away from the conceptual baggage of 'food justice' and instead acknowledge that we are simply trying to conceptualise, contextualise and achieve justice *in* food systems.

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