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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.

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