

Part 1:

From Table to Thought: Savouring Food Studies through the Social Sciences and Humanities

Food and its study are influenced by culture, history and a range of socio-political factors. When combined, these factors form a complex mix of relationships that define who we are as individuals and the broader society we form. Through food, we can view our past—our history of colonialism and apartheid—and understand how our present choices are shaped by a fusion of cultures.

As the title suggests, the authors in this section will touch on issues and methodologies that stem from the social sciences—historical and heritage studies, political sciences and sociology—to centre marginalised voices and challenge dominant narratives. The chapters that follow will discuss issues of access, inequality and the power dynamics related to food. Using key concepts such as food justice and food sovereignty, these scholars explore alternative food networks, community-supported agriculture, the political implications of dietary choices and the cultural meanings associated with different foods.

This section starts with a chapter by Nomkhosi Mhlanga who argues that food has historical significance, since it influences economies, politics, migration and social cohesion. This is why South African student teachers have advocated to include food in the history curriculum, because doing so will forge a better understanding of food's impact on society, particularly its social structures and divisions. Mhlanga argues that integrating food thoughtfully into the curriculum can enrich historical learning and reflect its role in shaping society. Ultimately, decision-making for curriculum content remains a political process, however, incorporating food as a first-order concept holds promise for enriching historical learning.

Nkululeko Shabalala follows with an article which explores the closure of social grant pay points in rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. Shabalala traces how this move has harmed small-scale farmers, food

access and community unity. According to the study, the tactic has undermined rural livelihoods by disrupting traditional markets, limiting access to fresh produce for vulnerable groups and effectively disconnected these groups from traditional food networks. This reflects, and indeed echoes Mhlanga's findings, that food systems have become politicised and for Shabalala, highlights the need to support informal markets and re-evaluate food accessibility in rural areas.

The chapter by Gabe Vermeulen further investigates this political dynamic, however, from a more sociological perspective. Vermeulen's study is an ethnographic study that examines the precarious lives of citrus farmworkers in Limpopo, South Africa. Using a Bourdieusian framework, the study reveals how farm owner's technocratic discourse obscures the employer-employee dynamic, effectively reinforcing labour exploitation and socio-economic vulnerability. The owner's rhetoric legitimises inequality and perpetuates a racialised distribution of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital in South Africa's agricultural sector.

28 Michelle Masuku's chapter studies the overlooked practice of marginal urban farming by women in Harare, Zimbabwe and highlights its role in economic empowerment, food security, and women's agency. Marginal urban farming involves cultivating crops in unconventional urban spaces and challenges the traditional agriculture discourse. Using Feminist Political Ecology and Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Masuku highlights women's contributions, challenges in land access and the need to recognise their role in shaping local food systems and urban agriculture policies.

Nthabeleng Tamako and Joyce Chitja conclude this section with a study that incorporates essential factors alluded to in each of the preceding chapters. The authors investigate small-scale urban farming in KwaZulu Natal's Sobantu township and focus on land access, gender disparities, and the importance of urban agriculture for food security. The authors highlight the challenges urban farmers, especially women, face in accessing land. Their analysis emphasises the need for collective action, community involvement and gender-sensitive practices to overcome obstacles such as financial limitations, resource scarcity and land use conflicts. Tamako and Chitja find that addressing land ownership and empowering farmers, particularly women, is crucial for sustainable urban agriculture and improved livelihoods.
