



plot.

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In this edition of The Plot we'll be exploring the theme of movements and reflecting on what space we each occupy as growers, community activists or organisers, campaigners and more. Within the world of food growing, we often refer to a broader 'food movement' a nebulous, intangible, overarching entity that guides and governs us on the path to change. A movement is generally understood to be the overall thrust of change which encompasses individual campaigns, tactics and projects. It is mass mobilisation of people towards the same rough goal.

Movement theorists often conceptualise our struggles in the context of a movement ecology. The ecology describes the different actors within the movement who each have different motives, different ideas on how change happens or who undertake different day to day activities but who are all working towards the same fundamental goal.

So for community food growers, what are the movements to be concerned with? Who are the actors in our ecology and what theories of change have we committed to by way of our work? What's the overarching goal of our movement?

When the day to day is so rooted in community building it is often difficult to conceive of ourselves as movement builders on top of that but every community food grower is crucial piece of our movement's puzzle. CFGN's First Frost event was case in point of a celebration of a number of small pockets of work in the community which all feed into us as a network taking up our space in the movement.

A special thank you to our new Membership Development Co-ordinator Nat Mady for her write up on that event and for our network co-ordinator Natalie Szarek for all her hard work on putting event on in the first place.

Community food growing confronts a number of issues simultaneously and inherently manages the intersections of different struggles. So whilst the broader 'food movement' speaks to the change we want to see in the food system, we can't talk about food and movements without also discussing climate, land distribution, housing and inequality.

Over the past few years CFGN has been an active advocate for changes in the land system and a new land movement has been emerging in this time, one which is reflected in our piece on the Dukes and Peasants planning meeting and the developments of the Land Justice Network.

The question of the environment and public space is the central burden of the group Reclaim Our Spaces of which CFGN is also a member. Hearing from Santa Pedone from RoS we'll see how the merging of groups and networks has manifested to be a force for a movement for access to public space and to confront inequality in the city. Leslie Barson of Granville Community Kitchen's recap of the conversation on gentrification with took place at last November's Land for What? Conference feeds perfectly into this conversation on overlapping movements and the intersections between food, housing, inequality, land and of course, gentrification.

So much action and activity sits under the banner of movements and in many ways we may ponder the worth in engaging with the concept of movements as broad and intangible as they are. But it's looking at our issues from the meta, from outside of ourselves with an aerial view, that really allows us to embrace the space we're in and develop conviction and clarity on what we're working on. The history of the exploitation of labour by the landed gentry in the UK and its colonies, explored by Mama D, serves as a reminder that the battles we face are not isolated but part of a broader international picture, often the root causes of which are located in the same place. We see that each fight, whether on just one plantation or in just one village, can be the straw that disrupts the system that the movement is trying to shake.

Celebrating First Frost with CFGN

Written by Nat Mady, Cordwainers Grow, Membership Development Co-ordinator at CFGN

This October first frost put on a First Frost Jamboree to bring together and celebrate all the amazing work being done across the network and beyond to transform our food system. The night was hosted by our member project London Grown at Wolves Lane Community Greenhouses in Haringey.

The night began with a tour by Rob Logan who explained the history of the site and explained how London Grown have been utilising the space for their food growing projects. Wolves Lane was formerly run by Haringey Council as a horticultural centre and in the last year has been handed over to a consortium of community food projects, enterprises and educators including OrganicLea, Crop Drop, Dee Woods and Shared Assets. They are working collectively to safeguard the site as a community asset and develop it into an educational hub for food growing, healthy eating and community activities that benefit local people.

After having a good look around the collection of glasshouses on site the group settled back down to have a discussion about inspiring work being done both locally and further afield to reclaim local and global food systems. The panel included speakers from Ehne Bizkaia, the Basque Farmers' Union, founding members of La Via Campesina along with

representatives from the Landworker's Alliance and the Wolves Lane consortium.

The night also saw the launch of the CFGN Project Toolkits, 'Working With Your Council' and 'Guide to Resisting Eviction' which have been designed in response to the challenges being faced by many projects. These resources are intended to provide the tools to help projects become more resilient to change and better equipped to overcome the barriers and threats that they face. We ended the evening with a delicious feast cooked up by Granville Community Kitchen's Dee Woods using a selection of freshly harvested produce from London Grown and Audacious Veg. As we ate we were uplifted by the sounds of Double Bass Dan and friends who got us jigging around and helped to keep us warm as the cold set in. It was great to see lots of CFGN members there as well as welcoming others who are new to the network. We'd like to say a big thank you to all the volunteers who helped in setting up the event, those who lent their hands in the kitchen and those who got an outdoor fire going when the electric hob blew up half-way through cooking the pumpkin curry!



Reclaim our Spaces:

overcoming fragmentation in grassroots movements

Written by **Santa Pedone** of Reclaiming our Spaces

It is well known how grassroots community organising often falls into fragmentation and in so doing it weakens the potential impact of any well thought-through campaign. It was from this awareness that the Reclaim Our Spaces (RoS) coalition, was initially born. On 25 June 2016 a number of grassroots community groups gathered, realising that a concerted effort was required, in order to put the protection of community spaces on the agenda of planning authorities and raise awareness of development pressures.

As many seasoned community activists and campaigners are well aware, overcoming fragmentation in grassroots movements is not an easy task. In the case of community spaces, fragmentation in a London context comes from the huge variety of campaigns, communities and spaces with different purposes, ownership and management arrangements. There is also the added complexity of diverse London neighbourhoods, where campaigns set in the suburbs do not enjoy the same visibility as those set in central areas. The diversity makes it difficult to see the 'big picture' and realise the many commonalities that all these community groups share.

Some people expressed perplexity at the need for a London-wide campaign to protect community assets, because they only regarded their local authority as the main authority to which to address their concerns. Others saw immediately the many shared problems across London: from the skyrocketing rent increases to local authority cuts, from short term leases (which make it difficult to secure funding) to the simple fact that community land use cannot compete against residential land use, if we value land use in terms of investment and profit.

A successful example of what community organising can do at a London-wide level is the Just Space network, from which RoS stems. Just Space has been working towards the objective of bringing together local groups at the metropolitan level for 10 years now and positive results can be seen, especially in last year's publication Towards a Community-Led Plan for London, which seeks to reclaim the right of community groups to be part of the process of writing up the new London plan, rather than being mere consultees.

The Reclaim Our Spaces coalition does not want to replicate what Just Space already does, but should be seen as a fortunate encounter between Just Space and The Ubele Initiative - a social enterprise which contributes to the sustainability of the UK African Diaspora community.

RoS aims to address the sense of loss felt by many of London's local communities - loss of small businesses, community centres, music venues, libraries, pubs, open spaces and public spaces, youth centres, land for community food growing and street markets - and the need for collaboration between various different social struggles (equality based groups, class struggle etc), which normally do not work together. Reclaiming lost community space in London and protecting those under threat must be a collaborative effort, if it is to be successful.

The Reclaim Our Spaces manifesto was thus born from the need to pin down what all the different campaigns on reclaiming community spaces in London had in common, despite individual differences. The manifesto focuses on three main areas of action. The first two focus on designing grassroots activities enabling us to reach out and connect to the many current campaigns on community spaces and raising their visibility through tools such as the creation of the digital platform, Just Map.

The third area of action is influencing the London Plan around some key policy proposals, which are developed in detail in the Community-led plan for London mentioned above. To provide a sense of these proposals, here are two of the most important ones.

First of all, helping produce a shift in thinking so that access to, and the value of community spaces is not based on income generation but on the social value of the, community space.

In order to do so, social impact assessments should be put in place when a community space is under threat of closure and the current London Plan does not provide adequate tools to evaluate the social value of community spaces. Also, the social impact assessment as the equality impact assessments (already in place to some extent) should be given greater weight in planning decisions, because at the moment EIAs are often bypassed by other planning considerations, as seen in the case of Wards Corner redevelopment.

Another crucial proposal is for the next London Plan to adopt policies which take into account “the irreplaceability” and uniqueness of community assets which prove to be of particular value to the community. This stems from the awareness that the history and social value of many community spaces cannot be moved or replicated by simply rebuilding them elsewhere, as the case of the Southbank skatepark has shown. Coalition building in London will not happen overnight, but working on making London’s diversity a strength instead of a cause of fragmentation, is the only possible way towards achieving this vision and the rationale for setting up the RoS coalition.

To sign up to the RoS manifesto and add your group to the digital map, look us up on **change.org** or type **www.change.org/p/reclaim-our-spaces-manifesto**.

To be part of the mailing list, please write to:
reclaim-our-spaces_london@googlegroups.com

Labour, Land and Poor Laws: Why we can't afford to lose the plot

Written by **Mama D** of Community Centred Knowledge

In Britain of the middle ages, the control of resources: land, labour and materials, for example sheep and their wool or women’s hand woven lace benefitted those privileged enough to own significant quantities of these and who were well positioned, such as landed gentry, to acquire more. It came to be considered natural and inevitable that surplus profit was as a God given right

How could this be possible in the face of the grim hardships faced by the masses of poor? Serfs had recently become landless, set adrift by the growing enclosures of land and with the removal of the yoke of Catholicism in Britain there was a loss of monasteries and churches, which provided for the very poor and ‘impotent’, which deepened impoverishment. Added to their numbers were thousands of monks, now homeless who were forced to join the ranks of the poor.

It became necessary for governing nobility to intercede and proclaim the first Poor Law in 1388 which located the responsibility for relieving those estranged by enclosures upon each parish.

This act came on the back of knowing that the labouring class, whether released from war or from farm drudgery could organise and threaten the accumulated wealth and status of the privileged, if they were not, somehow kept subdued either by civil responsibilities or by being forced to meet their basic needs and those of their betters.

This act also introduced the first criminalisation of the impoverished of the land who sought justice: those who migrated from their places of origin could be brought to the law and punished. The 1496 amendment to the Poor Law instituted serious punishments to those who were now referred to as vagabonds or 'idle poor'.

These attitudes paralleled the prison system of the colonial tropical plantations where it was also necessary to manage labour not only through control of movement but by using the prison as a form of valve, enabling the unchained labour therein to be freely available to pick up the slack of plantation labour requirements by creating a stock of captured labour available for free use as punishment.

The association of farm work with drudgery, producing cheap labour who could be used by the gentry and who were vulnerable to either organisational or much later technological change became a key feature of lands regarded as rural across the growing empire and it also translated into how labour was controlled industrially in the areas which became sites of urban (under)development.

The value of labour and its treatment differed only by degree and circumstance as plantation agriculture and the numbers available grew in the tropical colonies whilst enclosures of land continued apace in Britain. There were also cross-overs and exchanges: overcrowded prisons and the absence of a commitment to discharge parish obligations meant many poor were either press-ganged into forced ship's labour or sent for punitive sentences to Australasia or the Caribbean territories. In this way, those identified as poor, idle, vagabond or deserving capture were able to be brought into play in the early stages of the great colonial pre-industrialisation production system.

Those who were not sent abroad found themselves relocated to the northern territories within Britain where the processing of cotton and other imperial commodities were to take place. They faced either that, or to work in ship-building or other associated trades. Many were conscripted into the Navy's many imperial battles, or found themselves joining crews of brigands or buccaneers, intercepting and undermining Caribbean sugar, rum or mahogany profits.

Thus was the labour of both Africa and Britain, which serviced the wealth accrual of the landed gentry, first brought together in common suffering as mere factors of production.

The poor law of 1547 stated:

‘that if any man or woman should refuse to labour, and live idly for three days, that he, or she, should be branded with a red hot iron on the breast with the letter V, and should be adjudged the slaves, for three years, of any person who should inform against the said idler.’

It went on threatening a further branding on the cheek, beating and chaining and a diet of bread, water and ‘refuse meat’, such as the master should think proper.

Such conditions were not much different to those obtained in Barbados, for example, as a sugar colony, at a similar period, and which were experienced by Irish and African alike. The key difference in it was that the African was also subject, as servitude continued, to the warped logic of a science which determined that her condition was inevitable on account of her physical characteristics. As such it would take another 500 years before any African would feel able to renounce such a claim.

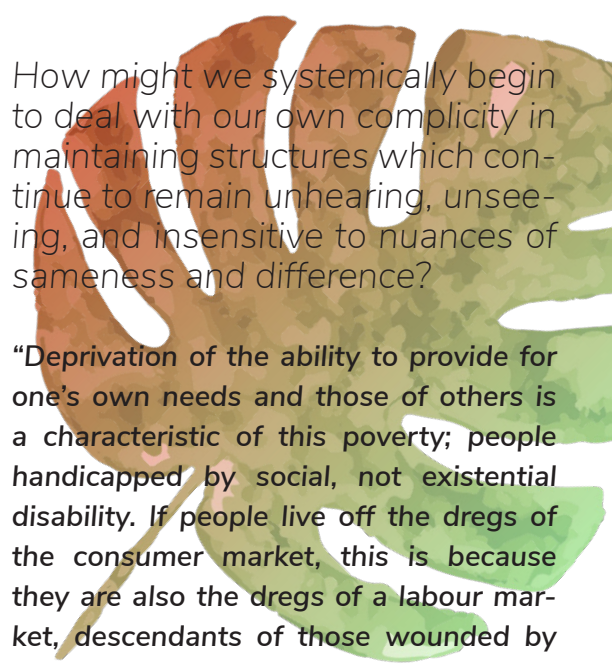
In the structures and systems of our social frameworks, such pseudoscience remains embedded, surreptitious and influential. Despite a number of acts to regulate its impact, it lives on regardless, shaping how migrants are perceived and received, ironically, often to work in farms which have been abandoned by those seeking to migrate to the cities. The irony is such that some of those abandoning the rural areas will even end up running or working on city food growing projects!

Given such histories, how can projects which may operate out of a legacy of seeking to extend charity to the poor, meet this same poor on their own terms?

Old and new migrants alike may well be hostage to similar factors of exclusion and institutionalised ways of operating which do not sufficiently join the dots or include their histories of displacement, different knowledges and experiences with the land and economic power.

More importantly, do those who administer the projects, initiatives and activism begin to make the necessary links between shared histories of oppression and privilege such that potentially transformational reconciliations have a chance of taking place, or at very least people have an opportunity for their own hidden stories to become acknowledged?





How might we systemically begin to deal with our own complicity in maintaining structures which continue to remain unhearing, unseeing, and insensitive to nuances of sameness and difference?

“Deprivation of the ability to provide for one’s own needs and those of others is a characteristic of this poverty; people handicapped by social, not existential disability. If people live off the dregs of the consumer market, this is because they are also the dregs of a labour market, descendants of those wounded by the injuries of industrialisation, urbanisation, slavery, imperialism and the remaking of the old rural sensibility in the shape of industrialised humanity. We should not imagine such traumas cease to work their evil, simply because those who were never victims of them prefer to forget. The inheritors of loss perpetuate that legacy, which survives the most dramatic periods of change and prosperity.”

J.Seabrook, Pauperland

It was not until the threatened loss of an allotment space in the heartland of a UKIP admiring, Brexit voting polity that I recognised, for myself, how symbolic that loss would be. Not simply for the black and female grower that I am and represent. Nor for the sake of preserving a claim with an identity or even the twinned identities of ‘minority ethnic female’, though this too would have its validity.

More importantly it was because I recognised and could empathise how it was the authorities could neither hear, nor understand the way in which this loss replicated the more general disenfranchisement that many of its own ‘poor’ were still experiencing as a result of a many centuries old erasure of their connection with the land and agency in their own lives.

More critically, I felt and understood how tied up my own life and reclamation of it was and is with theirs, as each moment spent within the allotment space is a recovery, a critical healing, a reconnection to the general sense of land, as connected earth, similarly lost to my ancestors and the associated loss of agency experienced.

The allotment produces to supply a local food bank and to encourage its users to reacquaint themselves with nature and to produce food from their own, direct intervention, rather than through total reliance upon the too-many-supermarkets retailing in the locality. It is also an opportunity to make connections and to challenge the narratives of ‘food poverty’ received wisdom fed to us by those who have no first-hand experience of it.

I welcome you, reader, to join me in rekindling some energy and enthusiasm after a hiatus. It’s a road less travelled, yet the rewards and satisfactions to be had are great, as I have shared. It is part of a larger Food Justice agenda, which involves re-imagining a broader food system that takes everyone into account, everyone and their histories, connected histories, shared histories, histories which cast a shadow on all our claims of visionary emancipation from the industrial food system.

We can share and exchange meaningful work which has potential to all the better liberate ourselves from others' over-arching stories which don't tell our truths quite like they actually are. We can work and learn together from the possibilities that really exist between us to achieve truly transformational change.



On Gentrification

Written by **Leslie Barson** of
London Community Neighbourhood Co-Operative

When thinking about movements concerned with land, food and housing in the early 21st century, the process of gentrification is central. It is a process that moves us away from a system whose policies and projects are based around the needs of people to one based on the needs of international capital with land, food and housing seen as a way to invest capital to hold or gain in value. This skews our relationship, at the most basic level, to these most basic human rights.

This article is written with the material gathered at a workshop held at Land for What Conference, November 2016. It should be seen as a beginning attempt to unravel questions around gentrification, a collection of ideas, a start of a debate. To understand the concept and its process the workshop asked two main questions:

- 1. What is gentrification?**
- 2. How is it done?**

Although these questions seem easy we found, on thinking about them, they are deceptively difficult. Gentrification is a vast topic affecting every area of life. It is not just about land, food and housing but about employment, shops, finance, health, family culture and personal choices.

First we generated ideas around the question "What is gentrification?" The word is from and includes the word 'gentry' implying a small section of society that is higher and better off than others through an accident of birth. Gentrification comes in waves in deprived areas where land values start low and is a mixture of improvement of an area with displacement of the original residents, a process of social change. It is social cleansing of the working class, pubs and community venues, markets which are replaced by expensive pubs, shops and restaurants with money made at with every action bringing only certain types of new jobs, cashiers and service industry low pay with little future. Those displaced must start all over again which requires lots of energy and time. It is a subsection of colonisation both of land and culture and a continuation of imperialism with middle class white western values (the gentry) seen as the only ones. This is an implied sub-text of 'you can't fight the tide' which is designed deliberately to stop any opposition to gentrification.

The second question asked how the processes of gentrification works and identified a typical process. Here is a brief rundown of the process we identified. Local government intentionally neglects areas of land or housing they have designated for 'regeneration' running down the area or housing stock.

Artists and “meanwhile” projects move in as the rents go lower. These can be paid for by the Council to create a ‘vibe’ or make area seem interesting in what had been considered to be a run down or crime ridden area.

Sub-standard housing caused by the policy of neglect is then used as an excuse to bring in plans to demolish the buildings with the promise of replacement of ‘affordable’ housing together with equal numbers of housing for sale. The plans are kept secret in that they change constantly and the changes are not made visible to the public. ‘Consultations’ are held where an outline of the plans are presented. The consultation suggestions made by residents are incorporated only when they raise the price of the private housing i.e. more green space added. The local population is split into as many diverse groups as possible through different tenancies and irrational allocation of new housing to divide and rule over any opposition.

Public land is given over to these processes raising property values and is therefore said to be the solution to local councils budget problems as well as the ‘housing crisis’. Public housing is given to housing associations to manage leaving public ownership. In some cases public land and housing can be leased on 299 year leases to developers so the Councils can still claim they own the land. Developers move in demolishing and building to ‘remedy’ the manufactured situation creating more housing to help solve the ‘housing crisis’. This housing is then sold to new people who can afford to buy into the area.

Once developments are built established businesses are forced out by rent increases. There is a loss of shops and light industrial spaces as the land is taken for more housing.

When done all spaces have to be paid for to use, even for entertainment. So there is nothing to do for those who have little money. The original residents, even if stay in area at the same rent, find it difficult to remain because of the rise in all other costs of area, for example council tax and service charges. Corporate shops move in raising the costs of shopping in the area. The artists who moved in at the start of this process can no longer afford to stay and leave the area. Although the details may change, the process outlined here has been repeated many times across deprived areas and is happening all over London right now.

Lastly, the workshop looked at the issue of gentrification and food. The discussions outlined five main issues and how we can act in response to these issues.

1. Loss of allotments and community gardens

With regard to the loss of allotments and community gardens we can use community gardens to connect and socialise, not only to garden. They can be play and art spaces where people of all ages are welcome without spending money. We can plant gardens of resistance thinking about ways we can own land in common and safeguard it in perpetuity.

2. Cost of food

To mitigate and reverse the rising cost of food and loss of local shops we need more food assemblies linked to class opening up access to training and growing food at affordable prices.

3. Understanding how government works

We need to understanding how government works and try and get more people involved with discussions, building capacity, involving local councillors and trying to overcome the boredom of local planning bureaucracy. This is locally based slow work but vital for a real change.

4. Food cultures

Supporting small food businesses is crucial to mitigate transport costs and pollution, the loss of cultural food, cultural food appropriation and to encourage access to low cost nutritious food.. There is a tension between affordability, cultural food and the environment impact and carbon footprint that needs further unpacking and addressing.

5. Access to food

Junk food is easier to access than 'real' food, to help combat this we need more community kitchens, improving and connecting food and where it comes from with more local community food production.

Gentrification affects all areas of life, is long term, complicated and difficult to see in its entirety. The ways to prevent it have to be long term and multi-pronged.

With thanks to all who attended this workshop. I really enjoyed delving into the notes from the workshop again after a break and realising how much depth of thought there was in the room. I hope I have included the ideas correctly. If not, I apologise profusely. This article is meant to encourage further thought. There is a lot more work to be done.

What Next for Land Justice: the networks within the

Following a two day convening Land for What? about land issues covering everything from land rights, ownership and distribution, the steering committee put to question its structure and existence before deciding on next steps. Steering a movement is near impossible as there needs to be space for different pockets of activity to pop up and take life. Different roles need to be filled and often one single idea, strategy or action isn't enough.

Across the land and food movements networks are often used to organise as it provides a solidarity and a space for growth whilst also offering the opportunity for coordinated efforts and actions. Within CFGN this is certainly true, as with Reclaiming Our Spaces. Moving on from last year's event the Land Justice Network has been formed which has invited a range of individuals and groups to come together to continue to push the work of campaigning on issues on land forward.

The Land Justice Network is now working towards a new set of goals and activities including preparing for International Peasants Day next April. To get involved with the Land Justice Network's efforts knowing and standing with the common ground statement. This goes more or less as follows...

Our aspirations:

1 – Distributed Ownership and Control

Although a majority of us have a small stake in the 5% of UK land upon which our housing is built, the majority of land (70%) in the UK is owned by just 0.6% of the population). Policies and practices should encourage a more equitable distribution of land rights and ownership. People should have more control over how land is used around them – ensuring that ALL affected voices get heard when decisions about land are made.

2 – Long Term Stewardship, Not Short Term Profit

The price of land has increased dramatically over time, leading to farmland being a better investment than gold and residential land being increasingly seen as a pension pot, rainy day fund, or investment vehicle. Land should not be a speculative financial commodity – it is a common good that should be managed in the best interests of society.

3 – Increases in Land Value should be Given to Society

It is the decisions and hard work of society, such as building transport infrastructure, regenerating communities or changing the permitted land use, that lead to changes in land values. The UK's current model allows the increase in the value of land to be retained as profits by its owner rather than returning to society. This is further exacerbated by the land tax and subsidy system that favours ownership. More of the increase in the value of land should be captured by society whilst striving for a system with lower and more stable land values.

4 – Proactive Community-centred Planning

A good planning system should be based on the participation of everyone in the decisions that affect their lives. Decisions about how land is distributed and made accessible should be based on the key principles of social equity, inclusion and sustainability.

5 – Transparency

Access to information is crucial to the achievement of land reform. Information on ownership, land purchase options, subsidies, tax breaks, common land, public space etc. should be openly and easily accessible to everyone.

If you want to get involved with the activities email

landjusticeuk@gmail.com

and check out the new website

landjustice.uk

