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COVER PHOTOGRAPHY Parinaz Adib of works by unknown graffiti artists

Eating politically

Food Not Bombs and growing resistance

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This paper aims to demonstrate how the organization Food Not Bombs fits into a history of counter cultural food movements, especially through focusing on multiple political aims and the building of community through mutual food production and consumption. Through speaking with members who fill multiple roles within the Ontario chapters of the movement, I explore how various issues around the commodification of food, meat consumption, and activism inform how these individuals conceptualize their ‘food activism.’

KEY WORDS food, counterculture, anti-capitalism

Because... FOOD is a RIGHT not a privilege! Because there is enough food for everyone to eat! Because SCARCITY is a patriarchal LIE! Because a woman should not have to USE HER BODY to get a meal, or have a place to sleep! Because when we are hungry or homeless we have the RIGHT to get what we need by panning, busking or squatting! Because POVERTY is a form of VIOLENCE not necessary or natural! Because capitalism makes food a source of profit not a source of nutrition! BECAUSE FOOD GROWS ON TREES. Because we need COMMUNITY CONTROL. Because we need HOMES NOT JAILS! Because we need ... FOOD NOT BOMBS.

—Keith McHenry, *Hungry for Peace* (2012)

Counterculture food movements can take many forms and encompass many different reactions to what is seen as an inadequate system within a given society. Despite this, in many cases, there seems to be a certain compatibility within the ideologies and methods of resistance which allows for a level of comparison regarding how food is eaten ‘politically.’ Such a simple action as eating or obtaining food can be highly charged with social meaning. In this paper I look at members of one such group or community, Food Not Bombs, and aim to gain insight into how food practices can function to communicate resistance, solidarity, difference, and protest. However, this can occur in many different ways within the organization itself, and is not carried out through any singular action. Based within a history of similar movements, I argue that these intersectionalities and multiplicity of issues, within a framework of community, are key in how these members I have interviewed understand their food activism.

Looking at the contexts in which Food Not Bombs emerged, the same types of dissatisfactions with the current industrial food system come up regularly in countercultural food movements. From the hippy communes of the 1960s and 70s, to the punk movements in the 1990s, issues such as large-scale food production, alienation of consumers, environmental issues, and sustainability are addressed through some type of alternative eating. The global movement surrounding the ideology of Food Not Bombs demonstrates the same types of characteristics as many of these groups, including the importance of community-building, and sharing of ideas in order to address what is seen as a social crisis in need of immediate action. Though limited, this paper attempts to understand the perspectives of several Food Not Bombs members throughout Southern Ontario within the framework of overlapping and intersecting forms of resistance and political concerns.

Food Not Bombs itself originally stemmed out of other types of activism and protest; primarily, the Clamshell Alliance in Massachusetts which set out to protest a nuclear power station in the community of Seabrook, including founding member Keith McHenry (McHenry 2012:97). This effort included bake sales to help provide funding to members of the protests who had been charged or arrested using an original poster with the slogan “It will be a great day when our schools get all the money and the air force has to have a bake sale to buy a bomber” (McHenry 2012:97). This demonstrates the early anti-military sentiments present in these types of movements that still remain integral to the Food Not Bombs community today. While the bake sales themselves did not result in much cash, those involved noticed that they facilitated political discussion and the sharing of ideas (McHenry 2012:9).

The first instances of free food distribution occurred by chance and were the result of the performances of street theatre groups such as Clamshell Alliance, which used such opportunity to spread their message. On one occasion, they staged a Depression-era soup line in front of the city hall. Lacking sufficient protestors, they invited individuals from the local soup kitchen to join for a free meal (McHenry 2012:13). This situation allowed for the realization by several of the activists that food is an integral aspect in the building of community, in humanitarian efforts, and in the sharing of ideas. With time, this expanded to include the staging of free meals through the use of surplus and scavenged food which makes up the activities of the organization today. This eventually led to the official establishment of the Food Not Bombs community, whose name aptly sums up the politics behind it. As Zinn states: “This slogan requires no complicated analysis. Those three words ‘say it all.’ They point unerringly to the double challenge: to feed immediately people who are without adequate food, and to replace a system whose priorities are power and profit with one meeting the needs of all human beings” (Zinn in McHenry 2012:31). With its development, it maintained a relatively loose and flexible set of parameters which could cater to different communities with a variety of political interests and remains so today.

Food Not Bombs abides by three main principles:

1. The food is always vegan or vegetarian and free to everyone without restriction: rich or poor, stoned or sober.
2. Food Not Bombs has no formal leaders or headquarters; every group is autonomous and makes decisions using the consensus process.
3. Food Not Bombs is dedicated to nonviolent direct action and works for nonviolent social change.

While regional groups may incorporate other aspects of political and social involvement depending on group consensus, these three principles are what marks them as a general chapter of this organization.

Groups built on the three pillars of the organization are prevalent globally, maintaining the same central ethos while allowing for flexibility depending on context and environment. The official website lists almost five hundred different chapters globally (as well as maintaining that there may be hundreds more groups unaccounted for). Though focusing primarily on the group within a broader context, this paper examines the testimonies of a few individuals involved in Food Not Bombs in varying capacities from two chapters—Barrie and Peterborough. The informants from different groups/chapters offer different perspectives of the organization. Individuals initially aided in organizing their local chapter; one interacts officially with the local chapter through another non-profit organization and protests, while another mostly frequents the meals with no organizational function (though may interact with the group in other ways occasionally). All interviewees subscribed to some aspect of the ideology of the organization which fit with their personal politics, often overlapping in their political stances and goals. By examining these three principles, their functions and their links to these members of the Food Not Bombs community, as well as the greater ethos present, it becomes clearer how this organization can allow for popular and pervasive food activism.

It is helpful to first understand why this type of movement is deemed necessary by members and food activists in general, and to see why their dissatisfaction with the current food system has led them to this type of activism. Many see the current food-based activism as a symbol of the problematic issues of society as a whole. While reasons for participation differ among the members, the same types of problems with the status quo seem to come up repeatedly in some form or another: animal cruelty, the commodification of food items and bodies, sustainability, environmentalism, and a rejection of the greater capitalist system as a whole. These vary in their intensity depending on the movement, but are certainly all present in the community of Food Not Bombs and can be seen in other food activism as well. For example in some punk-identifying communities in the 1990s and early 2000s, as analyzed by Clark, issues stem from an association of “the civilizing process with ... domination of nature and with white, male supremacy” (2008:411). Belasco describes some of the same themes present in counterculture movements of the mid- to late-twentieth century:

As for an underlying ideology, I have detected three major themes that intertwined to give shape and coherence to countercultural food writings and practices. A consumerist theme targeted foods to be avoided, especially chemicalized “plastic” foods. A therapeutic theme had to do with positive concerns for pleasure and identity, particularly a hunger for craftsmanship, leisure and tradition. Concerned with the integration of self, nature, and community, an organic motif addressed serious issues of production and distribution, that is, how to reconcile private consumption with wider planetary needs. [2005:220]

In this, one sees that it is not only the rejection of industrial food and a concern for the environment which drives many types of countercultural movements within food production and consumption, but also a desire for pleasure and the ‘local.’

Industrial food production is not only associated with class warfare and a more general detachment from our food products, but also the destruction of the ecosystem which is necessary to provide a future for the human race (Clark 2008:413). The connection between the attainability of food for all and the industrialization of food production is directly linked, in turn, to issues of environmentalism. The solution is seen as transforming food from a “commodity” to a right of all humans (Clark 2008:414), produced in a way which demands equality and fair treatment of all involved. Food Not Bombs members do not see their sharing as charity, but rather as contributing to rights for all to eat (Heynen 2010:1229). Keith McHenry also describes the way the current food system approaches class and sustainability as inadequate and, actually, the true cause of poverty and starvation: “Over a billion people struggle to have enough to eat because of the decisions of business and government leaders; trade agreements and laws forcing genetically engineered seeds and chemicals on farmers, commodity speculation, and taxpayer subsidies to agribusiness directly increase hunger” (2012:18).

Heynen (2010), in his analysis of the Athens, Georgia collective of Food Not Bombs, argues that the group is based in anarchist ideals of mutual aid (1227). Within a “post-welfare” state, Food Not Bombs provides a more involved alternative to charities, many of whom are indebted to corporations and entangled in the very issues they are attempting to work against (Heynen 2010:1226). He argues that the groups he is working with use public visibility, as well as the concept of food as a “right” to work towards a “decommodified mode of biopolitics” and chip away at the existing system of regulation (Heynen 2010:1227). The groups that Heynen has worked with in Georgia carry out similar practices and convey similar messages as those members I have interviewed in Southern Ontario.

Through this perspective, Food Not Bombs and other like-minded organizations aim to aid those who cannot afford to eat or are stripped from their rights to food, while resisting the very system that enables and nurtures such states of inequality. This process of resistance is done through decommodification of both the food and the bodies consuming it. The capitalist food system can be seen as one which, for profit, necessarily causes “overproduction and waste” (Gross 2012:85), which can be subsequently taken advantage of if desired. Belasco describes the environmental focus of many resistance and counter-culture groups as stemming from an “oppositional void” left through an inadequacy of social change accomplished in other movements (2005:226). In this, not only is the capitalist food system circumvented as much as possible, but the leftovers of large scale food producers are consumed with purpose. However, this production of food maintains a considerable effect not only on communities, but on the environment itself. Factory farming and other industrial food production impact the environment in a detrimental way, but also create a poor use of available land.

United Nations studies report industrial agriculture also uses exorbitant amounts of land, the world’s fresh water supply and oil supply, and is responsible for 19 percent of the world’s greenhouse gas emissions (McHenry 2012:14). While this is largely stemming from meat and meat products, plant-based agriculture is also responsible. More than one Food Not Bombs member interviewed brought up the issue of Monsanto seed patents, as well as the inequality within industrialized crop farming. One member of the Peterborough Food Not Bombs community linked the type of criminalization of seed saving to the criminalizing of the organization itself, where farmers are expected to pay for every seed they

plant and individuals are expected to pay for every meal they consume. These can be seen as not only monopolizing supermarket shelves, but overtly damaging small, local farms (McHenry 2012:15). Taking into account the negative effects of industrial farming and also the transport of food goods worldwide, these movements may be seen as resistance to globalization and the destruction of the environment as well (Gross 2012:79).

The first principle of Food Not Bombs links this rejection of industrial farming to a movement generally associated with vegan/vegetarian eating. This, being part of the first principle of the community, is indexical of much more than the choice of simply supporting animal rights (though this is certainly a factor for many) and addresses many issues including sustainability, environmentalism, inclusion, and health. Rejection of meat consumption is not new in counter-culture food movements and can be seen in many of the commune eating habits of the 60's and 70's (Belasco 2005), as well as punk subcultures (Clark 2008). Clark discusses this in reference to his studies with punk communities in particular, where meat is seen as violent and associated with masculinity, while veganism or vegetarianism is generally seen as feminist (2008:415). Eating animals and animal products are also seen as “collaborative with an unjust social order” and linked to “corporate capitalism, patriarchy and environmental collapse” (Clark 2008:416). Within this viewpoint, veganism alone may be seen as a powerful form of activism (Clark 2008:420). This is not a distinctly punk view of meat consumption, and many of those interviewed in this paper reflect a linkage of veganism or vegetarianism to feminist or environmentalist ideologies.

While this may be seen as individual, and allows for the “freedom to eat meat” if desired, this is often seen as an activity not only affecting the individual making the choice, but the animals involved, the environment, the future of humanity, and the amount of food available for all (Clark 2008:416). Food Not Bombs members offered varying opinions on the importance of vegetarian food within this movement. One Food Not Bombs organizer from Barrie, Ontario, believes that vegetarian/vegan food is important to the movement for several reasons: “having a large selection of animal-free products is safer, as we are scavenging lots of the food, and it sits around for a couple of days before we cook. It also builds inclusiveness, I know I would not attend a dinner event that doesn't cater to veganism and a lot of people I know wouldn't either.” He also expressed the ability to introduce individuals who normally would not try vegan foods to how “awesome” it is. Another member supports this sentiment, describing himself as a “snotty, privileged meat and potatoes socialist” until he tried the best (vegetarian) curry squash soup of his life. Such statements reveal the possibility of a political transformation through taste and the enjoyment of particular kinds of foods.

One woman who participated in consumption of meals at the Food Not Bombs Peterborough chapter did not believe that vegetarianism was essential to the political message of the organization and expressed anticipation for “the moment when it includes all sorts of food sourcing.” This demonstrates the fluidity that this type of organization allows for, and members—though served vegetarian and vegan meals—are not expected to adhere to this in other aspects of their lives in order to maintain membership. While claiming to be an activist in many capacities, she did not prioritize vegetarianism and veganism in the same fashion as many other members. She did however, understand that regulations surrounding animal products and by-products put forth by the government are

stricter than those on less easily perishable food goods, and donated items of meat or dairy would be difficult to “avoid from spoiling.” She also expressed the importance of gaining support within mainstream health organizations; something which is more likely without the use of more heavily regulated meat or dairy foodstuffs.

Another individual from the Peterborough Food Not Bombs community sees vegan/vegetarian food as in line with the explicit politics of the organization, albeit not part of the strict nature of the movement: “Food Not Bombs is certainly concerned about animal cruelty and opposes the factory farm industry. The primary message behind Food Not Bombs is not necessarily animal liberation...while I do believe it supports the animal liberation movement, providing vegan food is not meant to impose a vegetarian agenda onto the community but to provide as much food as possible that everyone can eat.” While there is no meat present, he points to the occasional presence of non-vegan goods provided by some members or chapters and echoes that meat is not practical for this type of food service, nor is it—in his opinion—necessary.

While these views focus on the more practical and inclusive aspects of refusing to serve meat products, there are many members of the community which stress the more overtly political nature of this decision. Keith McHenry, one of the founding activists behind the Food Not Bombs movement, emphasizes the cost of meat consumption environmentally and socially:

More people can be fed from one acre of land on a plant based diet than on a meat based diet. Our society’s current meat-based diet promotes centralized, profit-driven agribusinesses and a dependency on chemical fertilizers, pesticides and genetically modified crops, resulting in the declining nutritional value of the food that is produced, while contributing to the destruction of our environment. (McHenry 2012:26)

This falls in line with commune cookbook ideology as well in many senses despite many of the recipes within not necessarily being vegetarian or vegan (Hartman 2003:34). In addition to vegan or vegetarian food, the first principle also indicates that the food should be “free to everyone without restriction.” It is difficult to separate this egalitarian strategy from the vegetarian ideology, and both can be seen as stemming from a dissatisfaction with the very same social and corporate systems.

Three Food Not Bombs members identified as anarchists (one more specifically as an anarcho-pacifist), an ideology which falls in line with this type of horizontal, consensual way of operating and participating in communities. One organizing member even distributed and discussed anarchist literature at meals directly, though certainly not every individual participating adheres to line with this ideology. Nonetheless it is simple to see the links between the two, and it is stressed by many that this is not a charity (McHenry 2012:18) but rather a “revolutionary” way of sharing and consuming food. In fact, the majority of members described periods where they are able to obtain food in other ways, but participated to help reinforce the message of community and resistance.

This addresses the perceived inadequacies in the current food system surrounding fair access and power relations. Clark discusses these sentiments as pervasive in punk cuisine, seeing corporate food producers as involved in “resource allocation, (where) food tends to

recapitulate power relations. Around the globe, unequal allocations of food according to a patriarchal system are common” (2008:415). These beliefs about the current food system in the West are often mirrored in opinions of members of other food movements. Some see the “Age of Cheap Oil,” where status, affluence, and wealth are demonstrated through the consumption of oil being tied to the consumption of global, “plastic” foods (Hopkins 2009:3). In this, the food created through these processes was not only often unattainable to those of lower classes, but also deliberately a marker of wealth and the gap between the rich and the poor.

One Food Not Bombs member from Peterborough listed her rejection of a “heavily subsidized fossil fuel food system” as the first reason she participated. In this light, the move toward convenient, packaged, industrialized food may be seen as one linked to not only a lack of sustainability, but class and socio-economic status as well; though this is shifting with the rise of “elite” organic and environmentally friendly foods (Wilson 2004). This popularity of organic and “local” foods with upper classes is taken advantage of by the same type of industrial food companies which are the focus of criticism, exploiting the perceived heterogeneous food choices through clever marketing (Wilson 2004:254). This makes even these foods outside of the price range of lower classes, which is rejected by certain counter-culture movements who make a point to “take back” these types of food through theft (Clark 2008:415).

While some may see this as an awareness of the responsibility of the consumer in regard to organic food versus industrial food, it is often an uninformed awareness. Some members expressed pleasure in sharing ideologies with “mainstream” individuals who came to try the food, and help them better inform their food choices. The presence of middle- and even upper-class individuals at meals became more common during the 2007 recession in the United States (McHenry 2012:13). The state persecution of activist groups (as mentioned below), and Food Not Bombs in particular, may be seen as reinforcement of these socioeconomic inequalities as well as, in some cases outright class warfare. With a refusal to allow free distribution of food to those who need it, many are left with no choice but to turn to the fetishized food of corporations, or starve (Clark 2008:420).

One Food Not Bombs member in Barrie said he initially expressed concern that the meals were not “political enough,” though with time realized that “the act of giving away food, the creation of an egalitarian space in the community, and the attention drawn to waste by serving food that would otherwise be discarded (and is also ‘veggie’) are highly political in and of themselves.” This more political view of the aspect of vegetarianism and egalitarianism within the movement is echoed in other members’ beliefs. Another Food Not Bombs organizer from Barrie, Ontario says that this fits in with the general non-violent ideology of Food Not Bombs. “[We’re] non-violent, and that has always explicitly included violence against animals and the environment.” One individual saw it as a “refusal to support the conversion of animals into food products and a reimagining of the relationship between animals and human beings.”

Vegetarianism, as the preferred diet of Food Not Bombs, is reinforced through the humanitarian goal of the organizations and also, the persisting ideologies against animal and environmental harm. Vegetarianism, as the preferred diet of Food Not Bombs, is reinforced through the humanitarian goal of the organization, as well as persisting ideologies against animals and environmental harm. One organizer emphasized the cost that meat

consumption inflicts on the environment and society in general: “As far as I’m concerned, the only future is one where we eat very little meat or none at all, because otherwise our planet’s insane meat consumption is going to precipitate such catastrophic environmental change that it’ll kill us all.” This echoes sentiments of individual and group accountability, and the responsibility expressed by many members of actively resisting unfair allocation of resources tied to animals used as food products.

In regards to the importance of veganism as a greater form of social protest, both within and without Food Not Bombs itself, one Peterborough participant likened this form of eating to the “personal political” (Hartman 2003:30). “Veganism ... gets people into the habit of making politically charged choices every single day. For many people, becoming vegetarian/vegan is the first major political decision made.” He expressed that it is a choice so simple even children can understand it: that the consumption of meat is a violation of a perceived equality between humans and animals. He also claimed that it was a gateway into more pervasive political ideologies and resistances, as it quickly becomes clear that it is connected to “a web of other forms of oppression.” Hence, vegetarianism or veganism becomes a way to engage with the community and a platform on which to appeal to simple food sustainability.

By adhering to veganism or vegetarianism politically one often uncovers greater systems of injustice that affect the food we eat, as well as the broader social environment. While Food Not Bombs may not attempt to impose veganism or vegetarianism overtly, these practices open the discussion and contemplation of these issues. In this view, veganism can be seen as something which cannot be detached from the political. As one vegan Food Not Bombs organizer from Barrie stated “I have met health vegans and apolitical vegans and they just drive me crazy!” This sentiment demonstrates the underlying theories present in many individuals belief that they hold a personal responsibility to be conscious and aware of the food choices they make. In fact, all members discuss the heightened awareness which comes out of the community, as well as the realization of the intricacies behind issues in food structures.

Lisa Heldke discusses these greater webs of ethical food consumption in *An Alternative Ontology: Beyond Meataphysics*. She examines the suffering present in all eating, not simply meat-eating—the consumption of industrial food perpetuates the injustices present in the process of its production that affect both the animals and the factory workers. (2012:6). Even with the boycott of commercial foods based on the suffering of animals, the environment, and humans “we do not cease to consume the symbolic just because we cease to consume the literal” (Heldke 2012:7). In a stark contrast to the practices of Food Not Bombs, who also attempt to avoid these types of suffering, Heldke comes to the realization that this type of “cruelty-free” garden diet would leave the individual incredibly isolated (2012:8) without the kind of community so many members attested to feeling when participating in food movements.

One organizer from Barrie expressed similar problems with a “cruelty-free” consumption of food, stating that “capitalism is a very flexible system that moves to co-opt and contain resistance, so I’m wary of arguments that there are ethical types of consumption.” Despite this, he maintained that there are “consciousness raising” aspects of the choice to serve vegan food, regardless of its ability to supply a totally ethical food option. This is often approached through “expanding the non-capitalist aspects” of food production and

consumption, which are already in place (Gross 2012:71), and include a variety of ways counter culture groups work around the industrial food system. This brings to mind a type of food consumption which Heldke does not explore in her search for a way around the food systems based on suffering, and one which is an integral part of Food Not Bombs' strategy: food recycling, collecting, and recovery. The success of this movement is greatly impacted by the decision to serve food which has been donated, collected locally, or as one organizer in Barrie explained the process as "scavenging and recycling." This can be linked to other, similar food ethos such as dumpster diving, gleaning, back-to-the-landers (small scale agriculturists), and freeganism (those who attempt to avoid the participation in food commodity exchange or purpose). While it may be argued that in some cases these practices may be linked to the commercial food industry in that they use the refuse of such a system, the principles which compose them are based in cooperation and membership to this system through refusal of direct financial support (or in fact purchasing food at all).

McHenry attests to this as part of the success of Food Not Bombs from its beginning while it was still targeted at specifically needy aspects of the community (2012:99). "We picked up muffins and bread at bakeries, produce and tofu at natural food stores, and surplus stock from the food co-ops. Each weekday, within hours of collecting the food, we delivered it to battered women's shelters, alcoholic rehabilitation centers, immigrant support centers" (McHenry 2012:99). Not only does the organization offer food that attempts to eliminate animal cruelty, but through food which is donated or found without contributing to the capitalist system it further communicates its politics and goals. This not only allows for a sustainable flow of food without the need for exorbitant funding, it refuses the need to take part in the market economy and support the systems which often lead to hunger, poverty, and the suffering which Heldke addresses.

Though practically this gives a reason to why animal products are not appropriate for Food Not Bombs meals (as they spoil quickly), it also demonstrates the link that is undeniably present between different types of food activism and the permeating nature of industrial food systems. One member describes the practices of food scavenging and recycling as demonstrating a deep-seated ideology within the community—"healthy, vegan food which has been gathered from ethical sources such as local farmers, donations, gleaning, and dumpster diving represent us as communicating a political message of food sovereignty." While dumpster diving might at times use foods which are produced globally, the majority of the food is found from local sources (due to necessity, but reflecting an emphasis in counter-culture food movements for homegrown goods). Another member states that one of the reasons she visits Food Not Bombs is that they are "smart about playing the cards of the system—getting the food that otherwise would be thrown away and using it for the benefit for all. It is a true and smart way of utilizing all the energy that has been already put into making food and reducing waste."

This type of food recycling can again be seen in many types of resistance movements, where not only local and individual food sourcing but also dumpster diving (or even theft from corporate establishments) may be seen as the "de-commodification" of food (Clark 2008:413). The scavenged food, which was previously part of the industrial food system, is then "transformed" from its "civilized and fetishized" state (Clark 2008:416) to one that represents the rebellion of eating alternatively. One Peterborough Food Not Bombs

member saw food in capitalist society as “one of the most heavily marketed products, a major pillar of consumer culture mainly because everyone needs it.” Another described being drawn to supporting the community because of its “use of resources from the system to better the community.” Types of recycling practices may be seen as functioning to “resist the harm that is done to the earth and human health in the process of producing commodity food and work against the production of waste by buying bulk rather than packaged food, gathering their own food, and rescuing items” (Gross 2012:71).

These types of practices are also sometimes viewed as preparing individuals for the future. With an industrial food production, which is not sustainable long-term, many see a return to hunting, gathering, farming, and individual food production as “envisioning a post-capitalist food system” (Gross 2012:74). McHenry also describes Food Not Bombs as freeing people from “corporate domination” and showing skills needed to collect, share, and produce food sustainably (2012:12). He certainly adheres to this belief in organizing of Food Not Bombs, linking the group to a history of these practices as well as to historical and pre-historical hunter-gatherer groups (2012:18). Working within a system that he believes perpetuates poverty and hunger through the mass-production of food, Food Not Bombs goes a step further in its level of organization and consistency, making it, as McHenry states, “revolutionary” (2012:19).

One organizer from Barrie believes that this is only part of the political resistance present in Food Not Bombs, believing that, “counter-culture food practices are a form of social resistance, whether its dumpster diving or the community getting together to feed itself. It shows that we do not need to rely on the government if we have a strong, willing community—that’s why we get arrested.” This brings up another aspect of the Food Not Bombs community which is implicit in the second pillar of the organization, that of social resistance and protest in the fact of the criminalization of food sharing. The importance of a lack of any formal leaders within the organization, as well as the method of consensus for decision making is linked to the overall egalitarian efforts of the movement. McHenry describes this lack of centralized governance within the group as denying the opportunity for government or media to persecute a centralized leader in order to hurt the larger community—ensuring the endurance of the group regardless of which members are present (2012:13). It also allows for more flexibility in the face of police or state action against the organization, as the community is still intact regardless of which members are removed.

The community certainly has reasons to fear this type of legal action, with arrests and state interference being common since its foundation. Laws, which were explained officially through ideas of food safety or space usage, were often passed against the distribution of food. This reinforces Clark’s ideas surrounding mainstream food culture and capitalism and their obsessions with “cleanliness, whiteness and sterility” (2008:416). Food Not Bombs, unlike the community of punks Clark was studying, does not overtly attempt to subvert this through ‘rotten’ and unclean food practices; though they certainly do not meet the industry standards set for restaurants and other food-serving establishments. Nonetheless, this seems to be secondary to the real reason such extensive police involvement has occurred regularly, and many accounts by members explain it as a fear of the revolutionary messages the organization allows to circulate. This is perhaps confirmed in one interview with a San Francisco Police Captain as early as the mid-nineties, in which

he states that “they [Food Not Bombs] don’t want to feed the hungry, they just want to make an anarchist type statement and we aren’t going to allow it.” (McHenry 2012:17)

Food Not Bombs certainly supports many protest movements, sit-ins, refugee camps, disaster relief funds, and generally any non-violent resistance which falls in line with their ideology of human rights and anti-war sentiments (McHenry 2012:30). They do so through making available free food to protestors or refugees, acting on the belief that all have a right to free food regardless of their social status. This is represented by the third central pillar of Food Not Bombs which advises on nonviolent direct action. The majority of the members from Peterborough and Barrie described membership in other types of political movements, ranging from community-run outreach and aid programs, to the Occupy movements in various centers, and typically adhered to the idea of supporting social change in other aspects of their lives as well. Many encountered Food Not Bombs as a direct result of their presence in these types of organizations where police presence is often common.

The police interventions in the case of Food Not Bombs often result in the seizing of food from people’s hands directly, as well as whole meals brought to share. It may also involve the arrest of volunteers if they do not agree to stop serving meals. Often arrests are countered with arguments concerning the right to free expression and organization, with mixed results (McHenry 2012:13). Some members described this resistance to arrest as bolstering to the organization and legitimizing the cause, with the goal of demonstrating how ludicrous it is to arrest people for “feeding the hungry for free.” One member in Peterborough indicated the recent crack-down on some chapters in the form of criminal punishments for refusing to cease their meals, and explains it by stating that “the system expects people to pay for their food and sees organized public food sharing as a barrier to profit.” This may also be viewed as one small characteristic of the greater problematic system “arresting volunteers for sharing vegetarian meals with the hungry was a graphic example of the misguided policies of corporate and political leaders in the United States” (McHenry 2012:21). There are guides provided by organizing members on how to deal with attempts by police to seize food goods.

Despite this, some local police forces have become more accepting as a result of constant interaction with Food Not Bombs, as is the case with San Francisco police force which was previously very active in attempts to deconstruct their Food Not Bombs community:

After years of arrests and beatings for sharing food in San Francisco, the police became moved to noncooperation with their superiors. Our respect for them as people made a huge impression. Efforts to describe our volunteers as terrorists failed. As the economic, environmental and political crisis grows increasingly extreme, it will be more important than ever to maintain our dignity and to influence the police and military to rebel against their superiors.” [McHenry 2012: 67]

Heynen’s experiences in Athens also involve limited police interference, though he sees this as atypical (2010:1228). This demonstrates the type of gradual but eventual acceptance that many Food Not Bombs members expressed hope for: to bring this type of food consumption from a “fringy” status outside of mainstream society to a more regularly accepted solution getting around the industrial food system.

This level of acceptance leads to the strengthening of the community of Food Not Bombs, an aspect which many members deemed as a significant factor in joining the movement which gradually encouraged political discussion, exchange of ideas, and participation in other, similar types of events. When examining such organizations it becomes very clear that the isolation which Heldke speaks of in her text on ethical and individual gardening is absent. Instead, there is a shared sense of camaraderie among the members which strengthens and legitimizes the movement. In other counter-culture movements the same sense of community seems to be stressed an important movement for reimagining how “we” eat. This ranges from Clark’s punk culture, where food “helped shape community, symbolize values and foster group solidarity,” as well as a sense of empathy and equality with those less fortunate (2008:420), to “freegans” (scavenger/gatherers) and small scale-farmers who emphasize community with like-minded individuals as integral to maintaining their lifestyle (Gross 2012:76). These communities are not mutually exclusive, and often intersect as a result of similar ideologies.

This can be linked to the importance of not only eating but of food’s role in the human desire for community, belonging and socialization. As Gross argues in relation to freegans, “social networks are important to all people, and building social networks usually involves the sharing of food” (2012:77). It is clear in the insistence of Food Not Bombs movement that food is a right and not a privilege, and should be available to all communities and individuals (both members and non-members) no matter their physical, mental, or economic state or status. The fact that any individual, whether they are in law enforcement, homeless, maintain an opposing ideology, or are simply unknown to the volunteers, is still welcomed indicated the importance that is given to the practice of spreading the message and involving local individuals.

Every Food Not Bombs participant or organizer interviewed, described the strong link between eating and community within the movement. One organizer in Barrie stated the importance of these types of groups, and that “nothing brings people together like food does. Building this sense of community is the most important thing to me and it is a great way to open people’s eyes and to start thinking more critically about what they think and buy.” A sense of community therefore, is not only created by food, but also a sense of enjoyment and the sharing of ideologies. It is clear how integral shared eating is to many political movements: whether food is the main focus of the activism or is purely one of the issues addressed.

Another organizer from the Barrie chapter described communal eating as a favourite activity in other protest groups such as the Occupy movement, and saw the need for this to be reinforced when he relocated to Barrie where social issues were prevalent due to “austerity and industrial decay.” Eating together in a socially conscious way allowed for “community building based on food security.” They expressed moving past the capacity of food banks by creating an “inclusive and positive space to bond, to build community and sharing around food.” Again, others adhered to this sense of communal eating and sharing, stating that even when they were making enough money to afford their own food, spending time with the community and friends was important to them. They saw the meals as “a community hub, a gathering space where people come to be together and talk to one another in a politically empowered space.”

Food Not Bombs is also involved with other community based projects, such as Homes Not Jails, Food Not Lawns (aiding with community gardens), Really Really Free Markets, and Free Radio. These organizations help reinforce the types of anti-capitalist and humanitarian sentiments present in the organization as a whole, and allow for the expansion of the ideology beyond food (McHenry 2012:15). Despite this, the idea remains the same, with a desire to allow for a more sovereign decision making process within communities, a link to the local and a self-sustaining, anti-commodity way of living. Food Not Bombs can be approached as a way of changing people's behaviour and thinking through greater dependence on local and self-sustainable food sources (2009:5).

Many members described enjoying participation in Food Not Bombs in particular, and the movement as a whole, because it constituted something "real" (or effective), while still performing political ideologies. One member who encountered similar issues academically, expressed pleasure from "active activism" which was "palpable and real," not present in academic work. Many enjoyed that it was about the everyday, the real, and the observable ways in which food protests can make a difference. Another member described similar sentiments, saying "we can't identify our struggles theoretically, but rather by listening to the community and hearing about its concerns," and that communities must struggle together as well as eat together. The identifying anarchist members interviewed especially emphasized the importance of community in political movements they aligned with, not only Food Not Bombs. In addition, they demonstrated the reciprocal nature between politics and food, with one member pointing to Napoleon's idea that "an army marches on its stomach," and stating that this was also true of cultural revolutions.

This seems to add an aspect to Heldke's analysis of "meataphysics" and the possibility of eating ethically. While she supposes that a more ethical diet is necessarily linked to a lonely food existence, the community of Food Not Bombs and its large and vibrant membership, would suggest otherwise. While they may not be eating in a totally "cruelty-free" manner which Heldke suggests (2012), they are certainly working toward it and achieving a reasonable solution to a variety of issues which are fundamental to food activism. Through egalitarianism, anti-animal cruelty sentiments, attempts at scavenging and sustainable behaviour, Food Not Bombs attempts to drastically change the way food is consumed and produced, not only for "fringy" counterculture communities, but rather for the greater society. The organization leaves room for autonomy as well as multiplicity of voices, thereby allowing for the incorporation of many different political goals for the sake of a stronger community. Though they are working toward rethinking food, as one member concludes: "Food Not Bombs is good but not sufficient, it should be a platform from which to launch other anti-capitalist projects and develop revolutionary consciousness." As seen in many activist movements mentioned, food certainly seems an appropriate place to start this revolution.

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