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Real World Food Justice and the Enigma of the Scholar-Activist Label: A Reflection on Research Values

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Abstract

Engaging Kate Derickson and Paul Routledge's set of papers on scholar-activism, this paper reflects on what sorts of research values inspire and accompany scholar-activist research. We draw on multiple examples from research in Colombia and the United States, each of which speaks to the theme of food justice, broadly conceived. We pay attention to research "wants and needs," finding that specific outcomes (such as usable or compelling data) are only part of a wider array of desires and obligations that make scholar-activist partnerships valuable. Our examples demonstrate four distinct research values— *supportive networks*, *active science*, *productive discomfort*, and *affective moments*, —that form a vision of scholar-activism that blurs the boundaries between research, political realities, and everyday lives, and seeks to confront real world challenges. The emphasis on active science is as intentional as it is surprising; scholar-activism has been pigeonholed by mainstream academia as a kind of research that doesn't square well with scientific outcomes. Meanwhile, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are being espoused as essential to solving contemporary problems. Thus, we emphasize that the knowledge, skills and values gained through broad engagement between scholar-activists and others in and out of academia can make scientific inquiry more socially relevant.

Keywords

Scholar-activism; values; food justice

Introduction

The distinction between theories and values is not sufficiently recognized, but it is fundamental. On a group of theories one can found a school; but on a group of values one can found a culture, a civilization, a new way of living together. (Ignazio Silone, 1950, 114).

The last few decades of feminist scholarship have provided the academy with persuasive arguments that academic research is *always* something active (England 1994, Gilbert 1994, Katz 1994, Nast 1994, Sultana 2007, Collins 2013). 'Research' in any shape or form necessarily acts within and upon the socio-political context in which it occurs. Rather than establishing a clear path ahead for researchers, these claims have opened up a variety of suggestions and opportunities for research methods and methodologies, and they have necessitated engagement with an array of ethical questions and considerations. For example: What is and what should be the role of an academic researcher in the world? What do

researchers' identities and social locations mean for their research and research methods? Where should fieldwork for critical research take place and with whom should it engage? What do researchers owe to their research participants and research contexts? While these questions have never been definitively answered, and while critically-minded academics will continue asking them of ourselves, through such questioning, we have collectively created new ways of thinking about the 'active' nature of our academic work as well as new ways of being active – new ways of doing research. Many of these new ways of thinking and doing are captured under the label of scholar-activism.

For the four of us, the label of scholar-activism is both an opportunity and a problem; we refer to it as an enigma because while it has opened up the opportunity to do academic work that speaks to theory while also seeking to contribute to on-the-ground efforts for transformation, it also has boxed this particular kind of research into a category that is at once accepted and marginalized in the academy. We can recognize the distancing and discrediting of the scholar-activist label in the academy by paying attention to how the values that underlie scholar-activist research have also been deflated. In doing so, we hope to both (re)value certain ancillary effects of scholar-activism as well as open up spaces of connection and collaboration for active, transformation-centered research across the academy.

In this paper, each of the four authors relies upon examples from our current work to describe particular aspects or effects of our active research that we have come to value, despite being made to believe (through the academy's own structures and value systems) that these aspects *are not good* or that these effects *do not matter*. Although we did not set out to write a paper on scholar-activist research values, we began to think about their importance after being inspired by Kate Derickson and Paul Routledge's recent set of papers on "resourcing scholar-activism" and "situated solidarities" (2015a, 2015b).

In their paper titled "Resourcing scholar-activism: collaboration, transformation, and the production of knowledge," Derickson and Routledge (2015a) propose a particular political practice to guide scholar-activist research, which they term a "politics of resourcefulness" (p. 1). They discuss their politics of resourcefulness framework as emerging from "deep emotional responses to the world" (p. 3), while clarifying that these emotional responses motivate not only internal curiosity and compassion, but an approach to research that delivers "material and intellectual resources" (p. 4) to the activist groups with whom they collaborate (thereby "resourcing" them). To strike this balance, and to operationalize the blurring of the boundary between scholarship and activism, Derickson and Routledge suggest a tactic of "triangulating" research questions to

¹ Here we are mostly referring to the ways in which scholars are assessed within the academy at the graduate and postgraduate levels, including quantification of measures of impact for tenure and promotion, tiers and ranks of publications and publishers, and scientific output and grants.

simultaneously address current theoretical debates, institutional knowledge-building, and the resource needs of activist collaborators.

In “Situated solidarities and the practice of scholar-activism,” Routledge and Derickson (2015b) build on their framework of “resourcing scholar-activism” by advancing “situated solidarities” (drawing from Nagar & Geiger, 2007) as an objective to strive for in scholar-activist research. They share Nagar & Geiger’s critique of the individual-scale (rather than structural-scale) focus that researchers’ reflections on positionality tend to take up. They then think through how re-scaling the reflexivity question might stimulate the creation of research encounters rooted in a sense of solidarity with and active participation in the work and political struggles of activists and marginalized groups. To do so, Routledge and Derickson enumerate six practices that work toward and within “situated solidarities:” being moved, dispersing power, resourcing potential, resourcing solidarity, challenging assumptions and norms, and sustaining collaboration.

Taken together, these two papers are especially valuable in that they provide both a call to action as well as a set of tools and strategies for academics grappling with how to do politically engaged and meaningful research. Specifically, Derickson and Routledge’s unabashed call for young scholars to become scholar-activists because “the ongoing economic, political, and ecological crises confronting humanity urgently necessitate engagement” (2015, p. 4) impresses and resonates with us as scholars trained in trans-disciplinary research. In fact, we saw this call as a point of unity for our research. We also appreciate their belief that research can and should make material contributions to efforts at confronting such crises which they operationalize through “triangulating” research questions and practicing “situated solidarities” with communities and community-based groups. Among other things, these papers caused us to reflect upon what sorts of research values underlie and inspire us to do scholar-activism in the arena of food research, and how these values are critical to the ability of the academy at large to contribute to real-world problem solving with respect to food-related social and ecological crises. Through our discussion of these values in this paper – specifically revaluing *supportive networks*, *active science*, *productive discomfort*, and *affective moments* – we hope to contribute to Derickson and Routledge’s guide for doing scholar-activism both by connecting it to food and food justice specifically and by demanding an extension of the domain of scholar-activism to include the kind of multi-dimensional, transdisciplinary science that is championed for attending to social and ecological challenges (Ledford 2015, Popa et al 2015, Viseu 2015).

Collaborative Works

The arguments of this paper have been illuminated through the unique partnership of the authors, who have a series of overlapping and complementary research projects in Colombia and the U.S. While each of us have our own distinct fieldwork sites, research questions, methods, and goals, we often consult, support,

accompany and/or debrief one another on our research. We do this in part because each of us brings certain expertise to the others – expertise in logistical, locational, social, environmental, theoretical, emotional and scientific terms. This collaboration has played a large role in our ability to conceptualize food research and food justice in far-reaching ways, and we aim to communicate this collaborative broadening through our below narratives. Specifically, our collaborations have allowed us to see multiple sides of food justice – food as an organizing tool and food as nutrition, food as emotion, and food as a right, food/food production as a desire, and food/food production as an ecological action.

As researchers with diverse academic trainings and personal backgrounds, it was not surprising that we arrived at quite different conceptualizations about what is valuable about our research. As part of this paper, we hope to demonstrate that one of the reasons that scholar-activism has the potential to be so useful for food justice scholarship is its ability to enable food justice scholarship to be as broad, encompassing, and fluid as the food practices that are enacted in social and ecological mobilizations on the ground. This ability is in large part due to the collaborative mode of conducting scholar-activist research, which produces a multiplicity of perspectives, and which we have worked to cultivate as a research community. Relatedly, we also comment below on the enigma of the scholar-activist label and how, ultimately, revaluing the aspects and effects of our research that we have come to see as important may mean pushing beyond labels to insist (echoing the feminist scholars mentioned in the introduction) upon the active nature of *all* scholarship.

In the discussion that follows, we provide vignettes of our research on food, each of which revolves around a particular research value that we have come to cultivate in the field. We connect these values to Routledge and Derickson's scholar-activist practices, and label each vignette a *revaluing* of an aspect or effect of our research. We do this in order to take into account the fact that while some of these things may have been valued in the past by individual scholars or departments, they are now systematically undervalued in a corporate-model research context that tends to overemphasize standard outcomes, quantifiable data, and the quantity of written research deliverables. We agree with Derickson and Routledge's contrasting of their dedication to scholar-activist knowledge production with David Harvey's insistence on "critical distance" (Harvey 2000). Particularly in the realm of food justice research, the sorts of research activities that build both lasting relationships and comprehensive theorizations, such as eating with someone, sharing seeds, strategizing for the future, or participating in farm labor, requires sustained proximity. In thinking about closeness and long-term connection to our research contexts, it seems appropriate then to begin our discussion with revaluing *supportive networks*.

Revaluing *supportive networks*

Alexis has worked for many years as a scholar-activist / activist-scholar in the city of Medellín, Colombia and nearby rural towns and agricultural regions of Antioquia, Colombia. Recently, as part of his collaborative work with Allison, Alexis has begun to pay close attention to how food connects different rural and urban communities that are struggling for different kinds of justice. On the edges and steep slopes surrounding the city of Medellín, many rural communities that were displaced from their homelands due to violence have united to create peri-urban gardens. These gardens allow displaced families to acquire the kind of fresh, organic, and healthy foods that they were accustomed to in their rural homes. The gardeners encounter many obstacles to growing food in the city – including the high costs of seeds and water. Even more menacing are the recent plans of the city government to create a 72 kilometer public ‘green belt’ around the margins of the city, which is where many of these residents live and garden, as these lands have been recently recognized as prime property by Medellín’s elite class. To overcome these obstacles, gardeners from different neighborhoods in Medellín and farmers from other municipalities in Antioquia are uniting to create networks for the purpose of exchanging knowledge, resources, and experiences. These networks are especially valuable because while some gardeners have decades of experience, others are just beginning to grow food in urban spaces for the first time. For example, some are youth who were displaced at a very young age and the networks enable the interchange of skills and ideas. Also, the relationships built through the network are an important way through which communities rebuild their strength after years of armed conflict; youth particularly have taken up the tasks of rebuilding traditions, preserving biodiversity and participating in the nourishment of their communities through agriculture.

As Alexis has come to see the importance of these supportive networks, he has used his position as a scholar-activist to broaden and strengthen the networks and the relationships within them. Recently he and his research team accompanied five community gardens in their continued growth and community elaboration in Medellín: Sol de Oriente, Llanaditas, Bello Oriente, Antonio Derca and Nuevo Jerusalén. Through various gatherings they have succeeded in creating a cooperative affiliation between the groups called “Saberes y Semillas” [Knowledges and Seeds]². Alexis relies on methods learned from prior community activism and peacebuilding work to strengthen this affiliation. Specifically, two methods, ‘*piel a piel*’ [skin to skin] and ‘*viaje a pie*’ [journey by foot], have proven vital. *Piel a piel* refers to social processes that foster a sense of corporeal togetherness – the idea that those working together are human bodies with specific needs (e.g. food, rest, shelter) and capacities for feeling (e.g., emotion, tiredness,

² This work was done in collaboration with geographer Colleen Hammelman.

³ This activity was named after the book titled *Viaje a Pie* written in 1967 by Colombian writer and philosopher, Fernando González.

pain, heat, and so on) (see also Hayes-Conroy & Saenz-Montoya, 2017). The communities have fostered this sense of togetherness in a few different ways, including especially large popular banquets where community members share foods that were grown in their gardens. Community members have also journeyed together through *viaje a pie*, using their bodies to not only *feel* together, but also to get to know each other's agricultural spaces through direct physical encounter. For displaced youth who grew up mostly in urban environments, journeying to rural places (or vice versa) can be an incredibly powerful motivator to strengthen rural-urban networks.

Events like those described above – banquets, journeys, rituals – are not ‘research events’ per se, however, as part of a broader attention to how people organize, Alexis and Allison have studied the events themselves – the events they helped to create – as processes of forging connection. In doing so, they have also come to see how the formation of networks might itself be considered something to value in research. We understand this value in at least two distinct ways: First, such networks are valuable for their primary uses as webs of resources, information, and increased political strength in numbers. Second, these networks are valuable for their “tapping” capability, working in the domain of what Routledge and Derickson term “resourcing potential” (2015b) – the ability to connect new organizers, gardeners, activists and scholars or scholar-activists to others. Along these lines Alexis and Allison have recently created an online/offline mapping project called elatlas (elatlas.org⁴) that hopes to facilitate connections between diverse community groups, including food and agriculture-based groups, through both in-person events and online capacity.

In addition to academics resourcing the potential of community members and activists, we have also found that the process of valuing networks directly opens up channels through which community collaborators make their own inquiries into and demands of the research project, which is crucial to the sort of solidarity-based scholar-activism and “politics of resourcefulness” that Derickson and Routledge discuss. For example, in a related conversation with farmers from a different rural region in Colombia – Montes de Maria –it emerged that many of these farmers were in the process of creating agricultural cooperatives and requested assistance in the technicalities of this initiative. While Alexis does not have training or expertise in these areas, it occurred to him that his food research colleague, a sustainability scientist, Victor, might be able to help, and connected him to the project. Victor is now working to connect his interests in the rural communities of Montes de Maria to his ongoing research in a different agricultural region of Colombia (discussed in more detail below). Since food is a topic of (real

⁴ The elatlas project is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant Number 1452541, (PI Hayes-Conroy). Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

world) concern for a wide variety of researchers and research disciplines, creating networks of food scholars, food activists, and farmers seems especially valuable and apropos.

In summary, through this experience of building and cultivating supportive networks, we have come to realize that the practice of “resourcing potential” in the context of food justice research is particularly powerful when it involves transcending and transforming not only the barriers between scholars and activists, but also between scholars of different disciplines. Moreover, we have found that it is the valuing of networks for networks-sake, allowing them to evolve and deepen on their own, which facilitates this transdisciplinary engagement.

Revaluing active science

During the last 3 years, Victor has been working in understanding the social and environmental changes associated with rapid large-scale agricultural expansion in the Eastern Savannas of Colombia, a region known as Orinoquia. Specifically, the goal is to understand the feelings and relationships that different actors, particularly local rural residents, hold towards their land and towards other actors, as well as how they envision ‘desirable futures’ at the onset of a new post-conflict era in Colombia.

The construction and understanding of desirable futures is becoming a central point of researchers working in the field coined as “sustainability science.” The recent attention to this topic comes from the realization that as a transformative discipline, sustainability science should go beyond standard paradigms of conceiving the future as ‘what kind of world is probable,’ in order to elucidate ‘what kind of world is desirable’ (Bai et al 2015, Castree 2015, Verburg et al 2015). Sustainability science is perhaps one of the most prominent examples of how the social role of scientists has dramatically changed in recent years in ways that create potential convergence with researchers who practice scholar-activism. Traditionally, scientists have aimed to create empirical evidence to gain an “unbiased” understanding of the world, but have restrained themselves from making value judgments about those discoveries, leaving it up to policy makers to interpret and use their discoveries. This traditional view has been critiqued by many social scholars, most prominently feminist scholars (e.g. Haraway 1988), but that critique has itself been compartmentalized in the academy, and science is still in search of feasible ways to engage more meaningfully with people. However, there is a growing understanding among sustainability scientists that, given the linked challenges of global climate change, inequality, and environmental degradation, for which food production and distribution is central, scientists should go beyond providing empirical evidence to actually arguing for direct policy implications of their work. Or, even further, they may consider applying new actions themselves that directly work toward social justice or environmental sustainability (Lövbrand et al 2015).

Such questions are particularly relevant for the Orinoquia region of Colombia, which in the last two decades has undergone a rapid expansion of industrial agriculture. Orinoquia has been targeted by the national government, large national economic groups, and several global food commodity corporations as the next great food basket for fulfilling global demand (DNP 2014). Recent industrial cultivations correspond mostly to tree plantations, oil palm, grain crops and sugarcane. These industrial cultivations appear in many ways to be in conflict with the desires and livelihoods of traditional inhabitants, both those corresponding to several indigenous groups as well as later colonists that arrived to seek new opportunities or to escape from violence in other regions of the country.

Through his research, Victor engaged different groups of actors in individual and small group open conversations about their feelings and desires related to their everyday lives and food production in Orinoquia, and about the recent transformations occurring in their territory. As a sustainability scientist, he wanted to know: what are local people's desirable futures and how are they in conflict with the emerging rapid landscape transformation? How can these futures be accurately and justly represented in the landscape? With growing global populations and consumption patterns, some narratives have called for doubling agricultural output by 2050 (e.g. Alexandratos and Bruisma 2012). This blanket call has in many cases been made with no consideration of the disruption that such an increase can cause on the everyday life and desires of those living in agricultural landscapes. Participants in the research included long-term colonists, indigenous groups, and incoming investors and workers from other regions of Colombia.

Victor went to the field with the expectation that local residents would provide him with a detailed description about how they would shape the territory in order to fulfill their desires. This expectation was derived, in part, from the experiences of the other authors in Montes de Maria, Colombia, as described above, where rural residents were well organized and thinking collectively about the future of their territory. Instead, he found that for the most part, the desirable future by rural dwellers does not deviate much from the living present. While external entities have developed detailed visions of the territory based on changes that enable large-scale agricultural production (including infrastructural development, rural and urban landscape planning and the elaboration of investment schemes), smallholders, in contrast, speak about desirable futures in ways that are conditioned by their traditional agricultural practices and their everyday cultural engagement with the territory. For the most part, the desirable futures for rural residents involve the continuation, or in some cases, the intensification of their current practices.

Meanwhile, significant changes to the territory are already taking place, which will inevitably impact the current practices of rural residents. Examples of such changes include the selling of neighboring properties, the consolidation of several landholdings by new owners (many of whom are unknown to local residents), the outmigration of former neighbors, the establishment of large-scale

cultivations around their properties, the improvement of road infrastructure or even the formalization of land ownership, and the enforcement of unprecedented land taxation schemes by the state. The interviews in Orinoquia evidenced a lack of familiarity (on the part of inhabitants) regarding the extent to which agricultural development can change their ways of being. This finding is in contrast with the Montes de Maria case, where inhabitants have a long history of collective awareness of and struggle against different historic pressures for agricultural development by external actors. Rural residents in Orinoquia have not had the opportunity to collectively weigh the ongoing changes to their territory – an opportunity that may significantly alter the way they articulate desirable futures and develop strategies to achieve them.

For a positivistic researcher these initial findings constitute a challenge for objective inquiry: How can one understand desirable futures when they do not differ from the present? For a constructivist researcher, this same scientific dilemma lays bare a hidden cultural context to the science: in this case, the science is built on the assumption that people will desire something different to what they have. For an *active scientist*, however, this quandary entails deeper questions: How can we actively and appropriately enable rural residents to take into consideration the diverse ways in which emerging transformations may collide with their current livelihoods and therefore with their desirable futures? To what extent is it our responsibility as researchers to facilitate intellectual and emotional understanding of the changes to their region that are being planned? And more generally, what constitutes appropriate and effective collaboration between science and rural residents? These last questions are particularly tricky because many scientists feel that they must walk a fine line between avoiding bias and motivating new understandings among residents. As a result Victor is working to produce new, rigorous scientific methods, including the use of visual technologies, which more fully engage rural residents and facilitate their awareness of ongoing changes in order to build and strategize their desirable futures. He is doing this by involving some of the lessons learned by the team in other parts of the country (e.g. Antioquia and Montes de Maria).

Scholars and particularly sustainability scientists can make a profound contribution to enable the construction and achievement of rural communities' desirable futures. This contribution is vital because rural dwellers are commonly the most vulnerable and least politically influential actors in areas undergoing rapid agricultural changes. In terms of scholar-activism, sustainability scientists coming to value active science and grappling with the questions that ensue from enacting this value have a tremendous opportunity to practice what Routledge and Derickson refer to as “dispensing power” (2015b). In this case, it is scientific findings, techniques, and expertise, which all too often are monopolized by interest from those in a position of power, that instead get dispersed “away from [powerful entities and] academia, and in the form of connection, cooperation, and communication with community [members]” (2015b, p. 397).

For scientists interested in revaluing active science, however, three major challenges ensue: 1) confronting the orthodox practice of producing ‘objective’ results and using them to write papers with the hope of becoming highly cited by other academics, 2) reaching an appropriate balance between contributing with academic knowledge and providing space and resources for rural inhabitants to develop their desirable futures based on their own knowledge and cultural engagement with the territory, so that the scholarly contribution does not represent a form of academic colonialism, and 3) transcending the aversion to directly apply scientific knowledge relevant to real life decisions out of fears of sounding “biased.”

For the purposes of this special issue, this last challenge is particularly vital because there is much resistance among scientists to be labeled as “scholar-activists,” due to the risk, more prominently with climate change research, that this label can be used to question the validity of robust scientific findings (Dawidoff 2009). How can we ensure that active science is valued *throughout* the academy while also addressing the other two challenges listed above? We cannot thoroughly answer this question in this paper, however, we can begin to hint at a resolution that has come through our own cross-epistemological collaboration: Radically interdisciplinary engagement between positivist-trained scientists and those trained in critical epistemologies typically brings both sides outside of their comfort zones. We find that there can be productive value in this and other kinds of researcher discomfort.

Revaluing *discomfort*

Rebecca, alongside the other authors, has been participating in a long-term project with the Philadelphia Urban Creators (PUC hereafter), a youth-led urban farming and community organizing group located on the edges of Temple University, where all of the authors are either students or faculty. As a Temple graduate student, scholar-activism with a food justice organization gave Rebecca the opportunity to become more intentionally involved in a context that all of us are implicated in, simply by virtue of being part of Temple University. In fact, recognizing that we are always already involved in and impacting any given socio-political context that we choose to study, Rebecca has come to see her work with PUC as an example that clarifies the intentionality of scholar-activism – we are not simply *getting involved* but rather we are contributing towards specific aims, through the allocation of academic resources toward mobilizations for justice (food and otherwise).

Derickson and Routledge discuss the “need to engage our deep emotional responses to the world around us to compel us to become engaged scholars” (2015, p. 4). We relate to this claim because the project with PUC began after sustained feelings of discomfort and angst over the inequalities and strained relationships in the North Philadelphia-Temple University context. Among other things, involvement in this project has helped us to understand that the current relationship

between Temple University and its surrounding North Philadelphia neighborhoods is in flux and quite distinct from decades past, having evolved considerably since the university was founded in 1884. In its early years, Temple University had been very much embedded in the urban fabric of North Philadelphia. The university acquired its name because it was started in the basement of the Grace Temple Baptist Church as a subversive space for working-class parishioners who could not receive a university education otherwise (Hilty & Hanson, 2010). At this time, as industrialization in North Philadelphia boomed, so did Temple as an institution, offering more specialized academic services, but continuing to cater to the neighborhood's working class communities. As a result of recent economic trends of deindustrialization and subsequent profit-oriented urbanism, two interrelated outcomes have developed at the North Philadelphia-Temple University interface: 1) there has been an increase in vacant lots and abandoned properties that now dominate the urban-ecological landscape, and 2) Temple University as an institution has been expanding spatially into North Philadelphia neighborhoods, but is now focused increasingly on attracting students from outside the city, state, and country, rather than the now predominantly Black North Philadelphia residents with whom it shares a geography.⁵ This has generated an increasingly strained relationship between our institution and the neighborhood that did not always exist, and that has implications for everyday social relationships between Temple students and North Philadelphia residents.

Rebecca's first several weeks of graduate school at Temple University were accompanied by strong emotional reactions to the Temple-North Philadelphia divisions that are evident both spatially and socially. Thanks to a scholar-activist relationship already established by Allison (Rebecca's advisor), PUC's Life Do Grow farm became a place to learn about the fight for food justice in North Philadelphia, as well as a place for deploying and transforming feelings of discomfort over the existing relationship between Temple University and North Philadelphia into a set of research objectives with the organization.

One of the first projects Rebecca worked on with PUC was centered around a new initiative called the Regeneration Project, a restorative justice program for young people whose crimes occurred in the police district within which the farm is located (Croog 2016). While paying program participants a salary is an important component of the initiative, PUC's idea with the Regeneration Project is not just to hire young offenders as workers on their farm, but to engage them as "urban

⁵ Evidence of this can be seen in Temple's 2017-2022 alumni strategic plan which lists "The Generation Gap" as a major issue of engagement, explained as "Temple's alumni straddling an appreciable 'generation gap' between the Commuter Generation (pre-2000) vs. the Residential Life Generation (post-2000)" (*Temple University Alumni Association and the Office of Alumni Relations*, 2017, 6). These changes and date ranges are supported by an article in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* which discusses the increasing rates of out-of-state students at Temple University starting in 1998, accompanied by decreasing rates of Black students (Benner, 2007).

creators” to work alongside the rest of the organization to imagine and enact more just and sustainable visions of their city. As part of the organization’s funding agreement, PUC was required to conduct an evaluation of this program, but had neither the time nor resources to do so. Coincidentally, Rebecca had just taken a course at Temple on program evaluation and PUC asked her to do the program evaluation. This mutual relationship directly benefitted PUC while giving Rebecca a connection to the farm that enabled her to conduct her own participant observation with the staff and participants in the program.

While working on the Regeneration Project brought feelings of excitement, in part because the program evaluation as a scholar-activist outcome felt so tangible and useful to the organization, new feelings of discomfort and uncertainty also arose with the realization that this project was not explicitly about food. For a new graduate student trying to position herself as a food researcher, this was an anxiety-provoking insight. However, after months of fretting over how to understand the relationship between food and restorative justice, a moment of clarity occurred during a conversation with one of the founding members of PUC. In this conversation, he explained that for PUC, sustainability is “a process of restoring broken relationships at the scale of the body, the community, and the environment.” PUC’s own conceptualization of sustainability as *relationship restoration*, thus gave Rebecca a chance to see how PUC was fighting for food justice, without offering that struggle as an explicit goal; food provides a necessary context for community organizing and gives PUC tools to restore relationships that have been broken by oppressive histories, systems, and structures.

For the Regeneration Project specifically, the urban farm plays an important role, not only because it is the laboratory within which program participants cultivate relationships and “urban creations,” but also because it was the initial process of converting a vacant lot into a farm that exposed PUC most intimately to the criminal justice challenges facing North Philadelphia. Urban farming practitioners and theorists sometimes forget that so-called vacant lots are never really vacant. In addition to carrying multi-layered and contentious urban histories, they are also often times the site of an inner city’s “survival economies” or subversive social networks – drug dealing, sex work, drug use, and so on. Frequently, these activities get disrupted by urban agriculture, which many city politicians and planners consider a successful outcome. From a social justice (and food justice) perspective, however, the displacement of already marginalized people and economic activities from these spaces with little to no regard of their lived experiences is cause for concern and is both something that PUC is working on through their Regeneration Project, as well as something that our research has been able to highlight. Ultimately, it was by working through the discomfort and uncertainty of finding ourselves in a research project that seemed to deviate from established interests in food that allowed for these new theoretical insights into food justice to happen.

The two instances of discomfort discussed here (discomfort with the Temple-North Philadelphia relationship and discomfort with not directly studying food) are certainly not the only times emotions played a formative role our work with PUC. In these cases, however, engaging with uncomfortable emotions specifically brought us into new spaces, both physical and conceptual. Physically, it brought us from inside the walls of Temple University out into PUC's farm and other community organizing spaces in North Philadelphia, and conceptually, it brought us from a narrow conception of food justice as the growing and distributing of food in areas with food insecurity to broader theorizations of how food is used as a tool for inspiring and organizing communities in their fight for justice.

At the same time, emotions such as discomfort and angst, are seldom valued as productive forces in research. Particularly for graduate students and junior scholars arriving to new places, paying attention to discomfort in research may prove beneficial both in inspiring new collaborations and in making conceptual sense of what we see in the field and in our daily lives. Additionally, the process of coming to value discomfort rather than avoid it might inspire scientists to engage with politically-involved social science projects rather than remain in their own silos. In so doing, it has the potential to direct scientists such as Victor toward a deeper engagement with the social contexts of their research, leading to more comprehensive and situated understandings of sustainability and "desirable futures." It is important to note that discomfort in research is not a one-time thing that is simply transcended by establishing a scholar-activist project. Power dynamics within the university, within activist circles/communities, and between these different spaces mean that discomfort is likely a constant in this sort of research. Attending to the myriad of discomforts that emerge in these sorts of collaborations is crucial to achieving "sustained collaboration" (Routledge & Derickson, 2015b) within transdisciplinary scholar-activist networks.

Revaluing affective moments:

Thus far, we have described how researcher discomfort can move food justice scholarship forward, how active science might advance community engagement with food justice where there is none, and how in weaving networks of food growers, scholars and activists may prove supportive and beneficial for all. In this final section, we want to emphasize and provide examples of how within and beyond these efforts, food justice scholars might "resource solidarity" (Routledge & Derickson, 2015b, 10). In detailing this scholar-activist practice, Routledge and Derickson explain that "[b]eyond the mobilization of knowledge and the generation of specific resources, new spaces of encounter can utilize research methods and relational ethics of struggle ... [to bring] the future desired into being by creating something that would not otherwise exist and generating *moments* of possibility for the nurturing of solidarity" (2015b, 400, emphasis added). In this section, we want to linger on the significance of "generating [and revaluing] moments" and discuss the role that this plays in transdisciplinary scholar-activist food justice research.

Allison, alongside the other authors, has worked on two recent scholar-activist projects directly related to food justice. One of these was a project of “critical nutrition” (Guthman 2014; Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2013) in North Philadelphia, USA, involving staff and parents connected with the Norris Square Community Alliance (further described in Hayes-Conroy 2015). Norris Square is a community organization that offers many services, including preschool educational and health services, to several underserved neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The other project was an inquiry into food adequacy/security among women in the city of Medellin, Colombia who were violently displaced from their rural homelands (described in Hayes-Conroy and Sweet 2015). This project (conducted with another colleague, E.L. Sweet), partnered with the community organization, La Colonia de San Luis, a grassroots group focused on the needs and rights of displaced families. While the two projects have vastly different contexts and objectives, they also shared key methodological and operational lines of approach. Specifically, both projects centered on the creation of ‘research events,’ described below, where community members come together to ‘try on’ new ways of thinking and feeling in a shared environment.

In La Colonia, the relationship between the scholars and the organization happened spontaneously – through a serendipitous meeting that led to lasting friendships and commitment to continued work. The research questions – about displaced women’s experiences with food – were initially researcher-driven, but the research was very prone to change as there is much need for involvement and innovation in meeting the food needs as well as broader economic and social needs of many of the displaced women connected with La Colonia. In Norris Square, the relationship between the scholar and the organization happened organically – by following existing academic and personal connections and allowing them to grow. The research questions – about health and nutrition – were loosely driven by the organization, but the inquiry in this case was more creative than urgent, as most immediate nutritional needs have been met among families and staff connected to Norris Square, but there is fertile debate about how to do so in more culturally appropriate and economically just ways.

In both cases, the work evolved through the creation of research events where groups of people – between 8 and 12 – got together to share intellectual and sensorial experiences. In La Colonia, the events were centered on cooking and eating a meal, but the dialogue and emotions brought forth through the event were much bigger than food itself. In Norris Square, the events were centered on a practicum on food-body relationships where participants were invited to share, question, and analyze prior embodied experiences with nutrition and health. Food was present at these Norris Square events, but the central focus was common stories and experiences rather than tastes. In both cases, the research events took much preparation and “extra work” for both the scholars and community leaders involved. So, why did we do them?

This question was asked to one of our Norris Square collaborators when being interviewed (by an external referee) about the challenges and rewards of participating in community-university research partnerships: why did you do it? The implication in the interview was that the collaborator would relate how the information collected during the nutrition-based research had helped her in some way with her labor for the organization. Yet, the reality was, the research involvement had made her work harder. She did it, she explained, because the research events and the relationships built through them made her work “more meaningful.”

In the case of the research events with La Colonia, the information collected did very little to attend to the hardships described through the research, but the actual moments of shared tastes, feelings and desires that were created through the research events were moments that were highly valued by those involved. In the years following the main research events, many of the participants talked about how getting together with other displaced women (some of whom were acquaintances whom they had not seen in months or years) to eat and talk and share was itself a very important experience. They wanted to do it again – not necessarily to gain particular *outcomes* from the meeting – but rather to feel those feelings again. Of course, out of those initial research meetings grew important friendships, work relationships, and collective desires to keep dreaming up new projects and ways of working together; yet the events themselves, as they happened, were also very meaningful.

Certainly, qualifying the extent to which food justice research creates meaningful moments would be both absurd and pointless; yet, we argue that in focusing on outcomes – both research outcomes and organizational outcomes – we often lose track of the everyday significance of our work and of the long-lasting relationships of solidarity being created and cultivated. In Norris Square the research outcomes (data and enhanced understanding) were not particularly consequential, but the research events themselves were animated, unifying, and fun. Likewise, in La Colonia the research outcomes never seemed quite enough (there was always more to do and to understand), but the research events were moments of joy, nourishment, and emotional connection for all involved. Such fleeting moments – research events – are rarely seen as products in themselves, but for the lives of those involved, they may be more valuable than other more tangible or quantifiable products (e.g. articles, reports).

At the same time it seems crucial to point out that such affective moments are not at all tangential to science. In fact, research events organized around science can become a powerful means of ‘resourcing solidarity,’ while at the same time driving the kind of active science described above. Research events are just beginning to be recognized as an affective activity, although feminist scholars have long reminded us to remain thoughtful about potential negative *affects* (Elwood and Martin 2000, Rose 1997). Allison and Alexis have recently negotiated the potentially positive and motivational affects of scientific research events (i.e.

events intentionally framed as science) through their ongoing work in Medellín, especially in relation to the elatlas project. While such negotiations are certainly demanding, in part because of the challenges mentioned in the above narrative on active science, we would not be the first to insist that both activism and science can be nurtured by paying attention to affective moments (c.f. Young and Gilmore 2013).

Conclusions

The scholar-activist research values we have just proposed are not intended to comprise an exhaustive list, but are instead designed to open up conversations in the food justice, scholar-activist *and active scientific* research communities about why we do the type of research that we do. At the same time, we see these four particular values— *supportive networks*, *active science*, *productive discomfort*, and *affective moments*—as beginning to sketch a vision of academic research that we feel challenges current paradigms for conducting research in important ways and builds on Routledge and Derickson's work by attending to scholar-activist motivation and meaning-making.

While we discuss discomfort as a crucial motivator of active, critical scholarship, it differs from our other three values in the sense that it seems to be something that happens rather than something that we seek out in research. Yet, while seeking discomfort may not be a prime objective of research, we have used the previous examples to express how seeking *comfort* may also not be a wise objective. In (re)valuing discomfort, we thus value the uncertain openings – new ways of thinking and doing – that go along with it. In the same way, we value *affective moments*, not because all research moments are wonderful or significant, but because in (re)valuing moments we open to the possibility that research activities can be meaningful to all involved.

Our (re)valuing of networks also necessitates uncertainty: networks are imperfect, often power-laden or hierarchical, and filled with contradiction and controversy. However, giving value to the act of networking – of building connections that are supportive – also gives power to the possibility that something good can come out of connecting people and groups that are interested in changing our world. In food justice work particularly, many groups do not always have the power to connect and *stay connected* without outside resources; thus one of the important resources that scholars may provide is increased capacity for networking and sustained connection.

Fittingly – and this is one of the aims of our own networking project, elatlas.org – we also find value in connecting scientists with people and groups that are interested in social change. Transdisciplinary science is gaining legitimacy for its perceived potential to address real-world challenges, in part by connecting with others – farmers, organizers, teachers, activists, professionals, and so on – outside the academy. Sustainability science, as described by Victor above, is an exemplar

transdisciplinary science that is significantly relevant to global food justice concerns. Many sustainability scientists aim for active research agendas, but hesitate to use the label scholar-activist because of the politics of delegitimization that it entails in mainstream science. We ask why have there been so few instances of planetary, life or physical science appearing in scholar-activism or food justice work? In thinking about the normative imperative of sustainability science, we propose the value of *active science* in order to begin to carve out space for and attract the interest of scientists in scholar-activist and food justice communities. Such partnerships have the potential to expand and diversify the impacts of our work with community-based partners and organizations. In addition, through this paper we also call for a (re)valuing of the enigma of scholar-activism and a sustained effort to broaden the scope and substance of active scholarship within and beyond food justice.

To conclude, we would like to echo claims made by Derickson and Routledge by emphasizing that we are proposing this set of research values in the context of our neoliberal reality, under which the defunding of crucial social programs and community-based organizations as well as increasing inequality, necessitates that we conduct engaged research that allocates academic resources to the funding and expansion of such initiatives. Having this paper revolve around *values* was not random; we do not shy away from arguing that there is a moral urgency to conduct active and activist research. We feel that it is no longer appropriate or plausible to do research for research's sake and then merely hope that policy decisions or grassroots mobilizations will incorporate our findings. We envision scholar-activism not as a fringe movement within the academy, but as an academic paradigm in which the research process itself is used to collectively and collaboratively address current real world struggles.

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