

Ecofeminist kitchens: reimagining professional kitchens as spaces of sustainable foodwork

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Published Version

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Wylie, A. (2024) Ecofeminist kitchens: reimagining professional kitchens as spaces of sustainable foodwork. *Feminismo/s*, 44. pp. 367-395. ISSN 1989-9998 doi: 10.14198/fem.2024.44.13 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/117442/>

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Identification Number/DOI: 10.14198/fem.2024.44.13
<<https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2024.44.13>>

Publisher: Universidad de Alicante

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ECOFEMINIST KITCHENS: REIMAGINING PROFESSIONAL KITCHENS AS SPACES OF SUSTAINABLE FOODWORK

COCINAS ECOFEMINISTAS: REINVENTANDO LAS COCINAS COMO UN ESPACIO DE TRABAJO SOSTENIBLE

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Submitted / Recibido: 13/03/2023

Accepted / Aceptado: 18/09/2023

To cite this article / Para citar este artículo:

Wylie, A. (2024). Ecofeminist Kitchens: Reimagining Professional Kitchens as Spaces of Sustainable Foodwork. *Feminismo/s*, 44, 367-395. <https://doi.org/10.14198/fem.2024.44.13>

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Abstract

Professional kitchens are both producers and consumers of food and many operate through unsustainable practices which have significant social and ecological impacts. Socially, they are spaces of low paid, high-pressured work, where gendered occupational discrimination is common. Ecologically, food production in these spaces contributes significantly to the demand for unethical meat production and the commodification of nature globally. The main aim of this article is to reimagine professional kitchens as spaces of sustainable and equitable foodwork. To this end, this research combines an empirical analysis of the relation between gender, power, and sustainability in professional kitchens in Glasgow with a theoretical examination of ecofeminist scholarship. In Glasgow, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with both male and female head chefs on the everyday (un)sustainable practices and norms of professional chefs and the ways they intertwine with gender. This research found that kitchens are organised in ways that normalize toxic masculinity, disempower women, and seriously harm non-human others. Furthermore, the absence of ecological literacy in professional

kitchens is shown to be a significant driver of unsustainable behaviours. Drawing on ecofeminist scholarship, this article goes on to envision what changes are needed for a sustainable and equitable transformation in professional kitchens. Based on this theoretical engagement, I argue that transforming professional kitchens requires a redistribution of power across genders to eradicate sexist hierarchies. Furthermore, there is a need to decenter economic profit to make space for an ethic of compassion which fulfils our moral obligations to both human and non-human others.

Keywords: ecofeminism; gender; foodwork; sustainability; professional chefs; professional kitchens; animals.

Resumen

Las cocinas profesionales son tanto productoras como consumidoras de alimentos y muchas operan mediante prácticas insostenibles con un importante impacto social y ecológico. Socialmente, son espacios de trabajo mal remunerado y bajo condiciones de presión, donde la discriminación ocupacional por género es común. De una perspectiva ecológica, la producción de alimentos en estos espacios contribuye significativamente a la demanda de producción de carne poco ética y a la mercantilización de la naturaleza a nivel mundial. El objetivo principal de este artículo es reimaginar las cocinas profesionales como espacios de trabajo alimentario sostenible y equitativo. Para ello, esta investigación combina un análisis empírico de la relación entre género, poder y sostenibilidad en las cocinas profesionales de Glasgow con un examen crítico desde la perspectiva ecofeminista. En Glasgow, se recopilaban datos a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas con jefes de cocina, hombres y mujeres, sobre las prácticas y normas cotidianas (in)sostenibles de los chefs profesionales y las formas en que se entrelazan con el género. Esta investigación encontró que las cocinas están organizadas de manera que normalizan la masculinidad tóxica, quitan el poder a las mujeres y dañan gravemente a los demás seres no humanos. Además, se ha demostrado que la falta de conocimientos ecológicos en las cocinas profesionales es un factor importante de comportamientos insostenibles. Basándose en estudios ecofeministas, este artículo continúa imaginando qué cambios se necesitan para una transformación sostenible y equitativa en las cocinas profesionales. Con base en este compromiso teórico, sostengo que transformar las cocinas profesionales requiere una redistribución del poder entre los géneros para erradicar las jerarquías sexistas. Además, es necesario descentrar el beneficio económico para dejar espacio a una ética de la compasión que cumpla con nuestras obligaciones morales hacia los demás, tanto humanos como no humanos.

Palabras clave: ecofeminismo; género; gastronomía; sostenibilidad; cocineros profesionales; cocinas profesionales; animales.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminist scholarship has long demonstrated that societies, organizations and households founded upon masculine values generate detrimental impacts on both women and the environment (Merchant, 1996; Plumwood, 1986). The theoretical contribution of ecofeminism lies in shedding light on the relationship between environmental and gendered exploitation by unpacking both the historical and contemporary hierarchical relationships between genders and gender and non-human nature (Gaard, 1993; Merchant, 1996; Plumwood, 1986). Given that food production and consumption contribute towards environmental exploitation and the (re)production of social and gendered inequalities, ecofeminism offers a fruitful lens to examine the food service industry.

The food service industry has been well researched across disciplines to explore everyday practices, pleasure, ethics, nutrition, and inequalities in consuming food (Bezerra et al., 2012; Finkelstein, 1989; Salmivaara & Lankoski, 2021; Wood, 2017; Wylie, 2020). Sociologists have analyzed the food service industry from a variety of perspectives, including that of the consumer (eg. Warde et al., 1999; Warde & Martens, 1998, 2000), and the restaurant workers (eg. Fine, 1996, 2008; Harris & Giuffre, 2010a, 2010b; Meriot, 2006). Geographers, on the other hand, have explored the industry through celebrity chefs as well as the discourses around food and celebrity (see, for instance, Barnes, 2017; Bell & Hollows, 2011; Goodman & Barnes, 2011; Slocum et al., 2011). Concurrently, sustainability debates surrounding the food service industry explore sustainable food supply chains through food waste mitigation and innovation driven sustainable solutions (Dhir et al., 2020; Hennchen, 2019; Martin-Rios et al., 2018; Pirani & Arafat, 2016). Yet, there is an absence of consideration for approaching sustainability in the food service industry through dismantling the toxic everyday practices it is built upon.

In this paper, I examine the relation between gender, power and sustainability with a focus on professional kitchens. Professional kitchens are both producers and consumers of food and many operate through unsustainable practices with devastating social and ecological impacts (Gössling & Hall, 2021; Wylie, 2020). Moreover, they can be controversial spaces, characterized

by the reproduction of social inequalities driven by high-pressure work conditions, gendered occupational discrimination and low salaries (Harris & Giuffre, 2010b; Swan, 2020; Wylie, 2020). If, I argue, professional kitchens are embedded within processes and structures which contribute towards unsustainable outcomes, they can also become agents of sustainable transformations. Therefore, this article draws ecofeminism to explore what sustainable transitions in professional kitchens could look like.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Feminist food ethics

Eating has long been identified by feminist scholars as being intertwined with politics (Gaard, 1993; Ketchum, 2016; MacKendrick, 2014). Ketchum (2016) examined the self-identified feminist restaurants of the 1970's and 80's, conceptualizing them as spaces carved out by women, for women, to share art, music, politics and environmentalism. In examining the menus – which ingredients were included or not, and the food prices – Ketchum finds evidence that the food reflected the political values of the business owners and were an integral part of what made a restaurant feminist. Ketchum (2016) highlights that feminist restaurants were mostly vegetarian, reflecting the grounded ideology of the business owners, who sought to «undermine oppressive sexist structures in the United States and Canada» (p. 4). Over time, as feminist ideology evolved, so did feminist restaurants. As environmental issues rose to the forefront of feminist activist concerns, ecofeminist values began to forge new ideologies and values, encompassing concerns of ecological and species oppression alongside gendered and racial oppression (Gaard, 2011). This led to the establishment of businesses like the Bloodroot Collective who founded an ecofeminist vegetarian restaurant and bookstore in 1977 that still exist today.

Politicizing our food choices, Gaard (1993, 2002), alongside Carol Adams (1975, 1990), were first to conceptualize ecofeminist vegetarianism. Gaard (2002) notes that the rationale for vegetarianism differs between feminist and ecofeminist activists and scholars. Ecofeminists saw treating non-human animals with equal moral consideration as humans, and politicizing food consumption as essential. Rather than focusing on the moral obligation to

animals, vegetarian feminists related the violence oppression and suffering associated with the consumption of non-human animals to the oppression of women, people of colour and nature itself (Adams, 1990; Gaard, 1993; Spiegel, 1988). Meat eating was regarded as an extension of the patriarchal power and vegetarianism became a form of empowerment through the application of non-violence principles. More recently, ecofeminist concerns of ecology and society have shifted further into mainstream food trends as vegan and vegetarian lifestyles are increasing. Nevertheless, more animals are now being slaughtered for food than ever before (Holmes, 2021).

2.2. Ecofeminism, food, and sustainability

Ecofeminism is deeply rooted in feminist and ecological goals to liberate nature and society from oppressive patriarchal powers and to allow life to flourish free from exploitation (Cohoon, 2014; Gaard, 2017; Plumwood, 1986). Given this focus, it seems appropriate to apply ecofeminist philosophy to debates on food and sustainability. Ecofeminism considers normative dualisms between humans and non-human nature and masculine and feminine as key drivers of ecological degradation and social exploitation in Western cultures (MacGregor, 2021; Plumwood, 2004). According to Gaard (2011) and Bertella (2020) in the face of global crises such as climate change and environmental degradation, the sustainability discourse, which is shaped by rich white men in an industrial North context (MacGregor, 2003), would benefit from ecofeminist perspectives. Gaard (2017) interrogated the literature surrounding the sustainability discourse and she found the dialogue to be blind to gender, race, class, sexuality and non-human species, and over representative of non-marginalized groups.

Bertella (2020) discusses the anthropogenic framing of sustainability in food tourism, arguing that we must change the narrative that non-human animals are resources for humans to manage. Bertella (2020) argues there is a moral and ethical obligation to recognize the exploitation of sentient beings in food tourism, and recognising this will broaden the anthropocentric focused understanding of sustainability to include the consideration of non-human animals. Cohoon (2014) draws on the work of Adams (1991) to emphasize that the suffering and domination of animals for food production

and consumption should not be separated and viewed in isolation from the unsustainable environmental and ecological impacts of the commodification of animals for meat. Adams (1991) connects the ecological consequences of meat production to the patriarchal dualisms and the systems of oppression which ecofeminists aspire to dismantle, highlighting the need for ecofeminists to contest animal consumption and production processes. Similarly, Bertella (2020) uses the COVID-19 outbreak as an example of the consequences our unsustainable consumption and commodification of animals has for ecological well-being. The author sees tourism as the key driver of unsustainable food production and consumption, and advocates for an ecofeminist perspective to promote sustainable transformations that recognize the intrinsic value of human and non-human animals.

2.3. Sustainable professional kitchens

As mainstream concerns of climate change, sustainability and animal welfare continue to reshape contemporary food practices through dietary changes, there is potential for professional kitchens to become spaces of environmental stewardship (Wylie, 2020), with chefs as mediators of change (Pereira et al., 2019). Emerging literature around professional chefs and kitchens has emerged within sustainable tourism scholarship (Gössling & Hall, 2021) socio-ecological science (Pereira et al., 2019) and feminists food studies (Wylie, 2020), which share a vision of professional foodwork and practices as playing a key role in sustainable transformations.

In their book *The Sustainable Chef*, Gössling and Hall (2021) recognise restaurants as key consumers within the global food supply chain play and co-responsible for mass food production and its environmental consequences. The authors identify restaurants as potential sites of sustainable transformation and frame sustainability as a win-win scenario for both food businesses and the environment. A resource efficient kitchen, they argue, can be good for a company's «bottom line» whilst minimizing its environmental impact (2021, p. 18). Given the environmental costs of food production such as land degradation, fish stock depletion and greenhouse gas emissions, the authors stress the importance of increasing the interest in vegetarian and vegan food in restaurants. However, they highlight that what is understood as

environmentally and ecologically sustainable is not uniform across different food geographies and the transformations required must be context specific. Surprisingly, this book's careful reflection on chefs and professional kitchens does not delve into any gendered dynamics, thereby overlooking key insights regarding masculinity and gendered inequities and their social and environmental consequences (Harris & Giuffre, 2010b Koch, 2019; Nilsson, 2013; Wylie, 2020).

Bridging the gap between food preparation and the environment, Pereira et al. (2019) describe chefs as potential innovators who can utilize ecological traditional knowledge (ETK) to create sustainable food innovations. The authors speculate that «ways for innovation and tradition to meet in the kitchen are countless; the only restriction is the creativity of cooks» (2019, p. 3). Given that professional kitchens are spaces of stress, harsh working conditions and gendered inequalities (Harris & Giuffre, 2010b Nilsson, 2013; Wylie, 2020), Pereira et al. (2019) may imagine these innovations and creative practices taking place away from traditional kitchen settings. Overall, these studies invoke imaginaries of sustainable food transitions where chefs are mediators of change. However, ensuring inclusive transformations requires further interrogation of the power dynamics intertwined with food production and consumption, and their consequences. An ecofeminist perspective can provide crucial insights to unpack visible and non-visible power dynamics driving oppressive relations such as speciesism or gendered oppression (Adams, 1975, 1990, 1991; Bertella, 2018, 2020; Cohoon, 2014; Gaard, 2002, 2017).

3. METHODOLOGY

An inquiry into the everyday practices of head chefs was selected to explore, through an ecofeminist lens, the treatment of women and non-human animals in masculine and profit driven environments; and the transformational potential of these spaces if feminist environmental values were embedded in them. A qualitative case study of head chefs from restaurants in Glasgow, Scotland, was selected as the appropriate methodological approach to analyze i) factors shaping the (un)sustainable practices and behaviours of chefs ii) how chefs perceive the role of gender in their professional experiences.

Glasgow was selected as a case study because the city has a growing food industry. Moreover, the researcher was embedded in the restaurant networks of Glasgow.

Semi-structured interviews were identified as the most suitable method to address the analytical questions above as they provide an in-depth insight into the participants' interpretations of the topics (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The participants consisted of ten head chefs (6 x male; 4 x female) with an average professional experience of 16 years each. The participants were selected through snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). The researcher identified three initial participants from their network who then referred other chefs from their own networks.

The interviews encompassed explanatory and clarificatory questions to capture the motivations and perceptions of the chefs (Legard et al., 2003). Questions were informed by feminist scholarship concerned with gender and labour (Cockburn, 1983; Morrison et al., 1987; Steinberg, 1992), and ecofeminist scholarship on the masculine domination of women and non-human animals; food; and sustainability (Gaard, 1993; Merchant, 1980; Plumwood, 2004). The questions encompassed four themes: sustainability; kitchen practices; organization and hierarchy; gender. The interviews were held in the workplace of each participant, lasting between 20 to 90 minutes. The researcher's previous experience as a chef helped build a rapport with the participants and recognize certain nuances within the discussions that needed further probing and exploration.

The data analysis followed an inductive process (Kelle & Erzberger, 2003) where commonalities, differences and patterns were extracted as codes from the empirical data. These codes were generated first amongst participants and then across genders. Gender was the only variable applied to the data analysis. Age was ruled out as a variable as the chefs were all aged between early 30's to early 40's and this was not deemed a significant enough generational difference. Going forward, in the face of looming socio-political and climate crises (MacDonald, 2021), which are intersectional in nature (Sultana, 2021), and in the face of a sustainability discourse that has a tendency to be blind to gender, class and race (Gaard, 2017), research on sustainable and equitable professional kitchens would benefit from exploring the intersectional dimensions of paid foodwork. However,

given that the participants in this study were all White, Scottish, and of mostly working-class backgrounds, the data did not lend itself to an inter-sectional analysis.

A thematic analysis extracted the following key themes from the interview data: everyday (un)sustainability; toxic masculinity; and gendered discrimination. Given my own positionality as the researcher with experience as a chef I maintained a reiterative process of reflexivity during the coding process to ensure that what was being extracted from the data was representative of the participants experiences and perceptions and not a reflection of my own subjectivities. Participants were assigned a pseudonym to ensure anonymity. The pseudonyms for male chefs began with an M and F for female chefs, followed by a number: F1, F2, F3, F4. M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6.

4. FINDINGS

This section will illustrate the lived experiences and perceptions of the chefs. They discuss toxic masculinity and gendered discrimination; the stigma surrounding the well-being of chefs; and what sustainability means to them in the kitchen. These themes are relevant in making theoretical connections between professional kitchens and the broader societal and ecological issues of animal welfare, gendered discrimination and sustainability.

4.1. Everyday toxic masculinity

The chefs disclosed incidences when masculine characteristics and traits had detrimental impacts on women, animals, and the environment. M6 recalled witnessing physical fights between chefs and waiters, a chef throwing fish at him, working with sexist chefs, and witnessing bullied junior chefs «becoming a bully themselves». He specified that some female chefs also behave aggressively: «my first head chef was female, and she was crazy, she used to throw frying pans around the kitchen». In contrast, F1 believes that men and women take different approaches to leadership: «I'm sure I can bare my teeth with the best of them, but I think women rule with respect in the kitchen and men rule with fear».

Both M2 and M6 feel that celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay has «ruined the industry» by glorifying kitchens as places of aggression. Whilst some

believe that kitchens are beginning to «change» as «you wouldn't get away with the things now that took place before». M5 felt «fortunate» to avoid spending much time in «old school kitchens» with toxic environments. M3 however, chose to work in «military-style» kitchens: «when I first started out it was hard-core, I've had some experiences». Reflecting on what he enjoys about being a chef, M6 mentioned masculine characteristics such as the «adrenaline» of a busy service and the pleasure of «suffering like in the military» when having to «push physically and mentally to get through a shift». F1 believes that masculinity thrives from a need for male chefs to compete with one another:

guys want to prove they are tougher and can take more of a punishment, and they can lose sight of the end goal which is to produce good food. I think there is a difference of aggression. Even down to the music that gets played in the kitchen, women will play something everyone can sing along to. With men, it's always too loud and nobody can hear what's happening in the kitchen around them and they take dominance over the music and speakers [...] it's like sensory deprivation.

M2 reflected on reproducing toxic masculinity in kitchens, he remembers being on edge, argumentative and «doing some bad things.» He feels kitchens can become «a little bit more harmonious» when there is a gender balance. Similarly, F1 mentioned that she feels kitchens benefit from a gendered balance as it «dilutes the chest beating that happens».

One participant highlighted that animals are also vulnerable to kitchen violence as she witnessed unethical treatment of live lobsters. Her male colleagues had removed elastic bands from the claws of the live lobsters to enable them to «fight» one another. F1 covered the lobsters with a kitchen towel to stop them moving. F1 recalled that when she challenged the chef's actions, he «picked up one of the female lobsters and began to eat the eggs off her belly whilst she was still alive. [...] why would you treat something like that», F1 recalled emotionally. MacDonald (2021) argues that our disregard for other species caused and worsened the Covid-19 pandemic. In the face of the climate emergency and mass biodiversity loss, they argue, there is need to forge new relationships with non-human nature. Similarly, Taylor and Taylor (2020) have argued that «our conception of solidarity must cross the species barrier» (p.105).

With words such as punishment (F1), suffering (M3) and military style (M3; M6) hardcore (M3) being used in the interviews to describe the everyday, it is unsurprising that mental health and substance abuse were a common theme. F1 discussed her own sense of struggling: «I think the mental is far more wearing than the physical and the physical strain is huge. I think I got to a point that I was so stressed that it changed my personality». Whilst M2 believes that «the mental health issues within the industry are more recognized now», F2 disagrees:

I think this [mental health] is not spoken about enough and I think it should be. There is a stigma surrounding it and I think people underestimate how much pressure is involved in running a kitchen.

M2 recognizes the need to look out for others, however, as a senior chef himself he appears to lack empathy for those he believes have brought exhaustion on themselves:

it is constant and physically it is hard. If you don't take care of yourself nutritionally then your emotional side dwindles [...] You need to have the right people around you to say go take a break, have a drink, take a bite to eat and go rest. I say do not come in here hungover and give up the fags¹ (M2).

F1 reflects on the same problems more sympathetically:

I've seen chefs work 70 hours a week and spend four hours of the day taking drugs and drinking alcohol to calm themselves down from the natural adrenaline that we get from a busy service. [...] I don't think people realize how badly they are hurting themselves (F1).

The chefs have raised concerns about the fragility of many colleagues trying to cope with the pressures and stress of work. Yet, there is no support in place. In this work environment, it is difficult to focus on environmental sustainability: chefs struggling with their well-being will surely lack motivation to consider the ecological consequences of kitchen practices. In their ecofeminist vision of the future, MacDonald (2021) highlight that societies which prioritise the health and well-being of its citizens and which

1. The word «fag» is often used in the West of Scotland as a colloquialism when referring to a cigarette.

«compensates all its citizens commensurate with their value» (p. 370), will be both more equitable than what we have today and stronger in the face of impending future crises.

4.2. Everyday gendered discrimination

Both male and female chefs recognized signs of gendered discrimination in professional kitchens. Some female chefs described their own professional experiences and pressures as different from their male colleagues. They felt they had to meet greater expectations than men and continuously prove their abilities. F2 felt that as a woman «you need to have a thick skin» and «you don't have to prove you can do the same job, you have to prove you can do it better». In her opinion, male chefs should take responsibility to be «more welcoming and make the kitchen environment a lot less hostile». This perception is echoed by F4 who thinks there are «no female chefs out there» as «female chefs work harder to get their position». She feels that «it is hard for a woman; you have to be quite a strong personality» and the job role which requires working long and anti-social working hours can leave «no flexibility for a family life».

In contrast, male chefs perceived that their gender had no impact on their career and many associated questions of gender with the experiences of women. M1 and M2 touched upon the topic of chefs who are working mothers and implied that their reduced ability to be flexible is a «hindrance» for other chefs (M1), and if mothers cannot commit to more hours, they will be unable to undertake or secure more senior positions (M2). The under-representation of female chefs is rationalized as a lack of interest in the chef lifestyle: «from the outside, the perspective might be that this is a very rock and roll job, and a lot of women are not particularly interested in this» (M2). M4 believes that female chefs knew «what the (kitchen) environment was like before taking the job». Here, women are blamed for not integrating properly, there is no consideration for the gendered barriers they face.

Food suppliers reproduce these gendered discriminations. Both F1 and F4 mentioned their discomfort when male suppliers and delivery drivers

refer to them as «darling» and «hen»², and many suppliers have dismissed female head chefs whilst looking for the assumed man in charge. F4 mentioned times where she felt she had to push back against the performative femininity expected of her from food suppliers who request that she «smile» or «cheer up», a request she believes would not be asked of a male head chef. In response she «badly emasculated» a delivery driver in front of her junior male chefs, believing that if she didn't, it would send the wrong message to the junior chefs. F4 initially complained to the restaurant owner regarding the negative comments she continuously received and was told to «man up». It is evident through these stories that foodwork is intertwined with gendered discrimination, and the detrimental impacts on women have been normalized within the workplace. Brownhill and Turner (2020, p. 7) use the term «workplace ecology» to apply an ecofeminist meaning to ecologies of those of us who reside and work within built environments. As Brownhill and Turner (2020) argue, pushing back and resisting the «gendered struggle» of women in the workplace, is a fight for «agency and control over the ecologies they inhabit» (p.7).

4.3. (Un)sustainability in the everyday

Perceptions of sustainability differed significantly amongst participants. Some perceived sustainability as a personal rather than professional practice (F2, F3, M1, M6); some perceived it as non-financially viable from a business perspective (M2, M5, F1, F4), whilst others had never given it much consideration (M3, M4).

When asked whether they considered sustainability when designing menus, the chefs emphasized that making a profit must come first. Many felt that it was almost impossible to simultaneously buy local, meet customer expectations and generate profit. For example, F1 only sources vegetables from local small-scale farmers when her «budget allows», even though she considers the quality far exceeds that of vegetables «grown in a poly tunnel all year round in the Netherlands». For M2 «there are a lot of people [suppliers] coming in with really good stuff but it costs a lot of money and usually

2. The word «hen» is often used in the West of Scotland as a colloquialism when referring to a woman or girl.

comes from Britain. Whereas the cheap stuff comes from abroad». He goes on to say, «we are able to buy local because we have a loyal customer base». Yet, many of his so-called local products come with substantial carbon emissions, as they are transported by plane, boat, and trucks from the Scottish Hebridean Islands. M2 also indicated that meeting the demand for high-end produce is prioritized over environmental concerns and that chefs struggle to purchase sustainably, even when the customers are paying high prices.

F4 revealed a lack of transparency and communication between chefs and their supplier's concerning sustainability. She feels the relationship is largely based on an economic understanding:

you don't actually know where the veg comes from that the suppliers pick up at the veg market. They will buy what is cheap to give you a good price. I guess maybe they could provide me with a list of what is British or Scottish and I could work my menu around that. But a lot of time and effort is needed for that and what would be the cost?

Other chefs echo the idea that «the suppliers don't talk to us about it [sustainable options]. They just look at it as someone is going to buy their fish and that's kind of how it goes (M5)». Some chefs have highlighted that suppliers purchase products from overseas when they are no longer in season in Scotland, as they are under pressure to supply a large variety of unsustainable products all year round:

I had an argument with a chef one day who was freaking out because he couldn't get a hold of a breakfast radish from a supplier in December in Scotland. What must happen for this to change (F1).

Concurrently, chefs face pressures from customers. The empirical data shows that meeting customer expectations is driving unsustainable practices: F1, F2, F4, M2, M3, M5 and M6 feel the pressure to maintain a certain standard at an affordable price, which crucially determines what products are sourced and at what cost. According to M2:

the customer dictates to the whole industry. Winter in Britain is very difficult, so for us to be sustainable in winter everything has to be from a cabbage family or a root veg, shellfish or stuff that is killed in Scottish abattoirs. But to stick solely to that is difficult because the customer wants a varied choice.

Moreover, customer's price expectation has led to what F1 calls a «cheapening of the product». She provides an example of gas flushed chicken:

it makes me absolutely sick to think about it [...] the breasts are yellow, huge and full of water. The minute it comes into contact with a frying pan it explodes everywhere, that's not what a chicken is.

The expectations and needs of customers are also shifting: «Glasgow seems to be such a big place for vegans now. The vegan capital of the UK at the moment» (M3). Paradoxically, as mentioned by F1 and M3, these food trends and ethical food choices contribute towards unrealistic customer expectations, further burdening chefs who need to constantly adapt their menus:

I don't mind vegetarians, but I am not a fan of the other ones (vegans). It's not that I am discriminating against them because I am not, it's just a hassle. It is almost like the customers are now dictating to the chefs what is going on the menu, no longer the other way about (M3).

I think people are treating their dinner being in a relationship they no longer want to be in; always looking over their shoulder for the next best thing (F1).

Despite this, all the chefs provided both vegan and vegetarian options to their menus and some notice a financial benefit:

we provide a vegan and veggie menu in each of our places, so they are around 30% of our market. So, they bring a lot of money to this company so are well catered for (M2).

This shows that both the demand and supply of vegetarian and vegan diets are increasing and that professional kitchens will and can adapt for financial benefits. In some instances, chefs are faced with evidence of unsustainable human activities. One participant, M2, bore witness to the impact of human activities on non-human animals whilst preparing fresh seafood:

I never thought I would see this. I was cleaning mussels from the Isle of Barra and inside the digestive tract which I remove so customers don't eat it was lots of plastic, hundreds of plastics. So, it is like a bulbous sac, usually full of seaweed, and in it plastic, tiny tiny little bits of plastic.

It is evident here that the everyday foodwork of chefs is intertwined with a dualism between making a profit, meeting customer and meeting the expectations of the chefs themselves. Some chefs have been confronted with the

consequences of profit driven human activities that are unsustainable such as gas flushed chicken and plastic filled bivalves. Yet, they do not make the connections between these problems and their own kitchen practices or perceive themselves as potential mediators of change.

5. DISCUSSION: ENVISIONING SUSTAINABLE ALTERNATIVES

Ecofeminism as an ideology is deep rooted in feminist ecological goals which aim to liberate nature and society from oppressive patriarchal powers such as exploitation and speciesism (Gaard, 1993, 2002; Plumwood, 1986). According to Martin (1990, p. 191) ideologies are beliefs which make sense of certain social realities and present a notion for the way the world could be. Martin suggests that within organisations an ideology exists whether it is evident or not and it shapes an organisation's purpose and practices. The empirical data above has shown that at present, the purpose and practices of professional kitchens are profit orientated without any ethical or moral basis. The consequences of this – violence, exploitation, and oppression – are felt mostly by women, the environment, and non-human animals.

5.1. Social Sustainability: gendered redistribution of power

The chefs described working conditions which intensify gendered discrimination, substance abuse, poor mental-health, and violence. The data implied that gender, mostly in the form of toxic masculinity, is performed (Butler, 1990) in kitchens through a series of gendered norms and stereotypes (such as male chefs discussing the thrilling aspects of punishment, adrenaline, the military, etc). Gendered assumptions and expectations, especially on female chefs, are not only embedded within the organisation and hierarchy of kitchens, but also reproduced in the broader discourse on professional kitchens. To illustrate, when considering the well-being of chefs, both Raynor (2017) and Gössling and Hall (2021, p. 333) draw the upon restaurateur Jeremy King as an «interesting example». King has reorganized his kitchens to minimise noise, provide flexible shift patterns to accommodate working parents, and he claims to «employ older cooks and women to improve the work atmosphere». King claimed that «all masculine environments are harsh. Women are a simple way to destress them». In their analyses and support

of King's approach, both Raynor, and Gössling and Hall reproduce the idea that women are a «simple solution» to creating a «nice» atmosphere to calm male chefs. In this way, they fail to acknowledge the value of women's labour and the skills which they bring to their roles and inadvertently reproduce gendered discrimination towards female chefs. The undervaluing of women in the workplace has been an ongoing struggle for feminists and according to Benshop and Verloo (2011), the differences associated between genders such as emotions, behaviour and biology, and the assumptions that go along with these stereotypes, undervalues the economic and social benefits that women can bring to an organisation.

The idea that a gender balance improves the atmosphere of toxic kitchens was also mentioned by participants who believe women can make a «more harmonious» kitchen (M2), and «dilute the chest beating» (F1). I argue that the solution lies beyond making essentialist assumptions about the characteristics of women (Carlassare, 1994) and that kitchens need to tackle the deep-rooted causes of the toxicity and eradicate the negative work dynamics for the benefit of everyone. From an ecofeminist perspective, concerned with liberating the oppressed from exploitative powers (Chen, 2014), eradicating the gendered discrimination and reshaping the toxic hierarchy would entail making foodwork more accessible. In kitchens, shift patterns are a form of power as they dictate who can be hired and who can then secure and maintain the more senior roles. Gender is a limitation to women, especially working mothers, and a source of power to men. Overall, a gendered balance in kitchens will not eradicate gendered discrimination if women remain in lower ranking and lower paid positions. It would only reproduce gendered discrimination. Redistributing power is essential to alleviate many female chefs from being in constant subordination to male colleagues and from sacrificing career progression to maintain a job and a family.

5.2. Ecological literacy and an ethic of compassion

The chefs emphasized that their main priorities are generating profits whilst meeting the expectations of the customers. There were no significant considerations for the impacts of kitchen practices on «non-human others» (Curtin, 2021, p. 85), nor any indication that the chefs perceive themselves as

facilitators of change. This emphasizes the need for ecological literacy within kitchens. An ecological literate person, according to Pitman et al. (2018, p. 1), is «aware of the interconnected nature of the Earth and its systems, has the skills to understand and respond to the ecological relationships». If chefs were equipped with ecological literacy, they would be more motivated to make more sustainable choices, pass down knowledge to junior chefs and mediate sustainable changes in kitchen spaces. Ball and Milne (2005) highlighted that for businesses to operate sustainably there must be a flow of information within a workplace regarding the wider environmental implications of their work-related actions. If individuals within an organization are informed, then transformation can occur quicker. However, the authors found it may take coercion by external influences such as government policies before managers engage with issues of sustainability.

More recently, the UK government passed the Animal Welfare (sentience) Bill, in response to a report by the London School of Economics and Political Science (Birch et al., 2021) which highlighted that lobsters, crabs and octopuses are sentient beings, able to feel pain and distress. The Bill aims to protect these animals from cruel food preparation practices such as being boiled alive. Once this Bill is put into practice within kitchens it will provide chefs with incremental knowledge of the non-human others – a good example of ecological literacy. Deane Curtin draws on the work of the ecofeminist Carol Adams to highlight that our food is complex, political and embedded in our identities through gender, class, race, and caste. Through an «ethic of compassion», Curtin (2021, p. 85) argues, it is possible to change the relationships with «non-human others» and food, and over time, food practices can become non-violent and an expression of both knowledge and emotion. This requires a balance between ever evolving competing factors such as exploited food workers, food miles, fair trade, environmental degradation, cruelty to sentient beings. Therefore, Curtin (1991, 2021) proposes this as a direction to work towards rather than a destination to reach. This resonates with the struggles of the chefs. Like everyone, they have to navigate emerging and conflicting narratives surrounding food and sustainability whilst working under pressure and meeting financial targets. However, as Curtin (1991, 2021) argues, they can begin by making incremental informed changes in behaviour and in vision.

The empirical data showed how the relationships between chefs and suppliers is reproducing unsustainable practices. Chefs appear to undervalue their relationships with food suppliers, almost disregarding their own needs as a customer. Whilst some female chefs experienced misogynist treatment from suppliers. We can assume such masculine dynamics are reciprocated between male chefs and suppliers and this itself could be a barrier to sustainability. Many debates on gender and sustainable consumption consider sustainable motivations and behaviours as gendered (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020). This extends to food sustainability where meat eating is commonly characterised as a masculine trait (Adams, 1990; Greenebaum & Dexter, 2018) and healthy sustainable diets are associated with the feminine (Aavik & Velgan, 2021). Given the gendered norms currently associated with sustainability and food, we can infer that sustainability may not be perceived as masculine enough to be openly discussed between male chefs and suppliers. Therefore, work needs to be done to normalise sustainability in foodwork. If chefs, suppliers and consumers shared similar social and ecological philosophies, they could achieve more sustainable outcomes. Pereira et al. (2019) provide evidence of what a constructive dialogue between local chefs and suppliers can do. They found it forged localized sustainable food networks as the suppliers could focus on quality locally rather than quantity at a multi-regional level. Creating transparent food networks through knowledge sharing amongst chefs, customers, and suppliers generates the much needed information flow to build ecological literacy throughout the food networks.

Menu design is a key part of integrating sustainability and consideration for the non-human into kitchen practices. Bertella (2020) emphasises that applying an ecofeminist lens to consider the ethical dimensions of animal derived food produce can expand our mainstream understanding of sustainability to include human – non-human animal relationships and our moral obligations. Restaurants are far from being free from animal-based produce, but it can be argued that it is time for chefs to connect their choices and practices to their broader moral obligations to non-human nature. As highlighted by Adams (1991), dissociation from suffering is possible if we identify with the aggressor and with those in power. This argument resonates with the exploitation and oppression occurring in professional kitchens where masculinity is performed, and aggression is the norm. The empirical evidence

pointed towards such behaviour as the majority of the participants (F1, F2, F4, M1, M2, M5, M6) recalled witnessing or experiencing toxic masculinity through aggression and bullying at work (the lobsters for example). If chefs are no longer disassociated from the violence, suffering, and degradation associated with food consumption, they may be inclined to produce menus that reflect an ethic of compassion.

5.3. Decentering profit for sustainability

Drawing upon ecofeminist thought to reimagine professional kitchens as spaces of sustainability and equality inevitably means a revaluation of what is acceptable in the name of profit. Ecofeminism reminds us that exploitative practices are the cause of contemporary ecological crises, and scholars argue that neither food workers, animals nor the environment should be exploited for capital gains (Adams & Gruen, 2021; Bertella, 2020; Merchant, 1996; Plumwood, 2004). In 1990, ecofeminist Françoise d'Eaubonne (1999) imagined what an eco-feminist society could be. Over 30 years later, her concerns about women and the environment are the same: «it is impossible, within patriarchy, to suppress a market economy. And it is impossible, in a market system, to not devastate the planet» and the «misogynistic disgrace which enslaves women will cease only with a rise in the standard of living» (p.4). These issues reflect the problems associated with professional kitchens and emphasise the need to continue imagining ecofeminist futures.

Given the racist and sexist nature of capitalism which favours men in the labour hierarchies, and profits from the exploitation of women and harmful treatment of non-human nature, it is no surprise that ecofeminism has been applied as a lens to imagine post-capitalist futures (Brownhill & Turner, 2020; Giacomini et al., 2018). It is clear that forging sustainable alternative kitchen norms will require decentring financial profit as the priority to make space for the social and ecological obligations. The harm caused by the current economic norms was reflected in the data. On one hand the chefs face economic barriers in buying local products, yet, the demands for customer bargains is «cheapening the product» (F1) and driving unethical meat production. At times, the chefs were perplexed as to whether sustainable alternatives were financially viable, asking «what would be the cost»

(F4), «what would have to happen for things to change» (F1), highlighting that the «cheap stuff comes from abroad» (M2).

More recently, the Covid-19 pandemic reiterated that the economic norms of professional kitchens are unsustainable. To illustrate, the Covid-19 pandemic was the biggest disruption to the food supply chain since the 2007 global recession (Ozili & Arun, 2020), highlighting the financial and social vulnerability of the hospitality industry and its food workers to shock events. Following the implementation of national lockdowns, mass unemployment and job insecurity ensued (Lea, 2020; Richardson, 2020) and many food workers relied on government payments, whilst others faced unemployment. Studies by Alon et al. (2020a, 2020b) revealed that in the US food sector women were disproportionately affected by pandemic induced unemployment, due to pre-pandemic gendered inequalities. In a UK context, food workers in Scotland were amongst the second highest group of deaths, as of April 2021 (NRS, 2021). Overall, Covid-19 exposed the exacerbation of pre-pandemic exploitation on food workers and emphasized the unsustainable social and economic nature of foodwork (Swan, 2020).

Authors such as Blay-Palmer et al. (2020, p. 1), believe the pandemic represents a window of opportunity for transformational change, that we have an opportunity to «learn from past weaknesses and create food systems that are more healthy, sustainable, equitable and resilient». I argue, the pandemic has also presented an opportunity to imagine what professional kitchens could look like if they adopted a more solidarity approach to foodwork. For example, many social enterprises and professional chefs turned their attention to supplying food to vulnerable groups and essential workers, during lockdowns (Batat, 2020; Blay-Palmer et al., 2020). Professional kitchens forged new community networks when donating surplus food to food banks and charities, and many allowing their unused kitchens to be transformed into temporary community kitchens. The sentiments of food aid mutualism, where professional kitchens and their communities formed non-capitalist and mutually beneficial relationships opened up a «new ethics of compassion» (Curtin, 2021, p. 85) in the «kitchen conscience» (Wylie, 2020, p. 104) and this could reflect a step in the direction asked for in this paper.

6. CONCLUSION

Ecofeminism prioritises those who are most exploited in capitalist societies (Giacomini et al., 2018). According to Giacomini et al. (2018) ecofeminist visions and direct actions are gaining traction, promoting a transformation towards a «post-fossil-capital epoch» (p. 4) where control over the natural resources essential for life is collective. In the meantime, ecofeminism can be applied to envision potential transformations throughout society to mitigate harm and exploitation. This paper has applied an ecofeminist lens to professional kitchens to highlight the harm being done to women and non-human nature in the everyday, and to reimagine them as spaces of sustainable and equitable practices. A redistribution of power, I argued, is essential to eradicate the sexist hierarchies (Brownhill & Turner, 2020) that exclude female chefs from the higher paid, leadership roles, especially women with caring responsibilities. Overall, as highlighted by MacDonald (2021), compensating food workers for their value will be the foundation for more equitable and resilient societies in the face of looming crises.

Imagining the transition to sustainable foodwork in professional kitchens also means consideration for the «non-human others» (Curtin, 2021, p. 85) and extending our compassion and solidarity across species (MacDonald, 2021; Taylor & Taylor, 2020). This paper has argued that chefs equipped with ecological literacy would be better placed to apply an ethic of compassion to their foodwork, potentially leading them to reshape their everyday practices and menu design to reflect their moral obligations to human and non-human others (Bertella, 2020). This requires in first instance transparency and a sustainable dialogue between chefs and suppliers as a means to normalize sustainability in everyday foodwork.

I drew upon the Covid-19 pandemic to show how current economic logics of restaurants made food workers vulnerable during the crisis. The pandemic has also shown what lies ahead for food workers if we do not forge sustainable and equitable alternatives. At the same time, the crisis revealed that kitchens can adopt an ethic of compassion when needed, providing hope for sustainable futures.

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