



## Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems - Handpicked Podcast

### Season 5, Episode 3 - “Only as good as the organizing that accompanies it”: Filmmaking as Food System Solidarity, a Conversation with Raj Patel

Speaker	Transcript
<p><b>Laine Young (LY)</b></p>	<p>Hi and welcome to another episode of Handpicked: Stories from the Field with Laine Young and Charlie Spring.</p> <p>Today’s episode is truly something special. I’m really excited to share a conversation with one of the voices that has inspired so many of us in the food justice world, Raj Patel.</p> <p>Raj is an author, filmmaker, academic, and activist whose work has touched the lives of countless people passionate about food, equity, and the environment.</p> <p>We had the chance to sit down with him for an intimate discussion alongside colleagues from Canada, Kenya, and Brazil, plus some other guests from the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems.</p> <p>Our conversation takes us behind the scenes of a remarkable film by Raj Patel and Zak Piper, called <i>The Ants and the Grasshopper</i>.</p> <p>Its narrator and protagonist is Anita Chitaya, and the Producer and Cinematographer is Peter Mazunda.</p> <p>Shot over a decade, the film takes us first to Malawi, where Anita has spearheaded farmer-led research with the organisation Soils, Food and Healthy Communities.</p>

	<p>The film then follows her journey to the United States where she confronts climate denialism through intimate and often excruciating- dinner-table conversations with American farmers about the impacts of industrial agriculture on communities in the Global South, and the painstaking work of finding common ground.</p> <p>You don't need to have seen the film to appreciate this conversation however, it's widely available online and a deeply moving and important piece of cinema which raises vital but difficult questions for all of us to grapple with.</p> <p>So, today we're taking you behind the scenes of <i>The Ants and the Grasshopper</i>, to hear the stories, the challenges, and the powerful messages that emerge when food justice meets climate justice.</p> <p>Here's Charlie's conversation with Raj Patel.</p>
<b>Charlie Spring (CS)</b>	It's good to have you.
<b>Raj Patel (RP)</b>	It's good to be here.
<b>CS</b>	<p>Okay, well let's go.</p> <p>So, I'm Charlie and I'm really excited for us all to be here in conversation with one of my food system heroes, Raj Patel. Before we dive into the conversation, I'd just like to thank the Laurier Center for Sustainable Food Systems for supporting today's event. And, particularly Jane Clause for her administrative wizardry.</p> <p>But yes, today's event, was inspired by the Voicing Change Project, which is an ongoing collaboration between Rongo in Kenya, Parana in Brazil and the Northwest Territories in Canada. We've been exploring participatory podcasting as a way to share knowledge about agroforestry, agroecology and traditional food systems across some very different geographical contexts and thinking about how community radio and collaborations between academics and journalists can bridge knowledge gaps and make change.</p> <p>But one of the struggles we've encountered is how to best engage activists and farmers who might use different languages and platforms to organize themselves. And thinking about how to make connections across difference is what led us to, to 'the Ants and the Grasshopper' and to wanting to, have some space</p>

with you, Raj. And I really love how the film departs from conventional representations of international inequity and development that often present a Global South being intervened upon. And I think it documents some of the confrontations that make decolonization more than just a word.

And with that in mind, as with most Centre events we'll begin with a land acknowledgment. But because this is a virtual event, and many of us are in different places with different relationships to Empire, I'm just going to share that our Voicing Change team has been thinking about what land acknowledgment might mean in an international context and how these moments should go beyond acknowledgment and even thanks for the ancestors and the Indigenous inhabitants whose stewardship has allowed us to live and thrive in different places, but I'd like to invite us all just to be reflecting on, different positionalities, the histories of our different places and our different roles in decolonizing our relationships to land, property, knowledge, other beings, and to the ideas that can maintain a harmful status quo that many of us still benefit from.

So, coming to our guest, Raj's work has been close to my heart for a really long time and has truly shaped my path and thinking, and I'm sure many others. Before I took up grad studies, I was working at a charity in London that campaigned against poverty and inequality within London, and I was interviewing lots of women on very low incomes and noticing that the way they expressed their struggles was often framed through food, whether it was the inability to feed their kids what they wanted to, or experiences of eating disorders as ways to manage chronic stress. And I don't know how I came to be having Raj's book, on a London bus, but I remember reading 'Stuffed and Starved' on a London bus and having all these light bulb moments about how these very intimate food-related problems are connected, and are systemic, and I think Raj's work really helps us to see and understand contradictions.

Raj hasn't been afraid to speak truth to power, having both worked at- and protested against- international institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. But as well as his tireless campaign and organizing work, he's bequeathed us books and articles covering a really prodigious range of topics, but always documenting how very different people in very different places organize in making better lives and better and fairer ways of organizing society. And I'm just listening to 'Inflamed', his latest coauthored book with Rupa Marya, which is about a new paradigm thinking about health. And I'm quite new to audio books, but I always really appreciate it when the author is doing the reading. So, thanks for that, Raj. His co-

	<p>produced 'Secret Ingredient' podcast was a close friend of mine during the pandemic. And now we have this very special film.</p> <p>I'm going to start with a cheeky question of my own, if that's okay. Which is that Raj, I know you began making this film over a decade ago. And presumably much happened on that journey that didn't make it into the version of the film that we see. But what's really clear is the centering of Anita's voice and also Esther. And even though most of us won't understand Anita's mother tongue, her voice comes through really loud and clear. So, I'm wondering, how do you keep the documentation and the editing process as participatory as possible to achieve this rendering of voice? And were there conflicts along the way?</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>Thank you so much for that question.</p> <p>Thank you so much for having seen the film and for inviting me here. I mean, the finished product is <i>very</i> different from what we anticipated back in 2010 when we started, which back in 2010, it was still the era of films, like 'Food Inc.'. And if people have seen that, but, you know, a certain kind of sort of "campaigny", left of center documentaries. And the idea was that, you know, we'd travel around the world, we'd document this change, and then we have it out in a flashy package. And initially, Jake Gyllenhaal was going to do the narration. And then for various reasons, that became very clear that it was a stupid idea. And then, I was doing the narration. But I was doing a kind of 'woke David Attenborough', where we were like: "And here we are among the Malawians. And if you listen very carefully, you can hear them smash patriarchy." And that that was obviously stupid as well.</p> <p>So, part of the process of making this film was a decolonizing of the film making process. And in that process, the Director who originally was attached to the film, left, in part because he wanted to get paid and we had no money. But also, because he understood that this was not the kind of film that he normally made. He made films like 'Hoop Dreams' and, a few other well-received, US documentaries that have been classics of their kind, but don't centre voices from the Global South in a way that he was comfortable with.</p> <p>And so for us, our journey was one of recognizing that although we had sort of come in to Bwabwa and, you know, just sort of saying, you know, and here we are, we're from 'The Left', and we're here to tell you a story, but we're the good guys. We came to recognize that we had power behind the lens, and our process was one of recognizing that in fact, increasingly, Anita was in charge, which is what prompted us to go to the United</p>

States. It was Anita's idea, it was her who said "look, do you need me to come to America?" And then we caught a version of that on film later, and then we went all the places that we could that she wanted to go to. So, she wanted to see the president, she wanted to talk to the USDA. She wanted to talk to the head of USAID. None of those people would talk to us. So, we ended up going to visit the places that we could, which was mainly mates of mine, and friends of friends who were, in one way or another in the organic and alternative agriculture movement.

And even there, I mean, you can see some of the, some of the tensions, even within the United States, that organic doesn't necessarily mean fervently left wing. And the process then was to do the follow up a couple of years later, and then for Anita to pick the bits that she liked the best. So, for example, we visited a food bank in New York City. And Anita just didn't think that it belonged in the film, in part because she said, well, "it's disgusting. You know, why would you have a food bank? We don't have we don't have people hungry like this in in our village; if people are hungry, then we share our food. Why would you have a food bank? I didn't like it at all."

So, that editing process was one that was revelatory for us, because we thought, you know, this is a great, this is the Riverside church! This is where Martin Luther King had his incredible speech, and we've got all this B-roll and this archival footage. Wouldn't it be amazing to have a scene here? And she was like "nah". So, we didn't. And that really helped shape, the narration process as well, because once we figured out, well, she wants this, she doesn't want this, we went to Malawi and we spent a few days recording, with Anita. Ideally, we would have had Anita in the edit suite all along. All we could do was, you know, all we could afford was, like, 2 or 3 days in Bwabwa working with Anita to screen little bits and then have long discussions about them and then compress them into short bits of voiceover. And so that's how we ended up generating a sort of participatory process.

But we realize, you know, the process that you see on the screen is one that began in a very different way than it ended. And we realized also that there are proper ways of decolonizing filmmaking, we just didn't do them. So, what we did in as part of our conclusion of the film, we raised some money not just for us to finish the film, but for people in Detroit to make a sort of response film on their own terms entirely.

And that was part of our sort of decolonizing process, in a way that was really most participatory.

<b>CS</b>	<p>Thanks, Raj. I have three questions from some of our project partners, that they sent ahead of time.</p> <p>So, I'm going to start with Olga Awuor, who's based in Rongo and who is here. Hi, Olga. So, Olga was particularly struck by the storyline about Anita and marriage. And how Anita's hard farm labour and effort taken to get her husband to be supportive reflects gender dynamics often prevailing in food systems.</p> <p>So, her question is about how the film addresses race, class, gender, nationality and other factors that shape hunger and malnutrition. And Olga asks what you've learned about how an intersectional feminist economics can inform policy and practice to challenge the unequal burdens and devaluation of food work as caring work?</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>Thank you so much for that question, Olga.</p> <p>I mean, the process for us... again, first of all, it was very weird for two guys from the global north to come down and tell this story at all. And so, when Anita started talking about domestic violence and her experience of it, we backed away from it, and it was her insistence that it be in the film. I mean, this was one of the moments where we realized that that we were part of the problem, when we were trying to get permission to have this discussion in the film. And we said, look, Anita, you've talked about your marriage, there's some really very personal and very traumatic elements to that. Do you want it in the film? And she said, yes. And then we asked her again and we had it in writing, had it explained in lots of different ways. And in the end, she was like, "how many times I have to tell you people, this has to be in the film! Because if you don't talk about it, it won't happen again."</p> <p>So that's why it's in the film. And again, this was one of the areas where we took an incredible amount of time to make sure that it looked the way that Anita wanted it to and said what she wanted it to say. The consequence of that, though, is at some level, the feminist economics here is about the valuation of reproductive labor. And the story here is a story not just about Anita and her partner Christopher, but also about the broader dynamics around gender inequality. And what I learned through this process is precisely what Anita and the folk at 'Soils, Food and Healthy Communities' learned, which was that you can't tackle hunger without tackling gender inequality. But one of the things that's also clear is that there's an international feminist economic angle here. And that that international angle firmly, directly points the finger</p>

	<p>at the Global North, not just in terms of the legacies of colonialism, but the ongoing burdens of climate change.</p> <p>And when it comes to thinking about reproductive labor and its devaluation, and the gendered impacts of climate change, one of the things that Anita wanted alluded to but didn't make it into a sort of full-throated, observation in the film was the link between the rise of climate change and the rise of domestic violence. Because, if you have a patriarchal society, Anita observed: look, there are women here who are having to wait much longer now to fill their buckets with water, because the water's dried up in this lake. And, when they go home, they may be also suffering domestic violence. And this is directly related to climate change- and patriarchy. It's not just climate change is making the water disappear. It's also that patriarchy obtains in the household. And this is why we must fight both of these things at the same time.</p> <p>So, again, a lot of the insight around that comes from the lessons that have been learned by 'Soils, Food and Healthy Communities', through whom we met, Anita. I'm not sure if that answers the question, Olga, but certainly our understanding of this as the film progressed was precisely that it was intersectional. It was about gender, in particular, and it was also about certain kinds of colonial farming practices, and it was about the ongoing dumping of capitalist excess in the atmosphere and then in searching for ways to remedy that, this also became an issue about race and class crossing the Atlantic.</p> <p>So, all of these were sort of emergent discussions, but that, I think, is probably a good way of teaching people about it, because if you open up with a title card saying "this is a film about intersectional feminist, transnational economics and about race and class", people will just turn around and bugger off. Whereas Anita's journey, I think it was important for us not only to observe the intersections as you observe, Olga, but also to bring people along who don't normally want to think about those things. And Anita is very, very good at that.</p>
<p><b>CS</b></p>	<p>Thank you. Yeah, I think these are just often links that we don't necessarily see and consider. And I think the film's really powerfully brought through these often unspoken about connections with violence at their core.</p> <p>Okay, I have another question from Eve Nimmo, who coordinates our Brazil team and leads an NGO that supports erva mate agroforestry. And Eve has a question about farmer politics and solidarity in the US. So, the first American farmer that we meet is wearing an MST cap, the Landless Peasant Agrarian Reform</p>

	<p>Movement in Brazil. So, Eve says “this is an interesting piece of material culture that suggests wider networks of knowledge sharing and solidarity around organic and agroecological food production and environmental justice. How are the farmers that you know, how are they engaging with networks of solidarity and how might these networks be supporting discussions around change and transformation of farming practices, in different contexts?”</p>
<p><b>RP</b></p>	<p>Well, I mean, Eve, muito obrigado for this question. It's fantastic because the farmer that we meet, Jim Goodman, is the president of the National Family Farm Coalition here in the United States. The Family National Family Farm Coalition, like the NFU in Canada, is part of the international peasant movement, La Via Campesina. And so, Jim, and his partner Rebecca have been to MST settlements in Brazil. And they've spent a lot of time thinking about agroecology and thinking about, food sovereignty and about the international networks that are required for liberation.</p> <p>And for me, what was interesting was even on their farm, one of their employees who we see in the film <i>isn't</i> part of these networks. And I think to see that on the same farm is kind of interesting. And, you know, I think it sort of reveals something about the way that left politics can work. But it was also, you know, how the cultural politics of the Midwest also obtains. In the Midwest, you're aggressively nice and there are certain things you don't talk about at the dinner table. And religion and politics tend to be among those. And so it was, as Jim said, he took it for granted that everyone was seeing the same kinds of changes in weather, and everyone had the same kind of political philosophy, and so, in fact, it was our visiting the farm that brought this up to Jim.</p> <p>There are other kinds of networks of solidarity that you see in the film. So, in particular, when you visit Detroit, you see Malik Yakini. Malik, is part of the national Black Food and Justice Coalition; in fact, he started it. And I think that you can see that there are differences between the white and the black farmers in the United States. That I think is reflected in some of the transnational networks and national networks that they're involved in.</p> <p>And then you see the other, the farm family who are not as political, but who are involved in actually much more evangelical, Christian networks of solidarity. And those networks are not necessarily progressive. They're not necessarily interested in transnational liberation or the end of capitalism. In fact, they're very much <i>not</i> interested in those things! But what you see in the film, I think are... the sort of people emerging</p>

	<p>from these different networks, with different histories of political education. And you see Anita engaging with them in different ways as best she can, coming away with different kinds of understandings of subjectivities. And I think Jim Goodman's farm is particularly interesting because you see so many subjectivities in just this one space.</p> <p>So, I don't know if that answers your question, Eve, but... there are these different networks. Sometimes they interact, sometimes they don't. Sometimes they share political philosophy, sometimes they don't. But I do think La Via Campesina and the Black farmers coalitions are really interested in this idea of mutual liberation. I think that's something particularly Anita felt when she went to Detroit that felt much more comfortable.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<p>I think this is one of the reasons that we've been circulating around agroecology as a kind of movement concept, as opposed to just organic, which can imply certain techniques but doesn't necessarily call to mind the required engagement with power that I think agroecology makes more space for. But we circle around this a lot... the words that we used to shorthand very complicated things.</p> <p>I you also just brought to mind, the paper that you co-wrote with Jim Goodman, the 'Long New Deal', which I think really cleverly brings together some of these ideas around organizing across lines of difference in a historical context. It's a really interesting paper. So I'd suggest people read that as well.</p> <p>Okay. I'm enjoying seeing some questions in the chat, but I'm going to ask the last question that was sent to me before which is from Andres Kathunzi, who's part of our Voicing Change team, also in Rongo.</p> <p>So, Andres says the film shows some of the local economic and ecological struggles faced by smallholder farmers in Malawi while Anita and Esther's journey to America shows some of the conversations, but also the closed doors they encountered trying to engage with powerful institutions.</p> <p>So, from the process of making the film and working with 'Soils, Food and Healthy Communities', what have you learned about how voices like Anita can be amplified to affect change within their national agricultural sectors, but also internationally?</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>Thanks so much for that question, Andres.</p>

I mean, the conversations that have happened as a result have been quite interesting. I mean, we screened this actually at the US embassy in Malawi and, the various sort of heads of agriculture from the Malawian government came and said, “oh, this is fantastic, well done, we're here to support you.” And then did nothing.

And so, in part, that speaks to the way that any intervention like this, like a documentary, makes change. Which is just to say look, if you've got a book or documentary or academic paper, whatever it is a report, a podcast. It's only as good as the organizing that accompanies it. And that's been one of the lessons that we discovered when using this documentary here in the United States.

But probably the most impact in terms of shifting conversations here has been deploying this documentary in churches. So, there are a few centre and left of centre churches where the conversation has been used to bring along some of the sort of right of centre congregation. So, you know, we trialled this in a Baptist church here in Dallas, and after four weeks of screening little bits and then having a sermon associated with the film, people who initially were like “why do I care about Malawi?”, were very much by the end of the fourth sermon, really interested in engaging with these questions around race and reparation and climate change. But that wasn't us. That was the pastor, and some of the resources that we made available, like the sermon, for instance.

And yeah, I didn't think that I would become someone, I mean, I'm probably one of the most faithless people you're ever likely to meet. And so having something that I make appear in a church is just not something I had *any* mind to. But working with the right kind of impact partners, we were able to get the sermons written and circulating, and that's how some of the change happened. So, you know, it's about an articulation, a connection between Anita's voice and the movements that can make change where it's required.

So, we're doing some screenings in Washington, DC to see if we can change anyone's mind there. But, of course, you know, given the political climate right now, that's kind of hard. But I do think that, in terms of grassroots screenings, we've had some really interesting impacts. We've screened this with some of my comrades in South Africa, particularly in the ‘Shack Dwellers Movement’, who found the stuff from the United States a little less interesting, but found the stuff around gender and agroecology domestically, much

	<p>more interesting. So that part of the engagement, working with the ‘Shack Dwellers Movement’, has been really interesting because it's allowed activists within the ‘Shack Dwellers Movement’ to call out where they see patriarchy and also to observe where it is that they can engage in some really useful change around the possibilities for growing food and possibilities for agroecology, even in the shack settlements.</p> <p>So again, I think the way I understood your question was to say “how can Anita's voice matter?” And my response is, well, it depends who's making it matter. And where it is you want to make that difference. You know, if it's at government level, then it's going to take sustained lobbying at the government level. And some of that's happening in Malawi now. But some of the change is actually very much within grassroots movements taking from it what it is that they need to be able to then have the conversations they need to have.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<p>Thanks, Raj. And I guess it's this idea that organizing doesn't always happen in the places that we expect it to. And maybe it's sometimes making alliances with the people who can make change in those spaces.</p> <p>And so, Carla, I'm going to come back to your question, but Laine's question, I think follows on quite neatly from that, which is that the through line for some of these more patriarchal representations in the film is religion. And was it intentional not to be explicit about this? That question's from Laine.</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>Thank you. Laine.</p> <p>Yeah I mean, I've got views about religion and those aren't Anita's views. And this is a film that Anita was in charge of steering. So, while you'll notice the odd shot of ‘White Jesus’ in Malawi, you might even catch a little glimpse of the priest in the church and notice that he's white and everyone else is Black.</p> <p>But in general... the views about religion are Anita's, and Anita has some really interesting views around gender and Christianity. She's the only person who can read the Book of Genesis as a feminist parable. And she does that, you see this moment where she's confronting Winston and she says, well, “look, why would God make women unless it was to be treated with respect?” And again, that's not what I understand when I read that, but that's how she uses religion and I think that was something I learned along the way, which is- as I say, I've got my prejudices about religion- but, Anita lives religion and wants to use religion as a way around some of the other kinds of barriers that people have.</p>

	<p>So, for example, if we were going to make a film about climate change in North America, and it was me turning up at the door saying “hello, I'm here to tell you about how many parts per billion of carbon dioxide are in the air and how shit you are!” That would be not a good film for so many [reasons] and it wouldn't be politically effective. Whereas when Anita uses religion to both bond with people who are on the other side of the climate change debate, but then to try and sort of pull them around, I think that's effective political organizing.</p> <p>And so, is it patriarchal? Well, we should certainly talk about that. But Anita finds a way to limbo around some of that, to be able to get underneath people's defenses, around what they're expecting a conversation to be around climate change or around the responsibilities of white people in the Global North, to the Global South. And instead, you have a very different kind of discussion that is made possible by Anita's religious affiliation.</p> <p>So, I mean, I'm with you Laine in thinking, yes, some of the representations around patriarchy are certainly there. But it's also in tension with the way that Anita herself uses religion.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<p>Thanks, Raj. And, I mean it just occurs to me that I guess one of the themes of the film, to me, is around collective responsibility in action as opposed to kind of individual responsibility, which is so often the way that the solutions to climate change are framed. And it's about not ignoring any of the spaces where collectivity already happens. And religion is a powerful one of those.</p> <p>So, yeah, something to reflect on.</p> <p>Okay. Carla asks, “how do Anita and Esther reflect on the trip to the USA after a few years have passed? And where are Anita and Esther now? Can you give us any updates?”</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>Yeah. I mean, you know, I'm in touch with both of them fairly regularly. Anita got a new phone a couple of years ago and is on WhatsApp like a Wall Street lawyer. I mean, she's on it all the time. It's very exciting. And so we're in touch. She is doing okay. There was a pretty bad harvest this year, so, you know, things were pretty tough, but she's still, I mean, she's still in Bwabwa and, Esther is still helming ‘Soils, Food and Healthy Communities’, that's the name of the organization. And they're both working incredibly hard.</p>

	<p>The... climate change is a real problem. There are a couple of shots in the film of folk who are associated with 'Soils, Food and Healthy Communities'. And unfortunately, at the beginning of last year, there was a flash flood in which some of the workers were out about doing some survey work, and they got washed away and they died, in this sort of freak weather event. And that kind of thing is happening increasingly, as everyone knew it would. But it's putting a real strain, emotionally, psychically and obviously financially on the organization.</p> <p>And times are not getting better. The social infrastructure that they built in a relatively manageable moment in the climate crisis is now really being tested. And that testing is not going away. You know, this is the hottest year ever. Last year was the hottest year ever. And that's something we'll be able to say with increasing regularity for the rest of our lives. That's a problem when it comes to thinking about the sort of situations that they find themselves in.</p> <p>But when they reflect on their time in the United States, I mean, the last I checked in with them about this question was, a few years back, and they were just sort of pitiful, you know. They're really sad about how the state of denial that they saw in large parts of America- I mean, not Detroit, particularly not among, Black farmers and Black people. But some of that, some of the denial they saw made them very sad because they likened it to this incredibly rich child growing up and not recognizing how wealthy and spoiled it is. And you kind of just hope for the best for this kid.</p> <p>But they were really sad about how it is that we in North America at least have squandered the gifts that we've been given, and by gifts that we've been given, obviously they don't use the language of gifts that we've taken, because that interpretation- and the discussion about colonialism really wasn't one that they were particularly engaged with. But that's certainly one that, you know, I wish we were able to squeeze in the film, but yeah, they're just sad about how it is that we're wasting what it is that we've got.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<p>Thanks. And I mean, certainly for me again, that inversion of the usual representation of the white wealthy person that knows the answers is really inverted. And I think the film really invites particularly white audiences to reflect on white supremacy and its, our, intransigence to change. It's there's many uncomfortable moments, and I think that's probably a good sign.</p>

	<p>So, turning to Anna's question, "how did you identify Anita as the protagonist for the film, and what was your team's connection with 'Soils, Food, and Healthy Communities'?"</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>So, I've known 'Soils, Food and Healthy Communities Co-founder, Rachel Bezner Kerr, a great Canadian who finds herself now at Cornell. She and I were in grad school together in the 90s. So, I've known Rachel since then. And when I was doing a postdoc in Durban in South Africa, she was in Malawi. And so I went to visit her and I saw what she was doing. And I was like, "this is amazing, someone should make a film about this!" And this was in the early 2000s.</p> <p>I worked with, Rachel and, my colleague here, Erin Lentz, on a paper about women's time use, looking at some of the work that was happening in Malawi. So, I'd known about 'Soils, Food and Healthy Communities', really, since it started.</p> <p>And the way we found Anita was rather different. I was there with the original Director, Steve James. Now, Steve has many gifts. And one of them is to be able to observe a room and see who it is who's the most interesting person in that room. And so, what we did was, I went with, Rachel and Esther and a few other folk to Bwabwa for the first time. And they'd set up this tent where I was just going to talk a little bit about what the film project was.</p> <p>And so I was at the front going, saying "Here we are, we're really excited here, we're here to tell this...film, who's interested in being in the film?" People sort of stood up and were like "I am very excited about the things that you are doing, and it sounds very, very interesting. And we must tell this story to the world!" And Steve's camera kind of panned to the back, to three women who were standing there just sort of sassing everybody, like "that guy's an idiot, and that guy...and that guy at the front, he's an <i>idiot!</i>" And Steve's like, well, one of <i>those</i> three women is going to be in the film. She they you don't want someone who's converted. You want someone who's got spine and who's going to just throw shade at everybody.</p> <p>And so then we screen tested, we interviewed those three women, and it was very clear that Anita was just-the camera loved her, she was really excited to talk, and she was not reluctant to be in the film. She just thought that we were being stupid. And so that's how Anita got to be the main protagonist in the film. It was just a process of observing her thinking that this was all quite foolish. And she, you know, it turns out that she was exactly the right person to actually drive the story forward.</p>

<b>CS</b>	<p>Okay. And here's another question from Gabriel, about Anita's experience of making the film.</p> <p>“Were there any observed, discussed, or thought negative repercussions for Anita and her community as a result of participating in the film? For example, in relation to being exposed to food excesses and waste in the US. I'm interested in understanding the social, economic and maybe, the psychological impacts on both Anita and the wider community.”</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>That's thanks for that question, Gabriel.</p> <p>I mean, this wasn't the first time that Anita had left Malawi. She had been to other countries in Southern Africa, and had seen, for example, in South Africa, again, the sort of abundance and waste and inequality there. So, this wasn't a first time exposure to that kind of searing inequality. And so given that, it was the first time though that she'd been to the United States and she just saw how bonkers everything is here. And I say, the overwhelming kind of feeling was of pity. And I don't think that she came back keening to live in America. Because, I think it was very clear in the film that what she wanted was the rain, and the greenery, those things were quite important. And, I think that was something that she was very interested in.</p> <p>But, you know, again, the food bank story, the fact that it didn't make it into the film because she was so disgusted with America, is also indicative of why it is that there's no sort of hankering for her to come back. Because it just didn't seem like, sort of psychologically and psychically healthy place. And she's probably right about that. And, I don't think that there's, you know, three weeks was the time she spent here and three very intense weeks moving around.</p> <p>But, I think she came out with a few friendships, particularly with Malik. And she's very keen at some point for him to come over and for there to be some sort of exchange. But in the meantime, I don't think that there's any adverse psychological impact from, or long-term impact, for Anita and the community.</p> <p>I think most of all, you know, particularly with the, I think if you watch all the way to the end. But there was a moment where the local, you know, the village choir, the choir in Bwabwa were singing a song. And that was an important material moment. Not just because people were like, “oh, shit, that's us on screen”, which, you know, often folk are not dignified with that, particularly in rural Malawi. But also, we were able to pay for that music, at market rates. Now, in general, journalistic integrity prevented us from paying Anita for</p>

	<p>anything. And so, when we were able to use that music in the end and pay exactly what we'd paid our composer to do, some of the other music, that was of material impact to Bwabwa.</p> <p>And I know that in COVID that was a lifeline to the people who had been in the choir. And I imagine that that also caused some tension within the village for people who hadn't been in the choir, seeing people who had got money getting it. But I also know that that, insofar as I am told, the financial impact was shared even with people who hadn't been in the film or hadn't been in the choir. But it was an important sort of cash injection there.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<p>That's a really interesting point about the ways that you kind of have to navigate some of these rules to get what you want to happen, to happen.</p> <p>Carla asks, "So, Anita mentioned solidarity as the thing that US farmers can do to support her and her community. What do you think that looks like in practice?"</p> <p>And I'd add as well that there's this bit that occurred to me where the politicians refuse to engage, but the farmers do. But the farmers are often left out of political processes in some ways. So, yeah, there's an interesting tension there, around how we can have solidarity with farmers as well. So, I'm just adding a little add on there.</p>
<b>RP</b>	<p>No, I mean, when Anita, when asked, well, "what can we do?" The answer is: be activists for climate change. I think that opens up the question, "what is it to be an activist for climate change?" And I think that in part it depends on where you are, but in part there are some fairly well-defined things that one can imagine, around- look, yes, we can reduce our carbon footprint and, you know, ride an e-bike and drink through a metal straw. But there's only so many metal straws you can drink through. And, you know, how many e-bikes do you have to ride, in order to reduce your carbon footprint? I mean, at some level, this is a structural problem.</p> <p>And organizing for things like a 'People's Green New Deal' seems like the way to go. How do you do that? Well, you do that through joining movements. 'National Farmers Union' is a venerable organization in Canada, one for which I have a great deal of time, and I think, you know, working alongside them, joining their ranks, is an important way of expressing lived solidarity and understanding that to be an activist is not to do something for someone else, but it is to, to liberate yourself. It is not an act of pity or charity. It is</p>

	<p>because, you know, pity is kind of the opposite of solidarity. You see, you know, the family, on the farm who is just like, “oh, we feel very sorry for you in Malawi, and your struggles are all very sad.” But that doesn't move them to action. Pity is kind of the end of the discussion. And solidarity and activism is about recognizing “oh shit, well, you know, in order for us to be free, you have to be free and vice versa”. And that process is one that, you know, involves finding the organizations, for example, in ‘La Via Campesina’, so the ‘NFU’, the ‘MST’, I can't remember if there is a Via Campesina organization in Kenya, but if you go to <a href="http://laviacampesina.org">laviacampesina.org</a>, you'll be able to find out.</p> <p>And there's a lot of really interesting again, mutual liberation that can happen through, yes, writing to your elected representative. But there are kinds of democratic engagements that you can and should do, as well as direct action, as well as a range of other things. Now you're like, “oh, but I can't do it. I've got I've got a full-time job.” That's why you're part of a movement. When a movement is doing all of these things, your contribution gets magnified. Whereas if it's just an individual consumption decision, then, you might as well not bother. So, I do think that the joining movements and movement building is an important part of the work ahead.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<p>Yeah. And you remind me of some of the moments in the film where I think you really see the joy of being in movement. And that's something that's occurred to me, is that change isn't just about kind of, “oh, we've all got to suffer.” It's actually about finding positive ways to live differently, and with other people, that I think can be quite inspiring. And perhaps that's why Winston changes as well, because he sees that there's he doesn't actually have to suffer to participate in these things like cooking.</p> <p>So, okay, we've got two more questions. I think we can squeeze them in before we go. Is that all right, Raj?</p> <p>Okay, so Andres has another question around, how in Africa lot of people are reliant on agriculture. But he notices that Anita's son wants to be a pilot, and this has got him thinking “most of our ambitions and inspirations for our kids and young generation aren't geared towards wanting us to end up as farmers. This is seen as more of a retirement plan. So how do you think this has implications for how we get to be dedicated or to or how fully we get to play in the agrifood system?”</p> <p>So, I guess this is around generational, and engaging young people in the kinds of things that Anita's interested in.</p>

<p><b>RP</b></p>	<p>Well, I think I can answer that. And Laine's question about 'The Ants and the Grasshopper' visual at the same time.</p> <p>So, Laine, you're asking whether the visual came first and then the name came afterwards or vice versa, but the name came first. And it was something that Anita had said, that ended up being the title that she was happy with. We tried lots of other titles, including, 'Anita does all these things', which feels about right but at the same time, it doesn't tell you what the film's about.</p> <p>So, she decided on The Ants and the Grasshopper, and then we paid kids in sweets to go find ants and grasshoppers. And then kids came back "we found, we found, we found!". And we gave the sweets away and then we filmed them. But the reason that ants and grasshopper thing works so well is because, it talks about what's possible when a lot of people put their minds to something.</p> <p>And this gets to Andres' fantastic question about, "well, why does farming have to be the retirement option? Why is flying planes not just more exciting, but also more lucrative?" Well, it's because of the way society is structured. And, rather than taking that as a given, I think there are ways in which we can imagine a more just future in the climate catastrophe, in which farming is not only paid more, but in which land doesn't just become a sort of substitute for a good retirement. It becomes the space on which different generations, not necessarily from the same family, but different generations, collaborate together to be able to make sure that elders are taken care of and young people are taken care of, and, that it's possible to live a fulfilled and thriving life that is healthy and consonant with a future for the planet.</p> <p>But that requires the part of the story that is about the big structural change, that is about recognizing that if we're going to have these kinds of imaginations about the future, they need to be collective, needs to be collectively shaped. And they do need to decentre the Global North and the kind of urbanism and planes flying in the sky, like Anita's son France pines for. Because it's not desirable to pine for rural village life at the moment. What would it take for it to become recognizably beautiful? And aspirationally, the place that you would want to spend the rest of your life. Those kinds of questions need answers, and they're not going to be found individually. They're going to be found by all of us lifting the grasshopper together.</p>
<p><b>CS</b></p>	<p>Well. Thanks, Raj. That's I think, a lovely way to end. And I think also a way that connects our different regions. Certainly in the Northwest Territories, there are lots of questions around how young people are or</p>

	<p>aren't engaged in traditional food system activities and occupations and are often lured away to high income industries. And these are important tensions to, to reflect on. But I love that idea of, and it goes back to Olga's question, I think, of valuing what it is that supports us all. And actually, the people producing the food are supporting us all.</p> <p>But, Raj, I'd like to thank you so much for being here.</p>
<b>RP</b>	Thank you all. And I'm really very grateful.
<b>CS</b>	And thank you for this film. And, and thank you for reminding us that, you know, activism and scholarship are both possible together. I don't know how you do it, but you show us that it's possible. So thank you.
<b>RP</b>	Thanks so much. Thanks so much, comrades. Really lovely talking to you. Take care.
<b>LY</b>	<p>Thank you so much for joining me for this incredible conversation with Raj Patel. I hope you found it as inspiring and eye-opening as I did.</p> <p><i>The Ants and the Grasshopper</i> challenges us to think deeply about the connections between climate change, food systems, and social justice, and reminds us how important it is to listen to the voices of communities on the front lines.</p> <p>If today's episode moved you, I encourage you to watch the film, share it with others, and continue learning about these critical issues. There's so much power in understanding and solidarity.</p> <p>As always, thanks for tuning in to <i>Handpicked: Stories from the Field</i>.</p>
<b>LY</b>	Well, thanks so much to our guest, Raj Patel, and to all of the attendees for asking such important questions to guide the conversation.
<b>LY</b>	<p>This episode was hosted and produced by us: Laine Young [and Charlie Spring.</p> <p>This episode features music from Keenan Reimer-Watts.</p>
<b>CS</b>	<i>Handpicked</i> is produced with support from the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Wilfrid Laurier University, CIGI, and the Balsille School of International Affairs.

<b>LY</b>	Please check out our show notes for a bibliography, teaching tools, and links to other relevant information that we used to produce this episode. Make sure you check out our website for other ways to engage with us.
<b>CS</b>	This episode produced on the lands of the Neutral, Anishaanabe and Haudenosaunee people. We encourage you all to check the land acknowledgement link in the show notes to learn more.  As always, I'm Charlie Spring...
<b>LY</b>	...and I'm Laine Young and this has been an episode of the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems' podcast, <i>Handpicked</i> .
<b>CS</b>	Make sure to tune in next time, for more freshly picked stories from the field.