10 The Canadian Dream: Multicultural Agrarian Narratives in Ontario

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Introduction

In the lead-up to the 2011 Canadian federal elections, Michael Ignatieff, then leader of the Liberal Party, announced the party's plan for a national food policy. On the first page of the document highlighting the main policy goals, Ignatieff states, "Buying local is good for our farmers—who grow the world's highest-quality foods—for our families, and for our environment" (Liberal Party of Canada 2010). He went on to give campaign speeches from farm plots about the importance of home-grown Canadian food but was unable to sway voters and suffered a devastating loss at the polls (Swainson 2010). While the Liberal Party did not go on to win the election, this focus on creating local food policy gained increasing political support at the municipal, provincial, and national levels. Since then, local food procurement bills have been passed by several municipalities in Ontario, the province voted in favor of the Local Food Act in 2013, and supermarkets have increasingly sourced locally to meet growing consumer demand (Flavelle 2009). As different levels of government increasingly turn toward the promotion of localized production and consumption, it is worthwhile to analyze the rhetoric used to justify and support local food.

Discourse is intertwined with historical narratives and moral codes that outline the priorities and expectations of the society or social group in question (Fairclough 2003). Since discourse is often used to guide and justify political agendas, a close study of it can give insight into the underlying ideas driving policy, the power structures that are being endorsed, and the potential inequalities and exclusions being promoted (Razack 2002). To date, discourse on "local food" has been more thoroughly studied in the United States, where local food narratives have been associated with socially, and at times racially, exclusive language (Born and Purcell 2006; Hinrichs 2003). Researchers in different parts of the country, from California, to Iowa, to Washington, have noted that the imaginaries that organize alternative food movements[1] are often built around white identities and viewpoints (Ramírez 2015; Flora et al. 2012; Alkon and McCullen 2011; Guthman 2008; Slocum 2007). Although the exact organization of these food communities is different, they are frequently founded and centered on particular agrarian myths, such as the idea that white farm families made use of abundant empty land to grow food and create the fertile landscapes of today. Alkon and McCullen coined the term "white farm imaginary" based on their observations of California farmers markets. In their studies, they found that this white farm imaginary "romanticizes and universalizes an agrarian narrative specific to whites while masking the contributions and struggles of people of color in food production" (Alkon and McCullen 2011, 938). This white farm imaginary both follows and supports a nationalistic discourse that fails to recognize the historical exploitation of slave labor, existing racialized farmers (see Minkoff-Zern and Sloat, chapter 7, this volume), or the migrant farmworkers who do most of the cultivation. That being said, the white farm imaginary is not static but shifts according to its temporal and spatial contexts (McCullen 2008). While Canada and the United States exist on the same continent and their local food communities have transnational connections, it would be false to assume that Canadian farm imaginaries would work in the same way. There is a growing body of research that focuses on Canada's agricultural imaginaries and how Canada actively excludes Indigenous peoples and migrant farmers or workers (Rotz 2017; Wakefield et al. 2015) and the way that racialized boundaries exist in specific local food spaces such as Vancouver and Toronto (Gibb and Wittman 2013; Campigotto 2010). These researchers show that whiteness does play a role in agriculture north of the border but that it works differently because of Canada's divergent context, colonial history, and politics of multiculturalism vis-à-vis the United States.

Despite the government's official stance of celebrating diversity, Canadian multicultural policy has been criticized as a state-legitimizing tactic that reframes the long-standing problem of national unity, particularly indigenous sovereignty claims and French versus English division, into a society built on difference and diversity (Mackey 2002; Bannerji 2000).

Notwithstanding the country's rhetoric of inclusion, racialized immigrants continue to find that they are unable to achieve full status as Canadian, even upon obtaining citizenship. All the while, multicultural policy makes it difficult to name issues of systemic racism, as the policy's outward image obscures the continued racial exclusion of certain bodies from the Canadian national project (Bannerji 2000). Approaching these topics at the intersection of Canadian food politics and immigrant experience, this chapter conducts a discourse analysis of local food using data from the *Toronto Star* to determine the specific narratives and imaginaries that are used to support and justify local food in Canada. Considering Canada's policy of multiculturalism, immigrant-friendly rhetoric, and outward promotion of cultural diversity, its local food imaginary may also read as inclusive. I argue, however, that the *absences* in this rhetoric are most telling. The omission of indigenous perspectives, continued power imbalances, and historic inequality throughout these articles promotes a nationalistic ideal that is reductive and exclusionary.

Methods: The Changing Use of Local Food

To better understand the discourses around local food in the Greater Toronto area and the farm imaginaries at play, I completed an analysis of textual news media.[2] I chose the *Toronto Star* newspaper because it is a daily newspaper that is regionally focused yet has the highest readership of any newspaper in the country. It is a left-leaning publication, generally more liberal than any of the other daily papers with similar distribution levels. I conducted an online search of all articles in the ProQuest Toronto Star, Toronto Ont. Database (pubid—44892), which includes articles dating back to 1985. The search looked for all articles containing the phrase "local food," while excluding the phrases "local food drive" or "local food bank."[3] This yielded an initial data set of 615 articles dated between 1985 and 2015. Within this data set, the first usage of local food as a dedicated term to denote food produced or grown locally took place in an article dating back to 1987 discussing the benefits of "Agri-cities" and their role in land preservation (Steen 1987).

From this point forward, I logged all the articles in the search and then made further exclusions, yielding a focused final data set of 224 articles that was used for basic analysis. I excluded travel reports, event listings, and brief policy announcements, as well as articles that were written about locations outside Ontario or articles that only included local food as a descriptor or as part of a compound modifier (i.e., local food courts). The basic analysis consisted of cataloging articles by name, date, author, type, location, a brief summary, whether a definition of local was offered, whether immigrants were mentioned and how (positively, negatively, or neutrally), reasons provided for supporting (or not) local food, and key quotations. I used this catalog of 224 articles to quantify the main reasons that are given for supporting local food. From this data set, I selected for close reading and in-depth analysis 30 articles from 2003 to 2015. These articles were selected based on richness (prioritizing interviews and reports over lists or recipes) and variety. Despite there being dedicated food columnists, I selected multiple authors to ensure that one journalist's voice was not prioritized too heavily. Throughout this chapter, my arguments rely on the findings of the in-depth discourse analysis of the articles, with some context drawn from the basic analysis of the larger data set of 224 articles.

Understanding that newswriting has a very specific structure, I focused my analysis not on syntax or grammatical structure but on the ideas and content presented (Fairclough 2003). I followed Potter and Wetherell's (1987) understanding of discourse analysis: a careful reading and rereading in search of patterns of variability and consistency, followed by a second phase of analysis that focuses on determining the functions and effects of the texts analyzed. My analysis also follows Fairclough's idea that "text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts" (Fairclough 2003, 3). To this end, textual analysis was employed to the degree that it was useful for analyzing phrasing, but the larger focus remained on unveiling the ways in which the stories and subjects presented in the articles promote specific understandings of history, identity, and space in Ontario through local food.

The Changing Use of Local Food

Before delving into the in-depth analysis, it is worth acknowledging that the use of the term "local food" has changed over time. Currently, local food is generally understood as food produced within a specific geographical area in close proximity to the consumer, often with underlying sociopolitical motivations. In the original dataset, older articles did not use local food in this sense. Most articles in the 1980s used the term local food either to describe food consumed locally, such as travel articles describing local cuisine, or as a compound modifier referring to the place's location (i.e., a local food market, a local market that sells food). Slowly, however, articles began to mention local food as a political term, denoting food intentionally consumed *because* it was produced locally. After the first Agri-city article in 1987, an article in 1989 mentions the Slow Food movement growing in Rome, followed by another a year later celebrating World Food Day and discussing local food as an alternative to globally produced industrial foods. Despite these early mentions, it is not until about a decade later that this usage of local food is frequently featured.

The *Toronto Star* articles that mentioned local food production's political challenge to the global industrial food system go back about three decades, but more than 75% of them dated from 2008 or later. The articles did not give strict definitions or geographic boundaries to the term, instead focusing on discussions of local food's benefits. Articles in the 1990s and early the following decade largely focused on the benefits of freshness and quality, but by 2005 articles had shifted to arguments of the environmental and economic advantages, especially in relation to food miles. In 2008, when coverage of the topic increased dramatically, the "local food movement" is mentioned by name in several articles, reinforcing the fact that local food had gained a certain prominence in the mainstream. These articles still largely focused on the environment and climate change, alongside concerns of food security. From 2009 onward, the importance of supporting farmers grew, underscored by themes of community and tradition, as local food was linked to Canada's food history and settler populations. Finally, articles in the final five years of the data set carried an implicit suggestion that the reader should already be familiar with the many arguments in support of local food. These trends over the years were not strict boundaries, but they were nonetheless visible shifts in the benefits associated with local food. With this brief overview in mind, focus can now be shifted to the deeper narratives associated with local food and Canadian identity.

Multiculturalism: We Are All Immigrants

Historically, Canadian identity and mythology has long been built around a "northernness" that equaled whiteness, admittedly with two variations: one British and the other French (Berger 1966). However, after decades of explicitly racist immigration laws, the late 1960s and 1970s began the open-door policy for immigrants to Canada, which allowed a much higher number of visible minorities (the official term for nonwhite arrivals) to enter the country.[4] This period was initiated by the Liberals, as the new migrants were to supply the growing Canadian economy with a workforce. With the influx of nonwhite or racialized immigrants in this period came the introduction of Pierre Trudeau's national multicultural policy in 1971, after which Canada increasingly understood and sold itself as a nation built on a diversity of cultures and identities. Through this policy, immigrants become citizens, yet according to the government "keep their identities, take pride in their ancestry and have a sense of belonging" (Government of Canada 2017). This idea of a multicultural mosaic is promoted in contrast to (and as more inclusive than) the melting pot or politics of assimilation that the US government supports (Bannerji 2000). It therefore follows that if multiculturalism does play a major role in Toronto's local food discourse, it is possible that the nation's local food imaginaries themselves could be more diverse than those observed by scholars writing about the United States. While there were several references in the articles that explicitly name or support the discourse of multiculturalism, this chapter's following analysis reveals that the recent discourse on local food is less inclusive than it first might appear.

In their discussions of local food, several articles do follow a distinct narrative supporting the popular Canadian discourse of multiculturalism. Interestingly, some articles that discuss historic migration and its relation to farming portray Canada as having been a country of migrants since its inception—always a diverse blend of cultures. Multiculturalism in these articles is written about not as newly invented as a result of recent migrants but rather only newly named. In an excerpt from a 2011 interview, Dorothy Duncan, a Canadian culinary historian, expresses as much: "Yes, because from the outset, except for the First Nations, we have always been a very multicultural country. People from all over the world came here to live, brought their memories with them of what their favourite foods were, and then found this land with its unusual—in many cases—geography and wildly fluctuating climate" (Turnbull 2011).

This quotation reframes multiculturalism as the Canadian origin story, achieving a simultaneous task of placing all Canadians in the same migrant category, just in varying stages of settlement. In this narrative, immigrants of European descent and racialized immigrants are viewed as simply having different cultures. The power and privilege that European settlers were granted throughout Canada's history are not acknowledged in this picture of multiculturalism. While this quotation does acknowledge the existence of First Nations people, this romantic view of settlement ignores the violent legacy of colonialism and the explicit policies enacted to dispossess Indigenous peoples. Of course, this quotation could be seen as a positive acknowledgment that all Canadians other than Indigenous people are guests; however, this is not the implication. The passage reads "from the outset…we have always been a very multicultural country" (Turnbull 2011). The reference to the existence of First Nations people is an aside, an exception; they are not included in the "we" of Canadians. The quotation works to place Indigenous people as an exception to an inherently migrant and multicultural Canadian identity and history.

Aside from this historical framing of migration and multiculturalism, there is also a consistent thread suggesting that new immigrants have always used farming to achieve success. One article on the use of temporary migrant and immigrant labor on Ontario's farms follows this viewpoint, stating, "Ontario has a long history of foreigners and newcomers working the land. Take Ken Forth's farm near Hamilton. He's a fifth-generation Ontario farmer. In the 1920s, his family sponsored Czech workers. Then, they'd pick up Italian immigrants. Then Vietnamese. For all of them, it was a stepping stone to save money for a house and a better job. 'They did the Canadian dream,' says Forth, who now employs 16 workers from the Caribbean" (Porter 2007).

In this article, farming and working the land becomes a rite of passage. While Canada may be a multicultural nation filled with people of diverse backgrounds, there is an expectation that hard work, especially when connected to the land, is part of becoming Canadian. It is the "Canadian dream." This narrative supports the idea that all Canadians were once hardworking immigrants working the soil and that any difficulties are simply part of the journey.

Both these articles celebrate a narrative of multiculturalism that reframes Canadian identity as a fundamentally migrant identity beginning with the first settlers while simultaneously promoting a Canadian dream that promises new immigrants success and integration through hard agricultural labor. A celebration of multiculturalism and immigrant settlement could be seen as overwhelmingly positive, but it is more likely that as "difference is ideologically evoked it is also neutralized" (Bannerji 2000, 96). Although these articles celebrate difference and promote farming as a rite of passage for new immigrants, further analysis of the articles on local food shows this multicultural Canadian dream to be empty of critical discussion of colonial history, structural inequality, or recognition of differences in power and privilege for racialized Canadians.

A New History: Settling Rural Space

As foodie culture has grown throughout the new millennium, so has its influence on the local food discourse. Several articles, ranging from 2008 to 2015, ask the reader to think of the local food movement as a path to a more defined Canadian food history and cuisine. One author writes, "Making local produce available to consumers is actually a matter of recovering lost practices" (Gordon 2008). The suggestion is that Canadians have lost their way and should return to earlier local food traditions. However, these articles highlight European settler culinary traditions, positioning settlers as the original ancestors while ignoring indigenous foodways. One such article suggests Canadian cooks look to early settlers for inspiration when cooking with the native Canadian variety of gooseberries. It references how "in North America, settlers transformed the tart berries into wine, vinegar, preserves and pies" (David 2015). In this statement, settlers become the original innovators who took what the local landscape provided them and crafted unique dishes and beverages, with no mention of the precolonial past.

In the majority of the articles on local food, history begins with farm settlement. Questions of land ownership are not discussed, and in the larger data set of 244 articles, there is almost no mention of First Nations' existence or relationship to the land. In fact, less than five articles mention First Nations, Indigenous, or native people, and of the few that do, they are never the focus of the article itself. Throughout the discourse, there is rarely an elaboration of what came before; it is assumed that there was simply *terra nullius*—nobody's land—and therefore it was free for the taking (Razack 2002). Instead, the articles show farmers as the first Canadians in the national story. In one article (Baute 2009), a farmers market organizer is interviewed about her role. She responds, "It's more the farmers that I feel should be highlighted, really. … They're the ones that are doing the work of growing responsibly, the real *land stewards*" (emphasis my own). In the absence of indigenous bodies, farmers become the rightful caretakers of this unclaimed rural space. This theme of stewardship and responsibility recurs in several articles, positioning farmers in a role extending beyond simply growing food. In another article (Welsh 2009), a farmer is quoted as saying, "We are the stewards of the land.… We have to save it." The "it" is never clarified, although environmental degradation is implied, but what is clear is that farmers are positioned as the saviors. This theme is echoed in several articles that position farmers in the role of "white savior" and land or the environment as needing to be saved. By excluding Indigenous peoples from the discourse, they are essentially invisibilized from rural space and agricultural history, and a new version of settlement is offered in which settler farmers are the first Canadians, who come to own and care for unoccupied land. As a result, local food is presented as a way to support farmers as they fulfill the role of caretaker and preserve Ontario's farmland.

The Classic Farm, Farmer, and Farming Family

In the articles covering local food, there was a clear emphasis on naming the locations of local farms and highlighting individual food producers, painting a clear picture of the people and places involved. The majority of the articles portray local food as something that happens outside the city, on the farm and in rural regions surrounding the urban core. Mentions of urban farming largely introduce the concept as a novelty or innovation, such as the rising trend of urban gardening. One author in a 2013 article describing community shared agriculture (CSA) writes, "Like the many other CSAs around the province, Kawartha CSA brings two disparate communities together: farmers and city dwellers" (Black 2013). In the author's view, farmers and city dwellers are separate entities, once again emphasizing the location of farms in rural space and the connection of urban and rural spaces through produce delivery. There is little acknowledgment of urban farming as being legitimate, and instead the implication is that the *real* farms growing local food exist in rural space.

Aside from prioritizing rural farms, the articles specifically highlight the farmers themselves. In the 224 articles cataloged for basic analysis, the most popular reason given by authors for why someone should choose local food was to support and/or connect with farmers and their farms. While farming is frequently shown to be difficult in terms of profitability, farmers are portrayed as doing the important work of preserving the practices of their families. Most articles paint the picture of family farms, farms run by several generations of farming families, and often hint at the existence of potential future generations of farmers who are introduced to the work side of farming by being raised in this space. One such example features a wife and husband team running an organic farm and emphasizes that the wife, Haley, "grew up grading chicken eggs before school as the child of third-generation farmers" (Porter 2015). This example shows an overlap of domestic life (preschool routines) and the business side of farm space (grading eggs for sale), highlighting the way children are raised into the farming tradition. Families are portrayed not only as managing the farms but also as the hands directly responsible for cultivating and producing the local food feeding Ontario.

In many of these articles emphasizing generational traditions, there are no references to race or ethnicity. One example reads, "As a fourth-generation farmer, John Hambly is determined to leave his children with soil that is a little cleaner, richer, greener" (Welsh 2009). This article focuses on the farmer's ecologically sound growing practices and never references race, culture, or immigration. Hambly, pictured alongside the article, is a white man, but in the article, he is simply a Canadian farmer. Articles that focus on environmental issues of farming often feature these Canadian farmers without reference to their identity. Since these farmers remain unmarked in terms of ethnicity or race, these articles suggest that these multigenerational farming families are the original farming families. This invokes Lipsitz's point that as "the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its rule as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (quoted in Yancy 2012, 6–7). In this case, white farming families are the "unmarked marker," the universal from which all else is measured (Frankenberg 1997).

There are a few exceptions where white farmers are featured and their continuing ethnic and cultural identity is included, usually referencing a distinct cultural background (e.g., Mennonite, Jewish). However, the articles' overall construction of Canadian agrarian tradition remains that farmers are usually white, have multigenerational families, occasionally maintain ethnic cultural traditions, and are generally located in rural regions where they take care of the land and feed city dwellers.

The New Immigrant Farmer

In the articles on local food in Ontario, another distinct farming identity emerges in contrast to this image of the white family farmer: the new immigrant farmer. These articles often feature a backstory of the hardworking immigrant, usually racialized, who comes to Canada, turns to farming as their new source of income, innovates, and grows new, exotic produce—usually in urban or periurban locations. In a 2013 article, one author writes, “My favourite ‘farmer’ is a sophisticated Korean named Yun Joon (Ben) Park. He arrived in Canada in 2000 and soon found himself managing a high-tech mushroom company specializing in exotic Asian varieties such as slim enoki and king oyster, with its meaty white stem and velvety tan cap” (David 2013). Park’s arrival in 2000 is included early in the piece, as was the case in most articles featuring these immigrant farmers, emphasizing their relatively recent entrance and the exciting products they bring with them. The author’s description here is interesting because Park is identified as being Korean; he is not a Korean immigrant, a Korean-Canadian, but simply a Korean. This form of identification works to distance Park from Canadian identity; he remains as exotic as the mushrooms he grows.

Another key example of this narrative is a 2008 article titled “Diverse Harvest for Budding Farmers.” The article discusses an urban incubator farm in Brampton, stating:

> There are common crops at McVean—tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins and strawberries—but also callaloo, okra, chiles, bitter gourds and “dragon hot” Indian peppers. Some of these items are rare in Ontario fields, but pair the ethnic diversity of the GTA[5] with the local food movement—and add new Canadians with agricultural ambitions—and they begin to poke out of the soil. This Thanksgiving weekend the first harvest at McVean drew to a close as the budding farmers picked the last of their crops and began to prepare the land for winter. … Baloch grew up on a farm in Pakistan, where his family grew lemons, oranges, bananas, sugar cane and vegetables. Now Baloch lives in Brampton, works a desk job in Mississauga, and has only dreamed about having his own farm. (Baute 2008)

Here the emphasis is on the novelty of the farmers, the interesting foods that they grow, and the urban and periurban locations of the farms. The farmers are described as new and “budding,” their crops as rare, and farming as their dream. This focus on the innovative and exciting aspect of new crops is typical of many of the articles on immigrant farmers, as is the focus on periurban locations. The profile of Baloch checks all the boxes: the article refers to his country of origin and the exotic produce his family grew there, the plot in Brampton (a Canadian city) that he now farms, the exotic produce he now grows, and his agricultural dream that is as yet unfulfilled.

While it could appear that any representation of immigrants as farmers is automatically positive, the very act of emphasizing and naming their cultural difference, their newness, and their "exotic" tastes and cuisines implies that there is an unnamed norm, as Lipsitz suggests, from which they differ and to which they are being compared. Articles on white or unmarked farmers in Ontario tend not to linger on ethnicity, instead showing differences between the farmers themselves in location and motivation. In contrast, new immigrant farmers are described as existing firmly in urban or near-urban space, and their motivations to farm are reduced to growing exotic produce and gaining economic success via a generalized agrarian "dream" occupation. Similarly, the emphasis on their recent arrival and their countries of origin suggests that they are not truly integrated—they are not fully Canadian. These immigrants may be new Canadians, may be citizens, and may be farmers, but in the discourse they are "the other" when compared to the unnamed white Canadian farmer. As Mackey puts it, there are those who are "unmarked, unhyphenated and hence normative *Canadian* Canadians who are thus implicitly constructed as the authentic and *real* Canadian people, while all others are hyphenated and marked as *cultural*" (Mackey 2002, emphasis in original). The novelty and exoticness tied to these narratives solidifies the normal naturalness of the unmarked "*Canadian* Canadians" who have been farming for many generations.

There are a few exceptions in the articles that suggest a different story of immigration and farming. One such exception was a 2006 article focusing on the increasing number of immigrants turning to farming. The author, Nicholas Keung, writes, "At a time when European immigrants were still settling into rural Canada to grow wheat and potatoes, Sam Kang Shin-Bong bought a 35-acre farm near Newmarket with the aim of growing oriental vegetables" (Keung 2006). This article places Kang's farm operation on the same timescale as European farm settlement and challenges the idea that racialized farmers are a new phenomenon. This article breaks from the trend and chooses not to juxtapose a hardworking new immigrant farmer identity and a historic unmarked white Canadian one. Instead, the author emphasizes the similar timelines of European and non-European migration and shows racialized farmers as being equally established in Canadian farming history. In doing so, the article stands out as a near singular example of this narrative. Except for a few small asides featured in a few articles such as this one, the overwhelming trend in the discourse is a celebration of the new immigrant farmer as an innovation. Keung's article shows that there are other stories that could complicate this discourse beyond newly arrived immigrants growing exotic produce. However, stories of racialized immigrants do not fit into the historic white Canadian settler imaginary, so they continue to be portrayed as new and exotic, and their early contributions remain erased.

SAWP Workers

In contrast to the articles' dominant portrayal of small family farms as white or as the exoticized vision of new immigrant farmers, in reality Ontario's farms overwhelmingly use seasonal agricultural workers to fill a domestic farm labor shortage. Ontario relies on the largest population of these workers of any province in Canada (Preibisch and Binford 2007). The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) was started in 1966 as a visa program that brought in temporary agricultural laborers from Jamaica to fill the shortage on Ontario's farms during the growing season. The program has since expanded to include other provinces as recipients and Mexico and several Caribbean countries as new pools of labor. In the few articles that discuss the SAWP, even fewer mention any of the criticisms leveled at the program, including the precariousness of its workers, deplorable living conditions, racism, and abuse (Preibisch and Binford 2007). Rarely are the workers themselves given a chance to speak.

One article that focuses on the program and includes the workers' voices is titled "United Colours of Berrydom" (Porter 2007). This article accurately notes that most local farm labor is done by temporary seasonal workers or new immigrants willing to fill manual labor positions, in this case Sikh workers from Brampton. It specifically notes that these immigrants and SAWP employees fill "the void of native-born workers," who are unreliable and unwilling to do the work. The article opens with a description of the farm: "At a distance, you can tell the migrants from the immigrants on Bert Andrews' farms by their headwear. Fuchsia turbans and mustard-coloured scarves mean Sikhs from Brampton. Dark baseball caps mean Mexicans. Today, the turbans are picking red raspberries on one side of a thick row of maple trees. On the other side, the baseball caps are deep in the black raspberry bushes—30-odd flats deep, by the look of the mounting crates sitting in the shade of a nearby tree."

This description is interesting because it immediately uses objectivation to describe the immigrant and migrant workers. According to van Leeuwen, objectivation is the representation of a "social actor" by a place or thing closely related to them or by an action in which they are involved (van Leeuwen 2008, 46). This practice succeeds in impersonalizing the subjects and distancing them from the category of human. In the case of this article, turbans and baseball caps—objects—are used to represent the workers.

Although objectivation continues throughout the article, the author does later interview these workers and include direct quotations from their conversations, allowing them to occupy a subject position. However, these workers are quoted half as often in the article as other farmers, experts, and researchers. In fact, in a strict comparison of the lengths of quotations attributed to the two farmers and two workers interviewed, there are only 32 words that are spoken by the farmworkers, compared to 158 words spoken by the farmers. The farmworkers and their living situations are consistently described by the author rather than through the farmworkers' own quotations, while farmers are able to articulate their opinions and statements on the labor situation through direct quotations. Other articles that mention immigrant labor or SAWP seasonal workers follow this trend. Rarely are the workers interviewed and in even fewer cases are they quoted; instead, articles feature direct interviews with farmers that briefly mention the existence of foreign workers. Another such example from a 2009 article focused on a hydroponic farmer who acknowledges the use of migrant labor because of difficulties hiring Canadians: "The Mexican migrants are excellent. They come for a purpose—to work and make money. They're focused on the job. We house them very well—I call it Cadillac accommodation—and try to treat them well. It pays off for everyone" (Taylor 2009).

Again, the farmer speaks on behalf of the farmworkers, who are not interviewed, on their living conditions, motivations, and treatment. There is no interrogation of the fact that local Canadians are unwilling to do this work, and the undertone throughout the exchange is that the migrants have gotten a good opportunity to get ahead. The discourse's continued omission of the complicated legal and social realities of SAWP workers and existing labor disputes is surprising because many farms in Ontario rely on this stream of low-cost and reliable labor to remain profitable (Basok 2002). SAWP workers do not have access to the Canadian dream or even citizenship under the current system, yet the articles portray them as willing participants in the local food system.

Conclusion

The *Toronto Star* articles on local food include a celebratory narrative of multiculturalism woven within their discourses on rural space, Canadian history, and farming identities. However, because multiculturalism and difference are not discussed in relation to power and structural and historical imbalances, the Canadian local food discourse shares several similarities with the US white farm imaginary described by Alkon and McCullen. The articles largely portray Canadian farming as beginning with settlers, depict rural space as the uncontested property of generations of unmarked white farm families, celebrate a one-dimensional image of immigrant farmers, and underrepresent the SAWP workers who do the majority of farm labor in Ontario. In doing so, these articles ignore Indigenous histories, foodways, and land claims, create an "other" that reinforces the image of white famers as traditional and stewards, and leave unquestioned the exploitative and restrictive relationship SAWP workers may have with their employers and the possibility of the agricultural Canadian dream. In the articles' description of multicultural, diverse Canada, difference is celebrated but emptied of privilege or power, so white Canadian farmers who have occupied farmland for generations and people of color who have struggled and continue to struggle to own land and establish themselves in the Canadian landscape are all labeled "immigrant" and positioned as experiencing the same struggle on a level playing field. Indeed, according to this narrative, all Canadians are settlers adapting to the Canadian landscape with the same opportunities, only some people are further along than others.

Since the completion of the original analysis in 2015, there has been more writing on the subject of local food. A new search of articles spanning this period (2015–2018) found 49 relevant works out of 97 total articles returned. Four articles in this new data set mention Indigenous, native, or First Nations people, doubling their presence in the discourse compared to the original data set. One of these articles actually focuses on a new hospital program that provides traditional local food to Indigenous patients. While it is encouraging that in the past three years there does seem to be an increasing acknowledgment of the existence of indigenous people, the majority of articles fall in line with the discourses identified in the original search. Most still promote the image of the family farm absent migrant labor and position the farmer as the original environmental steward. Those tracing local food's connection to Canadian history still place its origins within the colonial period of settlement. The discourse may be changing, but it is happening slowly.

Local food narratives need to include a critical understanding of difference, power, and the racial and colonial structures that undergird agriculture and food production. As long as indigenous land ownership and foodways go unrecognized in conversations on local foodsheds and agricultural land preservation, their agricultural practices and foodways will likewise be marginalized and excluded in practice. Similarly, new racialized immigrant farmers may be celebrated in some articles, but what does this mean when the farming industry functions predominantly on low-wage work with low profit margins? Finally, it will take much longer to improve migrant workers' rights if the industry that benefits most from their work overlooks their existence or speaks for them. At a time when farmers are increasingly deserting the profession because of the high work commitment and low financial rewards (Weiler, Levoke, and Young 2016), it is valuable to reconsider these difficult issues embedded locally in our food communities. Recognizing and prioritizing the voices of indigenous people, migrant farmworkers, and racialized immigrants is a crucial step toward understanding their realities and unveiling the power imbalances that are currently obscured in the discourse on local food.

Notes

1. "Alternative food movement" is an umbrella term defined as commitment to ecologically and socially minded production methods. It includes but is not limited to farmers markets and community-based agriculture.

2. This research was funded in part by the SSHRC Insight Grant no. 76166—Unsettling Perspectives and Contested Spaces: Building Equity and Justice in Canadian Food Activism.

3. The exact search phrase was [(pubid(44892) "local food") *not* ("local food bank" *or* "local food banks")].

4. Although "visible minorities" is still the term used for statistical monitoring, racialized individual or group is considered more appropriate terminology.

5. Greater Toronto area refers to the metropolitan area surrounding the city of Toronto.

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