



“The Queen of Greens” Comes to the Tropics: The Articulations of Kale in the Philippines

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Chair: Assoc Prof Godfrey Yeung
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Abstract

There has been an upsurge of interest in the consumption and production of kale, a leafy green vegetable belonging to the *Brassica oleraceae* species and recognized by many as the ‘Queen of Greens’. While kale has been widely available in the Euro-Americas for centuries, it was only in the last eight years that the vegetable has been produced and consumed in noticeable quantities in the Philippines. I illustrate the complex ways kale has travelled from the Euro-Americas and articulated in the Philippines by examining knowledge production and translations, symbolic valuation, class representation, and the materialities associated with this Brassica crop.

My findings suggest that the arrival of the ‘Queen of Greens’ in the Philippines was primarily through privileged circuits of food consumption and production, mainly because of its symbolic value as a ‘superfood’ in the Euro-Americas. Backed by nutritional knowledge, kale quickly gained the interest of health-conscious upper class Filipino consumers and entrepreneurial organic farmers. Since it was first offered in gourmet restaurants and high-end markets, the price of kale has thus far made it the most expensive vegetable in the Philippines and therefore inaccessible to low income consumers. However, further observations reveal that kale has expanded outside privileged circuits, with homegrowers, urban gardeners and small farmers now growing it for self-sustenance. I argue that the translations and materialities of kale help explain its bifurcated class articulations.



About the Speaker

Marvin Montefrio is an assistant professor of social science (environmental studies) at Yale-NUS College. His research interest is in critical food and agrarian studies with particular focus on “global-local” dynamics. His scholarship draws from environmental sociology, political ecology, STS, and increasingly cultural studies. He did his graduate studies at the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry and the Maxwell School of Syracuse University.

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