

Political Imaginations of Community Kitchens in Sweden

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Abstract

Whereas the sociology of food has drawn attention to differences between corporate and alternative foodways, the political imaginations underpinning the latter are often overlooked. This article distinguishes between different political imaginations of the community kitchen, a set of practices characterised by collective preparation and redistribution of food. The analysis builds on ethnographic and archive material in Sweden to outline how the *folkkök* (people's kitchen) was once an institutional practice to address urban food insecurity, soon outsourced as altruistic soup kitchens, and then regenerated a century later by the anarchist movement. By distinguishing between altruistic and anarchistic imaginations in this analysis, the article adds another layer to the critical sociological study of alternative foodways.

Keywords

sociology of food, alternative food networks, social movement, temporality, collective kitchen, food aid, anarchism, altruism, welfare

Introduction

When globalised foodways cannot deliver nourishment even in advanced welfare states, the study of social movements becomes all the more critical. Attending to food security as an essential yet scarce ingredient of social welfare (Burnett and Oddy, 1994; Poppendieck, 2014; Riches and Silvasti, 2014), social movements have long sought alternative foodways to reorganise the production and distribution of food (Douwe van der Ploeg, 2008; Lundström, 2017; McMichael, 2020). Whereas alternative foodways include social practices of 'ethical eating' (Beagan et al., 2010; Johnston et al., 2012; Warde, 2017), scholars have also pointed towards political practices in which communities struggle for food sovereignty (Ayres and Bosia, 2011; Laforge et al., 2021; Lundström, 2019b), alternative food networks that reconnect production and consumption to empower local communities (Barbera and Dagnes, 2016; Niederle et al., 2020; Wilson, 2016). At the same time, conscious or 'ethical' food consumption has been pointed out as an exclusive middle-class

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phenomenon (Huddart Kennedy et al., 2019; Zukin, 2008), one that is marked by multiple othering processes (Paddock, 2015; Slocum, 2008). Such observations of privileged moralism have generated assumptions about alternative foodways entailing ‘thin democratic imagination reliant on shopping-for-change’ (Huddart Kennedy et al., 2018: 163).

My claim in this article, however, is that the broad repertoire of alternative foodways interlinks with different political imaginations. Social struggles for another world can include practices that, although similar in appearance, build on a variety of beliefs and political visions. This political diversity becomes noticeable in the practices of the community kitchen.

The redistribution of food according to need instead of purchasing power has typically been approached through the generic notion of the *soup kitchen*, a charitable institution addressing society’s impoverished strata. This type of food aid has been organised around the globe for at least 600 years, a benevolent practice that later became institutionalised as food assistance in modern welfare states (Gal and Ajzenstadt, 2013; Mosley and Tiehen, 2004; Singer, 2005). While soup kitchen altruism typifies a charitable rich–poor relation (Carstairs, 2017; Cohen et al., 2017), ethnographic research also shows that soup kitchens can become explorative spaces for social interaction (Caldwell, 2004; Glasser, 1988; Mulquin et al., 2000). As studies show that charitable and institutional food serving, as well as institutional food banks, can even articulate novel and unexpected political visions (Allahyari, 2000; Stevens, 1997; Williams et al., 2016), these food practices comprise a departure point for different political imaginations.

In this article, I dig deeper into that imaginative diversity by relating the soup kitchen tradition to the *community kitchen*, a small group of people who collectively prepare food for themselves and their local community (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum, 2007; Tarasuk and Reynolds, 1999). Just like institutionalised soup kitchens, community kitchens have indeed produced a wide range of social benefits. Scholars have documented how community kitchens have improved dietary and physical health (Fridman and Lenters, 2013; Furber et al., 2010; Hwa Lee et al., 2010; Iacovou et al., 2012), mitigated the negative effects of poverty (Chapman and Mundel, 2010; Immink, 2001; Schroeder, 2006), and mobilised resistance against socioeconomic marginalisation (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Lages, 2017; Lenten, 1993). Community kitchens are particularly recognisable in moments of popular uprisings (Bayat, 2000; Gordon and Chatterton, 2004), as well as during economic or ecological crises (Bun Ku and Dominelli, 2017; Jon and Purcell, 2018; Rakopoulos, 2014).

But if the community kitchen encompasses institutionalised charity as well as self-organised mutual aid, what is the difference regarding political imagination? To answer that question, I have studied historical and contemporary community kitchens in the Swedish context. Although Sweden qualifies as an advanced welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Korpi and Palme, 1998; Pierson, 1996), community kitchen practices have played a significant role in Swedish social history since the late 1800s into the present day. In the following pages, I build on ethnographic and archive material to distinguish between two lines of political imagination: *altruistic* and *anarchistic*. I show how *altruistic* food practices in Sweden have been motivated by spiritual faith, philanthropic dedication or democratic belief in human rights, whereas *anarchistic* food serving is rather driven by political beliefs in horizontal participation, political activism and mutual aid. In this analysis, I use the concept of food practices to capture connectivity between structurally dictated habitus and social movement agency (Twine, 2017; Warde, 2016), and I analyse how such practices can become part of a political *imagination* that shapes ‘individuals and groups to coordinate identities, actions, and futures’ (Fuiist, 2021: 357). My aim is to demonstrate that by distinguishing between different political imaginations, critical sociologists can add another level to the analysis of alternative foodways. I flesh out my argument through an empirical analysis of *folkkök* (‘people’s kitchen’ / ‘popular kitchen’), which developed as a state-led community kitchen in the Swedish 1880s and is now recognisable in the contemporary anarchist milieu. Through this story of *folkkök* in Sweden, I

approach social movement history as an ongoing dialogue with the past, a dialogue that – depending on the political imagination – becomes a workshop for the future.

Method

My inquiry into the community kitchen builds methodologically on a *multi-sited ethnography* (Coleman and Von Hellermann, 2011; Falzon, 2009), an approach through which *folkkök* was traced as a ‘cultural phenomenon in one site that is reproduced elsewhere’ (Marcus, 1995: 111). In this setting, multi-sited ethnography meant the inclusion of various types of data: participant observation, individual and focus group interviews, but also archive material to historicise the *folkkök* phenomenon. The empirical data were all thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2012); fieldnotes, interview transcriptions, and archive data were coded inductively and organised into preliminary themes to be iteratively revised in subsequent analyses (Charmaz, 2006, 2017). The interview excerpts surfacing in this article were all translated in the writing process, and they serve in the text as illustrative extracts of my thematic analysis.

Data collection took place during 2018–2019 in a Swedish welfare context, not yet marked by the COVID-19 pandemic. The archive material was collected from the Swedish National Archives, Stockholm City Archives, the National Library Database and the Swedish Labour Movement’s Archives and Library. It involved print publications about *folkkök*, annual reports from faith-based charity organisations, as well as thematically related entries in labour movement periodicals and the daily press. The investigation period spanned from the 1880s, a decade when the modern-day social politics debate emerged in Sweden, until the late 1940s when the foundation of the Swedish welfare system was established (Åmark, 2005; Huber and Stephens, 2001; Lundberg and Åmark, 2001). This short period of Swedish history includes three important events for the historical sociology of food: the mass-mobilisations during the general strike in 1909, the bread riots of 1917–1918 and the economic crisis of the early 1930s.

Apart from archive searches, my multi-sited ethnography also led to overt participant observation in three Swedish cities where *folkkök* were particularly alive at this time. I took part in food preparation and food serving by participating in ‘core activities but not as a full member’ (Bryman, 2016: 442). I attended demonstrations and anarchist book fairs, and I also participated as a researcher in an inaugural launch of a newly set up *folkkök*. In relation to these activities, I registered my impressions and reflections as mental memos and written fieldnotes (Emerson et al., 2011; Fetterman, 2010), to provide a ‘thick description’ of the empirical analysis (Geertz, 1973). Participant observation served to deepen my understanding of the *folkkök* phenomenon but also to build the ethnographic rapport necessary for conducting interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Based on the knowledge gained from participating in various *folkkök* activities, ten interviewees – selected from seven different *folkkök* – came to participate as participants in individual and focus group interviews. They all had considerable experience of this practice, also from participation in community kitchens abroad. I conducted three semi-structured interviews with *folkkök* organisers. Based on the information and rapport gained from these individual interviews, I then conducted two focus group interviews to enable collective reflection and discussion between *folkkök* activists. The focus group method was chosen due to its ability to capture dis/consensus in social groups – which makes it particularly useful for studying intricate workings of collective action (Lundström, 2017; Morgan, 1998; Peek and Fothergill, 2009). In two cities where *folkkök* were particularly well organised, I asked identified gatekeepers about participants who had an experience of working together. The focus groups were then self-arranged and conducted at sites chosen by the interviewees themselves (Hennink, 2013; Wilkinson, 1998). Conversations lasted approximately one hour, based on a semi-structured interview guide with thematic questions about *folkkök* food practices

and what they meant to the interviewees. The focus groups involved three and four interviewees, respectively, a group size chosen to facilitate the conversation dynamic and individual engagement of each participant (Morgan, 1998; Wilkinson, 2008).

It should finally be noted that all interviewees gave their full consent to partake in the study. The seven focus group participants permitted me to record and transcribe the conversations, as well as to analyse and include excerpts in a scientific publication, whereas the three *folkkök* organisers interviewed individually only approved manual note-taking. To secure the confidentiality of the interview participants, the original recordings were permanently deleted, and transcriptions of interview notes and recordings were cleared from all potential identifiers. I further asked all focus group participants to use pseudonyms and to avoid legally sensitive topics in the recorded conversations. In other words, my study involved no personal data, and it followed the ethical procedures and review requirements stipulated by the Swedish Research Council (2017), in the collection of empirical data here used to analyse food practices of *folkkök* in Sweden.

Food Practices of *Folkkök* in Sweden: From Altruistic to Anarchistic

Kim: I think *folkkök* requires that some people cook for an unknown group.

Markus: A public arrangement?

Kim: Yes, something like that, kind of having just random people eating there. An available event, not just: ‘let’s cook together’. Because that’s just dinner.

Maria: Or lunch [laughing].

Kim: Something about *folkkök* is . . . there is something public to it. But it’s also central to the concept that *folkkök* offers a place to meet, and that it has to do with politics.

Kerstin: I also think it’s about everyone being able to participate. Otherwise, it becomes just like any restaurant, someone standing there cooking for unknown people: that is a restaurant. With *folkkök* it’s like anyone can enter the kitchen, all can participate in different ways.

Daniel: And that’s another thing, [eating is] free if you work at *folkkök*.

Maria: Perhaps, *folkkök* also serves another purpose than feeding people. I mean, you need to eat to have the energy to listen to this lecture or eat while having this conversation. Perhaps, there’s this agenda behind *folkkök*.

Kim: And that agenda is not to pocket a profit. It’s voluntary, that’s an important part of *folkkök*: we aren’t paid.

This excerpt shows how three focus group participants work together to create a definition, based on collective experiences of a *folkkök* that for decades had served hundreds of meals every week. According to this working definition, *folkkök* is a public event and meeting place, participatory and voluntary, aimed at supporting political struggles. In line with this excerpt, all interviewees emphasised the social aspect of their activity; *folkkök* was described as a ‘meeting point’ and ‘forum’, a place to ‘sit and chat, attend lectures yes, but also to meet’. And they also accentuated that this place is *political*: ‘It’s cheap food, non-commercial and anti-capitalist; the kitchen is non-hierarchical, and anyone can join’.

Horizontal participation was a guiding principle for the interviewed *folkkök* activists, describing how ‘mutual trust’ ran through their anarchistic practices. It should here be noted that anarchistic and anarchistic are not necessarily synonyms. Whereas the adjective *anarchist* refers to self-described anarchist groups, the historical movement or tradition of anarchist thought, *anarchistic*

designates the strive for radical equality and anti-hierarchical practices that are ‘conceptually proximate to core anarchist commitments’ (Jun, 2019: 85). Hence, whereas not all interviewees in this study identified themselves as anarchists, their attention to horizontal participation could indeed be understood as an anarchistic practice. For instance, some interviewees reported having consensus decision-making through which suggestions could be blocked with reference to a common platform. Others accentuated participation in the cooking activity, how the kitchen was ‘non-hierarchical’ and open for ‘anyone to join’. They stated that everybody contributes on their own terms, ‘according to ability, everyone does what they can’. One interviewee described the *folkkök* as a ‘home away from home’:

People come into the kitchen to get a glass of water or ask if they can help: ‘Can I do something? Yes, you could chop this’. Even if people pay for the food, I think they realise that this is not a fucking restaurant [laughing].

Folkkök as participation – as community kitchen – has its own genealogy in Swedish labour history. The early 1900s, a time when the socialist movement organised itself into workers’ cooperatives, saw the emergence of food preparation collectives called *matlag* (food teams). The Women’s Trade Union, part of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, published an article in its journal *Morgonbris* (1907) reporting from a *matlag* of 40 workers at the telecommunications corporation Eriksson. At least 11 of these *matlag* were registered in Stockholm between 1905 and 1931 (Nilsson, 1952; Socialstyrelsen 4:e Byrån, 1913). Moreover, collective kitchens were activated to specifically cope with food shortages during the politically turbulent years of the Swedish general strike in 1909 and the nationwide bread riots in 1917–1918 (Andræ, 1998; Andréasson, 2008; Blomqvist, 2017). These glimpses into the Swedish labour history spotlight the community kitchen as a political enterprise.

Political activism was indeed located, by the interviewees, at the heart of their practice; *folkkök* was depicted as a central component of radical social mobilisation, a nodal point for various political struggles. One interviewee stated that ‘when there is a diversity of tactics, in the struggle against authority, this unites: everyone likes food’. Others described how they contributed with something ‘genuinely positive’, and that conviction seems to have triggered engagement: ‘I don’t like to cook [laughing]. But I like doing stuff and *folkkök* is great since it’s a practical work that feels so small but still makes quite a difference’. *Folkkök* was portrayed as ‘a good environment’ for spontaneous political conversations: ‘sitting there, chatting. Ideas grow and then lead to action’. Mobile *folkkök* also took part in collective actions such as occupations, blockades and demonstrations:

I appreciate having *folkkök* at demonstrations, to make it all a bit smaller than it really is, to take the edge off. People often circle around, stressed, and troubled about the situation; at a demonstration, you often experience adrenaline rushes. Then, it’s comforting to just be a little ordinary. Everybody eats.

This particular excerpt suggests that food distribution, when enacted during contentious situations, can influence the mood, morale and endurance of collective action. The interview account includes, quite tellingly, a double perspective of *folkkök* participants and appreciative activists. I, too, noted this blurred line in my ethnographic observations of situations where *folkkök* attended demonstrations; people dropped in and out of the kitchen space, alternating cooking tasks with other activities from their repertoire of contention.

It is precisely this combination of participation and activism, according to the interviewees, that distinguishes anarchistic community kitchen practices from mere altruistic endeavours. Promptly explaining that they were ‘not an organisation’, interviewees contrasted *folkkök* against

faith-based, philanthropic or other forms of charitable food distribution. Several interviewees had experiences of organising ‘traditional soup kitchens’. Some were positive and quite supportive of these altruistic soup kitchens, while others argued that faith-based groups had evangelising agendas impregnating their practice. However, the consensus among the interviewees was that *folkkök* should not be defined as sheer food aid or poverty relief; rather, it should be understood as a building block for social mobilisation. As one interviewee stated, ‘We contribute with cheap food, even free food if you’re poor, and you may also contribute yourself’. These ambitions differ not only from altruistic soup kitchens but also from the once institutional *folkkök*.

Institutional *folkkök* were inaugurated in Sweden around the turn of the past century and driven by municipal or government authorities. In a context of rampant food insecurity in the late 1800s, the newly invented steam kitchen brought new potential for organised food aid (Hirdman, 1983). Inspired by the German *Volksküche* – a community kitchen developed in the 1860s in Berlin and institutionalised as *Städtische Volksspeisung* during the First World War (Sprenger- Seyffarth, 2019) – Swedish authorities began to set up *folkkök* in Stockholm. According to the very first publication on this phenomenon, *folkkök* (popular/people’s kitchen) sought to ‘alleviate poverty by preparing nutritious food at the cheapest possible price’ (Retzius, 1891: 3). They were short-lived due to organisational problems, but institutional *folkkök* or *centralkök* (central kitchens) were later reactivated in Stockholm, Malmö, and Lund during the severe food shortage that came with the Great War (Bergström and Nystedt, 1917). However, although the Poor Relief Reform of 1918 promised basic food security, those who received poverty relief were not only socially stigmatised but also deprived of their voting rights (Åström, 2018; Holgersson, 2004). Many therefore seem to have preferred the non-governmental alternative – soup kitchens – offered by faith-based or philanthropic organisations. During the first decades of the 20th century, food serving became central to social charities’ repertoire (FVO, 1902: 5); soup kitchens were frequently mentioned in annual reports from faith-based organisations such as Frälsningsarmén (1912–1944), Sociala Missionen (1917–1940) and Stadsmissionen (1867–1940). Charities were also expected – and later even supported by the state – to distribute food in times of starvation (Dagens Nyheter, 1931).

Today, Sweden has no governmental food aid. Since the early days of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, food security has been understood as a citizen *right*. Guided by the logic of ‘interpersonal independence’ (Törnqvist, 2019), the Swedish welfare state set out to make philanthropic food aid obsolete. It did so by advancing public meals, rather than institutionalising *folkkök* or supporting soup kitchens (Morell, 1994; Taussi Sjöberg and Vammen, 1995). Public meals aimed at relieving economically poor strata from stigmatised food aid, primarily through ‘the modern school lunch’ (Gullberg, 2006). Public meals have now become integral to Swedish welfare politics (Sporre et al., 2017); more than three million meals are served daily in Swedish preschools and schools, hospitals and care institutions (Höijer et al., 2020). Yet, scholars continue to illuminate how the Swedish welfare system is incomplete (Inghe and Inghe, 1968; Sward, 2017). While rich people turn to privatised welfare services (Lapidus, 2019), and marginalised groups cannot access the Swedish welfare system (de los Reyes, 2006), social charity organisations once again become important for alleviating inequality (Trägårdh et al., 2013).

The interviewed *folkkök* activists did not expect the welfare state to deliver equality. Building instead on anarchist political thought (Kinna, 2019; Lundström, 2018), they argued that interpersonal, economic practices must be reworked thoroughly to change society. As part of ongoing social movement experimentation with collaborative, platform and other forms of sharing economies (Acquier et al., 2017; Kenney and Zysman, 2016; Kostakis and Bauwens, 2014; SOU 2017:26, 2017), the anarchistic *folkkök* followed the principle of mutual aid to create inclusive payment practices. Some had no prices at all, while others had a suggested price span. One *folkkök* had a set food price, accompanied with according-to-ability directives: ‘Pay what you want, based on what

you have'. Moreover, in contrast to altruistic community kitchens, *folkkök* served *cheap* food – not *free* food – for two reasons.

Mutual aid, according to the interviewees, was not a principle that impeded *folkkök* from generating profit – income that could fund political struggles, particularly against racism and speciesism. Their anti-racist activity included support and organisation of undocumented migrants, one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in contemporary Sweden (Andersson et al., 2018; Lind, 2020; Nordling et al., 2017). Anti-speciesism – struggles against the normative human/animal divide that informs today's political economy of meat (Lundström, 2019a) – was explicitly integrated into the platform of one *folkkök*, which stated a clear purpose of promoting veganism and funding animal liberation activism. Moreover, vegan food was also the culinary norm for every *folkkök* in this study. The interviewees said that they actively strived to develop tasty and appealing meals 'to show people something different than the classic punk stew'.

Punk stew refers to the cook-what-you-have cuisine that dominated the anarcho-punk scene in the 1980s (Glasper, 2007; Lohman and Worley, 2018). As a generic dish of this 'subcultural food system' (Clark, 2004: 19), punk stew became quite a trademark for this generation of veganism, solidified in the vegan straight edge scene of the 1990s (Jacobsson and Lindblom, 2016; Kuhn, 2019). Then, when the alter-globalisation movement boomed at the turn of the millennium, mobile activist kitchens became integral to the massive mobilisation that disrupted international summits across the globe (Anarchist Teapot, 2016; McHenry, 2013). In these settings, where cooking had to be swift and cheap, vegan punk stew established itself as *the* activist dish. According to the interviewees, mobile activist kitchens developing in Sweden were an offspring of the anarcho-punk scene's cookery. Its know-how and practices were thus transferred into what became known as *folkkök* in the early 2000s. But today's *folkkök* are typically run by a new generation of vegan gastronomists, and in these settings, it has become important to move beyond 'the classic punk stew'. By offering original and delicious food, *folkkök* activists try to produce a pull factor for veganism. The interviewees described their reflective cooking practice and detailed recipe planning in terms of political activism, a struggle against meat-eating normativity. They portrayed an ambition of serving vegan food that was affordable yet appetising – to introduce vegan cooking and to fund animal liberation activism.

At the same time, every *folkkök* in my study was struggling economically. They did not receive external funding from political parties or NGOs, and the activists were mainly young adults with considerably low income themselves. The interviewees explained that their ambition to support political activism, together with large expenses for equipment and groceries, impeded them from offering entirely free food. Still, the interviewed activists withheld their dedication to mutual aid through an inclusive payment practice: 'It's more like: "pay what you can if you can; we will manage somehow." People should not feel they can't take part in things just because they lack economic means'. To endure economically and also fund political activism, the interviewees reported that they worked hard to cut grocery expenses. They used various methods: purchasing from food wholesalers, asking retailers for contributions, bringing their own groceries or, occasionally, dumpster diving.

Dumpster diving refers to the practice of obtaining items from dumpsters, typically food waste from grocery stores and bakeries. It is exercised by food-insecure people that lack access to organised food aid but also by food-secure people that dumpster dive for ideological reasons (Barnard, 2016; Lou, 2019; Vinegar et al., 2016). In Sweden, dumpster diving is practised by anarchists and environmentalists alike (Jakobsson, 2015; Larsson, 2017) and then also by *folkkök* activists: 'When I work at *folkkök*, I bring what I have at home. Maybe I dumpster-dived the day before, found a lot of potatoes, well, then I make potato leek soup or something – just to cut corners, so we can earn more money for the projects we fund'. Other *folkkök* had more organised routines: 'It's a

groundwork: we dumpster dive a few days in advance, see what we find, base our cooking on that and buy complements if necessary'. Through this cheap acquirement procedure, the interviewees explained that supply costs could be reduced to enable their inclusive payment practice.

'Solidarity is the keyword here', one interviewee expressed when asked about the politics and economics of the *folkkök* practice. This statement summarises, I believe, a political imagination of the community kitchen that encompasses internal solidarity through horizontal participation, solidarity with commodified food animals through political activism, as well as solidarity with marginalised groups through mutual aid in the redistribution of food.

Concluding Discussion

My claim in this article is that an analytical focus on different political imaginations complicates and deepens the critical sociological study of alternative foodways. I build this argument empirically on the case of *folkkök* in Sweden, a community kitchen launched in the late 1800s to address urban food insecurity, outsourced as charitable soup kitchens in the early 1900s, reworked by the labour movement a few decades later, and finally regenerated in the anarchist milieu by the turn of the millennium. I argue that if ethical food consumption suffers from 'thin democratic imagination reliant on shopping-for-change' (Huddart Kennedy et al., 2018: 163), then charity and solidarity of the community kitchen entail practices that seek to draw desirable a future into the present. Such dynamic visions could 'allow actors to conceive of times they didn't experience, people they haven't interacted with, or events that haven't happened yet, serving as a lynchpin for the coordinating of social action' (Fuist, 2021: 359). This observation resonates with the temporally disobedient operation of *prefigurative politics*, 'an embodied process of reimagining all of society' (Maeckelbergh, 2016: 122), generating a 'future-oriented construction of political alternatives' (Yates, 2020). Such prefigurative dimensions of gift-inspired food sharing can indeed be found in everyday practices like dinner parties and other forms of domestic hospitality (Graeber, 2011: 94–109; Warde et al., 2020). Similarly, redistributive food practices – such as historical and contemporary *folkkök* in Sweden – encompass charity as well as solidarity.

Folkkök are today commonplace in mass demonstrations and typically stationed at anarchist social centres. Yet, the anarchistic *folkkök* is not a historical offspring to its charitable namesake; rather, it is linked to the collective kitchens developed by the Swedish labour movement in the interwar years. And just as solidarity was a guiding principle for early 20th-century socialism, including the Social Democratic engineers of the welfare state, it now shapes anarchistic *folkkök* in contemporary Sweden. On one hand, the historical and contemporary manifestations of the community kitchen, at least in Sweden, complicate any distinction between charity and solidarity. Social movement scholarship has recently made similar observations of a blurred line between humanitarianism and solidarity (della Porta and Steinhilper, 2021: 178), and that agency at this precise intersection can generate unforeseen forms of collective action (Monforte, 2020: 110). On the other hand, accounting for the prefigurative aspect of alternative foodways – the future enacted through the community kitchen – illuminates how this set of practices also entails different political imaginations.

In my empirical analysis of the historical and contemporary *folkkök* in Sweden, I have distinguished between two forms of political imaginations: altruistic and anarchistic. Whereas the historical *altruistic folkkök* interlink with spiritual faith, philanthropic dedication or democratic belief in human rights, the *anarchistic folkkök* of today are driven by beliefs in horizontal participation, political activism and mutual aid. In Sweden, the altruistic imagination historically defined the state-led *folkkök* and the soup kitchens driven by faith-based and philanthropic organisations. By contrast, the anarchistic imagination of contemporary *folkkök* is not primarily based on charity or

even state-given rights, but on the prefigurative agenda of building solidarity between humans and animals as well as bridging the gap between givers and receivers, producers and consumers.

Hence, the critical sociology of food could in this sense dig deeper into a more profound analysis of alternative foodways – through a sharper focus on the different political imaginations that underpin these collective actions. Attention to these political visions here aligns with practice-focused research that increasingly has come to bypass entrenched micro-sociological emphases on methodological individualism and macro-sociological inattention to agency (Spaargaren et al., 2016). As a ‘nexus of constellations’ (Hui et al., 2017), practices capture the very interconnection between systemic forces and individual behaviour, structure and agency, which in the sociology of food sheds new light on the power and resistance of eating (Twine, 2017; Warde, 2016).

Finally, an analytical focus on political imaginations also teases out embedded temporal imperatives. On one hand, altruistic food practices embody individual, organisational, or institutional responses to maldistribution and bring political attention to secure the human right to nourishment. Anarchistic food practices, on the other hand, are political by their participatory inclusion, mutuality and active support for social mobilisation. These practices bring from the anarchist tradition a politics of *direct action* that ‘means insisting on acting as if one is already free’ (Graeber, 2009: 207). While this anarchistic practice sometimes seems to be guided by mere ‘hostility to institutionalised politics’ (Corry and Reiner, 2020: 16), Swedish *folkkök* activists rather describe their direct action politics in prefigurative terms. They are not hostile to altruistic food practices set out to mitigate economic and social inequalities; their food practices have this ambition as well. Nevertheless, the anarchistic imagination translates into direct action in terms of prefigurative politics; *folkkök* food practices entail a temporal imperative of abolishing social inequalities in the here-and-now to envision, enable and enact another future.

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