Cultivating Care: Community Gardens, Complicity, and Coalition-Building

By

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

Gender and Social Justice Studies

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Treaty Six Territory

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Abstract

Community gardens are often credited with offering many positive benefits, such as improving food security, encouraging volunteerism, and building community (Lanier et al., 2015, Lardy et al., 2013). As community gardens require a fair degree of communal organizing and reciprocity, they may also be an excellent space to theorize coalition-building. Notwithstanding community gardens' benefits and potentials, there are critical issues that settler scholars and activists have not fully acknowledged and teased out. The community garden literature put forth by settlers in North America has yet to adequately address how community gardens are implicated and entangled in ongoing settler colonialism and interlocking systems of domination.

This paper investigates the extent to which settler-led community gardens serve as colonial tools upholding imperial state power through Indigenous land dispossession and how they instead might become coalition-building sites working towards disruptive change. The overarching questions driving this paper are whether community gardens can work against the erasure of land dispossession and, if so, how they can reconceptualize alternative social orders, relations, and ways of being. In exploring these questions my objective is not to condemn the community garden movement, but rather, help move it forward in a way that more deeply grapples with the cultural politics of food and land (Guthman, 2011). Using community gardens as a case study, this paper will explore the critical first steps in consciousness-raising of the historical and contemporary injustices upheld by settlers. Following a pedagogy of discomfort (Kepkiewicz, 2015), this paper will investigate what sort of work goes into acknowledging settler implications and entanglements within interlocking systems of

domination while being critical of the ways purity politics encourages settler moves to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This will be followed by an analysis of what kind of theoretical work a decolonial-intersectional feminist coalition can do (Carastathis, 2016) and how this might facilitate the exploration of coalition-building within community garden spaces.

Synthesizing Document

To refuse to participate in the shaping of our future is to give it up. Do not be misled into passivity either by false security (they don't mean me) or by despair (there's nothing we can do). Each of us must find our work and do it. - Audre Lorde (1982, p.141)

In exploring what work I was meant to do and how I could go about doing it, I embarked on my graduate school journey. I chose the Gender and Social Justice (GSJ) Studies graduate program for several reasons, some of which I was conscious of from the beginning, and others I only understand retrospectively. I initially sought to challenge how I viewed the world, initiated by my experience working on the Metis Settlements Life Skills Journey project, but found myself going much further in investigating my responsibilities as a third-generation white settler living on Treaty six territory. This has turned me to reflecting on my own subject position, my relations, my motivations, and my intentions.

Situating myself in relation to the people, land, and spaces that inform my work has become an important act of reflexivity. Reflecting on and answering the question, "who are you and why do you care?" (Wilson, 2008; Meyer, 2008 as cited in Clark, 2016, p. 48) has become a critical starting point for my academic and personal work. I have come to understand that my subject position as a third-generation white settler of Flemish and Norwegian descent living in Amiskwaciwâskahikan (Beaver Hills House) commonly known today as Edmonton and situated on Treaty six territory *matters* to what I do. Treaty six territory is the traditional and occupied territories of the Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, and Métis Nations. It is on Treaty 6 territory, specifically the ancestral territory of the Papaschase Cree, where I work and learn within the University of Alberta, an institution that reproduces and privileges settler knowledge. Through my coursework, I have come to understand that I am implicated in the historical and ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples and benefit from interlocking systems of domination. Acknowledging this subject position serves as a reminder of my noninnocent responsibility, namely to continuously and actively work on unlearning and challenging settler-colonial practices.

In acknowledging my position as a white settler occupying space on these lands, I seek to build good relations. To begin doing so requires doing more than performatively rehearsing my subject position. Instead, I need to acknowledge how it informs my standpoint, my worldview, my values, and my research. Goenpul/Nunukul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) poignantly argues, “whiteness is not perceived as a category of difference by many white feminists, yet it is a standpoint and subject position from which they view the world, theorize, and practice their politics” (p.xxiii). Throughout this portfolio, I take Moreton-Robinson’s point and interrogate my subject position as a middle-class white settler woman “in order to understand how such a subject position is represented, complies with and maintains the racial order” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.xxv). I have come to understand that I continue to benefit from ongoing white race privilege, colonialism, and dispossession, and I recognize that my “position as [a] situated knower within white race privilege is inextricably connected to the systemic racism [that I] criticise but do not experience” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.xx). Building upon Moreton-Robinson’s insights, I now understand that silence and inaction serves to uphold structural racism that I’ve had the privilege to learn about rather than experience. This learning is uncomfortable. However, to sit with this discomfort involves asking hard questions such as: where have you come from and why are you doing the work you are doing? Unpacking both my subject position and intentions requires confronting structures of whiteness and settler guilt, both of which can be immobilizing. With the intention of reducing harm and promoting collective care, there exists a need to confront implication in historical and ongoing interlocking systems of domination and, for settlers such as myself, recognize the responsibilities that accompany our very presence on these lands. I believe engagements with settler implications can help instill responsibility to act against and challenge the oppressive structures that we are all entangled in.

Recognizing that all research is “representative of the position or standpoint by the author”, I acknowledge that my work is necessarily incomplete and shaped by my specific subject position within the settler-colonial and white supremacist context in which I live (Lincoln, 1995, as cited in Mertens, 2014, p.39). Moreton-Robinson (2000) argues that “the subject position middle-class white woman is structurally located as an ideological position within whiteness” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p.xxii). My being and knowledge has and continues to be forged within these conditions and I understand that I cannot simply step out of the ways in which I am entangled and implicated. Therefore, my standpoint has limitations and characterizes my worldview, what I know, and personally experience. Accordingly, in this work I seek to think through the specifics of my implication in historical and present structures of inequality and understand that my structural entanglements make a position of innocence impossible. In this work I seek to develop ways to take on what Alexis Shotwell calls “non-innocent responsibility” (2016).

Many small moments of curiosity shaped this project. However, three of my graduate courses majorly inform this project. My fall course, *On Complicity and Being Implicated (GSJ 598)* with Dr. Susanne Luhmann, significantly challenged my worldview on settler relations and pushed me to not only acknowledge but grapple with the far-reaching ways I am implicated in interlocking systems of oppression, historically and in the present. That course grounded the importance of not only asking and sitting with difficult questions but also highlighted the need to “stay with the trouble” rather than rushing to find solutions (Haraway as cited in Shotwell, 2016, p.127). That course, along with Dr. Luhmann’s supervision and guidance, set me on a path to get comfortable with being uncomfortable and sitting with hard truths that call for active and continuous unlearning of racist, ableist, transphobic, and heteropatriarchal colonial practices.

As part of my *Social Justice Workshop (GSJ 501)* with Dr. Chloë Taylor this past winter semester, each student had the opportunity to apply to a community-service learning (CSL) placement. With an interest in care ethics, I chose to volunteer with a local community garden, which was seeking support in exploring a more socially just governance structure. As I learned more about the community garden, I became increasingly aware of the complexities of this seemingly straightforward task. My fall semester’s work on investigating and theorizing the implicated subject in community-building spaces, such as university hockey, pushed me to translate and apply those conceptual ideas to community gardens. Based on my work in the course *On Complicity and Being Implicated (GSJ 598)*, I felt it necessary to interrogate how the literature addresses the complexity of community gardens in a settler-colonial context and attends to related modes of domination, including racial injustices. Throughout this portfolio I seek to examine the relationships and connections between community gardens, settler-colonialism, and racial injustice by complicating community gardens' reputation as only ever beneficial. A central line of inquiry in this capstone project is whether community gardens act as colonial tools upholding imperial state power through land dispossession and/or hold transformative potentials. In this inquiry, I explore why and how community gardens need to address their entanglements and implications in these systems of domination.

Community gardens are excellent sites for understanding the structures of settler implication and for probing their potential to practice an ethics of care through coalitional, community-based work. In Edmonton, and around the world, the number of community gardens has surged, now sprawling across urban spaces. While mainly understood as purely positive spaces, they are actually sites of complicated relationships. In the context of settler colonialism, I seek to discover whether and “how alternative food movements [through community gardens] can transform the colonial system rather than unconsciously perpetuate it” (Matties, 2016, para. 22). The questions of community gardens’ role in transforming or perpetuating the colonial system has been front and center for my placement and shaped many of my questions the placement raised including: How did this community garden come to be? What responsibilities are associated with this garden? How do the gardeners relate to one another and the land? While my CSL placement occurred entirely online during the second and third COVID wave, I was able to visit the garden in person this summer. I was not surprised to see many hands tending to the garden. Community gardens rely on the care of the many, so does community building, which, besides food security, is a central objective. What I was unsure about was the sort of awareness the gardeners held towards questions of land and dispossession.

As I began researching collective change frameworks and collaborative governance models, I found myself digging deeper into the ways settler-run community gardens exist as what I came to understand as compromised community-building spaces. The figure of compromise emerged after my initial interest shifted, from an examination of the relationships between community gardens, mutual aid, and decolonial potentials to an interest in what Shotwell (2016) critically calls purity politics. Community gardens, analyzed through the critique of purity politics, worries that these more likely encourage ‘settlers moves to innocence’ (Tuck & Yang, 2012) rather than doing the work of acknowledging and grappling with how these community projects are entangled and implicated in interlocking systems of domination.

Building from these lessons, the course *Intersectional Methods & Research Design (GJS 598)* with Dr. Jessica Kolopenuk was transformational in my learning journey. The reading list, weekly assignments, and discussions significantly helped flesh out my capstone direction. This course disrupted what I thought I knew about intersectionality and invited me to further reflect on how my eagerness to learn more should be grounded in the genealogy, contemporary challenges, and critical understandings of intersectionality. It further reinforced the importance of taking time to considerately and intentionally explore the nuances of intersectionality as an analytical tool and framework. This course was extremely timely in my capstone development as it provided space to develop a proposal as the final paper. This assignment was largely informed by the course readings which pushed me to think deeply about theoretical frameworks and commitments.

A transformative methodological framework rooted in intersectional-type and decolonial feminist research paradigms informs the theoretical commitments of my capstone paper and portfolio as a whole. A transformative methodological framework "holds that research inquiry needs to be intertwined with politics and a political change agenda to confront social oppression at whatever levels it occurs" (Mertens, 2010, as cited in Creswell, 2014, p.9). These commitments inform the recommendation and future research sections that discuss some critical first steps and opportunities for community gardens to collectively pursue while seeking to build better relations.

Further, this paper will engage in Indigenous research methodologies as a means to center relationality, reflexivity, and to thoughtfully engage with Indigenous worldviews. While I seek to explore the connections between decolonial feminist and intersectional methodologies my aim is to "neither equate intersectionality and decolonial feminism nor to adjoin or append the latter to the former" (Carastathis 2016, p.201). Intersectionality is a key guiding theoretical framework informed by the Combahee River Collective Statement (1983) that acknowledges the intersectional lived realities of all situated within systems of domination. This theory posits that "multiple social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status) intersect at the micro-level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level (e.g., racism, sexism, heterosexism)" (Bowleg, 2012, p.1267). The Combahee River Collective Statement and Kimberlee Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality in 1989, draw attention to the pressing need to critically and thoughtfully engage with black feminist thought when seeking to employ intersectionality as a research paradigm. This employment requires both an understanding and an active commitment to “struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking” (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1983, p.1). While conceptualizing power, there also needs to be “an accounting of imperialism and colonialism, the ‘system of oppression’ that is imagined reinforces the state as a settled structure” (Barker, 2019, p.13). Sioux activist Zitkala-Sa (1901) writing over a century ago, along with other Indigenous feminists, speak out against the “interlocking arteries of colonialism” (Clark, 2016, p.49). These texts were extremely influential in my learning journey as they have highlighted the urgent need to thoughtfully engage with Black and decolonial Indigenous feminist thought when seeking to grow the field of intersectionality across disciplines.

Building an understanding of intersectional approaches that acknowledge how differently situated subjects experience community garden spaces will better inform potential strategies for collective action. Drawing on Dhamoon’s (2011) concept of intersectional-type work, this research paradigm is urgently needed in these contexts as “it treats social positions as relational, and it makes visible the multiple positioning that constitutes everyday life and the power relations that are central to it” (p.230). Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) importantly call for the adoption of intersectionality as a way of thinking, referring not to what it is, but what it does (Cho et. al, 2013). In challenging positivist approaches, Bowleg (2008) also argues, “interdependence, multi-dimensionality and mutually constitutive relationships form the core of intersectionality" (p.317). All in all, it is useful to engage in intersectionality more deeply as a "profoundly destabilizing, productively disorienting, provisional concept that disaggregates false unities, undermines false universalisms, and unsettles false entitlements" (Carastathis, 2016, p.237). Intersectional-type and decolonial feminist research paradigms are the lenses through which I approach this work and form the theoretical commitments that guide this paper. Ultimately, this capstone will explore how intersectional-type work and decolonial feminist research paradigms could facilitate the inquiry of how community garden spaces could nourish alternative ways of relating to one another.

Altogether, my graduate courses examined various approaches to social justice issues, enhanced my critical thinking skills, and challenged my worldview in how I understand settler responsibilities within interlocking systems of domination in the context of Canada. I'm fortunate to have experienced academic successes throughout my graduate journey, not only with institutional measures of success, but in the exposure I have had to different ways of knowing, theorizing, and being. My journey thus far has been grounded in humility in recognizing that I know so little and have much more learning to do. This has challenged what I thought I knew and led me to embrace uncertainty, imperfection, and questions. All of the aforementioned would not have been possible without the care of those around me, both during and before grad school. In identifying my relations, I want to specifically acknowledge and express gratitude to those who have significantly shaped my learning journey over the past few years, including Alicia Hibbert, Becca Shortt, Mandy Macrae, Destiny Chalifoux, Kyle

Durocher, and many others who have and continue to share their knowledge, energy, and time. My graduate supervisor, Dr. Luhmann pushed me to ask and sit with difficult questions, all the while exemplifying patience and support throughout. My partner, Craig Farkash has been my rock, sounding board, and ultimate support as I juggled school, work, and life during a global pandemic. Overall, my graduate school journey has been an extremely challenging but rewarding experience that has overwhelmingly illustrated the need for care.

Introduction

Urban community gardens are unique collaborative spaces that are widely embraced as a solution to many social problems as they support food access, participatory citizenship, and community development (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014). While much has been written about food sovereignty and, more broadly, alternative food movements, less attention has been paid to the particularities of urban community gardens, which are one piece in the much larger multidimensional food sovereignty puzzle. As food insecurity, income inequality, climate change, and political marginalizations mount, intersect, and accelerate each other, community gardens are increasingly seen as both solutions and “site[s] of contestation” (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014, p.1092). Some of these sites of contestation revolve around the complex relationships in which they are embedded, including deeply important relations to the land these gardens are situated on. Tensions lie in whether settler-run community gardens reproduce and uphold settler colonialism through continued land dispossession and/or, perhaps, hold the potential to transform colonial systems (Matties, 2016). Community gardens’ potential to contribute to larger structural change, particularly through grappling with their own implication and entanglements in structural injustices to develop decolonial-intersectional feminist coalitions has yet to be studied in great detail. In this paper, I explore how community gardens might come to be spaces that respond to and reconceptualize alternative social orders, relations, and ways of being.

The larger question that guides this work concerns the extent to which community gardens serve as tools of historical and ongoing colonialism and how they might instead become sites of coalition-building and disruptive change in Canada. This paper will critically analyze discourses on urban community gardens and engage with feminist and decolonial scholars to conceptualize what coalition-building in community gardens could look like. Several questions guide this exploration: How can settlers come to understand and build better community gardens within settler-colonial contexts? How can community gardens and their members forge and nourish solidarity, coalition-building, and care seeking to disrupt systems of domination? Further "what do everyday practices of responsibility and accountability look like for settler food actors as they live and work on contested and occupied Indigenous lands" (Daigle, 2017, p.16)? Through critical engagements with existing urban community garden literature in North America, I argue that the literature put forth by settler scholars does not sufficiently attend to the ways community gardens are implicated and entangled in settler colonial contexts. After undergoing a critical analysis of the literature on community gardens that is informed by intersectional and decolonial feminist theoretical commitments, I argue that settlers working in community garden spaces must recognize and accept what Alexis Shotwell (2016) calls "non-innocent responsibility". Further, there is a need to respectfully and thoughtfully engage with Indigenous-led alternative food movements and actively support coalitions working against land dispossession. In positing community gardens as a site for change, settlers will be pushed to develop a sense of responsibility to become caring stewards of community garden spaces that challenge contemporary social orders.

Chapter 1: Community Garden Literature

The goal of this section is to critically analyze community garden discourses, with a focus on how community gardens are understood and presented. The scope is centred on settler-operated urban community garden literature within the settler-colonial context of what is known today as Canada and the United States. I will identify emerging topics and themes in the community garden literature and discuss the saliency and gaps in how social justice issues are taken up. This exploration will be guided by a number of questions; how are community gardens portrayed? What assumptions, fantasies, tensions and, ultimately, limitations underwrite this literature?

The literature offers broad definitions of urban community gardens that reflect the diversity of purposes and approaches. After conducting a systematic literature review of urban community gardens research, Guitart et al. (2012) contend that urban community gardens can generally be understood as collectively operated community spaces in which food and/or flowers are cultivated. More broadly, community gardens are perceived as an alternative food institution, situated within the larger alternative food movement (Guthman, 2011). For Guthman, alternative food includes a “broad range of practices and programs designed to bring producers and consumers into close proximity and to educate people of the value of local, sustainably grown, and seasonal food” (2011, p.264). While Ferris et al. (2001) agree that community gardens are distinguishable from private gardens based on access, ownership, and democratic control, they ultimately concede “it is not very useful to offer a precise definition of community gardens as this would impose arbitrary limits on creative communal responses to local need” (pp.560-561). Current literature also offers a variety of urban communal garden types: ecological restoration gardens, leisure gardens, entrepreneurial gardens, child and school gardens, crime diversion gardens, work and training gardens, healing and therapy gardens, quiet gardens, neighbourhood pocket parks, and demonstration gardens (Ferris et al., 2001). Although this list is not exhaustive, it is commonly understood that community gardens exist in a variety of spaces for a variety of purposes. In fact, community gardens often combine functions in an effort to address multiple purposes. Due to their ability to respond to many social problems simultaneously, they have come to be largely understood as progressive spaces worth supporting (Ferris et al., 2001). Indeed, the diversity of definitions in the literature reflects the diversity of approaches to urban community gardens.

Much of the literature offers distinguishingly positive perspectives on the purposes and benefits of urban community gardens. It is well documented that community gardens offer several positive community impacts, such as improving food access, social connectedness, physical activity, environmental stewardship, and civic engagement to name a few (Lardy et al., 2013). Walter (2013) points to research that demonstrates strong connections between community gardens, individual growth, and societal change, providing such benefits as improved health and self-esteem, and the promotion of food sovereignty and environmental justice. Community gardens are also widely recognized “as sites of grassroots citizenship practice and place-based community development" (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014, p.1094) highlighting their role in fostering local and personal relationships. They are often sown to increase access to nutritional fresh foods and regularly evolve to become central sites of community organizing (Lanier et al., 2015). This corresponds with the primary motivation researchers found for community gardens: to produce fresh food, build social interactions, community, and welfare (Guitart et al., 2012). Accordingly, much of the current literature draws connections between community gardens and health, education, food security, and land reclamation (Ferris et al., 2001). Understanding the previously mentioned positive impacts of community gardens *for* community members, it's not difficult to see why they are widely embraced both in scholarly writing and by individuals.

While community gardens have a long and rich history, many scholars have noted steady growth in their presence since the 1970s as a response to economic crises (Neo & Chua, 2017, Karim, 2014). Karim (2014) argues that this influx can largely be attributed to ongoing neoliberal restructuring including land privatization, mass inflation, and welfare decline. A tension that emerges in the literature concerns the ways that community gardens both challenge and *uphold* neoliberalism. Some see increased citizen participation "as a component of collaborative governance used to reduce state responsibility for social service provision, and citizen volunteers are compelled to fill welfare deficiencies resulting from lapsed government spending" (Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014, p.1092). Others note that while community gardens are praised for their potential to improve food access and some material conditions, "they can simultaneously cultivate racist agendas by masking structural inequities, and conditioning participants to pursue change through individual endeavour" (Pudup, 2008, as cited in Ghose and Pettygrove, 2014, p.1094). This neoliberal critique stands in contrast to the more optimistic view that focuses more on the ways community gardens challenge corporate food systems by actively "creating an opportunity for people to dirty their hands, grow their own food, work with their neighbors, and generally transform themselves from consumers of food into 'soil citizens' "(Baker, 2004, p.305). While the ways community gardens uphold and perhaps challenge neoliberalism is an important structural critique, there is a need to go further in investigating how community gardens are implicated and entangled in larger interlocking systems of oppression. Chapters 2 and 3 respectively will focus on these questions.

Another significant gap missing from these conversations is an intersectional and decolonial feminist lens, addressed in more detail in chapter 5, that challenges and furthers the community garden movement more fundamentally, offering analyses of the historical injustices and contextual dynamics in which these spaces emerge and exist. After scanning the literature to uncover how community gardens are understood, several questions came to mind, reflective of the gaps that I see. To what extent does current community garden research address questions of settler implication in continued land dispossession, as well as its entanglement within interlocking systems of domination? Further, what is the awareness of how intersecting structures of power affect and play out in community garden spaces? Are those power relations unpacked and addressed in the literature? The community garden literature is grounded in a promise that they serve as a way to improve local food supplies and can become integral solutions to food deserts (Ferris et al., 2001, Wang et. al., 2014). While the literature is quick to illustrate the many positive benefits of community gardens, there is little scholarly work that engages and responds with how community gardens are entangled within interlocking systems of domination. Without engaging with how community gardens are entangled with structural racism, settler colonialism, ableism, transphobia and heteropatriarchy, community gardens risk reproducing the oppressive conditions that uphold food deserts, land dispossession, political marginalizations, and ultimately settlers' futurity.

Structural criticisms aside, another notable contestation that emerges when studying community gardens is the scarcity of fertile land that exists in urban spaces and the difficulty in procuring long-term land leases from governments (Guitart et al., 2012). While land privatization is often discussed, there is little to no mention of Indigenous land dispossession, and the ways settler-run community gardens in colonial contexts are implicated in colonial violence. For example, Walter (2013) discusses how community gardens have "helped native peoples unlearn and overcome food dependency on outsiders" without critiquing how colonialism has purposely disrupted food pathways and access to land through extractivist, wealth accumulative economies (p.533). To elaborate, Walter writes that "community gardens can promote the restoration of local food economies and food sovereignty for native peoples, [and] encourage a revival of healthier traditional foods and diet" (2013, p.533). Again, community gardens are presented as a decolonization strategy without discussing the ways settlers, and settler-run community gardens, are implicated in the historical and ongoing colonial violence that maintains land dispossession. In these representations, community gardens are seen as solutions, Indigenous peoples are presented as responsible, and settler responsibility and accountability are absent.

While community garden researchers do acknowledge the environmental, economic, and (some) social axes of oppression, critical gaps exist in the ways that they engage with settler-colonial power structures that uphold continued Indigenous land dispossession. In much of the previously cited work, settler colonialism is glossed over - if mentioned at all - and there is little-to-no discussion of settler complicity with ongoing colonial violence in the land that is known as Canada. Further missing is an interrogation of the ways “discourses of alternative food hail a white subject and thereby code the practices and spaces of alternative food as white” (Guthman, 2011, p.264). The production of white spaces in alternative food movements not only acts as an exclusionary measure, but also serves to erase structural racism and land dispossession (Guthman, 2011). In exploring the unbearability of whiteness in alternative food movements, Guthman (2011) seeks to make whiteness visible, decenter white as “normal”, and expose its manifestations as colorblind. While speaking more broadly about the alternative food movement, the same argument and urgency to address whiteness as an unmarked category needs to be applied to community gardens.

Overall, the community garden literature consistently acknowledges certain axes of oppression (e.g. class struggles), but there seems to be a persistent lack of an intersectional analysis. Single-axis struggles (poverty or environmental crises, etc.) take up significantly more space. Despite these trends, there seems to be some awareness of the ways gender and race matter in the power relations of those involved in community garden spaces. For example, Chattopadhyay (2018) contends that “urban gardening is still largely women’s work, work that raises food security in many places without consigning a higher social status to (urban) women-of-color gardeners” (2018, p.1301). Ghose and Pettygrove (2014) similarly argue for the need to address power relations between community gardening participants. In somewhat of an exception, Thompson et al. (2020) posit that scholars need to pay more attention to “the complexity of existing intersectionalities between race and socioeconomic disadvantages with food insecurity and other agri-food challenges” (p.381). While not speaking specifically to community gardens, there are instances of intersectional analyses within the larger alternative food movement that would be useful for food actors to apply to community gardens specifically.

Despite some discussions of power relations among community gardeners and of the intersections of poverty, gender, and race in the larger issue of food security, little attention is paid to how community gardens themselves are implicated and entangled within larger interlocking oppressive systems such as settler colonialism, structural racism, capitalism, transphobia, ableism, and heteropatriarchy. Instead, the literature often presents community gardens as a solution and saviour to many social ills without contextualizing their existence in larger structural systems of domination. Missing in this literature is a deeper engagement with how community gardens are implicated in land dispossession and ongoing colonial violence. Rushing to present community gardens as solutions to single-axis issues such as poverty and food insecurity without attending and challenging the ways that settler-operated community gardens are implicated in interlocking systems of oppression furthers those structures and misses a valuable opportunity for creating the conditions for effective alliances for building new pathways forward. The community garden movement would benefit from reflecting further on how these community-building spaces can more effectively engage with their implication as a starting point for collective action.

Chapter 2: On Settler Implications

While the community garden literature put forth by settlers in North America highlights numerous positive and far-reaching benefits and has begun to grapple with some of its problems such as neoliberal tensions and power relations, it has yet to adequately respond and grapple with its implication in larger interlocking systems of oppression such as settler-colonial and capitalist violence (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019). In this section, I promote active engagements with violent histories and urge community gardens to consider their role in upholding structures of violence that they did not create but benefit from.

Looking specifically at the colonial context of what is known today as Canada, some food scholars have argued that settler-Canadian food sovereignty scholarship has insufficiently engaged with how settler-colonialism deliberately works to disrupt food systems (Whyte, 2018). Historical and contemporary colonialism has intentionally disrupted land-based practices of Indigenous peoples through forced relocation to reservations and residential school systems along with policy-enforced economic vulnerability (Timler & Sandy, 2020). Adding to dispossession is the growing movement that calls for eating local, growing one's own food, and forging personal relationships to the land (Matties, 2016). For Matties these discourses are "also accompanied by an acknowledgement that settler desires for land and connection to land continue to play a role in the dispossession of Indigenous land and culture" (2016, para. 11). At the heart of this lies a significant tension that is ignored as settler-run farms, community gardens and agricultural projects are located on contested and stolen land (Matties, 2016). This is supported by Grey & Patel (2015) who argue that "there is an unrecognized conflict in the recent drive toward the local and sustainable, since in many cases, farmers—even small farmers and community gardeners—are sowing Indigenous Peoples' territories" (p.442). Speaking more broadly in the American context, Guthman (2011) similarly argues that the romanticization of the "agrarian imaginary erases the explicitly racist ways in which, historically, American land has been distributed and labor has been organized, erasures that ramify today in more subtle cultural coding of small-scale farming" (p.276). Overall, settler community gardeners need to reconcile that food production intersects with the appropriation of land and colonial processes that seek to invisiblize dispossession (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019). This broader critique is relevant for community gardens and requires that the community garden movement considers how it is implicated in histories of land dispossession and their effects in the present. To nourish the capacity to challenge colonial practices requires giving up the romantic narrative of community gardens' purity and to recognize the irony of settler-run community gardens providing food for Indigenous peoples on land that was stolen from them in the first place.

In this endeavour, Michael Rothberg's (2019) concept of the "implicated subject" is helpful for developing a more accurate picture of how such systems of oppression are reproduced. According to Rothberg, implicated subjects occupy "positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes” (2019, p.1). The implicated subject exceeds the category of bystanders, who are innocent participants in structures of oppression, because power and domination work by co-opting differently situated subjects. Applying this to community gardens, although differently situated folks working in various roles and capacities experience those spaces differently, they all benefit from land dispossession and as such, are implicated in ongoing colonial structures. Drawing on the work of the Combahee River Collective Statement, Rothberg (2019) illustrates that the theory of intersectionality proves necessary to understanding implications and the ways that people are situated differently across systems of power in different times and places. This is referred to as “complex implication” as people can occupy multiple positions of oppression and privilege at the same time where they can simultaneously be victims, perpetrators, and collaborators within the context of interlocking systems of domination (Rothberg, 2019). Implicated subjects do not possess an identity, but rather occupy or enter specific positions in histories of injustices or structures of oppression where they are beneficiaries (Rothberg, 2019). This is best understood in tandem with Primo Levi’s work on “the gray zone”, which serves as a useful space to think through the ways in which implicated subjects are situated differently (as cited in Rothberg, 2019, p.39). The gray zone is described as casting varying shades of complicity that are not easy to locate. Rothberg argues that in the gray zone, “ambiguity is productive; it is precisely the difficult-to-locate position between victims and perpetrators that makes implicated subjects useful to power, that makes them in Forti’s words, ‘transmission belts’ of domination” (p.55). For Rothberg (2019), this provides a visual metaphor of how inaction by implicated subjects on present injustices serves to uphold and reproduce structures of domination. In shifting out the victim/perpetrator binary, theorizing the implicated subject helps to explain how diachronic and synchronic forms of violence are pervasive and difficult to eradicate.

In the context of community gardens, illuminating the role of the implicated subjects in reproducing interlocking systems of oppression is an important and necessary starting point. Accepting that settler-run community gardens are compromised projects, in the ways they are implicated in land dispossession, calls for a reckoning as settlers are “enmeshed in histories and structures of violence they may not realize they inhabit and help prop up” (Rothberg, 2019, p. 49). Community gardeners need to ask themselves: how did I come to be on this land? How does my silence regarding questions about land serve and benefit my continued participation in community garden spaces? Without asking these hard questions, gardeners’ silence and “various characteristics of obedience (i.e. passivity, consent to authority, the ‘normativity of non-judgement') serve as the ‘transmission belt’ that carries out ‘political evil’ ” (Rothberg, 2019, p. 54). In learning from past injustices, there needs to be an acknowledgement that “historically, the most terrible things - war, genocide, and slavery - have resulted not from disobedience, but from obedience” (Zinn, 1997, p.389). While it is not enough to know one’s own implication in multileveled conditions of injustice, it is a crucial step in forming effective and meaningful alliances among differently situated subjects (Rothberg, 2019). Spotlighting the diversity of people participating in community gardens, and thereby understanding varying complex implications will be a critical step in forging coalitions across differently situated folks.

While it is necessary to understand and address settler implications in the community garden context, more work needs to be done. Shotwell (2016) reminds us that as forgetting is at the core of settler colonialism, it is important to think through the specific historical and contemporary injustices experienced by Indigenous peoples while working to understand contemporary implications as a foundation for collective action (Shotwell 2016). Unsettling the romanticization of community gardens in Canada - and amplifying Indigenous voices that complicate narratives of community building - requires working through historical injustices, no matter how far away they seem. This foregrounds the importance of “unforgetting”, a term coined by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz that involves *intentional* memory work necessary to understand histories, acknowledge the ways one benefits and is disadvantaged by current iterations and acts on that knowledge “as a part of resistance to colonialism” (as cited in Shotwell, 2016, p.36). This requires working through and with the past as a form of transformative remembrance (Rothberg, 2019). Transformative remembrance involves “aspects of reparation, restitution, commemoration, and historical education” (Rothberg, 2019, p.56). For community gardens and gardeners, this demands asking and sitting with questions of whose land one is on and how one came to be on it. This also requires going further in exploring lines of questioning, imagining and acting on what reparation, restitution, commemoration, and historical education about dispossession might look like for community gardens. Rothberg (2019) notes that in spaces of historical injustices and memory it is most often the case that there is little to no attempt made to address the implicated subject. This fails to put pressure on the implicated subject to enact change. He advocates for pushing beyond the victim/perpetrator imaginary in order to develop new forms of memory work that situate both synchronic and diachronic entanglements to confront dimensions of inequality (Rotheberg, 2019). This will be a critical and ongoing process as settlers unlearn colonial practices and learn the shared history of what is known today as Canada. This involves acknowledging the ways they disproportionately, and often exclusively benefit from colonial legacies that have secured settler's access and ability to grow and sell produce on stolen Indigenous land.

As community gardens grow as community building spaces there remains an opportunity for settlers to deepen their understanding of their ongoing implications with the ways settler colonialism seeks to erase land dispossession and strengthen globalized systems of domination. Grappling with implication and complicity may serve as a more effective starting point to grounding non-innocent responsibility oriented towards developing alternative ways of relating to one another and the land. Theorizing how implicated subjects govern and control access to community garden spaces develops a more accurate picture of how colonialism and other forms of oppression are upheld and helps to foreground an ethical call to form coalitions that collectively challenge, not perpetuate systems of domination.

Chapter 3: Entanglements

Understanding how we, as settlers, are implicated, entangled, and co-dependent beings is an important starting point in building solidarity. This section will explore how the concept of entanglement helps settlers to rethink community garden spaces and how it can help move collective action forward. Illuminating what systems of domination seek to conceal is necessary to not only truth-seeking but to uncovering and foregrounding settler responsibilities. In thinking through consciousness-raising of unjust conditions, exploring the concept of entanglement and complicity as constitutive factors is one way to challenge the workings of purity politics within community garden spaces. Purity politics often evokes individual ethical responses that deny the interconnectedness of complex global suffering and is a common response to concerns of contamination (both physically and politically) (Shotwell, 2016). Put plainly, purity politics is an approach concerned with returning to a perceived “natural state", one that seeks to distance from structures of oppression rooted in white supremacy, ableism, transphobia, healthism, sexism, etc (Shotwell, 2016). Therefore, along with unpacking why the concept of entanglement matters to community gardens, I will also explore the connections between food and purity politics as a way to demonstrate the far-reaching nature of entanglements.

In defining and employing the term entanglement, Shotwell (2016) poignantly writes:

> To say that we live in compromised times is to say that although most people aim to not cause suffering, destruction, and death, simply by living, buying things, throwing things away, we implicate ourselves in terrible effects on ecosystems and beings both near and far away from us. We are inescapably entwined and entangled with others, even when we cannot track or directly perceive this entanglement (p.8).

Applying this to community gardens, entanglements become more clear as we start to think about land dispossession and food production. Recognizing the political importance of food while exploring the question of interdependency, it is useful to understand “eating as illuminating our bodies as mere way stations in complex, entwined systems. The eating and excreting body is always entangled, enmeshed, a mess” (Shotwell, 2016, p.114). Just as the human digestive system is inextricably enmeshed, so are the systems that bring food to our mouths. As all beings consume, there is no escape from entanglements in near and far systems of power.

Acknowledging entanglement is useful for community garden actors as it foregrounds the interdependencies inherent in those spaces, and highlights their need to exist in the first place -- addressing food insecurity in an unempathetic political/colonial system. It further challenges the way we think about community gardens as it complicates food production and consumption within contextual and temporal boundaries. Just as we are connected to land dispossession in our own communities, so are we connected to such systems in countries around the world, through the import and export of food products. These ideas connect to the work put forth by Kim Q. Hall (2014), who critically interrogates the US alternative food movement. Hall (2014) argues that there are no foods that are pure and aren’t implicated in intertwining systems and relationships beyond one’s control. This critique matters to community gardens as it challenges romanticized notions of all food production. Even when cultivating food with one’s own hands, one cannot step out of entanglements in systems of domination and the ways community gardens are forged and benefit from globalized colonial conditions. In thinking through food justice, Hall (2014) calls for a rejection of purity politics which “emphasize individual efforts and better consumer choices [that] reflects the ‘neoliberal notion of sustainability’ that informs much of the contemporary food movement” (p.182). In making visible the illusion of self-sufficiency that is rooted in able-bodied assumptions, she argues that food politics that have this end goal enact a form of alimentary ableism. For Hall (2014), real food security requires food justice, not the illusion of self-sufficiency. Food justice calls for “all people [to] have access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious, culturally appropriate food produced in an environmentally sustainable way and provided in a manner that promotes human dignity” (Levkoe, 2006, p.91). Community gardens can be spaces where interdependencies are celebrated and where larger systems that deny human dignity not only in food access but in cultural food production are challenged. Thinking through food justice in community garden spaces can be a way to encourage settlers to rethink community-building spaces within the context they are situated in and to think through how to collectively challenge colonial food networks that seek to control and exploit food production, distribution, and consumption.

In being wary of quick solutions, what work goes into the critical first steps of consciousness-raising as it relates to food justice? For Shotwell (2016), displaying how we’re entangled, co-produced beings can help produce an ethical call to “care about others because the entanglement of ourselves is simultaneously an entanglement with other beings’ pain” (p.177). Illuminating and embracing the realities of interdependence and impurity, including implication in colonial food systems, calls for accepting “noninnocent responsibility that [does] not rest on the lie that we can step outside relations of entanglement that are also always relations of suffering” (Shotwell, 2016, p.121). Framing community gardens as sites of responsibility re-engages with the epistemology of those spaces; where instead of only focusing on whether community gardens are inclusionary or exclusionary, we can go beyond to ask what responsibilities are associated with community gardens in a particular time and place (Neo & Chua, 2017). For settler community gardeners, this requires not only asking whose traditional lands one is situated on but learning what responsibilities are associated with living in good relations with all beings, including the land. How can one practice reciprocity with the land and Indigenous peoples, who have called those lands home since time immemorial? Going beyond individual reflections, how can community gardeners come together to shift out of individual guilt to accepting non-innocent responsibility for Indigenous land dispossession and ongoing colonial violence? Connecting non-innocent responsibility to implication, Rothberg (2019) argues that “an approach to justice derived from an account of implication foregrounds instead the responsibilities of more ambiguously situated participants and descendants” (p.21). Returning to the question “what do everyday practices of responsibility and accountability look like for settler food actors as they live and work on contested and occupied Indigenous lands? (Daigle, 2017, p.16) helps to foreground the entanglements of community gardening in so-called Canada. Beyond performatively acknowledging whose land one is on, we can draw some inspiration from Hannah Arendt who in a different context argued to take

> vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men, and that the faculty of action...can be actualized only in one of the many and manifold forms of human community (Arendt as cited by Rothberg, 2019, pp.47-48).

Rather than focusing on blaming certain organizations or individual people for food injustices, Arendt’s point calls for collectively accepting responsibility for current conditions that cause mass suffering. By virtue of participating in living on earth with others, we must accept responsibility for both historical and contemporary legacies that mark community garden’s existence. In recognizing that settler-colonialism implicates and unsettles everyone (Tuck & Yang, 2012), entanglements and noninnocent responsibilities become integral to exploring the transformative potential of community gardens.

Building a better understanding of community gardens’ entanglements will help settlers realize that they are implicated and impure no matter how innocent or progressive they believe they are or community gardening is. As noted in my community garden literature review, there is inadequate engagement with implications and entanglements with settler colonialism and larger systems of domination. This is supported by Kepkiewicz (2015) who, speaking more broadly, argues that “although a few food movement spaces are opening up opportunities for collaboration between indigenous and non-indigenous activists, food movements have yet to adequately engage with the ongoing effects of settler colonialism in North America” (p.195). By facilitating a shift from unknowing to a space of continued consciousness-raising, community gardens can act as important cultural spheres that nourish engagements with entanglements, implication, and ultimately political responsibility. Encouraging a deeper reflection on entanglement will promote a necessary acknowledgement of responsibility that each participating settler holds when participating in land-based activities, even those as seemingly simple as gardening. Embracing this entanglement and responsibility will act as a force to disrupt purity politics which supports the idea that if one is pure one cannot be considered responsible (Shotwell, 2016). Rather than running away from entanglements and implications, it is more effective to “stay with the trouble” in order to pursue a politics of impure responsibility (Haraway as cited by

Shotwell, 2016, p.126). As such, participating in progressive spaces such as community gardens does not absolve settlers of colonial legacies and responsibilities. Despite offering affordable fresh nutritional food and social connectedness, settler-run urban community gardens still rely on continued Indigenous land dispossession. This entanglement begs an acceptance that there is no way to live a 'pure life' without causing harm (Shotwell, 2016). The concept of non-innocent responsibility is important as one begins to imagine how individuals can shift away from guilt and accept entanglements and implications in the pursuit of transformational change in community gardens.

Chapter 4: Open Normativities

In collectively imagining new pathways forward, this section will critically explore the usefulness of what Alexis Shotwell (2016) calls "open normativities" as a way to consider alternatives to current social orders, particularly as they relate to community gardens. Shotwell (2016), writes that open normativities involve "collectively crafted ways of being that shape subjectivities oriented toward widespread flourishing" and necessitates "a commitment to futures that can nourish relationality for all that has spirit" (Shotwell, 2016, p.162,178). This exploration is guided by several questions; why might community gardens consider this concept as a way to challenge current social orders? Are open normativities a more ethical way forward or is it another way to escape the unbearability of settler guilt? How can community gardens employ open normativities in a way that challenges purity politics and white saviorism? Can open normativities facilitate a radical transformation of relations? While these questions cover substantial theoretical territory, I hope to provide a degree of clarity as to their importance in what follows.

Open normativities reject individualism and purity, replacing them with collective resilience and change (Shotwell, 2016). Shotwell argues for the usefulness of normativities in general as they provide a “process by which people claim that a given way of being is good or beautiful, or to be endorsed” (Shotwell, 2016, p.143). While current conceptions of “normal” are narrowly defined and rooted in transphobic, homophobic, racist, sexist, ableist ideals, open normativities “is a way that expands the definition of normal to not leave anyone on the outside” (Shotwell, 2016). I would also add that open normativities is a way to rethink how we relate to not only each other, but to non-human things, such as plants, animals, and the land. Open normativities is an interesting concept to consider while exploring how community gardens can imagine new possibilities and relations orientated towards collective care. As a way to ground radical relationality and care, perhaps open normativities that allow for new ways of relating to the land (beyond a resource to be exploited) is a way to challenge colonial capitalist heteropatriarchal orders. As Shotwell (2016) suggests, open normativities are non-restrictive and call for new ways of being that can be critiqued and modified. As such, community gardens can practice expanding current conceptions of normal orientated towards care and widespread flourishing of the land, people, and animals. While norms are generally regarded as exclusionary and harmful, Shotwell (2016) offers how open normativities can be useful in shaping new futures. Open normativities encourage collective reimagining of new ways of being that nourish relationality and pleasure. This concept may prove useful for community gardens as it calls for revisions of what is considered normative and encourages intentional care for all that has spirit (Shotwell, 2016). In the same way intersectionality needs to be understood as a provisional concept, open normativities may be useful in the ways it calls for queering, challenging, and critiquing the social norms in place for alternatives. This connects well to Dhamoon's (2011) employment of intersectional-type work, used as an analytical tool to not only critique the world as it exists now but to uncover alternative ways of relating to one another.

There certainly is a desirability to utilize a concept such as open normativities in community garden spaces, especially in the way it calls for widespread flourishing and care. But what does widespread flourishing entail and, perhaps more importantly, what work must come before that? In being skeptical of fast solutions, approaches to open normativities need to be thoughtful and intentional. Unsettling community gardens in the pursuit of open normativities requires implicated parties to interrogate how differently situated settlers across social positions relate to or understand land (Kepkiewicz, 2015). This involves "unsettling the settler within" (Regan, 2020), embracing a pedagogy of discomfort (see chapter 5), and accepting implication and noninnocent responsibilities for conditions one has not created but benefits from (Rothberg, 2019, Shotwell, 2016).

As a community organizing space, community garden collaboratives may hold the potential for exploring and practicing different ways of relating to each other and the land, but this demands intense personal and collective reflection. Keeping in mind that while individuals catalyze change, change happens collectively (Shotwell, 2016), community gardens need to push settlers to go beyond individual actions. For Dancing Water Sandy "gardening should be about interconnections, health and awareness.

Gardening in a good way is an opportunity to bridge gaps between people, to learn together and possibly blend some Indigenous teachings" (Timley & Sandy, 2020, p.14). Gardeners should reflect on the purpose and impacts of their activities and how it maintains or challenges current social orders. Otherwise, as discussed earlier, inaction and silence serve as a transmission belt that maintains oppressive structures (Rothberg, 2019). Rather than choosing silence, settler-run gardens need to relinquish unfettered control of urban gardens and explore how they can practice collective care that seeks to repair *all* relations. The Red Nation posits that "the redistribution of abundance through and after the revolution must be premised on a different conception of wealth and value, particularly as they apply to land. Land is not a gift freely given, but a relation" (2020, p.7). In nourishing "radical relationality to land", there is an obligation to not only care for the land rather than commodifying it (Smith, 2012, p. 82-83), but also a need to challenge human exceptionalism (Barker, 2019). This shift will rely on centring relationality, reciprocity (Daigle, 2019) and "respect for other-than-human beings and other-than-seen realities" (Barker, 2019, p.14). These practices connect well with the concept of open normativities as it challenges what is considered "normal" (Shotwell, 2016). Colonial capitalist heteropatriarchy seeks to normalize exploitative relationships that further extractivist economies, land theft, and dispossession. Community gardens have a responsibility to forge non-exploitative relationships that challenge power relations and hierarchies that exist between differently situated folks, land, and animals. Open normativities is one strategy that could be employed in this direction.

What would practicing open normativities look like in community garden spaces? It first would call for settlers to acknowledge unjust conditions that have forged settler-run urban community gardens. It also calls for building the urgency to address the ways differently situated folks experience and access community gardens. This starts with asking; in what ways can community gardens intentionally promote care for all? Care can be defined as the ability to nourish the conditions that promote widespread flourishing of people, living creatures and the planet (Care Collective, 2020). Community gardens, as community-building spaces, have the opportunity to lead by example by nourishing collective care and well-being through genuine relationship-building orientated towards reconceptualizing alternative social orders, relations, and ways of being. In this way, they can perform prefigurative politics; “the practice of collectively acting in the present in a way that enacts the world we aspire to create" (Shotwell, 2016, p.168). Perhaps open normativities can encourage settlers to think deeply about how we can live and practice collective care *together,* not only as a means of resisting colonial capital white supremacist heteropatriarchy, but to also intentionally live politics collectively envisioned. Community gardens are an excellent medium to illustrate how we are all dependent on each other and can prove that “by nurturing these interdependencies can we cultivate a world in which each and every one of us can not only live but thrive” (Care Manifesto, 2020, para. 2). In this way, community gardeners may hold the potential to reimagine and practice how they can promote the role of care in their lives, making it an organizing principle to be collectively endorsed (Care Manifesto, 2020). While acknowledging there may be underlying fantasies to open normativities, the practice of collective care may prove to spread like weeds if nourished appropriately. These practices and commitments may help forge better conditions to build solidarity and coalitions across social locations that better allow for collectively reimagining new pathways forward.

Chapter 5: Coalition-Building

Community gardens are uniquely situated spaces in that they have the potential to create and nourish networks of relationships between diverse people who may not otherwise interact. However, just because community gardens have the potential for socially diverse interactions does not automatically mean that community gardens are sites of disruptive collective action. For that, community gardens need to engage in nourishing and building coalitions seeking to dismantle systems of domination. While diversity and inclusion should not be the end goal for settler-run community gardens, these are necessary components in collectively working towards overthrowing systems of power that disproportionately, and often exclusively benefit settlers. Accordingly, this chapter will explore how community gardens can forge and nourish solidarity and care-seeking and how this might lead to disrupting systems of domination. Given community gardens' implication in settler colonialism, how can decolonial-intersectional feminist coalition-building facilitate this change? I will first explore why community gardens are fit for coalition-building, why they should pursue this work, and what it might look like using a decolonial-intersectional feminist approach.

Community gardens are great mediums to theorize coalition-building as both community gardens and coalitions depend on collective commitments to shared goals. Research finds that coalitions are sites for transformational learning, especially for non-indigenous people (Davis et al., 2017). So when community gardens become sites for coalition-building they may hold the potential for supporting transformational change, especially regarding the ways settler gardeners relate to others and the land.

Challenging interlocking systems of oppression is complex and can be overwhelming to begin to understand and address individually. Distributing this responsibility among a collective while accepting that solutions are not immediate is a more realistic and sustainable approach. While community gardens are excellent spaces to rebuild relations, any work that seeks to challenge systems of domination requires collective action. This is supported by Rothberg (2019) who draws on Iris Marion Young's “social connection model of responsibility” for a politics of justice that moves away from a focus on individual guilt for inequality and oppression towards shared responsibility. For Young, injustices need to be explained by looking at structural conditions instead of individuals or even nation-states (as cited in Rothberg, 2019). Responsibility for Young always involves collective action, because the injustices it seeks to address, such as racism, the prison industrial complex, or sweatshops, are structural and do not exist independently (as cited in Rothberg, 2019). In accepting that collective action is necessary for systemic change, it is particularly urgent to explore the dynamics of building coalitions, particularly in community garden spaces.

Coalition-building can be best understood through the work of Anna Carastathis (2013) who describes coalitions as “alliances built across differences” (p.941). She builds off of Crenshaw’s work (1991) to similarly argue that

> conceptualizing identities as coalitions—as internally heterogeneous, complex unities constituted by their internal differences and dissonances and by internal as well as external relations of power—enables us to form effective political

> alliances that cross existing identity categories and to pursue a liberatory politics of interconnection (Carastathis, 2013, p.942).

These conceptions of coalition-building connect well with what Rothberg (2019) calls “differentiated solidarity”, which calls for grappling with the unique positionality of individuals to build solidarity that reaches across groups in order to transform unjust conditions. Differentiated solidarity requires self-reflexivity in considering one’s own positionality to help pass through differences to work towards collectivity (Rothberg, 2019). Connecting this to the implicated subject, settlers in community garden spaces hold a responsibility in working through one’s subject position within existing structures of power to confront the challenges that plague coalition-building (Rothberg, 2019). Speaking directly to coalition challenges, the Combahee River Collective Statement (1977) invokes a reflection on implication and also calls for a deeper interrogation of one’s positionality in relation to social movements. The authors argue that “eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue” (Combahee River Collective, 1977, para. 25). This call puts direct pressure on implicated subjects. As white settlers, this work must start at critical self-interrogation, implication, and acceptance of responsibility for things we have and have not done (Shotwell, 2016). In this quest, there is also a need for ‘negative solidarity’, which “helps clarify the unevenness that must be confronted in the creation of political coalitions of differently situated subjects” (Rothberg, 2019, p.37). Coalition-building requires working through different subject positions in specific contexts, but ultimately, implicates everyone.

Building an understanding of intersectional and decolonial feminist approaches that acknowledge how differently situated subjects experience community garden spaces can better inform potential strategies for collective action. While investigating “what kinds of theoretical and political work a decolonial-intersectional feminist coalition can do,” there are a number of tensions that crystalize around the concept of intersectionality (Carastathis, 2016, p.201). Many scholars have critiqued intersectionality for normalizing categorical or essentialized thinking (Dhamoon, 2011) and for “failing to tarry with the history of colonial violence underlying the categories of race and gender (among others) (Carastathis, 2016, p.207). In response to these issues, Dhamoon engages with “anticategorical approaches that deconstruct existing systems of categorization” (2011, p.234). In foregrounding issues in relations of power, any analyses of identities and categories need to be contextualized within the processes and systems that “constitute, govern, and counter difference” (Dhamoon, 2011, p.234). In other words, it is imperative to critically interrogate both the conditions and specific processes of the social (re)production of differences (Dhamoon, 2011). Therefore, while conceptualizing power, there needs to be “an accounting of imperialism and colonialism, the ‘system of oppression’ that is imagined reinforces the state as a settled structure” (Barker, 2019, p.13). In doing this, Carastathis (2016) contends that “a coalitional identity in this sense would be premised on a shared commitment to decolonization” (p. 205). Consequently, regardless of whether community gardens ascribe to feminist politics and approaches or not, if they aren’t actively working towards the destruction of the colonial nation-state, any feminism they recur to is colonial (Arvin, et al., 2013).

Settlers seeking to build alliances across differences need to critically examine their own intentions and commitments. In investigating the linkages between heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism, Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013) argue that in “critiquing settler colonialism and its intersections, feminist scholarship and activism may need to set different liberatory goals, ones that do not assume the innocence or desirability of the continued existence of the nation-state as we currently know it” (Arvin et al., 2013, p.16). For settlers working in community garden spaces, coalitional work seeking to dismantle systems calls for accomplices, not allies (Indigenous Action Media, 2014). This is a call to not only unlearn colonial practices but to act and “leverage resources and material support and/or betray their institution to further liberation struggles” (Indigenous Action Media, 2014, para. 12). In becoming better accomplices in liberatory work, settlers need to utilize and ultimately be prepared to relinquish access, entitlements, and privileges for disruptive change.

With a shared commitment to decolonial directions that utilizes intersectionality as a way of thinking about power in community gardens, settlers will be called to collectively interrogate the specific processes of the social (re)production of differences. This can be facilitated through adopting a pedagogy of discomfort through which to move beyond hegemonic ideologies to examine emotional investments in settler futurity (Kepkiewicz, 2015). This is supported by Matties (2016) who argues that settlers who are engaged in discussions about food, land, and sovereignty, should embrace discomfort as a means to develop stronger and more fruitful solidarities. In the context of community gardens and Indigenous food sovereignty, this work should be guided by what Tuck and Yang (2012) call “an ethic of incommensurability”. An ethic of incommensurability recognizes that “there are parts of settler and indigenous projects ‘that simply cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned or allied’ and that alliances that recognise this reality will result in more productive solidarities” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, as cited in Kepkiewicz, 2015, p.195). Importantly, Kepkiewicz (2015) contends that “pursuing a pedagogy of discomfort while accepting an ethic of incommensurability is a promising means of transforming relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples involved in resisting the current industrial food model” (p.195). While Kepkiewicz (2015) is speaking more broadly to alternative food movements, an ethics of incommensurability should be embraced in community gardens while questions of land and settler futurity are raised. In sitting with these hard questions, and this work in general, settlers need to embrace uncertainty, imperfection, and mistakes. Effective alliances require embracing settler discomfort and incommensurability, learning about and from our differences with each other, and utilizing these lessons to set different liberatory goals.

Recognizing the aforementioned work cannot step out of interlocking entanglements and implications, intersectional and decolonial feminist approaches to coalition-building are necessary to address power dynamics and structures within community gardens. Keisha Lindsay (2009) contends that for multiply oppressed people “it is not only a shared relationship to hegemonic power that motivates coalition-building; it is a shared relationship to oppositional power— that is, to monistic political movements” (as cited in Carastathis, 2016, p.214). Creating space to build shared consciousness guided by a pedagogy of discomfort and an “an ethic of incommensurability” (Tuck & Yang, 2012) is but one action that community gardens should commit to. This will require settlers to relinquish power and use varying degrees of privilege to create more equitable spaces in the reformation of community gardens. Although community gardening and coalition-building require one to get their hands dirty, both physically and metaphorically, the positive potential outcomes are well worth the mess.

Conclusion

As I have attempted to highlight above, urban community gardens are subject to more entanglements than may first appear. While exploring the extent to which community gardens act as tools of historical and ongoing colonialism and how they might become sites of collective action, it has become more clear that community gardens have deeply important implications and entanglements to grapple with and act on. Starting with the critical first steps of consciousness-raising that encourages sustained engagements with settler implication and non-innocent responsibility, community gardens can become sites of transformative coalition-building and collective action by accepting non-innocent responsibility in reconceptualizing social orders, relations, and ways of being. Below are recommendations for settler-run community gardens to consider when embarking on this lifelong learning journey.

Recommendations

In accepting the ways community gardens are entangled and implicated in interlocking systems of domination, this paper seeks to foreground the urgency of challenging romanticized representations of community gardens. Rather than focusing on seed libraries or compost sharing, these discussions are meant to get community gardens and their participants to think about the conditions that forge those spaces. By engaging settlers in reflecting and acting upon their implication in interlocking systems of domination within community garden spaces, these commitments can ground the importance of collective action rooted in impurity and non-innocent responsibility. Exploring the transformative potentials of community gardens requires “settler scholars and practitioners in food systems to reconsider [their] conceptions of land, examine colonized spaces in the food movement, and to dismantle settler-colonial structures and systems that prevent Indigenous people from achieving self-determination” (Matties, 2016, para. 23). As previously argued, settler community gardens must not only acknowledge whose traditional lands they live and work on, they must also learn about the shared histories and colonial legacies that have worked to erase colonial violence and land dispossession. Beyond performative land acknowledgements, hard questions need to be asked and acted upon. In what ways do settler gardeners seek to use their social positions and capital to challenge systems of domination from which they benefit from? In accepting non-innocent responsibility for historical and ongoing settler colonialism, how can community gardens treat the land as a relation rather than a resource? What does this look like in practical gardening practices? In what ways can community gardeners practice reciprocity and relationality for all that has spirit (Shotwell, 2016)? There’s not one singular way that these questions can be answered. Rather, when asking these questions, of ourselves and our communities, settler-gardeners need to collectively reflect on what each means in specific contexts. Exploring what reparations, restitutions, and historical education addressing land dispossession might look like for community gardens is the first step. Collectively acting on these questions is just the beginning of reshaping settler relations that promote collective care for all.

Future Research

In considering new pathways forward, acceptance of implication, impurity, and non-innocent responsibility in collectively crafting new futures in community garden spaces needs further attention. Future research could focus on several gaps I have identified in the current literature. These include further explorations of the proliferation of urban community gardens in what is known today as Canada, paying particular attention to gentrification and land dispossession. In foregrounding community gardens as compromised projects, interrogating the ways in which lands were stolen and given to settlers as a way to legitimize settler nation territorialized claims and commit cultural genocide is important memory work that underlays settler implication. In acknowledging this paper could not attend to all the intricacies of coalition-building in community gardens, more research is needed in exploring what kinds of theoretical and political work a decolonial-intersectional feminist coalition can do (Carastathis, 2016) in those spaces. Lastly, community-based research would be useful to engage settlers in the ways they understand and relate to the land and each other in community garden spaces. Community-based projects that actively involve settlers could be one strategy in promoting engagements with implication, entanglements, non-innocent responsibility, open normativities, and coalition-building. Overall, much of the community garden literature borrows from larger inquiries into alternative food movements and food justice more broadly. Therefore more research could be done to explore the specific intersections of nature-society relationships inherent in community garden spaces within the settler-colonial context of what is known today as Canada.

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