Abstract

Alternative food networks in North America have been critiqued for upholding patterns of inequality and racial injustice, in part because of agrarian narratives that exclude people of colour. This thesis first examines the dominant media narratives surrounding local food and farming in Ontario and how they include and/or exclude racialized immigrants and then presents counterstories of immigrants growing in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to determine their experiences and what barriers and challenges exist. The media discourse analysis of 224 Toronto Star articles shows that the dominant narratives show white family farms as the standard, while also promoting a multicultural, immigrant agricultural national identity that positions farming as a way for new immigrants to assimilate into Canadian society. The semi-structured interviews of immigrants growing in the GTA (n=12) show that growing is done for a variety of reasons beyond accessing culturally appropriate food, that urban farm spaces play an important role in cultivating belonging, that racialized immigrants do encounter discrimination within the food and farming community, and that the participants see local food as a way of challenging a flawed food system. The findings in this thesis can contribute to the literature on building just local food networks in Ontario.