



Alternative food provision conflicts in cities: Contesting food privilege, injustice, and whiteness in Jamaica Plain, Boston



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ABSTRACT

Food justice studies have exposed that lower-income residents and people of color tend not to participate in alternative food initiatives. Much of this marginalization originates in the often exclusionary practices and discourses from members of the alternative food movement. In this paper, I contribute to the scholarship on urban food justice by examining how Latino residents experience, reflect on, and confront new exclusionary practices in the spaces and discourses of alternative food activism and practices in the city. Through empirical research conducted on a conflict related to the opening of a Whole Foods store replacing a Latino supermarket in Jamaica Plain, Boston, I analyze how food injustice and food privilege have been produced in a neighborhood that used to have a variety of culturally-sensitive food options. Findings highlight a loss of a large variety of Latino products and of socio-cultural practices around food for Latinos and low-income customers. Such changes have created feelings of alienation, displacement, and of becoming out-of-place in the neighborhood. Results also show the slow disappearance of affordable or community-based food options in Hyde Square, turning the neighborhood in a “food unjust” neighborhood. Last, the paper brings to light the whitened and colorblind discourse about healthy and natural food of middle-class Whole Foods’ supporters. Such positions show how environmental racism, food privilege, and whiteness can affect the relationships that a community has with its food, invisibilize its members and its cultural and social food practices, and in turn affect their place-making and their territorialization in the neighborhood.

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Introduction

Every day in Jamaica Plain, Boston, Latino customers would anxiously wait for the opening of Hi-Lo Foods, a grocery store catering products from all over Latin America. Vans of residents from elderly homes would stop in front of Hi-Lo for their weekly trip to buy camote, yucca, café, mate, or recaó, a Puerto Rican herb used for cooking a variety of dishes. Local Latinos would set up milk crates in front of the store and hang out after their shopping trips. Hi-Lo was much more than a supermarket. It was about a neighborhood, a community, and valuable place and safe haven for residents and customers. However, on January 14, 2011, the same day that Knapp Foods Inc., the owner of Hi-Lo, announced that the business would be closed, it also revealed that it would be sold to Whole Foods Inc. and converted into a Whole Foods Market. The months that ensued saw an aggressive battle build up between supporters of the new store and activists who protested the opening of a Whole Foods Market. Why did such a polarizing

conflict arise in a neighborhood praising itself for its tolerance, inclusion, and diversity?

Many food justice groups organize to ensure that lower income and minority residents are able to afford fresh food in their neighborhood. Food justice is also part of a broader social justice and environmental justice agenda with a vision that brings together food and economic development, improved nutrition and health, and community empowerment (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010). Food justice organizations are often critical of alternative food movement activists who praise healthy, local, and organic food without considering the racial and social inequities within the existing food system and without incorporating a food justice lens in their activism (i.e., Guthman, 2008a,b).

Most recently, food has become a new actor worth of much examination in regards to gentrification processes and dynamics. In the last few years, urban conflicts have developed against projects or initiatives, such as waterfront restoration or park creation, that are presented as improving access to environmental goods while, in reality, creating or exacerbating risks of displacement and gentrification. This combined process of neighborhood greening and exclusion of vulnerable residents has been called environmental

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or ecological gentrification (Dooling, 2009; Checker 2011). However, environmental gentrification protests surface not only against municipal projects of waterfront clean-up or green space enhancement, but also against so-called healthy and natural food venues and stores in multiracial neighborhoods. Because issues related to food are more intimate (Winson, 1993) and visibilize individual choices toward basic needs, conflicts seem to be highly polarized.

In this paper, I use the conflict in Jamaica Plain to examine the production of food privilege – the exclusive access to desirable “natural” and fresh food thanks to one’s economic, cultural, and political power – and food injustice. How do food privilege and food injustice get produced with the opening of so-called alternative, organic, and sustainable food chains in multi-racial neighborhoods? In turn, how do local activists experience and confront the exclusionary discourses and practices conveyed by their defenders? Results show that the arrival of Whole Foods together with the mobilization of its enthusiasts triggered a conflict in which Latino residents and their supporters contested the slow dismantlement of a “food just” neighborhood and the colorblindness of Whole Foods supporters – many of whom committed to alternative food principles and practices and presenting themselves as defenders of social justice. The conflict illustrates new ways of conceptualizing and fighting (green) gentrification by showing how issues of food justice, whiteness, and social and “environmental privilege” – the exclusive access that some groups have to prime environmental amenities (i.e., parks, forests, etc.) and to elite green neighborhoods (Park and Pellow, 2011) – are enmeshed in gentrification processes.

Environmental gentrification and urban food justice: An emerging connection

In neighborhoods experiencing gentrification, developers, investors, and individuals from privileged backgrounds buy the devalued property of less well-off families and turn them around for new wealthier residents (Anderson, 1990; Smith, 1986). Through rent gaps (Smith, 1987), profits can be made by reinvesting in degraded and abandoned properties. Today, an increasing number of neighborhoods such as Harlem (New York) or Bronzeville (Chicago) are experiencing a “New Urban Renewal” through the revitalization of inner-city areas (Hyra, 2008). Land is being appropriated and speculated upon. In gentrifying neighborhoods, gentrifiers tend to be workers from white collar backgrounds inserted in a post-industrial, service-oriented economy (Brown-Saracino, 2013) and with a particular lifestyle and consumption associated with higher-status or alternative goods (Beauregard, 2010). Most recently, these multi-tier dynamics have come to include another variable: Neighborhood greening by public and private investors. Inequality (re)formation and gentrification are triggered by urban environmental transformations.

Recent research has exposed that a correlation exists between urban land clean-up; investment in park or open space, waterfront redevelopment, ecological design, or ecological restoration; and changes in demographic trends and property values. For instance, the clean-up of Superfund sites has been associated with up to an 18% appreciation in housing values – within 1 km of the site (Gamper-Rabindran et al., 2011). The removal of sites from the Superfund list results in an increase of 26% in mean household income, and 31% increase in share of college graduates (Gamper-Rabindran and Timmins, 2011). In other words, brownfield redevelopment does not seem to benefit people originally exposed to environmental toxins but rather well-off and educated groups who move to the neighborhood.

This process of combined greening and displacement of former residents is called ecological gentrification, that is “the implementation of an environmental planning agenda related to public green

spaces that leads to the displacement or exclusion of the most economically vulnerable human population while espousing an environmental ethic” (Dooling, 2009). Gentrification puts emphasis on the fact that new or restored environmental goods tend to be accompanied by rising property values, which in turn attracts wealthier groups, while creating greater gap with poorer neighborhoods where lower classes are forced to move because this is where they can afford to live (Gould and Lewis, 2012). In many ways, green gentrification is the flipside of what Mindy Fullilove (Fullilove, 2001), John Betancur, and Don Parson (Betancur, 2002; Parson, 1982) respectively called “Negro Removal” or “Latino Removal,” because displacement is followed by “green and white arrival.” The racial aspect of whiteness is in some ways hidden and invisibilized by the word “green.” As new high-end housing accompany greening, developers and real estate agents often point to the diversity and “authentic” black experiences of people who might move into places such as Harlem. They bank on the traditional local identity as they encourage newcomers to move in, but those same newcomers might ultimately sacrifice the sites where the local identity is best embodied.

Starting in the 1980s with the protest in Tompkins Square Park in NYC (Smith, 1996), activists have organized against processes that seem to combine greening and gentrification. Community organization seems to have accelerated and become more vocal in the 2000s. As residents fight the replacement of their community space and gardens by high-end housing and other developments, they question governmental projects that maximize exchange value while beautifying and sanitizing the city (Schmelzkopf, 2002). For instance, in Austin EJ groups such as PODER contest smart growth policies in the context of neighborhood revitalization and upgrading (Tretter, 2013). In 2006, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council released a report pointing to the “Unintended Impacts of Redevelopment and Revitalization Efforts in Five Environmental Justice Communities,” especially issues of affordability and displacement. Today, Activists also resist the transformation of streetscapes into motors of gentrification. In Portland, OR city plans to enhance biking safety along North Williams Avenue have been met with the resistance of residents, who explain that safety seems only to have become a concern because white residents are moving to the neighborhood or riding through it (Agyeman, 2013). Traditional EJ activism suggested that residents are fixed in their neighborhood and cannot move out away from toxic industries or waste sites. On the opposite, recent EJ activism related to gentrification is about fighting displacement from one’s long-time neighborhood.

Green gentrification activism is not only about viewing green spaces or waterfront promenades promoted by sustainability plans with a concerned look. Residents are now also apprehensive about the impact of so-called healthy food stores moving into their neighborhood (often with the approval of elected officials) because they signal to developers, real estate agents, and outside residents that it is “ready” to be re-developed. Activists talk about the Whole Food Effect: When chains like Whole Foods open a store, residents claim that the company knows that the neighborhood is ripe for socio-economic changes. After store opening, policy reports have shown that real estate prices tend to increase. For example, in Portland, price premiums for homes located close to specialty grocery stores are estimated to range from 5.8% to 29.3%.¹ This is where environmental gentrification, urban food systems, and urban food justice struggles start to connect.

The right to healthy, fresh, local, and affordable food for community food security is one of the main focus points of community

¹ See: <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/assets/Uploads/JohnsonGardner-Urban-Living-Infra-Research-Report.pdf>.

advocacy for urban food justice (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011a; Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010; Hess, 2009). Activists in this movement fight against ‘supermarket redlining’ (Eisenhauer, 2001) and for more affordable grocery stores offering fresh produce and goods in lower-income neighborhoods and communities of color (Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010). They also vow to eliminate unhealthy ‘foodscapes’ (Sloane, 2004; McClintock, 2011) – the complex daily survival practices of locating and purchasing food for low-income residents, who have to go to cheap corner stores and joints, subsidized cafeterias, or soup kitchens, while, for instance, not being able to afford the new gentrifying cafés and boutique restaurants burgeoning in their changing neighborhood (Miewald and McCann, 2013; Short et al., 2007). Geographical location of grocery stores is not the only determinant to being able to purchase fresh food. Recent research in Oakland and Chicago shows that high cost is the primary obstacle to healthy food access (Alkon et al., 2013).

Knowing the difficulty to truly enhance access to fresh food, the Food Justice Movement (FJM) often contests the discourses and claims of the so-called alternative food movement, which often works on improving access to organic and fresh food for wealthier residents (including through stores like Whole Foods) while overlooking existing racial and social inequities within the food system. The FJM is thus basically playing the same role that EJ activists were playing thirty years ago when they positioned themselves away from traditional environmental organizations (i.e., The Sierra Club or WWF) for their defense of wild ecosystems without considering the people who might depend on those resources for their livelihoods (Bullard, 1990; Gauna, 2008; Schlosberg, 2007; Shutkin, 2000; Dobson, 1998; Pulido, 1996; Sandler and Pezzullo, 2007; Martínez Alier, 2002).

Alternative food activists often embody the ideals and practices of white middle-class citizens. Despite their engagement toward local, community-owned, and sustainable food production and consumption systems, away from an agri-business model (DuPuis et al., 2011; Morales, 2011), the groups most at risk of food insecurity, – people of color and low-income groups, – are mostly absent within the alternative food movement (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011b; Slocum, 2006). Vulnerable people tend not to participate in alternative urban food systems as they either do not have the capacity to purchase goods from those networks, or as such markets or food distribution venues do not reach inner-city neighborhoods (Allen, 2004; Morales, 2011; Perez et al., 2003; Guthman, 2011).

Alternative food movement activists seem to often underestimate the obstacles that African Americans, Latinos, or Native Americans face in order to benefit from fresh food stores, farmers’ markets or CSAs. Higher-income households are indeed the ones who are more likely to purchase organic vegetables, including those of stores like Whole Foods because of the higher price tag of such items (Dettmann and Dimitri, 2009). Members of the alternative food movement often also overlook the negative aspects of the corporatization of organic food. For instance, large corporations advertise humble family origins and locally-scaled family food production, even though they actually obtain much of their food from large factory farms and make strategic decisions based on a corporate logic (Guthman, 2004; Johnston et al., 2009).

The discourses and practices of alternative food movement members often stem from a position of social privilege (Alkon, 2012), especially when choosing to purchase organic and natural foods. For instance, even if customers of stores like Whole Foods are not all active parts of the alternative food movement, their food choices and discourses tend to embody many of the principles and attitudes of activists within the alternative food movement: A commitment to natural and healthy food, to fresh often organic products, and to ethical consumption (Johnston, 2008), including the consumption of produce from organic food systems with

environmental and health benefits (Hartman Group, 2002; Whole Foods Market, 2004). In practice, when shopping at places like Whole Foods, many of them experience traditional consumer pleasures because of the store’s aesthetically pleasing and relaxing and calm atmosphere (Slocum, 2007; Johnston and Szabo, 2011). They also use a language that reveals an interest in preserving a higher distinguished social status and image (Johnston, 2008; Johnston and Szabo, 2011) while underplaying affordability issues.

The absence of people of color and lower-income residents from alternative food movements and practices has also been shown to originate in the colorblindness of the food movement, its commitment to a post-racist society, and to attitudes reflecting the movement’s whiteness. As Slocum argues, whiteness is embodied and produced in alternative food practices (Slocum, 2007). For instance, farmers’ markets are shaped by white cultural practices of consuming (Guthman, 2008a). In California, the managers, vendors, and customers at farmers’ markets seem to hold preconceived ideas about farmers and community members, which reflect a richer and liberal habitus of whiteness (Alkon and McCullen, 2011). Similarly, white farmers within the alternative food movement have been shown to conduct workshops targeted to marginalized communities and use motivation slogans such as the “value to put one’s hand in the soil” without realizing that they invoke past images of slavery and slave labor among African American farmers (Guthman, 2008a). Participants feel at times invisible as they navigate through white spaces. In other instances, alternative food activists call for reincorporating native plants and seeds in food production without considering that groups such as Native Americans have deep local knowledge of seeds such as heirloom seeds and have incorporated them in their land for generations in their own attempt to challenge the mainstream food system (Mares and Peña, 2011). Members of the alternative food movements are the ones who get to define the discourses and acceptable production and consumption practices.

Some have even argued that when food activists ignore their whitened cultural histories and their prominent role in the long-time shaping and reshaping of land uses and agricultural practices in the United States, this becomes a ‘metaprivilege’ (Flagg, 2005) because people fail to recognize their privilege and whitened cultural histories and to reflect on them. Even if many alternative food activists are committed to social justice, they often assert their privileged positionality without reflecting on the historical traumas that have destabilized local food practices and systems. Whites tend to ignore the cultural specificity and roots of their histories and experiences and see them as universal (Guthman, 2008b). As a result, this lack of recognition allows them to feel morally good about their work in the alternative food movement (Guthman, 2008a; Sullivan, 2006).

Members of the alternative food movement also fail to understand the deeper role played by land and food for historically marginalized groups. Land and food have indeed a strong historical and cultural value for them and do not “just” fulfill nutritional needs (Alkon et al., 2013). Among African American farmers, land has been shown to be more important than money as it provides economic security, community stability, and independence from dominating groups (Gilbert et al., 2002; Green et al., 2011). Community cooperatives in the Black South enable Blacks to secure livelihoods. Food is also part of heritage cuisines (Allen, 2004; Delind, 2006; Esteve, 1998; Mares and Peña, 2010), and activists defend the need to recognize the foodways of people of color – the cultural and social practices that affect food consumption, including how and what communities eat, where and how they shop and what motivates their food preferences” (Alkon et al., 2013: 127). This is why, through the cultivation of land in cities, urban people of color become reconnected to traditional practices and dishes. Growing food also helps minority farmers re-make place in their city and

community (Anguelovski, 2014). It allows people to foster a new place-based identity in a new landscape and territory (Mares and Peña, 2011).

This context explains why many FJ organizations include racial equity and anti-racist messages together with demands for improved and equal access to food. They work toward autonomy, self-reliance, liberation, and community improvement for minorities through the medium of food (McCutcheon, 2011, 2013). They demand a right to food, linking democracy, environmental justice, and citizenship (Miewald and McCann, 2013). In that sense they contribute to a critique of food being used as a way to construct the “common citizen” of the nation into whiteness (Watson and Caldwell, 2005). For instance, the Food Project in Boston is a long-time pioneer of training programs for youth that combine creating a sustainable food system, fostering a sense of racial and social awareness, and offering tools for community empowerment and neighborhood redevelopment (Anguelovski, 2013; Anguelovski, 2014).

Despite this wealth of studies on the inequalities in the alternative food movement and on food justice activism, new research is needed to understand how and to which extent Blacks, Latinos, and other marginalized groups experience exclusionary practices in the spaces and discourses of alternative food provision (Guthman, 2011). Scholars point to the need to better examine how environmental racism and privilege can indeed affect racial identity formation (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011b), place-making, and territorialization for these groups. On the other hand, the literature on (environmental) gentrification has yet to account for the role of alternative food stores in triggering or exacerbating exclusion, privilege, and displacement. Places such as healthy food venues are often appealing to or now promoted by gentrifiers, especially those involved in alternative food practices and activism, who often lack a consciousness about the political dimension and whiteness of their discourse and practices.

This paper attempts to address these limitations by examining environmental gentrification conflicts in the context of new healthy and so-called natural grocery stores. Why and how have healthy and natural food stores become the site of heightened and passionate resistance? How do food privilege and food injustice get produced within the expansion of so-called alternative, organic, and sustainable food chains? In turn, how do local activists experience and confront the exclusionary discourses and practices conveyed by their defenders?

Methods

This paper is based on an emblematic and critical case study of a conflict around a so-called healthy food store, Whole Foods Market, which opened in October 2011 in Hyde Square, the largely Latino area of Jamaica Plain (JP) in Boston, amidst much controversy and debate in the neighborhood and beyond. From 2011 to 2013, I collected primary data from local newspapers and blogs (the Boston Globe, Boston Herald, Boston Phoenix, the Jamaica Plain Gazette, the Jamaica Plain Patch, Universal Hub), radio stations (WBUR), and community organizations and groups (i.e., Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, Hyde Square Task Force, Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation) in the form of articles, videos, reports, comments, and blog entries from supporters of and opponents to Whole Foods. My goal was to better understand the context in which the controversy around Whole Foods took place, the development of the conflict over time, the stakeholders involved, and the perceptions and interpretations of the supporters and opponents in regards to Hi-Lo's closing and Whole Foods' opening. I also gathered statistical information on neighborhood demographic and real estate changes and on local business trends (opening of stores, real estate advertising).

Further in 2012 and 2013 I conducted semi-structured interviews in JP. The 19 interviews included members of a Whose Foods/Whose Community coalition who protested the arrival of Whole Foods, members of the JP for All Coalition who voiced their support to Whole Foods, members of the JP Neighborhood Council (most specifically members of the Whole Foods Ad-Hoc Committee), members of the JP Neighborhood Development Corporation, the Latin American Family Culture Network, the Hyde Jackson Square Business Association, Hyde Square Task Force, Whole Foods employees, Hi-Lo's former manager, local food business owners, and members of local groups and organization working on community farming. The interview questions were related to the interviewee's perception of food access in JP, Whole Foods' opening, his/her involvement in the conflict and motivation behind this involvement, the broader perceived impact of Whole Foods on different community aspects and on affordability issues, and finally the relationship between food, place, and identity in the mobilization. Data was coded using open coding, axial coding, and theoretical coding.

I analyzed the data using process tracing techniques (Brady and Collier, 2004; George and Bennett, 2005), which helped me unravel the evolution of activists' engagement in the neighborhood, the construction and transformation of their individual and collective identities and experiences before and during the conflict, as well as the multiple factors that shaped their neighborhood engagement over time. I also used analytical narratives techniques, which seek to account for outcomes (i.e. a local mobilization) by examining the mechanisms that generate them, especially actors' perceptions and preferences (Bates, 1998). I was thus able to examine Whose Foods activists' perception and understandings of neighborhood environmental gentrification processes, and to unpack discourses and experiences on privilege, exclusion, colorblindness (among others) in the context of urban food issues and urban conflicts.

The conflict over Hi-Lo/Whole Foods in Jamaica Plain, Boston

JP is a multiracial neighborhood with a high proportion of Latinos, especially around Hyde Square, and many African American families who live in Jackson Square, which borders Hyde Square. In the 1960s, Cubans settled down in JP and many of them opened restaurant or construction businesses, which, by the end of the 1970s, transformed JP in the largest Latino neighborhood in Boston. At that time, however, decaying and abandoned properties, arson for profit and insurance money, closed storefronts, and declining industries plagued the neighborhood (Douglas, 2013).

Gentrification in JP is a phenomenon that goes back to the late 1980s, when a substantial portion of the LGBT community, artists and musicians, as well as white progressive baby boomers moved to the neighborhood in search for more affordable houses and attracted by the higher amount of green space in JP and its proximity to downtown (Hirsch, 1998). Many residents also moved into counter white flight trends and rebuild the community after 700 homes and 300 businesses got demolished in view of a planned extension for the I-95 highway.

In line with an environmental justice framework (but without using the term) and a progressive political agenda, in the early 1990s resident activists started targeting an 8-mile strip of empty land to design public transportation and greenspace infrastructure while developing affordable housing, and fighting for housing rights and small business creation. The dedication of residents, nonprofit organizations and community groups transformed JP in a welcoming, affordable, livable, and vibrant community well-connected to downtown Boston (Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, 2011). In parallel, property owners and real estate professionals gutted housing for market rate sales and rentals and transformed triple-decker rental units into condominiums,

benefiting also from a context of rent control elimination in 1994 (Douglas, 2013). Between 1994 and 1999, average rents increased by 64% in JP (Boston Tenant Coalition and City Life / *Vida Urbana n/d*).

The remaking of the neighborhood and its renewed attractiveness accelerated gentrification during the 2000s, with property prices holding steady despite the economic downturn (Swenson, 2011) and demographics changing quite drastically. According to the 2011 US census data, JP lost 1041 Hispanic/Latino residents between 2000 and 2010 (close to a 10% decline) and 862 African American residents (a 14.6% decline), while the White population grew by 5.4%. During that time, the median sale price for a house increased from \$241,750 in 2000 to \$375,000 in 2011, and today this price is higher than Boston as a whole (\$362,500) (Department of Neighborhood Development, 2011). While the median rent in Jamaica Plain was less than \$1000 per month in 1999, by 2009 it had increased to over \$1700 per month (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). This increase is of particular concern from a gentrification standpoint, as 53% of Jamaica Plain's housing units in 2009 were rental units and 64% of Hyde Square's housing units rental units (Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation, 2009). Last, median income rose from \$48,000 in 2000 to \$73,000 in 2009, as indicated by the US Census Bureau.

Along with gentrification trends, patterns of anti-poor or anti-homeless behaviors have emerged. For instance in 2012, residents protested plans to build 20 units of housing for sick and homeless people because such projects were seen as detrimental to the "local quality of life" (Walker, 2012). Alongside such protests, JP has received growing interest from real estate developers and agencies, including those with ties to global capital such as the Boston Group. Despite the fact that the term simplifies social and ethnic lines of belonging and the complexities of residents' experiences, recent developments in JP reflect the presence of "Two JPs": A JP with higher income, better housing, greater access to green space, whiter, with people shopping at the trendy art galleries along Center Street and having dinner at high-end restaurants such as Canary Square, and a lower-income JP with struggling families, many of them Latinos or Blacks living in subsidized housing and going to dollar stores or take-out pizza joints.

In January 2011, when the news broke that almost 50 workers from the Hi-Lo Foods supermarket operating in Hyde Square would be laid off because of permanent business closing and Whole Foods announced right away that it would open a new store in Hyde Square, a unprecedented conflict erupted in the neighborhood. No further details were provided about the business decision. Whole Foods' objective was to "provide access to the freshest and healthiest local, natural and organic products at an affordable price,"² including produce, meat, seafood, and fresh bakery products. It was replacing a Latino institution and anchor business – Hi-Lo – which operated in the neighborhood for 47 years and was considered the biggest and best Latino market in the State, and some say, in New England. Even though Hi-Lo had grown as a successful and bustling food business, the offer they received from Whole Foods seemed too attractive to refuse it (Helms, 2011). Knapp Foods' owner, which ran Hi-Lo and owned the building itself, granted a 20-year lease to Whole Foods.

Soon after, protestors started hanging anti-Whole Foods banners in Hyde Square and raising their voice against the future store in newspaper articles, online forums or street events. On February 8th and 28th 2011, the Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council (JPNC) convened two public forums at which young and old attendees, Latinos, blacks, whites, supporters and opponents expressed their concerns or support about Whole Foods. The conflict gave rise to two coalitions: "Whose Foods, Whose Community" against Whole

Foods, with long-time Latino female residents, Latino and white social workers, college students with links to JP, and older white residents vowing to prevent resident displacement. "JP for All" was the other coalition, composed of Whole Foods' supporters, mostly white middle and upper class property owners, some of them members of the alternative food movement. During the conflict, some Latino business owners in Hyde Square remained neutral or showed their support to Whole Foods with the hope that they could attract some of the former Hi-Lo clientele. Almost from the start, the JPNC became the locus of much of people's anger or excitement. On March 8th, the JPNC organized a vote on Whole Foods, whose results showed that the store was "not a food fit for Hyde Square."

During Spring 2011, while coalition members continued to discuss Jamaica Plain needs at several public venues and exchange views on Whole Foods, the JPNC assisted by 79 community members worked on a Whole Foods impact report on the community. On June 28, 2011, with strong input from neighborhood resident Monica Rey, the JPNC released a 70-page report, pleading for affordable, healthy, and culturally-sensitive food and examining gentrification in JP. Among others, the report produced a "supermarket comparison" of items such as fruit, vegetables, meat, culturally-sensitive products, and other basic items. According to the report, among 13 staple items Whole Foods' prices were 39% higher than Hi-Lo's, while prices at Stop & Shop, another local full-service grocery store, were 12% higher than Hi-Los. Whole Foods also did not offer basic Latino items such as plantains and white cheese. The total price difference between Hi-Lo and Whole Foods was \$15. This difference is substantial in a community where 65% of Latino residents have a total income of less than \$35,000 per year (Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Council, 2011).

Upon the report release and realizing that Whole Foods was going to open its door no matter what in the Fall 2011 because it received the City's support and the transaction was a legal private deal between two corporations, anti-Whole Foods protestors assisted by the JPNC focused their fight on a Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) including a fund to support affordable housing and a fund for local organizations to use for foreclosure prevention (Rocheleau, 2011). However, they did not succeed because the company seemed to fear that a CBA would create a precedent that would oblige Whole Foods to sign similar agreements with other neighborhoods. For many months to follow, opponents remained active on a variety of small issues, including permits for outdoor sitting at Whole Foods, but slowly their fight began to die off. However, three years after, the community still remains divided and scarred. Tensions are still palpable.

In the next section, I analyze and present the findings from the fieldwork conducted in JP between 2011 and 2013 and from my analysis of online blogs, reports, and press clips. I use quotes selectively to illustrate the different parts of the argument I develop in the section. Data analysis reveals that the anti Whole Foods movement in JP emerged and developed to respond to a loss of socio-cultural food practices and food spaces, to the decline of affordable or community-based food options in a gentrifying neighborhood, and to a colorblind, whitened, and exclusive discourse about healthy food.

Producing injustice and food privilege in a multi-racial neighborhood

A loss of socio-cultural food practices and foodscapes

In contrast to Whole Foods, Hi-Lo was for decades a melting pot of Latin American food options and a cultural haven for many JP (and beyond) Latino residents (and also for the many white customers who appreciated the diversity of Hi-Lo products and

² <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/stores/jamaicaplain>.

who found products in general more affordable). Latino customers were the ones who made Hi-Lo Latino though the diverse food items they constantly proposed to the store and through the word of mouth they used to advertise the store and its items. Hi-Lo carried, for instance, dozens of coffee beans or rice varieties, Caribbean fruit of all sorts, Guatemalan and Salvadorian sauces, or Peruvian spices, allowing customers to recreate traditional food habits and dishes (“comidas”). It was the only place in the region with food from 23 countries. Through food, Latino cultural identities became strengthened over the years. Unlike in Whole Foods, everyone spoke Spanish inside the store and there was a sense of informality that made customers comfortable. Kyle from the JPNC recalls the atmosphere within Hi-Lo and contrasts it with Whole Foods:

“Whole Foods lacks people speaking Spanish at the checkout. Their way of doing food business is also a huge cultural shift. There are more pushy customers at Whole Foods. People don’t understand the impact that Hi Lo’s closing has on the melting pot of people who shopped there. Whole Foods does not represent people of color: They don’t feel at ease.”

With its closing, the heart of Latino foods and culture has been removed.

The variety of Latino products is not represented anymore in the neighborhood and it is not compensated by Whole Foods since the store does not carry many Latino and affordable food products. Similarly, Stop and Shop is not able to fill the multi-faceted vacuum left by HiLo and to offer a wide variety of Latino items, as its manager explains:

“Hi-Lo had unique items but we have difficulties sourcing products. The scale would not be worth it for us as a company to chase down assortment. We are a big corporation. And maybe people are not as comfortable giving us suggestions. Maybe it’s a language issue.”

For many Latinos, structural racism – racism produced because of interactions between institutions that eventually create racialized impacts for people of color – has thus become exacerbated in JP with the opening of a grocery store mostly ignoring their varied food needs and preferences and supported by public officials in Boston.

Hi-Lo’s former manager played a central role in making Hi-Lo the anchor business that it was for Latinos in JP and in helping the community grow. Bill Jordan was truly committed to being accessible to customers directly (unlike Whole Foods according to many Latino and non-Latino customers) and to obtaining a wide diversity of products. Even if Hi-Lo customers were aware that some of the labor policies Hi-Lo owners had in place were questionable, they had built tight relations of trust with the former manager, who showed a straightforward and clever management style, as he himself recalls:

“I ordered big quantities and discounted them. People would cook for their entire families. I had frozen food, dairies, creams, cheese, and aisles organized by region – Caribbean, Spain, Mexico, etc. People were very interested in what the store carried. I always tried new products. It was a big family. We got everything from like 100 companies, even bread from Puerto Rico.”

Hi-Lo was not only a store to buy a variety of culturally-relevant food staples, it was also a social meeting and gathering place where customers inside or outside the store would nurture existing social relations, share life experiences, and just converse about life, families, and the Latino community. Former customers explain that people would bring milk crates and play dominos in front of the store. Hi-Lo had produced a new sense of place in Hyde Square and allowed long-time immigrants to re-territorialize their traditions. One member of a local community organization remembers:

“There is a loss of place. It was a haven for Latino people even if it was portrayed differently. People gravitated towards this. It created a place within the neighborhood. Whole Foods is more transient.”

In addition, much social interaction was taking place in and outside Hi-Lo around available jobs or apartments in the neighborhood and around other local resources. Information would be passed down, creating a strong sense of mutual support and tight community. It was a cultural networking spot, which was important for disadvantaged people. It felt like a family, it was home, a place for Latinos of all nationalities and socioeconomic backgrounds to be and to meet, as many Hi-Lo supporters emphasize. In contrast, members of the Whole Foods coalition regret that the social and cultural aspects of food are absent in Whole Foods.

Hi-Lo was also a place that helped Latino customers re-create and strengthen cultural practices around food. Hi-Lo’s former manager remembers some of those rituals:

“You could smell bread at 7am. We would bring the latest newspapers and they’d go crazy. And they bought coffee. We had an oven, nice and hot. We could not handle all customers. It was like heartland.”

These foodways allowed Latinos customers and residents to feel more at home in the neighborhood or region. Today however, as several interviewees explain, many former Hi-Lo customers, especially the elderly, stay at their elderly home and do not shop in the neighborhood. Others shop online or further away at places such as Tropical Foods in Dudley Square. Many social and cultural rituals which were created through Hi-Lo have been lost and not been compensated, as illustrated by the words from a long term female Latina customer:

“Old people don’t really go out any more. I myself really don’t go to this area any more. The meeting spaces are not there. The cultural aspects of Latino culture changed.”

Similarly to other supermarkets (Deutsch, 2010), Hi-Lo provided a venue for socialization as well as ties to neighbors and traditions. It was a space where race relations were negotiated in favor of Latinos. With Hi-Lo’s closing part of the neighborhood cultural history disappeared. Its loss is experienced as traumatic for them and has produced fears of erasure from the neighborhood.

Last, Hi-Lo’s closing eliminated other social food practices in which residents used to engage once they would finish shopping at the store. People would go to restaurants such as La Pupusa Guanaca, Tacos El Charro or the Miami restaurant and continue to socialize there. This habit was part of another ritual around food and a showcase of the local Latino culture in the neighborhood through food stores and restaurants. However, those places are now struggling financially, as they have lost many Hi-Lo customers. This loss of business could indicate the slow closing of several Latino-owned food businesses in a neighborhood where the first businesses were Cuban as well as the acceleration of gentrification processes. The only traditional Latino restaurant that is doing quite well is El Oriental de Cuba because of its broad customer base.

The fading of affordable and community-based food options in a gentrifying neighborhood

The protest against Whole Foods emerged not only as a response to socio-cultural losses around food choices and practices but also as a response to the slow elimination of inexpensive local food options. In JP, many residents had indeed fought for years for bringing affordable food options, especially supermarkets such as Stop&Shop, to JP and Hyde Square in particular. For instance, when Stop&Shop opened in 1992, Hyde Square residents saw their food

access drastically improve through a new 30,000 square feet full-service supermarket. This opening was also the result of resident mobilization, as Juan Gonzalez recalls:

“We wanted a source of affordable food and Stop&Shop was the best option. It was the first supermarket in the inner city.”

Stop&Shop fulfilled an important need. Such a reality explains why in 2011 and 2012 Whose Foods coalition members were particularly angry at hearing claims from pro Whole Foods activists about Hyde Square supposedly being a “food desert,” such as:

“In terms of access to food, there was a lot of cheap food available. Fried food and pizza. But not generally good food.”

Whose Foods activists felt that such comments mistakenly disqualified the food options in the neighborhood and co-opted Environmental Justice discourses and fights about the need to eliminate food deserts and to provide access to fresh and affordable produce in socially fragile neighborhoods for the benefits of higher classes who defend their desire to enhance the convenience of their shopping – by walking to Whole Foods – and thus to consolidate their environmental and food privileges. Their right to shop by foot at a grocery store that fulfilled their higher-status consuming habits came at the expenses of Latinos’ ability to buy diverse and affordable food. Their commitment to be responsible consumers and buy healthy and organic products was not reflected in their incorrect claims about Hyde Square being a food desert. The label of food desert is increasingly used quickly to justify the sponsoring of and support to high-end food stores that target a different clientele.

Indeed, the closing of Hi-Lo and arrival of Whole Foods in Jamaica Plain symbolized the difference between proximity/convenience and access as well as between proximity/convenience and affordability of certain foods. In Jamaica Plain, the opening a Whole Foods market did not translate into the provision of healthy affordable food for people of color. Anti-Whole Foods protestors denounced the absence of debate about pricing as Whole Foods announced that it would open a store in JP. The owner of the restaurant El Oriental de Cuba summarizes this reality:

“Whole Foods is whole paycheck. One pepper is \$1.50. At Hi-Lo, people used to fill a shopping cart for \$45, now you have a small shopping bag for \$100. If I wanted to go out and spend \$100, I’d go eat at Legal Sea Foods”.

With the closing of Hi-Lo, Latino residents found that the reliability of affordable food disappeared. When Whole Foods decided to come into JP, many Latino and Black residents feared that they would not be able to buy and eat any more what they can afford, as an adolescent activist shares:

“You buy and eat what is in your budget. My mom can’t afford Whole Foods. She buys in big containers. Mac Donald’s or Burger King, we eat it but it’s bad for us. It’s right in the neighborhood, it’s less expensive. You have single-family parents who live on child support. We know we can’t afford Whole Foods. You have to eat somehow.”

During the conflict, those residents received the backing of some middle-class Whole Foods consumers who might drive to Whole Foods stores in more exclusive parts of the city such as Brookline, but who protested having a Whole Foods store in JP. They valued less the geographical convenience of a new Whole Food than the cultural diversity and affordability of their neighborhood.

The closing of Hi-Lo is not the only manifestation of changing food options and loss of affordable and accessible food practices in JP. In the 1970s, a *Cooperativa de Comida* (Food Coop) was very active during the anti-highway movement in Boston thanks to

the influx of young activists. As several community members and health providers emphasize during interviews, Latinos and Whites came together for the development of the coop. However, internal fights and organizational challenges made it difficult to keep up the model of the coop. Urban gardening by Latinos suffered similar processes of slow disintegration. In the late 1980s, when local activists – many of whom who had participated in the *Cooperativa de Comida* – took over vacant and often contaminated plots in JP to transform them into gardens and urban farms, many leaders and participants were Latinos. Latino gardeners helped to organize festivals such as “Wake Up the Earth in JP”. They used festivities to talk about gardening and food and to celebrate the environment, as one of the daughters of a former gardener recalls:

“My mom worked with her Latina neighbors and turned dirty, abandoned spaces into usable green spaces for everyone to use. Gardening was a practical activity, but it was also a symbol of love for nature, for the neighborhood, and for families and neighbors. It was about taking care of somebody–oneself and others. My mom grew up poor in Latina America as part of a farming family so she appreciated fresh foods and healthy eating. Food was a product of love because it was a communal process.”

Back then groups such as Boston Urban Gardeners lobbied the city for creating new gardens in Jamaica Plain, using the argument of healthy eating, bringing people together, and saving money.

While gardens used to feel like an oasis of people mixing racially and economically, many residents and activists and some workers from the Boston Natural Areas Network (BNAN), an NGO supporting many urban gardens in JP, relate that gardens such as Paul Gore and Beecher Street, who were considered gardens for a diverse group of neighbors, including low-income Latinos, are today mostly farmed by white, young professionals or hipsters. They are a clear symbol of the neighborhood gentrification. Some gardens such as Nira Roundhill Community Garden behind Hyde Square are in a predominantly Latino and Black portion of the neighborhood, but gardened by whites. According to interviews with gardeners and with the BNAN, new gardeners who work in the gardens tend to lack an understanding of the history of the gardens, show some disrespect for them, and ostracize vulnerable groups of Latino or Black gardeners, as one BNAN staff member explains:

“We notice a strong lack of understanding of the history of gardens by new gardeners. They show disrespect and unconscious ignorance. Before you were a minority in JP, now it is even more the case. Not many people are looking like you. Gardens represent a form of alienation. Before they felt like a home.”

Socio-economic changes in favor of wealthier and whiter gardeners/gentrifiers make many Latino gardeners feel displaced and out of home. They do not see themselves reflected in the gardens, which is also part of the gardens’ retention problem. The other factor for demographic changes in gardeners is that there are fewer Latinos and Black residents in JP because of gentrification forces. A few long-time Latino garden leaders have died. Because of the economic downturn and fragile labor conditions, BNAN staff reports that many Latino and Black gardeners have had to take multiple jobs to make ends meet, thus reducing their time to garden. In order to increase their participation, BNAN staff members attempt to offer technical support during off-hours and on weekends.

In other words, food coops, community gardens, and local farms are today mostly middle-class white spaces in JP, thus furthering food privileges and inequalities and creating new environmental

injustices in the neighborhood. Latino activists and their supporters regret that food practices are shifting in JP for the benefit of white gardeners and harvesters. As a long-time white female gardener highlights, the irony is that the wealthier families are the ones who are now working in the gardens and benefiting from the savings of growing their own vegetables:

“White families and gardeners are more organized and they put their money down every year quickly. The more organized ones are taking over. The significant savings that the gardens bring are now for different people.”

JP is turning from a ‘just food neighborhood’ to an ‘unjust food neighborhood’ – in contrast to many inner-city neighborhoods in the US in which Food Justice activism has helped create urban farms and gardens for people of color and open more affordable full-service supermarkets (See examples such as Planting Justice in Oakland or Just Food in New York City, among many others). Trends in Hyde Square are reverse because, as shown in the previous section, JP is increasingly attracting white middle class residents looking for an alternative life-style close to downtown Boston and with many amenities and services, including alternative grocery stores and community gardens.

A colorblind, whitened, and exclusive alternative food discourse

Last, during the JP conflict, Whose Food coalition members rejected the discourses conveyed by Whole Foods’ supporters about healthy food, as they saw them as an imposition upon Latinos and lower-income residents of what is healthy eating. For instance, they accused Whole Foods supporters of expressing colorblind views by saying “I do not eat processed food, and now I can finally eat healthy food” or “Eat less but eat better” (Interview data). They also criticized online comments such as “I love the healthy food options as well. I’m definitely one of the pro-Whole Foods people” for being centered on individual well-being rather than the well-being of the broader community. According to Whole Foods’ protesters, such words reflect how white privilege has shaped the preferences of Whole Foods’ supporters as well as the meanings that they assign to healthy food without acknowledging it. Other blog quotes pointing at the value of fresh vegetables seemed at times condescending and rested on the assumption that Latinos do not eat well and only eat processed food – by choice. Those statements did not find much social and cultural acceptance among people (Latinos) who felt frowned upon for their food choices and do not have (for many) the money to afford shopping at a Whole Foods. They have a negative connotation in the context of a Whole Foods replacing an established full-service Latino supermarket.

Whole Foods itself as a brand was criticized by several interviewees for manipulating the image of organic and healthy food. Not everything that Whole Foods sells is organic and minimally-processed, but the brand and its supporters portray Whole Foods as a supermarket selling natural and organic foods. Norma Rey-Alicea, one member of the Whose Foods Coalition, also explained that many Whole Foods supporters did not recognize the healthy and sustainable dimensions of the Latino community food habits when Hi-Lo was in business:

“I could go to Whole Foods and pack a shopping cart with foods full of sugar and fat if I want to. Whole Foods has a whole bakery full of fattening things to eat. . . And, it’s not just about what ingredients one starts with; it’s also about how one cooks the food. If you buy organic products from Whole Foods but fry them all, that’s not going to result in a healthy meal. On the other hand, I could shop at Hi-Lo and buy chicken breast, some vegetables and herbs, and make something pretty healthy.

Activists within the Whose Foods coalition regretted that many Whole Foods enthusiasts politicized the debate about food in way that made JP Latinos seem inferior and ignorant. They fought the messages and practices that Whole Foods convey because they believed that they wrongly express that the store opening is an improvement for everyone in the community, even though Whole Foods caters to a specific class and to people attracted by practices related to natural and organic food, and with the exclusive means to purchase it. Healthy and natural food is a social and racial marker.

Anti-Whole Foods residents and their supporters were also upset about how Whole Foods’ defenders did not acknowledge the natural practices of the neighborhood’s low-income residents and residents of color. Some Whose Food members mentioned that grains or plants now popular among white whole food eaters, such as quinoa or yerba mate, are traditional items in the many Latino culinary cultures. Yet, according to them, privileged groups have appropriated them in their discourses and practices of natural eating, thereby reflecting whiteness and metaprivilege, that is a lack of conscience and/or reflection on how their (white) discourses annihilate the role of Latino ingredients and traditions in shaping food practices – including so-called alternative practices – in the country. In other words, many Hi-Lo customers experienced social racism, and not only structural racism, toward the food bought and cooked by Latinos. They saw it as an attack on their food sovereignty, – on their capacity to control their access to food and define their own food systems through conscious decisions about where to shop, which products to ask the shop to source, and which items to buy. This trend illustrates what Mikki Kendall, a Black feminist writer, has called “food gentrification”, that is the appropriation of cultural food items by the market and by mainstream customers, with the risk of increasing food prices and excluding traditional users from purchasing and using those items. When Whole Foods decided to come into JP.

In addition, part of the frustration of Whose Foods activists against the JP for All coalition stemmed from hearing non-Latinos express racist judgments about the former store Latinos were shopping at. They denounced statements such as “dirty supermarket”, “dark,” “smelly food” (about Hi-Lo), “they come from the third world” (about Latino residents). For instance, a white JP resident and active Whole Foods supporter made the following statement at a public meeting:

“More middle-class people have been moving in for a while now, and thank goodness. I say thank you to all those people who have come in and made this a safer, quieter, and cleaner place”.

Others added: “Hi-Lo was sad run down, it smelled, it was never clean, and had bad quality food.” In contrast, Hi-Lo supporters called Hi-Lo a “modern business model” with items listed by country, negotiated prices, and money spent on important aspects such as heating and AC, and as a business which catered to customers’ needs. In terms of Whole Foods opening, Whole Foods supporters felt that their opponents were “against progress” or “against development” and that Whole Foods had good workers’ policies and a wider availability of grains and vegetables. Yet, Whose Food members considered Whole Foods as a “sterile” supermarket with standardized and homogenous food, which might look esthetically attractive, but is not serving all of the community needs and does not represent people of color. They also regretted that Whole Foods is part of a local trend toward whitened alternative food venues in JP, as reflected by the opening of cafés such as Café Aromi and restaurants such as Canary Square, which cater to white middle class residents.

As a result, Latino activists perceive that the previous image of a multicultural, tolerant, and progressive community that JP conveyed was only superficial and that the Whole Foods conflict revealed how gentrification is increasingly hurting and excluding lower-income Latinos. For many anti-Whole foods activists, the

conflict exposed the position of white middle-class residents in JP who felt that Latinos opposing a Whole Foods in their neighborhood were threatening their own socio-cultural privilege. One older activist Rosalba, explains:

“ We heard some nasty comments like ‘dirty and smelly foods.’ It hurts. This is a very mean attitude. The words were not about food and gentrification but just racism from neighbors. We felt we had created a diverse community with tolerant human beings, but this gentrification shows us who we are in the community. It’s more than food.”

According to Rosalba, the arrival of new residents with a higher purchasing power and with different consumer choices was accompanied by racist attitudes and rejection toward the practices of long-time Latino residents so that those new residents could more firmly establish their own privilege. Norma from the Whose Foods coalition further explains her frustration at such attitudes, especially when people recommended that Latinos shop at the local bodegas:

“They are saying insane things when they see their privilege taken away. They respond to low-income JPers of color who worry about the loss of Hi-Lo by saying: Shop at the many bodegas in Hyde Square if you want ‘your’ food and if you can’t find it all at Stop & Shop! Do they even know what a bodega has and what its prices are? Bodegas are convenience stores, not supermarkets! They talk about convenience yet they don’t care that many low-income JPers of different races and ethnicities now have to take the T to Roxbury to find their traditional foods or go to 3 different bodegas. They impose their privilege on this debate.”

Blog comments were particularly numerous about the fact that Latino shoppers should resort to the existing bodegas or to other Latino stores in the wider Boston:

“The downside is that access to certain ethnic foods may be curtailed. This is mitigated by local bodegas in and around JP. There are also larger markets in the Boston area that cater to that group” (Universal Hub, 01/21/2011).

As a result, Whole Foods’ opponents view the contrasted discourses about Hi-Lo and changes in JP as a representation of increasing class and racial divide in the neighborhood.

This racial divide was often best represented in public meetings in which Whose Foods coalition members felt that Whole Foods supporters attempted to silence and unfairly discredit them. People started feeling excluded from a gentrifying neighborhood and a country they helped build by words such as “You are trash, and you eat trash, and you can go back to your country.” During a town hall meeting led by Whole Foods on June 2nd 2011, police forces (called upon at Whole Foods’ request) appeared “aggressive” by removing more vocal participants and arresting three people on charges of disrupting a public assembly and of trespassing. They also intervened during media interviews and told Latino activists “Adios, get out.” Such words appeared on online blogs and forums as well as during town hall meetings throughout Spring 2011. One Whose Foods coalition member explains:

In addition, during the Whole Foods in JP debate, our coalition, which was founded by Latinos (mostly Latina women) who were born or have lived in JP for more than 30 years, we were constantly battling the stereotypes and insults of our white neighbors and of white-dominated institutions. [...] We were called every horrible name in the book. Mind you, these are some of the same people who consider themselves white progressive JPers and who “love” to eat at our JP Latino restaurants and to dance salsa at our neighborhood festivals.

As such quotes reveal, the class and social breach became very profound during the conflict.

In sum, two drastically-opposed discourses, with members on both sides carrying strong stances and words, were exposed during the conflict. During months, the conflict exacerbated differences in points of views, values and preferences about foodways and foodscapes. It revealed how Latino activists and their supporters contested the whitened discourses and positions of liberal middle-class residents, – many of whom who saw themselves as supporters of alternative food consumption, – about food and reasserted the importance of food consumption as a cultural and intimate choice and as a decision which also rests on fundamental issues such as variety and affordability.

Discussion and concluding remarks

Food justice studies have exposed that lower-income residents and people of color tend not to benefit from alternative food initiatives (Allen, 2004; Morales, 2011; Perez et al., 2003; Guthman, 2011). In addition, much research has shown that activists who promote the consumption of local and organic foods fail to consider the circumstances of traditionally vulnerable groups as well as dimensions of social justice and food sovereignty in their discourses (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011a,b; Slocum, 2006; Mares and Peña, 2011). Much of this marginalization tends to originate in the color-blindness of the alternative food movement (Guthman, 2008a).

In this paper, I have attempted to contribute to this rich scholarship on food justice by examining how many Latinos and supporters around them experience, reflect on, and confront exclusionary discourses and practices from alternative food practitioners (and often activists) inserted in environmental gentrification processes. Data reveals how environmental racism and privilege affected the relationships that a community has with its food, invisibilized its members and its cultural and social practices around food and beyond, and in turn destabilized their place-making and territorialization. The closing of Hi-Lo and opening of Whole Foods signified the loss of a socio-cultural food haven through which Latinos’ individual and collective identities had become showcased and strengthened and food sovereignty exercised. The store embodied for decades the diversity of Latino cultures with a management style that responded directly to the demands of its customers. The immense variety of products at Hi-Lo made Latinos feel respected and valued as clients but also as members of an ethnic group. Hi-Lo was a place that promoted and strengthened the culinary heritage of Latinos and allowed for the re-creation of a deep sense of place and re-territorialization. Such a process of place-making was also possible because Hi-Lo was a social destination where people would spend hours mingling and networking. After shopping, customers would also visit nearby Latino businesses, thereby furthering traditional social-cultural practices around food and strengthening the Latino culture in JP. Hi-Lo’s loss eliminated the heart of Latino foods and culture without compensation.

In Jamaica Plain, one of the ironies of Whole Foods’ opening is that while it will enhance for all residents the proximity of more organic foods, including fresh produce, it does not enhance access to healthy foods for the lower-income households and residents of color living in Hyde Square and its surroundings. The closing of Hi-Lo signified the end to affordable food for Latinos and lower-income residents in the gentrifying neighborhood. Changes in supermarket choices are also accompanied by the disappearance of Latino gardens and gardeners in JP, thereby exacerbating food privileges and creating new environmental injustices after decades of fighting for greater environmental and food equity and against food deserts. Such changes create feelings of displacement and of being out of place in the neighborhood. Latino residents express a sense of alienation and of sudden abandonment in a context of

environmental gentrification. The conflict is a manifestation of how activists who often see themselves as part the alternative food movement can increase inequalities and isolation by working on enhancing access to organic and fresh food for wealthier residents without considering the foodways of Latino people.

Last, the JP conflict rose in intensity because of the discourses conveyed by Whole Foods supporters about Hi-Lo and its customers (and directly and indirectly about Whole Foods). Many assertions about healthy foods were based on the assumption that Latinos do not eat well, and they overlooked Latinos' varied food practices – especially natural food practices –, including for those who shopped at Hi-Lo. At the same time, those discourses appropriated in a whitened way some of the natural and valuable items of the Latino culture and contributed to what is now called food gentrification. In return, Latinos and their supporters rejected how Whole Foods and its supporters politicized words such as “organic food” and “healthy food” because of the connotations they carry and because they feel that some of the people who promote such food choices are hypocritical. Some of the racism felt personal as Whole Foods' enthusiasts used negative and at times offensive qualifiers to describe Hi-Lo and the products it sold and its customers. According to Whole Foods opponents, the conflict brought to light the position of white middle-class JP residents who feared that their own privilege of choosing where to shop for food was being threatened.

In sum, Latino Hi-Lo customers and their supporters opposed the fact that white middle-class gentrifiers are the ones who get to define the discourses and acceptable consumption practices around alternative food consumption. They attempted to make their own cultural claims about space, territory, and food in the city while contesting white middle-class visions of food access, foodscapes, and healthy food as well as their colorblindness, whiteness, and food privilege. They refused to become invisible and out-of-place in their gentrifying neighborhood through the creation of new white foodscapes. An important policy and planning question thus remains open: How can we foster greater food diversity without creating exclusion, food privilege, and environmental gentrification at the expense of historically vulnerable groups and people of color whose place in the city is traditionally under threat? In the same vein as some affordable housing programs and ordinances, especially inclusionary zoning ordinances, Planning Departments together with Departments for Neighborhood Development could, for instance, create programs and grants directed at sponsoring and encouraging locally-owned food venues and shops that (re-)create and strengthen the diversity and affordability of food practices in racially-mixed and gentrifying neighborhoods. Another important challenge concerns how members of the alternative food movement can rebrand healthy and organic food in a way that does not exclude entire racial and ethnic groups.

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