

Introduction: The Immigrant-Food Nexus

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This story is a single “foodways” thread woven within the collective human story, a thread that speaks of recipes from all cultures, carried in memories, on folded and stained pieces of paper, in pockets and bags, like identity papers, only meaningful to the beholders, only fully real once cooked and eaten.

—The authors of chapter 14, “Recipes for Immigrant Lives”

These words remind us of the performativity, materiality, and intimacy of food carried across time and space. They remind us of the multiplicity of cultural, religious, and social meanings embedded within the cuisines we create and consume. These foodways are anything but static. Migrants carry complex and life-affirming foodways with them as both memories and dreams, creating an umbilical link between where one is from and where one is now. Food provides a grand stage for the performance of translocal identities, border transformations, belongings, and becomings in a new land.

In the wake of the 2016 US presidential election, media pundits and academics scrambled to provide insights into the likely effects of the new administration’s controversial immigration policy goals: stricter enforcement and mass deportation of 11 million undocumented immigrants living and working in the United States. One area of questioning emerged prominently: how would the proposed immigration policies impact our food system?

As two scholars who critically study food systems, we felt this was a question that was painfully absent throughout a campaign season so focused on the hysterical xenophobia of the immigration debate rather than the tangible policy ramifications of this topic. Gradually, however, select media outlets began publishing articles about the agricultural industry’s reliance on undocumented immigrants for more than half its labor supply to subsidize

prices and profits by using this underpaid and unprotected workforce. With increased deportations and stricter immigration policies throughout the previous decade, newly proposed enforcement policies had the potential to create an even more critical labor gap, forcing farmers to switch crops, decrease production, or increase spending on legal labor. Sources published alarming predictions of the potential costs to be passed on to both US and Canadian consumers. In focusing on price and profit impacts, however, many of these analyses seemed to miss the larger questions surrounding the precariousness of our entire food labor system and immigration status quo.

In February 2017, we proposed the idea for this collection after identifying the increasingly urgent need to recognize immigrant food politics and foodways as essential within these conversations. The impetus for our work was simple: we wanted to show that we cannot talk about immigration without talking about food.

As we and our authors were writing, events over the next two years showed the far-reaching impacts of anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiment and policies. These events included the 2017 Alt-Right and neo-Nazi terrorism in Charlottesville, Virginia; the attempted repeal of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA); the 2018 “zero tolerance” policy of criminally prosecuting those who cross the US border illegally, resulting in family separation and indefinite detention; and President Donald Trump’s 2019 declaration of a national state of emergency over the “national security crisis” on the United States’ southern border. These highly publicized events represent the tip of the iceberg; daily experiences of rising anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia are also widely documented, as are increased Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) presence, raids, and deportations across the nation.

On June 16, 2018, the US Supreme Court upheld the third version of the president’s Muslim-targeted immigration ban. As headlines flooded the news channels and social media, the moderator of a sustainable agriculture list service we subscribe to sent out a call to action to all its members. This message identified the criminalization of immigrants as a crisis and provided a list of training sessions for counteractions happening in major US cities. Moments later, a member replied to this entire online community stating that this was not “the proper forum to be calling for such an action,” using derogatory language toward immigrant farm laborers while arguing that the topic of immigration is a topic “peripheral to sustainable agriculture at best.” Over

the next several days, a debate erupted between the list service moderators and other members sharing opinions and resources on the place of immigration within food conversations—a place many members argued was crucial.

Weeks from the completion of this manuscript, we observed this virtual conflict and subsequent discussion as a fascinatingly timely microcosm of this book's purpose. Whereas we started this volume with the assertion that one cannot talk about immigration without talking about food, we were now witnessing the obverse: can one talk about food without talking about immigration?

Immigrants in Food Scholarship Today

As a conceptual framework for this volume, we have termed the intersection of food systems, immigration policy, and immigrant foodways the “immigrant-food nexus.” We feel the nexus is a compelling construct, offering both a theoretical and analytical framework to both pull together and tease apart the questions food and immigration scholars have been asking, albeit in a fragmented way.

However, to contextualize our theoretical intervention, and before we explore the immigrant-food nexus in detail, we must begin with where food and immigration scholarship currently stands. To start, scholars and activists have established that immigrants' role within the US food system is a key topic within the field of food studies and food system change. Inquiries into immigrants within the food system have fallen primarily in the “food justice” subfield of food system studies, a subfield that saw an uptick in research and attention following the rise in attention to food as a political and social topic in the new millennium. The growing environmentally focused food sustainability “movement” (referred to from this point forward as the alternative food movement) was quickly critiqued by academics and activists in the emerging food justice community. This community sought to bring recognition to the ways that low-income communities and communities of color are both disproportionately harmed by industrial food systems and underrepresented in the alternative food movement. To Michael Pollan's famous assertion that to eat healthfully and sustainably in the twenty-first century one should not eat “anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food,” the food justice advocate asks, “Whose great-grandmother?” (Alkon and Agyeman 2011, 3). Positionality

matters; some great-grandmothers were given scraps from the table, while others had their food demonized. The food justice movement begins with “an analysis that recognizes the food system itself as a racial project (Omi and Winant 1994) and problematizes the influence of race and class on the production, distribution, and consumption of food” (5).

As a result of this more critical attention toward food, scholars have established that attention to immigrants has occurred more slowly and sporadically than attention to other subtopics. The persistent marginalization of farmworkers, whether on large industrial farms or small, “local” family-owned farms, is harder to “sell” than the term “organic” (Gray 2013; Holmes 2013). Many critical food scholars critique how whiteness has guided alternative food movement concepts of “local,” “health,” and “access” in ways that negate black, brown, indigenous, and immigrant producers, workers, and consumers within both the conventional and alternative food economies (Alkon and Agyeman 2011; Guthman 2011, 2014; Minkoff-Zern 2018; Leslie and White 2018; Flora et al. 2012; Cadieux and Slocum 2015). Much research on urban food access has been called out for taking a “black and white” approach to the history of resource spatialization based on race, glossing over the nuances of different communities of color within these stories as well as the variety of food sources (such as home gardens and ethnic corner stores) utilized by present-day ethnic groups (Alkon and Agyeman 2011). Food Policy Councils, a growing governance approach to incorporating food policy into US and Canadian city policies and politics, have had mixed success in achieving their goals of diverse member and leader representation and explicit centering of racial equity (Boden and Hoover 2018; Horst 2017).

In addition to documenting the crucial shortcomings of the alternative food movement’s attention to immigrants, many scholars have established a growing critical body of work on immigrants within the food system. Scholars have shown how food is mobilized as a tool within the larger projects of settler colonialism and structural racism. Debates about where to locate farmworker housing, for example, reveal underlying tensions to maintain a space’s whiteness (Nelson 2007). Gentrification invites cultural appropriation of “authentic” foods, which are co-opted as “exotic” ways to consume others’ cultures (Hirose and Kei-Ho Pih 2011; Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002; Zukin, Lindeman, and Hurson 2017; Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco 2017). The media criminalizes and invisibilizes immigrants through

inaccurate, dehumanizing narratives of migrant farmworkers and their families (Holmes 2013; Horton 2016; Mitchell 1996; Sbicca 2015; Allen 2008).

Food and immigration scholarship shows us that it is vital to trace the history of the relationship between immigration policy and the daily lived experience of immigrants in order to understand how we have come to where we are today. In the twentieth century, the US agricultural industry began recruiting more heavily from immigrant populations, resulting in a shift from a predominantly black farm labor force to a Latinx one (Mapes 2009; Gray 2013; Mitchell 1996). To formalize and increase access to this labor source, the United States operated the Bracero Program beginning in 1946, issuing over four million guest-worker visas to bring Mexican laborers to US farms (Mapes 2009; Mitchell 1996; Gamboa 2000). Undocumented immigration continued at comparable levels during this time. The program ended in the 1964 alongside a wave of stricter immigration policies and the narrative of immigrant illegality, though the agricultural industry's use of migrant laborers remained strong. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) criminalized the employment of undocumented workers. Studies have found that the IRCA and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) have in fact resulted in an *increase* in Mexican migration by making undocumented workers attractive to employers while at the same time causing economic consequences in Latin America that decreased rural Latinxs' capital and increased incentives for them to find work on US farms (Boucher and Taylor 2007; Zahniser et al. 2018 Aydemir and Borjas 2006). Other studies have investigated the logic of anti-immigrant sentiment that immigrants are filling jobs that would otherwise be filled by US "blue-collar workers," finding on the contrary that immigrants have historically benefited (and are currently benefiting) the US economy (Lewis 2007; Lamphere, Stepick, and Grenier 1994; Dudley 2018).

It is useful to take a comparative look at immigration and food in Canada to provide a wider North American context. Since the 1970s, Canada has been an officially "multicultural" nation, and Canadian immigration policy more generally is seen as multiculturally progressive. In reality, however, Canada's agriculture sector relies on a structure of marginalized immigrant labor and a political language of "othering" immigrants in the same way that the US agricultural sector does. The Seasonal Agricultural Worker Program (SAWP) enables farmers to bring in temporary foreign laborers. It is considered a highly effective program that brings in the same workers

cyclically for eight-month periods (Aydemir and Borja 2006). The Canadian government's 2017 "Report of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food" devotes one page to the topic of labor reforms, only to focus on labor shortages as a problem for farmers, with no mention of the current marginalization of immigrant laborers through low wages, poor housing, hazardous working conditions, food insecurity, and inability to unionize (Weiler, McLaughlin, and Cole 2017).

While there have been fluctuations in open or closed border stances in the past two decades, US immigration policies and enforcement tactics during the post-9/11 era have increasingly taken on nativist, populist narratives of a "war" against "illegal aliens" on the border and within the nation (Nevins 2010; Horton 2016). This narrative acts as a racial project that defines who "belongs" as a legitimate subject deserving of national protections and who is regarded as an "other." Over the past decade, and particularly since the start of the Trump administration, an increase in deportations and stricter immigration policies has decreased undocumented Mexican migration into the United States and steadily shrunk the United States' agricultural labor force (Zahniser et al. 2018; Martin 2019). Facing financial losses and a drop in production, many immigrant employers and right-leaning congressional representatives have demanded legislation such as H-2A guest-worker reforms to reinvigorate the supply of cheap immigrant labor (Martin 2019). Even with this shortage, the predominance of undocumented immigrants within farm labor has held constant. Today, estimates of the number of undocumented farmworkers range from 1.5 to 2 million, accounting for 50% to 70% of total US farmworkers. H-2A position requests jumped in 2017 and 2018 to their highest levels in recent years, though studies are still anticipating diminishing agricultural productivity if H-2A program reforms do not occur (Martin 2019; Zahniser et al. 2018).

Scholars of food and immigrant studies have documented the extreme marginalization of immigrant farmworkers in the United States historically and today. Among US workers, farmworkers have the fewest labor protections—a structure continually lobbied for by the farm industry and its allies to effectively subsidize food prices and industry profits at the cost of worker marginalization. Farmworkers must endure long hours, are paid well below a living wage and often below the minimum wage, have poor living conditions, and have no vacation, overtime pay, or health insurance in most states (Brown and Getz 2011; Holmes 2013; Gray 2013; Berkey

2017; Mitchell 1996). Scholars have effectively shown that the agricultural industry thus functions through a delicate balance of invisibility created to allow worker exploitation while at the same time protecting their (undocumented) immigration status to keep them within the industry and not integrated into the majority of US public services (Martin 2009). One result of this paradox is that those who grow our food are one of the most food-insecure populations in the nation.

Marginalization is not the only focus of food and immigration scholarship, however. Scholars have developed a rich body of work on immigrant foodways and the sociocultural significance of food. Many scholars have documented how recipes and tastes move across borders and boundaries to provide new ways of performing old and new senses of home, celebration of tradition, and connection with kin and community within new and even hostile spaces (Koc and Welsh 2002; Ray 2004). The notion of “food citizenship” (Baker 2004; Cohen 2011; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014) considers how in times when the state’s definitions of citizenship have failed its inhabitants, food can become an alternative way to perform community care, responsibility, and belonging, as in our epigraph to this introduction, which speaks of recipes as “identity papers” asserting identity through food performance. Food is central to how immigrants (whether first generation or centuries past) interact with the concept of national and self-identity (Gabaccia 1998; Diner 2001; Garcia, DuPuis, and Mitchell 2017). Food also demonstrates the hybridity of these lines of difference and movement, invoking the complexities of the transnational subject (Zavella 1985; Cohen 2011; Holmes 2013; Nagel 2009; Baker 2004; Brandt 2002; Peña et al. 2017) and the translocal cuisine (Komarnisky 2009; Gibb and Wittman 2013; Filson and Adekunle 2017). The term “foodscape” encompasses how food practices are engagements with place making and identity performance, such as in community gardens or ethnic markets, where immigrants perform their transnational identities through the soil and economies of their new homes (Joassart-Marcelli and Bosco 2017; Roe, Herlin, and Speak 2016; Baker 2004; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014; Pine 2016).

The Immigrant-Food Nexus Framework

Given this broad overview of scholarship on immigration, immigrants, and food systems, we as co-editors asked ourselves what was still missing in the

study of this intersection. Since the 2016 election, it has become more pressing than ever to assert the importance of talking about food within immigration and immigration within food. Yet only the most astute observers in the media and in political discourse seemed to incorporate the intersectionalities and interconnectedness of these topics. In our review of the scholarly literature, it was easy to separate most inquiries into two categories: the “macro” approaches, which focused on policy and national narratives, and the “micro” approaches, which focused on daily lived experiences, materiality, personal identity, and cultural practices. These distinctions between foci on the policy narrative versus lived experience mirrored the very tactics being used to marginalize, distance, and dehumanize immigrant and other communities of color in the escalating populism and nationalist policies on the border and within the nation (Gökarıksel, Neubert, and Smith 2019).

What became clear is that multiscale, intersectional approaches to the connections between food and immigration were desperately needed. Moreover, a framework to bring together scholarship addressing the multitude of facets of this intersection was missing. The immigrant-food nexus encompasses the constantly shifting intersection of food systems, immigration policy, and immigrant foodways. We see the nexus as a multiscale concept, extending from the macro scale of national policy to the micro scale of the intimate daily performances of culture, community, and individual bodies through food. “Nexus,” meaning “connection,” encompasses the intimate messiness that becomes apparent when teasing apart the connection between food and immigration.

In taking a critical approach toward questions of food and immigration, we ask: *How can the immigrant-food nexus be understood in our current political climate of rising nationalism, and how does an analysis that transcends traditional micro scales or macro scales from the nation, to the community, to the body provide a new way to think about these issues?*

Through critical, multidimensional research, food and immigration scholars today find themselves at a generative place to bring fact-based, humanized, and multiscale narratives of the immigrant-food nexus to light. The story of national ICE policy debates, for example, cannot be told separately from the story of an immigrant woman serving tortillas to New York farmworkers while being increasingly surrounded by ICE agents, because these are not separate stories. The concepts we define as “macro” also have real, embodied consequences. The concepts we define as “micro” also

have large-scale, important meanings. Our authors recognize this: their work bridges the scales of the nation, community, and individual bodies to “render visible the political tensions about race, agriculture, immigration, and the future of the nation that simmer in everyday life” (Neubert, chapter 2, this volume).

Organization of This Book

This volume consists of three parts, each centered on one guiding theme: “Borders: Individuals, Communities, and Nations,” “Labor: Fields and Bodies,” and “Identity Narratives and Identity Politics.” Individual authors write from a variety of disciplines,¹ and many are members of the immigrant communities they study. When introducing each section, we include a note highlighting how the chapters combine to provide a new perspective on the immigrant-food nexus.

In part I, “Borders: Individuals, Communities, and Nations,” the authors explore cultural, physical, and geopolitical borders around immigration and belonging from the scale of the person to that of the nation. Beginning the section and contextualizing the chapters to follow, in chapter 1 Kimberley Curtis provides a case study of the agricultural borderlands of Yuma, Arizona, one of the border areas receiving the greatest focus by the Trump administration, and the area where 90% of the winter greens in the United States are grown. Viewing the border as a site of contention around the livelihoods of farmworker communities, Curtis asks: what kinds of civic worlds are being made as border militarization and immigrant criminalization intensify? Addressing the mobilization of these national politics far from the border, Christopher Neubert in chapter 2 analyzes an ongoing controversy surrounding the construction of a pork processing plant that will use immigrant labor in north-central Iowa. In this strikingly timely case study, this chapter demonstrates how nationalist “fascist body politics” increasingly deployed by far-right elements in the United States come to shape and be shaped by discourses on agriculture and immigration in rural America and leave indelible marks on rural communities.

Shifting from rural boundaries to urban ones, Pascale Joassart-Marcelli and Fernando Bosco in chapter 3 investigate the tensions surrounding immigrant markets in two adjacent urban neighborhoods of San Diego characterized by diverse immigrant populations and gentrification pressures. This

chapter shows that while these spaces promote intercultural encounters that may forge connections, they may also exacerbate differences, reflecting broader sociospatial processes associated with class and race within the meaning of “authentic” foods and “foodie” culture. In chapter 4, Maryam Khojasteh continues this focus on spaces of urban immigrant food commerce through case studies of two Middle Eastern grocers in a Buffalo, New York, “food desert” and a transforming market in Philadelphia. This chapter highlights the active role that immigrants play in (re)shaping community food systems while it also reveals the boundaries put up by the lack of support for immigrant food businesses in much of current city food planning. Ending this section, Sarah Huang demonstrates in chapter 5 how foodscapes constructed by immigrants and refugees in Anchorage, Alaska, complicate notions of locality, not only as a marker of space but also as a fluid marker of memories, ideas, and places through time and space. This chapter posits that transnational food identities may reveal nuanced opportunities and barriers through which the local food movement currently excludes non-white and nonmigrant identities.

Part II, “Labor: Fields and Bodies,” addresses the topic of labor as it connects embodied labor, agribusiness, and immigrant lived experience. To begin the section, in chapter 6, Katherine Dentzman and Samuel Mindes use a comparative US-Canadian approach to study how Mexican immigrant labor shortages are being felt as never before by US grain farmers because of increasing herbicide resistance. With farmers no longer able to rely on the technological labor of herbicides to weed their crops, the situation is forcing new conversations in the industry and engagement with the social side of immigration policy. In chapter 7, Laura-Anne Minkoff-Zern and Sea Sloat show how Latinx immigrant farmers’ cultivation practices are at odds with USDA program requirements for agrarian standardization, continuing a legacy of unequal access to agrarian opportunities for nonwhite immigrant farmers. In chapter 8, Mary Beth Schmid then counterconstructs stereotypes of Latinxs’ roles in agriculture with examples of binational Mexican American women in southern Appalachian fruit and vegetable farming enterprises who use cooperative, kin-based exchange relations to collectively mitigate consolidation-inducing policies and mediate globalized agrifood political economies. Finally, in chapter 9, Fabiola Ortiz Valdez concludes this part of the book with her ethnography of undocumented male laborers and immigrant women living on New York State dairy farms.

Exploring the intersection of gender, labor, and foodways as forms of resistance, Valdez shows how these women make it possible for workers to maintain a connection to their life back home, providing spaces of sanctuary from law enforcement while also securing the farmers' ability to retain their labor force.

In part III, "Identity Narratives and Identity Politics," the authors focus their analyses of current immigration politics and immigrant experiences on the politics of identity and the power of narrative. In chapter 10, Jillian Linton presents a media discourse analysis of agrarian narratives within the concept of "local food" in Toronto, Canada. Though Canada's agrarian narrative seems on the surface more inclusive than its counterpart in the United States, Linton finds that media coverage of local food continues to position white farming families as neutral, immigrants as "other," and settlement as an uncontroversial, nonviolent action. Shifting to institutional identity, in chapter 11, Victoria Ostenso, Colin Dring, and Hannah Wittman investigate the successes and failures of four food policy councils in Vancouver, Canada, to engage racial justice practices within their work. This chapter considers the complicated tensions occurring within many food-focused organizations in both Canada and the United States, asking what it takes for the alternative food movement to truly prioritize black, brown, indigenous, and immigrant participants within its foundational logic and actions.

In chapter 12, Catarina Passidomo and Sara Wood present oral history excerpts of Central American, Latin American, and Caribbean immigrant cooks and entrepreneurs collected by the Southern Foodways Alliance. Through these stories, the chapter documents the ways in which immigrants use foodways to navigate and make meaning within their economic and social lives in the contemporary, multicultural "New American South." Continuing this focus on identity formation through food, in chapter 13, Alison Hope Alkon and Kat Vang demonstrate the limits of much "dietary acculturation" literature on immigrant foodways. Through an ethnography of Hmong Americans navigating the meanings of food within their daily lives, this chapter advances the concept of translocal food, as it plays a vital role in immigrant identity formation. Finally, chapter 14 follows five immigrants whose lives have become interwoven like ingredients, creating complex individual and collective foodways intersecting at a shared-use commercial kitchen in Connecticut. This chapter illustrates the intricate ways in which

each of their stories is a product of both international macro-scale social, political, and economic events and the interplay of micro-scale choices and relationships formed across the kitchen. The authors of this chapter have chosen to remove their names in solidarity with the many research participants in this volume who are forced to remain nameless for their security.

Note

1. In their usage of the term Latino versus Latinx, chapter authors in this volume have made individual decisions based on their participants' own preferences and identity articulations.

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