Spaces Between Theory and Praxis: Exploring Action and Actors in Toronto’s Food Justice Movement

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ABSTRACT

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The Food Justice Movement has positioned itself as a response to the Alternative Food Movement’s alleged failure to address systemic injustices characterizing the conventional food system. Despite being rooted in a theory of justice and equity, there is uncertainty as to what the movement stands for, and how goals, values, and meanings can be translated into practice (Slocum & Cadieux, 2015; Slocum, et. al., 2016). Guided by a conceptual framework, this research combines content analysis of published materials and the distillation of semi-structured interviews with 21 representatives from 16 organizations to investigate programs, perceptions, and possibilities in the evolving Toronto food justice landscape. The study characterizes features of these organizations; explores individuals’ understandings of food justice; and makes connections between individual and systemic influences on their work. Employing prefigurative politics and emotional geographies, this study unpacks tacit theories within food justice literature that may expand the spaces food justice occupies.
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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Locating Food through a Justice Lens

In food systems literature, we are seeing an increase in scholars applying lenses of justice, power, and equity. The application of this lens arises from an understanding that systemic and structural oppressions are to be blamed for injustices in the conventional food system. Scholars trace relationships between these oppressions and commonly-cited issues in the conventional food system: those of hunger (Guthman, 2008b; Short, Guthman, & Raskin, 2007; Slocum, 2006, 2011), labour abuses (Preibisch, 2010; Walia, 2010), consolidation of farm land and associated farmer income insecurity (Albrecht, Johnson, Hamann, Ohberg, & CoDyre, 2013), land appropriation and indigenous displacement (Daschuk, 2013; Kamal, Linklater, Thompson, Dipple, & Committee, 2015), and environmentally-harmful agro-practices (Foley et al., 2005).

Slocum (2006) asserts that in efforts to improve social justice in the food system, to base efforts only around questions of poverty reduces the issue from one of systemic roots to one of only economics. Using income and poverty as a lens is not only insufficient as a means of understanding food system injustices, but also dangerous; Slocum (2006) points out that this can minimize the breadth of negative implications said injustices have for “health, well-being and safety, [and] a socially [dismissed] history and canon.” Furthermore, a focus on consumer incomes and the (un)affordability of foods may hide the multitude of injustices occurring on the scales of the producer, food worker, and displaced/marginalized Indigenous communities. A better way of studying food systems—and the approach to realize an equitable, alternative food system—is through a lens of power, which forwards a holistic approach to (food) system(ic) transformation.

1.2 Geographic Context: Food insecurity within Canada

Although the literature is predominantly limited to an American context, legacies of power imbalances and structural oppression exist today as inequities within Canada’s food system. This upcoming section will use the lens of power and contextualized history as introduced in Chapter 1.1 to contextualize the issues in Canada’s food security profile.
Canada presents itself as a country with bountiful agricultural produce and equitable food security, while scholars and UN officials present challenges to this narrative. Wakefield, Fredrickson, and Brown (2015) challenge Canada’s geographical imageries of a food secure, rich nation with “agricultural abundance”, and assert that reality depicts it as a nation that is rippled with inequalities and food insecure populations. After analyzing 101 English language policy publications, Wakefield et al. (2015) says that the conceptualization of Canada as a food secure nation, while omitting the historical and continued colonization, has material consequences for how Canada addresses it. They write that the ill effects are then disproportionately burdened by the poor and those living in remote areas, as the framing affects resource distribution.

This is supported by the visit to Canada by the Special Rapporteur on the right to food, Oliver de Schutter, in 2012. De Schutter (2012) writes that Canada is party to two covenants that affirm human rights—food being among them—that affirms Canada’s responsibility to fulfill every individual’s right to food. However, Canada is reported to be failing. In particular, de Schutter (2012) notes it is failing its indigenous populations “with considerably lower levels of access to adequate food relative to the general population” due to its “long history of political and economic marginalization” (p.16). It reports that the Inuit Health Survey reported that 70 percent of adults were food insecure in Nunavut—and that this is the highest documented food insecurity rate in a developed country for any aboriginal population (p.16). In 2014, the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) demonstrated that twelve percent of households—3.2 million individuals, and nearly 1 million children—reported experiencing some level of food insecurity; this number is significantly higher than it was in 2008 (Tarasuk et al., 2016).

However, it is important to note this survey does not measure food insecurity on First Nations reserves or homeless people, among other populations. The report states that although these populations do not comprise significant proportions of the population, they do have a high vulnerability to food insecurity that likely means the reported levels of food insecurity in Canada underrepresent the extent to which this is a crisis in Canada (p7). Reported characteristics that increase vulnerability to food insecurity in Canada are being of low income, being Aboriginal (25.7%), and being Black (29.4) (Tarasuk et al., 2016). The disproportionate burden of food insecurity on Indigenous populations and people of colour underpin the significance of
understanding Canada’s history of structural racialization and colonialization when studying and proposing solutions to contemporary food insecurity.

1.3 Research Gap

Recognizing the shortcomings resulting from efforts to create an alternative food movement without a comprehensive understanding of power, initiatives are motivated to form a subsect of the AFM—an equity-oriented ‘food justice movement’. United in its analysis of the structural and systemic issues within the food system, the literature about this movement presents a form of food justice whose theoretical underpinning is steadfastly committed to anti-racism, feminism, and, more common in Canadian literature, anti-colonialism. There is also consensus that, depending on geographical context, food justice relates differently to each of these three concerns. There is, however, less certainty and agreement in how these underpinnings translate into action by the non-governmental initiatives that dominate the movement, regardless of place (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014; Allen, 2008; Guthman, 2008a, 2008b). This uncertainty in how organizations carry out food justice work drives scholars to also question how the organizations (allegedly) understand food justice. It is apparent that even the justice-motivated sub-paradigm of thinking about food systems is not without its shortcomings. Food justice has come into a critiquing of its own in terms of the ways in which justice is described and pursued. To explore how the movement presents itself through its organizations in Toronto, Ontario, this research analyzes how Toronto food justice organizations implement food justice and articulate its ideologies. This thesis uses the term ‘movement’ in line with scholarly discourse that invoke this terminology; ‘movement’ herein speaks to the group of organizations that appear to share a common goal of ‘food justice,’ and is not defined by the degree to which these groups do or do not work in a coordinated manner with one another and identify as ‘a movement.’ Through this research, I seek to add to the understanding of how food justice is interpreted and enacted in place, as well as exploring what factors for success and challenge they face.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

Through a document review of public organizational data and semi-structured interviews with organizational representatives, the aim of this research is to explore how food system actors interpret and operationalize food justice through their efforts in either or both the policy and community spheres. This aim will be met through the following three objectives:
1) Develop a conceptual framework for exploring common core attributes of food justice organizations.
2) Apply the conceptual framework to examine and characterize the nature and diversity of groups working explicitly towards food justice in Toronto
3) Document perceived limitations and opportunities of organizational programming to improve food justice as perceived and experienced by actors within food justice organizations.

In the following five chapters, I will address the objectives outlined above to meet the broader research aim. Chapter Two provides an extensive literature review situating the food justice movement against critiques of the alternative food movement, and describing the movements that ideologically and temporally border it. It then outlines an ‘anatomy of food justice’, providing an in-depth exploration of the representation of the movement in academic literature. It concludes with the development of a conceptual framework that guides the results and the conclusion. Chapter Three explains the methods used to gather and analyze the data. Chapter Four, the first results chapter, characterizes the structural attributes of the sample organizations. Chapter Five continues with more results presented in two sections: the first provides an in-depth exploration of how organizational representatives understand food justice and their organizations’ role it (5.1); the second categorizes how the representatives perceive opportunities and barriers to their work (5.2). Lastly, Chapter 6 presents reflections on two emerging themes. This chapter is concluded by outlining the significance of this work for scholarship and future research.
Chapter 2 Literature Review

As outlined in Chapter 1.1, this research project is grounded in a lens that frames inequities within Canada’s food system as indicators of injustice. The significance of such a framing and its contentious translation to practice will be expanded upon in this chapter to further contextualize and situate this research in a thorough grounding of the food justice movement (FJM). Chapter 2.1 highlights the unique role claimed by the FJM through a critique of the rhetoric and practice of the predominant alternative food movement (AFM). Following the review of what food justice claims it is not, this chapter begins its exploration of what food justice is through an ‘anatomy’ of food justice ideology in Chapter 2. It does so through a history of social justice and food system movements with which food justice shares similarities and from which may partially originate (Chapter 2.2.1), and through a review of the ways that the literature characterizes the most defining features of the movement (Chapter 2.2.2). Chapter 2.3 attends to what it means ‘to do’ food justice in an overview of how food justice principles are applied throughout food system work (2.3.1) and Slocum and Cadieux’s outlining of processes essential to food justice (2.3.2). The lack of consensus on what food justice means and the contentious nature of ‘doing’ food justice provides the motivation for this research project. Chapter 2.4 explores the opportunities for research and further questioning that can be gathered from the existing literature. This chapter culminates in a conceptual framework of the mechanisms through which food justice is practiced in a ‘food justice organization’.

2.1 Critiques of the Alternative Food Movement

The multitude of issues raised with the industrial and conventional food system have catalyzed the AFM to attempt to dismantle it through various strategies to varying degrees of success. This section will problematize how ‘alternative’ the alternative food movement is due to its tendency to overlook questions of social justice and equity in the food system. Seminal author on the intersectionality of food and race, Slocum (2006), calls upon the approach of Gibson-Graham (2006) that centers on the “progressive possibility” of the alternative food movement. Prefacing this section with that same approach serves to portray that, despite its critiques, there is still belief in potential within the alternative food movement. This belief, however, demands a critical exploration of the ways in which social justice is obstructed within the AFM such that they can
be remedied. Allen & Wilson (2008) recognize that although it is not the movement’s intentions to reinforce past inequalities, this is a common occurrence because the movement presents solutions that fail to align with the scale on which the injustices occur (Slocum, et. al, 2016).

The two authors continue that the most popularized movements within the AFM, such as Slow Food and ‘Buy Local’ food campaigns, champion closer connections between farmer and consumer without recognizing the policies and inequalities that fostered the distance in the first place. This results in an alternative only for those able to afford and participate in it, primarily being the white middle class. The two main critiques of the alternative food movement are in the discourse that frames it and the resultant actions taken.

The discourse around the alternative food movement is problematic because it is prone to overlooking histories and realities of those other than the white, middle class population. Prominent author Guthman (2008), and Holt-Giménez & Wang (2011) who quote and agree with Guthman (2008)’s work, use Michael Pollan, a leading and influential author in the alternative food movement narrative, to showcase these critiques. Pollan is known for his work that celebrates “voting with your fork” as a means for food system change (Pollan, 2006). There are many ways to dissect the problems in the discourse that “voting with your fork” represents. The first two relate to the whiteness of the language used. First, Pollan (2006)’s phrase normalizes the economic and social privilege that allow the predominantly white, middle class consumer to afford the time and money to vote with their forks. By promoting ‘voting with your fork’ as the solution, and offering “those who can, should” as a respite, Pollan (2006) ignores the historical, racial, and market forces that allow some to do this while precluding others (Guthman, 2008). Instead, this refrain assumes that education, access, and cost are the primary barriers to accessing food, as opposed to the barriers imbedded in societal structure through racism, classism, and other forms of oppression present. When food—the knowledge around it and preferences towards it—is identified as the issue, the systems that have and continue to actively create these inequalities remain unchallenged.

The emphasis that this discourse places on the market as the primary solution is also problematic as this continues to exclude those already marginalized by the food system (Guthman, 2008; Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011). This method is asserted to be dangerous because it does not work to change the structures in place that are actively oppressing many communities, nor does it
recognize the oppression as happening. The narrative of market-based solutions is argued to limit society as only consumers, and not as citizens with other pathways for change (Levkoe, 2006). Guthman (2008) frames this as “reflect(ing) delimited politics of the possible”, by which she means that the alternative food movement has narrowed its field of vision to a constrictive realm of possibility. Advocating for an alternative food system could include actions such as “eliminating redlining, investing in urban renewal, expanding entitlement programs, along with eliminating toxins from and improving the quality of the mainstream food supply,” but instead, its restriction to the market-place reflects what the activists allow themselves to see (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011). Scholars highlight a few shortcomings of such an approach: it replaces sustained collective action with individual consumption (Szasz, 2007); it frames the market as innocuous and as ‘the solution’ (Guthman, 2008); and, it places the solution in what initiated the problem in the first place (Allen, 2010; Ramírez, 2015). The literature largely concludes that the failure of the alternative food movement to realize transformative change is a fault of this predominating discourse of market-based solutions.

The discourse of the alternative food movement is significant for its impact in shaping the action the movement takes. The discourse and actions associated with the alternative food movement are closely intertwined. As such, when the discourse misdiagnoses the cause of current food system injustices, the consequent remedial actions are also misdirected. This results in the movement missing social justice issues and concerns of disadvantaged and oppressed populations (Guthman, 2008b; Hinrichs & Allen, 2008; Sbicca, 2012). This, in effect, reproduces the very inequalities they seek to fix. Just as issues of class, race and inequalities have gone largely unnoticed in the AFM discourse, so too are they absent in its actions (Allen, 2004; Guthman, 2008b; Slocum, 2006). In Slocum’s (2007) view, these incomplete efforts cultivate a space in which whiteness emerges. She says that “while the ideals of healthy food, people and land are not intrinsically white, the objectives, tendencies, strategies, the emphases and absences and the things overlooked in community food make them so” (p.526). When shaped and animated by the white middle class, these spaces become welcoming primarily for that very same group. Hinrichs and Allen (2008) call this “selective patronage”: the exclusion of disadvantaged groups stemming from inequalities perpetuated by the capitalist economy and industrial mode of production (p.331). The discourse and the actions of the alternative food
movement are intertwined and reinforce one another, and together act to prevent the AFM from making transformative change.

2.2 An Anatomy of Food Justice

This section will explore the principal features of food justice as presented in academic literature. As discussed in Section 2.1, the food justice and the alternative food movements frame food system issues in contrasting ways. The former takes a structural and systemic analysis, while the latter presents them as being predominantly logistical and technical in nature. Building a unified food justice movement, however, becomes a complicated—and imperative—process because of the multitude of issues addressed under the term ‘food justice’ by both the literature and by grassroots initiatives. Cadieux & Slocum (2015) caution about implications of attempting to define ‘food justice’, warning that it may become an act of “policing the term and limiting whose knowledge becomes part of the definition” (p. 12). The complication of defining this term becomes greater when we consider that social and geographic contexts dramatically effect the meaning of food justice to different populations. However, tensions also exist in trying to pursue an ideal without outlining what is being pursued (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). For this reason, and with these tensions in mind, scholars have embarked on an attempt to outline generalizable, widely-applicable themes and principles of food justice such that it can act as a united movement even across different contextual backgrounds.

This section will thereby be divided according to the numerous themes through which food justice is explored in existing literature. First, this review explores historical social justice movements and contemporary food movements related to food justice. Studying these movements provides a useful model for understanding the roots of food justice in order to envision its future. Second, this review covers how existing literature portrays food justice principles and ideologies. Third, it turns to reviewing examples of organizations ‘doing’ food justice. In doing so, this section will provide a holistic overview of the presentation of multiple aspects of food justice in academic literature.

2.2.1 Historically and Conceptually Bordering Movements

Analyzing the commonalities and distinctions between historic movements that share similar ideologies with today’s food justice movement provides a useful perspective from which to study food justice and its practice (Fairbairn, 2012). One such social justice movement that,
before the term existed, exhibited themes commonly found in the literature surrounding food justice movements, was the Black Panther Party (BPP, or “the Party”). We can also review agri-food movements through history as a way to draw out the unique character of food justice vis-a-vis other movements. The agri-food movements from which authors say food justice evolved include community food security, sustainable agriculture and environmental justice, and food sovereignty. American and Canadian histories do not perfectly transpose over one another, making the usage of US-dominated movements an imperfect tool for this analysis of the rise of food justice. However, there is little Canadian literature that speaks to this. This section illuminates meaningful overlaps and contradictions between the aforementioned movements and today’s model of food justice, in order to enhance understanding of what food justice is working alongside, as well as what it is not.

**Black Panthers Party**

Scholars highlight similarities between the more radical Food Justice movement of today and the radical transformative politics of the Black Panthers Party (BPP) in the American late 1960’s (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014; Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011). The Party used food as an instrument through which they could rally change around structural racism and systemic inequities. BPP partially animated its aims through food distribution via food bag distributions to families, free breakfast meals to school children, and planting gardens in schools. Similar to current food justice literature, the Panthers did not perceive this food provisioning as a solution to such immense systemic problems. In addition to the nutritional contributions to its communities the food made, it was also seen as a strategy to “take themselves from the boot of [their] oppressors” (Hilliard, 2008). Defying the prescribed state of hunger, feeding their communities was a tool to resist the status quo, and to build as well as demonstrate their capacity to be their own agents of change (Dyson, 2010; Dyson, Brooks, & Jeffries, 2007). Similarly, in a system that actively marginalizes and oppresses people of colour, solely having their basic needs met was seen as an act of resistance in itself (Abron, 1998; Curran & González, 2011) and an act of healing for current and historic traumas (Pope & Flanigan, 2013). These concepts will be explored further in the findings of this research. The Party, while not working under the label of ‘food justice’ that exists today, shared many ideologies and strategies with today’s movement.
Community Food Security

Many scholars assert that Community Food Security (CFS) may act as a conceptual neighbour to food justice (Alkon & Mares, 2012). CFS grew from social workers and public health workers identifying a need to analyze food security issues from a community scale perspective (Fairbairn, 2012). Despite the fact that a lot of food security discourse and action originated out of the 1960’s and 1970’s civil rights movement, much of the rhetoric around food security today places responsibility for making change on the individual (Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996). In this light, CFS organizers intentionally focused their analysis at the community-scale (Alkon & Mares, 2012).

Community food security, in theory, strives to build healthy and just communities through emphasizing social justice, environmental sustainability, and equity in their work (Levkoe, 2006). Democratic decision-making is at the forefront of CFS initiatives. It sees the locus for change at the community level, while asserting for bigger structural and global shifts as well (ibid.). Even despite these positive intentions, CFS has also been critiqued for emphasizing market-based solutions and therein placing the responsibility on the shoulders of the individual to make profound change (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Allen, 2004).

Inclusive of the critiques against it, Community Food Security contributes to our understanding of food justice. Alkon & Mares (2012) say that food justice builds on the community food security framework by introducing and emphasizing a racial and socio-economic lens to its structural analysis of the inequalities rampant in the food system. Indeed, food justice is also unique from CFS for the significance it places on a place’s history and how that, in conjunction with current forces, contributed to both the legacy of injustices as well as the geographical distribution of marginalized peoples in marginalized communities. Food justice makes a point at looking at histories on the global, community, and personal scales. Thus, food justice focuses on where and why the community is a certain way, and which structural barriers are relevant in each community’s context. With its discourse and analytic gaze focused at the community level, the CFS movement is less able to take this important nuanced view. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) underline that food justice did not necessarily come as an evolution of analyzing the shortcomings of community food security—but it was motivated by its dissatisfaction with the way the community food security discourse and movement were framing and addressing the issues.
While the literature has a tendency of framing these two movements as oppositional, they may not act that way on the ground. Morales (2011:156) writes that the actors of the United States’ most influential food justice network regrouped as such due to a need for more diverse representation and greater attention to racial and class issues in the United States’ biggest community food security advocate group. Even with this history, they still cultivate an important working partnership. Morales quotes Erika Allen, one of the founders of the aforementioned instrumental food justice group, Growing Food Justice Initiative, as stating, “food justice is about complementing Community Food Security Coalition, not supplanting it” (2011: p 156). In this way, understanding community food security may be beneficial for food justice advocates as the two movements continue to learn and grow, and even work, together.

Sustainable agriculture and environmental justice

The sustainable agriculture and environmental justice movements may also provide significant fodder for understanding the food justice movement. Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) are accredited with providing the earliest literature that called for a partnership between the environmental justice and sustainable agriculture movements. Environmental justice is a movement that examines how race and class draw lines between those whose health benefits from their surrounding environment and those whose health is costed by environmental degradation (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009). The environmental costs and benefits of food production, however, have eluded inclusion in the analysis (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996; Mares & Pena, 2011:202-203). When food was discussed, scholars assert that the structural lens was primarily lost (Mares & Peña, 2011:202-203).

Sustainable agriculture, on the other hand, has largely focused on technical and market-based solutions to conventional food production and its immense ecological degradation. It works through many actors and pathways to improve the farmer-consumer relationship, the ecological stewardship of agricultural land, and agri-food policy (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009). The priority of the sustainable agriculture movement is the success of the small-scale organic farmer, with social justice often left out of their sustainability model (Allen, 2008; Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996; Guthman, 2008b; Slocum, 2006). Although the framing of food justice has changed since its original description by Gottlieb and Fisher (1996), what remains current is their suggestion that if the two related but disjunct movements worked together they could build a movement that
mobilized around, “system-based issues of hunger, access, quality, and availability, as well as related questions of how food is grown, processed…and distributed” (pg 193). Allen and Norgaard (2009), two decades later, reiterate and cite Gottlieb and Fisher (1996) in their statement that food justice acts as the perfect vehicle to look at racially stratified health and environmental benefits to ecologically produced foods. The shortcomings of both sustainable agriculture and environmental justice complement each other and create a space for food justice to unite them.

The connection between environmental justice and food justice is deeper than solely where food justice fills a gap. We can see a strong resemblance in the histories of these two movements: both were formed out of the need for greater social justice in low-income communities of colour; both movements identify the problem as being systemic, rooted deep in legacies of historical societal structures and power imbalances (Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996). It is clear that since it took several decades after the Gottlieb and Fisher article for food justice to take shape, food justice was not a child of the two aforementioned movements. However, looking at food justice through the gaps of environmental justice and sustainable agriculture allows us to see the potential of food justice not solely as a movement in and of itself, but as a uniter of other movements that could potentiate one another in a common discourse.

Food sovereignty
To further enrich our understanding of food justice, we can turn to the food sovereignty movement, which shares commonalities in terms of analytical scale and of core motives and tenets. The leading international movement on food sovereignty by peasant farmers, La Via Campesina, defines food sovereignty as, “the right of peoples and governments to choose the way food is produced and consumed in order to respect our livelihoods, as well as policies that support this choice” (Desmarais, 2007:57). Both food justice and food sovereignty seek a redistribution of power and productive resources in the efforts to restore greater control in our food system by those who have been marginalized and oppressed by it. The two movements work towards a food system that contributes to health and wellbeing, instead of allocating these privileges based on racial and class lines. Seminal authors on food justice, Cadieux and Slocum (2015) write that these movements grew as responses to “technocratic and middle-class consumer-oriented approaches” (pg 4) that the movements determined to be incorrect diagnoses
of the issues. Food sovereignty and food justice assert that food insecurity predominated by marginalized peoples and uneven land distribution are the result of structural and systemic inequities.

Food sovereignty and food justice share a central tenet of striving for a democratization of the food system (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Desmarais, 2007; Holt-Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). This democratization, as described by Holt Giménez and Shattuck (2011), refers to increasing citizen participation, redressing how land is distributed, and dismantling corporate food monopolies (see also McMichael, 2013). It seeks to prioritize the people involved in the food system, by ways of providing fair prices to food producers and labourers (Alkon & Mares, 2012). For food justice, a more democratic food system is one that recognizes the necessity of equitably providing basic rights, including food, and disregards the current model of devaluing certain groups of citizens based on social constructs such as race and class (Mares & Peña, 2011: 203). Democratic practices, both movements assert, are an important tool to bringing equity to the food system.

2.2.2 Features of Food Justice

The literature depicts food justice as a movement that “seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010: 7). Based on its implication of hegemonic systems in both the (re)creation and (re)inforcement of social inequities, food justice demands a complete transformation—and not solely a reforming—of the contemporary food system (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010:8; Alkon & Norgaard, 2009). Food justice thus exists to offer an alternative to attempts to reduce food insecurity without working to dismantle the power imbalances and unjust structures that are at fault (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Guthman, 2008; Allen, 2004; Slocum, 2006; Agyeman & McEntee, 2014). That these inequities are disproportionately distributed on people of colour, indigenous populations, and other marginalized populations and identities is the result of historical, and since unabated, oppressive structures such as systemic racism, settler colonialism, and capitalism. Food justice acts as a movement that stresses the myriad injustices related to food and how people interact with it—as well as the ways in which populations and identities are differentially positioned within the food system—as products of perpetuated historical elements. Food justice attributes those as the roots of food systems issues that need redressing.
By outlining four tangible entry points for transformative food justice work, Cadieux and Slocum (2015) further articulate how food justice materializes (p.14). These entry points, or “branches” are:

1) “Trauma and Inequity”: This branch entails recognizing and addressing social trauma from unabated inequalities based on race, gender, and class. Working from the standpoint of trauma, the food movement is enriched by raising the importance and impact of both historical and continued social trauma. It allows for a more human analysis of inequity, and brings the material consequences of inequity such that it is ongoing and not solely reproduced by societal structures but also relived. As such, this branch has an added sense of immediacy needed to ask if their actions and rhetoric contribute to the resolution of systemic racism.

2) “Exchange”: This branch proposes a reinvention of the market. It asserts that the conventional market degrades community, and uses social constructs such as race and class to differentiate between people. This type of work re-envisions markets that put the control, choice, and benefits into the hands of communities, replacing economic exclusion with interdependence and community resilience. It aims to erase socially and economically-imposed hierarchies, and replaces them with opportunities for equitable access to ‘good’ food.

3) “Land”: This branch of food justice challenges the conceptualization of land as a resource to be exploited and owned. It proposes to a) break down existing barriers to land access that marginalized communities and persons face and b) recognizes the myriad values land can have, beyond extraction, cultivation and exploitation for human benefit. It repudiates placing human, primarily economic, gain at the forefront of decision making and valuing.

4) Labour: This branch promotes labour relations that promote livable wages for fair work. It values women’s labour that often does not receive adequate compensation or recognition.

2.3 “Doing” Food Justice

2.3.1 Branches of Food Justice Work

Using Cadieux and Slocum (2015)’s delineation of the many intersecting and adjacent issues to food justice, it becomes clear that it is not necessary to be working directly with food to be
working in solidarity with, or towards the realization of, food justice. Resultantly, food justice takes on many faces. Food justice work begins where our food begins, on the farm, and extends outwards in various directions. It encompasses justice for those who are in the fields and processing plants; a just supply system that supports local production and local economies, and that operates without excess or industrial waste; justice for those who have difficulty accessing food; and justice in the form of access to nutritionally dense foods, and the knowledge and skills to prepare them. Throughout all of these branches of food justice, the movement places race, ethnicity, class, and gender issues at the forefront of the conversation “regarding how, by whom, and to what ends the food system is transformed” (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010: 229).

It is beyond the scope of this literature review to explore all the possible expressions of food justice, so this paper will constrain exploration to three examples predominant in the literature: food labourer abuses, food access, and food reclamation. The following discussion centres on these three areas to help illustrate how food justice theory manifests to take shape on the ground.

Labour injustices are normalized throughout the food sector—production, processing, packaging, distribution, and retail—in the form of exploitative wages and unpaid labour, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, and sexual abuse (Billy, 2015; Schlosser, 2001). Labour justice movement overlaps with food justice in the pursuit of fair wages and working conditions: for example, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) campaign across the United States to “Fight for $15” in effort to attain higher wages and the right to unionize for workers in the fast food industry (ibid). Gross injustices are tolled on migrant labourers in particular; these abuses, fueled and perpetuated by structurally racist governmental policies, receive the greatest attention by food justice activists (Agriculture Workers Alliance (AWA), 2015; A. Weiler & Otero, 2013). Whereas much of the academic literature focuses on the American context, migrant labour justice in Canada is a burgeoning field for academia and activists (Preibisch, 2010; Preibisch & Otero, 2014; A. M. Weiler, Levoke, & Young, 2016). Food justice work takes the shape of advocating for fairness and dignity for labourers throughout the food system (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015).

Food justice groups also advocate for a food system that enables equitable access to adequate, healthy, and culturally appropriate foods. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) assert that the ways in which ‘food justice’ and the ‘alternative food movement’ address this must be distinguished
from one another. Satin-Hernandez and Robinson (2015)’s case study of the Somerville mobile market highlight that a community-municipality partnership can have the potential to defy notions of farmers markets as ‘white spaces’. Instead, they directly reflected the interests and needs of the immigrant-rich population that it serves (Satin-Hernandez & Robinson, 2015). The Freedom Farmers Market in Oakland, California is another example that serves as both an alternative space that provides fresh foods grown by Black farmers as well as an alternative culture by supporting and gathering around Black culture and economies (Meyers, 2015). In this instance, the market is not only an accessible source of fresh produce but it also claims space in a movement typified as being primarily for and by white bodies and foods (Meyers, 2015; Slocum, 2007). Improving access in a just and equitable way depends on the neighbourhood and community context.

Food justice initiatives may further equity by reconciling immense amounts of industrial surplus food and food waste with poverty and hunger alleviation. Food reclamation for redistribution to those without access is oft debated as either being a vehicle for food justice or a form of charity that perpetuates the system instead of shifting it (Saul & Curtis, 2013). Not only does this abundance of food being wasted signify a great waste of the resources that went into creating it, but it also underpins how flawed the system is that an excess of food and of hunger exist simultaneously. However, it is argued that the immediate assistance offered by food banks and/or kitchens, while not necessarily directly challenging the systems that created the excess in the first place, is a necessary step to curtailing hunger until the system can adequately and appropriately meet society’s needs (Saul & Curtis, 2013). It is when we see these spaces double as a site of advocacy and activism towards larger action against the inequities rampant in the food system (Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011) that we see food justice in action. Food reclamation may fit into the food justice ‘rubric’ as it provides critical resistance to the injustices created by the industrial food system in its wanton waste and excess.

These three examples—labour, food-access and waste—provide tangible examples of the ways we see food justice enacted on the ground.

2.3.2 Food Justice Processes

This section will detail the processes that Cadieux and Slocum (2015) have assessed to be those defining a food justice initiative. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) and Slocum and Cadieux (2015)’s
analysis is unique from other food justice literature as they include the mechanisms and processes implemented by actors—and not solely their field of focus—in their description of what constitutes ‘food justice’ work. Cadieux and Slocum (2015) point out that it is equally important to consider the ways by which organizations work towards change as it is to consider what one works to change. It is important to note, however, that the concept of justice internal to the organization does not receive much attention outside of this series of articles; in fact, the authors assert that it is because of the lack of scholarship on doing food justice that they were compelled to write them (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015; Slocum & Cadieux, 2015; Slocum, et al, 2016).

Cadieux and Slocum (2015) outline five processes to guide food justice interventions; they are

1) **Recognize and discuss systemic power imbalances openly:**
Since food justice is founded on the need to dismantle power imbalances that privilege some and marginalize others, “bringing power relations into the open is essential” (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015) to address them. Food justice differentiates itself from the rest of the AFM through its explicit work to redress the power imbalances, as well as resists their insidious and hidden nature by openly discussing them.

2) **Apply a progressive sense of place:**
Here, Cadieux and Slocum use Massey’s “progressive sense of place” to emphasize that although food justice organizations need to work within their specific geographic context, they also must recognize the interconnectivity of places beyond geographical borders. A “progressive sense of place” acknowledges that places and injustices are not isolated geographically but connected socially through uneven power relations (Massey 1993, 1994). Allen (2010) also brings attention to the reification of ‘local’, asserting that “geography is not a defensible arbiter of the scope of caring, action, or understanding” (p.8). These authors agree that geographical borders do not delineate historical or current, covert or hidden, socio-political relationships.

3) **Use “ability to bring about systemic change” as a criterion for both policies and programs:**
Food justice actors should ensure that they are working towards transformative change and not solely reform and symptom alleviation (Levkoe, 2006; Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011). Johnston & Baker (2005) propose that one tool to invoke systemic change is to work across many scales.
The way organizations may enforce internal policies with this criterion will be discussed in further detail through the findings of this research.

4) *Thoughtfully deliberate what may or may not serve as constructive allies/partners:* Cadieux and Slocum (2015) stress the significance of alliances to the realization of food justice relies on this. They describe essential attributes of a beneficial partnership as ones that are democratic and decentering privilege, transparent, as well as cognizant of power imbalances that may exist between and within groups (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). Respectful partnerships have been reported by other scholars to help organizations work towards self-determination (Bradley & Galt, 2014); strengthen the movement and redistribute resources (Holt-Gimenez & Wang, 2011);

5) *Promote democracy and equality in every level of institutional practices:* This relates to the necessity of not only striving for democracy and equity in systems external to the organization, but bringing them to life within the organization itself (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). The organization in this way models a microcosm of the change it works to effect.

The literature suggests that successful food justice work comprises many features that includes explicit recognition of power imbalances (Slocum & Cadieux, 2015); geographic and structural scales of work (Allen, 2003; Massey, 1993, 1994); meaningful intention towards systems change (Holt-Gimenez, 2011; Johnston & Baker, 2005; Levkoe, 2006); strategic partnerships and meaningful alliances (Slocum & Cadieux, 2015); and consistency of ideological values throughout the institution itself (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). These features open dialogue within food justice to matters of organizational justice, which this study’s findings contribute to in greater depth. The multiplicity of these features, in a non-hierarchal order, help to conceptualize beyond principles of food justice into means of enacting it. This list will help build a conceptual framework of what the literature demonstrates as ‘doing’ food justice.

2.4 Conclusion and Research Gap

This chapter scanned and synthesized literature on the scholarship and practice of food justice to reveal both complementary and contested assertions of the potential of the alternative food movement, and the obstacles that obstruct the realization of this potential. One significant obstacle is that the predominant alternative food movement’s analysis of the problem, and as
such their framing of the solution, do not accurately represent the significance of historically uneven power relations. Understanding the shortcomings that characterize the AFM demonstrated the need for a food movement that more wholly incorporated issues of justice and equity into their analysis and approach. Following the discussion of what food justice distances itself from, this literature review provided an overview of what food justice strives to be. This was done first by looking to conceptually bordering movements: the literature depicts food justice as having emerged from a history of social change and anti-oppressive ideological movements as well as frustration with the manner through which change was being galvanized in other areas of the food movement. Finally drawing our focus to the food justice movement itself, Cadieux and Slocum (2015) and Slocum and Cadieux (2015) were drawn from heavily to substantiate the reader’s understanding of food justice through a detailed description of the features of food justice principles and practices.

Despite the wealth of literature on food movements, and the burgeoning literature on food justice in particular, several issues have yet to be addressed. There is little consistency or certainty in how these organizations define food justice, and perhaps even less coherence in how they pursue it as an objective (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). There is thus a recognized need to explore in greater detail how food justice is understood and implemented on the ground by food justice actors and advocates as opposed to the esoteric understandings provided by the literature: in short, a chance to expand the empirical richness of food justice scholarship. In addition to illuminating what it means to work towards food justice, there is also recognized need to explore what enables and obstructs food justice work in order to contribute to its progress. Hence, there is little research looking at multiple organizations and seeing how the definitions and pathways vary or stay consistent amongst them. Research on food justice is often then relegated to the organizational scale, and the relationship between food justice actors and their geographic contexts is not commonly examined. Research to date asserts the significance of historical and geographic context in the formation and undergoing of food justice work (Allen, 2010; Cadieux & Slocum, 2015; Guthman, 2008b; Kepkiewicz et al., 2016; Slocum, 2006). This study explores Toronto’s food justice movement.
2.5 Conceptual Framework of a Food Justice Organization

The literature reviewed in this chapter, taken together, provides the grist for a simple conceptual framework designed to delineate the scope and nature of the research and call attention to the reciprocal role of both organizational structure and actor agency with reference to food justice work in Toronto, Ontario.

As noted above, this research seeks to augment the empirical-based understanding of food justice as it plays out in the everyday experiences of actors on the program delivery side. It does so with reference to two intertwined dimensions: the material or “structural” dimensions of selected food justice initiatives (their architectural features) and their human dimension as reflected in living and evolving knowledge, values, beliefs and aspirations of people who work within such initiative in pursuit of greater food justice.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework of a Food Justice Organization

Figure one represents several factors that can be seen, cumulatively, to span the core elements of an organization’s practice of food justice. It investigates an organization’s enactment of food
justice principles alongside different elements of an organization’s structure, and is used to inform the lines of inquiry pursued in this research.

This framework is constructed from the writings of Cadieux & Slocum (2015), Holloway et al. (2007), and Allen, FitzSimmons, Goodman, & Warner (2003). From combined learnings from these scholars, this framework conceptualizes a food justice organization’s practice as being a product of both its understanding of food justice as well as its more mechanical organizational structure. This acts to contextualize the primary focus of food justice literature in answering the question of how ‘to do’ food justice—an organization’s programming, one of five segments in the outer circle of the framework—within the organization as a whole as well as within its ideological foundations.

This conceptual framework informs the methodologies that will be explained in Chapter Three, as well as guides the organization of the following results chapters. Chapter Four presents a detailed analysis on organizational structure, divided by the sections outlined in Figure One. The inner circle that examines organizational ideological underpinning, along with personal experiences of food justice, comprise Chapter Five.

Informing the outside circle of the framework, Allen et. al (2003) and Holloway et al. (2007) both draw attention to the significance of an organization’s structure in its ability to contradict paradigmatic power relations. Holloway et al. (2007) uses a heuristic analytical framework to assess different aspects of organizational composition and structure to determine where there are points of leverage to effect change. Allen et. al (2003) includes organizational structure alongside ideological motivations and geographical contexts to better understand limitations of organizations within the California AFM. This portion of the framework thereby contains five segments that together work to characterize an organization’s structure. These sections span the organization’s structure and mandate, its media for and means of implementing food justice, the linkages and networks the organization engages through, as well as the pathways through which it pursues food justice.

The inner segment of the framework draws on Cadieux and Slocum (2015)’s article that describes food justice principles as existing along a continuum; they assert that there is no one ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to understand or to do food justice. Framing food justice as comprising numerous features and qualities—and not as a static, uniform concept—is critical in a movement
that currently experiences ideological rifts across organizations and geographies. It also allows us to query organizational understandings of food justice with curiosity and not judgment.

The logic of this simple heuristic is to call attention to the multiplicity of factors that come together to create what appears simply as food justice work. It is meant to guide the investigation of how organizations enact food justice through these two related, but distinct, lines of questioning. The extent to which these two features of the conceptual framework interact and shape each other will be discussed further in Chapters Five and Six.
Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Research Approach
The goal of the research was to elucidate the ways progress toward the goal of food justice is pursued in a programmatic sense by food justice initiatives and how the concept (and goal) is understood, experienced and shaped by organizational actors (ie. food justice “workers”) within the large multicultural, urban area of Toronto, Ontario. This necessitated the creation of a conceptual framework of food justice, a systematic characterization of (self identifying) food justice initiatives via available secondary sources derived from published documents (plans, promotional, etc) and posted web-based and social media focused communications, and direct engagement with food animators across the city who self-identify as working to further food justice and comprise Toronto’s food justice movement.

As noted in chapter two, the literature largely focuses on either food justice as a theoretical approach or through individual case studies of ‘food justice organizations’ in action. As I was primarily motivated to better understand food justice across a movement through its constituent actors, it was necessary to widen the scope of my research from a case study (as much of the literature has used to study food justice) to accommodate a movement scale – hence the decision to involve multiple initiatives. This differs from, yet compliments, the literature’s investigations of food justice since a movement operates as its own unit as well as through the sum of its parts. This approach allowed me to gather both the broad overview of food justice in Toronto and complement it with the complexity and nuance that exists at a more individual actor level. Over a six-month period, I formed a conceptual framework of food justice as exists in the literature and a document review, as well as conducted semi-structured interviews as a means of capturing at least some of how food justice is expressed in the context of the City of Toronto.

The choice to study food justice organizations and not the individuals and communities experiencing the food injustices was deliberate and reflects an acknowledgement of the practicalities in scoping the research. Admittedly, studying the organizations alone without also studying the communities in which they work provides only part of the picture of what and how food justice ought to be and look. However, the intention of this research was not to reveal what food injustices exist or an ultimate definition of food justice itself (see: Cadieux & Slocum, 2015), but to explore the expression of food justice by a movement within a geographical
boundary. By focusing our gaze on the initiatives themselves, we can understand with greater
depth and detail what food justice means to them, and what opportunities and struggles exist in
that meaning. It must be stated that there are two issues that arise from formally distinguishing
between the food justice organization and the community, and these were recognized throughout
the research process. First, there exists at times a false dichotomy between the individuals in the
organization and those in the community. In many organizations, this dichotomy was blurred as
community members held leadership and other roles within the organization itself. It is also
noteworthy that in two cases, the organizations’ definitions of food justice deferred explicitly to
that held by its’ community members. Second, assuming a static interpretation of ‘community’ is
fraught by the intersectional ways in which food injustices afflict, unite, as well as divide
populations (see Massey 1993 on ‘progressive sense of place’). For instance, in an interview with
one organizational representative, they continually mentioned that their group did not adequately
have equitable representation from ‘the community’, by which they meant those experiencing
food insecurity. An interview with another individual from the same group stated their whole
existence stemmed from the drive to provide a platform for one marginalized community for
food system change, referring to ‘youth’. This example is not to demonstrate a lack of clarity or
thoughtfulness within an organization; it is to underpin the fluidity of the term ‘community’ and
its ability to refer to distinct groups of people depending on context and even the speaker.

Data collection was guided by the conceptual framework and lines of inquiry presented in
Chapter Two. This research employed a review of organizational websites and published
materials provided information for broadly characterizing the group’ structures and forms, along
with semi-structured interviews that were used to gain access to the more detailed, and often
‘messier’, information on their interpretation and enactment of food justice principles. Table 3.1
depicts the methods used, and which method was used to accomplish each objective.
The documents reviewed included organizational websites, and when available, publicly available documents including annual reports, public interviews with the organizations, and equity and accessibility policies. Following the breakdown of the framework, the document review together with the initial components of the interviews aided in a characterization of the groups working towards food justice in the city in my sample. Avenues of inquiries included the group’s mission, founding principles, range of programming, impact indicators, funding structure, partnership network. Additionally, websites were used to observe who is represented in food justice and what purposes, as well as for whom, their websites served.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as an appropriate method as they facilitate a detailed and nuanced exploration of how organizational actors understand food justice, what they perceive to be enabling and inhibiting factors for it, as well as how they understand food justice as connected to place. Semi-structured interviews are a useful research method to “to discover shared understandings of a particular group” (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This is because, in using an interview guide or key (Hay 2005, 82), the researcher is able to direct the content of the interview around a concept while also leaving room for the interviewee to contribute what is important to them (Clifford, et al. 2004). That the interviewees were able to contribute to the shape of the interview was useful so that my questioning, which used the literature’s depictions of food justice as a guidepost, could best reflect the individualized ways in which food justice materialized in their organization. Based off the direction of the initial interviews, the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews also allowed me to slightly alter my interview

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<th>Methods</th>
<th>Objective I: Framework Development</th>
<th>Objective II: Organizational Characterizations</th>
<th>Objective III: Limitations and Opportunities</th>
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<td>Document Analysis</td>
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<td>1 key informant</td>
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*Table 3.1 Methods used in each objective*
guide to best tailor my questions to the food justice actors, improving my ability to create openings for meaningful and engaged dialogue. The contents of the interview guide is further discussed in Chapter 3.4, and can be found in Appendix A.

The purpose of both methods being used together was not to provide a cut and dry definition of Food Justice in Toronto, but to provide insight on who forms the movement, how those actors perceive the movement itself as well as their roles within it, as a step towards forwarding justice and equity in our food system. The results presented in Chapters Four and Five are thus are intended to add constructive complexity and nuance to the literature’s depiction of Toronto’s food justice movement’s components and expressions. Limitations of the study, including of its methods, are discussed in Chapter 6.4.

3.2 Positionality

My familiarity with the alternative agricultural movement stems from an academic perspective, as well as from a practical perspective as I have long been a supporter, patron, and briefly an employee in Toronto’s alternative food movement. My undergraduate education on ecological agriculture systems made me deeply aware and critical of conventional agriculture from an environmental and systems standpoint; however, it did not call to my attention other elements and considerations relating to food and agriculture, particularly those relating to social justice, power and equity. I came to this research, that in large part incorporates a critique of the alternative food movement as being absent of social justice concerns, as someone who was until recently a strong advocate and participant in it through advocating for local, ecologically produced food. My research has widened my appreciation for the real scope of the term “alternative” when applied to the food system, and it has pushed me to question how a food system, as well as the many other systems we engage with in our daily lives, can be both accountable and regenerative to the environment and wholly accessible and inclusive to everyone—regardless of race, class, ability, gender, sexuality, etc—as human beings with inherent rights, autonomies, and diverse desires and needs. By pushing for greater access, I do not refer purely to ‘access’ in a consumer role as access is often attenuated, rather I refer to access to participation as well.

Part of what enabled and informed aspects of this research were facilitated by the social and cultural capitals I had gained from previous experience as a white, university-educated female in
Toronto’s alternative food movement. These capitals eased the process of finding interview participants as my familiarity with certain local change makers gained me entry to spaces with others. This was particularly salient in circumstances where I was an outsider to the community and had had someone ‘vouch’ for me.

These benefits came primarily from my work on the border of one of Toronto’s 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA), previously known as ‘Priority Neighbourhoods’. This neighbourhood is characterized with disproportionate rates of unemployment, homelessness and inadequate housing, mental health and addiction issues, and low health scores (NIA Profiles 2014, city of Toronto). The food co-op where I worked was reflective of the ongoing gentrification of the neighbourhood (as trendy, organic food places are wont to do) with prohibitively priced products, and fresh foods that need to be prepared from scratch in a neighbourhood where many residents are without access to a full kitchen, let alone the time and skills. Simultaneously, they were acting to improve access to healthy, cleanly produced foods for the neighbourhood’s ‘original’, and food insecure, residents by providing ‘credit’ that they could spend at the co-op and farmer’s market in exchange for volunteer hours. This duality brought up many tensions for me while working there.

Furthermore, while I became friends with my co-workers while there (only one of whom was from the neighbourhood itself), and some of the regular volunteers from the neighbourhood, I was far from being a ‘part’ of the neighbourhood. I was afforded the distinct luxury of mobility outside of the neighbourhood, where I lived, while also benefiting from the social and cultural capital of my relationship with this co-op, where I worked. I also gained (albeit limited) mobility within the food movement, all connected to my economic and racial privilege. Both of these forms of mobility are not realities for many of this neighbourhood’s residents and those experiencing the systemic oppressions upon which my research focuses. In maintaining reflexivity on this throughout my research design, data collection, and analysis processes, I was cognizant of how these might colour my first impressions and interpretations and actively sought out ways to challenge them.

I attempted to design my research around a focus and in a manner that would engage, and hopefully increase understanding, to those who are doing the hard work of dismantling these systems through their food animation and production. I deliberately don’t attempt to speak to the
injustices that others face and instead focus my attention towards those doing the work. This was motivated by calls from activists and writers of colour for white people to not speak over the voices of the marginalized, but rather to capture and convey their own words (McKenzie, 2014, p. 45 & 56; see also: Holloway, 2015).

3.3 Study Area

This study took place across the City of Toronto, with geographical boundaries delineated in Figure 3.1. Toronto is one of Canada’s most diverse cities with over half of its population are born outside of Canada, and 1/3 of Torontonians having arrived in only the last 25 years (Toronto, 2014). In 2011, 47% of residents were visible minorities, nearly three times the percentage for the average Canadian population (Toronto, 2014).

Food insecurity in Canada is more prevalent in urban centers than in rural areas, with twelve percent of Toronto households reporting experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity in 2012 (Toronto City Council, 2015). Food insecurity is unequally distributed across the city, and strongly correlates with neighbourhoods of low-income households and racialized populations. Hulchanski (2010) reports that the levels of poverty in Toronto’s low income neighbourhoods are both geographically stratified within the city as well as intensifying in the gap between low and high income households. Hulchanski (2010)’s analysis of 35 years of census data describes Toronto as a city stratified by income into three distinct ‘cities’; each ‘city’ grouped as such by a pattern of similar income levels, rates of income change, and geographic proximity. The most
contrasting of the ‘cities’ are cities #1 and #3: in city #1, located primarily in the center of the city and around subway lines, neighbourhood incomes have increased significantly relative to the average within the Toronto Census Metropolitan; whereas in city #3, located primarily in the northern edges (east and west) of the city creating what has become known as Toronto’s ‘inner city suburbs’, average neighbourhood incomes have decreased significantly since 1970 (Hulchinski, 2010).

This ‘three cities’ analysis provides significant context to my research for several reasons. Firstly, it illustrates the severity of geographic stratification within the city. When the maps demonstrating Toronto’s ‘three cities’ as divided by income level, as shown by Figure 3.2, are placed alongside maps depicting Toronto’s neighbourhoods’ racial compositions, as shown by Figure 3.3, there is great overlap between low-income and racial segregation (Canada Revenue Agency, 2012; Toronto Public Health, 2013). In a city where forty-four percent of its population was foreign-born in 2006 (Reitz & Lum, 2006), Toronto’s growing multi-racial demographics warrants a deeper examination into this. This underlines the importance of researching food systems in Toronto using a justice lens that allows us to see statistics of low-income and food insecurity as not just instances of ‘bad luck’ or a ‘failing system’, but of systemic and structural exclusion and design. These maps geographically illustrate the exclusion and inequities that exist within the city and its food system.
Figure 3.2: Average annual income, City of Toronto, 2012 (Canada Revenue Agency. Tax-filer data, 2012)

Figure 3.3: Percent of Racialized Group Members by Toronto Neighbourhoods, 2006 (Toronto Public Health, 2013)
Toronto is also conducive as a site for food justice research as it has a highly active food movement, both at the municipal and civil society scales. Since 1991, Toronto has had the distinction of having convened one of the world’s first municipal Food Policy Councils (Toronto Public Health, 2015): an initiative that has spurred the initiation of hundreds of new food initiatives in the city that are working to improve Toronto’s food security, health, and equity. Since its formation, many public sector documents and policies have been released and formed relating to improving urban food security through urban agriculture (Toronto Public Health, 2012), integrating food system thinking into urban planning (Toronto Public Health, 2011), improving food literacy around the potential of local and fresh foods (Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs, 2015), and other avenues of improving access and affordability (Toronto City Council, 2001; Toronto Public Health, 2010, 2015). These reports recognize that food insecurity is not evenly experienced throughout the city: food insecurity is often attributed to being disproportionally high among those living in low-income households and neighbourhoods, recent immigrants, and households with children; some reports recognize that racialized persons are also unevenly food insecure. Despite this recognition, most suggested solutions depict the city’s analysis of the problem as primarily as a class and geographic issue, as they make recommendations like increasing access to healthy food stores in low-income neighbourhoods (Toronto Public Health, 2015), and improving the minimum wage to reflect cost of living (Toronto City Council, 2015). These recommendations are all valuable and much needed, but do not recognize or work to actively dismantle the intersectional systems of oppression that have fostered these disparate inequalities. Resultantly, the city has a large and growing alternative food movement upheld by civil society and small businesses. In particular, there is a strong presence within this movement of actors working towards food justice and anti-racism in the food system, specifically. All of these factors compounded to make Toronto an excellent study site for this research.

3.4 Sampling Strategy and Sample Profiles

I attended a training in Toronto in May of 2015 around anti-racism in the food system (Intensive Leadership and Facilitator Training by Growing Food Justice Initiative), during which I was introduced to staff members from several organizations who work in solidarity with the food justice movement. After ascertaining that their respective organizations matched my sampling
criteria (discussed below), the attendees of this training were the starting point for my purposive sampling. Internet searches were used to purposefully add to my study sample, but were not found to provide organizations outside of those that had participated in the training. Purposive sampling is defined by the SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods as a form of non-probability sampling in which a set of criteria is created by the researcher and used to select informants (Oliver & Jump, 2006). These criteria were formed with the understanding developed through the background literature review performed, as well as including willingness to be interviewed (Tongco, 2007). Purposive sampling was employed in this research as it is a recommended sampling strategy when the information wanted is held by specific individuals in particular roles (Tongco, 2007), such as exploring how food justice actors frame their work. It is also a useful sampling strategy when the sample desired is to be illustrative rather than representative (Valentine, 1997).

Snowball sampling (Valentine, 1997; Longhurst, 2010) was also used to illuminate organizations perceived to be working in the food justice movement that were not present at the training and did not turn up in the internet searches. This was employed by asking organizations if they could think of any other food justice actors I should interview as part of the recruitment email. This greatly helped me increase my study sample. I contacted each organization as suggested to me and clarified with them if, on their own terms, they considered themselves food justice or social justice actors. One such referral directed me to an individual who had been both a recipient of Toronto’s food movement’s programming as well as a practitioner, in various capacities, within it. The vast, and intimate, experiences of this individual with Toronto’s food justice movement made them an appropriate key informant.

The primary criterion for my sampling was that the group had to identify their work with the food or social justice movements in Toronto. I looked for language on their website that suggested, implicitly or explicitly, an interest in working toward social justice, food justice, or equity in the food system. I intentionally reached out to organizations working all along, and at various intersections with, the food system to capture as holistic as possible snapshot of the expressions and manifestations of food justice in the city. These efforts were limited by the availability and capacity of organizations. This criterion was not restricted to the use of the term ‘food justice’ itself as the very nature of this research study was to better understand how groups
use and understand the term. Identification with some iteration of the movement was confirmed via email conversations through the recruitment process, as each actor stated that they believed their work contributed to Toronto’s food justice movement. The role of the person I interviewed ideally held authority over either the organization itself or whichever programming related to their food justice work, and for all but one interview in which the person with the most responsibility in the group was outside of the country this criterion was met.

The interview guide comprised semi-structured interviews, and were based off a preliminary conceptual framework of food justice principles that was the product of an extensive literature review. Each interview began with questions about the group’s programming that related to food justice, the scale in which their work reaches, what success looks like and how do they measure it. Participants were then asked about what are perceived enabling and inhibiting factors to this work, as well as, what “food justice” means to them. Lastly, we explored whether, and to what extent, place informed their understanding of food justice in Toronto. The interviews sought to explore what it means to the actors to ‘do’ food justice in Toronto and what are potential ways we can work to further it.

Interviewees were recruited by sending emails expressing the focus as well as motivation for my research, my affiliation with the university, and the details of participation (such as timing, length, and location of interview) (see Appendix C for information letter and consent form). Once the actors expressed interest in participating, the consent form was sent in advance of the interview for them to review. Interviews were preferably conducted in person and at the interviewee’s place of work. However, due to the variability in scale and nature across the sample groups, central offices were both not always available nor always in the same location as the services they provide. Furthermore, due to the nature of some types of the work done by these groups, interviews were not always able to be scheduled during the work week or traditional work hours. Due to these conditions, interviews were sometimes conducted in coffee shops of the participant’s choosing or over the phone or skype.
Organizational Sample

Figure 3.4 Annotated map of organizational sites at time of interviews

In total, over a two-month period in the spring, 18 in-depth interviews with 21 individuals from 16 food justice organizations, and one key informant, were conducted. The sample is represented geographically in an annotated map in Figure 3.4, as well as described with brief organizational profiles in Table 3.2. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and three hours. The variability in time occurred primarily because of interview participants’ time constraints or generosity with their time. Of the 18 interviews, one was conducted with a couple who worked together, and one was conducted with four of the group’s members. I was also able to conduct two separate interviews from one single group. The remaining interviews were conducted with one individual per initiative. Though the criterion for participation in this research was self-identifying with the label ‘food justice actor’, there was considerable variation amongst them through multiple aspects. A more in-depth exploration of these structural variations and commonalities is presented in Chapter Four.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participating Organization</th>
<th>Date of Est.</th>
<th>Brief Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Creek Community Farm</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Community farm in Jane &amp; Finch animating food and food programming with community participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Creek Food Justice Network</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>An arm of Black Creek Community Farm, uses food justice as a lens to engage community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Featureless urban farmers on a 1.5-acre plot at Downsview Park, working to produce “clean” food for everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CaterToronto</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Community-based catering network for social and economic outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food Forward</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Policy reform and facilitate neighbourhood-scale projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FoodShare Toronto*</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Oldest food security organization in Canada, animating food creatively across the city (and country)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greenest City</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Environmental organization, partnership with neighbourhood organizers to develop residents’ skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Thumbs Growing Kids</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>School gardens focused on food and climate literacy in two neighbourhoods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malvern Action Network Committee</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Food security branch helping residents overcome structural barriers to accessing and producing healthy food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meal Exchange</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Through cross-Canada student network, provide leadership training to post-secondary students to improve their institutions’ food systems and footprints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North York Harvest Food Bank</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Distributor of donated food to 30* food banks across North York, working to increase services food banks can offer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PACT Grow To Learn</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Four school-based large-scale gardens that respond to needs and wants of neighbourhood residents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace Farm</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Urban farmer and business coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permaculture GTA</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Volunteer-run community guided by principles of permaculture to do social, environmental, and food justice work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Youth Food Policy Council</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Youth-led council participates in Toronto Food Policy Council meetings, hosts city-wide community meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto Seed Library</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Coordinates 20 active seed libraries across Toronto and related workshops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2 Brief profiles of participating organizations in study sample*
In all instances, quotes are attributed per the interviewee’s wishes. Most quotes are not explicitly attributed, except for a consistent numbering system. In selected instances, research participants expressly requested to be identified by full name and organization, only their respective organization, or only their full name.

3.5 Analytic Approach

All interviews were audio-recorded, and supplemented with handwritten notes, and transcribed. NVivo was used to assist coding and organizing the data into three overarching categories: Understandings of Food Justice, Opportunities, and Barriers. These categories were chosen because they mirror the fundamental concerns of this research project. There were various emerging themes within each of the overarching categories.

Results, as presented in the following two chapters, are meant to identify trends in how food justice actors perceive the intention of the movement and their roles therein, as well as the barriers and opportunities they describe as presenting themselves.
Chapter 4 Characterizing Food Justice Initiatives in Toronto

As noted earlier, a simple conceptual framework was used to incorporate organizational features and the lived experiences of those working within those organizations. First, it sought to explore elements of structure and process amongst a selection of the different food justice organizations and initiatives in the Toronto food justice movement. Second, it called attention to how workers or “agents” inside these organizations understand, experience, and express food justice as both a concept and a calling. This framework recognizes that how food justice is enacted by an individual initiative is a function of both the features of the initiative itself as well as the multiplicity of people within it, their own understanding of food justice principles, and the power relations therein. Thus, this conceptual framework intends to provide a tool to explore organizational complexity, diversity, and purpose.

This chapter employs the ‘outer circle’ of the framework to respond to the second research objective of the thesis: to examine and characterize the nature and diversity of groups working explicitly towards food justice in Toronto, ON.

The following sections aim to characterize the movement in Toronto as categorized into the five analytical fields in the framework, as shown in Figure 1.1. The first field observes where, in place and scale, the food justice work predominantly takes place. The second explores the underlying objectives that motivate how the initiatives implement food justice through their programming and policies, while the third provides insight into how organizations understand food justice and are motivated to engage in it through profiling their structures and mandates. The fourth and fifth fields investigate the pathways through which the organizations engage food justice. They look at the organizations’ natures of engagement with their community, and lastly, the linkages and networks that exist across organizations both inside and outside of the food movement.
4.1 Medium for Food Justice Work: Space and Scale

This field refers to the actors’ use and creation of space, as well as to what scale their work is on. Which spaces the actors organize within, and how they use and construct them, varies widely. For some, a garden on school grounds is primarily a site of food production, for another its significance is rooted in its use as an educational tool, and for another yet it is a profound means of youth employment. This field also examines what scale their work falls on, such as whether they work primarily locally, on the ground, nation-wide, etc. These details all affect the ways in which the initiatives are able to execute principles of food justice, as well as are directed by them. This section will discuss the spaces and scales through which organizations materialize their food justice work separately.

4.1.1 Spaces of Food Justice

The types of spaces that the actors utilize can be grouped into four different types: growing spaces, learning spaces for youth, communal spaces, and commercial spaces. Growing spaces includes spaces wherein the focus is on maximizing food production and includes farms and gardens. Learning spaces for youth comprises spaces that prioritize youth and child learning, be it food literacy, or integrating gardening into school curriculums. These spaces exist in school classrooms and cafeterias, and on school gardens. Communal spaces are those in which many people are brought together for a gathering to create something, to learn, to exchange ideas and resources, etc. Examples of these spaces include workshops; community programming; community kitchens and group meals; and online communities. Commercial spaces include food markets and commercial incubator kitchens, in which goods are either sold through a market or prepared for it.

Nine of the groups in the sample create growing spaces as at least one component of their missions and programs. Seven of these groups, all but two, occupy both growing spaces and intentional learning spaces for youth. Some of these are shared spaces, as in the case of PACT Grow-To-Learn David Wilson Memorial Garden. This garden doubles as an outdoor classroom in which “students observe and participate in the entire growing cycle from seedlings to harvest” and as an organic food production site. Using the space simultaneously in these two ways facilitates a learning environment that teaches “first hand about important issues related to their environment” through gardening alongside “compassion and empathy” through
“delivering fresh organic produce to local food banks (...) supporting those less fortunate within [their] communities.” In Toronto, where real estate prices are soaring and access to land is growing increasingly difficult, this multi-purposing of land as seen in PACT’s garden is common throughout many of the studied organizations. While some gardens ground multiple distinct programs together, gardens like FoodShare’s School Grown gardens and Sunshine Garden’s were designated to a single program that each simultaneously served as both market gardens as well as sources of youth employment and therapeutic relief, respectively. In these programs, the garden space is organized to facilitate both marketable fresh produce and positive dividends such as income generation and a form of therapy. Black Creek Community Farm was the sole organization in the study that could designate distinct land to its different programming because of being situated on eight-acres of heritage land. As their website describes their summer camp programming,

At Black Creek Community Farm, campers are encouraged to explore their surroundings, as we are situated on a truly unique 8-acre property that includes pristine farmland, a heritage farmhouse and barn, and a surrounding forest that extends down into the Black Creek ravine.

Black Creek Community Farm’s geographical positioning facilitates their ability to physically distinguish space for different programming objectives: they have sufficient farm lands for food production as well as ravine and forest lands for recreational programming.

Eleven groups create communal spaces both outdoors in gardens and farm-sites as well as indoors, in community workshops, meetings, kitchens, and meals. The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council converts unique spaces across the city into places of learning and community-building among like-minded youth as they “bring together youth from across the city to discuss food policy issues.” A manager of one of PACT Grow-To-Learn’s garden described one great value of their garden derived from providing the community with a safe and beautiful place to come together. A formerly run down and vacant lot behind the school, the space now features a converted broken fence-turned-trellis for colourful flowers and resident-favourite pole beans. Instead of simply taking up space, the garden provides a popular and safe community gathering place. The intangible value of community space is observed to be an especially pertinent consideration throughout the study sample in communities, and for individuals, for which safe and accessible public spaces have been lacking, and private spaces may be crowded, unsafe, or
simply unstimulating and isolating. Considering Jane and Finch’s lack of accessible gathering places and high rates of social isolation particularly in their elderly residents, a representative of Black Creek Community Farm stressed ensuring the gates to the farm remained open to the community was essential to their mandate. This focus on creating community spaces is also evident from their continued tradition of annual festivals that “offer[s] fun for the whole family!” Using language like ‘bringing together’ and creating ‘gathering spaces,’ these initiatives hint at addressing individuals’ well-beings without stating it as that. The absence of explicit references to how these programs contribute to emotional and psychological well-being will be returned to in Chapter 6.

Five groups occupy commercial spaces, be it through wholesale food transactions, a booth at a farmers’ market, the coordination of an entire low-cost fresh food market, or a network of commercial kitchens.

As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 5, it is also worth noting here that the majority of organizations in the study sample also mentioned some degree of transience and impermanence in their programming and the spaces they occupy. For instance, from the time of the interview, FoodShare has moved its headquarters at the end of its lease from Bloordale, Toronto, where it worked from for nearly a decade, to the Mount Dennis, York neighbourhood. PACT Grow-to-Learn Schoolyard Gardens have downsized from four gardens in the summer of 2016 to three for the 2017 growing season. Relocation and closures are directed by range of factors such as changing neighbourhood demographics, instability of funding, and land tenure.

4.1.2 Scales of Food Justice

This section characterizes the nature of organizational work delineated by its scale and intended reach. The scales that organizations in this sample utilize range from micro, local, regional, to national. Many times, the organizations do a large part of their work across varying scales. While these scales are representative of how organizations present their work, they do not necessarily coincide with the scale at which the groups determine the causes of the issues to exist.

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1 FoodShare’s public persona does openly embrace the ‘healing’ and ‘therapeutic’ effects of their community programming. However, this is most prevalent on their social media, through the news posts they broadcast to their network and is (with few exceptions) largely absent on their organizational website proper.
Organizations working on the micro or community scale execute work that primarily encompasses the immediate geographical community. This might include working in one community, or in multiple, but addressing them each individually. The local scale exhibits work that targets Toronto as their primary level of focus. The ways in which the local scale is executed vary from working primarily with the municipal government to working in communities across the city and attempting to work with the city about common issues. The regional scale expands spatially to include all of Ontario, while the national scale features a group that works across Canada. While many of the organizations work across multiple scales from time to time, the interscalar category is reserved for those organizations whose work is characterized by its ability to cross scales.

**Micro:** 6/16 organizations fall into the micro category. These organizations mainly serve the community they are working in, tailoring many of their programs to its benefit. PACT’s Grow-to-Learn Schoolyard Gardens are only one part of the larger organization’s programming, and while the rest of its programming has a city-wide focus, the four\(^2\) gardens across the city in its urban agriculture program are fairly distinct and separated. Each garden in this instance have their own set of programming and directives based on the specific needs and assets of the community. Permaculture GTA’s work was classified as micro because, despite attracting community members from across the city and all over the world and the attention it pays to making itself accessible, its works are primarily directed at enhancing and improving “the village” that it is creating. Peace Farm was micro because it is a small social enterprise that both farms and sells its produce in the same community; though that community has recently changed based on available land. Black Creek Community Farm, Black Creek Food Justice Network, and Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) are all heavily invested in improving their neighbourhood’s food security and justice. This is evident from their programming as well as explicitly in their very names. The Farm’s reach also extends across the country as it models urban food justice in a Canadian context. The Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change is one of many ANCs across the city, but these individual projects operate on a neighbourhood, micro scale.

\(^2\) There were four at the time of the interview. A review of their website in March 2017 reveals that they have downsized to three.
Local: 6/16 organizations work on a local scale. The city is these organization’s landscape, and is used differently as a scale of focus across them. The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council and the Toronto Seed Library both intentionally organizes community meetings across the city to accommodate those outside the downtown core, while Food Forward, for example, directs their energy towards advocating to the municipal government. Different still, the North York Harvest Food Bank maintains a near-city perspective as it distributes food to its over 90 community agencies within North York. The Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective was a difficult group to categorize, but fit most accurately in the local category because despite being deeply embedded in the community of the land they farm, their perspective of who to involve spans the entire city (and their vision for justice extends further yet). Further, since their access to land is currently precarious—as renters and not land owners—they maintain a city focus to provide flexibility and resiliency for each growing season. Several of the participating organizations are also members on the Toronto Food Policy Council, expanding the impact of their work from community to city-wide.

National: Only one organization in the study sample works primarily on a national scale. Meal Exchange is located in Toronto but its gaze is directed to Canada’s food system. They facilitate micro level work in each post-secondary school campus they work in, but they coordinate each campus to be a part of a national directive and team, working towards goals on a national scale. FoodShare’s involvement in policy direction, as well as support to other community organizations, on a national scale cannot be ignored.

Interscalar: Three out of sixteen organizations’ work is largely interscalar. In each of these organizations, they have a primary focus that is either micro or local; however, enough of their work hits at another scale that it was inaccurate to place them in one or the other. Greenest City organizes predominantly in their neighbourhood of Parkdale and South Parkdale; however, they also act as a support for community gardens to many organizations across the city every year. Green Thumbs Growing Kids works in four school-gardens within the neighbourhoods of Cabbagetown and Regent Park, that operate on a micro scale. Green Thumbs uses these gardens as support for advocacy work to both the local school district board and the provincial government to increase the prevalence and quality of gardens in schools across the city and province. Foodshare is primarily local, with its origins being instigated by the City of Toronto in
the 1980s and continuing to work in neighbourhoods across the city. Being the oldest food security organization in Canada, FoodShare also has a predominant role on the national scale of advocating and both modeling its work. Furthermore, FoodShare also partners with some communities in the Canadian North to be part of their wholesale food box programs.

4.2 Implementations of Food Justice: Programs and policies

This section outlines the means through which groups position their various programs and events as tools to auger food justice, as well as how they might be modeling justice through their internal policies. Understanding how the different groups’ implement food justice through their internal and external actions is enriched through a consideration of both their programmatic underlying objectives and internal policies.

4.2.1 Programmatic Underlying Objectives

An attempt was made to thematically conceptualize the various organizations’ programming and see how the organizations publicly frame their underlying objectives and perceived contributions to the food justice movement. The themes arising from the data include motivations to push back against injustices; to provide basic resources; to build community; to engage youth; to increase environmental awareness and stewardship; as well as to create self-sustaining measures. The first three of these themes echo ones that receive attention in the following section on the groups’ missions and understandings of food justice, and thus will not be expanded on as heavily as the latter three.

*Push back against injustices*

These programs use food as more than a source of nourishment, but as a tool through which they can galvanize action around injustices in direct contradiction to them. Examples of how they do this resides in efforts to (re)include those who are—and who historically have been—systemically excluded, by strengthening those weakened by structural oppressions, and in defending and recreating cultures that fall outside the dominant culture. Cater Toronto does this in their assertion for fair prices for catering despite the depreciation of value that certain ethnic foods commonly experience, and the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council works towards this by asserting the value of the youth voice—and increasing the translation of its value through leadership training—despite its tendency to be excluded. The Black Farmers and Food Growers
Collective is an excellent example of food system actors resisting injustices committed in the form of the attempted erasure of cultures: they use agriculture, with a particular focus on cultivating Caribbean hot crops, to defend the invisibility of African and Caribbean food cultures from the societal ‘whiteness’ that characterizes conventional agriculture and mainstream cuisines. In doing so, they reclaim this practice for themselves and their cultures.

**Provision of basic resources**

These programs and initiatives use food in their programming as a source of sustenance and nutrition: this group refers to programs that distribute food to community members. However, within this group there are variations of how the food is distributed, and what, if anything, is exchanged for it. North York Harvest Food Bank distributes food to all its member agencies, facilitating the dispersion of food to those in need who access food banks. PACT’s production gardens produce food to be given to the community, often with a reciprocity model that explicitly distinguishes them from being ‘charity.’ FoodShare has numerous programs that disseminate food in various ways, both at low-cost wholesale pricing or free of cost.

**Build community**

Food is used in these programs and initiatives as a tool to build community by bringing people together around a common goal, a sharing of cultures, and a reduction of social isolation. Food’s significance here is both symbolic and material. We see this in Permaculture GTA’s creation of a ‘village’ that builds community through a common goal, sharing space, meals, and the exchange of ideas. Black Creek Community Farm’s senior program works to reduce social isolation commonly experienced by the elderly in their neighbourhood.

**Youth engagement**

Programs in this theme prioritize engaging and educating youth. Food and food production are education tools for topics spanning food literacy, environmental awareness, gardening, etc. PACT Grow to Learn, Green Thumbs Growing Kids, and FoodShare prioritize the education and engagement of children and youth through integrating their school gardens into the curriculum as well as tailoring workshops to students on food literacy and nutrition. Meal Exchange works with post-secondary students to engage them about food systems thinking through their Real Food Challenge Canada and Beyond Campus Food Banks programs.
Environmental awareness

These programs use food and gardening to bring awareness to environmental and conservation issues. They are motivated by a drive to improve urban environmental stewardship. Greenest City, though certainly not the only, most exemplifies this as they use community gardens and youth programming to educate about the importance of local food and the environmental cost of conventional agriculture.

Self-sustaining

These programs aim to generate revenues for the organizations. They vary on size and scale, as well as recurrence and regularity within the organization’s programming. They employ food as a material commodity that can not only bring in income but can also expand awareness of food security issues in the community or city. Many organizations rely on, to different extents, generating donations to support their other activities. FoodShare and Black Creek Community Farm do this through integrating social enterprises into their work, such as FoodShare’s Field to Table catering and both organizations’ gardening and farming workshops. These are distinct from other programming with the primary goal of creating an income for its participants. Peace Farm is a social enterprise in its essence, and as such works to generate enough sales to both provide an income for its founder and sustain itself.

4.2.2 Policies

This portion of the document review sought to explore the differences and similarities amongst equity policies in the sample group. Having such institutional policies—along with strong implementation and enforcement—embedded within an organization may resonate with the literature’s attention to “actively practic[ing]” (Slocum, 2006) anti-racism within their organization. Tarng (2015) highlights the potential for a “great disparity” between an individual’s awareness of privilege and recognition of power differentials and an organization’s “operating in a manner consistent with said level of awareness.”

Due to the City of Toronto’s recently mandated requirement for any organization or affiliation receiving financial support from, and/or partnering with, the City to comply with the City’s anti-discrimination and harassment policies (see Appendix D), thirteen of the sixteen organizations
studied incorporated such policies. This policy invokes the Ontario Human Rights Code—that every person has the right to equal treatment—and the Occupational Health and Safety Act—mandating all employers to have a “policy, program, information, and instruction regarding workplace harassment.” (City of Toronto, 2013). However, the city’s mandate only came into effect in 2013, and as such not all organizations were founded with these policies and/or are very familiar with them currently. Further, one organization in the study sample initially received funding from a different municipality without the same requirements because their parent organization was outside of Toronto. This organization’s representative stated,

_We had no anti-oppression policies, no anti-discrimination policies. None of that existed. Because again, think about it, in their defense, a[n] (...) organization that works with predominantly white, and a few maybe once in a year for just a season you’ll have one person of colour, never felt that they needed to have an anti-oppression, anti-discrimination policies._ [OR-2]

Community members of this organization recognized a need to create, and implement, an anti-oppression and anti-discrimination policy nearly immediately; however, despite active efforts and discussions on these very topics, several years into their work, such a policy is in the process of being approved by the board.

Implementing new, or reformed, organizational policies may be a lengthy and complex process for many of the organizations included in this study; further, they may not be the only route to bringing equity practices into the workplace as improvements at the aforementioned organization have long been occurring. Relatedly, one interview participant raised “a question of what is anti-oppression,” noting that it is not a clear-cut concept. They continued to question, “what does that [anti-oppression] mean? Who’s being oppressed? And what is oppression” (Alia Karim)? Tensions around executing anti-oppression appropriately mirror those around the questions of food justice practice (Barnoff and Moffatt, 2007).

Noting the difficulties around new policies, four more organizations have formally and publicly expanded upon the City’s requirements. The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, Permaculture GTA, and FoodShare each have their own policies or principles—anti-oppression, accessibility, and food justice and accountability structures, respectively—through which they see themselves as pursuing food justice. These are explicitly expressed on their organizational websites. North York Harvest Food Bank places signage in their headquarters and member agencies that strive to intentionally create a welcoming and non-discriminatory space; however, it must be noted that
these are more intended for the clientele using the spaces than for the staff and volunteers. These are shown in Figures (4.1 and 4.2). PACT Grow-to-Learn also implements “a strict safe space policy” in all of their gardens that is put in place to create and maintain a safe and welcoming environment that considers, and values, the neighbourhood’s diverse demographics.

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 “Your rights & responsibilities”, “This space is for everyone.”

Some of the organizational representatives expressed, in the absence of their own formal policy, a mutual understanding within their respective organizations of what these terms (anti-oppression, anti-racism) mean. When asked about any formal or informal equity policies, one head organizer of a small volunteer-run organization responded,

There is a strong ‘all of that [anti-oppression, anti-racism, anti-feminism principles] within the organizing core. We have extensive discussions around the kinds of language we use, and where we are organizing and who we are partnering with. We don’t necessarily use those words in our public discourse, (...) [but] that very much runs through our organization (OR-6).

The identities and politics of the people within the organization’s “organizing core”, including one “self-identified feminist critical theorist anti-capitalist organizer,” were seen as sufficient to maintain that the direction of their work remains oriented towards social justice and equity. This
emphasis on personal politics as a lead contributor to an organization’s output was most strongly echoed by representatives who worked in a non-bureaucratic or informal group, and by those who had significant influence over their own specific programming. The PACT Grow-to-Learn manager explained why they perceived their anti-oppression values translated so well into their programming without invoking a formal policy.

*The managers in all of our gardens are really self-directed. There’s not much of a hierarchical structure at all; there are managers and that’s it. And we work together, and it really allows everyone to use their own passions and to work with folks in that community and to come up with what needs to happen in that garden (...) You have to have the right people on board, but if you have the right people on board, I think that’s a really powerful way to make things happen.*

Both representatives, and others with similar responses, saw that the qualities of the individuals within the organization—and their ability to cohesively work together—replaced, and in some cases superseded, formal organizational policies.

4.3 Understandings of Food Justice and Motivations for Engagement: Structure and Mandate

This field captures two ways in which these organizations structure themselves both ideologically, through their mandates, and logistically, as a certain type of entity. Consideration pertaining to the similarities and differences across these two distinct, but related, means of structuring of the organizations in the sample can be grouped into three themes: the organizations’ missions and founding principles; use, and interpretation, of the term food justice; and what type of legal entity they organize under.

4.3.1 Missions and founding principles:

When reviewing the groups’ mission statements and founding principles as an aggregate, it was helpful to group them into four non-mutually exclusive themes that look at what their missions are motivated to work towards. Their missions and founding principles could be distilled to provide a service absent in the community; to push for a bigger picture ideal; to help meet necessary prerequisites to a just food system; and/or to advocate at various scales.
To Provide a service

Organizations in this category most commonly work on the ground level and provide the community with a service of some kind; most of them, however, distance themselves from the connotation this has of ‘charity’. ‘Doing’ charity is characterized by the study participants by the lack of dignity and choice in the interaction itself, and the absence of contributing to positive, meaningful systemic transformation. Tarng (2015) adds that acts of charity involve “do[ing] things ‘with’ and not ‘for’ their communities.” The services that fall under this category include a provision of: education, food, health and/or economic opportunities, skills training, and access to land.

Eight organizations include providing education as a part of their mandate. The topic being educated on and the intended audience varies across them. The majority of the education provided by these organizations target children and youth in an attempt to improve food literacy and nutritional education. For example, FoodShare has various programming that engages children and youth around food literacy through school lunch programs and workshops; providing “knowledge of” fresh and healthy foods is a fundamental part of their vision of everyone having access and the ability to cook nutritious, culturally appropriate meals. Green Thumbs Growing Kids’s work is inherently based around education as they “supply schools with expertise and support so that they can integrate garden-based learning into the curriculum” and “mobilize the community to continue gardening on the school ground” in the summer months. Their work is motivated by the food system’s reliance on resource heavy processes and the resultant distancing of children from familiarity with “the real story of food.”

However, some of the education undertaken by the organizations is directed at older demographics: they may take the shape of community meetings and journals on issues that intersect with food access, as is a keystone of the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council, or of workshops whose topics vary from “engage[ing] in outreach, events, organizing seedy gatherings and undertaking a process of collective evolution in preparation for an improved seed growing, sharing and saving program” by the Toronto Seed Library. Taking many shapes and targeting varying audiences, education about alternatives outside of the dominant food system was seen as a critical tool towards pursuing food justice.
Food provision is also a focus of seven of these organizations, whether it is sold or given away, grown on site or procured locally. Many of these organizations, although not all, have an explicit focus on fresh, culturally-appropriate foods; the Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective produces their own food to be able to provide ‘clean’—grown without the application of chemicals—food to those in need. They are sufficiently concerned with providing clean food to those who need it that they do not sell everything they produce, but distribute freely what they have in excess and deem necessary. FoodShare functions as a distributor of fresh produce for schools around the city, and an indigenous community up North, by buying wholesale at the Ontario Food Terminal first. These organizations note challenges in either or both the lack of options for accessing these foods, in particular culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables, and the issue of affordability.

One response to the challenges of food procurement, as well as to its imperfect response to food injustices, has been to produce their own ecologically-grown food. Growing and selling food is often used to accomplish two aspects of the organizations’ mandates—to both improve access to fresh, nutritious foods as well as to provide economic opportunities (in particular to youth) who are hired as farmers and paid by their sales. In this way, the youth employed gain employment, income, and skills training for future employment. FoodShare’s School Grown social enterprise hires 25 students to farm in three school market gardens. While this most obviously acts as a source of income and agricultural education for the youth, in an interview for Education Forum, Katie German adds that “growing food within the school can [also] be a powerful way to spark student interest” (Thompson, 2017) in learning about food and taking care of themselves. Economic opportunities are provided primarily in the forms of social enterprises as best exemplified by Peace Farm and Cater Toronto: Peace Farm and Cater Toronto were both designed in response to economic barriers related to food experienced by marginalized populations in Toronto. Peace Farm did this by creating itself as a business with the interest of supporting its founder, and Cater Toronto works as a catering incubator that supports numerous small catering businesses within it.
To forward an ideal

These are ‘bigger picture’ or ‘higher level’ motivations, with a reach that extends beyond their community or the direct actions of their group. These organizations’ demands are on a distinct scale from the other themes, yet this does not preclude overlap. These driving forces include pushing for: a healthy, sustainable, fair food system; equity and dignity for everyone, in particular those who are currently marginalized; sovereignty and right to self-determination; preservation of cultures that fall outside that of the paradigmatic; an end to injustices; as well as a push towards environmentalism. These motivations are shaped by the current framing of the world as inequitable, unjust, and with declining food systems and environments, and are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Equity and dignity, and a just and sustainable food system prevail as the two ideals most mentioned in the organizations’ documents. Nine out of sixteen organizations assert in their mission statements that the food system should be equitable, and that everyone should have dignified access and participation in it. For some this is equitable access to fresh foods, equitable pricing opportunities for ethnic catering, equitable employment opportunities to youth of colour with stigmatized addresses, or a dignified means of obtaining food, even if through donation. As well, the right to self-determination and sovereignty is a significant issue for three of the organizations. This includes the right to choose which foods to eat, and the right to foods that are culturally appropriate and meet dietary requirements. In particular, both Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective and FoodShare use the power of food to connect self-determination with the ability to preserve cultures that fall outside of the prevailing culture.

To contribute to food system building blocks

The groups that fall under this theme are working towards building blocks to a greater system, though they are not an end in and of itself like the ideals previously discussed. This theme encompasses groups whose mandate is to build resilience within communities, as well as building communities that mirror the relations and opportunities that they’d like to see external to it. For some groups, integrated into their mission is to be a model to others, either to demonstrate that what they are doing is possible and/or to shed light on how to do it.
Building strong, united communities is a priority for eight out of the sixteen organizations. The definition of community is fluid and vast, not necessarily delineated by space or borders. Food Forward seeks to “build a cohesive and stronger food movement” and has created an online space for this community to gather and unite; Meal Exchange fosters a community of students across Canada all working for a sustainable and just food system; and Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change uses their programming to assuage tensions amongst different populations that live as neighbours.

Being a model to others is an explicit part of the mandate for three of sixteen actors. They are contributing to a more equitable food system by providing a guided path for others to take part in and follow. This inherently integrates an idea of kinship into their work, that part of their efforts is devoted not only to their community but also to others looking to follow in their footsteps. Green Thumbs Growing Kids perceives itself as a model for school gardens and Black Creek Community Farm works to “inspire the next generation by providing leadership in food justice.”

Resilience refers to a greater ability to withstand stresses and is critical on the slow work towards food justice: for five out of sixteen food system actors, they explicitly devote some of their focus to improving the resilience of their community. Some work to increase the resilience of their community by providing improved access to fresh and healthy foods, thereby contributing to the improved health of their neighbourhood (as exemplified by Black Creek Community Farm and the Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective); and in others, it is an individual resilience that is enhanced by providing opportunities to gather communally, or to learn new skills, such as in FoodShare’s many communal activities and workshops.

To advocate

Varying proportions of energy in organizations that fall under this theme are devoted towards political advocacy at various scales. Some perform advocacy as a primary part of their mission, whereas for others it is less prioritized and more sporadic. The means and amount of advocacy can vary widely among these groups, despite falling under a common theme.

Four food groups have advocacy as part of their core mandates. For example, one of the main premises of the Toronto Youth Food Policy Council is to act as the “youth arm of the Toronto Food Policy Council (...) by making deputations at City Hall” to serve the underrepresented
youth voice, along with “advocacy work with other food justice organizations.” Food Forward’s primary aim is to “advocate, with our strongest focus at City Hall, to advance food policy change by mobilizing the public and politicians.” Food Forward recognizes the multitude of barriers that preclude equitable participation in and contribution to municipal policy from marginalized populations, and leverages the representative of Food Forward’s self-identified white privilege in order to do so with relatively greater ease. To this end, Food Forward uses their voice as a means of amplifying others’.

For the majority of other organizations, such as the Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective, appealing to different levels of government aligns with and supports their organization’s mandates and vision and is done as a critical addendum to their work on the ground. A founder and executive director from another organization said about their supportive, “gentle” advocacy work,

We’re involved with advocacy through our networks who are other people in the province of Ontario doing school-food. Whether it’s feeding and provisioning, or experiential food literacy programs, we have a bit of a big tent called Ontario Edible Education Network. (...) We run an annual school garden day celebration as part of our gentle advocacy for school gardens. (...) We reach out through the province to just connect school gardeners and give them a high five over the internets (OR-10).

They note that although they think advocacy “should be part of the core [programming],” (OR-10) they find it difficult to do so with funding limitations. In addition to their ground level work, FoodShare has a longstanding tradition of advocating for improved food security at the municipal and national levels. Most recently, FoodShare’s former executive director, Debbie Field, participated on behalf of FoodShare in the Conference Board of Canada’s 2nd Canadian Food Summit in 2012 that stressed the need for policy involvement on a National Food Strategy. Meal Exchange published a “Hungry for Knowledge” Report (2016), the first-ever comprehensive report illuminating the extent of food insecurity in 5 post-secondary institutions across Canada. Due to their extensive and intimate experience with these issues, many organizations make use of their knowledge to bring political attention to them.

Another means through which organizations in the study’s sample advocated for food justice were through setting ‘precedents’ with the (primarily) municipal government. One network’s founder explained that ‘piloting’ novel projects—that often contradict an existing policy, but
present the city as progressive and adaptive—can be an effective way to convert resistance into government support.

*The government is slow, and holy, and interested. (...) There's a beautiful garden that's behind Empress Walk and connected to Mackenzie House. Now it's known as Toronto's 'First Market Garden' but, technically, you're not allowed to sell food off of public land. So that's a good example (...) where you call up the counselor and you say, 'how about..?' You call it a pilot, and then you do it, and then when it works, the government will be like, 'Look how awesome this was!' (OR-8)*

The representative presented this means of ‘showing’ the municipality the benefits of policy change or support as an alternative (or sometimes a follow up) to the previously mentioned—and more celebrated—forms of advocacy that focus on ‘telling’ the government. This can be seen in the work championed by the Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change group in creating a pilot market garden under Toronto’s hydro-towers for their predominantly immigrant population. Black Creek Community Farm is also a model for the city in its role in food production, community engagement, and land stewardship on its eight-acres of heritage land. Likewise, Greenest City collaborates with the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust as they advocate with and for community-owned land and green spaces. As a means of addressing the rapid changes and gentrification occurring in the Parkdale neighbourhood, they work to bring land into the community’s hands to “ensure that everyone, particularly those with fewer resources and lower income, benefit from these changes [as well].”

It must also be noted that many of the community and school gardens serve as examples to multiple levels of government—the municipality, the Toronto District School Board, the Ontario Ministry of Education—to the myriad observed benefits of school gardens.

4.3.2 Conveyed use and interpretation of ‘food justice’

Related to how an organization defines its mission and mandate is its understanding of food justice. All the actors with available documents, except for one, use the terms ‘food justice’, ‘food security’, or ‘social justice’ in describing their mission and mandates. These terms are not always explicitly explained, however, as to what is involved in a ‘food just’ or ‘socially just’

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3 While Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change and their partners are supervising this pilot market garden, it must be acknowledged that the idea of using “idle land that could be put to work” under Ontario hydro-towers was raised by the Toronto Food Policy Council as far back as in 2001 (Roberts, W., 2001).
society. While ‘food justice’ remains unexplained in all but two of the documents, inferences can be made as to what it might mean in the context of a given organization.

There are three general headings that food justice can be understood as acting under. Food, for all of them, is seen as a material and symbolic locus for change – however at what level and through what mechanisms varies. These scales are not independent of one another, and interact as well as reinforce each other.

‘High level’ social change

This scale portrays food justice as a tool to redress social injustices that manifest in food insecurity. These injustices are not restricted solely to the food system, including for instance poverty, despite their interactions and material implications within it. 6/14 actors describe food justice as acting towards higher level social change. For instance, Green Thumbs Growing Kids explains food justice as “dismantling racism” and FoodShare describes their work as working to “end hunger from all angles.”

Redefining equity

Food justice can also be understood to redefine equity by those being oppressed and marginalized. In this framing of food justice, it does not only constitute a redressing of injustices, but it puts forth a recreated model for what equity and justice are. 8/14 food justice actors challenge the current paradigm and put forth a new means of access and inclusion. The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council does this by inserting the youth voice into the food policy discussion, and the Toronto Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective acts to recenter the indigenous African voice and culture into the primarily white alternative food movement.

Seeking community-scale justice

Some usages of the term ‘food justice’ express a relationship with contributing to marginalized communities’ resilience and health. This interpretation was assessed from when organizations directly referred to improving community well-being in their missions and mandates, such as in PACT’s Grow to Learn program that creates safe, inclusive learning environments through gardens to support low-income neighbourhoods.
4.3.3 Types of organizations

The types of organizations can be broken into two categories of formally and informally structured. This distinction is made between groups that are formally registered and defined, such as charities, social enterprises, registered non-governmental organizations, and those that are not bound by formal definitions, such as collectives or networks. Within these two categories, a group may exist as a subsidiary of another that may or may not be a separate participant in the study, or the product of a group of organizations working together. These subsidiaries exist in different forms and capacities as well, some acting more independently than others.

Within those that are formally structured, registered charities predominate this research sample with half of the food system actors involved being a charity. Only two out of sixteen food system actors were formally organized as a non-profit organization. It is clear that for Food Forward, this was done to distance itself from charity work insisting, “we are not a charity. We are a non-governmental organization.” One organizer described the difficult decision that surrounded the question of incorporating into a non-profit from its roots as an informal collective.

Many people in our organization felt that by incorporating as a legal entity within the system we were in some respects legitimizing the system (...) But the bottleneck came to the point where the responsibilities of continuing to organize were falling on a fewer and fewer number of people, as the skills and commitment necessary were becoming increasingly specialized in order to facilitate this kind of project with such diverse aims and programs. And so, it was decided, to avoid conflict in the organization, that we would incorporate with certain core values (OR-6).

Conforming to the requisite legal structures was determined to be necessary for their work to be accepted and supported by public institutions, such as the Toronto Public Library, “who don’t want to be seen as too radical (OR-6).”

Peace Farms was intentionally organized as a social enterprise, as well as site of research, from the onset. Collins Boahen said he designed it,

to support Black Creek [Community Farm] because they supported me. And it was also to research whether it was possible to live off of the wages in Toronto that Peace Farms was generating: could you live comfortably in a city like this as an independent farmer?
Peace Farms is intended to be a fluid, flexible initiative that adapts to meet the needs of its community.

Four groups are informally defined, and thus resist relegation to a category of charity, or non-governmental organization, or social enterprise. These groups are informal in distinct ways, however. For instance, Permaculture GTA is completely volunteer-run with a non-hierarchical governance structure, whereas the Black Creek Food Justice Network is a highly active committee that works out of the Black Creek Community Farm house, sharing many persons and policies with the Farm as well as other organizations in that neighbourhood. Their boundaries are blurred, as was noted when during the interview a participant kept confusing the Network with another neighbourhood community organization, stating that they overlap a lot. Two of these informal actors are also subsidiaries of larger organizations.

4.4 Pathways for Food Justice Work: Nature of Engagement

Related to the spaces the actors create and the programs they employ are the ways in which the food justice actors engage with community members. They do so in varying ways that create distinct roles and means of interacting with those who participate in the programming. Various relationships are created through the ways that the groups engage with individuals and communities. These include relating to each other as students, consumers, gardeners, employees, community members, and active participants/creators in the group. While some aspects of this, for example the role of community members as passive recipients or active players in the creation and execution of programs, is reflective of many factors (such as organizational capacity and resources), it can also allude to the organizations’ interaction with food justice principles.

Students of all ages participate in different learning programs and workshops, from PACT’s Grow To Learn student gardens to Black Creek Community Farm’s gardening workshops. Initiatives engage with the community by means of exchanging and consuming via selling fresh and prepared foods, as well as through services such as Green Thumbs Growing Kids Garden Care social enterprise, in which youth are employed as local landscapers. Gardens and growing spaces allow community members the chance to actively engage with green space that is typically limited in these neighbourhoods. FoodShare’s School Grown program and CaterToronto’s incubator catering program employ community members with meaningful and fair wages for the purposes of skill development and income support. Some programs are simply
meant to bring the community together, relieve social isolation, and let the community members engage with one another, such as Permaculture GTA’s Living Convergence and North York Harvest Food Bank’s community kitchens. Some programming allows for active participation and creation on behalf of the community members whereas some programming is more dispersed from the group itself. Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change provides multiple examples of programming initiated by the community itself, such as a weekly meal and a communal garden with different style plots to accommodate distinct wants and needs.

4.5 Linkages and networks
The literature posits partnerships and networks as a large feature of food justice work. This field examines the types and extent of linkages between and among the organizations in the study sample. The documents provide a static perspective into the outcomes and products of these networks and collaborations; however, they will be explored in further detail and nuance in the following chapter from individual accounts from organizational representatives. This static perspective, though, is valuable in situating the organizations in relation to one another. There were found to be many different types of linkages and networks, some intricate while others more straightforward, amongst the study sample.

Four of these organizations resulted from a partnership between parent organizations or as an offshoot of a single organization. They differ in their current relationship with their parent group; Black Creek Community Farm was founded by Everdale Environmental Learning Centre, FoodShare, and AfriCan Food Basket, and their website states that they continue to share a key partnership with FoodShare while adding relationships with others. Cater Toronto, originally a venture of Food Forward, is now almost entirely independent save for remaining a trustee to Food Forward. Black Creek Food Justice Network is a branch of Black Creek Community Farm, with its aims to support the food justice motivations of the Farm and surrounding community. The Toronto Youth Food Policy Council received support and mentorship from the Toronto Food Policy Council to grow its roots to work independently—yet complementarily—to the original Council.

Distinguishing themselves from the ‘subsidiary’ organizations, three of the initiatives in the research sample act autonomously but require a base from which to work out of. The Malvern Action for Neighbourhood Change group, created and funded between a partnership from the
United Way and the City of Toronto to support Toronto’s then-23 priority neighbourhoods, works out of the Malvern Family Resource Centre. They share the same physical space, and extend the programming that the Resource Centre is able to offer to its clientele as directly influenced by the community itself. The Toronto Seed Library is independently organized; however, to effectively facilitate the accessing and sharing of seeds across the city with limited resources themselves, their partnerships extend city-wide with other like-minded organizations with a permanent location. These include tool libraries, multiple community centres, university groups, as well as Black Creek Community Farm to house their seeds. The Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective do not currently own farm land, and lease land from Fresh City Farms.

Collaborations in program delivery and in advocacy work are widespread, and act to potentiate the work of individual organizations by coming together on their efforts. While partnerships within the food movement were common, of note are the partnerships that span across different sectors. These allowed organizations working towards distinct issues to leverage points of intersection between them. For example, when Black Creek Food Justice Network hosted a September Day of Action discussion panel, they did so with the support and engagement of other groups with mandates that do not explicitly overlap. As written in the acknowledgements of their food justice report,

“We are also grateful for the new connections and opportunities for solidarity that arose from the groups involved in our September Day of Action panel discussion: Jane and Finch Action Against Poverty, Justice 4 Migrant Workers, the National Farmers Union, the Network for the Elimination of Police Violence, the Toronto Food Policy Council, and the Workers’ Action Centre. We look forward to fruitful future collaboration” (Black Creek Food Justice Network, 2016: 3).

None of the collaborating groups participated in this study⁴, yet they proved ‘fruitful’ partners in a day dedicated to action towards food justice. As a product of the Black Creek Food Justice Network’s community engagement, they heard the neighbourhood’s concerns connecting “policing, race, and culture” and food justice that they acknowledge “are prominently absent in the larger food justice movement” (ibid). The report continues to explain this geographically

⁴ Two of the organizations, Toronto Food Policy Council and Justicia 4 Migrant Workers, may have been included in the sample, but were unable to accommodate interviews. The other groups were not contacted for the lack of explicit referrals to food justice in their public representation.
contextualized connection, and in doing so makes perfectly clear why the Network for the Elimination of Police Violence was present in their food justice panel discussion.

*Specifically, community members outlined the following issues: being followed in the grocery store; being searched and detained for suspicion of stealing food; the fact that our local grocery stores have security systems and undercovers while grocery stores in wealthier more white areas do not; and finally, the locking up of baby food. (...) No one ever should have to face the decision to either steal baby food or to not feed their child; stealing because you cannot afford the necessities comes from desperation and injustice, and this represents a serious need in the community* (Black Creek Food Justice Network, 2016: 11).

This exemplifies how intensely rooted in place food justice work is, and how addressing a community’s specific needs can be facilitated through cross-sector linkages.

Another example of intersectional linkages is the partnership between Greenest City and the Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust: Greenest City is on the board of this Land Trust that works to bring green land into communal ownership. This relationship stems from the Parkdale neighbourhood’s great, largely Tibetan, immigrant population who once were subsistence farmers and are now living in subsidized high-rises. In Parkdale, for these residents, maintaining Parkdale as home despite ongoing gentrification and lack of access to growing spaces are high priority and high impact food injustices (Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust, 2017); Greenest City on its own is unable to address them. Linkages like these were prominent across organizations with different focuses, that when brought together, allowed for a fuller representation—and more productive remediation—of the identified (and sometimes highly localized) issues.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has born witness to the fluid, competing, and contextualized discourses around meanings and performances of food justice in Toronto. In doing so, it has explored only a part of the diversity of issues and approaches that are carried under the banner of food justice by the sample organizations. People who approach food justice are creative in their use of resources, as observed by the common multi-purposing of land: gardens became sites of food production, teaching aids in school curriculums, sources of therapy, employment generators, and communal gathering spaces. So too are the groups intentional in their programming and partnerships, each one unique from its neighbour in their interpretation of and prescription for food justice.
The findings presented in this chapter align with the literature’s portrayal of food justice organizations: organizations’ perspectives on food justice are internally uniform. Existing literature centered around food justice holds critique for the way in which organizations involved in this work fail to agree with each other upon both the fundamental sources of injustices and how best to address them. In critiquing the organizations for having dissimilar views from one another, and failing to mention any possible dissention or discussion within the organizations—solely across them—the literature implicitly creates an image of the movement to be one that is comprised of monolithic organizations with singular, unified stances on these matters. This is evident in Cadieux and Slocum (2015)’s questioning of Second Harvest’s commitment to food justice by examining their mission statement/mandate exclusively, and echoed in Guthman (2011)’s critique of food justice organizations’ approaches to food justice\(^5\). Agyeman and McEntee (2014) extend this in their critique of “the movement’s engagement with larger neoliberal structures,” to portray the entire movement even as a homogenous entity with little explanation or exploration of what unites the underlying organizations to constitute this ‘movement’. There is little discussion or indication of the variation and contradiction that may exist at the organizational, and not just the movement, scale. The findings from an extensive document review support this representation of the groups comprising the food justice movement. Portraying food justice organizations as homogenous entities distances them from the unique individuals—in many cases, by design—that animate them, as will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

The findings also suggest that these food justice organizations present to the public that they view their food justice work as predominantly occurring in their programming and its outcomes. This positioning of programming as the putative primary site of food justice is also prevalent throughout the literature. We thus observe the onus of food justice being placed on programming throughout both the organizations’ documents and the literature. In the case of the organizations, this occurs in annual reports’ celebrations of achievements resulting from the services and

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\(^5\) This discussion does not rebuke such assessments, as discourse is demonstrably reflective of, and contributes to, power distributions (Foucault, 1980). An organizations’ public conflation of the term food justice with a paradigmatic charitable approach does thereby obscure the power relations that spur such injustices as if the problem is truly solely a lack of food. This discussion does, however, seek to add dimensions and nuances to how we categorize ‘an organization’s understanding’ of food justice.
supports they provided. This occurs in the literature when, for example, food justice actors whose practice entails engaging with the market are condemned for obfuscating social justice because of their engagement with market mechanisms that are inherently racist and neoliberal (Guthman, 2008b, 2008a; Hinrichs & Allen, 2008). Likewise, Agyeman & McEntee (2014) implicitly position programming as the site of food justice when they propose using urban political ecology as a framework in order to bridge what they deem to be two antinomic temporal scales invoked by food justice: the immediate need for hunger relief and the long-term work of dismantling society’s oppressive systems and structures. Similarly, it is frequently the outcomes of programming that are considered, measured, and lauded as ‘doing’ food justice: urban community gardens, youth-directed programming, and participatory education are celebrated as effecting food justice through increasing participation in, and control over, the food system; improving health; environmental dividends; income generation; and reclaiming power and autonomy, to name only a few (Alkon & Norgaard, 2009; Curran & González, 2011; Levkoe, 2006). This contributes to, as the following chapters will explore in greater depth, an imposed isolation of food justice’s potential to its programmatic outputs.

The following chapter directs its gaze from outside the organization to understandings and experiences of food justice from the individuals comprising the organizations.
Chapter 5 Means and Meanings of Food Justice

While the structure adopted in Chapter Four lent itself to the examination of published and/or posted materials and related secondary resources (e.g. media accounts, promotional material etc), augmented by commentary from participants, the approach in this chapter is different. The intention in this portion of the research is to move from a somewhat mechanistic description of organizations and practices to a more human-centric perspective illuminated through conversations with organizational representatives concerning the understandings, motivations, beliefs, and experiences that underlie the programmatic nature of food justice work. In so doing, the hope is to actively engage the complexity and nuance of food justice thought and action as it exists at the level of community-level food justice organizations. The chapter is presented in two substantive sections. Section 5.1 reports on how organizational representatives present the features and values they attribute to food justice. Section 5.2 provides an overview of the various perceived opportunities and barriers that are encountered in their work.

5.1 Understandings of Food Justice

In discussions of how food justice is understood and enacted by organizations, a dichotomy is often presented whereby the ways in which food justice is ‘understood’ and ‘performed’ are distinct. This leads to these two conversations being had separately—questions form around ‘how do organizations understand food justice’ and subsequently, ‘how do they pursue it’. However, interviews revealed that participants connote the term ‘food justice’ with both a set of social justice principles as well as a due process, switching between the two interchangeably. This blurs the distinction previously imposed between the concept of food justice and its implementation. The purpose of this next set of substantive findings is to wrestle through some of those more thoughtful elements that have come from the conversations in each of the two categories—food justice as goal and food justice as tool—and the themes expressed within them.

5.1.1 Understanding Food Justice as Societal State

A significant portion of the interviews were around participants’ strong reactions towards injustices informing their relationship to food justice. Food justice was frequently depicted as an antithesis to these injustices, and as such stood for self-determination and autonomy, equity, and healing and well-being.
Food justice means “ownership”

*We can take our future, our destiny, in our own hands because it’s our right to determine our own destiny. And not some other person (Jacqueline Dwyer, Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective).*

Ownership—herein described interchangeably with sovereignty, self-determination, and autonomy—presents as a significant feature of food justice by 12/17 organizational representatives. The systems and structures that have and continue to disallow independence and sovereignty motivate the actors to pursue self-determination. Participants raise three main areas of concern, or scales, at which injustices that deny ownership have been identified: these include ownership over one’s role in the food system; over aspects of life outside, but intersecting with, food access; and over a persons’ and people’s narratives. The following section discusses how the participants relate their food justice work to redressing these issues.

Several participants assert that food justice entails not only capacity to exert choice over food types, but it also allows communities to hold power over the food system itself and their role therein. They point out that lack of choice over types of food and where to access them, for example, are indicative of a broader denial of the right to self-determination. The founder of a purely volunteer-run organization expresses this sentiment explicitly.

> [Food justice is] the ability for people to change that situation. I think food justice has a lot to do with (...) your own ability, to own, to hold power in that [food system]. (...) because of marginalizations due to housing, education, and power dynamics, (...) your ability to create a just food system is very, very much hindered and you’re sort of stuck in the situation that you have [OR-4].

This participant reflects on the lack of options many people experience to create change in their food system. The essentiality of active participation and ownership over the food system as a key component of food justice was echoed by many. Jacqueline Dwyer, from Black Creek Farmers and Food Growers Collective, stated that food justice for her is “realizing and creating my own ownership so that I can ensure secure systems can be had by small people.” She contrasts this with the current system of having “to go through this guy and that guy to [access fresh produce].” Ownership and active participation in the food system restores a sense of power and relieves dependence on structures and systems that continue to disadvantage the communities in which these organizations work.
Food studies literature discusses the distance between society and the processes of the food system in conjunction with the resultant food illiteracy and deskilling. That society has been removed from seeing, and understanding, the processes through which food arrives at the grocery store has been reported to have many impacts on society’s relationship to food (Jaffe & Gertler, 2006; Thyberg & Tonjes, 2016).

Findings from this study complement those in presenting this segregation of production and consumption as one manifestation of, and tool for, marginalization and oppression. Participants explain that being denied agency over the food system parallels the systemic repression of agency in other areas of life. Further, it promotes the continuation of the inequitable status quo by adding barriers to their participation in it, thereby limiting their ability to transform it.

Food justice, for many participants, also speaks to realizing decision-making power in more general areas of life. Some respondents raised issues around the lack of options and choices for marginalized populations in many instances of daily life, including choice of employment, type of housing, and neighbourhoods. The literature’s neat definition and delineation of a food system, containing only that which directly pertains to food (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010), fails to acknowledge just how many systems and factors contribute to, overlap with, and stem from the processes and products in the ‘food system.’ Many respondents highlighted just how relevant to—and informing of—these tangential factors are to peoples’ involvement in and access to the food system.

Box 5.1: Rising land prices across the city crept into a discussion around the issue of ownership. Toronto’s high land values and changing land uses were reported to restrict access to public green spaces. In response, one organizational representative discussed their efforts to facilitate ownership over the food system in alternative ways, such as through improved food literacy and re-skilling. Pointing to an image of a resident on one of their printed materials, one commentator said, ‘if [she] can get somewhere to grow food, I’m doing food justice work because she used to farm in India and having a plot and having a plot like this [small] is like, ‘why don’t I have more land?’ and I’m like, ‘because it costs a million dollars for each.’” (OR-9).
Organizational representatives call attention to how lack of autonomy in areas around housing, income, and even self-expression also affects their participation in Toronto’s food movement. One program manager captures many of these interlocking issues when they retell a community’s response to a potential gardening project. Spoken from the perspective of the community members they work with,

‘Look, I don’t need you to come here and teach me how to garden. I know how to garden. I need the opportunity. And the opportunity’s missing because I have a language barrier, or because I wear a hijab and people don’t take me seriously, or that’s my perception of how I’ve been treated. Or, there are assumptions made about me because I’m an African-Canadian youth and people assume that I’m not going to be responsible.’ So we have to really provide opportunities to deconstruct those things, unpack them and then build them back up in a just and equitable way (OR-3).

While this powerfully speaks to the importance of community-led and -involved programs (that will be revisited in Chapter 5.2.1), it also illustrates the need to re-examine how we understand the food system and the injustices that manifest within it.

Lastly, ownership in food justice extended to include authority over one’s narrative. Food justice is seen to invite people to overhaul the narratives imposed upon them by society by cultivating opportunities to actively re-write them (Redmond, 2013). Rewriting narratives that depict the capacity and resilience inherent within any community was portrayed to be an important and meaningful component of food justice work. One example of this was one participant’s frustration with their experience of the predominance of white middle class people who act as spokespersons for the food justice movement. Alia Karim raised the questions, “Do you have any lived experience of food insecurity? And, of being, say, a racialized person? And facing discrimination?” There was clearly some importance attached to the notion that stories were to “come(s) from the most marginalized” as an element of taking back narratives.

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**Box 5.2:** Jacqueline Dwyer and Noel Livingston, of Black Creek Farmers and Food Growers Collective, see their work as both re-writing narratives outlining their capacity and asserting their historical relationship—of both oppression and intimate knowledge—with agriculture through their food justice work. Jacqui stated, “Way back, our ancestors died, and they were raped and all these things happened on the farm. And you have some guy telling us, ‘he’s an expert. he just ‘discovered’ something’. Yes, you just discovered it. We’ve been doing it.”
Food justice as Equity and Dignity

I think, food justice is also (...) allowing everyone with a diverse background, diverse culture, diverse however you define yourself--that shouldn’t affect how you access food (PACT Grow to Learn).

Interview participants overwhelmingly expressed that a critical defining feature of ‘food justice’ as a societal state was equity and dignity. Dignity is included alongside equity because the two were frequently brought up together throughout the interviews. It was often stressed that equity has not been achieved if not also done “in a way that is dignified (PACT Grow to Learn).” Organizational representatives described food justice as working towards a society in which access to food, participation in the food system, and compensation for food-work and food system-work were equitable and dignified.

For the participating food justice actors, food justice works toward equitable and dignified food access. A farm manager from PACT Grow to Learn highlights the need for dignified, equitable access to food in his statement that stresses the current inability for people to choose and access (with dignity),

*It literally comes down to the fact that people just need food and they need food accessible, and they need a way that they can get it that’s easy and that they don’t feel like they’re being demeaned in the process, or forced to wait in a line or forced to get a number, or [one of the] different waiting systems [that] are in these food accessibility programs.*

Included in the discussion around equitable food access, conversations also brought up more insidious disparities—including financial and health-related—that fall disproportionately on marginalized populations related to food. Actors were particular about it not just being ‘access to food’, and not only culturally appropriate, affordable, but also nutritious. Nutritional equity was brought up as a result of and contributor to inequity in many of the neighbourhoods that they work in.

(...) you can eat and your stomach is full, but you lack nutrients. The food as we know it today is compromised in terms of the nutritional values. It’s compromised. We’re eating stuff but we are not getting anything from it. It’s dead (Noel Livingston, Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective).
For Noel Livingston and Jacqueline Dwyer, nutritional (and resultant health) equity will enable these communities to “revolutionize”; the actors help “level the playing field” by providing cleanly produced, highly nutritious foods that the communities otherwise wouldn’t have affordable access to.

Equitable opportunities to participate in, as well as shape, the food system also fell under how interview respondents described food justice. Under this category fell a desire for equitable opportunities to create change in the food system; equitable opportunities to participate in food programming; as well as equitable opportunities to contribute to food production. A common sentiment shared by some participants was that the very existence and model of their organization was rooted in the intention to create a platform for oft-ignored voices. For one organization, their existence was in direct response to the previously absent outlets for their voices. One commentator stated,

Well I think actually, the mere fact that we exist is, it comes from an understanding that not all voices are represented in the food movement at all or equally. And so, because we represent a demographic that is often left out, often marginalized, we already come from a place where we feel as though we want food systems, and a food movement, that is more equitable. That is more inclusive. Where we can speak with as loud a voice if we want to on issues that matter to us. So I think that the mere fact that we exist is rooted in food justice [OR-5].

Many participants noted their intent to increase access to food programming, in order to overcome the barriers that often preclude it. Access was fostered through attention to providing tokens for transit, meals for events hosted at a typical meal time, as well as offering free or subsidized programming. For a founder of an organization, providing universal access to school gardening programs was the foundation for their advocacy work so that schools in low-income communities had equitable access to their wealthier counterparts. For this participant, one aspect
of their organization’s work was “really thinking about all of the dignity issues and access and equity to experiential engagement (OR-10).”

Equitable compensation for labour and effort resounded as a widely-held concern for many of the food justice actors. For one founder and orchestrator of their respective initiative, equitable compensation for labour was a primary motivation for their work. They qualified it unjust that for equivalent labour and products, “very frequently it’s gender, and class, and those cultural assumptions, and colour, and race that come in to affect the economic outcome (OR-8).” For this actor, one instrumental aspect of food justice is achieved when people are able to earn incomes dictated not by social constructs and marginalized statuses that artificially devalue many types of ethnic foods, but by the quality of the food products they create (Ray, 2011). For others, this comes up in equitable compensation for work even under limited resources. One interview with three organizational representatives raised that their network was intentional in being sure to value everyone’s efforts even when only modest stipends were available. This is one way that they cultivate a culture of care and appreciation as well as a more inclusive environment that recognizes that every contribution is valuable and that not everyone is able to volunteer time readily.

Food Justice as Healing

“Our motto is, ‘your food is your medicine and your medicine is your food.’” Noel Livingston, Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective

Organizational representatives made many references to a state of food justice as a state in which there has been, and continues to be, societal healing. Food justice, in much of the literature as well as to all of the actors, is based heavily on the premise that food injustices are the result of structural and systemic forms of oppressions that have created false divides between groups of people, leading to the marginalization and oppression of some and the privileging of others. As described throughout the interviews, food justice is thus a societal state in which society has healed from these afflictions. It is both created by and creates room for self-determination and equity to become foundational facets of society. For the sake of organizing this section, ‘healing’ has been divided into discussing ‘physical healing’ and ‘emotional healing’. This is not to create
a false dichotomy between the two, but to reflect the manner in which they were presented to me by the interview respondents.

Food justice allows physical healing, participants explained, largely as the health benefits from improved diets and physical activity materialize. This theme echoes much of what has been said in the preceding sections regarding self-determination over quality of life as well as health equity. However, it bears repeating here because of the way that participants explicitly framed it in terms of healing “from the monetization of their world” (KI-1). The key informant, along with the majority of the representatives, recognized the role that food in particular plays in physical healing in his community due to their inadequate access to food. He explained, “the reason why food justice is so critical, so important, is because it’s food. It’s the basic energy. It’s the gasoline, basically. The petrol for your body. Food justice is life or death” (KI-1). Without food justice, marginalized communities go without the body’s “basic energy, (...) the gasoline” and that this constitutes the difference between “life or death” (KI-1). As discussed above, Jacqueline Dwyer of Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective attributed poor health to poor food availability stating, “at least one component” of “why (...) people are having so much issues with crime and health issues is because of the food that we consume.” Implicating nutritional deficits in the cycle of marginalization, the key informant touted efforts to address maternal and pediatric nutrition as “nipping it in the bud, literally” (KI-1). Throughout the interviews, representatives continued to illustrate how the absence or presence of health from nutritional foods was relevant in food justice for the relationship it played in affording, or limiting, future opportunity. In this way, food’s role in physical health was not seen as purely an individual or static event, but one with possible social and systemic ripples.

Another theme that emerges from the interviews is food justice’s potential contribution to psychological healing, related to both historical and contemporary traumas. The physical act of

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6 The author is cognizant of the ways in which discourses around health (in particular, fetishism around the ‘obesity epidemic’) pathologize racialized bodies, perpetuating the cycle of injustice rather than redressing its symptoms (Colls & Evans, 2014; Guthman, 2011, 2014; Harper, 2016; Slocum, Cadieux, & Blumberg, 2016). This analysis of ‘well-being’ as a concern of food justice activists stems from discussions with research participants around their own experiences of food justice and of well-being. It also recognizes the complexity around what ‘being well’ looks like, and that it is different for each person. However, it is with these considerations in mind that this research intentionally avoids defining ‘well’ and ‘unwell’ as well as prescribing the pathway there; instead, it seeks to draw attention to an invisible, but “somatised” (Slocum and Cadieux, 2015), consequence of injustice (and life, more generally).
farming or gardening allows people “to take the frustration out of [their] systems” (Noel Livingston, Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective) as well as to provide a reason to gather for seniors “that are vulnerable to experiencing isolation in their homes.” Similarly, many participants noted the dividends that gardens provide beyond a source of food and space of learning, through their ability to bring communities together, foster friendships, and build confidence. Food justice also, for some, connotes an element of societal healing from historical, generational, and personal trauma incurred in direct relationship to the food system and systems of oppression. This is expressed most strongly by three separate interview participants as they connect their work to slavery and how that is still a vivid factor in how African Canadians, are able to and have the desire to participate and engage with the food system. Their work can be understood to challenge and address this trauma by creating new narratives and examples of how people of colour can shape their own food systems for themselves. Slocum and Cadieux (2015) describe the urgency and potential of focusing on trauma in food justice work, such that it allows practitioners to address the lived experience of systemic and structural inequities. Citing Redmond (2012) and Puar (2009), Slocum and Cadieux (2015) expand that a trauma lens to shape food justice work can be employed toward a food justice that unites based on shared experiences of varying degrees and types of trauma to create a politics of affinity and not identity.

5.1.2 Understanding Food Justice as a Tool

Study participants’ responses revealed that food justice actors also understand the term to signify a tool through which food justice as a societal state can be achieved. Being a practice in addition to an ideology, food justice in an organization or program may, in part, manifest as a function of the organization’s features. This may act to shed some light on one of the dilemmas the literature presents about food justice, such that the literature alleges a conflict in demands between the movement’s long-term, systemic goals and the immediate needs of the community. The literature presents this as a tension with the explanation that these two objectives (long-term and short-term) are mutually exclusive, such that attending to one detracts from efforts towards the other. By looking at food justice through the lens that presents food justice as a tool through which justice is reached, the objectives that the literature juxtaposes may be perceived to be, at least in
part, as working in tandem. Food justice actors understand food justice to be a tool to model justice in the present day, as well as to lay the groundwork for widespread justice in the future.

This section discusses the ways through which organizational representatives report embodying justice as an act of food justice. The two primary means this is achieved is through transforming workplace culture and structure and prioritizing community-directed objectives and community leadership. These practices, understood as interpretations of food justice, allow the organizations to recreate themselves as spaces of justice and equity. The former means of modeling food justice will be expanded upon in Chapter 5.3, while the latter is discussed here.

**Food Justice is Community-Directed and -Led**

Interview respondents resoundingly supported the notion that a key facet of their role as food justice actors was to potentiate the work that the community itself deemed needed and wanted. Organizations varied in how well, or to what extent, they perceived themselves able to materialize this principle into practice, but ‘community-directed’ nevertheless came up throughout the large majority of interviews (11/17) as a value they identified strongly with food justice. The three main ways in which food justice actors enacted this principle were through direct consultation with the community, working as support for communities to enact change themselves, and through ensuring means for community members to hold leadership positions within the organizations. As described in Chapter 3.1, the multitude of ways to delineate ‘community’ complicates this and, as several participants noted, raises attention to the possibility of tokenism. Conversations around community involvement and leadership were thereby had holding the many complexities and nuances entangled in the term ‘community’.

Creating and continuing programs that are community-directed took several forms. One of the more prevalent forms was through direct community consultations. Many organizational respondents emphasized the important role these consultations played in their food justice work. Throughout the interviews it was expressed that the role the community held in project design and implementation functioned, to varying degrees, as a distinguishing factor between ‘food justice’ work and ‘other’ food work. One representative reflected on how the pursuit and utilization of direct consultations was a fundamental part of the organization’s change in direction towards food justice. The consultations revealed that community members were
troubled by power imbalances between themselves and the organization; this contributed to this organization’s turning point for prioritizing food justice as a focal point of their objectives. Echoing a sentiment widely held across the interviews, an organization’s co-chair stated that working alongside the community through consultation and invitation is “the only way that it can work, and the only way we feel comfortable doing it” (OR-5). Similarly, many organizational representatives describe embodying food justice in their practice involves ensuring community members hold meaningful positions. Juneeja Varghese captures this well in her quote,

Most of the committees that I lead are actually resident-led and they have a say in things. (...) If the residents are taking hold of it, if it’s a joint initiative, (...) [we’re] making sure that we help to start it in the community and then slowly we step back and let the residents take the lead [Malvern ANC].

Although many interview participants state hiring from within the community is a strong component of food justice work, several of them noted the financial limitations they face when trying to enact this. This is a barrier to food justice that will be discussed in the proceeding section 5.2.2.

5.2 Experiences of Food Justice

While the literature details the organizations and programs that pursue food justice, there is less exploration of the experiences of those ‘doing’ food justices. The research sought to examine how organizational representatives reflect on their engagement with food justice and the conditions they find to be moving them forward towards, or stalling away from, food justice. Both outcomes are considered separately in the two proceeding sections. Section 5.2.1 engages with what interviews identified as enabling conditions for food justice work, and Section 5.2.2 details those they found obstruct it.

5.2.1 Conditions for Success

This section presents findings that respond to the question: what circumstances, both local and/or systemic, further progress? Conversations with organizational representatives about what they perceived to be conditions for success in their pursuit of food justice work ran the gamut from the hyper-local (ie. street-level) and immediate to a wider context, extending to the level of the City of Toronto itself. These categories are unique from the food justice ‘tools’ discussed in
Chapter 5.1 as they are not described necessarily as criteria of food justice but heavy contributors towards it. However, they are not completely distinct as both categories pertain to factors that contribute to the realization of food justice. The three opportunities reported the most frequently were network linkages and community embeddedness (13/17); the personal energy and character brought to the work from the individual actors themselves (9/17); and the informality of an initiative’s structure (5/17). This section will conclude with a list of more specific conditions that the representatives found particularly helpful in their food justice work, particularly as they contribute to the efficacy of movement linkages.

Embeddedness and Linkages

Being embedded within the community was seen to enable the relationships and familiarity needed for community-directed work. A resounding theme across the interviews was how integral it was for the community to be involved in the organization from its inception. Jacqueline Dwyer from BFFGC asserted, “I can’t roll up in your community and come and make plans for you and you’re not at the table. You’re not going to be very welcoming to me about that.” Juneeja Varghese relayed an anecdote she “love[s] to tell” describing the transformative power of engaging the community that neighbours where a new project was going.

Last summer we did a lot of door knocking in the area around the farm, the potential site of the farm. And I think it was almost 8 hours of door knocking spread over 2 days, asking, talking to people that there’s going to be a farm here, and ‘what is your opinion,’ ‘do you like it’ (...) The last house that I did on the second day, we knocked on the door and there were two youth who came out (...) and I made a pre-judgement call thinking that, ‘they’re young people, they won’t be involved, but might as well go with my shpiel so they can tell their parents.’ And they said, ‘wait there’s a farm coming in our area?’ And it’s about two minutes walk, the farm from their house, and I said, ‘yeah.’ And the boy goes, ‘wow!! I can actually go and water the plants at night if I wanted to.’ And I said, ‘yeah you could actually walk and go.’ And he said, ‘(...) I would love to be a part of the farm.’ (...) And he’s actually since then been coming to our consultations. He’s gotten his school interested in participating as well. And he’s in grade 9.

This quote describes how direct consultation and communication is, “how you find that interest, that knowledge, and that passion in the community” (Juneeja Varghese) to make a project successful.
Representatives relayed that patience, mutual respect and trust, and accountability were fundamental for an effective initiative-community relationship. When describing the progress made at the half-way point of a three-year grant, Aja Peterson said that the first half had been primarily about building “a lot of trust” to form “really strong relationships [with community members] that you’re working with.” This sentiment was echoed in many of the interviews, as many representatives brought up how having a consistent contact person between the organization and the communities allowed their relationships with, and food justice work in, communities to become much richer and deeper. The founder of one organization described the detailed process undertaken to put together an event with their community network.

One time, we had this group and I was pulling my hair out about why can’t ... [we can’t] all agree(d) upon [a size].... We drew it, we shaped it, we translated the language, we did everything. But on day of, there was this size [indicates], there was this size [indicates], there was this shape, and like I’m still scratching my head. We had their kids come in to remind them. I just could not understand [OR-8].

The challenges in communication continue to present themselves in the work, and demonstrate that embeddedness is a long and non-linear process. The participant stressed that “culture doesn’t mean just language,” (OR-8) and while the diverse cultures and practices are what create opportunities for their work, they may also take considerable work for both parties completely understanding one another.

Organizational representatives expressed that working from nested within the food (justice) movement helped increase their organizations’ capacities. Although linkages and networks were previously discussed in Chapter 4.5, they will be expanded upon here as more was revealed in individual interviews than could be gleaned from the static portrayal in the documents. The forms and functions of the linkages between organizations and groups varied as different groups leveraged unique aspects they had to offer. Some groups with more experience engaged in partnerships by offering mentorship; some groups acted as another’s financial base through which they could receive donations. The co-chair of one organization credited the group’s ability to do thoughtful, effective work in part due to the “monumental [mentorship] support” (OR-5) they received from their network. Many partnerships were creative, such as those that partnered with post-secondary institutions, providing several food justice organizations with volunteer and
work-term students. Juneeja Varghese described how they launched a social enterprise from their organization with the help of university computer science students.

The catering network is actually what we are trying to promote as a pilot university community food entrepreneurship model. And how can, well, students have a lot of things. So we have a computer class, but we don’t have internet literacy in terms of making websites, so how can we (...) fit in their [post-secondary students’] curriculum because they’re supposed to be working in the community, and supposed to be obtaining their hours, but these residents are needing to start up a business. How can we make sure that both of them are benefiting? But also in terms of education, seeing beyond just what are university requirements and this is actually something that you are helping to establish in a community.

Most commonly, however, interviews discuss how food justice is too big an issue for one organization or actor to engender on their own, but through partnerships each could tackle a more manageable piece of, or skillset for, it.

As raised in Chapter 4.5, the linkages between organizations were observed to potentiate their food justice efforts, making the progress of the movement much more than just the summation of each individual organization’s efforts but also a product of the efforts amongst them.

**Personal Energy and Dedication**

A big potentiating factor for food justice work is the actor’s own personal energy. This is particularly salient in the groups that were entirely volunteer-run, in which, on top of all their other conflicting responsibilities, the volunteers continue to put tireless energy into their roles.

We have a lot of really passionate young people who applied to be [in a leadership position]. And as I said, you know it’s a totally voluntary position, and we ask for 5 hours of commitment a week. Sometimes it’s less, sometimes it’s significantly more ... But we have without fail had ... very dedicated, very passionate, very hardworking ... people. That’s been a major driving factor behind (our) success (OR-5).

In another conversation, one representative who carries a great deal of responsibility for their initiative, mentioned that they had been told that their initiative “is you” and to “just be careful because ‘you will burn out’, because I do a lot” (OR-8). The physicality of the food justice work that engaged in farming and food production also took tolls, “not just physically but mentally, too” (Jaqueline Dwyer, Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective). Because of minimal
resources, Collins Boahen of Peace Farm described his primary mode of transportation for himself and his produce as on foot.

Last year was crazy. I have never walked like that in my life. The whole summer, I did so much walking I almost cried one time. It was just too much.

Despite the very real challenges posed by this work, the actors demonstrate perseverance and dedication to their food justice goals. The groups’ successes stem in no small way from the effort and energy the individual actors expend.

Progress in food justice work was widely depicted as coming very slowly, and this was a great test of patience and persistence. One representative describe that their advocacy took years to make only incremental progress, only after consistently coming across closed doors and negative responses. Outside of advocacy, two participants explicitly referred to their personal connection to food justice, with one program manager describing it “as an individual life-long journey” (OR-3). Dedication and personal emotional and energetic investment was unmistakable throughout the interviews, especially as participants discussed how intertwined food justice was in their personal lives. Noel Livingston (Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective) describes how the long process of de-toxifying his body from years of consuming conventionally-produced and nutritionally “dead” foods, is part of his own food justice labour.

I most likely have come across these bad foods, and they’ve left some residue or another in my system which has to come out. So I have to now undo all of that, all of that injustice, to work that stuff out of my system. So, it’s work. It’s work in every context and in every way, but I have to do it.

Unlike other work places or types of work, the very nature of food justice—and the everyday experiences of food injustices—means that actors do not leave work at the office. Food justice work, though largely performed and studied at an organizational scale, appears to be largely dependent on the individuals’ stamina and dedication to the movement.

Structured Flexibility

While the interview conversations largely focused on general conditions that augured for success, several participants raised four specific means of actively creating these conditions, specifically in relation to cultivating effective partnerships. They include:
• Establishing a clear set of criteria for the organization or group’s mandate, understanding of food justice and pathway towards it was said to be helpful since many of the organizations had different people in charge of different aspects of the organization leaving room for variation in its interpretation. It was also said to be helpful in maintaining momentum and consistency despite the turnover experienced by many of the initiatives. One representative said that their organization did this through their anti-oppression statement.

• Compiling a list of the organization’s assets and skillsets as well as their needs, as suggested in this quote: “I think that’s also a project for each group to identify their own, ‘this is what we can offer other groups, this is what we need’” (OR-1).

• Creating and maintaining venues for initiatives to meet, discuss, and partner. It was mentioned that the Toronto Food Policy Council serves this purpose, and that more would be helpful.

• Fluidity and flexibility were observed as key tools for reacting and adapting to continually changing contexts, allowing more immediate responses. One representative described their network as being in a “weird and awesome space” (OR-8) because of the extent of their network’s flexibility

5.2.2: Perceived Obstacles for Food Justice Work(ers)

Interviews with organizational representatives, as well as one key informant, revealed that working within the limitations of the current funding landscape provided a range of obstacles to food justice work. Although largely originating from insufficient and/or unpredictable funding sources for the organization or network, the barriers were analyzed to manifest in different forms at multiple scales.

This section will present and discuss the findings from interview questions regarding what the organizational representatives considered their works’ greatest barriers. It is organized into three identified impacts of the funding landscape, with each impact being further analyzed for its implications at the individual and organizational scales. The individual scale pertains to the individuals’ well-beings, while the organizational scale relates to the organizations’ functionalities and structures. This discussion presents how, within each material impact, these two scales interact with each other to hinder the ability of an organization to uphold its food
justice principles and practices, as presented in Chapter 5.1. Lastly, this section concludes with a consideration of how these reported obstacles—as they affect the individuals and organizations within Toronto’s food justice movement—both construct and reinforce power differentials within the movement that also disserves its integrity and unity. These impacts and summaries of scalar implications are presented in the following table, and are unpacked in the upcoming sections. Emerging themes will be further discussed in the following chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Impacts to an Organization’s...</th>
<th>Scalar Implications/Manifestations</th>
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<td>Individual</td>
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<td>Dependence/Reliance on Volunteers</td>
<td>• Busy schedules&lt;br&gt;• High burden of labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of support provided to employees/members</td>
<td>• Job (in)security&lt;br&gt;• Limited support for personal well-being and professional development</td>
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<td>Programs and services offered</td>
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<td>Ability to create linkages within the movement</td>
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Table 5.1: Limitations of funding landscape as they present at multiple scales

These discussions are particularly noteworthy because despite the phrasing of the interview question asking about obstacles to their individual group’s work, participants interchangeably discussed obstacles to the movement at large. This—supported by the analysis at the end of this section—may underline how the success of an individual initiative and of the movement are intertwined. However, the observed preference to discuss the obstacles as they affect the entire movement may also signal an individual’s hesitancy to single themselves out. From the repetition of highly similar obstacles reported across the interviews, the barriers likely occur for both the individual organizations as well as the movement at large. It must also be stressed that this section is intended to highlight the barriers that many organizations face—to varying
degrees—and the possible (reported) material implications these can have on the movement. It is not meant, however, to suggest that they are experienced equally across every organization.

Dependence/Reliance on Volunteers

A quality of the (problematic) funding landscape for many of the participating organizations in this study is a high dependence on volunteer and/or temporary intern labour; indeed, three organizations were completely dependent on volunteer work. Many representatives echoed the sentiment of one organization’s executive director that they would “love to be able to hire from within our community, for example, but it’s very limited as to how [since] we don’t have a lot of job opportunities” (OR-9). It was also observed that many of the organizations relied on ephemeral support or seasonal government funding in order to staff themselves. One organization reported being able to adequately support their programming with externally-funded or voluntary student internships/work terms from almost every post-secondary institution in the city.

The primary implication of the prominence of volunteers for the volunteers themselves is an additional commitment to their already busy and full schedules. As one participant who works entirely with other volunteers noted, “it’s obviously really hard [to manage volunteering] because we still have to work ... and do all the other things” (OR-5). This was mentioned alongside their recognition that the volunteers in their initiative “often say this, ‘I would love to work here and do this work!’” (OR-5) Even though volunteer positions are sought out, and thus not imposed on anyone, it can be taxing on those donating their time.

Limited permanent staff was reported to significantly impact an organization’s output and structure. It was noted that some of these organizations experience high turnover rates, largely from the structure of the volunteer position and the guidelines delineating governmental funding. Additionally, organizational representatives implicate the common situation of conflicting demands on volunteers’ time in their organizations’ limited capacities. The degree to which this impacted one’s work varied, from being unable to keep on track of communications to when most of the volunteers were on a trip, “they’re coming back tomorrow, so pretty well every thing’s on hold” (OR-1). Insufficient capacity relative to the vast amount of work to be done is characteristic of the non-profit sector, even when there are paid staff; however, its prevalence with volunteers and ephemeral employees was heavily emphasized during interviews.
Notwithstanding identifying equitable participation within, and control over, the food system as integral to their understandings of food justice, organizations’ high reliance on un(der)paid positions presents a significant barrier to materializing this aim. An organization’s limited ability to hire from within the community precludes them from addressing how, “realistically, especially in these communities, folks need money. High school students or folks who are just graduated, they need a job. There’s no other way around it” (PACT Grow to Learn). Further, representatives shared their frustration with how a culture of un(der)paid labour makes the movement vulnerable to not adequately represent the communities they serve. One program manager of a small organization reflected on how this, as well as delayed recognition within the organization of this as an issue, has led them to working primarily with youth of relative privilege rather than those directly impacted. In addition to not furthering this food justice principle within the organization, the key informant voiced concern over how this affects their efforts outward: “most of the strategies are being created by people who have read about exclusion. And then they do not take it as personal as someone--I’m technical about it because it’s personal” (KI-1). Limited funding poses as a challenge to reducing barriers to meaningful participation and equitable representation in the food justice movement.

The individual and organizational scales also interact through high turnover rates, as it stils relationship building between the organization and the community. One representative of a group with a high degree of turnover embedded in their structure commented on how this increased the difficulty of building meaningful and trusting relationships with their community partners.

_We do have a network and we’ve been working with quite a lot of people, but because we have turnover and because we are not necessarily always doing the same kind of work, establishing relationships and then maintaining them can be challenging. Because if someone used to have a really strong relationship with a community organization, and now there’s someone new and perhaps they’re not as comfortable, it takes a little while to re-establish that connection (OR-5)._
As discussed in Chapter 5.2.1, strong relationships are found to be integral to providing relevant and effective programming. While turnover doesn’t prevent them completely from building lasting relationships, it does add yet an additional strain on organizations with demonstrated limited resources and capacity.

**Box 5.4: In outlining the details considered in the designing and execution of their programs, Juneeja Varghese expanded on the rationale for their extensive use of resident-leadership. This was done primarily because their initiative strives to “strengthen(ing) the leadership capacity of residents, providing them the support to actually take ownership of the community.” As the conversation progressed, a supplemental reason surfaced. She stated, “we are always thinking from a standpoint that we may not have funding to have staff in these areas, with these initiatives.”**

Degree of Support Provided to Employees/Members

The funding landscape’s unpredictability obstructs an organizations’ ability to offer employees adequate professional and personal support. The most significant impacts on individuals and organizations were observed in the challenges this posed to ensuring job security, facilitating professional development, and offering sufficient resources about, and support for, experiences of ongoing oppressions.

Organizational representatives report that uncertainty in the organization’s funding future creates tensions for the individual’s job security. The executive director of a small organization spoke to this regarding past incidences of unexpected funding cuts.

That’s a justice issue too, is people’s employment. We’ve had to at times have people go down from full time to half time. That kind of thing. It’s not sustainable for an organization, but it’s also, I think, a lot of people sacrifice at their non-profit jobs in order to do the work that they believe in (OR-9).

For this participant, along with many others, job insecurity within the food justice movement is in itself a “justice issue” that comes at the cost of an individual’s “sacrifice” (OR-9).

Interviewees from organizations with paid employees pointed out that the organizations’ funding (or lack thereof) meant there was often inadequate support. The desired support most mentioned throughout the interviews were both professional and personal. The same executive director who framed job insecurity and instability as a “justice issue” also reported that extremely limited funding made his decision to attend conferences and trainings to not be made on the merit of
potential professional development but instead, “I often have to decide, ‘am I going to this conference?’ I’m going to have to pay for it myself” (OR-9). How supported individuals feel by their organizations is also impacted by working conditions: some participants state the organizations could dedicate more resources to prioritize how anti-oppression and anti-racism rhetoric are applied in the workspace. Some of these representatives suggested (more) anti-oppression and anti-racism trainings.

Not all the participants voiced these frustrations explicitly as impediments to their ability to work effectively. However, the prevalence of these reported “justice issue(s)” (OR-9) in the organizations in the study sample presents both a sustainability issue and a conflict with the intent to model justice and equity in the work place.

Programs and services offered

Box 5.5: In the white caucus during an anti-racism training specifically for Toronto’s food justice movement in May 2015, one attendee explained to the caucus that they had found a work-around to the issue of limited funding: they intentionally included anti-racism and anti-oppression trainings in the deliverables of their grant applications. This ensured that part of the grant funding was pre-allocated to directing organizational attention to structural power imbalances in the food system with the aim of strengthening their progress.

Many features of the overarching funding system were reported to affect the programs and services organizations are able to offer. While the material implications of insufficient and unpredictable funding on programming are more obviously related, the grant application process itself—including meeting some of the increasingly prominent requirements—were also reported as a hindrance.

The relationship between funding and the organization’s capacity to serve its community varies across the organizational sample, though is predominantly reported as difficult. The personal connection many participants express having with their work leads to frustration and disappointment when the funding landscape lessens the quantity, quality, and consistency of programs they are able to offer. These obstacles to their food justice work are primarily due to a shortage of funding and/or the time and energy spent fulfilling grant requirements. When asked about how funding affected their programming, one participant responds, “it’s a pretty big bummer most of the time” since “every year funding
changes a little bit and affects what you can do (PACT Grow to Learn).” They continued to relay a story about an impact of a recent cut to their funding.

Because this year, for example, we’ve had a student who ... spent a full summer volunteering with us and then we hired him through a program for another summer. So he had two summers putting in 40 hours a week every, from June-September. And that’s, after 2-3 summers at doing that, you’re pretty skilled at growing.... This season we’re hoping to hire them for 20 hours a week as a community volunteer and as an assistant manager.... And then there’s no funding and you end up having to cut half your budget for materials, and you end up even cutting weeks off of your own contract. And then you can’t hire this person that would be the most amazing person to take this project over (PACT Grow to Learn).

The personal connection and affinity they had for the “most amazing” youth they could no longer hire is conveyed through their willingness to sacrifice their own pay, and is compounded by how the rest of their programming will fare under this funding cut. In addition to the emotional strain of not being able to hire that youth, there is, consequentially, additional work placed on the manager as they must now adapt to providing the most and best services they can on a significantly reduced budget.

Although certainly not the dominant feeling, a few participants revealed unexpected dividends from their funding relationships. For one founder of a group, it was an “honour ... to sit in some of their seminars of who they’ve funded” and that they are “in awe” of being “in the presence of these other awesome organizations”(OR-8). This participant’s positive relationship with their funder was the product of feeling supported by them as well as the energy they got from meeting others receiving funding. Another representative note that funders have started looking for more youth-led initiatives, and that that would allow them to do that when previously their budget wouldn’t allow for it. Several others also demonstrate that funding shortages or changes catalyzed creativity in the ways they financially support their work, although few say this positively.
Organizational output is reported to be impacted in several ways by the funding landscape. The most common and predictable response organizations had is having to limit the programs and services they offer. However, limited and unreliable funding also acted to reduce the accessibility—and thus relevance—of the organizations’ programming. For one group this manifests in an inability to provide as many accommodations for improving accessibility to their events, and for many it means having to decide if they can still offer programming for free. One executive director described how “up till now, everything we do is free for participants. We’re considering some changes to that” (OR-9).

The funders demonstrate fetishism towards and prioritization of ‘new’ and “innovative” projects, forcing many participants “to tweak” and/or reframe their work accordingly (Juneeja Varghese). This need for organizations and their programming to maintain the appeal of funding agencies exhausts organizational resources and individuals’ energy, as well as increases the precariousness of an organization’s ability to stay true to what they regard as their fundamental concerns. Juneeja Varghese brought up the conflict this causes when, in order to continue their work, they are forced to tweak or change it.

We have to become more innovative every year because less and less funders want to fund the same projects. They want a new program, a new initiative, so every year we are trying to think of how to tweak the gardens, how can we tweak the educational programs so we can still find funding for the gardens. That becomes hard when there’s a lot of successful programs, and those are funded, but the idea of being innovative and creative has
An issue can also be seen with regards to an uncalculated impact of funding on the material expression of food justice. From the one participant’s comment about how increased funding for youth-led initiatives might lead their work to embody that, there is potential influence in funding discourse over how organizations pursue food justice. Another participant was cognizant of how accepting funding from major food companies directly impacted the way their organization both addressed and discussed food security (noting in particular, that the organization does not use such “radical” language). This is exemplified by an organizational founder’s reflection of the potential consequences,

They’re speaking the language, but it [the work] hasn’t changed. And it’s tough because I’m glad, I’m divided. Great, there are now people [who] know the words ‘food justice’, but I’m constantly challenged by this and thinking about, ‘How do I create a bigger movement while keeping true to what I think at least as food justice, and the people that I’m hoping to represent, and building capacity with so that they can represent themselves?’ It’s tough (OR-8).

From this quote it can be seen that funding discourse may, and is perceived to, affect how organizations pursue food justice as well as how the term ‘food justice’ is used (Cornwall, 2007). Both present challenges to the food justice movement moving forward in unity and conviction towards how they have identified ‘food justice.’

The relationship between funding and organizations presented many tensions around the organizations’ ability to stay true to food justice principle and their ability to be financially sustainable. One source of tension is around receiving funding from those institutions deemed complicit in, and/or actively contributing to, oppression and marginalization. Alia Karim found this to be an irreconcilable ideological contradiction of groups claiming to do food justice while, “either taking money from Walmart or other people that I think are a huge conflict of interest.”

A founder and executive director of another organization felt compelled to justify a source of funding by saying that they are “just a better version of capitalism” (OR-10). An additional source of tension comes from the stress and disappointment—among a range of other emotional responses from adding further challenges to an already difficult work—expressed by participants as a direct result of their (in)ability to provide adequate programming due to structural barriers. Not only is this found to have implications for an organization’s output, as previously discussed,
it also poses a challenge to working towards healing and well-being. Instead, the nature of the funding landscape and its interaction with organizations imposes additional emotional strains on food justice workers while simultaneously reducing opportunities for support. Additionally, as discussed above, many organizations find it difficult to sustain programs aimed at increasing equity and access to food as these typically are offered free of charge or at minimal cost. One commentator reflected on the conflict between selling to affluent, profitable markets to generate wages for their employees, or selling to the marginalized communities who were the initial catalyst for their work. This is a vivid example of one manifestation of the catch-22 that many organizations reported experiencing: in the honest quest to pursue and further food justice, organizations are often met with challenges that obstruct their ability to fulfill their original intents.

**Constraints of Uneven Power Relations**

It is essential to note that an overarching system of uneven power relations shapes how the organizations within Toronto’s food justice movement each experience the aforementioned challenges. Just as is observed in greater society, some organizations—and some individuals within them—are more privileged while others have less social or financial capital. Similar to discussions of power in structural racism and settler colonialism (and many other -isms), this discussion is not one of assigning blame or intentionality unto the organizations that fare better under the funding regime, but is one that highlights the insidious nature of structural power differentials such that they can pervade even a movement whose raison d’etre is to dismantle them. All the impacts that the funding environment has on the individual and organizational scale exist within a system of uneven power relations, and as such there is no uniform effect across all the organizations, though there is generalizability. Organizations within the movement and the individuals that animate them are affected differently and to varying degrees by the challenges of the funding landscape. How each is affected is determined by both a product, and reinforcement, of power differentials within the movement. Just as Chapter 5.2.1 discusses how food justice progress is potentiated, in part, by the linkages between the organizations, so too can its regression be effected by the power relations that characterize those linkages.

“*Competition*” (PACT Grow to Learn) and “*territorial[ity]*” (Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective) across the organizations were acknowledged as some ways the funding landscape
infuses a sense of struggle for influence and power within the movement. This struggle was also interpreted to shape who dominated the movement’s narrative,

*People (...) who are now spokespeople for food justice [in Toronto] and getting, it’s not just about money, but shit-ton's of money. (...) It does make me cringe when, I don’t think we have to go super slow to make it very quickly more represented by people who have strong voices and want to be at the forefront. There are definitely lots of reasons that people don’t want to be, say, the spokesperson. But, I also know tons of people who want to, and who have the ability to, be the spokespeople for their communities. So there doesn’t need, there’s not really a strong reason why the ones that are are (OR-8).*

Who is advancing the narrative of the movement is perceived to be influenced in part by power and funding, rather than wholly by the principles outlined throughout the interviews. These concerns arise amidst worries over the usage of the term ‘food justice’, and the role funding may play in the term’s recent uptake.

*I don’t see why all these groups and the funders [are territorial]. Now they’re getting smart: they realize that a lot of people are going to moving towards that [funding food justice work]. ‘Oh there’s money over there’ – you should see when the funders come out, how many people show up. (...) It’s a gold rush. (Jacqueline Dwyer, Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective)*

Many representatives voiced issues with how other organizations—none named specifically—may be using the term food justice. The emphasis was placed on “*if anything around equity had changed***” (OR-1) in their practice versus only in their discourse.

Funding also diffuses the movement in the way it forces groups—to varying extents—to differentiate themselves from one another through their analysis of the issues and their approaches to them to garner funding. Food justice is thereby at risk of being presented as disjunct as organizations vie to claim the ‘best’ version of it. Representatives were mindful to say that their organization did not absolutely sway to funders while recognizing at the same time their work did not occur completely separate from the perspectives of funding institutions. This is said not to depict the movement as at ends with itself. Its intent is to highlight the material impacts funding has on the power dynamics within the movement as its benefits are inequitably distributed. When asked about knowledge sharing and partnership between organizations, one participant said that competition was a bigger impediment to this than the time commitment involved.
Examples of power being recognized, and then leveraged as an asset to assist other organizations with less relative power, must be noted. One program manager said that their organization is cognizant of the relative power it holds, and that,

*that’s really what this food justice work is about, is understanding the dynamics of power and privilege not just as individuals (...) [but also] looking at how organizations can use their power as organizations to prove opportunities that are equitable and just (...) to open the way for them to self-determine how they want to organize themselves as an organization (OR-3).*

This example of the beneficial aspects of uneven power within partnerships does not erase competition also invoked by these power differentials. It sheds light in how exploiting them was also seen as a tool to equalize the movement.

### 5.3 Summary

This chapter drew on interviews with 21 organizational representatives and one key informant to explore their understandings of, experiences with, and contributions to food justice, nuancing the inner circle of the conceptual framework. Its analysis is divided into two substantial sections. It reported on how individuals within the movement interpret food justice as both a goal as well as a process; this emphasizes food justice is not perceived as something that is solely ‘accomplished,’ but is deeply intertwined with the means through which this is done. Organizational representatives highlight the importance of food justice modeling its principles of sovereignty, equity, dignity, and well-being in practice. Second, the experiences of food justice workers provide insight into conditions for food justice’s success as well as the complexity of obstacles that obscure it.

The findings portray the individuals that animate food justice organizations with their own agency and contributions to their respective organizations’ outputs. Both the investigations of food justice’s conditions for success and obstacles demonstrate the importance of the individuals to the organization’s success. Chapter 5.2.1 reflects on how many representatives credit the organizations’ abilities to accomplish so much with notable few resources to the personal energy and dedication of their colleagues. An organization’s embeddedness within the community and the movement is enabled by the individuals within it. Chapter 5.2.2 returns to this in its exploration of the barriers that exist at the individual, organizational, and ideological scales from
its positioning within the funding landscape. These findings begin to suggest that the organizations’ self-representations as homogenous and uniform throughout, in Chapter 4.6, might miss the significance of its staff/volunteers’ contributions. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 5.1.2, organizational representatives articulated the importance of process to food justice. This positions the creation—and maintenance—of a microcosm of reified justice within the oppressive macrocosm as both a prerequisite to and a tool for expanding their radius of change to the broader system. This echoes some literatures’ presentations of prefigurative politics as the concept of embodying the broader change that organizations are engendering on a larger scale that has been historically employed by social movements. Examples of this strategy in practice are seen in efforts to prefigure nonviolence (Epstein, 1991), gender equality (Harris & King, 1989), participatory democracy (Polletta, 2002), and autonomy (Leach, 2009). This study’s findings suggest that food justice organizations themselves are essential sites of food justice work that remain un(der)utilized, un(der)valued, and un(der)acknowledged throughout the literature and across many organizations.

Prefiguring social change may be an appropriate tool for food justice: the key informant posed this question about food justice, “(...) how can you have a just system when the organizational or institutional vehicle represents the same thing in terms of who’s employed and what roles do they play” (KI-1)? This is especially pertinent as interviewees reported that their organizations are still susceptible to having their organization’s power relations parallel those found, and problematized, in society. The same key informant continued about the significance of transforming food justice work spaces, “we can’t change the whole system, but we can change ourselves” (KI-1). Referring to the internal work that needs to be done by both organizations and individuals, a program manager stated that this was a crucial step to overcoming barriers to food justice.

*This whole, our society, was built on racism, and colonialism. And so we feel that we can just amend it by changing policy, and apologies, and whatever and whatnot. But we haven’t really done any efforts to really deconstruct in our path the functions and the forms in which we live within. And they were developed, with the true intention in mind, of capitalism using*
social construct of racism. So, until we actually do that, there's always going to be barriers because you're pushing against a supreme agenda (OR-3).

Prefiguring racial (as described by this participant) equity within organizations and structures working to further food justice is critical to complement programming and policy initiatives designed to realize an equitable and just society.

The findings revealed two particular elements of workplace transformation that were considered integral to food justice; both act to center the individuals within the movement as actors and recipients of food justice. The two elements were anti-oppressive and anti-racist hiring policies and practices, and overall workplace culture and support. Montalvo (2015) refers to this work as “cultural work,” and articulates that if food justice work primarily focuses on programming and policy work, then “what can be lost or overshadowed (...) is the opportunity to transform our everyday shared practices that re-perform and reproduce these structures of power.” Montalvo (2015) stresses the need to investigate how organizations might be “re-performing these [neoliberal capitalism and heteropatriarchy] systems in [their] everyday shared practices.” In Chapter 5.2, interviewees also expressed concern over their organization’s susceptibility to upholding—albeit unintentionally—the very power imbalances they seek to address. These findings bring our attention to how food justice work can be done within the organizations and for their individuals.

Kepkiewicz et al. (2016)’s assertion of food justice’s “need to move beyond inclusion and think more carefully about the structures that create privilege and disadvantage in our society (...)” resonates with this study’s findings that refocuses onto how those structures function and materialize within the organizations and movement themselves. Interviewees asserted that this demands an active, intentional effort to make it so that these “structures that create privilege and disadvantage” (Kepkiewicz et al, 2016) aren’t invisible, and thus unchallenged, within the workplace. Since “privilege then becomes embedded in and reproduced by the projects they [privileged, white food actors] create” (Ramirez, 2015), it also becomes of concern how the projects are then represented publicly to challenge, and not reify, existing inequalities (Ramirez, 2015). Taken together, re-thinking workplace culture and community representation help redirect food justice work from taking on a “missionary zeal” (Guthman, 2008: 436) that reinforces notions of the ‘other’ and further marginalizing populations. Instead, transforming workplace
“culture” (Montalvo, 2015) by increasing accessibility to work healthily within the movement and its organizations and using honest, authentic representation of the work were reported to be vitally important acts of food justice work.

However, as discussed in Chapter 5.2.2, the constraints of uneven power distribution from the funding landscape financially disadvantage many food justice organizations presenting organizations with additional challenges. The findings demonstrate that, with insufficient funding, organizations are limited in how they ‘do’ food justice both through an inability to meet the financial requirements of an adequate quantity and quality of programming, as well as through an inability to uphold food justice principles (as identified in Chapter 5.1.2) due to its reinforcement of uneven power relations both across and within organizations.

Chapter 5.2.2 explores the myriad implications both of these separate, but related, phenomenon have on the individuals comprising the movement. One such element of justice at the individual scale was highlighted by the findings presented in 5.1.1 to be that of emotional and psychological well-being. In this way, individual well-being is both a motivation for and value of food justice work. Despite the notable interest at the intersections of food and health, the idea of an intersection between food and mental well-being has largely been overlooked in the literature. The following chapter will explore this further, focusing specifically on psychological and social healing over physical due to its relative absence from literature (see Guthman, 2011, 2014’s critiques on the prominence and nature of the portrayed relationships between public health and food justice).

The themes arising from this chapter alert us to the depth of the role that individuals within the food justice movement might play in its execution and—inextricable from its process—its
definition as well. The energy and life that the movement’s workers breathe into it are not, however, infinite. The following, and concluding, chapter reflects on this investigation and further nuances the role of the individual food justice worker in animating food justice.
Chapter 6 Literature Revisited and Concluding Observations

The stated purpose of the research reported in this thesis was to explore (and thus understand better) how food systems actors concerned with promoting and achieving food justice interpret and operationalize it through their efforts and actions in the community and policy spheres. The research was organized and executed according to a conceptual framework that positioned food justice organizations as existing within geographical and historical contexts; enabled or challenged by political, financial, socio-economic, and cultural conditions; comprising distinct organizational features in terms of their purpose, approach, and composition; and animated (and shaped) by the involvement of people seeking to achieve progress toward the goal of justice in the food system—and often more widely. The previous two chapters explored separately how food justice organizations in Toronto have structured or organized themselves and their programs, and how actors within these organizations understand and experience food justice as a concept and a calling. The findings demonstrate that through individuals’ interventions, both an organization’s structure and its conceptualization of food justice are in fact bridged, not siloed.

Before revisiting the framework and nominating some scholarly and applied contributions, the intent in Chapter 6.1 and 6.2 is to offer some reflection on two emergent issues that arise across the research as a whole. In the main, these reflections call attention to the importance of organizational stability and sustainability, and the critical role of human engagement and agency in the performance of food justice work. Together, they emphasize the role that food justice initiatives, and those within them, may play in leading (sometimes contesting and uncomfortable) conversations about what food justice “is” and how it can be achieved.

The following discussion will explore the degrees of impacts individuals have on both the structure and ideological framing of their organization. Whereas the literature critiques the products of these constraints at the scale of the organization, and voices concern over the implications this may have on the strength and unity of the movement, the literature largely fails to acknowledge the individuals that carry these instruments of social change. In doing so, the well-being (or not) of individuals becomes a yet un(der)considered contribution to the organizations’ and the movement’s progress in their pursuits of food justice. Chapter 6.1 explores the significance of the individual in shaping the organization by calling into question
the literature’s implicit positioning of organizations as homogenous, monolithic entities. Chapter 6.2 explores how justice at the scale of the individual may include considerations of healing and wellness. Taken together they highlight the potential of supporting emotional well-being as both a concern of, and tool for, furthering food justice.

6.1 Organizations as sites and sources of diversity and debate

Chapters 4.6 and 5.3 highlight areas of tension stemming from the distinctions between how organizations present themselves as monolithic entities and how they are understood by those working in them who animate these spaces uniquely unto their own. This room for individual agency and variation is largely unacknowledged by the literature, eclipsing the roles, both formally and informally designated, carried out within the organizations as yet unacknowledged and undiscussed.

This study found that opinions on, and understandings of, food justice within organizations did not always match those described publicly by the organizations, nor were they necessarily unanimously held. Chapter 4 observed that organizations present a decisive front in their public-facing interactions; however, placing the public representation alongside private interpretations gained through interviews revealed that there was often room for fluidity. Illustrating this point, while staff members in both North York Harvest Food Bank and PACT Grow to Learn responded positively that their work falls into the camp of food justice work, their websites suggest that North York Harvest Food Bank primarily works to provide emergency food relief to those in need while PACT Grow to Learn engages students in food literacy programming through school-gardens. While there is overlap in their motivations—such that they both work to improve access to food for low-income populations, implicit differences in their visions for food justice are illustrated in their different missions and means of engagement. These distinctions in practice form the basis of the literature’s depiction of the movement; however, this eclipses the agency of individuals within the organizations themselves. It is clear that individuals may self-define and -enact principles of food justice as neither representative of North York Harvest Food Bank nor PACT Grow to Learn publicly identifies with food justice in their published materials despite both individuals interviewed describing their work in those terms. This sphere of inquiry thereby questions the role these individuals may play in shaping the public and private elements of their organizations’ stances.
Sbicca (2012) notes that “diverse individual interpretations of food justice” that “may not correspond to the [organization’s] public discourse” as a pressing complication of the burgeoning food justice movement. Chief Toyin Coker from Permaculture GTA expands on the diversity of opinions present within their volunteer-run organization:

*I’m not sure as a collective we would define it one way, just because it’s a collective. There’s many many different people. (...) I’m sure some people would disagree on some things. It’s an inclusive community. We don’t really have one opinion. Those communities freak me out.*

Their comment demonstrates that their organization did not have a singular definition of food justice. Moreover, rather than seeing this inherently as a complication, as Sbicca (2012) suggests, this non-conformity was a source of pride and a reflection of their inclusivity and accessibility. Another organizational representative specified that they can only “speak for [themselves]” (OR-1) when asked about their network’s motivation for pursuing food justice, recognizing the space that exists within their group for variable interpretations of food justice rather than an absolute definition.

Individuals’ understandings of food justice in many cases were found to be informed by their personal histories, a factor that further introduces room for subjectivity and variation into approaches to this work. It is interesting to note that despite not asking anyone for their personal background, participants consistently interwove these stories into their explanations of food justice and their relation to the work. When asked about what motivated their role in food justice work, one program manager responded, “personally, I’m brought up by black nationalist parents. I’ve always been very active within dismantling racism, so when I see it I know that it’s my responsibility to speak to it” (OR-3). For this participant, lessons they had learned since childhood contributed to their personal relation to,
and practice of, food justice work. A founder of a network interrupted themselves to provide their own context to their work, saying that they “believe that, first of all, food justice has many meanings to different groups and individuals and that we come to it with different histories and reasons” (OR-8). It was essential for this participant, along with others, to contextualize their responses to my questions in their own history. Similarly, Noel Livingston (Black Farmers and Food Growers Collective) described their deeply personal history that contributed to their dedication to growing nutritionally dense for their community.

*From where I’m coming from, my father was a farmer ... I grew up around farming. Everybody was farming in my community. ... And so, coming from that background, we’re always used to good food. ... And it was only when I came here, consuming the food, I realized my body was telling me something else. I did not feel as energetic, and I knew something was wrong. And I could tell that the food was compromising me. ... So, I decided to grow a little bit about food here and there but not enough because there was [no] plots [of land]. ... So we decided, you know what, we need to get land and grow our own food.*

For Noel, land and food sovereignty are integral and foundational aspects intertwined with food justice and this is translated into their farming and advocacy work. An organization’s seemingly singular portrayal of food justice may be in part a collection of perspectives and tactics from its staffs’—past and present—embodied experiences.

Related to persons’ histories, the findings point to how emotional responses also contribute to an individual’s construction of food justice and how ‘to do’ it. The same participant that described people coming to understand food justice through lenses of their histories and experiences continued to discuss how relationships amongst other activists, both positive and negative, had, and continue to have, material impacts on the type of work they take on as well as in the partnerships they build. Feelings of trust and friendship, as well as of hurt and fear, are embedded in this participant’s approach to food justice. In a farm manager’s description of food justice, their past experiences with food stamps and how “it sucks” (PACT Grow to Learn) shaped their initial relation to the imbalances within the food system. This participant gave additional personal and geographical context to why they chose to approach food injustices through farming:

*Ontario has weird cartel systems where you can’t produce or sell eggs freely outside of these quota systems... That’s a big problem. ... So for me, the hands-on approach feels the most empowering for me, and it’s what I enjoy the most.*
Frustration, empowerment, and a personal relationship to food insecurity all come together to help construct what food justice means to this participant.

Expanding beyond simply housing differing ideologies of food justice, many representatives relayed how their or another’s understandings of food justice had materially altered their organization’s practice. One program manager of a small organization reflected on a former staff member that “had a more radical analysis than a lot of the staff” and because of that “felt [his analysis] didn’t have a home in [our organization] because we weren’t ready to be that home” (OR-7). Although this former staff had already left the organization at the time of the interview, the critical perspective on food injustices of this one individual materially contributed to the current changes the organization is working towards. Similarly, another program manager echoed the sentiment that the staff members, both individually and collectively, hold the knowledge and experience that enable their organization in the work it does. “Let’s say that I wasn’t here, or let’s say that if all of us were to switch tomorrow, how would the next generation of [our organization’s] staff carry that on” (OR-3)? Both of these participants draw attention to the potential fluidity and diversity of an organization’s conception of food justice, and the extent to which it may be impacted on the individuals comprising it.

Contrary to the literature’s characterization—and organizations’ self-depictions—of organizations within the food justice movement as monolithic entities, the findings portray these organizations to be compositions of people with their own agency and who bring sensibilities and past experiences to their engagement.

6.2 Emotional Justice

The previous two chapters have pointed to the role that individuals play in creating and supporting Toronto’s food justice movement, as well as the ways in which interpersonal “cultural” (Montalvo, 2015) work that transforms workplaces into equitable environments that actively support their members. Reflecting on these nuanced perspectives that center the individual’s contribution to, and experience within, the organizations that build the movement, the findings bring our attention to the higher concept of food justice involving seeking justice not only for the communities in which they work but for the individuals doing the work as well.
Emotional and mental well-being merit the attention of food justice theorists, in part, because of how they are inherently interwoven into social structures. Anderson & Smith (2001), among others in the field of emotional geography (see also: Sharp, 2009), present emotions as pertinent and active factors that both shape and are shaped by the social world. Anderson & Smith (2001) assert that the implications of Western society’s tendency towards “suppression [of emotions] produces an incomplete understanding of the world’s workings” and “leaves a gaping void in how both to know, and intervene in, the world.” Conradson (2003), in their work on geographies of care, examines how an increased sense of care and empathy contribute to a reduction in social marginalization. Considering emotional well-being as a “way of knowing,” (Anderson & Smith, 2001) the social world could be a useful ingredient to the social change aims of food justice work.

Beyond the theoretical significance of considering mental well-being as a component of social change, it may also be pertinent to food justice more specifically. Food and emotional well-being are strongly connected: emotions affect feelings towards food, just as food—its presence, absence, particular types, etc.—affects emotional wellbeing. Food holds great power and connotations to emotional states, as do the injustices that spur food justice work. Access to food is affected not only by material and logistical issues such as proximity, affordability, and dietary restrictions and needs; Usher (2015) asserts access should expand to “include emotive components such as acceptability, accommodation, and residents’ perceptions of their food environment and foodways.” Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2016:44) focuses on African American women’s reliance on over-eating as a “survival strategy that allows [the women] to temporarily evade pain, prolong pleasure, and engage in short-term self-care.” This author connects contextualized emotional states, related to these women’s experiences of being both black and female in the US, to the food choices they make. Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2016)’s explorations of emotional well-being in relation to food complement this study’s findings as previously explored in Chapter 5.1.1. Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy (2013) present the varied ways in which emotional or affective encounters impact one’s “bodily motivation to eat certain foods.” There is also a wealth of literature demonstrating the inverse relationship in which hunger and malnutrition contribute to emotional and psychological stresses, such as depression and anxiety (Siefert, Heflin, Corcoran, & Williams, 2001, 2004). Emotional states, mental wellness, and
healing are intertwined into relationships to food, and thus may play varying roles in food justice work and especially in how we approach it.\textsuperscript{7}

Furthermore, recognizing and considering the emotions and emotional well-being of organizational staff and participants may also be considered an act, and not only an issue, of food justice work. Literature focusing on the “politics of emotion” (Ahmed, 2004b) contradict the paradigmatic view that “emotions are a private matter, that they simply belong to individuals” (Ahmed, 2004a), claiming that they “are also political and can be utilized to maintain the status quo” (Wilkinson, 2009 citing Illouz, 1997, 2007). Ahmed (2004b) adds that emotions can be instilled and harvested to further political goals and create uneven status quos. The literature explores many reasons why recognizing and addressing emotional well-being may be considered a political act. Firstly, emotions are positioned as political because they are prescribed upon populations (see prescribed narratives of femininity in L. M. Brown, 1991 as well as Shaw, 2001, and racialized femininity in Harper, 2016:138; and Philipose, 2007). They are also inherently politicized because they are “bound up with the securing of social hierarchy” (Ahmed, 2004b:4).

Further still they merit recognition in food justice work because emotions happen in response to socio-political contexts (Ahmed, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Philipose, 2007) and because they materially and affectively impact the work activists do (G. Brown & Pickerill, 2009; Wilkinson, 2009). Thus, confronting the insidious ways in which the hegemonic structure materially affects emotional well-being may be considered an appropriate target of, and tool for, food justice work.

\textbf{6.3 Summary of Findings: Reframing the Question}

To investigate how organizations understand and actualize food justice, a simple conceptual framework was used to tease out the many components within the heading of ‘food justice work.’ The framework put forward that the logistical features of an organization as well as its ideologies together shape its food justice work (Allen et al., 2003; Cadieux & Slocum, 2015; Holloway et al., 2007). This summary will revisit the framework and add sub-elements to it that were revealed in the findings and consequent analysis. It will also highlight the framework’s

\textsuperscript{7} The relationship between food and emotional states also cannot be separated from questions of power, privilege, and oppression as racialized, gendered (classed, etc.) historical and contemporary experiences of, and around, food play inextricable roles (McCubben, 2001; Brown, 2003; Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 2016).
utility towards better understanding food justice and its limitations in attempting to capture such inherently dynamic organizations in a single frame.

In Chapter 4, the framework guided the lines of inquiry through a systematic characterization of the sample organizations as reflected in their public documents and elaborations provided by insiders. The results highlight the range of converging and competing means and forms through which organizations interpret and pursue food justice (Cadieux & Slocum, 2015). The exploratory investigation in Chapter 5 gave voice to the core values, aspirations, and experiences that drive the organizations. The findings underpin the amplitude of food justice work being done at the level of the individual. People are at the heart of the movement, and in many ways, direct the trajectory of the organization they work within. This research calls attention to the framework’s inner circle as the source of debate, challenge, and creative destabilization of Toronto’s collection of food justice initiatives.

The framework was useful in recognizing the prevalence of competing and fluid discourses around the meanings and performances in the name of food justice. The framework also served as a helpful organizational tool to contain and partition the nature of the sample organizations using the static images presented by the public documents. Sub-elements were added to the outer portion of the framework, as shown in Figure 6.1, to acknowledge and hold space for the diversity and variation across the organizations ascribing to food justice in Toronto. By adding these sub-sections, the framework is better able to capture the multiplicity of distinct features of these organizations. They are added in an attempt to accommodate the complexity of each organizational structure. For example, the segment ‘structure and mandate’ is divided into sub-elements ‘mission,’ ‘conveyed use and interpretations of food,’ and ‘type of organization’ to better portray the complexity and contradictions that may exist between similar structures and mandates.

Findings gained from an analysis of the framework’s inner circle places people at the nucleus of an organization. The centrality of individuals within their respective organizations calls attention to the role persons, with their unique histories and experiences, play in constructing the organizations. An organization’s version of food justice also plays out in the power dynamics and internal culture within itself. Food justice—as a set of principles and as a practice—stems from individuals. Regarding the framework in its entirety, the study observes that how food
justice is enacted by organizations is truly a product of the two circles’—as dynamic and variable as they are independently—interactions together. Food justice organizations are products of their external contexts and the individuals animating them.

Figure 6.1 Updated Conceptual Framework

The research bears witness to the diverse range of ways food justice is understood and attested to by those enacting it. The framework helped us learn how dynamic and fluid the organizations and their partnerships are; however, this activity is unaccounted for in the design of the framework. This limitation is thus also a finding. The static nature of the framework also fails to visually capture the involvement of an organization’s external context on the framework’s two concentric circles. Two critical aspects of an organization’s context are the sociopolitical environment as well as its partnerships and linkages across and outside the movement. The environmental constraints imposed upon food justice organizations include being founded on precarious funding platforms (Broad, 2016; Sbicca & Myers, 2017). This necessitates them to be
flexible and reactive to their dynamic environments; however, adapting to funder preferences can also make the movement susceptible to co-optation (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Slocum and Cadieux, 2015). Partnerships and linkages are similarly impacted by fluctuating capacities to accommodate them and alignment of intentions resulting from an unsteady funding landscape. It was found that relationships between food justice organizations and their partners to be driven by both aligned ideologies, and circumstance and availability (Galt, Bradley, Christensen, Van Soelen Kim, & Lobo, 2015). Partnerships also serve as means to extend the reach of a single organization’s mandate. The confluence of individuals’ and systemic impacts on an organization’s capabilities to enact food justice may signify that an organization’s public front may more accurately represent what it is the group is able to do, hiding the distance—and factors—between that and what they want to do (McClintock, 2014)(Moore & Swisher, 2016; Zitcer, 2015).

In the exploration of how food justice is applied in practice and how it is experienced by individuals, the research reveals and unpacks two tacit theories within the literature. In doing so, the intent is not to ‘disprove’ these underlying assumptions, but to acknowledge their presence in shaping how we study food justice. This awareness contributes a new perspective from which we can study food justice; it directs us to consider beyond the organization into the external environments, as well as into the agency and role of the individuals shaping it. With the people who animate the organizations in mind, an investigation of how to promote a shared vision of food justice and sustainability of its practices across the movement can now explore how best we can enable the individuals’ works. This opens the door to study the spaces they work in and how to cultivate justice within them, as well as their emotional well-being and its relevance in food justice. The research takes advantage of the unique space created by curiously engaging with that which was previously only implicit within much of the literature around food justice. In this space, it builds on Slocum et. al. (2016)’s call to identify spaces of injustice by identifying where food justice does—and, importantly, can—take place. We can begin to redefine the boundaries of food justice work.

The literature currently presents the boundaries of food justice as limited to the realm of the organization: internally, our consideration of food justice practice exists in the actions and relationships outwards from the organization, missing those who animate it; externally, systemic
structures are regarded primarily as obstacles, and are not considered for their significant influence in shaping the movement. This research invites the possibility of expanding our delineation of food justice work into these new terrains: both the individual and systemic structure are inextricable from our understanding and enactment of food justice in how they both motivate and shape it.

Re-conceptualizing the spaces food justice exists in helps to reposition the research’s two motivating questions: ‘what is food justice’ and ‘how do we do it.’ ‘What is food justice’ becomes a more expansive question than solely pertaining to the movement’s principles. Asking ‘what is food justice now’ recognizes that the organizations, as well as the context they work within, are compositions of myriad moving pieces; the organizations were found to be continuously evolving and adapting to their surroundings, giving the study only a temporally static image of it. This also acts to deeply situate food justice in place, as changes within the City of Toronto’s political and socio-economic landscape were shown to directly impact food justice work. The question also becomes, ‘what is food justice not,’ reorienting the movement with intention around a food justice that employs food as a tool to further system-wide justice, not as a proxy for it (Slocum et. al, 2016).

Engaging with ‘how to do food justice’ in this new space provides the perspective to zoom out from only asking around practice to include ‘how is food justice happening.’ Asking the question in this way presents a new set of responses that acknowledge the contexts of food justice work. It highlights how the work happens at the hands of the individuals that interpret and animate it, and by the partnerships that expand the reach of an organization’s impact. Questioning the social and structural contexts as active elements of food justice work lets us honestly reflect on the degree to which food justice is directed—for better and worse—by the oppressive regimes it seeks to dismantle.

Recognizing the possible expansiveness of these questions, with considerations of the transience of today’s movement’s structure; the ineffable contribution of individuals; and the insidious systemic influence, we are forced to confront that the work is contained by an imperfect system and animated by imperfect individuals. Rather than this be a source of discouragement, I propose this for the opposite effect. The movement is currently characterized by contradiction (McClintock, 2014)—some of which stems from a failure to understand the systemic and
oppressive roots of food injustices, while some are the product of attempting to create change from within a stifling system (and likely, some are a combination thereof). Allowing these two to both exist provides the space to ask: how can we work within the contradictions and imperfections to their eventual transformation to justice and equity?

It is my hope that recognizing that organizations working so diligently to displace and transform the food system, and those tangential to it, are still subject to its contradictions will open questions of practice to include how to work within it—even imperfectly—in the process of transformation (Broad, 2016).

6.4 Scholarly and Applied Contributions

Chapter 1: Introduction acknowledges that much of the literature around food justice is reflective of the US experience, where histories and concepts of oppressions articulate differently from the Canadian urban context. The research contributes to the dearth of exploration of food justice in the Canadian context (see notable examples of Canadian investigations by Wakefield, 2007; Levkoe and Wakefield, 2011) through its exploration of how food justice is expressed by organizations in Toronto. Chapter 4: Characterizing Food Justice Initiatives in Toronto sheds light around the diversity of how food justice is presented and enacted, and Chapter 5: Means and Meanings of Food Justice grounds those findings in their personal and geographical context.

This research adds to our understanding of food justice by bridging the dichotomy imposed between principles and practice in our asking of ‘what is’ and ‘how to do’ food justice. Prefiguring cultures of care and accessibility in the organizations themselves was identified as a priority. Food justice entails transforming spaces and the power relations within them (Slocum et al., 2016), and we can direct our focus to create spaces that actively support those who do the work. This can be aided by considering emotional well-being in discussions of food justice that act to connect the personal and the political.

Exploring how organizations pursue food justice can be enriched by also considering how individuals’ experiences of and motivations for food justice are shaped by their personal political identities and emotional states (Sbicca & Myers, 2017). Contradictions exist at the individual and organizational scales, as both exist inside imperfect and incomplete systems (Broad, 2016). Understanding food justice as an emerging and evolving process, and its contradictions as well,
may help us appreciate the different forms food justice work may take at different times. Acknowledging that these contradictions exist may be useful in constructing fruitful narratives around pursuing food justice of how to move beyond these contradictions, not faulting organizations for them.

To food justice actors and animators, I hope this research acknowledges those that are already working to model justice and to support each other, and encourages those who have not.

6.5 Limitations and Future Research

Significant limitations to this research largely stem from the rigid structure of the conceptual framework. While this proved very useful in the characterization of organizations in Chapter 4, it struggles to capture the dynamism and variability that happens within, not only across, organizations. The research also relied on self-reporting of how the organizations see themselves, or would like to see themselves, in their roles in Toronto’s food system. While using publicly available material provided a rich source of information on the diversity and range of organizations’ features, and interviews helped substantiate and fill out the images they depict, these methods rely on information only from the perspective of the organization. Unable to verify their descriptions with lived experiences of those who participate in them, the findings provide only a partial glimpse into the story of food justice practice.

Food justice work exists in the complicated space wherein it is motivated by long-term, systemic transformation and must also address the immediate ramifications of these injustices in the present day. However, this work is largely investigated by studies (this study included) that do not reflect this temporal consideration. Evaluative research is important to hold the initiatives accountable and to find ways of improving efficacy and reach; however, this research is often performed on the basis of what results are visible ‘right now’ and projecting these results linearly into the future. These studies would be complemented by more longitudinal studies that might help future food justice work maximize its impact across the temporal scales.

Cadieux and Slocum (2015)’s paradigm of food justice interventions and processes aligned with the discussion content in the interviews; however, it became clear that actors faced multiple issues that prevented them from materializing these values in their entirety. This research adds to the literature that focuses on food justice from the perspective of the organization. This
unintentionally eclipses interpretations by and experiences of community members. It is worth researching these two perspectives in tandem. The research’s sample also primarily reports on food justice as it is presented by organizations that work with consumers, and misses the integral perspectives of those working at other parts of the food system. Most notably, this research does not include voices from those working towards indigenous food sovereignty or migrant labour justice.

Future research dedicated to investigating food justice from the individual (or team of) actor(s)’ perspective into experiences of food justice work may help to better understand what barriers that prevent the materializing of their efforts. When held in concert with critical analyses of the root causes of food injustices, these discussions may be constructive to finding a way to work towards food justice.

What could food justice community-academic partnerships look like if the discrepancies academics found between the actors’ practices and the academic’s ideals were creatively explored alongside critique? How could food justice work be improved and its impact amplified if the contradictions that exist within food justice organizations were acknowledged and explored? Could we work productively towards minimizing them? In prompting these questions, my intention is not to ‘critique’ the work—both academic and community-led—that has laid the groundwork for much food justice work (this study included) to take place. Nor is it to minimize the significance of having an authentic food justice movement truly working towards systemic and structural transformation. Instead, it is with respect and appreciation for this critical, challenging, and deeply essential practice that I raise these questions with the belief that they may equip and empower more initiatives to successfully pursue food justice. There are organizations that align with—and push further—how academia envisions food justice work; food justice work is not an impossible task, but one that may come with significant challenges and obstacles that should not be overlooked. I acknowledge that it is not fair to prescribe patience and understanding on those who continue to experience marginalization while the—primarily middle class, white—food movement catches up, and acknowledge that while this line of questioning and curiosity may not be appropriate for everyone, it may still produce fruitful discussions.
There is need for recognition of the labour and energy—both physical and emotional—that food justice requires and its actors exert, and of the justice required in the spaces and cultures of food justice initiatives. It is necessary to investigate what these spaces need to become and provide to best enable the individuals, in particular those experiencing interlocking oppressions, within them to enact food justice. Acknowledging that organizations are comprised of individuals who are not immune from hunger, exhaustion, apathy, mental and/or physical illness, or just having a bad day due to a multiplicity of experiences of everyday life, may position scholars to better support food justice actors in their food justice work. This study provides a starting point for asking: What would happen if our conceptualization of food justice extended to support those who work towards it?


Appendix A - Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me more about what your organization does?
   **Prompts:**
   what is your mission?
   What communities do you work with?
   How and by whom was your organization formed?
   What gap is your work trying to fill?
   How long have you been working here?
   Can you tell me about your role here?

2. Organizations work towards food justice at a whole range of levels, working towards food justice through policy, advocacy, provincially or locally. Could you speak to the different levels that you work with?
   Can you give me some examples at each level?

**Programming:**
3. We’ve talked a bit already about your organization’s programming in general. Can you tell me about your programs / initiatives that center around food justice issues more specifically?
   a. Who do you design your programming for?
   b. What does this look like?
   c. Who actually shows up?
   d. Are there certain groups or communities that you wish you could reach more effectively? That you’re trying to connect with and having limited success??
      i. What are perceived barriers for them being here?
      ii. Are there certain aspects of this your organization is trying to address?

**Experiences of food justice work:**
4. What priorities do you have for your programming? How do you prioritize them?
5. Do you work in collaboration, or in partnership, with other organizations or initiatives?
6. Do you think these partnerships allow you to meet your FJ goals?
   If so, in what way?
   a. How do these collaborations contribute to your goal?
   b. Why do you think this is or isn’t this an effective approach for you?
7. In all the work that your organization does towards food justice, what does success—or maybe progress—look like for your organization?
   a. How do you measure it?
   b. What are indicators?
   c. If you have to report back to funders or higher powers, what kinds of outputs are they looking for?
8. Can you talk about your organization’s best practices? The things that have worked really well for you in your [organization’s food justice work]?
   a. Why are they so helpful?
   b. Can you give me an example in which this has helped move your food justice work forward?
9. What about some challenges?
   How have you overcome them?
10. Are there any specific experiences or lessons that have caused a pivot in your approach to food justice work? Is there any advice you’d give to someone who’s working in this line of food justice work?

**Food Justice Questions**

11. Food justice is defined differently across the board. How does your organization define food justice?
12. Can you tell me about why your organization defines food justice like this? // Can you describe how you operationalize food justice given you don’t have a formal definition?
   a. How was this definition developed?
13. How does this definition inform the principles of your organization?
   a. Ie mandate; vision;
14. Does your organization try to incorporate those principles into its practices or actions? For example, through staff trainings or hiring practices?
15. Has your org always used the term food justice to describe its activities? Do you find any differences between working without and with a definition of food justice?
   a. If so, what are they? If not, tell me about that.
   b. When did this happen
16. Does your organization have any formal or informal policies and/or practices related to social justice and equity?
   a. (ie anti-racism/oppression/colonialism/feminism?)
   b. How do you enact your anti-______ policy?
   c. Can you tell me about this policy? (ie why do you need it; what was the process like of drafting it; decision to have it official on the website or not)
17. How does your definition of food justice inform your programming?

**Questions about Toronto**

18. Do you think that running programs or initiatives in Toronto impacts the types of services you provide?
19. How does working in Toronto affect how your organization defines food justice? Or shapes what food justice looks like?

20. Do you have any questions for me?
### Appendix B – List of documents (used in document review)

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Appendix C: Information Letter and Consent Form

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL AND APPLIED HUMAN SCIENCES
Department of Geography

Appendix (A) – Consent form for Research Informants

“Doing” Food Justice: Exploring Pathways and Challenges in the City of Toronto

You are invited to take part in our research exploring food justice efforts in food system organizations in Toronto, Ontario. This research is being undertaken in the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph under the direction of Dr. John Smithers. The lead field researcher, Ms. Maya Fromstein, is working towards a graduate degree in geography and this research forms an important part of her studies.

The purpose of this project is to understand how food system actors interpret and operationalize food justice through their efforts, whether through policy or community engagement. We would like to explore a clearer understanding of what ‘food justice’ means on the ground and in real practice as expressed through your efforts. In addition, we would like to shed greater light on what factors best facilitate the realization of a more food-just community, and what factors or structures impede progress toward this goal. Because of your activities and goals and apparent (or explicit) mandate we believe you are in a position to provide critically important insights for our work.

Our research approach involves the collection of information concerning community food organizations such as yours through a personal interview at a place and time that is convenient for you. We hope in most cases this would involve a visit to your organization. We are asking for no more than 1 hour of your time – but if you wish our chat to be either shorter or longer that’s also fine. We hope to shed greater light on what principles and practices underlie greater food justice in everyday life – either at the level of policy or in the delivery of programs or other interventions. A summary of the final results of the study will be provided to you (by mail) if you wish to receive them. There is no foreseeable risk associated with participating in this research. If we feel it would be beneficial to use direct quotations from our conversations we will seek your permission.

It is now normal practice at the University of Guelph to inform all study participants of their rights and our obligations to them. Please note the following items:

Rights of Participants

* You can choose whether to be in this study or not.

* You may decline to answer any questions you wish and still remain in the study.
* You may withdraw consent at any time and/or have the information you provided removed simply by asking.

* You can expect the researchers to treat you with respect and courtesy and honour any reasonable requests you may make for the scheduling of interviews or examination of the information we have taken down.

* You are not waiving any legal rights of any kind because of your participation in this research project.

Confidentiality

* Your information will only be used for our research purposes and will not be shared with any industry competitors.

* For purposes of both completeness and accuracy it is extremely helpful to have a recorded conversation. With your permission, interviews will be tape-recorded, though participants have the right to review/edit the tapes or transcripts.

* Data will be stored in a secure location designated for this purpose, within the Department of Geography at the University of Guelph. The data will be retained until completion of the research project, and will be erased thereafter (approx... in August 2016.)

* Your identity and personal details are confidential. We will not identify you in the reporting of results. Any quotations from interviews used to illustrate a point will not be attributed to the speaker unless permission is given to do so.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board for compliance with federal guidelines for research involving human participants (REB# 15DC020). If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact:

   Director, Research Ethics Telephone: (519) 824-4120, ext. 56606  
   University of Guelph E-mail: sauld@uoguelph.ca  
   437 University Centre Fax: (519)821-5236  
   Guelph, ON N1G 2W1

If you have any questions or comments about the research itself please feel free to contact either of us at the addresses below:

John Smithers (facul ty advisor) Maya Fromstein (graduate student researcher) 
Department of Geography Department of Geography  
University of Guelph University of Guelph  
519-824-4120 (ext.58950) mfromste@uoguelph.ca or jsmither@uoguelph.ca
SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT:
I have read the information provided for this study. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given a copy of this form for my records.

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Appendix D: Declaration of Compliance with Anti-Harassment/Discrimination Legislation and City Policy

Declaration of Compliance with Anti-Harassment/Discrimination Legislation & City Policy

Organizations/Individuals in Ontario, including the City of Toronto, have obligations under the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Employment Standards Act, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the Criminal Code of Canada and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In addition, the City of Toronto also has policies that prohibit discrimination on the additional grounds of political affiliation or level of literacy, subject to the requirements of the Charter. Organizations are required to have and post policies, programs, information, instruction, plans and/or other supports, and an appropriate internal process available to their employees and service recipients to prevent, address and remedy discrimination, racism, harassment, hate and inaccessibility complaints under the applicable legislation and including the additional grounds of discrimination prohibited under City policy. Individuals are entitled to refrain from harassment/hate activity.

The City of Toronto requires all organizations and individuals that contract with the City to sign the following Declaration of Compliance with Anti-Harassment/Discrimination Legislation & City Policy. This Declaration must be signed by your organization and submitted with the contract or Letter of Understanding. The name of your organization and the fact that you have signed this declaration may be included in a public report to City Council.

Declaration:

I/we uphold our obligations under the above provincial and federal legislation. In addition, I/we uphold our obligations under City policies which prohibit harassment/discrimination on a number of grounds including political affiliation and level of literacy.

WHERE LEGALLY MANDATED I/we have in place the necessary policies, programs, information, instruction, plans and/or other supports that are consistent with our obligations, and I/we have an internal process available to my/our employees and service recipients to prevent, address and remedy discrimination, racism, harassment, hate and inaccessibility complaints. I/we agree that I/we shall, upon the request of the City, provide evidence of the policies, programs, information, instruction, plans and other supports and an appropriate internal complaint resolution process required under this Declaration which is sufficient to allow the City to determine compliance. We acknowledge that failure to demonstrate compliance with this declaration to the satisfaction of the operating Division, in consultation with the City Solicitor, may result in the termination of the contract.

Name of Vendor or Name of Grant Applicant (Organization or Individual):

______________________________

Complete Address:

Email __________________________

Tel. No. __________________________

Postal Code: ______________________

Fax No. __________________________

______________________________

Name of Signing Officer or Name of Applicant (Name – please print): Position

______________________________

Signature: ________________________________ Date: ________________________________

Authorized Signing Officer or Individual

Multilingual Services: 311 and TTY 416-338-0889. Further information: www.toronto.ca/diversity.ca