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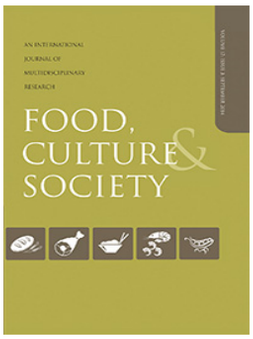

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Intersections between rural studies and food justice in the U.S.: some implications for today and the future

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ABSTRACT

Justice is a term increasingly used in rural studies and agri-food systems research. In this article, we examine how rural studies can gain by more directly integrating food justice and its focus on transformative intervention. First, we identify existing gaps in discussions about social justice in relation to rurality in the United States. Second, we analyze prominent food justice literature and its main conceptualizations, characteristics, and gaps in relation to rurality. Drawing on existing gaps and opportunities in rural studies and food justice, we discuss why and how critical analyses of race/white supremacy, intersectionality, and engaged scholarship can strengthen the study of injustices in rural settings. In prioritizing these aspects, rural scholars might adopt powerful lenses for interrogating the ongoing hegemonies of rural communities while also facilitating greater engagement in social justice within and outside our disciplines.

KEYWORDS

Food justice; rural studies; race; white supremacy; intersectionality; engaged scholarship

Introduction

Ongoing political initiatives to constrain research and teaching in U.S. educational institutions about social injustice and the ways that white supremacist violence is manifesting in the U.S. (see Cammarota 2017; Jones 2018; Morgan 2022) call renewed scholarly attention to the experiences of marginalized rural people. We believe it is imperative to pay more attention to social injustices in rural places. Aligned with these concerns and opportunities in U.S. rural studies, the Rural Sociological Society (RSS) announced calls in 2019 for both an edited book and a special issue of *Rural Sociology* (RSS's journal) examining racial inequalities, acknowledging that scholars have the opportunity to advance rural studies by paying more attention to the injustices experienced by historically marginalized groups and the role of white dominance as a structural system of power (Carrillo et al. 2021; Leap et al. Forthcoming). These actions and recent trends in rural studies invigorated our interests in this work. Thus, we ask how food justice scholarship could inform rural studies and what stronger bridges between these two bodies of scholarship could offer to future research.

In recent decades, there have been numerous studies looking at injustices affecting minoritized groups such as peasants, women, and people of color in rural settings,

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especially in the Global South.[1] Like in other countries, scholars in the United States have studied injustices by looking at social and spatial marginalities, inequalities, and differences between rural/metropolitan and/or core/peripheral places. Like research on environmental injustices (see e.g., Bullard 1993), studies of place and socio-spatial marginalities and inequalities in rural contexts flourished during the 1990s and early 2000s (see e.g., Lobao 1996; Cloke and Little 1997; Lobao and Saenz 2002). More recently, studies about the rural–urban divide and grievances experienced by rural residents in the U.S. regained scholars' attention in effort to understand why rural residents overwhelmingly supported Donald Trump as president in the 2016 presidential elections (Schafft 2021). Some studies (e.g., Ashwood 2018a; Wuthnow 2018; Carolan 2018, 2020; Sherman 2021) have unveiled rural residents' perceptions of injustices, marginalization, and/or abandonment by the state and/or people in power, located in demographically diverse metropolitan areas. While recent debates about socio-spatial marginalization and the significance rural injustices (Ashwood and McTavish 2016) have become more salient, discussions about injustices experienced by historically and currently marginalized people of color in the rural U.S. have remained at the periphery of mainstream rural studies scholarship.

In this article, we examine salient themes from recent literature that could theoretically and epistemologically advance the study of racial injustices in rural U.S. We thoroughly analyzed recent and prominent U.S.-focused literature in rural studies and food justice to identify existing gaps and future opportunities.[2] The analysis of prominent and recent work from these bodies of literature enabled us to identify race/white supremacy, intersectionality, and engaged scholarship as critical theoretical aspects in social justice studies in rural places and agri-food systems. Prioritizing these aspects is especially important to advancing a food justice movement that is inclusive of rural people and recognizes the particularities of social inequalities in rural places.

As has been recently highlighted by other sociologists, aspects of race, sexuality, gender, and class have been often analyzed as general assumptions and variables in the study of rural inequalities in the U.S. rather than as dynamic and intersecting systems of power (see Carrillo et al. 2021). This shortcoming in the U.S. rural scholarship has led to general assumptions and misconceptions, such as that rural spaces are white, or farmers are property owners and heterosexual men. These assumptions limit social scientists' contributions to addressing and confronting historical and intersecting structural inequalities in rural places. As an alternative, intersectionality enables scholars to study power through the systemic relationships between race and other identities such as class, gender, national origin and citizenship, and sexual orientation, among others. Importantly, to understand how dominant power systems are working to maintain status quo in rural areas, scholars must engage an intersectional framework to identify "how tensions *within* groups contributes to tension *among* groups" (Crenshaw 1991, 1242). An intersectional approach requires scholars move beyond focus on studies of singular identities among rural people, or studying rural people as a homogenous group, but rather recognize how rural people experience dominant systems of power such as white supremacy and patriarchy.

In this article, we also attempt to advance opportunities for future research by identifying why U.S. scholars should and how they can become more engaged with systemic and intersecting injustices in rural contexts. Such scholarship has long roots in rural studies, beginning with Du Bois (2007[1903]) and echoed by Freudenberg's (2006) Rural Sociological Society's presidential address calling attention to a continued and future focus on applied research. Building on these traditions, Sachs (2007) calls upon those working in rural research collaborations to step out of the expert role and to "interrogate issues of power, reciprocity, and trust." Such engaged scholarship can have an important impact on efforts to address white supremacy and its intersecting mechanisms of oppression. For the purpose of this paper, engaged scholarship means addressing injustices by developing knowledge through reciprocal relationships and participation that can benefit marginalized people, something that has been extensively addressed by the food justice literature (Cadeiux and Slocum 2015).

The food justice scholarship is large and diverse, but it is generally characterized by studies and actions aiming to reveal and/or dismantle social injustices and inequalities in the food system (Allen 2007, 2010). As a response to structural inequalities driven by neoliberal policies and increasing concentration of sociopolitical and economic power in the contemporary food system, scholars from myriad disciplines have increasingly applied grassroots movements' conceptualizations and practices of justice to agri-food systems research (Allen 2007; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011; Thompson 2016; Tanaka 2020). These advances often highlight the struggles of historically disadvantaged groups and communities of color, as well as positive implications for their democratic control, and empowerment, as a response to existing inequalities and grievances (see Holt-Giménez 2009; Pimbert 2010; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Holt-Giménez 2011; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011; Mares and Alkon 2011; Alkon and Mares 2012; Alkon and Guthman 2017a). Seeking transformational change toward more just food systems, the food justice literature criticizes the often-assumed benefits of the mainstream food movement while challenging historic and continued socioeconomic, gender, and racial hierarchies of power (see e.g., Allen 2010; Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011; Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Passidomo 2014; Alkon and Guthman 2017a; Ventura and Baikley 2017). The majority of U.S. food justice scholarship focuses on experiences from metropolitan areas. Fittingly, these studies have been generally published in interdisciplinary journals with a stated emphasis on food and agriculture or race, rather than sociology journals studying rural places and people.[3] In this article, we examine why and how rural studies in the U.S. can benefit from food justice's transformational work, but also why and how food justice scholarship can benefit from more rural engagement. Our goal is to nurture ongoing debates and discussions on how to advance toward stronger theoretical and epistemological perspectives to analyze injustices and potential actions in rural and food system settings in the U.S.

First, we discuss gaps and recent trends in research about social injustices in U.S. rural settings, with special attention to race/white supremacy, intersectionality, and engaged scholarship. Secondly, we analyze key contributions the food justice scholarship can make to rural studies of injustices. Then, we discuss how these aspects might inform future studies in rural settings as well as how rural perspectives can advance food justice scholarship in the U.S.

Social [In]justice in rural U.S

Race/white supremacy

During recent decades, uneven development and socio-spatial distribution of resources have created social injustices and inequalities in myriad geographic places, including rural communities. Work done, mainly by geographers (e.g., Lefebvre 1991; Harvey 2005, Harvey 2014; Soja 2010), influenced scholars from multiple disciplines to examine the marginalization of rural people, and places negatively impacted by development and power relations. Most of this literature focused on injustices and inequalities comparing different places, showing how spatial distribution of resources and centralized decision-making structurally disadvantages low-income and communities of color. Grievances created by neoliberal economic policies and a complicated role of the state consolidated socio-spatial justice perspectives (Soja 2010), making injustices more visible. One of the main characteristics across the literature on socio-spatial injustices has been its focus on geographic places to analyze unfair or structurally disadvantaged realities, usually experienced by poor communities of color.

Like geographers, community planners, and other scholars, sociologists focused their attention on socio-spatial injustices and inequalities affecting rural people of color, even at the early stages of sociology in the U.S. At the beginning of the 20th century, W.E.B Du Bois was one of the first sociologists to study injustices experienced by Black Americans in the rural South, contributing to the development of rural sociology (Jakubek and Wood 2017). However, as Carrillo et al. (2021) point out, mainstream rural sociology in the U.S. has ignored the work of some Black sociologists like W.E.B Du Bois or the development of the first applied rural sociology program in the Tuskegee Institute.

During the late 1970s, rural sociologists like William Friedland emphasized the importance for rural sociology to address injustices and inequalities in rural places created by the modern industrialized food system (Tanaka 2020). Some sociologists also became engaged with the environmental justice movement and studies showing how environmental problems disproportionally affected poor and historically marginalized people of color, in both rural and urban settings (Bullard 1993). Since then, socio-spatial injustices and inequalities in rural studies in the U.S. gained terrain. In 1996, the rural sociologist Linda Lobao (1996, 98) envisioned "the next epoch of transition in rural sociology may well be described as the declining significance of rurality and the rising significance of spatial marginality." Aligned with the socio-spatial approach, an important research area in the U.S. became to unveil existing differences between rural and metropolitan areas, highlighting how rural residents were deprived of resources, marginalized, and/or negatively affected by development. There is a diverse spectrum of sociological studies examining rural/urban differences and divisions, and highlighting the struggles rural residents often experience (see e.g., Cloke and Little 1997; Ashwood 2018a, 2018b; Sherman 2021, among others). Part of this research area regained interest after the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016, with some studies (see e.g., Ashwood 2018a, 2018b; Wuthnow 2018; Carolan 2020, among others) showing differences of sociopolitical views between rural and urban residents and the discontent and feelings of marginalization among rural residents (mostly whites).

The specificity of "the rural" is a common characteristic in recent literature addressing both socio-spatial inequalities and injustices. Analyzing rural sociology and race in the

U.S., Carillo et al. (2021) acknowledge intersections of rurality, race, and ethnicity have a long tradition. However, these authors highlight most of this work during the 20th century centered on inequalities as variables or demographic categories without a thorough theoretical analyses of race and relations of power. In the last decades, rural sociologists have (re)paid attention to characteristics of historically marginalized rural groups such as nonwhites, but these aspects have been mostly treated by rural sociologists as quantitative variables to explore social problems such as poverty and demographic changes, with a growing, but slow attention to issues of (racial) power relations and inequalities (Carillo et al. 2021). As argued by Harvey (2017, 142–143), the reduction of rural inequalities to disparate variables reduces racism to the influences of historical systems of white supremacy rather than recognizing these inequalities as outcomes of the continued production racial domination in rural areas.

Despite the growing interest in grievances experienced by rural residents in the U.S., scholars have overlooked how white supremacy shapes structural privileges that marginalize Blacks, Latinxs, Asians, and Native Americans and other (racialized) nonwhite groups. As Bonilla-Silva (2022) highlights, we cannot ignore racial constructions and hierarchies as projects that create racism and become embedded in our society. Recent sociopolitical phenomena affecting rural residents in the U.S. have created new opportunities to examine how white supremacy racializes nonwhites, creating injustices and inequalities in specific places (Bonilla Silva 2015). Individuals in specific settings experience racial construction and the hierarchies shaped by white supremacy differently (Bonilla-Silva 2015; Guerrero 2017). Increased attention to how farm and food laborers, immigrants, women, LGBTQ+, and others experience these hierarchies in rural areas should inform strategies for strengthening rural and food justice movements alike.

Recent studies from rural sociologists (e.g., Ashwood and MacTavis 2016; Carolan 2020; Sherman 2021) underline the complexities, injustices, and needs to pay more attention to the struggles experienced by historically non-marginalized groups such as white rural residents. Some of these studies in rural areas of the U.S. include references to nonwhite rural residents (see e.g., Ashwood 2018b; Wuthnow 2018; Carolan 2020), suggesting how race construction and white supremacy may create injustices for local people of color. Critical study of how white supremacy is created and reproduced in rural spaces can enable scholars to better understand racial and other hierarchies and their consequences on nonwhite people (Lewis 2004; Leap et al. Forthcoming). As Leap et al. (Forthcoming) stress, the study of whiteness construction and reproduction offers unique opportunities in rural settings. In the U.S., racial oppression has been historically shaped by whiteness and the privileges that often entail, having significant consequences for racialization and the lives of nonwhite people in specific places (Bonilla-Silva 2015, 2022; Leap et al. Forthcoming).

Intersectionality and engaged scholarship

Using existing perspectives of justice in rural sociology to analyze interviews with white and nonwhite rural residents in Colorado, Carolan (2020) invites us to re-conceptualize injustices by rethinking aspects of intersectionality even as scholars generalize about white residents as the dominant group in rural U.S. Carolan (2020) categorizes the justice literature in three different groups: empirical or methodological justice, justice activism,

and justice theory (i.e., ideal and non-ideal). Carolan (2020, 28) argues injustices experienced by rural residents in the U.S. "exist along the three axes of distribution, recognition, and representation," including socio-cultural and power dimensions in this categorization as key factors that shape marginalization of rural people. These aspects are often interrelated. After all, contemporary rural realities are shaped by injustices created by public-private exploitation of rural people and places (Ashwood and MacTavish 2016) across sociocultural, economic, political, and environmental dimensions. However, little has been studied about how these intersecting aspects of injustices are locally shaped by white supremacy, and differently experienced by nonwhite marginalized groups in rural places.

Rural studies in the U.S. could and should devote more resources on empirical/methodological justice and the intersecting struggles experienced by rural residents and historically marginalized groups (Carrillo et al. 2021), who often experience oppression imposed by white supremacy as a structural project (see Bonilla-Silva 2022). In this sense, explicit engagement of rural scholars in the struggles experienced by historically marginalized groups of color would constitute what Carolan (2020) describes as justice activism, an aspect of justice that is well familiar to food justice scholars. Understanding and engaging with how injustices continue to shape "the rural" as a space of white supremacy is critical to addressing and dismantling the interlinked and ongoing inequalities experienced by nonwhite rural people.

Carolan's (2018, 2020) emphasis on intersectionality and how differently social justice can be interpreted by rural residents calls attention to the multiple layers of oppression that marginalize oppressed groups. Carolan (2018, 2020) highlights how social justice conceptualizations can differ, and even the concept of justice activism embraced by some social scholars documenting injustices may not have any meaning for some groups. The complexity and different interpretations of justice need to be acknowledged by linking critical perspectives to the ongoing production of inequalities by white supremacy in rural places. Historically, marginalized rural people of color have been, and continue to be, relegated and more disadvantaged by structural and individual racism through multiple modes of exploitation (see e.g., Steusse 2016; Guerrero 2017). As noted by Leslie, Wypler, and Mayerfeld Bell (2019), race is a necessary lens through which to understand the gendered and sexualized power dynamics controlling rural capital, such as farmland. Therefore, rural scholars owe more attention to and engagement with intersectionality to better understand how power works at multiple levels to maintain white supremacy and racial oppression in rural settings. For example if, in recent decades, white rural residents have felt marginalized (culturally, economically, and politically) due to developmental changes promoted by neoliberal policies, rural scholars could examine how this has served their continued racial domination in the scapegoating of those living in the same rural communities who may feel not only marginalized by outsiders (e.g., people in metropolitan areas), but also by the local dominant group (i.e., white Anglos).

Although power relations and oppressive racial structures are not always recognized by white people (Bonilla-Silva 2022), social scientists have shown how they exist, often challenging how people (even rural scholars) perceive rural landscapes and people. As rural sociologist Michael Bell stresses (2007), there are different types of mechanisms to perceive and describe rural people and landscapes. Rural scholars are not exempt of these

different (epistemic and color-blind) views on what and who should be studied and acknowledged. Harvey (2017, 147–149) argues only a few rural sociologists treat racism as the cause for rural minority problems, even as rural minorities experience disproportionate rates of poverty compared to their rural white counterparts and also experience higher rates of poverty than urban minorities, translating to experiences of higher unemployment, health problems, and challenges in accessing housing and education.

Social deconstruction of rural people and places requires critically engaging with racial relations of power and injustices dominated by white supremacy and unveiling injustices faced by nonwhite marginalized rural residents who usually are made invisible. As some studies describing immigrant farmworkers in rural U.S. (see e.g., Keller 2019; Mares 2019; Thompson 2020, 2022) or networks of queer farmers (see e.g., Hoffelmeyer 2020; Leslie 2017; Wypler 2019) and women (see e.g., Trauger 2007; Carter 2019) have recently shown, behind idealized and imaginary rural landscapes and places are people and communities often invisible and/or marginalized by dynamic and changing relations of power (Greider and Garkovich 1994). Thus, there is a need not only to focus on specific rural places and sectors of the agri-food system to examine injustices experienced by marginalized people of color, but also to engage with structural and intersectional inequalities through the production of new knowledge and actions by and/or for those who are directly affected.

In sum, as we argue in this section, recent social justice perspectives in U.S. rural settings suggest scholars should pay more attention to race/white supremacy, intersectionality, and engaged scholarship. In the next section, we examine these concepts in food justice literature, identifying gaps and opportunities that could contribute to such efforts.

Food [In]justice in the U.S

Race/white supremacy

The conceptualization of food justice in the U.S. began in social justice movements, including Food Not Bombs, the Black Panthers Breakfast Program of the 1960s, the United Farm Workers' Delano Grape Strike and Boycott, and farmers' anti-foreclosure protests of the 1980s (Cadieux and Slocum 2015). Social and environmental movements have long called attention to and theorized about structural inequities and racial injustices (Alkon and Guthman 2017b). Their work precedes the current use of food justice in agri-food systems movements and research (Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011; Cadieux and Slocum 2015; Alkon and Guthman 2017b; Reynolds et al. 2020). During recent decades, multiple academic disciplines in the U.S. have addressed diverse approaches to examine injustices in agri-food systems. In doing so, the concept of food justice has become a very broad term among researchers and practitioners studying mainstream food movements, even as food justice is both specific and explicit in its racialized approach to food security and commitment to transformative change (Morales 2011; Cadieux and Slocum 2015; Alkon and Guthman 2017b). Food justice is based on the principle that social structures rooted in racist and patriarchal views and ideas have historically disadvantaged women, poor people, and communities of color (Thompson 2016). Thompson (2016) argues that it is "impossible" to engage in questions of food justice in North America without addressing structural racism. Food justice not only works to address the legacies of

historic harms, but also prioritizes the dismantling of white supremacy in contemporary mainstream and alternative food movements (Holt-Giménez and Wang 2011; Morales 2011). Kyle Whyte (2016) summarizes this multi-dimensionality of food justice, adding the important role of food in relationship to collective self-determination in addition to the existing dimensions well-documented in the literature (i.e., access to healthy, culturally appropriate, and nutritious foods and fair labor conditions for all up and down the food chain). The food justice literature is composed of critical perspectives analyzing, theorizing, and actively engaging with struggles experienced by historically marginalized groups in the food system such as Indigenous people, peasants, immigrants, Black farmers, LGBTQ+ members, and women, among others.

Intersectionality and engaged scholarship

Since the early 1990s, U.S. scholars and practitioners have exposed the human exploitation caused by the dominant industrialized food system, focusing on socioeconomic and racial injustices in food production, distribution, and consumption (Mares and Alkon 2011; Alkon and Guthman 2017b). Most of this work has come from scholars and practitioners working in higher education institutions, local governments, and non-governmental institutions (NGOs). This large body of literature is generally composed of studies identifying the intersectionality among socioeconomic and racial injustices, and, often, the community-based solutions to address them. More recent studies and calls for intersectional research have also included sexuality and gender (Sachs and Patel-Campillo 2014; Leslie, Wypler, and Mayerfeld Bell 2019).

Like environmental justice, food justice identifies how groups and communities are negatively impacted by inequalities and how aspects of governance or self-determination can be used to overcome their struggles. Food justice practitioners and scholar often work alongside one another, often embracing views and values aligned with food sovereignty, social justice, and civic engagement (Reynolds et al. 2020). However, this important scholarship, like the rural studies scholarship, can fall short when it comes to intersectional engagement. For example, Cadieux and Slocum (2015, 11) emphasize the important contributions of Gottleib and Joshi's (2010) *Food Justice* and Alkon and Agyeman's (2011) *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability* edited volumes, but criticize the lack of conceptualization of justice in many of the included case studies, arguing white imaginaries remain the default of many purported food justice efforts. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) highlight that food justice is not something emergent through the partnering of well-funded and/or white partners with underserved or under-resourced communities; rather, food justice must be something scholars and practitioners alike must actively do and should do more together. In this sense, food justice perspectives not only reveal social injustices, but also how organized efforts led by community members and engaged scholars can challenge systems of oppressions affecting marginalized people of color in the food chain.

Despite the extensive and diverse food justice work in recent decades, this literature has focused mostly in suburban and metropolitan places in the U.S. coasts, demographically composed by diverse racial and ethnic groups (Cadieux and Slocum 2015). There are hints of this shifting; in August 2022, Alkon and Agyeman's call for submissions to update their well-read food justice anthology–*Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class, and*

Sustainability (2011)–included the following as a possible submission theme: *"How have/can food justice shape urban and rural landscapes, communities, and the intersections between them."* The large amount of food justice work in politically progressive and demographically diverse places leaves aside how the intersectional dynamics of racialized, classed, and gendered power are used to maintain power in majority-white rural communities. Rural communities often rely on communities of color such as immigrant workers, Black farmers, and/or Native Americans for the production, process, and commercialization of food. For example, with the COVID-19 pandemic outbreaks in meatpacking and meat processing plants across the rural U.S., it became evident how structural inequalities of the food system disproportionally affected immigrant workers who became essential but often deprived from governmental policies and resources such as the COVID-19 stimulus checks issued by the U.S. government (see e.g., Alkon et al. 2020; Ramos et al. 2020). Food justice scholarship has also neglected how sexuality intersects with race to exacerbate food insecurity and other inequalities (Leslie, Wypler, and Mayerfeld Bell 2019). As summarized by Leslie et al. (2019), women immigrant farmers experience high rates of gender discrimination and sexual violence in agricultural labor, earning less than their male counterparts (Kominers 2015).

The few studies of rural food justice often frame its emergence or existence as unlikely or exceptional (see Hewitt 2010 or Winne 2019). However, a growing number of studies push back against these assumptions, positioning their studies in socioeconomically and racially segregated rural places not as accidental, but as a mode of resistance to historical and ongoing oppressions. These studies also provide examples of community-engaged scholarship. For example, in *Freedom Farmers*, Monica White (2018) documents Black farmers' application of social justice principles to form their own systems of empowerment and social support in the rural South and how these inform contemporary urban food justice projects in Detroit. Elizabeth Hoover's (2017) *The River Is in Us: Fighting Toxics in a Mohawk Community* documents the reclamation of food sovereignty in the face of increased cultural threat. Thompson et al. (2020) show how community members and land grant engaged scholars embraced food justice views to challenge historical segregation in rural Mississippi. There is also some work done in new immigrant destinations in rural U.S., showing struggles and sometimes empowerment of immigrants working in farms or in the meat industry (see e.g., Flora et al. 2012; Steusse 2016; Guerrero 2017; Keller 2019; Mares 2019; Thompson 2020, 2022).

Drawing on food justice work, Leslie et al. (2019) call for a relational agricultural lens in rural scholarship, emphasizing how heteropatriarchy has worked to maintain racial inequalities. Study of sexualities and rural life has been mostly published outside of rural studies journals,[4] with the exception of a couple recent articles in *Rural Sociology* (e.g., Leslie (2017) and Hoffelmeyer (2021)). There is much to be gained through greater integration of food justice and rural studies in understanding how gender, class, and sexuality sustain the racialization of rural places and agriculture as white spaces. Despite the recent growth of scholarship examining agri-food injustices and solutions to overcome them, little research has been produced by social scientists studying majority-white places that are less demographically diverse, like most rural communities in the U.S.

In sum, there is an important gap in the food justice literature about historically and currently marginalized rural people in the U.S., including the poor, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ and, similarly, a gap in the rural studies literature. With a few exceptions (see e.g., McEntee

2011; Mares 2019; Thompson et al. 2020), the scant rural food systems literature often omits a food justice lens or does not explicitly apply analyses of power relations (see e.g., Bitto et al. 2003; Morton et al. 2008; Gasteyer et al. 2008; Smith and Miller 2011; Flora et al. 2012; Hendrickson 2020). Greater attention to racial dynamics, intersectionality, and engagement can provide a bridge to improving the integration of social and food justice work in rural settings (see e.g., Sachs and Patel-Campillo 2014; Cadieux and Slocum 2015; Whyte 2016; Carter, Chennault, and Kruzic 2018; White 2018; Leslie et al. 2019). In the next section, we discuss how these aspects could inform such work in the future.

Toward antiracism, intersectionality, and engaged scholarship in rural settings

Food justice practitioners' and scholars' engagement with and focus on intersectionality in places with urban and racialized communities of color can inform the study of social injustices in rural places. Alluding to these existing opportunities in food justice and rural studies and the needs for rural sociology to specifically address contemporary injustices, Keiko Tanaka's (2020) presidential address at the 83rd Annual Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society discussed the concept of justice and highlighted the needs for agri-food systems studies with a focus on food justice to incorporate the "rural." This section proposes how rural studies and food justice scholars might begin to address this request to build bridges between food justice and rural studies by directly engaging in anti-racist work that could challenge white supremacy, while practicing intersectional, engaged scholarship.

Challenging racism and white supremacy

Both food justice and rural studies share a focus on the struggles and grievances produced by our contemporary and dominant economic system (and the state) that often omit negative externalities on rural communities (see Ashwood 2018b). Food justice work is often involved in what Carolan (2020) describes as empirical/methodological justice evidencing struggles, but also in justice activism, by specifically addressing responses to challenges experienced by communities of color. Monica White's (2017, 2018) work is an example that synthetizes these aspects by showing how rural scholars can study both struggles and resistance to structural racism and white supremacy. White's (2017, 2018) work analyzes how Black farmers in the South were able to develop prefigurative politics to resist challenges created by rural white supremacy, creating self-determination and positive conditions for future (anti-racist) social changes. Alkon and Agyeman's (2011) edited book also shows examples of how food justice perspectives can engage in empirical justice while also producing knowledge from experiences trying to dismantle racism in the food system. Another example is Thompson et al. (2020), who show how Black farmers and community members working with engaged scholars, used intersectional perspectives on race and class to address challenges created by structural racism and white dominance in rural Mississippi. These types of food justice studies showing grievances of people of color and responses to challenge white supremacy can advance studies of injustices in rural settings.

As noted by Allen (2010), both material and cultural practices shape our food systems. Social scientists are well positioned to analyze socio-historical processes shaping food systems and informing rural and food justice movements if they focus on racial systems of power rather than inequities as demographic variables. Reynolds et al. (2020, 279) argue food justice is a spatial phenomenon with multi-scalar inequities; understanding the historical and contemporary factors influencing food justice are questions of power and, specifically, in rural contexts, questions of ongoing white supremacy. Bonilla-Silva (2022, 20) highlights that systemic racism is "maintained not by the actions of the 'racists,' but by the passive, habitual, and mostly neutral behavior of the majority of Whites." In this sense, there is an urgent need not only to document problems created by racism and white supremacy, but more importantly, to elaborate social knowledge and practices that can contribute to challenge and dismantle inequalities maintaining racial systems of oppression in rural places.

Addressing opportunities for rural sociologists to address such injustices, Carrillo et al. (2021) suggest advancing toward values-oriented sociology embracing the ethical and epistemological opportunities and challenges this could entail. We agree with this position and we contend rural scholars cannot ignore the most vulnerable groups and individuals in doing research and/or outreach. To specifically address historical racial injustices and inequalities, scholars can keep "the rural" at the core while paying special attention to mechanisms of oppression and strengthening justice activism within and outside academic circles.

The use of justice lenses will aid rural scholars in seeing what is ethically correct or incorrect about the world (Dixon 2013). This requires rural scholars and practitioners to become aware of and to expose social, political, and economic injustices by learning about the specific characteristics of rural places (Dixon 2013). In this sense, consciousness raising is one mean of calling rural residents' attention to invisible and marginalized groups in rural settings (see e.g., Mares 2019; Thompson 2020, 2022). Creating consciousness about the realities of oppressed marginalized groups of color can be an effective way to engage both scholars and rural residents aiming to dismantle historical structural and interlocking mechanisms of oppression.

Rural scholars' awareness of existing marginalized groups and their struggles can be a starting point for those interested in rural justice studies, but this may not be enough. Rather than treating identities as mere demographic variables through which to examine other social problems, rural scholars must recognize their privileged positions in knowledge production and engage with intersectional analyses of how contemporary and dynamic racial systems of power maintain white supremacy. Scholars and educational institutions have had a historical role distributing and reproducing white's racist views as dominant frames (Feagin 2013). As Bonilla-Silva (2019) stressed during his 2018 American Sociological Association presidential address, sociologists (especially, whites) must acknowledge the significance of racism, even within our discipline, and work toward politics of progressive racial change. This would imply revisiting, reckoning, and acknowledging critical and historical aspects of our disciplines and institutions in relation to racism, discrimination, and privilege (Anderson 2021; Carrillo et al. 2021). However, this endeavor is not exempt of challenges even within our own academic circles. As Delgado and Stefancic (2017, 65) state:

> When we are tackling a structure as deeply embedded as race, radical measures are in order-otherwise the system merely swallows up the small improvement one has made, and everything goes back to the way it was.

Seeking transformational changes, those working to bridge food justice and rural justice might embrace "the ethics of human solidarity" (Freire 1998, 116) and humility, being open to learn from historically marginalized rural residents who have been previously ignored. This would imply what Paulo Freire (1993) called dialogical practice through dialogs among colleagues and with rural residents facilitating acknowledgment of oppressed individuals and groups, while considering race and the intersectionality of their identities, experiences, power, agency, and history as critical aspects.

Analyzing the role of people (including scholars) in making transformative changes in the food system, Patricia Allen's *Together at the Table* (2004, 214) highlights how changes in consciousness can catalyze "a vigorous general movement for social and environmental justice." Freire (1993, 10) highlights consciousness raising as a way to humanize the world and create empathy, solidarity, and engagement especially among oppressed individuals, becoming aware of the oppression while embracing transformative change toward a process of "permanent liberation." Freire's (1993) views of raising consciousness of oppression center on the empowerment and active role from those who are oppressed. Freire (1998) highlights the more we recognize our practices as scholars and the reasons behind them, the more we will be capable to accomplish transformative change through epistemological curiosity and engagement with our surroundings. Transformative change in rural studies challenging mechanisms of oppression of people of color implies, to explicitly embrace, and apply antiracist values, by acknowledging racial groups as equals, and developing actions in the form of research and/or practice to reduce racial inequalities (Kendi 2019). As Bonilla-Silva (2019, 18) (citing Zembylas and Boler (2002)) stresses, this requires a "pedagogy of discomfort" which implies scholars (especially, whites) to leave their comfort zones and challenge their previous academic assumptions and dominant views. In this regard, recent and innovative critical whiteness studies can be very important on dismantle how white frames are constructed and reproduced, affecting both rural studies and settings (Leap et al. Forthcoming).

White supremacy and structural racism are not only strongly present in U.S. institutions and communities (Anderson 2021), but are the foundation of our agri-food system in the U.S. Therefore, racial differences and grievances and their relation to gender, sexuality, and class-based oppression have to be acknowledged by scholars studying rural societies and their realities. The democratic and neoliberal economic systems affecting all rural residents (Ashwood and MacTavish 2016) do not affect all residents alike; in addition to being rural, individuals and groups have different experiences and characteristics that require an intersectional analysis. Otherwise, the use of a reductionist approach to studying rural communities of color could harm individuals or groups who are not or do not feel represented within dominant categories (Delgado and Stefancic 2017) such as Blacks, Whites, Latinxs, Asians, or Native Americans.

Toward intersectionality and engaged rural scholarship

An intersectional approach accounts for the realities of race, class, gender, national origin and citizenship, sexual orientation, and other types of identities differently shaping disadvantaged experiences of individuals or groups (Delgado and Stefancic 2017). Looking at intersectionality, Smith II (2019) proposes the term "intersectional agriculture" to address food injustices which would contemplate race but also other aspects of individuals and groups. Given the historical and "existing gaps on this area", an intersectional approach is critical for future studies of rural injustices. Working together, engaged rural scholars and disadvantaged communities can ensure accountability and avoid prescriptive definitions of individuals and groups (Cadieux and Slocum 2015). Leslie et al. (2019) call attention to the intertwined concerns of racial, gender, and sexuality justice in agri-food systems, arguing rural scholars need to reconsider sampling and language in research design perpetuating and further entrenching inequalities. For example, the question of who is considered a farmer (Leslie et al. 2019) is one that hits close to home in rural studies. In their study of the continued co-optation and colonization of agricultural knowledges and practices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color farmers, Layman and Civita (2022) considered any person currently or recently farming, regardless of land ownership, to be a farmer. A rural food justice approach may assist scholars as they work to dismantle and reformulate these dominant perspectives in rural places, challenging and changing how these epistemic views have been produced and reproduced.

It is no surprise that such perspectives are dominant; in the U.S., the rural sociology scholarship has historically taken place in land grant universities (Friedland 2010; Tanaka 2020). Land grant university scholars have been influenced by the agenda setting of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and, increasingly, from private companies that have had an important role in influencing the direction of rural sociological research in the U.S. (see Friedland 2010; Goldstein, Paprockim, and Osborne 2019). Consequently, the production of knowledge in rural studies has often responded to demands of the neoliberal economic system and protectionist-oriented sciences, prioritizing white farmers and blue-collar workers, with little attention to historically marginalized communities of color (Friedland 2010; Carrillo et al. 2021). This focus combined with a lack of critical perspective on the influence of white supremacy in shaping rural life has to be understood under this larger context. Currently, rural scholars have the opportunity and ethical responsibility to lead transformative work empowering the voices of these marginalized groups in rural settings (Tanaka 2020).

In recent years, there has been a revisionist approach to the historical role of land grant universities, showing how these institutions ignored and/or omitted structural racial inequalities in rural U.S. (see e.g., Harris 2008; Dunn, Zabaw, and Williams 2019; Goldstein et al. 2019; Carrillo et al. 2021). Under this context, rural sociologists within organizations such as the Rural Sociological Society facilitated and generated new debates with a focus on racial, and intersectional, justice. This has facilitated an increasing interest in critical studies of whiteness, heteropatriarchy, and classism in the U.S. (see e.g., Leap 2020 and Leap et al. Forthcoming), offering new ideas and opportunities for future research and engaged scholarship. New perspectives of social injustices in rural settings can also draw on previous work of engaged rural and food justice scholars

focusing on historically marginalized and vulnerable communities of colors in the U.S. and other countries. For example, working in rural development in the 1980s, Robert Chambers (1983) showed how engaged researchers and practitioners can pay special attention to the different (interlocking) factors that put specific groups and individuals at very disadvantaged situations in rural settings. According to Chambers (1983), aspects such as powerlessness, isolation, poverty, physical weakness, and vulnerability create deprivation traps for some groups and/or individuals in rural areas. To challenge dominant paradigms of scholarship ignoring these types of intersectional injustices and oppressions, Chambers (1983, 188) argues engaged professionals working in rural research or development should put "the last first." As we previously stressed, this argument has been at the core of many food justice perspectives but could be more and broadly applied in rural places. As argued by Loo (2014) and Alkon and Ageyman (2011), participative justice is an essential component of food justice. For example, studying the working conditions of food systems workers (who are largely working in rural communities and spaces), or the disproportionate access to food experienced by communities of color, should include decision-making power and consent by the communities studied (Loo 2014).

Conclusions

Our analysis of recent rural and food justice studies in the U.S. identifies important needs and opportunities, not only to study injustices experienced by marginalized people of color, but to challenge structural and intersectional injustices through the production of new rural scholarship and actions. Through the analysis of prominent and recent publications, we found that more focus on race and white supremacy, intersectionality, and engaged scholarship, would strengthen the study of injustices in rural settings.

The work done by food justice scholars and practitioners presents to rural studies an opportunity to move beyond identifying causes or prescribing policies as we focus on transformative action through both "a more rigorous scholarship" as well as "increased accountability" (Cadieux and Slocum 2015, 2). As we discussed in this article, rural studies in the U.S. may be at a crossroads; there are new and exciting opportunities to reengage critical studies of racism and white supremacy while challenging intersecting systems of oppression.

Rural scholars can complement gaps in food justice work by offering intersectional approaches to address racialized and gendered power dynamics in rural communities. Future work in rural studies can actively engage in anti-racism and the application of intersectionality to address social grievances that affect historically marginalized communities in rural places. Creating awareness about discriminatory academic practices and intersectional realities that affect marginalized rural residents could be a first step toward active involvement and engagement to challenge individual and structural mechanisms of oppression. This does not mean that scholars will not face challenges and obstacles. As Patricia Allen (2004, 161) highlights, the challenge may lie in how engaged scholars concerned about social justice can "meet the needs of the voiceless and the most vulnerable" in academic spaces that are dynamic and continuously negotiated.

Notes

1. Some of this work can be found in journals with focus on rural studies such as *Rural Sociology, Journal of Peasant Studies, Journal of Rural Studies*, and *Sociologia Ruralis*.
2. We recognize that there might be existing publications addressing the main topics of this article that were not found, a limitation that the literature review often entails.
3. See e.g., White (2011) in Detroit published in *Race/Ethnicity Multidisciplinary Global*, and Levkoe (2006) in Toronto, Sbicca (2012) in West Oakland, and Passidomo (2014) in New Orleans, all published in *Agriculture and Human Values*.
4. See the 2019 *Society & Natural Resources* gender and sexuality special issue or Dentzman et al.'s (2021) *Society & Natural Resources* article analyzing queer farmers in the U.S. Census of Agriculture.

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