

# Foreword

Janaka B. Lewis, Ph.D.

When we sit at individual or communal tables, we consider each other and our senses before taking a single bite. We think about what brought us to the table, who we are eating with, what meal will be served and possibly even where the food is from. In South Africa, which Lewis, Reddy, Moletsane and Thuynsma describe as ‘home to diverse cultures, histories, food heritages, culinary landscapes, food-growing and food-buying environments that collectively spice the food eaten and enjoyed by individuals and groups in the country’, food is sustenance, an access point, historical and cultural marker and much more. *Thinking Through Food in South Africa: Identities, Embodiment and Representation* explores the ways in which individuals define themselves and their role in society through food, including its role in school-based historical curriculum, alternative food networks, community-supported agriculture, intergenerational rituals and exchanges and as Nomkhosi Mhlanga argues, ‘historical significance [in the ways that] it influences economics, politics, migration and social cohesion’. More than a study of ingredients, this book holds and guides a multi-layered conversation about food as home, practice and community.

Key to this volume is its definition of the field of critical food studies in its interdisciplinarity and, rather than the lens of natural studies, expanding focus to humanities with some incorporation of social sciences. Expanding beyond incorporation and elevation of food narratives, the collection also, through a number of entry points, explores impact on small-scale farmers—closure of social grant pay points in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal and rural livelihoods and ability of these farmers to sell in these spaces (Shabalala), and as Vermeulen argues, ‘racialized distribution of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital’ based on citrus farmworkers in Limpopo province, South Africa. The book pays specific attention to the roles of marginal urban farming by women, with Masuku highlighting their role in gaining economic empowerment, agency and food security, use of unconventional urban spaces and changing narratives of land access in the ways that they shape local food systems and urban agriculture policies. Tamako and Chitja continue the focus on small-scale urban farming in KwaZulu Natal’s Sobantu township, with a focus on barriers to land ownership related to financial issues, resources and land use, extending the argument that ownership and empowerment for women is critical for ‘sustainable urban agriculture and improved livelihoods’. In these narratives,

women drive and change the narrative of food access on multiple levels.

While leaving room for the possibilities of the indulgent and of food as creative poetics, this critical volume leaves us with critical food studies and analysis as an “ideal lens” to examine complex relationships in politics, economy, and social and cultural dynamics. It highlights women, including grandmothers in knowledge transition, in the value of food production and access, and explores implications of food security and the significance of social networks. While contributing to the role of food in maintaining gendered systems and constructions of identity, subjectivity and conferral of power through food, *Thinking through Food* also explores the creation of food archives—cookbooks, memories and even as Bota contends, the silences that influence how we understand these archives.

10 Wnuczek-Lobaczewski uses food to offer historical analysis of narratives told by women who sent letters and *pakkies* (parcels) to service men, and in the imaginative possibilities of archive and narrative, multiple authors examine food stories as ‘alternative lens[es] through which one can observe important local histories’—Christian Afrikaaner histories, food and recipes as carriers of memory (and challenges to fictive constructions of memory through Steele’s critical attention to Disney’s Animal Kingdom Park) and visual essays (as Du Preez and Bleeker focus on the collaboration around the Elandskloof garden project). As Bester offers, ‘food is slippery’, and so we conclude with black middle-class South Africans eating practices as symbolic capital, food as connections with nation and identity, Black gay mens’ consumption of food as experience of community (Sibeko) and the role of food in local media. Throughout this book, the idea of local holds meanings that are relative and relevant to the story(ies) being shared, including the community itself.

As they focus on the significance of the specific values of food in South Africa, the perspectives offered in *Thinking Through Food in South Africa* are expansive. The authors connect to community-based narratives outside of local space (including Psyche Williams-Forson’s focus on Black American food practices), as they create and reveal unique lenses of critical significance. Food is critical, social, political, communal and most of all, cultural. Each narrative leads us to a greater understanding of the power held by food and its practitioners, demanding that we listen *and* engage as we consume.

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