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Food, Culture & Society

An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research

ISSN: 1552-8014 (Print) 1751-7443 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rffc20

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To cite this article: Tony N. VanWinkle (2023) Colonization by kale: marginalization, sovereignty, and experiential learning in critical food systems education, Food, Culture & Society, 26:5, 1072-1084, DOI: 10.1080/15528014.2022.2077531

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2022.2077531

FOOD, CULTURE & SOCIETY
2023, VOL. 26, NO. 5, 1072–1084
https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2022.2077531

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Colonization by kale: marginalization, sovereignty, and experiential learning in critical food systems education

Tony N. VanWinkle

Environmental Studies & Sustainable Food Systems, Guilford College, Greensboro, NC, USA

ABSTRACT

In increasingly cross-cultural global settings, the performance and promotion of healthy food, "good" food (*comida saludable*) have become conflated with a narrowing range of iconic vegetable and "superfood" trends that often reflect the health and dietary preferences of an affluent and/or aspirational consumer culture. These colonizing cultivars, and the haute cuisine trends they embody, often displace indigenous food knowledge, techniques, and products already compromised by the penetration of processed foods. Through experiential pedagogical examples from Guatemala and Vermont, this paper explores the ways in which participatory, indigenous food and seed sovereignty curricula can help decolonize these newest kinds of hegemonic impositions and reaffirm traditional food systems.

KEYWORDS

Marginalized foods; food sovereignty; experiential learning; critical food systems education; pedagogy

Introduction

"I didn't want the cookies. The basket was almost empty. There was one other person in the room standing on the opposite side of the table, waiting patiently for me to take my snack. She smiled and looked at the last package of cookies in the basket. I didn't know what language she spoke. I didn't know how to tell her that I didn't want them. "I'll just eat one cookie. Be polite" I reminded myself. I was nervous. It was my first full day in Guatemala and someone was already offering me food I've never experienced before. I took my snack and found my seat in the circle. Full of anxiety, I took a small bite of a cookie . . . I smiled. They were soft and sweet in my favorite way. Roni was speaking to us at the time, explaining how in Mexico these cookies are called alegrías. People chuckled. I found out later that in Spanish alegrías means smiles or happiness. I couldn't agree more. Within the next couple minutes I finished all four of the amaranth cookies.

Throughout my life, I have known of amaranth by the name of pigweed. As the common name suggests, I was taught it was a weed, something to be extracted from a garden because it was a nuisance. In Guatemala I learned that some species of amaranth have been domesticated and cultivated . . . for millennia."

~ Student Journal from Mesoamerican Food Sovereignty field course

CONTACT Tony N. VanWinkle tvanwinkle@guilford.edu

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

The passage above is the introduction to a student paper written for a field-based course titled *Mesoamerican Food Sovereignty*. The student paper goes on to examine the history, culture, contemporary uses and potential futures of grain amaranth (*Amaranthus caudatus/cruentas/hypochondriacus*) as a food crop. After five days at the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute (IMAP) on the shores of Lake Atitlan in highland Guatemala and an additional week visiting both producer cooperatives and small farms engaged in export production in western highland communities around Xela, this student had acquired the historical and cultural context enabling them to situate this initial multisensory impression within a specific historical-cultural conjuncture. The trajectory therein encompassed recalls the colonial oppression attending the Spanish occupation of Mesoamerica, making the crop's contemporary resurgence all the more poignant as an example of the intersecting meanings and practical implications for local food sovereignty and community empowerment.

In the Pre-Columbian context of Mesoamerica, and in the Mexica agricultural complex of the Aztec Empire in particular, amaranth was one of four major tribute crops (the other three being maize, beans, and chia) grown for the granaries of the capital city, Tenochtitlan (Early 1992). Similar in importance and esteem to maize, amaranth was a staple of both daily culinary culture and gastro-ceremonial observances. Popped amaranth grains, mixed most often with maguey syrup and occasionally human blood (and thus becoming *tzoali*), were fashioned into icons of major Aztec deities, which were consumed on ritual occasions such as the annual feast organized specifically around amaranth tamales. Spanish Catholic priests declared such practices idolatrous perversions of the Christian Eucharist and went to great lengths to strictly limit, if not altogether eradicate, amaranth as a food crop. In the margins of fields and the privacy of cooking hearths, however, amaranth persisted until the time was ripe for its reemergence as a cornerstone of the Mesoamerican diet, a restored status that we shared in that day at IMAP.

On the rural college campus in northern Vermont to which we all returned after our Guatemalan experience, through the college work program and experiential coursework, students engage in seed conservation and rematriation efforts initiated in partnerships with Abenaki tribal organizations in the state. The goals of these partnerships include a stewardship function to perpetuate and disseminate rare or endangered traditional crop varieties among Vermont's first peoples, as well as a broad educational function to bring attention to place-based, indigenous biocultural histories and agroecological knowledge. Most of the cultivars we keep fall within the trio of species commonly known as the three sisters (corn, beans, squash). This polycultural planting system is one shared by our Mayan teachers in Guatemala as well, where it is known as milpa. Variations of this basic system occur throughout the Americas.

One such cultivar preserved in our Abenaki-Dawnland Heritage Garden in Vermont is a variety of common bean (*Phaseolus vulgaris*) known by the name of Norridgewock. With deep red splotches on a background of white (similar in patterning to the better known black and white calypso or orca bean), this variety takes its name from the historic village known in the Abenaki language as Narantsouak, located on the banks of the Kennebec River in south-central Maine. It was here in the Third Abenaki War in 1724, that British soldiers, seeking to secure their military power in the region against the French, with whom the Abenaki were allied, raided the village and massacred its

defenders, the survivors fleeing to form settlements in Quebec. The legend of the Norridgewock bean recounts its rediscovery near its namesake village many years later, its deep red coloring a symbol of the Abenaki blood spilled there in 1724.

At the level of community action, both of these vignettes, one revolving around once-outlawed grain amaranth, the other around an endangered bean variety, embody the concept of "survivance." In the words of scholar Gerald Vizenor (1999), "Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry." Both of these accounts embody triumph and resurgence in the wake of the apocalyptic horrors of colonization. As educational projects at the intersection of theory, praxis, and experience they offer opportunities for learning grounded in experiential contexts and collaborative public partnerships. Indeed, we contend that these examples enact Meek & Turlau's call for a greater emphasis on "relationship[s] between … educational practices and the actual movements that are attempting to transform the food systems that we are studying" (Meek and RebeccaTarlau 2016, 238). As projects offering a rare opportunity to bear first-hand witness to the power and resilience of indigenous food and seed sovereignty efforts, these projects attempt to actualize more broadly the Critical Food Systems Education (CSFE) framework proposed by Meek and RebeccaTarlau (2016). As examples of CFSE connecting parallel processes of displacement and decolonization in two distinct localities representing the global north and the global south, interweaving the theoretical and experiential framework we observe in our curricula, we likewise demonstrate the ways in which an "experience-theory-skill complement," employed in place-based learning modalities provide "direct exposure to complex food systems topics; scholarship that frames, analyzes, and critiques those topics; and specific tools needed to engage with those topics" (Hilmire et al 2014, 727).

In tracing the arc of these connections, kale serves as a generic signifier of a hegemonic nutritionist discourse displacing traditional dietary staples like amaranth and dry beans with universally conceived categories of "correct diet," or *comida saludable* (healthy cooking). These interlinkages were interrogated by students engaged in both Guatemalan and Vermont contexts. As a darling of the alternative health and natural foods market segments, kale has enjoyed a meteoric rise to dietary and nutritive stardom propelled by targeted marketing campaigns and celebrity media promotion. In achieving the status of perhaps the quintessential universal "superfood," the growing popularity of kale has, in many cases, displaced comparable traditional food items and associated culinary knowledge and foodways (as in case of amaranth in the student comments opening the paper). A classic comparative example of this from the authors home region in the southeastern U.S. can be found in kale's displacement of the nearly nutritionally identical regional staple, collard greens. Indeed, in a 2016 article in National Geographic magazine's feature section, "The Plate," writer Rebekah Kebede (2016) suggests that the difference in the relative status of kale and collards likely has much to do with the latter's historic class and race associations, as its reputation as a subsistence staple of poor, post-civil war southerners determined its "downmarket reputation" vis-a-vis its cruciferous cousin.

Analogous scenarios have or are playing out in both the state of Vermont, USA, and in the department of Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, with similar though differentially experienced implications for food and seed sovereignty efforts in both localities. Through interweaving narratives focused on theoretical issues that directly inform course design with ethnographic vignettes of actual learning contexts in which those theoretical

engagements "come to life," this paper demonstrates the ways in which engaged, experiential pedagogy provides students with the analytical tools needed to understand the political-economic and agroecological complexities of these and similar situations.

Guatemala: kale and hierbas

Offered every other year at Sterling College, the intensive field course, Mesoamerican Food Sovereignty, is a learning experience occurring at several host field sites in two general locations in Guatemala. The first of these is the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute (IMAP), near the town of San Lucas Toliman, on the southeastern shore of Lake Atitlan. Arriving via mixed transportation from Guatemala City, visitors to IMAP enter the site on a gravel drive that passes through an adjacent avocado plantation. Finally arriving at the institute's unassuming entrance, one enters a complex, forest-based permaculture site. IMAP is organized around organically sited, sustainable building infrastructure, including a centrally located seed bank, a repository for a wide range of species and varieties of locally adapted medicinal, food, and fiber crops cultivated by Lake Atitlan's native Mayan peoples and newer arrivals. The site has numerous demonstration gardens for tropical annual and perennial production systems, composting toilets, a central gathering-teaching circle, and a dock and boat launch on the lake. It is a rich contrast to the avocado plantation that borders it, and a perfect juxtaposition for students who have traveled from Vermont to learn what local food sovereignty looks like in the context of the Global South, where the recovery of self-determination, community health, and sacred crops like amaranth occurs alongside, and sometimes within, sites dedicated to the production of monocultures of high-value export crops, like avocado and coffee.

For the first week of the course, IMAP and the surrounding area serves as our learning site. Students are mentored by both IMAP staff, many of whom are long-time activist-practitioners in Guatemalan and broader Mesoamerican agroecology and food sovereignty movements. Course instructors facilitate the synthesis of field activities and the theoretical readings that complement those experiences. This first week is a deep and intimate introduction to the brilliance, resilience, and vitality of traditional Mayan biocultural and eco-cosmological systems maintained by historically marginalized smallholder producers all over the country. These systems, both at the IMAP headquarters and in adjacent community-based projects, are all grounded in what IMAP calls the "Maya Complementarity Principle." As described by Figueroa-Helland et al, this principle is based on "long-term multi-stage cycles of regeneration that nurture biodiverse ecosystems, provisioning communities with sustainable and healthy food sources and materials for medicine, building, clothing, etc." (2018: 187). It is precisely through such integrated systems of production that food sovereignty is nurtured and enacted by IMAP and it's many community partners on Lake Atitlan.

For the second half of the course, we leave Atitlan to explore both complementary and contradictory systems in western highland communities in and around Xela (also known as Quetzaltenango), the second largest city in the country, and the heart of the K'iche Maya homeland region. In Xela and sites in the surrounding area, students are afforded the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the historical and political-economic contexts and processes that make movements for local or national food sovereignty a goal worth aspiring to in the first place. In the last many decades, Guatemala's highland

Mayan peoples, historically tied to seasonal migratory labor cycles on lowland plantations or mid-elevation coffee estates, have been increasingly integrated more directly into global export food production. This is largely through the cultivation of "non-traditional" crops for North American consumers, particularly those cool season crops that thrive in the mountainous highlands of western Guatemala – snow peas, carrots, beets, and cole crops including broccoli, cabbages, and yes, kale. As Fischer & Benson argue, the production of these crops has been readily assimilable into traditional polycultural systems, like milpa, and associated moral economies, allowing growers to participate in the global economy on familiar, if not exactly fair, terms. "A central reason the broccoli trade has become compelling for farmers," write Fischer & Benson, "is that it provides a way to earn some extra cash while retaining control over their means of production [largely in the form of land and community labor], which is valued for both cultural and economic reasons" (2006: 38–39).

Even so, such a system operates amid a global division of labor that remains inherently unequal. If non-traditional export crops like broccoli and kale have offered alternatives to migratory seasonal labor on coastal plantations and a modicum of self-determination, they have also reproduced certain global structural inequalities in which the respective positionalities of consumers in the global north and producers in the global south become naturalized categories in the development discourses of global economic integration on the basis of such metrics as "comparative advantage," a shorthand for the combination of eco-climatic and labor resources differentially distributed across the globe. As Fischer and Benson continue:

> "That broccoli has become a staple of many diets in the United States speaks to the ethically driven production of certain lifestyles and body types, the bourgeoisie cultural value of good eating and good living ... For affluent northern consumers [however], ethics becomes a project and self-fashioning and lifestyle embodiment far removed from a critique of global inequalities" (36).

At the time the fieldwork for their study was conducted (1993–2004), Fischer and Benson could claim that no local markets existed for "non-traditional" exports because these crops were outside the culinary repertoire and preferences of many Mayan producers. By the time of our field course in 2018, however, this observation no longer held true. Indeed, in both backyard garden plots and restaurant menus, evidence for non-traditional export crops' adoption into local foodways was abundantly evident. As such, students were able to see first-hand the ways the same "ethically driven production of ... body types" and "cultural values of good eating," formerly the exclusive privilege of northern consumers, have themselves become embedded into local dietary discourses and desires in the Global South.

Indeed, through the lens of our index crop of kale, such moral-ethical domains have found a comfortable home in the intersection of missionary zeal and epistemic myopia that adheres in the increasingly global discourses of "official," scientific nutritionism. In her study of dietary diseases, discourses, and public health interventions in Guatemala, Emily Yates-Doerr describes an illustrative encounter in the context of nutrition classes offered to elementary school students in contemporary Xela. Understood as a form of enlightened intervention, one of the teachers of these classes characterized his audience, parents and children alike, as "ignorantes sobre nutrición (ignorant about nutrition)"

[2015: 61]. Describing parallel processes in the professionalized discourses addressing public health crises like rising rates of obesity and metabolic diseases in post-NAFTA Mexico, Alyshia Galvez writes, "Implicit in ideas about 'el buen comer,' or 'the correct diet,' are norms that … draw on long-standing stereotypes about the inadequacy of peasant diets and the persistence ignorance of the poor" (2018: 143). Such a discourse has predetermined that in order for peasants to eat well, they must be *taught* how to do so by nutritional experts, many of whom do not take into account culturally specific approaches that might acknowledge or incorporate the dietary richness of many peasant staple foods and foodways. As Galvez further notes, while many traditional foods domesticated and long eaten by indigenous peoples and campesina/os in Mexico have achieved the status of "superfoods" abroad, they are not incorporated into governmentally-sponsored dietary and public health campaigns, due to their continued stigmatization as inferior "foods of the poor." By way of one final example, Gary Paul Nabhan has observed that in hegemonic dietary discourses there tends to be a countervailing association between "ignorance, poverty, and traditional foods." That association can often lead to blanket dismissals of "all food customs of the poor and uneducated as being maladaptive and based on ignorance" (1993: 108). In his critical interrogation of this tendency, the pre-Columbian process of nixtamalizing corn serves as an example not of maladaptation, but of great culinary ingenuity that protected the Native peoples from the same diseases of niacin deficiency that plagued Europeans who adopted the crop, but not the associated cultural knowledge, of maize production after the 16th century.

Immersing students in the history of such discourses is enhanced immeasurably when encountered in a living field context, and our time in Xela afforded opportunities for just such encounters. While we visited grassroots women's cooperatives engaged in mushroom cultivation and smallholder-led models for community supported agriculture in outlying communities and urban organic market gardens, we also visited key eateries in the urban core of Xela. Such restaurant sites can be key drivers of alternative local production as high-volume purchasers of locally produced products. One such restaurant in Xela is a taco-centric, Chipotle-style fast-food operation that prioritizes locally sourced fruits and vegetables. Taking cues from similar North American establishments, the restaurant has an interior wall devoted to photo installations featuring local producer-partners and their stories as farmers and/or artisans. The origin story of the restaurant itself, as told by the owner/proprietor, a U.S. transplant whose first experience in the country was development work in a rural Mayan village, reproduces the very kinds of narratives offered by Yates-Doerr, Galvez, and Nabhan, above. It is a heartfelt tale of revelation and the discovery of meaningful work in a world of inequalities. Among the key storylines for the founding of the restaurant, however, was the observation that the children of the village lived almost exclusively on tortillas and beans. This is paradoxical in an eatery devoted to tacos, no doubt, and even more so perhaps because the tortillas used therein are of the mass-produced store-bought variety. Exhibiting what is perhaps an a priori determination that the "food customs of the poor and uneducated [are] maladaptive and based on ignorance," students were left to ponder whether the depth and complexity of native food systems were recognized at all. For, as Galvez observes, "When beans and corn are combined with other plant foods and small quantities of animal protein, they constitute a complete and advantageous diet" (143).

The second local-food-focused eatery we visited in Xela specialized in more mid-priced, boutique-style food items marketed explicitly as products of "comida saludable." The restaurant's menu is divided into familiar sections for breakfast items, for drinks, including "healthy juices," and salads. Breakfast foods include items like fresh fruit with oatmeal, or yogurt and granola, modern dishes with traditional local ingredients like refried beans, chia seeds, and avocados, as well as a kale omelet. Salads, one the establishment's specialties, feature many of the non-traditional export crops commonly grown in highland fields surrounding the city, including beets, carrots, cabbage, spinach, mixed lettuces, and of course, kale. The Juices category includes fresh squeezed fruit-of-the-day offerings, lemonade, and "jugos saludables" (healthy juices). The latter regularly include carrots, apples, celery, and lemon. These juices are all attributed nutritional-medicinal qualities, including detoxification, weight loss, and immune system enhancement. One of the feature juices, called "I Love Kale," includes kale, spinach, pineapple, and mint, and is advertised as possessing anti-inflammatory benefits. With its centralization of kale, minimal inclusion of traditional foods, including the complete exclusion of tortillas and semi-cultivated greens known as quelites or herbas, the menu items here are perhaps equivalent to what Alyshia Galvez characterizes as the "salmon and broccoli approach" to comida saludable, a one-size-fits all approach that elevates key dietary "superfood" items like kale, attributing to these all manner of nutraceutical properties.

These specific experiences in Xela provide students a useful contrast to the models and approaches we encountered at IMAP, focused as they were on the reintroduction and revalorization of traditional foods and the agroecological and cosmological contexts that give them deeper cultural significance. In her introduction to the edited volume, *Reimaging Marginalized Foods*, Elizabeth Finnis writes that in the complex negotiation of between "global processes and local places," some foods are "being reimagined as representing a kind of 'indigenous' location, in that they are being positioned as quintessentially associated with very localized populations and specific traditions, rather than being imposed by outside forces [like, for example, kale]" (2021: 8). Inasmuch as IMAP's efforts might be said to embody such processes, they are aligned with La Via Campesina's original definition of food sovereignty as "the people's right to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems." Food sovereignty efforts like those of IMAP embody Enrique Salmon's observation that "Food landscapes remain intact when old recipes are regenerated" (Salmon 2012: 9) manifesting, for example, in the amaranth cookies students were served upon their arrival.

Vermont: contemporary vs. traditional localism

Back on our home campus in northern Vermont, we have been engaged in community partnership projects with the Nulhegan Band of the Abenaki Tribe for several years now, including the Abenaki-Dawnland Heritage Garden project. As defined in a Memorandum of Understanding drafted by all partner organizations, we defined the goals of the project to be:

1. The preservation and dissemination of Abenaki seed diversity, associated cultural knowledge and histories;

2. The reproduction of traditional agricultural methods, including multi-cropping, mound, and agroforestry systems, as well as ritual calendar observances;

3. The enrichment of agricultural education opportunities for both Abenaki tribal members and Sterling College students.

While no one of these goals works in isolation from the others, here we wish to focus on the educational dimensions of the project, not least of which is the conscience effort to re-center Abenaki (and greater northeastern) indigenous agricultural wisdom toward the end of decolonizing commonly inherited agricultural, dietary, and/or culinary narratives and practices. As such, this project aspires toward the intersectional objectives described by Figueroa-Helland et al when they write:

> food sovereignty rooted in indigenous revitalization and/or agroecology isn't merely an alternative 'food system.' While it produces 'food,' it fosters (agro)/biodiversity, polycultures, closed metabolic cycles and ecosystem restoration, coupled with labor and decision making based on communality, reciprocity, consensus, equity, and intersectional social justice (2018).

Incorporating these goals and intentions into coursework has been integral to these efforts, and students have been involved in every step along the way, from terraforming the mound system and participating in field blessings, to planting and harvesting seeds, to developing interpretive signage, to engaging in conversations about seed rematriation and sovereignty, climate resilience & justice.

The larger context of Vermont and the greater northeastern U.S., within which these efforts occur is, of course, considerably different from the Guatemalan context, but certain similarities cross these boundaries of differentiation as well. While around 40% of Guatemala's population works in agriculture, just under 2% of Vermont's population do so (based on 2017 statistics), mirroring national averages for the U.S. Indeed, this is one of the major demographic and political-economic characteristics the agricultural sectors in the Global North and the Global South, reflective once again of a larger global division of labor. Even despite Vermont's low number of farmers per capita, an imaginary of rural agricultural landscapes dominate images and representations of the state (and Vermont is, demographically speaking, an overwhelmingly rural state). Similar north/south disparities exist in health measures, with major epidemics of diet related illnesses attending the Guatemalan context as the country undergoes the "nutrition transition" from traditional to modern diets composed on highly processed foods facilitated by the rapid transformation of the country's retail sector, which, as Reardon and Berdegue describe it, "In one globalizing decade … made the change which took the US retail sector 50 years" (2002, in Yates-Doerr). In striking contrast, Vermont ranks among the top ten lowest U.S. states for type II diabetes and obesity, though 10% of the state's population lives in food insecure households. So while the Guatemalan context might be understood through the lenses of international developmentalism and modernization theories, Vermont requires a different framework for understanding patterns of dietary colonization. Engaging students in this work, we turn to historical assessments of state and regional dietary patterns like those captured in WPA era documentary projects

(Kurlansky 2010), and to current ecogastronomic restoration efforts such as those espoused by Gary Paul Nabhan and the Renewing America's Food Traditions project (2008, 2010). For capturing the dynamics of Vermont's contemporary food and farming cultures, Jesse McEntee's (2011) contemporary vs. traditional localism has proven a useful framework for student understanding.

Before discussing how these interpretive frameworks add to the depth and decolonizing potential of field-based experiential learning in the heritage garden project, however, we will look briefly at contemporary Vermont's ontological relationship with kale. Indeed, one of the major threads in kale's rise to superfood stardom is tethered to the Capital City Farmer's Market, in Montpelier, Vermont. It was there, in 2000 that the owner of High Ledge Farm, in an effort to sell a growing abundance of surplus kale, partnered with a local designer. The outcome of that partnership was the simple slogan, "Eat More Kale," first silkscreened onto T-shirts and subsequently onto bumper stickers that are quite common in the state to this day. Like all good David and Goliath stories, this modest grassroots effort to off-load a prolific, yet still somewhat obscure vegetable crop met with corporate might, and in 2011 Chick-Fil-A filed a lawsuit alleging copyright infringement on their "Eat More Chickin'" slogan and advertising campaign. Cementing kale's underdog status and thus ensuring its conversion into a vehicle and symbol of healthful discernment, Vermont's then-governor Peter Shumlin weighed in on the Chick-Fil-A lawsuit, stating, "Don't mess with Vermont. Don't mess with kale. And, Chick-fil-A, get out of the way because we are going to win this one." And win they did. This occasion was followed by a wave of celebrity endorsement and adoration for kale, from Gwyneth Paltrow's promotion of kale chips on the Ellen Degeneres Show in 2011, to Beyonce's sporting of a "Kale" sweatshirt in the video release for her hit song "7/11" in 2014. Thus a superfood superstar was born, becoming such a singularly powerful symbol of an internationalist nutritionist paradigm that it would feature prominently on a restaurant menu in Xela, Guatemala four years later.

Today, kale is ubiquitous in Vermont's "contemporary localist" cuisine (which is not particularly differentiated from contemporary localist cuisines anywhere/ everywhere). Indeed, kale has arguably become a key metonymic reference for healthy, organic, local, farm-to-table or any number of similarly coded descriptions that capture a discrete set of dietary-culinary formations embedded in lifestyle politics and ethical consumption patterns, or what Charlotte Biltekoff calls the "knowledge-pleasure-responsibility nexus" (2013). In one of the more striking and illustrative contrasts in our two contexts are the normative discourses of citizenship and responsibility that occur in each. In the case of Guatemala, as Yates-Doerr states, "those described as suffering from the diseases of modernity [are] often presented as not quite modern enough to truly master the refinement and restraint required by 'modern' civilization" (2015: 40). In Vermont, on the other hand (as is much of the contemporary U.S.) consumption of the "correct diet" is linked to a "pedagogy of good citizenship," wherein "the good citizen [is] increasingly imagined as an autonomous, informed individual acting responsibly in his or her own self interest, primarily through the market, as an educated consumer" (Biltekoff 2013, 92–93).

It is within such moral dietary discourses that the multivalences of contemporary vs. traditional localisms acquire their divergent meanings in McEntee's formulation. Herein, traditional localism centers the values of "reciprocity, affordability, and freshness." These values are typically met via long-standing rural self-provisioning activities, including

gardening, hunting, and fishing, all of which tend to be integrated into non-monetary sharing and exchange networks among kin, friends and neighbors. Such subsistence activities have been economically and culturally important to many northeastern indigenous communities. Indeed, in recent tribally led efforts to acknowledge and codify such practices through securing subsistence rights in the state of Vermont, House Bill 716, which guarantees free lifetime hunting and fishing licenses to Abenaki tribal members, was approved by the state legislature in 2020. In contrast to such examples, contemporary localism as defined by McEntee is enacted largely through market mechanisms like "buy local" campaigns directed toward economic development and/or environmentalist values. Typically expressions of larger local food movement activities grounded in market exchanges, McEntee argues that contemporary localist efforts "emphasize social justice needs for some groups (such as local farms) and can potentially disregard the needs of others (low-income consumers)" [2011: 254].

Applying a framework such as McEntee's to our work with the Heritage Garden project, we might ask students to consider how our own efforts create openings that might bridge these divergent localisms. One clear way we can do this is to intentionally re-center historically (and contemporarily) marginalized crops and foodways. This of course includes indigenous varieties and associated horticultural and culinary technologies that have been displaced by both the modern industrial food system and contemporary localist movements, which tend toward a similar, albeit very differently realized sort of standardization. Suggesting one the mechanisms for that standardization, writing in a sidebar entry for the RAFT coalition's working document, *Place-Based Foods at Risk in New England and the Maritime Provinces*, Vermont forager Nova Kim, reflects:

> Ironically, when I was growing up, everyone was promised that the science, the store, and the magic pill could bring you just about everything. They were told that instead of going to the woods—where the food and medicine were free—that penicillin could cure just about anything and the grocery stores would provide everything else. Collecting one's own food and medicine from the wild was looked down on and frowned upon, something only the very poor did (nd).

Indigenous crop varieties like those we grow in the Abenaki-Dawnland Heritage Garden were marginalized along a parallel trajectory, wherein the chimera of "improved varieties" promised to render the old knowledge and varieties obsolete.
In an illustrative example from a field interview conducted by the author years ago with an elder and seedkeeper of the Wichita tribe of Oklahoma, he said that while it was common among local American Indians to grow older heirloom corn varieties, non-Natives grew largely "improved" varieties. He then talked about a kind of discriminatory opinion toward indigenous corn: "You couldn't even sell it at the feed store or anything, they wouldn't take it . . . They said it was – how do you say – it was mixed? You know, it's not pure, so they wouldn't have anything to do with it." But indigenous seedkeepers from the Abenaki to the Wichita have always known better, and have maintained these varieties even against official narratives lambasting their inefficiencies. The rich foodways these varieties engendered and enabled in the northeast – beanhole suppers, hominy and three sisters stew, corn pudding and pumpkin pies – have similarly been displaced today by the ubiquity of contemporary localists dietary staples like kale. As students learn about and with Norridgewock beans and Calais flint corn, they simultaneously consume an

abundance of contemporary localist-inspired foods in the college dining hall, many of the ingredients for which are grown alongside indigenous crops. In scenarios such as these, where crops and foods are linked directly to land and community, "the context is the curriculum," as Leann Simpson (2014, 10) asserts.

Conclusion: decolonizing education, cultivating affinity

This article has provided a cross-contextualized example of Critical Food Systems Education (CFSE) in action. Through field- and experience-based education framed by theoretical understandings of the inequalities, challenges, and successes navigated by local food sovereignty efforts in the global north and global south, we argue that examples such as the those described here serve as one model for helping "students connect interdisciplinary knowledge to transformative systems changes," an objective that Meek & Turlau contend is central to CFSE. Similarly, through the focus on linking critical frameworks to horizontal, participatory partnerships that feature work and example of food sovereignty movement actors, such a structure actively works to decolonize traditional education approaches, allowing "instructors to behave as facilitators of knowledge rather than holders of knowledge," (Hilmire et al: 740), while simultaneously building affinity for and with transformative networks.

So students tend to the mounds and learn from the Norridgewock beans and Calais flint corn, the East Montpelier squash and the Morrisville sunflower, so that we might begin the work of dietary decolonization here in northern New England, mirroring food sovereignty efforts in Guatemala. As such, in our model of Critical Food Systems Education, rather than duplicating the convention of a vertical "scaling up," thereby reproducing the economistic logics of industrial capitalism, through experiential learning we demonstrate what a horizontal "scaling out" at the trans-local level looks like, in both theory and practice.

In an alternative rendering of the common "three sisters" garden framework that has become a common tool for understanding and demonstrating Native American agricultural technologies, ethnobotanist and Vermont-based Abenaki seed keeper Fred Wiseman (2018) proposes instead a regional indigenous agricultural system organized around seven sisters (corn, beans, squash, sunflower, ground cherries, tobacco and perennial Jerusalem artichokes). In regular speaking events and educational workshops, others have fully adopted this expanded framework for a richer understanding of Abenaki and greater northeastern regional agricultural systems. Drawing inspiration from Robin Wall Kimmerer's work (2013), Abenaki community activist Melody Brook, in her work as a speaker and popular educator, suggest that an eighth sister is also necessary to the full realization of this system. That final member in the reassembled octet is the human, is us, as active members of an interspecies community that demands long-term reciprocal relationships that ensure the mutual flourishing of all. This understanding of mutuality is another defining feature of the pedagogical model that we have described here, and one that we assert is central to a Critical Food Systems Education attentive to not only material and political implications, but to cultural and spiritual dimensions as well.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Gabriela Maldonado, Melody Brook, and Carol Dickson for providing early constructive feedback on this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Tony N. VanWinkle is an assistant professor in environmental studies and sustainable food systems at Guilford College, in Greensboro, North Carolina.

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