frontiers | Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems

TYPE Original Research
PUBLISHED 27 April 2023
DOI 10.3389/fsufs.2023.1066128

OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY
Max Stephenson Jr.,
Virginia Tech, United States

REVIEWED BY
Heather Zoller,
University of Cincinnati, United States
Katie Trozzo,
Virginia Tech, United States

*CORRESPONDENCE
Bradley R. Wilson
✉ brwilson@mail.wvu.edu

RECEIVED 10 October 2022
ACCEPTED 13 April 2023
PUBLISHED 27 April 2023

CITATION
Wilson BR and Lohnes J (2023) Food justice accompaniment research: theory and social praxis in West Virginia.
Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 7:1066128.
doi: 10.3389/fsufs.2023.1066128

Food justice accompaniment research: theory and social praxis in West Virginia

Bradley R. Wilson* and Joshua Lohnes

Center for Resilient Communities, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV, United States

Over the past three decades West Virginians have experienced a deepening economic crisis. Divestment in coal and manufacturing has resulted in widespread unemployment, state, county and municipal revenue losses, and cascading effects on social services, households, livelihoods and community life. For 10 years, FJL has conducted ethnographic research, coordinated cooperative experiments, and built pedagogical tools to democratize knowledge about West Virginia's food system amidst this crisis. Working in a so-called red state, we have fostered conversations about food justice with rural, often socially conservative communities, and have worked to raise up human resources for meaningful community-led food justice organizing in Central Appalachia. In this paper, we consider the long accompaniment process with community partners and the effects of this experience on the evolution of research questions and actions.

KEYWORDS

food, justice, social movement, praxis, accompaniment

Foodlands

In July 2017, a group of people from Calhoun County West Virginia contacted the Food Justice Lab (FJL)[1] at West Virginia University. The Grantsville Foodland was the only grocery store in the county and rumors were circulating that it was about to close. Fears over the loss of

1 FJL is an action research laboratory founded by Bradley Wilson and co-created by graduate students Autumn Long, Derek Stemple, Chad Spade, Alyssa Sobey, Mary Beth Ryan, Thomson Gross, Amanda Marple, Heidi Gum, Joshua Lohnes, Jed DeBruin, Valerie Slone, Emily Tingler, Alanna Higgins, Grace Dever and Erica Stratton at West Virginia University. Over the past 10 years, we have recruited, trained and learned from our graduate students, over 40 undergraduate part-time employees and volunteers, and numerous collaborating faculty at WVU who have dedicated themselves to action research for food system change in Appalachia. In the last 2 years we established a university center within which FJL is now housed. FJL is driven by active partnerships with community-based and statewide anti-hunger and farm organizations in WV. We have been funded by a combination of university, foundation and federal grants. To date we have conducted state level action research on self-provisioning, charitable food networks, food retail distribution, federal nutrition programming, health disparities, small-scale farm viability, and community grocery (each resulting in reports serving organizations working on these issues). We have also launched a worker-owned coffee cooperative called Firsthand, incubated a cooperative regional food hub called Turnrow Appalachian Farm Collective, incubated a beginning farmer training center called Sprouting Farms, established a long-term food system and policy monitoring GIS called WV FOODLINK, a food activist training program called Nourishing Networks and coordinated a statewide right to food coalition called Food for All.

this food access point had been mounting for years. Fresh produce and meat deliveries were inconsistent and even shelves stocked with dry goods were often bare. Though the Foodland was difficult to rely on for a healthy diet, the closest alternative was over an hour's drive away. The consternation over the grocer's imminent bankruptcy were legitimate. Tina, the director of the Calhoun Family Resource Network,[2] explained that her county already had one of the highest food insecurity rates in the state, if not the nation. Unemployment hovered around 13 % and 4000 people, over half of the residents, lived at or below the federal poverty line. As a part of her job, Tina coordinated regular charitable food distributions and many of her neighbors relied on the free food her organization distributes to make ends meet. Realizing the limits of her actions, she felt powerless in the face of the grocery closure. "It is already hard enough to improve access to healthy food in Calhoun. What is it going to be like when we lose our only grocery store?" she asked.

Over the past three decades, West Virginians have experienced a deepening economic crisis. Divestment in coal and manufacturing has resulted in widespread unemployment, state, county and municipal revenue losses, and cascading effects on social services, households, livelihoods and community life. For 10 years, FJL has conducted ethnographic research, coordinated cooperative experiments, and built pedagogical tools to democratize knowledge about West Virginia's food system amidst this crisis. Working in a so-called red state, we have fostered conversations about food justice within rural and urban, often socially conservative, communities and have raised up human resources for community-led food justice organizing in Central Appalachia. This work, following in a tradition of accompaniment, has placed us shoulder to shoulder with people like Tina in Calhoun County and other anti-hunger and food system development advocates across the state. The food system challenges that West Virginia residents face, such as the closure of a grocery store in a small town, have become our challenges. Our scholarship cannot evade the inescapable relationality of the connections we have to an ever-growing network of people who are engaging in food system change.

In this paper, we consider the nature of food justice activist scholarship based on the long accompaniment process with community partners who become involved in this endeavor by intention or happenstance and who, through their engagement, transform the contours of our process of experimentation. We also consider key intentions, decisions, and methodological refinements that went into "doing" food justice in a place that is often framed as one of the epicenters of rural authoritarian populism (Scoones et al., 2018). We unpack our doings and learnings in West Virginia through action-reflection on our approach, methodologies, and outcomes. A few words on what we mean by action-reflection here is crucial. Our gaze is turned, not upon the doings of others, but rather on our own doings with others. This distinction is critical as our goal is not to theorize based upon what others think and do or should be doing but instead theorize from reflecting on the experience of what *we* have done. As Horton (1997) argues in relation to the goal of enacting a society based upon the principle of equality: "the principle itself is not complicated, it's the application that's complicated" (p. 7).

To analyze our own complicated actions as scholars working within the fraught histories of a land grant university (Goldstein et al., 2019), we draw on field-note observations, recorded conversations, workshop documents, surveys, and interviews. This archive of observation and documentation, running parallel to our commitment to food justice, is an essential element of our praxis as it represents the shared product of 10 years of accompaniment research and cooperative experiments. Referencing Myles Horton again, "you only learn from the experiences you learn from." (Moyers and Horton, 1982, p. 251). Combined, these serve as a lens through which we reflect on three interrelated cycles of learning about how to advance food justice in West Virginia that we hope may also serve those engaged in activist scholarship elsewhere. In these cycles, we learned from participatory research with a county-based anti-hunger organization, the co-creation of a state-wide online mapping resource to democratize knowledge about nutrition assistance programs and advance the right to food, the facilitation of a series of local food justice workshops that included some 320 participants, and deep engagement with an emergent coalition of farmers, social service workers, nutritionists, doctors, state administrators, elected officials, food pantry directors, and citizen advocates working to end hunger and improve agrarian livelihoods. We conclude by arguing for more writing about accompaniment in food justice research that challenges the activist/scholar dichotomy (Reynolds et al., 2018) and creates more opportunities for shared learning rooted in activist experience and oriented toward popular education pedagogies.

"Doing" food justice

The call for social praxis in building sustainable food systems demands responsiveness to the urgent need for a broad based social movement that can unite around uprooting the political, economic and discursive structures underpinning food system inequalities and cultivate new systems and institutions that learn from and build upon histories and traditions of collective action and community resilience as tangible responses to structural oppression (Sbicca, 2018; White, 2018; Alkon and Guthman, 2019; Reese, 2019). Such a call must include time horizons that are not distracted by mainstream framing of food system problems and the unconscious centering of white-led, middle class, hyper local interventions like ethical consumerism, community gardens, farmers markets, CSAs, and food cooperatives as "solutions" which often uphold the status quo of the existing social, political, and economic order (Guthman, 2011; Alkon, 2012; De Souza, 2019). While these interventions may remain tangible pathways for people to engage in some of the more glaring problems wrought by the colonial, imperial, industrial food system, many of the protagonists of these kinds of interventions have failed to recognize their role in perpetuating perverse race, gender, and class dynamics that reproduce long-standing inequities community activists seek to address. We ground our understanding of social praxis for transforming agriculture and food systems in the movement for food justice and sovereignty.

2 Family Resource Networks formed in West Virginia to mitigate the effects of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act (PRWORA). These county level institutions are funded on a limited basis by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (WVDHHR) to coordinate public-private responses to poverty in local communities across the state.

Central to the concern of food justice scholars and activists is the critical question of how we produce or enact radical food geographies (Reynolds et al., 2020), not just identify the need for them. For us, the language, practice, and collectivities formed around the concept of food justice (and its critique), as well as its roots in the environmental justice movement (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996) continue to resonate as a means of talking about our place in a flow activism and action research that extends far into the past and will continue far beyond ourselves. The practice of "doing" food justice over the past decade has engendered extensive critical reflection. As food justice discourse is leveraged to frame projects funded by and within the non-profit corporate-industrial-charitable complex, including universities (Bradley and Herrera, 2016; Porter and Wechsler, 2018), there is legitimate concern that it has lost some of its salience as a radical organizing framework for dismantling structural inequalities around land, exchange and labor relations and the trauma and inequities these reproduce (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015). However, challenging the watering down of food justice, activist and scholars have returned their attention to the theoretical and practical roots of social justice organizing exploring the intersecting issues of labor rights (Sbicca, 2015), gender rights (Sachs and Patel-Campillo, 2014), reparations and the movement for Black lives (Pellow, 2016), prison reform (Nocella et al., 2016), migration and bordering (Carney, 2014), land rights (Daniel, 2013), farmworker rights (Minkoff-Zern, 2014), United States Farm Policy (Graddy-Lovelace, 2017), agro-ecology, biodiversity, and smallholders (Zimmerer et al., 2015), and the indigenous foodways displaced through settler colonialism (Mihesuah and Hoover, 2019). It is this return to the roots of food justice organizing that also inspires thinking about how to produce or enact radical food geographies. Working on different fronts in the movement toward food justice can offer new pathways to people-centered and community-led strategies to rewrite the rules of the food system, to right past wrongs, to create a future where benefits and burdens of producing, distributing and consuming food is distributed equitably, and to ensure that everyone can fully participate in the decisions informing how our food system should function and our communities flourish (Slocum and Cadieux, 2015).

Three pathways of food justice scholar-activism

Building on the question of how to "do" food justice as scholars en route to these futures, we have identified three pathways for social science researchers that are currently in practice. The first—*food justice critique* (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Guthman, 2011; Holt Giménez and Shattuck, 2011; Heynen et al., 2012; Graddy-Lovelace, 2017) challenges modes of comprehension, policy and action that create unjust food systems, undermine liberatory consciousness, and constrain emancipatory practice related to reclaiming our collective foodways. Critique, especially when informed by participation in collective action, is a fundamental labor in bringing about more just practices and in decolonizing individuals and institutions. The second pathway—*comparative food justice research* (Heynen, 2009; Watts, 2013; Chappell, 2018; White, 2018)—includes scholarship on people in history and or currently in movement—particularly marginalized communities of color—who articulate ideologies, strategies, and practices demanding food justice, sovereignties and cooperative economies within the context of systemic oppression. Such documentation, observation, interpretation, and theorization of collective action in the face of an oppressive food system serve as a gift of knowledge for uniting a community of practice through histories, case studies, and examples from which movements can learn. The third pathway—*food justice accompaniment research* (Bellows and Hamm, 2002; Pine and De Souza, 2013; Pettygrove and Ghose, 2016; Orozco et al., 2018)—is one in which social science scholars accompany marginalized communities and use forms of research practice—methods, resources, tools, and pedagogies—in a participatory process. In this work, researchers participate directly as protagonists in collective action, contribute to movement process, and hone research methods and pedagogies toward transforming the food system through more just institutions, some of which have yet to be born.

These three pathways are not divergent, but rather complementary. Indeed, many people who identify as food justice scholars do all of these things at various moments, in various sites, and with varying intensities. Scholars participating in the recent special issue in *Human Geography* (Hammelman et al., 2020) all engage in these practices; in fact, many of our most insightful food justice thought leaders blur the boundaries between these research and activist practice. Therefore, we do not wish to prioritize any one form of food justice scholarship and activism as it may hinder the production of knowledge, individually or collectively, with diminished returns to activist practice. We certainly do not, in any way, question activist commitments or priorities. However, we do argue that the scholarly practices demanded of the researcher on each pathway are distinct and therefore worthy of further inquiry and interrogation by both scholars and activists. In other words, each pathway—critique, comparison, and accompaniment—asks something quite different from the social-scientist-*cum*-activist-scholar and therefore requires different kinds of work, time, qualities, rigors, expectations, writing and postures of learning. Moreover, as scholarly practices they are also shaped by different qualities of accountability—philosophical, academic, spiritual, and kinship—and demand the presence of scholarly attention and embodied engagement over different time horizons. And, lastly each presents potential differences in the sociality of the research labor—solitude and togetherness—as it relates to food justice activism. It is in light of these differences in scholarly practice that we call attention to a gap in what we call the practice of accompaniment research.Food justice accompaniment research

Geographers have long engaged in participatory (action) research (PAR) as a means of co-producing knowledge with individuals, organizations, and communities engaged in social transformation (Kitchin and Hubbard, 1999; Pain and Francis, 2003; Kindon et al., 2007; Caretta and Riaño, 2016). The history of the approach stems from scholar engagement in social movements and revolutionary projects that democratized knowledge production (Freire, 1970; Bunge, 1971; Borda, 1979; Elwood, 2006). Over the past 50 years, PAR has been taken up by community-engaged, feminist and post-colonial scholars (Haraway, 1991; Hooks, 2003; Cahill et al., 2007; Torre, 2009) and vigorously debated as a science, method, development, and movement strategy. Consensus however centers on the central idea

that PAR engages with marginalized communities, shares ownership over the results, contributes to community projects, supports capacity building of activists and organizations, and principally follows the lead of community members "through all stages of research through to dissemination and action" (Pain, 2004, p. 652).

The practice of accompaniment is central to the epistemological and ontological foundations of the PAR approach. Indeed, the term "participatory" refers not only to oppressed communities contributing to the process of knowledge production but broader concerns over whose voice counts, who defines the problem, who produces truth, in cycles of research. Scholars are also taking active roles in the social action led by community members. In other words, participation does not only refer to the qualities of engagement of a given community in a research process whose end is ultimately arbitrated by a scholar (and academic institutions) but rather refers to the qualities of engagement of the scholar in their commitments to social transformation led by and with the community. Accompaniment represents the dialogic relationship that develops between people over time (often long periods of time) in which direct actions, participation, collaboration, strategies, planning and cooperative experimentation, or communicating research may be a product. Importantly, accompaniment does not give primacy to any one of these products, nor to one or another method of observation and analysis, nor to social hierarchies. Accompaniment research is, first and foremost, an act of commitment, friendship and love. We resonate with White's (2018) description of her research as a labor of love: "It is my firm belief that love and research are not at odds, but that the best research is driven by passionate commitment" (p. 27).

This paper connects theories and practice of accompaniment cultivated out of intersecting movements of agrarian reform (Issa, 2007), liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1984; Goizueta, 2009) in South America, and Black liberation theology in North America (Cone, 2010) to contemporary debates in food justice praxis, scholar activism, and pedagogy. Derived from the Latin *Ad Cum Panis*, the etymology of accompaniment points to the act of breaking bread with another person, with a compañero, on a mutual journey toward liberation from oppression. The sharing of bread in this case is not a unidirectional act of charitable giving, but one of the collective nourishment and common experience that comes from bearing witness to acts of violence and restitution, pain and healing, and fellowship and struggle over time. Accompaniment prioritizes work by and with the poor, the landless, the marginalized, the dispossessed, in explicit opposition to oppressive forces and institutions. Walking in the company of the poor intentionally moves away from any notion of individual expertise toward a shared struggle for survival, one that demands a long-term commitment to people in place (Watkins, 2015).

It should come as little surprise that for decades, Black scholars, particularly feminists, have urged all scholars to adopt precisely this posture in relation to their work with communities and through modes of writing that engender a community of practice that is sensitive to passionate commitment (Hooks, 2003). Yet, as Ashante Reese (2019) notes, "[i]n food studies, there is very little writing about caring for the communities we serve" (p. 135). Describing her grieving process over the death of a young Black man in her community, Reese expresses the kind of scholarly practice and sensitivities demanded if we are to deepen our commitments to the lived reality of individuals and communities struggling with systemic oppression in our work.

> In the context of research, particularly in food studies where Black lives, Black communities, are central in conversations about food access and inequalities, grief as an experience and a methodological tool asked me to lean into the vulnerabilities that are central to decolonizing anthropology. In my experience, it was emotional and physical, but it was also intellectual in the sense that the grief was not separate from the joys and traumas of writing or conceiving an intellectual project. At the very least, grief challenged the age-old notion of "objectivity." At its most transformative, it radically changed how I saw, heard, and experienced the communities where I worked (Reese, 2019, p. 136).

Our accompaniment practice did not unfold in urban Deanwood but in the rural state of West Virginia, where grieving with communities in crisis, lamenting their loss, and trying to envision a more liberatory future together has transformed us as people, as neighbors, as activists, and as scholars.

Context

The food system in West Virginia is paradoxical. Though the state is rural and has a long and ongoing history of subsistence agriculture (Pudup, 1990; Seaton, 2014) development has primarily centered on coal, timber, gas, and petrochemical manufacturing. The mountainous topography impedes large-scale mechanized farms although decentralized calf-cow operations, poultry CAFOs and processing factories and orchard operations do contribute to dominant agro-food supply chains. In the context of a land tenure system that favors large absentee landowners, the Mountain State maintains the highest rate of small farms *per capita* in the United States, many of them with family ownership structures. Furthermore, public access to large tracts of forested land reinforce a strong culture of self-provisioning that includes hunting, fishing and foraging (Long, 2011; Hall et al., 2020).

Despite conditions that might seem propitious to community food security, access to sufficient and adequate food is highly constrained for many people across the state. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 16 % of the population was food insecure and *per capita* enrollment in federal nutrition programs have consistently remained some of the highest in the United States. The rural retail landscape is in flux as corporate chains supplant locally owned grocers closing in the face of competitive pressures, leaving fewer dollars circulating through the regional food economy. Amidst this reality, work toward a "just transition" away from fossil fuel extraction has funded a number of food system projects and fostered new alignments between the state, the nonprofit sector and private capital interests. These foodways are splintering and differentiating along lines of income and social class. Even as food banking networks enroll an increasing number of voluntary organizations to distribute ever-increasing amounts of industrial food waste to the poor, local agriculture, particularly specialty crop production, has emerged as a key narrative in the state's economic development imaginary, one that also offers a promise to address public health concerns around the dearth of healthy food choices in a place with the highest rates of obesity and diabetes in the nation. Access

to local foods however is largely out of reach for low-income communities confronting a growing sense of economic and social alienation as divestments in coal and manufacturing result in widespread unemployment, massive state revenue losses, opioid addiction, and cascading effects on community well-being.

FJL accompanies people within these highly contradictory food system dynamics where different ideas and myths circulate about the past, present and future trajectory of the land and its people. The resources extracted from remote mountain communities in West Virginia fueled the rise of American industrial power, and identities remain deeply tied to those histories and imaginaries. Yet the state and wider region is also haunted by outside perceptions of cultural backwardness, homogeneity, isolation, poverty and intolerance, tropes which are also reproduced and reinforced by local elites. This "othering" process (Johnson and Coleman, 2012) has historically served to dismiss local knowledge and elevate technocratic ideas of progress and modernity driving capitalist development in the region (Eller, 2008), facilitating dynamics associated with internal colonialism including land and resource control and its associated political tactics of disenfranchisement and minority rule (Lewis, 1978; Gaventa, 1982). This place however is also one of collective resilience and agency, of progressive and radical activism, a cradle of the Civil Rights, environment and labor movements in the United States, spurred by legacies of solidarity forged among extremely diverse working class communities (Fisher and Smith, 2012; Billings et al., 2018).

In 2018, for example, a state-wide 12-day teacher strike demanding rights to fair wages and healthcare for public employees ignited a national revival in labor activism that sparked further actions across the United States. Food became a central politicized feature of these strikes because one in three children in West Virginia live in poverty and school-based nutrition programs are key sites for resolving food access failures. As legislators opposed to the strike lambasted teachers for "preventing" poor students from accessing food, local communities worked to set up feeding sites that ensured children no longer receiving free meals could still access nutritious food options. Such actions were reminiscent of the community food networks forged out of the rich networks of resistance that has also defined this region for over a century (Fisher, 1993).

It is within these many intersecting food system movements, in the midst of these histories of quiescence and rebellion that our food justice accompaniment praxis has unfolded over the past 10 years. In the sections that follow, we reflect on the cyclical process of action and reflection rooted in this practice.

Food, hunger, and the possibility of coalition

We started on our journey of accompaniment research with a local anti-hunger organization called the Monongalia County Food and Hunger Committee (FHC) in Morgantown, WV during the summer of 2013. FHC was initiated by a local nun from St. Mary's Catholic Church in 1996 in an effort to coordinate with other local churches to meet the anticipated growth in demand for emergency food after passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act in 1996 also known as welfare reform. Our decision to work with a small anti-hunger organization forged in crisis was both an intentional and serendipitous encounter.

Three forces converged to open this road. First, informed by critical scholarship on alternative food networks, we intentionally sought work with an anti-hunger organization because we were determined not to engage in the celebration of local "alternatives," often championed by community outsiders, as a solution to deep food system inequalities experienced by poor folks in WV. We were not only concerned with their reification of whiteness and market-solutionism, but their classed character and reproduction of a particular agrarian imaginary of Appalachia which bespoke the erasure of working or precariat class realities and histories. While our decision to turn toward emergency food agencies might appear surprising given the well-established contradictions of food charity (Poppendieck, 1999; Dickinson, 2019), we had other realities in mind. Emergency food agencies served an estimated 20 % of the population in the county. Therefore, we felt the charitable food phenomenon, the people it mobilized and those it served, represented a far more significant social reality than the less than 1 % we estimated were engaging in local food networks. Second, a significant cut to SNAP allocations were reducing household allocations by $20–30 per month in Fall 2013[3] and we were concerned about the large proportion of people, principally the working poor, who depended on these funds to make ends meet. Third, a student collaborator with another FJL project, had introduced us to his mother Ginny, a social worker at a food pantry affiliated with FHC. The personal connection with Ginny opened the door for us to engage in this work.

Six collaborating FJL researchers, including ourselves, participated in the work over 2 months in Summer 2013. The research questions focused on where, why, how and with whom FHC operated. Our research resulted in 22 interviews, a collective event ethnography of a food pantry distribution day, a community food security assessment, a group mapping exercise, a report back meeting and a discussion about next steps. The report back, planned from the outset of the project, created an opportunity for dialog with the 15 women (and 1 elderly man) that formed FHC. They gave critical feedback on our research, challenged our findings, and gave guidance about ways we might continue to contribute to addressing hunger, food insecurity and the provisioning of social services to support vulnerable households. And, our experience with the FHC pressed us into another cycle of research.

Cooperative experimentation, scale jumping, and the language of access

At the end of the first cycle of research, FHC asked us for an unconventional output. In a meeting, we hosted to present the results of our research, they asked for a tool or resource hub to reflect on what they were doing to meet the needs of the people they served. One of the key reasons for this "ask" was that our

3 The 2009 American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) increased SNAP allocations to spur consumption and stimulate the economy after the 2008 financial crisis. These were progressively phased out reaching their term in October 2013. Although much of the country had experienced an economic recovery by that point, West Virginia remained the state with the highest unemployment rate in the country.

participatory research uncovered that all of the members of the FHC produced monthly reports of their charitable or emergency food activities and "sent up the chain" to comply with the accounting and surveillance demands of the regional food bank, federal agencies, Feeding America, and their donors. Indeed, reporting was one of the most tedious aspects of their volunteer time and they felt this burden was uncompensated and quite unfair given that they had to raise the funds, distribute food, and provide services. Our observation was that the amount of accounting and reporting work by FHC members was astounding, and yet it was clear that no one in the group had been able to individually or collectively reflect upon or plan strategically with the information they were gathering. In other words, they could not use the knowledge they were producing for others to effectively advocate for the people they served.

While exogenous institutions like the regional food bank, federal government and Feeding America required data "up the chain" to comply within their emergency food systems they did not share such information "back down the chain." This opacity reflected wider trends in supply chain management and broader governance dynamics within emergency food networks. Engaging FHC to reflect on the data they were gathering revealed an asymmetrical power dynamic in knowledge flow. Clear action steps came out of this initial participatory research phase. FHC wanted a means of analyzing their own experience and those of the people they served. Furthermore, they wanted people to have access to more information on the availability of their services. They also wanted their agencies, and the work they were doing to be seen by the community and government, and they wanted a means to discuss approaches to address hunger and poverty issues. Some of those wider issues included the devastating problem of cuts to federal nutrition assistance benefits in the fall of 2013, ending 5 years of additional funding following the 2008 crisis. This was directly leading to increased demands on their services and additional pressures to "feed the line" with minimal resources, a dynamic we understood as opening spaces of political possibility within charitable food spaces (Lohnes and Wilson, 2018).

In response to FHC's requests, we drew upon our training and experience in participatory geographic information systems approaches to design a public facing resource hub for community food workers in West Virginia - an approach later described by our colleagues as community geography (Shannon et al., 2021). Through Fall 2013, we researched and evaluated existing online resources and tools from Feeding America, FRAC, JHU Center for Livable Futures as well as state resources such as 211, DHHR, and other social service agencies. Unfortunately none of these platforms met the expectations of the FHC, were not scalable to counties across WV, nor provided an integrated tool, designed for community food workers, or anti-hunger, community food or food justice advocates in support of individual or coalition work. We felt that we would have to create the public-facing online portal we and the FHC were looking for from scratch.

WV FOODLINK

WV FOODLINK became a thought project and a practical product that would consume the next 2 years of our lives. Over 30 people ultimately cooperated to create the resource hub WV FOODLINK.[4] Based upon the guidance from the FHC and our own commitments to food justice and advancing the right to food we determined that the first version of WV FOODLINK would include: (1) the location, operating hours, and prerequisites for accessing free food through nearly every emergency food assistance site in the state along with every food retail location where state benefits could be redeemed; and (2) county-level community food profiles for advocates working toward a more just food system. This led us to phone surveys of over 500 emergency food agencies, 2,500 food retailers, and processing data requests with the West Virginia Departments of Agriculture, Health and Human Resources and Education and Agriculture, the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, and United States Census Bureau.

In addition to data gathering and curation, the development of WV FOODLINK would be informed by over 200 qualitative interviews with anti-hunger advocates, policymakers, and grassroots leaders across West Virginia. It would also lead us back to FHC to review, comment and evaluate our efforts. In other words, while the online portal required certain capacities, skills, and technologies to create, all of which we had access to through our positions within the land grant institution, the cooperative experiment as a whole yielded a much wider set of questions, concerns, and preoccupations that had guided us to this work in our first cycle with FHC: What kinds of knowledge might be useful for organizing more just food futures from the ground up? What kinds of language might be useful in mobilizing grassroots leaders in WV? What kinds of tools might be useful in facilitating the translation of knowledge and language into action? It also led us toward a new, broader set of protagonists that might become allies in the work to advance food justice and food sovereignty across the Mountain State, perhaps even beyond.

We launched WV FOODLINK as a website in Fall 2015 and have kept it updated for the past 8 years. Following the extensive participatory GIS research process including interviews with community food workers across the state, we came to see WV FOODLINK as a resource hub for more people than just FHC, beyond the local or county scale. The need for participatory research, pedagogical and advocacy tools became clear through our continued interviews with various stakeholders across West Virginia particularly during Summer 2014 field research in the Southern coalfields. Our commitments to other organizations were deepening through relationships with anti-poverty advocates who called on us (and the arguments we could now make through the WV FOODLINK research) to provide testimony against food safety-net cuts at the state legislature. This offers an important insight on accompaniment research. Growing our relationships beyond our initial entry point in a given locality opens opportunities to learn up and serve across by traversing sites and scales of food justice organizing.

Reaching outward, demonstrating solidarity, and mobilizing our gathered knowledge and experience—while remaining humble to its limits at this early stage—enabled us to challenge militant particularism (Harvey and Williams, 1995) connect with more people, grow our learning, and recognize the use-value of what would ultimately become pedagogical tools for food justice work in the third cycle of

4 http://foodlink.wvu.edu/

accompaniment research. From the crucible of the oft mind numbing labor to create WV FOODLINK, we understood the need for ground up pedagogies that could translate large datasets and complex information about the foodways serving the poor in a way that enabled more and more people to bring the information up against their local knowledge, to leverage it, counter it and ultimately build a collective conceptual framework that would serve coalitions demanding food system change. WV FOODLINK, we thought, might be a vehicle for that.

In this second cycle of research developing WV FOODLINK, we learned a great deal more about the red herrings associated with data worship combined with the challenges of paternalism in the charitable food networks. Data worship manifested in people, especially people concerned with gaining resources such as grants, asking for an ever more detailed inventory of information about food insecurity thus perpetuating a process of gathering information for information sake; where data and accuracy merely becomes a means for funding, reproducing existing orders, or even worse, an end in itself. It was becoming clear to us in this second cycle that information requests such as "can you add this or that to the map" or "can you also get information from this database" or anything starting with "would not it be interesting to map…" was less about addressing oppressive structures and food system inequalities and more about creating an artifact to look at, a fascinating map, a means to consolidate power or a system to govern. We had already witnessed the problem of seeking data and information for governing people in the first cycle of accompaniment. Certain community food workers who sought to guard their scarce resources had expressed some authoritarian exclusionary tendencies and saw data gathering as a means of surveillance and discipline that could mitigate so-called "double dipping" or "pantry hopping." The data and the people who gathered it, used it or interpreted it were complicated, and we had no interest in it being used to reify or reinforce the whiteness and neoliberal rationalities that permeated through many emergency food organizations (Pine, 2016; De Souza, 2019). Indeed, there was danger, we felt, that the resource hub, in the absence of a pedagogical politics and successful advocacy for more resources to charitable agencies, could be used to discipline those seeking services rather than creating spaces of political possibility for a more liberatory food future across the state.

Building upon these two related concerns that emerged during the development of WV FOODLINK and our deepening relationship with anti-poverty advocates and other local food access groups, we began to articulate our principles of food justice accompaniment research. These came to form the basis of our shared fate, shared work and what we hoped might become a shared vision with many others. Doing so we came to balance our service posture to FHC and our growing community of interest across the state while standing firm and speaking clearly about our positions on food justice, food sovereignty, and the right to food. We also realized that we needed an intermediate language—a halfway house—as a means of working out what a shared vision might look like in West Virginia. At the end of cycle two, while writing a report of our activities to present out to our growing network of collaborators—a critical element of participatory action research—we consolidated our ideas into the language of *food access* to set an ideological frame that was wide enough, yet its core concepts deep and critical enough, to anchor a workshop program that could advance food justice at the community level.

Nourishing our networks: politics, pedagogies, and policy

By January 2016, FJL had developed quite a large network of friends, coworkers and co-conspirators. For the previous 2 years we had coalesced with a growing number of researchers and community partners deeply involved in imagining how to translate food justice principles into practice. The WV FOODLINK launch demonstrated that we were committed to playing a long term role in food justice organizing in WV. We had also interviewed, broken bread with and attended meetings with hundreds of people that signaled we were serious about showing up. In response to our growing concerns about how WV FOODLINK might be used and its intended purpose to serve community food workers and food justice advocates, we began to design a popular education workshop that could be held in local communities.

The goal of the *Nourishing Networks* pedagogy was quite ambitious. We wanted to create a train-the-trainers approach to raise up human resources for food system change which drew upon a process of consultation combining knowledge from WV FOODLINK and local knowledge and experience among community participants. Furthermore, we wanted to see if we could develop a pedagogy that enabled people to self-identify as protagonists in the food justice movement, collectively identify problems, assets and strategies for change, and then accompany one another into the field of action. FJL developed pedagogical tools including county profiles, workbooks, and meeting structures to address five key pedagogical elements: (1) inclusive recruitment of diverse groups of people as workshop participants, (2) collective identification of food access barriers, (3) collective mapping of existing food access strategies, (4) development of experimental food justice advocacy goals or projects, and (5) enacting accompaniment-in-practice as those experiments unfolded.

Rather than just heading out to communities with the popular education workshop we made a call for participation in a 2 days advocacy meeting called *Nourishing Networks and* 75 people from across the state signed up in a matter of days. The vast majority of those who accepted our invitation were people who had participated in our interviews and outreach and also included representatives from various agencies from the state such as the Office of Child Nutrition and Department of Health and Human Services. We also invited the FHC. The goal of the meeting was to take a group of advocates through the curriculum, get feedback and work on the approach. Moreover, through the workshop, we thought that perhaps we might be invited to communities by participants (which did happen in the case of three of our first nine workshops).

The May 2016 meeting to present the approach of Nourishing Networks was a call to action for our internal team. It shook us out of the solitary and lonely work of WV FOODLINK development and pushed us into a pedagogical posture with both friends and skeptics. Because participants signed up from a wide variety of sectors in West Virginia's food system we needed to solidify what we were trying to do both intellectually and practically. Following this meeting, the attendees challenged us to consider how we could do more local outreach across the state to support community food workers and advance capacity for advocacy. As we came to see, the *Nourishing Networks* workshop would become one of the primary rhythms, routines and accountability structures through which we would act and reflect on our accompaniment research for the next 3 years. It

pushed us back out into the challenging terrain of local coalitions and pressed us to ask hard questions about how our scholarship and activism connected with food justice practices at the community level. The heightened accountability (in a different kind of peer review process) created a context of productive anxiety for the FJL team of accompaniment scholars to advance deeper into another cycle of research.

Nourishing networks

Following our experiment with the statewide group of advocates, the Nourishing Networks workshop was refined into an 8 h program for local communities. Starting with the state-wide workshop in 2016 on WVU's campus that served to hone the pedagogy, we hosted local workshops in Logan, Wayne, Fayette, Calhoun, Wetzel, and Wood counties. In total, 320 people participated. Workshops included roughly 25–50 participants total and often depend on a facilitating team of five or six FJL members including faculty, graduate and undergraduate researchers. The pedagogy of the program revolved around a shared text with information specially curated for each local meeting which is facilitated in a small group setting composed of six to eight participants from diverse institutional or experiential backgrounds who are recruited to attend. Participants "worked through" the text to consult and share local perspectives while also challenging one another and the information presented in a dialogic process with participants and facilitators. The goal of fostering dialog was central to the development of this pedagogy. One of the key problems identified through interviews with food access organizations conducted across West Virginia was that community food workers were pressed to frenetically serve programs rather than ask questions about their efficacy to achieve food justice. As we explored with our anti-poverty collaborators, the opening for critical reflection and consciousness raising required these same community food workers to develop a critical analysis of both food access barriers and strategies in an environment that might challenge firmly held beliefs while building confidence among participants from diverse positionalities to find shared understanding of problems and potential strategies for change.[5]

The Nourishing Networks text centers on the variegated politics that shape food production, distribution and a community's access to entitlements over time (Watts and Bohle, 1993; Ribot and Peluso, 2003). It includes a conceptual introduction to the concept of food access barriers including income, identity (race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, age, and disability), knowledge, location, and crisis. Guided by a trained facilitator, participants work through a series of prompts which ask them to consider food access barriers in their communities supplemented by maps and statistical information curated from WV FOODLINK data. Once the barriers unit was complete, the group took a similar approach to review the section on food access strategies. These prompts introduced the dominant ways access to food is shaped in the region focusing on market structures, state nutrition assistance, charitable food assistance, self-provisioning, and agriculture. Participants then consulted during the third phase of the workshop on the degree to which these strategies effectively address the barriers to food access they have collectively identified. Finally, participants continue to work through the text to develop collaborative interventions that have the potential to enhance existing strategies to address specific barriers. These included both local development projects and ideas for policy advocacy. From there facilitators worked with the groups and the workshop participants as a whole to prioritize the strategies toward broader group consensus. The workshop concluded with a list of priorities and action steps, and everyone is encouraged to make a commitment to realize these.

The *Nourishing Networks* pedagogy ultimately sought to communicate the core tenets of food justice and food sovereignty to audiences that had never been exposed to its most basic premises. It compels protagonists engaging in the process to uncover within themselves and their communities some of the root causes of hunger and food system inequities and imagine ways to begin to address these collectively. A small group or task force of 4 to five people usually emerged out of these meetings to work on a food system project that carried the work and conversation forward throughout the implementation phase. While these initiatives were not groundbreaking or radical in nature, they did produce new local cycles of action-research in their own right and led these local groups to reflect on, theorize, and build upon the priorities they set with people that may not immediately identify with food justice or sovereignty goals.

Out of these first Nourishing Networks workshops, three of local groups focused their energies on establishing new programmatic interventions, two aimed toward seniors, and one toward low income populations with diet related medical diagnoses. Wood county organized pop-up farmers markets at several senior residential locations, and Calhoun county worked to develop nutritionally enhanced food distributions to seniors through their new "silver linings food box program." Wetzel County collaborated with their local federally qualified health center to design a produce prescription program, one of the first in the state. The three other groups chose to broaden the conversation that began in the workshop by inviting more stakeholders across their county to engage in food access outreach and training. Fayette County organized a "healthy food access summit," Logan county hosted "health and nutrition fairs," and Wayne County sought to expand learning opportunities through "ag-tivity days" in conjunction with middle and high schools.

Again none of these interventions were as radical or transformative as we the organizers might have hoped. From our vantage point, after pouring hours of work into organizing and facilitating these workshops, it was not always easy to contend with the limits of the collective imagination of its participants, not always easy to celebrate interventions that seemed to merely reproduce the very dynamics at work in neoliberal responses to food insecurity in the non-profit industrial complex (Guthman, 2008). Our yearning and motivation in organizing these workshops was to see campaigns emerge for raising the minimum wage, increasing state investments in community food security, and other policy interventions that explicitly addressed the root causes of hunger associated with such forces as food apartheid, labor exploitation, racial injustice, land loss, and environmental degradation. Notably, even though these concerns had not yet risen to the foreground, the FJL team committed itself to accompany these

5 For closer review, the curriculum is available on WV FOODLINK http://foodlink.wvu.edu/nourishing-networks-curriculum/.

"less radical" priorities and continues to be available to facilitate meetings with the groups as they see fit. To illustrate the length of those commitments, 7 years later, FJL continues to play a role in local processes in three communities including Calhoun where Tina, once a participant, now continues to train more community food workers and advocates and is on the cusp of introducing a right to food resolution with the Calhoun county commission.

Moreover, like Tina, many of the protagonists engaged in these workshops have since joined the *WV Food for All* Coalition.[6] FJL is a key driver in the formalization of this initiative alongside the WV Food and Farm Coalition, WV Center for Budget and Policy, Our Future WV, American Friends Service Committee, Mountaineer and Facing Hunger Food Banks. Over the past 3 years we have worked on a range of food policy issues weaving food-based solidarities between organizations and people with vastly different goals and ideologies in the process. *Food for All* is now bringing a wide range of organizations to the table around food justice principles. *Nourishing Networks* is integrating with the work of *Food for All*, training grassroots protagonists that want to get involved in policy *and* food system change.

By linking *Nourishing Networks* to organizing with the *Food for All* coalition, we feel we have protected its pedagogical goals. Even though we had significant success in reaching large numbers of people at the local level from 2016 to 18, we also became increasingly concerned about how the curriculum was being used and adapted by various people and organizations with related but not necessarily deeply aligned goals. Staff at one of the regional food banks that had attended a number of workshops began trying to use tools available through WV FOODLINK to organize their own meetings with member agencies. Food system developers were also keen to use the curriculum to advance creative place making and a grassroots anti-poverty organization began to express interest as well. In other words, we became increasingly concerned that some of the core principles and motivations underlying the tools and pedagogy were at risk of being lost. To re-establish understanding of the principles upon which it was built we relaunched WVFOODLINK with online training modules and created a new facilitator training workshop that we have now hosted with more than 40 advocates since 2019.

Linking theory to practice has created opportunities to bring the discourse of food justice, sovereignty and rights into the *Food for All* framework. Because of our long term commitment to accompaniment, we now have the trust and confidence to shape the wider political discourse around food policy in West Virginia. In fact, during our most recent policy summit, one of our delegates to the statehouse made a public statement about introducing a constitutional amendment for the Right to Food, the day after Jahi Chapell (whom we had invited as one of our keynotes) presented on the progressive food policies in Belo Horizonte, Brazil. While FJL does not claim this work, indeed it is the protagonists at the forefront of the campaign, we did help make this road by walking alongside others, co-creating an emergent, yet to be determined food justice activism that we believe might be a helpful model for coalition building efforts elsewhere.

On accompaniment research and social praxis

Although many food justice scholars do accompaniment work in organizations, communities and movements, in general, they are not necessarily encouraged to write about it, theorize their practice, nor offer systematic insight or guidance from which others might learn. As a result, we have found a poverty of food justice scholarship that provides scholars and community activists with real material, albeit circumscribed, examples of accompaniment with communities confronting food system inequalities. One reason for this is the short-term project-based orientation of much academic scholarship and the narrow timelines expected within periods of academic evaluation or funding horizons. Yet, perhaps one additional reason is an unwillingness to expose ourselves to scrutiny by telling the honest, banal and common stories of our activities, or failures and vulnerabilities as activists, or the limits of our own knowledge as scholars. There is little celebrity, nothing real heroic, in the complicated application of pure principle in the messy world we are trying to change (Horton and Freire, 1990). Yet if change is what we seek with others, our modes of accompaniment research should be honest sites of learning. Telling stories about these efforts can then serve as new sites of learning and collaboration.

Thus far, we have described our food justice accompaniment research in three cycles of action-reflection. The first was our initial research with the FHC of Monongalia County, the second included action research and development of the WV FOODLINK resource hub, and the third focused on the development of popular education workshops Nourishing Networks and its translation into a means for capacity building for the WV Food for All Coalition. In retrospect, we can see these cycles of action-reflection relatively clearly. In the midst of our action, however, the boundaries between them were blurred as were the streams of thought, relationship building, personal and collective consciousness that came to interrupt, mold and reorient our work. Nevertheless, throughout the action research process, our orientation was to try to keep the conversation open and accompany those working in organizations, especially those that were not advancing a radical food justice agenda to make a greater commitment to those goals. In other words, we recognized the importance of a developmental approach to those whom we worked with and saw that as critical in our own self-reflection as well. Yet, this understanding of a developmental posture is impossible without a long-term and ongoing set of relationships in which one acts and reflects and learns that extends beyond any one project or set of activities with community partners and participants. Our own research and contributions to food justice efforts in West Virginia pressed us to question our approaches but also to, as intentionally as possible, reconfigure what we were thinking and doing in practice with our co-conspirators over time. One of the key areas of learning we have found focuses on the development or constructive analysis of vital pedagogical or organizing tools (poems, songs, methods, maps, curriculum, facilitation strategy, etc.) which communities use or might use as protagonists in food system change. At best such tools may become the subject of critique or be documented in comparative

6 In 2016, after the release of WV FOODLINK, anti-poverty organizations called on us, and the data we had collected, begin to testify at the state legislature against food assistance cuts and regressive work requirements laws introduced by outside interest groups. This policy activism eventually translated into a state-level food policy coalition called *Food for All*.

research. At worst such knowledge, central to liberation struggles, goes unaccounted for. Further examples of the relationship between participatory action research and pedagogical engagement by food justice scholar activists could offer insights on paths forward.

Accompaniment research as social praxis is easier said than done within university contexts. There were many moments in the research process over the decade when the urge to ease back into the rhythms, routines and expectations of the insular university was overwhelming. But universities are also not safe spaces. We (faculty, grad students, and undergrads) in the FJL were also being disciplined back into those routines of teaching, publications, dissertations, theses, and other demands and pressures of the university—especially a state institution which is the target of constant austerity measures itself. Through the decade we struggled to maintain responsible relationships with folks who were trying to negotiate a crisis like a massive budget cut for food stamps, financial crisis or pandemic while higher education itself was also being transformed. But folks we worked with outside the university context also encouraged us to keep going and called on us to play our part in their struggles. The support and the demands from community collaborators was crucial to keeping us on track. We learned that if alone, unaided, or unaccountable to one another, individual scholars and small teams working with community partners may feel too overwhelmed to carry a project forward which demands so much extra-academic and emotional labor often seen in participatory action research processes. Furthermore, confronting such an overwhelming series of challenges, no one person, let alone an isolated academic scholar, would have been able to produce the kind of tangible change that sets people in motion to advocate for food justice in the first place. What we learned through our cycles of accompaniment research—indeed a prerequisite in participatory action research—was the need for the ongoing development and growth of a team of action researchers and community members. Mutual accompaniment among faculty, students, community partners, and many others working to advance food access in their communities generated a constant flow of action and reflection which propelled the work forward and created its own routines.

Now reflecting on this decade or work, we have come to value the language of accompaniment to describe the qualities of this kind of scholarly social praxis. As Paul Farmer states, "[t]rue accompaniment does not privilege technical expertise above solidarity or compassion or a willingness to tackle what may seem to be insuperable challenges. It requires cooperation, openness, teamwork and humility."(2011) Relations based on accompaniment need not be prefigured by professional or even political expectations. Accompaniment does not assert the primacy of scientific objectives, nor does it presuppose solutions or success. Moreover, accompaniment implies a willingness to solidarity with people who may not share the same ideologies or visions. Rather accompaniment is a human relationship characterized by finding our way to a shared vision through shared work. As Daniel Renfrew (2018) writes, accompaniment can lead to "the deceptively simple act of forging empathetic understandings of the complexity of local social worlds" (p. 167). Scholars such as Reese and White have pressed us to ask: How might the food justice activist-scholar stand shoulder to shoulder with individuals, organizations and communities? How might we partake in their struggles, joy and grief? How do we provide support, encouragement and resources when necessary, help identify, uplift and elevate grassroots leaders, and gather intimate knowledge by walking side by side with people? How can we develop relations of trust that are deep enough and meaningful enough to constructively critique, challenge or question the people we are working with? How do we remain open to critique ourselves? How do we engage with those who do not want to be on board, those who might go even further in an attempt to sabotage the work? In sum, through time, how do we walk with people as we all become protagonists of the food justice movement?

Tina: there is no alternative

Tina's 2017 call to FJL provides a helpful example of the role accompaniment research can play in cultivating food justice activism. When she first reached out we had no immediate answers to Tina's question, but promised to accompany her as she began to develop a local coalition to address the grocery store closure affecting her community. We walked alongside Tina as she hosted a *Nourishing Networks* workshop in Calhoun County and recruited 25 other participants, primarily women, with a stake in the future of the county's rapidly evolving food system. Over the course of 7 h we collectively identified 140 food access barriers, 38 community assets and devised 11 healthy food access strategies that might be implemented. We identified resources and institutions that were already available to build upon and then accompanied Tina in establishing a small team to advance the projects they voted to move forward. Tina not only led these initiatives with passion, she inspired us to prioritize the rapid development of the train-the-trainers curriculum we developed with our community partners.

In September 2019, FJL hosted a *Nourishing Networks* facilitator training conference. Over 40 people attended the two-day event from a cross-section of professional and institutional backgrounds. Nutrition educators, social workers, farmers, market managers, food pantry directors and community food system practitioners were there to learn how to effectively facilitate conversations about food justice in their communities and build grassroots support for food policy change by integrating the work of the *Food for All coalition*, whose various members helped to co-facilitate the workshop. Standing up to urge her fellow participants to take up direct advocacy Tina testified: "I never realized the need to get involved in food policy to address food issues in my community. But now I'm organizing with others to get involved." In the time elapsed since that initial call in 2017, Tina has come to identify herself as "in the infancy stage of food justice activism." She submitted public comments to the USDA on recent SNAP cuts which she had never done before. She joined the Voices of Hunger WV circle of leaders to advocate for a constitutional amendment for the Right to Food. She is showing up to the state legislature and inviting her delegates to support other parts of the *Food for All* policy platform. She is organizing *Nourishing Networks* meetings, gaining confidence to lead a local coalition demanding food policy change from the ground up. She is emerging as a powerful voice and leader in her community and across the state. This year, she introduced a resolution for the right to food to the county commission in Calhoun.

Tina is one of many protagonists that we encountered in FJL on a journey that began in 2013 with a group of women serving vulnerable households in Monongalia County. Despite our many frustrations and failures in the process of learning how to accompany well, to build trust with people and partner organizations and to accomplish this work within the fraught demands of contemporary institutions of

higher education, FJL is cultivating food justice activism and research within a state and region often overlooked. Yet looking back, Tina's deepening engagement in food justice action was also an effect of mutual accompaniment. Our ability to collaborate together was an outcome of our encounter in a cooperative experiment to understand dominant conceptualizations of food access failure in West Virginia, democratize knowledge about the food system, build a community of practice and common language that could facilitate cooperative responses to the contemporary food crisis in Central Appalachia. That community of practice is now growing. There are many Tinas with us today. Now we must continue to accompany her, love her well through our research and activism even when we do not understand where those steps may be leading, nor where we continue walking together. Indeed, there is no alternative.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary materials, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.

References

Alkon, A. H.. (2012). *Black, white, and green: Farmers markets, race, and the green economy*. *13*. Georgia: University of Georgia Press

Alkon, A., and Guthman, J. (2019). The new food activism: Opposition, cooperation, and collective action. *University of California Press*.

Alkon, A. H., and Agyeman, J. (2011). *Cultivating food justice: Race, class, and sustainability*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Bellows, A. C., and Hamm, M. W. (2002). US-based community food security: influences, practice, debate. *J. Stud. Food Soc.* 6, 31–44. doi: 10.2752/152897902786732725

Billings, D. B., and Kingsolver, A. E. (2018). *Appalachia in regional context: Place matters*. Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky.

Borda, O. F. (1979). Investigating reality in order to transform it: the Colombian experience. *Dialect. Anthropol.* 4, 33–55. doi: 10.1007/BF00417683

Bradley, K., and Herrera, H. (2016). Decolonizing food justice: naming, resisting, and researching colonizing forces in the movement. *Antipode* 48, 97–114. doi: 10.1111/anti.12165

Bunge, W.(1971). *Fitzgerald: Geography of a revolution*, Cambridge, MA: Schenkman.

Cadieux, K. V., and Slocum, R. (2015). What does it mean to do food justice? *J. Polit. Ecol.* 22:1. doi: 10.2458/v22i1.21076

Cahill, C., Sultana, F., and Pain, R. (2007). Participatory ethics: politics, practices, institutions. *ACME* 6, 304–318.

Caretta, M. A., and Riaño, Y. (2016). Feminist participatory methodologies in geography: creating spaces of inclusion. *Qual. Res.* 16, 258–266. doi: 10.1177/1468794116629575

Carney, M. A. (2014). The biopolitics of' food insecurity': towards a critical political ecology of the body in studies of women's transnational migration. *J. Polit. Ecol.* 21, 1–18. doi: 10.2458/v21i1.21123

Chappell, M. J. (2018). *Beginning to end hunger: Food and the environment in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, and beyond*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Cone, J. H. (2010). *A black theology of liberation*. Ossining, NY: Orbis Books.

Daniel, P. (2013). *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American farmers in the age of civil rights*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books.

De Souza, R. T. (2019). *Feeding the other: Whiteness, privilege, and neoliberal stigma in food pantries*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Dickinson, M. (2019). *Feeding the crisis: Care and abandonment in America's food safety*. Oakland, CA: Net University of California Press.

Eller, R. (2008). *Uneven ground: Appalachia since 1945*. Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky.

Elwood, S. (2006). Critical issues in participatory GIS: deconstructions, reconstructions, and new research directions. *Trans. GIS* 10, 693–708. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9671.2006.01023.x

Fisher, S. L. (1993). *Fighting back in Appalachia: Traditions of resistance and change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Fisher, S. L., and Smith, B. E. (2012). *Transforming places: Lessons from Appalachia*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed (MB Ramos, trans.)*. New York: The Continuum.

Gaventa, J. (1982). *Power and powerlessness: Quiescence and rebellion in an Appalachian valley*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Goizueta, R. S. (2009). *Christ our companion: Toward a theological aesthetics of liberation*. Ossining, NY: Orbis Books.

Goldstein, J. E., Paprocki, K., and Osborne, T. (2019). A manifesto for a progressive land-grant mission in an authoritarian populist era. *Ann. Am. Assoc. Geogr.* 109, 673–684. doi: 10.1080/24694452.2018.1539648

Gottlieb, R., and Fisher, A. (1996). First feed the face: environmental justice and community food security. *Antipode* 28, 193–203. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.1996.tb00522.x

Graddy-Lovelace, G. (2017). The coloniality of US agricultural policy: articulating agrarian (in) justice. *J. Peasant Stud.* 44, 78–99. doi: 10.1080/03066150.2016.1192133

Guthman, J. (2008). Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California. *Geoforum* 39, 1171–1183. doi: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2006.09.002

Guthman, J. (2011). "If they only knew. The unbearable whiteness of alternative food" in *Cultivating Food Justice: Race, Class and Sustainability*. eds. A. H. Alkon and J. Agyeman (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 263–281.

Gutierrez, G. (1984). A theology of liberation. *Monthly Review*, 36 93–107.

Hall, J. C., Gum, H., and Pietkoski, K. (2020). Wild alternatives: accounting for and rethinking the relationship between wild game and food security in Appalachian food systems. *Appl. Geogr.* 124:102329. doi: 10.1016/j.apgeog.2020.102329

Hammelman, C., Reynolds, K., and Levkoe, C. Z. (2020). Toward a radical food geography praxis: integrating theory, action, and geographic analysis in pursuit of more equitable and sustainable food systems. *Hum. Geogr.* 13, 211–227. doi: 10.1177/1942778620962034

Haraway, D. (1991). Simians, cyborgs, and women: The reinvention of nature. Routledge. Routledge.

Harvey, D., and Williams, R. (1995). Militant particularism and global ambition: the conceptual politics of place, space, and environment in the work of Raymond Williams. *Social Text* 42, 69–98. doi: 10.2307/466665

Heynen, N. (2009). Bending the bars of empire from every ghetto for survival: the black panther Party's radical antihunger politics of social reproduction and scale. *Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr.* 99, 406–422. doi: 10.1080/00045600802683767

Heynen, N., Kurtz, H. E., and Trauger, A. (2012). Food justice, hunger and the city. *Geogr. Compass* 6, 304–311. doi: 10.1111/j.1749-8198.2012.00486.x

Holt Giménez, E., and Shattuck, A. (2011). Food crises, food regimes and food movements: rumblings of reform or tides of transformation? *J. Peasant Stud.* 38, 109–144. doi: 10.1080/03066150.2010.538578

Hooks, B. (2003). *Teaching community: A pedagogy of hope. 36*. London: Psychology Press

Horton, M. (1997). *The Long haul: An autobiography*. New York: Teachers College Press

Horton, M., and Freire, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.

Issa, D. (2007). Praxis of empowerment: mística and mobilization in Brazil's landless rural workers' movement. *Lat. Am. Perspect.* 34, 124–138. doi: 10.1177/0094582X06298745

Johnson, C., and Coleman, A. (2012). The internal other: exploring the dialectical relationship between regional exclusion and the construction of national identity. *Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr.* 102, 863–880. doi: 10.1080/00045608.2011.602934

Kindon, S., Pain, R., and Kesby, M. (2007). *Participatory action research approaches and methods: Connecting people, participation and place. 22.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Kitchin, R. M., and Hubbard, P. J. (1999). Research, action and 'critical'geographies. *Area* 31, 195–198. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-4762.1999.tb00083.x

Lewis, H. M. (1978). *Colonialism in modern America: The Appalachian case*. Boone, NC: The Appalachian Consortium Press

Lohnes, J., and Wilson, B. (2018). Bailing out the food banks? Hunger relief, food waste, and crisis in Central Appalachia. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 50, 350–369.

Long, A. (2011). *The politics of self-provisioning in North-Central West Virginia*. Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Problem Reports. Available at: https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/etd/688.

Mihesuah, D., and Hoover, E. (2019). *Indigenous food sovereignty in the United States: Restoring cultural knowledge, Protecting Environment and Regaining Health*. Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press.

Minkoff-Zern, L. A. (2014). Challenging the agrarian imaginary: farmworker-led food movements and the potential for farm labor justice. *Hum. Geogr.* 7, 85–101. doi: 10.1177/194277861400700107

Moyers, B., and Horton, M. (1982). The adventures of a radical hillbilly an interview with Myles Horton. *Appalachian J.* 9, 248–285.

Nocella, A. J., Ducre, K. A., and Lupinacci, J.. (2016). *Addressing environmental and food justice toward dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline: Poisoning and imprisoning youth*. Berlin: Springer.

Orozco, A. A., Ward, A., and Graddy-Lovelace, G. (2018). Documenting USDA discrimination: community-partnered research on farm policy for land justice. *ACME* 17, 999–1023.

Pain, R. (2004). Social geography: participatory research. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 28, 652–663. doi: 10.1191/0309132504ph511pr

Pain, R., and Francis, P. (2003). Reflections on participatory research. *Area* 35, 46–54. doi: 10.1111/1475-4762.00109

Pellow, D. N. (2016). Toward a critical environmental justice studies: black lives matter as an environmental justice challenge. *Du Bois Rev.* 13, 221–236. doi: 10.1017/S1742058X1600014X

Pettygrove, M. W., and Ghose, R. (2016). Community-engaged GIS for urban food justice research. *Int. J. Appl. Geospat. Res.* 7, 16–29. doi: 10.4018/IJAGR.2016010102

Pine, A. (2016). *Confronting hunger in the USA: Searching for community empowerment and food security in food access programs*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Pine, A. M., and De Souza, R. (2013). Including the voices of communities in food insecurity research: an empowerment-based agenda for food scholarship. *J. Agric. Food Syst. Community Dev.* 3, 1–79. doi: 10.5304/jafscd.2013.034.007

Poppendieck, J. (1999). *Sweet charity?: Emergency food and the end of entitlement*. London: Penguin.

Porter, C. M., and Wechsler, A. (2018). Follow the money. *J. Agric. Food Syst. Community Dev.* 8, 63–82. doi: 10.5304/jafscd.2018.08A.006

Pudup, M. B. (1990). The limits of subsistence: agriculture and industry in central Appalachia. *Agric. Hist.* 64, 61–89.

Reese, A. M. (2019). *Black food geographies: Race, self-reliance, and food access in Washington*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press Books.

Renfrew, D. (2018). *Life without Lead: Contamination, crisis, and Hope in* Uruguay: University of California Press.

Reynolds, K., Block, D., and Bradley, K. (2018). Food justice scholar-activism and activist-scholarship: working beyond dichotomies to deepen social justice praxis. *ACME* 17, 988–998.

Reynolds, K., Lowitt, K., Furlotte, S., and Sayers, D. (2020). Envisioning radical food geographies: Shared learning and praxis through food justice scholar/activist-activist/scholar community of practice. *Hum. Geogr.* 13, 277–292.

Ribot, J. C., and Peluso, N. L. (2003). A theory of access. *Rural. Sociol.* 68, 153–181. doi: 10.1111/j.1549-0831.2003.tb00133.x

Sachs, C., and Patel-Campillo, A. (2014). Feminist food justice: crafting a new vision. *Fem. Stud.* 40, 396–410. doi: 10.1353/fem.2014.0008

Sbicca, J. (2015). Food labor, economic inequality, and the imperfect politics of process in the alternative food movement. *Agric. Hum. Values* 32, 675–687. doi: 10.1007/s10460-015-9582-2

Sbicca, J. (2018). *Food justice now!: Deepening the roots of social struggle*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Scoones, I., Edelman, M., Borras, S. M. Jr., Hall, R., Wolford, W., and White, B. (2018). Emancipatory rural politics: confronting authoritarian populism. *J. Peasant Stud.* 45, 1–20. doi: 10.1080/03066150.2017.1339693

Seaton, C. T. (2014). *Hippie homesteaders: Arts, crafts, music and living on the land in West Virginia*. Morgantown, West Virginia: West Virginia University Press.

Scoones, J., Hankins, K. B., Shelton, T., Bosse, A. J., Scott, D., and Block, D., et al (2021). Community geography: Toward a disciplinary framework. *Progress in Human Geography*, 45, 1147–1168.

Slocum, R., and Cadieux, K. V. (2015). Notes on the practice of food justice in the US: understanding and confronting trauma and inequity. *J. Polit. Ecol.* 22, 27–52.

Torre, M. E. (2009). Participatory action research and critical race theory: fueling spaces for nos-otras to research. *Urban Rev.* 41, 106–120. doi: 10.1007/s11256-008-0097-7

Watkins, M. (2015). Psychosocial accompaniment. *J. Soc. Polit. Psychol.* 3, 324–341. doi: 10.5964/jspp.v3i1.103

Watts, M. J. (2013). *Silent violence: Food, famine, and peasantry in northern Nigeria. 15*. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press.

Watts, M., and Bohle, H. (1993). The space of vulnerability: the causal structure of hunger and famine. *Prog. Hum. Geogr.* 17, 43–67. doi: 10.1177/030913259301700103

White, M. M. (2018). *Freedom farmers: Agricultural resistance and the black freedom movement*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press.

Zimmerer, K. S., Carney, J. A., and Vanek, S. J. (2015). Sustainable smallholder intensification in global change? Pivotal spatial interactions, gendered livelihoods, and agrobiodiversity. *Curr. Opin. Environ. Sustain.* 14, 49–60. doi: 10.1016/j.cosust.2015.03.004