



'Who do You Think this School is For?'
Moralties and Ethical Projects on a New Orleans
Urban Farm

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Øystein Kristiansen

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Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education
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1: Introduction

'...talking with people involved in urban farming, I've come to realize that their efforts have less to do with providing healthy food than they do with a reclamation of sorts, taking ownership of their community and their daily lives.' (Kotlowitz 2012)

'Who do you think this is a school for?' The question was asked with a tone of voice and a slight smile that made it clear the inquiry was rhetorical. The questioner is part of a small group of people running an urban farm in the Lower Ninth Ward, one of the most troubled neighbourhoods in New Orleans, Louisiana. Originally envisioned as a hands-on experimental school and a 'place to go' for local teenagers, a former grocery store and family house left for good after the ravages of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, is slowly being built up around growing food and keeping livestock.

Initially seeming a quite peculiar farming practice, the school-farm is part of an urban farming trend that has been gaining public attention across North America in recent years. In response to increasing or lasting degeneration of urban areas, a number of people are making use of unused and desolate spaces in cities to grow food and raise livestock. Some grow food for their own use, as individual or communal initiatives. Others grow food not intended for personal consumption, but as a commercial activity motivated by social and environmental agendas. It is a practice carrying strong ethical undertones.

Predominantly the result of bottom-up initiatives, a 'Good Food Revolution' (Allen 2012) is slowly inspiring new uses of abandoned sites in parts of American cities, where stories of violence, poverty, under- and unemployment, deterioration of living environment, and poor future prospects are prevalent. The tools of this 'revolution' are simple, direct, often communal, low-tech or no-tech initiatives, aimed at halting - and ultimately reverting - negative influences and imaginations of marginalized life in contemporary American cities. As Alex Kotlowitz (2012) suggests above, growing food in urban areas is often about much more than simply ensuring a source for healthy food.

As a commercial initiative, urban farms differ from typical allotment or community gardens in that they grow produce and raise livestock with the aim of a profit, but, I propose, many of the local benefits are similar: contribution to urban greening and a healthier environment, access to fresh and healthy produce, skills-training, a social platform, and, not unimportantly, a sense of taking ownership of community affairs and daily lives. Next to these benefits, growing food commercially also introduces a new source of income into neighbourhoods and generates local jobs. With these dimensions as a starting point, three general questions come to mind: 1) where does this urban farming movement come from, that is, what social, economic, political, cultural, environmental conditions form the backdrop of the development of this 'revolution; 2) what is it that these urban farmers are trying to achieve; and 3) how are they in fact working to achieve their goals?

Here, I will approach these three general questions by exploring how growing food is imagined and used as a tool for positive social and ecological change by a group of urban farmers in New Orleans, Louisiana. I will use recent anthropological theories of moralities and ethics to understand why a group of initially unlikely farmers are growing food in one of the more troubled neighbourhoods of New Orleans, and what it is they wish to accomplish by doing so. Ultimately, this will address the opening question of who the school is for.

This thesis builds upon previous research into the purposes and value gardening has to urban residents, and examines the recent urban farming trend in the United States in light of this. I make the comparison to gardening because the practice of growing food in an urban landscape more often than not has more in common with gardening than it has with the rural, highly mechanised more conventional techniques in Western agriculture. Food issues are generally regarded as agricultural and rural issues within policy in the US, and only recently are the potential of urban spaces becoming considered. Although, gardening and growing growing food is widely recognised as contributing significantly to to community health and welfare, access to food is also largely taken for granted (Pothukuchi & Kaufman 1999). But urban gardening is almost always also about something else than growing food, and urban gardens have historically been an important part of civil struggles in American cities, where local residents, city authorities, and businesses often compete over the rights to use urban spaces (see e.g. McKay 2011; Smith & Kurtz 2003).

In addition to paying attention to spoken and written accounts by the farmers, I will use the anthropological sense of ethical behaviour to see these accounts in reference to the everyday practices that take place on the farm. These practices involve social interactions with local residents as well as groups and individuals from further away, as well as interactions with 'non-human entities, such as plants and animals' (Shillington 2008: 756). Laura Shillington suggests that these other-than human entities are as important to the production of home as social relations are (ibid.), and although I am not directly addressing the production of home here it is an implicit concern throughout this thesis because of the ways urban gardening and farming can contribute to a positive living environment, socially, economically, as well as environmentally.

I will propose that the farm is set up as a defined space intended to challenge the moral sentiments and dispositions of people who enter it, with the aim of triggering a number of ethical questions in the broader, classical sense of the term. These include questions such as 'how ought I to live?' I take this notion of ethical questioning from Andrew Lakoff and Stephen Collier (2004), who suggest that the interest of anthropological work dealing with questions of what human life is becoming (in given a context) lies not only in describing the 'specificities of local responses to global forms of politics and technology,' but also in contributing 'to a broader understanding of contemporary configurations of ethical reflection and practice' (2004:420).

My intention is thus not to present a prescriptive argument - after all, a moral anthropology is, in Didier Fassin's words, 'not a call for moral sentiments, but for a science of morals' (2008: 334; see also Sykes 2012) - but to try to understand how the farmers have problematized their world ethically and hence arrived at farming in the city as a way to effectively and meaningfully address some pressing social and environmental issues in present-day America. But before proceeding to to the particular farm I am interested in here, it seems appropriate to place it within the wider context from where this thesis originated.

The broader context

The idea of growing vegetables and raising livestock within cities may seem a strange one to many Westerners, but the fact is that urban farming - or urban agriculture - has long been an important source of food in North American and Western European cities. This is not a point commonly made in literature on urban agriculture, which tends to focus on its role and potential in Asian, African, and Latin American cities. After all, it is in these regions that the majority of the world's projected urban population growth will take place (UNDP 2011), and examples of farming activity within the cities of Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Kinshasa, and Havana are often put forward as solutions for how these growing urban populations can be fed (UNDP 1996; Binns & Lynch 1998; Gonzales Novo & Murphy 2000).

Running through the literature is also a concern with the effects climate change may have on future food supply, the detrimental effects much of food production and consumption has on both environmental and human health, as well as how the high levels of energy consumption demanded by industrial agriculture is vulnerable to fluctuations in fuel prices, as happened when world food prices jumped in 2006-2008 (FAO 2011). But if increasing urban populations, fluctuating energy prices and availability, pollution, and climate change are sources for worrying in the developing world, this does beg the question of how the developed world is faring in reference to these same, global challenges.

The United States is also a particularly interesting case since its population is already overwhelmingly urban centred (approximately 80% - UNDP 2011), social inequalities are some of the more striking in the developed world, and several cities that formerly relied heavily on industrial production have undergone massive changes in a process of de-industrialisation. For example, the former 'Motor City' Detroit, which together with many other American cities experienced increasing suburbanisation and 'white flight' in the second half of the 20th century, have large inner-city areas standing unused, contributing to a sense of decay and neglect.

One of the main themes in this thesis is how food has been rendered problematic. This is because of, at least in the West, the predominance of certain foodways that are, on the one

hand, characterized by a unprecedented amount and variety of food often at incredibly affordable prices, but on the other hand plays a part in social and environmental harms that begs questions about the sensibility of these foodways. To be less ambiguous, what I refer to here as 'predominant foodways' is mainly industrialized production methods where petrochemicals are used as fertilizers, pesticides, fungicides, and so on, where production is energy intensive and water demands high, and where foodstuff is usually processed mechanically and regularly distributed over long distances before reaching its customers.

So we may ask a simple, yet daunting question: Provided that climate change is a source of concern for which it will prove itself worthy, and provided that the industrial agriculture which the world's increasing, and predominantly urban, population depends upon for its sustenance is a main contributor to environmental degradation and social harm, how does one take meaningful action in trying to steer things in a more desirable direction? Such a problematization may not occur to a person at all, and if it does it may be turned away as either irrelevant, something too much to ask or as an already lost cause. But here I wish to look at an instance where a group of people have taken on such a task.

A prominent writer on how particular *foodways* are connected to both social organization and uses of the environment, Michael Pollan (2008) amongst others link local, regional, and global problems of pollution, health, and social inequalities to the ways in which they feed themselves. Food, as such, offers a lens to look at how global flows of resources, goods, technology, information, and money affect local places, and, encouragingly, food also seems to provide one relatively straightforward way for individual and communal initiatives addressing environmental and social problems. This is reflected in the environmental justice discourse that has developed in the United States over the past thirty years, which highlights how environmental hazards are disproportionately found in the residential areas and workplaces of non-whites, and as such explicitly connected environmental issues with social ones. In this process, the 'environment' has been reconceived from the traditional environmental movement's focus on preserving wilderness and landscape 'out there' to include the places where people live their lives - 'right here' - and hence broadened the moral scope of what caring about the environment may entail. Similarly, the inclusion of a notion of

'justice' has brought new forms of moral subjects, arguments, and practices and new ways of perceiving these.

Seeing the recent food movement as a continuation of the environmental justice movement - environmental justice focused on food activism - I will use anthropological moral theories to try to understand why growing food has become the focus of a particular form of grassroots initiative in the United States, as well as how these initiatives are working to rearticulate food as part of the problem of living in the city into food being a solution to at least some of these problems. As a particular form of practice, growing plants in the city - whether as a source of food or for other purposes - takes place within an environment of highly contested spaces, and the history of urban gardening is full of quarrels between residents, city authorities, and businesses over the right to use these spaces (Smith & Kurtz 2003). These quarrels are loaded with moral constructs that identify who is 'good' and who is 'bad,' what is at stake, what ideals should be strived for, and who has the moral responsibility to ensure that these ideals are being worked towards.

Applying anthropological theories of morality and ethics to my own ethnographic data, I hope to show how the group of urban farmers in New Orleans are using growing food as a tool for training skills, education, creating jobs, and for bringing a source of income into their neighbourhood, while consciously trying to trigger ethical reflection and reflective action in people who get involved with the project. The farm's setting, its design, the people involved on it, and the work done - with other people and with plants and animals - are all vital elements in the attempt to be a meeting point and a moral crossroads for locals as well as for visiting outsiders.

Part of my argument is that in the midst of all the public and academic interest in 'sustainability,' its underlying values of must be explored. 'Its' being a misleading word here because notions of sustainability depend on people's value-judgements rather than on an objectively definable aim. 'In the end,' Michael Carolan suggests, 'talk of the *science* of sustainability puts the cart before the horse. We can use science to help us figure out how to best reach certain ends we define as «sustainable.» How we determine those ends, however, is a process best left for a little thing called democracy' (2012: 251). I hope to show that the

farm explored here is all about making a value statement - an ethical example - with the ultimate aim of provoking its visitors into reflective action.

Approaching urban farming through moral anthropology

A number of anthropologists have noted that their field has historically been surprisingly negligent toward the moral worlds people live in and how individual and collective values are often negotiated. Traditionally, things moral and ethical have been aligned with cultural norms and values, but recent calls for the establishment of a 'moral anthropology' - or an 'anthropology of ethics' - alongside other recognized subfields such as political anthropology, cultural anthropology, and visual anthropology have been persuasive in their argument that a new and distinct conceptual framework is needed. In general, this involves a conception of ethics as questions that go beyond the kind the alignment of moral reasoning and choices that anthropologists traditionally have placed within social and cultural norms and rules. Rather, moral anthropology tries to understand how people reason and behave in relation to what they regard to be 'good,' 'bad,' or 'evil.' This section provides an overview over relevant recent literature within moral anthropology, which will also act as an overview of the conceptual framework used in this thesis.

To understand the recent interest in morality and ethics within anthropology, we must first briefly survey how past anthropologists have dealt with these. The majority of the anthropologists included here have noted that, despite of the flourishing interest within the field, anthropology has an uneasy relationship with morality and ethics. Much of this discomfort has been attributed the domination of the intellectual legacies of Emile Durkheim and Franz Boas, whose main interest in the subject was how the study of non-Western cultures could serve as a moral critique of the West (Stoczkowski 2008: Laidlaw 2002).

Durkheim equated morality with the norms and values that could be found in a given society, which relegated it as an object of primary interest to one that would be studied anyway through the study of social norms and cultural traditions (Laidlaw 2002). Boas advocated a principle of cultural relativism in order to oppose the evolutionist and universalist paradigms

dominant social research at his time, which created cultural hierarchies based on how far different societies had 'developed' in comparison with others (Fassin 2008).

Boas' principle of cultural relativism was a reaction against this ranking of cultures - which he proclaimed to be immoral - and his principle has had a lasting influence on how anthropological research is presented (ibid.). For example, Claude Lévi-Strauss believed the mission of ethnology to be to transmit to the West 'the lessons of wisdom provided by that part of humanity known as primitive ... and accept the message of wisdom in order to develop a new moral order, extended to the ensemble of living beings and able to reconcile us with Nature' (Stoczkowski 2008:348).

This tradition of using anthropological research as a form of moral critique is also visible in the overwhelming tendency among works that deal with moral issues to side with the 'weak.' Fassin (2008) suggests that this focus on the marginalized and oppressed in society possibly reflects a reaction against anthropologists' long history of controversial involvements with colonial administrations, Cold War governments, as well as the post 9/11 war on terror, as so, to take the side of the weak possibly guarantees the moral nature of their work.

Jarrett Zigon (2007) have noted two main problems that are apparent in much of this work. One is that the work is often presented in a way that makes clear only what the researchers themselves - and not their subjects - consider to be moral; the other is that by overwhelmingly choosing the side of the weak the body of anthropological literature becomes disproportionately focused on issues of being marginalized and oppressed, without a similar weight on the forces causing this. There may be several reasons for this kind of favouritism, and although I am unsure about how much anthropology's controversial history actually weights in on researchers' decisions to study the weak as a form of redemption, as Fassin (2008) seems to suggest, the reality still remains that studying the struggles of the weak is often more engaging than to study their 'oppressors.' It is also often more manageable in terms of scope.

Morality and ethics, then, was to such prominent figures as Durkheim, Boas, and Lévi-Strauss - and still is to many anthropologists - more a matter of guidelines and codes for conducting

research and whether or not to follow up research with forms of public activism, than objects of study in their own right (Caduff 2011). This is not necessarily a bad thing per se, but leaving the moral and ethical to questions of practice alone may leave some fruitful sources of information unexplored. After all, Karen Sykes (2012) suggests, an 'anthropologist is neither an ethicist nor a philosopher. He or she can examine the range of answers that others offer to the question of what is the good, and then discuss why one should be convinced by those answers' (2012:176).

To return to the aim of this thesis, I said that I hope to demonstrate how my ethnographic data shows an urban farming project set up to trigger ethical reflection. How this works will become clear in the later chapters, but for now I will try to clarify precisely what I mean by 'ethical reflection.' I will start by clarifying the terminology used.

Although often used interchangeably, an analytical distinction is commonly made between morality and ethics. Morality usually refers to a set of established social and cultural norms and values, which function as general agreements within a society or a group of what behaviour is 'right' and what is 'wrong;' what is 'good' and what is 'bad' or 'evil.' Morals are therefore often referred to as - if not strict rules - at least a set of guidelines for what types of conduct are encouraged and approved of and what types discouraged disapproved of. We can therefore speak of moral 'systems,' although in a loose sense, that exert varying degrees of influence over people's decisions and behaviour. Often, established moral codes and ideals, whether in the form of civil laws or religious laws, are what people refer to if asked about what constitutes 'right' or 'good' behaviour (Zigon 2010).

Zigon (2010: 5-8) proposes a conception of morality as containing three different but interrelated aspects: the institutional, as public discourse, and as embodied dispositions. The institutional aspect refers to the influence formal and non-formal social organizations -which wield varying degrees of power over individual persons - make certain moral claims to which people are expected to conform. Religious as well as secular institutions have certain ideals they promote and expect their supporters to follow, which may or may not be the case. This also means that there is a plurality of institutional moralities within any given society. As public discourse, moral claims can be in the form of official ideology (upheld by institutions,

but not explicitly articulated) and behavioural ideology (which Zigon refers to as 'everyday dialogical interactions between persons' (6)). The point of this distinction is to highlight how the official ideologies and people in their everyday interactions both work to authorize and support each other but also to undermine and subvert each other. The third aspect, as embodied dispositions, Zigon likens to Marcel Mauss' notion of *habitus*, as 'unreflective and reflexive dispositions of everyday life acquired over a lifetime' of *socially performed techniques* (Zigon 2010: 7) Morality as embodied dispositions allows for 'nonconsciously acceptable ways of living in the world,' where 'acceptable' has less to do with a sense of obligation and more to do with 'being comfortable' or 'living sanely in one's world' (5). Zigon prefers Mauss' *habitus* over Pierre Bourdieu's identically named concept on the crucial point that, whereas Bourdieu thinks of habitus as something acquired largely unconsciously, Mauss' concept allows the often conscious and intentional work people do to make themselves more morally acceptable - to themselves or to others.

Most of the anthropological literature relevant here does not go into as much detail as Zigon does in clarifying what morality consists in, but at the same time interest in conceptions of ethics is much more widespread. Several anthropologists have commented on how our contemporary understanding of ethics is very different from that of earlier times. Ethics, in the narrow contemporary usage of term, refers to the application of these moral values to specific situations (Lakoff & Collier 2004: 421). It is 'narrow,' because it differs from the classical sense of the term as a form of reflection and practice concerned with questions about how one ought to live (ibid.), which is a form of questioning that goes beyond simply picking the best already available option. Carlo Caduff (2012: 476) notes that this tendency both within and outside of academia to reduce the 'ethical field' to sets of values and rules, and to reduce ethical problems to 'a question of deliberation and judgment,' is to follow the steps of Durkheim and equate morality with 'culture' or 'society' as an analytical concept, and hence makes independent study of morals neither necessary nor possible (see also Laidlaw 2002).

One of the consequences of this equation is insensitivity to what James Laidlaw (2002: 315) calls the 'possibilities of human freedom,' which to Laidlaw is the defining factor distinguishing the recent anthropological interest in morality and ethics from its more classical traditions. His choice of 'freedom' over, for example, the more commonly used term within

the social sciences, 'agency,' has to do with opening up to the possibility of ethnographically studying the 'aspects of ethical life that cannot be captured in a history of moral codes or social rules' (321). Agency is a matter of the effectiveness of action, of pointing out whose acts are structurally important or powerful, and so focuses only on actions that seem right from the outside (316).

This approach still focuses on how people maneuver within social and cultural values and rules as moral systems, and limits the scope of what can be considered ethical action. Laidlaw explains: 'Moral thinking ... is a matter of weighing obligations and deciding where one's duty lies, and moral judgment rests on whether one chooses, whatever one's desires or inclinations, to act in accordance with this duty' (317). His idea of freedom, on the other hand, is heavily influenced by that of Michel Foucault, as a critical distancing, in thought and practice, from 'normal' ways of acting or reacting, and to question their meaning, conditions, and goals (Laidlaw 2002: 324). Answers to this form of questioning are not found in the analytical concepts of cultural representations, habitus, or discourse, but in what Foucault referred to as *techniques of the self*, that is, the ways in which people purposefully make themselves into a certain kind of person (326; see also Caduff 2012; Zigon 2007, 2010).

The crucial point here is that ethnographically study how people exercise freedom in this sense is a way of understanding from where ethical projects derive, in a sense their motivation, which may appear to be the fulfillment of a moral obligation in the end, but this obligation was not the starting point of the projects. Zigon (2007) refers to his starting point as a moral breakdown.

A moral breakdown takes place when people find that their everyday behaviour no longer suffices to solve a certain problem, with the result being that what could previously be solved by the largely unproblematic way we act in relation to our social and material surroundings on a day-to-day basis suddenly requires new solutions (moves from being 'ready-to-hand' to being 'present-at-hand' in Heidegger's terminology). As an experiential moment, what has previously been an unreflective state becomes a reflective one, that is, as mentioned above, one starts to question the meaning, conditions, and goals of one's 'normal' behaviour (Zigon 2007:137). Just as Laidlaw, then, Zigon suggests that anthropologists should study these

moments where people question their moral dispositions, and how this questioning leads to a process of trying to alter these dispositions - to purposefully make themselves into a certain kind of person.

One more clarification is needed at this initial stage. Andrew Lakoff and Stephen Collier (2004) note that the kinds of moments of ethical reflection and practice we have just discussed are always part of historically particular configurations. What this means is that ideas of ethical practice ('*how*'), notions of ethical subjects ('*one*'), and questions of norms and values ('*should*') are contingent to a certain form of life in a given domain of living (420), that is, the ideas people have about what should be done and why in order to live ethically are based on particular forms of moral problematizations made by individuals or groups. One of the examples Lakoff and Collier make is how the modern assumption that ethics and rationality are two separate things, which in effect separates questions of 'facts' from questions of 'value.' This distinction results in a very different conception of what ethical action consists in today compared to, for example, ancient Greek conceptions of it as 'reasoned choice' (*phronesis*) wherein considerations of values were central.

The political community of the Greek city-state (*polis*), Lakoff and Collier point out, offered a degree of overview and sense of involvement in social and political matters that are not easily available within the much larger political arena of the modern polity. In fact, the Greeks made an ethical opposition between the state and the individual household (*oikos*), which was seen as essential because the former should be a space of freedom from the everyday concerns of biological and social existence that characterize the latter (Lakoff & Collier 2004: 425).

This distinction is removed in the modern concept of 'society,' which Lakoff and Collier claim operates as a national *oikos* - a national household - that is, an arena where 'only questions of sheer survival are permitted to appear in public,' which serves as the 'main source of state legitimacy and a primary goal of regulating collective life' (Lakoff & Collier 2004: 425, emphasis added). This notion of *society*, by now more or less accepted as a 'quasi-natural or universal term' in Paul Rabinow's words, only acquired this meaning in 19th century Europe (1988: 360). The point here is to show how changes in ideas of what constitutes an ethical subject and what its purposes, obligations, and rights are have dramatic consequences

in terms of limiting and opening up for certain behaviours and actions in people's everyday lives. A recent trend within moral philosophy, which anthropologists have picked up on, is to question the desirability of attempts to theorize a 'generalized ethical condition of the present' (430; see also Flyvbjerg 2000), because, as I have noted earlier, this is to place ethical action within a moral code of conduct and hence miss the situational understanding people have of what they are in fact doing when they are acting ethically.

Thesis outline

The overall purpose of this thesis is to show - through the example of an urban farm in New Orleans - how food has become the centre of an urban agriculture trend in the United States, and is in the process of being rearticulated from being part of widespread social and environmental problems to being a solution to these very same problems. To make sense of how this process is taking place, chapter two looks at the environmental justice discourse and activism that has developed in the United States over the past three decades, how it has changed perceptions of what the 'environment' is compared to that prevalent within classic environmental movements, and how its notion of 'justice' has gone beyond the traditional focus social questions and made these explicitly linked with natural and human created surroundings.

The environmental justice framework is reflected in the overall aims of the farm, and has been very influential to the way the farmers organize their farm and their work, and place themselves within larger narratives of social and environmental problems. The introduction of the environmental justice framework is aimed to place the urban farm and the particular urban farming trend within a particular form of environmentalism that has evolved in the United States over the past three decades, which is an important background to the subsequent chapters on how our farm is working.

Chapter three introduces the research setting and the methodology used in approaching it. Post-Katrina New Orleans has received an incredible amount of attention by researchers, and I will use select material focusing on one neighbourhood, the Lower Ninth Ward, to set the

scene before introducing the farm. This chapter offers a brief reflection on the research process.

Chapter four looks at how growing food is imagined and used by the farmers as a tool to involve and challenge locals as well as outsiders. It tries to pay attention to both the significance of the physical work and the resulting aesthetic this results in, as well as how growing food is used as a way of interaction.

Chapter five offers some concluding remarks, thoughts on the farm project and on the research process.

2: Urban Gardens, Farms, and Environmental Justice

'If you give me a fish, you have fed me for a day. If you teach me to fish, then you have fed me until the river is contaminated or the shoreline seized for development. But if you teach me how to organize, then whatever the challenge I can join together with my peers and we will fashion our own solution.' (a quote by artist Ricardo Levins Morales, painted onto one of the farm's outside walls)

'In the last decade, the most fundamental promise of the American Way - that the next generation will be better off - has evaporated for most families.' (Goldman 1996: 123).

To think of growing food as a way of doing justice implies that a wide ethical agenda is involved. In an interview in 2009, Will Allen, the founder of the Illinois-based urban farming organization Growing Power, articulates one of the social influences he hopes to have through his work: 'Low-quality food is resulting in diabetes, obesity, and sickness from processed food... One of our four strategic goals is to dismantle racism in the food system. Just as there is redlining in lending, there is redlining in grocery stores, denying access to people of colour by staying out of minority communities' (Bybee 2009). Allen has become somewhat of an icon among urban farmers across the United States, and his farm sites in Milwaukee and Chicago are both local and national showcases for growing food in cities as a positive tool to use desolate urban spaces, and not the least bring much needed work and training opportunities to locals.

The 'Good Food Revolution' Allen (2012) describes as being in the making in contemporary United States has as much to do with a sense of reclaiming land and an ability to impact local affairs in the midst of neoliberal policies and global capitalism as it has with providing fresh produce grown in ways more environmentally responsible than the country's more widely used farming techniques. In this chapter, I will look at these notions of reclamation and having an impact on one's immediate surrounding in the light of a particular form of environmentalism that has its origins in the late 1970s United States. The *environmental justice movement*, as it has become known, sought to eliminate the until-then common separation between civil struggles and environmental concerns, and join them within one framework of discourse and action.

In a general sense, 'justice' is usually a term that focuses on social issues, on crimes or offences being done to someone, and generally includes the idea of a two-part process needed to be properly achieved; that of the offender having to suffer some kind of loss, usually in the form of a compensation or in certain freedoms being taken away, and the offended being compensated for the harm done to him or her. More rarely is this kind of idea of 'justice' also concerned with harms done to animals or natural habitat, but over the past three decades in particular, there has been an increasing tendency among environmental movements in the West to highlight how many social issues - in particular relating to health - are directly and indirectly related to polluted and degraded natural environments, and not only in the countryside or in the wilderness, but also in urban settings. Along with this trend is the increasing participation within environmental discourse and activism by minority communities, who historically have not considered the 'environment' to be an urban issue (Checker 2001: 138).

The aim of this chapter is to show how environmentalism in the United States has developed primarily since the late 1970s, and moved from an almost exclusively middle-class enterprise (Heiman 1996) to also include the concerns and participation of socially marginalized groups. This process has involved debates and practices that have questioned the moral foundations of official legislation and business activities, and ethically problematised what the 'environment' is and how 'justice' is a concern not only for people, but for places, for habitat. By loosely following the development of the environmental justice framework, my purpose here is to provide a historical background and wider context from which the particular setting, time, arguments and techniques of our farm can be better understood.

Conceiving environmental justice

A clear-cut definition of environmental justice would be a convenient starting point, but as a theoretical concept and a framework for practical action, it is not without its difficulties to define. As a starting point, however, Pauline Deutz (2012: 3) offers a recent articulation that is representative for much of the contemporary literature:

Environmental justice concerns the equitable (i.e. perceived as socially or spatially fair) distribution of environmental dis-benefits (e.g. air pollution) and benefits (e.g. urban green spaces) as well as participation, democracy and empowerment.

In contrast to the more traditional environmental movement in the West, with its typically white, middle-class following, the environmental justice movement grew out of more sombre conditions (Checker 2001). In the early years of what would later develop into the environmental justice framework, activists tended to focus on the first part of Deutz' definition, i.e. preventing polluting facilities and factories from being disproportionately established near non-white residential areas, as well as highlighting the geographical inequalities already in existence.

Most environmental justice literature point to the 1979 landmark lawsuit of a Houston waste management company by African-American homeowners as the beginning of a wider, more organised movement. In response to the planned establishment of a landfill near a predominantly black residential area, the homeowners established the Northeast Community Action Group and filed the first lawsuit of this kind in US history (Bullard 2001). Three years later, a similar case in Warren County, North Carolina, brought national media attention to a protest against what was calimed to be environmental discrimination based on race (ibid.).

Inspired by the Warren County incident, the report *Toxic Waste and Race* was released in 1987, which found race to be a consistently more significant variable than poverty, land values, and home ownership in terms of determining the proximity of residential areas to commercial hazardous waste facilities (see also Bullard 2001). Finding a higher likelihood for poor and coloured people to be exposed to envionrmental hazards was itself nothing new, but what was novel about the report was that it suggested that there was discriminatory intent involved (Heiman 1996: 111). Increasingly, the 'environment' was becoming a voiced concern among urban minorities (Checker 2001).

Another report published in 1990, *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, highlighted that the link between race and exposure to environmental hazards was

particularly prevalent in the southern states of the US (Bullard 1990, 2001). Increasingly, a connection was being made between race, socioeconomic class, and the likelihood of being exposed to pollution at home, at work, and in school, along with a growing assumption that there was an element of intent underlying the geographic and demographic environmental inequalities found.

Well into the 1990s, the main attention of environmental justice activists continued to be the highlighting of spaces of environmental inequality. Largely in the form of geographical mapping, non-whites were consistently likely to be worse off than whites in terms of exposure pollution, health risks, and other environmental hazards. Debates would commonly revolve around how conclusive demographic evidence actually was, of whether class or race was the better predictor for hazardous waste siting, and when siting was disproportionate, whether this was the result of 'true racism or mere market efficiency' (Heiman 1996: 112).

Since the mid-1990s, researchers have become increasingly aware of the complexity of such spaces of environmental inequality, and have come to see a need for research that complements demographic and geographic mapping. Two manifestations of this increasing awareness are of particular interest here: the growing interest in the lived experience of individuals who are subject to this inequality, and the role of global capitalism in shaping these inequalities (Holifield et al. 2009; Deutz 2012; Heiman 1996). This latter point has particularly taken the form of researching what happens when environmental ills are removed from one place to another, which is often just a relocation of the problem.

In the United States, the southern states have for a long time served as a 'sacrifice zone' the nation's toxic waste, which is often accredited to insufficient enforcement of environmental regulations, but also on a prevalent perception that environmental regulation is bad for business (Bullard & Johnson 2000:566). The conclusion Bullard and Johnson (2000: 574) draw from this is that the environmental protection apparatus in the United States 'does not provide equal protection for all communities.'

More holistically, Bullard (2001) has argued elsewhere that besides a mere lack of enforcement, the dominant protection paradigm in the US serves to reinforce rather than to

challenge the stratification of people. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is the main official body in the US intended to write and enforce regulations to protect human and environmental health based on environmental laws passed by Congress¹. Bullard (2001) argues that this paradigm reinforces rather than challenges social stratification because the EPA 'does not ask questions about which groups are more affected than others by environmental pollution, why they are affected, who is responsible for the polluting, what can be done to remedy the problem, and how it can be prevented' (2001: 155). Ryan Holifield et al. (2009) follow by giving the example of 'the US Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund program, [where] implementing environmental justice came in practice to mean little more than finding ways to build trust with community residents, provide vehicles for their participation, and make them aware of federal grant and other financial opportunities' (598).

It is not within the scope of this thesis to suggest that there is indeed an element of intent or not behind the apparent environmental discrimination, but the fact that it is mentioned in debates and imagined among residents and activists makes for a very special socio-political climate. Relating Bullard's (2001) criticism to a moral anthropological view, we may even suggest that, rather than intent, the discrimination is partly a practical consequence of the conceptual categorizations and forms of reasoning made by the EPA and other government officials. An example of this is the EPA's prevalent use of the reasoning that, in the case of uncertainty, a chemical is 'safe to use unless proven otherwise' - quite a different line of argumentation than 'we do not know for sure that this chemical is safe, hence its use should be restricted until we know more.' Also, the burden of proof is more commonly placed upon the polluted rather than on the polluter, and focusing on intent tends to take focus away from actual effects (Bullard 2001: 559). This makes for a climate where there is a tension between marginalized groups (and their advocates), authorities, and businesses, that has been formed around questions of human and environmental health, where yet other conceptual categories and forms of reasoning are formed and negotiated. One major shift in environmental activism in the United States has been a widening of the term 'environment,' which is the subject of the next section.

¹ 'Our Mission and What We Do' United States Environmental Protection Agency. <<http://www2.epa.gov/aboutepa/our-mission-and-what-we-do>>. Unknown publication date. Retrieved 11 March 2013.

The changing proximity of the 'environment'

I have earlier touched upon the theme of globalization as a source of anxiety, and the repercussions of global flows of materials, goods, people, money, pollution, and so on are certainly closely held concerns among environmental activists. As early as in 1912, the researchers of New York City's monumental study on the food system that kept its residents fed found that not only was the system global in its scale, but that even 'relative low-value commodities such as potatoes were brought from as far away as Bermuda, Scotland, Ireland, and Belgium' (Donofrio 2007: 33). Although the researchers were supposedly surprised by the sheer size of the network that brought the city its food, for them it was a sign of the success of modern technology and progress - for others, the findings were a source of concern in the way the increasing globalisation and specialisation would affect cities and their regions economically, socially, and environmentally (ibid.). This example is particularly interesting in that it brings in questions of scale and scalar dynamics, and local impacts of larger processes.

Much of recent anthropological literature on globalization and food systems have touched upon a tension between 'discourses of expertise' and 'ordinary people' not only in terms of whose interests are taken into account in policy debates, but also, on a more fundamental level, how 'there is a sense that social exclusion is ever more tied to *epistemological* exclusion' (Appadurai 2000: 2, emphasis added). This tension plays out in a number of ways and takes a number of forms. In the production stage of a food system it often reveals a strained relationship between the policies implemented by governments, the technologies advocated by biotech companies, and the actual practices of farmers (see e.g. Pottier 1999; Richards 2010). In North America and Western Europe, the tension has been played out in various forms of a *countercuisine* movement since the late 1960s (Belasco 2005), but also as a broader environmental movement. What precisely the 'environment' is taken to mean is not at all a given.

To the more traditional American environmental movements, the environment was often imagined mainly in terms of pristine wilderness and wildlife, and activists sought to promote to protection of these from the destructive impacts of industrial production (McKay 2011; Heiman 1996). Conceptually, the movement made a distinction between 'Society' and

'Nature' as two largely antagonistic categories that should be kept apart as far as possible - a wish ecosystems research has come to deem mere wishful thinking (see e.g. UN MA 2005). Tactically, the movement focused mainly on utilizing formal 'power' channels such as legal action, political lobbying, and technical evaluation rather than mobilizing masses, which it had done at an earlier point (Bullard & Wright 1987).

The particular agenda setting, categorizations, and actions of the mainstream environmental movement in the United States reflected the interests of its predominantly white middle class supporters (Checker 2001; Heiman 1996). But although litigation, political lobbying and technical evaluation became the dominant tactics of the movement, there were also other forms of action that are of particular interest here. One of these was the establishment of the *countercuisine* movement in North America and Western Europe, motivated by an increasing disillusionment and abhorrence with the wider social and environmental impacts of a globalized food system and the environmental destruction resulting from the industrial agriculture of Green Revolution in the 1960s and '70s in the late '60s (Belasco 2005).

As a movement, Warren Belasco (2005) argues that the *countercuisine* 'represented a serious and largely unprecedented attempt to reverse the direction of dietary modernisation and thereby align personal consumption with perceived global needs' (2005: 217). The movement promoted the creation of alternative food systems through self-sufficiency and community supported farms, and as part of this project it introduced some of the oppositional grammar that is recognizable in food discourse to this date. This includes distinctions between 'plastic' and 'natural' foods, where the former described machine-processed food homogenous in form and containing chemical additives, and the latter was not only free of additives but also included elements of nostalgia, appearing more honest and simple than the standardized food processing of the larger industry (Belasco 2005: 221). Similar distinctions were made between 'craft' and 'convenience,' as skill and knowhow opposed to simple consumption, and, more provokingly, between 'white' and 'brown' as symbolized by the process of making Wonder Bread, America's best selling bread at the time of the movement's initiation:

Wonder Bread's manufacture could be taken to represent the white flight of the 1950s and 1960s. To make clean bread, ITT's bakers removed all coloured ingredients (segregation), bleached the remaining flour (suburban school socialisation), and then, to prevent

discolouring decay, added strong preservatives and stabilisers (law enforcement). [Belasco 2005: 221]

Some of the countercuisine movement's oppositional grammar has fallen out of use, although we find new forms in 'organic' and 'chemical,' 'local' and 'imported.' Another currently influential distinction within food activist discourse is made between the 'local' and the 'imported,' which relates directly to the anxiety over globalisation Appadurai (2000) identifies. Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman have noted how this distinction serves to identify the 'local' as a 'powerful political force against the forces of globalisation,' but also how it is often talked about within food activist rhetoric as a largely unproblematic concept (2005: 364; see also Winter 2003). *Food miles, foodsheds, and yield gap* are some of the more commonly used notions referring to local, regional, and global scales within food activism discourse, and most commonly so to argue in favour of increased localization.

DuPuis and Goodman hence identify the risk of *fetishising emplacement*, so as to assume that 'food systems become just by virtue of making them local,' which they find to be prevalent also in academic literature (2005: 359). Failing to consider the often hierarchical power structures and local conflicts therefore often ends in leaving out the important questions of how local food systems themselves can be made more just, that is, how localism itself can become an effective movement of resistance to globalism (364).

As a backdrop to these oppositions is the notion that food systems have strong social and cultural ties, and that the intensification and specialisation in food production, processing, and retail has an overall negative impact on local communities and natural environments². Heiman (1996) has argued that 'the modern environmental movement (in its regulatory mode) can be traced to a middle-class awakening to the spread of pollutants from industrial production beyond working class, inner-city neighborhoods' (116). Crucial to this point is that the 'environment' has historically not been considered an urban issue, at least not, according to Melissa Checker (2001), among urban minorities. To what extent this is accurate is difficult to

² Several studies relating to what is commonly referred to as the 'Goldschmidt thesis,' which proposes that industrial agriculture tends to impact local communities and social structures negatively, support this notion (see Carolan 2012 pp. 94-103 for a comprehensive list on community and environmental impacts of industrial agriculture).

tell - those with funds enough to leave polluted and crowded inner cities have tended to do so - but for those with poorer financial and social standings the promise of employment was understandably more important (ibid.). Not until the late 1970s and early '80s was any significant attention paid to the state of the living environments of people who could or would not simply leave.

What has been a continuing process within the environmental justice framework is the direct linking between the 'environment' - not as natural habitat 'out there' to be protected or conserved, but as the immediate surroundings where people live, work, go to school; 'right here' - and more traditional civil rights issues. The seeming failure of official bodies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (which was established almost a decade before environmental justice campaigns were starting to become visible) to prevent the establishment and continuing operation of hazardous waste facilities and polluting industries in the vicinity of residential areas has resulted in a movement that is largely formed from below, and that focuses on immediate action in immediate surroundings.

As an imagined geographical entity, the environment has come to mean natural, built, as well as social surroundings, and, if we are to believe Ryan Holifield et al. (2009), environmental justice activists and academics have become increasingly sensitive to how the removing of environmental ills from one area often means that it is merely relocated somewhere else. Hence, in the rhetoric and discourse among environmental justice activist, the environment is also not merely 'right here,' but a cross-scalar dynamic that has become increasingly visible through popular attention to issues such as climate change.

The environment, if a simplification may be permitted, has moved away from being imagined as something that was possible to be separated - in relative terms - from industrial societies and which mainly comprised Nature, and toward also being imagined to include human living health and safety. As such, Melissa Checker (2001) has noted, the 'environment' has increasingly been used as an 'organising narrative' that contains within itself enough of an ambiguity to gather people around claims of rights and justice (144). The next section addresses the how claims of justice have become centered around environmental questions.

The distributional justice paradigm

Etymologically meaning 'righteousness' or 'equity' (from Latin *iustitia*), 'justice' in the contemporary sense usually entails 'ensuring that each person receives what she or he is due' (Cohen 1986: 1). Justice in this sense, Allen Buchanan and Deborah Mathieu note, includes a sense of entitlement to certain benefits and burdens within a given society, which may or may not correspond to what people generally believe to be good or moral or virtuous (1986: 11-12). As a philosophical concept, justice involves questions of what the terms used in moral discourse mean, what rules of reasoning and what forms of knowledge are acceptable to show the truth or falseness of moral beliefs, as well as normative questions of what people ought to do (ibid.). But how does this theory work with actual environmental justice activism? To answer this question, I will use this section to mainly outline the argument David Schlosberg makes in his 2007 article *Reconceiving Environmental Justice*.

Schlosberg's (2007) aim is to evaluate how more philosophically abstract theories of justice fare with the actual work and perceptions of environmental activists, a process which leads him to conclude that the predominant sense of *justice* within the framework is problematic to both theory and practice. Theoretically, he argues that conceptions of justice within environmental justice research are dominated by an over-acceptance of 'justice' as to do solely with *distribution* (518). Identifying this particular understanding as central to liberal theories of justice, and in particular in the works of philosophers John Rawls and David Miller, Schlosberg questions the accuracy and use of distribution as a sole criterion for what justice is, as it relates poorly to how environmental justice researchers and activists articulate their aims and shape their tactics.

Practically, the distribution definition of justice does not adequately relate to the integrated demands and expressions that actually take place in environmental justice activism (Schlosberg 2007: 518). This, then, often leaves a gap in understanding between what matters in terms of defining environmental justice as a unified movement and how work is actually done in a given context. Finding the definitions dissatisfying both for theory and practice, Schlosberg argues that, although distribution is an important part of ensuring fairness, there

are two other elements of justice often overlooked in environmental justice literature that are essential: *recognition* and *participation*.

Following the arguments of Iris Young (1990) and Nancy Fraser (1997, 1998, 2000, 2001), Schlosberg takes on the liberal tradition in justice theory. He notes that, although a distributive focus may offer insights into how distribution may be improved, it fails to examine the institutional conditions underlying the poor distribution in the first place (2007: 518). A lack of recognition, he argues, is demonstrated in forms of insults, degradation, and devaluation at individual as well as group levels, which does not only harm oppressed communities in their place, but also their image in the larger cultural and political realms (519).

The argument goes as follows: without recognition, individuals and groups will not have their interests taken into account by the institutions and organizations that have the power to influence one way or the other, and without recognition there will be no opportunity for real political participation, leaving marginalized individuals and groups with still less influence on the wider decisions that affect their lives. This corresponds with Arjun Appadurai's (2000) warning of an epistemological exclusion of the marginalised mentioned earlier.

Hence, recognition is not, as liberal theories of justice suggest, merely a part of the distribution framework, because, for one, it cannot simply be assumed to already exist, as there is plenty of evidence of cases where it is absent, and two, it is not a 'thing' that can be distributed, but a product of the continuous relationships between people (similar to a Foucauldian notion of power).

Although Schlosberg does agree that the fairness of distributory processes can be ensured to some degree by the state and its institutions, he is also weary that the state apparatus itself may shape and be shaped by processes of unfair representation. Hilda Kurtz (2009) has suggested that, in fact, the state is often overlooked as a contributor to environmental injustices and their racial undertones. Similarly, Robert Bullard (2001) has argued that the 'dominant environmental protection paradigm [in the United States] reinforces instead of challenges the stratification of people (race, ethnicity, status, power, etc.), place (central cities,

suburbs, rural areas, unincorporated areas, Native American reservations etc.), and work (i.e. office workers are afforded greater protection than farm workers)' (2001: 155).

What is apparent in this argument is a variety of ethical constructs that identify not only an idea of who is responsible and who has rights, or of what should be done, but more fundamentally it also shows how these constructs can change in their identification of what is the problem in the first place. Andrew Lakoff and Stephen Collier (2004) give an example of how, at the point of intersection between technology, politics, and ethics, identifying 'appropriate agents' to respond to certain value questions shape both the processes followed and results coming resulting from trying to give an answer.

In Lakoff and Collier's (2004) case, they take the example of the questions novel reproductive technologies pose to Canadian 'society.' The agent found appropriate to answer what stand should be taken is the state, through the work of a commission, which assumes that it should base its conclusions on behalf Canadian society 'as a whole' (421). How can the commission register the opinions of 'society'? In this case through the 'appropriation and deployment of an ethical technology - a survey' (ibid.). By registering the opinions of citizens in this way, a procedural sense of justice and fairness could be claimed - but what is also taking place is that by registering the varieties of opinions so as to solve a conflict, the commission has dealt with an ethical question both in terms of a specific situation and as a broader reflection on how the ethical subject 'society' should live, but it has also done so by using a procedure that is grounded in an assumed universal value, that of liberality, which was left unquestioned. 'Would the recommendations have been different... if 'society' was deemed to be illiberal?' (Lakoff & Collier 2004: 422). My point here is simply that at a certain point, ethical assumptions are made and often left unquestioned, and the question of fairness and justice can be placed at different points of a process that may well be genuinely intended to secure just that fairness and justice.

In the case of environmental justice activism in the United States, Bullard (2001) observes that '[m]any grassroots activists are convinced that waiting for the government to act has endangered the health and welfare of their communities' (2001: 153). If Arjun Appadurai (2000) is right in that marginalized individuals and groups are not only suffering from a lack

of attention among policy makers, businesses, and other agenda-setting actors, but also a form of epistemological exclusion, then this particular grassroots activist attitude is quite understandable. Ultimately, the practical work of environmental justice seems to rely less on strict definitions of either of the two words the term involves and more on a sense of contextual pragmatism. In the words of Holifield and his colleagues (2009), 'activists, rather than defining environmental justice according to a rigid scheme, combine these elements differently in response to place-specific concerns' (Holifield et al. 2009: 596). A few examples of this is found in struggles over inner city gardens and in the recent urban farming trend.

Urban farms and gardens as environmental justice activism

For a number of city dwellers, gardening has long been an activity not only to provide a source of food complimentary to that otherwise purchased or a recreational and therapeutic activity; it also has a long history political and moral activism. Whether intended as private enclosures, community spaces, or artistic statements, these gardens have often attracted attention to conflicts between individuals, neighbourhoods, as well as between residents, city authorities, and businesses (see e.g. McKay 2011; Smith & Kurtz 2003).

Urban gardens inevitably exist on property that is contested, and as such also become sources and arenas for conflicts. Clear examples of which were the move by the city of New York to put 114 of its community gardens to auction in the winter of 1998-99 to make space for urban development projects (Smith & Kurtz 2003), as well as the forced closure of the South Central Farm community garden in Los Angeles in 2006 (Irazábal & Punja 2009). In the case of New York, the city had supported the creation of green spaces for growing food during the two world wars and the interwar period, but the gardens of the 1970s were created under quite different conditions. Their creation was a form of social action against the social unrest and urban disinvestment occurring at the time (Smith & Kurtz 2003: 197), several of which were protests against what they perceived to be the increasing environmental destruction caused by the modern, industrialised food system (Seitz 2011).

As New York city authorities made a claim for many of the properties where individual and communal gardens had been established, the gardeners and other users of the gardens began to organise against the upcoming eviction. Borrowing Kevin Kox' (1998) concepts of *spaces of dependence* and *spaces of engagement*, Smith and Kurtz (2003) show how the gardeners and their supporters made use of physical locations and formal and informal social networks to organise a popular movement against the eviction plans. The gardens and green spaces would in this case be spaces of dependence, as the particular places people are attached to for material, social, and emotional reasons. Spaces of engagement, on the other hand, can be particular places too, but can also be various foras and other communication channels that connect people who are not necessarily in the same places together around a common cause.

In New York, the gardeners and their supporters used a number of spaces of engagement to create a network of associations, to make their case visible in public spaces and on the internet, and to link the struggle of preserving their gardens (as spaces of dependence) to wider political struggles to gain popular support, before finally using the formal channel of filing a lawsuit against the city (Smith & Kurtz 2003: 205-6). The eviction plan was halted, but the final solution only came as the city's community garden organisations managed to raise enough funds to purchase the properties themselves.

The garden protests in New York were not preoccupied with protesting against polluting industries or hazardous waste facilities, but with keeping the green spaces they had co-created. An urban environment, where spaces are often strictly defined and regulated, poses challenges to involvement of this kind. Although there seems to be a growing interest among researchers and policy-makers in environmental stewardship - the idea that environments are best maintained and used if communities are actively involved - (see e.g. Campbell & Wiesen 2011 volume), it is not an idea easily imposed upon people, whether they are 'users' or owners.

A consequence of the large-scale deindustrialisation and widespread suburbanisation that has taken place across the United States in recent decades has been a large amount of unused urban land. This is the potential that the recent breed of urban farmers see, as they imagine turning cities such as former automotive centre Detroit into a major urban agricultural

destination (newspaper article). The timely appeal of the idea is understandable, as Luc Mougeot (2000) defines urban agriculture as

an industry located within (intra-urban) or on the fringe (peri-urban) of a town, a city, or a metropolis, which grows and raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re-)using largely human and material resources, products and services found in and around that urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to that urban area (Mougeot 2000: 10 quoted by himself in 2005: 2).

Farming in the city potentially works with most of the more serious challenges the West perceives itself to be facing: access to cheap energy and resources, potentially problematic climatic changes, urban blight at a time when there is a continuing demographic trend toward cities. In various forms, urban agriculture is considered fairly common in South- and Southeast Asia, Africa, and, to some extent, Latin America, and especially sub-Saharan Africa has been a focal point amongst researchers since most of the globally projected urbanisation is expected here (see e.g. Binns & Lynch 1998; Drechsel & Dongus 2010).

In its 1996 report on urban agriculture, the United Nations Development Programme found that as much as three in every five families in towns and cities in Kenya and Tanzania were involved in urban farming by the mid-1990s, with significant farming also taking place in cities such as Bangkok, Cairo, Bogotá, and Shanghai (25). The report also found that thirty percent of the dollar value of US agricultural production is produced within metropolitan areas, with Boston, Philadelphia, and New York City having the largest numbers of community gardens per capita (46-47). Urban agriculture is not new to the United States, but its appeal has always been variable.

Membership numbers in farmers' and garden associations in New York City increased during times of perceived crisis, so too is the national trend. The two world wars and the Great Depression saw a number of temporary gardens - commonly known as *Victory Gardens* - established across the US as citizens were encouraged to 'plant for freedom' and 'hoe for liberty.' Authorities would even require home growing in order for people to qualify for social security schemes (McKay 2011: 160). After World War Two, many of these gardens were no

longer used and gardening activity in general declined, but in the increasingly eco-conscious climate of the 1970s alongside desires for social community, non-commercial spaces and a place for physical work in the increasingly densely populated American cities, interest in allotment gardening was renewed and many former Victory gardeners became instrumental in the revival (161).

The neoliberal policies on urban development implemented in the 1990s saw a number of garden spaces being seized by local authorities to be sold on the 'free market' alongside a renewed public awareness and interest in preserving these (Stone 2011). More recently, urban community gardens and green spaces have been increasingly recognised by city authorities, planners, and health workers for their positive role in human individual and communal health, not the least as models for how green spaces and their 'ecoservices' can be organised and maintained through concepts such as *restorative commons*, that is, places that are 'contributing to the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and the landscape' and are 'publicly accessible, non-excludable, and managed through shared governance' (Campbell & Wiesen 2011).

Among the gardeners are often people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, for whom these small pockets of greenery are often of great individual and communal value (Murphy-Dunning 2011; Harrison 2008). These are spaces for repose within the buzzing cityscape as well as arenas for social gatherings, healthy activity and access to fresh produce (Campbell & Wiesen 2011). Beyond these more commonly appreciated benefits of gardening, there are also indications that the greening of vacant urban lots in Philadelphia may have helped reduce certain crimes in the city, especially in the forms of gun assaults and vandalism (Branas et al. 2011).

Gardening has also been used as a tool for trust-building and reconciliation between different ethnic groups in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (Campbell 2011). These 'peace and reconciliation gardens' also help low-income families with access to food, provide horticultural therapy for people with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental and physical conditions, and educate its participants in issues of food production and environmental protection. Not the least are gardens arenas as well as symbols of political

action and dissent, as we have seen earlier (McKay 2011). Gardens are, in other words, always imbued with a set of moral principles - an *ethic* - although their value have mainly been in terms use, not in terms of exchange (Schmelzkopf 2002).

Such ethics are the motivating force behind many of the recent gardening and farming initiatives that use growing food as a tool to - literally and metaphorically - bring new life to desolate neighbourhoods and urban areas. The Red Hook Community Farm in New York City is one of the more well-known projects of such a kind, as are Growing Power's two farms in Milwaukee and Chicago, as well as the numerous greening projects aimed at reinventing the former car capital of Detroit. These are all initiatives that try to find new and creative ways of utilizing the immediate urban landscape for growing food profitably and sustainably, and use it as a tool to reach out to, engage with, and exchange knowledge and stories with people particularly in troubled areas within cities. This are ways in which the recent urban farming trend intertwines with many environmental justice methods and aims; it is also the point where our farm enters the picture.

3: Growing Food and Future Prospects in a New Orleans Neighbourhood

Problem and perspective

This research is an attempt to engage with a critical moral anthropology. It is 'critical' in the sense that it rejects both the moral positionism and the cultural relativism that have been prevalent in the field, where the former acts to legitimate and position anthropological research often intended to 'give voice' to some social or cultural ills, and the latter is often linked to struggles for freedom and dignity by rejecting hierarchical cultural categorisations (Caduff 2011). Rather, a critical approach involves attempting to occupy a borderline position between the two other approaches, and to do so by 'de-naturalising' and 're-historicising' the obviousness of present moral rationales (Fassin 2011:487). The point is to appreciate the processes of 'production, circulation, distribution and use of norms and obligations, values and affects' as historically contingent, but also as processes that are fluid in terms of scale and space, allowing links to be made between the microsocial and the macrosocial, as well as the local and the global (ibid.; see also Lakoff & Collier 2004; Faubion 2001).

The critical approach questions what moral and ethical behaviour is taken to be and how we think about the performers of these behaviours. In effect, this is to expand the way the ethical field is commonly perceived to be both within and outside of academia - as primarily a set of moral values and rules to be followed or not - as well as to question the appropriateness of the 'ethical subject' as the main analytical concept to understand moral and ethical behaviour (Caduff 2011). *Moral economies* (Fassin 2008, 2011), *modes of subjectification* (Caduff 2011), and *regimes of living* (Lakoff & Collier 2004) are all examples of conceptualisations of people's engagement with moral and ethical questions and practices that do not limit themselves to categories such as the 'local' or 'cultural,' but allow for an appreciation of the dynamism, untidiness and paradoxes that often characterise people's ideas and actions relating to what they perceive of as 'good' or 'bad.'

In her discussion of Marcel Mauss' notion of the term *moral economy*, Karen Sykes states that it was a 'deceptively simple term that described the moral and the social relations that people called up as they struggled with the old question of what is the just price for the good,' which implies a sense of feeling for the fairness of an exchange (2012:182). Forms of exchanges, such as gifts and commodities (and here environmental 'injustices'), understood in this way - as a matter of transactions that are manifested in many different ways, but always including a sense of fairness - reveal the 'moral grounds of social life [to be] more malleable and less fixed, long-lasting rather than ephemeral, and mutual rather than individual' (ibid.).

Initially, the aim of my fieldwork was to get an image of the everyday realities of the running of an urban farm, its social, economical, political, and environmental challenges, as well as the benefits the farming had to the farmers and to their surroundings. Among the more intriguing of these 'everyday realities' was the farmers' almost constant attention to how their work served an ethical purpose, which was everywhere articulated through words as well as practically performed. Hence, the perspective through which I am approaching the 'everyday realities' is deeply phenomenological, that is, it pays attention to how the farmers and others who spend some time on the farm experience it in all its social and physical dimensions - which I hope to show are all heavily moralised and questioned for their consequences, value, and desirability. A phenomenological approach allows for an appreciation of what both these social and 'natural' dimensions play a part in the farm's design and pedagogy, and how people experience being confronted with these in ways that may question their moral stands.

Next to the more conventional sources for conducting ethnographic fieldwork and interpreting the data anthropologically, this thesis has also been influenced by the recent interest in *phronesis* among social scientists. Referring to the Aristotelian concept, commonly translated as 'prudence' or 'practical wisdom,' *phronesis* in the social sciences has been particularly associated with Bent Flyvbjerg's *Making Social Science Matter* (2001) and the debate that followed the publication of this work.

It is not so much as a novelty that this debate is interesting here, especially since anthropology has long had an openness to studying human complexity that has met less acceptance in other social sciences (see e.g. Schatzki 2006), but rather its strong synchronisation of philosophical

and empirical issues within the discipline (Canterino & Schram 2006), and most of all its sensitivity toward stages of human learning. This latter part offers, at least at the level of theory, a means to conceptualise how humans move from rule or law-based activity in the early stages of learning, which involves a conscious effort and forms of rationalisation, toward the later stages of competency and proficiency, where behaviours become internalised and *arational* (Flyvbjerg 2001: 10-17, 22).

This way of conceptualising human behaviour intertwines with how anthropologists suggest conceiving of moral dispositions and ethical projects (see e.g. Zigon 2007, 2010), which is also forced to look at forms of 'moral' and 'ethical' behaviour that are tacit and not rationalised. It is, of course, important to look at how people rationalise their behaviour, but to accept these accounts too readily is to risk a naive and perhaps even unrepresentative account, since the perspective taken on ethical behaviour here is that it is inescapably a matter of *practice* (Laidlaw 2002: 324; Caduff 2011).

The aim of the research is primarily to understand why a group of individuals are involved with urban farming, how they see its purposes, potentials and pitfalls, and why it is a form of activity that is meaningful to them. Secondly, the research is interested in understanding and showing the potential social benefits localised urban food systems can have in a world where the human population is already predominantly - and still increasingly - urban. Under the label 'social benefits' I also mean to say the benefits green spaces, gardening, and farming can have on people's health and well-being, also economically and democratically.

My own concerns with the present food system plays a clear role in how I have problematised the production, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal of food primarily focusing on the West (but without excluding its global impacts), but these are largely sidelined by the more local and regional concerns of the farmers. Although not easy in practice (Fassin 2008), I have made an effort to clarify which concerns (which are moralised) are mine and which belong to the farmers.

My goal is not so much to be value free as it is to engage in a questioning and clarification of my own motivations for writing this thesis - the values are there, and unapologetically so - but

take the back row. I do hope to show how the work on the farm is valuable to locals as well as to outsiders, and hopefully also contribute - in however small a manner - to the potential of urban farming being taken seriously also in developed countries.

This is another reason why regimes of living appears as an appropriate analytic tool, because it emphasises individual and collective problematizations, hence leaving room for analysing resistance as networks rather than as local 'communities.' In her study of member towns in the UK of the Cittàslow (Slow City) movement, Sarah Pink rejects 'community' as an effective analytic tool to understand agency and action, and instead argues for a focus on individual imaginings, the intersubjectivity that constitutes groups, collective group imaginations of alternatives, and the actions they agree to engage in (2008: 186). Agency and actions are thus seen to 'emanate not from communities, but from the socialities and embodied engagements that are integral to place-making practices' (ibid.).

The setting

The urban farm covers approximately one acre of land in the heart of the Lower Ninth Ward, a neighbourhood just east of central New Orleans. Officially, the Lower Ninth Ward is both a district and a neighbourhood, in which the former includes the Holy Cross neighbourhood that separates the Lower Ninth from the Mississippi River to the south. Three lift bridges connect the district to the central city in the west by crossing the Industrial Canal that connects the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain, and continue two of the main transport routes toward the east - the North Claiborne Avenue and St. Claude Avenue - where the larger retail parks at Chalmette in St. Bernard Parish are found. Immediately to the north lies the Main Outfall Canal, a former wetland turned lake as part of the flood drainage system of the city.

The district was particularly badly hit by the August 2005 floodings, as one of the levees on the western side breached, leaving many of the residents and the buildings, all of which built below sea-level, to the forces of the incoming water. Many of the lots where houses formerly stood were abandoned as a result of the damages caused by Hurricane Katrina, which saw thousands of New Orleans' residents more or less permanently relocated elsewhere. In the Lower Ninth district as a whole, the population plummeted from about 14,000 in 2000 to a

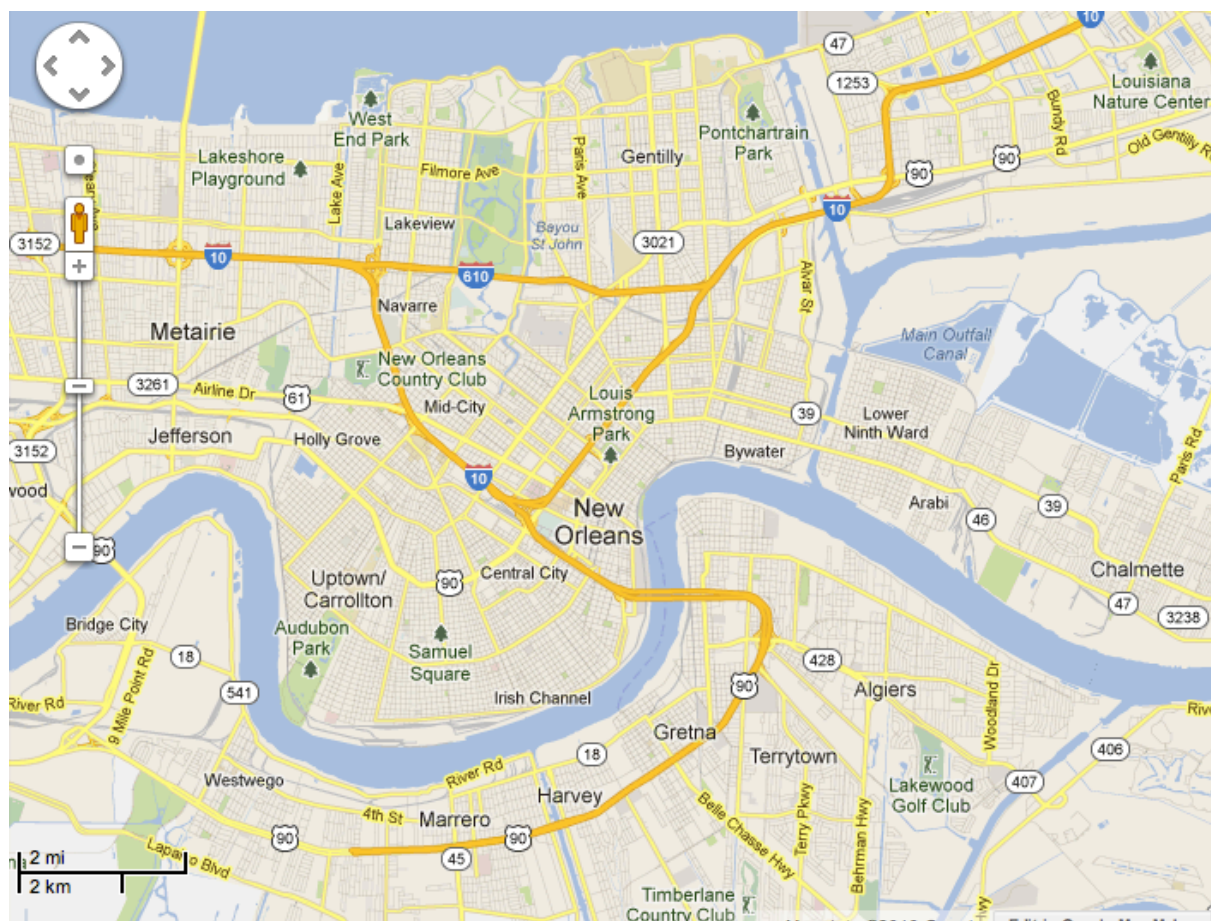
bare 2,850 in 2010 (GNOCDC 2012). Recently, there has been some influx of people again, as the period from 2010 to 2012 saw an increase of an estimated 200-400 residents (Ortiz & Plyer 2012), but the area is still marked by a surprising absence of houses and people, considering its close vicinity to the central city.

Most of the debris from the houses, buildings, cars, trees, and more from the 2005 flooding has since been removed, and the neighbourhood is now characterized by the large number of vacant lots and the fast-growing vegetation reclaiming these. According to one of the farmers, the block immediately to the north used to have sixteen houses on it; at the time of my fieldwork there was one still standing, although abandoned by its owners and covered in fast-growing vines. In an effort to tackle the problem of weeds reclaiming the neighbourhood, local authorities have created local squads of maintenance workers, who, equipped with lawn mowers, hedge trimmers, and weed cutters regularly patrol the area to 'Fight the Blight' (Rich 2012).

Basing itself on pre-Katrina data, the first ever *American Human Development Report* (2009) found that that Louisiana, along with Mississippi, Nebraska, and Alabama, were the states with the largest gap in levels of well-being³ between whites and blacks, with Louisiana ranking last of all states in terms of African American well-being and health specifically. A subsequent report focusing on Louisiana alone found that most of the racial disparities pre-Katrina seemed not only to have persisted afterwards, but in some ways also worsened (Burd-Sharps et al. 2009). It is not the the fact of racial inequality itself that the authors point out, but that 'what may perhaps be surprising is the extraordinarily wide divide in the most basic areas of human existence - survival itself, high-school graduation, and income adequate for a decent standard of living' (25). The Louisiana report also found that the state's average homicide rate of 14.2 per 100,000 was the highest of all 50 states, and that firearms were the overwhelming choice of weapon (used in four out of five cases; Burd-Sharps et al. 2009). Louisiana also has one of the highest per-capita incarceration rates and repeat-offence rates in the country, of which the majority are young black men (35-36).

³ The measure of 'well-being' is set by the criteria of the Human Development Index

The Lower Ninth Ward has for the past half century been a neighbourhood for poor and working-class black residents, who were 'forced to live on ecologically and economically marginal land' (Breunlin & Regis 2006: 746). In a region as prone to natural disasters as this part of the South is, it is unsurprising that geographical location can be a life-or-death

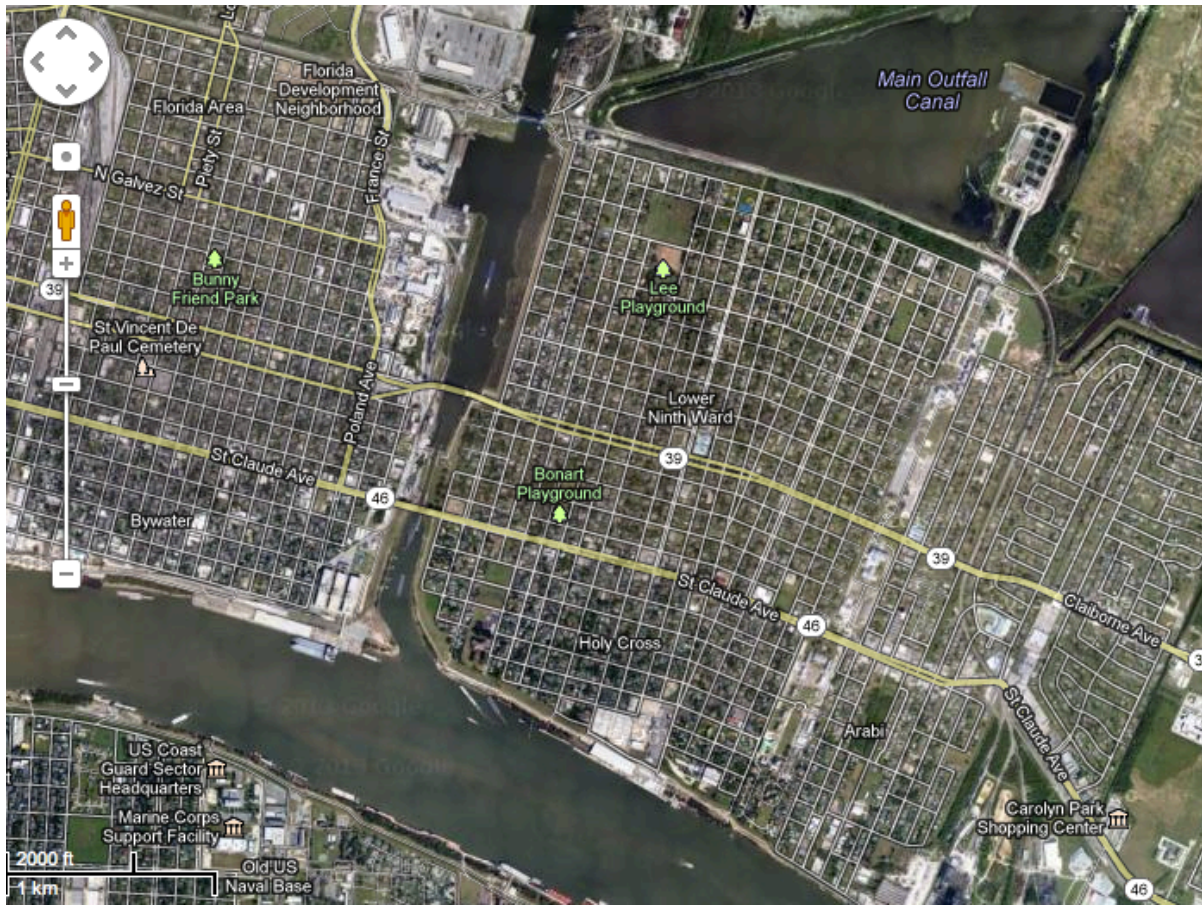


Map of New Orleans, with the Mississippi River dividing the city. The Lower Ninth Ward is located to the east of the central city on the northern side of the river. Source of image: Google Maps.

determinant, and that, in the case of New Orleans, safer ground corresponds with the more privileged parts of the population (Landphair 2007: 838). Approximately a third of the Lower Ninth Ward's residents are considered poor by the U.S. Census⁴, with overall educational performance and work prospects being meager (GNOCDC 2012).

From the outside, the Lower Ninth Ward has long had a reputation of being both isolated and dangerous. However, while the neighbourhood's homicide rates were some of the highest in New Orleans pre-Katrina and crime and poverty widespread, the Lower Ninth Ward also had

⁴ Although the U.S. Census definition of poverty is a highly criticised one (see GNOCDC 2012) I include the statistic here to give an impression of the official economic situation in the Lower Ninth Ward



Map of the Lower Ninth Ward district. Central New Orleans is to the west, Chalmette and St. Bernard Parish to the east. The north/south heading canal is where the levee broke in 2005. Source of image: Google Maps



Map of the farm's immediate surroundings. The two blocks at the centre of the map are the main sites. Source of image: Google Maps

one of the highest rates of black home ownership (Landphair 2007). Juliette Landphair (2007) has suggested that the Lower Ninth Ward is one of the areas in the city that has a particularly strong double narrative, which also contributed to the symbolic status it got in the aftermath of Katrina. The danger, isolation, and randomness perceived from the outside is often countered by the residents' own portrayals, who, after all, live their lives there with friends and family (ibid.).

The Deep South has also long been a 'sacrifice zone' for the hazardous waste produced in other states, as well as an area where polluting industries have been encouraged despite the existence of environmental regulation (Bullard 2001). Poor living conditions, inadequate and unrewarding education, lack of opportunity and access to work and healthcare, and levels of pollution that cause further health hazards and social problems (see e.g. Mielke & Zahran 2012) are all factors adding to a negative perception, which again is countered by the social networks and placial attachments of the people who actually live in the neighbourhood. It is within this context that the farm was originally set up as an experimental hands-on school for some of the worst-off youth in New Orleans.

Methods, positioning, and empirical base

My main method of gathering data was participant observation. Over a period of seven weeks, I continuously stayed on the farm and participated in almost all aspects of daily life there and in the running of the farm. Given the limitations of both scope and time for this study, I have limited myself to the study of one farm only, hoping that the potential pitfalls of my time-restraint can be reasonably limited. Apart from two individual excursions to other, similar projects within New Orleans intended as points of reference, my involvement on the farm was constant. This meant that I was with and around the project members at all times, in work as well as in social and private settings, joining delivery rounds, pick-up rounds, talks at one of the local universities, hosting groups of pupils, students, and others from New Orleans but also from other states. This gave a well-rounded impression of how the farmers present their work in formal and informal settings, as well as how they describe and go about it in more private times.

Because my participation was continuous and interaction with the farmers close to constant, I found attempting to initiate formal interviews not only unfruitful but also directly detrimental to the research process. The few attempts made to ask questions in a formal way would only cause annoyance, sarcastic replies, or silence, and it was in any case a futile method in this context. I would get my desired information anyways through the flow of natural conversation over the course of the day. I found a much better replacement in space that was particularly good for conversations was the many car rides that were made throughout the New Orleans area. These were most often done in the company of only one other project member, and provided an excellent setting for one-to-one talks, often triggered by the very action of driving through different areas of the city.

To my knowledge, the potential ethnographic value of driving has not received much attention, but, to draw a perhaps-risky parallel, the movements and change of scenery involved in walking has been pointed out by a number of social researchers to trigger fruitful conversations with informants (e.g. Pink 2008; Anderson 2004). Jon Anderson (2004) suggests that this fruitfulness consists in walking being a way to interact with places as physical and social environments, a way to interact with people's connection with their surroundings. Significantly, Anderson also points out that his study of radical environmentalism (2002) highlighted the need among activists for having time away from the sites of their activist activities; living on the location of the 'activism,' the car drives were a way for the farmers to get 'time away.'

Elsewhere, Anderson and Jones (2009) suggest that the conscious use of locations in a research process can offer a reasonably effective way to understand 'everyday social practice' Another benefit of these trips was that their purpose was usually part of the running of the farm, and so they provided a form of structure in themselves in addition to showing the project's network of contacts across the city.

My main informants were the three more-or-less permanent workers on the farm, which includes the founder as well as one other involved from the beginning, and one who joined in 2011. All three are male, two in their late twenties and one in his early forties. All three have

college degrees, two of which are from very prestigious institutions, and one pursued a PhD in anthropology that was never completed. All three are from other states than Louisiana, and, since colour does matter especially in the South, two are white and one is black. A local teenager, who during my time of fieldwork stayed on and off in the farm house is also a vital source. He had been involved with the farm for about six months at the time of my arrival, and given the particular circumstances I arrived in, he is my main contact with a longer local history.

Halfway into my fieldwork, a female American college student arrived with the intention to volunteer on the farm for a few months. She became a valuable source particularly as the outsider coming in and seeing the farm with fresh eyes. She asked similar questions to my initial ones, and her reflections on the farm - especially since she came from forms of environmental activism and anti-racism that more closely resemble the white middle-class initiatives that I have mentioned as a contrast to dominant environmental justice approaches. Her expectations and biases - as she expressed and showed them - are valuable to the research both in terms of reflecting on my own frame of mind as well as how the others on the farm perceived and expressed their roles.

I carried with me a small notebook at all times, which I tried to only bring out once the conversations reached an end to avoid as much intervention as possible. This notebook (or, rather, notebooks) serves largely as my descriptive source, where most of the quotes were noted, as well as a chronology of events and basic descriptions of these. I would also take photographs of work at the farm as well as its surroundings intended to serve both purposes of reference material as well as complimenting the presentation given here, as the aesthetic is an important part of this thesis. I also kept an interpretative journal where I noted my reflexions on the project and my own involvement. Throughout the research process I have complimented my own data with farm's own blog, as well as news articles and documentary films.

Another crucial part of the fieldwork was to get an understanding - or more accurately a feel - of the work and life on the farm. Their normative outlook and the context are of course crucial to make sense of, but without explicit attention to *praxis* there is a risk of falling into the trap

of 'merely *reasoning about action*' without considering the actual, 'generative *mechanism of action*' (Suchman quoted in Jansen & Vellema 2011:171, emphases original). As the farmers made clear on several occasions, there is a significant difference between 'knowing the way and walking the way,' and their use of growing food as a tool for teaching further necessitated a sensitivity to how the tasks involved in running the farm were performed. Hence, I found it important not only to be there and to participate, but also to try to grasp what it is about the work itself that makes - for one part - three people who could have found plenty of other ways to make a living chose to grow food and teach teenagers in a black troubled neighbourhood in New Orleans, and, for the other, what it could be about the work that makes the teenagers not only come once, but also to return to the farm.

'Work' is perhaps too narrow of a term here. For the three permanents, the local teenager, and the interns the farm represents a total everyday life. For the teenagers and outside volunteers it is work with a conscious effort by the core members to inform, educate, but also to learn, alongside. Wacquant (2011) stresses the importance that actually learning how to box had to his understanding of what it meant to the members of the Chicagoan gym he joined. The farm is, I would argue, similar to Wacquant's gym in the sense that it is a place intended for learning physical skills - to do something well - which also carries with it a necessity to train certain mental and empathic skills.

Ethical considerations and access

Access to the research setting was attained through direct contact with the farmers, who regularly welcome groups and individuals to visit their project. The particular farm was chosen based on the information by the farmers themselves and by outsiders available on the Internet, and a brief email exchange and phone call. In hindsight I was told that being a master's degree student played to my advantage in terms of being invited to stay longer than a few days, as there are a number of people, especially students at American colleges, who apply for volunteering or internship positions on the farm. Being foreign may also have played to my advantage, but gender and age seems to have had little influence, an assumption I make based on stories of previous people who stayed on the farm for longer periods.

Once on the farm, I assumed the role of a long-term volunteer, with the aim of making my role as an academic researcher as informal as possible. A few attempts of initiating more formal interview-style questions were unproductive, and besides my own, simple, participation proving to be very fruitful in terms of information, there were plenty of visiting groups and individuals who asked the more formal questions. I was always - or did always - introduce myself as a student conducting research for my thesis, and asked for approval to quote my informants if their statements were particularly interesting or relevant to this thesis. I use pseudonyms instead of the farmers' actual names. The research has been approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Being one of the more notorious cities in the United States in terms of recent homicide rates, and the Lower Ninth Ward having a reputation as one of the worse neighbourhoods in New Orleans, I was conscious to tread very carefully to begin with. Several of the local teenagers who attend the farm's after school programme have frequently been exposed to and participated in serious acts of violence, and not knowing where lines were drawn, what kinds of behaviour would trigger undesirable responses, and not having any previous experience with or being particularly good at confronting potentially violent informants, I decided to focus my energy on those staying on the farm. The farmers' were respected and appreciated within the neighbourhood for their work, and because of this the farm house was a safe place at all times.

A major concern was to not be a burden on the farmers during my fieldwork. Being a farm there were plenty of tasks to do, and working full workdays alongside the farmers, as well as contributing to daily house-keeping tasks, I strived to make my inclusion into the farm as smooth as possible. A donation was also made to cover the costs of food and housing, as well as servings as a financial contribution to the running of the farm.

Limitations, personal reactions and biases

The most noticeable limitation of this research is the limited time spent in the field. I have two comments to what this means in terms of the empirical basis. Based on the time that was spent doing fieldwork, I cannot reasonably claim to have a well-rounded understanding of the everyday realities of running a farm in the Lower Ninth Wards, especially with the seasonal changes on the farm and how this relates to the physical and social aspects of running it. For example, such an integral part of the farm as the after school programme had not been running since August, and was only expected to be restarted in mid-November. However, while the stay was short, it was also intense in terms of my constant engagement with the work and the farmers. So, although I do not claim to have a well-rounded understanding of the farm and its work in strict empirical terms, I will claim to have a fair understanding of what some of their main reasons for and aims are in terms of their work, and I have found moral anthropology to be an appropriate lens for the material I have.

The choice of studying one urban farm only was an epistemologically conscious decision as well as a practical one. The purpose of this thesis is to present how one group urban farmers view their situation and work, with the aim of understanding some of their deeper motivations and drives through personal narratives. It is not an overview of why people in general get involved in urban farming on a larger scale, but, although I at this point in time only have a mere argument and no empirical evidence to support my claim, I am convinced that the views and practices of this case study are representative for at least a smaller network of urban farmers.

As for my own background I had only once before conducted fieldwork prior to this research. Being very conscious of my status as a novice researcher in the field was also one of the reasons that I avoided acting out the role in a formal manner, but this also had to do with the little experience that I did have had suggested to me that I was more likely to get useful information by being the co-worker rather than the researcher. Given the particular setting of the research, I was likely closer to being the clown than I was to being the expert as Thomas Hylland Eriksen (2010: 27-28) puts it, but being on the farm site in itself did not present serious problems, as both the project members and the immediate neighbourhood were very used to visitors. I had also chosen a cultural setting that was not worlds away from my own, which certainly helped, although it was noticeable enough that I was neither American, nor

from the South, nor black, to put it in simple terms. There were plenty of subtle hints and mannerisms that I at first was clumsy at, and it did take me until halfway in my fieldwork until I felt reasonably comfortable that could go about without the risk of having my intentions misinterpreted.

This relative familiarity proved, as far as I have reflected on it, to place me in a much better position to “see the world from the native’s point of view” within the short period of time that I was there compared to what could easily have been the case. Eriksen has suggested that the ideal length of stay in the field is one that enables the researcher to get to this stage (2010: 30), and although I cannot reasonably claim that I can have an extensive understanding of my informants’ world views, I do claim to have a fair understanding of how they see their work, its meaning, and its significance, not the least how they actually go about doing their work and interact with outsiders that are interested.

It has been vital for me not only to hear how they present their work and purpose to me, each other, as well as to outsiders, but also what their actual performing of this work on a day to day basis can tell, as well as how my own active participation informed and sometimes changed my view of what was going on. What I mean by this is that there often seems to be a certain code, or *regime of living* (Lakoff & Collier 2004), at play among people doing ecologically- and socially-minded work, and in there are often very strong opinions within eco-movements about what can be done or not. Having had some earlier experiences with this myself, I did bring a set of expectations and on-hold prejudices with me that I would not be surprised to find at the farm.

I did find my expectations challenged, as well as my own set of values, by the practical realities of running the farm, but this was also an essential part of the farmers’ intentions - to unsettle their visitors, to challenge them to think again, to question their own assumptions, inclinations, and dispositions. This was also the case with my own conducting of my fieldwork, as, being trained as an anthropologist himself, one of the farmers immediately challenged my potential urge to rationalise what I observed around me.

As for the risk of 'home-blindness' - that the research setting is so common that the researcher takes no or limited notice of things he ought to have - I do find it fair to claim that my level of familiarity was at a more abstract societal level rather than with the realities of living and running an urban farm in the *hood*, of which I had no previous experience. I knew some general traits that I could expect, such as at least some views of three left-oriented college graduates, but I had little idea of how these were played out on the ground or how the locals viewed their situation.

4: Changing Urban Spaces and Challenging Moralities

'...the garden for Epicurus was a place from which and in which reality itself could be reconceived, its possibilities reimagined' (Harrison 2008:125-6).

'I don't see it as much as *Jungleland* as I see it as a *promised* land,' one of the more rhetorically inclined farmers declared after having read a recent article in the *New York Times Magazine* (Rich 2012) (conversation with author October 5). The article describes how the Lower Ninth Ward is in the process of being reclaimed by natural vegetation and animals. Rapidly growing vines, shrubs, bushes, and grass (especially of the Johnson variety) have been thriving in the neighbourhood since most of its residents never returned after Hurricane Katrina in August 2005. Without the former caretakers present, the rapid regrowth of vegetation has not only claimed abandoned properties and swallowed entire houses, but also attracted long-gone wildlife and shelter for the many dogs that were abandoned during the 2005 hurricane and have since turned wild (Rich 2012; Jonassen 2012).

The question of how to handle this uncontrolled growth is a sensitive one, especially given the controversies surrounding both the displacements residents in 2005 and the subsequent process of rebuilding New Orleans and the Lower Ninth Ward in the aftermath of Katrina (see e.g. Breunlin & Regis 2006). In the absence of larger initiatives to rebuild the neighbourhood, local authorities have resorted a system of financial punishment for leaving a privately owned property to 'excessive' growth as well as assembling teams of maintenance workers who regularly survey the area cutting down the growing vegetation.

The history of the neighbourhood, as 'ecologically and economically marginal land,' to borrow Breunlin and Regis' (2006) words, the displacement of its residents before and after Hurricane Katrina, and the controversies surrounding the authorities' views on rebuilding it, which involves a high degree of distrust toward government institutions and initiatives (see e.g. Lipsitz 2006), all set the physical and social scene for the farmers' involvement with the Lower Ninth Ward.

In this chapter, I look at how the farmers' are trying to challenge this conception of ecological and economic marginalisation by growing food, and rearticulate these problems into a resource for the neighbourhood and the city. As a starting point I take a fundamental question the farmers kept posing to their visitors as well as amongst themselves: 'How do *actually* change a situation like that of the Lower Ninth Ward for the better; how do you go beyond superficial and temporary initiatives, well-intended as they may be, which have been largely inefficient in dealing with the unrelying *causes* of inequality, as opposed to merely addressing their visible *syndroms*?'

There are many possible answers to this question, and the interest here lies not primarily in the articulation of more-or-less straightforward solutions, but in their actual implementation. In the following sections, I will look at how the farmers actually *use* growing food in practice, and how it makes for a very particular way of interacting with the neighbourhood - socially and ecologically - the city, as well as beyond the state borders. I will look at its functions in the more 'conventional' ways as an educational tool as an economic vehicle, but also as a transformer of the immediate physical landscape and as a means to trigger moments of ethical reflection in the farm's visitors. I begin with the most visible features of the project before proceeding to its deeper, more long-term, aims.

Growing the produce

In his 2010 farewell speech as Professor of Technology and Agrarian development at Wageningen University, Paul Richards proposed an anthropological take on technology as a promising way of addressing some of the most pressing food security issues in the 21st century. Technology, he suggested, is not primarily a matter of tools, machinery, or processes, but of technique: it is 'knowing how to do something' (3). This *knowhow* is culturally and socially created, transmitted, and adapted, and includes embodied as well as conscious knowledge (ibid.). Richards' work is mainly focused on developing countries, but his notion of technology as *performance* is useful also in the context of our farm: there are certain tools, machinery and processes, to which there are certain stereotypes or expectations within a society in terms of how they are used. But *performance* also implies that there is room for

improvisation. It can be useful to think of the farming practices at Our School at Blair Grocery as a performance in a number of ways, and, in the context of this thesis, one that is heavily moralised.

The most obvious performance initially is the farm itself with its physical features, as the conversion of former housing properties into lots for growing vegetables and keeping livestock. Most of the immediate land around the old grocery store is now used for growing rocket, kale, mustard greens, Swiss chard, sugarsnap peas, spinach, red beans, and lollo lettuce. A few banana trees, two fig trees, and a lime tree just south of the building contribute with some fruits, while bushes of rosemary, a tea tree, and a few shrubs of lemon grass make up the herbs. Two hoop houses, one on the northern side of the old grocery store and one on the southern, are used for growing seedlings and a variety of sprouts that are sold to restaurants in the city. An experimental aquaponics installation that looks roughly like a bunk bed stands on the southern side of the building with its circulation pump continuously on, filling the backyard with a mild buzzing sound. A couple of goats and about a dozen of chickens are kept in a coop just west of the building. Three compost piles stand in a line on the northern property next to a pile of coffee grounds that are picked up from a local coffee brewer every fortnight and a roughly compiled stack of flattened cardboard boxes. As the main features, all of these parts are part of a display that is in constant change as plants are sown and harvested, lots are tilled, and compost material is added and removed. The rocket, which is the farm's main source of income and is grown on most of the lots in the fall season, needs about two and a half weeks from seed until ready to be harvested. To ensure a constant supply of the plant, lots are sown and harvested according to an alternating scheme, and so there is a continuous produce life-circle on display.

Such a sight may be common in more rural areas, but it is quite something else in the city. Admittedly, since Hurricane Katrina, the kind of urban area the Lower Ninth Ward has become does not resemble a standard American cityscape, with varying degrees of activity; houses are relatively scattered, some abandoned, some only recently being repaired, but otherwise there are trees, vines, Johnson grass, shrubs and bushes hindered in their growth predominantly by the city's maintenance crews. In this setting of scattered houses, abandoned lots with varying extents of free plant growth, the farm lots are of a very different aesthetic:

they display a sense of relatively strict order, with vegetables growing in rows and on select beds, sprouts in trays, and an almost continuous change as beds and lots are rotated.

This rotation is part of another part of the performance, namely that of producing food by using 'organic' methods. Organic agriculture is too large a topic to dwell properly into here (see e.g. Buck et al. 1997; Belasco 2005), but it is an important part of the farmers' work in terms of objecting to the use of petrochemical fertilizers, pesticides, and fungicides. One could suppose that this is also has a lot to do with the farm being based in a residential neighbourhood, and that being a reason why using chemicals would meet resistance, but one of the farmers offered a wider context:

The Mississippi River must be one of the most polluted rivers in the world. It passes just [south of us] and carries tons of oil tankers. They come, pass by, leave a lot of shit and no benefits to the city. We've got the oil refineries just nearby; the reservoir a few blocks up has been flooded with all kinds of shit. It used to be a wetlands, but all the trees were either chopped down or killed [by the pollution]' [conversation with author October 26]

The American South's position as a 'sacrifice zone' for the nation's toxic waste (Bullard and Johnson 2000) and the prevalence of the notion that environmental regulation is bad for business, especially in Louisiana (ibid.), surely play an important part in creating this situation, but the farmers have little faith in simply criticising government or businesses and hoping that they will change their ways:

The only way we can actually improve things is by showing that there are better ways of doing things. The tricky bit is to make something that is 'green' and 'sustainable' into good business.[conversation with author November 10].

In its first years of running the farm focused on growing produce that people in the neighbourhood would eat, which proved to be difficult in terms of business. People wanting low-cost vegetables, and the lack of money - that is, 'buying power' in economist's terms - within the neighbourhood has made running a farming business with a profit impossible. Since the beginning, the farm has relied on grants from companies and the USDA to run financially, and so the farmers have begun to focus more on selling higher value produce outside of the neighbourhood. A process has taken place where the farmers' philosophy has

changed from a general 'include all' policy - in terms of produce selected as well as in terms of the teenagers invited to work - into a more selective one, partially for economic reasons, and partially because of the physical and mental energy the former requires. In the aftermath of Hurricane Isaac, the farmers decided to focus on growing rocket, a reasonably high-value salad leaf popular with restaurants, as well as re-introducing sprouts, also popular with restaurants and other bars and cafes offering so-called *superfoods*. Both of these crops grow quickly and are ready to be harvested within two-to-three weeks, and because the seeds can be spread as a 'carpet' (as opposed to rows) almost no weeding is needed and they require little attention besides watering. Hence, they are especially well-suited for small-scale enterprises.

But selling produce outside of the neighbourhood is not always unproblematic, especially when the customers are restaurants in the more touristic and affluent parts of the city. There is an expectation that 'you're not supposed to make a profit by doing the kind of work we are doing. We've been accused of being everything from sell-outs to hypocrites,' one of the farmers noted (conversation with author October 17), referring to reactions from other social justice and environmental justice organisations operating in the city. But he also added a question:

How can you be sustainable if you can't make a living from what you're doing? Look at the New Orleans Food and Farm Network: they're out of business until the next round of grants come in. If they'd utilized just a tiny bit of the space I know they have available they could still be doing their work. We could spend all day writing grants that we ultimately can't rely on [conversation with author October 17].

Using the 'expected channels' to sell urban farming produce, such as weekly farmer's markets in particular, may be a decent source of advertisement, but a poor source of income. The farm's produce is still being sold at a weekly farmer's market, mainly because one of the local teenagers involved with the farm takes an interest in it. For a while, the farm was also selling produce outside a local church after Sunday service, but, despite a positive reception from many church-goers was stopped by the church's priest because, according to the farmers, they 'had not accepted the word of God' (conversation with author October 28).

A recurring theme is thus the negotiation between the idealism of the farmers, their outward portrayal of what their work entails, and the economic realities of trying to run a small-scale food business. Growing quality produce by 'organic' means is one thing (the farm cannot afford - and opposes the idea - of becoming a certified organic enterprise, which means that organic grocery stores, such as Wholefoods, which mostly attract more affluent customers, will not sell its products), but also a seemingly fragile selling-point by itself. Perhaps more potent is the increasing connection food activists have made between supporting and creating 'local' food systems as a way to promote environmental sustainability and social justice (DuPuis & Goodman 2005: 359). The 'Good Food Revolution' (Allen 2012) is, after all, intensely focused on re-scaling foodways to the benefit of local communities.

The 'local,' DuPuis and Goodman (2005) point out, is often used in activist narratives to frame the 'space or context where ethical norms and values can flourish' (359), and so to create an environmentally sustainable and socially responsible alternative food system the 'local' offers a fairly manageable - at least in terms of imagination - starting point and arena. There are, of course, different scales of what the 'local' is taken to mean. The farm was originally set up to benefit its immediate surroundings in the form of the neighbourhood, and its main focus in terms of making a positive difference still consists in utilizing spaces within the neighbourhood for its food production and involving Lower Ninth residents in this process.

In growing food the farmers also rely on a wider network within and on the periphery of New Orleans. For composting material, which is essential to the form of intensive organic farming practices on the farm, organic waste is picked up six days a week at a grocery store in the western part of the central city. This waste also provides cardboard that used above ground as mulch or below the raised vegetable beds to halt the growth of weeds from below. A coffee brewer based on the southern side of the Mississippi River provides a load of used coffee grounds every week or two, which is used as an additional source of nutrients for plant growth. Both of these connections are vital to the running of the farm, both economically as well as ideologically; the use of other's waste products means that they are free of charge, and making use of what would otherwise be sent to landfills in a very direct way is, on the negative side, to confront people with how much easily usable waste goes unexplored, and on

the positive side, how easily available necessary ingredients for intensive small-scale urban farming can be (see also Deelstra & Girardet 2000; UNDP 1996).

In terms of sales and educational involvement, the scale broadens still. The farm is, at the time of writing, delivering produce to 20-25 restaurants, cafes, and superfood bars across the city on a weekly basis. A few of the cafe owners take a real interest in the project and its aims, but most buyers' primary concern is the quality of the produce and its price. 'Quality' is here mainly a question of flavour, freshness, packaging, response time and reliability. Most of these can be played to the urban farm's favour in strict business terms, but there is also a possibility to play on identity:

There's a guy we've worked with earlier who sells his produce to restaurants for insane prices. He's a local guy, black, and the restaurants probably feel like they're doing him a favour. I don't know if that's good or bad. We adjust our prices depending on the buyer too, but sometimes I think the prices he demands are bordering on exploitation. But he gets away with it. [converstation with author]

The price adjustments have to do with perceived buying power. Within the neighbourhood, to private individuals, and on the farmer's market, the farm runs a 'same price as WalMart' policy. The prices demanded from restaurants, on the other hand, varies based on the market the restaurants cater for as well as the longevity of their involvement with the farm. The (perhaps ironic) situation is hence that one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the city grows the rocket and sprouts served in some of its more expensive restaurants.

But out of this engagement with the wider city, two largely positive processes have followed. One the one hand, the sales bring money into the neighbourhood as the farmers hire local teenagers to work for them - and so also follow the after school programme - and, on the other, it has been a way of making the outside engage with the neighbourhood in new ways. In this context, the Lower Ninth Ward symbolises a neglected locality; one that outsiders have turned their back on. The two following sections deal with these two processes of the social engagement with the neighbourhood and involvement with outsiders.

Growing the growers

This section brings us back to the original focus of the farm as a safe social and learning space. Initially imagined as an 'experimental hands-on school' (conversation with author October 5), the farm was a partially a reaction to the majority of the reconstruction initiatives that followed Hurricane Katrina, brought in external expertise, stayed for a while, and then left again. By the time the soon-to-be farmers were involved with volunteering work in New Orleans, controversy had begun forming around the massive 'recovery' efforts in the areas affected by the hurricane, with allegations of these being used as 'instruments for capital formation and further concentration of wealth' (Pettersen et al. 2006: 666). In short, the reconstruction processes in New Orleans in many ways served to maintain or increase social differences and tensions rather than to alter them. Seeing these processes and placing them within a larger, ethical, framework, has been defining both to the location of the school and its operation as a farm.

Here, I suggest that the farmers' work can be understood in terms of promoting a certain mode of subjectification. This concept is understood here as a certain way 'through which individuals are brought to work on themselves, under certain forms of authority, in relation to truth discourses, by means of practices of the self, in the name of their own life or health, that of their family or some other collectivity, or indeed in the name of the life or health of the population as a whole' (Rabinow & Rose 2006: 197). In simpler terms, the farm is promoting the formation of a new collectivity, similar to what I have earlier referred to as Lakoff and Collier's (2004) concept of *regimes of living*. Also similarly to Lakoff and Collier (2004), Rabinow and Rose (2006) see modes of subjectification as interlinked with one or more truth discourses concerned with what human life is and what it is becoming, as well as certain 'strategies for intervention upon collective existence in the name of life and health' (Rabinow & Rose 2006: 197).

Rabinow and Rose (2006) and Lakoff and Collier (2004) take Foucault's concept of *biopower*⁵ as a starting point, and although a proper discussion of this concept lies beyond the scope of this thesis it may be helpful for the reader to know that one underlying premise is that contemporary biopolitics, in particular through the state apparatus, is involved with the preservation of life itself in a way previously unheard of. According to Rabinow and Rose (2006) biopower in contemporary states has increasingly taken the form of a relation between 'letting die' and 'making live' rather than a simple 'politics of death,' which occurs in more exceptional cases (e.g. dictatorships). Seeing the Lower Ninth Ward and its relation to the 'outside' in this sense offers one way of making sense of the neighbourhood's internal and external dynamics.

As pointed out earlier, there are at least two popular narratives of the Lower Ninth Ward. The kind of distinction Landphair (2007) makes between 'external' perceptions of the neighbourhood as dangerous, isolated, and uncivilized and 'internal' versions of belonging and care has also been noted by Lipsitz (2006) as a wider New Orleans phenomenon. The insecurities many inner city neighbourhoods face in terms of their future uses, and especially in those parts where housing is rented rather than owned, he argues, has often led residents to 'fashion ferocious attachments to place' (463). It would be overly simplistic to say that there is a mutually driven exclusion process going on between 'outsiders' and the 'insiders,' but that there exists certain modes of imagining that affect the neighbourhood's relation to its surroundings is quite clear. For example, many Lower Ninth Ward residents, because of the neighbourhood's history, show little interest in, and often contempt against, local and national authorities. As the 2012 presidential election approached and passed, the Lower Ninth remained remarkably unaffected by the event. It may be one point that Louisiana is relatively safely Republican in its votes, and so districts may not bother too much with voting, but the attitude expressed by one of the local teenagers working on the farm is more telling:

⁵ '...the concept of biopower seeks to individuate strategies and configurations that combine three dimensions or planes — a form of truth discourse about living beings and an array of authorities considered competent to speak that truth; strategies for intervention upon collective existence in the name of life and health; and modes of subjectification, in which individuals can be brought to work on themselves, under certain forms of authority, in relation to truth discourses, by means of practices of the self, in the name of individual or collective life or health.' (Rabinow & Rose 2006: 203-204)

Who gives a damn about the election? The government ain't gonna do nothin' for *us*. They only care about the rich. It ain't gonna change nothin' here. [conversation with author November 6]

Another instance of 'fierce localism' came with the opening of a skateboard park in the neighbourhood, funded by hip-hop artist Lil Wayne, himself a New Orleanian by birth. Although praised in the media and by government sources, people around the farm appeared less impressed and responded more with an attitude of 'who the hell does he think he is?' (conversation with author October 6). Clearly, this tension between the outside and the inside plays a role in the farm's work and prospects:

I could never make this farm truly integrated and accepted in the neighbourhood. I'm an outsider. We'll need someone from here to run the farm. Once that happens, maybe the neighbourhood will take the farm seriously. For now they don't really care. They don't mind, but they don't really care. I can't convince them that this is a good idea. For that we need someone from here. All I can do is to train people. [conversation with author October 6]

But this inside/outside tension also plays a central part in the farm's functioning as a meeting place, a meeting place I propose is designed to trigger a moral breakdown (in Zigon's 2007 sense of the term) in people who get involved on the farm. By 'designed' I mean to say that there is an intention and a purpose behind how everyday work is carried out, but not that there is complete control. Neither my empirical data nor our theoretical framework allows for such 'complete control' in the case of human moral behaviour. So, why do I propose to see the farm as a moral crossroads? I will offer three general answers to this question.

First, the farm represents an ethical statement by the farmers themselves. Take the farmers with backgrounds from outside of New Orleans and Louisiana. All of the three long-term farmers were neither destined to end up in the Lower Ninth Ward nor as urban farmers by any other means than their own ethical reflection and moral frustration. This frustration found a focus in what the neighbourhood came to represent during and after Hurricane Katrina, as the 'convergence of destructive forces on a society: the hurricane; the geographical vulnerability of New Orleans; government neglect; and urban poverty and racial polarization' (Landphair 2007: 837). Seeing this government neglect, urban poverty, and racial polarization as national problems, the Lower Ninth Ward offered a place to focus on with an already established

popular and academic image, and as such mostly a symbol of things gone wrong, but at the same time hence also the potential for being turned around into a positive example. The Lower Ninth Ward has a 'visibility' to it that the farmers, I propose, play on both consciously and unconsciously. On a number of occasions, the farmers declared that 'if you can make it [urban farming] work here, you can make it work anywhere.'

The way that the food is being grown also has ethical significance. Growing healthy food is a basic principle of the urban farming movement, and 'healthy' in this case means more than simply freshness and nutritional value. It also involves food life-cycle practices that have a positive effect on local environment and people, which excludes the use of petrochemicals and other toxins in most cases, and encourages local participation. Urban farms often go under a banner not far from 'for the people by the people,' but although urban farming undoubtedly has its positive influences on local environments and people (see e.g. UNDP 1996), farmers also need to negotiate this mantra to be able to survive financially. As Amos Wilson declared, 'economies are prior to money. At its base it refers to the relationship between people' (1993: 44). At present, however, the lack of money - and interest in the food grown - makes operating the farm without external sources of income a financial impossibility. But, that being said, this does not mean that the 'relationships between people' is swept aside. For example, the spaces the farmers use are, in contrast to most other urban farms within the city, not fenced in.

Many urban farming projects are fenced in to prevent people from entering, but a fundamental value we have is that you do not set up fences; they're marking a territory and exclude people, and that is counterproductive to the project. Involve the community instead; make it an integral part of the project' (conversation with author October 16).

As a tactic, the no-fence policy has not been entirely without its problems. In one instance, a woman enraged by seeing what she claimed was her property was being grown food on, drove her SUV over vegetable beds before driving off. This instance also highlighted one of the ongoing points of tension in the neighbourhood as well as in the city over ownership and use of urban property. On the one hand, the neighbourhood is particularly well-suited for participatory urban farming with all its vacant spaces where local plants already grow in close or immediate proximity of occupied houses. To emphasise the wish to involve the neighbours,

some of the locals who have already been working on and off on the farm have been asked to take charge over lots that are next to their houses. The farmers then offer to sell the produce through its established network and pay the grower a share of the sales price.

The farm is an ethical statement - or, more accurately, an ethical project in Jarrett Zigon's (2007) sense of the term - by the farmers trying to find ways to work toward a kind of living they would like to see. Focusing on food as a conceptual tool highlights social, economic, political, racial, and environmental relationships, and as a practical tool is a practice that needs few resources to start off and can grow from relatively humble beginnings (UNDP 1996; Deelstra & Girardet 2000). Keeping with the language of moral anthropology, I would suggest that for the farmers the project is a way of practicing *freedom* in the sense James Laidlaw (2002, see Introduction) suggests, since their process of becoming urban farmers and how they go about are based on ethical problematization and rejection of many of the institutions and organisations that are working within the city with similar aims.

Among the farmers there was a strong sense that many 'well-intentioned projects' were failing to ask themselves whether or not their work *actually* change things for the better in a fundamental way or merely skimming the surface. A favourite example was the manner in which the houses immediately next to the Industrial Canal, where the levees broke after Hurricane Katrina, had been rebuilt.

A lot of money went into building this new flashy Brad Pitt [*'s Make it Right Foundation*] housing. But what I don't get is why they didn't use the project as a way to train people from here to build those houses. They could have set it up as a temporary academy to teach people from New Orleans to build LEED certified housing. That would really benefit the city, give people a skill they could use. But instead they brought in expertise, built these houses, and left again. [converstation with author October 5]

The establishment of the farm is partly a response to this influx and subsequent outflux of work-skills. But it is also a way for the farmer's to 'work on themselves' in a classical ethical sense because it goes beyond simply being *conscious* of a perceived problem - it involves particular *practices* too.

The second way the farm tries to be a moral crossroads is in its interaction with neighbours and local youth. The intention to act as a schooling alternative in the area, predominantly aimed at local teenagers, has raised the question of how to get them interested in the project, and in the end the one effective incentive has been to offer payment. The 'after school programme' the farmers run normally six days a week is split up into two sessions, where one hour is spent working in the fields followed by a second hour spent training reading and writing skills, math, but also having group discussions about recent incidents, life situations, as well as plans and hopes for the future. The particular aim of these after school sessions, as one of the farmers phrased it, is

...not to train farmers. It would be *nice* if some of them would decide to become farmers, but that's not what is most important. What we're after is seeing a process of analysis happening, of [the teenagers] seeing a bigger picture. [conversation with author October 5]

Farming is a process around which more general skills - social, individual, and technical - can be trained. Generally disliking to be told what to do, the farmers have tried to find ways in which to make the teenagers interested in starting a conversation and getting them involved. Inevitably, the most effective incentive has proved to be money. The teenagers who attend both sessions - work hour and school hour- are paid 50 dollars a week, with the possibility of earning more if they work more than the set hours.

Knowing that payment is needed to keep most of the teenagers coming, usually 15-20 each time, the farmers expressed a hope that by repeatedly returning to the farm and engaging with work and people, the teenagers would start seeing possibilities; change their ways. One hope in particular has been to see a more long-term perspective be formed by the teenagers, but on a general level, results have been disappointing:

What's systematic among the kids is a lack of efficacy. [One of them] leaving the mushrooms he just spent an hour watering and taking care of before leaving it in the sun so that it dies is typical. We've gone over it again, and again, and again, and again. He just doesn't make the connection. [conversation with author November 5]

I underestimated one of the points of paying the kids, and that is that they would use the money to get somewhere else. But they just wanted the money. One is a sexual predator,

one is just violent. We don't know how to work with these kids. I naively believed that the work would create a curiosity in them. [conversation with author October 30]

Speculating in some of the reasons for the difficulties with working with the teenagers, one of the farmers, himself having research experience with former child soldiers in Liberia, drew similarities between some of the teenagers and what he had found in his research. Exposure to and participation in violent acts, sometimes frequent and often since early childhood, and growing up with a constant sense of having to watch one's back, as he put it, 'seems to leave them without some of the boundaries that you would normally expect people to have [in terms of resorting to violence]' (conversation with author October 5). One of the other farmer's later added another suggestion to why stirring a sense of genuine interest in the project has been difficult: 'people here have been trained to give up. All they want is to find ways to get out; become a basketball star or a rapper' (conversation with author November 11).

A main challenge for the farmers is to revert this ideal of 'making it' by 'getting out.' Whether or not it is an ideal the teenagers would actually act on if they could is, of course, uncertain, but it is prevalent in their talking about wishes and dreams. But this farming project is fundamentally about *not* leaving, about *not* wishing to go somewhere else. Rather, it is fundamentally working with *placemaking* in the geographical sense of the term, trying to work with the attachment people already have to their neighbourhood and turning the 'problem' of blight into a possible solution to the neighbourhood's problems.

Besides offering paid work and acting as an open house to the teenagers in the area, a third way the farm can be seen to operate as a moral crossroads is as a meeting place for 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' Since the farm was established, the farmers have encouraged and welcomed people from other parts of New Orleans, Louisiana, the US, as well as a small number of people from abroad, to come and work in the Lower Ninth Ward for a short period of time. The intention is undoubtedly to not only gather people from very different backgrounds in one place, but also to have them work with and alongside each other. The basic philosophy behind this seems to be similar to that of the American Friends Service Committee gardening programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where 'gardens for peace and reconciliation' (Campbell & Brdanovic 2011) have been set up as facilitating spaces in a post-

war setting. What the organisers hope these spaces will encourage is people from opposite sides of the Bosnian War (1992-1995) to find reconciliation with each other without being pushed into it.

The situation in the Lower Ninth Ward is not strictly that of a post-war zone, but it does represent 'another America' that shapes people's perceptions and brings along a number of stereotypes and prejudices. Local university groups are regular visitors on weekends, and a number of college groups, church groups, and synagogue youth groups from other parts of the US spend a few days working on the farm, some returning from previous years. There are clearly a number of hopes attached to these 'meetings' between locals and outsiders, especially in terms of triggering a desire to 'take action,' but it is also a setting where the stereotype of the 'well-intentioned white person' wanting to help is challenged. The farmers would accept and thank for offers to help the work on the farm as well as offers of financial contributions, but they would also try to get across a point that W. E. B. Du Bois (1996) articulates particularly well: 'Human advancement is not a mere question of almsgiving, but rather of sympathy and cooperation among classes who would scorn charity' (151). The farmers would suggest that rather than donating 20 USD, 50 USD, or 100USD in a moment of wanting to instantly support their work, they would be dramatically better off if the visiting students from the local university would approach the university canteen requesting that it would start buying produce from the farm on a regular basis. Similarly, the groups from other parts of the US could go back to their home regions and think about similar moves - not defined by charity, which is an incredibly morally loaded action at one level, but defined by an everyday form of cooperation.

At the same time, bringing in outsiders also carries with it a hope of incentivising the local teenagers:

We have quite a few groups of people coming here from elsewhere, people who wouldn't otherwise come here, have them work alongside kids from the neighbourhood, make them understand that there is an America that is completely different from the one they know. At the same time the kids see all these people coming here to look at what we're doing. That must at least be a *tiny* bit inspiring for them. [conversation with author October].

In these three general ways, the farm as a space and growing food as an activity offers a very particular framework for interaction between people as well as with place. By facilitating these particular kinds of interaction, I have proposed that the farmers are involved in their own ethical project in Laidlaw's (2002) sense of the term, which has come to involve trying to trigger in its visitors moments of moral breakdown in Zigon's (2007) sense of the term. It is an ethical project because running the school-farm is intimately intertwined with the farmers' questioning of their own lives and capacities to contribute positively in a context they see as a result of ignorance and cruelty - not necessity. It sets up a space that tries to work from within a troubled neighbourhood, which has its ups and downs as, if the farmer is right in his comparison between some of the teenagers and the Liberian child soldiers, they remain within the same surroundings, whereas a child soldier would normally be tried treated after having left his or her 'status' as a soldier.

The opening quote of this chapter has already alluded to a comparison between what the ancient Epicurean Garden School was intended to do and what our farm aspires to be. This comparison is not with the widely misrepresented image of Epicurus' school as teaching a self-indulgent carpe diem doctrine, but as one that directly exposed its students to circles of growth and decay sensitive to - but not in fully controlled by - human intervention (Harrison 2008: 120-121). Entering a similar area, Rudolph Borchardt (2006) has suggested that 'whatever it is [a garden] is finally a human statement... because a garden is always a notion of order... As a question of order it is also a question of example, education and redemption' (Borchardt 2006: 32 [quoted in Harrison 2008: 73]).

As a particular kind of space within the Lower Ninth Ward and as a meeting place built around the practice of growing food in a serious way, the farm seems purposed not only to be an ethical statement by the farmers, but also to confront its visitors with ethical questions in the hope that - be it a minority - some of them will find it an incentive to look for ways to work towards environmental justice-oriented goals.

5: Conclusion

This thesis has been an attempt to make sense of why a group of people are growing food in a troubled New Orleans neighbourhood and what it is they are trying to achieve. It has presented their work as an ethical project because of its deep ethical undertones, and likewise presented the farm as a project primarily from the perspective of the farmers. My aim has not been to draw a comprehensive picture of the different groups of people and individuals who stay on and visit the farm, but rather to get an understanding of why food is seen as an appropriate tool within this particular context.

To seek an appropriate frame for understanding this, moral anthropology offers a framework that does not only consider how people reason about their behaviour and choices, nor only to what truth discourses they subscribe to in certain situations, but also to the behaviour *itself*. Paul Rabinow (2003) explains - under the term of 'care of the self' - what I have referred to as an 'ethical project' entails:

The care of the self, then, was not just a state of consciousness; it was an activity. Furthermore it was not an activity appropriate just for this or that occasion; rather, it was an essential dimension of a whole way of life. It was a constitutive element of a form of life. Thus, in one sense it was part of a broader pedagogy, in the ancient sense of *paideia*, or in the more modern sense of *Bildung*. However, the care of the self was more than that; it was more than a stage (or set of stages) one passed through. The care of the self was also a form of critique, a critique of the self that entailed perpetual self-examination, an unlearning of bad habits as well as the forming of good ones. In sum, meditation, *melete*, was an exercise in the practical appropriation of thinking about and toward the self. It was an appropriation aimed at literally forming the subject. It was not aimed at merely enriching his knowledge, building his reputation, or polishing his style for its own sake. The care of the self was an essential aspect of how a moral existence had to be lived. Although this preparation and this exercise focused on the care of the self, it was far from being a solitary affair. In fact, the practice of the care of the self passed through an elaborate network of relationships with others. The care of the self was highly social, and it was oriented from the self outward to others, to things, to events, and then back to the self. [Rabinow 2003: 9-10]

This angle of care - and ethics - provides a suitable frame to understand why a group of unlikely urban farmers end up growing food in the city, and also why the kind of space that is the urban farm and the practice of farming itself are highly loaded in this project.

Urban farming in this context has perhaps a particularly great potential, as it ties in with a totality of challenges that the Lower Ninth Ward, New Orleans, and urban populations in a wider sense are facing. It is not a neatly implemented practice, as it needs to find its way into the world of retail and a 'free market' economy with relatively few means to survive economically, although it can come a long way with the support of local residents and institutions.

In countries such as the United States, where growing and processing food are commonly highly specialised and concentrated activities, its access is also often taken for granted (Pothukuchi, & Kaufman 1999). This is also a reason why urban farming at this point in time may seem superfluous as a serious source of food, and also why a lot of urban farming projects focus less on growing food and more on 'building communities' and 'training skills.' The authors of the 1996 UN report on urban agriculture observation that 'urban farmers by and large believe that they are isolated pioneers without support' (xviii) seems to still hold true for those trying to make it into a viable economic activity, but for the farm in the Lower Ninth Ward financial independence is seen as vital not only to the long-term survival of the project, but also crucial to it becoming an example of 'another way' of growing food - one which they believe can be more inclusive, and more socially and environmentally responsible.

'We have yet to discover what a strong, local, post-industrial food culture could look like, but there have never been a better time to find out,' Carolyn Steel writes (2007: 246). On a more cautious note, Gregory Donofrio (2007) notes that if the recent food movement offers 'signs of a food system undergoing reform, future researchers with an eye on both the past and the future may wish to ask what attitudes and circumstances make this moment so different from the time... more than half a century ago' (Donofrio 2007:39) when many of the same questions of sustainability, local community support, and small-scale economics were asked. One reply may be the increasing body of research suggesting that industrial farming in its present form is too energy and water demanding and causes too much environmental damage to be a viable long-term option. Another may be recurring economic downturns, although individual and community food growing has always fluctuated in times of prosperity and times of crisis. It may also be that the current food movement seems to be more deeply engaged with social class and race issues than before.

In essence, the recent urban farming trend in the US is not far from the idea of a *green revolution from below* Richards (2012) is describing. Richard's concern is mainly with smallhold farmers in African and Asian regions and their interaction with agroindustry (see also Pottier 1999), but the idea of a bottom-up movement of food growers seems to be catching on also among more highly educated younger people. As such, the urban farming trend may turn out to be an effective form of local activism in the midst of a highly globalised era, although its effectiveness will depend on how far it can harvest local support and enthusiasm because, as it stands now, the main asset of urban farms and gardens are to be found not in their exchange value, but in their use value.

The task the group of farmers have set themselves is by no means a straightforward or easy one. They are, after all, asking people in a maverick-sort-of-way to change their habits and to question their own moral sentiments. To what extent the school-farm will be successful in provoking this will be difficult to give an account of, but the interest it tiggers within the city of New Orleans and, perhaps more so, in other parts of the United States, makes it an intriguing example of an ethical project.

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