

OCCUPY GARDENS? A CASE STUDY OF THE PEOPLE'S PEAS GARDEN IN  
TORONTO, CANADA

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the nature of guerilla gardening as a possible means for political change. This study traced the historical roots of the People's Peas Garden (PPG), a garden planted without permission on Queen's Park, Toronto, in May 2012 by members of Occupy Gardens Toronto. The PPG was a significant event in Toronto's urban gardening history as it challenged state control over land and social structure by being planted on a city-owned public park.

A case study was conducted using semi-structured interviews to elicit the perspectives of PPG participants, Toronto food activists, and City of Toronto government officials. Participants perceived unjust distributional inequalities in the capitalist food system and experimented with 'reclaiming' the commons. Additionally, this research sheds broader insight on the potential of guerilla gardening as a means of addressing broader political, social and economic change.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

OWS	Occupy Wall Street
PPG	People's Peas Garden
TSL	Toronto Seed Library
UofT	University of Toronto

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This study was not intended to romanticize poverty but to question the systemic causes of it, and to acknowledge the deep commitment by many food activists who put themselves on the front lines for political change.

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“From little occupiers of land, they are reduced to the state of day-labourers and hirelings; and, at the same time, their subsistence in that state has become more difficult”. (Price, 1845)

### 1.1 ‘Plotting’ against powers: Urban gardening as a response to socioeconomic crises

Urban gardening is hardly a new movement, yet in recent years its popularity has swelled across North America. Urban gardens have existed since the late 1800’s when they emerged as a response to urban congestion, immigration and economic depression (Draper & Freedman, 2010). These gardens were established in the form of school gardens and vacant-lot cultivation projects for lower-income residents (Cockrall-King, 2012; Draper & Freedman, 2010; McKay, 2011; Pudup, 2008). World War I saw the state-organized ‘Victory Gardens’ movement for domestic food production due to crop failures, dependence on imported food, and diversion of the food supply to feed combatants (Bassett, 1981; Mok et al., 2013; Perren, 2005; Wright, 1942). Interest in urban gardens rose again with the Great Depression and Second World War as gardens provided food subsistence to thousands of families and the unemployed (Cockrall-King, 2012; Pudup, 2008). Then, the popularity of gardens waned as governments restructured their post-war economies towards mass production to work in favour of large farms and agribusiness (Friedmann, 1993; McKay, 2011; Walter, 2012).

The resurgence of North American urban gardening began in the late 1960’s. This period saw enthusiasm for food self-sufficiency, environmentalism and anti-materialist lifestyles that drew urbanites to conduct ‘Back to the Land’ agricultural projects (Brown, 2011). Urban gardening was also believed to have been part of civil rights struggles (McKay, 2011; Mok et al., 2013). For instance, The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense established urban agricultural practices in West Oakland in response to rampant poverty faced by its black population (McClintock, 2008). McClintock (2011) wrote: “The Panthers used gardening as a coping mechanism and a means of supplementing their diets, as a well as a means to strengthen community members engaged in the struggle against oppression” (62). Additionally, many urban gardeners around North America occupied land as a political reaction against commercial development, large-scale industrial agriculture and consumerism. Among these gardens were: The People’s Park in Berkeley in 1969; Vancouver’s ‘All Seasons Park’ in 1971; and Adam Purple’s Garden of Eden in Manhattan established in 1973 (Ferguson, 1999; McKay, 2011; Tracey, 2007; Walter, 2012). Throughout the 1970’s, urban gardening included the reprise vacant lot cultivation in poor, under-resourced inner cities. At this time, guerilla gardening emerged as an illicit act where gardeners occupied



land and planted without permission, often as a “small political gesture of aesthetic expression and environmental transformation” (Reynolds, 2008, 33). For instance, in 1973 a group of 30 East Village New Yorkers called the Green Guerillas tossed ‘seed bombs’, or compressed bundles of seeds and fertilizer, over the fences of vacant lots to start gardens (LaRocca, 2005; Pudup, 2008; Schmelzkopf, 1995; Tracey, 2007). These gardeners used guerilla gardening as an act of political resistance to challenge the dominant political, social and economic order that determined who had access to land and for what purpose.

Many scholars have suggested that the proliferation of urban gardens in the 1980’s and 1990’s were a reaction to the failures of neoliberal economic restructuring including the privatization of land, mass inflation, the decline of the social welfare programs, and reduced government spending to enhance the private sector and to increase corporate power (Bassett, 1981; Hynes & Howe, 2004; Press & Arnould, 2011). For instance, Schmelzkopf’s study of Loisaída (1995) revealed that the loss of government social services provoked lower-income residents to establish their own gardens for food subsistence. In the 1980’s Toronto grassroots food organizations pushed for community gardens in direct response to economic inflation that affected people’s ability to afford food (Husbands, 1999). But the gardens cultivated in this period largely struggled to maintain their presence in urban landscapes dominated by commercial development (Eizenberg, 2012; Englander, 2001; Mele, 2000; Pudup, 2008; Schmelzkopf, 1995). Harvey (2006) claimed that city governments have used the neoliberal logic of privatization to take over more and more urban land for development. For example, from 1994 to 2001 New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani initiated plans to auction hundreds of city-owned community gardens (Eizenberg, 2011; McKay, 2011; Saed, 2012). Gardeners responded to the threat with street protests in the struggle to claim land that was once designated for public use. At one such protest in 1999, gardeners created a carnival-like ‘festival of resistance’ protest in the East Village (Read, 2013). Organizers dragged plant boxes into the street, gave packages of seeds to passersby, and performed live music that attracted a crowd of over 500 people (Read, 2013). Months later in May, some land trusts purchased the gardens at auctions, but at least 50 gardens were bulldozed despite their efforts (Draper & Freedman, 2010; Durham, 2010; Eizenberg, 2011; Staeheli et al., 2002).

Twenty-first century acts of urban gardening in North America have included an array of city-organized community gardens and allotments, gardening for leisure, environmental and educational interests, and the continuation of politicized gardening to resist socioeconomic crises (Eizenberg, 2011; Guthman, 2008; Pudup, 2008; Wekerle, 2004). Several municipal governments across North America have drafted

policy to foster urban gardening encouraged by the potential contributions to public health, neighbourhood beautification, reduced crime, habitation restoration, greenhouse gas mitigation, and in some cases employment and economic development (for instance, San Francisco Bay saw the rise of ‘entrepreneurial gardening’ whereby the municipal government leased land free of charge to community groups, and their produce has been sold to food markets or donated) (Ferris et al., 2001; Baker, 2004; Guthman, 2008; Pudup, 2008; Guitart et al., 2012; Lerner, 2012; McClintock et al., 2012; Thibert, 2012). Yet, despite this positive response from governments, the continuation of neoliberal policies in the 2000’s sparked socioeconomic crises including the 2008 global financial recession. Community-organized gardening in urban areas took on renewed economic significance in the form of ‘recession gardens’ (Draper & Freedman, 2010; McClintock, 2010, Sutter, 2009). In cities such as Detroit, this gardening has provided food subsistence in reaction to widespread unemployment and inflation since 2008 (Sutter, 2009). McClintock (2013) argued that on one hand, urban gardening has been praised for its socially beneficial contributions to food justice through its participatory decision-making, community engagement, framing healthy food as a public good, and empowering participants to draw connections between structural modes of exclusion and inequitable access to food. But, on the other hand, he warns that urban gardening programs may ironically risk filling the void left by the ‘rolling back’ of social welfare, shift responsibility from the state to non-profits and community-based organizations, and even advocate neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility. Other researchers, such as Guitart et al. (2012) have found that urban gardeners still face challenges such as the insecurity of land access, shut down of gardens for commercial development, lack of funding, amongst other struggles.

In fall 2011, the global Occupy movement erupted in response to vast socioeconomic inequalities largely attributed to neoliberal policies that have increased the power of corporations (Breau, 2013; Brincat, 2013; Hayduk, 2012; Juris et al., 2012; Kunstler, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Van Gelder, 2011). Occupiers popularized the now-famous claim that the top ‘1%’ of income earners hold political and economic power in a way that disproportionately benefits them and undermines everyone else (the ‘99%’) (Breau, 2013; Brincat, 2013; Chomsky, 2012a; Goodman et al., 2012; Juris et al., 2012; Kunstler, 2012). As part of their protest, Occupiers created encampments beginning with Occupy Wall Street in New York City's Zuccotti Park on September 17, 2011, which was quickly duplicated in many major North American cities (Breau, 2013; OccupyWallSt, 2011). At these encampments, Occupiers fostered an alternative food culture whereby volunteers prepared food they received from donation and then distributed it for free (Graeber, 2011). This action influenced the Occupy Gardens offshoot in several North American cities (OccupyWallSt, 2011). The newer movement represented people interested in urban gardening and

revolutionizing the food system in a radically egalitarian way (Gonzalez, 2011; Horton, 2011; Kraus, 2012b; OccupyWallSt, 2011; Vanderlinden, 2011).

In May 2012 a group of activists calling themselves Occupy Gardens Toronto guerilla gardened on city-owned public land in Queen's Park. They established the People's Peas Garden (PPG) as a "stand against inequality, government corruption and corporate greed" (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a). They planted the garden on politicized land to make a symbolic statement on the inadequacy of government action on mounting food insecurity in Toronto, with the intent to evoke responses from media, passersby, and the government of the City of Toronto (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a; Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2013). The garden thrived through the summer and early autumn with an estimated 200 people tending to the PPG at various points (D'Aliesio, 2012). But in late September 2012, municipal workers arrived without warning, removed all unharvested plants from the PPG and laid sod overtop (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a; Ubbens, 2012). The city administration claimed that the PPG was "installed without contact" and that it was in violation of municipal policies related to safety and accessibility (Ubbens, 2012).

The PPG story raises questions about guerrilla gardening as a political act that in response to corporate-state managerialism (Certomà, 2011; McClish, 2007; McKay, 2011). Researchers such as McClish (2007) have argued that the spatial intervention of guerrilla gardening is a transgressive action that resists the established political, economic and social order that is not as explicit in other forms of urban agriculture. Guerilla gardening has also resisted traditional notions of land organization by challenging the regulation of public space by government and commercial development, and allowing people to participate in 'reshaping' the city (Swartwood, 2012). Swartwood argued that guerrilla gardening has real advantages: it offers little to no barriers to participate; it disrupts patterns of thought; it raises awareness of alternatives; and it allows people to learn from experience. As well, Certomà (2011) theorized that guerrilla gardening brings an innovative character to environmental politics because the action increases civic awareness of gardens and the use of common spaces. In effect, guerilla gardens like the PPG are worthy of study as political acts interested in broader social, political, economic and environmental change. For these reasons it is crucial to analyze the story of the PPG and the potential of guerilla gardening.

## **1.2 Purpose of research**

The intent of this study was to utilize the case study of the People's Peas Garden (PPG) to examine broader questions around whether guerilla gardening can serve as an engine of social, political and economic change. Aside from texts on guerilla gardening by American activists David Tracey (2007) and

Ryan Reynolds (2008), as well as George McKay's book (2011) on radical acts of gardening that traced the historical roots of guerilla gardening, there is a lack of literature on guerilla gardening in North America. Research papers by Certomà (2011) and Swartwood (2012) both argued for the potential in guerilla gardening as they argued that it disrupts patterns of thought, raises awareness of alternatives for political action, and resists traditional notions of land control. The most applicable case study of guerilla gardening to the PPG context is Crane et al.'s (2013) case study of Dig Kingston, a guerilla gardening project founded in 2010 in Kingston, Ontario. Crane's interviews with guerilla gardeners and passersby opened up discussions regarding how guerilla gardening provoked themes of expression, intervention, environmental sustainability, alternative methods of land-use and community-based action (Crane et al., 2013). They argued that guerilla gardening "has the power to initiate discussion regarding how city spaces can reflect localized needs and desires, while simultaneously stretching boundaries on who can produce space and for what reasons" (85). Altogether, these studies suggest that guerilla gardening is a timely issue of food activism to study.

The context of the food movement in Toronto is also worthy of research. Gardeners, nutritionists, social scientists and environmentalists in the Toronto area have been active in fostering the food movement since the 1980's, for instance, with the establishment of the Toronto Food Policy Council in 1990 and Community Gardens Program in 1998 (Langer, 2012; Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Although there has been much enthusiasm around food in Toronto, Langer's fieldwork between 2009-2011 (2012) documented how the City of Toronto government policies deemed gardening for recreational purposes rather than to provide food subsistence for lower-income residents. His interviews and policy analysis provide a basis for discussing the conflicting interests between Toronto's creative elite and those struggling to access land for growing food. He concluded that future research must understand "alternative ways of organizing these spaces" (Langer, 2012, 131). In this context, guerilla gardening in Toronto is useful to explore.

Within this view, the PPG is an important case as it sought alternative ways to organize gardeners and produce food. This study used critical theoretical approaches such the food justice frame. Perspectives of the participants discussed systemic inequalities in the capitalist system that affects the ability to access food (for example, the corporate global food system, income inequality, commodity fetishism, and so on). They argued that this access is disproportionately worse for people with low incomes or people who are socially marginalized. The results from this study will be of use to Toronto food activists and researchers of guerilla gardening, community gardening, and other urban social movements. Guerrilla gardening has yet to be explored in-depth by academic researchers in North America and it has not been documented in

Toronto. The case study of the PPG will be useful in better understanding guerrilla gardening, including some of the limitations, barriers, and issues that arise when implementing a guerrilla gardening project on a public park.

### **1.3 Research question**

The research question that guided this thesis was:

How did the PPG collective understand their guerilla gardening as a symbol of broader social, political, economic and environmental change?

### **1.4 Research objectives**

Goals pursuant to the research question were to: 1) investigate how the PPG fits within the broader landscape of social movements such as the global Occupy movement and the Occupy Gardens movement; 2) explore the significant events of the PPG through participant responses, such as the formation of the garden and its eviction; and, 3) analyze the participant responses using a critical theoretical approaches to discuss the PPG's intent to use guerilla gardening for broader social, political, economic and environmental change.

### **1.5 Research methods**

This study employed several research strategies in order to understand how the PPG perceived their guerilla gardening as a symbol of broader change. The data collection consisted of 19 semi-structured interviews in order to gain insight into the collective's history, 'guerilla' approach, strategies to access public land, and reactions to the City of Toronto's eviction. Informants included 9 participants of the PPG (Appendix B), 7 Toronto food activists who did not participate directly in PPG activities but were aware of the PPG (Appendix C), and 3 municipal officials who served in the City of Toronto government (Appendix D). The aim was to gather a diverse array of opinions including those who opposed the guerilla gardening of the PPG.

Participants were chosen based on their knowledge and experience with the PPG. For example, participants of the PPG entailed those who organized the planting actions, attended PPG events and/or tended to the garden. All other participants (i.e. Toronto food activists and municipal officials) were chosen based on their awareness of the PPG and its removal. If their knowledge of the group was sufficient enough to answer the interview questions then they were selected for interview.

Participants were contacted via e-mail and phone calls. Subsequent interviewees were recruited through referrals (otherwise known as snowball sampling). This method of recruitment was chosen because a limited number of participants were identifiable and available for interview. The initial contacts recommended other participants that they knew were directly involved in the PPG or who had some contact with the group and could provide an opinion about them. Interviews were audio recorded to ensure fidelity during the transcription phase. Then, the principal investigator carried out verbatim transcription of interviews. Transcripts were error checked for accuracy with a second listening of the interviews against the original transcripts. As well, participants were allowed to review the transcripts.

The data from the interviews were analyzed using grounded theory. This method of data analysis investigates the actualities in reality (i.e. through participant interviews and literature) and then analyzes the data without a preconceived hypothesis (Allan, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process allows for themes to emerge from the ‘ground up’ (Strauss & Corbitt, 1990). Grounded theory was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this study because it was anticipated that unexpected information would emerge from the data collection. The grounded theory method for this study primarily consisted of reading over the interview transcripts several times to identify core themes. After the core themes were identified, several theoretical perspectives were chosen for the study discussion.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

This thesis pulled together qualitative material in a case study narrative about the People’s Peas Garden. Chapter 1 outlines the research questions and objectives for this study. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the global Occupy movement and the Occupy Gardens movement in order to understand historical movements that influenced the PPG collective. Chapter 3 begins the case study of the PPG by analyzing their name, identity and the processes that led to their initial planting action on Queen’s Park. This chapter will explore the PPG’s criticism of rising income inequality, food as a commodity, the struggle for food subsistence, and so on, which explains how their guerilla gardening went beyond merely producing food to make criticism of broader inequalities in the food system. Chapter 4 conceptualizes the PPG’s experiment with the commons and their group structure including some challenges that they faced. Combined with their criticism of private ownership of land and commitment to community provisioning, PPG participants saw potential in the principles of democratic participation and communal ownership. Chapter 5 details the PPG eviction and the replanting of the PPG, as well as discussion on the differing perspectives of occupying public parks. Chapter 6 is the concluding chapter and discusses the influence that the PPG had on some of Toronto’s food activists, as well as the legacy of the garden on its own

participants. This chapter will discuss the utility of the PPG's guerilla gardening, for example, their idea to emphasize their gardening as as response to exclusionary governmental regulation to urban gardening and to show the potential of guerilla gardening as a symbolic political statement. Additionally, this chapter will outline the conclusions of this study and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER TWO: OCCUPY

“We are the 99%. We are getting kicked out of our homes. We are forced to choose between groceries and rent... We are working long hours for little pay and no rights, if we're working at all. We are getting nothing while the other 1% is getting everything. We are the 99%”. (Wearethe99percent, 2011)

### 2.1 The global Occupy movement

Occupy was an international social movement that some researchers suggested was inspired by Anti-Globalization movement of the 1990's<sup>1</sup> and, more recently, the uprisings such as the Arab Spring, the *indignados* demonstrations, amongst others (Angelastro, 2013; Brincat, 2013; Castells, 2011; Chomsky, 2012a; Graeber, 2011; Hayduk, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Van Gelder, 2011). More specifically, some claimed that Occupy was a direct offshoot of May 2011 occupation of Madrid's Puerta del Sol Square where hundreds rallied against unemployment, cuts to state welfare, and the Spanish political system (Castells, 2011; Labrandero, 2011). Others attributed the explicit call to occupy to the Canadian magazine *Adbusters*: “On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months” (*Adbusters*, 2011). That day about a thousand occupiers gathered to begin Occupy Wall Street (OWS) in Zuccotti Park (Kohn, 2013; Kunstler, 2012; Roberts, 2012). In a few short weeks, journalists reported that Occupy had spread to over 600 U.S. communities, and more than 950 cities across 82 countries (Adam, 2011; Brincat, 2013; Thompson, 2011). Through the occupation of public spaces in unprecedented numbers these historical gatherings provoked attention to income inequality, corporate-state power and widespread disenfranchisement from global capitalism (Breau, 2013; Chomsky, 2012a; Graeber, 2011; Kohn, 2013; Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012; Van Gelder, 2011).

Occupy was a people-powered movement broadly concerned with the influence of profit-seeking corporations and the political order that has generated income inequality<sup>2</sup> (Brincat, 2013; Chomsky, 2012a; Goodman et al., 2012; Lowenstein, 2011; Pear, 2011; Ruggiero, 2013). Occupiers claimed that an increasingly small sector of the population, the ‘1%’, hold socioeconomic and political power while vast majority of people, the ‘99%’, bear the burden of the social, economic, and political order that governs

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<sup>1</sup> Several researchers claim that Occupiers drew inspiration from the Zapatistas of Southern Mexico, the Reclaim the Streets movement of the mid-1990's, and the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization (Hayduk, 2012; Stavrides, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Scholars have traced the upward trend of income inequality since the late 1970's when several politicians began to make neoliberal reforms. These included fiscal policies to reduce income support and social assistance programs, the reduction of marginal tax rates for the wealthy, and the reduction of domestic regulations on finance and commerce (Breau, 2013; Piketty & Saez, 2003; Reinhart & Rogoff, 2009; Roberts, 2012).



their lives<sup>3</sup>. For example, the U.S. government's bailout bill of an estimated \$900 billion to financial corporations after the subprime boom revealed corporate influence over political decisions (Brincat, 2013; Stiglitz, 2009). Noam Chomsky argued that the decline in social welfare and structural violence waged in the interest of the corporate-state led to unrest for the 'precariat': the poor, the elderly, racialized communities and those who are otherwise marginalized (Ruggiero, 2013). "It's not the periphery anymore," he wrote, "it's becoming a very substantial part of society" (Ruggiero, 2013, 10-11). Indeed, Occupy attracted massive amounts of people to its rallies due to socioeconomic crises felt all around the world, such as high levels of household debt and unemployment, largely as a result of the Global Recession of 2008 (Brincat, 2013; Goodman et al., 2012).

The critique of economic and political inequality was best captured in Occupy's language and expression. After the call to occupy, *Adbusters* revealed a poster (as seen in Figure 1) featuring the *Charging Bull*, a 7,000-pound, 11-foot-tall bronze public monument in NYC's Wall Street by Arturo Di Modica in 1989 (*Adbusters*, 2011; Dunlop, 2008). Di Modica created the bull in 1989 as a tribute to the supposed 'potency' and 'resilience' of the U.S. financial system leading up to the 1980's (Dunlop, 2008). However, critics have said that the subprime mortgage crisis actually revealed the near-collapse of the global corporate financial system (Brincat, 2013; Stiglitz, 2009). The poster also showed a ballerina to suggest that the system needs to be 'tamed' by patience, grace and harmony, as symbolized by the ballerina's pose on top of the bull<sup>4</sup>. In addition to the iconic image, many researchers pointed to Occupy's now-famous slogan, "We are the 99%", that illustrated the sharp concentration of income held by the top 1% compared to the rest of the population in the U.S. and, in



**Figure 1.** The *Charging Bull* and ballerina symbolism of Occupy Wall Street. (*Adbusters*, 2011)

<sup>3</sup> This thesis will use the labels, the '1%' and '99%' throughout this study to denote the political language used in Occupy and subsequent Occupy-related movements; however, it is recognized that the 99% contains an array of socioeconomic backgrounds and interests (for instance, there are varying levels of income, employment, housing, food security, etc.).

<sup>4</sup> Haberman (2012) notes that the poster, perhaps unintentionally, foreshadowed state repression as seen in reality when NYC police ironically threw metal gates around the bull statue and forced Occupiers to move.

many cases, identically in other countries (Juris et al., 2012; Kunstler, 2012; Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012; Van Gelder, 2011). The slogan was not only used as a rally cry throughout Occupy but many took to social media websites to spread the theme (Berkowitz, 2011), as evident in this chapter's epigraph from the "Wearethe99percent" *Tumblr* account.

The discussion of income inequality and the struggle to afford basic subsistence by Occupiers led many to compare this use of language to Marx's notion of dialectical class conflict<sup>5</sup>. They argued that Occupy engaged in class conflict by uniting against those who own the means of production<sup>6</sup> in the 1%, and those who do not (and are thus part of the 99%) (Giroux, 2011; Kain, 2011; Lawler, 2011; Ruggiero, 2013). Some scholars believed that Occupy called for working-class action against those who own the means of production (Barry, 2013; Beams, 2011). Marx and Engels (1888) noted the ability for those who own the means of production to accumulate more wealth than the working class could accrue through wage labour. Therefore, so long as the latter are not a part of the ownership of the means of production they will always earn less than those who do. Likewise, Occupiers saw that it was becoming increasingly difficult for many of the 99% to earn enough income for their own subsistence. What is more, Marx and Engels claimed that the state is "a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (1888), meaning that they protect the interests of those who own capital through state policies, institutions, and more. Occupiers also called action against the politicians who govern in the interest of capitalist accumulation. For example, they criticized boundless money in political campaigning, 'loopholes' in state legislation for corporate profit, and low corporate taxes (Barry, 2013; Beams, 2011; Wolf, 2011).

Furthermore, scholars argued that what made the Occupy slogan a provocative statement was that it embodied a collective voice as it "immediately created a sense of inclusion and majority" (Kunstler, 2012; Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012). Chomsky remarked on its acceptance in some media coverage and official political discourse on income inequality after Occupy started: "There were many things that were sort of known, but in the margins, hidden, which are now right up front—like the imagery of the 99% and 1%... that's a big shift" (Chomsky, 2012c). Chomsky further claimed that Occupy's language was seen in political discourse, which demonstrated that "the public narrative can be changed by the public itself, and

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<sup>5</sup> Also referred to as class struggle and class warfare.

<sup>6</sup> Marx and Engels (1888) claimed that in free-market capitalism there are people who privately own the means of production, such as machinery, tools, infrastructure, natural resources and technology, and then the labourers, who sell their labour for a much lesser wage or salary from the owners. As a result, those who own capital can accrue surplus value, or, the net addition to the value of capital owned, or equal to the new value created by workers in excess of their own labour cost, which is appropriated by the owner as profit after products are sold.

altering the narrative is a necessary victory on the way toward transforming everything else” (Ruggiero, 2013, 10-11).

Occupiers used a range of strategies in their demonstrations that varied across communities (Chomsky, 2012a). Their activities ranged from encampments in public parks, squares, universities, bridges, and stock exchanges; general assemblies; social media activity; occupying foreclosed homes; and a ‘Bank Transfer Day’ to urge Americans to move their money from financial corporations to community credit unions<sup>7</sup> (Berkowitz, 2011; Christie, 2011; Devereaux, 2012; Kunstler, 2012; Lipka, 2012; Maira & Sze, 2012; Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012). General assemblies often used a consensus-based decision-making structure<sup>8</sup>, as opposed to representative democracy, in an effort to enhance participatory discussion and to avoid hierarchical structures (Kunstler, 2012). Occupiers exhibited creativity to organize the crowds at assemblies such as using a mic check to gather peoples’ attention<sup>9</sup>. Many participants claimed that this structure fostered a sense of connectedness and an opportunity to learn new organizational skills (Roberts, 2012). Moreover, researchers and participants deemed “the round-the-clock nature” of Occupy encampments to be the source of their expressive power (Kunstler, 2012). The fact that demonstrators were willing to literally put their lives and bodies on the line, to sleep and camp in order to physically occupy public spaces, demonstrated their serious commitment to experiment with radical egalitarianism (Hayduk, 2012; Kunstler, 2012; Stavrides, 2013).

If Occupiers were so collaborative and creative in their encampments then why did the movement end? In short, the Occupiers were forced out on the state-pretext of health and safety (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012). Often their street tactics were met with police brutality; for instance, two police officers pepper sprayed ten students at Occupy University of California Davis (seen in Figure 2) who protested tuition hikes by physically sitting down (Brincat, 2013; Greenwald, 2011; Maira & Sze, 2012). At OWS, police used a technique called corralling<sup>10</sup> to confine Occupiers (Axelrod, 2011). As well, an online video revealed several young women peacefully protesting who were corralled and then pepper-sprayed by New York City Police (TheOther99Percent, 2011). Additionally, the peaceful march across the Brooklyn Bridge on

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<sup>7</sup> *Reuters* reported that an estimated 600,000 Americans transferred their money on Bank Transfer Day (Lipka, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Van Gelder (2011) adds that this decision-making often featured the use of hand signals for a participant to express approval, disapproval, or block consensus, as well as facilitators to move discussion and ensure that everyone is heard. Many deemed this structure of decision-making to be akin to the Argentinian *horizontalidad* movement to establish participatory spaces for public discussion (Sitrin, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> A mic check, or ‘human mic’, was a common feature in Occupy encampments, where one person would speak in short sentences and then others closer to the speaker would repeat them for others who are farther away (Kim, 2011; Van Gelder, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> The use of orange plastic nets to isolate protestors into smaller groups.

October 1<sup>st</sup> 2011 saw about 700 arrests (Devereaux, 2012) and others estimate more than 7760 people in the U.S. have been arrested in Occupy-related activity as of July 2013 (Ruggiero, 2013). Only weeks after Occupy began, governments were quick to evict them: Mayor Michael Bloomberg forcefully shut down OWS in Zuccotti Park and police evictions also took place in Portland, Oakland, Berkeley, Denver, St. Louis, Vancouver, Halifax, Zurich and elsewhere<sup>11</sup> (Greenwald, 2011; Kishore, 2011). The majority of Occupy encampments were dismantled by mid-November 2011.



**Figure 2.** Police pepper-spraying seated Occupiers at the Occupy UC Davis encampment.  
(Buckland, 2012)

As a whole, the Occupy movement received mixed reaction from observers, media and participants. Some observers cited issues of race, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, and other modes of exclusion that created divisions within the movement (Juris et al., 2012; Knafo, 2012; Kilibarda; 2012; Roberts, 2012; Angelastro, 2013). Many researchers claimed that Occupiers faced various power struggles within the movement, for example, power struggles produced by the dominance of white activists (Farrow, 2011; Kilibarda, 2012). For instance, Kilibarda (2012) found that the encampments in Canadian cities did not fully address the underlying and intersecting issues of North American settler-colonial dispossession, patriarchy, and xenophobia. One Occupy Vancouver participant noted: “Fighting the 1% isn’t enough in

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that not all city governments rejected the movement. For example, Los Angeles City Council adopted a resolution stating its support “for the continuation of the peaceful and vibrant exercise” carried out by Occupy L.A. in October 2011 (Public Intelligence, 2011).



my opinion, we have to fight all the other issues that exist within the 99% in order to be successful” (Kilibarda, 2012, 30). As a result, Kilibarda recommended that social movements like Occupy employ a “decolonising framework” (35) that will not situate others, especially indigenous peoples, at the margins of the movement. On the ground in Zuccotti Park, journalists reported on hostility between Occupiers and nearby residents. For example, a group of drummers drove many of the park’s own residents “ape-shit crazy” to the point that it alienated neighbours who were once sympathetic to the movement (Gessen et al., 2011, 57). Furthermore, many media outlets criticized the movement for lacking clearly defined demands (for example, see Sorkin, 2012, and Knafo, 2012). Roberts (2012) argued that this inability to make demands undermined political action. For instance, when the Denver mayor asked Occupiers to choose a representative with whom he could negotiate about policing their camp its general assembly responded by electing a dog (Roberts, 2012). Therefore, scholars have criticized Occupy for its taking participatory structure to an extreme and failing to build alliances with politicians.

Anthropologist and early organizer of Occupy, David Graeber (2011), argued that issuing conventional political demands would have been counter productive for Occupy because doing so have legitimized the power structures the movement challenged. Rather, as a lead organizer of Occupy, he argued that it was based on four objectives: the refusal to recognize the legitimacy of existing political institutions; the refusal to accept the legitimacy of the current legal order; the rejection of internal hierarchy; and to embrace of prefigurative politics. Certainly, Graeber’s mention of Occupy’s experimentation with new institutions were largely unreported by popular media (for example, general assemblies, sanitation teams, communal kitchens, libraries, clinics, etc.) and shows how Occupiers rejected existing corporate-state institutions. He argued that because they were inspired by “anarchist principles of mutual aid and self-organisation” some media outlets were quick to dismiss it as “anarchist nonsense” (Graeber, 2011). Similarly, Pickerill and Krinsky (2012) claimed that the encampments incorporated provision for all, which extended beyond mere food subsistence to temporary housing, dealing with mental health issues, and in some cases, alternative employment in return for a share of food. Likewise, Kunstler (2012) wrote that the encampments became model communities that literally demonstrated the Occupiers’ vision of the form that a more just society might take. Thus, Occupy demanded a space to experiment with the refiguration of communal living. Despite mixed reaction from observers, the profound influence of Occupy was seen in its sub-movements and offshoots—one of which will be discussed in the next section.



**Figure 3.** An Occupy kitchen at OWS in Zuccotti Park. (Gordinier, 2011)

## 2.2 Occupy Gardens

In direct response to Occupy, Occupy Gardens groups started in cities such as Rome, Montreal, Toronto, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and Detroit (Gonzalez, 2011; Horton, 2011; Kraus, 2012b; OccupyWallSt, 2011; Vanderlinden, 2011). The first mention of the spin-off was when online garden writer, Ramon Gonzalez (known online as “Mr. Brown Thumb”), created the “#OccupyGardens” hashtag on *Twitter* on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011 (Gonzalez, 2011; Vanderlinden, 2011). He confessed: “The more I thought about it I started to wonder why the Occupy movement didn't address the issues of public spaces, vegetable gardening and seed saving as a means of self-sufficiency” (Gonzalez, 2011). Inspired by McKay’s book, *Radical gardening: Politics, idealism & rebellion in the garden* (2011), he explained that city governments have used public parks as a way to ‘civilize’ and impose order on the working class, therefore urban gardening was deeply rooted in political thinking. Like some critics of Occupy, he likened this historical pattern to class conflict by observing the occupation of public parks by working classes to demonstrate against ruling classes, which makes urban gardening an “act of resistance” (Gonzalez, 2011).

*#OccupyGardens* caught on with former Occupiers interested in food systems issues at a variety of scales. As shown in the Occupy kitchen in Figure 3, food was a central part of the Occupy encampments as several Occupiers voluntarily cooked for everyone. There were also instances of gardening incorporated at Occupy encampments (Gonzalez, 2011). A post on the OWS website revealed students from Sterling College in Vermont who came to Zuccotti Park and showed Occupiers how to plant and save seeds

(OccupyWallSt, 2011). As well, volunteers from Free Farm, an urban farm in San Francisco, attended an Occupy rally and educated people on urban food production (The Free Farm, 2011). Vanderlinden (2011) argued that Occupy Gardens was about ‘taking back’ power from food corporations and government and “bringing it back to we, the people, the 99%”. She explained: “ Every forkful that comes from our own labor instead of from the troughs of corporate food, is a statement that we are taking our power back”. Another participant of Occupy Gardens called for people to move past “the near-sighted monopolistic, free market and debt-based monetary paradigms” in the global food system (Kearey-Moreland, 2011). Like Vanderlinden he called for people to resist the control over food production and distribution held by food corporations. Some groups of the movement also used the language of Occupy, including Occupy Cargill, who wrote online, “We the 99% are creating healthy, local, sustainable food system... resisting the corporate food regime, the 1%” (Occupy Cargill, 2012). Through their various criticisms of the corporate food system and desire for alternative food subsistence, the Occupy Gardens movement linked Occupy’s general focus on political and socioeconomic exclusion of the 99% to issues of food access.

Most of the Occupy Gardens-related actions occurred in early 2012 after the shutdown of Occupy encampments. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012, Occupy Our Food Supply Day (as shown in the advertisement in Figure 4) called for Occupy activists, farm and food workers, environmental groups, and others to “resist Big Food” (Nelson & Lappé, 2012) by guerilla gardening, hosting seed exchanges, building community alliances to support locally owned grocery stores, amongst other actions (Kauffman, 2012). Nelson and Lappé’s article (2012) outlined the concentrated economic power in the U.S. food system where industrial agribusinesses own more and more of food production and distribution, leading to the decline of family farms. The writers claimed that this is a growing problem because these corporations are concerned less with protecting public health, workers’ rights, and the environment. Overall, Occupy Our Food Supply Day included an estimated 100 events worldwide, including 60 Occupy groups and 30 food-related organizations<sup>12</sup> (Nestle, 2012). Another prominent event was the occupation of a five-acre plot at the University of California Berkeley-owned Gill Tract on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 to resist longstanding plans for commercial development (Tepperman, 2013; Upton, 2013).



**Figure 4.** ‘Occupy our food supply!’ poster found online. (Kauffman, 2012)

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<sup>12</sup> Although these estimates are suspect because it was not reported by any media.

However, Occupiers were forcibly evicted after three weeks of camping and attempting to farm there.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

The Occupy movement used the tactic of occupying land to make a political statement about power held by the corporate-state and to experiment with radical egalitarianism. Occupy's political thinking influenced subsequent movements such as Occupy Gardens, which emerged in opposition to corporate control over food production and distribution in food systems. Whereas Occupy was concerned primarily with income inequality because it delineated a person's ability to afford basic needs to survive, Occupy Gardens focused on the importance of food subsistence made possible through the self-sufficiency of communities. Occupy Gardens further appropriated the language of the 1% and the 99% to underline corporate control over the food system. And in the same manner that police forcibly removed Occupiers off encampments, Occupy Gardens saw the eviction of community members on the Gill Tract in the interests of the corporate-state. The next chapter of this study will entail a closer look at a detailed case study of the People's Peas Garden born out of the Occupy Gardens Toronto collective.



## CHAPTER THREE: THE ROOTS OF THE PEOPLE'S PEAS GARDEN

### 3.1 The roots of the People's Peas Garden

Occupy Gardens Toronto was formed to represent a “stand against inequality, government corruption and corporate greed” and to provide healthy food in light of “growing hunger” in the city (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2013). The formation of the collective originated in the Occupy Toronto encampment held at St. James Park. In October 2011, a participant of Occupy Toronto held up a sign at the encampment that read, “Occupy gardens for world peas” (PPG participant 9). His initial aim was to gather a “militia of guerilla gardeners to make a veggie stand for food security” (PPG participant 2). This participant (referred to as the lead organizer herein) said that the political thinking in the Occupy movement made him think about occupying public space to grow food. Another PPG member claimed, “We were influenced by the whole idea of reclaiming public space which was what Occupy Toronto was all about... the idea that we can all grow food on our lawns, that's way more productive and better for the Earth” (PPG participant 3). As well, the alternative food culture that started with the Occupy Toronto kitchen inspired some Occupiers to expand on it (Bonnar, 2012). Anticipating that Occupy Toronto would not last due to the police shutdown of the encampments across North America, the lead organizer recruited a small group of Occupiers to discuss guerilla gardening in the city. They created online social groups on *Facebook* (“Occupy Gardens Toronto”) and *Twitter* (“@OccupyGardensTO”), in the hopes of establishing a network of food activists. In mid-October they conducted their first action by transplanting kale onto a bare plot in St. James Park to demonstrate “what could be done in these spaces” (PPG participant 2).

The collective spent the winter of 2012 convening in gardeners' assemblies at the University of Toronto (UofT). They hosted 4-5 assemblies with a relatively small group of people (PPG participant 7). Afterward they organized community events from late January to May including Seedy Saturdays where people exchanged seeds and they held a planning session for more guerilla gardening in the spring (PPG participants 5 and 7). The meeting minutes from a gardeners' assembly in January revealed their thinking at this early stage: they discussed where to plant, how to collect donations of plant material and compost for it, as well as political allies who could “back the movement” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012b). Along with those discussions, the minutes show their deliberation of issues that come with guerilla gardening, such as “the futility of planting food which will not grow/will be pulled out” and how to create a “radical AND sustainable movement” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012b).

Occupy Gardens Toronto continued organizing events to grow their movement. On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, they organized a “World peas expo” at UofT to celebrate food and discuss a “Mass Action in [the] Spring” that could involve some kind of “seed bombing” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012a). On February 27<sup>th</sup> a few members organized an “Occupy Seed Exchange” outside of the Toronto Stock Exchange as part of Occupy Our Food Supply Day. They made a political demonstration about the increasing commodification of seeds by agro-food companies, and to encourage passersby to grow food in public spaces (Bonnar, 2012). Yet, looking at film footage it appeared that only 6-7 people attended the rally and it did not appear to draw much attention from pedestrians (see OccupyGardensTO, 2012).

In March 2012 their *Facebook* page announced, “The most Radish Revolution is in our hands! - Occupy Gardens hosts the Gardeners’ Assembly on March 20<sup>th</sup> to plot Global Garden Party May 1st!” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012a). At that assembly they articulated their plan to guerilla garden on Queen’s Park (PPG participant 7). A few weeks before the action, an online blogger posted information about the garden party in a list of May Day events in Toronto, simply inviting people to meet on the

Queen’s Park south lawn in the afternoon (Kraus, 2012a). Later on, Occupy Gardens Toronto posted an

advertisement on their *Twitter* account posted by the group early on the morning of May 1st, 2012 (as shown in Figure 5). The advertisement was an open invitation to join them for a garden party but it only vaguely insinuated any kind of planting action. For example, it encouraged people to bring “seeds, soil, plants, signs, songs” etc., and it stated the quotation, “They came flowing with soil and shovels in hands gloved” which alluded to their gardening action but left out the full plan. Additionally, the invitation stated that they would plant “99 gardens” which one group member said was meant to symbolize the 99%



**Figure 5.** Advertisement by Occupy Gardens Toronto to announce the planting action. (OccupyGardensTO, 2012)



organizer conducted a ‘mic check’ (PPG participant 2). He announced, “Let us occupy gardens” and everybody twinkled-fingered to show their agreement (OccupyGardens, 2013). Then, they emptied the bags of soil and dug into the ground to form the new garden.

According to PPG members, the planting action was fun and inclusive, including people of diverse social backgrounds. The lead organizer described the scene as follows: “We were singing songs like *All we’re saying is give peace a chance* and it was very festive. There [were] kids there, kids of some of the fellow gardeners. People of all ages and backgrounds were gardening” (PPG participant 2). After the planting, some participants joined a street march throughout the downtown core and then an occupation in Simcoe Park in support of the Toronto May Day demonstrations (PPG participant 2). The lead organizer claimed that there were around 100 people present who physically helped plant and observed the action, some of which returned subsequently throughout the season and brought friends to help tend the garden (PPG participant 2). Another estimated “there may have been 30 to 40 there at one time, ranging in age from babies to senior citizens” (PPG participant 7). However, this information is suspect as a video online revealed about 8 or more people planting, a few others playing instruments, and small groups around them observing the action (OccupyGardens, 2013).

The fact that no one was arrested while digging up the lawn remains a mystery. The lead organizer pointed out that they had a police liaison who was made aware of the picnic potluck, although he was not aware of the actual planting action (PPG participant 2). One participant opined that the media presence might have kept the police from intervening with the planting action. She explained that having media, such as *CityTV*, created an atmosphere that made the police “very aware of their own optics” and “what kept them at bay during the planting because they knew that if they went and stomped on hippie-looking folks planting seeds it was not going to look good” (PPG participant 9). The lead organizer’s secret plan was well received by group members who were completely unaware of how it was going to be done. One member said that it was initially “a bit of a mystery” but she deemed the move from the south lawn to the north to be a “brilliant, brilliant tactical move” because they lost the heavy police presence that might have intervened with the planting action (PPG participant 4). The PPG started off only measuring a few metres wide, but group members expanded it every couple of weeks as the summer of 2012 wore on. One of the summer gardeners explained with a grin, “I felt like we basically kept pushing the envelope” (PPG participant 6). Figure 7 reveals the extent to which the participants expanded the garden, which was not very large at all. Two participants organized gardeners’ assemblies, where they alternated between garden maintenance and discussion of their broader political goals. As well, many participants said that they



enjoyed passing by the PPG and spending time at it throughout the summer (PPG participants 3 and 5). A *YouTube* video revealed a small group of people playing music at the garden and harvesting vegetables in late August 2012 (Tdotgardner84, 2012a). The organizers also hosted a “Summer Jam” on July 28<sup>th</sup> that consisted of music and a potluck which one participant described as a “huge success... there was [sic] tons of people there” (PPG participant 4). The lead organizer estimated that as many as 500 people participated in the garden at various points throughout the summer, but he also put the number at 200 in an interview with *The Globe and Mail* (D’Aliesio, 2012). No other sources were able to corroborate these estimates.



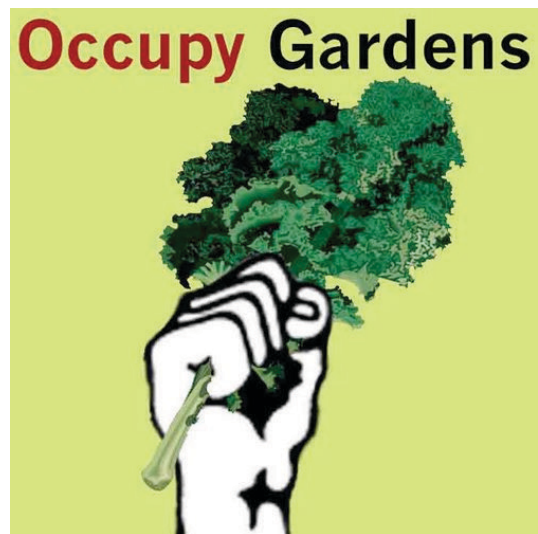
**Figure 7.** The People’s Peas Garden in July 2012. (Hamilton, 2012)

### 3.2 Name and identity

The name of the group, Occupy Gardens Toronto, explicitly identified their initiative as an offshoot of the Occupy Gardens movement. But it is important to further analyze the reasoning behind the name—the People’s Peas Garden. Group members decided on the name after the first planting sometime between late May and early June 2012 through informal conversations at the garden and in meetings (PPG participants 2 and 5). Indeed, the title named the literal garden but it was also chosen to connote people’s power. Esteva (1999) wrote that people’s power stems from the Greek word for democracy, from “demos—the people, the commons, and kratos—“force, power, rule” (154). Thus, the identifier in the

garden's title called for a shift of power from the corporate-state to the people of the 99%, like Occupy. This objective was confirmed in film footage where one PPG member explained, "It was called the People's Peas Garden because it belonged to the people. It was planted by people in the community, and maintained by the people" (Tdotgardner84, 2013a). PPG members also alluded to people's power through their image on their *Twitter* account (see Figure 8), which follows a tradition of raised fists imagery to call for the mass mobilization of people (Cushing, 2014).

Occupy Gardens Toronto used language, colours and images to appear friendly and light-hearted while simultaneously connoting radical political undertones. For instance, the word 'peas' is an obvious pun of 'peace', demonstrating the group's aim to appear non-threatening to the general public. Their posters commonly depicted cartoon vegetables and animals that appealed to all ages. The use of warm colours and images denoted an inviting, community 'feel', which is a contrast to other social movements that use bold colours, such as red and black. Welsh and Chester (2004) argued that pink, yellow and blue are seen as politically 'neutral' colours, whereas red and black have political connotations, such as identifying with the, sometimes violent, Black Bloc movement. PPG members gravitated towards neutral colours to appear friendly and peaceful. Likewise, the group's internal communications was indicative of how they wanted to appear to the general public. As one participant noted with laughter, "I don't know who started [using puns], it just caught on. We're known for our chive talk" (PPG participant 4). Another participant remarked, "Garden puns were deliberately used to provoke laughter and happiness and to defuse conflict... but also to win people over" (PPG participant 2). Some municipal officials took notice of their light-



**Figure 8.** Poster created by Occupy Gardens Toronto. (OccupyGardensTO, 2014)



**Figure 9.** Poster created by Occupy Gardens Toronto. (OccupyGardensTO, 2014)

hearted appeal and playfulness with language. A past municipal official observed, “Protests cans get so serious sometimes because they’re about serious issues... sometimes when there’s a serious issues you can bring more attention to it by having some fun with it. And that’s what I saw them doing with the name and what they actually did” (Municipal official 2).

PPG members also juxtaposed their ‘cute’ language and imagery with political radicalism. This is best demonstrated in Figure 9 that displays a cartoon squirrel with an over-sized smile, wide moustache and vertical beard, which is an allusion to Guy Fawkes. Occupiers frequently wore the Fawkes mask in several encampments throughout late 2011, which turned the mask into a “global symbol of protest” (O’Brien, 2011). O’Brien further claimed that the mask became associated with a “new disaffected generation who are raging at corporate greed and increasing economic inequality”. The allusion suggests that members of the PPG chose to associate themselves with the symbol to signify resistance to the global corporate food system and bureaucratic control in Toronto. The Fawkes mask has often been associated with violence (O’Brien, 2011), however, the light-hearted and peaceful approach appearance of the PPG was designed to soften this image and broaden their appeal. On the whole, the group used their language and appearance to gain popular support but also to generate political discussion on food issues affecting the 99%.

### **3.3 Food justice**

It is important to discuss how PPG participants framed their understanding of food issues because this was part of their justification for planting the garden. The collective was interested in going beyond the goal of producing food to shed light on the unjust distributional inequalities related to food as part of the food justice frame. Wekerle (2004) documented the emergence of the food justice frame in Toronto’s food movement: the late 1990’s saw a shift in focus to the right to food as a component of a more democratic and just society. She claimed that food justice has made “explicit critique of the global food system and a theoretical framing of local initiatives as both the practice of democracy and as means of de-linking from the corporate global food system” (379). Food justice has been critical of issues such as the commodification of food, cheap and unregulated labour, and free-market trade that have made food-provisioning part of a globally competitive marketplace (Agyeman & McEntee, 2014; Akram-Lodhi, 2013; Patel, 2009; Wekerle, 2004). According to Starr (2000) this frame provided insight “to reverse the corporatization of the whole food system, not only technically but in terms of institutions, policies and social organization” (125). More recently, Heynen et al. (2012) wrote that the food justice frame defends



a community's right to define their own food systems outside of corporate control<sup>13</sup>. With that being said, the food justice frame is critical of corporate control and state institutions that are largely responsible for systemic inequalities that prevent access to food subsistence. This section will explore how PPG members explicitly engaged in these issues and used their planting action to provoke political action. As well, this section will use a critical Marxist analysis to discuss the socioeconomic inequalities that have led to such outcomes. This will focus on the inability for many people of the 99% who sell their labour power to survive but they cannot afford basic food subsistence.

PPG participants were aware of the unjust distributional inequalities related to food access that many people of the 99% face. They commented on their personal experiences in Toronto to frame what they saw as a 'food crisis' in the city. The lead organizer described the crisis as "more and more people lining up at food banks for Kraft dinner and peanut butter", longer waiting lists for community gardens, and rising food prices (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a). Another member argued, "There's a problem where people can't afford to feed their family and keep the lights on and you know that's happening in Toronto", so she felt that "a crisis of this magnitude deserved swift and bold action" (PPG participant 9). She referred to the way in which rising housing costs negatively affect people's ability to afford food because they are more apt to pay for housing before food<sup>14</sup>. One PPG member and long-time Toronto resident observed: "There's so much hunger in this city. There's so many people, they come to my church every day—people who don't have food" (PPG participant 4). So it is apparent that PPG members perceived the widespread struggle for many Torontonians to access food and they saw this as a crisis of the right to food. The lead organizer argued that people struggling to afford food are forced to commit illegal actions for food subsistence. He explained:

People who have been marginalized or people who are economically deprived, who don't own property or capital, or who can't compete in the labour market—they can't really legally do pretty much anything. So they end up becoming illegal, basically—like where are you supposed to go to sleep? Or to get food? Or to do all these things? So people have to start bending and breaking the rules and doing things that they're not necessarily allowed to do, which might look like sleeping in a park, for instance, or dumpster diving. (PPG participant 2)

The participant argued that when people cannot compete in the labour market, or otherwise cannot find employment, they have to resort to illegal ways of providing subsistence for themselves (for instance, foraging through dumpsters for food). Other PPG members condemned these illegal ways to access food

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<sup>13</sup> Some food activists and researchers consider this objective to be part of what is called food sovereignty (La Via Campesina, 2000; Patel, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Several studies show that low-income residents are more likely to pay for housing before food (Tarasuk and Kirkpatrick, 2010; Hamelin et al., 2011; Wakefield et al., 2013)



subsistence because they have social stigma. As one member put it: “I think [the PPG] was trying to say that there’s nothing shameful about producing food” (PPG participant 5). Another member corroborated this view: “I think the goals were broadly [sic] the right to grow food anywhere. Tying that to the right to food as a basic human right” (PPG participant 6). In this sense, it is clear that the group’s aim was not only to cultivate a garden but also to underscore the severity of distributional inequalities.

### **3.4 Income inequality**

Members of the PPG named income inequality as a root cause of the inability to afford basic subsistence. One participant stated that the primary reason for food insecurity is “economic inequality, or lack of income” that is resulting in an “increasing number of people who are going without food” (PPG participant 2). A second member similarly identified income inequality and food insecurity as a crisis of capitalist accumulation. She explained, “The food system that we have is a perfect illustration of the problems of capitalism... by its very nature it precludes that there will be income inequality and therefore food inequality, in terms of access to food” (PPG participant 4). She suggested that the capitalism economic system necessarily relies on economic inequality and thus leads to distributional inequalities related to food access for many of the 99%. The lead organizer corroborated this socioeconomic perspective in stating:

Because of systemic inequality in the economy and in our political systems it’s resulting [sic] in an increasing number of people who are going without food, who are food insecure, and that’s measured in our city in hundreds of thousands of people... often the primary reason is economic inequality lack of income. (PPG participant 2)

Indeed, several research surveys have unveiled the recent history of low-income levels and food insecurity in Toronto (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2013; Tarasuk et al., 2013; Tarasuk et al., 2014; TCF, 2013). A report by the Toronto Community Foundation found that there were one million people, or about 43 percent of Toronto’s population, living in low or very low-income<sup>15</sup> neighbourhoods in 2012 (TCF, 2013). As well, Loopstra and Tarasuk’s study (2013) from 2009-12 with low-income families in Toronto found that low household incomes correlated with a high risk of food insecurity. These findings have led researchers to conclude that the prospects for improving long-term food security are tied to the same economic forces that affect income (Hamelin et al., 2011; Leblanc et al., 2005; Tarasuk et al., 2013; Tarasuk et al., 2014). Therefore, as participants of the PPG suggested, there is a strong correlation between low-income and food insecurity which affects the ability of the 99% to afford food in the city.

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<sup>15</sup> Definitions based on the Statistics Canada Low-income Cut-offs (LICO).

PPG members attributed these inequalities to the larger socioeconomic system. For example, they wrote on their *Facebook* page, “A system motivated primarily by profit and the accumulation of monetary capital, without reference to human or environmental need, is terribly inefficient and doomed to failure” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012a). In other words, they claimed that the socioeconomic system is driven by those in the 1% who try to accumulate as much surplus value as they can at the risk of everyone else’s living needs, as well as that of the environment. Their claim follows Marx and Engels’ (1888) analysis of the ability for those who own the means of production to accumulate as much wealth as possible while paying their labourers low wages, which necessarily leads to economic inequality. Therefore, those who do not have ownership of the means of production will always earn less for their subsistence. As PPG members pointed out, those who earn a low-income or who do not own property or capital face increasing difficulty to meet their food needs. They called for systemic change of the current capitalist system that they considered to be creating a food crisis.

### **3.5 Corporate control of food**

Along with income inequality, PPG members pointed to unjust distributional inequalities in the food crisis caused by the 1% who maintain power in the food system. One member remarked, “There’s this disconnect between how our food is grown and where it comes from, and what we actually eat. That’s a top-down structure. You go to the grocery store and the big *Loblaws*’ man is profiting off of you buying avocados from Mexico” (PPG participant 3). The participant referred to the ‘top-down’ structure of food production and distribution where the owners of food retailers are able to accumulate surplus value (Welsh & MacRae, 1998). Indeed, scholars have explained that the overarching goal of food retailers is profitability: “A key element of agribusiness strategy is to reduce risk by controlling the markets for both supplies and sales” (Welsh & MacRae, 1998, 243). Agribusinesses achieve control through the acquisition and maintenance of market share (Teece, 1988), and owners of grocery chains are able to make profits from selling food in high volume and at low costs for profitability (Akram-Lodhi, 2013). This is true for the Canadian food retail market, which is among the most concentrated in the world (Janoff, 2001). For example, the grocery store chain *Loblaws* made revenue of \$32.4 billion in 2013 (CNW Group, 2014) and their current Executive Chairman, Gale Weston, had a net worth of \$9.5 billion in September 2014 (*Forbes*, 2014). Although PPG members did not cite profit margins of retailers, they were aware that these retailers have the ability to accumulate mass surplus value through their corporate power. Another outcome of corporate power in the food system has been the ability to hide information regarding the production of their food products. Welsh and MacRae (1998) explained: “The marketplace... rarely provides broad information on the social, environmental and health impacts of food production,

processing and distribution” (245). More specifically, this touched upon issues of cheap labour in the food industry, exploitation of farm labourers, factory farming, genetically modified ingredients, and more, that are all hidden from those who purchase food items at corporate retail stores (see also Akram-Lodhi, 2013). Participants of the PPG expressed the desire that the conditions under which food is grown and consumed are socially conscious and equitable. One volunteer expressed, “For me, personally I like to feel connected to the things that I eat... I like to know who made them or who grew them” (PPG participant 1). This perspective corresponds with many of the Toronto food movement who desire to know about the socioeconomic relationships involved in the production and distribution of food (TFPC, 1998).

PPG participants realized that the corporate control of the food system has led to significant ecological destruction. On their *Facebook* page they wrote, “Do not wait for permission to do the right thing. The industrial food system is rapidly depleting the Earth's arable soil and cutting down remaining forests, polluting our air, water and land” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012a). Participants of the PPG also expressed concerns over the negative environmental impacts from large-scale industrial agriculture. One participant claimed, “In order to function capitalism requires inequality and constant use of new resources” (PPG participant 4) for the intense accumulation of resources for the production of commodities in the interest of generating surplus value. Foster (2013) explained that accelerating capitalist accumulation has necessitated the increased rate of natural resource extraction for monetary wealth. He argued that a “momentous epochal crisis... is occurring today, arising from the unlimited expansion of a capitalist system geared to a process of abstract wealth creation”. He further explained that there is no end to the incentive of seeking more monetary wealth since money is exchanged for labour power and commodities with which to produce a new commodity, to be sold for more money. Thus, there is an unending sequence of expansion in capitalist accumulation. Foster has warned that this economic expansion is “devoid of any concern for either the rationality of production or the sustainability of natural systems” (2013). One PPG participant recognized this very issue of capitalist accumulation: “It’s not their right to wipe out every living thing on the planet for short-term profit. Companies that have this industrial-agricultural model that involves having to be enslaved to buying things from them forever” (PPG participant 7). She alluded to manufacturers of high yielding seeds and chemical fertilizers that create a cycle of purchasing for farmers who are “enslaved” once they purchase inputs from them. As an alternative she suggested, “Farmers need support, like a living wage and their produce should not be undersold”, meaning that their produce could be sold at a price that reflects the production-time invested in it so that they can support their own living.

### 3.6 Commodity fetishism

Participants of the PPG also stated that their garden was a symbolic alternative to the commodification of food under capitalism. They lamented that food is no longer valued for its inherent quality in providing nourishment to people. One participant gave a personal account of this issue based on her experience living in Toronto:

In a sense, the problem is that food is treated as a commercial commodity—so if you have money you have access to good food, and if you don't have money you're scrapping for whatever you can get and it's probably not very good because of the way that food production and distribution works it is the least nutritious food that is the cheapest. I know what you get in food banks and I know what you get at meal programs, and somebody who has worked at these things I know how hard we try to make it nutritious, but fresh fruits and vegetables are hard to come by. And somehow it's not treated as a problem that there's all these people out there who cannot afford to eat nutritiously. (PPG participant 5)

She further explained: “As part of a publicity campaign I lived for a week on what you would get from a typical basket at a food bank... I deal with depression and eating highly processed crap for a week made that significantly worse”. She concluded, “We need to develop food systems that make nutritious food accessible to people regardless of whether or not they have money” (PPG participant 5). The above commentary reflected the PPG's concern that rising income inequality combined with the commodification of food has resulted in the inability for many of the 99% to access healthy food. Another PPG participant confirmed this perspective on the commodification of food by arguing, “Under capitalism everything is commodified, more and more so, including food. You can trace food insecurity to the fact that the only socially acceptable way to acquire food, in the Canadian context, is to buy it” (PPG participant 4).

This perspective resonated with Marx's theory of commodity fetishism. Marx (1990) suggested that a commodity and the “value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this” (195). Therefore, in the global capitalist food system, the monetary value placed on a market commodity does not reflect its value for people, nor does it reflect the production-time invested in producing and distributing food. Rather, food is seen as a commodity because people fixate on what it costs to make or to buy a product, what the demand for a product is, and so on. As soon as a product has entered into the capitalist marketplace it “is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities” (Marx, 1990, 195) and only treated as an economic relation. The price of food, then, does not reflect its value in providing nourishment for people, and as a PPG member pointed out, the cheapest food is often the least nutritious.

More recently, scholars have elaborated on Marx's theory by elucidating how the phenomenon of commodity fetishism affects both those who produce food and those in cities who struggle to access it. For instance, Kaika and Swyngedouw (2000) argued that commodity fetishism has been able to "veil and hide the multiple socioecological processes of domination/subordination and exploitation/repression that feed the capitalist urbanization process" (136). In other words, the fetishization of food has produced food as cheaply as possible and exploited workers for a cheap wage to grow and process that food. As well, the commodification of food represses those who are forced to eat cheap food because they cannot afford healthier food. Essentially, the entire corporate food industry is an input-output operation for as much profit as possible. As discussed, participants of the PPG argued that healthy food should be considered a basic necessity of human life and thus everyone should have the right to food. It is apparent, then, that PPG participants envisioned the garden as a symbolic alternative to the current food system that has increasingly denied access to healthy food for many of the 99%.

### **3.7 Struggle for self-provisioning**

Other PPG participants critiqued the struggle to provide subsistence for oneself because they believed that the 99% are discouraged from growing food as they are 'forced' into purchasing their means of food subsistence. One member explained:

We have deliberately been made helpless by the way society is set up and the way the economy works. We are actually discouraged from the time we are little kids from doing something that every baby monkey learns at its mother's breast, literally, is how to pick a fruit and eat it... everything that nature provides, we're not supposed to get from nature now, we're supposed to get it through industry, or through corporations, or through some complex social process that has nothing to do with the fact that this stuff often just grows right out of the ground. (PPG participant 7)

The participant felt that people have to buy food in the corporate food system, as opposed to growing it, in order to meet their food needs. She claimed that it often makes people "helpless" because they have not learned to grow food for themselves. In reaction, many PPG members stressed that their planting action was to educate other Torontonians in food provisioning. The lead organizer expressed that many Torontonians "don't have the skills or awareness in order to procure food or prepare food for themselves... they're dependent on junk food or processed food which is harmful for their health. So even though they're eating food, they're still malnourished or in other ways food insecure. Our action was calling attention to this" (PPG participant 2). Still, the goal of the PPG was not grow and harvest a large amount of vegetables. One member remarked, "The amount of food grown wasn't really the purpose. We weren't really growing to feed an entire city because you can't feed an entire city with such a limited

space, obviously. Our primary purpose was awareness, education and empowerment through demonstration” (PPG participant 2). Therefore their garden was deliberately conceived as a political demonstration on inequalities in the food system whereby they also encouraged the communal provisioning of food.

Some Torontonians outside of the PPG understood that the collective sought to make a political demonstration on inequalities in the food system and to encourage communal provisioning of food. One food activist explained:

I feel that this is... more about what Marx was talking about when he said that workers should own the means of production. People on the ground, people in their communities or the workplace, working people should own the means the production. Growing your own food in a community how else can you own your means of production than that?  
(Other activists 4)

In other words, he said that the PPG made a small symbolic model of agriculture where the soil and their tools are the means of production. The lead organizer confirmed a similar sentiment when he stated, “We’re actively trying to remove barriers that are preventing people from living and flourishing and being healthy... it’s access to the means of production. It’s access to food” (PPG participant 2). Here, he explicitly expressed the notion that the large majority of the population needs to own the means of production in order to flourish and have access to healthy food. The PPG’s advocacy for returning power and agency within the food system away from food corporations and back to producers also followed the argumentation of those who have said that communities have the right to determine their own food systems (Heynen et al., 2012; La Via Campesina, 2000; Patel, 2009). All in all, they planted without permission to demonstrate that the 99% should have more democratic decision-making power to fight unjust distributional inequalities and thus work towards the right to food.

### **3.8 Critiques of the Toronto Community Gardens Program**

Another element of the PPG was to criticize the existing approval process for community gardens in Toronto. PPG members sought to challenge bureaucratic power in the City of Toronto government to allow for more direct participation in gardening. A member said that the problem is the Forestry & Recreation Division’s (referred to as the Parks Division herein) “layers of bureaucracy” to get through in order to have a community garden approved, which can be “quite difficult and prohibitive” for people wanting to start a garden (PPG participant 5). One gardener referred to approval process that consists of filling out paperwork and waiting for the Parks Division to respond. “It can be really long and time consuming, and in the end there’s no guarantee that it’s going to be approved”, she explained (PPG

participant 3). Another gardener revealed a similar criticism: “With the city of Toronto there’s a lot of administration behind these processes that can take a really long time, which isn’t necessarily efficient if people are hungry and they need to grow their own. They can’t just wait around a couple of months to have this approved” (PPG participant 1). One PPG volunteer perceived a lack of administrative support in the Community Gardens Program: “There’s this huge waiting list of community garden applications with 1 city staff worker to process them, so there’s a big back log... there are way more people trying to start community gardens than are being accommodating to do so” (PPG participant 6). She concluded that the “process isn’t working”; suggesting that guerilla gardening in public spaces is a more accessible way to grow food.

Previous research has echoed the critiques that PPG members made of the Community Gardens Program. Langer’s (2012) interviews in 2011 with community garden coordinators along with his analysis of the Toronto Parks’ Strategic Plan (2004) led him to malign the municipal government for deeming gardening as a leisure activity for ‘the creative class’<sup>16</sup>. For example, corporate development of new buildings along with community gardens in David Crombie Park and Parkdale beautified these neighborhoods in order to attract “creative people” whom the Strategic Plan deemed to be the “best and brightest” of the city (4). Langer used this example to point to the gentrification of lower-income residents. Essentially the city’s development process has prioritized the elitist lifestyles of the creative class (i.e. in the 1%) while pushing out low-income Torontonians who cannot afford the rising property values. He further argued, “These functions reveal aspects of class bias that is built into the Community Gardens Program and that excludes an understanding of poor Torontonians from the Program” (88). Langer concluded, “Community gardens and other urban agriculture would very likely fulfill a future role in allowing all Torontonians suitable access to food and to space” (131) if they are reorganized in a way that is equitable instead of pushing gentrification. Overall, Langer and PPG members shared the view that the municipal government must remove exclusionary regulation over community gardening so that all Torontonians have direct access to land.

### **3.9 Location, location, location**

Along with their critiques of the Toronto Community Gardens Program, it is critical to understand why PPG members chose to guerilla garden on a politicized area. They chose Queen’s Park in order to

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<sup>16</sup> A term from Florida’s (2002) concepts of the creative city and creative class.



associate their planting action with the politics of the city. One volunteer claimed that the group chose the location “specifically that it’s public space—it’s not like the lawn of the *Canadian Tire* or something, which is a different statement... public space [is] supposed to be used for public good” (PPG participant 4). She added, “The general public has very little control over how [public spaces] are used, or how they’re allowed to use them”. Queen’s Park is a park in the downtown core of Toronto situated next to the building for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario (“Queen’s Park”, n.d.). Bishop Strachan, the first Anglican bishop of Toronto, purchased the land in 1828 as the site for King’s College. In 1859, the property was leased to the Government of Ontario for a period of 999 years for the purpose of creating a public park. This new park officially opened on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 1860, by the Prince of Wales (who would later become King Edward VII) and named in honour of his mother, Queen Victoria. Although the term Queen’s Park refers to the physical park, the public and media commonly use it as a metonym for the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Today, the Province of Ontario Precinct Properties maintains the park grounds at the front of the Ontario Legislative building. The north side of the park behind the legislative building is maintained by the Parks Division giving the department decision-making power concerning the planning of the area, who has access to it and for what purpose (City of Toronto, 2012).



**Figure 10.** Aerial image of Queen’s Park and highlighted area showing the location of the People’s Peas Garden. (Queen’s Park, 2006)



Their choice of location was explicitly rooted in a desire to make a symbolic statement in response to the statues in the park. One PPG participant referred to state power associated with the monuments and statues of past historical figures, many of which were British monarchs, or otherwise affiliated with them (PPG participant 8). These include the equestrian statue of Edward VII in military regalia, Queen Victoria, the war memorial of the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders, as well as individual statues of John A. Macdonald and John Graves (National Defence and the Canadian Forces, 2013). Planting on Queen’s Park allowed the group to make a symbolic statement on the public statues placed there by the government. The same PPG member explained, “This entire expanse of property was often being used for some of the most commercialized [uses]—displays of power and control. And we wanted an act to show the opposite” (PPG participant 8). Alternatively, she traced the historical roots of Queen’s Park to indigenous communities when she stated, “We targeted Queen’s Park because of the stoic-ness of it... how potent it was—what we understand as Turtle Island and that this sacred land was being used”. Her comment implied a desire to honour indigenous peoples who used the land for agricultural purposes before settler colonialism. By and large, it is clear that Queen’s park is used to show state power, which the group wanted to symbolically ‘take back’ through claiming a space for the PPG.



**Figure 11.** Signage at the PPG in 2012. (Kearey-Moreland, 2012c)

Group members were also drawn to the location of Queen’s Park due to its heavy pedestrian traffic. The lead organizer explained, “Thousands of people go through there all the time. It’s by [the] UofT campus so there’s exposure to students going there. And just people in general. People use that space for all kinds of activities—so it’s very high profile for being seen” (PPG participant 4). Another member further explained their hope that this exposure to passersby would generate “momentum” for the PPG (PPG participant 8). In order to let passersby know of the garden, the group placed signs in and around the planted area (as seen in Figure 11). However, the gardeners experienced struggle trying to sustain the group’s signage because strangers kept taking their signs down when no one was tending to the garden. The lead organizer explained: “Throughout the growing season we put up probably half a dozen different signs which were taken away within days, or every time we came back” (PPG participant 2). Therefore, people who walked by the garden may have not entirely understood its purpose. As well, by being at a location where political decisions are made and people commonly gather to rally, group members thought that planting in this vicinity had the greatest potential of attracting media attention. The lead organizer also claimed, “If we were to choose any other location I don’t think it would’ve draw out the amount of media... which was one of the primary objectives of the garden—to increase the awareness of the food crisis, as well as awareness of solutions to that” (PPG participant 2).

The site was also chosen due to its physical environment where the lead organizer had conducted his own site assessment<sup>17</sup>. City of Toronto regulation requires that a community garden must have adequate sunlight, water, and ensure that the soil does not contain any harmful contaminants (Toronto Public Health, 2013). The Parks Division also determines whether a proposed community garden will conflict with other uses of the park (Municipal official 1). The lead organizer of the PPG decided that the north side of the park was appropriate as “it was closer to the road so it wasn’t in the middle of Queen’s Park, it was off to the side... most people would be walking on the paths more in the centre of the park. So it wasn’t really conflicting with other uses at that time” (PPG participant 2). Additionally, he claimed it was ideal as there was a bare patch of soil that received enough sunlight to grow vegetables. Thus PPG members demonstrated that they could conduct a site assessment on their own which further shows their desire for self-sufficiency. In effect, this fit within the PPG’s goal to ‘take back’ state decision-making power through claiming a space for the garden.

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<sup>17</sup> A site assessment is one of the necessary conditions for having official approval for a community garden through the Parks Division (City of Toronto, 2004).

### **3.10 Conclusion**

The roots of the PPG were formed from the alternative food culture of Occupy. As the Occupy Toronto encampment shutdown a small group of people spent the winter convening in gardeners' assemblies to discuss food issues. Their meetings eventually gave way to their plan to guerilla garden on Queen's Park. The lead organizer carefully executed a plan to hold their gardening resources secret and they were successful in planting the garden despite the police presence. PPG members expressed that they wanted a bold action that would send a message to municipal politicians in light of growing hunger in the city. They particularly criticized the Parks Division's decision-making power concerning city planning and the Community Gardens Program, and they called for Torontonians to have more decision-making power to determine how public parks are used. Members of the PPG agreed that the north face of Queen's Park was chosen for the garden due to its political association with municipal and provincial politics.

The group's guerilla gardening went beyond merely producing food to making a broader criticism of unjust distributional inequalities in the food system. The gardeners used the PPG to make a political statement about the inability for many of the 99% to access food and to their inability to provide subsistence for themselves. They wanted to increase the awareness of the food crisis, including such issues as income inequality, the commodification of food, control of the food system and discouragement from gardening. Alternatively, they advocated for returning power and agency within the food system back to small producers of the 99%. This also addressed the issue of exclusionary state regulation and their layers of bureaucracy for urban gardeners to go through in order to start a garden. For these reasons, the PPG was intended as a form of guerilla gardening that saw alternative forms of food production and distribution as part of broader change.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RECLAIMING THE COMMONS

### 4.1 The People's Peas Garden as a symbolic commons

The previous chapter argued that the PPG intended to go beyond the goal of food production a small food production demonstration to make a political statement on systemic socioeconomic problems in the food system, as well as barriers to urban gardening in Toronto. In the same way that Occupiers created space for communal living (namely, through the Occupy kitchen, the People's Library, sanitation crew, and so on) the PPG established a communal social structure. Their vision was similar to the idea of 'reclaiming' the commons. The commons has traditionally referred to the land that was once held in communal ownership by rural English peasants before they were expropriated (Thirsk, 1967; Marx 1867). Thirsk (1967) explained that when people had access to the commons they "all depended on common resources for their fuel, for bedding, and fodder for their stock, and by pooling so many of the necessities of livelihood" (164). Thus, they largely relied on communal provisioning for their subsistence. Yet, the enclosures of the commons took over land formerly held by peasants and forced them to sell their labour power to survive. They could no longer provide subsistence for themselves to the extent that they did on common lands<sup>18</sup> (Marx, 1867). The entire process saw the ownership of land and the transformation of capital increasingly held by a small sector of society. Accordingly, this history is significant to the PPG story because they too noticed that wealth and power in the food system is concentrated in the hands of a few. This chapter will explore how PPG members explicitly engaged with the struggle to reclaim the commons and tried to make their gardening accessible to all.

### 4.2 Criticism of private property

PPG members were emphatic that the garden was established in order to draw attention to privatization of land by a small sector of society that does not account for the interests of the 99%. One gardener remarked, "We've had the idea so engrained that everything is property. And everything is the property of somebody. There's nothing that is the commons anymore" (PPG participant 5). To illustrate this point, she talked about her experience harvesting food from the PPG and offering it to passersby. She explained:

When I was working in the garden people would come by and say 'You have permission to do this?' I'd say 'No, we're just doing it'. When I was working in the

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<sup>18</sup> The bourgeoisie expropriated peasants because they considered their work in the common lands to be a wasted opportunity for labour power. Their intention was to commodify the land so they could exploit the landless peasants' labour to produce wool and so that large-scale agriculture became the norm. Marx claims that this was a violent process as the houses of the labourers were often razed to the ground and "doomed to decay" to drive them off the commons (Marx, 1876; Neeson, 1996).

garden... I would offer people vegetables and they would go like ‘No, no, no those are your vegetables’. ‘No they’re not my vegetables. This is a cucumber. I’m offering you this cucumber. Take this cucumber. Pick a tomato if you want a tomato’. ‘No, no, no it’s your garden’. ‘No it’s not my garden, it’s a garden’. It’s meant to be a people’s garden. And it’s actually very hard for people to see that. To see that you can have a garden that anyone can come along and take a tomato. (PPG participant 5)

In effect, her interactions with passersby supported the premise that the implementation of private property has influenced the way people perceive land for food production—as something to be privately and individually owned. Another PPG participant referred to the acquisition of land by Tridel, a luxury condominium development corporation in Toronto (PPG participant 8). She criticized the corporation for buying land in the interests of enhancing their profits, such as purchasing airspace around their buildings. Thus, she argued that people have learned to define land “with rigid, linear boundaries”, as evident in the purchasing and privatization of land, as opposed to viewing land as communal and interconnected. It is clear, then, that in reaction to the privatization of land by a small fraction of society, PPG members sought a model of communal ownership of land for food production.

One member expanded on the idea of communal ownership but in the sense that land should belong to everyone and hence to no one. She argued, “We leverage space, we don’t necessarily look to buy or own, which is part of guerilla gardening—we all own this land, we are all stewards of this land” (PPG participant 8). Thus, she argued that land should not have a property status at all because the process of dividing and purchasing land is exclusionary to many of the 99%. Another member agreed when she stated, “Land is not the property of anything. We are the property of the land, if anything. She feeds us. It isn’t a matter of who owns what, or what they can ring out of it for short-term gain, but how you can keep her healthy so that she will always feed all of us” (PPG participant 7). She took issue with the privatization of land by the corporate-state because it has led to vast profits in the hands of a few who have the ability to buy property. Even some food activists outside of the group agreed that land for food production should not be held in private ownership. One activist explained, “Personally I see it as like land doesn’t really belong to anybody. If I want to grow something somewhere where nothing is being grown I’m going to do it” (Other activists 4). One PPG member also believed the guerilla gardening imitates the natural environment that existed before corporate-state managerialism. She explained: “The art of guerilla gardening is imitating the natural cycle that already happened. And how as human beings have lost our place, as stewards—as keepers of the land... like the birds we should be depositing seeds all over the place” (PPG participant 8). Therefore, she argued that there should not be any exclusionary government regulation that prevents people from using land as everyone is a steward and has the right to food. Taken together, the quotations suggested that members of the PPG wanted to put forth the radical

belief that everyone should be entitled to access land.

Additionally, PPG members intended the garden to be distinct from existing community gardens in Toronto, in the sense that they believed the current garden allotment model was divisive. For example, one gardener explained:

We didn't have fences or anything. Because it was a place where people can be open—you didn't feel these restrictions... other community gardens that I've been at, at least, you know you're assigned a certain plot, there are these boundaries, but we didn't lay any boundaries with the PPG, it was kind of free to grow wherever it wanted, in our eyes at least. (PPG participant 1)

The lead organizer confirmed this view by stating, “rather than having it as an allotment which is a common structure where people have their own allotted space and control and they pay \$20 or whatever for that our garden was a free for all community garden. Free for all beings” (PPG participant 2). Another gardener explained how she organized the PPG gardening space: “It was kind of like an open place for people to use if you had a plant you'd be welcome to plant it... it wasn't like a huge controlling thing where people were really specific and wanted specific things, it was just open to everybody” (PPG participant 1). Proponents suggested that the PPG was different from other community gardens since they did not have organizers to tell gardeners what to plant. One PPG member said that most community gardens follow an “old paradigm” (PPG participant 9). Based on her experience with community gardening in Vancouver, she said that gardeners there had an attitude of “This is my plot and that is your lot’ and it being about ownership”. Yet, historically, the expropriation of people off common land to establish private property has been “what got wars start[ed]”. She concluded, “If we were able to release that desire, that emotion of possession, we would probably be able to grow bigger, more self-sustaining community gardens”, for example, she suggested growing food forests that are grown communally and without using an individual allotment system (PPG participant 9). As well, PPG members harvested what little food they had to volunteers who tended to the garden and people who passed by the garden. One volunteer explained, “Some of the people who harvested took some food over the course of the growing season. Some of it we would give away—if people came by while we were working in the garden sometimes we would give them a cucumber or tomato” (Occupy Gardens participant 5). This way of distributing food, as opposed to selling food or requiring people to pay a fee in order to access the garden (such as in allotment gardens) signified the group's sociopolitical demonstration to show that public land should be accessible to all.



### 4.3 Community provisioning

Another element of the PPG as a commons was their experimentation with community provisioning. Since they did not receive corporate or state funding to pay for gardening resources, the planning of the garden depended on the resources they were able to access via other means. One organizer explained, “A lot of other gardening groups in the community would donate seedlings or seeds. I personally grew some seedlings prior” (PPG participant 1). Likewise, another volunteer remarked, “People [came] together with seeds and bring a trowel or watering can or soil. We never know what we’re going to have so we’ve just been like going with it—whatever we are able to do we just try to make the most of” (Tdotgardner84, 2012a). Group members walked across Queen’s Park Avenue West to UofT’s Hart House and used tap water from the outside of the building, which they carried back across the street in watering cans<sup>19</sup>. This method of watering proved to be a physical challenge for some members. A participant explained, “It was a big job carrying water across the road in buckets”, especially in the hot and dry weather of the summer (PPG participant 5). Still, PPG members were fully committed to community provisioning as part of their commons-like model that they adhered to.

The PPG as a symbolic commons for food production echoed theoretical perspectives on ‘reclaiming’ the commons<sup>20</sup>. Scholars such as Johnston (2002) have argued that struggles to reclaim the commons encapsulate principles determined by participatory democratic communities instead of corporate-state managerialism. Johnston explained that contemporary struggles for the commons push for a deeper meaning by “challenging a paradigm of relentless commodification and eco-social enclosure... as such, the commons discourse represents a direction for human-nature interactions that is more egalitarian, democratic, and oriented towards ecological survival across generations” (5/6, 2003). Similarly, some PPG participants explicitly identified their garden as an experiment with the commons. One member stated that the PPG participants were interested in “putting the power within the people to choose what food we produce and eat” and she understood that “the concept of the commons is that it can be used by the people for the people” (PPG participant 4). Combined with their criticism of private ownership of land and commitment to community provisioning, PPG participants saw potential in the principles of democratic participation and communal ownership. They sought to operationalize these principles through their guerilla gardening.

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<sup>19</sup> The gardeners were able to do this since some members had been a part of the UofT’s Dig In! Campus Agriculture project, so they knew where to access the water system (PPG participant 7).

<sup>20</sup> This debate could also be extended to include discussion of the commons on a global scale (e.g. concerns about over-population and the over-exploitation of natural resources) as seen in arguments by Garrett Hardin’s “Tragedy of the commons” (1968), and Elinor Ostrom (1999), but it was not included in this thesis as members of the PPG did not address the arguments pertaining to this discussion.



Advocates of reclaiming the commons have recognized that community provisioning could accumulate enough resources to provide everyone with basic subsistence. Roos (2014) argued that the commons challenges the idea that people should sell their labour power to another person (i.e. those who own the means of production) to survive. For example, the notion of basic income and housing for all “would have profoundly transformative implications for social relations and the nature of everyday life” because it could value these things as common resources that people need to survive. Some researchers claimed that Occupy created actual commons, and subsequent Occupy-related offshoots have restated a revolutionary aim to separate the human need for subsistence from the commodification, subordination and exploitation seen in capitalist accumulation (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012; Ross, 2014; Watkins, 2012). Likewise, PPG participants intended to use their guerilla gardening as a means of establishing a new political discourse on the right to land and to food.

#### **4.4 Group structure and power struggles**

The PPG collective experimented with a participatory democratic structure. The lead organizer who participated in Occupy Toronto decided to mimic that decision-making structure, which was based on “voluntary participation” and “non-coercive, free, non-violent consensus decision-making” (PPG participant 2). Most PPG members reported the use of consensus-based decision-making in a non-hierarchical structure. In terms of roles, the group structure contained a few “lead cultivators” who led the social events, “master gardeners” who taught gardening skills, and other volunteers who took on maintenance tasks and offered other organizational assistance (PPG participant 9). The lead organizer explained that their structure consisted of a core group of two to three people during the growing season that spearheaded things along with other volunteers who organized tasks that were “open to whoever wanted to take it on” (PPG participant 2).

Participants were nearly unanimous in stating that there was minimal group conflict within the collective. Positive feedback of group decision-making was reflected in commentary, such as, “Everybody was cool with pretty much everything that was happening in the garden” (PPG participant 2), and, “It was cooperative. I mean no one person was making decisions for themselves... there was a lot of trust” (PPG participant 3). Another participant described their decision-making as “pretty informal”, and that there were not too many decisions to make, besides event planning (PPG participant 5). According to one member, when they voiced disagreements they were never “aggressive”, but rather “always quite intellectual” (PPG participant 4). Several members claimed that they were glad to have a lead organizer, as observed in participants’ responses that commended his leadership and vision. One group member

stated that his leadership was “absolutely phenomenal”, and that he had “clear visions and a very clear mandate” which heavily contributed to the group’s success (PPG participant 9).

But other interviews suggested that such rosy portrayals were “oblivious to conflict” that permeated group interactions (PPG participant 6). One member voiced concerns about power dynamics within the group, particularly since the lead organizer was the driving force behind the initial planting. According to her, the group dynamics significantly changed as the lead organizer left Toronto for a few weeks in the summer. He justified this leave as a tactical decision made on behalf of the group:

I was leaving as a strategic action because I had attained centrality within the movement, which is not good for a number of reasons. For one, the movement then starts revolving around me personally as an individual, not necessarily around an idea. Or I became associated or synonymous with that idea, so if I’m to leave then so is the idea. (PPG participant 2)

He believed that it was a good strategy to leave, yet his absence proved to be challenging to members who tended the garden for the growing season. One summer gardener claimed, “Nobody was picking up the reins”, so two members took it upon themselves to organize the group, despite their lack of experience in gardening (PPG participant 6). She recalled, “It was very overwhelming. I drew on whatever support I could and sometimes very few people would come out” (PPG participant 6). In addition to her frustration leading the group for the growing season, she also disagreed with the lead organizer’s leadership style because it discouraged other people from making decisions in the group. She explained:

I don’t think [he] realized that why people weren’t being attracted to be core organizers because it was [his] vision not everybody’s vision. And then [he] would be like oh but I want everyone’s input I’m not trying to make these decisions. But I’m like yeah that depends on stepping back and talking and thinking about these things. [He] always seemed really hesitant to do—which is why I didn’t bring up these things. (PPG participant 6)

This participant argued that the lead organizer’s vision excluded other participants by dominating the group’s decision-making. Therefore, it is evident that the group faced internal conflicts due to their lack of coordination and perhaps a lack of trust since only a few group members knew each other beforehand, but many were new. Even though the PPG had a loose structure and open participation, it appears that they could have applied more formalized structures to better plan the growing season.

Similar struggles for non-hierarchical structures and participatory democracy were reported in the Occupy movement. While many participants claimed that these structures fostered a sense of connectedness, understanding, and an opportunity to learn new organizational skills (Roberts, 2012), some critics scrutinized Occupy for its taking participatory structure to an extreme (Sorkin, 2012; Knafo, 2012). Even

before Occupy, researcher Francesca Polletta (2002) found that relational social structures inevitably shape group practices and affect activists' ability to implement participatory democracy. She argued that these often invisible structures were most damaging when activists groups sought to integrate new members (for example, old friendships and cliques hinder the participation of new members). On a similar note, one participant of the PPG said:

There's always this problem in participatory democracy that you want to have completely open events where anyone can come and participate in the decision-making but it also means that you're starting from zero at every single meeting. Because every meeting you have a dozen people there who haven't heard any of the background and you spend the entire meeting explaining the background and there's no time to make any plans for the future. (PPG participant 5)

She said that members recognized this issue and applied some formal structure to the group by creating sub-committees and smaller groups to discuss their future direction. Likewise, several Occupy encampments, including Occupy Ann Arbor, faced a lack of coordination among movement leaders (Schulman, 2011). To prevent these logistical issues the assembly formed a scheduling committee to plan their food, events and communication with the public (Schulman, 2011). Smith and Glidden (2012) added that the acknowledgment of people's diverse abilities (e.g. leadership skills and expertise) is essential for sustaining individual participation and building movement power (Smith & Glidden, 2012). Altogether these experiences suggest that models such as consensus-based decision-making<sup>21</sup> and group organization have to be modified when problems arise. Furthermore, the formal organization of sub-committees with leaders can be used to plan particular actions.

#### **4.5 Privilege, group struggle and learning opportunities**

Although the PPG claimed to be participatory and inclusive to all, a few members expressed concerns over issues of representation. They were concerned that this group misrepresented Torontonians who struggle to access healthy food and other issues related to food insecurity. Toronto food activists speculated about the PPG members' socioeconomic backgrounds. One food activist speculated, "My guess is most of the people doing the Peas Garden were white and came from families that are relatively affluent. Comfortable. And their reason for growing food would not be because they have to stretch their limited budget to cover food" (Other activists 1). His comment claimed that the PPG members were privileged in terms of their affluence, which further suggests that they did not intimately understand the problems of food insecurity because they have not struggled with it. In discussing the gardeners'

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<sup>21</sup> Smith and Glidden (2012) argued that there are different forms of consensus processes which affect how activists engage in the movement as well as whom they might be excluding when they adopt particular forms.

socioeconomic backgrounds, one participant echoed this observation: “We were a relatively very privileged bunch of people—like mostly white, university educated. We weren’t the marginalized folks in the city who are actually hungry and to whom food justice is not just a phrase, but a lived reality they’re struggling with” (PPG participant 6). This led her to claim, “I didn’t think we were necessarily a very inclusive group”, meaning that the gardeners faced a lack of leadership by those most affected by food insecurity. Another PPG member argued that privilege was revealed during the PPG planting action, yet the group tried to subvert their power and privilege by choosing to highlight the struggle of Torontonians who do not have access to food. She explained: “There was a huge display of privilege... there was a lot of energy [that] wanted a stage to display. This was a beautiful stage [where] they saw the opportunity” (PPG participant 8).

Their commentary on privilege also touched upon a problem for food justice movements; namely, there has been a disparity between the perspective of the privileged and those who have experienced food insecurity. Another Toronto food activist stated, “Right now the food justice movement tends to be led, or the visible side of it, are your typical people with privilege—educated, white”, but these activists should enable those who struggling to access food to speak up, such as “people with low-income, racialized people” and “people with mental health [and] addictions issues” (Other activists 5). Scholars such as Slocum (2006) argued that privilege has been a problem for food movements because privileged people tend to dominate leadership roles. She referenced American food movements where those who have experienced food insecurity tended to be the ‘objects’ of food movements but not the leaders of it. She also referred to indigenous peoples, Latinas, African descendants, single mothers, and people working for low wages as marginalized peoples who are most affected by food insecurity (Slocum, 2006).

Struggles concerning the misrepresentation of marginalized peoples were also observed in the Occupy movement. Critics of the Occupy encampments claimed that people of privilege led the decision-making so they reproduced power struggles within the movement (Farrow, 2011; Kilibarda, 2012). For example, Rezaee (2011) noted that the activists who led Occupy Vancouver’s committees and general assemblies were largely university educated and did not sleep at the encampment, whereas most of the people who stayed overnight and participated in more communal activities (food, cleaning up, peace-keeping, etc.) were lower-income earners and often homeless. He suggested that in order to subvert power activists must bring these power dynamics into view and have honest discussions about their privilege. Occupy Vancouver established an anti-oppression committee to address and discuss issues of classism, sexism, ableism and more (Kilibarda, 2012; Rezaee, 2011). Likewise, in Kilibarda’s interview with Kraus (2011),

she claimed that the free school initiative at Occupy Toronto was a space where activists discussed critical reflections on the power dynamics within the 99%. So while the dominance of privileged people has been a problem for food movements and Occupy, observers of Occupy encampments have observed that these issues could be discussed openly in activist groups, which would begin to address them.

What is more, participants commented on this problem by suggesting that those who are privileged could still occupy leadership roles in food movements in different capacities. A PPG gardener remarked that privileged people could be advantageous to food movements by fostering gardening activism that the general public is not used to seeing:

What we're doing is we're trying as a group to leverage privilege, and the University of Toronto is privileged. And the student body that came out of it was predominately Caucasian and it gave an image to gardening that not a lot of people had seen before. Privileged people who can easily go to whole foods and but they're choosing to struggle and fight it out. (PPG participant 8)

One food activist directly stated, "It's not to say that folks with privilege shouldn't be involved. It's the opposite. Folks with privilege absolutely need to be especially when it's well meaning" (Other activists 5). As well, she further claimed that privileged people could help with direct actions that have certain risks, such as getting arrested if they chose to do so. She said, "the people who don't have the same kind of risk, who are more privileged, who will likely feel more comfortable to confront directly the authorities—they can probably pay bail, or their families can help them pay bail, if they face that kind of repercussion" (Other activists 5). All in all, activists and PPG members suggested that people of privilege could still occupy roles in food movements but these groups must create spaces where activists discussed critical reflections on the modes of exclusion within the 99%.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

PPG participants experimented with reclaiming the commons. Inspired by Occupy's prefiguration of communal living, the PPG collective tested participatory democratic structures such as community provisioning, communal ownership of land and free distribution of food. The PPG's prefiguration of alternative food production found similarities with theoretical perspectives on 'reclaiming' the commons that has been traced to the expropriation of the commons, as discussed by Marx and Thirsk. Scholars such as Johnston have also argued that the contemporary struggle for communal land and communal ways of providing food subsistence challenge commodification and corporate-state managerialism. The PPG participants commented on explicitly critiques were largely a reaction to the privatization of land, commodification of food and divisive models of food production. Overall, the PPG's experiment with the

commons, as with the Occupy movement, intended to restate a revolutionary aim to value the need for subsistence for the 99%.

It was also apparent that the PPG members' attempt to create an inclusive and participatory structure did not go without some challenges. One PPG gardener said that she disagreed with the lead organizer's leadership style because it discouraged other people from making decisions in the group. As well, outside criticism of the group centered on the issue of privilege. Some Toronto food activists saw that the PPG did not represent those of the 99% who are most impacted by food insecurity. Experiences in Occupy and earlier social movements suggested that applying formal structures to participatory democratic groups could be useful. For example, the breakdown of large groups into smaller sub-committees could allow more participation from marginalized groups and new members. Some PPG participants and activists also believed that those who are privileged could occupy leadership roles in food movements in different capacities. Nevertheless, the PPG aimed to create a space for discussion and experimentation with a communal social structure.



## CHAPTER FIVE: THE PEOPLE’S PEAS GARDEN EVICTION

“Activist groups get repressed. Power systems don’t just pat them on the head”. (Chomsky, 2012a)

### 5.1 Eviction

Maintenance workers from the Parks Division arrived to evict the People’s Peas Garden on the morning of September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2012. It was only by chance that a member of the PPG was walking by Queen’s Park when she witnessed the workers throwing out the plants. She asked the workers to stop removing the garden but they continued to go through with the eviction (PPG participant 1). She cried in frustration and called another member of the PPG to come witness the eviction. They took photos of workers placing the plants into garbage bins and placing sod on top of the former garden area (see Figures 12 and 13) (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a). One participant estimated “close to 10 Parks staff involved in the destruction of the garden, including 2 trucks” (PPG participant 2).



**Figure 12.** Photo of eviction taken by PPG members. (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a)

PPG participants took to social media to spread the word about the eviction. They blamed the municipal government for destroying the garden, lamenting that officials are “hiding behind their desk[s] ordering

the workers to destroy whatever hope we have left” (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a). Another participant reacted by posting ‘before’ and ‘after’ photos on the Occupy Gardens Toronto *Facebook* page (see Figure 14) to contrast a few people enjoying the PPG during the growing season with the evicted garden after the Parks Division staff covered it with new grass. The ‘after’ photo featured a sarcastic remark: “Thanks City of Toronto Parks... it’s so beautiful!” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012a).

The majority of PPG participants remain unaware of who ordered the eviction or how the municipal government came to that decision. The writer of one prominent article published in *Toronto Media Cooperative* article declared that the order was given from Parks Division Director, Richard Ubbens (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a). Another participant claimed, “It was the Parks and Rec committee official who told some city workers to go and rip it up that day, and they never really told us, but tried to make it seem like word came up from above” (PPG participant 6). The PPG participants directed their frustration at Ubbens and the municipal government for evicting the PPG without any prior notice. A non-participant of the PPG from Washington started a petition on *Change.org* to send to Ubbens, with the request to “Stop the removal of a free food garden in park limits”, which 183 people signed (Hanson, 2012).



**Figure 13.** ‘Before’ and ‘after’ photos posted on Occupy Gardens Toronto’s social media after the PPG eviction.  
(Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2012a)

Ubbens wrote a response to the online petition in an attempt to explain why the Parks Division evicted the garden. The response was published in *NOW Magazine’s* on October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2012 (Ubbens, 2012). He prefaced the letter by claiming that Toronto has cultivated a “very successful and much-appreciated Community Garden Program” that has produced “tens of thousands of kilograms of food annually”. He further stated that the Parks Division chose to evict the garden on September 28<sup>th</sup> because it was part of the department’s annual fall cleanup. The primary reason for evicting the PPG was because it did not

“comply with city policies and process to ensure the safety and pleasant park access by all people”. Furthermore, he wrote that the city was unable to notify gardeners about the eviction because they did not have contact information for the organizers, yet he also stated that when evicting the garden Parks staff advised PPG members that the garden could be moved to an approved community garden location. PPG participants deemed the claims to be untrue. One member believed that government officials were well aware of their signs with their contact information posted around the PPG. He explained, “We have evidence to prove that in that the Parks Ambassador [Troy Ford] was holding our sign as they were destroying our garden” (PPG participant 2). This PPG member also pointed out that the city could have put a notice through a physical sign or note by the garden in the same way that they do for other evictions. Another PPG member expressed similar frustration, “As far as we know they made absolutely no effort to contact us. And material had gone all over the city with contact information for the garden, it wasn’t a secret of how to get in touch with the people who put in the garden” (PPG participant 1).

## **5.2 Tensions over the occupation of park space**

The eviction is best understood as the culmination of ongoing power struggles between the municipal government and park users, namely, who has the final decision over public space. Researchers such as Certomà (2011) have argued that the government regulations and by-laws in public parks reflect their ability to control society at large. She explained that governmental institutions have historically used these public spaces to affirm political stances. For instance, the creation and maintenance of these spaces was to show the public that the state values their constituents’ recreation and is willing to invest time and money in order to preserve this. Negri et al. (2010) understood public parks as spaces that are “controlled, captured, and exploited – this has to do with the circulation of money, police presence, the normalisation of life forms, the exploitation of productivity, repression, the reining in of subjectivities”. In other words, the state’s control over public land and society at large has been a part of its apparatus of power involving the increase of capital accumulation, use of the police force to defend the interests of the 1%, influence over media, and so on.

Certomà’s argument that government control over public green spaces reflects broader patterns of institutional power was evident in the Parks Division’s stance on the PPG eviction. One departmental representative described the Parks Division’s relationship with the public as multi-faceted. One of their roles has been to “work with community members to help build capacity” for activities like community gardening, and “to demonstrate that they’re really in this for the long haul, that they’re in this for the right reasons, and that they have a governance structure that’s fair and accessible” (Municipal official 1).

Another role was to manage public parks for the public, which was made clear when the departmental representative said, “Who’s the steward of your park? Who makes it beautiful and accessible and usable and safe? That’s staff” (Municipal official 1). His view about the department’s role in keeping parks safe and accessible followed the same line of argumentation that the Parks Division Director stated in his response when he wrote that Toronto city policies “ensure the safety and pleasant park access by all people” (Ubbens, 2012). Likewise, another Parks representative stated that the public could “take an action role in the stewardship of our parks” but “they need to recognize that it’s public space and they need to engage with city staff in a productive way that acknowledges park staff as stewards of the public resource” (Municipal official 1). He elaborated on this point when he gave justification for the PPG eviction: “It contravenes the parks’ by-law and we as staff [are] stewards of the public resource. We cleared it with our council-delegated authority” (Municipal official 1). However, his justification clashed with members of the PPG who argued that Torontonians “are all stewards of this land” and they all have the right to food (PPG participant 8). Moreover, other participants expressed a desire to completely avoid governmental processes. One PPG participant stated: “We really wanted to encompass guerilla gardening, of doing it yourself. With the City of Toronto there’s a lot of administration behind these processes that can take a really long time, which isn’t necessarily efficient if people are hungry and they need to grow their own” (PPG participant 1). Thus, whereas the Park Division perceived the government to be the steward of these public spaces and council holds them accountable for their actions, PPG members argued that this amounts to exclusionary regulation and broader institutional power that has limited public participation in park spaces.

The struggle between PPG members and municipal officials was reflective of broader tensions over the occupation of public space. One PPG participant questioned the extent to which the public has access to parks: “It’s public space, but not really because there’s all these by-laws, and who has the right to use the city in ways that work for them?” (PPG participant 6). Other PPG members insisted that their planting action was to question the power held by the municipal administration through the city’s by-laws and governance structure. The lead organizer understood the government’s imposed ideology on the public when he stated that the PPG was “to challenge authority and the priorities of the established disorder of the mainstream culture” (PPG participant 2). When asked what he meant by authority, he responded:

A lot of laws have been created to regulate our behavior—what we can and cannot do in society. And then these laws are upheld by authority figures, people in positions of authority, whether that’s elected officials or administrators who are tasked with administering these laws, or, our police force. (PPG participant 2)

Thus this participant recognized that the government’s control over park space reflected its authoritative



control. What is more, it was apparent that Toronto municipal officials did not perceive the prolonged occupation of public space as democratic protest. A past high-level official from the City of Toronto government argued:

There's a tension [in] the philosophy — that public space is anybody's to use and using it in a way that excludes some people from it. Occupy for example, brilliant move in making a really important point. But in the end, the people involved in Occupy have to accept that at some point in time they don't have the right to exclude everybody else from their space. (Municipal official 2)

The representative from the Parks Division claimed a similar perspective when he stated, “At what point does your message get diluted or harmed by other actions that you take that actually harm the public good? So yes, occupy space, occupy a park, but to what end—what's your political point? Who are you convincing by this? When is the time to retreat and take other tactics?” (Municipal official 1). These two quotations show that municipal officials recognized the occupation of space as political demonstration, but they believed this tactic had limitations because they saw the prolonged occupation to be an exclusive use of public space. The Parks representative maintained that instead of planting without permission that the PPG participants’ “appropriate resource was to go to their elected representative—a councilor and say this is what we've tried to do... that's the democratic process and they circumvented that—took [sic] the decisions in their own hands and broke the law” (Municipal official 1). In contrast, PPG participants argued that the prolonged occupation of these areas made the political point to refuse the legitimacy of the existing political, social and economic order. As one member said of the PPG planting action: “This is a show of how we want to participate in democracy. Not just at the ballot box but in how I engage my community and how I engage the land that we live on every day” (PPG participant 9). PPG members believed that the current avenues for democratic decision-making such as voting were limiting and failed to directly address control over public parks. Thus, they perceived the occupation of parks land and guerilla gardening to be tactics that experimented with participatory decision-making.

Tensions over the occupation of park space were also seen in the Occupy movement, yet observers argue that occupation of public parks and guerilla gardening offer ways to challenge the existing political system from the outside. Kunstler (2011) argued that the shutdown of Occupy encampments by governments changed the Occupiers' message because it forced them to conduct more acceptable and conventional forms of political demonstration. She suggested that the prolonged occupation was an empowering way to give voice to the 99%. Likewise, PPG members and scholars saw guerilla gardening as an empowering way to challenge the existing political system from the outside in. McKay (2011) argued that guerilla gardening offers a “critical rejection of dominant society... and an energetically

creative social mobilization around questions of land” (195). On a similar note, Certomà (2011) wrote that guerilla gardening is necessary because it increases civic awareness and requires people to address social, political and environmental issues directly. As discussed earlier, PPG members believed that their guerilla gardening not only challenged the City of Toronto Community Gardens Program, but it also provoked some Torontonians to think about inequalities in the broader food system. Thus, PPG members wanted their guerilla gardening and prolonged occupation of Queen’s Park to make an unconventional political statement; namely, to refuse the legitimacy of the existing political, social and economic order and to reclaim common space for all Torontonians.

### **5.3 Eviction rally and Councilor Wong-Tam’s proposal**

The PPG evictees held a “Right to Food Rally - No Garden is Illegal!” event in front of City Hall on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012, with the hope of spreading awareness about the eviction and reclaiming the right to garden without permission. A video online revealed about 10-12 people who came holding signs such as a banner that read “Peas and lovage in soildarity... Occupy Gardens” (as seen in video by Tdotgardner84, 2013a). One PPG member with a ukulele sang “Rest in peace” in reference to the evicted garden, and shouted, “Amid global food crisis City of Toronto workers destroy free community food garden right before harvest” to people walking into City Hall. There was a short interaction with Councilor Doug Ford of Etobicoke North who thought that the group was referring to a garden behind the City Hall building that he was involved in implementing. When members said they are rallying about the PPG on Queen’s Park, he remarked “I’m all for gardens” and walked away (Tdotgardner84, 2013a). Overall though, it appeared that this protest failed to garner significant public support.

Despite their small turnout, the group received a formal response from Councilor Kristyn Wong-Tam of Toronto-Centre/Rosedale who stopped by the rally and spoke to them. A video online showed her speaking directly to the group where she explained that her office did not know that the PPG existed but they could have offered to help the gardeners had they known about the garden before the eviction (Tdotgardner84, 2013a). She explained,

The first time that I was notified that there was a garden at all was the day that it was being tornout... what I’d like to say is that if people are interested in building community gardens, I want to work with you. We can find the appropriate garden spaces and we can even bring out city resources... your objectives, which is to green the city, to build local food security — is our objective as well. (Tdotgardner84, 2013a)

Wong-Tam’s response differed from the Parks Division in that she made an effort to meet PPG participants in person and addressed their interest in fostering food security in Toronto. However, similar



to other municipal officials, she suggested finding an “appropriate” garden space for the PPG, which meant that the gardeners were still subject to rules and parameters determined by the government. Therefore, although Wong-Tam may have exemplified good intentions in trying to console the group and find an alternative location to replant, her response reveals regulatory power held by the government. One PPG participant responded to Wong-Tam, “If we went and collectively replanted that garden, you would make sure that it wouldn’t get taken out? Like if we went back to the exact location, redid it right now, that would last?” (Tdotgardner84, 2013a). The Councilor replied, “It wouldn’t necessarily last *per se*... we can tour the various locations that you’d like to work on and then we can identify what are the appropriate spaces and who is going to maintain and take care of it”. It is evident, then, that municipal officials were keen on holding onto their power and they did not address issues of exclusionary governmental regulation to gardening, as well as more public decision-making ability over public park spaces.

Following the rally, Wong-Tam and her Constituency and Planning Assistant organized a meeting with participants of the PPG on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 (Municipal official 3). In the meeting she proposed the idea to plant in a lower-income community, such as Moss Park. Her assistant explained: “We heard them quite clearly, that they wanted to create a political statement to the province about food security. And there seemed to be consensus about everyone wanting to help communities in need” (Municipal official 3). He explained that they encouraged PPG members to contact their office in the future but they received only one other communication from the group that was in the form of an invitation to a scheduled protest.

#### **5.4 Replanting the PPG**

The collective replanted the PPG on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013 in the same area of Queen’s Park. On April 14<sup>th</sup>, a member made an announcement on the Occupy Gardens Toronto *Facebook* page that they would be replanting the PPG as part of their “Free Food For All Festival”, held in conjunction with annual Toronto May Day events (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2013). Their promotion for the re-planting action clearly outlined that the day would consist of a replanting from 1-4pm, after which they would join the May Day March with other activists. The approach continued the use of puns and playful language, but there was a more confrontational tone as group members made continued reference to the eviction of the first PPG. For example, the group’s *Facebook* page stated that the PPG was “destroyed” and “tastelessly and violently uprooted last fall on the eve of harvest” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2013). They blamed the municipal government and they also encouraged people to contact Richard Ubbens, Kristyn Wong-Tam, as well as the Toronto Community Gardens Program coordinator Solomon Boyé, in a non-confrontational

manner: “Peas bee nice, these are hard working people and deserve respect. Simply state that access to healthy food is a basic human right, and the reality of food insecurity in this world” (Occupy Gardens Toronto, 2013).

Participants began their “Free Food For All Festival” with the distribution of free chili on the south lawn of Queen’s Park (Bettencourt-McCarthy, 2013). Speakers from indigenous communities discussed colonialist thought and behaviour with the audience and made a call for solidarity with indigenous peoples in Canada (as seen in the video by Tdotgardner84, 2013b). Others performed musical pieces including an unidentified hip-hop artist who sang lyrics such as, “Food politics is simple extortion/Liberate the seeds/We need more than a portion/Take back the wealth of those that’s exploiting” and “Liberate the plants from corporate control” (Smile, 2013). Then, members of the PPG held a performance of their self-written play, *No Garden is Illegal*, about the birth, life, death and re-birth of the PPG (PPG participant 6). The play recalled the significant historical moments surrounding the group’s first planting action with an emphasis on the eviction. Participants dressed up as vegetables they grew, as well as animals (e.g. bees and worms) to create an allegory of the garden events. The animals told the story, rather than the people involved in the real-life events, which one participant claimed was similar to the style of George Orwell’s novel *Animal Farm* (PPG participant 9).

The play revealed the group’s evolved attitude toward the garden and Parks Division officials. For example, the narrator opened the performance declaring that the PPG had “real food grown with real love” but the “harvest and seed-saving plans were ruined” by the Parks Division’s removal of the garden, at which point the audience booed. The narrator of the play displayed a very positive attitude of the garden, saying lines like, “The garden, though tiny, is triumphant!”, and “We’ve already won, the seeds are planted waiting for the sun”. So, despite the removal of the PPG, the actors in the play argued that the garden had a positive impact for the people involved in the planting. One performer made a parody of the Parks Division’s approach to gardening when he dressed up as an outdoor worker and sang about the department’s “14-step process” where people “wait and wait and wait some more” for the city administration to process their community garden application (as seen in video by Tdotgardner, 2013b). One member suggested that the play once again captured their political message to illustrate that guerilla gardening should not be illegal because people should have the right to grow food for themselves (PPG participant 6).



**Figure 14.** Children participating in the re-planting of the PPG on May 1, 2013. (Photo still from video by Smile, 2013)

The group replanted the PPG immediately after the play (as seen in Figure 15). This time around they put soil on a large tarp and carried it over to the northern lawn of Queen’s Park where they planted. About 10 people moved it to the northern lawn (as seen in video by Tdotgardner, 2013b). Afterward, they dug up the patches of lawn that the Parks Division had put in September 2012, transferred the new soil and planted seedlings. But again the garden was evicted, this time within a few short days (PPG participant 2). Bettencourt-McCarthy (2013) wrote that an official from Queen’s Park told her that they allowed the group to put on their event but they would remove the garden immediately afterward. Despite the failed attempt to replant and sustain the garden, the lead organizer deemed it to be a “huge success” and another stated that there were 500 attendees (PPG participant 6). From viewing two videos of the event (i.e. Smile, 2013, and Tdotgardner, 2013b) there appeared to be more attendees than the first planting of the PPG, which indicated that the attention generated from the first eviction might have helped the collective to gain more popular support.

No one has tried to replant the garden since the second iteration was removed in May 2013, but there has been interest by non-participants of the PPG to document their guerilla gardening. In addition to this thesis, a student from Ryerson University completed a photo exhibit of PPG members (Virag, 2014), and there is still active communication about Toronto food activism on their social media outlets. For instance, the *Facebook* group, Occupy Gardens Toronto had 674 members, and their *Facebook* page

(where people receive updates from them in their newsfeed) of the same name had 2248 ‘likes’ as of June 1, 2014. Yet, even with their considerable online participation, one member stated that the group never developed a strong volunteer base to carry on their vision of guerilla gardening. She said, “We had a very small core of people who were actually doing the organizing. Even though we had like 1000 people on *Facebook* and almost that many on our e-mail list” (PPG participant 6). Her comments brought up the concern that the group’s online presence was fairly passive, and even though they had many people online, they did not actually contribute to the group’s activities. In contrast, another member said that people “move[d] in and out” of the PPG organizing, but they did not lose energy about issues raised in the PPG; rather, they moved on to “different issues that need attention” (PPG participant 9), such as the Toronto Seed Library.

### **5.5 The Toronto Seed Library**

The Toronto Seed Library (TSL) was a well-received offshoot of the PPG that continues to exist today. After the first eviction in the fall of 2012, several PPG members got together with students from UofT and York University to establish free seed libraries. This new group envisioned “a network of seed libraries across the Seedy of Toronto, inside Toronto Public Libraries, schools, community centres, places of worship, and other public space” (Toronto Seed Library, 2014), which obviously followed a different tactic to political organizing in comparison to guerilla gardening. The lead organizer remarked that some PPG gardeners shifted their focus to the TSL because the municipal government barred any Occupy-related activity, so they had to change their tactics. He further explained:

We didn't see it as 'being accepted' by existing institutions, but rather transforming existing institutions to fortify the commons... so we haven't given up any of our radical positions, I still advocate guerrilla gardening and free food for all, but I find this platform—the Toronto Seed Library—to be more family friendly, expansive and accessible. (PPG participant 2)

Therefore he still wanted to reform public spaces to experiment with the commons and to educate Torontonians on food justice as he had done with the PPG. Another PPG member echoed a similar sentiment that they wanted to move on to a new tactic. She said: “We tried to put [the PPG] back in again and the city responded almost immediately. So I’m not so much involved with the People’s Peas Garden but I’m involved with Occupy Gardens and the projects that have come out of that” (PPG participant 5), to which she mentioned the TSL. She added that she made her own seed library that was a direct offshoot from the PPG: “I wouldn’t have a branch of the Seed Library in my church if it hadn’t been for that garden”. Additionally, the lead organizer observed that the TSL “spoke to a lot of people and is more accessible for mass participation, than is the tactic of illegal gardening which intimidates some people

[sic]” (PPG participant 2). Their effort with the TSL has culminated in over 13 branches in the Greater Toronto Area<sup>22</sup>, including branches in Toronto Public Libraries, as well as partnerships and support from local, national and international seed-saving organizations (PPG participants 2 and 5).

One Toronto food activist remarked that the TSL might gain more traction in the Toronto food movement than the PPG because “it’s just about capturing people’s imagination around a particular idea... we should use our libraries and that infrastructure to educate people about community gardens and seeds, that’s really positive” (Other activists 6). Her commentary suggested that the TSL is much more feasible to the public and municipal government because it does not involve radical, illegal action. She also mentioned that this initiative was “positive” which hinted toward the idea that it was less confrontational to municipal officials than the PPG. In fact, their involvement with Toronto Libraries did not directly involve the city administration since the group asked for consent from librarians (PPG participant 2). This may indicate that the TSL is less radical than the PPG because it did not directly confront the political order and issues on public land use, but the lead organizer claimed that it is radical in the sense that TSL branches transform existing institutions to fortify a commons. He explained that similar to the PPG the TSL has encouraged free food distribution for all and advocated for principles of democratic participation and communal ownership in response to the corporate control of food (PPG participant 2). So their inability to sustain the PPG shows that governments might not accept the forcible reclamation of public space; namely, the occupation of public parks for guerilla gardening. Their subsequent success with the TSL suggests that activism that works within existing political and social institutions will have greater success because it is less confrontational.

The PPG’s move to organize the TSL had similarities with critics of the Occupy movement who claimed that it was beneficial for Occupiers to move on to new political tactics. As Chomsky explained in an interview:

Tactics are tactics. They have a kind of half-life. They don’t go on, and you can’t use them forever. They lost their efficacy. They just don’t achieve anything after a certain point. Even just the actual ‘occupy’ tactic couldn’t really be carried on for very long—like, in most places, you couldn’t carry it on over winter. It’s just impossible. So I think a move had to be made... it was beginning to be made, towards diversifying the activities, reaching out beyond the kind of people who were able to sit in Zuccotti Park, or Dewey Square, or wherever, to communities, to other sectors of the population, and trying actually to engage the ‘99 percent’ in activities and long-term programs. (Chomsky, 2012c, 118)

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<sup>22</sup> As of September 2014 (Toronto Seed Library, 2014).

In other words, he remarked that occupying is just a tactic that is useful for a while but it would have been too difficult to sustain it. He added that those who participated in the original Occupy encampments have continued to organize new tactics from inner-city neighbourhoods organizing to rural farming. He argued that this evolution of political organizing toward long-term programming was an achievement in itself (Ruggiero, 2013). In contrast, one researcher of the Occupy movement argued that confrontational demonstrations outside the political system are necessary for broader change. Wight (2012) wrote:

The violence produced by the global economic system on the 99% may well only be overturned by more direct and overt forms of action. Protest needs a voice and riots are a class phenomenon that expresses that voice. As long as the 1% can continue to dance the night away they won't listen to anything but the music. Indeed: riot, why wouldn't you? (Wight, 2012, 165)

Wight argued that it was necessary for Occupiers to confront the existing political order through their prolonged occupations because it captured the attention of the state. Similarly, Tormey (2012) wrote that Occupy provided evidence that “the paradigm of representative politics, the politics of political parties, elections and voting is on the wane” and “only a ‘disorganised’ repertoire of direct and immediate political actions enables people to be ‘heard’ as opposed to being subsumed within the machinic meta-mobilism of ‘normal’ politics” (134). In comparison to the PPG, it is clear that participants moved on to TSL organizing because they wanted to create a long-term program to spread awareness about food justice issues. This indicates that the PPG changed their tactics to work within the existing system if they wanted to create something that could be sustained and win popular support; yet, it was not as confrontational to the existing sociopolitical order. One PPG member argued that activists “need to be working within the current system and also outside of it to continue its evolution” which she described as a “push and pull” with the existing sociopolitical order (PPG participant 9). From that quotation it appeared that PPG participants oscillated between a radical, confrontational action like the PPG, versus the decision to work from within existing social institutions in a less confrontational way so that they could sustain it. The choice to move on to new tactics was beneficial to sustain their activism, but it denied the confrontation with governmental officials, which some critics have said was necessary for broader change.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The PPG eviction reflected ongoing power struggles between the municipal government and users of public parks. The Parks Division evicted the garden because it did not comply with city policies. Researchers such as Certomà (2011) contended that governmental regulation of public parks is reflective of their ability to control society at large. Likewise, PPG participants viewed the City of Toronto's



institutional regulation of spaces for gardening as a way of shaping how the public behaves and they wanted to challenge that power. In response to the PPG, the Parks Division claimed that they have always been the steward of these public spaces and justified their authority by explaining that council holds them accountable for their actions. But PPG members claimed that the existing political system limits their decision-making power. It appeared, then, that PPG members used their guerilla gardening as a symbol to refuse the legitimacy of the existing political, social and economic order.

Their emphasis on replanting in Queen's Park in order to make a symbolic political statement to city officials was also apparent in their discussion with councilor Wong-Tam. A PPG member stressed planting a symbolic garden in a highly visible area, suggesting that they wanted to use guerilla gardening as an empowering political strategy that challenged the existing political system from outside of it. The replanting of the PPG showed the collective's interest in making this very political statement again, but the garden was evicted immediately. Based on their move to organize the TSL, it is clear that participants moved on from the PPG because they wanted to create a sustained educational action about food justice issues, as guerilla gardening on Queen's Park was not a viable strategy in the long-term. PPG participants oscillated between a radical, confrontational action like the PPG, versus the decision to work from within existing social institutions in a less confrontational way so that they could sustain it. This change in tactics is similar to critics like Chomsky said that occupying was useful for a while but it would have been too difficult to sustain it, so it was beneficial for Occupiers to move on to newer tactics. In contrast, other researchers wrote that radical and confrontational tactics are necessary to refuse the legitimacy of the existing political, social and economic order. Therefore, the PPG gardeners' choice to move on to new tactics was beneficial to sustain their food activism, but it denied the confrontation with governmental officials that could lead to broader change. The concluding chapter of this study will look at other responses from Toronto food activists and determine the PPG's legacy in the Toronto food movement.

## CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

### 6.1 The legacy of the PPG

What is the legacy of the People's Peas Garden? PPG members were hopeful that their garden made some Torontonians question the utility of guerilla gardening and inspired them to do their own acts of gardening. Several PPG members believed that the garden was successful in raising the profile of these issues within local media. For example, the lead organizer claimed that "mass awareness of food security and the food crisis" was communicated through the media as a result of the PPG. He also remarked that Toronto media were not only reporting on their gardening but "they were reporting on why we were gardening" (PPG participant 2). Another member claimed, "I haven't had any negative feedback... I imagine there's some here and there. But I've only seen the community grow and get more and more engaging, and more honest and truthful with each other" (Occupy Gardens participant 9).

However, food activists who did not participate in the PPG but were aware of its story had mixed reactions to the planting action. They were concerned about the relevancy of guerilla gardening to defy Toronto municipal officials considering the growing opportunities to advocate for food justice within existing political institutions. Other activists were concerned about the PPG's legacy in the political environment because they believed that long-term political change in Toronto should seek changes in policy. Still, some activists said they would like to see more guerilla gardens like the PPG. This chapter will discuss what kind of legacy of the PPG had on its participants as well as Toronto food activists and municipal officials outside of the group. Additionally, this chapter will consider the possibilities of political resistance that have emerged from the PPG.

### 6.2 Political goals

Participant interviews with PPG members and food activists revealed polarizing views on the gardeners' defiance of the City of Toronto's authority. The lead organizer believed that their action "put a little bit of pressure on the city, as well as embarrassment, and maybe a little bit of shame. Saying well maybe Toronto isn't a leader in urban agriculture if this is how they're doing it, right?" (PPG participant 2). But this decision to confront city politicians was criticized by a long-time activist of the Toronto food movement. He claimed:

We're busting our rear ends really to get community gardening established as a practice within the city, as an institution. We've been trying to improve the relationship with the Parks and Recreation, which has not been easy by any stretch of the imagination. So

something like that that just—openly and publicly defies authority, at the city level not the federal or provincial, wasn't what the movement needed. (Other activists 1)

He argued it was problematic that PPG members were interested in making a “theatrical” political statement to openly defy the community garden approval process and the municipal government. The result, this long-time activist explained, was that the PPG “marginalized urban agriculture at the very moment when we have opportunities to expand it” (Other activists 1). He claimed that the best way to affect change is to first try to work within the existing political structure. “I think they should work wherever they can be most effective. If it's inside the political system they should do that”. He also believed that the City of Toronto has already made opportunities within the existing political system to advocate for food justice. For example, he pointed to the Toronto Food Policy Council who hosts meetings with the public and advocates for policy change. Yet, a different food activist agreed with the PPG's aim to defy city politicians in order to make a symbolic political statement. She claimed, “I think it was more to send a message, and in that case they were successful. They're going to antagonize some people in the process but I think in social movements that's par for the course” (Other activists 5). Likewise, another food activist stated, “I agree with the tactic, because I feel like if they hadn't gone to this public space in Queen's Park they never wouldn't have gotten noticed... I feel sometimes you gotta do something drastic to get attention of media and government” (Other activists 4). Together, these activists suggested that PPG members attempted foremost to send a message to municipal officials and their defiance was necessary to draw attention to their cause.

While some food activists interviewed recognized that PPG members tried to make a politicized statement on food issues in the city, they were not sure whether the collective made an impression on the municipal government that led to any tangible political outcomes or policy change. One activist explained:

I'm not sure it positively impacted the political environment or political process. I'm not sure they were the group of stakeholders that led to any particular policy change... I haven't seen that group of people around the table of partners and advocates that have actually contributed to new urban policy... I think in the end maybe they were just more of an irritation to city staff than having done something that made people go, 'Aha! We probably need different city policy to take into account these kinds of activities'. (Other activists 6)

Another activist corroborated this view by stating that PPG members should have pursued change within the existing political process. She argued: “The attention that you get from an action, like the Occupy garden... it needs a follow-up for policy and political change. I think just doing it and having it pulled out—just leaving it at that won't get you the change you're looking for” (Other activists 5). Two PPG

members mentioned their hope that the PPG could build a guerilla gardening movement that would put pressure on the City of Toronto government to eventually “be able to see through [a] piece of legislation” or policy change to give the public more direct access to land for gardening (PPG participants 5 and 9). But they saw guerilla gardening as a way to put pressure on the political system. One PPG participant argued: “People who were like you’re never going to change anything. Or, why are you complaining that way? Why can’t you just do it by the book? The story of the garden got them going, oh why did they rip it out? Why didn’t they talk to you? It got them asking questions” (PPG participant 9). As mentioned, their activism in the Toronto Seed Library showed they wanted to move on from the PPG and to diversify their tactics as they worked with librarians, but in such a way to cultivate principles of participatory democracy and communal ownership of food.

In addition to the lack of tangible political outcomes, some activists and PPG members believed that the group should have been grounded in the nearby culture and community. Kristyn Wong-Tam’s proposal to plant in a lower-income community, which the PPG did not seize, suggests that the group was not grounded in the nearby community like many community gardens in Toronto. One PPG member said that if they were to pursue this kind of planting action again then she would like to communicate with existing community organizations. “We didn’t build strong relationships with the kinds of people I wanted to build strong relationships with—which is other grassroots activist groups who do understand our radicalist politics”, she explained. The PPG also stood in contrast to other community garden groups who typically involve individuals and groups from the surrounding neighbourhood. Baker’s research (2004) claimed that community gardening in Toronto is largely a place-based social movement whereby gardeners are involved in “shaping their community” (305), particularly for marginalized ethnocultural groups. Baker further explained that neighbours have come together to access land and gardening resources, which have in turn led to the effective mobilization of certain communities in Toronto. Thus, in contrast, the PPG case study shows risks of creating a symbolic and political act without developing relationships with the surrounding neighbourhood. Had they contacted neighbourhood groups and community organizations that had similar political affiliations they may have gained more popular support and this would have been particularly useful after the first PPG eviction.

Food activists also recognized that the PPG did not lead to a sustained garden, yet many interviewees felt that guerilla gardening, in general, still has potential. One explained, “It was a political stance not to like formally request a community garden [sic]. I just thought in the end, that’s fine, but that’s the way to get a more established garden” (Other activists 6). She later stated, “Along Bloor street people were planting,

between Bloor and University, so the sort of high-end part of Bloor street... I think guerilla gardening is a great civic activity” (Other activists 6). She did not oppose guerilla gardening but she said that the PPG did not successfully lead to a sustained garden on Queen’s Park. Another activist said that the political outcome they desired depended on the goal they sought: “If you’re looking to make a message then yeah guerilla gardening will do it. But if you want to have a long-term community garden then you need to do the groundwork of establishing relationships and seeing what other uses might be contested for that space” (Other activists 5). Likewise, some food activists agreed that guerilla gardening on Queen’s Park was not appropriate. One PPG member justified their choice in location by stating: “I think that most often guerilla gardening is definitely done in more low-profile spaces specifically so that it’s not destroyed. It depends on your goals... the garden was very small. The focus was not to have a highly producing garden (PPG participant 4). Thus, again, PPG members wanted to put forth the idea that small acts of guerilla gardening could be pursued in highly visible areas to raise political awareness. She added that the idea was to make statement on why they gardened. Clearly, the idea of the PPG was to emphasize a political statement on exclusionary governmental regulation to gardening and to draw potential to guerilla gardening on politicized areas.

### **6.3 Subsequent initiatives**

Several PPG members argued that the experience of the garden successfully ‘seeded’ subsequent urban agriculture initiatives in Toronto. The lead organizer claimed, “We very much popularized the idea of guerilla gardening within the city and I’ve heard of many other people who have since gone on to plant many guerilla gardens around the city of Toronto, and other cities as well” (PPG participant 2). For example, the Scadding Court Community Centre by Alexandra Park created an Occupy Gardens Toronto plot that was established in March 2013. Together the Urban Agriculture Coordinator of Scadding Court and former PPG members cultivated a “Free Food For All Community Garden” to engage gardeners who cannot afford or otherwise access an allotment garden, as well as to encourage passersby to forage from the plot (PPG participants 2 and 5). The garden is still maintained by PPG participants today (PPG participant 5). Another participant was so inspired by the PPG that she planted on the Saint Stephen-in-the-Fields’ church property in May 2013 (PPG participant 5). Despite the decline in interest to replant the PPG itself, some members remained hopeful that the PPG planting action could inspire more guerilla gardening in Toronto and elsewhere. One PPG member pointed out that people outside of the group were quick to deem it as a failure since the PPG was evicted. She explained, “When that one action fails, people think the mandate fails, but it doesn’t because also with this movement is the respect of time—that things are growing organically” (PPG participant 8). She further explained:

Although the Peas garden was a project that dissipated in terms of its action right now, it's still the stepping stones to what we've been building and how we are moving forward... so my role is actually to link our experience with the Peas garden so people are using it as a constant case study going forward and how we keep moving. (PPG participant 8)

This participant was confident that the PPG was not a failure, but an experience that people could look to in order to discuss the challenges of guerilla gardening, which will in turn help people to conduct their own gardening and related activism. Another participant claimed that the PPG brought like-minded activists together to support other urban agriculture groups in Toronto. She explained, "In Occupy Gardens we would sometimes help with other community gardens that were legal and established. I remember we went to Christie Pitts Park and we helped clean up their garden there because it was in need of some lovin' [sic]" (PPG participant 3). Thus, some members of the collective claimed that the PPG increased solidarity among urban gardening groups.

#### **6.4 Popular support**

Generally, food activists and PPG members believed that the PPG raised important questions surrounding food justice and exclusionary regulation over public land. One activist said,

I think it's been really effective in getting attention in the need for food justice, for example, and the need for reimagining our public spaces... it's a very direct way to ask the question—is there another way that we can use space?... this is a great example of a direct action approach to speaking directly to government and the public about the need to focus on food justice, on access to food. So that's one approach by just going out and taking space. (Other activists 5)

Interestingly, one food researcher did not want to have an opinion on whether the public should plant on Queen's Park or not. In her words, "I don't really want to have an opinion on what anyone should do... I think that making a garden in Queen's Park is a really interesting form of speech, if you like. An interesting way of raising a range of interconnected issues, and connecting them is really useful" (Other activists 7). Therefore, she agreed that the PPG was successful in raising issues about the regulation of public land and access to food. Of course, some activists challenged this by asking whether the PPG's symbolic speech had an impact on the Toronto food movement. One activist said,

I guess it's just about capturing people's imagination around a particular idea. I felt there was a huge opportunity to capture people's imagination around a garden on Queen's Park and it didn't happen, right? There wasn't like a huge outcry, as far as I could tell, saying yes we should have a garden at Queen's Park... I didn't see that that was an outcome of their activity. (Other activists 6)

This participant remarked on how the group did not receive much popular support following the eviction of the PPG in September 2012. But she did not elaborate on the reasons why she believed that the group



did not capture people's imagination around the PPG. In response, the lead organizer claimed, "We've recruit[ed] and engaged many people—potentially hundreds of people who would've have otherwise known about it or seen the value or importance of the movement" (PPG participant 2). Yet, this claim is suspect because the photos and film footage of the PPG events generally did not show hundreds of people participating.

The discussion of popular support raised the question of whether the PPG received as much media attention as they had hoped. Many PPG participants were adamant that the overarching aim of the PPG was to garner media attention on food justice issues in Toronto. The majority of the articles on the PPG featured its eviction from Queen's Park. According to the lead organizer, the planting of the garden was mentioned in the *Toronto Star* (Li & Gillis, 2012) and on the front page of the *Metro*. During the growing season, an online blogger for *Rabble* wrote about their Summer Jam event (Kraus, 2012b). The PPG eviction was featured online on the *Globe and Mail* website (D'Aliesio, 2012), *Natural News* (Benson, 2012), and *Treehugger* (Gonzalez, 2012), and it was explained through the perspective of a PPG member on the *Toronto Media Co-operative* (Kearey-Moreland, 2012a). Their protest at City Hall on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012 was written about on *Digital Journal* (Mullins, 2012) and the replanting of the PPG was featured on the *Torontoist* website (Bettencourt-McCarthy, 2013). Overall the PPG received some local media coverage for their actions. However, group members argued that the media negatively portrayed the PPG as they failed to highlight the gardeners' social and political aims. One participant claimed that the media wanted to focus on "very linear conversations" (PPG participant 8), namely, they reported on basic event details and quantitative information as opposed the significance of planting the garden as a guerilla garden. Bettencourt-McCarthy's (2013) coverage on the replanting of the PPG had a bit more in-depth analysis of the group's vision by emphasizing the group's focus on reforming food politics in Toronto. She noted the group's playful use of puns, their general criticisms of the local and broader food system concerning the lack of access to healthy food, and that the group wanted to do this to give people an "opportunity to grow their own produce". Thus, overall the PPG received some attention but their goal to garner media coverage largely failed because it was little coverage and they did not critically discuss the PPG's cause.

Other PPG members believed that they captured people's imaginations, even if there were few. One said, "I think it brought together people who were more interested in direct action rather than lobbying or buying a space to have a garden" (PPG participant 3). Another member said, "I think it planted a lot of seeds in people's minds and it kind of made the idea of reclaiming space for public use more widespread

and easier to talk about maybe... on a grassroots level it had some impact” (PPG participant 3). So she suggested that the PPG sparked some conversations about guerilla gardening in grassroots Toronto food collectives and it might have made them consider the idea of ‘reclaiming’ public land for urban gardening. One food activist who did not participate in the PPG but visited the garden once discussed this very point. He said, “It caused a lot of people to question new things, new concepts. Like for instance, the legitimacy of taking a space that you don’t have official permission to plant but using that space anyway. It did for me—it definitely made me question” (Other activists 4). He expanded on this point:

Noam Chomsky said, I don’t want to quote him directly, but any kind of power has to be challenged and as long as someone can justify why they want to give someone an order to do something or not do something, they have to justify it. I think what the People’s Peas Garden did was it forced people to confront the reality of land usage and at least try to answer why or why they cannot use that space for community gardening. It’s different from other community gardens because it’s part of a movement that sought to raise the issue of where and where not people can plant... and use land for communal benefits. (Other activists 4)

Thus, he claimed that the PPG made an impression on some Torontonians because it provoked them to question why PPG participants decided to garden without permission, as well as why they gardened within a communal social structure.

Indeed, other activists said that they were interested in seeing more guerilla gardening on highly politicized land like the PPG had done. One activist remarked that he would like to see the PPG revisited and he would even participate in it because it demonstrated that “we should own our right to plant gardens around the city and to maintain them” (Other activists 2). He claimed that the PPG also made a significant point of exclusionary governmental regulation that has posed barriers to lower-income Torontonians. He explained, “Putting food in public spaces means that it’s more accessible to people that are homeless and sheltered that wouldn’t otherwise be able to have a garden on their own. There’s too much red tape... they want complete control over every inch of government space—and that just leaves us with private space” (Other activists 2). Therefore, he believed that it is necessary to working outside the existing political system to affect change, particularly for homeless Torontonians, because the state currently does not provide any gardening access to them and they do not own property for food production. He added that the PPG was a positive “political statement by being right behind Queen’s Park” and he argued for guerilla gardening in politicized areas as “spaces for resistance are hard to come by” (Other activist 2). Another food activist advocated for activism outside the existing political system by stating that it is “more worthwhile being active in sectors like the Occupy Gardens movement, and other community garden movements, than it is being in actual politics parties right now” because these

parties have proven to be “so desperate to become a governing power that they drop their social justice mandate” (Other activists 4). Thus, he suggested working outside of the existing political system, such as pursuing guerilla gardening, in order to be active on issues like social justice, environmentalism and food justice.

A PPG member added that their actions have led to capacity building in the sense of discussing broader change with people who had not been politicized before. She explained: “The intention was to raise the capacity of the people participating. And once the capacity of the individuals participating is raised they can do whatever political acts they need to do” (PPG participant 8). Moreover, she said that the PPG meetings, and most notably the garden itself, were “healing spaces” for the participants because they needed a “space for people to congregate” and have critical sociopolitical discussions that did not often occur in peoples’ everyday lives. Other PPG members agreed, including one participant who thought that the PPG led to her personal growth: “The trials and errors is what made me realize these things and what helped me learn and grow as a person... my awareness about those kinds of things had been growing over the course of my year and a half with Occupy Gardens” (PPG participant 6). Another member put it simply: “The whole thing was trial and error. People experimenting, people learning and teaching one another” (PPG participant 2). Altogether, members recognized the PPG as a learning experience for its participants, from working alongside each other to discussing questions of social, political and economic change. They suggested that there is potential for guerilla gardening as a tactic to work outside the existing political system to affect broader change because it increases participation in these issues.

## **6.5 Sowing new seeds of resistance**

How does the PPG shed insight on the potential of guerilla gardening as a means of addressing broader political, social and economic change? Similar to urban gardening groups of the 1960’s and 70’s, namely the Green Guerillas, the PPG used guerilla gardening as an act of political resistance in opposition to the boundaries of law and political order that have determined who has access to land and for what purpose. The PPG collective also shared similarities with urban gardens in the 1980’s and 1990’s as a reaction to the failures of neoliberal economic restructuring, including recession, mass inflation, and the decline of the social safety net. Additionally, the PPG gardeners showed a clear desire for food self-sufficiency, environmentalism and anti-consumerist lifestyles that have been long-standing in many urban gardening movements. Yet, instead of planting as a direct action against commercial development or in poor, under-resourced urban areas, the PPG differed from prior urban gardening movements because it was a case of guerilla gardening that took place on politicized land to confront the government. What is more, the PPG

collective explicitly engaged in Occupy's political discourse of the 99% versus the 1% to make a symbolic statement on the socioeconomic inequalities that have resulted from corporate control over the food system. They made numerous criticisms of income inequality, the commodification of food, and discouragement from growing their own food as they have been forced into purchasing their means of food subsistence. The PPG suggests that urban gardening groups could engage in these political discourses and criticisms to address broader political, social and economic change.

The PPG also appears to be part of a trajectory of social movements, like Occupy and its related offshoots, experimenting with radical egalitarianism and food justice. It was made clear in Occupy that millions of people in the 99% were upset with the current vertical hierarchies in the social, political and economic order, where the 1% of the population holds most power. By incorporating participatory democracy, consensus-based democracy, and communal ways of living, Occupiers tried to exemplify the change they would like to see. Likewise, PPG participants intended to create a commons-like model. A food activist outside of the group who noticed this effort remarked, "This society is still so individualistic. The idea that people would maintain a community space is still unusual or suspect" (Other activists 5). One PPG gardener argued, "People don't really have a sense of the potential of the commons because they don't trust each other. If we can grow some trust in each other we can see the potential come to fruition of what can be done with common public spaces" (Occupy Gardens participant 9). Furthermore, the PPG case shows that some food activists are willing to grapple with broader issues related to class and power as socioeconomic relations responsible for the creation and re-creation of unjust access to food, as Agyeman and McEntee (2014) have suggested. The PPG's criticism of the corporate global food system fits in with the emergence of the food justice frame that has focused on food as a component of a more democratic and just society (Wekerle, 2004). What is more, the PPG's criticism was wary of the trend of 'rolling back' of social welfare in neoliberal restructuring, as McClintock's research (2013) pointed out. Yet, although the PPG tried to confront land usage to Toronto's politicians, they did not succeed any of them consider keeping the garden on Queen's Park, removing their own layers of bureaucracy, or otherwise changing exclusionary regulation in public parks, thus revealing the unsuccessful effort and risk that this kind of guerilla gardening may face.

Nevertheless, the PPG's focus on land usage is important for other urban gardening groups to keep in mind and to hopefully confront as well. It is critical to see the overlap of the PPG's criticism of the struggle to afford food subsistence with Karl Marx's analysis of the expropriation of rural peasants off common lands in England after feudalism. Indeed, the rural peasants who once occupied common lands

for their subsistence were reduced to day-labourers by the bourgeoisie who forced the peasants to sell their labour power for their survival. Marx argued that this made food provisioning more difficult because the few in the ruling class who own the means of production began to accumulate more wealth than the working class could accrue through wage labour. Thus, the capitalist system, by its very nature, cannot guarantee the right to food for everyone. Similarly, Occupiers claimed that an increasingly small sector of the population hold power while the 99% have taken on the burden of the social, economic, and political order that governs their lives. Activists in Occupy Gardens and the PPG noticed that the wealth and power in the food system is concentrated in the hands of a few. This is precisely why food activists called the 99% to 'take back' power through guerilla gardening, seed saving, and community provisioning. All of these are political acts of resistance that signify the move toward the reclamation of the commons.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

To conclude, the legacy of the PPG is a mixed one. Their decision to defy city politicians was criticized by a long-time activist of the Toronto food movement who claimed that urban gardeners should advocate for activities that would be supported by the government. He argued that in the City of Toronto particularly has already made opportunities within the existing political system to advocate for food justice. Yet, other activists agreed with the PPG's aim to directly confront city politicians in order to make a symbolic political statement and they expressed that they would like to see guerilla gardens like the PPG revisited. Others recognized that PPG members made a politicized statement but they were not sure whether the collective made an impression on the municipal government that led to any tangible political outcomes. It was also apparent that the group failed to garner much media attention. Still, PPG members justified guerilla gardening as a way to put pressure on the political system and they claimed it was successful because it made others question why they did it, even if they did not impact many people.

Overall, both PPG participants and food activists saw potential in future acts of guerilla gardening. The idea of the PPG was to make statement on why they gardened rather than to have a highly producing garden. One member stressed that the PPG was not a failure, but it should be seen as an experience that people could learn from, which will in turn help people to conduct their own gardening and related activism. Other members and activists suggested that the PPG sparked some critical conversations about guerilla gardening in Toronto and it might have made urban gardeners consider the idea of 'reclaiming' public land for gardening. Altogether the discussion confirms that many activists saw potential for guerilla gardening as a tactic to work outside the existing political system to affect broader social, political and economic change.

## 6.7 Closing thoughts

This study highlighted the need for additional research on guerilla gardening and strategies for political change within food systems. Case studies of guerilla gardening in Toronto and other locales are necessary in order to better understand reclamation of public space as a strategy to induce social change. These studies could analyze how guerrilla gardening deliberately challenges the exclusionary regulation of land by governments and corporations, as opposed to more normalized forms of gardening, such as state-organized community gardening programs. Future research could also explore how guerilla gardening disrupts notions of land organization that have been normalized by capitalist accumulation, such as the privatization of land. In addition, there is a paucity of case studies that link guerilla gardening actions to the context of urban resistance and social movements. Future research that connects guerilla gardening to broader social movements could better determine the social, economic, political and environmental ideologies of this kind of gardening.

The PPG received criticism from municipal officials and food activists who condemned the gardeners for defying city authority; however, not all activists opposed their guerilla gardening. In fact, many food activists in the PPG's defiance of the Toronto Community Gardens Program because they made others question the governmental regulation of public parks. It is apparent that PPG members largely sought to work outside of the political system through their guerilla gardening, but then they wanted a 'push and pull' with the political order. That is to say, they wanted to work outside of the political system so they would not legitimize current political institutions and processes, but they have also organized branches of the Toronto Seed Library to work within existing institutions because the PPG could not be sustained. In addition, what was fascinating about the PPG was their experimentation with a communal social structure where they had participatory decision-making, shared gardening duties, and distributed free food to passersby. One PPG member pointed out that the group faced the long-standing struggle of white privilege in activist circles; yet, she learned that they could work toward participatory structures that diminish modes of exclusion within the 99%. Nevertheless, the PPG proved that community provisioning is possible and they were successful in raising issues about the exclusionary regulation of public land and inaccessibility to healthy food. The PPG's success in raising these questions showed others the potential for guerilla gardening as a tactic to work outside the existing political system to affect broader social, political and economic change.

Overall, the PPG collective made a strong political statement that the growing number of people in the 99% who are struggling to afford food subsistence is unprecedented and unjust. The PPG demonstrated



that the spaces for resistance against the capitalist corporate food system and state regulation are possible, and there are alternatives to re-establish political control over both land and social structure.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM



### **Principal Investigator:**

Alia Karim  
Master of Environmental Studies Candidate  
School for Resource and Environmental Studies  
Dalhousie University  
Halifax, NS Canada

### **Committee:**

Dr. Matthew Schnurr (Supervisor), International Development Studies, Dalhousie University  
Dr. Michelle Adams, School for Resource and Environmental Studies, Dalhousie University

### Introduction

You have been invited to participate in a research study I am conducting as part of my Master of Environmental Studies degree at Dalhousie University. **Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time.**

### Purpose of study and research design

This research phase will consist of in-person interviews asking questions regarding the history of the People's Peas garden in order to evaluate activist approaches to community gardening (e.g. gardening on public land without permission). The responses along with information gathered from my literature review will then be assessed for coding and themes. Final results will be presented in an academic thesis, and other potential forums, such as academic conferences.

### Who can participate in the study?

You may be asked to participate in the study if you are a member of the People's Peas garden, a non-participant of the People's Peas garden who has knowledge about the collective, or a municipal official who has who has knowledge about the collective.

### Who will be conducting the research?

I, the principal investigator, will be conducting the research, which includes all of the data collection.

### What you will be asked to do

If you choose to participate in this research study, you will be asked to answer a series of questions regarding the history of the People's Peas garden, as well as community gardening more generally.

### Possible risks and discomforts

This study is expected to involve minimal risk. However, for any reason, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw prior to the completion of the interview you can decide to either withdraw completely or to allow me to use the information you have provided to that point. If there is concern about potentially damaging information, that material will be removed and deleted.

### What happens to the information once it is collected?

The interviews will be transcribed and maintained on my password-protected computer throughout my data collection in Toronto and travel back to Halifax. Dalhousie University Policy on Research Integrity requires that data collection be securely maintained by the institution for 5 years after the thesis publication. After this time, data collection and participant contact information will be deleted.

### Confidentiality and anonymity

Your name will not be used in any reporting of the data, nor will I share any personal information that I may obtain throughout your participation in this study. Quotations from the interview will be used. I will use a pseudonym to identify individual participants. However, due to the possibility of identifying participants in their responses (e.g. in quotations), I cannot guarantee complete anonymity of participants.

### Questions

After the interview, any questions you may have can be directed to me, Alia Karim, by phone at (902) 293-7876 or by e-mail at [alia.karim@dal.ca](mailto:alia.karim@dal.ca). You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Dr. Matthew Schnurr, by phone at (902) 494-7711, or by e-mail at [matthew.schnurr@dal.ca](mailto:matthew.schnurr@dal.ca).

Problems or concerns

If you have any difficulties with, or wish to voice concern about, any aspect of your participation in this study, you may contact Research Services of Dalhousie University by phone at (902) 494-8075 or by e-mail at research@dal.ca.

**SIGNATURE**

I understand that information stated during this activity may be recorded (with audio and through written notes), and I freely give my permission for this information to be used in reports and related materials without being attributed to my name.

**YES/NO**

I would like to be contacted to review the transcription of my interview.

**YES/NO**

Signature of Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

E-mail or mailing address

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS OF THE PEOPLE'S PEAS GARDEN**

1. How long have you been gardening for?
2. Why do you garden?
3. When did you become involved with the People's Peas garden (PPG)?
4. What was your role in the PPG?
5. Are you still involved with the PPG? Why or why not?
6. How did the PPG come together and choose this particular plot of land?
7. Why did the PPG choose Queen's Park as opposed to another public space in Toronto?
8. How come the PPG did not ask for permission to plant the garden?
9. What did you grow and how did you distribute it?
10. How were operational decisions made within the group?
11. Did the PPG want to achieve political and/or social justice goals?
12. Should community gardeners in Toronto work within or outside the current political system?
13. Do you consider this garden to be an activist project? How do you define activism?
14. Did the PPG affect the community gardening movement in Toronto? Why or why not?
15. Did members of the People's Peas garden consult other community gardeners in the city before planting?
16. Is there a relationship between the PPG and other social movements in and/or outside of Toronto?
17. Who opposed the garden and why?
18. What was the justification from the City of Toronto for removing the garden in September 2012?
19. What were some of the outcomes for the PPG after the removal?
20. Should we use public space for community gardening? Why or why not?
21. Do you think there needs to be more municipal, provincial or other policies or laws that support community gardening?

22. Is there is anything missing that would be helpful to supporting the activities led by the People's Peas garden?

23. What activities has the PPG established and/or been engaged in since the removal?



## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOOD ACTIVISTS**

1. Are you currently a member of a community garden in Toronto? If so, which one? What is your involvement?
2. Why do you garden?
3. What was your contact and/or involvement with the People's Peas Garden?
4. Do you agree with the strategies employed by the PPG? Why or why not?
5. Is the PPG different from other community gardens in Toronto?
6. How did the members of the People's Peas garden communicate with other community garden collectives, groups and/or individuals before and during the planting of the garden?
7. Do you think community gardening can be used to achieve political and/or social justice goals?
8. Should community gardeners in Toronto work within or outside the current political system?
9. Do you consider this garden to be an activist project? How do you define activism?
10. Did the PPG affect the community gardening movement in Toronto?
11. Should we use public space for community gardening? Why or why not?
12. Do you think there needs to be more municipal, provincial or other policies or laws that support community gardening?

## **APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS**

1. Tell me a bit about yourself: What do you do in the City of Toronto municipal government? How long have you been employed by this government?
2. What was your contact and/or involvement with the People's Peas Garden?
3. How did the members of the PPG communicate with the City of Toronto before and during the planting of the garden?
4. Do you agree with the strategies employed by the PPG? Why or why not?
5. What was the opposition to this garden? Who opposed it and why? (For example, Toronto community gardeners, neighbours, businesses, etc.).
6. What was the justification for removing the garden and its crops in October 2012? Who was involved in enforcing the removal?
7. What were the outcomes for the City of Toronto government after the removal?
8. If the PPG asked for permission from the City of Toronto to plant on Queen's Park before, would they have been allowed to establish and keep the garden?
9. Should citizens be able to use public space for community gardening?
10. Do you think there needs to be more municipal, provincial or other policies or laws that support community gardening?
11. What is the current relationship between the People's Peas Garden and the City of Toronto government?