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the plot.
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the twelfth edition of The Plot, under new editorial direction.

In this summer edition, we will be giving you an update on everything that has been happening at Community Food Growers Network - from staff changes to the draft London Food Strategy, and our plans for upcoming events and activities over the next few months. We have to say our sad goodbyes and huge thank yous to Zahra Dalilah and Natalie Mady for all their hard work with the CFGN. In April, CFGN welcomed Rose Ziaei as the new Network Coordinator, and Castle Climbing Centre as a new member! Our member projects have been working incredibly hard to keep plants alive during this summer's heatwave, and we just about managed to find time to write our response to the Mayor's Draft London Food Strategy.

We have planned a number of events and started a long process of rewriting our Manifesto.

As a London-wide Network, we have been looking at the root causes of the food system failing us - poverty, discrimination, and unequal power and privilege. We recognise we are part of the problem, and therefore we can be part of the solution. We also recognise we are not experts or perfect in our ideas about these issues, but how can we as food growers with variant levels of power and privilege come together to build the collective power of our communities? This means being prepared to have difficult conversations within our organisations - compassionately, shining light on all the oppressive systems we continue to uphold through our everyday practice. It's time for us to recognise the interconnected nature of all systems and ask better, deeper questions:

What processes can we adopt to deal with power relations across different levels to bring about systemic change? How do we plant anti-oppression foundations? How do we as food growers cultivate justice?

We begin by further exploring these questions with a reflection piece on our Gentrification, Food Justice and London event. We're delighted to be able to share with you the poetry of Selina Nwulu, who kindly allowed us to reprint *16 Ways To Eat Well,* and *If We Knew Their Names* and gently set the mood for a deeper look at *What is 'good' food and who gets to define it?* by Mama D. In our Member's section, we look at an interview with Ian from May Project Gardens aiming to provide an alternative narrative to the mainstream food and environmental narrative that leaves people behind.

Reflections on Gentrification, Food Justice and London

Written by ***Rose Ziaei***

This summer, Community Food Growers Network held an evening of discussion on Gentrification, Food Justice and London for around 35 people at Impact Hub in Brixton. For many of us, reflections around the topic started with our journey to the event. Our journeys involved walking past the Brixton Arches where traders were recently forced out of their spaces due to Network Rail's development plans, and through to Pop Brixton where 'foodies' were enjoying the taste of over-priced street-food in their idea of a 'community project'. The event happened against the backdrop of regeneration-led evictions and community-led resistance; of families being forced out and corporate uniforms taking over; of tokenistic and exclusive 'regeneration' consultation processes in the area. The scale and very essence of gentrification was hard to miss. Featuring speakers and attendees from community food growing initiatives, anti-gentrification campaigns, local community members, community centres, various Network representatives, students, and activists, the event provided

a space for conversations about food's role in gentrification.

In recent years, there has been a lot of focus on the benefits of urban agriculture and local food systems, including more green spaces in urban areas, social benefits, employment and training opportunities, and environmental sustainability. At the very least, the concept of the 'alternative' food movement offers an answer to the environmental, social, and economic challenges of the neoliberal capitalist food system. Yet, there seems to be limited understanding of how food initiatives interact with and impact the everyday realities of low-income communities of colour in London in which they are often situated. There are food system localisation efforts happening in London and across the world, but what is becoming apparent is the lack of consideration in these efforts for pre-existing economic, social and cultural relations of power and privilege existing both among and within localities.

Who can afford to buy local, organic food? Who can afford to grow it? Is urban food growing used by estate agents and councils to increase the "market value" of an area, resulting in driving out less wealthy and more precarious households?

Our panel speaker Betiel Mahari gave an example of this in Brixton, where she became an accidental activist to save her own flat in Loughborough Park Estate when she was abruptly given an eviction notice by the Guinness Trust, with no alternative housing offered to them when the redevelopment plans started. Similarly, local businesses that have been operating for years in the area, some providing affordable culturally appropriate food are being shut down and will soon be replaced by the 'organic', 'vegan' cafes and bars culturally appropriating the food of marginalised communities but marketing it to the new wave of 'trendy' professionals arriving in the area with prices that local people cannot afford. The alternative food movement has a lot to offer against the current capitalist industrial agriculture system, however, power and privilege emerge through community food spaces and unless difficult realities are faced, the food movement is in danger of creating an 'alternative' food system that perpetuates oppression, instead of confronting persistent race, gender and class inequality.

The panel reminded us that localised food systems are not enough and food projects cannot be removed from issues of concern to communities – gentrification being one of them.

The event discussions made it really clear, **there is more work to be done than merely localising food systems and changing habits.** Those of us in the food movement need to have a willingness and commitment to do the work on systemic change based on an interrogation of power, privilege, access, inequality. How are we going to change the system so that excluded people have access to land and food? How do we reframe the conversation/process in order to engage those people? Those impacted the most by systems of oppression must be taking part in shaping answers and identifying solutions. It is not enough to want 'local participation' and 'engagement' from the community, as Farzana mentioned during the event - this is still embedded in power dynamics, and it is up to us to shift power and resources to uplift the issues crucial to that particular community.

We need to listen deeply and begin by building trust. The event made it really clear – without addressing justice, food projects will not be successful, so how can we start planting social justice? I believe we need a deep analysis of power and privilege, and institutionalised inequity in the food system. We need to change organisation processes to ensure transparency, accountability, share power and responsibility.

We need to transform our processes and ways of working and operating in communities. We need a better way of allocating resources. We need to repair historical trauma and shame caused by injustices. We need to see expressions of solidarity and movement building to work towards these change. There is no doubt, both the event and this article have left me (and probably you) with more questions than answers. But, it is ok to not have all the answers yet. I am hopeful by this crucial moment of reflection and action happening in the food movement, and I trust deeper answers will come when we make space to come together more regularly, eat together, connect with each other and collectively start to reimagine an alternative food system that holds itself accountable for its role in wider social justice issues, thereby moving us closer to an alternative food system rooted in real justice where power and resources are shared equitably.

A special thanks goes out to: Zahra Dalilah (KIN Folk Network), Deirdre Woods (Granville Community Kitchen), Farzana Khan (Voices that Shake), Ian Solomon (May Project Gardens), Betiel Mahari for making a great panel, and Daniel Azavedo for feeding the revolution and everyone who co-created the space with us and provided further feedback for us to build on.

Check out minutes and audio from the event on our Facebook page, and look out for our future events around these topics.

We are really grateful to Selina Nwulu - Young Poet Laureate for giving us permission to reprint two beautiful poems from the *Who's Full?* series which fitted perfectly with the theme of this edition. You can read the full series by visiting: ***http://www.selinanwulu.com/poetry/***

Who's Full?

Series by ***Selina Nwulu***

16 Ways to Eat Well

Don't eat meat, obviously.

Scrap that, go Keto: high fat, low carbs.

Hello? A plant-based diet is the way.

Eat what you want - but only 5 bites of it.

Well actually, you should only really eat according to your blood type.

Try intermittent fasting.

Rid yourself of acidic foods, follow an alkaline diet.

Calorie control. SmartPoints.

Juice cleanse!

No, don't eat meat - only fish on special occasions.

Ok, wow. Fish is the worst thing you could eat. Steer clear.

Look: whatever it is you do just don't eat gluten.

Protein, protein, protein.

Become a raw vegan.

Avoid carbs naturally.

Fruitarian, anyone?

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Meanwhile crops across fields wait, sway, hoping to be known by their truest selves

If We Knew Their Names

You think us fools
for the fish and chips we buy.
a bundle of heat held to us
on our way home

Tasteless for the crisps we consume,
grab-bags of crunch, a rustle
of crispy confetti
full of salt and light

Think us illiterate for those
chicken drumsticks in cardboard boxes,
amber coat crumbs on our lips
bought for the change in our pockets.

You never know, we might love
hot boxes of burdock root,
bowls of spelt and teff
if they lived here, specially
offered, Buy One Get One Free.

Might relish a slice of jackfruit,
freshly baked ezekiel bread
chia and sarsaparilla
if only they lived here, in this place
and we knew their names.

What is 'good' food and who gets to define it?

written by ***Mama D,***

Community Centred Knowledge

'Good food matters' and 'we all have to eat more healthily, sustainably and locally'. Such are the mantras of the modern era but who is it that voices these messages and demands? What might be the real meanings and agendas behind these voices?

Is there a consensus on what is healthy eating and what the context of sustainability is? Surely locality on its own cannot be the primary way we determine the range of what we eat for all members of the community? If it does become a primary determinant, what are the repercussions for diverse community, international relationships and the livelihoods of those whose production systems have been defined by the colonialism of the past and the neo-liberalism of the present? How honest is the declaration of 'local' by those who savour the popular beverages of the day and the wide array of fruit and vegetables at our disposal?

The language that we use around the various food agendas which surface really matters if we wish to develop a caring, compassionate and equitable set of interwoven food systems in the UK.

How can we develop a mindfulness about what actually takes place in the world of food? How can we be more careful in exploring how we speak about what is grown and how and where it comes from as well as where and how it is processed and distributed? What would be the impact of a greater discretion around the many phrases, expressions and sheer jargon in the world of food that we use about these transactions?

But before we even develop a discussion on the language per se, what about those who are responsible for shaping it? Is there truly potential for internally inspired resistance to the type of jargon and easy messaging emanating from what is very complex, interwoven food system? What role is there for the politics of commodification, enclosure, racial hostilities and exclusions all wrapped up in the legacy of class and status and how we speak about food today?

This is important because it is those people who are defining what gets to pass as a public response to the brokenness of the food system who get to demarcate the language and its meaning. We can define a demographic of predominantly younger working age, recently graduated, vegetable and salad growing, box scheme denizens who are mostly white, mostly middle class and mostly those who enjoy recourse to parental safety nets. There are also those who are in established senior positions, older, white and more often male. It is members of these demographics who are writing the articles, present on the governance boards, occupying the paid jobs, and visible in the funding bodies and networks of academia and activisms that populate and shape what passes as the alternative to the industrial food system.

And what values do such people hold that might genuinely connect with the everyday realities of the majority of the populace who are totally dependent, landless and enclosed by the extractive physical and conceptual structures that mould our everyday lives?

It might feel disingenuous as an - albeit marginal - member of such networks myself to critique those who amount to being colleagues, but as a precariously earning, single parent of obviously different from UK mainstream ethnicity (look how clunky it is to establish this differentiation!) I am rarely called upon to define mainstream narratives or lead popular food discourse. As one who has been living 'on the edges' since day one, it means a lot to me that 'Community' is genuinely a part of organisations that use that term in their name. Such organisations may nevertheless claim to be there to protect the interests of 'the marginalised', the 'hard to reach', and migrant inhabitants of a city and on and on... (The terms equivalent to 'victim' are many and as full of potent meaning as they are meaningless to those they describe).

Being catered to in this way does not mean being relegated as statistic or baseline data only or being identified as a recipient of waste or donated food meals (by product of a wasteful and profligate way of generating food). No! Being a part of the community means that, right from the outset, we are taken seriously as ones who have agency to shape our own long-term solutions in the languages that we understand and according to the timelines that work for us and with our needs firmly stated as being the critical bottom lines.

We do not want to have to translate the jargon that imbues the food movements. The jargon keeps the structures that use them against us firmly in place, behind a veil of incomprehension. This takes away our agency.

Yes we consume – we eat – but so do you, you who count yourselves as food growers, funders, activists and academics! Why are we being differentiated? To help make arguments which empower mainstreamed agendas and agency whilst reducing our own?

Why are our own histories of enclosure and commodification as labour and miseducation (not only at school, but by street adverts, visual and so called social media, entertainment industry and free paper alike) not factored in when questions are being raised about food poverty? Why, for example, are the structures and systems that created and keep us in increasingly hostile environments insufficiently considered before the statistics of our obesity, cooking skills and wretched state of poverty of agency are offered for projects to practice on?

Why is class not a factor when we are speaking about what and how we eat either in the city or the countryside?

Obesity is generally not a wealthy, well-educated, middle-class household's problem, so why do we not entertain solutions which address endemic structural issues rather than blame those who are suffering multiple social inequalities and deprivations?

Food is a national challenge which can be also become a national opportunity to act as a lens for how disadvantage is configured. Why is it that for every farm I visited, while studying agriculture, it was also a glimpse into how the 'other half' lives? Large, well equipped kitchens provided fare for hungry students mostly purchased at Waitrose (rather than being on farm fare) because farmers were mainly busy husbanding thousands of cattle, pigs and hectares of wheat and barley. When we wanted to gain insight into small-scale, sustainable farming we had to look at overseas, tropical systems, often named subsistence, even though produce was being sold in local markets or being exchanged with neighbours. Would today's small scale British activist-farmers consider renaming their systems 'subsistence', even as they adopt the cloak of 'global peasant?' How comes we fail to see and name the contradictions?

Why is it so difficult for the denizens of the food movements of today to speak publicly about the lands and people and economic deprivations of empire and its subsequent industrialisation of a system that was used to supply the imperial power of Britain with food, clothing and equipment (we often conveniently limit our discussion to what we ingest, but what about textile fibres, medicines and fuel)? Much of the raw material for industrialising Britain and the rest of Europe was derived from the plant cornucopia of the tropics. It has framed a civilisation now understood as British in a very particular and peculiar way. Yet the corridors of food jargon invention are nevertheless pretty quiet about it. It is the science of yesterday that has led to the narrowing of the gene-pools of commercial crops of today, yet we point to tropical farmers as if they are at fault, unable to look at the mirrors of our own pasts, unbroken even in the present.

As all such arguments, when presented, are eschewed as political and we'd prefer to speak of Permaculture and Agro-ecology as if both of these are not appropriations of systems of cultivating land and cultural modalities of relationships between people and land and between people themselves that imperial encounters met in their voyages of exploration.

An adequate review of the literature will point to the early identities of the cultural, 'indigenous technical knowledge' which has formed the bedrock for what is now held to be an advanced and alternative farming and living solutions to an industrial destruction of the environment and ourselves, but we still won't clearly identify these roots in academic papers or well-meaning workshops!

I have yet to read a paper which speaks of the ways in which the first generations of so called 'Windrush' citizens of British Empire cultivated their hard-won city gardens, bringing colour and taste to what Tim Lang has referred to as the 'brown food' of the British Isles. These were the some of the first urban agriculturalists post-war and yet the presence of these people, or their descendants, is scarcely found in the 'community' food projects that abound.

Such has been the spread of globalising values, language and priorities within the food system that the rediscovery of 'good food' and 'food growing' amongst the descendants of the post war 'Windrush' generations are likely to be as dissimilar to 'their mother's gardens' as their white

peers. Not always, but when expressed values become concordant with white, well-meaning colleagues, such as attitudes of distanced and distancing charitable sympathy towards society's victims: the homeless, the refugee, the victim of islamophobia and deportation, we may have damagingly relegated more authentic responses to the 'dustbins of forgotten traditions'. Have we forgotten that these words are constructed labels for people; humans, who, like us, have antiquity, knowledge and perspectives which can help transform the food systems we inhabit for the good of all of us?

For those in the food movements, I ask, has the rot penetrated so deeply that it feels impossible to begin to create spaces for otherised voices: to give them space to first exhale, and then to speak and contribute to the bringing of solutions? Can it become possible to imagine that these voices can set agendas, can voice concerns that are listened to, can be seen as a part of the people's bank of knowledge?

It would seem as if we have forgotten the history of charitable enterprise in the UK, much based upon misguided philanthropies, themselves based upon systems of classification, racist theorising and fear of the other.

Missions of aid were civilising missions conducted with the same ideologies with which both urban and rural poor in Britain were castigated under poor laws. The tropical farmer, labouring under the hot sun was seen as indolent and lazy, it was 'his nature' and the tropics would never amount to much under his husbandry. To what extent are these attitudes still reflected in recommendations for policies around food importations and in the image of the eat-well plate?

What kind of values can we yet embrace to be confident to speak about how we nourish ourselves in ways that reflect more humane and interdependent principles? When is it that we will come to understand that both class and race, as social constructs, with their interwoven manifestations of cultural norms and unearned status, as well as consumption norms, do not serve the purpose of a collective stewardship of an ailing planet?

Food and the current food systems that abound in Britain, rather than simply being seen as being broken, can be hailed as an opportunity to creatively and collectively fix, using within and across community's intelligence and traditions. Rather than seek to re-establish an old, colonial order which contains indelible blueprints of disorder,

misogyny, and racist practice and theory, we can co-create a new or restored and recovered vista of interdependence, where all voices are valued and in which all bodies matter. Can we face the ugliness of the past with what is required to clearly discern and then heal and atone it: a clear-sighted honesty and preparedness to see the entirety of the present – as a product of the past.

Not to resort to the stockpiling of greed and narrow self-preservation, but to recognise that Britain is the land it is today because of how it conducted itself yesterday and therefore to understand that all of us need to be involved in creating better tomorrows, no matter our accents, our infirmities or our hairstyles. We all need the means to do our bit, we need equity in land distribution and access, we need to recover more holistic education systems, we need to see social class in its manifestations as a construct, among others, which privileges outdated ideas about the nature of what it is to be human.

We must try, or else those of us who retain a stubborn, wilful ignorance will prevail but lose the greater battle and take the rest of us down with them.

Our food justice relies on our recognising that food is part of how our broader social justice is enacted. How we speak about food gives us a glimpse into how we have accepted and incorporated wider injustices into our everyday being. But where will this take us if we do not express good vision?

The earth may recover from the folly of our short-sightedness, but will we give ourselves a chance to?

Members' Corner: May Project Gardens

Interview with

Ian, co-founder and co-director

written by ***Rose Ziaei***

We have started a new addition to the Plot - the Members' Corner, where we will be interviewing member projects about their work and wider food related issues. In this issue, we caught up with Ian from May Project Gardens and talked about their approach to food growing and cultivating social justice.

Tell us about the work you do.

We started in 2006 as a permaculture site with Randy. After Randy left, I felt I was left with a void of skill-set and started to look at combining Hip Hop and gardening because my skill sets were community activism and engagement. In 2011, Hip Hop Garden was developed with the help of Zaira and then Mona came on board to look at all the work we do at the garden to actually create programmes - Hip Hop Garden, Grow Cook Eat, and Come We Grow.

What do you feel makes you different to other food initiatives?

We are grassroots. Everyone is using this terminology which makes it sound like a washed-out word, but I'm from a working-class background where even my economics remain grassroots. Secondly, the project is based in my council house which is unique. Thirdly, it's 70% women, and we are made up of pretty much all people of colour - I get surprised at how much we do stand out for this in the movement in a city like London. Lastly, we've only recently started to get funding for the last 2 years but prior to it we were resistant to funding because we wanted to create resilience and some funding sources create dependency.

Can you talk a little bit about how you apply permaculture principles to everyday aspects of running May Project Gardens?

Our main focus is people-care. If we don't have people at the forefront of food justice and food sovereignty, then we can't have anything else. It is about using the ethics of permaculture through the lens of people-care. Who are the people in the margins of society? People with disabilities, people of colour, working-class people, women.

We need such people to be included in our work. Often, because people have power and privilege, they go in to spaces and decide what needs to happen without any awareness of the context or looking around to see what's actually needed after having conversations with local people. You only start the work after you've connected with people and observed the context and this is really important to our work.

You talked about power and privilege just now - can you talk a little bit more about issues of power and privilege in food and other related systems?

It's interesting to see where people of colour, women, working-class people, disabled people are situated in the food movement., We're seen as consumers, not as policy or decision makers. We need to be at the table of decision making, at the table of distribution, at the table of policy making, at the table of food creation, and included in every step of the way. If we're not present, then why is it that we're not present? I've heard conversations about 'I don't know how to engage with people of colour', we're all human beings - the reality is that there is an uncomfortability, and you don't want to do the work and looking at what you might be doing wrong or looking at notions of whiteness.

Where do you think the mainstream food movement stands at the moment?

The food movement at the moment seems to be going the same way as some other social movements - becoming really homogenized, people are talking about diversity and other buzzwords but if you look at who is actually in control it tends to be the same demographic over and over again. It's got to be more diverse. There is a lack of opportunities to provide more localised jobs and employability in the food movement. We've got lots of green spaces in London, but we are also dealing with austerity and gentrification. In our borough (Merton), we have the second highest percentage of green spaces of all London boroughs, so people could easily grow food. At the moment, the food system is very fractured, it's in the hands of very few people, such as supermarkets, and there needs to be more independent traders, more farmers' markets, financial incentives to local people to grow their own food etc.

You talked a bit about diversity, how do you think issues of race, gender, class etc. interact with food?

If you look at some of the most popular foods in this country, e.g. curry, chocolate, sugar - all these things are not produced here,

they are produced in other countries.

The food system has to reflect the race and class of people who produce it - chocolate: Africa; tea: India. Why are people from these backgrounds not benefiting from the system, and always end up being consumers? There are so many economically and racial injustices black people have to deal with in order for our businesses to work. For example, we're in an African restaurant right now and the only people here are black, which means their customer base is smaller. However, if you're a white person you could appeal to anybody and reach a wider demographic. It's important for conversations around this to keep happening. It should not be about conversations anymore, but about what can we put in place to ensure our people survive and thrive? Is it subsidy? Is it branding? Is it awareness? We need all of it to thrive. If the working class and people of colour are not reflected within the system, then it's not a resilient system.

How do you feel about the discussions around healthy eating?

The main thing for me about healthy eating and good food is that as people of colour, we come from cultures across the world where plant-based diet cultures are standard. This new wave of veganism with its expensive products and diets is a myth, because we have come from environments where we have coexisted with the land, but now we've become disconnected. What's important for us is to recognise our history. How did we come to Britain? What is that journey? We need to have these conversations and underpin it with food justice, food sovereignty, intersectionality. Once you understand it, then you can do the work.

How did May Project Gardens get involved with CFGN and what kind of stuff are you guys up to at the moment?

We were doing food work in various different ways and faced lots of the challenges which we've covered in this chat. CFGN recognised our challenges, supported us, and recognised the value we bring as an organisation. For example, networking events happen a lot, where charities and privileged people are able to afford such events, but we're not salaried in this way so we're not present.

However, CFGN advocated for me to get paid to be at a particular event and that's so important because what I can bring to those spaces is valuable, but I often miss out on such opportunities. This model of support needs to be replicated. More recently, they provided us with a small budget to explore issues of diversity and how it impacts the food growers network, so we did a training based on intersectionality. CFGN constantly highlights and uplifts the work we do and not treating us like other charities, but instead valuing and celebrating our uniqueness whether it's financially, whether it's labour, or general support.

Any suggestions or possible solutions for those in the food movement wanting to do meaningful work?

Always ask: who's not at the dinner table? Who's not present? If you're an organisation with no women, no people of colour on your board or as leaders - what's going on?

Also, there are people who think they are doing really great work for communities. However, I think if you have the power to replicate community food growing projects, why do you need to do it? It's better to support and partner with existing organisations such as May Project Gardens, to do it better or more engagingly, instead of creating more competition for funding resources. If you're from a wealthy privileged background looking to set up new projects, what are you doing to support projects like ours that don't have access to the same resources? You have power. You have privilege. It's not a bad thing, it's what you do with your power and privilege which is key.