

# THE KITCHEN AS A CREATIVE SPACE FOR WOMEN

Monmouth University Scholarship Week 2022



The Kitchen has long been a battle ground for women who are trying to reclaim their identity against the oppression of gender roles. Men have long won this battle and yet, despite various forms of oppression and unequal power dynamics, women have proven themselves resilient and rebelled. Women were assigned to the Kitchen in the early years of society, hidden away from participating as active members of the broader intellectual society. Over many decades, the Kitchen has undergone a metamorphosis that mirrors female self-discovery and transformation via literary and architectural innovations.

## In what ways is the Kitchen a place of self-discovery and freedom for female authors?

For many years, women have been hidden away in the kitchen. Limiting women and forcing them to be confined in a space in order for their family and society to value them. Because the kitchen is where they would spend all their time, it became a place for self-discovery and freedom for these women writers. As exemplified by the protagonist of *Como Agua para Chocolate*, Tita, “nunca se sintió rebajada en ese mundo, al contrario, la cocina se convirtió para ella en universo único y maravilloso al que sólo ella... tenía acceso” [1](Gac-Artigas). She created elaborated recipes that were tied to specific emotions, therefore making her an author in her own right. The results the women achieved in the kitchen helped them realize what they were truly capable of and who they were as people or cooks. Whether they were more sensual, aggressive, timid, as cooks, it would also reflect how they were or present themselves in other aspects of their lives.



## How has the evolution of the Kitchen revolutionized a woman's societal role in the wake of capitalism?

With many similarities between capitalist structure and gender inequalities between men and women, the Kitchen played a vital role in liberating the minds of oppressed women around the world. Despite lack of employment opportunities and basic civil rights, women transformed their position in the Kitchen to juxtapose that absence of true equality in their own lives. In the early 20th century, kitchens were increasingly modernized therefore ushering in a “dramatic shift in culinary expectations for women across class lines” (Fiore). Architects such as Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky reconstruted pre-war kitchens to address the needs of an increasingly consumeristic society. “As the century pushed on, middle-class women, especially in the US, became increasingly confined to the traditionally feminine sphere, promised pleasures from a refrigerator with built-in ice maker or a newfangled dishwasher” (Fiore). Despite aiming to alleviate the wifely duties forced upon women, the evolution of kitchen appliances further exacerbated the issue. Consequently, there was a proportional development between female liberation and the evolution of the kitchen. As the woman wanted to redefine her status in society, the kitchen adapted to reconfirm the fact that women were permanently tied to that space within the confines of a capitalistic society. Fortunately in the 21st century, women have come to the realization that discovering their power within the Kitchen started to create societal shifts in how the world viewed their worth. With more importance placed on women in the Kitchen to provide for all of society, their culture slowly transitioned into one that welcomed women's power and crucial role to those around them. By expressing themselves within the confines of their Kitchen, women started the conversation that leads towards gender equality.



## How did the Kitchen allow women to transform experience into art?

At the beginning of the feminist movements, women's literature sought to reclaim their identity and freedom. “Sin embargo, esta búsqueda toma una dimensión mucho más amplia en las obras de las escritoras: la búsqueda —y desarrollo— de una voz literaria propia”[1] (Gac-Artigas). At first, the kitchen was only a place of subjugation that made women fit and fall under societal roles and expectations. Now, the Kitchen has been reclaimed by women as a space where they feel free and comfortable to express themselves artistically. Sandra Cisneros says, “when you are sitting at your kitchen table with your pajamas on, you have no fears, no doubts. No one is questioning your language or your heart. You don't have to worry about fitting in because you are only writing for you” (apud. HINOJOSA, 1995, p. 18). Isabel Allende is an example of how the Kitchen served as a creative space. What started as a letter to bid her grandfather farewell turned into her sitting down to write every night at her kitchen table after her family went to bed, resulting in her first novel. The Kitchen allowed women to go through a journey of self-discovery by leaving the fear and societal oppression behind and recognizing their literature as a work of art while rebelling against the patriarchal society.



[1] Translation: However, this search happens to take on a much broader dimension in the works of women writers: the search for – and development of – a literary voice of their own.”

[1] Translation: she never felt unworthy in that world, on the contrary, the kitchen became a unique and wonderful universe to

The kitchen is an area in which the woman exercises complete power. In attempts at undermining the validity of this power, the kitchen “ha sido silenciado y relegado a un segundo plano por estructuras machistas” [1] (“Apetito literario”). When examining the woman in conjunction with the kitchen within the contextualization of female vindication, it is easy to see how some women “embraced domestic femininity, but on their own terms” (Mills 65). This would include architects Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, who revolutionized the 20th century kitchens to include more compact counter-space, writers such as Isabel Allende, who spent nights on end constructing *The House of the Spirits* at the kitchen table, and Criseta Comerford, the first female White House Executive Chef. The truth is, the kitchen possesses a double connotation: “mágico y creador, espacio abierto formado de múltiples espacios, si utilizado por la mujer o, espacio de reclusión, de sometimiento, de rebajar la condición, si el espacio es leído por el varón” [2] (Gac-Artigas 21). Therefore, the kitchen is not a realm of punishment, it is a respected place of creativity rightfully dominated, vindicated, and reimagined by women.

[1] Translation: has been silenced and relegated to the background by machistas structures.

[2] Translation: magic and creator, open space formed from multiple spaces, if utilized by women or, a space of seclusion, of subjugation, of lowering the condition, if the space is read by men.



## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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