

Urban Community Gardens as Spaces of Citizenship

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Abstract: A growing body of literature conceptualizes urban agriculture and community gardens as spaces of democratic citizenship and radical political practice. Urban community gardens are lauded as spaces through which residents can alleviate food insecurity and claim rights to the city. However, discussions of citizenship practice more broadly challenge the notion that citizen participation is inherently transformative or empowering, particularly in the context of neoliberal economic restructuring. This paper investigates urban community gardens as spaces of citizenship through a case study of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. It examines the impacts of community gardens on citizenship practice and the effects of volunteerism on the development of community gardens. It explores how grassroots community gardens simultaneously contest and reinforce local neoliberal policies. This research contributes empirically and theoretically to scholarship on urban food movements, neoliberal urbanization, collaborative governance, and citizenship practice.

Keywords: urban agriculture, neoliberalization, collaborative governance, citizen participation

Introduction

Mounting concerns about urban food insecurity, poor urban environmental quality, and political marginalization of minority urban populations have led to growing interest in urban community gardens as a site of contestation. Such gardens are lauded for enabling citizens to grow their own food and participate in shaping their urban environments (Armstrong 2000; Baker 2004). They are conceived as spaces through which citizens can challenge dominant power relations and claim rights to the city (Schmelzkopf 2002; Staeheli et al 2002). However, this citizen participation may not be inherently transformative or empowering (Staeheli 2008). In the context of neoliberalization, citizen participation is 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 (Perkins 2010). Amidst the discourse on shifting state–civil society relations and scales of governance, inquiries into the relationships between space and constructions of citizenship are needed (Painter and Philo 1995). Drawing upon our longitudinal research on citizen participation and urban governance, we explore urban community gardens as spaces of citizenship practice in the marginalized “inner city”, where gardens are positioned predominantly as responses to diminished local urban food environments and high levels of urban land vacancy. Data were gathered from 2010 to 2012, through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with actors involved in Harambee neighborhood community gardens, including residents, community garden organizers, and representatives from non-profit organizations and city

government. Additionally, we engaged in participant observation at four Harambee community gardens, attended relevant public meetings and conducted content analysis of planning and policy documents.

Neoliberalization, Citizenship Practice, and Urban Community Gardens

Characterized by market triumphalism, entrepreneurialism, and privatization, neoliberalism has been a dominant policy influence at all levels of US government (Harvey 2007; Peck and Tickell 2002; Weber 2002). At the urban scale, promotion of collaborative governance models encouraging citizen participation and volunteerism has been a key neoliberal strategy (Ghose 2005; Jessop 2002; Lepofsky and Fraser 2003). The role of nation-states in securing substantive citizenship has declined and sub-national scales have become important sites of citizenship practice (Hankins 2005; Kofman 1995; Marston and Staeheli 1994). As state provision of basic welfare entitlements wanes, rights traditionally afforded by citizenship accrue only to individuals able and willing to voluntarily work for them, and those who do not participate may be cast as undeserving of citizenship rights (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003; Perkins 2009). This form of conditional citizenship has been legitimized by linking citizenship practice and volunteerism to discourses of place-making, empowerment, and local autonomy (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003).

These discourses are simultaneously individualistic, in that they promote self-help, and communitarian, because they draw on notions of participation in a community (Fyfe 2005; van Houdt et al 2011). Neoliberal conceptions of citizenship thus narrow the terms and scope of political participation (Maskovsky 2006). As Roberts and Mahtani (2010:255) note, “racist thinking saturates the very organizing principles of neoliberalism”. Unsurprisingly, resource-poor minority communities are disproportionately burdened by state welfare retrenchment, which compels communities to compensate through voluntary or grassroots community development projects (Perkins 2010). However, the capacity to participate in voluntary organizing or formal government processes varies contextually, and opportunities for participation are not equally accessible to all (Fyfe 2005; Kearns 1995; Staeheli 1999). The rhetoric of collaborative governance simultaneously obscures and reproduces race and racism as organizing principles of society through discourses about individual responsibility and the supposed color-blindness of market-based systems (Roberts and Mahtani 2010). Citizens practicing localized community development can become complicit in the construction of neoliberal hegemony, acting as neoliberal citizen-subjects who alleviate the state from service provision (Perkins 2009).

Through these processes, neoliberalism effectively disciplines marginalized citizens and their participating organizations (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003). Although formally independent of the state, voluntary organizations that rely on or compete for state funding may become “arms” of the state, serving to translate state policies to non-state practices (Swyngedouw 2005; Trudeau 2008; Wolch 1990). Grassroots organizations are increasingly pragmatic and less politically confrontational due to the necessities of competing for scarce resources and the greater demands for social services (Eick 2007; Elwood 2004; Harwood 2007; Newman and Lake 2006).

Community Gardens in the Neoliberal City

Urban community gardens have proliferated as localized strategies to combat the effects of neoliberalization of US food systems (Guthman 2008; Jarosz 2008). For marginalized citizens, community gardens provide an alternative to food welfare reductions, urban food insecurity, environmental degradation, and urban disinvestment (Pudup 2008). They are widely recognized as sites of grassroots citizenship practice and place-based community development (Armstrong 2000; Baker 2004; Kurtz 2001; Macias 2008; Schmelzkopf 1995; Staeheli et al 2002). The development of urban community gardens can challenge hegemonic ideologies, resist capitalistic relations, and assert rights to space for citizens marginalized along race and class lines (Schmelzkopf 2002; Staeheli et al 2002). Community gardens may function as urban commons through which minority residents collectively produce space to resist or provide alternatives to capitalist social relations (Eizenberg 2012).

However, community gardens are less valued under dominant classist and racist ideologies that conscribe what kinds of people should belong in public space, or what forms of public green space are legitimate (Barraclough 2009; Domene and Saurí 2007). Conflicts over urban land use and rights to space are common, as urban redevelopment projects prioritize economic development and housing over community gardens (Rosol 2012; Schmelzkopf 2002; Smith and Kurtz 2003; Staeheli et al 2002). While community gardens enable minority citizens to counteract marginalization by improving material conditions at the neighborhood level, they can simultaneously cultivate racist agendas by masking structural inequities, and conditioning participants to pursue change through individual endeavor (Pudup 2008).

Community Gardening in Milwaukee

Once a booming manufacturing city, Milwaukee has been significantly altered over the last 40 years by forces of deindustrialization and disinvestment. Central city neighborhoods, which once thrived with manufacturing industries, have been particularly devastated. This has particularly affected the black community, as it is spatially concentrated in these neighborhoods owing to Milwaukee's history of racial segregation. While Milwaukee's predominantly white neighborhoods have fared better in the post-industrial phase, the central city now represents the typical "inner-city" with high rates of poverty, unemployment, crime and a generally degraded standard of living. These form racialized spaces labeled as "blighted" and "dangerous", representing ongoing racial tensions, mistrust and inequities between black and white populations. The city has adopted characteristically neoliberal approaches to its inner-city redevelopment, focusing on public-private partnerships and commercial and real estate development. Development of a neighborhood strategic planning (NSP) program targeting 18 "inner-city" neighborhoods has been a major component of this restructured governance model (Ghose 2005). The NSP program, administered by the Community Development Block Grant Administration, formalized citizen participation. However, the neoliberal aspects of these programs have demanded citizens overcome their problems through voluntary and self-disciplining activities (Ghose 2005, 2007).

Persistent food insecurity coupled with nutrition related diseases has given rise to community gardening in Milwaukee. While community gardening represents voluntary ways of transforming blighted vacant lots, City policy is ambiguous towards it as it champions commercial development over gardening. To the extent that the City champions urban agriculture, it promotes larger, commercially oriented farming initiatives and organizations. Thus, community gardens on Milwaukee's vacant lots evolved through citizen activism, not state support. Through regulatory measures that control citizen access to vacant lots, the City maintains its decision-making power over land use, thereby restricting greater development of voluntary community gardens. This exhibits a moment of significant tension between the "roll-out" and "roll-back" impulses of neoliberal policy, as the City has otherwise clearly attempted to shift the burden for social service provision to private and non-profit sectors (Peck and Tickell 2002).

As in Eizenberg's (2012) discussion of New York City community gardens, Milwaukee community gardens are spaces of possibility that counteract effects of hypersegregation and uneven development processes. Community gardens provide rare opportunities for its marginalized black residents to reshape their neighborhoods, and are alternatives to capitalist modes of land use. However, the gardens also unwittingly reproduce capitalist relations and existing class- and race-based hierarchies. They alleviate the local government of responsibility for providing food welfare and green space by virtue of their reliance on volunteer citizen participation and their obedience to restrictive local government policies. These community gardens provide localized benefits that reinforce what Perkins (2009:403) refers to as an "unjust political economy", in which only those who are able and willing to volunteer earn citizenship rights. We provide details of the case study and discuss our findings in subsequent sections.

Haramabee Neighborhood Gardens

The Swahili word Harambee means "pull together" and indicates the tradition of forming a cooperative society and community building in the face of adversities. The name is an indicator of this neighborhood's long history of community building and organizing through grassroots civic activities. It is one of the 18 neighborhoods targeted for the NSP program, and has considerable experience with collaborative governance. It is primarily a residential neighborhood, in which 81% of residents identify as African-American (City of Milwaukee 2012). It has high levels of poverty and property vacancy relative to the city as a whole. In 2012, Harambee contained 12.76% vacant land, in contrast to 3.8% of vacant land in the City of Milwaukee (City of Milwaukee 2012). Approximately 43% of Harambee residents earned incomes below the federal poverty level (double the proportion for the city as a whole).

Harambee has attracted attention from multiple community development organizations and grant foundations, including the Milwaukee branch of Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a national organization that promotes urban revitalization and for-profit economic development in marginalized neighborhoods.

In 2006, LISC selected Harambee for a comprehensive neighborhood planning initiative. In partnership with Harambee residents, local non-profit organizations, and multiple private foundations, LISC developed a neighborhood plan articulating goals and priorities for development of the neighborhood. During this process, Harambee residents identified community gardening as a high priority and designated a specific parcel of land to be reserved for future agricultural use. In subsequent years Harambee residents worked with local non-profit organizations to build six community gardens on vacant lots throughout the neighborhood (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

It is important to note the racial composition of the organizers and participants in these gardens. The lead organizers of All People's Garden and Nigella Commons are white, but they are also neighborhood residents who work with other participants who are black. Other gardens (5th Street and Grow and Play) are led by black organizers, and comprised primarily of black volunteers. Concordia Gardens is an exception, as its head organizer and most of the volunteers are white residents of a wealthier suburban neighborhood.

Harambee Community Gardens as Spaces of Citizenship Practice

Urban community gardens have been conceptualized as sites of citizen participation and grassroots control that enable residents to shape the forms and meanings of

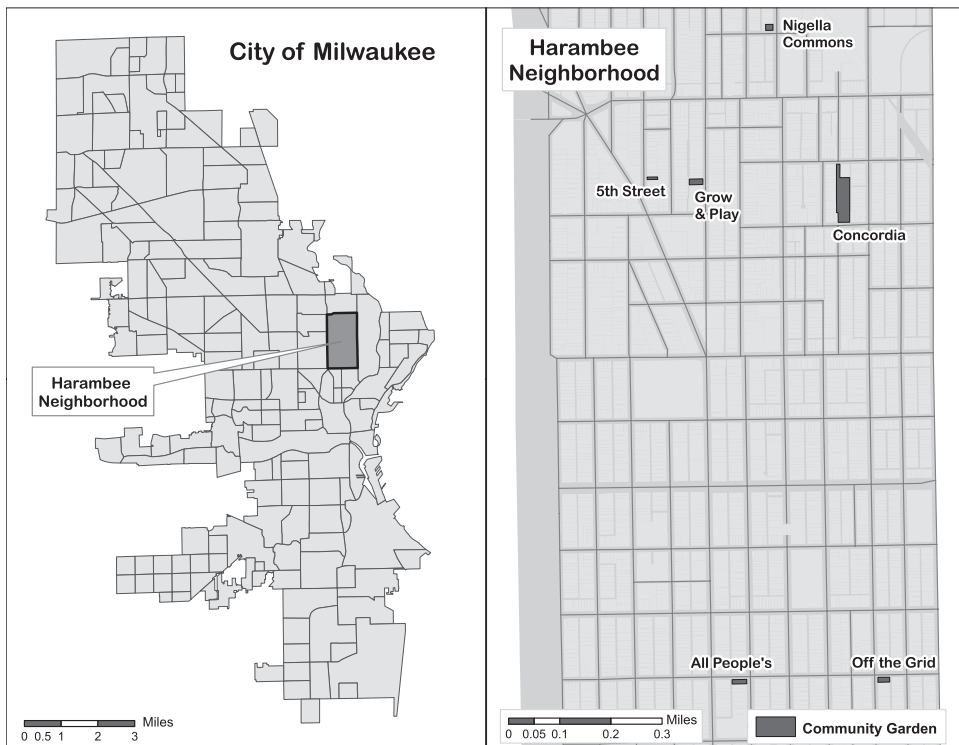


Figure 1: Harambee Neighborhood. The left-hand map locates Harambee in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The right-hand map displays Harambee, with community garden sites symbolized in dark grey

Table 1: Harambee Community Gardens

Garden	Year founded	Lead organization	Number of participants	Supporting organization(s)	Land tenure
All People's	1995/2008	All People's Church	15	Victory Garden Initiative Milwaukee Urban Gardens (MUG)	3-year lease
Concordia	2009	Victory Garden Initiative	10	Bliffert Lumber MUG Bliffert	3-year lease
Grow and Play	2007	None (citizen volunteer led)	4	Urban Ecology Center Groundwork MUG Cluster 2 Neighborhood Association Bliffert Lumber	6-month seasonal permit
Nigella Commons	2010	None (citizen volunteer led)	8	Groundwork MUG Bliffert Lumber	3-year lease
Off the Grid 5th Street	2008 2007	None (citizen volunteer led) None (citizen volunteer led)	Unknown 7	MUG Groundwork Bliffert	3-year lease 6-month seasonal permit

urban landscapes (Armstrong 2000; Baker 2004; Kurtz 2001; Schmelzkopf 1995). Community garden development can serve as a means for marginalized communities excluded from formal political processes to engage in local politics and decision-making activities (Irazábal and Punja 2009). Through constructing and maintaining place in the form of community gardens, groups may enact place-based collective identities and assert claims to space (Gottlieb and Joshi 2010; Staeheli 2008; Staeheli et al 2002). Our research shows that the gardens in Harambee serve similar functions, enabling participants to actively engage in the (re)production of (their) space and contestation of inequities. The gardens function as spaces of citizenship practice in which participants transform space according to their own interests, claim rights to space, engage in leadership and decision-making activities, contest material deprivation, and articulate collective identities. The residents of this neighborhood have always struggled to be incorporated politically and to meet material needs, caused by the effects of racial politics and deindustrialization (Ghose 2005; Heynen 2009). Community gardens represent a spatial strategy by which residents navigate these forms of marginalization.

The first garden in Harambee was founded in 1992 by the neighborhood's All People's Church to provide educational space for the church's youth programs. The church maintained All People's Garden with an annual permit from the City of Milwaukee until 2005, when the city revoked the permit and evicted the garden with intent to commercially develop the land. This goal never materialized and the former garden became an abandoned space. In 2008, residents led by All People's Church reclaimed the space and rebuilt the garden. Church members added a cross to the rebuilt garden to reflect its importance as a religious space for church members (see Figure 2). All People's pastor conceives the rebuilding of the garden as "an act of civil disobedience" proclaiming "that we are not going to let the city call this a vacant lot" (personal communication).¹ The City eventually acknowledged this status by providing a new permit for gardening, and the garden thrives once again. By reclaiming control over the space and returning it to its original use and



Figure 2: Children participate in a lesson at All People's Garden, July 2010

meaning, the church and the residents spatially enacted their right to control the forms and functions of local space, resisted the valuations assigned to that space by the City, and reproduced the space to serve neighborhood needs.

Other community gardens in Harambee—Grow and Play, 5th Street, Nigella Commons, and Concordia—have emerged more recently from self-organized groups of residents seeking to fulfill various neighborhood needs and transform vacant lots. While the primary motivation is to create space to grow fresh produce, gardens serve additional purposes. Residents built the Grow and Play Garden because they wanted to create a safe play space for children (see Figure 3). With Nigella Commons Garden, residents sought to create more green space. Concordia garden emerged as part of a local environmental justice movement promoting sustainable food and an “off the grid” approach. Harambee gardens are spaces in which individuals with different race and class identities interact and collaborate. Such interactions are generally harmonious, but also reproduce racial hierarchies.²

Harambee gardens provide opportunities for resident leadership and decision-making, as their development has depended largely on the leadership and participation of citizen volunteers, who are mostly neighborhood residents (see Table 1). Volunteers decide how to assign responsibility for garden work, what to plant in garden beds, and how to distribute garden produce. Volunteers organize workdays, transport garden tools, raise funds, and perform regular maintenance tasks, such as shoveling snow and mowing grass. Nigella Commons Garden, for example, is led by two female residents, who write grant applications to solicit funding, store tools at their homes, and organize regular group workdays at the garden. All People’s Garden is deeply rooted in the neighborhood, as the church and garden are an established neighborhood community site where residents interact. Participation and leadership in the development of gardens represents an important step for Harambee citizens in gaining control of their built landscape and engaging in localized political activities.



Figure 3: Volunteers build raised beds at Grow and Play Garden, June 2010

Harambee gardens also serve as spaces that counteract material inequities, including food insecurity and limited green space access, which are particularly acute for the residents of “inner-city”. These gardens thus enable participants to challenge racist discriminatory actions, and claim material rights associated with citizenship. Harambee gardens contribute to alleviating food insecurity by providing spaces for residents to grow their own food. Within the contexts of rising food costs and lack of access to urban green space, this is economically significant. Studies indicate that in Milwaukee, at the census tract level, food affordability tends to decrease as poverty level increases (Gibbs-Plessl 2012). Further, most food stores located in predominately black census tracts have relatively limited availability of nutritious foods. Fresh produce is particularly inaccessible. Through gardening, Harambee residents can grow sufficient produce to reduce their food budgets and increase access to fresh vegetables. The manager of All People’s Church Food Pantry explains:

We serve a lot of men that don’t have incomes, and get a hundred and something dollars’ worth of food stamps; you want to stretch it as far as you can ... even if we [the food pantry] gave them healthy food, they are not going to be able to keep it up with their income. [Gardening] is free ... these are vegetables you are getting for free, and you are growing them, and so you can pick them when you want (personal communication).

This statement reflects a belief common among Harambee garden participants that growing one’s own food contributes to economic stability and self-sufficiency, particularly when formal economic opportunities are limited. However, because approximately 60% of Harambee residences are renter-occupied, many residents lack access to land for gardening. Community gardens thus provide needed space that enables residents to grow their own food. Because most Harambee gardens operate without chemical pesticides or fertilizers, and purchase organic compost for beds, they also increase participants’ access to organic produce, which low-income individuals might be unable to afford otherwise.³ As All People’s Church pastor argues, creating community gardens: “becomes an act of justice, because organic food shouldn’t be reserved for those with means ... [but] should be a common right of all” (personal communication).

Excess produce from All People’s is donated to the church’s food pantry, extending the material impacts of the garden beyond those who directly participate. The pantry operates at full capacity and has such high demand that it is regularly forced to turn away clients. Fresh produce is one of the most popular items the pantry distributes, yet is the most costly kind of food the pantry purchases. Accordingly, receiving donations of organic produce greatly benefits the pantry and its clients.

Harambee community gardens produce additional material benefit by providing safe, green, recreational and social space, a scarce commodity here, as in many impoverished urban neighborhoods (Quastel 2009). However, such problems are particularly acute for the black population of Milwaukee’s “inner city”, which suffers from the highest crime rates, lowest number of parks, and largest presence of vacant lots. Residents therefore consider the gardens as valuable assets that contribute to the safety, stability, and aesthetic quality of the neighborhood.

According to All People's pastor, residents living in the vicinity of All People's Garden "think it is a place of beauty" and were distraught when the City of Milwaukee ordered its removal in 2005 (personal communication). These residents, the pastor explains, "want the neighborhood to be a good place ... where their kids are safe", and they see the garden as contributing positively to these ends (personal communication).

Gardens provide safe community space for multiple forms of socializing and recreation. At All People's, residents use benches in a dedicated area of the garden to rest and socialize. When people work in the garden, passersby often pause to converse with them and ask about the garden. Nigella Commons serves as a valuable community space that has brought together many formerly unacquainted residents who had lived for nearly 30 years without knowing each other. Numerous elderly and retired residents have become involved in Harambee gardens, often as leaders and primary participants, as a way to remain actively involved in a social community. As one Nigella Commons organizer explains, "Lilly [a retired woman] said, 'I don't have anything else to do' ... it's something that gets her out of the house and she can grow her own food" (personal communication).

Harambee gardens also provide safe recreational and educational space for black youth, who is particularly vulnerable to the high crime of the neighborhood. As its name suggests, the Grow and Play Garden is designed to allow children to play safely while their parents garden in the same space. According to the garden's organizers, children "are always around" and have been eager to be involved in Nigella Commons Garden because there is "so little green space" in the neighborhood:

[There are] four kids that come over and they come over pretty regularly and see what we're up to; they've helped with putting soil in the beds, and they want to plant things and are very curious about what we're up to and excited about learning stuff (personal communication).

For this reason, Nigella gardeners created special garden beds for the children to use. One gardener works voluntarily with a group of children during summers to teach them to garden and grow food. The children plant and tend multiple vegetable and fruit crops in their designated beds. These children thus have a rare opportunity to raise a garden and experience nature.

All People's Garden provides more formalized opportunities for youth through the church's "Kids Working to Succeed" (KWTS) youth job training program. Youth training activities are particularly valued in "inner city" community organizing, as these are perceived to counteract the effects of racism, poverty, unemployment and crime. Youth participants, who receive an hourly wage, maintain the garden along with paid church staff, including the church pastor, a temporary grant-funded garden coordinator, and a groundskeeper. KWTS participants learn how to garden and grow food and gain job skills and experience. According to the pastor, the KWTS participants responsible for the bulk of garden work are "almost entirely youth from the neighborhood" (personal communication). A mother of two KWTS participants cites job experience and earned income (\$10 per day) for her sons as important benefits of involvement in the program, but also notes that working in the garden contributes to their overall character and social development:

the garden “works them, it makes them better people ... when I get ready to do my garden with flowers at home, my kids help me out” (personal communication). Additionally, youth participate in the garden through the church’s “Freedom School” summer program, which provides a space for youth to learn ecology (e.g. soil, insects, plant growth), environmentalism (e.g. composting, air quality), and nutrition. In one summer-long lesson, youth explore the industrial food system by examining the production process of French fries; the lesson culminates with the youth making French fries out of potatoes that they have grown. Other lessons are simpler: for many youth, the garden provides a first opportunity to handle worms and soil, or to see an okra plant.

Overall, we find that Harambee community gardens are multigenerational spaces in which youth and adults interact in mutually beneficial ways. One of the resident leaders of the 5th Street Garden explained, “it’s so nice for me at this garden, because my grandchild can play with the grandchild of the man who lives next door; that’s so important to me, so I want to stay here” (personal communication). At All People’s Garden, the youth assist adult residents who have personal plots in the garden. As its pastor comments:

because we have this pool of young folks, we are able to really support and encourage the individual [adult] gardeners. So, if they don’t get to the weeding one week, we can help them out, and then encourage them to come back saying “hey, we took care of your weeds” (personal communication).

The gardens also play an important role in promoting healthy eating, and encourage transfer of knowledge. Informal workshops on gardening and cooking are held for this purpose by many garden organizers. All People’s pastor notes, “we’ve got kids going home and teaching their parents and grandparents what they learned in the garden” (personal communication). One mother, whose sons work in the KWTS program, notes that she benefited because her sons brought home fresh vegetables and shared their knowledge with her. As a result, she says, “I was able to cook fresh vegetables that I didn’t know how to cook [before] ... you learn a lot” (personal communication).

As these examples suggest, Harambee gardens contribute to the negotiation and assertion of individual and collective identities of a historically marginalized population. By improving the built landscape and perceived cultural qualities of the neighborhood, many of the gardens have come to function as places imbued with cultural meaning. When All People’s Garden was torn down in 2005, many residents regarded this as an affront to neighborhood identity. Rebuilding the garden was, therefore, a reassertion of that identity. Some garden participants suggest that the ability to grow food is an important cultural practice. In the words of one gardener: “that’s African American culture: we grow our own foods” (personal communication). Another participant contends that growing food is important for older adults because “a lot of the folks, they’ve grown their own food before ... they’re the part of the generation that they remember doing that with their parents” (personal communication). For these individuals, gardening is meaningful because it provides a connection to family tradition.

Meanings associated with Harambee gardens are formed as individuals interact to develop shared spaces. Processes of collective identity formation often involve

delineation of boundaries that simultaneously include and exclude (Staheli 2008). Harambee gardens appear to function as spaces of inclusion based on shared interest and the necessities of collaborating to plan and maintain physical garden spaces. In most gardens, participants of different races and ages interact, and many report feelings of community emerging from these interactions. This is perhaps best exemplified in the case of Nigella Commons Garden, which developed when two white female residents invited all interested residents to join them in building a community garden. Although they initially feared they would be dismissed, they found many black residents eager to participate, and the group is now predominantly black. Over time, opportunities have emerged for residents to explore cultural and racial understandings through exchange of knowledge about plants and food. As one white organizer notes:

we like to eat kale and chard and collards and all that kind of stuff, but, when we grow them we get a [response] like, “what do you mean you’re growing greens, how do you know how to cook greens?” And I say, “well, we have our own way of cooking them and I’ve never actually been taught” ... so we’ve had a conversation about how to cook ... so that’s what’s really fun about food is that the cultural experiences ... can be very, very different, but it’s food ... It’s just a nice familiar way to discuss things, ’cause we all need to eat. It’s been a nice way ... to kind of defuse those sorts of tensions (personal communication).

This individual experiences the garden as a shared space for white and black residents to bridge cultural differences and build connections between each other around the shared activities of growing and eating food.

To the extent that Harambee community gardens are places around which collective meanings and identity are negotiated, they may contribute positively to bridging various forms of difference. However, they must also be situated in relation to broader understandings of citizenship and race as outcomes of neoliberalization, which we discuss in the proceeding section.

Constraints on Citizen Participation in Harambee Community Gardens

Neoliberal policy discourses promote neighborhood or community development, rather than interaction with the state, as the main channel of political engagement (Lepofsky and Fraser 2003; Newman and Lake 2006). This significantly impacts politically marginalized “inner city residents” because, as Maskovsky (2006:77) notes, “the terms upon which [they] are allowed to be visible and the avenues available to them to participate in political deliberation and dissent are increasingly defined in terms of their own abilities to govern themselves as a community”.

In this context, voluntary or grassroots organizing may serve to inadvertently support the hegemony of neoliberal governance by alleviating the state of responsibility for social service provision and reinforcing the legitimacy of conditional citizenship, under which rights extend solely to individuals who voluntarily claim them through formal political participation or community-based organizing (Kofman 1995; Perkins 2009; Staheli 1999). Participation requires access to material resources and knowledge (Kearns 1995). Abilities to participate vary contextually because

organizational capabilities, social connectedness, and resource access vary contextually (Elwood and Ghose 2001; Staeheli 1999). The tensions that emerge between the benefits of grassroots volunteerism and the possibility that volunteerism reproduces neoliberal modes of conditional citizenship are apparent in the case of Harambee, where community garden development produces opportunities for some residents, but remains constricted by broader structural conditions of political and economic inequity.

In Harambee, volunteerism requires extracting material and labor resources from already resource-poor citizens, who struggle to fulfill basic survival needs. Establishing gardens is not easy as citizens must know how to acquire material resources and navigate specific procedures for obtaining land use permits, through partnerships with large non-profit organizations, funding agencies, or informal social networks. As the first step, citizens contact Milwaukee Urban Gardens (MUG), a local non-profit land trust that provides organizational assistance to community gardens, and submit an application to obtain a land use permit. MUG is the official liaison to the City of Milwaukee Department of City Development (DCD), and DCD requires all citizens seeking permission for community gardens on vacant lots to go through MUG. Approval is contingent on having a minimum number of committed garden participants, a sponsoring organization, and a vacant lot that is not on hold with DCD. Existing Harambee garden groups gained awareness of the application process and criteria either through personal social networks or through participation in the 2007 neighborhood planning process where they became acquainted with Groundwork Milwaukee, a non-profit organization that collaborates with MUG and champions community gardening. This suggests that while the opportunity for grassroots community garden development exists, the ability to take advantage of the opportunity depends on having knowledge acquired through specific channels and on developing relationships with specific gatekeeping non-profit organizations. While these organizational connections benefit garden groups, they also function as preconditions (and thus potential barriers) to success.

Ability to procure material resources is equally crucial to successful community garden development. This includes knowing what companies are likely to provide in-kind donations and how to apply for monetary grants. Groups with relatively good access to material resources can more easily develop community gardens, while those with poor resource access may be unable to afford basic infrastructural needs, such as lumber for raised beds or clean soil. All Harambee garden groups have obtained donations or grant funding, but in varying quantities and from different sources. Because each group relies on its own knowledge, social connections, and skills to secure material resources, there is no guarantee that all groups will be equally successful. All People's Church has a network of institutional connections and organizational experience that enables it to find and apply for grant funding, which has allowed it to hire a part-time garden coordinator. Nigella Commons, conversely, has obtained funding only to build raised beds through a small grant. A Nigella Commons leader explains the importance of funding to the initial success of the garden: "building the garden was a huge expense ... if we had not been in the ten neighborhoods [eligible for this particular grant], I'm still not even sure how we would have managed" (personal communication). Although

Nigella Commons successfully secured grant funding, this was principally due to the knowledge, skills, and commitment of two lead volunteers. The uncertainty and variability of funding underscores the ways in which grassroots community garden development in Harambee is uneven and context dependent.

Dependency on volunteerism as a strategy for navigating the effects of urban disinvestment and political marginalization has created inconsistencies in Harambee community gardens. As scholars have noted, in urban agriculture organizations, volunteer turnover, lack of skill among volunteers, or unreliability of volunteers can limit organizational capacity and scope of feasible of action (Sheriff 2009). In all Harambee community gardens, recruiting and sustaining volunteer participation are perpetual challenges. In the Grow and Play, Concordia, and Nigella Commons gardens levels of volunteer participation have fluctuated over time, particularly during each garden's first year. Participants tend to be more involved in maintaining personal plots, to the neglect of essential communal tasks. Grow and Play leaders, for example, struggled for two years to convince participants to uphold responsibilities for tasks like mowing grass. Participation levels dropped in Nigella Commons Garden when leaders stopped organizing group workdays. Even highly committed volunteers often have limited time to dedicate to the garden and are restricted in what they can feasibly accomplish because they support themselves through regular employment. Without adequate volunteer participation groups lack the labor necessary to establish and maintain community gardens.

Additional problems occur when volunteers lack the skills or physical abilities necessary for garden work. In the Grow and Play and Nigella Commons gardens, the most actively involved participants are elderly residents with limited mobility or children too young and unskilled to work efficiently. Consequently, the burden of ensuring the survival of these gardens typically falls on a small number of skilled individuals. Concordia Garden's organizer notes that with volunteers "tasks are not always going to happen exactly when or how you want them to happen" (personal communication). Although the organizer values the volunteer basis of the garden, she acknowledges that paid employees would be able to tend it more efficiently and effectively. Accordingly, privileging volunteerism as the basis of community garden development may reduce capacity for food production. It also excludes those who lack ability or willingness to volunteer. Thus, while gardening is a potential means for marginalized or impoverished residents to claim citizenship rights by improving food security and exercising control over space, this means is only accessible to individuals with physical abilities, knowledge, and time to volunteer.

Other forms of subtle exclusion occur in the division of leadership roles and navigation of difference along intersecting lines of race and class among garden participants. Although Harambee gardens are spaces in which individuals with different race and class identities interact and collaborate, there have been tensions. At Concordia Gardens, the head organizer and most of the volunteers are white residents of a wealthier suburban neighborhood. Thus organizer has experienced difficulty getting neighborhood residents to participate; of three neighborhood participants, two are white. Simultaneously, these very contexts are likely to also have benefitted the organizer, who is well connected to resources, institutions and volunteers outside the neighborhood. Other gardens show greater racial

harmony, and no apparent divisions. However, they all rely on larger non-profit organizations for support, which are led and staffed by white professionals. While these divisions of leadership suggest strategic actions on the parts of organizers and participants, they also serve to reinforce existing race and class inequities. This emphasizes the ways in which neoliberalization reproduces particular racialized social structures (Roberts and Mahtani 2010). With the greater burden on voluntary organizations and increased competition for community development resources under neoliberalization in Milwaukee, small citizen groups with fewer resources are more likely to depend on assistance from larger and wealthier organizations and individuals.

This division of leadership roles derives in part from constraints imposed by the City of Milwaukee DCD. Rather than simplifying the process of establishment of community gardens, DCD has created a set of complicated rules that creates bureaucratic hurdles for residents of marginalized neighborhoods. Instead of allowing individuals or citizen groups to apply directly to the government for community garden permits, DCD requires groups to apply to the non-profit organization, MUG, setting it up as an intermediary gatekeeping institution. MUG, in turn, has to interpret DCD's criteria and establish a framework to determine whether to deny or grant permits to potential gardening groups. Further, DCD directs residents to MUG for resources and information about developing gardens. This hierarchical system reinforces existing raced and classed structures, despite existing ostensibly to enable grassroots organizing. It is also an effective disciplinary mechanism, for it sets up divisions between non-profit organizations and grassroots groups, thereby controlling any united form of contestation.

DCD policies regarding community gardens are restrictive in other ways as well. DCD tightly restricts use permits for community gardens: the maximum lease period is 3 years; if DCD wishes to hold a particular lot for development, it will refuse to permit a community garden there, even for as short as 6 months. DCD policy also requires community gardens to use wood-framed raised beds and to mow the grass surrounding beds, and prohibits use of hoop houses, storage sheds, or other structures. Citizens must comply with city policies and permit application procedures in order to obtain legal land tenure. Despite the ubiquitous complaint, among gardeners, that DCD policies are overly restrictive, Harambee garden groups do not challenge DCD because they regard land tenure as inherently insecure and know that DCD retains power to grant and revoke land tenure for community gardens. Garden organizers tend to behave responsibly and avoid confrontation by vigilantly maintaining the visual appearance of garden spaces and abiding by all city regulations, even when it conflicts with gardeners' interests.

Although DCD constrains community garden development, it nevertheless characterizes community gardens as a kind of community asset potentially benefiting citizens and neighborhoods through provision of green space, food access, and environmental beautification. DCD also tentatively indicates that community garden development may be a means to reduce the abundance of vacant city-owned lots in Milwaukee. Yet DCD emphasizes that citizen use of public land can lead to unwanted or unproductive activities, and must therefore be carefully vetted and moderated. Further, while officials characterize Milwaukee as a "leader" in urban agriculture, they

distinguish urban agriculture as a commercial enterprise that attracts investment, research, and technological innovation (personal communication). Community gardens, from DCD's perspective, are a small-scale, ad hoc form of community development that must be monitored, rather than an activity to be actively pursued and promoted. Its benefits are not considered to be particularly advantageous, except where particular gardens are well developed and artfully designed, thereby contributing to the city's project of beautification of "blighted" neighborhoods. Thus, community gardening is ultimately framed as an activity that can contribute to the city's (entrepreneurial) goals, if it occurs in specific ways, but that can also hinder these goals.

As Domene and Saurí (2007) argue, permitting urban community gardens while strictly regulating where and how they exist can be a government strategy to retain control of space and appease citizens. More broadly, simultaneous promotion and conscription of citizen participation is a mechanism by which neoliberal governments discipline citizens to accommodate rather than confront the state (Elwood 2004; Ghose 2005; McCann 2001; Perkins 2010). While recognizing the constraints imposed by the local government, Harambee garden organizers appear to have adopted conciliatory stances toward this government, regarding it not as a threat, but as a potential ally whose support must be earned. One organizer explains, for instance, that it is "best to ask the City for things that it can say 'yes' to" (personal communication). Although this non-confrontational attitude should be attributed partly to the lack of any direct government challenge to community gardens in Milwaukee, it also seems to reflect a degree of resignation on the part of organizers.

In contrast to cities such as Vancouver, BC where community gardens are regarded by local government foremost as a positive urban good that promotes revitalization and development (Quastel 2009), Milwaukee has a more ambiguous or tenuous relationship to community gardens. Community gardens on Milwaukee's vacant lots evolved as a direct result of citizen activism, as strong lobbying from its citizens led the City to provide permits for gardens on vacant lots. However, it is commercial development rather than community gardens that the City prioritizes for its vacant lots. While echoing the value of urban gardens, the City promotes larger, commercially oriented farming initiatives and organizations, while merely tolerating community gardens on vacant lots used by marginalized populations. City policy reinforces classed and racialized notions of an ideal urban form, in which vacant lot gardens are a survival strategy for the urban poor, while other forms of urban agriculture represent development and innovation. Through its list of criteria for issuing a temporary permit, City policy allows vacant lot gardens only to groups that demonstrate a particular level of organization and willingness to develop gardens according to particular visual aesthetic standards. This effectively prioritizes groups with skills and resources and discourages gardens that might appear "unruly".

Recent scholarship posits that community gardens and other forms of contemporary food activism cultivate neoliberal citizen-subjectivity by conditioning participants to behave as consumers and to pursue change through individual endeavor (Guthman 2008; Pudup 2008). However, others counter that even where actions do not produce conflict or opposition, participation can enable individuals to negotiate alternative

meanings of citizenship and cultivate alternative political imaginaries (Harris 2009; Staeheli 2008). In the case of Harambee, community gardens do not overtly challenge existing power relations that have produced conditions of poverty and political marginalization. Participants in Harambee gardens endeavor towards localized change in terms of food production, community building, and environmental revitalization. By emphasizing improvement through individual effort, these community gardens reinforce the neoliberal tenet that citizenship (including rights to material reproduction and participation in decision-making processes) should be earned through active participation. Nonetheless, these community gardens also create potential for alternative practices by enabling citizens to assert partial control over space and to use space in ways that are not strictly capitalistic.

Conclusion

Our case study of Harambee community gardens demonstrates that citizen participation in the context of neoliberalization can simultaneously empower and challenge citizens (Elwood 2004; Trudeau 2008). Collaborative governance programs have contingent and complex forms and effects (Kofman 1995; Peck and Tickell 2002). The emergence of new citizen participation opportunities in a neoliberal context does not necessarily translate into greater grassroots control, and often reinforces existing power hierarchies (Ghose 2005). Community gardens, however, can be sites through which historically marginalized black citizens contest power relations and develop alternative citizen subjectivities (Baker 2004; Staeheli 2008). Our paper aims to recognize the kinds of citizen-subjectivity that neoliberal policies promote in particular contexts to understand the contingent meanings and outcomes of citizen participation. As Kofman (1995:134) notes, the question of citizenship “is not simply the disparity between the normative and the real”, but also “the mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion that regulate membership of socio-cultural and political communities”.

We find that community gardening in Harambee simultaneously resists and reinforces hegemonic relations. The gardens are grassroots spaces that exist because citizens have supported their development and volunteered to build them. These provide numerous benefits to participants, enabling them to grow organic vegetables, to interact with other residents, and to control small pieces of urban space. To the extent that Harambee community gardens represent efforts to resuscitate degenerating urban space from forces of economic and political marginalization, they represent prospects for democratic citizenship practice. These community gardens create claims to space and resist local government policies that prioritize for-profit development, whether or not they concretely impact state policies.

Yet, because of the material and political constraints on community garden development, citizen control of these spaces remains narrowly conscribed. Citizens gain access to participation in community gardens only if they behave proactively and according to terms established by the City of Milwaukee. While all Harambee citizens ostensibly have the same rights to build and participate in community gardens, all citizens are not equally able to do so. Groups that lack access to material resources or organizational capacity face relatively greater barriers to participation in community

garden development. In Harambee, where many residents already face poverty and food insecurity, acquiring resources for grassroots organizing is likely to be a significant challenge. Furthermore, because the City of Milwaukee espouses neoliberal discourses promoting individual responsibility and welfare retrenchment, grassroots activities based on volunteerism may inadvertently support the interests of the local state.

These contradictions mean that citizenship practice through grassroots community gardening in Milwaukee produces a form of conditional citizenship in which membership is available only to those with resources and who produce space conforming to government specifications. Notable about this case is the tension between local state recognition of the value of community gardening and its efforts to restrict such community gardening. This reflects, on one hand, how neoliberalization in practice is partial and may entail conflicting impulses, such as the goals of property tax revenue generation and promotion of non-profit community development. It also highlights the ways that neoliberal government policies reflect and reproduce race and class as organizing principles of society.

Examining the tensions between the emancipatory and state-supporting potential of grassroots community garden development (while possibly discouraging) can contribute insights to enhance the politically transformative power of such grassroots activities. Most clearly, our findings suggest the importance of political activism that directly engages the state to challenge restrictive policies that make voluntary community garden development difficult. Alternately, citizen groups might attempt to circumvent the state by establishing community gardens on vacant lots without first obtaining governmental permission. Scaling up or linking together various individual community garden projects may be beneficial, as a step towards ensuring that the impacts of grassroots community gardening extend beyond particular garden spaces.

The Harambee case study emphasizes the complexities entailed in collaborative governance and citizen participation. Citizenship is complex, dynamic, and continually negotiated (Staeheli 2008). As neoliberalism opens up opportunities for citizen participation and grassroots activism, it continues to narrow the scope of legitimate citizenship. Conceptualizing urban community gardens without reference to broader political economic contexts obscures entrenched systems of power and difference (Barraclough 2009). Community gardens may have a more substantial systematic impact if the basic structural conditions underlying resource scarcity are addressed and the restrictions on community gardens are eliminated. It is crucial to target activism towards improving the conditions in which community organizations operate, such that competition for resources does not impinge on the capacity of these organizations to advocate for radical social and political reforms. For community garden development in Milwaukee, this means that the barriers to participation in the process need to be leveled, such that residents who lack financial resources and social connections can directly enjoy the benefits of community gardens.

Endnotes

¹ Data for quotations identified throughout as “personal communication” are drawn from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Individual names have been removed, at the request of participants, in the interest of anonymity.

² This is explored in detail below.

³ Due to concerns about soil contamination from heavy metals, the City of Milwaukee requires all community gardens to use raised beds to mitigate potential contamination of food.

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