June 9th, 2020

CAFS Statement on racialized police violence

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Food Studies (CAFS), we write this letter to acknowledge the historic and contemporary systemic oppressions that are part of a living reality for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour across the globe. The consequences of such inequities are visible in the recent deaths of George Floyd, Tony McDade, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, David McAtee, Chantel Moore, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, among others, at the hands of police and the very systems that claim to serve to keep people safe. We wish to express our support and solidarity with Black Lives Matter movements, and all those on the front lines of struggles to challenge systemic racism and oppression in all their forms. It is important to specifically acknowledge the presence of systemic racism and racialized police violence here in Canada; Black and Indigenous people are disproportionately incarcerated and killed by police in Canada.

Food studies is inherently interdisciplinary. We represent diverse areas of work. Many of us see food systems as important sites of broader social transformation. However, we also recognize that food systems are composed of relations of power and oppression. Racism is a reality in our food systems that we must acknowledge and confront. Black households are over 3 times more likely to experience food insecurity than white households. Racialized migrant food and farm workers are placed in precarious and often dangerous working conditions yet lack access to many labour rights and are denied permanent citizenship status. Indigenous food systems and foodways have been ravaged by centuries of colonialism; and Northern Indigenous communities experience exponentially higher rates of food insecurity.

CAFS’ mission is to promote “critical, interdisciplinary scholarship” and as an organization we recognize the important role that research can play in informing policy makers and demonstrating the unequal social and environmental impacts of food systems and food policies. As food scholars and educators, we have a collective responsibility to acknowledge these truths and work to actively confront and challenge them through research, teaching, critical analysis, and collective action. Indeed, there is a long and powerful history of scholar-activism, oftentimes led by BIPOC scholars, that should serve as inspiration for this work. While this statement is in response to direct acts of violence at the hands of the police, we also acknowledge that systemic and institutionalized racism continues to take place within academia and is experienced acutely by Black communities as well as Indigenous Peoples.

We recognize that acknowledgments and written statements of support are not nearly enough. We must commit to learning and working within an anti-racism paradigm. We are committed to
the work of anti-racism, specifically anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism, through the following:

- We urge the Federation for Humanities and Social Sciences to recommit to the theme of anti-Black racism for the 2021 Congress. Regardless of their decision, we commit that next year’s CAFS Assembly will retain the theme of Everyone at the Table, with a focus on challenging the systemic injustices of the industrial and alternative food systems that marginalize food histories, practices, and BIPOC racism.
- In partnership with the Canadian Food Studies Journal Governance Committee and Editorial Collective, we commit to publishing content on the theme of racism in the food system, as either a Special Issue and/or specialized web content on the Journal website. We will seek out contributions from under-represented and under-recognized voices in these contributions.
- We commit to curating and making publicly available on our website a list of resources that attend specifically to the intersection of food systems and racialized oppression within the Canadian context.

We see these actions as a first step in a broader process of reflection that is continual and ongoing. We commit to report back to the CAFS membership on these actions and propose additional steps in the coming months.

Sincerely,

The Canadian Association of Food Studies 2020-2021 Board

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