CULTIVATING SUBJECTIVITIES: THE CLASS POLITICS OF CONVIVIAL LABOR IN THE INTERSTITIAL SPACES OF NEOLIBERAL NEGLECT [1]


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This dissertation explores home kitchen gardens and the role they play in the lives of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual community of diaspora and low-income residents in San José, CA. Drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork from 2012 through 2016, I develop three central arguments. First, I argue home kitchen gardeners produce garden subjectivities. These subjectivities enunciate a complex world-view that challenges inequality through cooperative labor. They allow this group of gardeners to learn to live with uncertainty as they navigate and transform their worlds. I argue a “moral economy of the home kitchen gardener” exists because people have the necessary knowledge and skills as well as a capacity for autonomy to create new worlds while transforming existing ones through the intentional self-organization of direct lived experiences. Second, I argue that there exists a tight relationship between social and cultural diversity. These gardens encourage various forms of biological, social, cultural, and economic diversity. The ethnographic narratives and observations reveal that the gardeners actively seek to make sense of their worlds and their circumstances with a sense of openness to the truth claims of others, and this encourages the diversity of the crops grown in gardens as much as it promotes a wide range of convivial social relationships. Finally, I argue that home kitchen gardening offers new spaces to emerge through the practice of autonomy. These home kitchen gardeners encourage cohesion informality, or an assemblage of informal networks that foster solidarity, trust, and social-ecological resilience. Growing food for this group and many other precarious, diasporic, and working class groups like them, is a means to self-determined and self-defined justice.