LOCAL FOOD GLOBAL PEOPLE: IMMIGRANT
COUNTERSTORIES IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

by

Jillian Linton, B.A. (Hons.)

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Geography and Planning
University of Toronto

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Abstract

Alternative food networks in North America have been critiqued for promoting exclusionary narratives and upholding patterns of inequality. This thesis examines the dominant media narratives surrounding local food, farming and racialized immigrants in Ontario and then presents counterstories of immigrants growing in the Greater Toronto Area to explore their experiences. The media discourse analysis of 224 Toronto Star articles reveals dominant narratives that promote a multicultural, immigrant agricultural national identity and position 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 urban farm spaces play an important role in cultivating belonging, that racialized immigrants do encounter discrimination within the food and farming community, and that participants see local food as a way of challenging a flawed food system. This research shows a distinction between media narratives of local food and farming and immigrant experiences.
Acknowledgments

This project could not have been completed without the constant guidance and advice of my supervisor Professor Sarah Wakefield and the whole FEAST team. You all reassured me that the work I was doing was both important and possible, emboldened me to speak frankly on issues of racism and inequity, and taught me so much about being scholars actively invested in social justice. Thank you for all the time and energy you invested into me and this project.

I owe so much to my entire support network of friends who encouraged me daily and reminded me there was an end to the process, including Kaitlyn who joined me for countless sessions in Gerstein, Alex who talked me through the most stressful parts of the past two years, and my partner Matthew who coped with my chaotic schedules and helped me take necessary breaks without guilt. I also want to thank my parents who supported me in my pursuit of higher education from the very beginning and gave me space to figure out my next steps.

Finally, thank you to the growers, farmers and community members who took the time to speak with me and trusted me to put their words to paper.

This project was funded in part by the 2016-17 Ontario Graduate Scholarship and by the SSHRC Insight Grant #76166 - Unsettling Perspectives and Contested Spaces: Building Equity and Justice in Canadian Food Activism.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................................. iii

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................... iv

List of Figures ..................................................................................................................................... vii

List of Appendices ............................................................................................................................. viii

1 Chapter 1: Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Outline .................................................................................................................................... 2

2 Chapter 2: Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 5
   2.1 Local Food Research ................................................................................................................ 7
   2.2 Whiteness and the White Farm Imaginary ............................................................................. 9
   2.3 Canadian Multiculturalism ...................................................................................................... 11
   2.4 Canadian Agricultural Identity ............................................................................................... 12
   2.5 Counterstories ......................................................................................................................... 14

3 Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology ......................................................................................... 18
   3.1 Methodology .......................................................................................................................... 20
      3.1.1 Discourse Analysis .......................................................................................................... 20
      3.1.2 Producing Subjective Knowledge and Counterstories .................................................. 22
      3.1.3 Reshaping Power Dynamics .......................................................................................... 24
      3.1.4 Creating Reflexive Research .......................................................................................... 26
   3.2 Methods .................................................................................................................................. 28
      3.2.1 Media Discourse Analysis ............................................................................................... 28
      3.2.2 In-depth Interviews ......................................................................................................... 31
      3.2.3 Limitations & Credibility ............................................................................................... 35
   3.3 Challenges and Reflection ........................................................................................................ 36
5.5.3  Government Support: Funding .................................................................111

5.6  Summary of Narratives ...........................................................................113

6  Chapter 6: Conclusion ...............................................................................116

References .......................................................................................................121

Appendices .................................................................................................135
List of Figures

- Figure 1: Reasons for Supporting Local Food…………………………………p. 55
- Figure 2: Farmer, John Hambly…………………………………………………p. 57
List of Appendices

- Appendix A: Data Set for In-Depth Media Discourse Analysis
- Appendix B: Recruitment Documents and Consent Forms
  - B.1 Community Recruitment Poster
  - B.2 Research Study Information and Consent Form
  - B.3 Organizational Recruitment Email
- Appendix C: Interview Prompts
- Appendix D: Focus Group Prompts
1 Chapter 1: Introduction

The provincial government and various municipalities in Ontario have increasingly turned to local food policy as the way forward in planning, yet immigrants and racialized people generally are often underrepresented in the writing on local food work and the development of alternative food networks (Slocum, 2011). Some scholars have suggested that alternative food networks are often characterized by imaginaries and mythologies that deny the experiences and impact of people of colour and this is a contributing factor in the development of atmospheres and programming that cater specifically to white participants (Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Guthman, 2008a; Guthman 2008b; Slocum, 2007). I argue that as efforts are made to increase local food activity it is important to critically analyze the discourses being deployed around local food and farming to understand what narratives are being promoted and whose voices are not included. Simultaneously, those narratives that are underrepresented in the dominant discourse need to be shared to better understand their experiences, which may vary from the information widely disseminated.

This project first analyzes the local Toronto news media on local food and farming to determine what narratives are prominent. Determining the dominant narratives is important because discourse shapes our understanding and perception of society and therefore has material effects. As noted above, narratives around food and farming govern who can access these spaces and shape the focus of local food organizing. By interrogating these narratives, it is possible to draw out imagery that upholds racial hierarchies and highlight omissions. For the second phase of this project, immigrants are interviewed to determine their thoughts and experiences of growing food in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). By speaking with these immigrants, varied
perspectives can be drawn out and barriers or instances of marginalization can be revealed. The research questions are:

1. What narratives are promoted about local food and farming and how are immigrants included and/or excluded in these?

2. What are the experiences of immigrants (especially racialized immigrants) and how are they similar to and different from the experiences of others growing in Ontario?

The dominant narratives found in local Toronto news media tell a specific story of local food as taking place in uncontested rural space largely by multi-generational farming families. However, the stories shared by immigrants growing in the Greater Toronto Area highlights different concerns and difficulties not included in the media narratives. By comparing these dominant media narratives with the counterstories of immigrants, it becomes possible to reveal areas of inequality and identify opportunities for change.

1.1 Outline

The following chapter (Chapter 2) provides an overview of the relevant literature in North America on local food: its benefits, but also the critiques increasingly levelled against it, particularly the whiteness of alternative food organizing that can unintentionally exclude racialized people in its design and programming. It also summarizes the Canadian historic context, which has its own specific national mythologies that differ from those in America. Finally, I will draw on the work of critical race scholars to emphasize the utility of counterstories in challenging dominant narratives and whiteness.
In chapter three, I discuss the critical methodological ideas that were the foundation of this project and their related methods. As this project is two-fold, it reviews the methods used to conduct the discourse analysis of Toronto Star Articles and those used to complete a series of semi-structured interviews with immigrants growing in the GTA. A final reflexive section focuses on the challenges encountered and the ways in which I returned to my methodology to try and resolve them. This section is an important part of conducting transparent research that acknowledges my positionality and accurately portrays the difficult and complicated nature of the work.

Chapters four and five share the results of both the media discourse analysis and my in-depth interviews. Chapter four is an exploration of the results of the discourse analysis of Toronto Star articles written about local food. I identify a specific narrative about a multicultural, immigrant agricultural national identity that positions farming as a way to access integration and assimilation into Canadian society - a sort of “Canadian dream”. However, I argue that this media discourse nonetheless associates local food with pristine rural space and white farming families, without problematizing issues of land, labour, colonialism, or race.

In chapter five, I share the counterstories of the immigrants growing food in the Greater Toronto Area. These stories are divided into three major thematic areas. The first set of stories show that growing food is not simply a question of wanting to have culturally appropriate food, but occurs for a variety of reasons, including transmission of familial traditions, gaining access to affordable healthy food, and for their physical and emotional wellbeing. The second theme concentrates on the question of citizenship and belonging and these stories show that even when immigrants are socially established in Canada, involved in growing, and active in their communities, they may still feel excluded from Canadian identity as a whole. The third theme
focuses on the question of racialization and discrimination. These stories show that these immigrants are racialized differently, and as a result have varied experiences encountering discrimination in their daily lives, especially as farmers trying to establish businesses in the food community. Finally, the fourth theme shows that these immigrants are conscious and vocal in their denunciation of the systemic issues of the food system, the tangible effects it has on their communities, and have ideas for how the system can be improved.

Chapter six concludes the thesis with a summary of the project and how the research objectives were fulfilled, followed by a discussion of the way the counternarratives of chapter five can inform or speak to the dominant narratives identified from the media discourse analysis. I argue that based on the counterstories of the immigrant growers, local food is not necessarily as rural, as white, as neutral or uncomplicated as it is portrayed in local news media. Instead, there are racialized people across the GTA growing in urban spaces, running up against many of the same struggles as other new farmers and increasingly without access to funding or key start up programs. These immigrants are choosing to grow food locally for reasons of health, wellbeing and cultural traditions, but also because they see extreme inequality in the food system and believe that growing can oppose this. This project shows that there are differences between the dominant narratives surrounding food and farming and the experiences of racialized immigrants, suggesting that more work must be done to promote the voices of other marginalized groups.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Canada, local food as a political movement has picked up steam as its proponents have lobbied for greater government support for the cause. Several cities have put forth their own local food policies, like the city of Toronto that wrote and implemented a local food procurement policy between 2008 and 2011 focused on reducing emissions. Local food production has been so important on the political landscape that in 2010 Ignatieff, the then leader of the federal Labour party, held a press conference on a farm in the Holland Marsh to announce a new national food policy that would, “put more Canadian food on Canadian plates” (Swainson, 2010). In 2013, the Local Food Act was launched by the provincial government in Ontario to “foster successful and resilient local food economies and systems…to increase awareness of local food in Ontario, including the diversity…[and] to encourage the development of new markets for local food.” (2013). The act was accompanied by significant funding for local farmers, organizations and municipalities and an annual local food week in June. Following the act, the ministry of agriculture collaborated with Municipalities of Ontario (OMA) and Ontario Municipalities Knowledge Network (OMKN) to produce a best practices document for municipalities to move towards increasing local food policies (2013). That same year, supporters of local food successfully pushed for federal legislation to change the official designation of local from an older measurement of 50 km or one municipality away to a much larger designation based on provincial borders (Porter, 2013). These collective efforts of the various levels of government have been largely aimed at economic, community building and sustainability goals, but there is great optimism that as a result the average family in Ontario will
have increased access to quality, local food. Despite increasing government focus on food policy, food insecurity in Ontario is at 11.9% with almost 600,000 households reporting food insecurity in 2014 (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Recent immigrants are more likely to be food insecure than the rest of the Canadian born population at 15.2% compared to 11.8% and black and indigenous households had extremely elevated rates, at 29.4% and 25.7% respectively (Tarasuk et al 2016). These figures confirm that food insecurity in Canada is a racialized issue and any food policy solutions including local food programming should be targeted.

Ontario has the highest number of immigrants of any territory or province in Canada including 43.1% of all recent immigrants and despite serving as a hub for immigration, recent immigrants across Canada are one of the groups that are most at risk to be food insecure (Tarasuk et al, 2016). This project focuses on immigrants growing on farms in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), because they may experience discrimination and unequal treatment due to several factors of their identity, including racialization. Recent immigrants are likely to struggle with low income, geographic distance, language and cultural barriers in attempts to access quality food (Rodriguez et al, 2016; Vahabi and Damba, 2013; Lessa and Rocha, 2012; Vahabi et al, 2011; Koç and Welsh, 2002). They also have a higher risk of food insecurity than those who have lived in Canada for longer periods despite high levels of education (Tarasuk et al, 2016; Rush et. al, 2007). Immigrants can sometimes define food terminology differently than the rest of the population and have different understandings of “good food” or “local food” (Valiente-Neighbours, 2012) and policy focusing on the cultural acceptability of food usually goes no further than trying increase access to “multicultural” foodstuffs (Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy, 2015). If local food continues to be the government’s policy of choice, it is important that the perspectives of all marginalized groups, including immigrants, are an integral part of future policy development.
2.1 Local Food Research

Beginning in the nineties, there has been a popular shift in research communities towards local food systems or foodsheds. These local food systems are often defined in opposition to global networks and seen as regional, community based networks that could reconnect the social and natural elements of food production and solve some of the problems of global food chains (Halweil, 2002; Hendrickson and Heffernan, 2002; Feenstra, 1997; Kloppenburg et al, 1996; Getz, 1991). Local, community based food activity, such as community gardens, farmers markets and urban farms, have been increasingly found to have benefits for health, community building and citizenship formation including in immigrant populations (Carney et al., 2014; Wakefield et al., 2007; Welsh and MacRae, 1998) In fact, immigrants in urban environments who grow food in community and household gardens do so for a wide variety of positive reasons: to have access to quality, culturally appropriate produce, to reduce food costs, to relax, to get in touch with nature, to build community, or resist gentrification (Seto, 2011; Flora et al, 2011; Klindienst, 2006; Head et al. 2004, Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Baker 2004, 2002). Some authors also argue that growing is a way of enacting “soil citizenship”; resisting the corporate food system by getting involved in the production of food and as a result investing and integrating in one’s community (Baker 2004; DeLind 2002). Local food activity and community based growing has significant researched benefits and is increasingly supported at the political level, but even its supporters have important critiques.

Despite the researched benefits of some community based food activities and their increasing promotion in political spheres, some of the writing on local food movements cautions being overly zealous or uncritical (DeLind, 2011; Born and Purcell, 2006). Some researchers focus on the assumed normative quality of the term and the difficulty of narrowing down a
definition of local itself, since different users contract and expand the category based on their needs (Feagan, 2007; Hinrichs, 2003). Aside from varying definitions, others point out that centering local as an organizing principle of change in the alternative food movement is not inherently better and that problems associated with global food chains are also found at the local level (DeLind, 2011; Born and Purcell, 2006; Winter, 2003). In fact, local food organizing including community gardens can become an elitist past time (Donald and Blay Palmer, 2006) or a social safety net for people that supports the increasingly neoliberal state (McClintock, 2014).

Others note that since the very idea of local food is mobilized in different ways by different groups any related programming is usually influenced by those able to leverage enough power to challenge the existing system (Hinrichs and Allen, 2008; Hinrichs, 2003). As a result, local food activism usually favours the promotion of specific agendas that privilege certain groups and may exclude or marginalize other disadvantaged ones (Hinrichs and Allen, 2008; Guthman, 2008a, 2008b). Since local food work is embedded in local structures of power and privilege, scholars writing on alternative food movements note that while they have the potential to be beneficial, increasing work must be done to unveil the ways in which alternative food movements reproduce various forms of racial injustice and patterns of inequality (Slocum, 2011; Allen, 2010; Dupuis and Goodman, 2005). Even organizers who run programs aimed at promoting “inclusion” for vulnerable communities fall into similar traps of ignoring historic power imbalances and can ultimately alienate racialized communities (Ramírez, 2015; Flora et al., 2011). This can particularly be an issue when policy focuses on only on facet of change, for example Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy (2015) note that attempts to create culturally acceptable food policy often fixate on increasing access to multicultural ingredients and neglect other areas of concern. Many of these works come from a stance that there are definite benefits that are
possible when local, community-based food organizing takes place, but proactive steps need to be taken to avoid reproducing problematic power structures.

2.2 Whiteness and the White Farm Imaginary

The critical view of local and alternative food movements continues in food justice scholarship with discussion of the racial dynamics of these spaces (Cadieux and Slocum, 2015; Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Gottlieb and Joshi, 2010). Scholars in the United States outline the ways in which alternative food work is often imbued with whiteness, focused on an affluent audience and ignorant of the power and privilege that undergird its activities (Flora et al., 2011; Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Allen, 2010; Guthman, 2008a, Slocum, 2007). As Allen writes:

“...social relations of power and privilege affect participation and decision making. They not only determine who is allowed to be part of the conversation but also shape who has the authority to speak and whose discursive contributions are considered worthwhile” (2010, 303-4).

The particular discourse or white imaginary (Slocum, 2007) of alternative food organizing can determine who feels comfortable and who belongs in that space, and therefore who does not. In their research of farmer’s markets in California, Alkon and McCullen note a specific agrarian narrative that celebrates white contributions while simultaneously ignoring those of people of colour who are involved in farm and food labour (2011). This nationalistic narrative, coined a white farm imaginary, dismisses both the historic exploitation of slave populations and the current labour of racialized farmers and migrant farmworkers (Alkon and McCullen, 2011). They suggest that this narrative contributes to the material and physical exclusions that can be seen at the market.
Lockie, writing on the racialization of alternative food networks, critiques some of these authors for drawing a picture of whiteness that is static, when specificities abound and may not confirm the ideas we assume to be true about who has power and how differences manifest (2013). He warns that we must be careful “not to assume that class or race, at any particular time or place, will manifest either in a consistent manner or in ways that common sense and conventional wisdom tell us they might” and argues that case studies must focus on the multiple factors of oppression and difference and be understood as confirming the specificities of that space (Lockie, 2013, 413). This is a valid point as whiteness is not static and racism is specific and variable over time and space (Goldberg, 1993). Additionally, as Himani Bannerji states, “‘race’, gender, and patriarchy are inseparable from class, as any social organization rests on intersubjective relations of bodies and minds marked with socially constructed difference on the terrain of private property and capital” (2005, 149). The overlapping influence of race, gender and class on human lives, is an idea articulated for some time by many feminists of colour (Hill-Collins, 1990), but is extremely important as this project aims to understand immigrants’ experiences who may not be uniformly racialized.

To combat a dominant agrarian narrative that ignores and/or oppresses certain groups, it is necessary to first identify the existence of this dominant narrative. Alkon and McCullen describe a white farm imaginary from their research in California and while North America does share similar colonial histories and logics it is still important to confirm what imaginary exists in Canada, or at a regional level in Ontario.
2.3 Canadian Multiculturalism

Canadian identity and mythology has historically been built around a “northernness” that equalled whiteness, one which admittedly had two variations, a British side and a French side (Berger 1966). However, since the introduction of multicultural policy in 1971, Canada has increasingly understood and sold itself as a nation built on a diversity of cultures and identities. Immigrants, through multicultural policy, can become citizens without discarding their ethnic identity or ancestry (Government of Canada 2012). This policy contrasts with the politics of assimilation associated with America. Despite Canada’s official stance of celebrating diversity, multicultural policy has been critiqued as providing a way of legitimising the state by reframing the longstanding Canadian problem of national unity (Mackey 2002). In Bannerji’s opinion, multiculturalism was an “administrative device” that allowed Canada to cobble together an identity out of the division of French and English Canada, the ‘Indian Problem’ and the increasingly diverse population resulting from rising migration (2000, 73). Diverse bodies and cultures are needed to support the Canadian national identity project that is multiculturalism, however, despite rhetoric of inclusion, racialized immigrants continue to find that they are unable to achieve full status as Canadian, even upon obtaining citizenship.

As Mackey puts it, there are those who are, “unmarked, unhyphenated and hence normative Canadian Canadians who are thus implicitly constructed as the authentic and real Canadian people, while all others are hyphenated and marked as cultural” (2002; 102, emphasis in original). Racialized immigrants may become fully Canadian from a legal standpoint, but their status and identity may be questioned even generations later, since they do not fit the image of so-called Canadian Canadians (Peake and Ray, 2001). A major consequence of multicultural policy has been the general assumption in public spheres that race problems have been fixed and no
longer exist in Canada (Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002). All the while a brand of “Canadian racism” has emerged that is hidden, veiled, and even genteel while remaining woven into the fabric of daily life (Peake and Ray, 2001; Dua and Robertson, 1999). Narratives of white Canadian identity have also long been intertwined with agricultural identity.

2.4 Canadian Agricultural Identity

Farming identity in Canada is historically associated with the nuclear family farm as it formed the basis of the British colonial project of settlement (Mancuso, 2011; Phillips, 2009). The government explicitly tailored immigration and settlement policies in an effort to establish the Anglo-Saxon farming family as the true Canadian identity (Mancuso, 2011). The project was largely successful, because the family farm was an important unit in the economic development of the country, particularly in certain agricultural industries (Friedmann, 1978). The government policies and economic success of the white family farm developed into a historic Canadian agrarian narrative that celebrates the abundance of the land and the industrious work of white Canadians (Wakefield et al., 2015). This narrative ignores racialized people and their agrarian histories, such as the black farmers and their communities that persevered in the face of antagonistic immigration and state policies (Winks, 2000) and the long history of First Nation agriculture, including the Huron or Wendat who were growing and harvesting food long before the arrivals of settlers (Sioui, 2008; Trigger, 1990). This historic narrative also conceals the violent dispossession of land and the active restrictions placed on indigenous peoples to prevent them from continuing to practice their traditional foodways (Rotz, 2017; Bodirsky & Johnson, 2008). Some recent research suggests that this white Canadian family farming narrative continues to be held today and is promoted in cultural activities, advertising, and media campaigns (Cairns et al., 2015; Aguiar and Marten, 2011, O’Connell, 2010).
In the province of Ontario, the number of immigrants in farming populations continues to decline, despite an overall increase in immigration rates nationwide (Statistics Canada 2004). A 2004 report notes that, “the farm population — farm operators and the people in their households — remains predominantly of European ancestry” (Statistics Canada 2004) and a more recent census confirms that the immigrant farm population in Canada still comes mostly from the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States, despite none of those countries being the top sources of immigrants generally (Statistics Canada 2011). Although the reasons for this may be multiple, 90% of the farm households reporting in the 2011 census live in rural areas and new immigrants are generally deterred from rural settlement by the reduced access to social support hubs, transportation services and other infrastructure (Leach et al., 2007). Racialized immigrants are also likely deterred since racial discrimination in the form of slurs, exclusion, mistreatment, surveillance and microaggressions are documented in small towns and rural space in Ontario (Arora, 2017; Lai and Huffey, 2009). A recent study focusing on the placemaking of new farmers that moved from urban to rural environments note that there is a high degree of isolation and low acceptance of newcomers in existing rural communities (Ngo and Brklacich, 2014). While they do not explicitly mention the race of any of the participants, one participant, named Annie notes, “I do feel a disconnect with the people out here a little bit because it’s white, very white. It’s small town…” (Ngo and Brlacich, 2014, 58). This sentiment suggests that Annie, whatever her race may be, feels out of place in part because it is a majority white space, likely in comparison to the urban space she moved from. The question of who belongs in rural and urban space may also be a product of discourse.

In Ontario, O’Connell’s (2010) study of the Canadian Redneck Games in Ontario shows that for many of the participants the imagery of rural space as white space endures, with rural spaces portrayed as the location of true Canadian identity and as separate from multicultural city
The idea of separate spaces, white rural space and urban multicultural space was reinforced for me in watching a Foodland Ontario commercial from 2013. The commercial promotes fresh, local Ontario apples and features an older white man and a younger white, blonde woman, who the viewer would assume is his daughter. They are picking apples and placing them in baskets on a conveyor belt (Foodland Ontario, 2013). This conveyor belt of apples passes through the landscape of Ontario fields and ends up in a multicultural classroom, where a young boy with dark skin, who is ethnically ambiguous picks up and eats the apple. Although the commercial is only 15 seconds long, it succeeds in reinforcing the image of family farms free of migrant labour and white rural space providing food for racialized consumers residing in multicultural urban space. This commercial is only one example of visual media promoting local food, however it supports the larger discourse on white heteronormative farming identities and rural space. Of course, a single commercial does not confirm that this is the dominant narrative in Ontario currently and this project completes a more comprehensive study of media on local food as a useful first step in determining if this narrative prevails.

### 2.5 Counterstories

Once a dominant narrative has been identified, it is important to “‘unnaturalize’ geographical stories in which the effects of racialization are left out or normalized” (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000, 399). After critically analyzing these stories, one way to expand the narrative is to empower those who are ignored by sharing their stories. Counterstories are used by critical race scholars to challenge dominant narratives and the systems they uphold but also as a way of sharing pre-existing knowledge in communities (Merriweather-Hunn et. Al, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado, 1989). Researchers in the United States writing on food and farming are increasingly focused on telling these stories for racialized people and immigrants and their
specific experiences taking part in the food system. Some scholars focus on black farmers, their historic discrimination, and the challenges they continue to face in an unequal farming system (Tyler et al., 2014; Reynolds, 2002; Gilbert et al. 2002; Havard, 2001). Others focus on migrant farmworkers and other farmers of colour generally, highlighting issues and experiences dealing with racist structures (Bowens, 2015; Minkoff-Zern, 2017, 2014, 2013) or quantifying and recording levels of food insecurity (Quandt et al., 2004). Researchers have found that immigrant farmers often have different motivations for participating in farming and different ways of running their farms as well (Minkoff-Zern, 2017; Flora et al. 2012). A project by a team of researchers in Iowa focusing on including Latino immigrants in a local agriculture project found that these individuals have different motivations for participating and are generally not interested in economic profits, but use growing to foster other forms of capital: cultural, human, and social (Flora et al. 2012). By focusing on the desires and voices of racialized people involved in the food system, researchers show that there are different experiences compared to the dominant agrarian narrative, but what is the research landscape on these same issues north of the border? Specifically, what research is being done to give voice to racialized immigrants in the Canadian food system?

A key area where agricultural research in Canada has been working to change the dominant narrative is work on the temporary foreign worker program (SAWP), which employs mostly people of colour from the Caribbean or Mexico (Preibisch, 2010; Hennebry, 2010; Basok, 2002). By speaking directly to these farmworkers, researchers discover that often the treatment of these workers is very different from that reported by program managers or farmers themselves. Often farmworkers report abuse, racist treatment and language, and fear of retribution, which prevents them from speaking up. This kind of research is important in supporting ongoing political activism for changes to the SAWP program and citizenship for
these temporary migrants. Similar research that aims to speak to marginalized permanent residents participating in alternative food organizations or local food spaces is increasing as well. A study in Vancouver on Chinese farmers growing locally showed that the Chinese community had developed a well-established but parallel network of local food producers and consumers, that did not intersect with the more publicized and celebrated, white and affluent local food community (Gibb and Wittman, 2013). The researchers argued that the Chinese community’s parallel network had developed in response to a legacy of racism and discrimination that continues to this day. In Ontario, a study of racialized immigrants who were leaders in the alternative food community suggested that there were ongoing issues of discrimination and tokenization, due to a culture of whiteness and persistent economic and geographic barriers that continued to affect these communities’ ability to access quality food (Nouri-Sabzikar, 2016). These researchers show that explicitly sharing stories of racialized people growing food can expose the challenges and obstacles that may only be affecting some people, because they show, “food and farm realities through the eyes of the marginalized” (Bowens, 2015, x). This project chooses to focus on those immigrants who are growing on farms across the Greater Toronto Area, whether as their career for income or to supply their families or friends. It unveils the experiences of those who are growing in these farm spaces to determine if and how they are connected to the larger local food and farming communities.

Peake and Ray emphasize the importance of conducting research in the Canadian context that does not only look for explicit cases of racism such as physical violence or slurs. Instead they advocate for research that scrutinises subtle racist expressions or micro-expressions and “the places of their normalization - those interiorized and exteriorized spaces of normalized whiteness” (2001, 181). The goal of this research project is to do this in a two-pronged approach. First, by studying the media discourse on local food in the Toronto Star I identify what the
current dominant narratives on local food and farming that are normalized in Ontario and analyze how immigrants feature in these narratives. What specific ideas about race, citizenship and belonging are being told in the dominant narratives on local food? The second part of this project speaks with immigrants growing on farms in the Greater Toronto Area to learn their unique experiences of the food system and local food activity. These immigrant counternarratives reveal information that is ignored in dominant narratives and give an alternative perspective, and in doing so expose inequitable relations or the subtleties of racism that are normalized.
3 Chapter 3: Methods and Methodology

My goal for this research project is to add to the literature that challenges whiteness in local food and farming in Ontario by speaking with predominantly racialized immigrants growing food in the Greater Toronto Area and how they view local food, farming, and the food system. Initially, I thought that the very act of conducting research on this subject matter, when I myself am an immigrant woman of colour, would yield positive outcomes. However, early on in my reading I came across work by a variety of authors that challenged the outlook I had of research as neutral or even inherently positive (Tuck, 2009; Hill-Collins, 1986; Smith, 1999). These authors highlighted how traditional academic research led by universities is often complicit in the system of colonial and capitalist domination and, in many cases, does not benefit the involved communities (Tuck, 2009; Smith, 1999). These readings pushed me to consider how research must be intentionally designed to avoid certain practices that reinforce marginalization. This chapter will first discuss the critical methodological principles that I draw from action focused research, community based, participatory, anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, feminist and queer writings, and the methods I use to support them. Secondly, it will discuss the successes and challenges of using these methods throughout my time within the communities. Finally, I will reflect on my positionality, my experiences using these methodologies in practice, and discuss lessons for future research.

Early on I found a wealth of literature that focused on this theme under different names: action-focused research, community-based, participatory, anti-oppressive, anti-colonial, feminist
and queer writings. By discussing and trading references within my research group, FEAST\(^1\), this list grew and I began to feel it was possible to do the kind of research I hoped for. I formed my methodology by drawing on ideas from this wide range of methodological literature, so while I will highlight and reference the key ideas that are foundational to my methodology, I do not align myself specifically with one category. Most of these authors eschew prescriptive methods or strict checklists for research design in favour of specific and varied methods that fit the community. Following this idea, I chose key methodological principles that I wanted my research to embody and then tailored my methods to fit with these principles in a way that I felt would apply to immigrants working and living in Ontario. First, I explain the key ideas that inform my methodology, then I outline the methods I chose to support my methodology and finally there is a frank discussion of the obstacles, challenges, and successes that occurred over the course of the research. This final section is aimed at moving past a short explanation of my positionality to a more structured reflexive methods discussion that leaves both my successes and failures transparent. By structuring my methods in a way that foregrounds difficulties and uses continuous reflection, I hope to challenge the idea of research as neat and the researcher as expert.

\(^{1}\) Food, Equity and Activism Study Team, a collection of researchers from the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto working with Professor Sarah Wakefield
3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Discourse Analysis

Consensus on discourse analysis can be hard to find, as definitions range in scope, focus and from field to field. Part of this variety arises from the disagreement on what qualifies as discourse, whether defined as a grouping of statements, text or more widely in the Foucauldian sense where it broadly covers linguistic practices over time (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discourse analysis, however focused or broad it might be, is generally viewed as a key way of understanding society because of the impact discourse has on daily life. Fairclough writes, “discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions” (2003; 124). This point is extremely important, as discourses are representations of the world that have the ability to legitimize and reinforce the way society is structured. Foucault advocated for careful analysis of discourse as a way of understanding where power is located and how subjects are created (Wetherell and Potter, 1992). This understanding of discourse analysis is particularly useful when focusing on race and difference.

Scholars who focus on race and difference have also highlighted the ways in which discourse inevitably excludes certain views. In fact, despite modern narratives of individualism and neutrality that aim to represent all people, often the same groups are left out of the ideal picture of modern society. Lipsitz identifies, “the overdetermined inadequacy of the language of liberal individualism to describe collective experience” as a factor for continued problems with race relations (1998, 356). The language used and the stories we tell shape how certain groups
of people are viewed or if they exist at all. Discourses that have become entrenched in modern society as normal and natural continue to perpetuate certain ideas about the way the world is constructed, at the expense of other existing conceptions of the world (Lipsitz 1998). The promotion of certain viewpoints has powerful real effects. Discourse can change understandings of space, naming some spaces as desirable and others as wild or unclean, in turn allowing for policy to be enacted in response to these perceived problems (Razack, 2002). Alternatively, as certain bodies are wiped completely out of narratives or framed in particular ways, it reinforces the system and the distribution of power and positions within it (Feagin 2010). Scholars focusing on food and farming have also been conscious of the way discourse and narratives can do just this in the alternative food movement.

Guthman has proposed that alternative food movements in the United States are often socially exclusive because they are characterized by whiteness (2008a). These communities are often founded on and organized around particular agrarian myths, such as the idea that white farm families made use of abundant empty land to grow food and create the fertile landscapes of today (Wakefield et al., 2015; Guthman, 2008a). These underlying agrarian narratives exclude racialized bodies and viewpoints and the work of these organizations can often do so as well, in the design and aim of their programming or even by assuming racialized people are not interested in healthy food (Guthman, 2008b; Slocum, 2007). Building on this concept, Alkon and McCullen coined the term the white farm imaginary based on their observations of California farmers markets (2011). In their work this white farm imaginary, “romanticizes and universalizes an agrarian narrative specific to whites while masking the contributions and struggles of people of color in food production” (Alkon and McCullen, 2011; 938). This white farm imaginary both follows and supports a nationalistic discourse that fails to recognize the historical exploitation of slave labour, current racialized farmers or the migrant farmworkers who do the majority of the
cultivation. However, it must be noted that the white farm imaginary, is not static, but shifts according to its temporal and spatial context (McCullen 2001). While Canada and the United States exist on the same continent and our local food communities have transnational connections, it would be false to assume that our farm imaginaries would work in the same way from region to region, much less from country to country. What discourses are at work in Ontario around farming and local food? How does Ontario’s unique history and national construction affect farming imaginaries related to local food? In conceptualizing local food in Ontario, what imaginaries about Canadian identity, farming and rural space are being promoted and supported? Who is excluded and included in the discourse, and what subjects are created in the process?

3.1.2 Producing Subjective Knowledge and Counterstories

After the discourse analysis, the second phase of the research project required fieldwork and in-depth interviews with the immigrants growing in the GTA to create the counterstories speaking to farming and local food. Many traditional research methods and methodologies celebrate objectivity and the all-knowing viewpoint of the scholar, upholding ideas of who possesses knowledge or the ability to interpret it (Jaggar, 2014; Moss, 2002). However, numerous scholars particularly feminists and black women argue that objectivity is not possible and that all knowledge is political, partial and subjective (Harding, 1998; Hill-Collins, 1986). There is knowledge which is dominant and promoted through schools, universities, institutions and governments, but alongside this dominant knowledge exists knowledge that is subjugated (Moosa-Mitha, 2005; Hill-Collins, 1986). Often the knowledge and viewpoints of marginalized communities are systematically subjugated; underrepresented in these mainstream institutions and mediums of exchange, which can mean valuable information is excluded from processes of
public consultation or policy creation (Moosa-Mitha, 2005, Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). To challenge the marginalization of certain viewpoints, these scholars instead call for research that acknowledges and accounts for multiple viewpoints. Counternarratives are one method used in the critical race community to challenge dominant viewpoints (Hunn et al., 2006). Counternarratives or counterstories are stories that centre the lived realities and experiences of individuals who are often excluded from dominant narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado, 1989). These counterstories are not created in direct opposition to dominant narratives, they already exist and are shared within marginalized communities as a way to process and understand the world and can themselves can be shaped and influenced by existing dominant knowledge and structures (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). The point of my research then was not to create new counterstories, so much as to record and give voice to knowledge and community information that already exists, understanding that it might both overlap with and present a challenge to the dominant media narratives learned from the discourse analysis.

Even as I consider counterstories to be positive tools for challenging dominant narratives and bringing about change, I also understand the risks of taking one story or viewpoint as the final truth, dichotomizing who is powerful and who is oppressed, or simply reframing a different group as expert (Razack, 1993; Haraway, 1988). If knowledge is partial and situated, then replacing one viewpoint completely with another, can be unproductive if not negative (Razack, 1993; Mohanty, 1984). At the same time, groups of people cannot be reduced to a single identity or viewpoint and, on the other, valuing a new singular point of view as definitive only shifts the subjugation of knowledge and does not create a fuller picture of understanding (Mohanty, 1984; Hill-Collins, 1986). This concept of multiple understandings was especially important as I planned to interview immigrants, who are inevitably a diverse group. This grouping includes people who may or may not be racialized, from different ethnic backgrounds, with varied
migrant histories and with different socioeconomic positions in Canadian society. It is important that my research show a range of viewpoints and experiences found within the communities of immigrants growing food in Ontario. Consensus, whether it be on interpretations or outcomes, may not necessarily exist, however I do not see this as a negative outcome, but a necessary challenge of creating research that balances multiple understandings (Jaggar, 2014; Mohanty, 1984). The point of these counternarratives was not simply to replace one dominant narrative with another, but to add more voices to the conversation to form a more complete picture of farming and food growing in Ontario.

3.1.3 Reshaping Power Dynamics

Another concern that I wanted to be aware of was the simultaneous power and danger of research. This was particularly reinforced by authors that traced the violent history of research in indigenous communities (Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2009). Researchers are given an extraordinary amount of power in the traditional research process as they generally decide the issue on which to focus, the research design, and the outputs of their work (Kumar, 2011). For better or for worse, research can have long lasting effects because it records knowledge about a subject and makes it available to a larger audience, who can then disseminate and use it as they see fit. While sharing knowledge can be positive, creating research about a group that does not represent them truthfully, sympathetically and with context, is to create a weapon that can be misinterpreted, misconstrued and used against them. It can continue to position them as damaged goods, incapable of sovereignty (Tuck, 2009). Freire writes, “attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated” (65, 2005). A way to avoid this scenario is embedded in
the quote itself, as it asks for reflective participation from those who are themselves the focus of the project of liberation. This sentiment was echoed in many other works I read, as they called for collaborative research that is produced in partnership according to the needs and desires of the community and based on lasting, meaningful relationships (Smith, 1999; Tuck, 2009; Jaggar, 2014). To challenge traditional power dynamics and manage the risks of knowledge production, I needed to have genuine collaboration and partnership. This was a critical focus of reflection throughout the entire research process, from creating the plan to actually conducting it. Was I genuinely partnering with the immigrants growing food and farming or treating them only as participants? Additionally, once we were partnered, was the research contributing to liberation, empowerment, beneficial change of any kind or was I only advancing my academic career?

Often the structure of academic research can create firm roles for all parties involved and this can often mean that the researcher is positioned as all-knowing, all powerful and in total control (Moss, 2002; Jaggar, 2014). In creating this research, I did not want to make the people from these communities into objects who I wrote about to emphasize a point, but to give them an active role and amplify their voices through the work (hooks, 1989). I hoped to have “interactive interviews or conversations,” that would allow for mutual exchange of information and yield new ideas previously unimagined, instead of strict questions that limited further discussion (Al-Hindi and Kawataba, 2002, 106, emphasis in original). Including community members in the interpretation of data was another way to promote this active role. This choice continues to challenge the position of the researcher as the most skilled analyst by feeding back ideas to the community and allowing them to take part in and sanction the analysis (Al-Hindi and Kawataba, 2002). Beyond information gathering and analysis, I also wanted to challenge the traditional research power dynamic by moving towards something closer to partnership, without putting unnecessary strain or extra work on community members. I did not want to ‘parachute’ into
communities, take my information and leave, but to build relationships and provide benefits in some way (Jaggar, 2014). This question of providing benefits was a key consideration, as I did not want to create additional work for members of the community and add large burdens to their daily lives, but be useful to efforts and projects already underway in the community. For the project to be mutually beneficial, it is important then that community members had a say in the final product (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Sharing power and changing the researcher-researched dynamic was an important part of my methodology and although feedback can be uncomfortable, awkward or not what I expect as a researcher, these perspectives continue to be a necessary part of shifting the scales of that process.

3.1.4 Creating Reflexive Research

Finally, there has been a long history of feminist critique of the way in which claims of objectivity ignore the biases inherent to all researchers while also positioning the researcher as a god like figure who is capable of gleaning true knowledge from research subjects that they themselves do not realize (Haraway, 1988). There is a wealth of feminist writing that theorizes the multitude of ways to challenge this commitment to objectivity and rational knowledge through standpoint theory, reflexivity, positioning and production of situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988, Harding, 1998; Hill-Collins, 1986; Moss, 2002). The researcher is asked to think about how power and difference influence them and their viewpoints and to foreground their work with an acknowledgement and exposure of their identity and these influences. Reflexive techniques are popular among feminist researchers because focusing on the research process itself and the role of the researcher offers an opportunity to challenge the concept of the researcher as a neutral analyst and to locate the researcher within the complicated, tangled power structures that make up our society (Al-Hindi and Kawataba, 2002, Jaggar, 2014). In my own
research, I wanted to be reflexive throughout the process, thinking about the ways in which my position in relation to community members affected the conversations we had and the work I was trying to do. That being said, reflexivity is not simply about naming oneself or centring the research on personal struggles, but is meant to address the potential for exploitation, misinterpretation, and the ways in which power affects the research process itself (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2014, Al-Hindi and Kawataba, 2002). While many of the techniques focus on the researcher analysing themselves, Kohl and McCutcheon call for informal discussion, or “everyday talk” between peers about power dynamics in their research (2014). They suggest that this frank discussion is a kind of communal reflexivity that can help researchers to dig deeper and push past basic self-reflection or a simple statement of fixed positionality (2014). Alternatively called, “kitchen table reflexivity” this practice can challenge researchers to think more critically about the dynamic nature of their positionality and how it changes throughout the research process (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2014). Reflexivity, both personally and in groups would be another major facet of my research praxis.

In summary, reflexivity combined with my desire to challenge traditional power structures, produce collaborative work and provide benefits to the community were methodological principles that I wanted to guarantee were cornerstones of my research. As important conversations continue to take place around changing Ontario’s food and farming systems, my goal in my research was to speak with and record the knowledge of first generation immigrants farming or growing food in Ontario, whose voices may not be included in many of the larger conversations taking place. I hoped that by writing stories of immigrant farmers in Ontario, I might complete counternarratives that could be, “a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging the majoritarian stories of racial privilege” (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002, 32). To do
this, I first had to determine what the majoritarian stories were for local food and farming in Ontario.

### 3.2 Methods

In this section, I first discuss the methods used for the initial phase of the research project, the media discourse analysis that identified some of “the majoritarian stories” for local food and farming. Following the discussion of the media discourse analysis methods, I focus on the methods used for the in-depth interviews where I listened to the experiences of the immigrants growing so that I could write counterstories drawn from their words. I show how I applied the critical methodological principles discussed above to the design and execution of the fieldwork and analysis phase of the research project.

#### 3.2.1 Media Discourse Analysis

To better understand the discourses around local food in Ontario and the farm imaginaries at play, I chose to analyse textual news media. This is by no means the only way of determining the local food and farming narratives that are relevant to the Greater Toronto Area, but daily newspapers provide a wealth of information that is usually regionally focused. For this reason, the Toronto Star Newspaper was selected. This newspaper contains articles that specifically focus on the Greater Toronto Area within its larger provincial context. The Toronto Star also has the highest readership of any newspaper in the country, indicating widespread and important impact in the formation of public opinion. An online search was conducted of all articles in the ProQuest Toronto Star, Toronto Ont. Database (pubid - 44892) which includes articles dating back to 1985. The search looked for all articles containing the phrase “local food”, while
excluding the phrases ‘local food drive’ or ‘local food bank’. This yielded an initial data set of 615 articles, beginning in 1985 and ending in 2015. This data set was then used to determine the first usage of local food as a dedicated term to denote food produced or grown locally. This first took place in articles dating back to 1990.

From this point forward, all the articles in the search were logged in a spreadsheet and then further exclusions were made. Travel reports, event listings and brief policy announcements were excluded, as well as articles that were written about locations outside of Ontario or articles that only included local food as a descriptor or as part of a compound modifier (i.e. local food courts). These exclusions yielded a much more focused final data set of 224 articles, which was used for basic analysis. This basic analysis consisted of cataloguing articles by name, date, author, type, location, a brief summary (where relevant), whether a definition of local was offered, whether immigrants were mentioned and how (positively, negatively or neutrally), reasons provided for supporting (or not) local food, and key quotes. This catalogue of 224 articles was used to understand on a large scale the main reasons that are given for supporting local food.

From this data set, 30 articles were selected for close reading and in-depth analysis (Appendix A). These articles were selected based on: richness (I prioritized interviews and reports over lists or recipes); and variety (despite there being dedicated food columnists, I tried to feature multiple authors to ensure that this was a general survey that did not prioritize one journalist’s voice too heavily).

2 The exact search phrase was [(pubid(44892) "local food") NOT ("local food bank" OR "local food banks")]
As the pieces used for this closer textual analysis are all newspaper articles, they will have common features and share a generic structure. A focus on content, summary, objective reporting, and the classic structure of headline, lead paragraph and satellite paragraphs is to be expected (Fairclough 2003). Of course, a news article is not objective, although it attempts to be. As Fairclough writes, “The issue of selectivity necessarily arises: journalists are in the business of including some things which were said and excluding others (which often means excluding certain voices), selecting particular parts of what was said, and generally ordering what is often a cacophony of speech and writing into separate speech events” (2003, 85, emphasis my own). Understanding that news writing has a very specific structure, the focus of this analysis will not be on syntax or grammatical structure, but on the ideas and content presented within the pre-existing generic structure of news reporting and the voices that are excluded.

Methods of discourse analysis vary widely, but most refuse to record a specific step by step analytic method. I follow Potter and Wetherell’s understanding of discourse analysis. They eschew a list of instructions and instead advocate for careful reading and rereading in search of patterns of variability and consistency, as well as a second phase of analysis that focuses on coming up with theories about both the functions and effects of the texts analysed (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, 168). I also follow Fairclough’s idea that, “text analysis is an essential part of discourse analysis, but discourse analysis is not merely the linguistic analysis of texts” (2003, 3). To this end, textual analysis was employed to a certain degree, where it was useful for analysing particular phrasing, but the larger focus remained on unveiling the ways in which the stories and subjects presented in the articles promote specific understandings of history, identity and space in Ontario. I aim to reveal the ways the articles on local food may ignore and exclude certain voices, while also furthering existing nationalist discourses.
3.2.2 In-depth Interviews

As a second phase to the research, I wanted to speak with immigrants to hear their experiences so that I could write counterstories based on their own words. To do this, I conducted semi-structured interviews with immigrants growing food on farms in Ontario (n=12). To find participants I reached out to two farming organizations themselves, Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF) and McVean and gained permission to speak to members of their communities. I interviewed a total of 12 immigrants growing food or farming professionally in the GTA, with one farmer who had recently moved out of the GTA and into the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Immigrants were defined as anyone who was born outside of Canada, regardless of the age that they arrived in Canada. Almost all the immigrants I interviewed were directly connected to or currently farmed with Black Creek Community Farm or McVean Start up Farms, with a few interviewees farming on separate plots. Both these farm organizations include organic farming as part of their mandate, so as might be expected, all the farmers and growers I spoke to followed organic growing practices, whether officially labelled as such or not. I did want to focus on the particular experiences of racialized immigrants, but did not exclude any immigrants growing food who were interested in taking part. In the end, eleven out of the twelve people interviewed were racialized immigrants. 5 participants were born in the Caribbean, 3 were born in Africa, 2 were born in Asia, 1 in Latin America and 1 in Europe. 7 of the participants were men and 5 were women.
Of the twelve immigrants I interviewed, none would be considered recent immigrants\(^3\), with most arriving in Canada for the first time at least 15 years prior and three interviewees arriving when they were young children. Half of the participants grew food as their primary form of employment or as part of their jobs, while the other half grew food as a hobby or in their leisure time. None of the participants owned or lived on their land, however 6 participants leased their land directly or work for an organization that leases on their behalf. It is worth noting that since all the participants interviewed farm and live in urban or peri-urban zones and grow organically, this project does not offer perspectives from immigrants that have managed to settle and farm in rural areas or do not follow organic growing methods, who likely may present their own challenges and concerns.

Once I got approval from the organizations, I began to volunteer or otherwise offer my time on the farms as a form of sweat equity (Sbicca, 2015). Not only is volunteering a way of meeting members of the community, building relationships and growing to understand the places themselves, but it is a tangible way of enacting reciprocity. It is a basic way to help address some of the difficulties in community based farm work since weeding and other physical tasks are always needed throughout the growing season. This was more easily achieved at BCCF because of an already established volunteer program, whereas I was unable to volunteer regularly at McVean because of the structure of the farm. To contact participants, I used a combination of emails, posters (Appendix B) and in person interactions. Some participants were also put in contact with me via the snowball method.

\(^3\) The federal government defines recent immigrants as those who arrived in Canada in the previous five years.
I conducted semi structured interviews all throughout the growing season (spring to late fall of 2016) that were aimed at being conversational, because I wanted to allow for open, wide ranging discussion, rather than circumscribed responses. Although, I knew that I had a focus on farming, food, identity and race that I wanted to bring to each engagement, I also understood that there were elements of each person’s experience that I would not know to ask about and I would want them to feel comfortable sharing with me, without fear of straying off topic. I created a list of questions (Appendix C) related to the themes mentioned above, which I sent out to participants who wanted to see it in advance and kept visible during interviews, to keep my ideas transparent. Since I hoped that these interviews could be as conversational as possible, I explained at the beginning of every interview that I was happy to move away from the listed questions and simply focus on the things that each participant felt was important. I also tried to facilitate a more relaxed, informal dynamic of sharing rather than one of expert and researched, by offering to speak with members of the community over a complimentary shared meal, in place of the stipend. I also gave each person the choice to have the conversation without recording, if this was more comfortable. I kept a journal over time where I reflected on my research process and adapted my interviews over time to try and improve my interview skills but also to focus more closely on themes that were shared by participants in the earlier interviews. For example, after my first interviews, I reviewed points where questions seemed confusing or did not seem to resonate, made notes and used these to alter and shift the direction or focus of my questions, themes or even my way of introducing the conversation. This continued throughout the period of interviews, with each round changing slightly based on the last.

After the interviews were completed, I transcribed the audio and used N-Vivo 11 to analyse the text and identify key themes that were shared by several participants. Once this initial analysis was complete, I held a focus group where participants and other members of the farming
community could hear these early results and determine their credibility (Kumar, 2011). The focus group allowed me to get feedback from the community, discuss the interpretations, and also allowed the community to steer the research to some degree. The focus group was held over a shared meal, allowing a level of collaboration but also community celebration at the end of the growing season. First, I presented my early analysis of the comments and opinions of my conversations and interviews with participants and then over the meal, community members and participants weighed in on what I had presented. I had a series of prompts that I planned to use to stimulate discussion following my presentation of the comments drawn from the interviews (Appendix D), but preferred to allow the conversation to flow naturally. Participants reiterated what points were most important to them, what changes they would most like to see and ongoing frustrations that were pinpointed in earlier interviews. After this phase was complete, I planned to produce a piece of work, for example a short publication or a newsletter, on behalf of the community once the research was complete to give back to the community. I did not want to simply take information and produce a thesis that would not be read by anyone who I had spoken with. The discussions at the focus group were the forum where the participants could make the decision on what kind of work the community hoped to see. This piece of work was to be done in addition to the creation to my thesis and distributed electronically to those same communities, as a tangible product that they could keep at the completion of the project. The focus group decided that a report outlining their complaints and desires for change in the food system was the most important and useful output for them.

Finally, using my initial analysis, the focus group discussions, one-on-one feedback and discussions with my research group, I used the data to write a personal counterstory for each participant that highlighted each persons’ key concerns, beliefs and experiences. Instead of sharing the personal counterstories that could potentially be linked back to individuals, I then...
used these individual stories to write composite thematic sections using quotes from all the participants each assigned a pseudonym. These composite thematic sections feature less personal information and therefore are not identifiable, yet still allow for the different viewpoints of the participants to be shared. Throughout this entire process, I kept a journal that wrote in after conversations on the farms and at points when I felt challenged, troubled or moved in a new direction. By keeping this journal and rereading it throughout the project, I tried to continuously reflect on the different methods I was using and whether I felt that they continued to align with the methodological principles I had laid out for myself. I also practiced kitchen table reflexivity with other researchers as part of the Food, Equity, and Activism Study Team (FEAST), a collective of researchers including my supervisor Professor Sarah Wakefield who met on a weekly basis.

3.2.3 Limitations & Credibility

This study uses 12 interviews, a small sample size that is not representative of immigrants in Ontario generally, however that is not my intention. These stories are examples of the experiences and different viewpoints that immigrants can and do experience, not meant to be generalized across the province. In terms of the demographics, a few of the organizations I originally contacted did not wish to take part in the research, which led to a smaller scope focusing only McVean and Black Creek Community Farm (BCCF). This was adequate for the scale of a Master’s research project, but it did change the demographic makeup of the immigrants I interviewed. McVean and BCCF plots are certified organic and farmers using the land must grow using organic methods. As a result, all the farmers and growers I spoke with used and advocated for organic growing. Aside from this, one of the original organizations I contacted worked specifically with ESL students and had a majority East-Asian population, a group which was not as well represented at McVean or BCCF. Although I offered the option to
do interviews in English, French or Spanish, there are many immigrants in Ontario who speak a wide range of languages that I would not have been able to communicate with. In fact, the majority of the immigrants I spoke with were actually fluent or comfortable speaking English. This has reinforced for me the need for further research with immigrants who are learning English as a second language or do not speak English at all to better understand their experience growing and navigating majority English speaking environments.

An unforeseen challenge was low attendance at the planned focus group for feedback (n=5). The focus group took place close to the winter holidays and the day after a major snowstorm that left roads hard to traverse. This low turnout made it difficult to ensure the credibility of my analyses in that space, since many of the people who wanted to attend the focus group and add to the conversation could not. It also meant that I was not able to host a discussion of diverse viewpoints or arrive at any collaborative decisions. Instead I chose to follow up separately by email or over the phone with those who could not attend, which did allow me to gather feedback, but could not yield the same collective outcome.

3.3 Challenges and Reflection

Having outlined my methodology and the related methods, I want to dedicate some space to explaining how these methods worked in practice and the tensions I dealt with during the research process. The following section focuses on two challenges I encountered and how I returned to my methodological practices to try and work through them. First, I discuss the difficulty in gaining trust in the early stages of my research and the continued efforts I made to embed myself in the communities. Secondly, I discuss the difficulty of the insider outsider struggle and how I worked through my position through reflexive journaling and discussions.
This section is an effort to showcase some of the difficulties and obstacles I encountered as I tried to follow this participatory, critical research plan. By making these issues transparent, I want to show the messy negotiations that are a part of research and how methods and plans may or may not work in practice.

3.3.1 Gaining Trust

Doing research at a master’s level, where funding is provided for only the first year, puts pressure on students to finish within that year. Not only is this extremely difficult alongside coursework, teacher assistant appointments and other employment, but it imposes a short timeline in which all work must be done. This timeline means that ethics approval must come early, in my case before I could integrate into these communities. All the work I read emphasized the importance of picking research methods that fit the community, but this did not seem to align with the need to complete the ethics process early in the academic year, while I was still in the middle of academic coursework and TA work and unable to devote much time to visiting the farms. Although I did a lot of online research on these communities and established contact with the organizations and some of the staff, I did not directly consult with the community in the methods planning phase of the project. I tried to compensate for this by leaving certain areas purposefully open ended in the ethics application. For example, I did not specify one way of recruiting participants, but outlined a variety of options for ethics, so that later any selection of these methods could be used depending on each community’s situation.

The reduced timeline of the masters also does not support prolonged community work. To complete within a year, data gathering must be finished early enough to allow for analysis, writing and final defence. I did not want my interviews and time spent on the farm to be a quick data gathering period, but meaningful engagement and integration with the communities. I
wanted to show participants that I was invested in understanding and getting to know them beyond what a 1-hour interview would allow. This was especially important because one day on approaching a farmer at one of the farm spaces to explain my project and interest in speaking with her, I received this response. “I don’t have time for this. I’m sorry, all you guys want to do is talk, talk, talk and nothing ever changes. I don’t have time to talk anymore.” I listened to her and did not ask any further questions, but this reaction was something I heard a few times, as farmers in urban areas were used to researchers or policy advisors visiting to the farm spaces, but they felt nothing ever came of these interactions. I wanted to show that I was committed to producing work that was mutually beneficial and that I did not plan to simply parachute in and leave. In different farm spaces, this looked different.

I became a volunteer at Black Creek Community Farm, worked on the shared community plot and eventually signed up for their produce share program. This space was the most conducive to integration, because I could access it via transit and I was able to work on the community plot even if there was no one around to offer guidance on other ongoing projects. In the case of McVean and some of the other miscellaneous farm spaces where I visited, there were only individual farmer plots, they were farther away, and I did not have a formal volunteer role so I could not integrate in the exact same way. In those cases, I tried to attend farmers talks, bought produce and returned to the farms frequently as a way of showing my face and getting to meet people. These actions, coming to the farm, buying produce, and generally being present in the farm space, usually increased the likelihood that farmers were open to talk. In fact, the same farmer who turned me away in the earlier anecdote eventually reached out to me at a later date to share her story.
As mentioned previously, because of the structures of the two main farms McVean and BCCF, I did also find that I was unequally embedded in the two farm spaces. As a frequent volunteer at BCCF, I was much closer to members of the community and often spent time discussing personal anecdotes and sharing food, outside of any official interviews. With McVean and other miscellaneous farm spaces, because I did not have the opportunity to visit as often or drop in, my time spent simply interacting and helping was limited and meant that I did not grow as close in my relationships with these farmers and growers. Interviews I had later in the growing season at BCCF were more candid and open and required less explanation as we had often spent time talking about my research before. The difference between some of my early interviews and later interviews confirms the importance of relationship building before sharing stories. Different researchers call it different things, sweat equity or embedded research are two examples, but the key to increasing engagement and gaining trust was my physical presence in those spaces actively building relationships and this takes time.

Going to the various farms was always a significant time commitment as I do not drive, so travel to farms was always at least two hours’ round trip. This time was useful for taking notes and reflecting after the conversational interviews, but it also meant that this period of interviews was a slow process. Fortunately, I received government funding for my second year, which allowed me to continue to volunteer and conduct interviews well into the fall of my second year. Had I not received this funding I would have had to reduce my hours of writing and further delay graduation or reduce my number of interviews and volunteering in the communities. The timeline of a masters and the constraints of funding is a significant barrier to doing embedded community research, but the benefits are clear. Upon reaching out to members of the community to schedule the focus group, I received a surprising response. The reply began, “It is great to hear back from you. We don't usually hear back from researchers.” This response is a clear indication
that research in this community continues to miss the mark of involving the community in all aspects of the work, including the outputs.

3.3.2 Insider- Outsider Struggle

Another major struggle for me throughout the project was the question of positionality and the motivation of my research. I am a Canadian citizen who immigrated from Jamaica at the age of 11. I am black, but because I am light skinned I am frequently assumed to be mixed race. I am privileged to have completed higher education, encouraged by two parents who have also done so. This was important for me to clarify because although I am an immigrant, who has focused my research on immigrants, I do not experience the same struggles as some of the people to whom I spoke. I did not come to Canada as a refugee, I have had middle class upbringing, I have worked low paying or exploitative jobs, but I have never been unemployed on long-term basis. A major struggle for me as I planned this research was how to navigate what has been termed the insider-outsider struggle (Sandoval and Davis, 2000; Hill-Collins, 1986).

Sandoval’s description of the dilemma is as follows, “these theorists see what they do as they do it from the dominant viewpoint as well as from their own, shuttling between realities, their identities reformatting out of another, third site (2000, 84). This feeling of being split between two ways of looking, one informal and the other academic, was present throughout the interview process.

The struggle of being an outsider was particularly pronounced in some cases because I was not speaking with a community with a singular ethnic background, but immigrants generally, which meant that even though I was a minority myself, I was inevitably more of an outsider to some of my planned participants than others (Egharevba, 2001). Put differently, cultural sensitivity is part of creating counternarratives and it refers to the ability of members of
specific communities, “to accurately read and interpret the meaning of informants” (Hunn et al, 2006; 245). Since I noticed there were some members of the community, those of Caribbean ethnic background, that I was able to better achieve this with, I wondered if I was doing an injustice to other members of the community from different cultural or ethnic backgrounds and so it was something that I focused on when journaling and meeting with my research team FEAST.

One example of this struggle revolved around the question of race and how it affected the different members of the communities. I found it easiest to talk about race with black members of the community, while for others who were people of colour or passed as white, I often hesitated around the wording or found it difficult to probe the issue, once they declared it irrelevant. In some cases, this was because black members of the community were more likely to bring up race themselves or talk quite freely about race once the topic was broached, whereas others, whether people of colour or not, appeared less concerned with the topic or felt it had not affected them personally. Figuring out how to continue the conversation without dismissing other views or prioritizing my opinions or concepts required continuous navigation.

A major benefit throughout this process were in-depth conversations on a weekly basis with members of FEAST including my supervisor Professor Sarah Wakefield. These meetings held in person or over skype were informal discussions that covered a range of topics including power, race and the struggles of navigating ethics, obligations and boundaries in our various forms of critical research, a form of kitchen table reflexivity (Kohl and McCutcheon, 2015). These conversations were particularly useful for me because our group was made up of scholars of different ages, stages, races and identities, focusing on different areas of study, which meant that conversations would inevitably push me to consider different viewpoints and concepts.
While my research focuses on immigrants, largely racialized, in Ontario, other discussions of research on indigeneity, settlers, and latinx identities has pushed me to consider how my focus and goals for my project interacted with other communities and larger questions of justice. The discussions of FEAST helped me to reshape my way of approaching and prompting discussion of race in later interviews.

The counternarratives that came out of my interviews are some perspectives of immigrants who are farming or growing food in the Greater Toronto Area, they do not represent the feelings of all immigrants, nor are they meant to be a final statement on how local food systems can or should work. Even as they represent voices that are not often listened to in the question of local food, there are other voices also excluded from this conversation, particularly those of the indigenous communities whose land we now occupy. The narratives shared in the following chapter do succeed in showing the variety of connections immigrants have to growing, nature and land and the ways in which growing continues to be a way to. They also show the specific difficulties immigrants can and do face as they try to find land, grow food and provide for their families and communities.

4 Chapter 4: Discourse Analysis

Introduction

This chapter addresses the first objective of the research project, by determining what narratives are promoted about local food and farming and how immigrants are included and/or excluded in these narratives. It is important to draw out the dominant narratives on food and farming, because then it is possible to critically analyze what systems of privilege they uphold and who is excluded from these stories. As mentioned in chapter 3, I conducted a search for “local food” on the ProQuest database of Toronto Star articles dating back to 1985. After
narrowing down the search results, the larger data set of 224 articles was catalogued and sorted, followed by an in-depth discourse analysis of 30 articles. I explain the findings of the in-depth discourse analysis of the 30 articles, with some context drawn from the basic analysis of the larger data set of 224 articles and I relate them to literature on farming and national identity in Canada.

The articles span a wide range: some focused directly on local food and farmers, while others discussed local food as it related to a larger topic, such as the environment or land protection. Although the articles vary in focus and subject matter, the majority trace a distinct narrative of farming and rural space in Ontario. Particularly important themes were: the historic settlement of rural space through farming, local food as a return to earlier traditions, farmers as protectors of the land, Canada as a multicultural land of immigrants, and farming as a rite of passage. These themes are divided into two large sections related to certain spaces: the space of rural Ontario and the space of the farm. In the interest of space, all the information yielded will not be discussed in depth. Instead, the results will focus on the broad patterns revealed, explaining them with key examples from the articles analysed. By linking these narratives to the spaces where local food is said to grow, I unveil the way seemingly innocent and positive conceptions and narratives of local food erase certain bodies and histories from rural space and farms in Ontario.

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Locating Local Food: The Space of Rural Ontario

Food must be grown and produced somewhere. While some articles did introduce the idea of growing food in the city, the majority of the articles portrayed local food as something that happens outside of the city, on the farm and in rural regions surrounding the urban core.
Mentions of urban farming largely introduce the concept as a novelty or innovation, such as the rising trend of urban gardening. One author in an article describing Community Shared Agriculture writes, “Like the many other CSAs around the province, Kawartha CSA brings two disparate communities together: farmers and city dwellers.” In the author’s view farmers and city dwellers are seen as separated, once again emphasizing the location of farms in rural space and the connection of urban and rural spaces through produce delivery. There is little acknowledgement of urban farming as being legitimate, instead it is shown as novel while real farms exist in rural space. Another article titled, “Country wedding in urban setting” focused on the marriage of a couple based in Toronto whose wedding is described as, “fresh, local food, country living, family…” (Baute, 2010). This title and description is important to note because although the setting is urban, farm fresh food is separated from the urban and tied to the concept of country. The implication is that local food comes from farms and farms exist in rural space. The description emphasizes what makes the wedding ‘country’ and fresh, local food is connected to country living and farming. This idea is reinforced later in the article when the author mentions that the couple has bought a farm in Maple Valley and plans to leave the city and that this, “…urban wedding is the beginning of their foray into the country” (Baute, 2010). The couple has begun their country transition and temporarily transformed this urban setting with the introduction of these country elements. The narrative throughout the various articles continues to support this view that local food comes from specific places and most of those places are located in rural space.
Very few articles actually tackled the explicit task of defining local food\(^4\); instead, most articles made a clear effort to name locations where local farms and food producers were located. Local food was often tied to place and articles commonly named multiple locations in quick succession, reinforcing the idea that local farms and food producers are bounteous in rural areas. The article on the country wedding devoted a whole paragraph to the description of a wedding’s selection of local food and each food item was linked to its place of origin. The author describes that, “the rainbow carrots, beets, salad greens, fennel, eggs and duck came from a co-op of 20 farms called the Kawartha Ecological Growers, as did the 128 chickens, raised just for today. The fruit is from Niagara; the water from the Niagara escarpment…” (Baute, 2010). Another article, focusing on farms and restaurants in Wellington County, takes care to not only mention place names and addresses, but the stories of the people associated with them.

“The Desert Rose (130 Metcalfe St.) is an Elora tradition. Chef/ owner Resa Lent founded her vegetarian business in 1979 and has built a huge, loyal following. Way back then, she taught the village about falafel, burritos and moussaka. But it’s her black bean chili that’s one of my favourite all-time suppers. Wandering down the hill, you will see Santé (102 Metcalfe St.), a “natural food emporium.” It sources as much as possible from local producers and manufacturers. There are Harmony Dairy and Organic Meadows dairy products and a huge selection of Saugeen Specialty Grains, from lightly sifted Red Fife to kamut and spelt flours. It carries a great NuSun sunflower oil from Mitchell, the only really local oil around. There are Maria’s homemade noodles from Kitchener and Feng’s dumplings from Guelph in the freezer” (Stewart, 2008).

The article continues like this, highlighting proximity, naming places, streets, and people, but also storytelling: referencing bartering between producers, a fire that took place recently or the porch where town members wait together for their turn inside a popular spot. Naming places and people and foregrounding community events and traditions works to create a picture of the

\(^4\) Several articles reviewed the existing debates around defining local food, but nearly all refrained from offering their own final definition.
county as a cohesive community that supports each other and in doing so supports local food. Local food production is tied to this picture of rural regions as healthy, close knit communities.

Many articles also focused on describing the landscape of rural regions as ideal for tourism because of their natural beauty and unspoiled nature. The tendency was to describe these rural regions as being pristine, idyllic landscapes fit for consumption by city dwellers and visitors in need of a change of scene. An article focusing on food and foraging in Muskoka highlights its status as a, “mecca for tourism for more than a century because of its fresh lakes, virgin forest and gorgeous rock” (Steel 2002). The beauty of the natural space is emphasized and even active farmland is imagined as its own sort of paradise. One article focusing on agri-tourism in the Beamsville Bench area spends quite some time on local cuisine and food production, but rounds out the article by quoting two travellers:

“…beyond culinary experiences, Vanti says the landscape of the area makes the trip worthwhile. From the top of the bench, there's a panoramic view of Lake Ontario, complete with Toronto's skyline. "The whole bench wraps around the lake and you get a spectacular view,” he says. The beauty hasn't been lost on Yu, either. "It's just a beautiful place - it's full of peach orchards and wineries and what could be more pleasurable than that?" she asks." (Lockhart, 2013).

So-called untouched landscapes of the north are not the only ones worthy of tourism. Articles highlighting local food put forth the idea that farms, orchards and planted fields are beautiful too, worth visiting and equally capable of offering city dwellers escape. Although many industrial farm and livestock operations exist in Ontario in close proximity to Toronto, they are not featured in the local food discourse, perhaps because they may raise issues of environmental or ethical concerns or because they do not offer attractive landscapes or peaceful scenery. Likewise, place and landscapes were important in the discourse on local food in Ontario, but
were never problematized. Questions of land ownership are not discussed, particularly noticeable is the lack of mention of First Nations.

In the larger data set of 244 articles, there is almost no mention of First Nations occupation of the land. In fact, less than five articles mention First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal or native people and none of these make any reference to their historical ownership of the land. In articles that do mention indigenous peoples, it always in an offhand manner and never the focus of the article itself. In one such example the author quotes a source stating that, “…Jacques Cartier found natives growing corn - a Mexican grain - on the island of Montreal when he sailed the St. Lawrence 470 years ago, evidence that trade has long been a part of Canadian food consumption.” (Laidlaw, 2005). The point of this comment is to validate the argument that the Canadian diet has long included both local and globally traded food. There is no further mention of “natives”, their existence or their diets in the rest of the article. What the article succeeds in doing is drawing connections between the current Canadian citizen and the natives growing corn, as if they are one and the same. Indigenous histories seem to conveniently end in this period, as Canadian history moves forward and no acknowledgement of the violence that occurred and continues to occur exists. In a wide selection of articles that focus on local food, especially ones that emphasize place, tradition and reference historic regional foods, there is a continuous, notable absence of Indigenous bodies and their foodways. By excluding Indigenous peoples from the discourse, they are essentially disappeared from rural space and a new history of settlement is offered.

4.1.2 Settling Rural Space

In the majority of the local food discourse, history begins with farm settlement. With no elaboration in most articles of what came before, it is assumed that there was simply *terra*
nullius. There is no mention of the protracted struggles for land, of any previous ownership or occupation. Settlers came and occupied empty land, working hard on their family farms to produce food and survive. In the local food discourse, farmers are the first Canadians in the national story. The farmers are presented as the first and only inhabitants of this land who have worked hard to cultivate food and make productive land. In one article, a farmer’s market organizer is interviewed about the hard work she does in ensuring the market runs smoothly. She responds, “It's more the farmers that I feel should be highlighted, really …[t]hey're the ones that are doing the work of growing responsibly, the real land stewards” (Baute, 2009; emphasis my own). In the absence of Indigenous bodies, farmers become the rightful owners of this unclaimed rural space, the only ones who really belong. This theme of stewardship and responsibility recurred, putting farmers in a role beyond growing food. In one article, a farmer is quoted as saying "We are the stewards of the land," he said. "We have to save it." (Welsh 2009). The “it” is never clarified, although environmental degradation is implied, but what is clear is that farmers are positioned as the saviours. This theme was echoed in several articles, particularly those advocating for land protection as a key benefit associated with local food. The articles continually assert that by supporting farmers, Ontario’s farmland and this pristine rural space could be preserved. The land is not wild, instead there is order and control seen in the rows of corn or fruit trees, the greenhouses and barns. All this is attributed to the hard work of generations of farmers. With Indigenous bodies erased from rural space, the local food discourse supports a narrative of settler farmers as the first Canadians who come to own unoccupied land and now are required to protect it in the face of urban encroachment, environmental degradation and continued development.

The erasure of Indigenous stories and bodies in Canadian history continues in the description of rural non-farm landscape of Ontario as well. Articles frequently described the
regions of rural Ontario through picturesque scenes that emphasized their exceptional natural beauty, while switching to narratives of wilderness and foraging, more so than farming. One such article focusing on Muskoka set out to answer the question, “… is there palatable food north of the 45th parallel?” (Steel, 2002) It turns out there is, thanks to enterprising chefs and restaurants that have moved into the area. This article ignores current Indigenous communities both those near the Muskoka region and all those found north of the 45th parallel, who have distinct cuisines and foodways. Instead the article portrays Muskoka as the vacation destination of Canadians. Although it lacks the wealth of ingredients found in other regions, Muskoka is seen as full of adventurous cooks who are willing to forage, hunt and be creative with what is available. The author mentions that these cooks show a “…commitment to Canadiana” and “All make good use of Ontario-grown ingredients, and offish, game and fowl that are indigenous to the area” (Steel 2002). Canadiana is never strictly defined, but in the creation of this Canadian cuisine, chefs in the area become the hunter-gatherers and foragers capable of finding food in the wilderness and animals seem to be the only Indigenous presence worth acknowledging.

The erasure of Indigenous foodways is particularly noticeable in articles that ask the reader to think of local food movements as a path to craft a more defined Canadian terroir. These articles highlight earlier culinary traditions and suggest a return to these recipes and practises. One article highlighting gooseberries, a fruit that is native to Canada, and the ways they can be used in the kitchen references how, “in North America, settlers transformed the tart berries into wine, vinegar, preserves and pies” (David 2015). Settlers become the innovators, who took what the local landscape provided them and crafted dishes and beverages that we, as Canadians, need to be reminded of. There is an implication that settlers are the original ancestors and we should remember them as we craft a local culinary tradition today. Many articles advocating for increased local food support see it as a return to earlier times. There is a continued call for a
temporal shift that would bring us back to our better days. One author writes, “making local produce available to consumers is actually a matter of recovering lost practices” (Gordon, 2008). The suggestion is that somehow, we have lost our way and to return to local food and cooking is to find the right path once more. Of course, this return is to a recent past - one where farmers held more power - not a return to our pre-colonial past.

The local food discourse thus crafts a narrative around rural space and the history of farming food and settlement in Canada that ignores Indigenous presence and replaces it with a history of settlers, who farm and tame the land. As local food is heralded as a return to earlier culinary traditions, Indigenous bodies and foodways are erased from the landscape of Ontario. This landscape is instead portrayed as a vacation space that is prime for hunting and foraging, or further south as an idyllic paradise of farms and orchards with endless comestible bounty. The chefs who occupy the northern spaces are seen as the original innovators who are capable of finding food in the wild, while the farmers further south are given the responsibility of protecting the land from other interests. These farmers are shown as the stewards charged with caring for the land, resisting development from encroaching cities, and preserving green space. Having crafted this distinct narrative of rural space, the history of rural settlement and farmland in Canada, what did these articles have to say about the space of the farm and farm labour?

### 4.1.3 The Space of the Farm

In the local food discourse, rural landscapes are not the only spaces that are praised. The space of the farm itself is also repeatedly described as a beautiful natural area. The farms themselves are so integral to the local food community that certain farms in Ontario become household names (Liu 2014). Despite their role in providing food, farms are also portrayed as a vacation destination marketable to city dwellers wanting to leave urban spaces. Articles
emphasize not only the wealth of local food offerings created on and around the farms themselves, but the serenity that can be found in the space itself. In one article, the travels of a Toronto food loving couple are detailed as they visit different parts of rural Ontario to discover the origins of their food. The couple visits a variety of farms and even engages in agricultural activity, they, “…picked berries in Prince Edward County and stayed on a cattle farm in Southern Ontario” (Lockhart, 2013). Although they partake in what could be considered work, for them the farm is a space of leisure, an escape from city life and a chance to reconnect with nature. Just as rural space is described as a beautiful, idyllic space, so too the farm becomes a tourist space for city dwellers, represented as utterly different from urban space, and farm labour becomes an enjoyable pastime. The portrayal of farm space is different for those who live and work on farms.

Most articles paint the picture of family farms; farms run by several generations of farming families and therefore farms are portrayed throughout various articles as both workplace and familial home. When describing farmers and their relationship to the farm, the articles often feature descriptive scenes emphasizing this delicate balance of place of work and domestic space. In an article focused on apple farming, the author mentions a farming father of four who, “put his kids in apple bins instead of playpens,” (Bain, 2015). This imagery is clear in suggesting the overlapping use of space, the apple bin serves both as a domestic play space for children and a useful farming tool. This example also hints at the existence of potential future generations of farmers, who are introduced to the work side of farming by being raised in this space. This generational aspect is emphasized often, with most articles mentioning the number of generations the farmer has been doing this work. One such example features a wife and husband team running an organic farm and emphasizes that the wife Haley, “grew up grading chicken eggs before school as the child of third-generation farmers” (Porter 2015). Again, this example
shows an overlap of domestic life (pre-school routines) and the business side of farm space (grading eggs for sale), all while highlighting the way children are raised into the farming tradition. In most of these articles families are portrayed as not only managing the farms, but as the hands responsible for cultivating and producing the local food feeding Ontario.

In contrast to this portrayal of family grown and harvested crops, Ontario uses seasonal agricultural workers, the most of any province in Canada, and most farms benefit from this labour (Preibisch & Binford, 2007). The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program (SAWP) is mentioned in a few articles that focus on Ontario’s local food and a few of these articles mention some of the critiques levelled at the program, but rarely are the workers themselves given a chance to speak. One article that mentions local food, focuses on SAWP, and includes the workers themselves is “United Colours of Berrydom” (Porter, 2007). This article focuses on the fact that most farm labour is done by seasonal workers from SAWP or new immigrants willing to fill temporary manual labour positions, in this case Sikh workers from Brampton. It specifically notes that these immigrants and SAWP employees fill “the void of native-born workers” who are unwilling to do the work or unreliable when they show up (Porter, 2007). The article opens with a description of the farm:

“At a distance, you can tell the migrants from the immigrants on Bert Andrews' farms by their headwear. Fuchsia turbans and mustard-coloured scarves mean Sikhs from Brampton. Dark baseball caps mean Mexicans. Today, the turbans are picking red raspberries on one side of a thick row of maple trees. On the other side, the baseball caps are deep in the black raspberry bushes – 30-odd flats deep, by the look of the mounting crates sitting in the shade of a nearby tree.” (Porter, 2007)

This description is interesting because it immediately uses objectivation to describe the immigrant and migrant workers. According to van Leeuwen, “Objectivation occurs when social actors are represented by means of reference to a place or thing closely associated either with their person or with the action in which they are represented as being engaged” (2008, 46). This
practice succeeds in impersonalizing the subjects and distancing them from the category of
human (van Leeuwen, 2008). In the case of this article, turbans and baseball caps – objects– are
used to represent the workers. This objectivation is continued throughout the article, when in
another passage the author writes, “That means the Ontario raspberry you are about to pop into
your mouth has a distinct international flavour – chances are its plant was pruned and watered by
Mexican hands…” (Porter, 2007). This quote represents the Mexican labourer by a part of their
body, their hands. However, Interestingly it also seems to suggest that the Ontario raspberry is in
fact changed by having come in contact with these hands. It gains an “international flavour,” it
has been altered (or contaminated) and is no longer the Ontario raspberry you may be familiar
with.

Although objectivation continues throughout the article, the author does later interview
these workers and include direct quotes from their conversations, allowing them to occupy a
subject position. However, these workers are quoted half as often as other farmers, experts and
researchers in the article. In fact, in a strict comparison of the length of quotes attributed to the
two farmers and two workers interviewed, there are only 32 words that are spoken by the
farmworkers, compared to 158 words spoken by the 2 farmers. The farmworkers and their living
situations are continually described by the author, while farmers are given more space in the
article to directly articulate their opinions and statements on the labour situation. Other articles
that mention immigrant labour or SAWP seasonal workers follow this trend. Rarely are the
workers interviewed and in even fewer cases are they actually quoted, usually they feature direct
interviews with farmers that occasionally mention the existence of foreign workers. In reality,
even the family farms featured in the Toronto Star articles likely also rely on SAWP workers,
because many farms in Ontario rely on this stream of low cost and reliable labour to remain
profitable (Basok, 2002). However, the overwhelming picture remains one of family farms whose family members pitch in as necessary to get the job done.

The space of the farm is described in a variety of ways throughout the articles, but the main trends were clear. Farms were either beautiful spaces where one could connect with nature and by completing farm labour (of a short-term, leisure-oriented character) really understand where food came from; or, the farm was a mixed space, both private domestic space and a space of work. One’s perception of the space was dependent on one’s identity. For farmers, it is both seen as the home for their families and a workplace, for visitors it is often portrayed as an escape from the city. For SAWP workers, there are hints that it must be a place of hard work, but their experience is not described in depth and often we don’t hear from them directly. In fact, many articles do little to acknowledge this powerful workforce and shift focus to the farmers and their families. Considering the erasure of SAWP labour from the space of the farm, what does the local food discourse have to say about the farmers themselves? Since the farmer is given primacy in these articles and has a specific role in the historic narrative of settling rural space, how else is the subject of the farmer represented today? Who is the farmer in Ontario’s local food discourse?
4.1.4 The Farmer

Aside from focusing on rural regions and the space of the farm, the local food discourse captured in these Toronto Star articles also specifically highlighted the farmers producing local foods. In the 224 articles catalogued for the basic analysis, the most popular reason for choosing local food was to support and/or connect with farmers and their farms (Figure 1). A major theme throughout all the articles was the naming of farmers, as a way of advocating for increased support for their products. Many of the articles feature the farmers themselves and their life stories, focusing the reader on the idea that farming is personal. While farming is seen as difficult at times, in terms of profitability, farmers are portrayed as following and preserving the practices of their families.

Figure 1: Reasons for Supporting Local Food
As mentioned earlier, most articles emphasized the generational aspect of farming and most farmers were described as carrying on family traditions by passing on wisdom to their children. In many of these articles emphasizing generational traditions, there was no reference to race or ethnicity. An example is an article focused on a farmer growing crops and raising livestock in an ecologically sound way that writes, “As a fourth-generation farmer, John Hambly is determined to leave his children with soil that is a little cleaner, richer, greener” (Welsh, 2009). This article focuses on his growing practices and commitment to protecting the land for his children and never references race, culture or immigration. Hambly, pictured alongside the article, is a white man, but in the article, he is simply a Canadian farmer. Articles that focused on issues of land preservation or politics of farming often featured these Canadian farmers with no reference to their identity. Since these farmers remain unmarked in terms of ethnicity or race, these kinds of articles suggest that these multigenerational farming families are the original farming families. They reinforce the idea that white farmers are the original mold or the prototype for the identity of farmer.

In a few articles, an exception to this identity of the unmarked white Canadian farmer is also featured, it can best be described as the white ethnic historic immigrant farmer. This small but interesting exception occurs in a few articles that feature white farmers but focus on their continuing ethnic and cultural identity as well. These articles feature white farmers who are Canadians, but they reference a distinct cultural background, whether it be Mennonite, Jewish or
otherwise. The articles either mention or make a determined effort to emphasize the cultural diversity of these white Canadian farmers. In one article focused on farmers using advanced hydroponic technology to grow greenhouse peppers in Ontario, the author notes, “VanderKnaap was born and raised in the Netherlands. Hendriksen was born here but his background is Dutch. Both have been in the business for years” (Taylor, 2009). This follows an assertion that the company was started by other previous immigrants from the Netherlands, as the hydroponics industry is further advanced there. The Dutch connection is related to the growing style, hydroponic growing, and it could be argued this mention of ethnicity is pertinent information.

In another exception, an article focuses on a Mennonite turkey farmer, mentioning multiple times the different style of farming associated with Mennonite lifestyles. The author writes, “The turkey pen is down the road. Martin, an old order Mennonite with 11 children and 10 grandkids, hops out of Schmucker's van and runs toward the century-old barn, pushing
through a weathered wooden door…But Martin makes sure the birds - grown only for Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter - are raised on the same ethos and specifications: no drugs, no hormones. They live in open-air pens and they're fed only locally grown, vegetarian grain, with no bone meal or animal by-products” (Henry, 2014). The author focuses on Martin’s Mennonite identity to show the difference between modern day farming and the ongoing by-hand process of the Mennonite farm, that is rooted in historic cultural practices. While these articles that mention white ethnic identity were not the majority, they showed an acknowledgement of ethnicity in rural Ontario. However, in many of the cases where ethnicity is mentioned for white farmers, it is directly related to their growing methods and farming practices or to a historic ethnic identity, such as the Mennonites. This is a notable difference in comparison to another identity in the narrative of farmers in Ontario: the new immigrant farmer.

4.1.5 The New Immigrant Farmer

In the articles on local food in Ontario, the new immigrant farmer, usually racialized, often has a different narrative from the one’s described above. In many of the cases these immigrants come to Canada, abandon a career in another field and turn to the land as their new source of income. These articles often feature a backstory of the hardworking immigrant who turns to farming and innovates and grows new exotic produce, usually in urban or peri-urban locations. One author writes, “My favourite "farmer" is a sophisticated Korean named Yun Joon (Ben) Park. He arrived in Canada in 2000 and soon found himself managing a high-tech mushroom company specializing in exotic Asian varieties such as slim enoki and king oyster, with its meaty white stem and velvety tan cap” (David, 2013). This quote is interesting because Park is identified as being solely Korean. He is not a Korean immigrant, a Korean – Canadian, but simply a Korean. This form of identification works to distance Park from Canadian identity; he remains as exotic as the mushrooms he grows. His arrival in 2000 is included early in the
piece, as was the case in most articles featuring these immigrant farmers, emphasizing their relatively recent entrance and the exciting products they bring with them.

Another key example of this narrative is in an article on new farmers titled “Diverse harvest for budding farmers”,

“There are common crops at McVean – tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins and strawberries – but also callaloo, okra, chiles, bitter gourds and "dragon hot" Indian peppers. Some of these items are rare in Ontario fields, but pair the ethnic diversity of the GTA with the local food movement – and add new Canadians with agricultural ambitions – and they begin to poke out of the soil. This Thanksgiving weekend the first harvest at McVean drew to a close as the budding farmers picked the last of their crops and began to prepare the land for winter... Baloch grew up on a farm in Pakistan, where his family grew lemons, oranges, bananas, sugar cane and vegetables. Now Baloch lives in Brampton, works a desk job in Mississauga, and has only dreamed about having his own farm” (Baute, 2008).

Here the emphasis is on the novelty of the farmers, the interesting foods that they grow and the urban and peri-urban location of the farm. The farmers are described as new and budding, with aspirations of farming; their crops as rare and just poking out of the soil. This focus on the innovative and exciting aspect of new crops is typical of many of the articles on new immigrant farmers. Baloch farms at a plot in Brampton, near where he lives. As mentioned above, this focus on peri-urban locations is common in articles on new immigrant farmers. Articles on white or unmarked farmers in Ontario varied in location, some in rural landscapes and some innovating in urban contexts, however articles that focused on new immigrant farmers generally mentioned that these operations were urban or near-urban farming projects, near Toronto or other major cities, but did not question or problematize this trend. The unmarked Canadian farmer can operate in either rural or urban areas, however the racialized new immigrant farmers seem to be stuck in near urban space. The Canadian census does not distinguish between farm populations in rural or urban areas, but immigrants make up 8% of the rural population and 9.4% of the farm population in Ontario, so although they are by no means
the majority it can be assumed that some immigrant farmers are established in rural areas in Ontario, despite the framing of the discourse.

While it could appear that any representation of immigrants as farmers is automatically positive, the very act of emphasizing and naming their cultural difference, their “exotic” tastes and cuisines, implies there is an unnamed normal from which they differ and to which they are being compared. In this case, whiteness is the “unmarked marker”, the universal from which all else is measured (Frankenberg 1997). Similarly, the emphasis on their recent arrival suggests that they are not truly integrated, they are not fully Canadian. These immigrants may be new Canadians, may be citizens, may be farmers, but in the discourse, they are “the other” when compared to the unnamed white Canadian farmer.

There are a few small exceptions in the articles that suggest a different story of immigration and farming. One such exception was an article focusing on the increasing number of new immigrants turning to farming. The author Nicholas Keung writes, “At a time when European immigrants were still settling into rural Canada to grow wheat and potatoes, Sam Kang Shin-Bong bought a 35-acre farm near Newmarket with the aim of growing oriental vegetables” (Keung, 2006). This article places Kang’s farm operation on the same timescale as European farm settlement and challenges the idea that racialized farmers are a new phenomenon. This article provides a narrative that shows racialized farmers as equally established in Canadian farming history, but in doing so it stands out as a near singular example of this narrative. Except for a few small asides featured in a few articles, the overwhelming trend in the discourse is a celebration of the new immigrant farmer as an innovation that could potentially revitalize the declining farm sector. This is an interesting theme, because increasingly Canadians are choosing not to farm, because of the long hours and low pay (Weiler et al., 2016). However, this article
suggests that there are other stories that complicate this narrative because it acknowledges another narrative of farming identities. This article breaks from the trend and chooses not to juxtapose a hardworking new immigrant farmer identity and a historic unmarked white Canadian one, by emphasizing the similar timelines of European and non-European migration, but the thrust of the common history of migration.

4.1.6 Multiculturalism: We are all immigrants

There are other articles that discuss historic migration and its relation to farming, however these articles follow a distinct narrative that supports the popular Canadian discourse of multiculturalism. In the local food discourse, Canada is portrayed as a country of migrants since its conception; always a diverse blend of cultures. Multiculturalism is not newly invented due to recent migrants, only newly named. In an excerpt from an interview with Dorothy Duncan, a Canadian culinary historian, she expresses as much:

“Yes, because from the outset, except for the First Nations, we have always been a very multicultural country. People from all over the world came here to live, brought their memories with them of what their favourite foods were, and then found this land with it's unusual - in many cases - geography and wildly fluctuating climate” (Turnbull, 2011).

This quote is one of the few that acknowledges the existence of First Nations people; however, this romantic view of settlement ignores the violent legacy of colonialism and forced migration that is part of Canada’s history. While this could be seen as a positive acknowledgement that all Canadians other than Indigenous people are guests, this is not the implication of the quote. The passage reads “from the outset…we have always been a very multicultural country” the reference to the existence of First Nations people is an aside, an exception. They are not included in the ‘we’ of Canadians. The quote works to place Indigenous people as an exception to Canadian identity and history. It also reframes multiculturalism as our origin story, achieving a simultaneous task of placing all Canadians in the same category of migrant, just in varying stages
of settlement. In this narrative, immigrants of European descent and racialized immigrants are viewed as simply having different cultures. Power and privilege are not acknowledged in this picture of multiculturalism. One article on the use of temporary migrant and immigrant labour on Ontario’s farms follows this viewpoint:

Ontario has a long history of foreigners and newcomers working the land. Take Ken Forth’s farm near Hamilton. He’s a fifth-generation Ontario farmer. In the 1920s, his family sponsored Czech workers. Then, they’d pick up Italian immigrants. Then Vietnamese. For all of them, it was a stepping stone to save money for a house and a better job. “They did the Canadian dream,” says Forth, who now employs 16 workers from the Caribbean (Porter 2007).

In this article, farming and working the land become a rite of passage. While Canada may be a multicultural nation filled with people of diverse backgrounds, there is an expectation that hard work, especially hard work connected to the land, is part of becoming Canadian. It is the Canadian dream. This narrative supports the idea that all Canadians were once hardworking immigrants and any difficulties upon arrival are simply part of the journey. This line of thinking not only negates discussions of structural privilege, but it also suggests that hard work by new immigrants will eventually yield the same results. This is not only unlikely but structurally impossible for the temporary workers in SAWP, who are not able to use the program as a pathway to Canadian citizenship at all.

With this emphasis on the immigrant roots of Canadians featured in some articles, alongside discussions of white ethnic farmers, it could be argued that unmarked whiteness is not the only feature of the Canadian imaginary. The articles, in their reference to the ethnicity of white farmers and their focus on new immigrants’ exotic cultures, celebrate a narrative of multiculturalism through the ages. This Canadian dream promotes the settlement of immigrants through hard work and farming and promises integration over time. A celebration of multiculturalism and immigrant settlement could be seen as overwhelmingly positive, but I
suggest that it is more likely that as “difference is ideologically evoked it is also neutralized” (Bannerji, 2000; 96). If we, whites and non-whites, are all immigrants and different from each other, then no one can be accused of privilege or power. In this narrative, white Canadian farmers who have occupied farmland for generations and people of colour who have struggled and continue to struggle to own land and establish themselves in the Canadian landscape, are all labelled immigrant and positioned as experiencing the same struggle on a level playing field. Once difference is emptied out of power, we are all settlers adapting to the Canadian landscape with the same opportunities, only some of us are farther along.

4.2 Conclusion

The Toronto Star articles on local food emphasize place, the products that emerge from the landscape of Ontario, and the benefits of supporting local farmers and rural communities. However, in doing so, these articles support and promote specific discourses on rural space, Canadian history, farm labour and farming identities. The articles portray rural space as the uncontested property of generations of unmarked white farmers who build and preserve Canada by working the land. The farms themselves are shown largely as homes for families or destination sites of leisure. The articles promote these discourses at the expense of others. The articles ignore indigenous historic and current claims to provincial land as well as their foodways. Similarly, migrant labour - often exploitative and restrictive - is rarely mentioned, and largely only in terms of its economic benefit, with little reference to the complicated relationship SAWP workers may have with farm spaces, their employers, and the “Canadian dream”.

While there are elements of a white farm imaginary described by Alkon and McCullen, layered over this imaginary is a specific narrative about a multicultural, immigrant agricultural national identity. For people that have been accepted into Canada as permanent residents,
farming is cast as a rite of passage, a way into the Canadian society. Work the land like the settlers, the first *real* Canadians and pay your dues. Blend your culture with the geography and climate of our nation, adapt and eventually you may become a Canadian. The idea is that hard work will lead to eventual inclusion. Local food discourse in Toronto does seem to include a multicultural, immigrant farmer imaginary that could be seen as more inclusive than the white farm imaginary identified by Alkon and McCullen. I argue, however that it is similarly reductive and exclusionary, and that this discourse has potential material effects.

As scholars such as Bannerji have argued, multiculturalism is often used as a way of halting meaningful conversations on difference, race and systemic change, by claiming difference for all (2000). If we are all different and difference is emptied of discussions of power, then what grounds does one group have to complain? As long as indigenous land ownership, traditions and foodways are ignored in conversations on local foodsheds and agricultural land preservation, so too will their agricultural practices and foodways be marginalized and excluded in practice. Similarly, migrant worker rights will take that much longer to improve and change if the industry that most benefits from their work ignores their existence or speaks for them. Finally, new immigrant farmers who are generally racialized may be sold this story of hard work yielding inclusion, but the articles do not discuss potential barriers that new farmers experience, their relegation to specific urban spaces and the fact that statistically they are underrepresented in farming communities in Ontario.

Even as immigrant farmers are celebrated in some of these articles, we must be cognizant of the fact that the farming industry is typically low wage work with low profit margins and question the forces pushing racialized immigrants in this direction. At a time when traditional farmers are increasingly deserting the profession due to the high work commitment and low
financial rewards, many articles touted immigrants as the solution. However, in this narrative, immigrants are not seen as being encouraged to take on low wage work that Canadians are refusing to do; instead, they are playing their part in a long history of hardworking settler farmers that work the land, adapt their cuisines, and build a better future in Canada. New immigrants are being celebrated in these articles for taking on this position in the Canadian nation building project. - yet what does this mean, if this is a position that is increasingly refused by other Canadians? While there may be many benefits to supporting local food, the dominant discourse presents a narrative that celebrates particular ideas around the farm and rural space, without critically analysing the contested nature of these spaces. Prioritizing the voices of indigenous people, migrant farmworkers and racialized immigrants is an important first step in understanding their realities, which are currently obscured in the discourse on local food.

5 Chapter 5: Counterstories

5.1 Introduction

In chapter 4, the media analysis of Toronto Star articles on local food showed that the dominant discourse does promote specific ideas about local food and agriculture. Articles in this data set tended to focus on local food as taking place in idyllic rural landscapes, positioning farmers as guardians of the land and showing farming as a historical and continuing conduit for immigrants to settle into Canadian identity. However, very few of the articles spoke to current immigrants growing food in Ontario to share their experiences. In this chapter, I present the counterstories of 12 immigrants growing food in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 5 of whom do so as a source of income.

Storytelling has been used for some time in geography, particularly in historical, cultural and feminist works; however, the purpose of storytelling and the theoretical frameworks behind
it varies from work to work (Cameron, 2012). In my case, I draw the concept of counterstories from the tradition of critical race scholars (Merriweather-Hunn et al., 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Delgado, 1989). As mentioned in chapter 4, counterstories are existing stories that focus on and originate from communities that are often excluded from dominant narratives and these counterstories can be used as a tool to challenge dominant narratives and their embedded inequality (Solórzano & Yosso; 2002; Delgado, 1989). Although the counterstories that follow may act as such a tool, they are not presented in binary opposition to the local food discourse analysed in the previous chapter, but rather as a platform for other stories that are not always included.

The stories and experiences described in this chapter focus on each individual’s relationship to growing food, how they began and why they choose to do so. They show barriers and obstacles encountered, each person’s opinions and experiences of the food system in Canada, and how they would like to see it changed. The participants are assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities. The stories shared with me during my interviews are not recorded in their entirety, but are divided into 4 major areas that emerged as important themes. The first was why participants chose to grow, with major reasons centering on the taste and quality of the food, cultural and familial tradition and a distrust of the food system at large. The second theme focused on the space of the farms and how farming built community and belonging, both on their plots and externally, including citizenship. The third theme is the impact of racialization on their experiences, specifically for those who have chosen to grow food as a first or secondary career path. Finally, the fourth theme shows participant’s opinions on the state of food system policy and their own visions and desires for the future. In each of the four areas, the participant’s experiences shared will simultaneously be discussed in relation to the existing literature.
5.2 Why Locally Grown?

5.2.1 Family Tradition and Transmission

In speaking with the participants, it was obvious that all of them were exposed to growing food as a young child by members of their family, whether they lived in rural or urban settings. All but one of the participants actively helped their family as a child to tend to plants, forage, rear animals or harvest produce. While many came from families who had relatives who farmed as a source of income, others did not. In either situation, farming was not seen as simply a career that one could pursue, but often as quotidian, something that all families did and should do as part of daily life. In many cases it was simply integrated into the household activities. While some participants loved growing, some participants did not necessarily have a choice in helping as children. Micah described his childhood where farming was an activity that everyone in the family was involved in, no matter their age. He noted:

*When you grow up your first chore is to water the garden, that’s your ultimate responsibility. [For] watering the garden and agriculture, the support unit is the children and subsistence was the key of economic sustainability in the social context that we grew up - we had to plant. When it was planting time, everyone had to go planting, at this time everybody had to go harvesting...what happened is in the city. We have a home garden, chickens in the back, fruit trees and then the home, we doing the grains, the sunflower, cash crop selling.*

For Micah and several of the participants, helping with the gardening was not a choice, but a part of the way the household was organized to make ends meet.

Similarly, several of the participants mentioned that learning to grow as a child was necessary because often the family produced nearly all the food that they consumed. David got into the tradition of growing because that was the way he was raised. What was grown was what was eaten. He said:
I grow my own food because as always, I start out my experience and my livity\(^5\) from childhood, from I was born, was of that, where my parents and my families grow their own food, we rarely go to the store to buy anything, unless it’s something that is foreign, you know most of the time, but you know all of the food that we use from time to time was always grown at home or we have a field away from home, you know.

Like David, some other participants noted that there would be no need to go to the store, but they attribute this to established trade networks that existed between neighbours and other community members. Donna spoke of her experience:

> we grow with our cook food and my parents them were so strict you never could go to a neighbour house and eat, no. No, no against the rule and regulation. We had extra but they share to relative, they have kids and they share with people, that is it, we don’t waste nothing, throw away nothing. I go to class I have friend, and you ask them, “oh you know that I have this and I have this.” They plant this, I plant that, what they do not have I give them, If I don’t have, they give me. We make exchange.

This story shows that in her birth country children were often the ones who actually completed the trades, meeting with others their age or going to the market for their older relatives. Janine had a similar experience and remembered:

> You would have your cocoa beans, your coffee, your breadfruit, everything that you would need at home. That’s how I grew up, the fresh milk, the whole nine yards, we had to buy nothing and when we did have to buy, it was like go trade, go trade that for a bag of sugar, flour or that kind of deal.

The participants were not anomalies in their neighbourhoods, but members of larger communities of families who grew food.

Some of the participants were doubly exposed to growing at home and through the school system. Anna remembered, “we had gardening class, the teacher would have, the school would have a piece of land. We would grow there and goof around [and] we would pick vegetable from

\(^5\) Rastafarian concept of righteous living, often through natural lifestyle
that. ” The school system in her birth country valued agriculture and taught it alongside other practical skills such as wood working and provided the space for kids to learn, if they were unable to do so at home. Micah also remembered having mandatory agriculture classes at school as a young child, but beyond that he notes that in his birth country the school system was also tailored to the agricultural calendar.

The growing season matches the school season so when its planting time the kids are at home, then we go away. When its time to do the weeds, we get a break and we go and do that and then when its harvest time, its around Christmas time, everybody’s harvesting so its also when the school has seasons. Here, [in Canada], even the season doesn’t work with school systems.

Several participants believed that growing food was embedded in everyday culture in their birth countries in a way that it is not in Canada.

Although food growing was a part of daily life, participants varied in their enjoyment of the task. Several participants loved growing from a young age and remember this period with joy, such as Talia who remembers helping her father, “in the neighbourhood there was an empty plot that he had access to, so he used to plant everything we needed for my family, five people. And I used to help him too, so probably from there I got my love for planting.” However, other participants resented these activities as children even as they were learning how to grow. Anna says,

When I was that age, oh gosh, I would rather be partying and go to bars. People sometimes have a model in life and [my parents] were not, I want to do the opposite of what they were doing, not be in a village, be in the city, not be attached to land.

Janine echoed this sentiment when she spoke of visiting her grandparents where she had to join them in the field. She remembered,

As a kid, I hated it. I hated it so bad cause I’m from the city and I’m like why? It was like a culture shock, they made me cross the river to go over there on my day off and I
was a little girl and it was hard for me, but you know what? I found that although my grandmother didn’t sit down and say, “hey! That’s ginger under the ground,” and, “Hey! This is how you hold this hoe and not hurt yourself,” I absorbed so much that I didn’t even realize how much I absorbed until I got to be an adult.

Farming may have been woven into the daily life of the participants as young children, but nonetheless the career of farming was often unappealing to them for many years. Adam came from a family full of farmers, but did not want it for himself as a young man:

My uncle was a farmer. I been going to the land with my uncle when I was small it was a really good thing to do. I would love to go, and my dad also had land, my grandfather was a farmer. But never to the extent that I wanted to be myself a farmer, because I didn’t see myself working so hard like my grandfather did or my grandparents did, so I wanted to follow that American lifestyle and get rich, you know?

Having seen the difficult daily grind of farming from a young age, Adam saw other professions as more appealing. This was common for many of the participants who wanted to pursue professions that were considered more prestigious. Although participants were split over whether they enjoyed partaking in these activities as children, they agreed that this period of their youth helping to farm was a catalyst to them growing food themselves as adults. Even in the cases where participants did not necessarily enjoy growing at the time, they cherish those memories as adults.

For the participants who farmed as a source of income (n=5), often it was only after working several other careers in other fields that they took a break to re-evaluate and looked to farming. Janine is one such example, “I went through like three careers before I realized, this is what I know, this is what I want to do.” Like Janine, Adam spoke of being at a crossroads before realizing he wanted to return to some of the skills he learned as a youth. He also spoke of wanting more control over his actions:
I was at the end of that career and I was looking to create something new for myself, I wanted to be in a place where I was more self determined, I had more autonomy in my career where I didn’t need to be employed by someone, I was looking to employ myself.

The benefits of self-employment were very important to many of those who chose farming as a career path and not only a hobby. Donna who farmed in her birth country before moving to Canada notes that, “everybody is independent, no one works with no one, everybody have their own environment, so it’s a big environment, people got their own thing and everybody do their own thing.” This idea that the labour arrangement of farming is better than the traditional workforce, whether more fulfilling or more worthwhile, is repeated by several participants.

Anna spoke about the difference between her and her partner’s work life before:

This feels more important and more makes sense. Also, we both are very much independent, I don’t see myself working for a salary. I always had an issue with that, that I cannot just take time off when I want, so there are days I can have my energy 250% and days when I need to slow down, when you work they don’t take that into consideration, when I was in [my other career] I could do that like that but then it wasn’t really going nowhere.

Again, self-employment and the ability to determine one’s own schedule and work life was key, but also this idea that the work you were doing was leading somewhere. Micah echoed these sentiments stating:

When you’re doing something, you’re being told to do it’s a drag, whereas [as a farmer] every realm of my livelihood I start it. I start it, yet I do a lot of hours, I wake up any time I want I could decide right now I’m going home to sleep and then catch up somewhere, so time is based on a certain willpower drain that plays in it, you get less tired if you shift from one idea to another, it changes the drag for me.

Lewis expanded on this point:

nobody asks me to do anything, do that do that! When I want to do something, I do it. I want to take a break? I take a break. Nobody ask me to do nothing. My own boss...you could do something for yourself, you only do for yourself. Nobody asks you, you do when you want to do something for yourself, and then its okay. In Canada, it is better to work for yourself than for someone else, you know? You making them rich. Agriculture if you work for someone else you are making them rich and you become poor.
This idea of finally being able to enrich one’s self off your own labour surfaced frequently. By farming for yourself you also avoided relinquishing control of your time and energy to someone else. In Bowens’ interviews with racialized farmers in the United States, the participants note that farming for yourself is worth it because you can escape arrangements where your employer is made rich and you continue to work without improving your situation (2015). In Minkoff-Zern’s study of immigrant farmworkers who later run their own farms, working for oneself was perceived as much better, even when the income did not necessarily increase, precisely because one had control over decisions like labour and growing practices (2017). In my conversations, whether the participants had been established or not in their previous careers farming had become the preferred choice. It provided an outlet where they could make decisions about their own lives, direct their day to day activities and keep their total earnings, even if these earnings were significantly less or required supplementation from a second job. These stories supported the findings in the American context, but since many of the participants I spoke with transitioned from non-farm labour to farming, these stories also hint at a potential trend wherein some immigrants may find the Canadian job market to be so exploitative or exclusive that they wish to turn to entrepreneurial pursuits or self employment to distance themselves from difficulties advancing in their fields or finding work.

In terms of sharing these pastimes with relatives or passing these skills on to children, the response was varied. Miles spoke about bringing his whole family to the farm and how everyone can get involved, particularly his youngest. He said:

*I have a little daughter, five years old and she was coming here since she was in her mum’s belly, she comes here all the time, she loves it. So, she’s like a farmer, she grow up right here. She knows everything about plants, she probably knows more than I do!*
Stories like this about raising their children to know about and appreciate plants from a young age, suggested that the multigenerational aspect of growing and teaching family members to grow was taken with these individuals to Canada. Some like Janine, also mentioned taking their children to the farm when they were younger, but noted that as the children grew older they grew less interested. Sometimes one child would be more interested than the other. Talia remembered, “I used to bring my children to farms, animal farms so they could be in contact with the animals, cows and pigs and even I involve my son because my daughter was always not much interested.” However, Talia noted that her emphasis on healthy eating has still influenced both her kids. Ray talked about the fact that although his grandkids don’t like coming to the farm even though they like the fruits of the labour:

_They don’t like [the farm]. Summertime lots of mosquito, smell, everything no like. Yeah, no good, dirty…Yeah, they like the taste, maybe cucumber supermarket taste no good. Here make them taste very good, tomato, everything good. It’s better, they like eat but come here they no like._

Donna also had a grandchild who she introduced to farming, but she noted that her older grandchildren didn’t even like to eat the food she cooked for them. She said:

_These days the kids in Canada what you cook, they don’t want to eat. I am not telling you about other people, I’m telling you my own grandkids! They said, “mmmmm no, granny, that is not good.” And I say, “What is good? Go to the store and buy nonsense, right?” [To them], that is good.” She felt there was something different about growing up in this generation. She continues: “we grow in ancient days, so I know about everything and I know what is punishment and I know what is happiness. We grew quite happy. Our parents grow us very good with everything, we have no comments over nothing. I grow my kids the same way and I teach them_

This narrative hinted that Donna did not always feel that she was able to teach her grandkids the same values she held as a child. The farmers I spoke to used farming and the food they prepared from their work as a way to keep certain cultural traditions alive and teach them to their children, in keeping with the literature on immigrants growing. Wanting to grow food from
one’s cultural background is commonly reported as a major reason that immigrants choose to grow (Klindienst, 2006; Baker, 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). The childhood memory of or cultural attachment to farming is often found in other studies of immigrant farmers and often these farmers chose to grow foods that would connect them to memories and legacies of their families and ancestors and pass them on to the next generation (Minkoff-Zern, 2013; Bowen, 2015; Flora et al., 2011). However, there is an emerging narrative from several of these participants that their children do not always support them fully or care to be involved. Immigrants’ children or grandchildren appear reluctant to take on their cultural values, which begs the question of how these skills will be transmitted over time. However, as several of the immigrants note a reluctance to farm as children and a renewed appreciation for it as adults, it is possible that their children and grandchildren may experience this same shift.

5.2.2 Taste, Quality & the Capitalist Food System

There was no consensus among those I spoke with on how local food should be defined. Some saw it as being close to home, food that was either grown one’s self or grown in one’s neighbourhood, some saw it simply as a label that could fetch a higher price at the market and others saw it as any food grown within the boundaries of the province. What was abundantly clear was that local alone was not enough to warrant quality and that the way the food was grown was of utmost importance. As almost all of the participants were directly associated with McVean or BCCF’s organic farm plots, they were all in support of growing organically whether it was officially labelled as such or not. In most cases this was as important if not more important than the food being locally grown. Both those who grew food as a hobby and those who grew food for sale agreed that growing and eating organically was positive not only for one’s health, but for the environment as well. In most cases the desire for organic food that they grew themselves stemmed from a belief that there were adverse health effects associated with eating
the wrong kinds of food, whether that be food grown using GMO’s or chemicals or food that has travelled too far.

From the very first conversations, I quickly identified a consistent narrative of the activity of farming itself being viewed as beneficial for a variety of reasons. Aside from the organic question, growing locally was seen as a positive for some participants because of the taste and freshness, since vegetables or fruit grown locally were likely to spend less time getting from earth to table. Miles noted that growing his own food is important for being able to grow specific kinds of produce he likes to cook with, but more so because the flavour is better. He said:

> it make a big difference, because the callaloo that’s coming from [elsewhere] it doesn’t taste the same, its not as fresh, cause it have to go through freight shipping and things like that. But these now you grow, its more fresh and things like that.

The freshness was also a factor when considering the nutrition of the food. Anna was motivated to start growing because of a drastic improvement in her personal health when she started eating a vegetarian diet of only organic food. She prefers local food because it is fresher and therefore retains more nutrients, but insists that it must also be organic, she says:

> What you eat influences how you feel spiritually, how you feel inside, the food is really the start, it’s the beginning of everything, its not just eating and it kind of makes you more connected...A lot of people don’t know that its not just planting, its doing it organically. I look for seeds that are not genetically modified, look for that, look for the soil, don’t do the shortcut, don’t buy the massive stuff, do the composting, don’t throw the garbage product in.

In their viewpoints that the benefit of growing one’s food was not only that it was fresh, tasted better, and contained more nutrients, but knowing exactly what went into it. These reasons of taste, freshness, quality are all benefits that are frequently touted in the literature on community gardening (Seto, 2011; Baker, 2004; Klindienst, 2006; Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). Some studies of new immigrant farmers show that the decision to grow food is often not strictly for economic
reasons, but for a variety of interrelated reasons. A study of Latino farmers growing food in Iowa researchers found that participants saw growing food as a way to save money, but also as a way provide better quality food and nourish their family and community rather than as a money-making enterprise (Flora et al, 2011). Other studies show that new immigrant farmers often opt for growing styles without pesticides, chemical fertilizers, or GMO’s particularly because this was the way they learned to grow as youth, they intend to feed their families with their crops, and they want the safest working environment for themselves and any relatives (Bowens, 2015; Minkoff-Zern, 2013). Some chose these methods after themselves working for conventional agricultural operations and deciding they did not want to run their own operations with similar labour conditions (Minkoff-Zern, 2017). Growing food for themselves and their families allows the participants to control and guarantee the quality of the food, something which cannot be assured when buying food elsewhere.

Throughout my conversations with those growing, there was an obvious theme of distrust of the food system in Canada, particularly the corporations selling food and the chemicals used in conventional growing systems. Lewis, speaking on the shopping habits of Canadians, remarked:

*they go to the shop, not the farmers market they go to Food Basics, they have vegetable from Mexico, from the USA, from everywhere, they don’t know how they grow that. Maybe they use chemicals or GMO’s, so its no good for your health. Here I don’t use chemicals, I don’t use GMO, everything is organic. My seed is organic, my compost is organic everything is organic, its good for yourself and myself too.*

As the person growing the food, one can be sure that every part of the process aligns with the kind of food that you want to be eating or excludes the chemicals you do not want to ingest. Miles was equally concerned with GMO’s and pesticides, he notes:
Organic is much better than the GMO and all these other things that’s going on in the food industry right now, because I know exactly what I’m eating and you know it makes a big difference. What’s going on now with these GMO’s and all these kind of things, it’s chemical warfare when you eating things you don’t even know what you’re eating. GMO’s or you have this thing named Round Up, and you just don’t know, it kills everything in the field, so it probably can kill you too!

This distrust of chemical fertilizers and pesticides was present in almost every conversation and was a huge concern for participants. As mentioned in earlier chapters, because most of the participants interviewed were associated with two organizations that advocate for organic growing, this is not a surprising stance. However, the narrative of distrust for chemicals extends to the system, including the producers growing the majority of the food found in supermarkets and stores. Participants cast the food system as a whole in a negative light. Talia reveals that the quality of food available in stores has been a long-term preoccupation for her and that growing food and cooking items from scratch is her way of protecting herself and her family:

*I am very concerned about what we are eating, that’s why I am always trying to research, and I recognize that we are at war with the food companies because they are putting so much garbage so you have to defend yourself in which way by being, by reading the labels.*

This is an interesting quote because it places consumers and large producers in opposing positions and reframes the shopping and provisioning experience as an antagonistic one. David does not explicitly identify food companies as the enemy, but he does cast doubt on food producer claims that fertilizers and chemical inputs are necessary or achieving an overall better outcome. He says:

*If you going have a mass agriculture thing happening you going use a whole heap of fertilizer and sometimes those fertilizers and the spraying and thing is not really good for the people. They say they have to do that because they have to produce more food, which I don’t think more is necessarily better than the quality. The system should make sure make the thing wholesome that the people getting, because that will save a lot of expense from the medical stance. You don’t have to need as much hospitals or as much things related to that. So, I think from the food stage that is very important... I really advocate for sensible farming, wise farming, and local farming if it is done the proper...*
way where people can buy things that are organically grown, no GMO, and at the same
time you can afford it. Because most of the time the things that are good for people, they
can’t afford it, so they are left to buy the things that are mass produced and it is not really
good for them.

Here, there are several important points. There is an implication is that some of the narratives
promoted by food producers are false, that the system is not actually concerned with promoting
the wellbeing of the people buying their food, and that healthy food is unaffordable for many
people.

The affordability of quality food is another reason many participants preferred to grow
food, as growing is a way to reduce their costs while still being able to access food they consider
healthy. Having the power to grow one’s own food is a way of stretching one’s budget and
avoiding the capitalist food system’s influence on your diet and health. David points out that:

*Most of the things that happen here now that you see in the stores, it’s a money-making
process, so people don’t think that way. They think about how they can make more
money and they cut corners and do things that are not necessary, that are not really
healthy or good for your health. It’s like the money is an issue when it comes to that
perspective, but it shouldn’t be. Everyone knows that you need food, so if you can
produce good food then it’s so much better. It’s a cycle, it produces a cycle of difference,
starting from that.*

He argued that starting with healthy, quality food would reduce problems down the road. Anna
also had this view on the link between capitalism and health, noting that since she had started
changing her lifestyle she needed less medication and was spending less money.

*There’s no business in it right, I’m not gonna get the flu shot or some other shot I’m not
gonna by drugs, not even the hormonal drugs I used to buy for years, for 20 years, I
would spend money on it every month, $30, multiply, there’s no profit in me. I’m no
good, I’m not very good for the society that is based on profit, on drugs on going to
hospital.*

In telling her story of health struggles, she suggests that businesses may not want to see people
having access to quality food and changing their diets because it will reduce their profits. David
and Anna were not the only ones to point out that the pursuit of money might be driving more worrying trends in terms of the health of the population.

Capitalism, unfair labour conditions and the problem of quality food access were all intertwined in many people’s responses. Most of the participants did not in that moment find it difficult to access food and eat the kind of food they wanted to, precisely because they have access to a space to grow, but this did not stop them from seeing the greater system as flawed and pointing out lasting issues in their community. Vivian actively named the food system as a culprit in the ongoing health issues of her community:

"Sometimes I get a little frustrated when I go to some of these meetings and you hear, “Oh we need to get black people to grow, black people don’t like growing.” I’m like I don’t understand who are you talking about cause we are growing the food. The problem with the food system is we’re not benefiting. We’re growing it for everyone else, but not ourselves. Our families are still going to bed hungry. Our families are still malnourished. Our communities still have high rates of diabetes. Our communities still deal with obesity. Our communities are struggling. We’re growing the food and we’re struggling, so for me, it’s looking at the issue from a different lens than we’ve been doing and looking at access and looking at migrant injustice, looking at how we can access the food that we grow. It’s weird saying that. We got the food, but we don’t have access to it."

The systemic issues that contribute to questions of access to quality food are obvious to Vivian, yet she did not feel that policy makers always see it that way. She also pointed out that these exploitative relations tend to disproportionately affect black people, who are both the labourers and those excluded from the products of their labour. Ontario’s agricultural system is racialized, usually with people of colour working in the most vulnerable positions (Weiler et al., 2016), Vivian suggested that taking a different viewpoint that focuses on identifying these root problems was a first step to changing the system. Gary also felt that growing and redistributing food are only partial solutions and actively named capitalism as a root issue:
To me it’s about moving to a post-capitalist environment, like where essentially everything is free. We can feed everybody in the world right now, but we choose not to. Like here in Canada we have tons of obesity and we have tons of people who don’t have enough to eat everyday. These are structural issues and they should be taken care of, okay, there’s a problem with distribution, but also a problem of why is it set up this way? Why is it easier for someone to set up those agribusiness farms where they grow like a whole ton of food and then they also pay their migrant workers less than minimum wage and they are exploiting them and they do all that terrible stuff, but they still get to call themselves organic? I mean, if the only way you can grow food is through mistreating workers that’s not a good system. It’s not even sustainable.

Gary pointed out that capitalism is not only the cause of issues related to access and distribution, but it is linked to exploitative working conditions as well. He criticized the fact that agribusinesses with these labour conditions benefit from the organic labels, while continuing to take advantage of employees and argued for a truly sustainable system that accounts for the environment, but also the wellbeing of workers and consumers.

There is a clear set of narratives that position these growers as resisting corporate influence on their diets and those of their communities. These narratives echo some of those included in Natasha Bowens’ book on racialized farmers, The Color of Food (2015). Several of the farmers she spoke with specifically positioned themselves as doing their work in opposition to the greater corporate entities at work in the food system. Growing may be a way to reduce costs, avoid unhealthy options, or participating in positive physical activity, but aside from this it was a way to resist the powerful forces shaping their food environment. For example, all the immigrant growers I interview, even those growing food as a source of income, speak of sharing produce and meals. This can be seen both as a coping mechanism and a point of resistance to deal with the food system they mistrust. Minkoff-Zern speaking with immigrant farmworkers turned farm owners in the United States suggests that “this form of farming is a means of both survival and resistance to the dominant mode of global agricultural development…” (2017, 4). This dual idea of survival and resistance highlights both the fact that the food system pushes
these individuals to seek alternative sources of food, but also the agency that they display while growing and cultivating community spaces. Literature and policy on increasing immigrant access to food often centres on providing access to culturally appropriate vegetables and fruit, but there have been calls for more comprehensive change (Hammelman and Hayes-Conroy, 2015). These stories suggest that participants are perhaps equally concerned with creating a food system that is not based on exploitation and that has affordable and healthy options for the community at large. These stories also highlight the racialized nature of the exploitative labour relations in some agricultural companies, and the fact that for many of these immigrants, changing these relations is important because they have visible and direct impact on their communities.

5.3 Farm Spaces, Belonging and Community

5.3.1 Wellbeing and Connection to Nature

While farming was seen as hard work, none of the participants resented the labour required. In fact, the participants mentioned the variety of positive attributes that the activity of working outdoors in the field brings for them. For some it is therapeutic, for others spiritual or a way to connect to nature. Ray, who is retired, found that farming helped him physically, “at home I have pain, but here working no strain. Here better, home I sleep and have back pain.” The physical activity that he does at the farm is better for him than the more sedentary lifestyle he leads at home. Adam chose to pursue farming as a career because of an early experience where growing helped him mentally. He remembered,

*I grew food one time I was going through a difficult time in my life and I chose to deal with the earth as therapy. I grew okra in my dads’ backyard, and it really grounded me and it gave me a good grounded experience.*
In some cases, both the physical and mental benefits combined to lead to a general feeling of wellbeing and joy. Talia felt refreshed by the growing she did, despite squeezing it in after a long day of work. She noted that there was a satisfaction related to the actual process of raising plants:

*Another thing that is very important for me is the satisfaction of getting the produce in your hand from the seed to your plate. All the way, the growth and all the effort, all the good intentions you had to get that good thing. Then you have the result, the satisfaction and of course you are eating something much better than what you are getting in a supermarket...city life, to have access to a place like this is like a breath of fresh air, you know?*

Not only did the actual process of raising plants bring her joy, but the space itself was a break from city life, despite existing within the city and very close to her home. The important connection to nature and green space was echoed by several other participants.

*Being outside at the farm is a place that participants could be in touch with the land, this was important for David who felt strongly that growing was another way of learning and knowing our place on earth:*

*When you go out there and start farming it’s like you’re a totally different person, you know? You’re in tune with nature, you’re in tune with life. You see certain interactions with animals and things and just to watch the things that you put into the earth come alive and after some time they can feed you, its really, its bigger than a phenomenon, you know? It’s just life. Farming is a living thing, you can see the regrowth and regeneration after winter here, especially here, of plants just springing up and you see life again. So, I always love to see that. When you dig up the earth just to see how many different insects share the earth that you see the living entity, you see that the earth is not a dead thing. It’s a learning process, it simplifies and teaches you things that a lot of the time people go university and still don’t get the fullness of.*

According to David, by farming and growing one can learn about their place in the entire ecosystem, rather than feeling separated from these processes. Miles reiterated this idea and mentioned that even some of the aspects of farming that people might find annoying are important to him:
weeding is a part of it because, the insects and all those things they are part of the whole ecosystem, cause the worm that goes underground, they burrow here into the soil and they put oxygen into the roots of the plant, so these things are all a part of it, the insects and the worms and all these things.

Talia echoed this sentiment, as she relished even the smallest of tasks associated with growing.

She said:

*I don’t know, there’s a pleasure to see when you plant the seed and see the plant grow and you water it, it’s a pleasure I feel. I don’t know how to express it. It’s not “ugh, I have to do it,” it’s like, okay I’m weeding, okay. I’m looking at things, oh this plant is broken! It’s taking care all the time, it’s not oh I have to go, I would like to have more time.*

Growing food may be work, but the activity itself and the chance to be outside in the field brought joy to the participants across the board.

The farm spaces themselves and the opportunities they offered to interact with nature, the insects, and wildlife were distinct to some participants. Gary noted that being on the farm is different than simply being in other outdoor spaces in the city:

*I don’t know, this farm is a pretty cool place, there’s all kinds of stuff here, its in the middle of the city but then you have like this green space, even something like High park, it’s nature there or not really because it’s all carefully managed but even here it’s not actually wild, but you can kind of see, you can feel kind of connected to nature here.*

Although there are many city parks in Toronto, Gary drew a distinction between the managed green space of a park and the wilder space of the farm, where nature is allowed to take over to a larger degree. For Lewis being out in the field meant he could be in nature where he feels best:

*I learn agriculture, I know agriculture, that’s why I want to do agriculture, because it is my passion, it’s my background. You could go to a factory or work somewhere else, I don’t feel good. Here I feel good because I hear the birds sing, the wind.*

Commonly, participants noted that they learn more about their natural surroundings the more time they spent at the farm. Janine spoke of having to account for the wildlife that passes through her plot, including an animal that had taken up residence in one part of her field. “...the hotel
that some creature has for me under my ground cherries, where they dig up through it, they come out every night and there’s a patch in the bed where I never get one ground cherry to save my life and that’s okay, just keep that patch.” She spoke of learning the feeding patterns of some animals and when they were likely to visit and planting decoy crops to protect other ones, advice she passed on to new farmers who would not be familiar. Anna also felt the difference, she noted that before, “I didn’t see that many animals, now I spot the nests, I take pictures of animals, I take pictures, I document I put that in my blog.” Over time however, the more she learned about foraging and growing, the more in tune she felt with her surroundings. This link between foraging and a genuine connection to one’s natural surroundings was a clear theme throughout the conversations, even though there was a split between participants on whether or not they foraged in Canada. Those who felt comfortable identifying and eating wild plants had usually been taught or were able to forage with someone more familiar with Canadian plants. Others who chose not to forage, said it was specifically because they consider it too dangerous since they lack the knowledge and it was possible to make a mistake and eat something poisonous.

This was interesting because these participants noted that they were constantly foraging, hunting, hiking or fishing before coming to Canada, even though they had not done any of these activities since their arrival. Vivian was one participant who went from foraging frequently as a child to never doing this activity in Canada:

I don’t do that at all here, I did that in [my birth country] yes. We would go in the forest and we would find different kinds of berries, berries I’ve never seen here before of course, umm we would cook there, my grandmother maybe she would have yam or whatever and we would go and find whatever leaf, you know she would make some kind of a sauce or a base to go with it, so we can eat. Yeah, we forage a lot!

For Vivian, foraging was a regular familial activity, but the foliage and plants were significantly different from those found in Canada. Again, her story reinforces the idea that foraging is usually possible when there is deep knowledge of and connection to the land. Adam also had stopped
foraging since moving to Canada and attributed this to not having access to land, “Food is a major difference, not having access to land, growing up in [my birth country] I was a child I was free to roam, go fish, go hunt, go to the garden, I was maybe a child of the land.” Adam spoke about the freedom to forage, hunt and take part in other forms of food provisioning beyond cultivation in his birth country and links these activities with a feeling of kinship to the land. For Adam, he did not have this same kinship with land in Canada. Several participants did not feel equally comfortable in or attached to natural spaces in Canada, like rural parks or forests.

For most of the participants, the farms and plots where they grew were the primary (if not only) places where they felt they could comfortably access large areas of green space, like Talia who was willing to forage only for specific plants she had been taught to identify, within the boundaries of the farm space:

_I only pull the wild plant here usually is dandelion because I know its organic soil, I would not pick dandelion from the street or parks, but over here it grows naturally, so I use it for my smoothies…if I know its clean yes, because I trust, but I would not do, for instance, grab mushrooms that I do not know, because with mushrooms you have to be careful and berries, still I don’t differentiate the bushes how they look like._

I frequently witnessed her verifying with other farmers the identity of wild plants on the property. For Talia, foraging within that space was safe because she could trust the quality of the soil and the guidance of her peers.

It could be expected that the growers would enjoy the activity and report benefits for mental and physical health especially because connecting to the land and the therapeutic nature of the activity is noted in other studies of immigrants growing (Baker, 2004; Klindienst, 2006; Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). However, an interesting point brought up by some participants was the idea that the natural space of urban farms was a different experience of nature than urban parks. These farm spaces are safe both because of the guaranteed physical quality of the earth
(i.e. soil health) and because they are spaces where the participants feel comfortable to learn the land. The participants are able to touch the earth, recognize native animals and plants, and reap all of the related health benefits of being outdoors in a way that is distinct from city parks.

Several authors have written on the various ways civic agriculture can contribute to citizenship, as members participate in community food organizations they can shift values and become more invested socially in their food system and also their communities (Baker, 2004; DeLind, 2002; Welsh and MacRae, 1998). Welsh and MacRae argue that food citizenship reframes people from simply passive consumers to active citizens, wherein they are participating and belonging (1998). DeLind argues specifically that growing can lead to “understanding of place and practice within a particular place” and that this soil citizenship eventually paves the way to the development of new shared practices and culture and a sense of belonging (2002, 220). These stories suggest that urban and peri urban farm spaces are not only important for the preservation of familial traditions and the production of food, but also critical for placemaking and increasing the comfort level and attachment of immigrants to the new environment they occupy.

It is documented that new immigrants are less likely to access national or provincial park areas, which tend to be less manicured as they are focused on preserving the existing ecosystems (Parks Canada, 2011). National parks exist at the expense of Indigenous foodways and livelihoods (Lawrence, 2002) and are often not accessible to racialized people, yet they have strong associations with true Canadian identity (Razack, 2002). Scholars have drawn connections between the manufactured landscape of wilderness found in national parks and the importance of camping, wilderness trips and other similar activities in the formation of white Canadian national identity (Mortimer-Sandilands, 2009; Mackey, 2002). Based on the stories shared, these urban
farm spaces acted not only as places to grow food, but as safe spaces to experience nature and the outdoors, perhaps in lieu of more remote destinations where specific constructions of white Canadian national identity are formed. The fact that some participants were learning to forage and identify plants in these farm spaces, shows that these spaces were facilitating a deeper connection with the natural environment that is distinct from visiting a municipal park. While these immigrants may not be able to participate in the citizenship formation activities that take place in distant provincial or federal parks, they were able to practice soil citizenship within city boundaries in these farm spaces. The space of the farm is simultaneously distinct from manicured city parks and the wilderness of national parks, but there is a type of citizenship formation taking place that is rooted in the natural environment, albeit one that is distinct from the kind of white Canadian citizenship formation associated with wilderness trips or camping.

5.3.2 Community and Belonging

The farm plots were also spaces of strong friendship and support between the different growers. In my time volunteering alongside some of the participants or visiting the plots, I witnessed the closeness and cooperation among those who used the space. It was common to see impromptu shared meals, breaks spent storytelling, advice and input given or small gifts brought for one another. Miles enjoyed the community aspect of the garden, “its very intertwining life, you get the residents in the area involved which is really good, you know to see the people in the area sharing with the farm, it’s a good idea.” He came very frequently and met friends and family here to hang out, later sharing the bounty, “I share it with friends and family and you know? I can’t eat everything.” Talia supported this idea and suggested that friendships were so close on the farm that they approach family, “I’m very happy coming here, very nice people, it’s
like a family. They treat you friendly, in a friendly way, they are very friendly.” Growers also spoke of sharing seeds, advice, labour and trading produce once harvest came around. Anna who had only recently switched to farming from a career in finance was learning to adjust to this atmosphere:

“There’s trust and it’s so different that people are just sharing. They just, somebody just gave us some of the seeds, are you sure you don’t want us to pay? Whereas in [my job before], oh I had to deal with [colleagues] where they wouldn’t care about the wellbeing of the customers. I’ve been there for ten years I soaked in that, not talking about my projects, not being open, not sharing, I have to kind of re-invent myself, where people are so willing, it’s different knowledge.

Ray, who farmed on a plot of land divided amongst a large group of friends, noted that even though the plots were separated they came together to buy inputs, share produce and preserve the harvest at the end of the season. He discussed how they got fertilizer from a neighbouring cattle farmer, “so we pay a little bit and they share a little bit cow soil. Not much, one little bit, we divide it between the plots. We get cow soil and cover over. Any more soil we put in, no chemicals, so the vegetables taste good.” By splitting some of these costs, the entire group benefited and was supported. These strong relationships and cooperation have also been seen in several studies of community gardens (Baker, 2004; Saldívar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004) and immigrant farmers (Minkoff-Zern, 2017, 2015; Flora et al., 2011).

Aside from the growing community they cultivated directly around them, with their friends, family and those sharing their land, the participants were asked if they take part in any other local food organizing, farming and/or growing communities in the GTA. The majority of the participants were involved in other food-related groups or activities, but often they were not necessarily focused on cultivation, but on other interests - usually health or justice related initiatives. Activities were wide ranging: cultural food related events, community food justice organizing, health programming, food waste reduction actions and environmental greening
initiatives. In several of the cases, these activities were joined because of connections made through their farm plots, in keeping with the concept of food citizenship as a pathway to increased social and political engagement in the food system and elsewhere (Welsh and MacRae, 1998; DeLind, 2002). Despite active engagement in other groups, those who speak about the farming community in the GTA seem to place themselves outside of it or any larger local food movement. Ray, a hobby farmer whose only connection to farming was the plot where he grew, seemed unsure of how to learn from other farmers because of both the language barrier and where to go. He said:

*I wanna be but English no good. Sometime different asking vegetable making have problem here, professional farmers we are asking but I don’t know where asking. No asking, we are sometimes nursery, we are little bit asking some help, when put in seed, when cutting, some asking. Every time, watching TV, last year I made, but no professional.*

He did want to learn more about farming, particularly because he has had problems from time to time with his produce and thought an expert’s knowledge could help, but the language barrier was an issue when asking complex questions. Additionally, as someone who does not take part in any formal farming organizations, the nursery was the only place where he had encountered others he considered to be “professional” farmers. On a basic level, immigrants like Ray, who have quite a bit of difficulty expressing themselves in English, may not feel able to access farm or food-oriented programming because of the language barrier. This issue was identified in past research with Chinese gardeners in Toronto, who did not attend relevant planting events in part because the material was in English (Baker, 2004). Although these farm spaces may be successful in creating a safe space for building strong internal community ties, increasing social engagement, falling in line with the ideas of food citizenship, this did not necessarily mean that participants built connections with the larger local food community of farmers.
In terms of how participants felt in connection to the greater national community as citizens, several were generally appreciative of the opportunities available to them in Canada and specifically in Toronto, particularly those who came from situations where they felt their safety was at risk or their family’s future was uncertain. Talia was one of those who valued the security that she felt Canada gave in place of her birth country. She said:

*I love this country. I love this country... I like because you are on your own, your own life, it's like you don't depend on other people or how the government because I remember [in my birth country] sometimes you woke up in the morning the police, there were changes to the government, the money you have in the bank was devalued, because it was high inflation rate, so people were always dependent on the political moves of the movement. So over here there is stability. At least over here there is stability supposedly between the governments, so you don’t have to worry about that, you only have to worry about how you can improve your life and you have so much to choose from, I like it, I like this country.*

For Talia, the safety and security she felt for herself and her family has made her happy to call Canada home.

Lewis also came to Canada for reasons of safety and security and he felt that Canada was home because he had grown to understood this place better than his place of birth. He said:

*Yeah, now I am more Canadian, Yeah, because [several] years I stay here, I change everything, if I go back home I go back my country again, I must try to do something, when I go there, I feel like new... now its ok. In Canada I know everything now, I know what I can do.*

Participants frequently acknowledged that they felt more comfortable in Canada than anywhere else in the world, but not always in a positive sense. Gary hesitated when asked if Toronto felt like home, but conceded by stating, “*Its where my stuff is [laughs] I don’t know, I don’t have anywhere else to go. It’s my home by default.*” This feeling of relative comfort in comparison to anywhere else in the world was often accompanied by a certain feeling of displacement and a fair amount of grappling with the concept of home.
David was clear on the fact that he did not feel that home needed to be tied to a place, while others stated that even if they did not feel comfortable calling Canada home, it did not necessarily mean that they were able or wanted to call their birth country home either. Micah spoke about making the conscious decision of where to call home and picking Toronto. He said:

*I have decided to make it my home. It comes from a place where I think when I went to [my birth country], I did not belong there, I did not belong here, but the place that I most felt comfortable with who I’d become like from a global perspective was Toronto living. It’s the safest place I can call home because you can just morph into this whatever fake politics. There you’re American, “go back to America!” and here they’re like, “where are you from?” Then it shows at some point after 2-3 years of working in [my birth country], 6 years ago I got back home and then I realized, I think I’m now a foreigner here, everybody treated me like a foreigner no matter how long I stayed there.*

This narrative shows the complicated position that Micah was in. While he was open to the idea of returning to his birth country, he felt alienated there by those who viewed him as a foreigner because of his long time away. On the other hand, this question “where are you from?” is a constant reminder that he was not seen as Canadian either. Baker applies DeLind’s concept of soil citizenship in case studies of immigrants farming in Toronto to suggest that the immigrants growing, “claim their ”soil right” to Canadian citizenship” (2004, 309). However, in the narratives of my participants, although their comfort level in their farm spaces and within their growing communities is high and cannot be disputed, it did not necessarily lead to a larger feeling of belonging in Canada.

In total, only four of those I spoke with were eager to call Canada home, and most participants grappled with the concept or shared a certain feeling of displacement. Vivian was adamant in saying it was not her home, and attributed this feeling to the culture in Canada that has never made her feel like she could belong. She noticed this affected not only herself an immigrant, but her children as well who were born and raised here. She says:
If you ask my daughter, “where are you from?” [or my son], they would never say Canadian. Cause when you look at the media, stupid commercials like the Molson commercial when they talk about what it means to be Canadian and the images they show of what a true Canadian is, of course as young as they are they realize that they are not reflected in that image that, you know, they are always not going to be Canadian enough, right? So, I think from a young age they get that books, textbooks, things they read, when they talk about true Canadians, when you look at the Canadian dollar who is reflected and who isn’t reflected. I think images are very powerful in terms of shaping who [belongs and] how people identify as well.

The imagery that exists to create a national idea, the imagined community of Canada does not represent her or her children (Anderson, 2006). Vivian mentions that she thinks sometimes that she may one day return to her country of birth:

To be here in this country where you’re not truly ever really accepted as Canadian, as part of this family. I think as a black young woman who’s also raising two black kids that at the back of your mind because there’s never that acceptance fully within the structures that exist here of your true Canadian heritage there’s that draw to go back to where I will never be denied as from there.

Vivian’s experiences align with some experiences of immigrants featured in the literature on Canada and integration, which argues that no matter how long racialized immigrants spend in Canada they may never feel fully represented in the imagery or accepted into the society (Mackey, 2002; Bannerji, 2000). Canadian society was originally built on an idea of whiteness that balances French and Anglo identities, while denying Indigenous or racialized bodies (Berger, 1966). More recently, the concept of multiculturalism has been promoted as a way to build national community with diverse people, but this discourse still creates a dichotomy of neutral whites and others and has only succeeded in depoliticizing race in planning conversations (Baldwin et al, 2011; Das Gupta, 1999). This same pattern was identified in Chapter 4, where white farmers were promoted as neutral and racialized people as other, albeit with the suggestion that farming was a route to assimilation.
In the stories shared by the participants, there is a wide variation in how comfortable different people feel as part of Canadian society. The majority note that even if they are happy to be in Toronto, are active members of society and have many close family and friends, they do not necessarily feel as if they are fully Canadian. The growers clearly create strong internal community ties and foster belonging within these farm plots. They also do participate in social and political activities in combination with and as a result of growing. Both belonging and increased participation are in keeping with the writing on food citizenship, however cultivating these in their growing communities does not necessarily translate into feeling more comfortable outside of that space or feeling as if they belong to Canadian society as a whole.

5.4 Racialization in the Farm Community

5.4.1 Farming as a Source of Income

The participants who grew food as a source of income (n=5) often reported relative success, but admitted that farming continued to be a difficult livelihood to support. Although several participants were full time farmers, they often also maintained other sources of income, in keeping with the trends generally for farmers in Ontario. Some farmers relied on both their farm income and the off-farm income of their spouse, while others retained secondary jobs or picked up extra work in the off season. None of the farmers regretted their choice to follow this career path, but they told several stories that underline the precarity and difficulty of the job.

Vivian talked about this idea that farmers could be working everyday and selling consistently and still not make enough to support themselves. She said:

We have a few farmers who were trying to do this on their own and when they sat down and really look at [the numbers], it’s like ‘oh, we had a great year, we made $32,000,’” but if you bring it to like hourly salary, I was literally paying myself $3/hour to grow the food and that’s not sustainable. I would love to see more farmers markets up and running, but in a sustainable way where farmers are getting the support that they need to grow the vegetables that people need, because you know its disheartening. We don’t
think when we go to the farmers market to buy food, especially when we're buying from individuals, that they are struggling to feed you. They’re paying themselves $3 dollars, it’s a different kind of exploitation to feed you the food that you like.

Even when farmers discussed how much they loved to farm, they did not hesitate to explain that it also was an extremely difficult way to make a living. Lewis said:

I know my job is hard job, agriculture is a hard job, you know now, couple months ago, weeks ago, no no rain! Soil very dry, yeah, [laughs] when you water, bring water, water can’t go through. Only in the surface, can’t go deep in, so yeah Agriculture is a very hard job, so harvest today tomorrow I go to sell, I do that myself.

Other farmers’ experiences echoed this struggle of keeping afloat and pointed out the ongoing risk of farming including the chance that the business could fail. Janine noted “The hardest part about it for me is that its all out of pocket, right? And I could tell you that because the farming business is so risky, kinda like the restaurant business, I guess the whole food business, banks are reluctant about just giving out loans.” In the face of this risk and the need to often rely on their own savings, the farmers developed clear tactics both to cover themselves and also to help other farmers.

Many of these participants discussed business strategies that they used to distinguish themselves from other farmers and remain competitive. Janine spoke of several tactics, including making her own food items from her vegetables so that she is not only selling produce, but value-added items. Another sales tactic of hers was to focus on growing specialty produce. She advises:

When you go to market, you need a niche. You have to understand, it’s a short season and we’re all growing the same things. So, if we all go to the market with the same thing, as much as customers want to spend five cents here and there it gets really thin, so you need to find your thing. So, my niche was micro, I grew everything baby baby, I didn’t wait for anything to mature. Micro vegetables were my thing and I did very well with that because nobody else was doing that.
Micah mentioned a similar tactic of promoting his goods as local, to create a sales advantage in a market where many vendors are already organic. He said

*I’m selling local vibes! We’re all organic, it’s a point of differentiation. It’s because of the local branding, space identification people have and the affinity, because people are more interested where the food is grown, they’re assuming already that it is organic.*

Micah sells the “vibes” or feeling of local to his customers, by mentioning the neighbourhood or the city when he sells, because at farmers’ markets people tend to assume the produce is all organic, so that alone is not enough to distinguish oneself. These entrepreneurial narratives position the growers as business leaders, planning out ways of marketing their goods and appealing to customers and beating out competition.

Aside from business strategies that are aimed at distinguishing oneself from competition, there are also several stories that speak to the high degree of cooperation between farmers. As mentioned in the section on community, there was cooperation between farmers on shared plots including: sharing advice, seeds, equipment, produce, and even in some cases shared labour. Donna is a retired farmer and often helps the other farmers around her because they trust her to do it well. She starts by listing some of the things she does, “*Helping, keeping company, you know, you get better mind to do something, when you have someone you know doing this. I will do this, I will do that, it’s something that I can help.*” Continuing on this tack, she speaks of helping another farmer in this story:

*I did see him and I say, “I am here, what to do?” and he said, “go and pick the tomatoes.” I pick one of that tray of tomatoes and I say I cannot leave it in the sun, I pick it half and then me and [a relative] bring it there and then I take and she bring it out whilst I am picking. I understand myself good, because tomatoes are small so I pick a lot and the sun was hot. Farmer come and he say, “come and sit down, sun is too hot!” He said, “come out, come out here and sit down.” And I said, “no, how this boy work going finish? And I pick all that tomatoes.” So, I put it in [the hoop house] there. Whilst [I] going out he came in. If not, I would have told [another farmer] to come and get it out,*
don’t leave it here for the night, because animals and so. I was thinking, but when I was coming out he come. So, I say ohh [sigh of relief]. My heart was free.

In telling this story she is not focused on the fact that she is providing free labour and expertise, but rather on the freedom and relief she feels in completing this task for a fellow farmer. This idea of not only getting help, but getting help you can trust, is an important one. Micah notes he does not often ask for volunteers because he is unsure of the skills they have and if they can be trusted with his crops. He says:

*Its two things though, I’m not good at asking for help and the other one too, it depends what help is. The ability...it’s a bit more demanding. Plants are like babies, so getting someone the level of attention, skills, everything counterbalance the help.*

In terms of contracted labour, none of the farmers had permanent employees, although some did have volunteers or interns. While some did not have businesses large enough to require it, others pointed out that the lack of training was an issue in trying to find qualified farm help. The cost of labour was also an issue. Micah noted that:

*Everyone wants an 11-dollar staff, most people who have been trained in this stuff don’t wanna do it. They don’t wanna do it for eleven dollars. They could get paid more for just being on the counter of an agricultural store in a small town selling feed.*

While some farmers express interest in eventually bringing on interns, they were willing to do so only if the interns were willing to commit to a full season and eager to learn.

There is reliance on familial labour for some of the farmers. Usually spouses or close relatives lend a hand, particularly in specific aspects. For example, they are more likely to help on market days than with planting or weeding. For example, Lewis, when asked if he ever gets help from his wife, he replies, “she’s Canadian, you know Canadians. Some Canadians work on the farm and then some don’t work on the farm. The field is hard, sometimes when we sow, she wants to help, but I say NO, you can’t you’re going to break your back.” This narrative suggests
that farm work is difficult work and only some Canadians are willing to and/or capable of taking it on. Lewis goes on to clarify that she does help him to sell sometimes on market days or visit him in the field, but that she has her own job. He sees the on the ground aspect of farm work as unsuitable for her, whether or not she is interested in participating, but he also is clear that farming is his job and she has her own career and work to do.

Janine is one farmer who gets help from her children. She brought both her children to the farm with her as they were growing up and they learned how to grow, weed, and harvest, but she mentions that they only help with market days now. She notes that neither of her children are interested in following in her footsteps. She says:

My son he’s now 15, but he’s been at the market since he was nine and when he was nine he used to come to the farm, but now that he’s fifteen he’s decided that he’s not going to be a farmer. So, no not really, I wouldn’t say he lost interest, but he knows it’s not his thing.

Adam says he has gotten visits and help from his family in the past, but since many of them are not nearby or in the country that was not necessarily possible. However, he regularly gets help from community members that work on the plot and he thinks of them as family now too. He says:

I’ve extended what family means to me, so yeah absolutely I get a lot of help from the community, I get a lot of support from people coming in here, just seeing me and appreciating what I’m doing support me and I support them, it’s a very supportive movement

This narrative of the familial nature of the community that supports and volunteers on the farm is complicated by the fact that this free labour is essential to the farm’s survival. Many of the racialized farmers featured in The Color of Food prioritize cooperative networks that facilitate teaching, sharing and mutual support (Bowens, 2015). The narratives of cooperation, competition and self exploitation also remind of the dual sided concept of survival and resistance
mentioned earlier (Minkoff-Zern, 2017). However, self exploitation, cooperation and free labour are also tactics used by non-immigrant small-scale farmers in the current economic climate to remain solvent (Ekers et al., 2015). Just as the use of volunteers, interns, family or other forms of free labour was variously portrayed by participants as a way of teaching, passing on expertise, or cooperation, this set of narratives has also been used by other small-scale farmers in Ontario (Ekers et al., 2015) and does bring in the question of whether or not these enterprises are successful or simply kept afloat through a mix of self-exploitation and exploitation of others’ free labour. These narratives show that immigrant small scale farmers are using many of the same tactics as other small-scale farmers in Ontario.

Land was also a preoccupation for the majority of the participants. For hobby farmers, they often had difficulty finding somewhere to grow, encountering waitlists, full plots or no viable spaces near where they lived. For all the farmers growing for income, they mentioned the difficulty of finding land at all, much less available affordable land. As noted earlier, none of the participants owned the land they farmed on; they either leased the land themselves or farmed on land leased by Black Creek Community Farm. Adam named land as the number one issue contributing to farmer’s struggles and even though he had found a space he believed he was very lucky. He said, “The hardest part of making it economically viable is accessibility to land, most farmers don’t have access to a growing space.” Janine also chalked her own ability to find growing space up to luck, as she stumbled upon a posting online on the very night that the deadline was closing. She noted that immigrants are in a unique position because they have to learn about growing in Canada, adjust to the climate and once they do, they still have to find land. She said, “you don’t own land. It’s not, you don’t inherit any, I think the struggle might be to attain land, right?” As she pointed out, immigrants are not generally able to access land through familial ties.
Micah felt that the immigration system is part of the problem as well, since new immigrants are often trapped in parts of the city where they have no options. He says:

*Right now, the newcomer settling system doesn’t work. It doesn’t work on so many levels that by the time people end up here then we bring them into towers where they can’t even do anything themselves. So just taking my story, I had a backyard so I could grow, I started just moving until it became a trade. Now I’m employed in it. Do you see what I mean? The first thing is location and relocation of immigrants based on land….there’s another part where the draw to urban spaces feels like a social bait where there’s nothing, no jobs, no anything and grey matter and distress, and so it feels like the government wants it, there’s a need for rural growth, but there’s no push for people to think rural is cool or stop lying to us and giving us incentive so that we move to rural spaces...So rural changes, it becomes mechanized farming and [sighs] sounds crazy too, you know when the money moves there...its like this gentrification, when no one’s there rent is cheap, things are different and then all of a sudden things start to change you can’t afford the metro, things are different too. So, I don’t know, its complicated.*

Micah drew on a lot of points in this speech, but what is palpable throughout is his angst about the topic. He thought that land was a critical component in securing livelihoods for new immigrants facing a tough job market and a way to sustain oneself instead of being trapped in apartment blocks and reliant on government aid until you are able to enter the job market. He also suggested that rural space might be the solution to immigrants crowding cities without finding opportunities and that immigrants could be the rejuvenation that many rural spaces require. However, even within his same speech he acknowledges that this is not as simple as it sounds as the question of gentrification would affect costs over time.

Micah was correct in pointing out a clear trend in the urban – rural divide. Lewis also noted that when he moved to a more rural location to farm he stopped encountering the same diversity of farmers. Speaking of his new farm location he said, “*No not diverse no, when I go there I don’t see so much black people. In Toronto, every meter you see black people, every five meters you see black people, but in [this area] no*” He went on to mention that he could meet, “Jamaican, African, Indian, and Canadian people,” at his earlier plot, but since moving further
away because of a lack of land options near the city, he only really saw white farmers. This separation of racialized and non-racialized farmers into urban and non-urban environments respectively is something that came up anecdotally throughout my time on the farms and that I noticed myself in visiting farm spaces further from the city core. Most of the participants noted that they lived in apartment blocks or housing where they could not grow at home, and that their plots are the only place where they can grow, but even so, no one wanted to move to rural communities. Considering new immigrants are less likely to want to live in these areas because of the lack of infrastructure and social services (Leach et al., 2007), Canadian laws and immigration policies have shaped and continue to shape where racialized bodies can settle and belong in the Canadian landscape (Aguiar and Marten, 2011) and the fact that research has shown that immigrants can and do experience racist discrimination in rural areas in Ontario (Arora, 2017; Lai and Huffey, 2009) it is not necessarily surprising that the participants did not want to relocate. However, when asked why exactly they would not want to move to a more rural area, few of the participants gave one specific reason. Some participants noted that they did not want to move away from familial or community connections where they had established themselves. A few participants also acknowledged Indigenous people or their presence on the land and pointed out that the government giving away land to new immigrants was also a thorny proposition, because of the vicious history of settlement and land theft in Canada. Vivian stated that farms in Ontario all occupy Indigenous land, making for a complicated situation for both those already farming and those looking to get started. She said:

*To be honest, this is a native settlement that we on right now, this is stolen land. It’s sort of like stolen people on stolen land. Like bringing stolen people and people who had their land stolen together to look at how we can work together to support each other as we do food justice work.*
According to Vivian, no one could shy away from the fact that the land is stolen, so direct and open communication and cooperation was necessary to move forward, because new immigrants are also in a complicated position occupying colonial land.

In Ontario, land is a preoccupation for all new farmers, regardless of race or ethnicity, as it is one of the biggest barriers preventing new farmers from running their own operations (Mitchell et al., 2007). This scarcity of available land in Toronto and its environs has resulted in a variety of creative solutions, such as backyard sharing or squatting on unused property (Wekerle and Classens, 2015). It is not surprising then that these farmers also list land access as a significant impediment to growing. That being said, new immigrant farmers that are more likely to farm in urban or peri-urban areas have to deal with the increased scarcity and prices of land in these areas and are unlikely to have familial connections to land or networks that give them access to growing space. On the other hand, as noted above, simply relocating immigrants to rural land is not the desired choice for any of the participants or an uncomplicated option.

5.4.2 Racialization in the Farm Community

Despite facing some of the same difficulties as other small-scale farmers in Ontario, there were some points in the stories shared that it became clear that racialization created distinct experiences for the participants. When I probe if and how participants feel race affects their experiences of farming, an interesting pattern emerges. Most of those growing food only for personal use or as a hobby did not feel it was a factor, which may have been because they did not have to encounter much resistance to their day to day work, farming within their community on their plots. Similarly, the racialized but non-black farmers in the group also did not elaborate on the subject, while all but one of the black participants felt that race played a major role. The fact that only the black farmers discussed these points, may have been connected to my own presence
as a black researcher and the comfort levels of those participants, but it also may suggest that racialization affects these immigrants differently and that black participants may be more likely to experience racial discrimination or are more perceptive of these situations.

Vivian explained that for some people of colour, particularly black people, farming itself can be a loaded activity. Vivian’s own opinions on the activity changed several times from childhood to adolescence, so she described her views in her birth country as a child moving to a big city and later once she moved to Canada:

…from living in the village and then coming to the city and then knowing that oh farming is not so sexy, its not so hot, you don’t really wanna say that you’re a farmer, that’s looked upon as like a native thing. But then also learning in the north American context, there’s a different context when you talk about the North American slave trade and how people of colour were used for farming and just sort of that understanding, so me...coming into this country and then learning that there’s another layer of like slavery that’s added to farming, so of course when I first came here, farming was not what I wanted to be when I grew up.

Vivian’s use of native here is not referring to indigenous people in Canada, but rather tribal communities found in her birth country. Farming is associated with these tribal communities and so Vivian realized that her family’s lifestyle was looked down upon in her birth country when she moved to the city because of ideas of class and what kind of work is considered respected. However, she learned an entirely different understanding of farming when she spoke with black people living in Canada, who in some cases associated farming with slavery. These associations sometimes had material effects, not only in the reluctance of some black people to start farming, but even in the day to day work of the job. Vivian described one such scenario in which a black farmer and a white farmer were working together to complete a task:

they had to throw hay into the back of the truck, but the white guy was driving the truck and the black guy was the one dumping the hay into the thing. And he [the black farmer] had a moment where he had to pause, “this feels so weird to me, I don’t wanna be the one throwing the hay, I wanna drive, you throw the hay, this feels like slavery, right?”
In this story, what may seem like a neutral task, had underlying racial undertones that were disproportionately felt by the black farmer. However, Lewis was one black participant who asserted that he was not bothered by the fact that most of the people he farmed with were white, because when it came to his daily work he did not feel race is a major factor, since the job and methods he used are the same as the other farmers who did not share his race. He said:

*Black farmer is no different. It’s the same. Black farmer, white farmer it’s no different, it’s the same job, black colour to white colour, that’s it, the difference is colour, the technique is the same...Farmer, when I meet some people, I don’t see the difference, once they say they are farmer I say Oh Okay! You are farmer ok! Nice to meet you, it’s okay... Always smile, It’s not different.*

This quote implies that he felt the identity of farmer was more relevant on a daily basis than his racial identity, particularly because he did not experience overt racism in the form of slurs or hate crimes and all his colleagues were polite and kind.

However, racism was described by other farmers, although not necessarily in the form of violent verbal attacks. The other black farmers were adamant that race played a determining role in how they were treated and the opportunities they had. Janine stated:

*race plays into everything. Let’s just say I don’t think a lot has changed, I think there is tremendous tolerance, but I don’t think a lot has changed, I think a lot of stuff is now either swept under the carpet or because we’re so diverse right now, we learn to live with each other’s differences, but basically black will always be black, white will always be white and I don’t mind saying that. And I don’t say that from a nasty point of view. I’m just saying it is what it is.*

This aligned with a common refrain in many writings on race in Canada - the feeling that race is not discussed, that it is hidden or deemed finished all while continuing to shape lives and preventing those affected from moving forward (Dua and Robertson, 1999; Bannerji, 2000). For
Janine, race is pervasive and ever present whether it is being addressed by the average person or not.

Participants mention a range of stories from personal microaggressions to larger systemic issues. Vivian spoke about being frequently overlooked in meetings and assumed to be holding a lesser position based on her appearance. Adam shared the following story:

_I was transplanting something one day and this woman who happened to be a Caucasian woman was telling me, “oh that’s not how you transplant,” and I was like, “What? I’ve been transplanting ever since I was like 5 years old with my dad and my uncle and so I think I know how to transplant a vegetable.” And that was just one example of the experiences [I have had]. Also, being out there in the farmers’ market and not seeing a full identification of people of colour represented in the food movement and I felt that was not a true story of the food growers that I know to exist._

Here Adam describes two experiences. First, the lowered expectations of some of the people he encounters and the assumptions they make about his abilities. Secondly, the question of representation. Since he grows primarily with people of colour, yet rarely sees any people of colour when he goes to venues to sell produce, he feels that there is a disconnect between the space where he grows and where he sells. Adam’s story suggests that even as a farmer and vendor who has managed to access this space, the overwhelming physical presence of only white bodies can itself be a signifier that he is out of place (Saldanha, 2006; Slocum, 2007) and this can be alienating and frustrating, particularly because he knows a wide variety of racialized growers. It also reinforces the idea that although white spaces are naturalized as neutral, they are _not_ neutral for the people of colour that encounter them (Kobayashi and Peake, 2000). There has been significant research on the whiteness of farmers markets in the United States (Alkon and McCullen, 2011; Guthman, 2008b; Slocum, 2007) and Canadian studies also show that the clientele is overwhelmingly white and middle class and racialized vendors are underrepresented (Gibb and Wittman, 2013; Campigotto, 2010). Representation in farmers markets is important
not only because of the discomfort racialized farmers can feel participating in a white space, but also on a financial level, as this can be a primary way that small-scale farmers are able to distribute and sell their produce and therefore make money.

Adam went on to explain that he has often felt left out of some of the more recent food movement actions that have taken place in the GTA and therefore lost out on key opportunities to sell produce or make connections. He believes that white Canadians tend to have more resources and access to opportunities and can get further ahead. He continued:

*I feel that once you leave out the disenfranchised and the dispossessed people from an apparent organic movement then its not really a movement that is bringing along the fullness of organic agriculture. Because mostly the farmers when you go the farmers market are usually run by white women who have some form of university education and who have accessibility to money, to buy loans, equipment to get grants whatever, so they are able to take advantage of that movement, but I think people of colour and black people, don’t have equal access to that same market. The movement could be more inclusive and share more information.*

This emphasis on young, white women being the leaders of this movement for growing locally and sustainably is pointed out by several participants. This is in line with the most recent agricultural census\(^6\) which shows young women are a growing demographic, farmer anecdotes (Levkoe and Ekers, 2016), and surveys of farm internship programs like CRAFT that report their participants are 63% women, an average age of 26 and 81% university educated (Mitchell et al. 2007). According to Vivian, even once racialized farmers manage to get established they have to do more work in comparison to white Canadians:

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*We are dominantly racialized here and I feel that, it’s not even I feel, it’s a fact that we’re not taken seriously. I feel like you’re scrutinized differently, you have to work ten times as hard, you have to prove yourself, and I feel like you’re never done proving yourself. I proved myself this year, give me some slack? You gotta keep proving yourself.*

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\(^6\) The 2016 Census of Agriculture reports that women farmers are up from 27.4% in 2011 to 28.7% in 2016.
Urban agriculture in the city of Toronto is dominated by white people, its dominated by white women, by young middle class, upper class, white people, who saw this as a hobby as well in some respects. And then there are some who really care...the people that should be providing support are like ohhh [disappointed tone] ...I’m sure if it was dominated by white people it wouldn’t be the same, you know?

This personal story highlights the daily pressure to work harder than others to see the same results. This is a form of extra labour and eventually this extra labour begins to take a toll. Micah sums this up succinctly, “it drains, trying to fight for space is more draining than anything I know. I don’t even want it any more.” This racial battle fatigue (Smith, 2004) manifests as mental and emotional stress, the result of dealing with racism in its many forms: ranging from microaggressions and inequitable dealings to violent actions. This exhaustion was a feature of all these stories shared by black farmers.

These stories show the range of effects race can have on these farmers, whether colouring their own perceptions of the tasks they are completing, dealing with microaggressions or struggling to be given the same opportunities and support. The majority of the black farmers who farm as a source of income face similar challenges to other small-scale farmers, but have distinct experiences because of their race and their stories show the extra strain that places on them.

5.5 Visions for Change

Many of the immigrants I spoke to are frustrated with the current system and want to see more support for change. The main frustrations surround access to land and the perception that the government is always talking and never doing. On the other hand, there are many ideas that they want to see come to pass, including more programs to help those transitioning to farming, increased government support, and more connection of agriculture to other social issues.
5.5.1 Real Action

An ongoing narrative is one of frustration with the status quo, despite continuous government committees, meetings and stakeholder consultations. While Adam wanted to see, “...more meetings, more consultations, more training and development, more hands-on training....”, Janine felt there had been too much talking and consulting, and not enough change.

She said:

*I’d like to see the people who write all these policies and make all these promises actually take a step and fulfill some of these things and not just talk about it and have a meeting about the meeting about the meeting, I’d like to see them do something instead of just talk, because so far that’s all they’ve done is talk. It seems to me that they hire more consultants to do more talking. There’s no manifestation of anything, it’s all talk to me.*

Janine was frustrated because although there had been an abundance of meetings, they had not necessarily led to meaningful change. Vivian pointed out that sometimes the meetings themselves are not the issue but the Government inaction that follows. According to Vivian, there was also government bias towards large corporations and this contributed to the barriers blocking radical change. “*It’s a government body that has the power to change the way the food systems are set up. And they don’t do that, why? Because they’re also in the pocket of these big corporations, right?*” Writing on the development of federal multicultural policy in Canada, Das Gupta suggests that the government is largely focused on it’s economic wellbeing and is increasingly reliant on private interests in the capitalist system to remain solvent (1999). She also argues that policy makers’ consultation with marginalized groups is simply done to legitimize the government and not necessarily to have meaningful dialogue (Das Gupta, 1999). Micah argued along this line because he was skeptical that there was even useful consultation happening:
There’s systemic deafness, I know there’s systemic deafness. Whenever there’s an idea the solution has already been made and we’re just being walked through to the gate, to be honest. The decisions already made and we’re just being swayed. Behind the backdoors the people have already decided, the movers and shakers, affinities, it’s what makes it, foundations that give the money. [It’s a] private public, kind of balance so by the time it gets to us it’s more like, “this would be more beneficial for you if this way.” And how you tell the story shapes the answer, if I bring the story to you, consulting to you. Your answer will be based on what information I give you, so that’s where I think, by the time it’s a consultation there is already an idea.

This narrative of deafness implies that although there is a lot being said by marginalized communities, those with the power to make change are not listening. Although Micah had been officially included, he felt that he still lacked any power in the situation and was only present so that he could rubber stamp any proposals that were passed his way. Writers focusing on food related organizing and activism criticize attempts to include marginalized groups in policy circles or organizing for exactly this reason: failing to actually share power equitably (Guthman, 2008b; Slocum, 2007). There are calls to move “beyond inclusion” towards new relationships that alter current power structures and prioritize anti-oppression and decolonial strategies (Kepkiewicz et al, 2015). The participants’ frustration with continuous talks and consultations, was not because they did not want a chance to share their thoughts but was tied to this feeling that conversations are not held in good faith and were unlikely to involve substantial change. This frustration is understandable when each participant had a wealth of ideas for the future of the food system.

5.5.2 Government Support: Transitional Programming

For the participants getting involved in farming was consistently a long process that required significant personal investment alongside luck. Lewis had trained and worked as a farmer before moving to Canada, but nonetheless was not able to find work when he first arrived. He recounted the story:

I moved Canada and I send my resume everywhere, everywhere, everywhere! I call and they say, “yes, you have good experience, good everything” but they say, “we get some
people who are better than you.” Every time! “Yes, you have good things, but we get someone else.” So, after one year I say no I can’t stay at home nothing to do, and umm Service Ontario give me some money to pay rent and do everything but I need to look my job, so I what I do, I go factory to look a job to get some money to do my own business, that’s why. I go to factory maybe 2-3 years and get the money to pay [for land], but when I start [farming] I didn’t start full time but part time, I was working and after work I go to the farm.

Lewis only took this final step to pay for land once he had completed one rural internship and several OMAFRA workshops, and was finally told by a second mentor who he applied to intern with that he was overqualified and ready to branch off on his own. He applied to work with a farm incubation program and even once he started growing he continued to work at the factory job that he did not enjoy to ensure that he was covered should his first attempts fail to make him enough money. This process of starting up a career in farming always required a significant investment of time, if not money as well. Janine took a series of OMAFRA courses and business courses, all of which she paid for using savings from her other career, one of these involved leaving the city for training. She explained:

it was a little bit hard cause it was this time of year a little bit cooler when everything is done in the fields and you need to book room and board, bread and breakfast and just stay there, its out in Guelph somewhere until you finish this course. So, I got a certificate from that and then I went and I took a business course and that took six months, and so I learned all I needed to know from that business course and so I decided that I was gonna bring all these things together and I was going to go into business for myself.

Janine had to relocate for a period of time, take time off work, use her savings to pay for the courses and additional costs, all before she was sure that she was prepared to go into farming officially. All these costs preceded any and all start up costs, such as buying equipment and supplies or leasing land. After all of these costs and commitments, she still was only able to lease land because she qualified for a farm incubation program, where she paid for a small plot and was mentored and monitored throughout her first growing season.
Micah and Adam both were growing food on their own, before they were fortunate enough to qualify for different, but similar government programs that funded their growing in Toronto. Micah started growing in his backyard as a way to deal with his work status being in limbo when he first decided to file to stay in Canada. He said:

*I kinda came [to Canada] and then decided I wasn’t going back so my whole paperwork wasn’t allowed to start doing anything until all my paperwork came in. I was so naive, ok I’m going, maybe I stay, maybe I go, alright I’m not going back. And so, I couldn’t work, I couldn’t do anything and at that point it was starting to drive me nuts. And then I started growing food. It felt like that was a natural way of entering the system without breaking any law for a start.*

Once his paperwork came through, he applied to and was accepted by a municipal youth growing program that was critical in teaching him the skills he later used to launch his career. Meanwhile, Adam was taking a step back from his career to decide on next steps when he began to consider organic growing as an option, “I started coincidentally reading the right books, meeting the right people and being in the right place at the right time and things started materializing.” He began reading up on organic agriculture online and using the library system, something mentioned by many of the participants. Since he was unemployed, he qualified for an employment program that was partially subsidized by the government that started him working in agriculture and begin learning the trade firsthand. Both Micah and Adam needed their respective programs to transition from farming at home to farming professionally, because they did not have any relevant personal connections, inheritance or large amounts of savings to get a first foot in the door. All of these immigrants cited luck in stumbling upon their programs and grants, because they lacked the networks or connections to introduce them to farming and would likely have not been able to proceed without these programs and grants.

These stories show that there usually was a significantly long process of transition for those looking to start farming, and this process also required significant investments of time and
money. This is in line with other new farmers, for whom the upfront costs of equipment, supplies and land are huge barriers to entry (Mitchell et al., 2007). In one study of new farmers in Ontario, the farmers list parents who are able to help financially as a major asset, because they can provide loans, new equipment and even a place to stay in the off season (Ngo and Brklacich, 2014). None of the immigrant farmers I spoke with mentioned receiving funding from their parents or relatives to begin farming. Instead they all relied on farm incubation programs, government employment or youth training programs, suggesting that municipal or provincial programs that support new farmers may be essential for immigrant farmers to get started, especially since this demographic may not have relatives in a financial position to contribute to their ventures.

5.5.3 Government Support: Funding

There were some participants who felt that they had gotten good help from government agencies or programs, particularly positive advice or funding that they received while establishing their farm careers. Lewis was the most positive about the work of OMAFRA as he relied on them the most for courses, advice and contacts when he was first trying to get Canadian experience in agriculture. He said:

_I think the rules and system in Ontario is very good, OMAFRA do good job, I like OMAFRA, because they work with the farmer and they have good advice and do good job...Advice and sometimes they give money to the farmer to work, they encourage, they push farmers to do well._

The interesting point here is that OMAFRA served both an advisory role and provided funding, not simply one or the other. Some farmers, like Janine and Lewis credited their success to aid they were given in the form of advice, monetary or policy based support from organizations like OMAFRA or the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation and advocated for these programs and supports to continue. A point that was brought up by nearly all participants is continued and
increased government support, in a dual format of advice and funding particularly for individuals and small-scale farming.

Others acknowledged the existence of government programs and subsidies, but felt they were geared towards larger farm operations and corporations that actually made it more difficult for them to compete. Vivian noted that there was a general trend in funding or subsidizing large scale chains and corporations, while smaller scale projects floundered or were unsure if funding would be renewed. She stated:

*Part of the challenge is that, there isn’t [money] for small scale farming or urban agriculture projects. There isn’t core funding from all levels of government, municipal, federal, or the province, there’s none that exists. Loblaws, big chain stores they get subsidies, right? They get subsidies to grow food, to sell food, they get subsidies overall. But small-scale farmers like us, we don’t, so it makes it very challenging for small scale farms, urban agriculture projects that are really looking into engaging people.*

Adam echoed this point of small scale funding that is accessible to those starting out, “*I think we need access to small grants, to small capital since there is enough access to some land in the city to show someone how they can grow food reliably.*” Here Adam suggests that for those starting out with small scale projects is needed alongside access to land, not simply one or the other.

Securing funding for those looking to run farms of any size is incredibly difficult because of the risk associated with farming, which makes banks hesitant to give out loans. A Greenbelt study of new and ethnic farmers in Ontario noted a major barrier to entry is the “lack of access to capital and credit” (Mitchell et al., 2007, 2). Buying equipment and supplies and renting or buying land are just some of the necessary start up costs that can deter or stop someone from starting out.

Gary pointed out, however, that it was not only the size of the farm that made securing funding difficult, but the kind of farm enterprise as well:
it’s easier to set up a farm that’s like a top down hierarchy, that it’s very easy for them to take advantage of workers, but it’s harder to set up a worker owned co-op farm, just trying to get loans and stuff to get that sort of business of the ground it’s much harder.

In Ontario, the tax and policy rules around setting up farms are already confusing for individuals wanting to enter the field (OMAFRA and OFA both have primers to help new farmers navigate the rules), but there are no similar widely available information packets on joint ownership arrangements. In terms of finding land for agricultural use, non-traditional arrangements outside of leasing, renting and owning exist (Wekerle and Classens, 2015) but these are not tracked by the government so there is little data on how commonly these arrangements take place, if they are successful and if they are increasing (Ekers et al., 2015). Currently tax breaks, property laws, grants and agricultural policy generally still support larger consolidated farm entities (NFU 2015; NFU 2010). For example, grant schemes that require farmers to match government funding are not always accessible to new and small-scale farmers. The overwhelming response of these farmers is that existing funding has been crucial to their success, but that it is usually difficult to find, qualify for and temporary. Alongside increased funding and grants tailored to new and smaller-scale farmers, they want to see policy evolve to promote or allow for other formats of farm enterprises.

5.6 Summary of Narratives

The stories shared in this chapter are small in number, specific and localized in focus, but as Cameron writes, “it may be that it is precisely in small, local storytelling that political transformation becomes possible, even if we cannot know in advance where our stories will lead” (2012, 588). In beginning this project, I was careful not to make specific claims as to how exactly sharing immigrant stories can change the landscape of farming and food growing in Ontario, because the experiences of twelve individuals cannot represent the diversity of opinions and outlooks that exist for all immigrants growing food. Nonetheless, I believe that these voices
enrich understandings and open avenues to new conversations. The narratives shared in this chapter show aspects of each participant’s personal journey and relationship to food and growing throughout their lives. They show several different histories of and pathways to farming, a variety of opinions on the food system, and the distinct experiences that they associate with farming in Ontario.

The stories shared by the 12 immigrants show that growing is not as concerned with culturally appropriate or ethnic produce as it is a combination of reasons including taste, freshness, quality, and the ability to pass on cultural memories to one’s family. Growing is also both a way to cope with the failings of the food system, and a way to fight back or extract themselves from the food system, which they feel in many ways has been set up for people to fail. These stories suggest that immigrants are not only growing for cultural reasons, but for a wide variety of concerns to do with the taste, freshness and quality of their food. At the same time, the space of the farm acts as a comfortable and accessible green space where they can experience the therapeutic effects of nature, learn the Canadian terrain and become more comfortable with their new physical environment. The community built around these fields was a source of joy and belonging and the growers did tend to participate with other aspects of social and political life in their neighbourhoods, in keeping with concepts of food and soil citizenship, however these stories show that connection with the local food and farm community in the GTA or Canadian identity did not necessarily follow. For many of them, national belonging was tenuous at best and many of the farmers did not identify with the local food movement generally. Participants cited language barriers and a lack of connection as reasons they did not meet with others outside of their internal farm community and on a larger scale pointed to an exclusionary national imaginary as a major reason why they did not feel this belonging.
For those farming as a source of income, the same difficulties for other new and small-scale farmers applied, high start up costs, the obstacle of land access, and elements of self exploitation and the use of free labour. These participants noted, however, that unlike some new farmers in Ontario (Ngo and Brklacich, 2014) they could not necessarily receive parental financial support and instead relied on their own savings or miscellaneous government programs to take that first step. The black farmers also highlighted the effects of race on their impressions of farming and their daily operations, such as microaggressions or their perceived ability to access opportunities.

Finally, there were some key ideas that emerged around the changes they wished to see. Many pointed out that currently consultation is very popular, but doubted that these consultations were linked to meaningful dialogue or active change, especially because the government was perceived as being focused on serving big capital, such as food corporations or large agricultural entities. There were also calls for transitional programming and government funding for individuals entering the field and starting small-scale farms. For new farmers who do not have access to capital, property or contingency plans through their families, farm incubation programs, youth agricultural training programs, loans and grants are essential. They also pointed out that policy needs to be shifted to allow for different models of farming outside of the large corporate farms that dominate Ontario agriculture. Most of these immigrants had a lot in common with other small-scale farmers using alternative growing methods, but did display different understandings of farm space, belonging and the effects of racialization. They were also generally not satisfied with the status quo of the food system and the inaction of the government, but were motivated to see real change for future generations, even though this fight for change and belonging can be a tiring one.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, I conducted a discourse analysis of local news media to determine what imaginaries and narratives were associated with local food and if and/or how those narratives are intertwined with and uphold whiteness and national mythologies. The second part of the study was focused on immigrant voices and their stories and experiences of growing food in the Greater Toronto Area. This process was useful because in both the critical analysis of dominant narratives and the gathering of counternarratives it became possible to unmap (Razack, 2002) these narratives and expose the ways in which they support racial hierarchies and inequality.

The media discourse analysis of Toronto Star articles showed that these articles do disseminate specific ideas about local food. In the articles, local food is associated with specific places in rural space. These landscapes and the farms found on them are portrayed as beautiful, potential spaces of leisure for city dwellers wanting to experience farm activities or and a mixed home and workplace for farming families. There was a larger narrative of agricultural identity that promoted a multicultural, immigrant agricultural national identity. This narrative suggested that farming was a rite of passage for assimilation into Canadian society similar to the experiences of the first settlers. While this narrative may appear more inclusive and open to diversity, it nonetheless maintained the picture of white farming families as unmarked and presented settlement of rural space as an uncomplicated and uncontroversial process, whether or not this is realistic or achievable for new immigrants. The call to the long tradition of local food denies the violent history of settlement, ignores the histories of indigenous occupation of the land and excludes the people of colour who farmed in Ontario long before current waves of immigration.
The counterstories of the immigrant growers showed that there were different experiences of growing food and farming not seen in those articles. These immigrants were almost all growing in urban or peri-urban locations, a space that was rarely represented in the local food discourse. Although these immigrants were not in rural space, they viewed their farm plots as wild, natural spaces where they could interact with Canadian wildlife and nature. The discourse portrayed rural farm space as the place to go for city dwellers needing a break from the city, but the farm plots of these immigrants all exist in urban and peri-urban space, challenging the notion of city vs. nature. Similarly, none of the immigrants lived on their farm plots, further challenging the idea of classic family farms wherein the farm space is both home and work. While this is a product of my sample, speaking with immigrants renting farm plots on communal spaces and does not mean immigrants may not be interested in living on their land, it does hint that the farm landscape of Ontario is changing and new farmers may be less likely to follow the patterns of land ownership and homesteading of previous generations, because of land cost and accessibility.

Aside from the space of the farm, the media discourse on local food focused on the farmer as being one in a long generational line of farmers, who continues to teach their children the trade. This farmer was an unmarked or neutral white Canadian and immigrants were portrayed as the exotic other, who over time with hard work could settle and become like their white Canadian counterpart. Many of the immigrants did come from farming backgrounds, but most were second career farmers, who only turned to farming after working in other areas. Since they did not inherit farmland, equipment or have access to capital, my participants reported many of the struggles faced by new farmers that were not featured in the media discourse. On the other hand, because the discourse framed white farmers as the norm, experiences that are unique to
racialized farmers were never featured, such as the microaggressions, systemic exclusions and language barriers reported by my participants.

The media discourse also suggested that immigrants could eventually access Canadian identity through agriculture as the first immigrants did, without mentioning the violent history of settlement or acknowledging the wildly different circumstances of today’s society. While the growers I spoke with built internally strong communities and cultivated belonging, this did not extend to the wider farming community or local food movement. It was clear that the growers I spoke with were participating in many organizations and were active members of the body politic in their neighbourhoods or cities as suggested by the concepts of food and soil citizenship, but this did not necessarily translate into a strong connection to Canadian identity and citizenship, because of powerful racial imaginaries of what it means to be Canadian and how racialized people are often excluded systemically. In fact, the very idea of soil citizenship could be considered as problematic, when the land required to undergo this process is stolen land and indigenous people are often disappeared from this narrative.

For those farming as a source of income, there were clear elements of self-exploitation and reliance on free labour that suggest that farming remains a difficult profession, not the idealized picture seen in the articles. Those farming as a source of income experienced many of the struggles identified by other new farmers, difficulty accessing loans and land and continued struggles ensuring that the business remains economically sustainable, but none of those I spoke with could rely on familial capital, connections through networks or land inheritance that can be passed on within established farming families. Unlike the passing down of farms portrayed in the media discourse, Immigrants relied on programs offered by OMAFRA, the municipal government and organizations like the Greenbelt Network to start farming. Despite the help
received from these programs they were not guaranteed or permanent and these farmers expressed frustration with the government who they felt was not doing enough, especially for small scale farmers or farmers using alternative cooperative formations to build their businesses. Those who were frustrated cited capitalist influence and a lack of meaningful consultation as important reasons why the food system was not changing and they saw the government as complicit. These counterstories suggest that the idyllic picture of local food as a is in fact much more complicated than the local food discourse portrays.

The issue with some of the aforementioned omissions from the media discourse is that they can have material effects. If issues are not spoken about in news media, they often have trouble gaining political support and are less likely to influence policy decision. For example, Farmstart, the organization that ran McVean Incubator Farm, suspended operations in 2016 of its various farm training and incubator programs because of a continued lack of funding. Programs like McVean were essential in the development of the farming careers of many of the immigrants I spoke with. If the discourse assumes all farming families are multigenerational and continue to pass on land and equipment, without discussion of the struggles facing new farmers or the contested nature of this land, then new food and agricultural policy will ignore the need for targeted funding, transitional programming and Indigenous involvement in agricultural land policy.

In keeping with my desire to do critical research that was participatory and beneficial to the community, this thesis is not the only output for this information. The focus group decided their preferred output would be a report that spoke about their difficulties within the current system, but also their desires for the future. This report will be made electronically available to all participants as well as the organizations themselves and can be shared in future policy meetings,
consultations or grant applications, if necessary. My hope is that the information gained from these interviews will not remain only in the academic realm, but that it can be leveraged by community members for their own activities. This project focused specifically on the subset of immigrants growing in Ontario, but future research needs to include other perspectives such as the racialized Canadians who have been here for generations and Indigenous people who continue to fight to protect their land. Future research must also determine how these projects can go beyond academic conferences and have material effects for the communities involved. By building policy that features the voices of other vulnerable or marginalized groups, there is a better chance of capturing inequities and therefore working to change them.
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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Data Set for In-Depth Media Discourse Analysis

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Appendix B: Recruitment Documents and Consent Forms

B.1 Community Recruitment Poster

Department of Geography and Planning
University of Toronto

Are you an immigrant growing food in Toronto and the G.T.A.?
PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON LOCAL FOOD IN TORONTO.

We are looking for volunteers who were born outside of Canada to take part in this study. As a participant, you will be asked to give an interview sharing what you think about local food. The interview will be about one-hour long. You will also be invited to an optional focus group in August where you will be able to hear the research results and give your feedback.

In thanks for your time, you will get $20 CA or a shared meal during the interview.

For more information or to volunteer for this study,
please contact:

Jillian Linton
Email: jillian.linton@mail.utoronto.ca

This study has been reviewed by Dr. Sarah Wakefield and been approved by the UofT Research Ethics Board.
B.2 Research Study Information and Consent Form

Who?

My name is Jillian Linton, a Masters student from the Department of Geography and Planning at the University of Toronto. The study will focus on first generation immigrant ideas of local food and local food work in Toronto.

What?

I will be asking you to share your thoughts on local food and making, growing and eating food in Toronto. This will happen in an interview of about 1 hour, where we can share a meal if you choose or be compensated ($20) for your time. There will also be an optional focus group with other members from your community where I will share the information that I learn and you will be invited to share your opinion.

How?

With your permission, I will record the interview and write notes, but I will protect your privacy during the research project. Audio files will be destroyed after transcription and your personal information will be saved in encrypted files on a protected computer. They will be destroyed one year after the end of the research project. Identifiable comments and sensitive information from the interviews will not be shared during the focus groups. The report written based on the information gathered may be published in some form and include some quotes from your interview, but they will kept anonymous.

More Information:

I do not expect that this research will put you at risk or make you uncomfortable. If you do not want to answer one of the questions you do not have to. The benefit is that this project will include your opinion in local food conversations in Toronto. Your participation in the study is your choice and you may choose to stop or quit at any time. Your decision not to volunteer will not change your position at the University of Toronto. You can stop participating in the study at any time, for any reason, if you choose. If you leave the study, at any time before September 30, 2016 all information I take from you will be destroyed right away. After this date, your personal information will be destroyed, but it is possible that some parts of your interview may be mixed into the report. If you have more questions about the research, you can contact the researcher at jillian.linton@mail.utoronto.ca

I ________________________ have read/heard and understood the information above and agree to participate in this study.

________________________  _______________________
Signature                  Date
B.3 Organizational Recruitment Email

Hello _______________,

My name is Jillian Linton and I am a student researcher from the University of Toronto. I am a Masters student from the Department of Geography and Planning who is currently researching immigrants and local food here in the Greater Toronto Area. I have identified your organization* as an important hub for immigrants growing food locally in the Greater Toronto Area and was interested in completing interviews with some of your members in the coming months.

The focus of my project is on the different ways that immigrants (both new and established) perceive local food, food provision and the community created by the work of your organization*. Once the interviews are completed the participants and members of your organization will be able to hear a presentation of the important themes and ideas that emerged during the process at a focus group that I hope to hold in August. Participants will be able to comment and share further thoughts on the process. These interviews and comments will be analysed and compared to interviews collected from other similar organizations to better understand the way immigrants are participating in local food in the Greater Toronto Area generally. This research will also allow you to have a better understanding of what members think are the benefits and areas for growth for your organization*.

I would like to meet with you in person to discuss the project further and answer any questions you may have. I want this project to be mutually beneficial and I am also open to discussing ways that this project can help you. Is there a time in the coming week that is convenient for you to meet? Thank you for reading and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best,

Jillian Linton

MA Student
Department of Geography and Planning
University of Toronto
http://feast-uof.org/

* Replaced by Black Creek Community Farm or McVean Incubator Farm
### Appendix C: Interview Prompts

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<td>What motivated you to come to Canada?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Did you speak any English before you arrived?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Are you connected to your immigrant community here in the GTA?</td>
<td>How? (Community celebrations, Religious events etc.) IDENTITY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you feel at home in Toronto/GTA?</td>
<td>Why, Why not? BELONGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there major cultural differences?</td>
<td>Can you name some/ explain? BELONGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Food &amp; Foodways</strong></td>
<td>What is local food to you?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you eat, grow or buy local food?</td>
<td>If yes/no, why/why not?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>How have your diet/food consumption practices changed/ stayed the same since you have been in Toronto?</td>
<td>Could you tell me more about your role (in your family/household)? GENDER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would you want your diet/food habits to change?</td>
<td>If so, how? IMAGING ALTERNATIVES</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you imagine your ideal food buying experience?</td>
<td>(or how would you improve your current food buying practices?) IMAGING ALTERNATIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you imagine your ideal eating and/or cooking experience?</td>
<td>(or how would you improve your current food cooking/eating practices?) IMAGING ALTERNATIVES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community/Organization</strong></td>
<td>How did you get involved with this organization?</td>
<td>Was it through a friend/family, community posting etc?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you involved in any other food related organizations or events in Toronto/the GTA?</td>
<td>If yes, how did you get involved? If no, why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What benefits do you get from being involved in this (or other food related) organization(s)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How do you feel as part of this (or other food related) organization(s)?</td>
<td>Can you explain… What makes you feel this way? BELONGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you get involved with food events in the GTA?</td>
<td>If so, which ones? If not, why? BELONGING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Farming/Growing Food</strong></td>
<td>Why do you grow your own food?</td>
<td>Personal/Business etc. What do you do with the food you grow (extra)? Share it, cook it, sell it etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF BUSINESS:</td>
<td>Is farming your main job?</td>
<td>If yes…were you able to do this only from the beginning? What was the process like of starting a commercial farm?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does your family/ do your friends help you farm?</td>
<td>Is this a bonding activity? Are they employees? GENDER &amp; FAMILY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you grow food in your birth country?</td>
<td>If yes… how? On what scale? If no…why did you start in Canada?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did you find it hard to get started?</td>
<td>Why/Why not? What was difficult?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Questions</strong></td>
<td>There is a focus group in August…would you like to attend?</td>
<td>Do you have any plans in August that would make it difficult to attend? If so, when?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Focus Group Prompts

- Some interviewees said there were health, social and environmental benefits to growing food, but mentioned that they did not think the majority of people or young people would want to get involved in farming. *Do you agree with some of the interventions they suggested? How do you think people can be encouraged people to get involved (for example your children, friends, or acquaintances)*?

- Some interviewees noted that the business model of food has led to many health, social, and environmental problems, as production of food is about making money rather than producing something good for people and the environment. *Do you agree/disagree with some of the points they mentioned? What are changes you would like to see take place in the food system as a whole or what are changes you want to see as farmers, to the farm /production side?*

- Some interviewees mentioned training as being something important that they want to see more of, *what do you want to see in these training modules and/or how would you like existing training programs to change?*

- Some interviewees wanted to see more government funding for farmers, *what kind of funding would you like to see? What are some of the highest costs or costs that are most difficult for you to cover?*

- Some interviewees suggested that alternative farm business structures based on cooperation were preferable, *do you agree? If so, what business models would you like to see? Do you want to use cooperation or resource sharing more than you currently do?*

- Finally, *What output would you like to see for this research? (i.e. a report outlining opinions, an information booklet for new farmers, a website with resources etc.)*