

Guest Editors' Introduction: Special Issue on Critical Food Studies in South Africa: Feminist Perspectives

Desiree Lewis

University of the Western Cape,
South Africa
dlewis@uwc.ac.za

Vasu Reddy

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6004-2320>
University of Pretoria, South Africa
vasu.reddy@up.ac.za

Currently, our social, cultural, and existential experiences are being very directly influenced by our relationships to food. The health, economic, social, and psychological consequences of pathogens originating in industrial agriculture are glaringly manifested around the world, while poverty, inequalities, vulnerabilities, social injustices and hegemonic knowledge are being magnified by the impact of COVID-19. Innovative thought and practices around food therefore seem to be more relevant than ever before. Understanding the connections between corporate food systems and the Anthropocene, or unravelling the conviviality and humane values underlying many indigenous or localised food events and discourses, can generate revolutionary understandings of assemblages among the human, the social, and the non-human.

As this issue reveals, interdisciplinary work in the humanities and social sciences immeasurably strengthens exploration of these entanglements. By turning to food as an analytical lens, contributions draw on disciplines including anthropology, history, literary and cultural studies, and sociology to unravel people's sensory, social, and cultural lives. Many contributions also straddle disciplines, seeking to raise transdisciplinary innovation around topics that discipline-bound research can flatten.

This interdisciplinary work in the social sciences and humanities is important in view of the dominance of work on food within the natural sciences and development studies. Scholarship and public debate about food in South Africa usually focus on production, control, and distribution, assuming that food is significant primarily as a material resource for survival and reproduction. Thriving agro-food and scientific scholarship and practice therefore neglect social, cultural, and historical processes that shape human experiences and subjectivities around food (see Guptill, Copelton, and Lucal 2017).

It is for this reason that many of this issue's contributors engage and discuss hegemonic knowledge-making about food. Discourse analysis of scholarly and popular sources is

evident in articles by Carla Tsampiras, Mary Hames and Desiree Lewis and Rory Du Plessis. Focusing on the aggressive marketing of meat in contemporary corporate food systems, Tsampiras homes in on forms of representational violence that mirror the virulence of industrial agriculture. She shows that stereotypes and normalised aggression in advertising texts expose contemporary networks of anthropocentric, capitalist and patriarchal values and practices. Hames and Lewis turn to the politics of scholarly and practical responses to students' hunger in universities. Demonstrating that this work has been constrained by hegemonic knowledge-making as well as the neoliberal restructuring of universities, they foreground the need for critical confrontation of the structural parameters of groups' and individuals' hunger. In his historical investigation of nutritional practices, Rory du Plessis builds on analysis of South African archives of food practice and knowledge. He shows how dietary regimens in an early twentieth-century mental hospital in Grahamstown (present-day Makhanda) worked to cement the binary categorisation of race and gender, as well as "sanity" and "health." In this way, Du Plessis draws attention to food as a policing instrument in the institutionalised and discursive regulation of bodies in South Africa.

The critical scrutiny of dominant practices in this issue coexists with attention to the densely creative meaning-making evidenced in various groups' neglected foodwork. Vasu Reddy and Lebo Moletsane, and Marius Crous and Alan Murdoch turn to recipe books in confronting this meaning-making. Crous and Murdoch reflect on the way that seemingly frivolous cookbooks unveil complex patterns of identity-making and social history. By analysing a cookbook produced at the start of the nineteenth century, they explore the social and cultural dynamics often ignored in many scholarly social histories. In Reddy and Moletsane's article, a textual reading of curry-making with reference to two cookbooks demonstrates the hybridisation and mobility of curry in South Africa. By identifying these energetic transformations in material culture, the writers illustrate the dynamism of many popular culinary transformations of cuisines and dishes through global flows.

In contrast to this view of the productive consequences of certain transnational foodways, Mercia Andrews's essay and Haidee Swanby's article turn to the global neoliberal food system. By foregrounding the role of women in South African food production, they show how the current world food regime entrenches power relations at the national level. As Donna Andrews shows in her article, however, those most marginalised within dominant food systems also have the knowledge-making and political resources to forge alternative and democratic food cultures. Utilitarian and destructive attitudes towards nature have been naturalised by capitalist and patriarchal food systems; in contrast, certain African women's marginalised food practices and politics have the potential to destabilise existing power relations as well as the arrogant exploitation of the natural environment and resources for excessive consumption and profit-making.

Because food is experienced so intimately and viscerally, many seek to convey its sensory and personal dimensions in their subject matter as well as their writing style. Personal essays by Jacki Job and Lauren Paremoer reveal this. Making connections between the visceral act of eating and both the materiality and the social inscription of bodies, they trace negative and positive ways in which food is experienced in relation to embodied identities and understandings of pleasure and duty. The value of the personal essay in writing about food cannot be overstated. As evidenced in the range of memoirs, autobiographies, and fiction that foreground food in storytelling, some of the most insightful explorations of human relationships to food are conveyed through life narratives (see Counihan 2010).

It is significant that the experimentation with writing genres has been a feature of feminist traditions and scholarship on food, thus signalling how these fields simultaneously confront nuanced detail and structural power. In their groundbreaking collection, *From Betty Crocker to Feminist Food Studies: Critical Perspectives on Women and Food*, Arlene Voski Avakian and Barbara Haber (2005) demonstrate how attention to gender in food studies provides insights into topics such as hegemony, identity formation and corporeality. More recently, feminists such as Psyche Williams-Forsen and Abby Wilkerson (2011) have argued that intersectional feminist perspectives can lead to even deeper investigations of embodiment, social subjectivities, and discourses. Contributions to this issue seek to address Williams-Forsen and Wilkerson's (2011, 15) call to "place the methodologies and theories of gender, race and intersectionality at the centre of food studies research."

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