

THE IMMIGRANT-FOOD NEXUS:

Borders, Labor, and Identity in North America

Edited by Julian Agyeman and Sydney Giacalone
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In the introductory chapter of this edited volume, Julian Agyeman and Sydney Giacalone outline an ambitious project to bring together an eclectic yet focused collection of contributions exploring the intersection of immigration and food. Describing the immigrant-food nexus as the crossroads between food systems, immigration policy, and immigrant foodways, the editors propose three necessary approaches to its study: multi-scalar thinking, intersectionality, and critical analysis. They illustrate this need by showcasing a bifurcation in food studies, split between the food sustainability movement (also known as the ‘alternative food movement’) and those who make up the food justice community. To the editors, the former too often embodies a white colonial imaginary of what constitutes ‘good’, ‘healthy’, and ‘sustainable’ food, leading to somewhat of a tête-à-tête with other food choices and practices of immigrant communities. This same imaginary is constitutive to the expected identity of farmers, farm owners, and more broadly to the agricultural industry in North America. As one would expect, this has a marginalizing effect for immigrants that both consume and produce food; one that the food justice community seeks to address. In its exploration of these issues, this edited volume is divided into three sections, as is suggested in the title. Section 1 – ‘Borders’ – looks at some of the physical and imagined borders that define the limits of immigrant belonging within agricultural space. Contributions in section 2 – ‘Labor’ – focus on the lived experience of immigrant farm workers and farm owners. And lastly, section 3 – ‘Identity’ – explores narratives around and politics of identity at the intersection of immigration and foodscapes.

A notable strength of this edited volume is its groundedness. By this, I mean that all (at the exception of one) contributions are based on empirical evidence. More than this, a wide breadth of methodological approaches are employed. Through interviewing, Curtis (Chapter 1) explores world making at the Arizonan borderland, Huang (Chapter 5) provides nuance between local food and food from home amongst immigrant and refugee farmers in Alaska, Minkoff-Zern & Sloat (Chapter 7) explore legibility and access barriers for farmers looking for support within USDA programs and resources, and Ostenson, Dring, & Wittman (Chapter 11) examine the extent of cultural inclusion within food policy councils in Vancouver. In their chapter on Hmong American foodways, Alkon & Vang (Chapter 13) use survey data to demonstrate that translocality intersects with food practices to produce identities that

are hybridized yet still distinctly Hmong and American. In two chapters, content analysis is used to draw out narratives and discourses about food and immigrants within predominantly white agricultural spaces. Here, Neubert (Chapter 2) looks at the racial politics surrounding the building of a new slaughterhouse in Iowa, and Linton (Chapter 10) confronts Canada's mythology of multiculturalism by demonstrating color blind agrarian narratives in Ontario. In-depth personality profiles also play an important role in this edited volume, where Valdez (Chapter 9) features the life of four women who feed dairy workers and recreate a home away from home, and Passidomo & Wood (Chapter 12) profile the work of three women who are leading food businesses in the *Nuevo* American South, building "familial and community 'wealth' beyond the monetary" (249). Finally, ethnography also plays within the methodological arc of this collection. In Schmid (Chapter 8), the intimate qualitative data collected from Mexican American farming families in Southern Appalachia reveals the central role women play in organising cooperative community networks to 'move' fresh produce. In the final chapter, the anonymous Situational Strangers (Chapter 14) report their observations at a shared-use commercial kitchen in Connecticut, delving into the processes of crossing, cooking, cultivating, and culture as they relate to community formation and individual futurity.

Moving on, I have selected what I believe is the strongest chapter for each of the three sections of this edited collection. This is certainly subjective, but I have tried to align my choice with the intended goals articulated by editors Julian Agyeman and Sydney Giacalone. I have also selected these chapters based on the different geographies (or spaces) in which they investigate. For the first section (Borders), I found Joassart-Marcelli & Bosco's (Chapter 3) contribution to be the best executed. Focusing on San Diego's 'ethnic foodscapes' of Barrio Logan and City Heights, defined as the physical places, people, objects, discourses, and sensual elements "associated with the foodways of ethnic groups in particular places" (61), the authors explore the nexus of food and gentrification. Interviews with shop keepers, residents, and consumers supplement a rich analysis displaying the tension between urban discourse and foodscapes, where ethnic enclaves are often qualified as 'food swamps' or 'food deserts' while also standing as the site of exoticisation and excitement by foodies, tourists, and developers. The latter dimension serves as a force to propel gentrification, where the authors examine the use value of food and appropriation from a Marxian economics perspective, contrasting this to local forms of resistance that seek to preserve the symbolic value of ethnic foodways. Within the 'Labor' section, it is Minkoff-Zern & Sloat (Chapter 7) that struck me as particularly interesting. Here, the authors use James Scott's concept of 'legibility' to examine why immigrant farmers are not accessing (or being granted) USDA financial resources to the same extent as their white counterparts. It is shown that racial discrimination has long existed within the USDA, showcased through the experience of black farmers during the civil rights era. With immigrants, discrimination is subtly anchored in questions of legibility. This can be a relatively simple question of linguistic barriers, where immigrant farmers are asked to read and understand financial program requirements and write application documents exclusively in English. It also trickles to the more complex issue of agricultural practices, where immigrant farmers' diverse crops (i.e., agroecological variety) are at odds with contemporary industrial practices of monocropping; the latter being more persuasive in competitive bids for USDA

support. Beyond the interesting arguments this chapter provides, it is also 'backed up' by an impressive study involving seventy interviews with immigrant farmers and another forty-seven with staff in government and non-profits. For the last section, 'Identity', it was the chapter by the anonymous 'Situational Strangers' (Chapter 14) that I found most riveting. Here, the nuance between 'authentic' and 'original' food takes on a metaphoric life throughout, where authentic is understood as objective cultural legitimacy and original stands as its subjective kin, drawing on authenticity but remixing it to create something new. Through anonymity, the authors de-centre the ego of ethnographers. They do this in an acknowledgement that only 'original' knowledge is reached via co-production, subverting the claims of authenticity often held by those writing ethnographies. Drawing on the lives and voices of immigrants working through CLiCK, inc., a shared-use commercial kitchen, the authors show that there is no universal recipe for authentic immigrant lives. And while both authentic and original life often coexist, this tired binary is perhaps unreflective of the in-between of both conceptual categories of cultural embodiment.

This edited volume provides a wide breath and deep wealth of content beyond what I have presented. The multi-scalar aims of Agyeman and Giacalone are certainly met, with chapters spanning North America and exploring geographies that go beyond the agricultural. Contributions specific to Mexico, however, would have strengthened this collection. The aim of intersectionality is relatively well achieved as a whole, but in terms of individual chapters, it is seldom described in these terms and only a few chapters take this up successfully (Ostenson, Dring, & Wittman; Schmid; Valdez). The aim of producing a volume that critically examines the connection of food and immigration, however, is a bit of a miss. While the editors don't go in detail about what they mean by 'critical' or 'critical approach', this volume lacks the edge that seasoned critical scholars may be hoping for. From a theoretical and conceptual standpoint, there is almost no mention of how postcolonial, decolonial, or critical race theories enrich and push forward conversations on food and immigration. Marxist and anarchist approaches, often standard in critical studies, are also absent (For an exception, see Joassart-Marcelli & Bosco). And besides the contributions by Linton (Chapter 10) and Ostenson, Dring, & Wittman (Chapter 11), this volume grossly glazes over how food and immigration intersect with settler colonialism and the contemporary livelihoods of indigenous peoples. To reiterate a previous point, the strength of this edited volume lies predominantly in its empiricism and geographic reach. Its primary weakness, however, is that it falls short in developing conceptual knowledge. While I can appreciate that this is perhaps an inevitable compromise when writing in chapter form, many recurring concepts to which contributions gravitate to – hybridity, translocality, race, place, home, power – are largely taken-for-granted and remain relatively static. Even the vernacular of food studies – foodmaps, foodways, foodscape – does not receive a critical treatment. All in all, though, I believe this edited collection does two important things. First, by focusing on the centrality of immigrants, immigrant farm workers, and immigrant farm owners in the North American foodscape, this book subverts the white, male, and middle-class agricultural imaginary. Second, this book's wide and deep exploration of immigrant livelihoods shows us that this group is leading the way in agricultural and food system alternatives.