

# The Modern/Colonial Food System in a Paradigm of War



co-authored by Marcelo Felipe Garzo Montalvo and Haleh Zandi

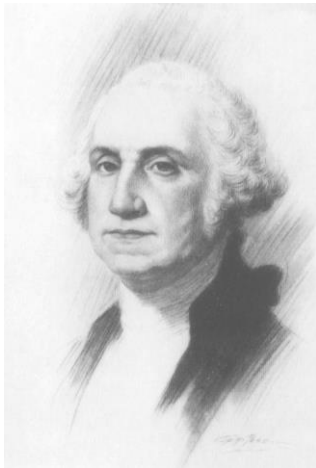
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“The immediate objects are the total destruction and devastation of their settlements. . . It will be essential to ruin their crops now in the ground and prevent their planting more. . . Our future security will be in their inability to injure us, the distance to which they are driven, and in their terror.”

-Orders by General George Washington, 1779 (La Duke 2005: 154)



"Control oil, you control nations; control food and you control the people."

-Henry Kissinger, 1974 (National Security Study Memorandum 200: Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interest)

"Food is Power. We use it to change behavior. Some may call that bribery. We do not apologize."

-Executive director U.N. World Food Program, U.N. 4th World Conference on Women, Beijing, China, September, 1995

## ***Food is Life: An Opening Meditation***

***(For Thich Naht Hanh and the indigenous peoples whose lands we occupy)***

Food is Life. And all Life is sacred. We give thanks to the sacred comida that has given us the strength to survive, to live, today. When we eat, we nourish the body, and also, the spirit. Our food reflects our relationships, to the land, to each other, to the ancestors, to ourselves. When we pay attention to Mother Earth, she teaches us, provides instructions on how to be generous, abundant, with Life, giving, receiving, freely, in community. Our bodies feel, with Nature, heaviness, darkness, light, love, emotion, all things that begin and end in the cycles of Life, the sinews and spirals of Creation. Today, let us remember that the nourishment of our bodies first began with the milk of our mothers, and that all food begins in the sacred seed, which sprouts from the rich soil, moistened by the spirit of the water, tended by the hands of the worker. May we receive this energy with humility, with gratitude, and with action, for justice and beauty, in struggle.

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This writing project is an effort to re-member the relationship between our bodies and the land. We are concerned with how the disruption of this relationship affects our health and the wellbeing of our families and our communities. Colonialism, both historically and today, dismembers our bodies, from the land, and therefore, from our ancestral foodways. This de-territorialization of the body has resulted in the cultural alienation of our communities, and the unmitigated destruction and violation of the sacred. Frantz Fanon understood colonialism in a similar way, as a perversion of the ‘proper’ order of things, of our most fundamental rights as human beings. He reminds us that “there will be an authentic disalienation only to the degree to which things, in the most materialistic meaning of the word, will have been restored to their proper places (Fanon 1954: 11).” This paper seeks to decolonize the land/body split by healing the disorder embodied in the modern/colonial food system, a system that defines both our bodies and the land as ‘things’. The decolonial world we are imagining and bringing into being is one that sees both, the brown land and the brown body, as Beings.

As participants in the movement for food justice in the San Francisco Bay Area, we are taking this time to reflect, to question and to record

through the written word what it means to work for decolonization at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following text is an effort to engage in direct conversation with the many writers, thinkers, and activists working for food justice through social movements, organizations, academic institutions and other sites of political/spiritual struggle. Spiritual activist practice reminds us to interconnect inner work/public acts, to re-member theory/praxis (Anzaldúa 2009). Dialectical humanism teaches us to continuously problematize our methods of struggle, to learn from our mistakes, to think and act towards (r)evolution (Boggs 2011). These moments of activist reflection provide space to continue developing strategies that do not reproduce the very oppressions we are seeking to dismantle, and continue building praxes of decolonization amidst daily realities of colonial presence.

### ***What is the Food System?***

As educators in the food justice movement we have designed and facilitated a workshop that unpacks the important question: “What is the Food System?” With the community present for each workshop, we move through the stages in the food system: from production, through processing, distribution, consumption and waste. We emphasize the systemic oppression at each of these stages on “who”

performs this labor and “where” it happens. We close by strategizing projects that ask, “how can we make this more sustainable and just?” In this paper, we use the framework provided by this workshop in order to organize and locate a paradigm of war in the modern/colonial food system.

By emphasizing the “systems” approach to our food justice work, we make visible the limitations of many contemporary food-related movements in North America. These movements have emerged over the past 40 years to change the way we eat and produce food in the Global North. Many of these movements, however, have been led and maintained by white, male or other privileged subjects that prioritize only certain moments in the food system itself. This has led to the obfuscation of many struggles and concerns pertaining to workers, people of color, women, and the land. By emphasizing the food systems approach to organizing our movements we hope to reveal the many spaces within the food system that remain unaddressed by dominant food movement agendas. In this effort, we will locate struggles for food justice from below, from communities of color, particularly native (women’s) struggles, and how they dismantle multiple oppressions through intervening at each stage of the food system.

## ***Theorizing the Modern/Colonial Food System as Problem Space***

Our experiences in the struggle for food justice have led us to explore what it means to exist in the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. The term paradigm of war emerges from the decolonial ethico-political philosophy and religious thought of Dr. Nelson Maldonado-Torres. We find this term to be particularly useful to describe the lived experiences of coloniality, that is, the persistence of the colonial context in a world system that thinks itself post-colonial, or *after* administrative colonialism. Instead, by describing contemporary struggles as decolonial in nature, we are aiming to dismantle the coloniality that persists amidst post-colonialism: both within institutions of power that perpetuate the colonial worldview and within social movements that dream of better worlds. Sometimes these very movements, in their resisting&àoppressing, re-open the colonial wound itself (Lugones 2005?). Therefore, we use the term “paradigm of war” to refer to the political naturalization and cultural stabilization of settler colonialist ways of being. In this context, war is no longer a state of exception but the order of the day, as colonial relations of exploitation, domination and violence become ‘normal’ facets of everyday life. The colonial wound itself, as it were, remains open.

A paradigm of war is a state of endless war, inaugurated through the conquest of the so-called New World and the enslavement of African peoples, and as we will argue, continues through our neoliberal moment of interlocking, late capitalist/corporatized industrial complexes: military, prison, academic, non-profit, food (See Appendix A). War becomes paradigmatic, that is, everywhere and always, in communities of color through institutionalized forms of dehumanization and control by settler colonialist populations. Our usage of a paradigm of war is, at once, an historical and contemporary diagnosis. By articulating the food system in a paradigm of war we are simultaneously pointing to the violations of the land/body connection perpetrated by historical colonialism – as a state of perpetual war – as well as its continuation in the post-modern/late capitalist moment where we find domestic state violence being enacted through the food system itself. In this paper, we argue that the modern/colonial food system has served as an important vehicle to initiate and perpetuate this paradigm of war, maintaining the colonial wound on the body and the land. We seek to expose how the food system shifts away from producing food as Life and instead commits everyday acts of war, performed and naturalized in the intimate spaces of colonialism’s perpetual enemies.

We use the term “modern/colonial” to strategically challenge the linear narrative of modernity as progress. This is a device of decolonial theorist Walter Mignolo, as he reminds us that modernity is not without its underside, its darker side, that is, what he calls “coloniality” (Mignolo 2005). For many in our families, and the world at large, the modernization of the food system has meant displacement from ancestral lands and foodways, resulting in hunger and malnutrition on one hand, and disease and overconsumption on the other. When we shift the geo- and body-politics of knowledge and situate our analysis of the food system from its underside, we point to how the modern has always been enabled by the colonial, how modernization is always already colonization. The linearity of modern history occludes its own coloniality of power through erasure. It rationalizes violence as a necessary part of the forward march of progress that begins and ends in Western Europe. In this paper, we enact the decolonial turn by always articulating the modern/colonial together, reminding us of the dual nature of modernization, and therefore unearthing and re-centering colonial violence in our understanding of the food system.

Native women’s voices and struggles inspire and situate our analysis in this project (Anzaldúa 2009; LaDuke 1999, 2005; ManKiller 2004;

Mihesuah 2005; Smith 1999; Smith 2005). These voices are what make up the content of much of our paper. Our theoretical frameworks, however, will be placing these decolonial projects in conversation with critical theoretical interventions articulated inside and outside the dominant, imperial university (Marx 1887; Foucault 2003, 2008; Fanon 1954; Shiva 1997, 2005). Marx provides our understanding of labor and the structures of capital shaping relations of power between those who control the means of production and those who are consigned to exploitative conditions of work for survival. Marx traces how masses of people were legally forced off the land and ushered into urban areas, creating conditions by which labor becomes exploitable and dispensable. The historical processes that Marx traces are important in understanding what has produced the conditions of alienation and dispossession between people and the land, which characterizes the modern/colonial food system.

Foucault's notion of a biopolitical order – in which modern nation-states regulate their subjects through numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations – evidences how oppression shifts within the modern/colonial food system, becomes invisibilized within structures of liberal governmentality and the discourse of the state of

exception. This shift, from dominant power that seeks to “make die, and let live” to a biopower that “makes live, and lets die” is one that the modern/colonial food system mobilizes in order to perform a paradigm of war. We also draw on Foucault's genealogical method to locate the history of the present in institutions of power and the matrix of industrial complexes that interlock within the modern/colonial food system.

We take up Fanon's sociogenic principle as a theoretico-praxis of decolonization. For Fanon, sociogeny is the relation between the individual and the social structure, between the colonial subject and the colonial world itself. We mobilize Fanon's understanding of how, “in the colonial context what happens at the level of the private and the intimate is fundamentally linked to social structures and to colonial cultural formations and forms of value (Maldonado-Torres 2008: 127).” The social movements for food justice/food sovereignty echo this decolonial critique, as they reclaim the spaces of the garden, the farm, the kitchen, and ultimately, the body and the land. Food justice enacts this Fanonian decolonial praxis and interfaces with our understandings of spiritual activism, as a mobilizing political agency through inner work/public acts (Anzaldúa 2009).

Vandana Shiva's activist research is concerned with processes of colonial violence at work from seed to body, from Columbus to Monsanto. We extend her observations regarding genetic modification and 'biopiracy' to frame our genealogy of the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. As she states:

...five hundred years after Columbus, a more secular version of the same project of colonization continues...The principle of effective occupation by Christian principles has been replaced by effective occupation by the transnational corporations supported by modern-day rulers. The vacancy of targeted lands has been replaced by the vacancy of targeted life forms and species manipulated by the new biotechnologies. The duty to incorporate savages into Christianity has been replaced by the duty to incorporate local and national economies into the global marketplace, and to incorporate non-Western systems of knowledge into the reductionism of commercialized Western science and technology (Shiva 1997: 2).

This group of theories regarding power, oppression and liberation frame the stories we share throughout this paper. The story of amaranth begins our journey, illustrating the paradoxes and plunders of production and processing.



*Amaranthus retroflexus*

Following this sacred grain's history of conquest, commodification, and resistance allows us to map the contours of production and processing in the modern/colonial food system. As this grain enters the market, we enter with it, to shift our gaze towards understanding the ways in which distribution centralizes power and control through colonizing economic relations of exchange. The result of this inequitable distribution of food and Life is dis-ease, the symptom of consuming a diet of genocide, bought and sold at a price. From Life in Nature, comes food, seeds, as

reproduction. From products, in the market, comes Waste, as premature death. All along this journey are dynamics and relations of oppressing, resisting, movements and moments that we trace together, now.

### ***The Story of Amaranth: Ceremony, 'Lost Seed', 'Super Weed'***

Spilling over with rich grain, deep hues of red and purple, flat green leaves, red veins, matching in taste and color with the red flint corn, sacred crops imitating each others beauty (Nabham, Food Traditions). The soil is wise, remembers its seeds, its crops, old friends, meeting again, in warm embrace. Amaranth is ancestor, teacher, conscientious objector to the war on the land and seed. Amaranth has fed the peoples of this land for over 8,000 years, native, deep, staple crop of the Mexica-Nahua, huiuhli, sister of maiz, frijol, symbol of strength, power, royal, ritual object and cosmic offering. What the Europeans saw as cannibalism, a key marker of savagery, was in fact sacrifice, ritual offering and honoring of the body for the sun, for the earth. In Tenochtitlan, women mixed the grain with honey and human blood, boiled over open flame, mixed with the toasted semillas to make cakes, galletas taking the form of Huitzilopozchli, sometimes called the god of war, embodied in father sun, born fully grown and ready for battle, ready to

defend his goddess mother Coatlicue. When amaranth took this form of sacred object, a source of spiritual power, perceived as cannibalism, it became a key target of conquest. As one healing food encyclopedia illustrates,

The Spanish conquistadors, who were appalled by this practice which they considered a parody of the Holy Communion, forbade its use after conquering Montezuma in 1519. Reasoning that eliminating amaranth would also eliminate human sacrifice, they burned every crop of amaranth they could find and forbade growing the grain. The punishment for possession of amaranth was severe – having even one seed was punishable by chopping off the hands. As a consequence, amaranth quickly became a 'lost' seed, a status that lasted for hundreds of years (Murray and Pizzorno 1997: 337).

But amaranth survives, protected by seed savers and brought through the Sierra Madre, and the majority of what is now the American Southwest. A few varieties also made it back to Europe, de-spiritualized, de-politicized, commodified as ornamental flowers, leaves to be admired for their color alone, unacknowledged as nutritious food for the body, nor the spirit. In its travels, amaranth also found new meanings in India and China, where growing populations honored the crops nutritional benefits as a complete



protein, as a medicine, and cosmetically, as a deep red dye.

An enemy of Christendom, a false idol, sacrilegious; amaranth was banned for its sacred properties. Not just to starve the body, but to kill the Indian, to disrupt the spiritual realm of Native life, destroy cosmologies of sustenance and nourishment directly from the land. Later however, following WWII, the grain becomes an enemy of another epistemic/political order: Western Scientific, Capitalist biopower, where we locate the paradigm of war's neoliberal turn (Foucault 2008, Shiva 1997, Marx 1887). From the colonial/capitalist gaze, amaranth's resilience and fertility as a crop (with up to 500,000 seed from a single mature plant) is not seen as strength, but as a danger to monocultural production, and therefore profits. In the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the modern/colonial food system is rapidly industrializing through the so-called Green Revolution, late capitalist US Empire is simultaneously re-arranging the global war machine. The enactment and conquest of the Green Revolution is a story of explicit attack on the land, through obstructing waterways, saturating the soil through heavy irrigation, dumping chemical and petroleum-based inputs, and destroying biodiversity through monocultural designs. These are methods that we understand as a war on food, on Life. Long-time critic and

activist against the Green Revolution, Vandana Shiva, reminds us that:

Food production technologies have undergone two generations of change over the last few decades. The first shift was the introduction of chemicals in agriculture under the banner of the Green Revolution. Toxic chemicals used in warfare were deployed in agriculture in times of peace as synthetic fertilizers and pesticides. Agriculture and food production became dependent on 'weapons of mass destruction' (Shiva 2005: 153).

During this period, the genealogy of the modern/colonial food system transmutes to become a key articulation between the military and agricultural industrial complexes of late 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. Empire.

The ethnobotanic work of Jonathan Deinger Sauer is illustrative of this turn. While writing his dissertation on the newly problematic amaranth grain through the University of California, Sauer takes a break from graduate studies to work for the Pentagon as a weather and botany specialist. Demonstrating the facility with which one can shift from the military to the agricultural industrial complexes, Sauer identifies how amaranth has "moved uninvited into clearings and fields; with the unintentional help of man they have become aggressive and widespread weeds (Sauer 1950: 561)." In a

discourse that bridges military and agricultural lexicons, Sauer sees the amaranth as a genus to be “too massive a problem to be attacked here (Sauer 1950: 561).” “Uninvited guests”, “unintentional help of man”, “aggressive weeds”, “huge problem to be attacked”, Sauer could be speaking of the grain amaranth as easily as he could be talking about the racialized enemy Other, whichever enemy of war was in fashion for Western Man, from the Indian/Savage to the Muslim/Terrorist.

Here we resist a particular colonizing technology in the Western, scientific, positivist imaginary. The feminization of Nature, within a heteropatriarchal worldview, occludes Nature’s agency, denies her power in lieu of masculinist understandings of control and domination. Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva also trace this impulse in Western Science, a shift from *Terra Madre* to *Terra Nullius*, towards the “transformation of nature from a living, nurturing mother to inert, dead, and manipulable matter (Shiva 1997: 47).” Cherrie Moraga and Andrea Smith offer methods of critique that intervene in the domination of Nature and women by the West. As the racialization and conquest of the “brown and female body” is the racialization and conquest of the “brown and female earth”, the women of color movement to end sexual violence joins with the

movement to protect the rights of mother earth.

In this context of eco-feminist movements, amaranth resists, embodies resilience, the ability to adapt, survive, and fight back. Considered to be a ‘super weed’ in the genetically-modified fields of monocultural production – where the land is abused in order to overproduce cotton, soy, wheat, corn and other crops as commodities for the global market – amaranth is comrade, engaged in the spiritual/political struggle to decolonize the land. Resisting petrochemicals, herbicides designed to destroy native plants, amaranth is reclaiming hundreds of acres of land being mistreated through the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. Plant biologists based in the modern/colonial, imperial research university are hired to produce ‘knowledge’ that is designed and packaged to defend agribusiness and its domination of the land. Scientists in these fields lament amaranth’s “cross-resistance to chemically-dissimilar herbicides and to herbicides with different modes of action (Gossett, et. al. 1992: 587).” Recent campesino blogs celebrate the “counterattack of nature” as amaranth “devours” fields of transgenic corn and soy, forcing the Monsanto Corporation to abandon over 12,000 acres of land, with an additional 120,000 acres

marked as hazardous areas (Casa Europa 2009; Pijama Surf 2011).

What do these stories of amaranth tell us about the larger transformation of agricultural production as a result of the conquest of the Americas? Similarly, how does amaranth teach us to resist, to adapt, to decolonize? Amaranth is a sacred crop, a staple not only for physical nutrition and sustenance, but for spiritual nutrition as well. A food of the gods, a key interlocuter between the body, the land and the cosmos. Amaranth provides a complete protein, a rich source of dietary fiber and minerals such as iron, magnesium, and especially manganese, an essential trace nutrient in all forms of life, which benefits our bones, kidneys, liver and human brain.

This story of amaranth, from ceremony to super weed, could be told about nearly any sacred crop, namely corn, potatoes, beans, and chocolate, to name a few. These histories teach us how the paradigm of war seeps through the pores of social structures and into the intimate spaces of our kitchens, gardens, and bodies. In many ways this echoes Fanon's assertion in *Black Skin, White Masks* of how colonial structures produce colonial cultures, ways of (non)-Being that reproduce coloniality itself. Thus, through the modern/colonial food system, the paradigm of war represses the

sacredness of our food and its journey from seed to body. In dismembering our connection to the land, the modern/colonial food system brings this violence into the body through consuming perverted, embalmed corpses of what used to be food. Disease and hunger, of the body and of the land, are two sides of the same coin, two effects of the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. It is here that we must turn to distribution and consumption, and amplify indigenous struggles that resist the forceful and violent colonization of Native identities: from producers to consumers, stewards to shoppers, from farmers to diabetics.

### ***Distributing Dis-ease, Consuming the Colonial***

The emergent fields of food studies and sub-field of food *justice* studies are currently taking shape around critiques of the neoliberal, globalizing, capitalist food system in conversation with grassroots movements worldwide for food sovereignty. Authors and activists rightly point to distribution as a site of intervention into existing power structures that perpetuate food injustice. This analysis tells the story of the negative consequences of post-WWII development trends, such as the formation of "food deserts" through "grocery store redlining": the corporate-driven, racialized movement of food distribution stores

from “distressed areas” of the inner cities to the “serene suburbs” (Morales 2011: 151). Our aim here is to contribute to this literature from a decolonial, spiritual activist perspective, and evidence the colonial violence present throughout the food system in a paradigm of war. This section begins with the next stage in our food systems approach to strategizing food justice, that is, the methods of distribution in a modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. We engage with interventions emerging from communities of color, and native communities in particular, to

evidence how processes of genocide and conquest are being contested through food. The food system perpetuates itself, and normalizes violence against native women’s bodies and the land through land dispossession, destroying native foodways and selling a diet of genocide on the market for corporate profits.

In particular, we are concerned with the commodification of food, and therefore of the land, the seed, reproduction, Life itself. We hope our analysis makes clear that underneath Monsanto is Columbus, below Wal-Mart is the albóndiga.



**WANTED**



**CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS**

GRAND THEFT, GENOCIDE, RACISM  
INITIATING THE DESTRUCTION OF A CULTURE  
RAPE, TORTURE, AND MAIMING OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND INSTIGATOR OF THE BIG LIE.

**500 YEARS OF TOURISM**



They exist simultaneously, the colonial violence and the capitalist processes of commodification. But we refuse to collapse these categories of oppression, that is; they do have distinct technologies that we need strategic precision in building our movements to support Life and land. To decolonize, is to uproot, the colonizer/colonized relationship itself, in our bodies, in social structures. In our communities, we need new ways to (re)distribute food and health, provide access to those excluded from Life through the modern/colonial food system. We must also, however, shift our values, our culture, and our principles, in order to challenge a worldview, a world system, that not only produces 'food deserts' for academics to write about, but also produces death and dis-ease in our families, in our communities. How this diet of genocide is distributed is our main concern here.

We identify the emergence of the albóndiga – a controlled market for grain in 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish America – as an illustrative institution in the genealogy of the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. While we cannot substantiate evidence of amaranth grain being implicated in this history, the sacred crops (namely corn) brought into these storage and distribution sites surely underwent similar colonizing and commodifying processes. The albóndiga (alhóndiga in Old Spanish)

is the space where “the gradual centralization of grain policies” culminates, where, “according to theory, the sale of grains in a public market, under the supervision of municipal officials, on city property, and with a published schedule of prices,” takes place. This regulation and control of grain in the New World was designed to “eliminate abuses” (Super 1988: 48).

'Abuses' here refers to the process of resisting colonial foodways being placed on indigenous lands and worldviews. From the beginning, the market itself is a colonial introduction, an experiment in conquest, a foreign idea and structure of power, struggled over and designed in Western Europe (notably through the Spanish Reconquista and expropriation of peasant land in England), to be exported and strengthened through the trade of bodies and land across the Atlantic, in the so-called New World. Marx traces in *Das Capital* how land dispossession plays a central role in the formation of capitalism. Initiated in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, the processes of the expropriation of people from the land, the centralization of agricultural control, and the homogenization of crops immediately produced hunger and poverty. This in turn produces “a body of men who earn their subsistence by working for others, and who will be under a necessity of

going to market for all they want” (Marx 1867: 750).

The albóndiga must be situated in this modern/colonial context, in which proto-capitalist conquistadores, in the spread of Christendom, colonized Native trade relations, forcing them into the container of the market. As in Europe, the formation of the market in the Americas was met with resistance, from below. Indigenous peoples, refusing to be assimilated into colonial/capitalism as consumers, preserved traditional economic and trading systems, continuing to buy and sell grain “outside the market.” Cautious of the colonial control of such spaces, they resisted the imposed order, where “hoarding and speculation” were common distribution practices (Super 1988: 50). Today, when the poor and dispossessed refuse to take part in the global market, economists express concerns over the under-regulated, “informal sector.” In Mexico City, Tenochtitlan, over half of the economy is still considered “informal” (Garcia-Navarro 2006). Mexico City is one of the birthplaces, along with Lima, of the albóndiga itself, where it was first introduced in 1567, and began trading commodity grains in 1581 (Super 1988: 48). As another example of the ways in which colonialism and capitalism co-exist, are inextricably bound together, we see Wal-Mart, the super-albóndiga of the 21<sup>st</sup> century,

dominating Mexican markets, continuing to turn peasants into buyers, producers into consumers. It is the market itself that introduces this violence through the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. To be a consumer, is to be a dis-placed person, where our sacred right of connection with the earth through our food is denied.

As the albóndiga is Wal-Mart, it also the commodity store, the main food distribution site for Native people within the settler colonial U.S. nation-state, following the Reservation Act of 1850. Winona LaDuke grounds, shifts Marx’s analysis of capitalism. From an indigenous perspective, colonial/capitalism embedded itself in the modern/colonial food system. She notes,

The work of planting and nurturing seeds – calling forth and honoring life on the land through an intricate ceremonial cycle – has been a mainstay of indigenous cultures...As colonizers drove Indigenous peoples from our territories, we were cut off from access to traditional foods. Starvation and disease became rampant. The forced reliance on inadequate government rations, often called ‘commodity foods’, only changed the starvation from quick and obvious to hidden and slow (LaDuke 2005: 191).

LaDuke situates our argument in the racialized experiences of native

peoples, evidencing the modern/colonial food system as a strategic space to invisibilize and normalize the everyday violence of the colonizing process (paradigm of war/biopower). For LaDuke and many other native activists, type II diabetes is an omnipresent dis-ease, a symptom of consuming the colonizing diet, a clear mark of the colonial wound.

The American reservations' commodity stores are distributors of this disease, key institutions in the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, as settlers continued to encroach on native lands of the Southwest, "the US military began distributing free commodity foods to Native Americans. This surplus food – white flour, cheese, refined sugar, lard, canned foods – is a diabetic's nightmare. It was not until 1996 that fresh produce was offered in the program. And authentic traditional foods are still not included (California Newsreel 2008: 5)."

Native food activist, physician, and author, Devon Mihesuah, places diabetes and other diet-related disease in the context of a larger genocidal reality. For Mihesuah, genocide is not only "the loss of land; the loss of population through war, sterilization, disease, (and) policies," but includes premature death as a result of:

...poor health, changing cultures, and removal-relocation; a dependency on material goods that result in competition between tribes; alcoholism and other forms of self-abuse; a change of environment that includes a loss of plants and animals; gender role change (the loss of respect for females' important social, political, economic, and religious roles and the loss of men's hunting roles);...a dilution and loss of cultural knowledge; dilution of indigenous blood...depression and other mental problems associated with being disempowered; internalizing colonial ideologies that result in feeling confused about identity, feelings of inferiority, apathy, and helplessness; the continued subjugation of Natives because the ideology of Manifest Destiny is still in effect; the loss of intellectual rights (theft of knowledge by scholars and others for the purpose of personal gain); and continued monitoring of tribal governance policies and procedures by the federal government. (Mihesuah 2005: 49-50)

This analysis has led many to draw cross-cultural connections between communities of color around the world, particularly indigenous peoples, and their shared experience with alarming rates of type-II diabetes. As the important documentary film series, *Unnatural Causes*, makes clear, "Pacific Islanders, African Americans, Aboriginal peoples in Australia, all

suffer from Type II diabetes at rates double or triple the national averages (PAGE).” In the film, Epidemiologist S. Leonard Syme of UC Berkeley’s School of Public Health, asserts that these communities “have totally different histories. They are all different populations, and yet they all have the same manifestation...And in every case, we’re talking about people who have been dispossessed of their land and of their history. They haven’t been able to re-create it. In all these far-flung parts of the world the social circumstance of being ripped from roots ends up with the same manifestation of disease” (California Newsreel 2005: 3).

What is significant for us as food justice activists is how LaDuke and Mihesuah take up food sovereignty as an aspect of the struggle for sovereignty at large. Today, these native woman activists are part of an expanding community of activists of color working for food justice across the globe. Alongside LaDuke and Mihesuah, Gary Paul Nabhan, Lebanese-American ethnobotanist and native foods activist, tells the story of how many native people are healing diabetes by decolonizing their diets. He writes of a 12-day healing pilgrimage for native peoples of the Americas suffering from diabetes. Eating only indigenous foods for the entirety of the trip we witness how a return to the traditional foods of one’s own ancestry leads to rapid recovery.

Trials from 10 days to 6 weeks have reversed many of the symptoms of Type II diabetes. According to Nabhan, “within 10 days, their weight and their blood sugar levels had been dramatically reduced, and everyone felt healthier. The changes began so immediately that several participants had to seek medical advice to figure out how to reduce the hypoglycemic medications they had been self-administering for years (Nabhan 2005: 182).” He emphasizes the holistic healing that is facilitated by this process, a process we highlight in spiritual activism as decolonizing the mind/body/spirit. We include his story at length:

“The pilgrimage allowed us to clearly see for the first time all the damage that had been done to our homeland and its food system, damage that was echoed in our very own bodies. There was something else going on among my native American companions during that walk. The Seri, Papago, and Pima pilgrims frequently expressed that their cultural pride, spiritual identity, and sense of curiosity were being renewed. And so, a return to a more traditional diet of their ancestral foods was not merely some trip to fantasy land for nostalgia’s sake; it provided them with a deep motivation for improving their own health by blending modern and traditional medical knowledge in a way that made them feel *whole*.” (Nabhan 2004: 184)



Public health and dominant epidemiological research fails to look at processes of colonization as determinants of diet-related disease. Through our method of exploring Native women's writings and related texts, our intention has been to resist reproducing these methodological blindspots. Instead we point to the cultural and spiritual shifts that occur as a result of displacement from land and the taking of natural resources through force, sanctioned by imperial nation state's rule of law. The return to ancestral foodways is an important decolonial move in resisting the modern/colonial food system through spiritual activism. We close this section with the healing wisdom of Dr. Terry Shintani, Hawaiian elder, doctor of Japanese ancestry, student of the healing traditions of his native relatives. Here he explains the connection between the decolonization of knowledge and decolonizing our health, our bodies, and the land.

This diet isn't something I learned at Harvard. It's something that Hawaiians and their ancestors knew for thousands of years. They knew that food without *mana* – that is, without *life force* – is not going to support anyone's health.... In traditional medicine, it is recognized that there is really only one disease that all of us must learn to resist: *arrogance*. It is simply arrogant to think that we can violate the laws of

nature and get away with it (Shintani quoted in Nabhan 2004: 199).

### ***Wasted***

I am a product. I am a symbol of endless, hopeless, fruitless, aimless games.

I'm a glossy packages on the supermarket shelf.

My contents aren't fit for human consumption.

I could tragically injure your perfect health.

My ingredients will seize up your body function.

I am the leper nobody wants to touch..... much.

-Crass: "End Result", 1978

The food system – as modern, colonial, distributing genocide, consuming the land, processing bodies – produces anti-Life. Through this food system we are turned into consumers, torn from the land, dismembered from the sacred cycles of Nature, interrupting circles of reciprocity. Our relationships are disrupted. Where we desire to receive and give freely, we are compelled to take, and therefore, what we return is turned into *waste*. When we take, without giving, from the earth, through the food system, we produce waste. Nature, however, does not produce waste; it holds ecosystemic Life in order, with Life and Death in sacred relation, forming natural synergies, spirals and mixtures of darkness and light. Our journey through the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war

continues, ends, begins again, with waste.

Industrial waste has been a toxic weapon of war against native peoples in the form of environmental injustice. Toxic waste – left behind by industrial capitalist extraction and exploitation of native lands – greatly impacts, distorts, and interrupts the daily lives and foodways of native people. This fact problematizes our earlier research that demonstrates the benefits of returning to a native diet, because of existing obstacles to decolonizing our diets. The political structures of colonialism are such that they often occlude the possibility of having the choice to eat our heritage or not. Therefore, we must also include strategies to resist and decolonize the ways in which the modern/colonial food system perpetuates dis-ease through its waste products; be they agri-chemicals, slaughterhouse waste, or heavy metals and plastics from processing and packaging pseudo-foods, to name a few.

There is a long tradition of native struggles to keep toxic waste out of their communities. With other people of color they restore the land and resist the colonial project through the Environmental Justice movement. This movement weaves, embraces, and inter-connects with the movement for food justice in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Winona LaDuke is an elder in both movement

spaces, articulating these struggles as one un-entangled vision of recovery and healing through decolonization. Her work in collaboration with Katsi Cook, Wolf Clan mother and traditional midwife, organizer for the Akwesasne Mother's Milk Project, is one that heals the food system's wounds on the land, on the body, on the spirit. This project is centered on Mohawk land, at the US/Canada border, emerging to respond to the contamination of the local waters, wild life, and women's bodies (LaDuke 1999).

This work highlights the affects of the waste products from the modern/colonial food system. Cook explains how the Mother's Milk Project works to "understand and characterize how toxic contaminants have moved through the local food chain, including mother's milk (Cook in LaDuke 1999: 19)." She elaborates on the impetus, the need, for such a project:

The fact is, that women are the first environment. We accumulate toxic chemicals like PCBs, DDT, Mirex, HCBs, etc., dumped into the waters by various industries. They are stored in our body fat and are excreted primarily through breast milk. What that means is that through our own breast milk, our sacred natural link to our babies, they stand the chance of getting concentrated dosages (Katsi Cook quotes in LaDuke 1999: 18 – 19).

Compounding the structural injustices inherent in the reservation, a series of corporate polluters exploited and contaminated the land (most recently General Motors), further interrupting Awkasanse traditions. The native diet has been undermined on many fronts. Toxic chemicals from modern/colonial industry pollute native lands, with such agents as polychlorinated biphenyls, or PCBs, “one of the most lethal poisons of industrialized society.” PCB is “an insidious chemical known to cause liver, brain, nerve and skin disorders in humans, shrinking testicles...cancer and reproductive disorders (LaDuke 1999: 15).” The introduction of this toxic chemical has “completely disrupted (the) traditional lifestyle” and polluted indigenous foodways. Cook explains:

Many of the families used to eat 20-25 fish meals a month. It’s now said that the traditional Mohawk diet is spaghetti. We feel anger at not being able to eat the fish. Although we are relieved that our responsible choices at the present protect our babies, this does not preclude the corporate responsibility of General Motors and other local industries to clean up the site.... Many of us bless the seeds, pray to corn, and continue a one-on-one relationship with the earth. (Cook in La Duke 1999: 20)

This war on the body and the land, racialized/gendered as brown and

female, is carried out through the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. LaDuke points out “that a culture and identity that are traditionally matrilineal will come into conflict with institutions that are historically focused upon their eradication (LaDuke 1999: 11).” The struggle to decolonize emerges from this problem space, as the “process of remembering and restoring the relationship between people and the earth is a crucial part of healing the community from the violations of the industry in their way of life (La Duke 1999: 20).” Mohawk women are actively organizing to protest, resist and transform toxic waste in their communities. Working with native mother’s whose breast milk has become hazardous waste, they heal through recovering traditional aquaculture methods, caring for local fish in clean waters, waters that nourish and provide Life where the modern/colonial world has created waste and dis-ease. What we have found as organizers in the movement for food justice is the need to intervene and find more ways to transform waste into Life through spiritual activism. This is why Planting Justice reminds us to “Compost the Empire”.

### ***Spiritual Activism, Decolonization, and Self-Determination***

Together we have travelled through the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. We began as a

sacred amaranth seed, sprouting into a symbol of spiritual sustenance, and later perceived by the colonizer as Savage. Protected and stewarded by the ancestors, spread throughout the world, re-emerging to resist the monocultures and agri-chemicals of industrialized agriculture. What we learned from this story is that amaranth is our companion in struggle. The earth, the plants, seeds, and other sources of Life, should be treated as participants and teachers in the struggle for decolonization. A genealogy of Distribution and Consumption in the modern/colonial food system continued our journey. We learned that we are not only consumers, that food is not simply a commodity, not another product to be bought and sold on the market. This war on the sacredness of food produces dis-ease, on the body and the land, where both become waste dumps for the accumulation of toxicity. In a paradigm of war, the food system is a slow and violent genocide.

Spiritual activism provides us with a means for decolonizing the food system in our bodies and in our communities. Along with Chicana feminist activist/scholar Leela Fernandes, we believe in “the possibilities of spiritualized social transformations of this world, one that seeks to challenge all forms of injustice, hierarchy, and abuse from the most intimate daily practices in our lives to the larger structures of

race, gender, class, sexuality, and nation....Movements for social justice are sacred endeavors (Fernandes 2003: 11).” Drawing on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, we are committed to inner work/public acts, the inextricable interconnection between the violence and healing that takes places in our individual bodies, and the violence and healing that is necessary in our social and physical worlds.

We desire Work, not Jobs. Grace Lee Boggs asks us to “reconceptualize the meaning and purpose of Work in a society that is becoming increasingly jobless (Boggs 2011: 30).” As Boggs elaborates:

Work comes from inside out; work is an expression of our soul, our inner being. It is unique to the individual; it is creative. Work is an expression of the Spirit at work in the world through us. Work is that which puts us in touch with others, not so much at the level of personal interaction, but at the level of service in the community.

Work is not just about getting paid. Indeed, so much Work in our culture is not paid at all, for example, raising children, cooking meals at home, organizing youth activities, singing in the choir, repairing one’s home, cleaning up one’s neighborhood, listening to a neighbor or friend who has undergone trauma, tending a garden, planting trees, or creating

rituals that heal and celebrate.  
([www.boggsblog.org](http://www.boggsblog.org))

The alienated worker is a consumer, one who needs a Job in order to pay for the basic necessities of Life. This distinction between Jobs and Work is central to our food justice activism, where, through the project of Planting Justice we seek to create meaningful Work in a food system that heals the land and the body.

Our sacred food justice activism is part of a larger, interconnected global movement for decolonization. Boggs, as movement elder, offers insight into the level of transformation at hand. “The physical threat posed by climate change (another symptom of colonial/capitalism) represents a crisis that is not only material but also profoundly spiritual at its core because it challenges us to think seriously about the future of the human race and what it means to be a human being (Boggs 2011: 32).” These questions have gained momentum and daily attention as (r)evolutions take shape and reclaim power in the Global South, notably the Arab Spring and Chilean Winter, to name a few. Movements formulating within the empires of the Global North, notably the Greek rebellions and U.S. based Occupy Movement, have also brought structural critiques to the lasting effects of neoliberal, late capitalism.

At Occupy Oakland in particular, we have witnessed an important conversation regarding the meaning and implications of decolonization, vis a vis the discourse of ‘Occupy’. The queer person of color caucus at Occupy Oakland has submitted multiple proposals to change the name of Occupy to Decolonize, in an effort to point out the occupation of the land already in progress, inaugurated by the founding of the U.S. nation-state. This name change also implies strategic shifts in regards to methods and pragmatics of struggle. Interestingly, the same elders we have been invoking are active participants that are challenging the Occupy movement to move beyond simply articulating grievances. Amongst these spiritual activist critiques, Leela Fernandes affirms: “A lasting transformation of society can never rest on a movement based purely on making demands, on an ideology of getting more – no matter how just these demands may be... We must simultaneously commit to processes of both making demands and of giving up (Fernandes 2003: 18).” This notion of “giving up” is also a central technology of Boggs’ “Next American Revolution,” which asks us to resist dominant culture by recognizing our own complicity in the machinations of imperial ways of being. Therefore we centralize the need to transform our values and our daily cultural practices in the struggle for decolonization. Self-determination over our bodies and

the right of reciprocity and sacred communion with the land, the seed, and the water, is necessary to begin building a food system that restores our ancestral foodways; ways of being that sustain Life.

## **Appendix A: Book Project**

The attached paper is our first effort in a larger project, a series of research projects that traces the contours of the modern/colonial food system in a paradigm of war. How has the food system served as a space for the colonizing technologies of slavery, genocide, and militarism to become definitive parts of the lived experiences and social realities of colonized peoples? How does this system articulate with other systems of power and oppression to take its place as the global food system, the first of its kind in its dominance and monopoly on the world's food supply? We divide this genealogical study into three main historical time/spaces: Native genocide in the Americas, racial slavery in Africa, and neoliberal wars of aggression in Latin America and the Middle East.

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We have devised this writing project as an experiment in producing 'movement theory.' Our writings will be workshopped in community; circulated, informed and critiqued by our compañer@s in the struggle for food justice. In the end, our authorship will serve more as a facilitation of dialectical humanism, a re-articulation of theory/praxis; by working to record the knowledge being produced from the neighborhood, placed-based projects of food justice and food sovereignty in the San Francisco Bay Area.

As authors, we meet in the space of scholar/activism. On one hand, a professional student/scholar working in the imperial research university, engaging in sacred activist work in my communities, and on the other, a paid activist/organizer, supporting herself through the sacred work of Planting Justice, but committed to knowledge production for social change. By combining our voices in this paper we are inviting others to amplify theirs, as we inhabit this border space, and utilize its potential to decolonize our lives and society.

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