Ethnicity, Nature, and Community Gardens

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Abstract

This thesis explores the use and design of New York City (NYC)'s community gardens, and how the social processes that characterise community gardening influence gardeners' notions of ethnicity. The study examines the dialectical relationship between nature and culture in community gardens from the theoretical perspectives of debates over ethnicity, the social construction of nature, and political ecology. The study's analytical position directs attention to the rhetoric and behaviours of community gardeners as well as the socio-ecological and political-economic processes operating at broader and multiple scales. The three main aims of this dissertation are: first, to explore the influences of community gardening on how gardeners understand and express their ethnicity, second, to identify the main motivations for (re)configuring nature in gardens, and third, to understand how the elision between nature and culture in gardens shape and is shaped by societal power struggles.

This dissertation draws empirically on a cross-case comparison of Puerto Rican gardeners across three community gardens in the South Bronx. Narrative and semi-structured interviews enabled gardeners to directly voice their sentiments of self and community, and in conjunction with active-participant observations and garden-related discourse analysis, the 'triangulation' of these qualitative research methods colours a rich picture of the ideological and political markers of ethnicity and nature in NYC. The study also incorporates state and non-state actors active in the community garden movement and in the provision of one or more of the case studies. I argue that community gardeners' notions of ethnicity and nature are animated by questions of politics, resistance, class, and social positions.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree.

Acknowledgements

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Abbreviations

Green Thumb - The Green Thumb Program

Parks Department - Department of Parks and Recreation

HPD – Department of Housing, Preservation and Development

UCTP- United Confederation of Taino People

ACGA - American Community Garden Association

NYCCGC- New York City Community Garden Coalition

RDAC - Rebel Diaz Arts Collective

CCNYC - Citizens Committee for New York City

Chapter 1 Introduction

Ethnicity and nature, the two main subjects of this study, are neither fixed nor constant phenomena. Our ideas about the world and who we are may not be the same today as they were yesterday or will be tomorrow. These two phenomena and their representations are continuously changing according to various social experiences and encounters. Thus, the specific results of this thesis must be understood in the particular time, place, and social context in which the research was conducted. Nonetheless, while the specific community gardens and gardeners examined in the current study belong to a unique New York City story, the issues explored here and the dynamics of ethnicity and nature have relevance to the understanding of community gardens across different American cities, large and small.

I began this research by searching for some concrete explanations of ethnicity. What is the meaning of ethnicity - a subset of identity categories in which membership is determined by (real, imagined, or (re)invented) attributes of descent - and how does it influence our ideas of the world? I wanted to acquire a straightforward answer to my questions. The theorisations and applications in the literature on ethnicity, though, are divergent and ambiguous. Indeed, many academics are at odds about how to define ethnicity (Cohen 2004; Hirschman et al., 2000; Nagel, 1997, Isaacs, 1975, Geertz, 1973). One of the prevalent themes that emerges from the literature is that ethnicity plays a significant role in how people understand, interact and organise themselves in society, and that various global, socio-political and economic changes over approximately the last 70 years have pushed the issue of ethnicity to the forefront of public discourse (Sadler et al., 2010; Seol, 2008; Sanders, 2002; Spickard and Burroughs, 2000; Rothchild, 1995). Perhaps nowhere is this trend more prominent than in America (Fenton, 2010; Guibernau and Rex, 2010; Jacobson, 2008; Hirschman, 1983).

Researchers concur generally that Americans are increasingly defining themselves along different and distinct ethnic lines (Guibernau and Rex, 2010; Jacobson, 2009). In his account of the post-civil rights era revival of interest in ethnicity, Jacobson (2009) contends that Americans are now more than ever 'reviving' and 'rediscovering' their ethnicity to the point where they have become obsessed with the phenomenon. This

trend runs contrary to the 'melting pot' concept (Gordon, 1964), which asserted that ethnic distinctions in America would eventually disappear as immigrants to the country would meld into one unified, new culture. As such, unpacking the dynamic, complex and often conflicting ideas of ethnicity remains a chief concern of human geographers in America.

In America, the number of ethnic minorities is growing rapidly and these groups are increasingly willing to define and identify themselves as members of distinct minority groups in census bureau statistics (Conzen et al., 1992; Nagel, 1997). In fact, the very idea of a white majority is disappearing as it is postulated that various non-white ethnic minority groups will collectively represent the new majority in the country (Lichter, 2013). In effect, advancing scholarship on America's ethnic minority groups is vital for understanding how the centrifugal forces of various ethnic loyalties will shape popular consciousness on local, regional and national scales (Olson, 2011; Lind, 2010).

Cities offer particularly fertile ground for research on ethnicity since it is there where the phenomenon is salient and relevant to everyday life. Some theorists emphasise that the competition over resources is particularly fierce in cities, and thus groups of people often band together under ethnic categories to compete better in society (Cohen, 2004; Macionis and Parrillo, 2004; Laguerre, 2003). A number of other theorists stress how the frequency and intensity of people's social interactions are greater in cities than in rural areas, and this trend results in the increasing fluidity and significance of ethnicity in people's lived experiences (Krase and Hutchison, 2004; Laguerre, 2003; Rodriquez, 2000, Nagel, 1997; Giddens, 1991). In Krase's and Hutchison's (2004: 89) study on ethnicity in New York City (hereon referred to as NYC and the City), for instance, people often expressed sentiments on their ethnicity differently depending upon who they were talking to, where they were, and even how they were feeling on a particular day. This fluidity may be mediated by people's ever-changing goals and interests, be they social, economic or political (Matsumoto, 2011; Alcoff, 1995). It is especially within multi-diasporic cities that the activities and goals of ethnic groups have long been and continue to be of particular concern to social scientists (Lipsitz, 2006; Falcon, 1998; Glazer and Moynihan, 1963).

Research in NYC provides a unique angle to explore the phenomenon of ethnicity. It is the most populous city in the US, one of the most populous metropolitan areas of the

world, and it is also considered one of the most ethnically diverse places in the country (Marcuse, 2011; Galligano and Frazier, 2006). The City's continued attraction for migrants and its long-standing role as a 'Mecca' for the newest immigrants to the country make its boroughs like continents and its neighbourhoods like provinces with "streets teeming with diverse life" (Greenfield et al., 2006: 19). The predominance of ethnic minorities in the City's population has effectively made it a 'majority-minority' city and a metropolis of the world (Kasinitz et al., 2002). Indeed, NYC is a remarkable and complex mosaic of social worlds and ethnic diversity (Currid, 2006; Krase and Hutchison, 2004; Waldinger, 1999). NYC's ethnic diversity, majority-minority status, and size make it an appropriate and particularly fertile testing ground for exploring ethnicity and how ethnic groups may shape and be shaped by the socio-political and structural processes of urbanisation.

NYC is also an insightful platform for exploring the interconnectivity between humans and nature. Geographic research has emphasised the explicit connection between 'natural' processes and the processes of urbanisation (Benton-Short and Rennie, 2008; Pincetl, 2007; Kaika, 2005; Gandy, 2003; Keil and Graham, 1998). Human geographers Gandy (2003) and Harvey (1996) have both highlighted the importance of acknowledging that cities are not purely human-made, stressing that there is essentially nothing 'unnatural' about NYC. Rather, cities are part-human, part-nature social and ecological assemblages, and NYC is a 'nerve centre' capable of elucidating societal and natural forces impacting most of the globe (Mollenkopf, 1992). NYC, therefore, represents a profoundly revealing case for exploring human-nature relations, and investigating the forces that shape and reshape the City's social and material landscape is critically important for understanding the trends of urban futures on both national and local scales.

Community gardens are uniquely positioned to unpack the dynamic relationship between ethnicity and nature in NYC. Community gardening is a practice that involves a variety of activities including plant cultivation, socialisation, and learning. Some gardens may have a large membership base and host many visitors, while others may have only a handful of members and visitors. In contrast to city parks, which are either managed by the government or by private organisations, community gardens on city-owned land generally require that their members actively design, care for, and manage these spaces themselves (Tidball and Krasny, 2009). Largely for this reason, each

garden allows for a uniquely different experience of nature, and gardens can have a distinct design and pattern of utilisation that reflects the 'free' expression of individuals and groups (Eizenberg, 2012: 10; L'Annunziata, 2010; Von Hassell, 2002: 156; Hanna and Oh, 2000; Stocker and Barnett, 1998: 180). Furthermore, community gardening is also a movement that comprises a network of gardeners, activists, agencies and non-governmental organisations. Hence, grassroots activism is a relevant element of the community garden praxis. People and institutions may also address multiple issues in gardens, enact multiple visions of the space and assign various meanings to gardening activities. Appreciating socio-ecological dynamics in community gardens can help illuminate the ways in which ethnicity and nature are implicit dimensions of the cityscape.

Contemporary community gardens in the US emerged by and large as a result of urban deterioration and the country's financial crisis in the 1960s and 1970s. During this economic downturn, many of NYC's inner-city and low-income neighbourhoods experienced a host of urban problems, including a reduction in public services and an increase in poverty and unemployment. This trend was notoriously prevalent in the South Bronx (Rooney, 1995). As derelict and decaying lots became prominent features of this marginalised district, many of its residents became active in grassroots community reform initiatives such as the community garden movement. By transforming vacant lots into community gardens, residents were helping to beautify their neighbourhoods, reduce crime, and resist the further social and physical deterioration of their under-served neighbourhoods (Aponte-Pares, 1997). These spaces also came to represent vehicles through which people could struggle to compensate themselves for the 'barriers' they faced in accessing social and material resources (Zukin, 2009). As a whole, the scholarship on community gardens emphasises how these spaces have and continue to improve the lives of many low-income urban residents, and specifically in relation to the degradation of social and physical urban infrastructure (Peters and Kirby, 2008; Waliczek et al., 2005; Lawson, 2004; Ferris et al., 2001; Armstrong, 2000; Schmelzkopf, 1995).

When the American economy improved in the 1990s, the demand for urban commercial development rose and community gardens were targeted by private developers and government officials as sites for housing and more capital intensive forms of redevelopment (Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Schmelzkopf, 1995). During this decade, one of

the most concerted attacks on community gardens in the country was in NYC (Schmelzkopf, 2002; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). For many inner-city dwellers, the demolition of gardens represented the major loss of a valuable resource. Although community gardeners and many of their supporters banded together and struggled to preserve these spaces, many were bulldozed and destroyed. Fortunately, by 2002 an agreement was brought into effect whereby all city-owned gardens would be preserved from redevelopment. However, this agreement failed to provide these spaces with permanent, legal land tenure and up until this day the City preserves the right to turn over these gardens to developers (Zukin, 2009). Community gardeners are therefore a vulnerable group in NYC (Martinez, 2010).

NYC has one of the country's most active community gardening movements (Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Von Hassell, 2002). The Green Thumb program, which is now part of NYC's Department of Parks and Recreation (Parks Department), is also America's largest community garden agency. The program is responsible for supplying program and material support to over 500 gardens across the City (Zukin, 2009). The development, controversy, and continued prevalence of these spaces in NYC make it a particularly relevant locus for research on community gardens and human-nature relations.

In NYC and other cities across America, there has been a recent increase in academic research on community gardens and a popular surge of community garden-related initiatives (Corrigan, 2011; Martinez, 2010; Lawson, 2005). Public interest and enthusiasm for community gardening in America is clearly elucidated by First Lady Michelle Obama's initiative to plant a vegetable garden at the White House, and her opening speech at the American Community Garden Association's 2010 Annual Conference. Some researchers draw attention to how the growing public concern for food justice in marginalised areas has brought community gardens into the limelight (Mees and Stone, 2012; Corrigan, 2011; Levkoe, 2006). A number of studies even describe community gardeners as food justice practitioners (Guthman, 2008; Baker, 2004; DeLind, 2002). In this regard, local forms of food production are closely associated with improving the availability of and access to nutritious foods in low-income areas (Alkon and Agyeman, 2011; Winne 2009; Brown and Jameton, 2000; Allen, 1999). Urban agricultural schemes related to food justice include, most notably, community gardening (Baker, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996).

Possibly nowhere else in America and NYC are environmental injustices as rife as in the South Bronx; the poorest congressional district in the country (Kaplan et al., 2006; Calman, 2005; Jonnes, 2002; Rooney, 1995). According to a recent study in the New York Times, nearly 37% of all South Bronx residents frequently lacked enough money to buy food, which is a statistic higher than any other congressional district in the country and twice the national average (Dolnick, 2010). Moreover, compared to the rest of NYC, this district has more than twice the rate of poverty (85% of the residents receive public assistance), higher rates of health problems (e.g. diabetes and obesity), the densest concentration of public housing in the country, and it is also home to some of the most heavily trafficked highways in the nation (Mero and Philippidis, 2011; Wallach and Rey, 2009; Maantay, 2001). By appreciating the way in which the creation of contemporary community gardens represented a response to and continued persistence of social and environmental decline, it is unsurprising to discover that more community gardens were built and continue to exist in the South Bronx than in any other area in NYC (Checkoway et al., 2008).

Since the great majority of South Bronx residents are ethnic minorities (Kaplan et al., 2006), and low-income ethnic minority groups are primary tenders of community gardens (Ho et al., 2005), the prevalence of community gardens in the South Bronx is testament to how social, economic, and political inequalities reflect the fragmented human geography of the cityscape. In this regard, research has exposed how distinct neighbourhoods form as a result of their residents sharing a similar income level, and these geographic divisions often separate low-income African American and Latino communities from more privileged white ones (Logan, 2000; Alba et al., 1995). The former communities also tend to face disproportionate environmental decay and injustices compared to the rest of society (Bullard, 1994). These phenomena reveal the key role ethnicity must play in understanding contemporary community gardening and the socio-physical (re)structuring of cities. In particular, members of the Puerto Rican community are dominant and active community gardeners in NYC, and the South Bronx has one of the highest concentrations of Puerto Ricans in the City (Eizenberg, 2012; Zukin, 2009). Puerto Ricans not only played a major role in the development of these spaces, but this 'community' continues to be extremely relevant to the current socio-context of contemporary community gardening in the City (Martinez, 2010). Thus, the thesis's investigation of Puerto Rican community gardeners offers important

theoretical and practical contributions to understanding the dynamic relationship and interplay of ethnicity and nature in NYC.

Existing geographic research on community gardens is scarce, scattered and lacks theoretical coherence. Few studies focus specifically on the South Bronx, and those that do tend to be wide in scope, incorporating more than ten gardens into the project design (Ottmann et al., 2012; Ottman et al., 2010; Mees, 2006). Such an approach overlooks the fact that community gardens are not uniform or homogeneous entities with single agendas. Other studies explore a broader category of 'Latino' community gardeners but fail to specify and explain what specific sub-groups constitute this pan-ethnicity (Ohmer et al., 2009; Teig et al., 2009; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). As such, these studies tend to yield broad based assumptions that overlook the more subtle, albeit significant ways in which gardeners' conceptualise self and their knowledge of nature. In general, the changeability and dynamism that knowledge of nature is subject to is also often left unaddressed in studies (Winterbottom, 2007; Armstrong, 2000). As a result, while some important contributions have been made to the study of community gardens, these contributions remain wanting in quality and quantity. As a whole, the idea that knowledge of nature is not fixed and rooted in time, and gardeners are capable of exhibiting different and disparate gardening behaviours, remains peripheral and poorly theorised in existing research.

Additionally, human geographers seldom consider the implications of community gardening on gardeners' notions of ethnicity: a remarkable oversight in the nature and society interface. This may partly be due to the monolithic and unchanging treatment of ethnicity in much of the existing discourse on community gardeners (Eizenberg, 2011; Winterbottom, 2007; Baker, 2004; Aponte-Pares, 1997). Assuming the fixity of ethnicity disregards the significance of social relations in how human-nature relations are formed and manifest. In contrast, the views of ethnicity offered in this thesis appreciate the socio-spatial determinants of people's articulations of ethnicity and the relevance of *in-group* and *out-group* social processes on conceptualising ethnicity (Sanders, 2002; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001; Nagel, 1997). The community garden component of my empirical framework is placed into conversation with debates on the discursive mediation of ethnicity across time and space (Laguerre, 2003; Spickard and Burroughs, 2000; Swidler; 1986). By considering ethnicity in this way, this thesis addresses the critical knowledge gap in community garden research; it explores the

complex rationales underpinning gardeners' behaviours and the significance these spaces may play in preserving, shaping, and reshaping notions of ethnicity.

Human-nature relations within community gardens are not constituted in a vacuum and in isolation from wider societal power relations. The great majority of researchers tend to neglect this reality, exploring the meaning of gardeners' everyday patterns of socialisation and activities as if they occurred in a 'container' (exception of Martinez, 2010; Zukin, 2009). By incorporating the theoretical lens of political ecology, this investigation is effectively positioned to capture community gardening's entanglement in the web of intra-garden and broader social relations. Within this research paradigm, the environmental justice approach (Walker, 2012; Heynen, 2006; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003) especially provides a fruitful starting point for new lines of inquiry into how notions of nature and ethnicity in these spaces are shaped and reshaped for various instrumental purposes on multiple scales. By recognising the fragmented social and physical geography of NYC, the current study contributes to a more theoretically nuanced and dynamic understanding of community gardener-community garden relations in the academic literature. In effect, I reconceptualise community gardens as places where the complexities of social power struggles are a part of and inherently interwoven with gardeners' knowledge of nature and ethnicity.

Specifically, community gardens in the South Bronx offer particularly relevant locales for exploring nature-societal relations. By applying a contextual and theoretical framework for exploring ethnicity, nature, and a range of socio-political realities, research uncovers how gardeners, state and non-state actors co-construct gardens in relation to often contentious intra-garden social relations and broader urban politics. It also reveals how these spaces tie in political ecological considerations and are emotionally charged and thus capable of transforming the character and functionality of gardeners' ethnicity and gardening activities. Given the scope of the topic and depth of issues to be explored, I specifically examine Puerto Rican gardeners in three community gardens in the district. The study also employs a multi-case narrative research approach by triangulating three data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, active participant observation and discourse analysis. Perhaps the most important contribution of this study is that it shows how community gardens are meaningful and significant sites for exploring ethnicity, and the dynamic synergy between nature and humans in the on-going processes of urbanisation. Especially at a time when ethnicity is at the forefront of

public discourse, appreciating the powerful symbolic and physical value of community gardens on how people contextualise their ethnicity and urban space is important on both theoretical and practical levels. In the section that follows, I will discuss the particular research questions and how the theoretical structure employed aims to address them before I outline the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Research questions

This dissertation sets out to answer two main research questions. First, how, if at all, do community gardens influence gardeners' notions of ethnicity? To address this question, I first explore the meaning of ethnicity and consider the prevailing debates from the three main distinct and disparate schools of thought: primordialism, social constructionism, and instrumentalism. I draw attention to the relevance of each at different points of the analysis, while also finding novel uses that emerge in community gardens. When these disparate schools of thought are combined into a theoretical hybrid on ethnicity (Thananithichot, 2011; Seol, 2008; Spickard and Burroughs, 2000; Nagel, 1994), I take into account the significance of both 'pan-ethnicity' and 'sub-ethnicity', and their usefulness in providing a nuanced and contextualised understanding of how the phenomenon is experienced through time and space (Laguerre, 2003; Rodriquez, 2000; Portes and Truelove, 1987). Insights from social capital theory (Lin, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1994) are then briefly introduced to underpin the significance of socialisation on the processes of conceptualising ethnicity. The literature related to social capital underscores the significance of a person's socio-spatial context in how they will ultimately form notions of self and community.

The second question this dissertation addresses relates to the functions of community gardens: how do gardeners use and design these gardens? Insights from the social construction of nature theory provide analytic resources for exploring how knowledge of nature is value-laden and socially determined, and how nature entails both bio-physical and cultural phenomena (Bhatti and Church, 2001; Askins, 2009; Procter, 2004; Castree, 2001). I explore how community gardens are constructed in relation to a gardening group's set of ideological presumptions. I specifically unpack how gardeners use and design gardens by their social patterns of inclusivity and exclusivity, notions of real and imagined memories, and the enactment of accepted and (re)invented cultural traditions.

Of particular interest for comprehensively answering these research questions is the way in which gardener-garden relations shape and may be shaped by societal power struggles. As a theoretical lens, political ecology is well-adapted to exploring how ideas of ethnicity and nature are inherent in urban politics and socio-geographic disputes (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Harvey, 1993; Neumann, 1992). Insights about social power struggles help to 'delocalise' social and natural phenomena in community gardens by elucidating how they are generated within the web of social networks in which they are located. The theoretical lens of political ecology also allows for a consideration of the effect of factors other than gardeners' interests in what actually occurs in gardens. Charting social power relations on multiple scales illuminates how community gardening activities are often executed in relation to the shifting priorities and agendas of the elites. Within this research paradigm, insights from environmental justice (Walker, 2012; Heynen, 2006; Foreman, 1998) are particularly useful for charting how social power relations, culture and class can determine the availability of and people's access to vital socio-ecological resources, such as healthy food.

As a whole, I set out three main aims to answer the study's two research questions. The first aim is to explore how gardens provide a localised context for gardeners to express, learn about, and enact notions of ethnicity. The second aim is to explore the interconnectivity between nature and humans, and how gardeners construct these spaces in relation to their intra-garden patterns of socialisation and on-going (re)conceptualisations of memory and traditions. Finally, the third aim is to recontextualise the dynamic relationship between intra-garden social and natural phenomena by exposing how gardens and gardeners exist within the complex social and physical fabric of NYC. This entails appreciating how social power relations on multiple scales are a part of, and intertwined with how ethnicity and nature is constituted and understood by gardeners. Each of the study's three aims is addressed in one of three empirical chapters. Next, I will briefly outline the structure of this thesis.

1.2 Structure

This dissertation is divided into eight main chapters. In chapter two, I outline the research's theoretical framework that structures the analysis. I discuss and weave together debates on ethnicity, the social construction of nature and political ecology theory. The framework gives special consideration to ethnicity and nature as natural,

social, and political phenomena, which are co-constructed in dynamic and complex ways by various actors on multiple scales. The theoretical context produces a coherent agenda for gathering and analysing the empirical data.

In the third chapter, I briefly map out the social and environmental landscape of community gardening in the South Bronx. I examine and explore the uneven processes of urbanisation that catalyzed the development of the contemporary garden movement. To understand the repertoires of political action used by gardeners and garden activists, I also outline the processes by which gardening enacts socio-ecological change and is imbricated in the socio-ecological fabric of NYC. I explain the rationale for why community gardens in the district and Puerto Rican gardeners especially deserve analytic attention and consideration for answering the research questions. I then go on to introduce the three community garden case studies selected for fieldwork, and I elucidate the logic for using these fieldwork locations. The overarching goal of this section is not to present a detailed historical account of all of NYC's community gardens, or to provide an in-depth conversation about all the ideologies that underpin gardening in the South Bronx. Rather, it is to highlight the relevance of my theoretical framework, and bring it together with the contemporary socio-context as to inform the most appropriate research methodology.

Chapter four explains why a qualitative methodological framework offers effective research methods for answering the research questions. I specifically draw upon a multi-case narrative research approach, which entails (narrative style and semi-structured) interviews with and active participant observations of gardeners as well as a discourse analysis. Three community gardens in the South Bronx were selected as case studies, and 17 Puerto Rican gardeners across the three sites were selected as research participants. A cross-examination between these three different community gardens addresses conceptual models of ethnicity and nature-making. I also incorporate state and non-state actors who were relevant in the provision of one or more of these gardens. This enables an exploration of the dynamic interplay of social relations in constituting human-nature relations in community gardens.

Chapter five is the first of three chapters presenting the results of the field research. Specifically, it describes gardens as spaces that allow for the enactment of gardeners' ethnicity. I focus on the mechanisms by which gardeners learn about their ethnicity

from others, and how the gardens' social gatherings were at the core of how gardeners' articulated their own ideas of ethnicity. This thesis goes beyond existing research that underpins the relevance of community gardens for affirming and preserving gardeners' ethnicities (Winterbottom, 2007; Baker, 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004) by revealing how these spaces marshal new understandings of ethnicity based on gardeners' active and on-going engagement with the gardening group. The overarching theme of this chapter is that ethnicity is not an entirely unchangeable phenomenon (Sanders, 2002; Nagel, 2000; Rothchild, 1995), and a gardening group's distinct and dynamic social character represents a formative mediating variable for how an individual gardener will ultimately (re)create and (re)form his or her ethnicity.

Chapter six discusses the symbolic reasons and social values imbued with using and designing community gardens. I explore three significant modes through which nature is constructed: inclusive and exclusive patterns of socialisation, ideas of real and imagined memory, and the role of enacting accepted traditions. I show how the garden is not simply a construction of individual proclivities, but how it is also a physical configuration of social relations that transpire from garden membership. These physical configurations, in turn, shape and reflect gardeners' dynamic web of intra-garden social relations.

In chapter seven, I shift the scale from intra-garden social and natural considerations to how gardeners' knowledge of ethnicity and nature shapes and is shaped by broader social power relations on multiple scales. Through the lens of political ecology (Harvey, 2006; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Walker, 1998) I unpack the mechanisms by which gardener-institutional partnerships structure and restructure gardeners' social networks and power hierarchies. I consider how the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the wider community garden movement played a role in mediating gardeners' priorities and how gardeners strategically employed notions of ethnicity and nature to gain legitimacy and secure external sources of support. In this regard, gardeners' expressions of ethnicity and their engagement with nature are understood in relation to both outside audiences and intra-garden social processes.

I conclude in chapter eight by summarising the study's findings and discussing its implications for trends in the field. I specifically consider the implications of the three empirical chapters and identify directions for future research. While it is hoped that this

project will serve as a launch pad for further academic inquiry into broader and deeper issues, the particular scope of this dissertation aims to uncover how ecological, political, and social manifestations have influenced the construction and meaning of the three community garden case studies, the the roles these spaces play for (re)forming notions of ethnicity.

Chapter 2 Conceptual Foundations

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I map out the study's theoretical framework. The research paradigms that underpin this thesis are the debates on ethnicity, the social construction of nature, and political ecology theory. This theoretical agenda is aimed at elucidating the particularities of community gardening in NYC, and it helps to analyse and explore the findings of my ethnographic research. I begin this chapter by reviewing classical and more recent theoretical approaches to unpacking the significance of ethnicity. I have limited my discussion of debates on ethnicity to those with relevance to the research questions. I identify and discuss the three main thematic contributions on ethnicity: primordialism, instrumentalism, and social constructionalism. I address the theoretical tensions between the insights provided by each approach, and I also consider how merging these three traditional paradigms will inform the study's analysis of ethnicity. My application of ethnicity is also underpinned by insights from social capital theory (Lin, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1994). The way in which I implement these insights is influenced by the theoretical discussion on ethnicity and how socialisation modifies an individual's and a group's predilections and understandings of ethnicity across spatial and temporal dimensions (Laguerre, 2003; Nagel, 2000; Rodriquez, 2000).

In order to explore gardeners' use and design of community gardens, I draw on insights from the social construction of nature theory in the second section of this chapter. The applicability of nature to my study centres on how 'the social' and 'the natural' are co-created and mutually reinforcing phenomena (Askins, 2009; Procter, 2004; Scarce, 2000; Haila, 1997; Naveh, 1995). This perspective challenges notions of 'true wilderness' and 'untouched nature' in public environmental discourse (e.g. Landres et al., 2008). I also explore the prominent role of memory in nature-making, and the idea that memory is not constituted by immutable and fixed properties (Ginn, 2013; Bhatti and Church, 2011; Brook, 2003). By acknowledging how nature is value-laden and socially determined, I lay the groundwork for grasping how gardens are not ideologically neutral places.

To interrogate comprehensively the dynamic and dialectical relationship between nature and society that create and re-create gardens and gardeners over time, I introduce political ecology as the study's final theoretical tool. I consider how social and natural phenomena are unavoidably political and cannot be extracted from the political circumstances in which they are situated (Swyngedouw and Heynan, 2003). I then consider how in the first world urban context, appreciating politics entails an understanding of the marketisation of nature and the social policies that assess its meaning in relation to exchange values (Braun, 2006; Swyngedouw, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Keil, 2003). This approach is then complimented by theoretical insights from environmental justice, which explores people's (in)access to and control over resources and the implications of these processes on people's livelihoods, socio-ecological health, and social positions (Walker, 2012; Taylor, 2000; Bullard, 1994). In particular, food justice surfaces as a conceptual tool to interrogate critically the relationship between nature, ethnicity, and the contentious urban politics involved with community gardening.

2.2 What is Ethnicity?

Current theorisations and applications of ethnicity in scholarly research show how its definition is complex, varying in form, scope, and intensity (Chandra, 2006; Cohen, 2004; Hirschman, et al., 2000). Indeed, a number of human geographers posit that ethnicity is one of the most difficult concepts in the social sciences to define (Gregory et al., 2009; Bradby, 1995; Moynihan, 1975). On the whole, research on ethnicity has been conceptually divided and largely fuelled by three distinct schools of thought: primordialism, instrumentalism, and social constructionism. Primordialists share a deterministic conception of ethnicity and assert that it is an innate, unchangeable, and biologically preordained phenomenon (Geertz, 1973; Shils, 1957). What is referred to as 'race' in much of the literature is the result of the primordialist mechanics for dividing people into sub-divisions of phenotypic categories, which give ineffable importance to shared notions of blood and skin colour (Boas, 1940). These categories may also be linked to people's intellectual capacity, morals, and their patterns of socialisation (Isaacs, 1975).

More recent scholarship tends to explore how primordial beliefs resonate with and often give credence to notions of the 'natural' inferiority of certain groups and individuals

(Kraler and Sondergger, 2009; Chandra, 2006; Omi and Winant, 1986). These beliefs may thus support and promote modern structures of inequality. American sociologists Michael Omi and Howard Winant (1986) developed a theory for racial formation that reinforces this idea and defines race as a concept that signifies and symbolises social and political conflicts between different types of human bodies. The recognition that race is linked to discrimination has fuelled the research that both challenges this perspective's scientific validity (Manica, 2005; Anderson, 1987) and shows how it fails to account for the processes of change, fusion, and dissolution of ethnic groups over time (Rodriguez, 2000; Llobera, 1999).

Instrumentalism and social constructionism theory, in contrast, argue that ethnicity is not an objective and static reality. These two approaches foreground individual agency in the creation of ethnicity, demonstrating that ethnicity may be shaped in relation to various situational and ever-changing social phenomena. Specifically, instrumentalists view ethnicity as a type of interest group that is created to defend or pursue certain political, economic, and or other material interests (Congleton, 1995; Rothchild, 1995). These groups are created and destroyed in relation to the ever-changing perception of 'us' versus 'them' (Barth, 1969). As such, ethnicity is fluid and used to mobilise people into groups in order to compete for political power and maximise their benefits and rational choices in society (Messay, 2001; Cohen, 1986). While still appreciating the ever-changing situational contexts that determine ethnicity, social constructionists add to instrumentalist insight by arguing that people are consciously creating their ethnicity, and also define themselves in response to a variety of societal agents acting upon them (Spickard and Burroughs, 2000). In effect, people may use, create, and exploit notions of a shared descent in their pragmatic pursuit of interests, and ideas of ethnicity are shaped and reshaped by societal power relations (Alba, 1990). Socialisation, therefore, is emphasised as an analytic priority for how ethnicity is negotiated through people's daily interactions with others, and how these interactions are influenced by cultural, historical, and political processes (Hampel, 2004; Rodriguez, 2000).

Ethnicity is particularly fluid and varied in cities due to the high concentration of people living and frequently interacting with each other in the same locale (Cohen, 2004; Giddens, 1991). As mentioned above, socialisation may be a central factor in how conceptualisations of ethnicity are discursively mediated. In cities, people's social interactions tend to be particularly intense, and largely for this reason, people may

express their ethnicity differently in terms of who they are talking to, where they are, and even how they are feeling that day (Krase and Hutchison, 2004: 89). Rodriquez (2000) shows how individuals identify as Puerto Rican or Latino depending on the relative salience and situational context in which they find themselves. Their choices may be linked with political policies and people's goals and interests (Alcoff, 2005). Thus, individuals may carry a portfolio of ethnicities and they may make superficial and variable commitments to each of their ethnic choices (Buckser, 2000: 713; Nagel, 2000: 84).

Conceptualisations of ethnicity may even be influenced by the interactions people have with their particular neighbourhood and the ensuing social networks associated with their immediate locale. In NYC, Laguerre (2003: 142) discovered how 'sub-ethnicities' are created among Puerto Rican residents, and these ethnicities reflect the distinct social ethos and history of their immediate neighbourhood. For this reason, he explains how sub-ethnicities distinguish Puerto Ricans of a certain neighbourhood from those of another in NYC, even though these different neighbourhoods may be located within the same borough or be relatively close to one another. Such 'bonds of local solidarity' (Sanjek, 2000: 242) may also explain how a unique culture is formed when residents share local knowledge, common experiences, and a way of life that is reproduced on a daily basis and within a specific locale.

There has been a recent surge in the academic literature that critiques these three theoretical approaches when they are operationalised separately in research on ethnicity (Thananithichot, 2011; Berbrier, 2008; Seol, 2008; Chandra, 2006; Nagel, 1997). Thananithichot (2011) asserts that social constructionism often fails to acknowledge fully the role that individuals have in constructing their ethnicity. Seol (2008) also identifies a weakness in instrumentalist insight when he argues that some primordial notions, such as a shared sense of descent, may be used and transformed by people in their strategic pursuit of power and interests. Political societal entities may also inspire the creation of people's primordial beliefs to effectively mobilise people into collective, cohesive groups (Guibernau, 2010; Nash, 2001). It is important to explore when and why certain ideas of ethnicity are relevant and overlap in research.

A number of researchers suggest that ethnicity is created by the interplay between in-group and out-group social processes that may involve primordial mechanisms of self-

ascription and ascription by others (Chandra, 2006; Spickard and Burroughs, 2000; Buckser, 2000; Nagel, 1997). Nagel's (1997: 42) theoretical hybrid of ethnicity holds that people's notions of a shared sense of descent and 'natural' membership in a group may be extracted by societal groups depending on their social and political interests, and in relation to how other such groups view each other as distinct and different. However, no matter how deeply people feel about sharing a common ancestry with others, there is nothing objective or fixed about ethnic conceptualisations. Rather, notions of ethnicity constantly evolve and are delineated by socially defined structures and markers of power created and shaped through the actions of ethnic groups and their antagonists or political authorities (*Ibid*).

Spickard and Burroughs (2000) also emphasise the significance of applying a theoretical hybrid in research on ethnicity. In doing so, they point specifically to how the Hispanic or Latino ethnicity (the two terms are used interchangeably in the literature) came to exist in America. These researchers explain how the salience and strength of the Latino ethnicity grew as a result of Mexican, Puerto Rican and Cuban populations (the three largest sub-groups under this ethnic label) being too small to achieve many shared political and socio-economic interests when grouped separately. By joining together strategically to form a larger constituency, these sub-groups became better positioned to attain their common interests, compete with other societal groups, and respond to instances of discrimination. Omi and Winant (1996: 246) also discuss how pan-ethnic groups find it advantageous to make political demands backed by the numbers and resources they can mobilise. As a result of their increased interaction with one another, these disparate sub-groups of the Latino pan-ethnicity then created primordial notions of a shared and innate culture that binds them together naturally (Spickard and Burroughs, 2000). The Latino ethnicity was finally solidified by the US government's data gathering methods and the politically dominant Anglo-American community subsequently portraying the Spanish-speakers as a unified group (Rodriquez, 2000: 14; Espiritu, 1992).

Appreciating articulations of pan-ethnicity is significant since it is a powerful empirical alternative to assimilation in America, and it is also important theoretically since it focuses attention on and is an essential part of ethnic transformations (Marrow, 2003; Oboler, 1995; Lopez and Espiritu, 1990: 198). On this note, Latino pan-ethnicity is one example of 'ethnic revival' (Nagel, 1997; 1994), whereby a 'new' ethnicity is created

out of historical, social and symbolic systems and cultural performance (e.g. music and dance), whilst political policies that reinforce and recognise this ethnicity provide the basis for socio-political claims-making (Sommers, 1991). What is of particular interest for understanding the processes of 'ethnic revival' is Nagel's (1994: 164) description of cultural construction, that is, the intra-group content of ethnicity (rather than the inter-group influences on it). This idea is especially relevant for pan-ethnic groups since they tend to be composed of sub-groups with histories of conflict and animosity (Alcoff, 2005). Cultural construction serves two important collective ends. First, it aids in the construction of a community. Community is a concept that has been broadly defined in human geography. Some human geographers suggest that community be defined as a geographically-rooted group of people engaged in relationships (Meltzer, 2005) while others suggest that the definition includes groups formed by an interest or a shared philosophy regardless of whether or not they share a geographic locality (Holland, 2004; Khan, 1999). In particular, research on community gardens tends to link the concept with the gardening group that created, uses, and maintains the gardening space (Eizenberg, 2012; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Twiss et al., 2003). Eizenberg (2012) stresses how 'gardening groups' constitute 'communities' because gardeners cooperate and work together to construct and use a common resource in relation to their own culture, vision, and desires. In addition, community may imply the creation and expression of culture, which results from assigning things and events certain meanings that cannot be strictly understood with physical senses alone (Naveh, 1995: 46). Culture, in turn, influences the informal practices of everyday life and also provides a 'tool kit' for a community's habits and practices (Swidler, 1986: 273). Culture may therefore work to hide intra-group ambiguities and prompt 'outsiders' to perceive a community as a homogenous entity different or similar to their own (Cohen, 1986: 11).

Cultural construction may also serve as a mechanism of collective mobilisation, which may represent and even encourage the pragmatic pursuit of common interests (Snow and McAdam, 2000; Nagel, 1994: 163; Weber, 1978). Cultural construction may therefore be conducive to collective action and enable the community's protagonists, adversaries and audiences to respond to cultural content (Hunt et al., 1994). Nearly any element of culture can function to mobilise a community and reinforce social cohesion, and especially the cultural traits (e.g. language) that work to distinguish a group from one or more other collectivities (Weber, 1978). Largely for this reason, a number of

scholars have written about how organising along ethnic lines facilitates collective mobilisation and action in society (Okamoto, 2003; Calderon, 1992; Olzak, 1983).

Research on Latino pan-ethnicity in America has approached the subject from many different angles. Some studies focus on the community's processes of migration, fertility, and the analysis of government census data (Valenzuela, 2010; Guzmán and McConnell, 2002; Guzmán, 2001). Latino ethnicity has also been studied in relation to the creation of shared cultural ties that promote a sense of homogeneity for this group (Handler, 1999: 6-8). On this note, Dávila et al. (2003) point to the similarities among Latino peoples; their tendency to have more children and maintain a stronger network of family ties, their usage of a common language, and their shared experiences of socio-economic discrimination in America society. The combination of these phenomena has been argued to contribute to people's tendency to articulate an ethnicity that is not based solely on their national origin (*Ibid*). Similarly, Masuoka (2011) also gives theoretical attention to the socio-spatial dimensions of Latino pan-ethnic consciousness. Particularly relevant to the current study is her conclusion that individuals who thought that ethnic discrimination was a major problem in their life expressed a strong Latino consciousness. In this regard, experiences of discrimination may increase a sense of moral virtue associated with an ethnicity, and in general render ideas of pan-ethnicity more salient where previously they may have been marginal for an individual (Walder, 2000; Calhoun, 1991). An individual's experiences of discrimination and marginalisation, therefore, influence the formation and persistence of his or her expressions of pan-ethnicity (Masuoka, 2011; Takezawa, 1995).

Notwithstanding the nature of these studies, there are significant methodological limitations associated with recruiting research participants who merely claim to be Latino. The principal limitation is that the Latino community is a conglomerate of entities and each may constitute a distinct 'nation' defined by unique and complex cultural characteristics (Sommers, 1991: 34). Latinos may differ, for instance, in terms of their immigration status and levels of acculturation. Along this line, Portes and Truelove (1987) discovered that some Latinos have had ancestors living in America since the country's independence, while others were recent arrivals to the country. Similarly, Hirschman et al. (2000) argue that individuals often have disparate views of Latino ethnicity even though they may share a common language and have beliefs of a shared ancestry. Studies have also revealed that a large number of people who at times

identify with being Latino may actually believe that they do not have much cultural similarity with other Latinos (Marger, 2000; Espiritu, 1992). Hence, using this pan-ethnic label in research is unavoidably trivial (De Greiff 2000; Gimenez, 1989).

One of the most significant differences between individuals of pan-ethnic groups is their national origin (Portes and Truelove, 1987: 360). Sommers (1991) particularly finds that most Latinos insist on maintaining notions of ethnicity based on their national origin. This phenomenon does not imply that people entirely overlook notions of a Latino ethnicity. Rather, during the course of reacting to different socio-contexts, people may draw on a Latino ethnicity to assert their common goals or similarities with others. For this reason, pan-ethnicity is simply part of a constellation of ethnic identities available to an individual and people may 'manage' these ethnic options in very different and fluid ways (Portes and Truelove, 1987). Along this vein, when Padilla (2011) examined separate sub-groups within the Latino category, he explicitly took note of how pan-ethnic solidarity may be created and expressed and the reasons why ethnic transformations occur within diaspora groups. By also explicitly investigating people of one Latino sub-group, the current investigation will be strategically positioned to capture not only the individual and social consciousness rooted in people of one national origin, but also the extent to which and the reasons why pan-ethnic sentiments may be felt and expressed. The next section discusses the significance of socio-contextual factors on how ethnicity is understood, and why these factors are relevant for understanding how individuals resist, accept, or reinforce notions of ethnicity. Recognising the existence of social capital and its manifestations in everyday gardening life merits attention in this review, since community gardens are where people can gather, network, and identify with a gardening group.

2.2.1 Ethnicity and Social Capital

The breadth of literature on social capital is extensive, and, as with the concept of ethnicity, its definition is contested (Putnam, 2000; Maloney et al., 2000; Narayan and Pritchett, 1997; Coleman, 1994). Coleman (1994: 98) defines social capital as a useful resource available to an individual, and, unlike other forms of capital, this resource is 'located' within their social relationships. In this way, social capital is characterised as both an asset and public good, which is constructed by the social structures that

facilitate certain actions of actors (e.g. persons or private and public institutions) within the structure itself (Burt, 2000: 347; Narayan, 1997). In general, ideas of social capital are recognised as an amalgam of social norms, such as trust and reciprocity, and encompass certain features of society, such as social networks and sense of place (Putnam, 2000; Maloney et al., 2000; Coleman 1994).

The achievement of personal benefits as well as collective socio-political interests, such as improved health, lower incidences of crime, and an increase in commitment to a community has been attributed to the possession of social capital (Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Adler and Kwon, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Putnam (2000) emphasises the role of social clubs and associational activities that bring relative strangers together on a routine basis in fostering the general reciprocity and trust between people, and how this in turn facilitates their collective action and cooperation as they continue to pursue their own self-interests. Putnam (2000), however, has been criticised for under-valuing institutional and state agency, and for neglecting the role of politics in how social capital is formed and used (Mohan and Mohan, 2002, Maloney et al., 2000). Maloney et al. (2000: 803) stress how institutions and their decision-making processes are not passive players in society, and Malesevic (2011) further notes how institutions may create and be created by new environments, which is of particular relevance to this research, since gardening implies forging relations, to varying degrees, with interest groups and other non-member stakeholders. As such, integrating institutions into an exploration of ethnicity is implicit in appreciating ethnicity's socio-spatial dimensions, especially since institutions may be key in mediating Latino pan-ethnicity (Valenzuela, 2010).

Social groups and networks are premised on the inclusion of some and exclusion of others, and the way people socialise with one another depends on their status in different groups and networks (Narayan-Parker, 1999; Burt, 1997). Lin (2002: 33) explains that once resources are defined and their values and significance are assumed, they may be embedded in the nature of a group's social structure since it is comprised of hierarchical positions that possess differential amounts of one or more types of valued resources. The 'bonding', 'bridging', and 'linking' social capital framework also facilitates understanding of the various different types of networks between people and communities (Putnam, 2000). The former describes emotionally close relationships, such as those between family and friends, which is established from multi-functional

and strong but localised trust and reciprocity (Pretty, 2003; Putnam, 2000). It also tends to encompass people in similar socio-demographic situations and these strong ties reinforce a group's cultural homogeneity (Burt, 2000; Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital, on the other hand, tends to bring people together across diverse socio-demographic situations. This often results in weak ties of loose networks where people differ in national origin and cultural background, but can gain the access to another group's resources because of overlapping membership (Adler and Kwon, 2002). Put more simply, bonding social capital helps people 'get by' while bridging social capital helps people 'get ahead' (Burt, 2000). Finally, linking social capital involves people's social relations with those of dissimilar socio-demographic situations and concerns the relations with those in power and places of authority either to influence policies or to draw on resources (Pretty, 2003).

Ethnicity plays an important role in the formation and maintenance of social capital (Portes, 2000). The resources located in people's ethnic bonds are significant for creating social capital, and social capital also requires a degree of coordination, which may be more difficult to achieve if people belong to different ethnic networks (Anthias, 2007). Partly for this reason, a group's ethnic composition is a predictor of people's trust for one another; social exchanges between people of different ethnicities involve significantly lower levels of trust and reciprocity than those exchanges between people of the same ethnicity (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2002). Along this vein, Misztal (1996) explains that trust is nurtured between people who share notions of the same ethnicity, since these bonds enable them to better predict the behaviour of others within the same ethnic category. It is clear that people's ethnic ties embody an important component of social capital.

Social capital may also be a relevant factor to how people experience and understand their ethnicity. This phenomenon is substantiated by the assertion explored above that people are capable of modifying their ethnicity in relation to the spaces they inhabit (Laguerre, 2003; Hetherington, 1998). The high prevalence of bonding social capital may bring about social conformity as it places great control over individual and group behaviour (Portes, 1998). Rishbeth (2004: 104) also underlines that as people of a minority culture interact with external exigencies that are of a majority culture, they are more likely to emphasise their difference to this majority culture. However, if valuable resources are generated from external exigencies, people's ethnicity may become more

porous, fluid, and varied (Sanders, 2002: 348). This is due to significant spheres of life necessitating greater involvement with 'outsiders' of different ethnicities. Even so, Alesina and La Ferrara (2002: 225) assert that people have a natural aversion to environments of ethnic heterogeneity. People may thus be less likely to visit the places that are frequented by people of a different ethnicity, and they may also experience a lower degree of trust and commitment to these spaces and groups of people. If social capital decreases, people's distrust toward and disregard for others may rise (Putnam, 2000). Social capital, therefore, has significant implications for how people use space and form perceptions and attitudes toward other groups and themselves. Next, I will introduce insights from the social construction of nature theory to address the research question of how gardens are used and designed.

2.3 Social Construction of Nature

Insights from the social construction of nature theory emphasise how 'true' nature is an elusive concept and that ideas of 'the natural' are not uniform or extra-human (Castree, 2001; Scarce, 2000; Castree and Braun, 1998; Naveh, 1995). The understanding that there is no singular and objective knowledge of nature underscores how nature may never be thought of as untouched by humans or as a pure material object removed from the lens of cultural meaning (Scarce, 2000: Peterson, 1999). Even nature that is popularly regarded as 'pure', 'wild' or 'free of human imprint', such as the Amazon rainforest, are widely recognised by scholars as 'humanised' landscapes that are dramatically modified, both socially and materially, by human activities (Heckenberger et al., 2007). In this way, bio-physical and material objects reveal less about the natural world than about the culture of how people understand nature and science (Proctor, 1998: 353). In an effort to blur the divisions between social and natural phenomena, the term 'socio-nature' is often used in the literature to emphasise how nature is intrinsically social and our knowledge of nature is socially determined (Askins, 2009; Scarce, 2000; Haila, 1997; Swyngedouw, 1996).

The concept of socio-nature also underscores the dynamic interplay between social and natural phenomena. Many researchers assert that social relations influence our views of and the meanings we assign to nature, and in turn, nature influences our social relations (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003: 388; Eisenhauer et al., 2000; Naveh, 1995: 48). As social processes unfold in concert with constructions of nature, humans co-evolve along

with their physical environments (Ekers et al., 2009). Notions of human identity, then, may evolve contextually through interactions with the world, and consciousness of this co-evolution emerges through active involvement with constructing nature (Ginn, 2013). Humans, too, are a part of and cannot be extracted out of the natural context in which they exist (Swyngedouw, 1996; Naveh, 1995).

Different individuals and groups may use different discourses to make sense of the same nature (Haila, 1997). This is partly a result of the tendency to confer meaning to nature in ways that reflect individual and social experiences of self and community (Greider and Garkovich, 1994). On this note, Castree (2001) explains how comprehending people's language and knowledge of nature entails the process of 'denaturalisation'. In other words, understanding nature involves unpacking how the phenomenon is a social product used to organise schemes of perception which serve specific and dynamic social interests. This process also entails exploring the interconnections between languages, discourses, institutions and practices when constructing realities, and the ways in which these realities are produced through processes of socialisation and legitimisation (*Ibid*: 12). Thus, social phenomena may be 'read' through material and 'natural objects', and nature is inseparably linked to historical and cultural processes (Guthman, 2002).

According to social constructionist views (Scarce, 2000; Castree and Braun, 1998; Swyngedouw, 1999) facts about nature are a part of, and interrelated with, social values. Even if based on formal 'scientific' and numerical language, knowledge of nature is discursively mediated (Naveh, 1995). This interpretation suggests conceptualisations and concepts of nature are inherently unstable, and form and reform along with ongoing social relations. In their social theorising about nature, Pincetl (2007) and Swyngedouw (1999: 461) specifically identify that comprehending facts and values of nature means recognising that knowledge, practices, and discourses on nature are context-specific, and how nature, in turn, is capable of interiorising the flux and dynamics of socio-spatial contexts. When investigating the ambiguity of the concept of 'wilderness', Haila (1997) reinforces the interconnectivity of culture, nature, and 'radical contextuality'. In particular, she elucidates how some American contemporary ideas of 'wilderness' are produced by the social and natural history of nationalism and past efforts to separate the country from the 'other' European culture: "nothing exists outside of context that would be consequence for our existence" (Haila, 1997: 142).

Ideas of nature and self may be based on our changing interests and value judgements of duties, rights, and responsibilities (Hanssen, 2001: 248). During the course of our lives, the process of attributing value to ourselves, to others, and to nature means making moral decisions and ethical considerations (Castree, 2001). This phenomenon is based on ideas of what is 'right,' 'wrong,' 'better,' and 'worse,' both socially and ecologically (Drenthen et al., 2009: 227). These different concepts of reality may also have instrumental values that can be used to achieve goals and objectives, be they aesthetic, economic, intrinsic or recreational (Naveh, 1995: 15). This viewpoint also recognises nature as a 'site' of contestation between who constructs and deconstructs nature, through what means, and the power of language in constructing natural realities. Values of nature may shift in relation to social struggles and power relations (Swyngedouw, 1999), and this then invites an analysis of who controls, acts, and has the power to produce what kinds of socio-natures in cities, an issue which will be taken up in the following section.

Plants are a form of socio-nature that are of particular importance for this current study on community gardens. Plants have always played a central role in our lives: "people and plants are entwined by threads that reach back to our very beginnings as a species" (Lewis, 1996: xvii). In recent years, research on the act of growing plants has attracted substantial and diverse scholarship in geography (Perrault-Archambault et al., 2008; Head and Hampel, 2004; Kimber, 2004). These studies go beyond the notion that plants are a basic means of human survival and assert that they also have the capacity to inform and reflect the values of its users. In this way, plants are far from ideologically neutral. In Perrault-Archambault et al.'s (2008) study on home gardens, for instance, food plants were discovered to be like 'ethnic markers' since some ethnic groups exclusively cultivated and used certain plants that other ethnic groups did not. Implicit in their results is also the idea that some people may view certain plants as desirable and imbue them with a special significance, while other people may view the same plant as insignificant or merely as a weed. The mechanisms of growing food may also shape and be shaped by a person's interpretations of the rules and traditions that embody their ethnicity (Quayle and van der Lieck, 1997). Particularly through gardening, people may transform plants from biological materials to cultural ones and thus, horticultural knowledge is intimately intertwined with culture and the social world (Kimber, 2004).

Several authors describe food as one of the most commonly used semiotic systems for communicating notions of ethnicity (Montoya, 2009; Hinton, 2008; Guthman, 2002; Brown and Mussell, 1984). Christie (2004) substantiates this idea in her study on house-lot gardens in Mexico in which she asked participants to describe their ethnic community. All of her study's participants invariably drew attention to food, and in particular to the *mole* sauce that was considered a traditional Mexican condiment. The general underlying assumption adopted by social constructionists is that food is central to groups' cultural celebrations (Montoya, 2009; Brown and Mussell, 1984), and the ways in which people grow food plants represent a comprehensive narrative of how individuals express and reconstruct notions of self and community (Kimber, 2004; Rishbeth, 2004).

The multivalent nature of memory has been a prominent topic in the research on growing food and plants (Ginn, 2013; Head et al., 2004; Rishbeth, 2004; Bhatti and Church, 2001). Perhaps Hester and Francis (1990: 10) say it best when they assert that "every garden, even one just made, is a place haunted by spirits that whisper to our memory". In exploring the meaning of nature, social constructionalists argue that memory elides both the 'now' and the 'then' (Legg, 2004; Brook, 2003; Marcus, 1992; Deleuze, 1988). Marcus (1992) argues that memory may consist of ideas from places and people of the past, and replicating and remembering these phenomena may produce a sense of control, psychological comfort, and an identity that was experienced at an earlier age. She offers a conceptual definition of memory that reveals how memory shapes both self and nature, and how it may also be used for social purposes and supported by reproducing the essence of a significant past environment in the present. Rather than being fixed and constituted by immutable properties (Bergson 1911, cited in Muldoon 2006), then, memory is seen to be a continuously changing phenomenon. People may construct spaces to look and feel like places of their past, and they maintain a living and ever-changing connection to their memory through an active engagement of nature in the present (Brook, 2003). As such, memory is not rooted in the past: it is where the past and present co-exist.

In recent years, human geographers increasingly have been exploring ideas of nature in light of the processes of urbanisation (Benton-Short and Rennie, 2008; Kaika, 2005; Gandy, 2005). In this regard, nature and cities are both regarded as 'socio-natures' and 'nature-cultures', neither purely human-made nor purely nature (Heynen et al., 2006;

Kaika, 2005: 5). Viewed in this way, cities are essentially 'natural' (Gandy, 2003; Harvey, 1996), and their residents and infrastructure are perceived as being "built in nature, with nature, through nature" (Keil and Graham, 1998: 104). Indeed, cities are appropriate locations for understanding how nature is inseparable from human practices (Pincetl, 2007).

In summary, nature is understood to be both natural and social - like the people who construct it - and ideas of nature also exist in a web of social relations. Nature may also be shaped as well as used instrumentally for a variety of purposes and benefits. Since the focus of this thesis is on community gardens, and the extent to which they influence gardeners' ethnicity, it is critical to appreciate how the socially constructed character of these spaces does not occur in isolation from broader social and political urban processes. To make sense of my empirical research and to bridge ideas of nature and society, I will now draw critically from strands of political ecology.

2.4 Political Ecology

The theoretical lens of political ecology deepens the study's analysis of human-human and human-natural relations in community gardens. Research in political ecology remains highly diverse and varies in substantive focus (Robbins, 2004; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987, Escobar, 1999; Peet and Watts, 1993; Blaikie, 1985, Wolf, 1972). Though the term is loosely defined in the literature, its core premise is that environmental problems have social and political definitions, implications, and origins. This perspective thus diverges from 'apolitical' perspectives on ecological concerns (Kaplan, 1994). Political ecological analysis in part entails the consideration of three issues 1) who the resources' users are and the social relations in which they entwine, 2) the linkages of these localised social relations to wider geographical and social settings, and 3) the historical processes which underpin the contemporary situation (Paulson et al., 2004; Brown, 1998; Walker, 1998; Moore, 1993). These issues help to interrogate the process whereby individuals become 'victims' of environmental degradation and the relationship between the environment and social, economic, and political processes (Robbins, 2004; Pezzoli, 2000; Bryant, 1998).

The theoretical positioning of the literature tends to unpack how social relations of power have profound implications for how nature is perceived and used by different

groups of people on multiple scales, and how asymmetrical power relations can configure social, economic, and environmental disadvantage (Passi, 2004; Walker, 1998; Peet and Watts, 1993; Blaikie, 1994; Blaike and Brookfield, 1987; Pred, 1984). The political ecological research of the 1980s was largely concerned with how ecological change on local scales is contextualised within broader historical, political and economic processes (Bassett, 1988; Blaikie and Brookfield, 1987; Blaikie, 1985). Much of this early research, though, reflects a one-way approach that predominately focuses in on how accumulation possibilities of the dominant classes influence poor people and the environment. Black's (1990: 44) work, for instance, underscores how local political structures can affect environmental outcomes in ways that are not necessarily state decisions imposed from above. Other researchers (Bailey and Bryant, 1997; Peet and Watts, 1996) also identify a neglect of politics in Blaikie's (1985) study on soil erosion, and identify how local conflicts over land resources can impact wider political processes also. One impact of this more recent scholarship is the growing awareness of how socially vulnerable people play a role in shaping and co-producing nature and environmental knowledge (Braun, 2002; Escobar, 1998; Zimmerer, 1991).

More recently, the scope of political ecology has shifted from the rural and third world to the global North, providing a nuanced understanding of the production of urban and industrialised settings (Hagerman, 2007; Evans, 2007; Gandy, 2003; Keil, 2003). In an age where the majority of the world's population resides in and continues to migrate into cities, political ecology contextualised within urbanisation processes is particularly relevant to today's socio-geographical realities (Clark, 2003). Political-economic and environmental processes drive urban transformations, which constitute a particular set of social power relations that in turn continuously produce socio-ecological urban change (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1997; Harvey, 1996). In the first world urban context, political ecology appreciates the deliberate and systematic reshaping of landscapes, and recognises the wider political, economic, and historical-geographical influences on the urbanisation of nature and the differential access to environmental resources (Smith, 2010; Pincetl, 2007; Swyngedouw, 2006; Harvey, 1996).

In America, contemporary urban societal relations derive their character from capitalism. Capitalism is driven by the political and economic processes that produce nature as forms of capital to be appropriated by socio-economic order (Harvey, 2005;

Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Walker, 1998). These processes 'metabolise' nature into social matters of social production (Smith, 2010). The significance of metabolism in this sense is that nature is conceptualised, used, and transformed for social, political, and economic ends by both resource users and non-users (Keil, 2003; Swyngedouw, 1996). This concept draws critical attention to the power relations between actors and institutions (e.g. land users, non-profit organisations, and government agencies) that are intertwined with differential access to resources in society, and how ideas of nature can be manipulated, co-produced, and mobilised for specific socio-political interests in multiple ways (Harvey, 2006). In this way, space is an 'entity' in social power relations that is constantly shaped and reshaped by people, objects, organisations and language, which are themselves each made and remade through social power relations (Braun, 2006; Heynen et al., 2006; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Smith, 1994).

One prevailing theme in the political ecological literature is that environmental issues are deeply imbricated in the capitalist notions of power and accumulation, and capitalism is one cause of environmental degradation (Robertson, 2004; Harvey, 1996). In this regard, short-term profit motivation and the profit-driven interests of the government both encourage behaviour that allows for the degradation of environments (Harvey, 1993). The neo-liberal rationale also involves government cuts to some public and basic institutions of civil society, which tends to undermine the non-commodified public spheres of life (Giroux and Giroux, 2006). As such, the metabolism of nature is dominated by the exploitation of modern industrial society, which tends to serve the interests of the elite at the expense of underprivileged populations (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Rocheleau and Edmunds, 1997).

In particular, work in urban political ecology is deeply concerned with inequalities, injustices, and grassroots activism, often linking environmental themes with social struggles (Walker, 2012: 72; Evans, 2007: 131). Insights into political ecology therefore intersect with the key concerns of the environmental justice movement since they work to develop an analysis of environmental problems, people's exposure to environmental perturbations, and the uneven degradation of both environments and human lives (Walker, 2012: 72; Keil, 2003; Bryant, 2001: 153). When coupled with the politics of environmental justice, political ecology becomes a powerful tool for comprehending produced natures and socio-ecological relations (Smith, 2006: xiv). Largely for this reason, there has been an increasing trend to tie together the political ecology

framework with the recent corpus of environmental justice research (Walker, 2012; Heynen et al., 2006; Pelling, 2003; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003), which the following sub-section discusses.

2.4.1   Environmental Justice

Environmental justice research underlines how certain societal groups face greater environmental problems relative to others (Walker, 2012; Swyngedouw and Kaika, 2000; Pulido, 2000; Swyngedouw, 1996; Bullard, 1994). Research also addresses the inequitable application of environmental protection policies for vulnerable groups, and how these groups struggle to gain access to more salubrious environments (Pastor et al., 2005; Cutter et al., 2000; Pulido et al., 1996; Cutter, 1995; Bullard, 1994). In general, the US environmental justice movement has been analysed in terms of 'framing' and 'claims-making'. The former is about making sense of the world through normative ideas and visions, identifying problems and the culprits, and creating viable solutions for these problems (Benford and Snow, 2000). The latter is the process of articulating ideas about the conditions of a situation and the extent to which it is unjust (Taylor, 2000). By compiling evidence to show how some people disproportionately face environmental pollution and disadvantage, the uneven processes of urbanisation are the praxis around which groups negotiate the distribution of and access to resources broadly defined as environmental, political, and social (Sze, 2007: 10; Cutter, 1995: 156).

In America, research in environmental justice implies taking issues of race and class seriously (Pulido, 2000). The US-based study conducted by the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice is highly regarded as a fundamental benchmark in the literature (Weinberg, 1998). This 1987 study was among the first to document occurrences of environmental injustices, and reveal how race configures access to (un)salubrious urban environments (Cole and Foster, 2001). Since then, a number of studies have explored the idea that race is inherent in people's experiences of environmental injustice and that race and environmental justice are mutually constitutive (Romm, 2002; Alba et al., 2000; Pulido, 2000; Bullard, 1994). Specifically, studies underline how 'people of colour' face disproportionate environmental injustices, and how their access to healthy environments is adversely affected by political marginalisation and deeply-rooted institutionalised racism (Pulido, 2000; Bullard, 1994). Indeed, Bullard (1994:15) points out that in America, "communities are not

created equal". This is evidenced in the studies that show how 'people of colour', who are generally regarded as members of the African American and Latino communities, are often relegated to poor, polluted, and socially marginalised neighbourhoods that are away and separate from the more affluent and prosperous white neighbourhoods (Alba et al., 2000; Alba et al., 1995). As a result, notions of race are found to be embedded in the spatial distribution of communities, and elite and white communities seemingly reap disproportionately the benefits of government and state natural resource policies (Bullard, 1994). Given that race signifies an axis of subordination and institutionalised discrimination, race clearly cannot be divorced from environmental justice issues.

Since the current study is concerned with ethnicity, it imperative to highlight here how much of the above literature on environmental justice is couched in terms of primordial notions of race, and how the relationship between people and marginalised landscapes is deterministic. In effect, this phenomenon overshadows the theory that ideas of ethnicity can constantly shift according to changing instrumental values of producing and shaping racial categories (Omi and Winant, 1994). It also ignores the theory that the lived dynamics of everyday environmental degradation can (re)shape notions of self and influence people's conceptualisations of nature (Sze, 2007). Di Chiro (1995: 301) argues that 'people of colour' do not have innate and universal cultural norms and behaviours, and consequently they may have different ideas of nature and culture depending on where they "work, live and play". Nonetheless, factoring in notions of race through environmental justice activism captures how the concept can be a powerful political tool to challenge these systems of rule and authority, and mobilise people in a unified effort to gain resources and collective goals (Di Chiro, 1995). In this regard, notions of race are understood to be a socially constructed difference embedded in the fabric of modern social relations (Sundberg, 2008). Appreciating contemporary environmental justice activism entails exploring how actors draw and (re)interpret racial categories in the context of asserting their interests and claiming distinct environmental justice goals (Solano, 2005).

The inequitable distribution of and access to urban green spaces is a prominent and growing environmental justice concern (Pincetl, 2007; Heynen, et al., 2006; Bullard, 1994). Urban green spaces can be broadly defined as spaces in a city that have either natural or planted vegetation (Girling and Kellett, 2005: 57). Research on the benefits of urban green spaces is extensive. These spaces have been found to improve physical and

psychological health, as well as provide various ecosystem services such as air filtration, noise reduction, and storm-water infiltration (Heynen, 2006; Kaplan, 2001; Gobster, 2001; Armstrong, 2000). Urban green spaces are important environmental resources in cities (Maas et al., 2006), and the social power relations that configure people's (in)accessibility to these spaces have environmental justice implications (Pincetl, 2007). Heynen et al. (2006) explain how the privatisation of urban green spaces such as parks creates economic and cultural barriers that restrict marginalised groups' access to these resources. The prevailing trend here is that residential property values tend to rise as private investors restore parks and many marginalised groups are unable to afford the rising costs (Tajima, 2003; Hanna, 2000). Dooling (2009) describes this phenomenon as 'ecological gentrification', as low-income minorities are displaced from their neighbourhoods owing to increased rents and environmental improvements, and then forced to move into economically depressed areas characterised by ongoing environmental degradation, economic disinvestment, and high poverty rates.

Environmental justice also includes public and human health concerns, such as food justice, which interrogates people's access to healthy food (Levkoe, 2006; Heynen et al., 2006). Food has been used as a metaphor for urban power structures, representing a product and a reflection of the organisation of society (Levkoe, 2005; Counihan 1999; 6). To this end, Heynen (2006: 139) argues that appreciating how people face barriers to food access, a phenomenon commonly termed as 'food insecurity', is central to understanding the social production of urban inequality. He explains how urban hunger is both a natural condition and a socially produced phenomenon through the power relations that dictate who eats what and how much, and who goes hungry. Social power relations are thus inherent in urban food systems and cannot be divorced from the political ecological systems under which they operate within on multiple scales (*Ibid*: 129).

The concept of 'food deserts' is a prevailing theme in the research on food justice. This concept is used to demarcate the low-income urban neighbourhoods where food accessibility is especially difficult. The theme is commonly explored by measuring an area's proximity to or distance from the nearest food store (Zenk et al., 2005, Larsen and Gilliland, 2008). The absence of large supermarkets in low-income inner-city neighbourhoods especially embodies a prevalent theme in existing research on food injustices and food deserts (Gottlieb and Fisher, 1996; Morland et al. 2002). Many low-

income neighbourhoods have been found to be served by smaller, non-chain stores, and these stores not only rarely supply healthy foods, but the food also tends to be more expensive than similar purchases in wealthier neighbourhoods (Winne, 2008; Bolen and Hecht, 2006; Lawson and Knox, 2002). Specifically, Helling and Sawicki (2003) found that 'communities of colour' face higher incidences of food injustices than whites even after they controlled income as a mediating variable in their analysis of food deserts. Largely for this reason, food injustices are also attributed to nutritional and diet-related health problems in these disadvantaged communities. For example, numerous studies have shown that Latinos in the US suffer from disproportionably high rates of diabetes, poor nutrition, and obesity (Vitiello et al., 2008; Dixon et al., 2007; Caballero, 2005). This in part implies a linkage between diet and health, and the probability of Latinos residing in food deserts and facing challenges to purchasing and having a healthy food intake.

Food informs ideas of identities in ways that other environmental justice issues, like access to water, do not (Alkon et al., 2011: 10). Winson (1993) refers to food as an 'intimate commodity', which has an exchange-value but it is nonetheless consumed and imbued with symbols of cultural histories, traditions, and proclivities. This idea shifts our focus on food from merely something that has nutritional value to its ability to express social power relations and membership in a group. It also assumes that food has agency and forms of sociality across time and space and within social networks (Heynen, 2006).

One final important observation on environmental and food justice relates to encompassing a diversity of conceptions of nature and ideas of environmental problems and solutions. Pulido and Pena (1998) suggest that identifying the positionality of a person's location within the broader socio-political network is important, since people in different geographic, historical, political, and institutional contexts may understand environmental concepts differently. This difference might reflect the varied cultural understandings of nature and experiences of environmental degradation, as well as people's conflicting interests (Forsyth, 2013; Holifield, 2001). In this context, research draws attention to how low-income 'communities of colour' may experience the environment, politics, and everyday life differently from white, middle- and upper-class communities (Taylor, 2000), and that notions of environmental problems are not even understood uniformly among members of the same marginalised communities (Di

Chiro, 1995). Moreover, Holifield (2001: 79) underlines how environmental justice policy-making is dominated by individuals whose training and cultural experience is based on western ideological and 'scientific' traditions. Indeed, Alkon et al. (2009: 2) note particularly how the food justice movement resonates most deeply with white, middle-class and 'like-minded' individuals who have similar backgrounds, values, and proclivities, and who also share similar conclusions about how the food system needs to change. As such, environmental justice issues and concerns function as part of the societal power hegemony.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out the theoretical framework that underpins the thesis. In the first section I explored ethnicity and how the phenomenon is a lens through which people understand and interact with the world. I discussed the three traditional research paradigms on ethnicity: primordialism, instrumentalism, and social constructionism. I reviewed the central debates from each school of thought, and also drew critical attention to the strengths and limitations of each approach. I then highlighted the significance and formation of both pan-ethnicity and sub-ethnicity, which will help capture the potentially divergent expressions of ethnicity and the relevance of gardeners' social-contextual conditions. I drew on ideas from social capital theory, and emphasised its complex, intangible quality, one that is perhaps impossible to accurately quantify (Adler and Kwon, 2002: 22; Burt, 1997). Thus, I use the concept of social capital somewhat metaphorically in this thesis, and I particularly explore participants' formal and informal gatherings and the significance of gardeners' social bonds for understanding their patterns of socialisation in the garden.

In the second section, I discussed ideas from the social construction of nature theory. I explored how knowledge of nature is socially determined, and how ideas of 'the natural' are not uniform, universal or extra-human (Castree, 2001; Phillips, 1998; Naveh, 1995). The concept of socio-nature elucidates the interconnectivity between natural and social categories and processes (Askins, 2009; Procter, 2004; Swyngedouw, 1996), and social phenomena may be read through material objects (Greider and Garkovich, 1994). This idea entails 'denaturalising' people's language and knowledge of nature - a process that works to reveal how social meanings and moral considerations of nature are inherent in how people interact and think about with nature (Drenthen et al., 2009; Hanssen, 2001).

Scholarship also identifies that food and food crops are prevalent and commonly-used semiotic systems for expressing notions of self and community (Christie, 2004; Kimber, 2004). I engaged with concepts of memory by theorising how it elides elements of the past *and* present (Marcus, 1992). Drawing together the work of urban human geographers, I concluded by underlining how urbanisation shapes and is shaped by social and natural processes (Benton-Short and Rennie 2008; Gandy 2003; Keil and Graham, 1998).

Finally, I explored how ideas of ethnicity and nature are of particular interest to urban politics since these phenomena are used to apply, reinforce, and respond to societal power structures (Kaika, 2005; Keil, 2003). The third section thus draws on political ecology scholarship (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003) to identify tools for determining the extent to which community gardening is an instrumental and political activity. Important political ecology principles that inform this research include the social positioning of actors involved with environmental issues, the socio-historical significance of environmental degradation, and the field of power relations in producing socio-ecological transformations (Robbins, 2004; Lipietz, 1995). Specifically, the analysis is positioned to interrogate the tensions that mount over access to urban resources and how vulnerable communities struggle to gain access to more salubrious environments. Within political ecology, the environmental justice approach (Walker, 2012) interrogates the roots of institutionalised racism inherent in environmental politics and resource use. Exploring people's access to and usage of urban green spaces provides much insight into the cityscape and the power relations that determine a group's social, political, and economic position in society (Pincetl, 2007). The treatment of race in the literature is constituted in time and place (Sundberg, 2008), and I reflect on this idea in the context of notions of ethnicity being used as a tactic by actors for various political and social purposes (Sze, 2007; Escobar, 1998; Di Chiro, 1995). In order to address the full range of strategies and tactics that community gardeners and their supports enact in gardens, I will now introduce the socio-ecological milieu of the location of fieldwork and the US contemporary community garden movement.

Chapter 3 Background

3.1 Introduction

In order to contextualise the arguments presented about community gardening in the proceeding chapters, and emphasise the relevancy of the study's selected community gardens for answering the research questions, I offer here a brief overview of the case study. This study takes place in NYC, a city that lies on the United States' north-eastern Atlantic coast, on the south-eastern point of New York State. The City consists of five boroughs each comprised of numerous neighbourhoods with distinct history and character. Ethnographic fieldwork is based in one of the City's five boroughs - the Bronx - and in its 16th congressional district, an area widely referred to as the South Bronx.

In the chapter's first section, I explore the social and political processes that have shaped and reshaped the human and physical geography of the district and its community gardens. I then provide a brief historical overview of the contemporary garden movement and underline the considerable diversity among the City's community gardens in terms of size, aesthetics, and organisation. In the second section, I review the distinct characteristics of each of the three case studies through historical accounts and contemporary typologies. This chapter will also incorporate a number of direct quotes from gardeners to capture the voice of participants. As in all sections of this dissertation, these quotes are the exact words and sentences of the participants. In addition, unless otherwise indicated, I photographed all the images in this thesis during the course of fieldwork.

3.2 The Nature and Politics of Urban Decline

Beginning in the late 1960s, the processes involved in de-industrialisation resulted in many municipalities losing private investments and tax revenues as people - particularly those from the middle and upper classes - moved away from city centres toward suburbs. The ensuing demographic shifts left a great deal of inner-city land abandoned while reduced municipal budgets translated into a reduction of public services. Amid the economic downturn, federal policy failed to provide a safety net against social and structural inequalities. City policy-makers accepted an idea of 'planned shrinkage' that entailed abandoning low-income neighbourhoods in the face of population shifts, capital

disinvestment, and physical decline (Zukin, 2009; Wallace, 1990). Whilst government cutbacks in the form of welfare and public service reductions were rife in lower-class neighbourhoods, public planning policies reflected concerted efforts to invest in 'worthwhile' and more affluent neighbourhoods (Neumark, 2012). This phenomenon contributed to the transformation of the City's landscape and the formation of class-segregated neighbourhoods (Kozol, 2002). Aponte-Pares (1997: 55) describes the sharp bifurcation between the City's neighbourhoods that were either tainted by pollution and high rates of joblessness on one hand, or were well-maintained and prosperous on the other, as "a unique form of an American urban apartheid". Overall, the processes of de-industrialisation, the trend of middle and upper-class residents and businesses pulling out of low-income urban areas, and social disintegration, which was strongly mediated by public policy, produced the unavoidable physical collapse and accelerating socio-economic crisis of NYC's low-income neighbourhoods (Wallace and Wallace, 1990).

Perhaps nowhere in NYC during the economic downturn was urban decay and social disintegration more pronounced than in the South Bronx. A number of researchers have underscored the severity of the South Bronx's collapse by describing the area's downfall as a 'catastrophe' unparalleled to any other case in urban history (Gonzalez, 2004; Wallace, 1990; Glazer, 1987). When recounting the physical neglect, Rooney (1995) described the district as resembling a third world country within NYC, which itself looked like the German cities of Berlin and Dresden immediately after WWII (*Ibid*). Amidst the waves of disinvestment, countless buildings and lots were abandoned and they eventually became sites for illegal garbage dumping, drug dealing, crime and vandalism. Many landlords and tenants also opted to burn their properties in hopes of collecting insurance sums. As outbreaks of fire ravished through the area, City fire-fighting units were either disbanded outright or reduced in the district (Wallace, 1990). The conflagrations that took hold of the South Bronx ostensibly exacerbated the area's already high unemployment rates and housing abandonments, and they also had a devastating impact on the lives of its residents, too (*Ibid*). In the latter half of the 20th century, media images of the South Bronx in flames became national emblems of urban decay (Freudenberg et al., 1999).

Just a short bus or subway ride away from north Manhattan, which is home to one of the richest areas in the world, poverty-stricken South Bronx remains to be the poorest congressional district in the entire country. Compared to the rest of NYC, this area is

notorious for having twice the rate of poverty (85% of the residents receive public assistance), higher rates of health problems (e.g. asthma and obesity), the densest concentration of public housing in the nation, and it is also home of some of the most heavily trafficked highways in the nation (Checkoway et al. 2008; Gonzalez, 2004; Maantay 2001). Coupled with the fact that sewage treatments, waste-recycling plants, and incinerators that burn hazardous waste from around the City are located in this area, scholars have often referred to the South Bronx as the City's 'toilet' (Neumark, 2012; Rooney, 1995).

3.2.0   The Puerto Rican Experience in New York City

The great migrations from Puerto Rico (which has been a US colony since 1898 and its residents American citizens since 1917) to mainland America began in the 1940s and 1950s. During this period, a number of 'push' and 'pull' factors encouraged migration, including post-war labour recruitment campaigns, more affordable rates of air transportation for rural and working-class people, and the island's growing economic and political dependence on the mainland (Durand and Massey, 2010; Gandy, 2002; Rooney, 1995; Rodriguez, 1994). Vast numbers of Puerto Ricans migrated toward the promise of employment opportunities in the country's manufacturing sector, and most notably to the northern metropolises such as NYC (Korrol, 1994). By the 1970s, the concentrated exodus of people resulted in more Puerto Ricans living in the NYC and the surrounding metropolitan areas than in San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital city (Sowell, 1981: 231).

America's post-war political and economic shift - from a production oriented economy to a service oriented economy - forced many Puerto Ricans out of employment. The new arrivals faced a shortage in available manufacturing jobs whilst insufficient sources of alternative and desirable employment opportunities remained (Rooney, 1995: 42). They were often restricted to menial and poorly paid work - if they were able to find work at all - and they also faced imminent relocation to impoverished and disenfranchised neighbourhoods with dilapidated housing, inadequate access to basic public services and already high rates of unemployment (Gandy, 2003: 161; Wallace, 1981). Specifically, the community's vulnerable social and economic position contributed to many Puerto Rican migrants (re)settling in the South Bronx, where a large majority of Puerto Ricans in NYC continue to reside until this day (Rodriguez,

1994; Tienda, 1989; Wallace, 1981). Their large presence in the district has resulted in the election of Herman Badillo in 1965, the borough's first Puerto Rican president, and then later to Fernando Ferrer in 1987 and Jose Serrano in 1990.

The pattern of settlement to disintegrating urban areas with extremely high levels of unemployment and little public services has contributed to the Puerto Rican experience of 'persistent disadvantage' in mainland America (Rodriguez, 1994). Educational attainment, language disparities, the concentration in low-wage services, political marginalisation, and finally, job, health, and residential discrimination based on culture and social class are also all regarded as relevant factors to understanding their disadvantage (Benjamins, 2012; Melendez and Visser, 2011; Thomas, 2010; Rodriguez, 1994). Their plight has received quite a bit of public attention: from the Broadway musical West Side Story to government and scholarly reports that underline the community's socio-economic adversities (Martinez, 2010; Pérez, 2004; Gandy, 2003; Aponte-Pares, 1997; Rodrigues, 1994). Hip-hop also became a popular musical expression for Puerto Ricans in the City to publicly voice the hardships of living in the South Bronx (Hill et al., 2013). The reality of this community inhabiting specific socio-spatial locations characterised by poverty and despair elucidates the susceptibility and vulnerability of Puerto Ricans to socio-ecological burdens and hardships. The continued persistence and growing awareness of inequalities and socio-political discrimination led some Puerto Ricans taking matters into their own hands, and along this line, the following section will discuss the emergence of NYC's community garden movement.

3.2.1   The Development of the Contemporary Community Garden Movement

The American account of contemporary community gardening links the activity with the economic downturn of the late 1960s and 1970s, and the ensuing socio-ecological crisis in low-income areas (Zukin, 2009; Lawson, 2005; Smith and Kurtz, 2003; Schmelzkopf, 1995). This account contributes to the interpretation of community gardens as valuable social and natural resources, and especially in impoverished areas (Von Hassell, 2002; Schukoske, 1999). In a comprehensive review of the development of contemporary community gardening in America, Lawson (2005: 3) defines community gardens as 'communal resources' since they improve the neighbourhoods and living conditions of low-income groups. As such, community gardens were predominantly established and still tend to be located in marginalised areas of the City.

These low-income neighbourhoods tend to demarcate African American and Latino communities from white ones (Alba et al., 2000), and largely for this reason, the great majority of NYC's community gardens are tended by members of these ethnic minority communities (Eizenberg, 2012; Martinez, 2010; Von Hassell, 2002).

Contemporary community gardening also arose along with country's civil rights movement (Ferris et al., 2001). During this time, social and political groups like the Black Panthers and Young Lords emerged to help provide food and basic social services to marginalised ethnic minority groups. Indeed, one of the first initiatives of the Young Lords was to address the dangers of garbage not being collected by NYC's sanitation department in largely Puerto Rican and low-income enclaves (Gandy, 2003). The Young Lord's decision to burn garbage was devised as a complaint and a clear political act against the City's abandonment of its Puerto Rican residents. Similarly, community gardening was also seen as a type of political act that worked to resist the further deterioration of low-income neighbourhoods (Zukin, 2009). Many disenfranchised residents aimed to 'reconquer' the City and address the dangers posed by derelict and trash-infested lots in their neighbourhoods (Schmelzkopf, 2002). As previously mentioned, the great majority of these derelict lots had been created by arsonists and left abandoned by landlords during the economic downturn. As a result, these spaces were legally in the hands of the Municipality who seized many in substitute of the owners' unpaid taxes. Whilst establishing these gardens, many low-income residents ignored questions of legal land ownership when they transformed lots - from junk-laden spaces "complete with hypodermic needles, empty crack vials, and rusting appliances" - into community gardens (Schmelzkopf, 1995: 371-72). In this way, community gardening emerged as an "audacious act of civil disobedience and hope" (Zukin, 2009: 199).

The South Bronx has the greatest number of community gardens in the City as well as a significantly large cohort of Puerto Rican residents (Checkoway et al., 2008). As a result, Puerto Ricans have especially taken an active role in forming and tending to community gardens. It is also relevant to note that prior to the 1980s, the great majority of Puerto Rican migrants to NYC had originated from the rural areas of the island and had work experience in the agricultural sector (Flores, 2000). The transformation of urban lots into community gardens thus implied putting to use many migrants' building and agricultural skills - a 'recovery' of many Puerto Ricans' agrarian past (Arroyo, 2010; Sciorra and Cooper, 1990: 156). Partly for this reason, the literature on community

gardens tends to emphasise how these spaces enable Puerto Ricans to celebrate their national identity and cultural background (Arroyo, 2010; Winterbottom, 2007). This phenomenon offers a broader description of gardens as spaces that allow for the plethora of social and cultural activities.

The relationship between gardeners and the Municipality is not on neutral ground. In 1978, the City essentially legitimised gardens on abandoned public land through the establishment of Operation Green Thumb, a gardening program part of the NYC Department of General Services (Staeheli et al., 2002). Indeed, the word 'Operation' gave this program a military sounding name, clearly reflecting the severity of the situation for low-income residents in declining neighbourhoods (Mees and Stone, 2009; Lawson, 2005). In effect, the Municipality welcomed community garden development since these spaces helped to improve the conditions of urban blight, and the grassroots initiative did not entail huge sums from City budget (Von Hassell, 2002). By 1985, NYC had more than 1,000 community gardens (Hynes, 1996), and the program offered leases, resources, and technical assistance to gardeners (Staeheli et al., 2002). However, the Municipality maintained legal access to these lots and the gardens' leases contained provisions that protected the City's right to remove the garden at its own discretion (Zukin, 2009; Fox, 2005: 773).

The lukewarm relationship between the Municipality and community gardeners began to grow colder by the early 1990s, when the American economy started recovering from its recession. At this time, real estate developers had new sources of financing and City officials were eager to exploit them (Zukin, 2009). With no official legislation in place to protect and preserve community gardens, the renewed feasibility of private investment promoted the City's administration to propose selling these spaces to investors (Eizenberg, 2012). The word 'Operation' was also removed from the Green Thumb program's name, which indicated the administration's changing values of community gardens in light of the growing economy (*Ibid*). With competing interests to redevelop the gardens for other purposes, the City's former Mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, transferred the gardening program over to the Department of Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD), which was an act that reinforced the idea that gardens should be redeveloped into housing - something that the Mayor claimed was the most pressing of all needs in the City. However, when the administration first sold a block of gardens in the 1990s, there were no restrictions in place as to how the lots could be developed

(Martinez, 2010). This suggests that the construction of housing developments was not necessarily enforced.

In 1999, the City announced the auctioning of 112 community gardens. This declaration generated a great deal of media attention and public sympathy to the plight of the community gardeners (Martinez, 2010; Lawson, 2005). Eliot Spitzer, the former State Attorney General, sued the City that same year for violating New York's environmental laws. These laws required an environmental assessment of land use changes through the sale of public properties (Mees and Stone, 2009). The result was a temporary restraining order to stop the auctioning of community gardens, and later that same year, after Mayor Michael Bloomberg's inauguration, a Community Gardens Agreement was reached. According to the Agreement, 500 community gardens would be transferred over to the Parks Department on condition that they were registered and licensed with the Green Thumb program. Another hundred gardens were destroyed or converted to housing, and the remaining hundred or so gardens were purchased by private foundations or left under the jurisdiction of other City agencies (Eizenberg, 2012: 6). All in all, by the end of the Giuliani years, an estimated 90 community gardens were bulldozed and turned over to developers (Zukin, 2009).

It is important to note that the crisis in the 1990s left a legacy for current gardeners, who now have a wide social network of support (Martinez, 2010). Gardeners won access, albeit temporary, to the land chiefly due to the wide range of support they received from beyond their gardening groups (Zukin, 2009). During the crisis, community gardeners, politicians, non-profits, and members of the general public were able to preserve some of the gardens partly because they successfully banded together to do so (Martinez, 2010: 97; Smith and Kurtz, 2003: 201). New non-governmental organisations dedicated to supporting community gardeners also formed as a result of the crisis. Take for instance the establishment of the New York City Community Gardening Coalition (NYCCGC) in 1996, a non-profit organisation founded to foster a coalition of community garden communities to resist the threats of demolitions. This draws attention to the reality of how today's community gardeners rarely act alone. It also important to highlight that community gardens need to be in compliance with Green Thumb license terms, and this has some implications on a garden's provision and physical maintenance. For example, community gardens need to be open for general public visitation at least 20 hours per week, and these hours must be visibly posted on a

garden's gate. Therefore, networks of social connections and support are important for fully appreciating the practice of community gardening in NYC.

3.2.2   The Complexities of Community Gardening

Insecure land tenure and insufficient access to resources continues to be a significant challenge and concern for community gardeners (Lawson, 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Von Hassell, 2002). Gardeners need to constantly seek out external sources of support (Zukin, 2009), and the resources and supplies provided by the Green Thumb program often fall short of gardeners' basic needs (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004). As such, gardeners need to establish relations with various non-state actors who have access to physical and social resources. In doing so, gardeners may reform their priorities or find themselves being drawn into broader social matters as the public relations value of their gardens wane in favour of new topics (Baker, 2004; Von Hassell, 2002).

The literature on community gardens exposes how gardeners obtain tangible and meta-physical benefits from these spaces. Access to gardens may improve the mental well-being of individuals (Hanna and Oh, 2000), resist the further deterioration of under-served neighbourhoods (Aponte-Pares, 1997: 56-57), reduce crime and improve public health (Armstrong, 2000). Research also underlines how residents have come to treasure these spaces as sanctuaries from the hardships of inner-city living and insalubrious environments (Lawson, 2005; Lewis 1994). Community gardens, then, enable people to actively construct a better way of life (Von Hassell, 2002: 8).

Currently, public attention on community gardens has heavily shifted to a specific concern for food production (Firth et al., 2011; Baker, 2004; Von Hassell, 2002). This trend runs parallel with contemporary national policy and hegemonic ideas of healthy and organic produce, which particularly reflect the food ethics and identity of the middle-class (Buckingham, 2005). The significance of locally produced food also resonates with various mainstream health and environmental movements (Atkins and Bowler, 2001). Studies have pointed increasingly to the nation's exacerbating public health, and most notably to the prevalence of malnutrition and obesity (Guthman, 2008; Hamm and Bellows, 2003; Marsh, 1998). In these studies, the environment and lifestyle

are widely accepted as key determinants of health, and diet and food consumption play an important part of this.

The significance of income as an explanatory variable in understanding various health issues has in part prompted health professionals, urban planners, community organisers, and policy-makers to frame and conceptualise community gardens as sites that help improve and prevent various health problems (King, 2008; Holland, 2004; Baker, 2004: 308; Kingsley and Townsend, 2006; Ferris et al., 2001; Brown and Jameton, 2000). Community gardeners are recognised as being mainly composed of low-income individuals who tend to reside in neighbourhoods without equal access to healthy food (Lawson, 2005). Particularly since food production is among the features that distinguish community gardens from other types of urban green space, garden campaigns have emphasised gardeners' food-growing activities as important and key distinguishing characteristics of these spaces. This emphasis is an important factor in the resurgence in popularity of community gardens in many developed market economies, including the US (Firth et al., 2011; Baker, 2004). In NYC, legislative actions have described community gardens by their agriculture uses, and the trend is growing as many US cities now have urban agriculture ordinances and zoning use categories that define community gardens as a land use form which is focused on food production (Mees and Stone, 2012: 5). In effect, stressing gardens' capacity to grow food and their ability to address public health concerns in inner-city neighbourhoods provides community gardeners with a lifeline for the future (Zukin, 2009).

NYC is home to one of the most active community garden movements in the country. The City holds about 600 community gardens on private and public land (Mees and Stone, 2012). The City's Green Thumb program is also currently the nation's largest urban gardening program (Eizenberg, 2011). Community gardens, though, are far from homogeneous entities. Each community garden may have a unique history and social context, which may influence, among many other things, how gardeners perceive and use the space. In general, Martinez (2010) explains that community gardens generally fall under two main categories: Casitas or Formal gardens (note the capitalisation of the categorical names). She elucidates how Casitas are often used and managed by low-income, island born Puerto Ricans who tend to be older in age and who migrated to the City in the 1950s and 1960s. The name used to refer to this type of garden originated from their physical hallmark - the casita - or little house. The casitas are a form of

Caribbean vernacular architecture that is associated with the island's working poor in preindustrial, rural landscapes (Aponte-Pares, 1997: 56; Sciorra and Cooper, 1990). Formal gardens, in contrast, are predominantly used and managed by an ethnically diverse membership base, and the gardening group also tends to be loosely constructed (Martinez, 2010). By considering Puerto Rican gardeners from both types of gardens, this investigation is positioned to gain a deeper understanding of the relevance of social relations in the understanding and expression of ethnicity and knowledge of nature in gardens. Comparing the data will also enable research to better explore and test the theories discussed and applied in this study's theoretical framework.

Furthermore, some community gardens are located on the privately owned land of non-profit organisations, and most notably the Trust for Public Land (TPL) or the New York Restoration Project (NYRP). This phenomenon relates back to the garden crisis in the 1990s, and how these organisations purchased gardens on public land to prevent them from being sold for redevelopment. Privately-owned community gardens often have paid organisational staff members who maintain the space (Eizenberg, 2011). In stark contrast, members of public gardens, which are mainly under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department, maintain the space voluntarily. For this reason, a number of researchers have asserted that members of public gardens take it upon themselves to plan and care for these spaces, and with a great deal of freedom too (Eizenberg, 2011; Tidball and Krasny, 2009; Holland, 2004; Stocker and Barnett, 1998). Since public gardens necessitate the participation of gardeners in the organisation and management of the space, this study's three garden case studies will all be on publically-owned land.

In the section that follows, I provide background information about the two Casitas and the Formal community garden selected as case studies. It is important to note that the data gathered from each site is primarily based on verbal recollections: literature is scarce. Though the research draws on some online sources, the data is predominantly based on the narratives of gardeners, non-profit representatives and civil servants. I cross-checked the data to verify that the historical information provided was consistent.

3.3 Garden Profiles

This section represents an essential prelude to the discussion of ethnicity and nature, which lies at the heart of this investigation. I will briefly describe each of the three

garden case studies, which include two Casita gardens and one Formal garden. I provide some information about the establishment of each garden, the spaces' physical layout, and its provisional policies. Rather than always using full names, gardeners are identified by a certain number and the first letter of their garden's name. As the methodology chapter discusses, these numbers were randomly assigned to each participant in order to protect his or her identity.

3.3.1 El Flamboyan Community Garden

Figure 3.1 The El Flamboyan Community Garden, located on Tinton Avenue at the corner of 150th Street. Displayed using Microsoft Bing Maps.

The El Flamboyan community garden (hereon in referred to as El Flamboyan) was established in 1988 by a group of five Puerto Ricans, which included two of this study's participants. This garden was first located on 750 East 152nd Street at the corner Concord Avenue. Gardeners accounted for the derelict lot before its transformation into a community garden. They mentioned how the lot was frequented by drug dealers and was also a site of illegal garbage dumping. In 2002, the City selected the garden, which

at that time was under the jurisdiction of the HPD, for a new housing development. In an effort to save the slated garden, the garden's coordinator (who at the point of study remained in the position) garnered a coalition of support from various community leaders and local organisations against the City's proposal. Unfortunately, these efforts to protect the garden from demolition were of no avail. However, a legal agreement between the garden and the City was reached in 2004. This agreement arranged for the garden to be relocated and rebuilt on a nearby derelict lot, on 580-592 Tinton Avenue at the corner of 150th Street, where it remains until this day. The garden is now under the jurisdiction of the Parks Department.

During the course of fieldwork, members organised and celebrated the following holidays in the garden: Halloween, Easter, Mother's and Father's Day, July 4th (Independence Day), Labour Day, Memorial Day, Thanksgiving and the Puerto Rican Parade Day. Many of these events were advertised to the wider public on the Parks Department's website. In addition, El Flamboyan hosted the Green Thumb program's annual community garden 'Harvest Fair', which was co-sponsored by the Bronx Green-Up program of The New York Botanical Garden. The garden also hosted an educational workshop co-organised by a local non-profit organisation called Just Food. Besides these more formally organised events and social gatherings, gardeners often came to the space to celebrate their birthdays. In figure 3.2, we see one gardener being surprised with a cake that had been purchased by the group on his birthday.

This garden had approximately 15 members. Five members, including the coordinator, had the key to the garden's main entrance. As captured in figure 3.3, the garden had a casita and inside the structure was a large table around which members often congregated. They also stored their eating utensils and condiments toward the back right hand corner of the casita, and during most social gatherings, trays of food were placed here too.

Figure 3.2 Celebrating birthdays in El Flamboyan.

Figure 3.3 A view of El Flamboyan's casita on Mother's Day.

Closely beside the casita to the left stood the portable toilet, and to the back there were fruit trees and a small chicken coop. There was also an open roasting pit, which was used to prepare the traditional Puerto Rican roasted pork or *lechon*. Next to this stood a tool shed that was partly connected to a large covered stage. The stage was decorated with pictures of members and of beaches and forests in Puerto Rico. During the garden's large social gatherings, a small sound system was set up and live bands played on the stage. Behind and adjacent to the stage was the garden's 'planting area'. This area was also sectioned off from the rest of the garden by a small fence. There were also two picnic tables, a small playground and children's play equipment.

3.3.2   United We Stand Community Garden

Figure 3.4 The United We Stand Community Garden, located on 137th Street between Cypress and St. Ann's Avenue. Displayed using Microsoft Bing Maps.

The United We Stand Garden (hereon in referred to as UWS) was founded in the early 1970s and it is located on 137th Street between Cypress and St. Ann's Avenue. As in El Flamboyan, all participants retold stories of the vacant lot before it was converted into a community garden. One informant [U3] summed up the accounts of others when he stated that "there was nothing here [before the garden], just garbage". Many gardeners

had also participated in the process of cleaning and transforming the space into a garden, and one gardener [U1] described the experience as a gruelling and even on-going process "we're still cleaning [the garden] here and there every day…the ground still has a lot of glass in it, but you wouldn't believe how it looked before".

The garden had about 20 members, and four gardeners had the key to the garden's main entrance. This garden also had a casita, which is captured in figure 3.5. There was a small open space adjacent to the casita, where there was a small pit for cooking the *lechon* and some low hanging shade trees and grape vines. Planting plots surrounded the casita and the outer edges of the garden.

Figure 3.5 A view of UWS's casita surrounded by gardeners' planting lots.

During the course of fieldwork, the following holidays were celebrated in the garden: Mother's and Father's Day, July 4th, Labour Day, Memorial Day, and Puerto Rican Parade Day. Some of these events were posted on the Parks Department's website, and gardeners also advertised them to their family and friends. Though there were no formally organised garden celebrations for some national holidays like Thanksgiving, gardeners often came to the garden on these days. On this note, one gardener [U3] described his sentiments about visiting the garden on Thanksgiving: "I feel like I can always come here…and on holidays, like this last Thanksgiving…I came here and I found the guys hanging out, and we just talked, relaxed, spent the day together…in the garden".

3.3.3   Brook Park Community Garden
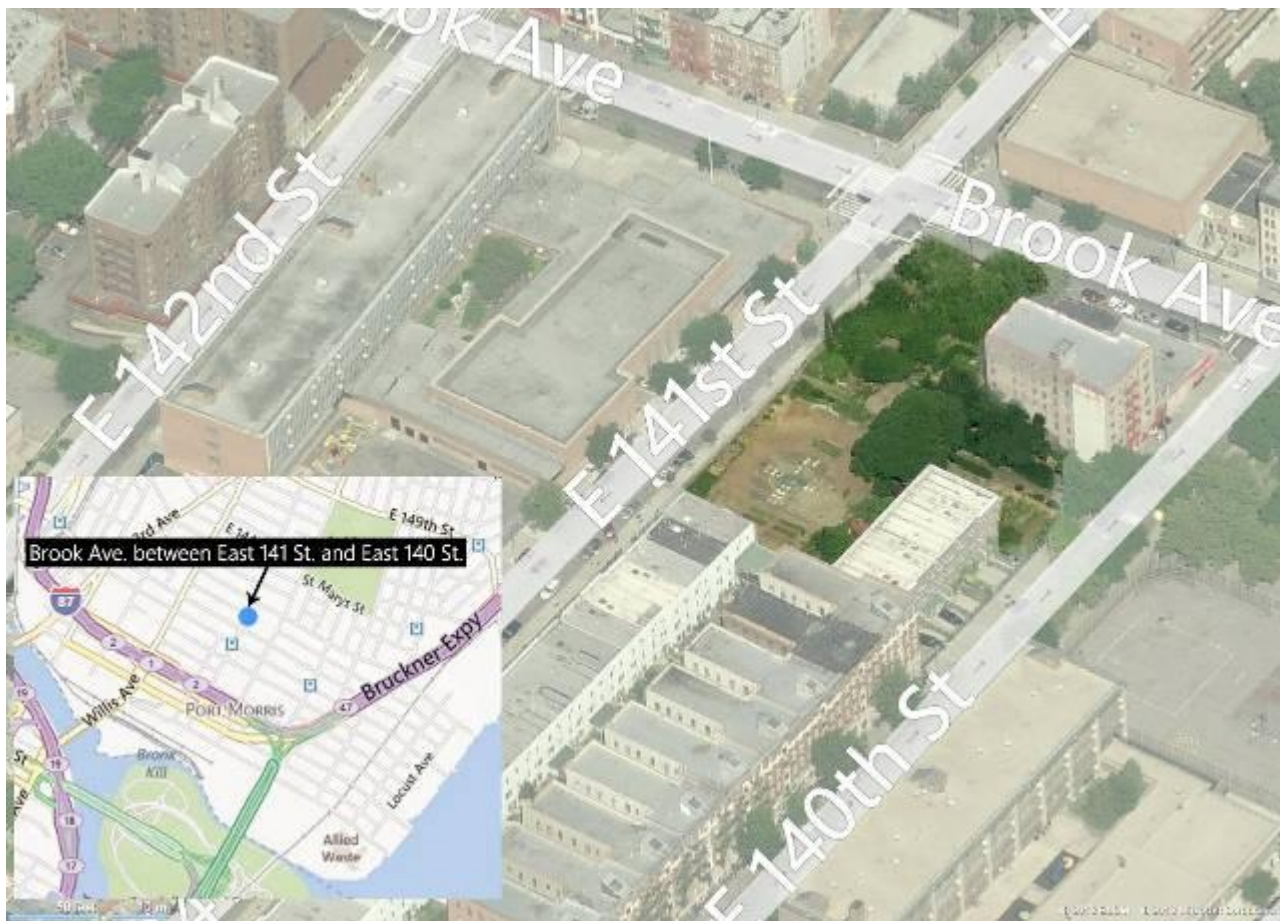
Figure 3.6 The Brook Park Community Garden, located on Brook Avenue between East 141st Street and East 140st Street. Displayed using Microsoft Bing Maps.

Brook Park was established on a small part of a large derelict lot in 1978 by a coalition called the South Bronx Open Space Task Force, which was composed of local residents from the proximate neighbourhood and other garden activists. The garden is located on

Brook Avenue between East 141st Street and East 140st Street. The development of this space was initially funded by a grant from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (a division of the US Department of the Interior) and the land became part of the Parks Department in 1979. In 1999, with the help of community activists and non-profit organisations, gardeners expanded the size of the garden to include the larger and remaining section of the once derelict lot.

There were eight raised planting beds in the garden's main planting area, and a glimpse of this area is provided below in figure 3.7. Toward the back end of the area there was a chicken coop constructed in September 2011, as illuminated by figure 3.8.

Figure 3.7 One gardener working in Brook Park's planting area.

Figure 3.8 Brook Park's chicken coop.

Beside the chicken coop, a large opening in a fence connected the planting area with the remaining section of the garden. Here, there was a wooden tool shed, and to the right of this structure there was a wooden sweat lodge and a fire pit. In figure 3.9, we see the sweat lodge in use by participants of an event planned by an organisation called the United Confederation of Taino People. Toward the far left end of the garden there was an area of raised garden beds that was sectioned off by a fence and a sign that read 'youth farm'. Although garden members watered and, at times, gathered some of the harvest from these planting beds, the area was predominantly tended by participants of youth educational programs organised in the garden by local youth groups and schools. As the following chapter discusses, the garden does not have an official membership count, and the garden's coordinator explained that "the whole community, the whole world is a member here at Brook Park".

Figure 3.9 Brook Park's sweat lodge.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the geographical and socio-historical context of community gardens in NYC. I underlined how contemporary community gardening arose from instances of urban decay following the economic downturn in the 1960s and 1970s. I discussed how low-income and marginalised residents converted derelict and publicly-owned lots into gardens, and explained how this was in part a political act to address the dangers wrought on by the City's neglect and social abandonment of marginalised communities. This phenomenon was especially prevalent in the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the US. I drew attention to the experiences of Puerto Rican migrants in NYC, and especially to the processes of urbanisation that have pushed this community to the poverty-stricken district. I then elucidated the complex and dynamic relationship between gardeners and the City, and how these spaces are politically contested in a political system where the interests of private investors triumph over gardeners' claims to the space. To defend community gardens from the onerous pressures of the market system, gardeners have established ties with the broader public for support for their cause. Until this day, gardeners remain a vulnerable group since they do not have permanent land tenure of the space, and they also struggle to gain resources and political legitimacy.

The last section of this chapter briefly discussed some of the physical and social particularities of the three community garden case studies. I provided some details about the formation of each garden and each gardens' physical layout. I also included some pictures to illuminate the physical typology of each garden, and maps to capture the geographical location of each site in the South Bronx. An important point to draw from this chapter is that community gardens are far from homogenous entities. This chapter also revealed the realities involved with contemporary garden provision, and it also provided the contextual basis for this study's main arguments. The next chapter will describe the current study's methodology for answering the research questions.

Chapter 4 Methods and Procedures

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce, explain and justify the study's methodology. I adopt qualitative research methods to answer the two research questions. These methods involved three main data gathering techniques; in-depth (semi-structured and open-ended) interviews, active participant observations, and discourse analyses. Two Casitas and one Formal community garden in the South Bronx were selected as case studies, and 17 Puerto Rican gardeners across the three sites were selected as research participants. The case studies enabled me to make in-depth comparisons and explore how gardeners expressed and enacted their knowledge of nature and ethnicity in different socio-contexts. I also interviewed state and non-state actors involved with the local or national garden movement, and in the provision of one of the three gardens. Including these participants in the research design allowed me to explore the social relations, strategies, and some of the diversity inherent in the contemporary community garden movement, and the kinds of local or broad agendas these actors develop.

This chapter is divided into five main sections. I start by setting out a qualitative methodological basis for the study. I then outline how I selected the case studies. These sites and the gardeners were not intended to be a representative sample of community gardens and gardeners in NYC. Rather, they enabled me to gain in-depth knowledge of localised garden designs and experiences, and the ways in which Puerto Rican gardeners described their daily practices and reflected on their work in different physical and socio-contexts. The final three sections describe how I gathered and analysed the empirical data. It is important to note here that I randomly assigned gardeners with a number and in most of the thesis I refer to garden participants by the first letter of their garden's name and their assigned number. While the great majority of gardeners were happy for their real names to be used in the study, for the purposes of consistency, participants are mainly referred to in this manner. I use the terms 'participant', 'informant', 'respondent', 'interviewee' and 'gardener' inter-changeably when referring to the study's group of gardeners. Fieldwork commenced on April 16, 2011 and finished on December 15, 2011.

4.2 Qualitative Multi-Case Narrative

The study's methodology is based on qualitative research methods. There are strong arguments for drawing on a qualitative methodological framework. First, these methods aim to achieve in-depth understandings of how and why people behave, think, and make meanings in context-dependent sites and situations (Baxter and Eyles, 1997). Empirical data is directly drawn from the people 'who live the information' by watching, talking, listening and participating in the particular activity under examination (Shkedi, 2005). The analysis also acknowledges relevant historical information and how the researcher is a variable in the data collection process (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In contrast, quantitative methods tend to be geared toward addressing static and stable research subjects, drawing on inferential methods and materials to discover 'value-free' and 'objective' answers (Carey, 2008). To the extent that quantitative research concepts overlook the breadth of peoples' lived experiences and changing social contexts, I am in agreement with Denzin and Lincoln (2000) about how remote empirical methods are not positioned to capture a comprehensive and holistic picture of research subjects' lives. Largely due to the 'hands-on' nature of qualitative inquiry, qualitative field techniques are appropriately suited to appreciate the world of the 'lived experience' and the uniqueness of individual cases and contexts (Stake, 1995).

Within qualitative research traditions, ethnographic and phenomenological approaches represent two distinct modes of data collection. The hallmark of ethnography is fieldwork, where the researcher aims to look beyond what participants *say* to what they *do* during the course of their everyday lives (Emerson et al., 2011). Ethnographers argue that by directly working with people for an extended period of time, the patterns of thought embedded in their everyday behaviour surface as 'speech in action' (Goulding, 2005: 299). Written documents and other visual materials may also be collected during the course of fieldwork for data analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Social scientists that claim allegiance to phenomenological approaches, on the contrary, stress that in order to comprehend peoples' behaviours and their 'common-sense' thinking about life, the data gathered for research needs to directly come from the people under examination (Bryman, 2008). The main assumption here is that people conduct everything in life with conscious awareness, and hence researchers' search for understanding the nature and essence of people's experiences and behaviours should heavily depend on in-depth interviews (Moustakas, 1994).

This thesis's approach to fieldwork includes both ethnographic and phenomenological concepts. In one respect, I appreciate how interviews are valuable modes of inquiry when participants are willing and able to describe features of social life since the information gathered is direct and straight from the source (Emerson et al., 2011). Interviews may also provide relevant biographic information about a person that mere observation cannot deliver. I am also aware, though, that if phenomenological approaches are solely employed the study may yield limited results. Specifically, the thesis will fall short of capturing people's day-to-day experiences and any potential discrepancies that may arise between participants' verbal articulations during the interviews and their behaviours in the field. By pulling together features inherent in both approaches, my interpretations of the activities I observe can be confirmed by participants in formal interviews and vice versa. In this way, the empirical data collected for the study may be consistently cross-checked. The validity and credibility of a project's findings is ostensibly enhanced when the two above qualitative research approaches are integrated into a study's methodological framework (Greene, 2007).

This thesis employs a multi-case narrative (MCN) research approach through the 'triangulation' of these two qualitative research approaches. Inherent in MCN is the amalgamation of three particular data collection techniques, as depicted in the figure 4.1, which work together to minimise misunderstandings of the research's findings: interviews, observation and material gathering (Greene, 2007; Mathison, 1988). The MCN approach emphasises how complex human experiences are effectively internalised and expressed through stories and narratives. In other words, people are considered 'story-telling organisms' that lead both individually and socially 'storied lives' (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990: 2), and through narratives, individuals are able to express their understandings of self and community (Bruner, 2004; Leiblich et al., 1998). The call for researchers to draw on narratives when exploring people's notions of 'who I am' is clearly articulated by Shkedi (2005: 9): "the richness of human events and thought cannot be expressed in statements or definitions, but only demonstrated and evoked through story".
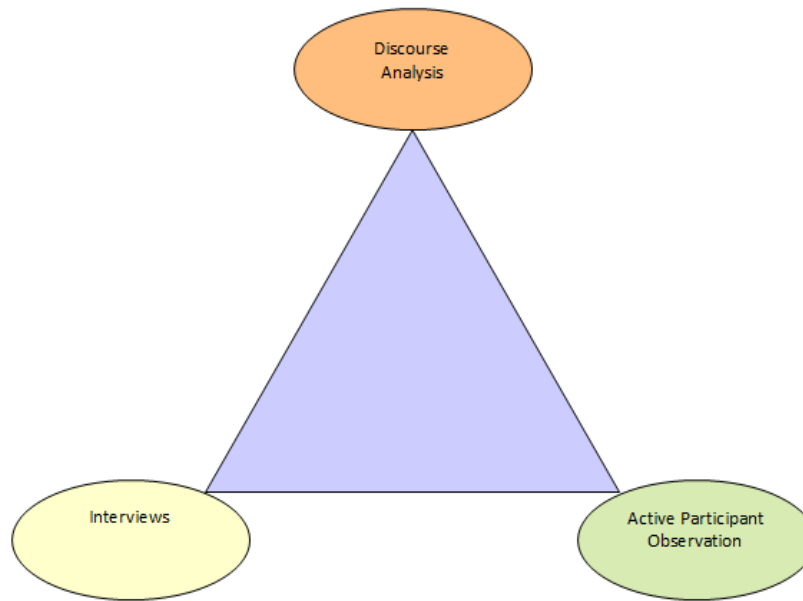
Figure 4.1 The research's methodology.

In MCN research, the primary data-gathering instruments are the researcher and the research participants (Marshall and Rossman, 2010; Walsham, 1995). Maykut et al. (1994: 27) emphasises how humans are the only 'data collecting instruments' multifaceted enough to capture complex and dynamic facets of life. It is important to recognise, then, that any interaction between two or more humans potentially alters the perceptions and actions of all the involved parties (Walsham, 1995). Since the researcher and the participant impact each other, the study's findings are understood to be a part of a dialogical process in which the research situation and data gathered is structured by both the researchers' and research participants' understandings of realities. The dialogical process of research also posits agency and fluidity in the act of communicating information (Glenda and Kelly, 2002). In addition, the research findings are correlated with how the researcher discovered the data in the first place (Emerson et al., 2011: 11). In this regard, I gave critical attention to and documented my activities, the social context, and my emotional responses to my own and the participants' actions. This underpins the idea of 'meanings-in-context', which is the researcher's methods of interpreting the data in the analysis (Shkedi, 2005: 180). For this reason, an interpretative epistemological approach is also implicit in data analysis. In contrast to the assumptions of positivist science, the interpretative approach appreciates how both the researcher and participant impact each other, and how the researcher's subjective interpretations are always implicated in the phenomenon being studied since concepts of reality are fundamentally subjective (Bryman, 2001: 13; Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). In

effect, there is no universal, unchanging 'truth' to human behaviour and perception (Bloor and Wood, 1996), and therefore the primary interest of MCN is in how and why people view themselves and others in certain ways during certain scenarios and across different spatial and temporal dimensions.

Abandoning the idea of value-neutrality and embracing close relationships with research participants meant becoming a part of their everyday lives. On this note, it is relevant to briefly discuss my own particular attributes which have personalised this thesis. The research topic partly stems from my interest in horticulture. I have completed a variety of horticultural courses and I have also worked on a number of small-scale urban and peri-urban farms. These previous gardening experiences enabled me to comfortably enter the field and also get my hands dirty alongside gardeners. I could also keep up with and engage in conversations about pest management and compost, for instance, rather than simply be a passive observer. In addition, a large portion of my family is from the Caribbean, and at a young age I moved from New York to the Caribbean island of Curacao. These background experiences facilitated my ability to participate in some of the gardens' various social activities. For instance, I speak Spanish and I often communicated with gardeners in a mix of Spanish and English, which was mainly the manner in which garden members communicated with each other. As a Spanish-English bilingual, all participants were able to discuss matters with greater ease and in their native tongue. I am also very familiar with salsa music, which was a particular genre of music gardeners frequently listened to and spoke about, and I was also accustomed to eating and cooking some similar food dishes to what gardeners prepared too, such as fried *platanos* (plantains) and rice and beans. As such, my personal attributes and my commitment to being intimately engaged in social activities aided the process of establishing good rapport and create a trusting environment with gardeners.

4.2.1   The Sample

Three community gardens in the South Bronx were selected as field sites. I first identified these three gardens by using the online Open Accessible Space Information System (OASIS) database. This public online database provides demographic and geographic information about community gardens in NYC. Since this thesis's research design derives from my specific theoretical concerns and my aims to answer the research questions, I determined the cases before commencing fieldwork. The three

research locations were purposively selected for several reasons. First, the three gardens were all situated near the same subway line running through the South Bronx. This logistical convenience helped me to avert great time and financial difficulties associated with travelling to and from each garden. I was also able to devote more time to visiting and collecting data from each site. Though the gardens were located in relatively close proximity to each other, participants from one garden were not necessarily familiar with or had experiences visiting the other gardens. This phenomenon affirmed Smith's and Kurtz's (2003: 201) findings about how members of one garden tend to not frequent or be familiar with members of different gardens. As such, the data was 'contained' as gardeners from one site were not seen to influence the data gathered from another site. In addition, each garden site included a number of people who were interested in speaking with me and reflecting on their work in the space. Before fieldwork commenced, I frequently visited these three gardens to view and directly experience the social particularities of each site. Even though the temperature was quite cold to permit much outside gardening work, I was able to observe and socialise with gardeners at this time. By the onset of fieldwork in mid-April 2011, I had became acquainted with what Spradely (1979) describes as 'good informants' who were currently involved in the phenomenon being studied and willing to reveal information about their perspectives and experiences.

Furthermore, two of the garden sites, El Flamboyan and UWS, were Casita gardens and Brook Park was a Formal garden. Participants from the Casita gardens served as a type of control group for exploring the daily practices and ways in which Puerto Rican gardeners account for their membership experiences in quite a similar socio-demographic context. The subtle and substantial material and social differences among all three of the sites also enabled me to explore the diversity of localised garden designs and gardeners' lived experiences. Even though the case study approach's main weaknesses is its inability to generalise theory and populations (Eisenhardt, 1989: 17), the project's key concern was depth, rather than coverage. Indeed, the small garden sample size ensured that I acquired in-depth knowledge and experience of the unique social and political complexities distinct to each site. From the onset of fieldwork, then, the data generated from research was not presumed to be generalisable, transferable, replicable, and in essence, represent 'the truth'. The theoretical framework appreciates how the main subjects at hand - ethnicity, nature, and social power relations - may be fluid and contingent on specific temporal and spatial conditions. The research locations

and participants are not intended to be a representative sample of community gardens and gardeners in NYC.

When fieldwork commenced in mid-April 2011, I enlisted between five to seven gardeners from each garden site. This number was largely determined by the presence of gardeners who were interested in participating in the study. They all self-identified as Puerto Rican were interested in my project and thrilled that I was pursuing a topic related to Puerto Rican gardeners. I found it preferable to keep the number of participants low since a larger cohort would have imposed greater difficulties in conducting detailed active participant observations. Recruiting at least five participants from each garden when fieldwork commenced also ensured that if one participant dropped out, there would still be a sufficient number of participants left as to not drastically disrupt fieldwork (no participant dropped out).

Though the goal of the informal discussions and interviews was not to gather detailed socio-economic information about each participant, my conversations with gardeners over time revealed that many were receiving social welfare, the majority for most of their adult life. Gardeners also tended to be unemployed or retired, and they often complained about their financial hardships. The great majority had dropped out of school before receiving a high school diploma, and only three of the gardeners had received an education beyond high school. With the exception of one Puerto Rican gardener who was raised in San Juan, the island's capital city, all of the gardeners were born in Puerto Rico's rural countryside. Many participants migrated to NYC when they were a young child or teenager. All but two of the gardeners resided in the City's Housing Authority's (NYCHA) housing developments that either surrounded or was in the immediate proximity of each garden. The two gardeners who did not reside in public housing were members of Brook Park, and these participants also did not live in the South Bronx. Rather, they lived and commuted to the garden from the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn. As previously mentioned in chapter three, the majority of gardeners were of an older age since community gardening, and especially in Casitas, was an activity more popular among older age people. In this regard, the sample primarily reflects people of a certain age range, and the data mainly reflects the attitudinal characteristics and experiences associated with a certain generation of gardeners. The graph in figure 4.2 illuminates the age range of garden participants. These subjects are particularly worthy of attention since they have been and still are

currently active in NYC community gardening initiatives (Armstrong, 2000). This clearly has implications for contextualizing the contemporary community garden scene.
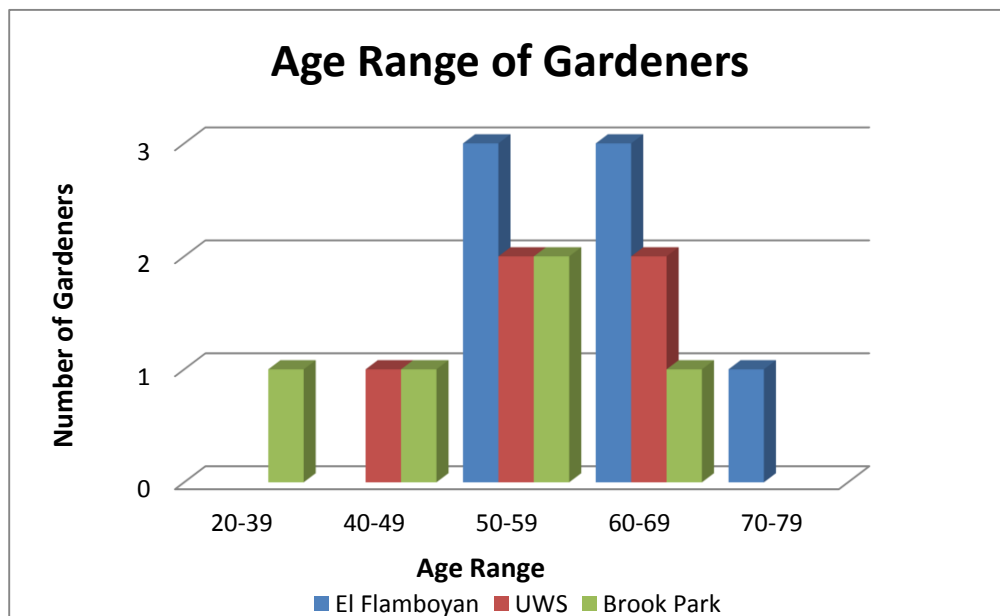
Figure 4.2 The age range of community gardeners.

Included in the study's cohort of research participants was each of the three garden coordinators. The involvement of the gardens' coordinators served to deepen my understanding of the underlying philosophies and the goals embedded in the creation, organisation and management of each garden. While I was concerned with recruiting participants of the same ethnicity, Brook Park's coordinator was not a Puerto Rican. He was born and raised in the more affluent area of the (north) Bronx, did not speak Spanish, and was college educated. Since Brook Park is a Formal garden, and the research design entailed exploring notions of Puerto Rican ethnicity in Formal gardens as well as Casitas, including Brook Park's coordinator informed the study on how this gardening group's diverse socio-demography influenced gardeners' behaviours and activities.

Moreover, also included are state and non-state representatives who are active in the garden movement. These specific representatives were selected because they were directly in touch with these gardens' coordinators and/or gardeners, organised programs within the gardens, or otherwise responsible for supporting one or more of the gardens. These participants informed research on how social power relations on multiple scales influenced gardeners' activities in the space and the gardening groups' social hierarchy.

The inclusion of these participants is a significant point of difference from the majority of studies on community gardens in general, and Puerto Rican community gardeners in particular (Ottmann et al., 2010; Winterbottom, 2007, Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004, Armstrong, 2000). Since it was more difficult to schedule times to meet and interview these participants, I choose to only conduct one, semi-structured narrative interview with state and non-state actors. The following section discusses how the interviews were administered to all participants.

4.3 Narrative Interview Procedures

Narrative interviews granted each research participant the opportunity to express his or her feelings and opinions. This style of interviewing encourages participants to express their perspectives and experiences through a number of narratives or stories (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000). By understanding the meaning of social events directly from the perspectives of research participants, these interviews are particularly appropriate for person-centred studies on everyday social behaviours (Bates, 2005). All of the study's interviews were also conducted in a one-to-one, private setting. With the exception of one participant[1], I conducted all interviews with gardeners and garden coordinators in a secluded area of their garden and away from other people.

This one-to-one narrative interviewing format was chosen since private accounts between the researcher and the research participant yield thorough, deep, and comprehensive data (Smith, 2008). Contrary to these private encounters, focus groups, for another example, often result in individuals concealing their real opinions when their views differ from the majorities. Hence, the results from focus groups often veer toward a consensus, which may not always represent the perspectives and intentions of each interviewee (Barbour, 1995). Another advantage of the one-to-one narrative interviewing format is that there is no significant time delay between asking a question and receiving an answer. The researcher and interviewee can immediately react on what the other says and does, and answers also tend to be more spontaneous and 'raw' since there is no time for extended reflection or consultation with others (Opdenakker, 2006).

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[1] One participant was recovering from a back injury in June 2011 and I therefore conducted the open-ended interview in the privacy of her home.

Before commencing each interview, I revisited the nature of my research project. I briefly provided them with an overview of the coming interview, including the overall subject matter and the number of questions to be asked. I then clearly notified each participant that the interview would be recorded for transcription purposes, and I stressed the confidentiality of the entire interview process. I also addressed any concerns or answered any questions, if the informant had any. I did not pay any of the research participants, and no one declined to participate in the interviews or in the project as a whole.

I also appreciated how language can either encourage or discourage the flow of conversation during interviews (Bates, 2005). To stimulate participants to comprehensively explore the issues raised, interview questions were worded in their everyday language. Shkedi (2005) and Mishler (1991) underline how interviewees who are granted the flexibility to speak in their 'own voice' with the language they feel most comfortable using will feel more secure to express their viewpoints and experiences. This also worked to ensure a clear understanding of what both the researcher and research participant were saying. In addition, participants were not treated as being 'epistemologically passive' (Elliott, 2005). All interview questions stimulated the interpretive capacities of participants so that the data generated not only worked to answer the research questions, but it also prompted interviewees to explore the significance of the research topic as well. This entails collaboration between the researcher and the interviewee, which also permits the participant to obtain a clearer understanding of the research (Bates, 2005).

Throughout the interviews, participants were encouraged to answer the questions by alluding to specific times and situations. I was influenced by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) who affirmed how it is easier for research participants to speak about particular scenarios rather than answer broad questions with no specific time frame. How participants narrate particular events or features from their everyday life also elucidates important forces which influence their behavioural and thought processes (Bates, 2005). In this regard, the method elicited descriptions of particular episodes that deepened my understandings of the data generated through participant observations. At certain times, it also highlighted some of my own misinterpretations of the data. On one occasion, for example, I came to the conclusion that one gardener [F5] was indifferent to the presence of chickens and did not enjoy having these animals in the garden. My thinking was

framed by how I observed this gardener often walking away from the animals whenever they were roaming near her. During the interviews, however, this gardener stressed her satisfaction and enjoyment in seeing the chickens and knowing they were in the garden. She specifically described the significance of chickens by narrating her past in Puerto Rico, and her memories of watching chickens roam around her family's garden there. The interviews elucidated how memory was at work in her passive observations of the animal. Therefore, it was not necessarily accurate to merely conclude that the gardener did not derive satisfaction from seeing the chickens.

Whilst conducting the interviews, my impressions of the interview and my observations were documented on a note pad. Observations often included the participants' body language or long pauses in the conversation. This information added detail to the digitally recorded and later transcribed interviews. It helped to add colour to the understanding of informants' emotions and their sentiments about experiences (Bates, 2005). At times, I followed up on particular issues that were raised to elicit further narratives and clarify any points of confusion. I did so by asking questions in an open-ended manner that still addressed the distinguishing features of the conversation like, is your interpretation of X like X? Is this your thoughts about the event like X? The next two sub-sections will provide an overview and describe the processes of how I administered the open-ended and semi-structured interviews.

4.3.1 Open-Ended Narrative Interviews with Gardeners and Garden Coordinators

Open-ended narrative interviews were administered to gardeners and garden coordinators. All of these interviews tended to last between 30 to 45 minutes, and they were administered to these participants throughout the month of June 2011. I conducted these interviews during the mornings (7am - 11am) and the afternoons (3pm - 8pm), so as to avoid the hottest hours of the day. I did not schedule specific interview times with each participant. I opted, rather, to simply work or chit-chat with a participant and after our discussion or activity, I invited them to sit down with me in a private area of the garden to answer some questions related to my dissertation. On two separate occasions, two gardeners expressed a concern about 'not being able to help me'. They initially assumed that I wanted detailed information about the garden's history or 'Puerto Rican horticultural techniques', as if I wanted to test their knowledge of the garden or skill-set.

Once I assured them that this was not the case, they immediately became more relaxed and happy to sit down with me.

The focus of these interviews was on the core issues outlined for answering the study's research questions. For gardeners, I was particularly concerned with gathering data on how they understood the meaning of their ethnicity and the value of the garden. I also asked them to recount situations and experiences that underpinned the significance of their social relations with other members and their usage of the space. The interview was clearly not an effort to acquire a complete history of all of the participants' experiences in the garden. It is important to note that coordinators were given a different set of interview questions. Questions directed at coordinators aimed at eliciting a comprehensive understanding of the garden's managerial style and processes of garden provision. They also probed into the garden's and gardeners' interactions with organisations and agencies in the garden movement. Addressing these issues worked to explore how and why gardeners may be exposed to or cooperate with non-members, and the implications of these broader social relations on their perspectives and priorities in the garden.

Coupled with observations, informal conversations and discourse analysis, these interviews with gardeners and coordinators worked to identify all the organisations and agencies that had relations with each gardening group. This data then helped me to identify and recruit all the relevant non-member garden advocates involved with these gardens' provision. The inclusion of these participants addressed the implications of gardeners' broader web of social relations on intra-garden social relations and garden usage. Once the interviews were transcribed, I highlighted statements that appeared significant for research and I began considering topics for research themes. I also started creating a list of appropriate questions for the semi-structured interviews, which were administered to all participants approximately five months later.

4.3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews with Gardeners, Garden Coordinators, and Garden Advocates

The value of conducting an additional interview with gardeners and coordinators was that it confirmed and deepened my understanding of the data gathered from the open-ended interviews, and also from the observations and materials gathered during my

remaining time on the field. Semi-structured interviews were administered to gardeners and garden coordinators during the final stages of fieldwork in November 2011. These interviews were longer in length than the open-ended interviews, and each one lasted for about 45 minutes to one hour. Even though I did not attempt to conduct a longitudinal study but rather explored 'the state of ethnicity at a given time' (Phinney, 1992: 81), conducting these additional interviews during the final stages of fieldwork allowed me to detect and analyse some transformational processes associated with members' conceptualisations of ethnicity and nature. Also worth noting here is that since I had already spent a considerable amount of time with each gardener by this time, these discussions were more free flowing when it came to addressing personal matters.

The structure of these interviews was constituted by first order and second order questions. First order questions worked to consolidate the findings that derived directly from the informants. This data was gathered either from their open-ended narratives or my informal conversations with them in the field. The second order questions were based on gathered information not directly provided by the informants themselves. This data derived from my observations, garden artefacts, or other material objects and documents. As such, second order questions worked to paint a rich picture of gardeners' lived experiences. With regard to the gardens' coordinators, the combination of the two questions especially worked to draw explanations of 'cause and effect' in how the garden was organised and managed. That is, what provisionary policies were in place that had an influence on how gardeners' behaved in the space, for example. In general, first order and second order interview questions further substantiate the findings from research by addressing any major inconsistencies between how participants express themselves and what they ultimately do in the field (Baxter and Eyles, 1997).

Semi-structured interviews were also administered to state and non-state actors starting in the month of October up until December, 2011. These interviews were primarily held in each of these participants' private offices or conference rooms. The interviews tended to last for approximately 45 minutes. In effect, organisations are also constructed through acts of language, and therefore they are conceived as storytelling systems (Brown et al., 2005). Focusing on how these participants deployed narratives to account for their activities and agenda clarified how they are constituted with respect to broader social relations, and what the implications of their work were on each of the gardens' provision. These interviews also informed research on their interests and motivations

for working with gardeners, and the scale of their involvement in each garden site. Questions were specifically constructed to obtain feedback on my speculations and interpretations of observed activities, discourse analysis, and my interviews with gardeners themselves. In the following section, I discuss one of the primary tools of qualitative fieldwork - participant observations - and how narrative researchers also need to put themselves in their participants' shoes and look out at the world with them (Shkedi, 2005; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990).

4.4 Participant Observations

I conducted participant observations of all research participants. In contrast to passive observers who assume peripheral observatory positions, participant observations are made by developing close relations and directly interacting with research participants (Adler and Adler, 1987). These types of observations are capable of exploring the nature of social groups, their structure, individuals within the context of the group, and individual behaviour (Lewis et al., 1972: 16). By actively extending a helping hand in the garden, gardeners could feel that they were some benefits from participation in research whilst I could acquire a more nuanced understanding of the complex social and political processes involved with community gardening. This phenomenon deepened my understanding of why gardeners assigned specific values and meanings to the garden and their activities in the space. I was also able to witness how these meanings were created through speech and behaviour, and how gardeners' conceptualisations and expressions of ethnicity changed in relation to socio-spatial contexts. By developing close relationships with participants and having the opportunity to intimately familiarise myself with the gardens' social milieu, I grasped what gardeners experienced as meaningful and important. I was also able to formulate the most appropriate and relevant questions for both the open-ended and semi-structured interviews. Most importantly, participant observations served to cross-check all the data gathered, and elucidate any potential misunderstandings between what all the informants did in the field and what they said during the interviews.

Participant observation methods are generally very flexible and they often do not prescribe a concrete and predetermined set of procedures. I was influenced by DeWalt's and DeWalt's (2002) recommendations of some basic principles of participant observations which include learning and using participants' local dialect, actively

participating in various activities in the examined context, and informally observing participants during their leisure activities. I also followed Forsey's (2010: 567) explanation of how observations entail observing and listening closely to the beliefs, values, the material conditions and structural forces that underpin the socially patterned behaviours of participants, and the meanings people attach to these conditions and forces. I recorded my observations in field notes and used both tacit and explicit information in the analysis and writing (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The field notes were based on what I viewed, the informal conversations and my social activities with participants. The products of these activities, which in many cases included artefacts and tools, also provided sources of research material.

While conducting participant observations, I simultaneously recorded two different types of field notes. The first type was an on-the-spot record of various events as they arose in time. The second type was a more detailed and analytical summary of my observations. The former provided the latter with take-off points for interpretation, synthesis, a selection of specific issues for further detailed observation, and the integration of events into a broader conceptual framework (Pohland, 1972). There were also some fundamental questions that guided my observations whilst recording field notes. Examples of these questions include; what is occurring? How are people going about their daily activities? How is horticultural knowledge and skills transmitted and acquired? And, how are events organised and what does the provision of the garden entail? Though I did not hide from people whilst writing notes, I avoided writing for extended periods of time in front of them. I opted, rather, to make 'scratch notes' (Sanjek, 1990) immediately after my encounters and conversations with research participants. These notes highlighted important episodes, my impressions of situations and events, and significant quotes from participants. I then typed up these notes in full that same evening to preserve the immediacy of my feelings and ideas, and to maximise my ability to recall the happenings in details (Emerson et al., 2001; Lewis et al., 1972). My notes became increasingly focused and coded in the later stages of research as I identified prevalent themes for answering the research questions.

Provided that qualitative research is not socially and ideologically neutral, researchers cannot study aspects of the social world without claiming to be a part of it (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Tedlock (1991: 69) underscores this idea by arguing how the mere concept of 'participant observation' is an oxymoron since researchers, too, need to

appreciate that they have an important impact on the kinds of data collected and the sort of analysis that is possible during fieldwork. As such, I consistently recorded and provided an explicit discussion of my own behaviour and emotional involvement during each day of fieldwork, plus any observations that may have explained how I influenced the data gathered. In this way, instead of only writing an ethnographic memoir centred on the 'self', or a standard monograph centred on the 'other', both the 'self' and 'other' are presented together within a single narrative description (Tedlock, 1991: 69). This process entailed a representational transformation from 'participant observation' to 'observation of participation' (*Ibid*).

I spent about six days a week in the gardens and my visits in each site often lasted for hours at a time. In the two Casitas, I generally did not set up specific pre-arrange times of when I would visit the garden. This was due to the fact that I would find most, if not all, of the participants in the garden on any given visit. In the Formal garden, however, gardeners often informed me of when they would be visiting the garden. Here, gardeners visited the space less often and thus it was often more difficult to randomly catch them in the space. For example, on a number of occasions, two of the gardeners [B1; B3] would send me a text message to inform me that they were planning to head to the garden, and asked if I wanted to join them to talk or work while they were there. As a whole, I visited each of the two Casitas at least three times a week and the Formal garden once or twice a week. On some days, I would spend the full day in one garden. On other days, I would visit one site in the early morning and afternoon, and then after a few hours I would walk or take the subway over to another garden and spend the remaining part of the day at a different site.

By experiencing gardeners' daily routines and the conditions under which they performed them, I quickly assimilated into their everyday lives in the garden. Though they were still aware that I was gathering data for my dissertation, their perception of me as solely an outsider who probed around their daily experiences disappeared; I became treated as a co-participant in a joint endeavour. I often joined in whatever was happening, from preparing food to weeding planting beds. When more formal social happenings were planned in the El Flamboyan garden, for instance, I was treated like any other member whereby I was asked to prepare a food dish to share and help serve the food to other gardeners and visitors. Besides being treated as a garden member, I was also considered as a friend and gardeners often asked me for advice on confidential

and personal matters. During the course of each day, gardeners openly shared their on-going thoughts about such issues as their childhood and feelings toward other garden members. As time went on, members invited me to join them at social gatherings that took place out of the garden, such as nearby salsa music concerts and performances. Invitations soon followed to visit them in their homes and meet their family. Indeed, I felt early on in the fieldwork that my relationship with gardeners was not merely characterised as researcher-participant, but as friend and fellow member of the garden. The processes of being accepted in each gardening group through participant observations proved quite revealing.

My close social relations with gardeners did not imply that I disrupted or completely altered the on-going patterns of individual behaviour or social interaction in gardens. Rather, this phenomenon led to a greater appreciation of how social life is an on-going and fluid process that has the ability to reveal the terms and bases under which research participants form their thoughts and social ties in the first place (Emerson et al., 2011). I found this to be especially true after working in Brook Park one hot summer day. I felt a bit weak and expressed my symptoms to one garden informant [B4]. This gardener soon after called to a man who was across the road to bring him 'some birds'. After a few minutes, the other man arrived to the garden's entrance with two live pigeons in an empty shoe box. While pointing to the box, the gardener explained to me the importance of eating these birds when feeling weak; "pigeon soup, with cilantro and oregano is the best remedy for weakness". I realised that I had initiated a deep and detailed discussion about 'traditional' Puerto Rican food remedies. This discussion was also linked to the gardener's motivations for cultivating certain plants in his garden bed. This particular incident even revealed some important details about the gardener's views of the garden space. On this note, the participant did not want to bring the pigeons inside the garden for fear of 'starting trouble'. In this case, the incident was an example of a 'consequential presence' in which the researcher's participation impacts what informants talk about or how they behave (Emerson et al., 2011: 3). The research participant's reactions to the researcher is not a 'contamination' of what is observed and learned, but rather it is the very source of that learning and observation (Clarke, 1975: 99).

I also conducted participant observations of non-member actors relevant to the garden movement and the provision of these garden sites. As previously mentioned, I identified these actors by formally asking coordinators during the interviews which organisations,

agencies and non-members were influential to the garden's provision. During the course of participant observations, I also took note of any organisational representative working in each site, or any documents or flyers they made that were circulated in the garden. I informally conversed with coordinators and gardeners about their perceptions of and social relations with specific organisations and agencies in the garden movement. The results enabled me to compile a list of important state and non-state actors relevant to the provision of each garden.

Participant observations of state and non-state actors often entailed volunteering and attending many of their organised activities, events and meetings, both in and out of the garden sites. For instance, I attended the New York City Community Garden Coalition's (NYCCGC) monthly meetings, and I helped to edit some of the documents they posted on their website. I also volunteered for the organisation Farming Concrete by collecting data on the number and size of garden beds in various community gardens in the Bronx (excluding the case studies). I did not always share my experiences about volunteering with these organisations with gardeners. I wanted to avoid seeming like an outside 'informer' who worked for various institutions and who would monitor the gardening group and gardening activities on the behalf of others.

Volunteering experiences provided me with an overall sense of the garden movement's political structure as well as a deeper understanding of the mission and agenda of various institutions. I was also able to better familiarise myself with the Bronx geographically, and learn more about the neighbourhood I was conducting fieldwork in. Indeed, my experiences of volunteering supplemented the pages of field notes I had recorded about what I saw within gardens. The next section will provide an overview of how the sources of secondary information that were collected during observations - such as written documents, tools, handicrafts and the other visual data - were incorporated into the study's methodology.

4.5 Review of Documentation and other Visual Data

In order to appreciate the breadth and depth of gardeners' knowledge of nature and ethnicity, it was important to recognise how information and ideologies are often passed through secondary sources of information. In this regard, a wide range of material and visual sources were collected and analysed to supplement the data gathered from observations and interviews. This included posters and flyers circulated in the garden,

and photographs I took of each site. Literature found on the internet was also considered as a source of secondary information. I collected data from various organisational websites and I also subscribed to the email lists of such organisations as Just Food. This all provided me with a window to view how gardens were being framed by non-members and gain a deeper appreciation of the current trends and situation of the garden movement.

One important dimension of any document and artefact rests on the manner in which it is used (Prior, 2003: 51). The very essence and nature of any document is determined by the manner in which it is integrated into an individuals' routine or their social activities (*Ibid*). Rather than simply focusing on matters of content, then, I also examined how documents and artefacts were created, distributed, and used by gardeners, coordinators, and other garden supporters. On certain occasions, I participated in the creation and dissemination of such data to gain a more nuanced understanding of the processes involved with its preparation and the target audiences. For instance, I helped edit a few grant applications which were prepared by some Brook Park gardeners. This course of action worked to expose how the creation and usage of documents and artefacts were in part mediated by intra-garden and broader social relations.

4.6 Data Analysis

Implicit in the MCN research approach is analysing the data gathered whilst collecting the data. In this way, data analysis is an interactive, dynamic, and on-going process in which the researcher works with the data to analyse it on a conceptual level (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As I analysed the data gathered from field notes, interviews, and other visual documents, I also made various connections between concepts and theories which provided me with a clearer sense of how to direct informal conversation topics, interviews questions, and where to focus succeeding observations. I took note of how a variety of conditions and factors may have influenced the outcomes at any given time, and thus the goal of data analysis was often to identify which interactions or factors were central for distinguishing one result from another (Souilliere, 2005).

By conducting data analysis in 'real time' (Shkedi, 2005), I constantly compared different pieces of data gathered during fieldwork to create codes. These codes were often a word or short phrase that captures a salient, summative, and evocative attribute

for answering each of the research questions (Saldaña, 2009). Thus, coding is not a precise science but rather an interpretative act (*Ibid*). Codes were generated, tested, and redefined throughout fieldwork and during the final stages of writing this thesis. It is also important to note that I uploaded and analysed the data using QSR NVivo 9, a qualitative research software program. This enabled easy retrieval and the electronic organisation of all the data gathered from research. When using this program, I assigned each code with a number. I then highlighted the sections and parts of the data that related to each code. I choose to use in-vivo codes to capture the language of the participants, and in this thesis the participants' exact words are enclosed by quotation marks.

Whilst grouping the commonalities of the data and organising them into 'units of data', codes eventually constituted the theoretical properties of a category (Spiggle, 1994: 493). Beth et al. (2005: 5) refer to this process as the 'thematic level' of data analysis since it considers passages of a text or a sequence of sentences as representing themes and prevalent phenomena. I located the research within the literature discussed in chapter two. As I analysed the information gathered, I read about the debates on ethnicity, the social construction of nature, and political ecology, and I made connections between the conceptual tools and theories provided in the literature to understand and describe the empirical data. I moved back and forth between these different theoretical domains, thinking about and revising the codes and themes.

I expanded, revised, and developed new themes as I continued to transcribe and cross-reference all the field notes, interviews and catalogue all the visual data. Considering the initial themes as provisional permitted the flexible use of subsequent interpretations (Spiggle, 1994: 493). Initially, the coding of the data constituted about 15-20 themes. After fieldwork, I reviewed the coded data again and wrote more detailed summaries of my interpretations of the data. I then revised and integrated the material from the 15-20 themes, a process which resulted in narrowing down the number of themes to 13. Some of the units of data also overlapped and were assigned two numbers because they related to two or more different categories. As I continued to search for the commonalities in the coded data, I paid particular attention to any emerging themes that addressed the research questions. These themes included gardeners' recollections of Puerto Rico's landscape and ideas of Puerto Rican tradition.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has clarified the methodological tools that have informed my research. Fieldwork entailed the 'triangulation' of three main qualitative research methods: (narrative and semi-structured) interviews, participant observations, and the review of documentation and other visual data. This methodological framework enhanced the output of meaningful results by consistently validating and cross-checking the information gathered. It also appreciated the subjectivity of knowledge and reality, and implied the self-reflectivity of the researcher when recording and analysing the data.

This thesis is based on case studies from three different community gardens in the South Bronx. Recruiting Puerto Rican gardeners from three different sites helped to inform my research praxis. Their participation in the study enabled me to actively observe community gardening activities. I also recruited state and non-state actors into this examination. This provided me with in-depth knowledge of the garden movement's trends and fashions, and the relevance of social power relations for community gardening. All research participants were speaking at particular points in their experience as gardeners, coordinators, or garden advocates. The research, therefore, offers a 'snapshot' of people's lives, and the results do not represent participants' current ways of thinking or positions. The following three chapters will discuss the research's findings, and I commence by exploring the phenomenon of ethnicity in community gardens.

Chapter 5 Cultivating Flowers: Budding Ethnicities

5.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to answer the first research question, which asks how, if at all, community gardens influence members' conceptualisations of ethnicity. Community gardens provide the social space for gardeners to learn about their 'natural' ethnic traits from others in order to achieve certain personal and collective interests. To address how sentiments of ethnicity emerged and entered the consciousness of gardeners, this chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, 'Being Ethnic, Naturally', I demonstrate how biologically preordained notions of ethnicity were promoted by the gardens' cultural events and gardeners' day-to-day activities. I draw a thumbnail sketch of one cultural event in Brook Park, the Mexica Danza Ceremony, to discuss deterministic conceptions of ethnicity (Geertz, 1973; Shils, 1957). The section is then used as a basis for the remaining chapter's exploration of how and why primordial perspectives are put into play by gardeners. That is, it explores how notions of an innate affinity are socially constructed, used, and mobilised to achieve strategic instrumental interests (Guibernau, 2010; Seo, 2008; Sommers, 1991; Omi and Winant, 1986).

In the second section, 'The Successes of Creating Ethnicity', I draw attention to how certain ideas of ethnicity are mobilised through people's pragmatic pursuit of social, political, and other material interests (Rothchild, 1995; Cohen, 1986). In particular, I examine how Book Park gardeners' Latino consciousness arose in part from gardening with others of diverse national origins. I also consider the relevance of pan-ethnicity in relation to gardeners' shared experiences of discrimination, and the instrumental value of pan-ethnicity for making political demands (Masuoka, 2011; Walder, 2000; Omi and Winant, 1996).

The third section, 'Teaching and Learning about Ethnicity', explores the relevance of social relations in shaping and reshaping people's ideas of ethnicity (Hampel, 2004; Krase and Hutchison, 2004; Jeffres, 2000). I elaborate on UWS's accepted Puerto Rican tradition of dominoes as it provides a clear example of how gardeners consciously learn about their 'natural' ethnicity from the social norms and habits of the gardening group. I also reflect on how the distinct social ethos of a group strengthens, shapes, and fosters

new expressions and ideas of culture based on people's shared and everyday lived experiences (Languerre, 2003; Sanjek, 2000; Nagel, 1994). I then draw attention to how primordial perspectives on ethnicity can work to mobilise a community and reinforce social cohesion (Buckser, 2000; Hunt et al., 1994).

In the final section, 'The Value of Gardeners' Social Bonds', I draw upon insights from social capital theory (Putnam, 2001; Coleman, 1994) to deepen the study's analysis of how and why community gardening prompts certain notions of ethnicity. I explore how issues of trust, reciprocity, and social interaction shape and are shaped by ethnic considerations (Anthias, 2007; Coffe and Geys, 2006). I then explore how social capital is both an asset and a public good that facilitates certain actions within a group (Burt, 2000; Narayan, 1997). The exploration of intra-garden social hierarchies expounds on how a group's social structure is organised by people's roles within the group that possess socially valuable resources (Lin, 2001).

Throughout this chapter, I emphasise the complexity and fluidity of ethnicity, and how people make variable commitments to each of their ethnic choices depending on the socio-context (Laguerre, 2003; Nagel, 2000). The observations recounted in this empirical chapter, as with the following two empirical chapters, are derived from my experiences in each of the three gardens – the stories I heard, the activities I performed, and the interviews I conducted with informants. The pictures provided in this chapter also help to capture certain social processes and add value to the chapter's arguments.

5.2 Being Ethnic, Naturally

5.2.1 "Our blood"

In Casita gardens, gardeners' ideas of growing food were intertwined with their discourse on what activities came 'naturally' to Puerto Ricans. This was even the case on one occasion when an informant [U3] from UWS confessed to not having experience of food cultivation prior to garden membership. Largely for this reason, he described his need to obtain help and advice from other members whilst tending to his planting lot. What was particularly noteworthy about this phenomenon was that both this informant and another gardener [U2], who eventually offered his assistance, described the act of gardening as an 'instinct' that simply came 'naturally' to *all* Puerto Ricans. Their logic

in part underpinned the idea that ethnic factors ultimately determined people's knowledge of, and capacity for, learning about gardening. This knowledge was considered to be flowing through gardeners' 'blood'. The finding that gardeners had obtained horticultural knowledge from each other, though, reinforces how primordial beliefs were socially constructed by gardeners. The issue, then, is not so much the question of whether if or what notions of ethnicity are accurate, but rather when such notions might come to the forefront and for what purposes.

Brook Park provided an interesting case study for exploring how gardens influenced gardeners' primordial articulations of ethnicity since members here were of diverse nationalities. One gardener [B4] underscored how the garden's planting beds provided him with the space to naturally act like a Puerto Rican. He continuously emphasised ideas of a Puerto Rican self when he worked, alone, on his planting bed. In this space, he placed a plaque that read 'Puerto Rico' and he put a little ceramic *Coqui* (frog) in his bed, which he explained were special and unique Puerto Rican animals. He also erected a large scarecrow onto the edge of his bed that had a Puerto Rican flag in its hand. Images of his planting bed are captured in figures 5.1 and 5.2. According to this informant, the planting beds particularly reinforced his *Jibaro* roots, a term commonly used to describe Puerto Rico's rural dwellers. He explained that growing plants was 'in my blood' and by not having another place to cultivate plants in NYC, the garden 'preserved' his *Jibaro* behaviours: "the garden doesn't let me forget my instincts".

Figure 5.1 A scarecrow with a Puerto Rican flag, a Brook Park gardener's planting bed.

Figure 5.2 A ceramic Coqui frog, a Puerto Rican animal.

Ideas of how garden membership preserved natural and innate conceptualisations of ethnicity became particularly salient during one of Brook Park's cultural events, the Mexica Danza Ceremony. This event was a 'spiritual commemoration' for the changing of seasons, which took place in April and in November, 2011. At these times, dancers dressed in feathers and leather skirts or, in the words of two informants [B3; B4], "our traditional way of dressing". During the Ceremony, approximately 15 men and women danced for nearly four hours to the sounds of banging drums and the blowing of sea shells. An image of this is captured in figure 5.3. One of the dancers described this choreographed dance ceremony as a ritual which "cleanses us, nourishes our soul, gives respect to our earth, and welcomes the new season".

Although gardeners here did not actively participate in the Ceremony, which they described as a tradition originally from the Indigenous tribes of Mexico, they still expressed great emotion and excitement for viewing the event in the garden. One informant [B1] pronounced her pride for observing the Ceremony and said that "we see bits and parts of the old culture that we share, and it's not dead". Her comments highlighted a sense of a belonging to an Indigenous culture that she 'naturally' shared with the dancers and the great majority of Brook Park members: "these [dancers] are my brothers, there are many Indigenous people [in the garden]". Two other informants clearly articulated how the Ceremony reminded them of their 'true' ethnic roots and how it impacted their conceptualisations of 'who am I?' in terms of ethnicity.

> It makes me feel like we are all the same. What they do in other countries and what we did in Puerto Rico is the same, we are the same...we are all Indigenous and we all have the same roots. [B4]

> There is something about these Indigenous events…they reside deep inside all of us…and as a Puerto Rican, when there is stuff going on in the garden and there is music and drumming in ancient languages…it takes you back, and you say this is what it means to be Puerto Rican, this is what it means to be brothers and part of the Indigenous peoples…Indigenous peoples have very agrarian roots…gardening is something that is very visceral for us…so when we are [in the garden] it is like [the garden] is calling us back to ourselves on multiple levels - on a sheer human level and a cultural level. And [the Ceremony] helps to identify who we are. Brook Park is making my true roots really, really super salient. [B2]

These above comments underscore how concepts of an Indigenous culture were brought to the forefront when gardeners described what bonded them to the gardening group and what their activities in the space symbolised. This is clear in the comments above [B2], where the value of the community garden was understood on a 'cultural level' as well as

on a 'sheer human level'. In this way, the garden provided the space for the enactment and viewing of gardeners' innate traditions, which were conceptualised as deriving from a natural affinity. The Ceremony especially prompted the 'rediscovery' of gardeners' true sense of self. The following section discusses gardeners' ideological and moral considerations when choosing when and how to express notions of ethnicity in Brook Park.

Figure 5.3 The Mexica Danza Ceremony: hallmark of an Indigenous tradition.

5.3 The Successes of Creating Ethnicity

5.3.1 "Our struggles"

Brook Park was a site in which gardeners learned about and became involved with 'Latino struggles'. This phenomenon was apparent in how one gardener [B3] distributed fliers for an event commemorating 'Immigrants Day', which was organised at a nearby public school. She found the fliers on the table near the garden's fire pit, and she was unsure about who created or brought these flyers to the garden. The event, which was advertised in the Spanish language, was being organised to encourage reform on the country's legalisation policies on immigration. Although this informant was Puerto Rican and a legal US citizen, her understanding of possessing a Latino ethnicity 'opened her eyes' to the problems that many people in the district, and in the garden,

were facing: "I began to realise, you know, I'm not Mexican or illegal but then you realise that you're a part of the garden and also a part of the same community". As such, she conceptually linked the concerns of illegal immigrants with her own set of concerns that went hand-in-hand with sharing a Latino ethnicity with others.

Another Brook Park gardener [B4] also explicitly described his feelings of being 'at one' with Latinos in the South Bronx during a protest against the closure of a nearby fire station. He learned about this protest in the garden and from other gardeners. At the protest, he received a sign to hold that was in Spanish and read 'save our community'. He also brought two Conga drums to the protest, which were usually stored in the garden's tool shed. This experience reaffirmed his sense of belonging to a Latino ethnic community in the South Bronx. Specifically, the protest against the fire station's imminent closure reflected unequal social policies, and in the gardener's words, "the things that are not fair for the Latino people" at large.

By community gardening, participants in Brook Park learned about events and issues that reinforced their awareness of belonging to a distinct pan-ethnic community that faced various socio-political disadvantages. One of the gardeners [B3] summed up the sentiments of others by iterating how garden visitation kept her 'up-to-date' with the "challenges we face as Latinos".

> You come to the garden and you find out about all the problems in the South Bronx and it makes you realise it's not fair. So [the garden]…opens your eyes to more ideas, or like facts about the Latinos and the problems...and Latinos have many of same goals. [B3]

The above comments underscore gardeners' feelings of sharing similar hardships and goals as other marginalised groups within the same ethnic strata. Informants recognised that certain goals could be pursued more effectively if they formed and expressed their interests as a larger cohort of people. As such, gardeners put emphasis on Latino ethnicity, rather than Puerto Rican ethnicity, when describing their understandings and experiences of discrimination in the South Bronx. When formulating ideological constructions of Latino ethnicity, Brook Park gardeners unvaryingly stressed the significance of the Spanish language and how it was a unifying trait of all Latinos. Although one gardener [B3] drew attention to how Puerto Ricans use words or slangs that other Spanish-speakers of different nationalities do not use, these linguistic

differences were discounted: "[Spanish] unites us". Spanish, therefore, kept with Brook Park gardeners' understandings of belonging to a socially and culturally cohesive, underprivileged group.

5.4   Educating and Learning about Ethnicity

5.4.1   "Our Puerto Rican traditions"

The prevailing theme that weaved through all of the gardeners' accounts was that community gardens, which facilitated and provided the space for social interaction, played a central role in how they learned about their ethnicity from their gardening group. This finding elucidates how social relations influenced gardeners' rationalisations of ethnicity. In the UWS garden, for instance, the process by which participants gained knowledge about their ethnicity vividly came to life by the game of dominoes. By deliberately creating the space to socialise and enact the game, gardeners actively brought to life an element of accepted Puerto Rican culture. All participants here described the game as a very significant and distinctive Puerto Rican tradition, irrespective of whether they had prior cultural knowledge of the game or practical experience playing it. In effect, the game, and the locational context of it being played in the garden, influenced how informants attributed meaning to their ethnicity. This phenomenon was apparent in the comments of a number of informants when they described why the game was so important for Puerto Ricans. An expression of this idea is captured by these two informants.

> Believe it or not, I started learning how important dominoes is for Puerto Ricans [in the garden]. I didn't grow up with it at home…I learned it here… [gardeners] taught me how [dominoes] relates to the culture of Puerto Rico…and my background. [U3]

> I have learned a lot [from gardeners]… Like my parents didn't play dominoes at home, that was a new thing when I came to this garden…when I play I feel more connected to the people here, it's important for [the gardening group] and for Puerto Ricans…and I feel more like a team [when I play dominoes]. I didn't feel that before. [U4]

The understanding and meaning of dominoes varied over time and according to gardeners' social circumstances. Socialisation processes clearly mediated informants' high valuations of the game. Community gardening and belonging to a gardening group, therefore, were formative factors in how gardeners understood and attributed meaning

to their ethnicity. This finding was substantiated by research in El Flamboyan and Brook Park. In this regard, three El Flamboyan informants [F1; F2; F3] indicated that they learnt "how important growing food is for Puerto Ricans" in their garden. One gardener [F1] explained how prior to membership, she did not strongly associate food cultivation with notions of Puerto Rican ethnicity. Nonetheless, just because she did not consciously connect gardening to "what it means to be a Puerto Rican" previously, it did not mean that she now doubted whether the activity had great ethnic significance.

> [Gardening] was just a matter to survive, you know, we grew [food] to live. I didn't really have the chance to think like how it is important for [Puerto Ricans]…what it means for [Puerto Ricans], though [gardening] has been there for so many years…a part of us. [F1]

Her interpretations of the relationship between ethnicity and growing food stemmed from garden membership and her lived experiences in the garden. Growing food in the present, and in the locality of the community garden, invoked new interpretations of the activity. Gardening was no longer simply a habitual practice that the rural inhabitants of Puerto Rico did 'just to survive'. Gardening was now inextricably linked to ethnicity and the belief that it was innately 'a part of us', irrespective of matters of survival. In this way, we see the on-going negotiation and nuanced nature of ethnicity. The reality was that gardening distinctly characterised the group she now realised she belonged to. Located in a different network of social relations and everyday practices, gardening also effectively separated her and the gardening group from other societal groups in NYC who did not garden. This finding substantiates the trend discovered in UWS, and particularly about how playing dominoes there promoted individuals to attach their ethnicity to the value of the game. Gardeners' lived experiences of socialising in the locality of their gardens played an influential role in how they reconceptualised new awareness of Puerto Rican ethnicity.

5.4.2 "Garden-only traditions"

Casita gardeners were co-creating distinct traditions in their gardens in which ideas of Puerto Rican ethnicity evolved in a new, localised fashion. These traditions, such as UWS's 'Good-bye Summer Harvest Party' and 'Domino Night', were not entirely dependent on concepts of accepted traditional Puerto Rican culture. Nonetheless, when celebrating these new traditions, the activities that were expressively linked to their

ethnicity were practiced and revered. For instance, every Thursday evening in UWS was referred to as 'Domino Night'. This was a time when gardeners played more competitively and without taking long intermissions between games. At this time, it was common to find a scene in which people discussed the game and strategies for winning until late in the evening. One informant [U3] interpreted this tradition "like a national holiday here at the garden", and he emphasised how much he enjoyed and looked forward to the night.

> [Domino night] is something that we do here….it's what being member [of the garden] is all about…we take is seriously. It is [an event] that brings us together. Sometimes people can't make it [to the garden] every day or they come [to the garden] but they come just for a short time or they work in the garden. But, on this night everyone knows that we come together to just come together…you know to play and to catch up and see who is the best [at dominoes]…spend time with each other. [U3]

The Puerto Rican 'tradition' of dominoes was continuously played during the 'Good-bye Summer Harvest Party'. Gardeners, though, tended to underline how this Party was unique to the community garden, and not necessarily unique to Puerto Rico. Expressions of this sentiment are captured in the comments below.

> [Good-bye Summer Harvest Party], that's our tradition. It's only in this garden, it's our new tradition in our place, you know, here in the garden we celebrate our own things. [U2]

> In Puerto Rico, you know, it's not like there are any good-bye summer parties because summer never leaves Puerto Rico. I think that if there were four seasons in Puerto Rico, then people would celebrate a holiday like this and probably do the same things we do. But it is really like a holiday for this garden only. [U1]

When I explored the meaning of 'our traditions' by asking one gardener [U2] if he was referring to explicit Puerto Ricans traditions or more narrowly to the gardening group's traditions, he responded by saying "yes". It remained unclear who exactly he was talking about when he enthusiastically emphasised *our* traditions and *our* own things. This ambiguity suggests that both interpretations were correct and interconnected. Gardeners were consciously aware of how some of their traditions were unique to the gardening group. Yet, we witness a continuity of distinct and accepted Puerto Rican traditions in these new garden traditions, and most notably by the game of dominoes. The readily accepted understanding that dominoes was a Puerto Rican practice helped

bound gardeners to a specific space and gardening group. The game served as a linking force between members and provided the nexus around which gardeners came to socialise with one another to 'feel more connected' and 'like a team' in the garden. The garden became a space through which ideas of *old* Puerto Rican culture and *new* community gardening traditions merged and intersected.

The finding that gardeners were co-creating traditions through which ideas of Puerto Rican tradition evolved to adapt to the social norms of the local gardening group was also discovered in El Flamboyan. This phenomenon clearly resonated in gardeners' accounts during their Halloween Party. Gardeners described Halloween as an American holiday. Yet, a number of informants [F2; F3; F4; F6] also underlined how their Halloween Party had a unique El Flamboyan 'flavour' that could not be found anywhere else in the world. During this holiday, salsa music continuously played from the garden's loud speakers, and 'traditional' Puerto Rican food, such as the *lechon* (pig roasted on a spit), was prepared and shared with all attendees. Gardeners were in large part celebrating the holiday with such things as *lechon* and salsa music because they were from Puerto Rico. But they were also celebrating the holiday because they now lived in the US. One gardener [F4] explained how "it's nice to celebrate new things…it's a holiday from [the US] but with El Flamboyan style… now [Halloween] is our own, too". Whilst gardeners recognised that Halloween was not a holiday from, or largely celebrated in Puerto Rico, by bringing in elements of their own accepted Puerto Rican tradition they felt comfortable about making it 'their own' and incorporating it into their own notions of traditions as community gardeners and residents of NYC.

It is important to first realise here that in El Flamboyan, informants rarely played dominoes or mentioned the game in relation to their ethnicity. To explore this phenomenon further, I asked an El Flamboyan informant [F3] if he knew how to play dominoes. Although he had never mentioned the game during the interviews or in any of our informal discussions, the question quickly sparked a passionate response and a detailed account of his past experiences playing the game. He later alluded to how he no longer plays the game whilst asserting that "[dominoes is a] thing of the past…we don't play it much [in the garden]". It was clear from the informant's response that the value and meaning of the game was connected to his awareness of how other gardeners did not play dominoes in the space. It is plausible to assume, then, that if this informant had been a member of UWS, he may have otherwise closely aligned the game with notions

of his ethnicity and perhaps even been an ardent player. This phenomenon is also telling to how Puerto Rican traditions were not uniformly understood by members of different gardens. What was considered to be an important Puerto Rican tradition in one garden was not always true in another garden.

5.5 The Value of Gardeners' Social Bonds

5.5.1 "You can take the Puerto Rican out of the farm, but you can't take the farm out of the Puerto Rican"

Gardeners' tendency to depend on one another for horticultural learning, advice, and assistance was a reoccurring pattern in the two Casita gardens. These gardeners believed that the skills and labour involved with plant cultivation was inherent in the practices and embedded in the knowledge of the garden's community of members. As such, horticultural knowledge was conceptualised as a 'valuable resource' within the intra-garden social network. One El Flamboyan informant [F1] described her experiences of cultivating a tomato plant in her gardening bed: "this is how we grow tomatoes [in the garden], [another gardener] taught me and he knows". In this regard, the act of cultivating plants in Casita gardens enabled and encouraged relationships of reciprocity.

The understanding that some gardeners had more horticultural knowledge, skills, and interests than others influenced Casita gardens' intra-garden social structure. A number of gardeners [F2; F3; U; U2] were especially revered for their gardening skill-sets. In fact, other members of the group referred to them as the garden's 'teachers'. These teachers, in turn, described their role as a respected and privileged status within the group. One of the teachers in El Flamboyan [F3] emphasised his pride in knowing that his skills and interests in gardening were appreciated and valued by other gardeners. He also alluded to the 'power' of knowing how others needed and depended on his assistance, and how largely for this reason it made him 'look better' in the eyes of other gardeners. In effect, horticultural knowledge and the act of offering gardening support anchored teachers' social standing within the Casita gardens' social hierarchy.

> It makes me feel good to know that I can teach other people. You know, when you have [horticultural] experience gardening is not difficult. And I like to do it. Yeah, it makes me feel good and I think people look at me better. I'm here to help. I want to help. [F3]

Casita gardeners also signalled an implicit limitation to what they could learn from the *Gringos* or non-Spanish speaking Americans in the context of gardening. Embedded in this rationale was the idea that Puerto Rican ethnicity was tied to the 'right' ways of gardening. For instance, one El Flamboyan gardener [F1] described her indifference to attending educational workshops organised by non-gardeners by clearly linking horticultural knowledge with Puerto Rican heritage: "Puerto Ricans already have gardening knowledge, we understand the things about plants that other people [in NYC] don't know". In this way, people who were not Puerto Rican simply did not have the same amount and quality of horticultural knowledge and skill-sets as Puerto Rican gardeners.

By critically interrogating intra-garden social dynamics, though, undervaluing the importance of educational workshops may have had more to do with maintaining intra-garden social hierarchies than with ethnicity per se. The social value attributed to teachers' knowledge could possibly be devalued if other gardeners readily attended and gained knowledge from these workshops. As such, it was important for teachers to maintain their social worth and value within the group in order to uphold their revered status. Educational workshops were also perceived by Casita gardeners as infringing on their social bonds and norms of reciprocity. Offering forms of help and support bounded the gardening group together. This notion was well articulated by one informant [U2] when he explained that "the point, you know, of gardening is to come and learn new things, and to put some of the things you knew already to use, and to learn from each other…because then I think people really start coming together, you know they start to like depend on each other". Furthermore, attending educational workshops was not always high on the agenda of most gardeners. As the following section will discuss more thoroughly, many Casita gardeners were interested in coming to the space to socialise.

5.5.2 "Home is where Puerto Ricans are"

For Casita gardeners, the idea that everyone was Puerto Rican was at the core for why they considered the garden to be home-like, and why they could also feel comfortable doing their 'own thing' in the space. One UWS informant [U1] expressed this sentiment when he described the 'homeness' of the garden: "I believe that because we are from

Puerto Rico, we do things in a certain way, and we feel good to have that common thing, our culture, we can all enjoy it…we are all alike". Similarly, insight from another participant here [U4] reinforced the idea that "[gardeners] feel comfortable around people of the same background". In the comments below, we see how it was the awareness of 'not having to deal' with non-Puerto Ricans that made this gardener feel comfortable in the garden.

> The garden, for me, it's a place where after work - where I don't work with any Puerto Ricans - I can come and hang out with my friends who are Puerto Rican. We can talk about our day, and we can talk in our slangs…and relax….talk about the day and what's going on in our lives in words [Puerto Ricans] feel comfortable using. [U4]

As a form of value of the garden, Puerto Rican ethnicity also emerged in how a gardener in El Flamboyan [F3] characterised the space. In his rhetoric below, he stretched the significance of gardeners' ethnicity to his social relations with 'others' and 'non-members'. In doing so, he conjured an image of Puerto Rican people as different and distinct from all other ethnic groups in the City, and even those groups under the Spanish-speaking Latino label.

> [Puerto Ricans] can feel more free talking about the government and doing things because we are legal citizens of the country…we also follow and talk a lot about sports [in the garden] but you know, we don't always follow soccer like the Mexicans and other Latinos do. [F3]

At the root of both of these above descriptions were the gardeners' [F3; U4] values of the garden. Puerto Ricans had distinctive interests and ways of speaking. These phenomena not only separated gardeners from non-members, but it also drew a line of separation between gardeners and other non-Puerto Rican Latinos. The garden provided the space for Puerto Rican members to congregate, socialise, and 'feel free' to embrace their differences as a distinct group in NYC. Sharing a common Puerto Rican ethnicity was essentially how these gardeners came to understand the significance of the space, and the fine lines that made the Puerto Ricans dissimilar from other ethnic groups.

5.5.3 "Gardeners help and support me"

Casita gardeners visited their gardens about four times a week and often stayed there for a few hours at a time, if not longer. The connection between ideas of 'homeness' and

their frequency of visitation readily surfaced in these gardeners' daily rhetoric. In this regard, one respondent [F6] explained why she frequently came to El Flamboyan: "the garden is our home so of course we would want to feel at home every day…[members] are like brothers and sisters…we come and share things, we unite and spend a good time here. Everything is very [calm] here". In many instances, gardeners phoned each other before or after they arrived to the garden, informing the other that they were there and that they too should come and 'hang out'. Gardeners were seeking a comfortable place to socialise with each other, and the garden's home-like ambiance played a role in their frequent patterns of visitation.

The interconnectivity between Casita gardeners' social dependency on the group and their visiting patterns was also apparent in how gardeners considered members as an extension of their own family. Two garden teachers from El Flamboyan [F2; F3], for instance, often came to the garden in the early morning to either water the planting beds or feed the chickens. At this time, they often worked alone or with each other, but it was rare to find other gardeners present at these early hours. Later on in the afternoons, these two gardeners returned to the space 'to relax' and to socialise with members. It was simply not enough to visit the garden without being able to socialise with members. A clear expression of this sentiment was articulated by one of the two garden teachers.

> I feel good with the people [in the garden], united, like a family. It's very important for me to have [the garden], very important….sometimes I think about my own family, some are in Puerto Rico or other places in the [US], but here everyone is together and like a family, [garden members] are my family, 100 percent. [F3]

The above comments revealed the gardener's physical separation from his biological family. He was undoubtedly interested in cultivating a similar social network in the garden with members. In practical terms, membership offered him the status reassurance he could not receive from his own family. The informant's language also revealed how the garden offered a space for strong societal ties to be developed. The garden enabled and provided the 'social space' within which to create and reaffirm social networks of support. The social norm of depending on others for social support was what many Casita gardeners desired and came to expect from their garden membership. As such, ethnicity was implied but not firmly explicit in his remarks.

The significance members placed on their social ties with each other was also expounded by another informant [F1] when her daughter died of cancer in July 2011. Whilst discussing the unfortunate circumstance with each other, she stated that "when I'm [in the garden] I don't worry about nothing else, it takes my mind off the problems in my life…coming [to the garden] is helping me deal [with the loss]". In addition, there were three separate occasions when I heard people screaming at each other from an informant's [F5] apartment, which was located just adjacent to the garden. Shortly after, this informant came to the garden and explained how she just had a fight with her husband or daughter and needed 'to unwind' and 'get away' from the problems and chaos at home. Indeed, the garden was a place of escape and a place for these Casita gardeners to work out anxieties.

5.5.4 "I trust members"

Gardeners from across the three sites repeatedly mentioned that they didn't trust strangers and found many areas close to the garden intimidating and scary. This fear was also evident in their frequent recommendations to me and to others on which areas and streets to avoid when walking to and from the garden. The great majority of participants also contrasted the community garden to other public spaces and parks in NYC. This was especially the case in the two Casita gardens, where informants stressed how they felt safer in the garden than out and trusted fellow gardeners. A clear expression of this phenomenon was articulated by a male and female informant from El Flamboyan.

> [In the garden] you basically know all the people that come. It's the feeling of comfort here, like family…There are not many places that I like and feel comfortable in [the City]. I use to always be in my house, but now it's not like that…Outside of [the garden] there are Puerto Rican people too, but you don't know them, you can try, you know, to talk with them, but it's not the same… you may not know a lot of people and you feel scared [out of the garden]. [F3]

> You don't have to be afraid [in the garden] because [members] are together… [there is] security [in the garden], you know. At the park… [people there] don't care who you are. But [in the garden], as soon as you get to the gate, and we don't know you, we gonna say "who is that"? And [non-members] know that the we are like a family…We gonna ask [visitors] what is your name, and who you are…[The garden is a place] to stay a long time and feel comfortable. [F5]

The relationship between Puerto Rican ethnicity and trust, therefore, was important insofar as it related to the specific gardening group. In the above comments, we see how a clear distinction was made between garden members and non-members, even if both groups of people were Puerto Rican. These Casita gardeners were primarily interested in socialising with garden members, and socialising with non-members was invariably 'not the same'. This suggests that Puerto Rican ethnicity was not the only and underlying reason why these informants felt 'at home' in the space. This finding helps to shed new light on the discussion from section 5.5.2 about how Casita gardeners were attributing value to the garden and the fact that group members shared a common ethnicity. What we see here is that it was the specific Puerto Rican people in the garden, as opposed to Puerto Rican people in general, that made Casita gardeners feel comfortable in a home-like and family-like atmosphere. In effect, the frequently reported sentiment of 'it's important for me that members are Puerto Rican' may have more to do with the fact that informants were community gardening and building social networks in a specific space, rather than merely the fact that members were all from Puerto Rico.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter reveals how, when applied separately, the three disparate theoretical lenses of ethnicity fail to reveal the fine grain of the experiences and expressions of the phenomenon across time and space. Theorists have a tendency to be weighed down by the debate on primordial, instrumental, and social construction perspectives, and about which one of the three is the most precise and relevant theory for structuring research on ethnicity. Yet, I found that when each theory is applied to the research separately, the risks of oversimplification become far too obvious. This chapter has demonstrated the importance of merging these theoretically opposing camps at different socio-contextual points. The results, then, reinforce the literature base that acknowledges that ethnicity is the result of the dynamic interplay between all three of these approaches (Seol, 2008; Spickard and Burroughs, 2000; Nagel, 1997).

The Brook Park case study offered a revealing story partly because members were of many different nationalities and yet, they all socialised and worked in the same space. The discussion around the Mexica Danza Ceremony unpacked the relationship between gardeners' notions of an innate Indigenous ethnicity and the garden's social gatherings

that reinforced these notions. In this case, we witness how ideas about extended kinship, prompted by the Ceremony, held the diverse group of gardeners together by disguising informants' national differences to the gardening group, The intensity and persistence of Indigenous ethnicity in gardeners' repertoire, however, wavered across temporal and spatial dimensions. When addressing wider concerns of social discrimination in the district, for instance, gardeners prominently drew on notions of Latino ethnicity to assert their common goals with other gardeners and residents. This suggests that people find it advantageous to make socio-political demands backed by a larger cohort of people (Masuoka, 2011; Walder, 2000). It also suggests that the state by and large recognised this pan-ethnic label in public discourse. However, when gardeners were engaging in individual pursuits in spaces regarded as personal, the significance of Puerto Rican 'blood' rose to the foreground and imbued their activities with emotive power. Articulating innate notions of distinct Puerto Rican ethnicity whilst socialising with others in more public spaces of the garden would have ostensibly dampened participants' efforts to pursue common interests and assert similarities with other gardeners and garden visitors. Therefore, the garden was found to provide the space in which all three sentiments were created and recreated by gardeners' patterns and practices of socialisation. The shift between Puerto Rican, Latino, and Indigenous ethnicity, occurred in no particular order but rather depended on where gardeners were and what they were doing at the present time. There was no *right* or *wrong* way for gardeners to express their ethnicity.

The garden itself enabled processes of socialisation, and within the particular three gardens these processes were shown to play a powerful role in influencing gardeners' understandings and expressions of ethnicity. This phenomenon was elaborated in the UWS case, particularly in relation to enacting notions of accepted Puerto Rican tradition through the game of dominoes. Gardeners effectively learned about the significance of the game through playing, viewing, and speaking to other gardeners about the game. Prior knowledge or experience of the game was not a fundament for gardeners to attach their ethnicity to dominoes. In addition, though playing the game was legitimised by the UWS group as a distinct Puerto Rican tradition, the value and significance of the game was not uniformly understood by gardeners in the other two sites. In large part, what participants perceived as their ethnic traditions depended on which gardening group they belonged to. Playing or not playing dominoes, then, had less to do with one group of gardeners having the *correct* or *true* understanding of what constituted Puerto Rican

traditions and more to do with these traditions simply being conceptualised differently by different groups of people over time. This finding challenges existing research in the field, which tends to describe Puerto Rican gardeners as if they all think and act alike (Winterbottom, 2007; Aponte-Pares, 1997).

Community gardens are not only places for the preservation and protection of certain cultural values and elements of ethnicity, enabling people to practice their traditions from their homeland (Peters and Kirby, 2008; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Corlett et al., 2003: 367; Schmelzkopf, 1995; Airriess and Clawson, 1994: 19-20). Gardens also provide the space in which people come together to actively create new traditions through which ideas of ethnicity evolve across time and space. The localised evolvement of Puerto Rican culture in these community gardens occurred through the creation of new traditions, festivals, and gardeners' every day practices of socialisation. This was evidenced during El Flamboyan's Halloween event, for instance, when participants roasted a *lechon*, bringing a Puerto Rican 'twist' to the holiday, which allowed its incorporation into their own established traditions as gardeners in and residents of NYC. Awareness of the degree to which boundaries between garden-only traditions and gardeners' notions of their own ethnic traditions can become blurred certainly broadens the scope of research on Puerto Rican community gardening in NYC. The findings from this chapter suggest that Winterbottom's (2007: 83) assertion that Casita gardens are the living expression of a gardening group's culture should not be merely interpreted with regard to how these spaces preserve ethnic traditions or evoke memories of Puerto Rico, but rather it should be interpreted with regard to how gardeners shape and recreate ideas of ethnicity in these spaces. Theoretically then, the socio-spatial formations of ethnicity could extend to other groups of people who are sharing experiences of daily life in other urban spaces. Thus, the research's finding is unlikely to be exclusively contingent to Puerto Rican community gardeners. Rather, it is suggested here that reconceptualisations of ethnicity are likely to arise irrespective of specific ethnic labels and specific spaces such as community gardens, and extend, for one example, to Dominican members of a youth club.

Notions of ethnicity were impetuses for fuelling ideas of Casita gardens as home-like spaces. In turn, feelings of comfort in the space were identified as strong motivating forces encouraging gardeners to frequent the garden and socialise with members of the group. Informants' testimonies about valuing the community garden as a comfortable

space and the power of socialising as a motivating force for members to visit their community garden corresponds with those findings recorded in the literature (Lawson 2005; Glover, 2004; Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Kurtz, 2001; Armstrong 2000; Schmelzkopf, 1995). Casita gardeners also made the explicit connection between the value of their garden and how the space accommodated their distinct Puerto Rican habits and interests. This finding suggests a gap in Ottoman et al.'s (2012) study on the reasons why gardeners describe community gardens as home-like. These researchers argue that a short walking distance and the close proximity of the garden to members' houses largely accounts for this phenomenon. The researchers, however, overlook the significance of ethnicity as a relevant variable in the analysis. Especially since a few Casita gardeners in this study did not walk or live within walking distance to their garden, the idea that ethnicity might be a related factor for assigning meaning to community gardens is credible and resolves the contradiction with Ottoman et al.'s (2012) assertion.

Horticultural knowledge and skills influenced Casita gardeners' social standing and instilled a sense of social order within the gardening garden. Horticultural abilities were inscribed with ethnic meaning and Casita gardeners' rationales about not needing to attend gardening-related educational workshops were in part based on the limitations of learning from non-Puerto Ricans. The finding that gardeners called on each other for advice and support consolidates Glover's (2004: 150) and Teig et al.'s (2009) work on how community gardens can increase members' social connections and bonds of reciprocity. The findings also reveal how horticultural skills and interests were considered valuable resources and reinforcements of members' social bonds. Hitherto, no other study within the literature on community gardens gives explicit mention to the implications of formal educational workshops on the processes of intra-garden social bonding and social hierarchy.

Although concepts of a common Puerto Ricans ethnicity were central to Casita gardeners' valuations of their garden and their social behaviours within it, the near-obsession with the phenomenon oversimplifies certain matters here. It was clear from the findings that a number of gardeners found themselves in need of social support and a safe, comfortable space in NYC. Puerto Rican ethnicity was not totally unrelated to this phenomenon. However, ethnicity as an all-encompassing frame for analysing gardeners' behaviours camouflages the significance of how Casita gardeners wanted to

specifically socialise with fellow members. In these cases, it was the particular garden and group members - irrespective of ethnicity - that enabled and provided the social space within which to create and reaffirm networks of social support. As such, gardeners' notions of ethnicity were largely based on a connection to place and their social relations with the gardening group. Ethnicity was found to provide a significant, albeit not all-encompassing account of why gardeners behaved in certain ways. It was also gardeners' design and use of the garden, which shaped and reflected social phenomena, that was a mediating variable in gardeners' lived experiences, and I now turn to this issue in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Inherent and Invented Memories, Traditions, and Socialisation Patterns

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research question, which asks how community gardeners design and use gardens. I engage with contemporary social construction of nature debates on nature-culture relations at a local and everyday level in each of the three community gardens. I explore three significant modes through which nature is constructed: inclusive and exclusive patterns of socialisation, ideas of memory, and the role of traditions. Each of these three modes of shaping nature-culture is explored in this chapter's three main sections.

In the first section, 'Coming Together', I describe the processes by which participants from each garden co-constructed space to enact their routine behaviours and patterns of socialisation. I explore how people's social relations produce complex, ambiguous, and personalised connections with nature (Castree, 2001; Peterson, 1999). I also demonstrate how the different symbols that bestow various meanings to natural objects and conditions arise from on-going social negotiations which are grounded in a particular cultural context (Castree and Braun, 1998; Greider and Garkovich, 1994). These considerations elucidate the materiality and lived experience of human-nature relations and how 'natural' and 'social' phenomena are intertwined in the processes of nature-making (Askins, 2009; Procter, 2004; Naveh, 1995).

In the second section, 'Memory in Gardeners' Lived Experiences', I discuss how people's experiences of constructing nature reflect historically-specific social practices that guide their interactions with nature in the present (Brook, 2003; Marcus, 1992). My discussion is informed by an appreciation for how there is no straight line between memory and gardeners' narratives of the past and practices in the present. That is, concepts of memory are ever-changing and rooted in people's social experiences in the present (Marcus, 1992; Deleuze, 1988). This fluidity also elucidates how ideas of nature are congealed by memory, and how nature also shapes our memories and ideas of self through everyday experiences (Ginn, 2013; Bhatti and Church, 2001; Casey, 2000; Olick and Robbins, 1998). I then demonstrate the significance of contesting nostalgias,

and how space is a mediating variable for exploring the 'presentness' of the past (Legg, 2004).

I conclude in 'Puerto Rican Gardening Traditions' by exploring the role of gardeners' intra-garden social relations in determining and reinventing traditions linked with everyday community gardening practices. I discuss how people's conceptualisations of and engagements with nature are both socially and morally guided by notions of traditions, ethics, and cultural 'truths' (Drenthen et al., 2009). These 'truths' are not universal and static, but rather evolve and fluctuate as people's social relations and nature's instrumental value shift across time and space (Hanssen, 2001; Naveh, 1995). I specifically examine the rituals and beliefs tied with food as these semiotic systems express concepts of self and community (Hinton, 2008; Christie, 2004).

The overarching theme in this chapter is that there is no *right* or *wrong* mechanism for constructing nature in community gardens, just as the previous chapter found that there was no *right* or *wrong* way to express ethnicity. The constellation of social and physical characteristics that differentiated each of the three gardens captures the absence of a systemic and uniform account for how community gardeners use and design their gardens. What surfaces in the analysis is that there exists a complex and dynamic relationship between participants' constructions of their gardens, the gardening group, and self. There is no clear border between the hitherto discussed phenomena, nature and ethnicity, and the relationship between them is found to be complex and dynamic.

6.2 Social Patterns of Inclusivity and Exclusivity

6.2.1 "The casita is home"

Community gardeners constructed distinct spaces, which were often separated from their planting beds, to enact their own mode of social interaction. In both of the Casita gardens, the casita and the areas around the structure were built and used as the centre point of socialisation in the garden. One informant [U3] summed up the sentiments of Casita gardeners when he stated "the casita is like home plate" (plate is a term used in baseball to signify the game's centre of attention). Upon entering the garden, these participants often went straight to the area and greeted one another, and joined in or

initiated conversation. If the weather was cold or rainy, members would gather inside the casita. Here, they designed the space so everyone could sit down on chairs around a large table. Otherwise, they would sit right outside of the casita, where they created a large, shaded open space. In UWS, the casita also had a patio with chairs that faced this open space. The area in and around the casita was created as the gardens' focal point.

Exploring Casita gardeners' social gatherings in their casitas, which were often marked with food and drinks, provided further insight on the social construction of these spaces. These informants tended to come to the garden with a bottle of beer in their hand, which had been purchased from the neighbouring kiosk. As time progressed, members took turns buying each other additional beers or other beverages. They also often brought food items to share, which usually included fruits and sweet 'typical Puerto Rican desserts'. In addition, on several Sunday afternoons, members brought homemade savoury entrees, such as rice with beans. As illuminated in figure 6.1, we see how fruit was placed on the table in El Flamboyan's casita and around which the gardeners sat. One informant explained the reasons why she brought food items to the garden, and these reasons were inherently tied to her expectations of 'coming together' to socialise with fellow members in the garden.

> When we come to the garden, we like to share food with each other…we come together around the table in the casita…we all feel good to come around and sit and talk. And, to share food with one another, we like coming together. [F5]

Figure 6.1 Co-creating spaces to socialise in El Flamboyan's casita.

In UWS's casita, gardeners installed a television set in front of the large table that stood in the centre of the structure. On many Sunday afternoons, participants came to the garden specifically to watch televised (American) football games together in the casita. While watching the game, members sat together and talked. They also brought with them food and drinks to share with everyone. By bringing a television to the garden, they were creating a space to watch games and socialise. One participant [U4] explained why he enjoyed watching the game in the garden rather than watching it at home: "we could all watch the games at home, but watching the game [in the casita] is more fun…we are all together here and it's more fun this way". The television enabled members to socialise and 'do what they liked'.

Figure 6.2 The television set in UWS's casita.

Casita gardeners prioritised socialising over other community gardening activities. This was evident in how they would come together to sit and speak to one another in the space, often for hours at a time. In this example, watching television in UWS became a praxis around which gardeners could socialise and in a way that best addressed their interest in following sport. This finding demonstrated the interwoven relationship

between the processes of constructing nature and people's social relations. Be it under a tree or in front of the television, UWS participants were valuing their social relationships in the garden. These gardeners clearly preferred to watch the game with other members in the casita rather than watch it alone in their house.

By watching television in the casita, UWS's participants were transforming the garden's social and physical landscape to create a wider domestic space through their inhabitations and informal patterns of socialisation. As captured in figure 6.2, the television clearly added an element of home as the casita's interior more closely resembled a room in a city apartment rather than what the commonplace assumption of how a community garden space might look. This phenomenon links back to and reinforces chapter five's finding about how Casita gardeners valued the space as a 'home'. In the particular geographic and social context, the inclusion of a television set in gardeners' conceptualisations of home also suggests that ideas of home embodied qualities of both their past and current life. As one gardener [U2] put it, "we did not have much in our casitas [in Puerto Rico]…a big bed for us children to share, a small area to eat or prepare food". For these Casita gardeners, the construction of the casita encompassed their notions of home, both in Puerto Rico and in NYC.

The practice of co-creating casitas as a domestic space was not merely a direct consequence of the physical practice of community gardening. The phenomenon also represented a conscious and strategic choice, and raised questions about the current state of gardeners' homes. Gardeners often lived in crowded, high-rise public housing developments. One informant [F2] clearly described the characteristics of her place of residence: "[My apartment] is small, and now my daughter moved in with her two kids…I don't like being at home too much, it's too small and crowded…noisy". Carving out home-like spaces in the garden was thus related to participants' attempts to create a comfortable home outside of their actual places of residence. To this end, the above informant added that "the garden is where I can get away from my house to relax and breathe without the troubles that everyone [at my house] is bringing". The garden enabled them to reinvent and build the home they wanted to inhabit and compensate for their lack of power to do so in NYC.

Home-like spaces in Casitas often had access rules based on membership. The casitas were largely perceived by these gardeners to be 'family-only' spaces. This implied that these spaces were distinct from all other spaces in the garden. By controlling access to the casita, members were claiming ownership over the space: if you were not a part of the gardens' family, you were not immediately invited into the gardeners' home. This phenomenon reinforced the idea that these gardeners considered the casitas to be a home, albeit communal. The structure was also an extra social and physical measure of safety for gardeners. This viewpoint was clearly articulated by one Casita gardener.

> People that aren't from the neighbourhood or we don't know, we cannot deny them of entry [into the garden]. But we could deny them entry into the casitas…for whatever reason. The casita is for the family only…[non-members] are little more cautious about entering the casita if they are not members…and so, the casita makes me feel safe. [U2]

Conceptualisations of membership contributed to the Casita gardens' socially relevant and symbolic landscape. In these gardens, that were otherwise 'open to the public', the casita symbolised a member and family-only space. The co-construction of the casita reflected their interpretations of belonging to the group. In effect, the construction and usage of the structure interiorised the dynamics of Casita gardeners' social relations with both members and non-members.

The processes of co-constructing the Casita gardens as homes was also central to how they distinguished the nature in the garden from nature out of the garden. For instance, some UWS members, such as one informant [U4] named Robert, had a chair informally reserved for him on the patio of the casita. In recognition of 'his spot', some members purchased a placard for his birthday that read 'Robert's Parking only' beside his spot near the edge of the porch, as illuminated in figure 6.3. This finding elucidated how the value of the placard and 'his spot' was embedded in the group's social habits and norms. Social meanings fuelled gardeners' constructions of nature, and the garden's physical constructs in turn reinforced gardeners' social values of the garden and the group. When reflecting on the birthday present, Robert underlined the meaning of the garden as he pointed to the placard.

> There is no place like the garden anywhere else in the world…you can't find [that placard] anywhere else, it's only here and it's special…makes me feel good like I'm here and [the garden] is my place. [U4]

Figure 6.3 Robert sitting in 'his spot' on the porch of the UWS casita.

By recognising the placard as a source of knowledge about the gardening group, rather than merely a physical object, it becomes a tool for understanding various social phenomena. On this note, Robert explained how "if I don't come [to my spot] for one day, [gardeners] start worrying and calling me at my house to make sure everything is okay". From his comments and frequency of garden visitation, the fact emerges that Robert was able to visit the garden nearly every day because he was unemployed. This informant explained how he had lost his job a few months before fieldwork commenced, and his experiences of finding employment were challenging. The garden enabled him to escape the boredom of 'just sitting around' while he waited to obtain employment: "I could be here in the garden with my buddies, or, you know, at home just being alone and bored". Coupled with the earlier finding about how gardeners often lacked comfortable homes, this phenomenon conveyed a sense of the wider political-economic situation of South Bronx residents, as the background chapter discussed.

6.2.2 "To get away from people and things"

Brook Park gardeners rarely came to the garden to socialise. I explored this phenomenon in more detail with one gardener [B1], named Natty, who often worked alone and would bring her own gardening tools to the space. Upon arriving, she would straightaway start pruning or weeding areas of the garden she thought needed some attention. On several occasions, after working for about an hour or two, she would take a break to eat a sandwich and drink a coffee, which were usually purchased from a nearby kiosk. This break, which lasted between 15 to 25 minutes, would be the only time she would sit down to rest in the garden. She would often take her breaks near her own planting lot, or on one of the tree stumps that encircled the garden's fire pit. In both cases, she would sit alone and away from others. Evidently, it was her motivation *to do* something rather than her desire to socialise with members, which drove her, albeit infrequently, to the garden.

Natty's minimal social interaction with other gardeners also intensified her feelings of anonymity in Brook Park. She confessed that at times she felt uncomfortable in this garden since she "didn't know many people" and didn't know if "anyone really cares about what I'm doing…there are so many people in the garden who I don't know". Clearly, a sense of belonging to and having close social relations with this gardening group was absent in her rhetoric and behaviour. In some instances, this professed feeling of anonymity influenced her horticultural undertakings in the space. On one occasion, she initially wanted to weed a section of the garden but later grew uneasy about doing so because she didn't know if the area 'belonged' to anyone and whether she needed explicit approval from someone else: "I don't want to touch people's stuff or do something and they get mad at me".

Brook Park's 'open membership policy' worked against the idea that a garden should have a specific core membership base. In the words of the coordinator, "everyone, the whole community, the whole world is a member here at Brook Park". In this way, any person who inquired about using the garden and attended the 'first time gardener meeting' could effectively become a garden member and acquire a garden plot. Being a member also often implied having the key to the garden's main entrance. At the onset of fieldwork, I too was offered a key to the garden's main entrance. When I asked Brook Park's coordinator who else had the key and how many key holders there were in total,

he replied by stating that "at this point, I lost track". The key had symbolic and material value as it physically enabled gardeners to access the space and it was also aimed to increase gardeners' sense of ownership of the space.

Brook Park's 'open membership policy', however, contributed to sentiments of mistrust and anonymity in the garden. Natty, for instance, expressed some appreciation for receiving the garden key and said that it was a "nice feeling to get the [key so easily]." Nonetheless, the idea that the garden was 'open to everybody' was a significant issue of concern for her. Her pronounced fear was evident in the fact that she carried her valuables in a fanny bag around her waist the entire time she was in the garden, and on a several occasions she made clear that "you never know who can come in [to the garden] and just take something". In fact, only one Brook Park informant [B2] alluded to a sense of trust in gardeners when he mentioned how the space was safe from local gang violence: "both the crips and the bloods [local gang names] know that [the garden] is off limits to violence and crime". His comment, though, was in terms of other people rather than in terms of his own experiences in the garden. What is also relevant to note is that whilst making this comment, he was adamant about not letting his bicycle out of 'eye's reach' for fear that it would be stolen. His behaviour echoes Natty's suspicions and lack of trust in the garden. Research also substantiated this finding when I examined how one Brook Park gardener [B4] watered his planting bed nearly every morning and tended to his plants at least twice a week. Before, during, and after conducting these activities, he, as Natty, was rarely observed socialising with other gardeners. Yet, on most occasions, he was found sitting outside of his own apartment's main entrance on the side walk that was located only a few yards away from the garden's back entrance. He often sat there in the company of his friends who were all Puerto Rican. I spent many afternoons sitting with him in this area and joining in on his conversations with the 'regulars'. When I questioned why he and his friends didn't sit in the garden where there was enough space for everyone to find shade from the scorching summer sun, he was quick to reply that "I prefer to hang out here…it is better [on the sidewalk], we do what we like here".

On one afternoon, this participant [B4] was found using the garden's fire pit to prepare *Bianda*, which he explained was a typical Puerto Rican dish made from cod fish and root vegetables. As soon as the dish was ready, he quickly brought the pot of food to

where he usually sat out on the sidewalk. The news of the *Bianda* must have travelled fast because on this day, all of the 'regulars' were present and hungry. Some people, including myself and this participant [B4] had to stand while eating the dish. Nonetheless, they all evidently preferred to stand and eat the dish on the sidewalk rather than sit and be in the garden.

What is resoundingly clear here is that this participant [B4] felt comfortable out on the sidewalk because he knew all the 'regulars'. As opposed to the gardening group, he felt comfortable in a space where everyone knew him and he was familiar with everyone too. This phenomenon provided him with a sense of control and ownership of the space, something that he did not experience in the garden. In addition, he also preferred to share and consume the food he explicitly attached to his Puerto Rican ethnicity out of the garden. The fact that garden members were of different nationalities might have also exacerbated his worry about expressing his ethnic distinctiveness through food.

Brook Park's provisional policies of social inclusivity resulted in gardeners constructing spaces to 'get away' from other people in the garden. For instance, the gardener mentioned above [B4] erected a hammock underneath the grape vines that grew beside his gardening bed, as depicted in figure 6.4. He perceived the hammock, which he tried to fully conceal with the vines, as his own 'private' space in an otherwise 'very open' garden. His motivations for constructing the space were fuelled by his priorities to "get away from people and things [in the garden]". As such, the hammock allowed him to successfully achieve his social priorities. In Brook Park, creating and using secluded spaces in the garden addressed informants' interests to sit in solitude.

Figure 6.4 Lounging in a hammock, a private place of solitude.

The processes involved with constructing secluded and private spaces also depicted gardeners' interests in gaining a sense of safety and ownership in the garden. With this in mind, gardeners' underscored the value of their private spaces especially when they accounted for how Brook Park was frequented by 'many strangers'. Whilst in their private space, though, informants could escape the uneasiness related to their feelings of anonymity and inability to control the flux of people coming in and out of the garden. Therefore, the garden's policy had a bearing on gardeners' socialisation patterns, and their associated feelings of uneasiness, in turn, inscribed the ways in which they used and constructed garden spaces. It is also relevant to point out that in Brook Park, there was no casita or a comparable 'member-only space'. In gardeners' private and secluded spaces, though, they were able to control, to some degree, who was allowed to enter or use the spaces. The hammock, in this case, was constructed to address this particular gardener's interests in controlling and 'owning' a space. These interests were certainly addressed by the casita and the social patterns of exclusivity practiced in the two Casita gardens.

6.3 Memories in the 'Then' and 'Now'

6.3.1   "Remembering Puerto Rico"

The community garden prompted many informants to recall their childhood or adolescent memories of life in Puerto Rico. The vivid picture informants painted of

their memories illustrates how elements of nature had personal meaning on an emotional dimension. Exploring the stories that emerged from the planting of *gandules* (a variety of legume) especially exposes the social values and meanings imbued in their gardening activities. All of the informants from El Flamboyan enthusiastically spoke about the cultural significance of the *gandules*, and many recalled memories of their parents or family members cultivating this crop in Puerto Rico. To this end, one informant [F1] described her pleasure for viewing the plant in the community garden: "[*gandules*] makes me happy because I remember Puerto Rico and [members] remember too because [*gandules*] makes them happy…it's something we remember and it makes the garden like Puerto Rico". Gardening invoked a sense of nostalgia of nature and remembering home in a new country.

The thoughts and memories sparked by this specific plant provided informants with enjoyment and satisfaction even if they did not directly engage with its cultivation. In fact, there were only two informants [F2; F3] who actually cultivated the *gandules*. This phenomenon was partly related to the idea that cultivating the plant required the 'know-how' and a horticultural skill-set that only garden teachers possessed. This finding links back to chapter five's discovery of the gardens' hierarchical social structures. One of the cultivators [F2] was acutely aware that "[*gandules*], everyone likes them". In this case, cultivating *gandules* reinforced the teachers' social standing in the gardening group.

What was particularly noteworthy was that different discourses were used to describe the same plant. In El Flamboyan, where the plant was cultivated, *gandules* was highly valued by informants as it reminded them of their past in Puerto Rico. In contrast, informants from the other two gardens did not cultivate the plant. They also did not explicitly mention gandules in relation to their past memories and to what makes their garden look like Puerto Rico. When I discussed the significance of the plant with an UWS informant [U1], he emphasised how it was just one of the many plants that was grown on the island; "sure we had *gandules* in our garden…we had many things, we grew many things…I remember all the plants that we grow here from Puerto Rico". This trend suggests that gardeners in El Flamboyan were co-creating a collective, coherent memory. Indeed, my experiences of speaking with each gardener in this study underscored the reality that they all had memories that were unique and enmeshed with personal experiences. Nevertheless, by denoting nature with tangible and emotive

qualities, gardeners here were linking the entire group to a collective memory they could all share and enact in the garden. This essentially reduced memories of Puerto Rico to one vision and landscape. In this case, the shared memory served to anchor flora to notions of rural Puerto Rico. It also created a unified voice for how nature was socially valued by the group.

Co-creating a narrative of the past meant that gardeners did not necessarily come to and leave the space with exactly the same ideas of their memories and the Puerto Rico landscape. In the above example, for instance, we see how membership in El Flamboyan fostered the strong belief that Puerto Ricans grew and highly valued *gandules*. Passively or actively engaging with the plant's cultivation also fostered a coherent and collective memory of a distinct Puerto Rican landscape. This suggests that gardeners' lived experiences in the space had implications on the process of recalling landscape memories of the past. It is plausible to assume, then, that if the crop had been cultivated in UWS, gardeners' persistence to recall and their descriptive language of *gandules* could have conveyed a different set of values in relation to the present socio-context of cultivating the plant in the garden.

Gardeners' memories of the past in Puerto Rico were also linked to the presence of chickens in El Flamboyan. The garden's teachers [F2; F3] often cared for these animals, which often entailed feeding and cleaning their cages. All of the gardeners here professed their enjoyment for seeing the animal roam in the garden. The sights and sounds of chickens brought back memories of informants' rural upbringing. A number of informants [F1; F2; F4; F5] grew nostalgic and shared stories of how they remembered chickens grazing near their homes in Puerto Rico, too. When I asked El Flamboyan's coordinator if gardeners gathered chicken eggs or eventually killed and consumed the chickens, she made clear that it was simply the memory of the chickens, as with the *gandules*, which gave her and other gardeners enjoyment.

> We just like having them, it's like how it was on the island because chickens were always around there too. My father used to take the chickens and kill them with his own hands and then we could have to clean the bird and we did everything ourselves…we don't do that here, we don't kill them or really use them for anything but having chickens is something Puerto Ricans know about and it makes me happy to see them here.

The construction of the casitas in El Flamboyan and UWS was also reflective of informants' real and imagined memories of the rural Puerto Rican landscape. If we refer back to the previous section, we are reminded that many gardeners described how they lived in such dwellings in Puerto Rico. They also claimed to have built the structure in the garden to remind them of 'where *we* came from' [F4; U3]. Their emphasis on 'we' elucidates the processes of co-constructing nature and co-constructing notions of a collective, coherent memory. This idea is also substantiated by the fact that no two casitas were built exactly alike. In UWS, the casita was painted with bright colours. All informants here stated that in particular, these colours made the casita resemble the casitas from their past. Yet, in El Flamboyan, the casita was painted in bold white, blue, and red colours so as to reflect the colours of the Puerto Rican flag. Here, informants did not emphasise the casita's exterior colours when they described their memories of the structure in Puerto Rico. Rather, they spoke about their memories of looking out from the casitas and onto the island's rural countryside. For this reason, they hung pictures and painted the casita's interior to remind them of what it was like looking out from and being in their casita in Puerto Rico. An image of this is captured below in figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5 Interior of El Flamboyan's casita, a vision of the Puerto Rican landscape.

6.3.2 "Traditional Puerto Rican plants"

All gardeners described the processes of selecting and cultivating plants by stressing how they enjoyed using their harvest to prepare traditional Puerto Rican food dishes and in particular, *sufrito*, which was described as a typical Puerto Rican condiment. Partly for this reason, all informants cultivated peppers and tomatoes, and either basil or cilantro. The picture captured in figure 6.6 is of one El Flamboyan informant hovering over his planting bed whilst explaining the details of preparing *sufrito* from his harvest.

Figure 6.6 Growing plants to prepare *sufrito*.

Although gardeners across all three gardens had quite a similar plant selection, the meanings and values of their crops did not exist in an objective and uniform manner. Indeed, Brook Park gardeners linked the tomato plant to being a fundamental ingredient of *sufrito*. However, no informant there specifically characterised tomatoes as being a distinct 'Puerto Rican crop'. This was clearly evident in one informant's [B4] comments about how "the tomato plant, many people use it…it's a food that grows good, almost everywhere good". However, in El Flamboyan, a number of informants [F2; F4; F6] explicitly described tomatoes as 'Puerto Rican'. Therefore, different discourses were used by informants to describe the same plants and their plant selection.

Although El Flamboyan gardeners were expressing notions of Puerto Rican ethnicity through their plant choice, these food crops - and especially peppers, tomatoes, and basil - can essentially grow in many different regions around the world. These plants are also not entirely unique to the Puerto Rican climate or soil conditions. This suggests that the process by which nature is transformed from biological into cultural materials is malleable. Ideas of an 'ethnic' or 'conventional' crop are social and cultural phenomena. In this way, a tomato was a fundamental ingredient of *sufrito* but not necessarily a fundamental attribute to notions of Puerto Rican ethnicity.

The gardening groups' hierarchical social structure also influenced how informants constructed their planting beds. This idea resonated in the rhetoric of one El Flamboyan informant [F1] when she informed me that her crop choice was based on notions of what was a accepted crop choice for the garden teacher: "it's what we all grow here… [the garden teacher] said it will grow good and he knows best". This statement revealed how ideas of 'we' were intertwined with the value individuals' placed on certain crops. It also works to consolidate the findings in chapter five about how Casita gardeners perceived their garden's teachers as the best source of horticultural knowledge. In effect, teachers acted as arbiters of inherited and traditional practices.

The finding that Casita gardeners depended on their garden's teachers for help and assistance also helped to explain the narrow plant selection. For instance, on one occasion in UWS, a teacher [U1] spent nearly three hours helping and showing another informant [U4] how to stake his tomatoes according to the "way we did it in Puerto Rico". The gardener described the teacher's help as necessary, and emphasised that "this is my first year gardening, and [the teacher] really knows his stuff". From that

point onwards, I observed how the gardener followed the teacher's advice on the mechanisms of staking his tomatoes. What this finding suggests is that if the gardener grew certain crops that were unfamiliar to the teacher, these crops could potentially serve as a barrier for receiving horticultural assistance. In this case, the gardener was a novice and he needed help cultivating his plants. Clearly, he needed to grow the plants that enabled him to receive this help.

What is also significant to note is that gardeners' co-constructions of nature, as their co-constructions of self, were shaped and reshaped by their physical setting: both in *past* and *present.* In this regard, even though the value of such plants as the *gandules* and tomato was not expressed in a uniform fashion by all gardeners, Puerto Rico was simply unimaginable to all informants without these plants. Indeed, every informant recalled memories of seeing tomatoes in Puerto Rico, irrespective of their valuations of the plant. This phenomenon even held true in Brook Park, where there were no garden teachers. This suggests that gardeners were drawing on the physical and 'natural' landscape of the island in making their plant selection. This finding points to a historical materiality of nature. Informants remembered tomatoes in Puerto Rico, so they grew tomatoes in NYC. In addition, the physical materiality of being located in NYC and working in the garden must also be considered. Gardeners had to contend with natural elements, such as the garden's soil conditions and the climate, when they selected which plants to grow. Not everything could realistically grow and bear fruit in NYC, irrespective of whether gardeners wanted to grow or not grow certain plants.

6.4 Puerto Rican Gardening Traditions

6.4.1 "The right way to garden"

Gardeners' ideas of traditions and what were 'our right' Puerto Rican behaviors were rooted in the social norms and values of the gardening group. This phenomenon was especially prevalent during my discussions with informants on the issue of organic food production. I found that there were no straightforward definitions of the term 'organic'. In El Flamboyan, for instance, informants' decision to use or not use the Miracle Grow Fertilizer Mix (a commercial fertilizer mix) was linked to what the garden's teachers did. One informant [F1] explained how she applied the mix to her gardening bed

because the teacher used it, and he knew "good things for the soil". In this case, the teacher's horticultural expertise allotted him the power in the garden to decide and do what was 'right'. Therefore, it was listening to the teacher that was 'good', and the decision to use the mix was disconnected from any explicit 'scientific truth'. This finding elucidates the idea that gardeners' understandings of nature complimented the social ethics of the group, and these values were formulated in relation to what the gardening group takes as 'good' at a particular time.

In UWS, organic gardening was practiced by applying horse manure to the soil instead of using any kind of synthetic fertilizer. Gardeners' choice to use the manure was again linked to what the garden teacher did and the discursive depiction of what was 'organic'. One of the teachers [U1] travelled every autumn to Staten Island to purchase and collect horse manure for all other gardeners, and he explained that by spreading the manure onto the gardening plots and rotating the soil a few months later, the soil becomes 'naturally' and 'organically' rejuvenated before the planting season. The teacher frequently stressed that his utilisation of horse manure was in line with the 'Puerto Rican tradition': "we used [manure] back in Puerto Rico". In addition, UWS informants also tied notions of organic gardening to their mechanisms of planting crops directly on the ground, rather than in raised planting beds. One respondent [U2] explained how cultivating crops directly on the ground was the more 'natural': "it's more true, it's the more natural way".

In Brook Park, I observed the coordinator speak to a group of gardeners and explicitly mention that "this is an organic garden" and "we do what's healthy for us and the earth and our community". He went on to describe what he thought were 'good' gardening practices and highlighted the overarching need to avoid using any commercial fertilizer mixes, including the Miracle Grow Fertilizer Mix. Immediately after this discussion and away from the group, I conversed with one of the informants [B1] who was present at that time. Though she kept quiet during this discussion with the coordinator, she informed me - in a whisper - that she had a pack of Miracle Grow in her car. In fact, she had intended to use the mix on that day, but after listening to the coordinator, she made the decision to avoid using it and instead comply with his gardening preferences. In this case, we see how this informant's motivation for not using the mix did not come from her own personal gardening preferences, but rather it was driven by a specific social context of being in the community garden led by a particular coordinator. The

coordinator did not consider how his rhetoric and underlying assumptions of the practice might have differed from the other gardeners. In this case, his position as coordinator allotted him the power in the garden to decide and do what was 'right'.

Educational programs also informed and shaped some informants' understanding of organic gardening. El Flamboyan's coordinator, for instance, expressed a sense of shame when she discussed how one of the garden's teachers [F2] used the commercial fertilizer: "I don't like to use it, but he likes it...It's not good, but he does it". What is particularly noteworthy about this case is that the coordinator confessed that she once used the commercial fertilizer, too. She explained how after she participated in various horticultural classes and workshops out of the garden, she underwent an 'ethical makeover'. She reportedly learned a 'new' and 'better' set of values toward nature, which included knowledge of fertilizers and why they were 'bad' for 'good' gardening. Hence, as she developed a different set of social relationships out of the garden, her horticultural knowledge and gardening methods had changed and shifted over time. In this case, her new set of values had more to do with what others out of the garden considered 'good' and 'bad', rather than what the gardening group thought was 'right'.

6.4.2 "The Puerto Rican way"

The on-going processes by which Casita gardeners reinforced, re-created, and internalised 'traditional' Puerto Rican social norms were intimately tied to the cultivation, preparation and handling of food items in the garden. In El Flamboyan, men were responsible for roasting the pig on the spit or *lechon,* and in general for preparing any other meat dish. In figure 6.7, we see gardeners preparing fresh fish in a 'male' space. One female informant [F5] confessed that "cooking meat, that's what the men like to do, that's their stuff". In regards to preparing the *lechon*, the same female gardener claimed that "women don't really do that, in Puerto Rico it's a man thing".

Female Casita gardeners were responsible for preparing non-meat and side dishes, which usually consisted of rice and beans, fried plantains, and various dessert items. During social gatherings in El Flamboyan, female gardeners were also responsible for serving the food to members and garden visitors. At some point during a social gathering, female gardeners here would gather in the casita, where all the prepared food

dishes were placed. These gardeners would then put small portions from each food dish on individual plates, and distribute these plates to everyone in the garden. An image of this process is captured in figure 6.8.

Figure 6.7 El Flamboyan gardeners prepare fish in a 'male space'.

Figure 6.8 El Flamboyan gardeners serving food to others in a 'female space'.

Female Casita gardeners also rarely engaged with the physical work involved in preparing and weeding their planting beds or lots. Instead, many of these informants opted to grow flowers around the casita and the periphery of the garden. In El Flamboyan, for instance, members had scheduled a day in April 2011 to transplant seedlings into their planting beds together. It was the men in El Flamboyan who were working on this day and 'getting their hands dirty' in the planting beds. One female informant [F1] in El Flamboyan addressed this phenomenon and explained how "the men, they are more into the physical work…we prefer to do other things [in the garden]". In a similar way, a male participant [U3] from UWS iterated; "I guess [women] are just not that into growing food, you know, it's like something that the guys like to do here". Largely for this reason, female Casita gardeners here were not actively involved with the daily upkeep of their planting beds. Other than collecting their harvest, they were rarely seen in the planting bed area of the gardens. This idea also links back to the findings discussed in the previous section about how only two informants from El Flamboyan cultivated the coveted *gandules* crops. In this case, the two cultivators of the crop were male, and a number of gardeners [F2; F4; F6], including one of the cultivators, specifically described cultivating this crop as *hard work* and *for the men* since it required even more skill and space to grow than some other crops.

This division of labour in their constructions of nature was an example of how Casita gardeners aimed at reproducing 'traditional' Puerto Rican social roles in their new geographical context. It was more than the presence and consumption of food items, such as the *lechon*, which represented gardeners' connection to the past. There was an active engagement with co-creating the rituals and beliefs tied with food, which were heavily imbued with notions of a past Puerto Rican lifestyle and which differently gendered social roles were validated. By fashioning this division of labour in the garden, we see how notions of Puerto Rican behaviour determined and shaped garden use. Knowledge of nature also became gendered through the norms and responsibilities attributed to both men and women in the gardening group. In effect, the division of labour underscored their interests to recreate this 'traditional' lifestyle, and the garden, in turn, provided gardeners with the space to enact these traditions. This idea was clearly articulated by one informant in UWS.

> We come together [in the garden] like how we did in Puerto Rico. We like it like this. Women talk about their own things and we [men] talk about our own things. We feel more comfortable like this. [U1]

Gardening practices reflecting the 'Puerto Rican way' were rooted in what was and was not accepted as traditions by members of the group. This was clearly evidenced when four Casita gardeners [U1; F2; F4; F6] - both male and female - revealed how they remember their fathers *and* mothers working in the garden. This suggests that food and the garden's division of labour was partly shaped by the social norms of the particular gardening group. In Casita gardens, we see how food was used as a tool by the group to reinforce networks of reciprocity and social cohesion. Food, thus, provided the means by which to celebrate events in a unified and 'traditional' way. The processes of enacting traditions also helped to create and recreate intra-garden social structures. As such, the socio-context of the garden provided the reality and possibility of acceptable Puerto Rican traditions.

Along this line, there was also a tendency to equate cultivating food crops with notions of acceptance into the Casita gardens' community of (male) members. This was especially the case in UWS, where gardeners provided descriptive accounts of how they understood the meanings entangled with their garden plots. One male informant [U3] described the process of being asked, and his consequent receipt of the gardening plot, as every member's 'rites of passage' in the garden: "I was just asked if I wanted a planting lot, that for me is a big deal, that's when you know you are really in, like a part of the garden". Entangled with the plot were symbolic and material meanings. He not only had 'ownership' of a space, but the plot also conveyed a clear message that he was now trusted and an accepted member of the group. Essentially, he had now been officially accepted into the garden's community of male gardeners.

6.5 Conclusion

No two gardens were built exactly alike, and no two garden groups had exactly the same knowledge of nature. Rather than a fixed and unwavering plan, informants from each of the three gardening groups expressed different notions and values of nature. The chapter's three sections are about designing and using gardens in three different ways: 1) through the processes and patterns of socialisation, 2) through the co-constructions of

real and imagined memories, and 3) through the enactment of socially accepted notions of inherent and invented traditions. The results underpin how an emphasis on the pluralities of gardeners' lived experiences, rather than solely on ecological concepts of nature, is essential for appreciating the on-going dynamic processes of using and designing community gardens.

In El Flamboyan and UWS, the gardens' casitas were constructed to enact gardeners' hopes for 'home' and 'family' in the garden. These structures were physically made to resemble the characteristics of a dwelling in rural Puerto Rico. They also embodied physical qualities of a home in the current NYC socio-context. This finding reinforces the idea that the casita is an important and dominant feature of Casita gardens (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004; Aponte-Pares, 1997). Additionally, the discussion on the television set in UWS's casita certainly did not fit in the classic and popular image of community gardens. The television set specifically contradicts some research on community gardens by complicating ideas of how these are vital sites for people's 're-connection' with the 'natural world' (Hale et al., 2011; Tidball and Krasny, 2007; Barlett, 2005). Socialising with group members was of the most importance for these gardeners and the television provided the means to socialise and in a fashion that best suited their interests. This finding also contributes to scholarship on how the design of community gardens can reflect members' interests in engaging in more passive pursuits, rather than solely on growing plants (Tidball and Krasny, 2007; Baker, 2004; Von Hassell, 2002; Crouch, 2000).

The fact that all the gardens exhibited different forms of social inclusivity and exclusivity also underscores the relevance of localised micro-politics in assessing what is going on in gardens. For instance, in UWS, Robert sat in a chair that was physically reserved for him and made meaningful through gardeners' everyday lives. Community gardens, then, are experienced through symbols that express emotional qualities, personal history, and a sense of ownership (Eizenberg, 2012; Winterbottom, 2007). Furthermore, the findings point to the variety of manifestations and mechanisms of social cohesion and connectedness possible in community gardens (Armstrong, 2000; Kingsley and Townsend, 2006). In Casitas, non-members, irrespective of whether they were local South Bronx residents, became scripted as 'the other'. Controlling access into the casita especially marked the line members drew between 'insiders' and

'outsiders'. The processes of exclusion worked to reinforce members' social bonds, and it also fostered and reproduced gardeners' core values, customs, and conceptualisations of a distinct, domestic garden space.

In contrast to Casitas, research in Brook Park revealed that nature was constructed in relation to a different set of social relations. In response to the garden's social conditions, participants created spaces that enabled them to sit alone. They also did not express an interest in socialising with other people in the space. Even though these gardeners expressed an interest in sitting in solitude, the processes by which they created nature were still inherently social. Their anxieties about anonymity in the garden meant that they created spaces in relation to social phenomena; they expressed a desire to get away from *others*. This finding also reveals the significance of garden provision as a factor in the kinds of social practices that emerge in gardens. In this case, the garden's provisionary polices aimed to make the space welcome to 'all members of the community'. Ideas of community members extended well beyond the specific gardening group. Largely for this reason, informants at times felt anxious about being in a space frequented by many unknown people. This finding challenges the research that simply asserts how community gardening increases gardeners' social bonds and ties with each other (Wakefield et al., 2007; Doyle and Krasny, 2003).

The collective and collaborative nature of gardening also elucidated the role of memories in influencing meanings of spaces, material objects, and informants' everyday social experiences in the garden. In the two Casita gardens, nature reflected the groups' accepted ideas of what the social and physical Puerto Rican landscape looked like. This had implications for how gardeners ultimately perceived and valued certain crops. In El Flamboyan, for instance, the *gandules* crop was cultivated in an effort to make the garden look like a distinct vision of rural Puerto Rico. Thus, the crop served a purpose other than the tangible product of its fruits. The memory of the plant provided gardeners with pleasure and satisfaction. The equation of 'tangibly using the plant' and the 'value of the plant' undoubtedly fails to attend to the complexities of gardeners' conceptualisations and constructions of nature. The finding that tangible use is not sufficient for understanding evaluation also reinforces the idea that community gardeners cultivate certain plants based on their landscape memories of homeland

(Winterbottom, 2007; Baker, 2004), and that in general, plants can shape people's memory rather than solely reflect it (Head et al., 2004; Hester and Francis, 1990).

The plurality of 'traditional' Puerto Rican practices reflected how gardeners' ideas of traditions were formed according to a discursive and ever-changing logic. The discussion on organic gardening revealed how gardeners' interpretations of Puerto Rican horticultural traditions were not divorced from the garden's social milieu. According to Casita gardeners, for example, ideas of organic gardening were deeply rooted in how the gardens' teachers enacted notions of traditions. Teachers clearly played a key role in determining what kinds of nature-knowledge emerged in gardens, and what notions of tradition were accepted by the group at large. Horticultural processes involved with community gardening, then, do not so much maintain and preserve gardeners' cultural traditions (Winterbottom, 2007: 82; Twiss et al., 2003), as shape and reshape them across space and time. Indeed, gardens are places where traditions are shared, celebrated, and reinvented in relation to changing socio-contexts.

The social complexity and emotionality of nature helped gardeners express themselves through ideas of 'ethnic' versus 'conventional' crop varieties. Along with the work of Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny (2004), this study's results showed that crop varieties were chosen by gardeners as nature was transformed from biological into cultural materials. Yet, these researchers fail to explicitly indicate what signifies an 'ethnic' versus a 'conventional' crop. Specifically, their study belies the contentious accounts of gardeners' realities, and along with other studies (Winterbottom, 2007; Baker, 2004), it overlooks intra-garden and inter-garden debates on why certain crops are being valued as 'ethnic'. In this case, ideas of ethnic crops were not uniformly accepted by all gardeners.

In the Casita gardens, spaces and roles were gendered. Gardeners' choices about which activities or roles to assume were mediated by the intra-garden social context, and group expectations with regard to gender inform such choices (Shaw, 1999). This finding lent credence to the contention that community gardens enable people to reassume the social roles they might have lost after migrating (Winterbottom, 2007; Aponte-Pares, 1997; Schmelzkopf, 1995). The division of labour in Casita gardens was constitutive of the social and cultural processes of membership itself. Each gardening group had their own

unique repository of knowledge, memories, and culture. The idea that the division of labour in community gardens is based on accepted cultural norms was largely ignored by Parry et al. (2005) in their analysis of the relationship between gardening activities and gardeners' gender ideologies. According to these researchers, personal enjoyment, skills and knowledge, physical ability and 'natural' strengths were central to exposing gender roles and gender-related responsibilities in community gardens. I put forth the notion that the gendered division of labour also reflects accepted social norms, networks, and bonds of reciprocity in gardeners' new geographic context. From this perspective, gendered roles are negotiated by and a product of social milieus and the specific interests of a gardening group.

It must also be acknowledged that there were a number of distinct 'natural' realities that determined gardeners' ideas of nature and crop selections. To varying degrees, gardeners' specific crop selections were inherent in their memories of Puerto Rico simply because of the distinct physical reality of the island. Certain plants - due to the island's weather, soil conditions, and other natural factors - grew in Puerto Rico. As such, the physical landscape helped to create both the possibility for and limits on what could be realistically linked to Puerto Rico's landscape. This suggests that even though gardeners' did not always express the same social value toward particular plants, the physical and 'natural' conditions of Puerto Rico played an influential role in gardeners' decision-making processes related to their crop choice. The physical reality of NYC also played a role in this phenomenon. Certain plants could or could not grow and bear fruit, both in Puerto Rico and in their community garden in NYC. In effect, 'the natural' plays a role in understanding constructions of nature (Stedman, 2003; Shields, 1991). Indeed, people can apply their horticultural knowledge and construct socio-physical environments for plants insofar as there are suitable 'natural' and physical conditions (Ingold, 1992). I do not suggest, however, that nature is not semiotised and culturally reproduced. Rather, the false binary between 'the nature' and 'the social' distracts from the point of how certain plants come defined as Puerto Rican. This false binary also draws attention to a weakness of the social constructivism genre in community garden research. Once we accept that nature is a cultural phenomenon, this phenomenon may become just as deterministic of an idea as the strictly 'natural' phenomenon it is posed to replace when assessing nature (Hacking, 1999). When understanding the extent and

significance of social meanings inherent in gardeners' plant selections, therefore, we need not to entirely overlook 'the natural'.

Gardening practices also reinforced the social structures of the gardening groups. Garden teachers in Casitas maintained their privileged status by performing particular gardening practices. These practices usually implied helping other members in their horticultural endeavours. Existing research that explores how gardeners may learn from more experienced members fails to appreciate how these learning processes may structure intra-garden social hierarchies (Tidball and Krasny, 2009; Hancock, 2001). In UWS, nature also informed the group's social norms by defining the boundary of belonging in the garden's community of members. Here, food cultivation only commenced when members underwent a 'passage of rites' into the gardening group and subsequently obtained a planting lot. Power constellations were also a powerful driving force behind some gardeners' horticultural methods in Brook Park. In this case, the power dynamics between the coordinator and gardeners revealed that the coordinator was allotted the power to construct nature in particular ways. Overall, growing food was not only an activity structured around gardeners' real and imagined memories, but it was also executed in relation to the social structures and values of the gardening group.

In this chapter, it becomes clear that gardeners expressed their sentiments on their garden in relation to the various natural and social goods and services that membership provided. In particular, gardeners tended to highlight their meaningful social and personal experiences of recreation, relaxation and spiritual reflection in the space. Absent from their rhetoric was the garden's bio-physical impact on the surrounding environment and the economic assessment of their time and activities in the space. The value of community gardens was unvaryingly conceptualised and articulated by gardeners in non-monetary and unquantifiable terms, diverging from the dominant neo-liberal mind-set of the NYC's political economy. Even so, gardeners were acutely aware of the fact that their garden did not exist in a void, independent of the market economy. Within the capitalist mode of governance, their valuations of the garden were essentially 'value-less'. In the chapter that follows, I will address the third aim of this thesis by focusing in on how urban politics shapes the day-to-day realities of community gardening, and how nature and ethnicity are intertwined with political ecological discourses in NYC.

Chapter 7 The Power of Plants in New York City

7.1 Introduction

To critically tackle the two research questions and address the complexity of community gardening in a particular locality and specific social-political context, this chapter explores gardeners' capacities to contest their use of gardens through various social and political processes on various scales. Each of the chapter's five sections will discuss the prevalent themes synchronous with social power relations and community gardening in NYC. In the first section, 'The Uncertainties of Community Gardening', the context is set out for appreciating gardeners' social relations with various state and non-state actors. I first recognise the persistence of neo-liberal redevelopment policies to privatise and assess land values in relation to exchange-values (Harvey, 2005; Keil, 2003). I draw attention to how space and nature are tied to economic power and social class hierarchy, and how associated struggles over resources produce notions of 'winners' and 'losers' (Harvey, 1996, 2006). This logic embeds the social within the material, reflecting urban socio-spatial patterns that produce social inequality and suspend marginalised communities in the process that regulate who has control over and access to resources (Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003). In this section and throughout the rest of the chapter, I demonstrate how discourses and images are rooted in power relations and driven by people's pragmatic pursuit of various socio-political interests (Swyngedouw, 2006). Social power relations are conceptualised as having multiple forms besides the economic-political dimension: there is power embedded in words, images, and material objects (Walker, 2012).

In the second section, 'Resource-Poor Gardeners: Resource-Rich Garden Supporters', I capture how the garden-institutional relationship was power-laden rather than politically inert. I draw attention to how gardeners were struggling for permanent land tenure, supplies, validation, and capital for their community garden-related endeavours. I then show how non-governmental organisations tend to have wide scales of influence, information, cultural and monetary resources (Pelling, 1999), which gardeners lacked. Attention is paid to the role of non-state actors in mediating society-nature relations and public discourse (Covey, 1995). In doing so, I explore how non-state actors are not independent of the state and social policy processes at various scales, and how people

may engage with the values of the neo-liberal market economy (Heynen et al., 2006; Harvey, 2006; Keil, 2002).

The third section, 'The Environmental Justice Dimensions of Community Gardens', explores the politics of framing gardeners as the victims of systematic social and infrastructural discrimination. I elucidate how the act of naming 'natural' realities, such as food justice, is discursively mediated (Taylor, 2000). I then explore the political objectives and agendas of garden-related organisations. I show how people's knowledge and social beliefs of nature and land intersect with social power relations to affect which discourses become institutionalised and accepted (Alkon et al., 2009; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003; Pulido and Pena, 1998).

In the fourth section, 'The Social and Political Function of Socio-Natures in Community Gardens', I show how class and social power struggles produce new social and physical milieus (Heynen et al., 2006; Braun, 2002; Swyngedouw, 1999) in community gardens. I draw attention to how framing collective incidences of marginaliation around concepts of ethnicity helps to mobilise action for and craft meaning to environmental justice campaigns (Di Chiro, 1995). In particular, I explore how food is a form of nature capable of reflecting social power structures, and how socio-nature can 'voice' ideas and advance new notions of identity (Alkon et al., 2011; Heynen, 2006; Levkoe, 2005).

The final section, 'Counter-Narratives of Community Gardens', recognises how gardeners and their supporters can challenge hegemonic narratives of nature and ethnicity. I show how socially vulnerable people have the ability to shape and co-produce nature and environmental knowledge, and how subaltern actors can generate a different set of values of socio-natures that disrupt the flow of mainstream discourses that serve the political-economic interests of elites (Escobar, 1998; Peet and Watts, 1996). Discourses on nature and ethnicity can serve as powerful justifications for different social processes and material practices in community gardens. In effect, the social, political, and ecological processes of community gardening are (co)constituted, struggled over and (re)produced on shifting and multiple dimensions, both from within and out of the garden. Overall, the chapter's overarching theme is that social-political and cultural-ecological processes provide the context for social power relationships and

human interaction with nature (Heynen et al., 2006; Braun, 2002; Swyngedouw and Heynen, 2003).

7.2 The Uncertainties of Community Gardening

7.2.1 "The garden is not real until it is permanent and legal"

Community gardeners and their supporters conceptualised community gardens as spaces that could literally be lost on a whim. Although the three garden case studies were under the jurisdiction of the Park's Department, and were not under any apparent and immediate threat during fieldwork, gardeners voiced their concern over the fact that the space did not have permanent land tenure. In particular, gardeners felt that they were struggling against private investors and the economic interests of the government for permanent access to the land. One gardener from Brook Park [B2] summed up the sentiments of others when he stated, "what does it mean to be a part of the Park's Department? Really, nothing. I mean the City will always be in favour of the private investors and we can wake up tomorrow and see a bulldozer here ready to tear us down". Gardeners recognised how they were in an unfavourable and weak position. They tended to have less capital and resources than private investors, and this phenomenon rendered them as the obvious losers in the competition over the land.

Gardeners did not raise a white flag and passively surrender to this competition, though. They continuously strove to safeguard the garden from prospective threats and demolition. This phenomenon was evident when a Brook Park informant [B3] distributed postcards to other gardeners in the space. She had obtained the postcards free of charge from 'NYC Garden Law', which was an organisation composed of both gardeners and various garden supporters who were all particularly focused on the issue of gardens' legal and permanent tenure. As illuminated below in figure 7.1, on the front side of the postcard there was an image of two NYC policewomen in the garden and the phrases 'preserve all community gardens' and 'there oughta be a Law'. On the backside, the postcard was stamped and addressed to Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito, who was a council representative of the district in which the garden was located.

Figure 7.1 Advocating for community garden preservation.

Whilst distributing the postcard in the garden, this informant [B3] underlined the significance and the reasons why it was crucial to send the postcard to the Councilwoman: "it's important to show the City that [community gardens] are here and we need to stay here and [the Municipality] needs to understand that". As this informant spoke, people cheered her on and voiced similar sentiments. 'Yes, that's right!' and 'Let's show the City!' were people's prevailing responses to receiving the postcard from and speaking with this informant. Everyone present in Brook Park at this time strongly agreed on the issue of making all community gardens permanent with binding legislation. Preservation of the garden invariably depended on binding Municipal legislation, and gardeners needed to make their demands for permanent and legal land tenure 'loud and clear' to the government. Gardeners, thus, were strategically embracing existing power structures in order to protect their rights to continue using the land. In this case, the informant was appealing to the Councilwoman for gardens' legal permanency. Ideas of the garden were then intertwined with broader social relations between nature, power, and the state. Though it is difficult to decipher the exact intentions of the policewomen in the image on the front side of the postcard, this informant made clear what the two figures represented for her.

> The policewomen represent the City…what [the postcard is] saying is that [the police] are supposed to uphold the law. Now, there's no law that says hey, this is our garden. [The garden] is for us. We are here to stay. [B3]

By viewing the garden vis-à-vis the contestation over space in NYC, the informant was calling on the state to protect the garden against market pressures on the land. In doing so, she identified dominant symbols of government power. The postcard mobilises images of government law enforcement to reinforce gardeners' claims to the space. It specifically links the police to gardeners' underlying desires for binding legislation. Therefore, gardeners' conceptualisations of community gardens and notions of legal land tenure were intertwined and interdependent. Community gardens were clearly located within a nexus of wider spatial, political, and economic relations.

During the interview, Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito emphasised the fact that many of her constituents were community gardeners and otherwise ardent supporters of gardens in the South Bronx. She 'heard' her constituents and was in-tune with their interests. Largely for this reason, she stressed how gardens' land tenure was an issue of great concern for her work: "[garden permanency] is of great interest to my constituents, so it's a high priority for me in my work". Garden permanency was a chief concern for the Councilwoman because she identified the issue as a great concern for the people who elected her and whom she represented in office.

I asked the Councilwoman to elaborate on the postcard's (figure 7.1) significance and relevance to her work. This request sparked a deep and passionate discussion about how she cared for and supported gardeners in the South Bronx. She was very aware of how rising property values in the City meant that gardeners were unable to effectively compete against private investors for garden spaces. Community gardens needed legal land tenure to survive in the City. The City, though, was not necessarily sympathetic to gardeners' pleas.

> I see gardens as vitally important to the health of a community. [Gardens are] really important. Many of these lots are on city-owned property so when the City has demonstrated an interest to develop or to sell these lots, I tried to preserve as much as I can and to figure out a way to offer the protections that gardeners want….I'm negotiating that right now with the City, but it's not been completed. I value the contributions that gardeners have made. You know, these are individuals who have tended to these lots when there was blight in our communities. When our community was neglected, gardeners were creating services when the City was not stepping up to

the plate...I'll do what I can to preserve these gardens now that the environment is different. Because now...there's more capital floating around. But you know, we shouldn't disregard all those efforts that [gardeners] have made that led to gardens thriving in our community.

The current market value of City land influenced the relationship between the Municipality and community gardeners. In the comments above, the Councilwoman elucidated how the City had once neglected these lots in the district. Yet, the way in which the City valued these spaces shifted over-time in relation to changing exchange values of land. They had now revaluated community gardens and wanted to take advantage of selling the spaces for financial gain. Gardeners simply did not have the resources to contend with these new and rising exchange values. She also pointed to how in the past, experiences of marginalisation and structural discrimination stimulated community gardeners to construct their gardens on former derelict lots. At the present time, uneven social and political processes now threatened gardeners' access to these spaces. Her constituents' hardships were continuously perpetuated by City polices.

The awareness of gardeners not holding positions of power in society was apparent in her fluctuating terminology of the space. She did not consistently refer to these spaces as *gardens*. Implicit in the real and projected reality of these spaces was the idea that gardens would eventually be sold to the 'higher bidders' in the market economy. This phenomenon had clear implications on how she referred to these spaces as *lots*. The City clearly did not fully legitimise gardeners' activities in the space. This idea also suggests that she was faced with an underlying dilemma in her work as Councilwoman. She was elected by and had to respond to the interests of her constituents, whilst at the same time she operated within a system that was fundamentally orientated to the interests of private investors. To at least some degree, this inferred accepting City policy and ideology that favoured private investors rather than gardeners. Insofar as gardeners held lower positions of power in the City, gardens were not guaranteed a clear and promising future.

7.2.2   "Green Thumb is weak, just like gardeners"

Gardeners' values of and claims to their gardens were being largely ignored by the state and social policy processes. In this regard, community gardening was not seen to

effectively advance economic competitiveness in the City. A clear example of this phenomenon was Congress's proposed 2011 federal budget cut. This proposed budget cut threatened to reduce funding for the national Community Development Block Grant program. This program was Green Thumb's chief source of funding. The potential cut to Green Thumb's budget was a powerful blow for the garden movement and gardeners' efforts to gain government support for their cause. The volatility of gardens was therefore not independent of the processes of government restructuring.

Edie Stone, Executive Director of the Green Thumb program, was greatly disheartened by the prospect of federal budget cuts. She emphasised how she was currently unable to provide all community gardeners with the help and support they need due to the program's present-day, menial budget: "we currently have very low staff, we can only extend our hands out so far". She also alluded to the great challenges she would be up against if the budget cuts were indeed passed: "[the situation] is tough now…so it's hard for me to imagine what it'll be like if these cuts go through, [Green Thumb is] facing difficult times". Edie Stone, as Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito, found herself in the middle of the battlefield between gardeners and the City. As the program's Executive Director, her job entailed supporting and understanding gardeners' interests. She was also a civil servant who represented the interests of the City. Ultimately, she recognised how the state, and not gardeners, had the power to determine the future of community gardens and the Green Thumb program.

Green Thumb's Outreach Coordinator, Lillian Reyes, also alluded to how the program was struggling to work with a menial budget. She explained how in previous years, Green Thumb delivered materials directly to gardens. Recently, the program had instituted a new policy whereby materials were distributed to gardeners at Green Thumb sponsored educational workshops.

> We give [gardeners] most of their plant supplies that they wouldn't be able to get. A lot of them come to the workshops to receive the materials....workshops are considered like an access point where gardeners get educated and get materials…instead of us bringing the materials to them. We've been doing more workshops over the years.

The means by which materials were being distributed to gardeners elucidates how Green Thumb was struggling to cope with an insufficient budget. Lillian Reyes

underlined the significance of no longer distributing materials to each individual garden. Clearly, this was a practice that was more time-consuming and costly than having gardeners come and pick up the materials themselves at their workshops. For Green Thumb, then, organising workshops for gardeners had real, instrumental value. It was necessary for Green Thumb to work efficiently and reduce its costs under the current socio-economic conditions.

Despite the available materials offered to gardeners at these workshops, a prevalent theme that ran through all of the gardeners' accounts was that Green Thumb did not have the capacity to supply them with all the necessary gardening materials. In this regard, all gardeners from each garden site frequently iterated how community gardening required a steady influx of supplies. One participant from UWS [U1] eloquently explained that "things break [in the garden], you always need to fix and build things, and every year you need to maintain things, like make sure things work good, look good, and stay good". When responding to the question of whether Green Thumb supplied the group with ample support to physically maintain the garden, three gardeners [U1; U2; F3] in UWS and El Flamboyan pointed to their pockets as a symbolic gesture of how they often had to purchase their own supplies. There was an overall understanding among gardeners that Green Thumb was a *weak* governmental agency that did not have the *power* to provide them with fundamental support for their gardening activities.

Gardeners' concerns over obtaining garden supplies were especially prevalent after an intense summer storm in July 2011. The storm resulted in various structural damages to each garden. This was especially the case in UWS. Here, several fences had fallen down and many of them needed to be repaired or replaced. When discussing the details of these repairs, a number of gardeners [U1; U2; U4] sneered when I asked them if they had received enough financial and material support from Green Thumb. Especially at this time, gardeners put emphasis on how the materials they received from Green Thumb - irrespective of the storm - was far from what they actually needed. One of these informants [U2] also remarked, "what did we receive this year? A little bit of soil and maybe a tool or two tools…they don't give us everything that we need, they can't". Their concerns substantiated the idea that Green Thumb was not a resource-rich and powerful agency that could support gardeners with the help and support they needed.

This section has demonstrated that community gardeners and the Green Thumb program occupied weak positions within the societal framework. Urban redevelopment regulations valued the exchange value of these spaces over gardeners' use-value. Private investors, rather than the Green Thumb program, were also favoured by the state and in the market economy. Faced with the challenge of acquiring resources and legitimacy from the state, gardeners turned to non-state actors whom worked within the community garden movement for a lifeline of support.

7.3 Resource-Poor Gardeners: Resource-Rich Garden Supporters

7.3.1 "Gardeners cannot maintain the garden alone"

Gardeners understood that if the government was not necessarily an ally for maintaining and preserving their community gardens, then they would have to garner support for their cause by other means. Research found that gardeners had developed a nuanced appreciation of alternative sources of support within the City's garden movement. In particular, forging relationships with non-profits in the movement was as a means by which gardeners acquired the social, material, and economic support they were unsuccessful at obtaining from the City. Gardeners' fostered their relationships with non-profits most notably through such informal avenues as educational workshops.

Participation in educational workshops provided gardeners with the opportunity to acquire gardening materials and supplies. Non-profit organisations, as Green Thumb, distributed materials to gardeners at the educational workshops they managed and organised in the City. Even UWS's and El Flamboyan's coordinators attended educational workshops despite the findings discussed in chapter five about how Casita gardeners' mantras were 'we like to do what we want' and 'what we learn from each other'. On this note, UWS's coordinator highlighted gardeners' general apathy and indifference to attending educational workshops by claiming "even when I go to the workshops…usually [gardeners] don't really listen if I come back and have something to share about what they were teaching about planting". He made it clear, though, that his participation was an 'obligation' and part of his responsibilities as the garden's coordinator since it enabled him to "pick up plants or things we need that they give out". Similarly, El Flamboyan's coordinator did not mention 'learning' in her reasoning of why she appreciated educational workshops: "what I enjoy the best about the

workshops is that I get to meet new people and sometimes important people too, and you know, for them to see us too, and that's very important". Instead of alluding to the educational benefits, we see how here and in her comments below, El Flamboyan's coordinator primarily associated educational programs with her aims to accumulate resources for the garden.

> I'm starting to go [to educational workshops] more and…I'm beginning to know more people. The more I meet people, the more they come [to the garden] and I get to reach those peoples for the needs of our garden, for whatever we need.

Rather than reference learning and knowledge acquisition, coordinators' social relations with actors in the movement disclosed a new logic for understanding why some participants attended educational workshops. Participants' attendance at these workshops was instrumental and largely understood in the context of resource procurement. The above two garden coordinators underlined the necessity to 'show face' at non-profits' educational workshops to consolidate gardening materials and supplies. Their participation was not a clear reflection of their day-to-day desires to learn and gain knowledge at these workshops.

The relationship between gardeners and non-profits in the movement also worked to 'validate' the space and gardeners' activities within it. Arif Ullah, Director of Programs at a local non-profit called Citizen Committee for New York City (CCNYC), asserted that validation is a core reason why it is important for non-profits to support gardeners, and why gardeners, too, strive to acquire support from non-profits.

> I think whether in gardens or any other group for that matter, what happens is when a garden receives a grant from us, it often gives the group, in this case the garden group and the community garden more credibility. The gardeners or the other people from the neighbourhood might say 'oh, they got a grant from this organisation, they must be doing something right'.

Sarah Katz of the Bronx Green-Up program also specifically addressed the connection between supporting and improving the image of community gardens. She claimed that funding "lends a hand to helping gardens get legitimacy and gain public validation". In her comments below, Sarah Katz focused in detail on the socio-political implications of receiving support from the Bronx Green-Up, which is the community outreach program of the New York Botanical Garden (NYBG). The NYBG is one of the largest and most

renowned botanical gardens in the US. It is also located on a National Historic Landmark site that is protected by NY State Legislation, and its International Plant Science Center is one of the world's leading plant laboratories.

> Institutions have a lot of resources, and prestige and sway… And the Botanical Garden is an institution that is known to have a lot of sway in the Bronx…I sort of feel like [El Flamboyan] has taken the initiative to be a resource…to work in concert with institutions and my organisation as well…gardeners here may also feel supported, if they have a problem they would assume that we would be able to help. We do many educational programs here and we are there to give them support...And if people see us and say, 'oh, this big institution is investing in this space', people and the gardeners that come here might think of this space differently, as a more important and relevant place… [since] we are investing our time in it.

A theme that runs through both Sarah Katz's and Arif Ullah's accounts is that non-profits, and not community gardeners, were validated by the state and hegemonic public discourse. Rather than in the hands of gardeners, resources were nominally controlled by organisations in the movement. This is evidenced by the fact that the NYBG was not in a trivial position: its longevity and legal land tenure was not in jeopardy. Sarah Katz also pointed to the fact that the NYBG draws nearly 100,000 visitors annually, and publishes scientific articles and journals that are circulated world-wide. As such, the NYBG was important enough to matter socio-politically and economically. Largely for this reason, it was a respected and validated cultural symbol of the City.

Lenny Librizzi of GrowNYC also substantiated the claim that community gardeners did not have access to as many resources as non-profits. As this non-profit's Assistant Director of the Open Space Greening Program, Lenny Librizzi often organised and managed educational workshops in various community gardens throughout the City. His professional responsibilities often exposed him to the realities of gardeners: "[gardeners] don't always have all the materials they actually need". He was also acutely aware of how gardening supplies were often expensive purchases for gardeners. He linked these phenomena to the significance of providing materials to gardeners.

> For any garden, the garden is never finished….things need to be improved, replaced, and there is always a need for materials. Plant materials or things like fences and lumber. Gardeners need help, yeah, they need our support…that's where GrowNYC comes in.

Lenny Librizzi's and Sarah Katz's comments also captured the reciprocal nature of dependency in the relationship between gardeners and non-profits. Gardeners depended on non-profits for resources and validation whilst non-profits worked under the premise of gardeners constantly needing their help. As such, gardens were conceptualised by organisations as 'resources'. Sarah Katz underpinned this idea in her comments above, when she specifically described the El Flamboyan garden as a resource because of its initiative to work in concert with her organisation. To this effect, El Flamboyan gardeners were the living proof that the Bronx Green-Up's services were appreciated, needed, and valued by the City's community gardeners. These gardeners helped to validate the existence and significance of the Bronx Green-Up, and in turn, the organisation provided El Flamboyan with validation and support.

What is also relevant to note is that the Bronx Green-Up was competing with other non-profits in the garden movement over funds and recognition. If we specifically refer back to Arif Ullah from the CCNYC, for instance, we see how his organisation had a similar mission statement as the Bronx Green-Up. In fact, both these organisations' mission statements entailed improving urban neighbourhoods, which explicitly entailed working with and supporting community gardens. As such, the strength and continued existence of both these organisations, to some degree, depended on gardeners turning to their organisation - and not to others - for help and support. It also depended on the popular public perception of their services being more effective and significant than what is currently available as well as more important to gardeners. As both these organisations were channelling capital within the same pool of funding, gardeners' continued reliance on their services was an inherent component of the non-profit market-driven character.

As a whole, this section demonstrates how various organisations in the movement had access to gardening materials and were validated members of society. In part, the existence of many non-profits was also not trivial insofar as community gardeners continued to depend on them for support. These phenomena also implied that non-profits in the movement had more power and access to resources than gardeners, and gardeners heavily depended on their relations with non-profits for more social and political visibility in NYC. Gardeners could also plug into a broader web of social relations by forming relationships with organisations. In a partnership with the NYBG, for example, this social network extended beyond the organisation itself - and even

beyond the City - to regional, national and global networks. Although research elucidated the mutually supporting relationship between non-profits and gardeners, higher positions of power were occupied by non-profits in the societal structure. The next section will explore organisational representatives' interpretations of community gardening as a prelude to understanding the implication of their viewpoints on community garden provision.

7.4 The Environmental Justice Dimensions of Community Gardens

7.4.1 "Community gardens grow justice"

Every state and non-state actor (non-gardeners) interviewed in this study emphasised how gardens ameliorate a number of environmental injustices, and that these spaces were vehicles to socially and economically improve the lives of South Bronx residents. They particularly underscored how these spaces improved the adverse psychological and physical impacts related to two environmental injustices in the district: the lack of green space and healthy foods. According to Gonzalo Venegas, Co-founder and Director of a local hip-hop and arts community centre, the Rebel Diaz Arts Collective (RDAC), community gardening improved the quality of gardeners' lives and the lives of other South Bronx residents.

> The South Bronx is…forgotten. It has the highest rate of poverty…so [our organisation talks] about those issues like poverty in regards to what makes the idea of community gardens… so in regards to that, things like 'let's do gardening work' is cool, but it is also about putting that work into context…when you put [community gardening] in context…[the] lack of green spaces and people's [inability to] access to healthy foods explains the urgency and the importance of doing the work of community gardening and putting that in context is crucial. I think our work more intimately relates to what Brook Park…Brook Park does that.

Community gardens were linked to improving the deleterious environmental and social condition of the South Bronx. In the above excerpt, this logic transformed the act of gardening into an activity that had significance beyond what was actually occurring within the confines of a garden. Broader socio-ecological concerns became matters of local concern in a community garden praxis. Gardeners existed and worked within a wider socio-political milieu, which was in part responsible for producing their neglected neighbourhoods and precarious living conditions. As Gonzalo Venegas's concerns

about the lack of green space and healthy food intersected with his rhetoric on Brook Park, community gardeners were put on the front lines of a broader struggle for environmental justice. In this regard, he rapped to a catchy rhythm when he described how gardening was a 'positive' and 'pro-active' activity in Brook Park and in the South Bronx in general. Gardens evidently had important equity implications, and gardening was understood to be largely fuelled by people's aspirations to address such environmental justice concerns as food insecurity.

In particular, the significance of growing food in community gardens was an issue that dominated the discourse of organisational representatives. As previously mentioned, gardening was considered by organisational representatives to be an act that rectified the City's unjust and uneven food distribution system. This was largely due to the fact that most gardens were located in marginalised neighbourhoods where people could not easily obtain healthy foods. As such, issues associated with healthy food availability and access were addressed by community gardening since the food grown by the cultivator essentially belonged to the cultivator. In effect, the meaning of food production in these spaces was intimately tied to its contribution to increasing the availability and accessibility of nutritious foods in the low-income district.

Arif Ullah of the CCNYC described community gardens as 'vital resources' for South Bronx residents. He pointed to the fact that within the district, many of the small convenience stores (that primarily served processed foods and alcohol) and fast establishments vastly outnumbered the grocery stores or fruit vendors (the latter also known colloquially as *bodegas*) which sold fruits and vegetables. Hence, gardens were resources since they offered a means to improve gardeners' accessibility to and the affordability of healthy produce.

> Community gardens really provide a vital resource for a lot of people [in the South Bronx]. And that many times, these community gardens are the only places where people can actually get fresh and organic produce…rather than the types of produce that they sometimes have access to in [grocery stores]…that are sad looking.

Arif Ullah's comments above underpin the assumption that growing food was of high priority to community gardeners. Beth Urban of the ACGA also voiced this idea with enthusiasm when she asserted that growing food was of upmost importance to

gardeners: "people are coming to [community gardens] because they have more awareness of growing their own food and about the importance of growing their own food. I think most people approach a community garden initially out of an interest to grow food". As such, gardens were conceptually framed as important sites for the advancement of food justice.

Food justice was a concept emphasised in garden organisations' mission statements and it was even obvious in some of their names. Hannah Risley-White, Community Organiser of the Green Guerillas, explained that one of her organisation's chief concerns was to maximise food production in gardens in order to specifically advance food justice. In the past, she explained how Green Guerillas was predominately geared toward helping people transform empty lots into garden spaces. Since the early 2000s, the organisation's direction had shifted to "help gardeners to achieve food justice". Similarly, Owen Taylor described his Program Manager position at Just Food as "helping community gardeners grow more food". He also explained how his organisation's prime mission was to establish and promote healthy food systems in NYC, and its name, Just Food, was an overt play on the words food justice. The explicit connection between community gardening and food justice was also made apparent on Just Food's website, which had a separate web page entitled 'Food Justice'. This page was headlined with a picture of Karen Washington, President of the NYC Community Gardening Coalition (NYCCGC), as captured by figure 7.2. In this image, we see Karen Washington chanting with community gardeners at a public rally for garden preservation. Community gardens were clearly being framed by garden advocates as sites of food justice, and gardeners were framed as food justice practitioners.

Figure 7.2 Framing gardeners as food justice practitioners. Image downloaded with permission from Just Food's website.

7.4.2   "The government values food justice, not dominoes"

The idea and practice of growing food in community gardens served as a powerful tool to reinforce the significance of these spaces in the cityscape. Edie Stone of Green Thumb especially emphasised how food justice was a 'hot and sexy topic' in public discourse and policy. She even drew attention to people's near-obsession of food growing in community gardens: "City Council and the [garden] funders and everybody else is getting obsessed with food production in gardens". In fact, both Arif Ullah and Beth Urban also took explicit note of this trend when they both stated how "everyone seems to be talking about food and gardens". The garden movement's emphasis on food justice clearly corresponded to the popular usage of the concept in mainstream public discourse.

Growing public attention on food justice was a trend that garden-related organisations were moving in on to exploit for their own purposes. By latching on to the idea that gardens effectively improved food injustices, organisations opened the door to a new frontier of accessing capital and generating public visibility to their cause. It was crucial for institutions to attract funders, call attention to the significance of these spaces, and continue operating within a relatively unstable market economy. Engaging with mainstream public discourse was a strategic mechanism for organisations to take

advantage of the opportunities confronting them as part of a larger political economy. Effective garden campaigning implied recognising what was of value to others and potential funders, and these values in part determined what facets of community gardening would be most helpful to highlight in their own campaign initiatives.

In addition, many organisations emphasised the importance of framing gardeners' activities as a valuable set of clear economic benefits. Growing food in gardens was an activity that could successfully result in monetary value. This was the story that Mara Gittleman told me when she reflected on her work at Farming Concrete. The Co-founder and Project Director of this organisation explained how its mission was to ascertain and record the quantity of food produced in the City's community gardens. Inherent in the organisation's main initiative, the 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project, was the overarching goal to create "data based on food production that can be used for garden advocacy". This project involved distributing scales and official record-keeping documents to gardeners who would then be responsible for recording the quantity of their food crops and the total weight of their harvest. She stressed the significance of this project for the garden movement and garden preservation efforts.

> Food production is really meaningful. We focus on it [in community gardens]…We were all really surprised to see how much food was being produced in these gardens. Now that we know how many pounds of food are being grown, we can make a legitimate connection between gardens and food justice in areas that do not have access to healthy and fresh produce. Once we tied our work to advocacy, food production became something bigger...I think this project is so appealing because it now gives us something to mobilise around, to get people to come together...spark interest and discussion to the wider audience. Some gardens participated just to make themselves more visible, [and] to join the struggle for their preservation.

Food crops were conceptualised as quantifiable commodities that could be used to 'meaningfully' assert the importance and reinforce the legitimacy of community gardens in NYC. Though Mara Gittleman did not refute the idea that gardens yield a variety of other benefits besides food, she asserted that food crops effectively addressed the lack of 'important' and 'quantifiable data' on gardens. With this in mind, Twiss et al. (2003) stressed how many of the potential benefits of gardening, such as physical exercise and stress reduction, are difficult to measure. Food cultivation, in contrast, is an activity that directly manifests itself in observable, material outcomes (Keys, 1999). As such, the 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project provided 'real' and 'valuable'

momentum to garden preservation efforts since it worked to underscore the 'legitimate connection' between community gardens and food justice.

It is also relevant to note how Mara Gittleman described the need to translate gardens' food production into a currency that has 'real value'. The idea of 'real value' was portrayed in terms of the relationship between 'growing food' and 'growing money'. Simply put, by growing food, gardeners produced a tangible product that had a real exchange-value in the market. The 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project, therefore, worked to reconfigure the conceptual understanding of community gardening as it drew attention to the monetary value of the food produced in the space.

> If gardeners, let's say, are growing five tomato plants in their planting bed, and then these plants altogether produce 20 tomatoes during the course of the summer, that's 20 times however much is the cost of an organic tomato…that can add up to a lot of money…so these spaces and [the food] are valuable in that respect, too.

Monetary values reframed the significance of community gardens and gardeners' horticultural activities. Largely for this reason, Haja Worley, the former President and then acting Treasurer of the NYCCGC, referred to the data generated by Farming Concrete as a 'powerful' and 'significant tool'. He stressed how the data on gardens directly related to food production was particularly beneficial for community garden advocacy work. He described NYCCGC's mission as promoting and helping to preserve gardens by representing gardeners' political demands and interests to the City. Farming Concrete's 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project was undoubtedly geared toward generating the data that was appreciated by the state and mainstream public discource. Food was both visual and quantifiable, and he explained how this enabled people to "objectively assess the significance of gardeners' activities". Though Haja Worley also alluded to the other non-tangible benefits of gardening, such as mental well-being, he asserted how focusing in on the monetary values of gardening was an effective means to inform the wider public of the 'value' of these spaces. The monetary value of gardeners' food transformed the act of gardening into a language that was politically palatable to the state.

What is important to grasp from these previous two sections is that organisations in the garden movement had, to varying degrees, access to resources and the capacity to

support gardeners. Since resources were in the domain of organisations, and not community gardens, the task of research now turns to understanding the implications of how materials and knowledge were moved from organisations to gardens. The great majority of organisational representatives elucidated how they did not blindly or equally support all community gardens in NYC. They preferred to work with gardeners who were aligned with their own mission and vision of community gardens. As such, their interpretations of gardening often dictated which gardens received and *deserved* their support. This phenomenon had implications on gardeners' activities in the space, which the following section explores.

7.5 The Social and Political Function of Socio-Natures in Community Gardens

7.5.1 "The food gardeners grow is valuable"

Informants were acutely aware of how the garden movement put emphasis on their food growing activities. One Brook Park informant [B2] confessed that food production was an activity that organisations were focused on and this subsequently "trickles down to what [gardeners] do". Brook Park's coordinator also acknowledged the movement's emphasis on food production in gardens. He explained how public attention on this activity worked to bring community gardens into the public spotlight.

> [Food production] is like the flavour of the month. That is just how people are framing things, that gardens should be producing food. If that's what people are interested in and if it lets people know that the space is important, and we can get help, then fine.

This 'trickling down effect' was clearly elucidated in El Flamboyan. The garden's coordinator informed all gardeners that they *must* weigh their harvest on a scale and record the results on a specific sheet of paper in a 'Farming Concrete Binder'. This binder was typically found on the table next to where the coordinator would often sit. In many instances, when the coordinator observed members gathering their harvest, she reminded them, and at times, assisted gardeners with recording their results. At the end of the growing season, this binder was submitted to Farming Concrete and the data was incorporated into the organisation's 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project. The garden coordinator not only emphasised how the data was important for Farming Concrete, but since it would show people what gardeners can do in terms of food

production, the data also constituted important 'proof' that the garden was worth supporting.

What is also relevant to note is that in El Flamboyan, all informants emphasised that the garden's food growing area was one of the most significant spaces for 'others'. In fact, it was often the first place gardeners showed non-members when they gave tours of their garden. To this end, some gardeners [F2; F5; F6] stressed the importance of keeping this area 'looking nice' and clean. El Flamboyan's coordinator also articulated the central role of the food growing area to her ability to create a positive public image of the garden.

> The garden beds, you know, are usually the first place people like to look at when they come here. It's important to keep it looking nice... it is a part of my job to make sure everything is clean...so nobody will take [the garden] away from us or say we are not doing a good job or anything like that.

Gardeners' recognition of current funding trends and fashions were inherent in the pattern of presenting the food growing area as the most significant space in the garden. This phenomenon was indeed telling of how the meanings of activities and spaces in the garden were reconfigured in relation to the gardeners' wider social relations. Rather than solely considering their own ideas of a productive and desirable landscape, gardeners' aims to keep the food growing area 'looking nice' worked toward creating a landscape that 'others' would find appropriate. Informants' behaviours were ostensibly influenced by their attempts to make the garden aesthetically fit into the movement's vision of what were acceptable community gardening practices. This was even the case in both Casita gardens, where informants socialised with each other more than they spent time working in this growing area. This finding suggests that the particular space possessed an instrumental value that was distinct from other spaces in the garden. The interplay between both intra-garden *and* broader social processes, therefore, instructed garden provision and some gardening activities.

Since the garden movement valued food production over various other community garden activities, there was much incentive for garden coordinators to push for this activity. There was instrumental value and resources to be gained from channelling attention to their garden's food production. Coordinators' ideological commitment and

lip service to the significance of food production also needed to be followed through with visible end-products. That is, coordinators had to match their rhetoric on food production with concrete action on the ground. If there was no tangible proof that the garden was taking matters of food production seriously, then organisations may have ceased viewing certain coordinators and gardens as 'valuable resources' and worthy recipients of support. Largely for this reason, the findings suggest that in El Flamboyan, the 'Farming Concrete Binder' was placed on a table near to where the coordinator sat for gardener surveillance. In this way, the coordinator was able to monitor, encourage, and in part control gardeners' food-related activity.

Coordinators pushed gardeners to grow food, regardless of whether or not this activity overtly contradicted gardeners' preferences. In reality, the quantity of food produced in gardens was not an apparent and major concern for most gardeners. In El Flamboyan, gardeners stressed how they grew food 'just for fun' and how it was not their top priority in the space. In fact, there were several instances when El Flamboyan informants [F1; F4; F5; F6], in the coordinator's absence, did not care to record the data related to their planting bed's harvest. To explore this phenomenon further, I asked one of the gardeners [F1] why she did not record the weight of her harvest on a day when the coordinator was absent. She then asked me to accompany her while she recorded the weight in the binder. Whilst recording the weight of her two aubergines, she asked me to help her spell out the name of the vegetable, in English, beside its recorded weight. In this regard, irrespective of whether or not she was interested in record-keeping, she faced fundamental challenges to participating in the project. There were literacy issues involved with her decision to not record her harvest's weight. This gardener needed the help of the coordinator to participate in the project, which suggests that her actions were not necessarily a form of protest against the coordinator and the project as a whole.

In Brook Park, one gardener [B1] explicitly emphasised how she felt the coordinator exerted great pressure on her to cultivate food crops. This gardener had a particular passion for cultivating non-food producing flowers. Whilst recalling memories of gardening in Puerto Rico, she also spoke about how particular flowers had special meaning and a strong connection with her background. In Brook Park, though, she felt restricted from pursuing her passion and planting these specific flowers. Her uneasiness was linked to the coordinator and his insistence on gardeners cultivating food crops.

This pressure markedly stood in her way of feeling free in the garden: "I much prefer to grow flowers…[the coordinator] expected me to grow food so I just said 'yes'". Hence, garden coordinators played an influential role in mediating gardeners' cultivated plant selections and their food growing activities.

In Casitas, gardeners described the processes involved with growing food as a complicated managerial balancing act. On the one hand, they wanted to placate the interests of the coordinator. Informants understood that the garden relied on the support and reinforcement from the wider movement. Coordinators needed to be in-tune with what the movement expected from gardeners and the space. On the other hand, the great majority of gardeners were interested in using the space for other passive, social pursuits. In order to appease the demands of 'others' and simultaneously address their own interests in the space, Casita gardeners often tapped into their intra-garden social networks. For example, three El Flamboyan informants [F1; F4; F6] asked the garden's teachers for support with cultivating their food crops. In fact, these three informants were only observed tending to their food crops twice throughout the summer months, from May until August 2011. In this regard, one of these gardeners [F1] stressed the significance of her intra-garden social bonds of reciprocity. By receiving assistance to grow food crops in her planting bed, she could get away from her food growing *obligations* as a member of El Flamboyan: "I don't always have to take care of the plants because I get help, we all help each other and [the garden teacher] likes to do it". In this case, gardeners' social networks resolved a problem that could have otherwise impeded the collective interests of the group to acquire resources. Intra-garden social bonds enabled Casita gardeners to simultaneously address their own interests and the interests of 'others'.

In some instances, gardeners' intra-garden social networks constituted a barrier to the penetration of mainstream social values attached to growing food in the 'right' and organic way. According to Edie Stone of Green Thumb and Lenny Librizzi of GrowNYC, organic gardening was understood as the practice of tending to plants and soil without the usage of synthetic commercial fertilizers and pesticides. If we refer back to the findings in chapter six, we are reminded that there were no uniform and straightforward understanding of the concept of organic in community gardens, though. In El Flamboyan, for instance, garden teachers used commercial fertilizer mixes even

though they knew the practice was frowned upon by many outside actors, and to some extent, by the garden's coordinator. When gardeners from this group discussed their usage of the fertilizer mix, they explicitly referenced the teachers as having the power to know and decide what was 'right' from 'wrong'. As such, the findings go beyond acknowledging how people's outlook of organic gardening is not universal in community gardens. In part, participants' intra-garden social bonds worked to challenge mainstream social beliefs around the practice and significance of organic horticulture in gardens. In this way, even though discontinuing the usage of commercial fertilizer mixes was of high concern for garden advocates, it remained of low priority for El Flamboyan gardeners. Monitoring particular notions of organic horticulture in community gardens is posited as a challenge for organisations and agencies, though. This process would entail visitations to gardens to ensure that gardeners were following in-line with particular understandings of organic gardening. On the contrary, evidence of food production more broadly could be achieved without such visitations, and proof of these practices could be attained in the absence of gardeners themselves at any given time in the garden. This suggests that El Flamboyan's coordinator was not strongly pressured, concerned, nor particularly motivated to enforce certain notions of organic gardening that overtly contradicted the teachers' practices and the social norms of the gardening group.

7.5.2 "Gardens are spaces for the community"

When Owen Taylor explained why Brook Park was a viable recipient of Just Food's support, he underscored how this gardening group showed commitment to the organisation's own vision of community gardens. He stated that "our main focus is on community change, and Brook Park is one garden that represents that, they also have the organising skills and are thinking on a community level". His stance on garden provision reflected his belief that these spaces should deliberately aim to have many users. When I asked Owen Taylor to expand on the meaning of 'organising skills' and 'community level', he underscored how Brook Park was 'open', welcoming all members of the public and involving as many people as possible in their garden-related initiatives.

> [Brook Park has] a lot of things going on. It's always very active with different people coming in and out. There are many educational activities…[The coordinator]

is really active about knowing what is going on in the neighbourhood, and using the garden as a way to organise people.

The significance Owen Taylor placed on having different people coming in and out of the garden was also reinforced when Just Food helped fund and construct a chicken coop in Brook Park. I spoke with Owen Taylor whilst the construction of the coop was underway in September 2011. He once again iterated his satisfaction for seeing many people in the garden and said how "it is great to see so many people here…a lot of people can see what we are doing and learn more". He emphasised the importance of providing as many people as possible with the opportunity to learn about the chicken coop; a project that his organisation funded. Embodied in the significance of people coming in and out of the garden, then, was an effective outreach strategy for Just Food. Exposure to and usage of the chicken coop implied individuals learning about Just Food and the organisation's work in NYC.

Hannah Risley-White also described how Green Guerrillas wanted all community gardens to reach the 'next level'. In this case, the 'next level' meant gardeners implementing inclusionary projects necessitating the involvement of "as many people from the neighbourhood as possible". Her understanding of community garden users clearly extended beyond a garden's specific community of members. Passive and active users of the three gardens, therefore, included all residents in the district, irrespective of people's actual garden membership status. The fact that she considered Brook Park to be a 'highly functional' garden because they were doing a lot of things for the community reflects her positionality on and how she deployed notions of community gardening. Indeed, she was especially enthusiastic about Brook Park's inclusive garden policy. The overarching logic here was that if many people use community gardens, then environmental justice concerns could be addressed on broader scales than if only the garden's group of members frequented and used the space. In her comments below, she explained how this idea was powerful for community garden advocacy.

> We help [garden groups] get to the next level…so they become a highly functional group…if we can prove they are doing a lot of things for the community, then that will help [gardeners'] case for [garden] preservation…so we help the gardens who want to get to the next level by offering them support and guidance… Brook Park is quite an open garden, [the coordinator] is good at making that a priority there…I think in that way the garden is highly functional.

El Flamboyan's coordinator's attempts to expand the image of the garden on Mother's Day - from a place specifically for the garden's community of members to a place for the district's community of residents at large - was a strong example of how the garden's broader social relations influenced and restructured local garden provision. In this case, the garden's coordinator accentuated the importance of organising this event for the wider public, and advertised it on the Park's Department's website. The day prior to the event, I helped gardeners and the coordinator decorate and prepare the space for the celebration. This entailed weeding the garden's planting area, making and hanging Mother's Day posters on the casita, and deciding how much food to cook and who was going to prepare which food dishes. The coordinator complained about how the holiday's preparations were hard work partly because she expected a lot of people to turn up. I also took note of how gardeners complained about the work load associated with preparing the space for many attendees.

I questioned the coordinator on her reasoning for advertising the Mother's Day event on the Park's Department's website. She stressed how organisations would appreciate her efforts to make this event open to the wider public, and she emphasised that "the people who help us like to see these events in the garden [advertised]". In effect, the coordinator was responding to Hannah Risley-White's concept of the 'next level' and the movement's general rhetoric on 'doing a lot of things for the community'. In these instances, notions of the 'community' extended beyond the garden's specific gardening group. As such, the Mother's Day event was in part organised to align the garden with the interests of 'others' who occupied more powerful social positions, rather than solely with the interests of gardeners. This phenomenon revealed the powerful influence of organisations' agenda-setting on local garden provision.

7.5.3 "Gardens need strong coordinators"

The personal characteristics of garden coordinators were relevant factors for establishing and maintaining garden-institutional relationships. Mara Gittleman stressed the significance of active, charismatic garden coordinators for her ability to effectively work with a gardening group. She specifically explained why Farming Concrete began working with El Flamboyan in 2010: "[The coordinator], that aspect of the garden, really fuelled our interest to work with [El Flamboyan]". She described this garden's

coordinator as socially savvy and confident when speaking and following-up with the organisation. This implied that a garden coordinator needed to engender and manage his or her self-image for both the gardening group and to an audience beyond the garden. Implicit in a garden coordinator's ability to be confident and socially savvy with both parties was the central issue of language.

There was a heightened emphasis on English fluency in relation to coordinating community gardens. Gardeners rationalised English proficiency as a trait that went hand-in-hand with successfully accessing resources from out-of-garden sources. They were also acutely aware of how organisational representatives spoke English and that garden grant applications were often in English too. In UWS, for example, the issue of English fluency surfaced when the former coordinator [U1] explained why he had asked the current coordinator to replace his position. This gardener [U1] realised that in order to be a competent coordinator acting within the community garden movement, he needed to have a strong command over the English language: "I think it is better for the garden to have someone that speaks good English, you know [the current coordinator] speaks better than me and he understands [English] a lot". When I asked him about whether or not he had ever thought about re-assuming the coordinator position, he elucidated how he would not be to the advantage of the gardening group: "I want the garden to have a strong coordinator…when I went to some meetings out [of the garden] I was shy…because of my bad English". What's important to note is that whilst explaining his thoughts, he primarily spoke in English suggesting that factors like accent or grammar were at the heart of why he felt shy and thus unable to effectively coordinate, form relations with institutions, and in general be an asset for the gardening group. This viewpoint was inculcated into his reasoning for why he was simply a *weak* coordinator.

Indeed, many state and non-state actors working within the community garden movement, and even directly with community gardeners, were unable to speak Spanish. In this regard, Edie Stone identified the 'short-comings' of Green Thumb by explicitly mentioning the lack of Spanish material available to community gardeners. Even Sarah Katz of the Bronx Green-Up, who had clearly informed me of how her daily work responsibilities entailed communicating with gardeners and organising educational workshops in gardens (many of which occurred in Casita gardens), did not speak

Spanish. These two organisational representatives, nevertheless, confessed to how not speaking Spanish was a challenge to their work with gardeners. To address this concern, Sarah Katz revealed her intentions of *perhaps* one day enrolling in a Spanish language course "when I get the time". Expressions of this 'short-coming' in relation to language are captured in the accounts below of three organisational representatives.

> I don't speak Spanish very well, sometimes that can be a bit of a stumbling block to speaking with gardeners. [Lenny Librizzi of GrowNYC]

> We do try to have at least a minimal ability to serve the Spanish-speaking community, although I think we could do a better job. Like we don't translate all our publications into Spanish. [Edie Stone of Green Thumb]

> My involvement in [El Flamboyan] is not that deep, I wasn't able to reach as many people as I wanted to because of my limitations in Spanish…even though [the coordinator] is available to help translate workshops [from English into Spanish]…maybe for that reason [gardeners] think they are involved with us and getting support from [the NYBG] because [the coordinator] speaks English and can be a liaison between [NYBG and the gardening group]. Ideally, wouldn't we send someone who could speak the language of the community and the people involved in the garden? [Sarah Katz of the Bronx Green-Up]

Language encapsulated the dominant power structures of society. An English speaking coordinator was critical for effective communication with an English-speaking organisation and an English-speaking state. Therefore, intra-garden power structures were in part based on the requirement that coordinators be conversant in English. The social ordering of gardening groups was mediated by the demands of society. The issue of language was seemingly important in the eyes of both organisations and gardeners.

The relationship between organisations and gardens not only re-arranged but also reinforced existing intra-garden social power structures. Owen Taylor of Just Food frequently underlined his awareness of how his relationship with El Flamboyan's coordinator coloured her experiences in the garden as a coordinator. He mentioned how she "really enjoys my support, and it boosts her self-esteem as a leader [in the garden]….she had a transformative experience of being a coordinator in that way". Along this line, the coordinator's personal sentiments run parallel to the feelings of empowerment described by Owen Taylor. El Flamboyan's coordinator confessed that "I feel good when I meet with [organisational representatives]…I start to feel better about what I'm doing, like about myself as a coordinator at this garden". Adding to this, the

coordinator acknowledged that her association with organisations and people 'higher up' improved her reputation in the garden and enhanced her position of power within the garden: "I think that [gardeners] look up to me more because they see that I am involved with the higher people and they respect me from out of the garden…like all those organisations". Thus, the processes of coordinating the garden group were interrelated with the ability to cultivate good relations with both gardeners *and* organisational representatives who were *higher up*.

El Flamboyan gardeners' sentiments on the coordinator were clearly tied to her relations with organisations in positions of power and authority. The endorsement the coordinator received from these organisations contributed to gardeners' beliefs that she was the only person with absolute authority to deal with matters of garden provision. A clear articulation of this sentiment was apparent in how two informants [F1; F2] frequently mentioned that the coordinator knew 'a lot of people out of the garden' when they alluded to why they highly respected her as a garden leader. This suggests that the coordinator's relations with seemingly important people *out* of the garden enabled her to flex more of her muscles *in* the garden. In this way, the coordinator's social status was elevated from being a leader of the group to being someone connected with and well received by organisations, and thus, someone worthy of even more respect and authority in the garden. As a revenue generating actor for the gardening group, informants reinforced the coordinator's position largely on the basis that she was able to deliver resources down the chain, from the 'elites' to the gardening group. From this perspective, intra-garden power structures were clearly interrelated with broader political-economic rationalities operating beyond the confines of the space.

7.5.4   "Ethnicity is a powerful weapon in the defense of gardens"

The idea that ethnicity was inherent in the manifestation of socio-political inequalities, and specifically with respect to the access of healthy foods in the South Bronx, was emphasised by garden supporters. "Being Puerto Rican in the City", in the words of Gonzalo Venegas of the RDAC, "usually means that you are treated not like everyone else, that you are unequal, and you don't have access to things like gardens…always pushed around". This idea was also echoed by Lenny Librizzi of GrowNYC. He followed on from Gonzalo Venegas's assertion by recognising how Puerto Ricans, in

the past and present, face social and economic hardships because of discriminatory social policies. He drew attention to how gardeners were not only vulnerable to losing their gardens, but also to losing their homes in NYC. He especially described the forces in the market economy that continuously pushed gardeners to impoverished and marginalised areas: "I know that some gardeners in the Lower East Side [of Manhattan] lost their gardens or could no longer garden there because they had to move, and many moved to areas like the South Bronx". Community gardens were evidently not the only spaces gardeners had to continuously defend.

Recognising the uneven socio-physical landscape of the City gave way to new understandings of gardeners' behaviours in community gardens. For example, if we refer back to the findings discussed in chapter five, we are reminded of how one Brook Park gardener, named Natty, confessed to how she did not feel very connected to the garden nor the garden group. In this regard, research also captured a relevant and influential finding in the analysis of this phenomenon. Natty had relocated from Manhattan to the South Bronx less than ten years ago. In Manhattan, she had been an ardent member of the Jardin de Tranquillidad community garden, which was located in the Lower East Side and in an area also known as *Losiada*, a term coined by the Puerto Rican community there in the 1970s. Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, economic and socio-political forces associated with the area's increased property values had forced many low-income Puerto Rican families out of *Losiada* and to other marginalised areas of NYC, and most notably to the South Bronx. Natty, unfortunately, was not able to avert this dislocation and she informed me of how she moved out of *Losiada* against her free will: "I would still be there if I could…it is way too expensive these days to live [in *Losiada*]". During the course of fieldwork, nonetheless, she continued to visit and work in Jardin de Tranquillidad, her former and first community garden in NYC. Even though she often complained about the relatively long commute from her home to this particular garden, she confessed to her continued preference for being a member there, rather than at Brook Park: "I still like going [to Jardin de Tranquillidad]. I have always loved that garden...it was my first garden". On three separate occasions, I also travelled with Natty to Manhattan and worked with her in the Jardin de Tranquillidad. Here, Natty proudly identified all the many plants she had cultivated in this space during the course of 30 or so years. In figure 7.3, we see Natty pointing to a tree that she had planted just a few days after her marriage about 20 years ago, which had reminded her

of the 'good old days' in her old neighbourhood in Manhattan. Her attachment to this garden and its plants was markedly strong. In effect, her feelings of not belonging to Brook Park may have been at least partly influenced by her feelings of not belonging to the Bronx as a whole. Both her first home and her first community garden in NYC was in Manhattan.

Figure 7.3 Natty beside her tree.

7.5.5   "Ethnicity and community gardening are one of a kind"

Community garden supporters achieved a greater sense of purpose for their work and missions by anchoring gardeners' claims to gardens with concepts of ethnicity. Hannah Risley-White aligned part of Green Guerilla's mission - to help gardeners grow more food - with what was already inherent and embodied in 'normal', 'Puerto Rican' and 'Latino' gardening practices. She also remarked that "it would be weird to see a Puerto Rican garden not growing food…that's a big part of what they do". Mara Gittleman also maintained that Farming Concrete's 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project ran parallel with what "Puerto Ricans do already". She elaborated on how the initiative was 'natural' to Puerto Ricans since "most Puerto Ricans have an agrarian background and recording their harvest would have been an activity they probably would have done anyway". In this way, many community gardeners were 'naturally' in-tune with their organisation's initiatives. The dominant rationale was that Puerto Rican gardeners have

always been and will always be interested in growing food in community gardens. This phenomenon contributed to the sense of gardeners acting independent of current and transient social policy trends and fashions.

Certain concepts of ethnicity also worked to mobilise gardeners around organisations' agenda in gardens. In El Flamboyan, for instance, gardeners were well-aware of how Puerto Rican ethnicity was intertwined with how Mara Gittleman framed the practice of recording keeping. The garden's coordinator even described the expectations put on her gardeners to grow food *because* of their Puerto Rican ethnicity: "[Mara Gittleman] knows how good we Puerto Ricans can grow food". Therefore, gardeners understood that Farming Concrete partly relied on the gardening group not only because they were members of a garden that grew food, but also because they were members of the Puerto Rican ethnic community. As such, these gardeners were integral partners for the record-keeping project for 'natural' reasons, and in order to live-up to the expectations of Mara Gittleman, gardeners needed to prove themselves as good food growing Puerto Ricans.

Gardeners were not necessarily impartial to the notions of ethnicity put forth by the movement. Even though El Flamboyan gardeners did not record the weight of their harvest prior to working with Farming Concrete, the garden's teachers emphasised how this was a 'universal' and 'natural' practice for Puerto Ricans, irrespective of Farming Concrete. One El Flamboyan informant [F2] also explicitly linked Farming Concrete's mission to Puerto Rican ethnicity by saying "for people like us who know how to work the land, it's important to know you have more weight…we are working to perfection and showing that we are serious about gardening". However, we witness how the activity was not necessarily described as a personal interest. The enthusiastic vision of 'working to perfection' also etches itself in a way that has more to do with the opportunity to *show* Farming Concrete how the gardening group was adhering to and valuing *their* concerns.

Gardeners' understanding of how their food growing activities were especially important for garden supporters gave way to some plants becoming vehicles for expressing notions of ethnicity. Specifically through food crops, gardening groups could articulate ideas of their ethnicity, their associated horticultural knowledge, and the gardening group's participation in 'valuable' gardening activities. For instance, El

Flamboyan's gardeners boasted about their garden's cultivation of *gandules*. One informant [F3] repeatedly underscored how *gandules* was 'special' because this crop was 'Puerto Rican' and could reflect the ethnicity of the gardening group. She also linked the Puerto Rican qualities of the gardening group and *gandules* with the significance of the community garden.

> People see how these Puerto Rican plants grow in [NYC], and people are surprised to find these plants here. It is special and you can't find it because people don't know how to grow it here. But we do. And they say 'oh wow, I didn't know you could grow that here'. Most people, you see, they never see [*gandules*] before…So we explain them what they are, and that they are Puerto Rican plants, and they are important plants for us, you know, they grow strong in this garden like we do.

Gandules became a metaphor for the gardening group and the socio-political processes that made them vulnerable to losing their garden. The crop was considered by 'others' to be distinct and Puerto Rican plant. Despite the City's often unfavorable weather conditions, *gandules* grew 'strong' in the garden. Gardeners were also seeking a chance to 'grow strong' and secure their access to the garden despite the unfavourable processes of urban redevelopment. By cultivating and drawing particular attention to *gandules*, these gardeners were expressing their ethnic distinctiveness and claims to the land through nature. The crop also reinforced the idea that the space enabled the group to enact their Puerto Rican traditions through food cultivation. These expressions were difficult, if not impossible, in other spaces of the City. These elements of ethnicity worked to add weight to gardeners' claims to the land. Gardeners not only deserved the space as compensation for the injustices they faced, but gardens also provided the special space for gardeners to enact their ethnic traditions where they were unable to do so elsewhere.

El Flamboyan gardeners also underscored their cultivation of *gandules* during a workshop co-organised in their garden by Just Food. At the onset of this workshop, which was led by a non-Spanish speaking Just Food staff member, the garden's coordinator outlined the theme of the workshop, which was on how to 'properly' organise garden events in ways that attracted people from the 'community' to the garden. At this time, the coordinator welcomed all attendees, which included El Flamboyan and other gardeners from around the City, as well as Green Thumb and other Just Food personnel. The coordinator then immediately drew attention to the

garden's planting bed area. Whilst pointing to this area, she stressed how good her gardening group was at growing food. She also referenced the Puerto Rican qualities of both the plants and the gardening group by saying "we grow crops like we did in Puerto Rico….*gandules*…are special to us". Once again, we see how *gandules* was strategically called upon to emphasise the significance and distinctiveness of gardeners' food growing activities.

During this particular event, Owen Taylor informed me of a new model his organisation had recently instituted that entailed gardeners co-leading educational workshops along with Just Food staff. He explained the significance of Just Food's new model and his attempts to increase gardener participation in his workshops.

> If workshops are at least in part led by [gardeners], it gives a different depth and people identify with the trainer....they look and speak like each other and gardeners can relate to each other. So they want to come to [the workshops]. Also, this gives a whole other level to the workshop and what we are doing.

This phenomenon reinforces the idea that organisations were also drawing on notions of ethnicity to mobilise gardeners around their own agenda. The logic here was that if Just Food's workshops for gardeners were in part led by gardeners themselves, then gardener participation at the workshops would increase. Increasing gardener participation at the workshops was important since these activities were integral components to Just Food's own mission and agenda. Incorporating gardeners into the design of educational workshops added an edge to Just Food's attempt to rally gardeners and increase gardeners' interests in these workshops.

As previously mentioned in chapter five, many Casita gardeners were reluctant to attend such formal educational workshops as the ones organised by Just Food. Gardeners often attributed their reluctance to the idea that the staff members of these organisations were often not Puerto Rican and thus, they did not have access to the 'good', innate knowledge and skill-sets of their own gardening group. If educational workshops were partly led by Puerto Ricans and in this particular case by the gardeners' own coordinator, this rationale could no longer hold true. Yet, what is imperative to note here are gardeners' sentiments toward this Just Food event co-organised in El Flamboyan. Rather than express a genuine interest, El Flamboyan gardeners expressed

indifference to attending this educational workshop and three informants [F1; F2; F6] remarked how 'the coordinator expects us to attend the workshop'. This sentiment was clearly evidenced by a gardener's comments below.

> I was over at [my friend's house] and [the coordinator] called me and asked me where and why we hadn't come to the garden as yet. I had forgotten all about this thing today, and she wanted us to come. [F6]

To some extent, the example above about Just Food and their new model necessitating the active involvement of gardeners contributed to the sense of organisations being on an equal footing with gardeners. Organisations had the capital to organise workshops, and gardeners had the knowledge to lead and teach these workshops. However, even during this particular Just Food event organised in El Flamboyan, we see how the coordinator's leadership role in the workshop came to an end as soon as she finished her introduction of the garden and of the workshop itself. The core parts of the workshop were led by a non-Puerto Rican and non-Spanish speaking Just Food staff member.

Besides gardeners' lack of involvement in leading educational workshops, gardeners also faced challenges to fully participating in the ACGA's Annual Conference entitled 'Community Gardening Works!', which was held in NYC in August 2011. As a PhD researcher of community gardens, I was fortunate enough to be able to apply for and receive a scholarship from the ACGA to attend the conference, which covered the conference's fee of 300 US Dollars. Community gardeners, however, were not as fortunate. Not one of the study's gardeners attended the conference, and regardless of their interest in attending, they made clear that the conference fee was simply 'too much money'. These gardeners could not afford to attend the conference about community gardening in their own hometown. In addition, despite the vibrant history and active involvement of Puerto Ricans in the City's community gardens, there were no workshops organised by Puerto Ricans during the conference. There were, though, some academics and researchers who spoke about the City's Casita gardens.

For the most part, the only instance when gardeners were incorporated into ACGA's agenda for the conference was during their garden tours in the South Bronx. In this case, the El Flamboyan garden was selected as a visiting site on the tour. When the bus full of conference attendees arrived at the garden in the morning, only the coordinator and two

other gardeners were present. The coordinator briefly spoke about the garden, its history, and she encouraged everyone to walk through the garden's planting area to especially view the *gandules* - the 'Puerto Rican crop'. After about 10-15 minutes, the tour organisers rallied everyone back on the bus. The garden coordinator and two gardeners remained in the space to socialise, and more gardeners came to join them as the morning turned into the afternoon.

7.6 Counter-Narratives of Community Gardens

There was a paradox in how some garden supporters articulated and understood the ethnicity of community gardeners. Rather than stress notions of Puerto Rican or Latino ethnicity, as did the great majority of state and non-state actors, two garden supporters were adamant about affirming gardeners' Indigenous ethnicity. One of these organisational representatives was Gonzalo Venegas of the RDAC. Though it was previously mentioned that Gonzalo Venegas explained how gardeners faced institutionalised discrimination because they were Puerto Rican, he later clarified that Puerto Rican ethnicity was not gardeners' 'true' ethnicity. He explained that "the City calls them Puerto Ricans but you know that they are really Indigenous peoples". This idea was also echoed by Roberto Borrero, President of the United Confederation of Taino People (Taino referring to the pre-Colombian inhabitants of the Caribbean). Roberto Borrero organised and attended a number of Brook Park's 'Indigenous spiritual gatherings', such as the 'spiritual Taino sweat lodge' event. During this event, seven hot stones were placed in the garden's sweat lodge, and individuals sat inside the lodge chanting various 'Indigenous tunes' and blessings to the moon, sun, and earth for nearly an hour. Roberto Borrero preferred to go by the name, Mukaro, which he regarded as his real and Indigenous name. He addressed me as a sister whilst informing me of how growing food was inherent to an 'Indigenous understanding of self'.

> It's a driving force in my work, as an advocate and community leader, to help promote and protect my culture…Indigenous culture, the very people that have a rich history of gardening and being at one with the earth are now the ones facing these challenges and hardships to accessing gardens...[gardeners] have a rich culture tied to nurturing the land and gardening We need to learn about it and each other in order to protect [the garden].

For Gonzalo Venegas and Mukaro, reinforcing gardeners' Indigenous ethnicity was part of a strategy to counter the threats against community gardens. Mukaro explained how Indigenous peoples had a conceptual understanding of land that went beyond assigning spaces with monetary value: "[Indigenous peoples] have always had a different set of values [to land] than the government". In this way, Indigenous ethnicity conceptually moved gardeners' activities in the space beyond the neo-liberal paradigm, and challenged the idea that these spaces should be privatised, marketed, and sold to private investors. Inherent in gardeners' innate Indigenous mind-set was the core appreciation for the space's use-value. The logic here was not so much that gardeners were weak and incapable of effectively competing with private investors over the land, but rather that gardeners naturally operated on a different playing field where the significance of capital was irrelevant to their valuations of the land.

Mukaro's and Gonzalo Venegas's strategy was not any more ideological than it was realistic. They were both aware of how the monetary value of food grown in gardens would never realistically add up to market value of the land, for example. In this regard, Gonzalo Venegas addressed a weakness in the community garden advocacy work that emphasised the monetary values of gardeners' food growing activities: "[is] a tomato ever really going to measure up to the millions of dollars the City could get from selling the land?" In this way, he underlined the importance of growing food in gardens whilst stressing that for gardeners, growing food was appealing on an unquantifiable and spiritual dimension. In addition, the Indigenous ethnic label provided a means by which community gardeners could broaden their support base. Rather than promote notions of Puerto Rican or Latino ethnicity, Indigenous ethnicity effectively encompassed members from both of these ethnic labels, and *more*.

What is also relevant to note is that Gonzalo Venegas and Mukaro were both born in Puerto Rico, and lived and worked in the South Bronx for most of their lives. Thus, their social and cultural background markedly distinguished them from other garden supporters in the community garden movement. These two actors had critical insight into and first-hand experience of many of the challenges and troubles facing gardeners in the South Bronx. In order to struggle against the power structures that kept gardeners - as well as *themselves* - in weak positions, they aimed for a radical challenge that necessitated broader structural transformations within society. As such, struggling for

community garden preservation went hand-in-hand with struggling against the neo-liberal understanding and structuring of land and resources. They understood that community gardeners and certain societal groups would systematically remain victims of structural and social discrimination so long as capitalist values of land and nature reigned. Adopting an Indigenous ethnicity, then, represented a means by which gardeners could resist, rather than work in-line with, hegemonic principles.

Brook Park gardeners were not entirely impartial to the notions of Indigenous ethnicity promoted by Gonzalo Venegas's and Mukaro's activities in the garden. These two garden supporters frequently visited and organised activities in Brook Park, and as previously discussed in chapter five, Brook Park gardeners explicitly articulated an Indigenous ethnicity at different points in time. These articulations were never mentioned by gardeners in the other two case studies, where these two actors did not actively work. This finding suggests that gardeners' articulations of ethnicity were not altogether divorced from the activities and ideas of ethnicity being promoted by garden supporters. In chapter five, for instance, we saw how Brook Park gardeners conceptualised the Mexica Danza Ceremony as one of their own Indigenous traditions, which socially connected them with other members of the group. Notions of this ethnicity also arose to the forefront when gardeners spoke about the prospect of losing their gardens. On this note, one Brook Park gardener [B2] described the process of potentially being removed from the community garden in terms of the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the US. In this context, community gardeners and Native Americans shared the same battle for struggling against structural discrimination and the uneven access to resources.

> Identifying with the larger community, Indigenous, what does that do for us? It's not unlike what has happened with the Native American community. That is to say, the Indigenous people of this nation, they were invaded. They were removed…we need to secure our access to land and access to natural resources. Very much so. [B2]

An Indigenous ethnicity contributed to this gardener's sense of belonging to a wider community beyond his own gardening group as well as beyond members of the wider community garden movement. He, like his fellow Native American compatriots, faced comparable hardships because '*we* were different'. Along this line, gardeners needed to protect their Indigenous traditions which were, as Brook Park's coordinator described,

"under threat by our society". The coordinator went on to explain how the garden provided the safe space for these traditions to be practiced and embraced since these traditions were otherwise rejected by "the modern world [and] most areas of the City". This understanding of the space and gardeners' ethnicity helped to reinforce the contention that community gardens needed long-standing protection and safeguarding for cultural as well as material purposes. One gardener [B3] even described the garden's cultural traditions as affirming his 'humanity'. In this way, practicing accepted notions of Indigenous culture in the garden symbolised a struggle and an active form of resistance against the state.

> At least in the community garden we're able to engage in an active form of resistance...not necessarily of a militant nature, but a resistance and a cultural resistance that affirms our humanity. [B3]

What is imperative to highlight here is Brook Park's gardeners fluctuating rhetoric in relation to their Indigenous ethnicity and their everyday behaviours in the garden. As mentioned, when speaking about issues related to garden preservation and the significance of the garden's social events, gardeners' mobilised their Indigenous ethnicity to accentuate their interests and viewpoints. This ethnic label helped to socially connect them with other garden members of diverse national origins as well as other vulnerable societal groups. It also helped to underscore the unique and distinct characteristics of the garden that made this space different and special to all other spaces in the City. However, we witnessed in chapter five that these articulations of ethnicity were not prominent when gardeners worked in the spaces they regarded as private in the garden. At these instances, gardeners unvaryingly drew attention to their Puerto Rican ethnicity and described how they were acting in distinctly Puerto Rican ways. Indigenous ethnicity was also largely absent from gardeners' rhetoric when they accounted for actively participating in other forms of social activism in the district. When one gardener [B4] attended a protest against the closure of a nearby fire station, for example, chapter five showed how notions of Latino ethnicity were omnipresent in his rhetoric and ways of thinking. This phenomenon suggests that notions of Indigenous ethnicity were just one of the array of ethnic options available to gardeners. In large part, accepted notions of Indigenous naturalness were socially co-constructed by Brook Park gardeners and some garden supporters whilst in the garden and made meaningful

in relation to the specific garden space, garden activities, and the resistance against the market pressures that threatened their garden.

The recognition that Brook Park gardeners were expressing notions of Indigenous ethnicity did not go unnoticed by members of the wider community garden movement. Edie Stone of Green Thumb, for example, spoke in detail about the garden's Indigenous events. She was clear in her affirmations that these events were not affiliated with gardeners' interests but were the result of non-members using the space for their own interests. In this regard, she described how some organisations were attempting to "expand the mission of the garden" by promoting ideas of Indigenous ethnicity. She underscored how ethnicity, in this case, was being 'exploited' by non-members in Brook Park to achieve their counter-cultural goals, which were distinct from gardeners' interests. To reinforce this idea, Edie Stone compared the events at Brook Park with the events at El Flamboyan. In her comments below, the idea that El Flamboyan gardeners solely operated in accordance to their own interests was emphasised.

> If you look at El Flamboyan…[gardeners] are doing what is a traditional event for them, the event is kind of more organic…but a lot of the times I really think like in Brook Park, people there are almost exploiting gardeners' ethnicity...It's very paternalistic in a certain kind of way, like we're coming in to help [gardeners]…like what is that? Like Running Bear, Spirit Sun…like all that weird stuff that [Brook Park] does with the Native American stuff. It's not like there's a lot of Native American gardeners up there.

Edie Stone's comments epitomised how community garden supporters, as community gardeners, were not homogenous entities. In effect, organisations and agencies were utilising different strategies to defend gardens, and these strategies were aligned with different notions of gardeners' ethnicity. Along this line, Edie Stone's reasoning of how El Flamboyan's events were more 'organic' had less to do with non-members not advancing their own interests in this garden, but rather more to do with which organisations were advancing what notions of ethnicity, and for what purposes. Farming Concrete and other organisations were undoubtedly interacting with El Flamboyan gardeners and restructuring ideas of nature-culture in the space. Yet, for Edie Stone, these organisations were acting in-line with gardeners' interests, and in large part, acting in-line with the interests of Green Thumb, too. Thus, ideas of gardeners' ethnicity were being pulled in different directions on multiple scales, and for different underlying reasons and objectives.

7.7 Conclusion

Community gardening emerges as something rather more complex than what was understood prior to the research's application of political ecology literatures. There are scalar ramifications to gardeners' behaviours and gardens' functions in practice. The interrelationships between the social and natural processes of community gardening are not exclusively constituted by intra-garden social and ecological concerns. The three-way relationship between governmental agencies, non-governmental organisations, and finally the gardeners themselves is part of a highly complex and dynamic process mediating the overall trajectory of ecological and social change in gardens. This 'triangle of relations' entails the appreciation of capitalist development, social and productive relations, and the different discourses on land and nature. The unifying theme here is that social-political and cultural-ecological processes related to community gardens in NYC shape and are shaped by social power relations produced in a particular historical, cultural and ecological context. Community gardening, therefore, is an activity that entails much more than intra-garden social relations and localised ideas of nature.

Community gardeners lack capital and political power to effectively compete with private investors who promise to deliver more profitable forms of redeveloping the garden (Wakefield, 2007; Smith and Kurt, 2003; Schmelzkopf, 2002). Surrendering claims to community gardens, nonetheless, was simply untenable to gardeners. They sought to address their weak positions in society through leveraging support from institutional bodies in the wider community garden movement. By establishing social relations with various state and non-state actors, gardeners' efforts to maintain and preserve their garden gained momentum.

Community gardeners' relationships with supporting institutions are important for resource procurement (Baker, 2004). Institutions clearly operate from more powerful places and positions in society, and they also have access to more resources than those locally available to community gardeners within their own gardening group. As such, the garden-institutional relationship was perceived by gardeners as a source of and means to gain power and legitimacy for their cause. Indeed, the explicit link between 'receiving support' from an organisation and gaining a 'sense of validation' was a powerful rationale for forging relationships with others beyond the gardening group

(Glover, 2004: 158). What is important to highlight here is that rather than remaining in the hands of gardeners, resources were nominally controlled by institutions that were largely recognised, both socially and politically, by the state. Understanding the garden movement, then, entails understanding how interrelated social and power relations between gardeners, institutions, and the state are constituted and (re)produced.

The garden-institutional partnership was underpinned by a common ideology to preserve community gardens on prime development land. Although sharing a common endeavour, the bonds between these actors did not always stand on solid ground. At various times, the tensions between gardeners' interests and the interests of institutions epitomised how the meaning of community gardens is not universal and the values of gardening can change in relation to the diverse actors involved with garden provision (Baker, 2004). Specifically, gardeners' valuations of the land emphasised their passive forms of recreation, namely, socialising. They conceptualised gardens as spaces to enact cultural traditions, and for finding solitude or finding friends for socialisation. These values thus tended to foreground local scales of interests, which were not necessarily and explicitly political or broadly connected with socio-ecological issues beyond the confines of the space. Organisations and agencies in the garden movement, however, underscored the connection between gardens and gardeners' ability to improve environmental injustices in their marginalised South Bronx neighbourhoods. This discourse on socio-environmental injustices and the processes of urbanisation were rooted in the dynamics of place specific historical and cultural particularities. In particular, this discourse was entrenched in the idea that gardeners were of a certain ethnic group and thus, they were inherently and systematically the victims of social and political discrimination that physically relegated them to the poorest congressional district in the country. Gardens, for certain ethnic groups in certain areas, were conceptualised as a basic amenity, rather than a luxury.

Certain policies and programs in gardens were encouraged and initiated by garden supporters in the movement. These policies and programs were heavily influenced by food justice issues and concerns. Ideas of food justice were even embedded in the fine grain of how many organisations defined community gardens as a land use (Martinez, 2010; Baker, 2004; DeLind, 2002; Armstrong, 2000). This conceptualisation of gardens as sites of food justice arose out of the intersection between larger scale discourses of

environmental injustices and ideas on the local needs of disenfranchised gardeners. In this way, growing food in gardens was conceptually transformed into a 'delocalised' activity that was intimately connected with broader ideas of justice. By framing gardens as important sites for food production, organisations were crafting ideas and knowledge of nature wherein food is linked to broader societal inequalities and power constellations.

Ethnicity further solidified the interconnectivity between community gardens and food justice. Ethnicity was an effective means to contextualise gardens in the socio-historical and physical framework of NYC. Puerto Ricans were systematically discriminated against by the neo-liberal structuring and processes of urbanisation, both in the past and the present. The logic presented by most institutions was that Puerto Ricans lacked equal access to healthy food, and hence, this population group was suffering from food injustices. As such, notions of Puerto Rican ethnicity accentuated the link between 'community gardens' and 'the needs of Puerto Ricans in the South Bronx'. In this discourse, growing food was also conceptualised as a 'proactive' activity that worked to improve the dire situation of poor, marginalised, and culturally suppressed peoples: gardens enabled Puerto Rican gardeners to do something about their desperate situation *themselves*.

Food justice was the focus for garden supporters in the movement in part because of the City's political economy. Garden projects and policies oriented around concepts of food justice were largely rooted in market-based models of valuing nature. Farming Concrete's 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project, for instance, essentially naturalised the dynamics of the free market by assigning monetary values to the food cultivated by gardeners. In this regard, food represented a clear exchange-value and a commodity that could be bought and sold in the market-economy: articulating a clear set of capitalist relations between gardeners and their gardens. This particular project also worked to create 'truths' of gardens since the data was widely considered as 'scientific' and 'objective' due to its numerical and visual nature. The results of Farming Concrete's project, therefore, constituted a potent source of claims-making as it enabled gardens and gardening activities to be framed in a politically palatable language to the state.

In very significant ways, the wide interest in food justice influenced gardeners' management and use of their gardens. Non-profit organisations did not have a mandate to help and support all community gardens in the City. Rather, they had the power to pick and choose which community gardens they wanted to allocate resources to and form social relations. As a whole, non-profits tend to favour community gardens that align with their own beliefs and objectives (Martinez, 2010; Baker, 2004). Since the longevity and vitality of gardens are dependent on links with supporting institutions (Firth et al., 2011: 565), gardeners had to prove that they were 'worthy' of external sources of support. Along this line, garden coordinators' ideas of what a 'good' garden should look like and how it should function were largely encapsulated in the idea that gardeners needed to grow food. Gardeners, irrespective of whether they were even consciously aware of certain food justice concepts, were expected to grow food and symbolically and materially 'sweat equity' (Zukin, 2009: 218).

Farming Concrete's market-based model of valuing gardens did not necessarily account for the ways in which gardeners articulated and experienced the value of their gardens. Not every gardener wanted to actively cultivate fruits and vegetables, and record-keeping did not always fall under the category of fun. Gardeners *needed* and were *pressured* to act in ways to maintain their social relations with the elites and more powerful, and at times, gardeners' interests were also relegated to the periphery of garden provision. This did not imply that gardeners did not enjoy, use, or find value in the food grown, for instance. Rather, these considerations were in the background and not the focal point of how they assigned value to the space and their garden membership. Gardens were also places of peace, and reflected a panacea of other benefits including helping people cope with stress. Benefits such as stress reduction can also be intertwined with gardeners' health and consequently be positioned and theorised within an environmental justice frame, too. Yet, such non-tangible by-products of gardening did not constitute a persuasive and compelling community garden campaign in the context of neo-liberal contemporary societal relations. Largely for this reason, the significance of other gardening activities was drowned out by the movement's chorus around growing food. This finding itself reveals the relevance of social power relations in determining ideas of nature and corresponding land use practices. Turning gardeners into 'food justice practitioners' was a strategy that favoured hegemonic beliefs over gardeners' understandings of nature-culture.

The finding that some El Flamboyan gardeners found basic participation in Farming Concrete's project to be challenging also elucidates NYC's class based system. Gardeners, due to educational and language factors, experienced difficulty in record-keeping. This activity, though, was considered by the organisation's Director to be a natural Puerto Rican practice in gardens. Gardeners were also unable to attend ACGA's Annual Conference in NYC due to its relatively expensive entrance fee. Though the ACGA awarded some people with conference scholarships, applications for these scholarships were in English and they mainly targeted academics and researchers. Community gardeners themselves were left out. There were obvious cultural and class differences between gardeners and the great majority of their supporters in the movement. These cultural and class issues were interrelated with multi-scalar social relations, reinforcing gardeners' weak positions in the movement and uncovering why some ideas of community gardens carried more political and symbolic weight than others.

In El Flamboyan, the 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project was largely carried out with success because of the unique way the program intersected with intra-garden social relations. The garden's teachers were called upon by some members of the group for help and support with maintaining their planting bed. In this way, gardeners who did not want to grow food didn't have to actively partake in the activity. Gardeners' personal interests were addressed whilst the group's broader interests to sustain social relations with organisations could be protected. This draws attention to how gardeners need to mediate tensions among group members themselves (Schmelzkopf, 1995), especially when the interests of gardeners and organisations do not exactly line up. This finding also foregrounds the significance of gardeners' social bonds as a formative factor in mediating the influence of power relations on gardeners' beliefs and everyday practices in the space.

The garden-institutional relationship also reinforced and restructured intra-garden social relations. As mentioned above, teachers were happy to share their horticultural knowledge and to help others maintain their planting beds. The external demands on the garden to produce more food effectively increased the worth of teachers' horticultural knowledge within intra-garden social networks. Indeed, teachers' skills and knowledge were significant resources for the group, and in part they determined whether the

garden's food production activities would be seen as a success by others. As a result, teachers experienced an improved social standing within the gardening group. In addition, garden-institutional partnerships also produced particular manifestations of garden coordinators. Implicit in the understanding of effective garden coordination was that the coordinators be socially savvy, charismatic (Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004), and, perhaps most importantly, speak English. This also revealed how language was tied to power. Spanish speakers remained systematically under-represented within the decision-making spheres of the garden movement (Martinez, 2010). The phenomenon lends credence to the idea that non-profit work and policies maintain in the position of the elites (Daniels, 1988). Coordinators needed to be confident English speakers in order to communicate and comfortably socialise with non-Spanish speaking garden supporters. Insofar as resources were brought down the chain from the elites to gardeners, the garden coordinator was considered a 'strong' and respected leader by and for the gardening group. Local, intra-garden social relations were not entirely independent of gardeners' social relations on broader scales.

The emphasis on food production in community gardening initiatives instilled spaces and activities in these gardens with social and political meaning. In El Flamboyan, for instance, the planting area was the first place gardeners showed non-members when they gave tours of their garden. This area visually represented the group's commitment to growing food, and anchored the discourses of food justice in material form and physical action. The planting area was instilled with the power to influence outsiders' perception of the garden group (Lawson, 2005). Since gardeners were acutely aware of how these spaces were being valued more than other spaces in the garden, the area had to be constantly maintained to look nice and presentable for 'outsiders'. Keeping the planting area clean solely for the sake of gardeners certainly did not uncover the whole story of what was actually happening in these gardens.

The ability of plants to represent ethnicity served as an important catalyst, motivating gardeners to attribute value to and grow certain crops in their planting areas. In El Flamboyan, *gandules* was cultivated and highly valued by gardeners. This finding reinforced what was found in chapter six about how gardeners cherished this crop and insisted on its linkages with Puerto Rico. In this chapter, I explored the evaluation of ethnically-charged plants further by demonstrating how gardeners' ideas of the crop

were constitutive of the complex intersections between cultural and political processes operating at larger scales. *Gandules* could be 'read' by others as a distinct, Puerto Rican crop. As a result, this crop produced a visible and tangible construct of their ethnicity that ultimately reinforced the link between gardens, food justice, and garden preservation. Food in community gardens is no more politically neutral than the processes that contributed to the formation of these spaces (Baker, 2004).

The implications of garden-institutional partnerships on gardeners' notions of ethnicity fluctuated across spatial and temporal dimensions. The idea that gardeners grew food, and specifically because 'that is what Puerto Ricans do', was a powerful notion for certain organisations and agencies to rally gardening groups around food growing schemes. I found that in specific relation to the 'Crop Count and Harvest Report', El Flamboyan's garden teachers, for instance, did not always account for their food growing activities as merely reflecting garden membership. They accounted for their knowledge of food cultivation as being a 'natural' expression of their Puerto Rican ethnicity. This understanding, though, had more to do with reinforcing their own knowledge and social status in the group. In addition, some gardeners drew on discourses of ethnicity and food production that seem antithetical to their observed everyday practices in the garden. These apparent contradictions were important for understanding the oversimplification of Puerto Rican ethnicity promoted by the movement. Reinforcing the stereotype of Puerto Ricans as food growers, nonetheless, helped to cement food justice and community gardens with a set of relations between Puerto Ricans and the City. This finding shows how notions of ethnicity are interrelated with the significance of community gardening, and these notions themselves are in part mediated by social power relations and not altogether independent of them.

Alternative discourses of gardeners' ethnicity and the value of gardens were produced by subaltern actors. This phenomenon underscored ideological contradictions, as well as cultural and class differences between entities within the garden movement. Mukaro, for instance, constructed a political strategy for the defense of gardens that entailed explicitly binding gardeners to the Indigenous ethnic label. He found instrumental value in underscoring this ethnicity over the Puerto Rican or Latino one since it helped to underline the significance of community gardening on a local level whilst it 'innately' connected gardeners with larger, existing environmental justice movements in the country. It also lent ideological impetus to garden advocacy work. It reinforced the idea

that gardeners inhabited the land prior to the government's reevaluations of the garden space, and that gardeners needed to be compensated for the hardships and past wrong doings wrought on by the government. Perhaps more importantly, the Indigenous mind-set conceptually removed gardens from the capitalist rubric of how space is assessed as meaningful. In this regard, Mukaro was well aware of how the economic value of gardeners' food would never realistically amount to more than the garden's market values. Contrary to Farming Concrete's strategies for garden preservation, then, constructing an Indigenous view of valuing nature underscored the need for society-nature relations to be organised differently than the dominant model that the economy mandates. This did not mean, though, that Mukaro or Brook Park's coordinator did not emphasise the importance of growing food in gardens. Indeed, both these actors drew attention to gardeners' food growing activities, and some gardeners here also felt pressured to grow food crops. Even though this phenomenon ran somewhat parallel with hegemonic ideas of gardens' function, advancing notions of Indigenous ethnicity also acknowledged how realistically, gardeners could never effectively compete in a society where everything is considered up-for-sale or sold for monetary profit.

Irrespective of notions of Puerto Rican or Indigenous ethnicity, concepts of ethnicity were at the forefront of community garden advocacy, and these concepts were also mediated by the specific ecological and social considerations of the South Bronx and its gardeners. Garden supporters framed community gardeners as being 'naturally' subjected to poverty and at the same time 'naturally' predisposed to engage in certain garden activities. Fixed notions of gardeners' ethnicity were being constructed by political ecological issues and used as a means for gardeners and their supporters to define and redefine social power relations. Notions of gardeners' ethnicity were used selectively, actively, and were strategically constructed by gardeners, garden advocates, and the state for various social and political interests. Evidently, subaltern and hegemonic actors in the garden movement, to varying degrees, can strengthen ideas of local culture as well as create and recreate meanings and values of nature-culture in a localised garden context.

Overall, this chapter made the case for the necessity to view gardening within broader societal relations and social power struggles. A holistic and nuanced analysis of how gardens are used and designed, and how these spaces in turn influence gardeners'

ethnicity, inherently entails an understanding of wider social and political processes operating on different and intersecting scales. In this light, gardens are not merely spaces where ideas of nature and ethnicity are set in stone and solely mediated by intra-garden considerations. Gardens are spaces where multiple forces work over time to pull notions of ethnicity and nature in directions for different social and political aims. The relationship between gardeners and gardens combine social and nature considerations which are also produced by political ecological relations across time and space.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This investigation provided a specific perspective on Puerto Rican gardeners across three different community gardens in the South Bronx. Two questions formed the focus of the research: first, how, if at all, do community gardens influence gardeners' notions of their ethnicity, and second, how do gardeners use and design community gardens? The field research for this thesis was conducted between April and December of 2011. Narrative and semi-structured interviews enabled gardeners to directly voice their sentiments and experiences in each garden. Coupled with active-participant observations and discourse analysis, the 'triangulation' of these qualitative research methods coloured a rich picture of gardeners' everyday realities. Calling on the range of social and natural phenomena within community gardens also involved a critique of power relations and a critique of how access to resources is understood, negotiated, and contested at multiple scales. As such, along with community gardeners, the investigation also included civil servants and organisational representatives as research participants. Their inclusion reflects a recognition and appreciation of the roles played by the state and wider institutional arrangements in gardens' human and organisational landscape. Specifically, this study explored how community gardening is a culturally, socially, and politically mediated act transacted by relations of inequality. All gardeners are equal, but some more than others.

In this concluding chapter, I revisit the study's three research aims that worked to answer the two research questions. I summarise and connect the substantive arguments of each of the three empirical chapters, and reflect on the contribution of this thesis to existing theoretical and empirical research. I also make recommendations and suggest avenues for future research. It is important to emphasise here that this research did not seek universal or conclusive answers. The overarching aim of the study was to reveal the ways in which ethnicity and nature intersect and manifest in a specific time, place, and socio-political context.

8.1 Summary

My first research aim was to uncover how community gardens influence gardeners' notions of ethnicity through a localised lens of intra-garden social relations. An

important conclusion to draw from the thesis is that community gardening involved participants learning to effect and be affected by socialisation with members of the gardening group. In Casita gardens, for instance, I discussed how notions of ethnicity were made meaningful by gardeners insofar as these concepts worked to reinforce gardeners' social bonds with the group and attachment to the space. During daily routines and practices, primordial ideologies were folded into these gardeners' understandings of self. Ideas of 'naturally' belonging to an ethnicity also provided Casita gardeners with moral justification for their gardening activities. Indeed, these ideas were seen to be key factors in maintaining, shaping, and reconstituting the groups' social hierarchy. Naturally belonging to an ethnicity was instrumental in determining social structures whilst being themselves socially constructed. In general, all gardeners' primordial sentiments were formed from everyday interactive experiences, and their articulations of ethnicity arose tacitly in relation to the changing values of different ethnic options across time and space.

The findings from this investigation draw attention to the necessity of reframing the current geographic research that explores issues of ethnicity in community gardens. Rather than interrogating social influences, contemporary scholarship tends to neglect the complex social dimensions of these locales and relies instead on assumptions of fixity when exploring gardeners' ethnicity. Theorising ethnicity as a static phenomenon has contributed to the plethora of studies that suggest that community gardens function to preserve the 'true' philosophies and practices of gardeners' ethnicity (Winterbottom, 2007; Saldivar-Tanak and Krasny, 2004; Aponte-Pares, 1997; Airriess and Clawson, 1994). This study, however, provides a critical vantage point from which to view ethnicity. I found that the co-mingling of the past and present in conceptualisations of ethnicity had implications for how community gardens ultimately refashioned, rather than simply preserved, gardeners' notions of ethnicity. The distinct micro-politics of gardeners' social and material practices created the basis for new interpretations of ethnicity to form and transform. In this way, gardens were not only 'containers' in which social events happened, but they also provided the space to shape what happened and how it happened. Community garden researchers should therefore heed this study's call to capture the complexity and subtlety of local social and natural systems in a place-specific manner. Such an approach would emphasise the importance of considering

gardeners' social relations and cultural practices in order to understand how and why certain issues tied to ethnicity are made meaningful in community gardens.

Research in community gardens can teach us to ask particular questions of ethnicity and how this phenomenon manifests itself in particular social and physical contexts. The case of Brook Park, which is shared by gardeners of different nationalities, was particularly useful in demonstrating the fluctuations that expressions of ethnicity can undergo over time. In this regard, these gardeners would often inform me that they acted in distinctly Puerto Rican ways. Soon after - on a different day or time - these same gardeners would lay emphasis on how they were naturally (i.e., through blood) either Latino or Indigenous. The findings demonstrate how gardeners' shifting articulations of ethnicity did not reflect a sense of confusion or lack of self-awareness. The strength of gardeners' ethnic bonds varied in response to where they were and with whom and about what they were speaking. Latino and Indigenous ethnicity proved to be a particularly powerful resource uniting diverse members of the group under one, unified pan-ethnic label. However defined, ethnicity is invariably central to the 'everdayness' of gardeners' realities in these spaces.

Many elements and aspects of social capital intersected with gardeners' social norms, even though gardeners tended to explain these behaviours as merely the result of their ethnicity. Gardening groups' provision and governance style, and their intention to link with organisations in a wider garden movement, intersected with gardeners' experiences and expressions of self and community. For instance, Casita gardeners explicitly stressed how their groups' Puerto Rican character enabled them to feel safe and comfortable in the space. When the study considered gardeners' comparison of the groups' Puerto Rican character to Puerto Rican non-gardeners, it became clear that it was the particular gardening group, and not ethnicity per se, that profoundly impacted the conditions of gardeners' everyday life. Research on gardeners' expressions of ethnicity should thus be supplemented with lines of inquiry on gardens' structural and socio-contextual factors, which may have strong bearings on and intersect with the processes of making particular notions of ethnicity meaningful in community gardens.

The second aim of the research was to explore the use and design of gardens in relation to the intra-garden social and cultural relations on ecological conditions. I elucidated

three modalities in which nature was socially constructed in gardens: socialisation patterns, memories, and traditions. Gardeners' patterns and practices of social inclusivity and exclusivity were invariably fundamental to understanding the groups' social and natural landscape. In Casita gardens, gardeners' close and tight-knit social bonds were reinforced by the groups' social patterns of exclusivity and their ascription of non-members as 'outsiders' who 'don't belong' in all spaces of the garden. These social concerns were important catalysts for fuelling the beliefs and meanings of spaces, and especially casitas, as home-like. In Brook Park, more inclusionary garden policies often resulted in gardeners feeling socially inhibited in the space, which led them to seek out and build places of solitude. Research on gardeners' usage of community gardens should consider the formative variables of social inclusivity and exclusivity when assessing the possibilities and limitations of how gardeners act and enact their values toward the gardening group and gardening space.

Memories were not divorced from people's on-going social experiences. Memories - real, imagined and (re)invented - helped to bring gardens and gardening groups 'to life' in the present. Understanding gardeners' behaviours and practices, therefore, had to go beyond their narratives of the past in Puerto Rico. The groups' repository of knowledge and their social bonds of reciprocity were all relevant to how individual gardeners narrated memories through garden use and design. Research also reinforced the idea that dynamic, collective, and coherent memories of the past were being formed from the present socio-contexts. This point emerged in the discussion on growing *gandules* in El Flamboyan, and how its cultivation played a role in mediating the creation of gardeners' unified, collective memory of the rural Puerto Rican landscape. Although existing research on other categories and types of horticulture underpin how the past and present co-exist and become constituted in parallel with the act of growing plants (Ginn, 2013; Head et al., 2004), scholarship on community gardens should also appreciate how certain plants reflect gardeners' real and imagined memories and how they are interconnected facets of community gardeners' everyday lived experiences.

The conversation around the division of labour in El Flamboyan demonstrated how community gardening created and recreated notions of Puerto Rican tradition. The gardening group's particular concepts of tradition, in which spaces and activities were gendered, were not uniformly accepted and practised by all gardeners across the three

sites. The contradictory systems of cultural signification draw attention to the relevance of intra-garden social relations in defining meanings of space and accepted notions of tradition. Similarly, the key role played by teachers in Casita gardens also launched a critique of what kinds of horticultural knowledge were explicitly linked with tradition. Gardeners' ideas of the 'right' ways of doing things in planting beds or lots intersected with teachers' social power and skill-sets. The attachment of skill-sets to specific notions of tradition further contributed to teachers' ability to harness the power to direct and redirect horticultural activities as well as reinforce their revered status within the group. Members' rationale to use manure in their planting lots in UWS, for example, was connected to a teacher's specific mode of gardening as expressed by their discursive depictions of accepted Puerto Rican practices. When gardeners' social roles, relations, and ideas of traditional practices are collapsed into each other, the mutually co-constitutive ecological and social purposes of various complex gardening decisions, discourses and practices are revealed.

My use of socio-nature as an analytic domain does not completely overshadow the importance of nature and physical landscapes in ascertaining how gardeners use and design gardens. I outlined how the physical amenities of each garden played a role in crystallising certain social phenomena and determining what social needs could be realistically achieved within the space. For example, I found that certain plants, such as tomatoes, were grown by all of the study's gardeners. This overlap was telling inasmuch as gardeners' crop selections were partly based on the outstanding physical features of the Puerto Rican landscape. The overlap was related to Puerto Rico's vegetation as well as other ecological conditions of the community garden and processes of cultivating crops in NYC. As such, I do not suggest that gardeners' design of these spaces is strictly conditioned on social elements. Rather, I conclude by asserting that ideas of reality are both materially and semiotically constructed in community gardens, and that what gardeners consider as 'natural' and 'worthy' of cultivation will partly depend on the garden's local socio-physical culture. The community garden landscape will always have multiple meanings and dimensions, which may not only inform us about gardeners themselves, but also about the dynamics of a group's social structure in a particular locale.

An important conclusion drawn from empirical chapters five and six is that despite the lack of uniformity among gardeners' valuations of their gardens, these valuations were never solely expressed in monetary terms. Their gardens' use-value, rather than its exchange-value, was central to how they attributed value to these spaces and related activities. Yet, gardeners' values were not heard, or at the very least, not appreciated by the state and market economy. As in many cities, 'money talks' in NYC. An analysis of human-nature relations in community gardens, therefore, involved recognising how the two phenomena are intertwined with political ecological discourses on multiple scales.

This trend led logically to the third aim of this thesis, which was to situate the dynamic and complex meanings of gardener-gardener and gardener-garden relations in a broader context of social power relations on multiple scales. Insights from political ecology helped to shed new light on socio-natures in gardens by generating deeper understandings of how nature is valued in NYC. The changing infrastructural provision of the South Bronx, from abandoned land of demolished buildings to community gardens and now 'revitalized' real estate, underpins the dynamics and complexities of urbanisation. The idea that space was tied to power also raised substantive questions about how gardeners had to collectively act to defend their gardens, and how their garden use partly evolved from and was located within a nexus of spatial, political, and economic relations.

For gardeners and garden advocates, it was impossible to neatly separate ideas of the space from the awareness of how gardens were 'up for sale', at least conceptually, even if not in actuality during the course of fieldwork. Since most community gardeners throughout the country do not directly and legally own their gardens, participants' worry and concern for permanent land tenure is not explicitly unique to this research or setting. Along this line, gardeners' relationships with their supporters in the community garden movement also entailed their own geometries of power. Various state and non-state actors in the movement were in different class positions and social locations, and they often had access to more resources and political power than gardeners too. The uneven social power dynamics that characterise garden-institutional relationships in NYC are important determinants of how and which particular community gardening initiatives and land use practices are played out in the field.

Cognitive polarities and divergent values of community gardening were epitomised in this study by garden-institutional relationships. Contrary to gardeners' views, most state and other non-state actors underlined how gardens made a significant and positive contribution to improving food injustices in the South Bronx. In doing so, the meaning of growing food in gardens was recrafted to recast gardeners' social and political problems, and their claims to the garden, into numerical as well as 'scientific' data. In El Flamboyan, the Farming Concrete's 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project, for instance, helped to quantify and assess the monetary value of the garden's cultivated food. This project was largely in-line with the hegemonic regulatory structure and idiosyncrasies of valuing nature. In fact, the recent formation of the organisation Farming Concrete itself demonstrates how the wider community gardening movement was engaging with cultural and dominant discourses on nature, which was rooted in the promotion of certain gardening practices. There were, evidently, some obvious quantitative complexities involved with generating the project's 'scientific' data. Indeed, not every gardener always weighed the results of his or her harvest. This phenomenon raises some questions about the validity of the 'Crop Count and Harvest Report' project's findings. It also underscores how gardeners were not necessarily interested in recording their harvest. Farming Concrete's project, nonetheless, mobilised and entrenched hegemonic ideas of and techniques for valuing nature. Such food growing activities constitute compelling community garden campaigning, irrespective of gardeners' interests and priorities.

The power relations between Farming Concrete and El Flamboyan gardeners ensured that the 'scientific' management of the garden's planting spaces prevailed over management that might promote gardeners' own social interests. This suggests that the institutional setting in which community gardeners find themselves will be a significant force in mediating their land use practices, both in NYC and beyond. I argue that it is important to consider gardeners' intra-garden social networks as an analytical entry point to exploring how these power relations eventually impact gardeners' belief systems, though. In this regard, I outlined how El Flamboyan gardeners, without jeopardising their relations with Farming Concrete, were able to carry out record-keeping projects largely due to its intersection with preexisting intra-garden social networks. In this way, gardeners who did not want to grow food didn't have to actively partake in the activity. This finding demonstrates how community gardeners may evade

hegemonic beliefs of nature, and at times, the land use practices that are essentially antithetical to their own personal interests. In effect, the social and physical manifestation of garden-institutional relationships in gardens will depend on the socio-political context of each garden and the gardening group's capacity for independent action.

For the most part, community gardeners were 'planted' by their supporters in the lower social and political spheres of the community garden movement. Gardeners were incorporated into garden advocacy campaigns insofar as they were in the garden and growing vegetables. Most state and non-state actors were also largely made up of college-educated 'experts' and civil servants who were non-Spanish speaking and did not themselves reside in the South Bronx. The regime of 'truth' around community gardens, which was in part created through the discourse and policy of many organisations and mediated by urban governance, meant that certain concepts of nature in gardens were being socially constructed by elites. Thus, the social positioning of people in the garden movement is relevant to the understanding of how gardens are framed in the context of socio-ecological justice.

In addition, missions to achieve ideas of food justice in community gardens effectively worked to justify and sustain the existence of various agencies and organisations in social positions of power. Indeed, the fantasy-like conjunction of community gardens and sites that improve food access in the South Bronx underscores the distinct and politically driven interests of non-gardener actors. Gardeners were in large part left in a state of vulnerability and were heavily dependent, rather than independent of, external sources of help from the elites. The fact that the City's inequitable food distribution system itself was rarely, if at all, addressed by most garden advocates was also testament to how the vulnerability of gardeners was largely normalised and considered part of the inherent functioning of the capitalist state. To a large extent, we witness the garden movement's propensity to follow and reproduce the patterns of inequality that have regulated gardeners as powerless in society. This finding also lends credence to the studies that explore the winners and losers in NYC's mainstream community garden movement, and how gardeners often fall in last place (Martinez, 2010; Zukin, 2009). Future research could therefore usefully explore the politics of gardeners and their supporters, and the policies and gatekeepers that keep gardeners 'planted' away from

the decision-making and policy-oriented spheres of the movement. Such research would also be imperative, and perhaps even generalisable to other locales where the garden-institutional relationship is characterised by socio-political inequalities.

The social and environmental justice elements of community gardening have multiple points of entry, which may be foreclosed to their detriment. Gardens hold realisable potentials for a range of social and physical benefits, besides food production. Along this line, there is a lack of research on the effect these spaces have on air quality and rain-storm mitigation, to name two examples. By incorporating and elucidating the importance of multiple gardening benefits in campaign work, hegemonic actors in the garden movement may better respond to ever-changing trends and fashions in public discourse. Simply put, though food justice and food cultivation are two issues currently in vogue, there is no guarantee that the significance of these issues will remain salient for elites in the near and distant future.

It is important to understand that this study does not argue that local agricultural schemes are incapable of improving the availability of local food supplies in inner-city neighbourhoods. What this research suggests, rather, is that hegemonic notions of community gardens as vital sites of agricultural production have the potential to change the conceptual vocabulary employed by gardeners to express meanings of nature. In addition, the tendency to frame community gardens as sites of agricultural production is gaining momentum in NYC. This trend is evidenced by the recent collaboration of the Bronx Green-Up and Just Food in 2013 to offer 'Grow More Vegetables' educational workshops. This phenomenon is certainly not pinned down to NYC. In many inner-city low-income areas around the country, such as in Detroit, new non-governmental organisations like 'Keep Growing Detroit' (established in 2013) continue to emerge and explicitly describe community gardeners as urban farmers. In fact, the most recent ACGA Annual Conference in 2013 was entitled 'Cultivating Community, Harvesting Health: Community Gardens to Urban Farms'. Indeed, the readings of gardens as mainly food growing sites enables discussions on how dominant cultures function in relation to periphery cultures, and how hegemonic beliefs about socio-nature derive from the metanarratives that serve as a template for urban change. Even so, as urban centres become dominant features of human habitation on earth, the significance of and demand for agricultural production in metropolitan areas will inevitably rise. Future

research might explore the ways in which other forms of urban agriculture might substantiate the produce grown in community gardens. Such research could potentially disclose the options available for growing food in cities that are based on broad participation schemes and on large enough scales to realistically feed whole neighbourhoods, rather than relatively small groups of community gardeners and their active supporters.

Food cultivation in gardens, I suggest, is also about acknowledging how ethnicity is implicated in societal power structures and the socio-spatial landscape of the City. State and non-state actors explicitly linked community gardens with the local socio-geography of the South Bronx, and particularly with the Puerto Rican experience of physical and social marginalisation. Since these processes were rooted in the dynamics of place-based historical and cultural specificities, the struggle for these gardens was also conceptually regarded as a struggle of culture. Food had a powerful agency to express gardeners' notions of ethnicity and gardeners' aims to improve their adverse socio-ecological realties. The blurring of boundaries between ethnicity, nature, and the City codified gardens in a specific way that captured the inequalities linked with socio-political processes operating at wider scales. In this regard, I found that gardeners in El Flamboyan found pleasure in viewing or cultivating *gandules* because it reminded them of Puerto Rico and their memories of the past. The significance of cultivating the crop in the garden was also given fresh impetus as it could be 'read' and interpreted by others as a distinct form of nature tied to their ethnicity. In effect, cultivating *gandules* was partly performed for political ends, which subsequently influenced how gardeners attached ethnic significance to the crop. Food in community gardens is essentially a particularly potent source of claims-making for contemporary garden preservation effort.

On the micro-level, each of the three community gardens was unique with a multiplicity of social singularities. The findings that the two Casita gardening groups often had different and contrasting conceptions of ethnicity further problematises the contention that gardeners' ideas of the phenomenon are constant from one locality to the next. Most of these cultural fine points, however, were unnoticeable to non-gardeners in the movement. Most of these state and non-state actors failed to address the qualitative realities of how ethnicity was more ambiguous than what was often implied in the

political and policy-oriented circles of the movement. They also often lacked the will or the incentive for learning about each garden's unique socio-physical landscape. Conceptions of fixed and uniform ethnicity remain encapsulated and constitute an important part of the environmental justice's theoretical and practical landscape. The oversight of distinct discourses on ethnicity in community gardens will most likely continue in the reality of NYC's contemporary garden movement, and funding steams of multi-diasporic governance.

Understanding gardeners' everyday lived experiences in the space is undoubtedly animated by questions of politics, resistance, and social positions. In Brook Park, the formation and reshaping of an Indigenous ethnicity consciously challenged the hegemonic neo-liberal views of valuing nature. This process involved reinforcing a set of social networks and structures that did not conform to mainstream social attitudes and conceptions of gardens, and in terms of locally specific materials, practices, and ideas. This alternative subculture was in part co-created by Brook Park gardeners and their supporters who 'imagine' the gardening group, as well as other populaces who have been systematically marginalised by the state, as sharing beliefs, attitudes, and socio-political aspirations common to their own.

The emergence of the Indigenous ethnic label in Brook Park also reflects an allegorical embodiment of communal agency through which ideas of self are constructed in relation to the City. As such, rather than the hegemonic, romantic framing of gardeners as marginal, helpless, and in the guise of organic food growers, the self-acceptance of the term Indigenous envisaged gardeners in a less hegemonic-centred account of community gardening. The genealogy of associated discourses was also part of a more inclusive strategy for community garden campaigning, and it had rich implications for how gardeners viewed nature and their social positions within the state. In general, the expressions of Indigenous ethnicity heard in Brook Park reflect a rejection of an identity imposed on them by the City and 'others' in favour of 'self'. In the discourse on land tenure in NYC, therefore, ethnicities of 'liberation' can reflect counter-cultures and reinterpretations of urban life.

It also appears that community gardening can influence understandings of ethnicity in politically vital ways. The formation and the eventual evolvement of the self-definitions

of groups like the Young Lords in a sense mirror the accounts of gardeners and subaltern actors working in Brook Park. These participants sought cultural self-determination and greater political power in society vis-à-vis the community garden praxis. Articulations of Indigenous ethnicity may remain prevalent and continue to grow in popularity in the repertoire of community gardeners, both in NYC and in other areas where the status of community gardens are at-risk. This pan-ethnic label keeps in line with gardeners' conditions as a threatened and endangered group. The pan-ethnicity is also elastic enough to incorporate gardeners of many different nationalities, facilitating social cohesion and collective mobilisation in and around gardens.

Overall, community gardening is a protean concept and can manifest in many forms and serve diverse interests concurrently. The research dispels the perceptions of community gardeners as helpless food growers and allows new ways of thinking about how communities in NYC operate, form, interact, survive, and change. While no attempt has been made to generalise empirically beyond the unique South Bronx context, many of the issues explored here are shared by other gardeners in different American cities. In fact, the entire concept of modern community gardening in the country - from its inception to its current contestation - reflects the ever-changing and interdependent relationship between nature, ethnicity, and the neo-liberal (re)structuring of the City. People's perceptions of and interactions with nature in community gardens are not independent of hegemonic political discourses. These spaces are a microcosm of both intra-garden *and* wider societal relations. The state, supporting organisations, gardeners - and the market economy under which they all function - pull notions of ethnicity and nature in different directions for different needs and purposes. This study thus provides a detailed account of the complexity and non-static conditions of nature and ethnicity in gardens and in the context of uneven development in NYC.

Chapter 9 Bibliography

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Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Open-Ended Interview Schedule for Community Gardeners and Garden Coordinators

I'm interested in learning more about who you are, can you tell me a little about where you were born and grew up?

What do you remember, if anything at all, about gardening from your childhood in Puerto Rico? Did your family have a garden, and if so, what do you remember about it? Did your family teach you about gardening?

Have there been times when being in the community garden has made you think about your past in Puerto Rico? Describe what you remember and what you are doing in the garden in these instances.

Does your Puerto Rican background, you think, play a role in what you do in the garden? If so, how and what are you doing at these times?

Is there anything about community gardening that is especially important for Puerto Ricans?

Are there any special events or activities in the garden that are important parts of your Puerto Rican tradition?

Can you tell me about the times when you feel the most comfortable being in the garden? Describe what you are doing at these times.

What are your favourite parts of the garden?

9.2 Appendix 2: Semi-structured Interview Schedule for Community Gardeners and Garden Coordinators

Background

- When did you first start community gardening?

- Why did you choose to become a member of this community garden?

- Are the reasons why you first became a community gardener the same as they are today? If not, how have they changed?

- What are the most important parts of your community garden?

- What benefits are there from community gardening?

- How much time do you spend in the community garden?

- Did you face any unexpected problems or challenges to visiting the garden during these past few months? For example, were you sick or suffer from a physical injury?

Intra-Garden Social Dynamics

- How well do you know fellow garden members?

- Is your relationship with other gardeners an important reason for why you come to the garden?

- Do you think your presence in the garden has any influence over what gardeners do in the garden? How they tend to planting beds/lots?

- How important is it, do you think, to be a member of a community garden with members of the same cultural background as you?

- Do you think your presence in the garden influences which and how events and activities are organised in the garden? If so, how?

Valuations of Community Gardens

- What would your ideal community garden look like?

- What do you do in the community garden that makes you feel the most satisfied and comfortable?

- What aspects of the garden do you find most interesting, or most appealing?

- Do you have a special place in the community garden? If so, can you describe why it is special for you?

- What did you do in the garden that you enjoyed the most or were most proud of during the past few months?
- Is there any plant you enjoy viewing or growing the most in the garden? Why?
- What plants do you grow well?
- What is the purpose you have in mind now for your planting bed/lot?
- When and how often do you tend to your planting bed/lot? What are the main tasks you have to do?
- How do you choose which plants and flowers to grow?
- Is the amount of food you harvest an important reason for having a planting bed/lot in the garden? If so, why?
- When people who are not members come to visit the garden, what are you most proud to show them? Why are you most proud of these things?
- When people who are not members come to visit the garden, what are they most interested? Can you tell me why they are interested in these things?
- If your community garden no longer existed, how would you feel?

Garden Provision

- What do you think is the role of the garden coordinator?
- Do you recall any times when you felt pressured to do something or people had expectations of you in the garden? If so, who were these people and what did they expect?
- Are there any things you would like to do in the garden that either you have never done or you have done in the past but don't do now? If yes, why don't you do these things now?

Traditions and Memories

- What specific things in the garden remind you of Puerto Rico?
- Are there any specific events or things in the garden that you think are especially important for Puerto Ricans? Can you tell me why they are special?
- Has community gardening influenced how you think about and practice your ethnic and cultural traditions? If so, how?
- Do you think your gardening skills and knowledge have changed over the years? If so, how?

- Can you describe how the physical aspects of the garden relate to the social interests of your gardening group?

Social Relations with Garden Supporters

- Who are the biggest supporters of your community garden, other than garden members themselves? Has this changed over the years?
- Do you feel that your community garden deserves support and funding from non-garden members? If so, why?
- Where do you get most of your gardening supplies? Has this changed over the years?
- Are there any particular organisations or agencies that you think do a good job of supporting your goals as a community gardener? What are the reasons for this?
- What events or activities occur in the garden because of organisations or agencies? What do you think about this? Has this changed over the years?
- What do you think of the community garden educational workshops organised by non-garden members?
- Have you ever attended an educational workshop that has influenced what you do in the garden? If so, how?
- Do you think that there are some people specifically interested in supporting you here because you are a Puerto Rican?
- Do you think that your interests in community gardening are the same as for other people, both in and out of the South Bronx?

9.3 Appendix 3: Interview Schedule for State and Non-State Actors (N/A)

Background

- Can you tell me about your work?

- What is the mission of your organisation/agency? (N/A)

- Describe your role and job responsibilities in the organisation/agency. (N/A)

- What is the significance of community gardens to your work?

Funding and Support

- What are the interests of people or funding bodies when they support your work with community gardens? Where does most of your funding come from? (N/A)

- Has the way in which you think about and interact with community gardens changed throughout the years? If yes, why? What has influenced this change?

- Have you ever emphasised specific aspects of community gardening for garden campaigning and advocacy? Why? (N/A)

Valuations of Community Gardens

- Can you describe how you first learned about community gardens? What initially fuelled your interest in community gardens? Are these reasons the same today?

- When and why did you start working with X community garden? (N/A, and if applicable to the interviewee)

- What benefits do you think people gain from community gardening? From visiting community gardens?

- What would the ideal community garden look like?

- Can you describe the aspects of community gardening that you find the most appealing and important?

- Have you discovered or learned new things about community gardens over the years?

- Can you describe the significance of gardeners' food-growing activities?

- How do gardeners choose which plants and flowers to grow?

- What do community gardeners value the most about their gardens? What makes them feel the most satisfied?

- What expectations do you think community gardeners have about their experiences as community gardens? Puerto Rican community gardeners?

Garden Provision
- Can you describe what the role is of a community garden coordinator?
- Have your interactions with community gardens been influenced in any way by coordinators and the ways in which they manage their gardens? If so, how?
- Have there been times when the garden's management style played a role in how you organised a program or activity in a garden? (N/A)
- Do you think gardeners would do exactly the same things in their garden if your organisation/agency did not exist? (N/A)

Traditions
- To what extent, if any, do you think gardens enable people to practice their cultural traditions? Can you describe these traditions and how the garden enables them to do so.
- What specific things or activities in community gardens, do you think, are the most important for Puerto Rican gardeners? Can you explain why they are special?
- Can you tell me about the significance of gardeners' ethnicity to community gardening? To your work with community gardens?
- Have there been times when gardeners' cultural background influenced the way you organised a program or activity in a garden? How? (N/A)
- Are there times, do you think, when your involvement with community gardens influenced the way gardeners think about their own ethnicity? If so, how?
- Can you describe the needs of Puerto Rican gardeners in the South Bronx? How do community gardens support those needs?

Garden-Institutional Relationships
- Can you describe how you interact and communicate with community gardeners?
- To what extent, if any, do you feel like your work has influenced what community gardeners do in their gardens? How?
- Do you think your work has influenced how community gardeners view their gardens? How other members of the public view community gardens?

- Do you have any expectations of gardeners and their community gardening activities? Can you describe them to me?

- Has the way in which gardeners think about and use gardens changed throughout the years? If yes, why? What has influenced this change?

- Do you directly consult with gardeners or coordinators regarding their needs when you support or work with gardens?

- How do you think members from this garden view the work that you do?

- Do you think community gardens could function as they do now without your support? Why?

9.4 Appendix 2: Organisations and Agencies Included in the Research

The Green Thumb Program - Program of the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation that leases city-owned land to community gardeners and provides them with supplies, plant materials, and organises educational workshops on horticultural and general issues of community garden management.

Green Guerillas - Established in 1973, this non-profit is one of the oldest community garden organisations in New York City. Provides materials, planting supplies, and educational workshops to gardeners, and also aims to build coalitions of support for community gardening.

American Community Gardening Association - Non-profit organisation founded in 1978 to serve individuals and organisations that support community gardening across the US and Canada.

New York City Community Garden Coalition - Non-profit organisation founded in 1996 to preserve, create, and empower community gardens through education, advocacy and grassroots organising.

Just Food - Non-profit organisation created in 1995 to help develop a just and sustainable food system in New York City by fostering understanding, communication, and working relationships with diverse groups concerned with agriculture, hunger, and other issues related to food, such as community gardening.

Rebel Diaz Arts Collective - Community arts centre that includes a performance space, a multimedia studio, a computer lab, and an art gallery in the South Bronx. Created in 2009, the centre provides an artistic space for youth and uses music as a prime organising tool to spread awareness of injustices.

GrowNYC - Non-profit organisation established in 1970 as the Council on the Environment of New York City. Provides supplies and technical assistance to community gardens, develops online GIS of community gardens in NYC, and also works with other organisations to influence City legislation for community garden preservation.

Bronx Green-Up - Community outreach program of the New York Botanical Garden that provides horticultural advice, technical assistance, and training to community gardeners, schools, and other individuals and groups interested in improving urban neighbourhoods in the Bronx through greening projects.

The Bronx Land Trust - Non-profit organisation that assists established garden with preservation issues through establishing land trusts, provides educational workshops and grants to gardeners for organisational development and community outreach.

The United Confederation of Taino People - A Caribbean Indigenous leadership coalition inspired by ancient Taino and other indigenous confederacies as well as contemporary initiatives such as the National Congress of American Indians.

Citizens Committee for New York City – Micro-funding non-profit organisation that raises money from foundations, corporations and individual donors and then provides grants to support grassroots advocacy and community building projects, such as community gardens.

The South Bronx Community Supported Agriculture - Social justice-minded community supported agriculture project that supports local farmers and works toward creating affordable access to healthy food in the South Bronx.

Community Connections for Youth - Bronx-based non-profit organisation that develops community-driven alternatives to the incarceration for youth that builds on local community resources, such as community gardens.

Farming Concrete – Community-based research project created in 2010 that is fiscally sponsored by the non-profit public charity, Open Space Institute, Inc., as part of their Citizen Action Program. The project measures how much food is grown in community gardens and school gardens.

9.5 Information Sheets and Consent Form

Information Sheet for Community Gardeners or Garden Coordinators

Title of Study: Ethnicity, Nature, and Community Gardens in the South Bronx

REC Reference Number: 10/11-11

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. If you do decide to take part now, you are still free to withdraw at any time without providing an explanation. In addition to withdrawing yourself from the study, you may also withdraw any information you have already provided up until it is transcribed in January 2012.

Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask me at any time if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like additional information.

The aim of this study is to explore how community gardeners build and use community gardens, and how, if at all, these spaces may influence their understandings of ethnicity. As a Puerto Rican community gardener or community garden coordinator, your participation in the study will help contribute to research on the New York City community gardening movement. In particular, it will add to research that explores the relationships between community gardens in the South Bronx, and Puerto Rican gardeners and their supporters.

Interviews will take place in the community garden. I will also be actively observing your activities in the garden, from April to December 2011. Data collected from your participation will be solely used for the purpose of this project. It will be stored in the servers of King's College, London, and in compliance with the College's strict safety and confidentiality standards. I will be the only one handling the collected data and for revision purposes, my supervisor may review the data at any time as well.

Interviews will be recorded, depending on whether you allow me. You don't need to answer anything you don't want to. These recordings will be deleted upon transcription. You will be informed by email or by telephone when the final report is ready, and you will be offered a copy of it.

If you do decide to take part in this research, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. I have provided contact details below if you need to contact me at any point.

Liat Racin (PhD Researcher)
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Department of Geography
London, WC2R 2LS, England

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US Mobile: 804- 833-3600
US Home Address: 953 7th Avenue
New York, NY, 10019

Information Sheet for Municipal or Organizational Representatives

King's College LONDON

Title of Study: Ethnicity, Nature, and Community Gardens in the South Bronx

REC Reference Number: 10/11-11

I would like to invite you to participate in this postgraduate research project. You should only participate if you want to and choosing not to take part will not disadvantage you in any way. If you do decide to take part now, you are still free to withdraw at any time without providing an explanation. In addition to withdrawing yourself from the study, you may also withdraw any information you have already provided up until it is transcribed in January 2012.

Before you decide whether you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what your participation will involve. Please read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask me at any time if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like additional information.

The aim of this study is to explore how community gardeners build and use community gardens, and how, if at all, these spaces may influence their understandings of ethnicity. As a representative of an organization, agency or the Municipality, your participation in this study will help contribute to scholarship on the New York City community gardening movement. In particular, it will add to the academic research that explores the interactions between community gardens in the South Bronx, and their Puerto Rican gardeners and garden supporters.

Interviews will be conducted at a time and place of your convenience, any time between the months of September to November 2011. I will also be observing activities your organization is affiliated with in some community gardens, and at times, in other venues across NYC. Data collected from your participation will be solely used for the purpose of this project. It will be stored in the servers of King's College, London, and in compliance with the College's strict safety, confidentiality, and encryption standards. I will be the only one handling the collected data and for revision purposes, my supervisor may review the data at any time.

Interviews will be recorded, subject to your permission. You don't need to answer anything you don't want to. These recordings will be deleted upon transcription. You will be informed by email when the final report is ready, and you will be offered a copy upon request.

If you do decide to take part in this research, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. I have provided contact details below if you need to contact me at any point.

Liat Racin (PhD Researcher)
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Department of Geography
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Email: Liat.Racin@kcl.ac.uk
US Mobile: 804- 833-3600
US Home Address: 953 7th Avenue
New York, NY, 10019

CONSENT FORM FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Please complete this form after you have read the Information Sheet and have listened to an explanation of the research.

K ING'S
College
LONDON

Title of Study: Community Gardens and Ethnicity in New York City

King's College Research Ethics Committee Ref: 10/11-11

Thank you for your interest in participating in this study.

The researcher must explain the project to you before you agree to take part. If you have any questions about the study, please ask the researcher before you agree to take part. You will be given a copy of the Information Sheet and this Consent Form to keep.

Please tick or initial

- I understand that if I decide at any point during the research that I no longer want to participate, I can notify the researcher and withdraw from it immediately without giving any reason. I also understand that I will be able to withdraw any information I have provided the researcher until the data is transcribed in January 2012

- I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes explained to me. I understand that my personal details will not be realised to any third party.

- I consent to my interview being recorded.

- I would like my identity to remain anonymous. This means that it will be impossible to identify me in any publications related to this research.

Participant's Statement:

I (Print Name) _____

agree to take part in the study. This research project has been explained to me to my satisfaction. I have read and understood the Information Sheet and Consent Form, and I am aware of what my participation will involve. .

Signed _____   Date _____