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Communities and Places of Food in the American South

Much academic writing describes communities and systems providing organic (as in, originating from the community) food sovereignty and access as an "alternative foodscape," which challenges the hegemonic and capitalist systems of food distribution across the landscape (Cook & Sumner, 2009; Psarikidou & Szerszynski, 2012; Spijker, Mathijs, & Parra, 2020). This project centers on these counter-hegemonic food networks to challenge political perceptions of the American South while discarding the notion of "alternative" networks. While much popular perception of the American South involves the image of the white American farmer with traditional conservative views, the legacy of agriculture and foodscapes in the South has and continues to be very different.

As stated by Gilbert Fite (1979), "So far as agriculture is concerned there are really several 'Souths.' Historically the South has been a complex and contradictory region where both sharp differences and basic similarities existed." One of these basic similarities continues to be dependence on the labor of Black people (and other people of color across the American foodscape) and the dispossession of indigenous people of their lands. The continual reconstitution of foodscapes and communities of care surrounding food for BIPOC residents of the South despite their dispossession of land and other capital is not an alternative as much as it is an undercommon (Harney & Moten, 2013) that is revolutionary in nature.

The project makes use of the work of Doreen Massey, who was a preeminent scholar of the multiplicity of places. While the term "foodscape" is geographic in nature (Cook & Sumner, 2009), it leans into a reductive view of space and landscapes as opposed to place, which is productive in a strictly agricultural view but overlooks the complex nature of the cultural networks that striate the landscape and connect seemingly discrete spaces. In "Politicising space and place" (1996), Massey poses a question about why the dynamics of power exist as they do, using the infiltration of work into the home as an example of the impositions of capitalism on the waged worker. Food networks present a challenging reinterpretation of this relationship, with the growth, synthesis, and distribution of food being a more essential representation of the wage's corollary--waged work is often described as "putting food on the table." Furthermore, food's infiltration into the home is a key point of culture and community, and the delineation between the commercial foodscape and the private life cannot be drawn easily. With foodscapes, culture and place come to the forefront.

Massey's views on place as summarized from *Space, place and gender* (2013) are that places are processes that have many identities and lack clear boundaries. These distinctions are true of each place we selected for this project. They are often temporary in nature and stem from the work of many participants to create these sites of counter-hegemonic community and food sovereignty. For instance, each farmers' market may change locations, exist seasonally, and only operate on specific days. They exist as an agglomeration of community around food, thus creating a place through the process of food's production and delivery to market. Furthermore, the continuation of this lineage of food into the home blurs the distinction between the market as a place and the home as a place, thus more intimately connecting the participants of this network to it as opposed to a network selling other goods.

Massey's feminist geographies and focus on gendered experience is also very relevant to the discussion of food, as both food accessibility and the socialized responsibility for providing food are stratified by gender in addition to race (Bowen & Hardison-Moody, 2023; Bowen, Elliott, & Hardison‐Moody, 2021; Kwan, 1999). Women are largely socialized to bear the responsibility of actually providing food for their family, separate from the financial responsibility that the "bread-winner" of the family traditionally offers. These themes of "bread-winning" and the differentiation of providing money versus actual meals are another contribution to the tilt this topic offers to Massey's one-way dynamic of work invading the home. Providing places that are welcoming to non-male and non-white people deconstructs the barriers to accessibility that are not represented simply through calculating transit times, for instance.

One additional framework this project looks to incorporate are the ideas of "DIY urbanism" and "guerilla urbanism." These two concepts are similar in the sense that they are methods of subverting conventional urbanism, which relies on participation in government systems, in order to enact informal urbanism. They differ significantly, however, in the sense that DIY urbanism involves undertaking projects that are not within the purview of urban governance due to shortcomings in budgets, jurisdiction, or available labor. Examples of DIY urbanism are filling potholes or decorating street posts (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Conversely, guerilla urbanism involves actively rebelling against urban governance through actions like removing hostile architecture or damaging surveillance equipment (Simpson, 2014). Due to ethnic/cultural/racial distribution in the American South and the (often codified) separation between urban landscapes and agricultural foodscapes, these places of food sovereignty may represent a form of DIY urbanism or, where food apartheid and grocery redlining and strictly enforced, a form of guerilla urbanism.

If cartography is the art of creating maps, of revealing the imagined borders and renames practices by those arrogant enough to claim dominion over water and land, counter-cartographies and restorative cartographies are powerful tools for centering the marginalized and for repairing the fissures between one's ancestral landscape and ancestral memories. Particularly in the face of traumatic histories—histories of bondage, oppression, and generational poverty—restorative mapping can act as a transformative balm for those who feel wounded by memories of the land. [1] Michelle Lanier offers restorative mapping as praxis for reclaiming and recognizing the actual landscape as it was and is. Extending beyond the hegemonic shaping of the built environment to remember, recognize, and restore. Restorative mapping inherently understands that folk have and will always be present, will continue to be present, whilst recognizing the changing relationship between folk and land. (Folk refers to Black, Indigenous, people of color, poor, queer, and other marginalized groups). Erasure is a essential tool for White supremacist politics and geographies, erasure in this context refers to the historical, cultural, and physically violent implications of settler colonialism. This project seeks to excavate and remap the built environment through the lens of the folk, particularly through mapping food networks.

Power invades our social perception by rendering the mechanisms and the people that employ and manipulate them invisible. The Sexual Contract by Carole Pateman discusses the creation of woman as other and distinct from and formalizes the binary between gender, as understanding the difference between nature and order, intellectualism, and barbarism. Pateman's analysis is useful to illustrate how the creation of a binary system reinforces power structures. Mapping, rather than simply being a tool for charting, representing, and analyzing the earth, has long been

[1] Lanier 2020

a "political technology"[2] for claiming, naming, numbering and bounding spaces for the purpose of their control, thus allowing these spaces to be put in the service of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, neoliberalism, racism, and a host of others political-material orders.[3] Powerful institutions such as governments, corporations, and universities have traditionally controlled mapmaking and the production of authorized geographic knowledge. Yet, through counter-mapping practices, less powerful, historically marginalized communities are increasingly realizing the value of maps to their own struggle for self-determination and material well-being.[4] Pateman's framework highlights that patriarchy (white supremacy) creates a binary that restricts as it defines the "other", crafting a justification for a system to "civilize" and structure "the other". This restructuring is violent and retroactively refits our collective past into a colonized normal coded as the inevitable, natural outcome of progress in our "accepted" memory. In the U.S., it functions as easing its hostages into a false sense of reality and security. It is the gaslighting impact of racist, hegemonic, capitalist, sexist, and a host of other -isms that augments reality, erasing legacies of the past and present, through imminent domain, forced labor, regulation of education and the built environment.

While the Sexual Contract doesn't fully grasp the nuance of how gender identity, race, ability, class, and geography complicate the parameters of the contract, it does provide language for understanding the white supremacist tool of binary production and enforcement. One of the most invisible displays of systemic control and power is the relationship between the built environment and access to food networks. Settler colonialism, or the violent hijacking and reallocation of land and resources, required individuals working on behalf of the colonial entities (Europe at the time) to seize control of and manipulate the food systems and literally restructure

[2] Rose-Redwood et al. 2020
[3] Alderman, Inwood, Bottone 2021
[4] Peluso 1995, Maharawal & McElroy 2017

the global south's relationship to food. Across the intersections of difference, colonized people lost access to their natural ways of knowing and being and through social "reprogramming" through control of the built environment. However, particularly but not limited to the US, people found ways to resist systems of oppression and control through reconceptualizing land and space by community built mutual aid networks.

An important example of mutual aid and re-contextualizing space is "petit Marronage" and the Great Dismal Swamp. Petit Marronage is a term that refers to the intentional communities built by escaped enslaved Africans in the Great Dismal Swamp located between the borders of North Carolina and Virginia. These were intentional communities that were created to resist enslavement by any means necessary. Petit marronage specifically refers to the Great Dismal swamp settlement located at the border of North Carolina and Virginia[5]. This site was often revisited throughout enslavement as a semi-permanent, multi-purpose space for Black, Indigenous and white folks attempting to escape enslavement, white supremacy, and settler colonialism. The theme of petit marronage allows us to consider how individuals and communities created sites of resistance though community-driven food systems. The Great Dismal Swamp existed as a site of safely and refuge, operating outside of the white supremacist, patriarchal, hegemonic binary, interestingly North Carolina and Virginia tried and failed to claim it, that is until 1865's Declaration of Independence changed the context and need, therefore the land was then claimed and now exist as a wildlife refuge.

[5] Nevius 2020

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