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Navigating gendered labor and local food: A tale of working mothers in Vermont

Teresa M. Mares

Department of Anthropology, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont, USA

ABSTRACT

Over the past several decades, the state of Vermont has become a national leader in the local food movement. Located along the banks of Lake Champlain, Chittenden County is a hub for the local food movement and innovative food security efforts. This article presents qualitative data from a collaborative research project examining the multiple ways that Chittenden County residents access, prepare, and share food. Following the model of “critical case studies,” I focus in on the narratives of six working mothers from diverse cultural backgrounds to examine the work of these mothers related to accessing, preparing, and sharing food and how this work is shaped by intersections of cultural identity and gendered obligations. I argue that narratives of food and family are a meaningful site for examining the lived dimensions of local food systems and shared values related to food that are culturally familiar and embedded in social relationships.

KEYWORDS

food access; gendered labor; local food; Vermont

Introduction

Despite, or perhaps due to its small size, the state of Vermont has become a national leader in the local food movement over the past several decades (Conner et al.; Macias). With hundreds of roadside farm stands, bustling farmer’s markets, and the nationally recognized Farm to Plate Strategic Plan, Vermont has made impressive steps towards building a more localized food system (Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund). These efforts draw upon a long and diverse agricultural history, and the state has seen significant shifts in the patterns of producing and distributing food (Albers). In developing innovative food policy and programming in recent years, local food systems have become a significant leverage point for various efforts in community development and economic revitalization. As is the case across the United States, women have played a prominent role in this work. In this small, mostly rural state, “the Vermont brand” generates both pride and revenue for agricultural producers, as well as a point of distinction for consumers who enjoy the state’s *terroir*, or “taste of place,” in the form of artisan cheese, craft beer, and carefully

CONTACT Teresa M. Mares  tmares@uvm.edu  Department of Anthropology, University of Vermont, 509 Williams Hall, 72 University Place, Burlington, VT 05405.

graded maple syrup (Trubek). At the same time, Vermont has a sizeable number of households struggling to put food on the table, with 13% of its residents reporting food insecurity based on the 2012–14 average, including a significant number of households with children (Coleman-Jensen et al.; Hunger Free Vermont).

Located on the banks of Lake Champlain, Chittenden County is a hub for the local food movement and innovative food security efforts. As a mixed urban, suburban, and rural region, it is an excellent site to simultaneously consider urban, peri-urban, and rural food system issues. Chittenden County has a total of 620 square miles and a population of 161,382 as of 2015, making it the most populous county in the state following a period of rapid economic and demographic growth over the last few decades. Chittenden is also the state's most ethnically and racially diverse county, with 6.1% of the total population born outside of the United States. This diversity is largely connected to Vermont Refugee Resettlement Program's operations in the Burlington area. Since the late 1980s, approximately 6,700 refugees from Burma, Burundi, Bosnia, Vietnam, Bhutan, Somalia, Sudan, Congo, and Iraq have been resettled in Vermont, with the vast majority resettled in Burlington and other towns in Chittenden County. This resettlement has motivated the development of farming programs like New Farms for New Americans to encourage entrepreneurship and enhance food security for refugee families, as well as efforts to make school meals more culturally appropriate in an exceptionally diverse school system, as seen in the work of the Burlington School Food Project.

Shortly after moving to Burlington, I quickly became intrigued by the diversity of food options in such a small city, a place where Nepali restaurants jostled for retail space with natural food cooperatives, Halal butchers, Vietnamese grocers, and Pan-African markets. With financial support from the University of Vermont (UVM), I soon became the primary investigator for a collaborative project that posed a deceptively simple question: How are Chittenden County residents feeding themselves? The broader study informing this article involved a team of two additional UVM faculty members, two leadership staff members of local food-related organizations, and a student researcher. Through observing the changing demographics of the county and participating in the local food system as consumers, advocates, and producers, my collaborators and I had a strong sense that refugees from Bhutan and Somalia were undoubtedly shopping and eating differently from the upper-middle class Vermont-born residents involved in local gardening initiatives and picking up their CSA shares from the region's small diversified farms.

The task for our collaborative research team was to examine these socio-cultural differences to inform a richer, more community-based understanding of food security within the local context. In this way, we sought to complicate a limited understanding of food security that is endorsed by agencies like the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which defines it as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life," a laudable goal, yet at the same time, necessarily vague in its conceptualization (Coleman-Jensen et al. 2). For county residents whose relationships to local food systems stretch from the farm down the road in Vermont to places as distant as the rice paddies of Bhutan, we knew that

the transnational and cultural dimensions of food security had to be considered in understanding their negotiations of the local food system. In analyzing interview data from this project, the role that gender plays in these negotiations became increasingly apparent.

The popular discourses engaged by those in the local food movement often center on reclaiming the values of an idyllic past or returning to foods that your grandmother would recognize, a refrain of food movement luminaries such as Michael Pollan. Food scholars have critiqued these discourses for the ways they erase histories shaped by inequalities of race, class, and gender while simultaneously depoliticizing and romanticizing the local (Alkon; Gray; Guthman). Of particular interest within this article is the gendered labor that takes place within and against the confines of local food systems. As feminist scholars of food systems have long noted, these complex forms of reproductive, emotional, and productive labor such as cooking and childrearing often remain underappreciated within food movements and locally oriented food systems (Allen and Sachs; Cairns et al.; Sachs; Som Castellano).

Using the themes of change and nostalgia to examine the ethnographic narratives of six working mothers from the United States, Bhutan, and Somalia, this article examines the work related to accessing, preparing, and sharing food and how this work is shaped by intersections of cultural identity and gendered obligations. I argue that narratives of food and family are a meaningful site for examining the lived dimensions of local food systems and shared values related to food that is culturally familiar and embedded in social relationships. Feminist scholars have long noted the disproportionate role that women play in feeding the family across lines of culture and class (Carney; Counihan, *Around the Tuscan Table, A Tortilla is like Life*; DeVault; Page-Reeves). This article follows this line of inquiry to examine how women from diverse cultural backgrounds living in Vermont engage both with the local food system and with food systems they have known around the world.

A mixed-methods approach to studying (gendered) food access

The project team included geographer Dr. Pablo Bose and anthropologist Dr. Amy Trubek from the University of Vermont, Jessica Hyman, Director of the Vermont Community Garden Network, Alisha Laramee, Program Coordinator for New Farms for New Americans, and Tyler Wilkinson-Ray, then an undergraduate student at UVM. While the research design and data collection was collaborative, I completed the data analysis and write up independently, including the analysis offered in this article. In collecting data, we relied mostly on methodological tools of geography and anthropology to investigate vulnerabilities and resiliencies in Vermont's food system. Ethnographers trained in these disciplines are particularly adept at collecting and adding qualitative richness to demographic and statistical data, conducting community surveys and in-depth interviews, and examining spatial dynamics. Our study design not only benefitted from collaboration across academic disciplines and colleges but also from relationships we built across sectors with local community-based organizations and agencies. Hyman and Laramee,

as staff members from local organizations, were central to designing the study in a community-based fashion, securing funding, and collecting interview and survey data.

Our team's use of a community-based, transdisciplinary approach to food systems research—one that draws on ethnographic and survey-based methodologies, spatial analysis, and the analysis of demographic data—followed an approach outlined by team member Pablo Bose (2012). Combining methodological approaches and specific methods—within or across qualitative and quantitative traditions—offers the opportunity to triangulate inquiries and results (Bloor and Wood; Creswell; Dencombe). Whatever the data source, method of collection, or approach to analysis, the overall value of triangulating multiple or mixed methods while conducting community-based research cannot be underestimated (Newbold). Within food systems scholarship, mixed-methods research is especially appropriate for community-based studies of local food consumption, barriers to food access, and the connections between food security and culture. Given that human–food relationships are inherently difficult to generalize but are nevertheless marked by patterns and common experiences, adopting a transdisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach allowed us to engage a holistic and comprehensive approach to examine how Chittenden County residents are interacting with the local food system and to tease apart both common patterns and dissimilar practices.

This article presents survey and interview data from six research participants, drawing upon a larger sample of 25 Chittenden County residents, all of whom were affiliated with or relied upon programs and services from five community organizations: The Vermont Community Garden Network, New Farms for New Americans, The Chittenden Emergency Food Shelf, the Visiting Nurses Association (VNA) Family Room, and the Women Infants and Children (WIC) office of Chittenden County. These organizations were selected because they represent a dynamic cross-section of the local food system, spanning from the local and statewide nonprofit sector to federally administered government agencies. This article focuses on the experiences and viewpoints of six mothers from different cultural backgrounds who were balancing the care of their children with paid work both inside and outside the home. I have chosen these six narratives as they help to illuminate the economic and ethnic diversity of the county in particularly dynamic ways. As discussed in more detail in the following, the selection of these six participants from the larger sample follows Michael Patton's model of "critical cases," which are "those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things" (Patton 174).

Collaborating with the five community organizations was imperative given the exploratory nature of this study and our desire to use this initial series of interviews as a jumping-off point for developing a more in-depth and longitudinal examination of food security in the region. In beginning this project, our team set up meetings with staff from each of these organizations to present our research goals and to learn more about how each organization defined and addressed the food security concerns of county residents through their programs and services. These meetings allowed

us to add and revise interview and survey questions, resulting in a semi-structured interview guide containing 25 questions, divided into three parts: (a) Household Cooking and Eating Practices, (b) Accessing Food and Shopping, and (c) Accessing Food and Non-Shopping Activities (See [Appendix](#)). With community-partner input, the project team also designed a brief written survey to collect basic demographic data, including age, nation of birth, self-identified race/ethnicity, highest education level completed, household size and composition, primary language spoken in the home, and usage of various local and federal food security programs. Designing the interview and survey instruments in this iterative and collaborative fashion allowed us to refine our survey and interview questions in connection with community concerns and generate data on a wide range of food access strategies, household food practices and labor, seasonal food consumption patterns, food preferences and exclusions, and experiences with food security organizations and programming.

Working in collaboration with these organizations also allowed us to recruit a culturally and economically diverse group of participants. Staff from each of these organizations helped us to identify and contact research participants, following Institutional Review Board guidelines. Through this convenience sample of participants, we recruited individuals over the age of 18 who were responsible for a majority of the food-related decisions in their household. Four members of the research team (myself, Wilkinson-Ray, Laramée, and Hyman) conducted interviews for this project using the same interview guide, with Wilkinson-Ray and I conducting the majority of the interviews. All interviews were completed in-person by one of the four interviewers at a location selected by the interviewee and were digitally recorded and transcribed, with the exception of one interview where the participant preferred that the interview was not recorded (in this case, I took copious written notes during and after the interview). Participants were compensated for their time with a \$20 gift card to a local grocery store of their choice. Before each interview, the participant gave their oral consent for participating in the study and received a written summary of the project's aims and goals. To facilitate interviews with non-US born participants who were not fluent in English, all of whom were resettled refugees, we contracted with a paid interpreter from a local interpretation provider. After each interview, subject participants completed a brief written demographic survey, with the interpreter's assistance if necessary. Interview data were then coded using HyperResearch, a qualitative analysis software package, to identify common themes and outlying perspectives. Per IRB guidelines, the names of all interviewees have been changed in this article.

Of the total sample of 25 participants, 13 were born in the United States, 6 in Bhutan, 4 in Somalia, 1 in Burma, and 1 in Burundi. Of the US-born participants, 11 identified as Caucasian/White and the remaining 2 identified as Mixed Race/Ethnicity. Participants from Bhutan and Burma reported their race/ethnicity as Asian American, and those from Somalia and Burundi as African American. The average age of the participants was 41, with a range of 22–65. The sample was overwhelmingly female (23 of 25), which reflects our intent to include individuals who

Table 1. Utilization of food programs and services, total sample vs. foreign-born.

Program/Service	Total Number (and %) of Individuals Utilizing Program/Service out of 25 participants	Number of Foreign-Born Participants (and %) Utilizing Program/Service <i>n</i> = 12
WIC	16 (64%)	9 (75%)
SNAP/3SquaresVT	20 (80%)	12 (100%)
Free or Reduced School Lunch	13 (52%)	9 (75%)
Food Pantries/Food Banks	13 (52%)	6 (50%)
CSA Programs	2 (8%)	0 (0%)
Farmers Markets	19 (76%)	8 (67%)
Community Gardening Programs	17 (68%)	10 (83%)

make the majority of the food-related decisions in their household. Perhaps most striking within the sample characteristics is the intersection of income and household composition. All 12 participants born outside of the United States had household incomes under 30,000 USD per year, with an average household size of 6.92 individuals. For the 13 US-born participants, a sizable number of households earned less than 30,000 (9 of the 13 participants), but the average household size was much smaller, at 2.38 people per household. These demographic factors and household composition patterns were reflected in the diverse navigations of the local food system that interview data revealed.

Within the broader imperatives of our collaborative study, I was especially interested in examining how women in particular balanced their food purchasing with their usage of various food-based benefits and local food outlets including farmer's markets and community gardens. In our written survey, we asked about seven specific programs and services, including market-based initiatives that were dedicated to providing local food, such as farmer's markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) projects, federal benefit programs administered at the state level including WIC and SNAP (the Vermont program being called 3SquaresVT), and local nonprofit initiatives including food pantries and community gardening programs. The number of participants who stated that they had used these programs (either at the time of the interview or at any point in the past) is noted in Table 1. Additionally, Table 1 documents the number of foreign-born individuals who indicated utilizing that program or service. From these numbers, it is clear that a greater percentage of foreign-born residents reported using income-restricted programs like WIC, SNAP, and school lunch programs. These same individuals were not utilizing CSA programs at all but were regularly utilizing both farmer's markets and community gardening programs. This higher rate of usage is likely the result of heavy outreach to resettled refugees within programs like the Visiting Nurses Association Family Room's community gardening initiative and New Farms for New Americans.

Thoughts on gendered labor and local food from six working mothers

The survey findings outlined previously provide some insight into the use of food security and local food initiatives within the sample of Chittenden County residents and demonstrate the usefulness of the rapid demographic survey we conducted. Our

extended interviews, however, revealed a richer set of data concerning the everyday negotiations that county residents make when accessing food for their families. These negotiations were guided by gendered obligations, cultural and religious preferences, household economics, and experience with and knowledge of agricultural practices. Interviews also allowed for participants to express their thoughts about and experiences with these programs, both positive and negative, and to make suggestions for program improvement. Noteworthy across interviews were the nostalgic views that participants expressed about foodways and food systems of the past, and the ambivalence (and sometimes disdain) for the changes they had experienced, or that their children were experiencing, in their own food growing and eating habits. Using Patton's model of critical cases, I have selected six narratives from the broader sample that offer particularly interesting thoughts on the complexities of feeding one's family and navigating local food systems. These narratives, all shared by working mothers, show the delicate balance that women strive to achieve as they feed their families in a region widely recognized for the vitality of the local food movement.

These six working mothers all shared their appreciation for the foods and cooking practices they had been exposed to as young children. I interviewed Geri, a single 34-year-old mother, in the small but immaculately kept condo she shared with her two-year-old son. Born and raised in Maine, Geri expressed her appreciation for her grandfather's farm: "I mean my, it's funny because my mom grew up on a farm and like on the coast of Maine so they ate a lot of seafood and shellfish and stuff like that because it was readily available and also they grew pretty much all of their food so my grandfather was kind of a back-to-the-lander." While her own mother leaned more towards prepared convenience foods in her cooking practices, Geri has harnessed her appreciation for her grandfather's gardening efforts into a sizeable container garden at her apartment in addition to a large community garden plot in Burlington where she and her son grow foods that they cook together. She explained that her son takes great joy in helping to cook because of his involvement in their garden and is more likely to try new fruits and vegetables than many of his peers. Geri also expressed the importance of practices related to food sharing with her mother and older sisters, whether through celebrating with foods of her Swedish heritage or cooking a simple meal of roasted chicken with vegetable side dishes. For her, it is less about the actual food that she consumes than the company she keeps while doing so, and meals with family are much more meaningful than those without. These perspectives underscore the importance of commensality for her family and echo Alice Julier's claims about the centrality of food in social life (Julier).

While Geri loves shopping at City Market, the local food cooperative, her busy schedule and the need to limit her driving time means that she does most of her shopping at the large chain grocer closer to her home. In the summer, the foods that she buys here merely complement the produce she obtains from her subsidized CSA share and her own garden, while in the winter she is forced to purchase the majority of her food from this large grocer. She explained,

I love grocery shopping so I also try to cut it down because I know that the more often I go into a store the more often I'm going to buy things that I don't really need and don't really want ...and if I'm picking my son up from day care and coming home and we're stopping at the grocery store and we're both kind of hungry and a little bit cranky that's like the worst time to be in a grocery store.

While Geri holds many of the values that the local food movement endorses and greatly enjoys her CSA share and community garden plot, the obligations for caring for her son as a single mother means that she often has to sacrifice these values for the more convenient, less expensive options available in the chain grocers.

Living about 30 minutes away from Geri, Sarah is a 37-year-old mother of two boys who maintains a very small family farm with her spouse in one of the more rural areas of Chittenden County. As we sat next to a community garden that she also helped to maintain, Sarah explained that while the majority of the farm-grown food is consumed within her home, she also sells at the local farmer's market each weekend to earn extra income. Like Geri, Sarah has made efforts to recapture the foodways of her grandparents after becoming disillusioned with the convenience foods of her youth. In discussing her motivations for doing so, she stated:

It's part that we you know want to eat as healthy as we can and the only way we can afford to do that is to grow our own food so, you know, I guess it's two different parts. But we do have the kind of ideal where you go, "Oh, you know it's just like grandma and grandpa did it." But they did it for the same reason! They needed healthy fresh food and that was the only way they could get it.

Sarah has taken care to sustain her children with foods grown on their farm while farming to earn much-needed income, though as she noted, sometimes she is not always able to purchase the local and sustainable food she values because of the need to save money for other household expenses.

Like Geri, Sarah is the primary cook in her home, and as she explained, a typical day in her home meant, "there's lots of me cooking and preparing food, and then lots of hungry boys devouring it really quickly." After describing herself as a "stay at home mom" despite her obligations to the family farm, I asked her if she felt that her perspectives on food changed after she became a mother. She replied,

I don't if it goes hand in hand all of a sudden you start worrying about what you feed your kids and you know for me just at the beginning it was junk food. I don't want them to have junk food. But I see emotional swings with them if they do have too much refined sugar, or you know, especially the sugar is a real big indicator of moods with the kids. So we try to just work on balance. We have the five vegetable rule in our house and you know if the kids want a snack it's, "How many fruits and vegetables did you have today?"

This deep knowledge of the embodied consequences of consuming junk food for her children reveals the wide-reach of the care work that women like Sarah perform in their homes. This concern, combined with Sarah's adherence to many of the values of the local food movement, ultimately benefits the emotional and physical health of her children.

Growing up on the other side of the world, Maano is a 28-year-old mother of four from Somalia who came of age in a refugee camp in Kenya. I first connected with Maano through the Burlington WIC office, and our interview took place in a small patient room while she was on a break from her part-time job providing community outreach on breastfeeding support. Like Geri and Sarah, Maano invests significant reproductive labor into feeding her family with the time and financial resources she has available. She expressed to me her fondness for freshly hunted giraffe and camel meat, raw cow's milk, and "*moufo*," a corn and wheat-based bread cooked in earthen clay ovens. Her positive recollections of food consumed in a refugee camp were noteworthy, and while she did not talk in detail about her life in the camp, it is important to note that at this time in her life, she remained connected with her family and had found a safe(r) haven after fleeing the violence in Somalia. Needless to say, Maano no longer has access to fresh camel and giraffe meat in Vermont, even though the presence of one lone camel living at a farm alongside a small state highway south of Burlington is a cause for much excitement among locals. Maano compared the freshness of the foods in Africa with those in the United States: "In Africa the meat is fresh but here everything is frozen. Like, even sometimes I buy meat from the halal store but it doesn't, well, the taste is different than what I'm used to because of the freshness and we don't know how long it was in the fridge." Also absent from her diet in the United States is a sweet wild green that grew everywhere near her home in Kenya. She has searched high and low for the seeds in Vermont, including at the local food cooperative, to no avail. At the time of our interview, Maano was not tending a garden because of the obligations she had to her family and her schooling, but she explained that she would love to if she had more time.

Maano's emphasis on sourcing foods that are culturally familiar are entwined with her commitment to halal, which means she rarely goes out to eat because of her concern that the foods she would consume may be made impure by shared cooking implements. This leaves her to balance the reproductive labor of caring for her four children, with part-time employment doing breastfeeding outreach with WIC, and with her studies to become a medical assistant. While Maano is concerned about the preparation of the meat her children consume at school, her limited income pushes her to utilize the free lunch programs to stretch the household food budget and ensure household food security. In doing so, she trusts that her teachings around the importance of halal carry through to the choices her children make over the foods they place on their lunch trays. In many ways, Maano's values for fresh, culturally familiar foods are compromised by her economic situation and the obligations she faces at work, school, and home.

Another Somali Bantu woman, Faaiso, age 38, has become well known in the local Burlington community for her catering business, focusing on selling *samosas* at several farmer's markets. Our interview took place in the living room of the apartment she rented in a small public housing community, while her children looked on with a mixture of boredom and curiosity. A keen entrepreneur, Faaiso expressed her preference for her own foodways in comparison to those she has observed in the United States and her desire to share her cooking with the broader community, both

Somali and US-born. She prefers to make her own flat bread, called *injera*, at home and regularly visits goat farms in the area to obtain, and sometimes help slaughter, halal meat for her family. This connection to Vermont's local food system in many ways replicates what she misses from her home in Somalia.

Like Maano, Faaiso misses the fresh produce that her family grew in Somalia, especially sugarcane, multiple varieties of bananas, mangoes, and the fresh camel meat they regularly consumed. As a child, Faaiso and her siblings each tended a small plot of land without the use of tools. This cultivation was overseen by their grandmother, who also encouraged the consumption of camel meat because it "would make them strong." Faaiso felt that Americans ate too much cheese and that their diets were not as varied as Somalis', explaining that in her home, there was a constant rotation between different seasonal meals, including those based on *mufo* (the same bread missed by Maano), *injera*, rice, pasta, and *mandazi*, a type of fried bread. These starchy staples were always accompanied by vegetables, and if available, halal meat of some kind. From Faaiso's narrative, it seems that her children have internalized the appreciation for their mother's food and carefully select what they eat at school, taking guidance from her even when she is not there to observe.

For Devika, a 35-year-old mother of two children, her experiences growing up in Bhutan, and then living for several years in a Nepalese refugee camp, significantly shaped her perspectives on food and agriculture. She explained that while growing up in Bhutan, everyone farmed, first to feed themselves and then to sell if needed. She explained, "Whatever we grow, [on] our farm we have to eat that thing. We grow vegetables, we grow rice, we grow wheat. We grow everything and no need to buy everything or everyday." While she conceded that at times they had to buy sugar, tea, and salt, they also earned income through selling cardamom and citrus fruits, in addition to handmade wooden tools. Along with her husband, Devika acted upon her love for this nostalgic landscape as she tended two community garden plots and a home kitchen garden in Burlington, with varying degrees of success. Here, they focused on growing sunflowers, snake gourds, potatoes, and daikon radish to prepare using a traditional Bhutanese recipe involving drying and fermenting the vegetable.

In their home, Devika and her husband prefer to eat vegetarian Bhutanese dishes, especially those based around *chiura*, a type of flattened rice. Their children do not like this basic staple, despite their parents' insistence that it provides more energy than American cereals. Devika explained her preference for vegetarian dishes: "Yes [we] eat a lot of vegetables: sometimes beans, sometimes spinach, sometimes okra, sometimes small, baby pumpkins; we made curry from baby pumpkins sometimes. All vegetables, especially because we can't eat meat much; we have to eat only vegetables. We eat meat but not regular, only once or twice a month." As Devika and her husband explained in a joint interview, there was a significant amount of tension in the home given one daughter's preference for American foods, especially pizza, chicken wings, yogurt, and McDonalds chicken sandwiches. Given this daughter's preferences, and some diet-related illnesses that she had recently experienced,

Devika usually ends up making several different variations of each meal to please everyone.

Rekha, a 34-year old Bhutanese mother of two, had capitalized on her cooking skills to earn income from a small informal catering business, in addition to being employed as an interpreter and program assistant for a local organization serving refugees. Explaining that her food habits have closely paralleled those of her parents, Rekha explained that if she is not able to eat rice for a whole day, she feels like she has not eaten at all. She explained the embodied manner of learning to cook, saying,

You know that is what I learned from my mom. I don't know how, we don't have spoon and then you know measuring cups. We just put. It's in our head. Like we just do by seeing: my mom, my grandmom. They look at the time and we learn from them. Automatically it comes. Like to make that chutney my mom used to do like put olive oil in the pan and then heat and then put onion, and then garlic, and ginger, cilantro, put tomatoes, some chilies. And just cook it. That's it. So we typically don't measure anything. We never use measuring cups and all this. I learned from them by seeing. Everyday they cook you know. When you stay here and see like everyday I am cooking, cooking, cooking. You will learn by yourself.

This form of cooking, and learning to cook, closely parallels the embodied practices described by Meredith Abarca in her study of Latina cooks. As for Devika, Rekha is constantly forced to balance her son's preferences for American foods with her own, explaining, "nowadays, my son he goes to school and he is saying all the time, you cook food all the time Nepali food. I don't want to eat rice. I want something different." In his preferences for pizza or ravioli, Rekha believes that ultimately, the school is to blame for his disdain for Nepali food. An avid gardener, Rekha is deeply committed to cooking vegetarian meals centered on rice as much as possible, both for cultural reasons as well as economic. Yet, to appease her son she sometimes will buy a ready-made pizza to put in the oven or chicken to bake at home.

These six women all emphasized their love and appreciation for local food, but the *local* to which they referred varied in significant and meaningful ways. While Geri and Sarah grew up appreciating the agricultural and maritime bounty of New England and had the ability to stay closely connected with the geographies and social ties to home, the women from Bhutan and Somalia experienced great upheavals in their relationships to localized foodways as they were moved through refugee camps within their continent and then resettled in the United States as adults. Yet, all the women, to varying degrees, had enacted their desire to cultivate foods with deep cultural resonance in Vermont's soils, and the diverse fruits and vegetables they grow (or attempt to grow) are symbolic of place-making processes anthropologists have described in previous writing on immigrant foodways (Mares, "Engaging Latino Immigrants," "Tracing Immigrant Identity"; Mares and Peña). In this way, these practices represent a desire to feed themselves and their children with foods that transcend the mere consumer-commodity dynamic, even if economic and time constraints sometimes required these women to submit to the McDonalds chicken sandwiches and pizza that their children often prefer.

Despite these differences, what united these women was the time and effort they all spent navigating Vermont's food system and ensuring the food security of their

families, a form of gendered labor that typically remains unpaid and undervalued. As Page-Reeves and colleagues show in their work, this “food access expertise,” is in actuality an underappreciated fund of knowledge. The fact that each woman was balancing these efforts with paid work is significant and reminds us that the “double day” persists, even across lines of culture and class. Rather than efficiently purchasing all of the food they needed from a single source, each woman strove to balance food entitlements like WIC, SNAP, and school lunch programs, with food purchasing and self-provisioning through gardening and farming. Although Sarah, Devika, and Rekha had some assistance from their male partners, all six women took on the majority of the food sourcing and preparation work in their household, leaving them intimately familiar with both the preferences and the disgusts held by their partners and children. For these women, this form of care work, or what Sobal (“Marriage, Obesity, and Dieting,” “Men, Meat, and Marriage”) terms “foodwork,” is both a source of pride and constraint, and is an obligation that binds their families together even while it sometimes is also a source of frustration, exhaustion, and dissent among family members.

Perhaps the biggest distinction in the foodways of these six women was the rationale underlying their avoidance or acceptance of certain meats, either based on the animal of provenance or the slaughtering practices that were utilized. For Rekha and Devika, their preference for vegetarian-based meals, but particularly the avoidance of beef, resulted in tensions between their consumption practices and those that their children were developing. For Faaiso and Maano, their strict adherence to halal practices within the home was counterbalanced by the uncertainty of the foods that their children were eating outside their own kitchens, particularly those that were prepared at school. Geri and Sarah on the other hand were not heavy consumers of meat, but their preference for local or sustainably raised meats reflected their appreciation of Vermont’s very active local food movement, rather than religious teachings. While one may argue that the local food movement forms an important part of the worldview of movement advocates, these consumption preferences and rules not only impacted what was happening outside the home for these women but also the degree to which they interfaced with the social world of Chittenden county and its vibrant food system.

Conclusion

In my ideal ethnographic world, in the next stage of this project, I would bring these six women together over a table to share stories, taste each other’s recipes, and reflect upon their experiences caring and feeding their families. Rather than report out data from distinct interview encounters, I could instead share observations from a place of commensality, of cultural exchange, and of embodied research. While this would not be an impossible task and indeed, shared meals are often the source of the best anthropological detail, my task here has instead been to put these women into conversation through the text, in order to draw out common themes and points of divergence. In doing so, I have emphasized that the narratives of these six women

cannot be decontextualized from the food environment in which they live, with its hyper-attention to local food and significant rates of food insecurity. Yet, they simultaneously remain connected to the food environments in other US regions, if not in other nations entirely, as they work to feed their families with a great deal of love, attention, and care.

While these working mothers from diverse cultural backgrounds make highly personalized choices about what they and their families eat, the broader constraints of economics, food availability, and gendered expectations remind us that food security is about much more than mere calories. Even in a place like Vermont, where the food movement has brought positive changes, food insecurity remains a significant problem, particularly for refugee families and other low-income residents. Scholars have critiqued the ways that food security is measured, particularly how the widely used USDA Household Food Security Survey module emphasizes material wealth over other determinants of food security, particularly in marginalized communities navigating complex relationships of formal and informal economies (Ready). The experiences of Geri, Faaiso, Maano, Sarah, Devika, and Rekha, in addition to those of the 19 other participants, reveal that food security must be understood in deeper and more complex terms than the narrow quantitative data offered by USDA Food Security measurements. If one defines food security based on regular consumption of rice, or trust in the butchering practices of the meat they consume, we must, as food scholars, think of new and innovative methods to draw out these narratives and connect them with the food systems in which people participate. As importantly, we must consider how food security is achieved through obligations of reproductive labor that, more often than not, are predominantly shouldered by women.

Although there is little doubt that the state of Vermont has accomplished a significant number of goals in rebuilding a localized, sustainable food system, the benefits of this system are not yet spread out evenly for all the state's residents, particularly those without economic means and those living in isolated rural areas lacking in transportation options. Further, the unique cultural and religious needs and preferences of the state's residents call for a more focused consideration of the diversity of foodways present in the state. Over the past few years, nonprofit and small business initiatives in Chittenden County have begun to celebrate this diversity, developing collective goat farms and rice cultivation initiatives that make the local food system more relevant and familiar for members of the refugee community. There is no doubt that these are exciting steps for the state of Vermont. As the narratives of these working mothers reveal, for the local food movement to be fully realized and inclusive, we must think more deeply about the relationships between people and place, and women's work to sustain their families must be not only be acknowledged but celebrated.

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Appendix: Interview guide

Household cooking and eating practices

- 1) Describe a typical day of eating for you. How has this changed since your childhood (or from living in your country of origin)?
 - a. Do you have any memories of how this might differ from your parents or grandparents?
- 2) What is your favorite meal? Tell me about obtaining and preparing the ingredients for this meal.
- 3) Tell me about preparing and eating a typical meal in your household. How is this different for holiday or special events?
- 4) Tell me about your cultural or religious food preferences. Are there foods that you either include or exclude because of cultural or religious beliefs or practices?
- 5) Who does the majority of cooking/food preparation in your household?
- 6) Do you share foods with other people (outside of the household)? If so, who do you share with and why?
- 7) Do members of your household have different food preferences and/or needs? How do you address these different preferences/needs?

Accessing food: Shopping

- 8) Where do you obtain the majority of your food?
 - a. Why do you obtain food from this source?
 - b. How do you get there?
- 9) What is the closest grocery store to your house?
- 10) What are your most and least favorite places to shop?
- 11) Who does the majority of food shopping for the household?
- 12) Where do you obtain your food in the summer? In the winter? Spring? Fall?
- 13) Do your shopping habits change during the course of a month? If so, how?
- 14) What other strategies have you used in the past to access food?
- 15) Have you ever shopped at a farmer's market or had a share in a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) Project?
- 16) What do you find difficult about accessing food? (Prompt for time, transportation, location, cost)
- 17) Are there any foods that you have trouble accessing, and why?
- 18) Do you feel like you have enough money to purchase the food that you need?

Accessing food: Non-shopping activities

- 19) Do you get any of your food through hunting/fishing/gathering? If so, what kinds of foods do you obtain, and where do you obtain them?
- 20) Do you maintain a garden or raise any animals for food?
 - a. If so, where do you practice this and what kinds of foods do you grow or raise?
 - b. Where do you get your starts and seeds?
 - c. Can you find the kinds of foods that you want?
 - d. Where is your garden?
 - e. If you do not garden currently, would you want to?
 - f. Is there a community garden near your residence?
- 21) Do you preserve any of your food through canning, freezing, etc.? If so, which foods and how do you preserve them?
- 22) Do your children utilize school breakfast or school lunch programs?
 - a. If so, how often?
 - b. What are your thoughts on the program?
 - c. Do you access any of the summer food programs offered in local schools?
- 23) Does anyone in your household utilize senior meal or commodity programs?
 - a. If so, which ones? How often?
 - b. What are your thoughts on the program?
- 24) Have you utilized any food pantries or meal programs? If so, which ones? What were your thoughts about the food provided?
- 25) Have you utilized any other food programs in the community? If so, which ones? What are your thoughts on these programs?
 - a. Prompt for specific programs (WIC, 3 Squares/EBT/SNAP, commodity programs), local programs, state programs
 - b. If people receive 3 squares, ask if they have used their benefits to purchase starts or seeds for their garden (if they garden)