Paola Della Valle

Community and Tribal Gardens in Aotearoa New Zealand: Some Literary Images

Abstract: Community gardens, that is sections of public land collectively gardened for the specific purpose of growing fruits, vegetables or flowers, have risen in Western urban societies all over the world in times of emergency or as alternatives to current food environment as well as opportunities to engage in outdoor physical and social activities. Recent academic studies about community garden participation in Aotearoa New Zealand have highlighted its benefits to health and well-being. The idea of community gardens, however, reflects notions of sharing, reciprocity, and conviviality that are alien to the Western solipsistic view of the garden as a "private haven" and much closer to the Māori concept of "tribal" or "communal gardens", which was a standard feature of Māori subsistence economy prior to the advent of European settlers. This article will provide literary images testifying to the two above-mentioned views of the garden. It will also show how community gardening has become part of the strategies of the public health sector in Aotearoa New Zealand and how it has been utilized by Māori communities for cultural and political purposes.

Keywords: Community gardens. Tribal gardens. Māori literature. New Zealand literature. Well-being.

Community Gardens: Meaning and History

Recent academic studies about community garden participation in Aotearoa New Zealand[1] have highlighted its benefits to well-being. Glover defines a community garden "an organized, grassroots initiative whereby a section of land is used to produce food or flowers or both in an urban environment for the personal use or collective benefit of its members".[2] Such initiatives have risen in Western urban societies all over the world as alternatives to current food environment as well as opportunities to engage in outdoor physical and social activities. The term "community" may mean that public land is used or that the gardening is done as a group (schools, neighbourhoods, city blocks, faith communities, prisons, nursing homes, and hospitals).[3] "Gardening" can cover a wide range of horticultural practices including growing edible plants, flowers and ornamentals, and carrying out revegetation programmes. Stocker and Barnett have identified three types of community gardens. Their classification, regarding Australian and overseas gardens, is based on how the plots are gardened and who benefits from the work. In particular, they distinguish between individual plots, communal plots for the benefit solely or largely of those who garden them and collectively worked plots for the benefit of the broader community.[4]

[1] Aotearoa is the Māori name of New Zealand. It means "the land of the long white cloud".

[2] T.D. Glover, K.J. Shinew and D.C. Parry, "Association, Sociability, and Civic Culture: The Democratic Effect of Community Gardening", *Leisure Sciences*, 27, 2005, p. 79.

[3] C. Draper and D. Freedman, "Review and Analysis of the Benefits, Purposes, and Motivations Associated with Community Gardening in the United States", *Journal of Community Practice*, 18, 2010, p. 459.

[4] M. Earle, *Cultivating Health: Community Gardening as a Public Health Intervention*, Master's thesis,

Historically, community and allotment gardens have supported their communities during political and economic crises. As Barthel et al. underline: "Urban allotment gardens in the Western world originated primarily in response to food shortages during the transition from feudal agrarianism to urban industrialism".[5] In Britain, for example:

> From the 17th through to the 19th centuries, vast areas of previously communal sites for food production, fuel gathering and grazing were privatised and enclosed. […] By 1850, approximately 88 per cent of farm labourers had no personal ownership over the lands they tended. This 'great enclosure' dissolved the 'commons', along with the ancient system of local food production, leaving the poor to live at or below subsistence levels. This suffering catalysed collective social movements, leading to the passing of laws allocating space for urban allotment gardens.[6]

During the two World Wars of the twentieth century considerable amounts of food were produced in backyards, allotments and community gardens in order to compensate for war-time food shortages. Community gardens became widespread in Europe and "played an important role in national food security, by supplementing rations and providing essential nutrients that were unable to be otherwise supplied by the food environment of the time".[7] In the United States, too, urban community gardens began in the late nineteenth century in times of economic hardship. They supported the living of new migrants, unemployed and impoverished workers during the Great Depression and the two World Wars, giving access to inexpensive healthy food. As Ohmer et al. maintain, community gardens provided opportunities for city residents, particularly the poor, to grow their own food on vacant city-owned lots.[8] The Victory Gardens Program is an example. Implemented by the U.S. Department of Agriculture during World War II, it produced "approximately 40 percent of the fresh vegetables in the U.S. from 20 million gardens located in communities across the country".[9] President Roosevelt's wife Eleanor started a garden for the people on the White House grounds during her husband's mandate (1933-45), just as former First Lady Michelle Obama did in 2009, when the U.S. was confronting the worst economic crisis after the Great Depression.[10] For two decades after the Second World War there was little focus on community gardening in the U.K. and America, probably due to the economic boom of the 1950s, and the development of capitalism and consumer society. The re-emergence of community gardens in these countries began in 1970s in response to increasing food prices and rising environmental awareness.[11]

University of Otago, 2011, p. 12. Quoted from L. STOCKER and K. BARNETT, "The Significance and Praxis of Community Based Sustainability Projects: Community Gardens in Western Australia", *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 3 (2), 1998, pp. 179-89.

[5] S. BARTHEL, J. PARKER and H. ERNSTSON, "Food and Green Space in Cities: A Resilience Lens on Gardens and Urban Environmental Movements", *Urban Studies*, 52 (7), 2015, p. 1323.

[6] *Ibidem*.

[7] V. EGLI, M. OLIVER and E. TAUTOLO, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing", *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 3, 2016, p. 348.

[8] M.L. OHMER, P. MEADOWCROFT, K. FREED and E. LEWIS, "Community Gardening and Community Development: Individual, Social and Community Benefits of a Community Conservation Program", *Journal of Community Practice*, 17 (4), 2009, p. 379.

[9] *Ibidem*, p. 380.

[10] C. DRAPER and D. FREEDMAN, "The Significance and Praxis of Community Based Sustainability Projects: Community Gardens in Western Australia", pp. 459-60.

[11] M. EARLE, *Cultivating Health: Community Gardening as a Public Health Intervention*, p. 16.

Community Gardens in Aotearoa New Zealand

Although a strong tradition of home vegetable gardening has always existed in Aotearoa New Zealand, interest in growing your own "veges" began to decrease once food became more accessible from supermarkets and households had less time for gardening. While gardening remained a national pastime, by the 1960s the production of fruit and vegetables in backyard gardens was declining and the focus moved to growing decorative plants, as shown by the 2003 anthology *My Garden My Paradise*, which will be illustrated in the next pages. As a result, today's younger generations have little experience with growing and harvesting food.[12] Since the 1970s, however, community gardens have become more and more popular in Aotearoa New Zealand, as elsewhere in the Western world, and their number has increased. In the last few decades, in particular, there has been a growing interest from the public health sector, environmental groups, local authorities and *Te Puni Kōkiri* (Ministry of Māori Development), who have understood the benefits that can be gained from supporting community gardening in social, health, cultural and environmental terms. As Earle's research well illustrates, these benefits include among others: promoting healthy and active lifestyles, enhancing interest in nutrition and engagement with fresh food, increasing social interaction and involvement in the community, breaking down barriers between age groups and ethnic groups, reducing health inequalities among disadvantaged social and ethnic groups, helping the budget of low-income households, and creating pleasant and welcoming spaces within the community area. The connection with soil and nature also increases a sense of well-being and improves mental and spiritual health.[13]

Well-being and Community Gardens

Well-being is a multidimensional construct that is becoming an increasingly popular measure for health promoters, government agencies and academics as an indicator of societal contentedness and population progress. Well-being is not just the absence of disease. It encompasses optimal physical and mental functioning, and implies hedonic and eudaimonic components, that is, the combination of feeling good and functioning well.[14] Huppert and So identify ten features of positive well-being: competence, emotional stability, engagement, meaning, optimism, positive emotion, positive relationships, resilience, self-esteem, and vitality.[15] Well-being also intertwines with community gardening because, as Egli, Oliver and Tautolo underline, "while wellbeing may not be the intended goal of community gardens, many of the outcomes of community garden participation positively influence wellbeing".[16] What emerges from their research is that community gardens contribute to the community well-being by influencing two major factors – the nutritional health environment and the social environment – which can be divided into a series of major and minor themes (Fig. 1).

[12] *Ibidem*, p. 17.

[13] *Ibidem*, pp. 130-31.

[14] F. Huppert and T.T.C. So, "Flourishing Across Europe: Application of a New Conceptual Framework for Defining Well-Being", *Social Indicators Research*, 110, 2013, p. 839.

[15] *Ibidem*, p. 837.

[16] V. Egli, M. Oliver and E. Tautolo, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing", p. 349.

Major theme	Minor theme	Reference
Nutritional Health Environment		
Healthy body weights	Fruit and vegetable consumption	Alaimo et al., 2008; Hanbazaza et al., 2015; Litt et al., 2011
	The influence of social networks	Zick et al., 2013
Physical activity	Nature contact	Maller et al., 2006
	Regular movement	Park et al., 2014
Food security	Economic benefits	Litt et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2014
	Shortened supply chains	Wang et al., 2014
Social Health Environment		
Ownership and pride	Crime reduction	Art McCabe, 2014
	Decreased stress	Art McCabe, 2014
Urban beautification	Civic engagement	Saldivar-Tanaka and Krasny, 2004
	Political activism	Litt et al., 2011
Community cohesion	Cultural identity	Graham and Connell, 2006; Li et al., 2010
	Shared goals and experiences	Buckingham, 2005

Fig. 1: V. Egli, M. Oliver and E. Tautolo, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing", *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 3, 2016, p. 349.

Fig. 2: V. Egli, M. Oliver and E. Tautolo, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing", *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 3, 2016, p. 350.

Egli, Oliver and Tautolo have also devised a graphical representation of the benefits of community gardens (Fig. 2). The aim of their study was to develop a model that could synthesize a large amount of literature and research. They looked for a format that could be eye-catching and easily understood by layperson audiences. The following graphic provides an example of effective "knowledge translation", summarizing large quantities of academic findings into an attractive format applicable for use and adaptation by communities, health promoters and government agencies.

Community Gardens and the New Zealand Public Health Sector

While initially the focus was on encouraging the establishment of edible gardens in schools and early childhood centres, more recently the health sector has started supporting community-based garden projects. As Earle explains, "the New Zealand health sector has begun to identify gardening as a community intervention to assist in reducing the impact of chronic conditions like diabetes and to improve nutrition outcomes for high-deprivation neighbourhoods".[17] Beside the health sector, the potential benefits from promoting gardening have also been identified by environmental groups and, in some regions, local authorities and politicians, who are championing the idea that communities should use vacant land to grow edible gardens. In this context, community-based gardening initiatives are being seen as part of a larger plan aimed at addressing local, national and global challenges that range from poor nutrition and food insecurity to environmental sustainability and cultural revitalisation. Moreover, like most Western developed countries, Aotearoa New Zealand is marked by ethnic and socio-economic inequalities. Statistics demonstrate that the health of Māori, Pacific and Asian minorities is poorer than that of Pākehā (New Zealanders of European origin). Although the gap is narrowing, the high prevalence of chronic conditions has led the health sector to place increased emphasis on promoting physical activity and healthy food choices. Community gardens are viewed favourably because they give access to inexpensive healthy food options.[18] Reasons for supporting community gardens also include their induction of environmentally friendly behaviours such as promoting organic food and the short food supply chain, reducing organic waste, decreasing dependency on fossil fuels in food transport, and contributing to environmental sustainability. Community groups have also discovered the potential of using gardens to enhance social networks, promote understanding between communities or provide meaningful activities for unemployed youth or people with mental health conditions or impairments. According to a web-based review of New Zealand city councils' and gardening organisations' websites, in 2016 there were approximately 150 community gardens within New Zealand's three largest cities (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch).[19] One of the main educational institutions in Aotearoa, the University of Canterbury,[20] established community gardens on campus in 2002 "as an informal recreation and learning space", whose purpose is thus described on the website:

[17] *Ibidem*, p. 1.

[18] *Ibidem*, pp. 2-3.

[19] N. Shimpo, A. Wesener and W. Mcwilliam, "How Community Gardens May Contribute to Community Resilience Following an Earthquake", *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 38, 2019, p. 125.

[20] Canterbury is a region of Aotearoa New Zealand located in the central-eastern South Island. Its main city is Christchurch.

The vision of UC's community gardens is "To create an attractive, living campus that is transitioning into a resilient, edible biophilic landscape".[21]

Other universities have followed their example: Victoria University in Wellington, with a vegetable and fruit co-op, Massey University, with a compost collective at the Albany campus, and the University of Otago in Dunedin.[22] Shimpo et al. have also studied the beneficial effects of community gardening on Christchurch citizens in the aftermath of the 2010-2011 destructive earthquakes which struck the region of Canterbury (NZ). Following research led in the US about the key roles of community gardening for people recovering from extreme natural events, such as floods and hurricanes (in particular after hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and hurricane Sandy in New York), Shimpo et al. demonstrate that community gardens provided post-trauma therapy, serving as important places to de-stress, share experience and gain community support.[23] All in all, community gardening is now regarded as a practice that can positively contribute to the environment, to people's health and to a general sense of well-being.

Māori Tribal Gardens

Community gardening is usually seen as a relatively recent phenomenon in Aotearoa New Zealand when compared with its long and diverse history in some cities in North America and Europe. In reality, community gardening has an unrecognised and disjointed history in this country. The history of Māori communal gardening long predates European settlement. When the first European settlers arrived in New Zealand in the 1840s, they found that the indigenous Māori population had a tradition of communal gardening (tribal gardens), which started to decline in the late nineteenth century.[24] European explorers observed that Māori had neat gardens, about 0.5-5 hectares in size, on sunny, north-facing slopes. These gardens were communally owned and worked. Kūmara (sweet potato) was the main crop and could be grown throughout the northern and coastal North Island, and in the northern South Island. Four other important food plants – taro, yam, gourd and tī pore (Pacific cabbage tree) – were confined to northern gardens. Until the middle of the 20th century most Māori continued to live in small rural villages, where the *marae*[25] was still the heart of the community. After the Second World War, however, many Māori, especially the young, moved to the cities. Work for wages had replaced hunting, fishing or growing vegetables. Tribal gardens therefore declined.[26]

[21] See: https://www.canterbury.ac.nz/life/sustainability/sustainability-engagement---get-involved/community-gardens/ (last accessed on 31 December 2019).

[22] See: https://www.facebook.com/campusgardenotago/ (last accessed on 31 December 2019); https://compostcollective.org.nz/venues/massey-university-community-garden/ (last accessed on 31 December 2019); https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/sustainability/get-involved/food-coop (last accessed on 31 December 2019).

[23] N. Shimpo, A. Wesener and W. Mcwilliam, "How Community Gardens May Contribute to Community Resilience Following an Earthquake", p. 124.

[24] M. Earle, *Cultivating Health: Community Gardening as a Public Health Intervention*, pp. 16-20.

[25] A *marae* is the open space in front of the ancestral house, in which all the important gatherings and ceremonies take place. Figuratively it also means "the heart of a Māori tribe and village".

[26] See: https://teara.govt.nz/en/daily-life-in-maori-communities-te-noho-a-te-hapori, https://teara.govt.nz/en/gardens/page-1 and https://media.newzealand.com/en/story-ideas/kai-traditional-maori-food/ (last accessed on 31 December 2019).

Nowadays, community gardening gives Māori an opportunity to reconnect not only with food production but also with their identity and animistic culture. It has become a way to retrieve traditional knowledge and pass it on to younger generations. Cultural practices are therefore integrated in a community garden context and adapted to it. As Earle points out:

People who saw community gardening from a Māori worldview described a clear link between community gardening and the concepts of te ao Māori (the Māori world), in particular maintaining the connection with Papatuanuku (Mother Earth). They viewed community gardening as a holistic response that addressed many aspects of what it is like to be Māori in a twenty-first century urban setting.[27]

From Earle's research it appears that Māori are mostly involved in gardens established in Māori settings, like *marae*, *kōhanga reo* (Māori pre-schools), and other community places. In the Papatuanuku Marae in Mangere, they are built on a council reserve, divided into plots and tended communally by families belonging to an *iwi* (tribe) group. They include teaching gardens and marae gardens, which are often coordinated by *kaumātua*.[28] From the interviews conducted it came out how the *kaumātua* were utilising the skills they had learnt in their younger years and promoting traditional values in a multicultural urban setting. As reported by Earle: "One garden mentor described herself as the 'old kuia of the plot'[29] and the garden as being 'our marae, where you sit and talk and learn and respect it'".[30] So the act of gardening is not only a sustainable method to grow food, but also a way to do it traditionally, following cultural practices which need to be handed down. Interviewees also saw it as a way to employ people from the community.

Promoting gardening is consistent with *Te Pae Māhutonga*, the Māori model of health promotion developed by Professor Mason Durie, the Māori psychiatrist who first tried to conjugate Western science and indigenous culture for Māori people in the treatment of mental illnesses.[31] *Te Pae Māhutonga* (Fig. 3) is the Māori name of the constellation of the Southern Cross, which identifies the magnetic South Pole and is associated with the discovery of Aotearoa by the Māori Polynesian ancestors and with its later re-discovery by the European voyagers. It is formed by four central stars in the shape of a cross and two other stars in a straight line pointing towards it, called the pointers. The Southern Cross has served as a navigational aid for centuries and is an iconic image in New Zealand. This is why Durie uses it as a symbol pointing Māori in the right direction in terms of health and well-being. The four central stars of the constellation are depicted as representing the four key tasks of health promotion: access to the Māori world (cultural identity), environmental protection, healthy lifestyles and participation in society. Community gardening seems to go in the right direction too, as it fosters the same principles.

[27] M. EARLE, *Cultivating Health: Community Gardening as a Public Health Intervention*, p. 70.
[28] *Kaumātua*: respected tribal elders of either gender.
[29] Kuia means "elderly woman".
[30] M. EARLE, *Cultivating Health: Community Gardening as a Public Health Intervention*, p. 71.
[31] M. DURIE, *Ngā Kāhui Pou Launching Māori Futures*, Wellington, Huia, 2003, pp. 147-56.

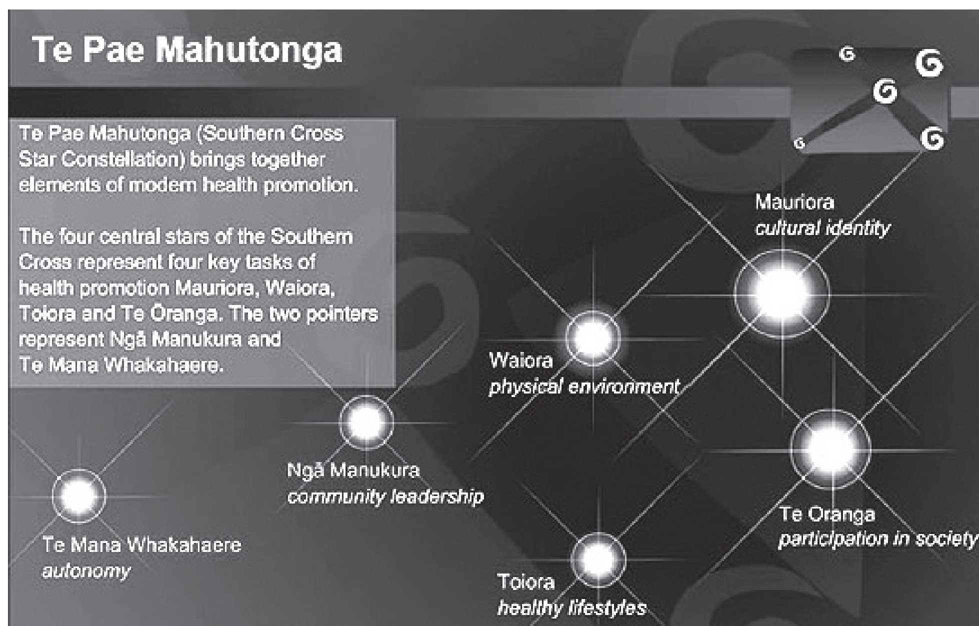

Fig. 3: Ministry of Health: https://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/populations/maori-health/maori-health-models/maori-health-models-te-pae-mahutonga (last accessed on 31 December 2019).

Some Images of Gardens in New Zealand Literature

The necessity of a garden as a natural aesthetic complement to one's home in New Zealand is longstanding. Nineteenth-century European settlers, coming mostly from the U.K., found a green and lush country, covered with rainforest and an enormous variety of native plants, bush herbs and colourful flowers, especially in the North Island. The main occupation of settlers was to clear the bush and tame the land, in order to make it cultivable and domestic. The European concept of private property was also extended to the idea of garden. The garden appears as an interface between nature and nurture (civilisation, art, expertise), the result of one's ingenuity and labour completing the domestic space of a house. In the course of time gardens have become mostly occupied by flowers and trimmed lawns, not fruits and vegetables, as we mentioned before. Vegetables are purchased from stores, together with other food provisions.

Images of gardens are frequent in poems and fictional works in New Zealand literature. The 2003 anthology of poems and photos *My Garden My Paradise* gives us an idea of the great number of authors who engaged with gardens in the past and present. As the title suggests, the garden is generally perceived in personal terms: a projection of one's most intimate feelings and thoughts, an embodiment of one's hidden life, desires or privileged private space, and a symbol of vital force. Contemporary poet and photographer Sally Mason conveys some of these feelings in her poem "The Meadow":

Imagine a flower,
many flowers, in a meadow –
my meadow, my life.

Growing together, faces to the sun,
their colours laughing and bright,
or shyly subdued.
Bathed by the rains,
dancing in the winds,
standing tall and strong in a forest of grasses.

Imagine my flowers plucked with care,
gathered in great bunches and given to friends,
sharing me, my self, given with love –
'til the meadow becomes but a field of grass,
the flowers gone…

I lie in my meadow, my view framed by the grasses
contemplating, awaiting a new season of flowers – to be gathered,
and shared, once again.

For the gift of a flower, to a friend, is a gift
from the soul.

To be given one back… just imagine.[32]

Although Mason expresses her desire to share flowers with her friends, "For the gift of a flower, to a friend, is a gift from the soul", the prevailing idea of garden is that of a secluded intimate space, a silent refuge of the soul that is opened only at the owner's will. The repetition of the possessive "my" also underlines notions of privacy and property. In Ursula Bethell's "Bulbs" the poetess feels she is not up to the lilies' beauty and fears they will not grow in her garden:

I have planted lilies, but will they all grow well with me?
Will they like the glitter of this north-looking hillside?
Will they like the rude winds, the stir, the quick changes?
Would they not have shadowy stillness, and peace?[33]

The perfect texture of the lilies makes them look like angels that can be found in the foothills and fields of paradise. Lilies become the embodiment of a perfection the poet aspires to:

All these lovely lilies, I wish that they would grow with me,
No other flowers have the texture of the lilies,
The heart-piercing fragrance, the newly alighted angel's
Lineal poise, and purity, and peace –

(We wait their pleasure. Yet if they grow not
Need only take patience a little while longer;
For these are the flowers we look to find blooming

[32] C. STACHURSKI (ed.), *My Garden My Paradise*, Christchurch, Hazard Press, 2003, p. 42

[33] *Ibidem*, p. 90. Ursula Bethell (1874-1945) was a social worker and a poetess. She was born at Horsell, Surrey, England. Her family moved to New Zealand when she was one year old.

In the meadows and lanes that lie beyond Jordan –
All kinds of lilies in the lanes that lead gently,
Very gently, by degrees, in the shade of green trees,
To the foothills and fields of Paradise.)[34]

Flowers replace the poet's children in Cyril Childs' haiku poem, "Untitled":

Children gone –
we nurture
the camellias[35]

And Charles Brasch describes the garden from inside the house, while the wind and sunlight are giving life to the "pulsing white curtains" in and out the French windows. The garden, vibrating with the life of bees and flies, seems to invade the inner space of the building and bring its vital energy. While the garden is an extension of the house, it also appears as its heart and animating engine in the summer.

An afternoon of summer, and white curtains –
Sunlit curtains hung to the floor and pulsing
Calmly in and out through wide french windows
In warm and drowsy light; from the lawn beyond them
Cool undertone of leaves lifted and fretted
On wandering airs, and that of all sounds peaceful
The happiest–the engrossed, ecstatic murmur
Of bees and sunbeam flies endlessly intoning
Their mass of life: and in that joyous intoning
All summer swam and all our years were wafted
Through life and death breathed in the pulsing curtains.[36]

Numerous are the images of gardens in Katherine Mansfield's short stories, in which they seem to be the complement of rich bourgeois houses, as in "Prelude" and "The Garden Party". Here the garden becomes a ludic playground for children, but also a site of mystery, where they can even get lost while walking among lush greenery and plants much taller than they are. On the contrary the garden turns into an escapist space for women, who find a temporary suspension from their traditional roles of mothers and wives or, when unmarried, a place in which to be free to dream about future possible lives. For adults there is nothing communal in these gardens, very little to share. Gardens are projections of one's inner private world or a refuge from routine, the presence of other family members, and pre-established rules.[37]

Interestingly, in *My Garden My Paradise* a different note is provided by Māori author Keri Hulme.[38] In a passage from her Booker Prize winning novel *The Bone People* (1984),

[34] *Ibidem*.

[35] *Ibidem*, p. 86. Cyril Childs (1941-2012) was a poet and past-president of the NZ Poetry Society. He wrote haiku and related forms after living in Japan for 12 months in 1989/90.

[36] *Ibidem*, p. 62. Charles Brasch (1909-1973) was a poet and literary critic, the founder and first editor of the famous NZ literary review *Landfall*.

[37] Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) is generally known as the first New Zealand writer, a master of short stories and a central figure in British modernism.

[38] Keri Hulme (1947-), of Māori, English and Scottish origin, won the Booker Prize in 1985 with *The Bone People*.

the garden is turned into a wide natural area where herbs and vegetables are collectively picked and eaten:

Kerewin's next meal featured a salad with fourteen different greens in it, all plucked within a one-mile radius of the Tower. Sorrel, wild turnip, lambsquarters, dandelions, pikopiko curls, puha, cress, young yarrow… "In summer I can make you an even better one," she said.[39]

As mentioned before, the modern idea of community gardens is very close to the indigenous idea of tribal gardens, that is, plots of land belonging to the tribe or *iwi* and collectively cultivated. The idea of "garden" among Māori did not imply an aesthetic or introspective concept, but a practical function to be shared with the community, for the collective good. This customary habit was lost with the advent of modern society.

The importance of tribal gardens had been signalled in two early novels written by Māori writers, *Whanau* (1974) by Witi Ihimaera and *Potiki* (1986) by Patricia Grace, both probing into the effects of individualism and Western "progress" on Māori people.

Whanau (which means "extended family" in the Māori language) deals with a Māori rural community living in the 1970s that is undergoing a process of decadence and disaggregation due to the shift of many of its members from the village of Waituhi to the cities, in search of occupation. Two seasonal moments that kept the community together were the communal planting and harvesting of the ancestral land, which involved the emigrated people as well as those still in Waituhi. One of the characters, Rongo, who lives in the city suburbs with his family, says that he and his wife could never "break the emotional link between them and the village".[40] However, the novel describes his disappointment when he comes to Waituhi only to find that everybody else now deserts those communal moments, which don't fit in the rhythm of modern life:

On that first day of the planting last year, Rongo Mahana had waited alone in the paddock. He'd hoped that somehow, the others of the family would be able to come. Even though they'd told him they couldn't make it, he had still kept on hoping. The sun had sprung quickly in the sky. And he had felt his heart breaking. The time of the family planting was over but he had been too stubborn to realise it. He couldn't blame the others for moving from the village and destroying the rhythm of the land. He couldn't blame Rawiri and Teria for being in Hastings while he waited here alone, nor Pita and Miriama for being away shearing. He could only blame himself for waiting, for being so stubborn. For hoping. And then he had not been able to wait longer. He had felt the earth crying out for seed. He had felt the yearning of the land for peace, for it had become accustomed to the rhythm of the yearly planting. And there had been a crying out of his blood too. The rhythm of the land and the rhythm of his blood had been one and the same. And he had begun the planting and both blood and land had gradually become calm. And he felt the strength of the land calling him. He had made a promise to himself and the land that day. That every year he would return to bring peace to the land and to himself. Even if it meant pulling himself along the ground by his hands, he would do it. Crawling on hands and knees, he would do it. One row after another. Slowly. Painfully. Until it was done. And the tears from his eyes, it would be they which would water each green shoot.[41]

Rongo realises that times are changing. People working in town cannot afford days off, not only for communal activities but even for a funeral. He identifies the moment he engages

[39] C. STACHURSKI (ed.), *My Garden My Paradise*, p. 50.
[40] W. IHIMAERA, *Whanau*, Auckland, Heinemann, 1974, p. 48.
[41] *Ibidem*, p. 54.

with planting as one that brings physical well-being, "peace to his blood", and, despite the absence of his family members, he does not want to renounce it.

Grace's *Potiki*, too, tells of a rural extended family, the Tamihanas, holding to 'the old ways' and selecting from modernity what they find useful or necessary. They apply a form of subsistence-economy model, which allows them to be self-sufficient in a period of economic crisis and unemployment, without losing their cultural bearings. Instead of joining the urban proletariat of mainstream New Zealand, they have re-established the vegetable gardens, using the agricultural knowledge handed down to them by their elders, and supplemented by the modern implements of a tractor and a truck. Their sources of sustenance are agricultural produce, which they also sell at the market, and the fish they catch in the sea, which is still unpolluted and not over-fished. Here gardening is also a means of survival, economic and cultural, something they do not want to renounce, despite the millionaire offer of private developers for their land. But they have to fight to reject the pressure of the speculators that try every way, legal and illegal, to force them to sell. The importance of the gardens is expressed by Hemi, the father of the family, in this passage:

> His own apprenticeship, his own education, had been on the land and after his father had died Grandfather Tamihana had taught him everything to do with planting, tending, gathering, storing and marketing. He'd been taught about the weather and the seasons, the moon phases and the rituals to do with growing. At the same time he was made aware that he was being given knowledge on behalf of a people, and that all trusted him with that knowledge. It wasn't only for him but for the family.[42]

These novels record the importance of community gardens (in this specific case tribal gardens, as they are run by an extended family group) in cultural, social and economic terms. In the last few years, the New Zealand health sector has begun to identify gardening as a possible way to help reduce the high prevalence of avoidable chronic conditions among communities with poor health, among which, as mentioned before, we find disadvantaged people from lower classes and minorities such as Māori and Pacific Islanders. Access to healthy food produced in customary ways is also a political issue, so much so that Māori activist and lawyer Annette Sykes encourages the reinstitution of tribal gardens by Māori communities within a larger militant programme against Western capitalism and corporations:

> So when you ask me what would I include in a definition of Māori resistance, such a process must ensure a Māori resistance at those many specific levels that neoliberalism operates to distort or destroy. For instance, globalisation and neoliberalism promotes the substitution of foods and the consumption of fast foods for the nutrition and knowledge that was maintained by what we grew. So at the most basic level, Māori resistance to that is not to go to McDonald's and KFC, and lately with the threat of things like the Bird Flu pandemic, *to reinstitute traditional tribal gardens* so thus I am encouraging my children to look at growing their own food using traditional Māori food harvesting practices.
>
> In any definition of Māori resistance, for me it must come back to personal commitment to change right through to a political commitment to challenge the inculcation of those neoliberal values into our modern Māori institutions, including direct challenges on corporate elites, which are really the living icons of this philosophy […].[43]

[42] P. GRACE, *Potiki*, Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 1986, p. 59.

[43] M. BARGH (ed.), "Blunting the System: The personal Is the Political: An Interview with Annette Sykes", in *Resistance. An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism*, Wellington, Huia, 2007, p. 116 (my emphasis).

In 2004 the Tāhuri Whenua – a National Māori Vegetable Growers Collective – was established in response to the loss of Māori horticultural knowledge as well as the loss of local food systems and alarming obesity trends among the Māori. As well as reviving traditional crops and promoting a return to traditional food systems, the collective also explores traditional and non-traditional production systems, markets, indigenous branding, education and research. In Māori, Tāhuri Whenua means 'returning to the land'. The collective's purpose is also to ensure Māori have access to relevant resources in the horticulture industry and to support Māori business development in the horticulture sector through provision of advice and information.[44]

Conclusion

To conclude, the recent surge of interest in community gardens in New Zealand is due to their recognised physical, psychological, social and economic benefits. These include learning about where food comes from, learning about healthy eating, improving health through good nutrition, creating opportunities for physical activity, facilitating social interactions and breaking down barriers. More generally, community gardens have proved to be able to enhance people's well-being, which is this reason why they have been officially promoted by the public health sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. For Māori, the revival of community gardens has been translated into a reconnection with the past and traditional expertise, which means cultural revitalisation and healing. Literature, as usual, has been able to reflect people's needs and desires by conveying different notions of garden – the Western and the Māori one. While community gardens have already been celebrated by Māori authors as part of their cultural heritage, the image of the garden by non-Māori is still attached to other (traditionally Western) views. We are still waiting for a Pākehā author to transform the experience of the community garden into a work of literature.

References

BARGH, MARIA (ed.), "Blunting the System: The personal Is the Political: An Interview with Annette Sykes", in *Resistance. An Indigenous Response to Neoliberalism*, Wellington, Huia, 2007, pp. 115-23.

BARTHEL, STEPHAN, JOHN PARKER, and HENRIK ERNSTSON, "Food and Green Space in Cities: A Resilience Lens on Gardens and Urban Environmental Movements", *Urban Studies*, 52, 2015, pp. 1321-1338.

DRAPER, CARRIE and DARCY FREEDMAN, "Review and Analysis of the Benefits, Purposes, and Motivations Associated with Community Gardening in the United States", *Journal of Community Practice*, 18 (4), 2010, pp. 458-92.

DURIE, MASON, *Ngā Kāhui Pou Launching Māori Futures*, Wellington, Huia, 2003.

EARLE, MARGARET, *Cultivating Health: Community Gardening as a Public Health Intervention*, Master's thesis, University of Otago, 2011.

[44] See: https://www.tahuriwhenua.org/ (last accessed on 31 December 2019).

EGLI, VICTORIA, MELODY OLIVER, and EL-SHADAN TAUTOLO, "The Development of a Model of Community Garden Benefits to Wellbeing", *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 3, 2016, pp. 348-52.

GLOVER, TROY D., KIMBERLY J. SHINEW, and DIANA C. PARRY, "Association, Sociability, and Civic Culture: The Democratic Effect of Community Gardening", *Leisure Sciences*, 27, 2005, pp. 75-92.

GRACE, PATRICIA, *Potiki*, Honolulu, Hawai'i University Press, 1986.

HUPPERT, FELICIA and TIMOTHY T.C SO, "Flourishing Across Europe: Application of a New Conceptual Framework for Defining Well-Being", *Social Indicators Research*, 110, 2013, pp. 837-61.

IHIMAERA, WITI, *Whanau*, Auckland, Heinemann, 1974.

MANSFIELD, KATHERINE, *The Collected Stories*, London, Penguin, 2007.

OHMER, MARY L., PAMELA MEADOWCROFT, KATE FREED and ERICKA LEWIS, "Community Gardening and Community Development: Individual, Social and Community Benefits of a Community Conservation Program", *Journal of Community Practice*, 17, 2009, pp. 377-99.

SHIMPO, NAOMI, ANDREAS WESENER, and WENDY MCWILLIAM, "How Community Gardens May Contribute to Community Resilience Following an Earthquake", *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 38, 2019, pp. 124-32.

STACHURSKI, CHRISTINA (ed.), *My Garden My Paradise*, Christchurch (NZ), Hazard Press, 2003.

STOCKER, LAURA and KATE BARNETT, "The Significance and Praxis of Community Based Sustainability Projects: Community Gardens in Western Australia. Local Environment", *The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, 3 (2), 1998, pp. 179-89.