

Meal Cultures: cooking and the kitchen as missing links

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As human beings usually do not eat raw agricultural products but prepared dishes, it is necessary to focus on that what people really eat. It is the process of transforming food to meals that needs our special attention. Thus the meal culture concept based on human and cultural ecological approaches can be seen as a challenge to the classical discussions on food security and safety as well as the binary approaches of alternative and conventional food networks.

When thinking about 'meals' we will recognize that there are much more components necessary to prepare a tasty meal that will fit the habits and preferences of people in different societies. Food systems and the mode of preparation are diverse and they change from region to region based on ecological, technological, economical as well as political conditions. And last but not least we should not forget the symbolic and cultural value systems of our every day meals.

On a global level the work that is needed to prepare these meals is still done by women at home. Their work has remained invisible and thus not yet honoured fairly in the food-studies debate. The value chain debate needs to include the production as well as the following processes that take place in the social reproduction sphere at home and in the kitchen. Meal preparation is part of the hidden care economy and should be included in food studies.

The presentation will introduce the meal culture concept within an African-German research project in Kenya dealing with indigenous vegetables funded by the BMBF.