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Abstract:

Cooking People's Knowledge: A Case Study of the Granville Community Kitchen (GCK) in South Kilburn, London

Despite the shift in the practice of industrial agriculture towards more regenerative paradigms such as *Agroecology*, the prime focus of this emerging-yet-ancient field has so far been on the sides of the ecological sciences and championing political movements, while less attention has been paid to its social or personal dimensions. Given these knowledge gaps (Morgan & Trubek, 2020), this research investigates the linkages between community kitchens and people's knowledge, using the case study of the Granville Community Kitchen (GCK) in South Kilburn, London, between 2021-2024.

The main contribution that this thesis makes to new knowledge is that of deepening the understanding of the way in which "culture and food traditions", one of the main 10 elements of agroecology (Biovision, n.d.) , can be applied practically within communal eating places, such as community food initiatives (CFIs). These include "community kitchens" – known otherwise by various names- which are recently gaining traction as a trendy concept, especially in the UK, with the rise of complex poverty in its post-Brexit, post-pandemic era, whilst it simultaneously reminisces on the faded legacy of Churchill's post-war public diners.

In order to enable a critical perspective, the thesis draws on the theoretical frameworks of decoloniality, visceral geography and "food culture". In order to unpack the multiple connotations of "culture", the scholarship of Stuart Hall on "cultural hybridity" will be of essence as it links people's food knowledge with resistance and intersectional identity formation (Hall, 2015). Second, a review of existing scholarship on the various global and local formats of community kitchens will be evaluated, along with insights into the evolution of commensality and conviviality in Britain (Albala, 2011, 2013; Burnett, 1989; Cook et al., 1999; Fischler, 2011; Smart et al., 2000; Sutton, 2001). Filtering this through the lens of Claude Fischler (1988), food is then identified as a symbolic cultural and social marker which impacts social cohesion and individual self-perception. This notion is recently making a second comeback, highlighting the visceral aspects that make food "more-than-food" (Goodman, 2015; Kneafsey et al., 2017; Strathern, 2020) especially in the period of hardship that the UK is undergoing.

The research employs Participatory Action Research (PAR)- inspired ethnographic and reflexive methodologies. With the researcher being in the uncommon position of being a Global South researcher studying a Global North case study¹, storytelling was chosen as an

¹ The socio-political systems and historical contexts of the Global North differ significantly from the Global South.

indigenous decolonial method that would hopefully offer a different epistemological perspective, liberating knowledge production and challenge Eurocentric norms. This approach prioritizes the lived experiences and sensory narratives of a diversity of GCK community members through their food practices, memories, identities and encounters at the community kitchen meals.

The empirical chapters capture the embodied knowledge of the people through 29 in-depth interviews conducted over two consecutive years. By focusing on sensory and visceral experiences, the research acknowledges food's role not only as sustenance but also as a medium for conveying emotion, memory, and identity. The research therefore spotlights the importance of community kitchens not only as "spaces" for collective eating but as "places" where food knowledge and identity are actively in flux, as they are being shaped and re-shaped, preserved, and transmitted across generations of locals, migrants and immigrants who frequent these meals. The ultimate aim of this study is therefore to infuse more cultural sensitivity and awareness into CFIs and UK food policy.