Chapter 8

Thinking through Food in South Africa: Identity-making, Embodiment and Representation

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Introduction

In many parts of rural South Africa, elderly women in their role as grandmothers, wield significant influence on a household's access to food and nutrition (Madzorera and Fawzi 2020). As caregivers, their practices and foodways are also often key to securing children's positive development outcomes. Literature reveals interesting insights into how indigenous foodways practiced by older women influence food distribution within poor households. For example, a study on the coping strategies of poor households in an informal settlement in South Africa, found that especially female pensioners produce a significant positive impact on the food needs of children in their care, compared to households with no pensioners (Devereux and Waidler 2017; Koetaan et al. 2018; May 2016; Oldewage-Theron, Dicks and Napier 2006).

It is interesting to compare patterns revealing older women's relative strengths in networks of food distribution and access with many women's conventional roles in patriarchal societies. In patriarchal societies, women often share a subordinate social status with children and therefore, appear to be highly dependent on others for their own nutrition (Jarrott et al. 2019; Madzorera and Fawzi 2020). Yet, as Madzorera and Fawzi (2020) argue, women are the most food-productive group, and their empowerment translates into improved nutrition outcomes for the entire family, especially children. This is because women's traditional roles are anchored around food and childcare. Maternal caregiving enables children to enjoy better nutrition, especially children who share in gender and cultural roles involving food work (Devereux and Waidler 2017; Olderwage-Theron et al. 2006). Further, gendered roles often bind female caregivers and younger girls together in households and food-making chores; giving children (girls) better nutrition outcomes. As such, the argument for the inseparability of women and children as they are tied together by social and cultural relations is compelling, mainly because of their membership into the marginalised social

group in patriarchal societies. This paper reveals that there is even more specificity surrounding the role of grandmothers as a particular category of women.

While the role of grandmothers as child caregivers is widely recognised in society, the influence of their caregiving practices on children's general development and wellbeing seems to go largely unexplored, specifically, their food practices and their impact on the children in their care remain unidentified. It is also significant that the indigenous food practices with which older women are familiar and are often experts on, are embedded and (re)produced within patriarchal systems. Fleming (1997) and Fraser (1985) provide leads to explore the above-mentioned power relations surrounding this chapter's topic.

In rural contexts such as rural Kwazulu-Natal (KZN), a specific form of patriarchy informs family relations, community and daily life in significant ways, even though these contexts are situated within capitalist systems. Capitalist societies exhibit patriarchal relations, although these are not manifested in women's gender roles and lives within communities—as they are in rural KZN. In KZN, as in other similar rural contexts, patriarchy informs the culture, norms and daily life in rural communities in ways that invariably favour men (Oyowe 2013). What, therefore, might it mean to consider and explore older rural women's everyday resistance, rebellion and autonomy in decisions about food, food work and meal distribution in their homes? This research was approached with a deep awareness of intersecting forms of power, and the need for a theoretical and methodological approach to unpack these. In terms of my methodological work with older women, I wanted them to reflect on their contestations of dominant values by co-creating a civil space wherein they could give insights into their own actions, rather than being defined by dominant myths in their society, racial and regional myths in the national context or the assumptions of urban-oriented and elitist scholarship.

This study was undertaken in Lower Molweni, a rural village near Hillcrest nestled between the Umgeni River in the north and the Kranzkloof Nature Reserve in the eastern and south eastern boundaries of KZN province, South Africa (Reserve 2009). Lower Molweni is under traditional authority. Only 16 per cent of houses have piped water, while 41 per cent of houses still use pit toilets without ventilation. Children under fourteen years make up a third of the population in the village of Lower Molweni (StatsSA 2011), with many of these children being orphans and being raised by their grandmothers (University of the Witwatersrand 2018). Lower Molweni is still governed by

cultural norms and practices, including virginity testing of girls and abstaining from cultivating a garden whilst in mourning. Many families here practice subsistence farming through gardening and keeping chickens, goats and sometimes cows.

I engaged eight elderly women, seven of whom were pensioners, and all of whom were grandmothers providing care to grandchildren in primary school. My efforts to solicit these older women's actual voices and understand the significance of their actions were facilitated by what has been known as participatory visual methodology (PVM). As Ngidi and Moletsane (2018) show, participating in research through PVM does not depend on literacy, it encourages the researcher's sensitivity to research participants' sensory, intuitive and orally acquired knowledge which they discuss and reflect on using readily available tools and skills. As such, marginalised, elderly women can participate meaningfully in research using innate, familiar and easy to learn modes of data generation, such as making collages by selecting relevant or resonant images from magazines (Ngidi and Moletsane 2018; Treffry-Goutley, Moletsane and Weibesiek 2018). Haffejee, Banda and Theron (2018) argue that the process of making and discussing visual artefacts elicits self-reflection and critical thinking; inviting participants to become co-creators of knowledge, especially regarding everyday actions that may often go unchallenged or taken for granted, like food practices. By using magazine images to think through the questions, participants were able to distance themselves from their everyday food practices and apply a critical lens to the values that inform their actions.

This chapter, therefore, focusses on exploring the indigenous food practices of rural grandmothers, and the impact on children in their care by asking, "what are the indigenous food practices of grandmothers as child caregivers", and "how do caregiving grandmothers understand the influence of indigenous food practices on children's development outcomes". Moreover, how can one define "indigenous food practices", given the extent to which food practices in rural areas in South Africa have undergone several centuries of transformation through agriculture and through corporate-driven food production and food selling. The above questions are explored by focussing on the participants' use of mainstream magazines to create collages to critically examine these ideas. The analysis and insights in the chapter are not only derived from the data generated, but also from the research process itself; which seeks to demonstrate the use of PVM with marginalised groups in well-considered and meaningfully inclusive ways.

Grandmothers writing self-narratives about meals

The aim of using visual methodologies was to present the participants with various images, mainly from popular magazines, to allow them to write or narrate their own stories involving their role in providing food. Words such as in writing and text were therefore avoided, and it was perceived that this allowed these older women far greater freedom to be active producers of knowledge and writers of their own stories. The approach that the participants often settled on after playing around with various images and magazines, was the practice of collage-making. Once they completed their collages individually, they were regrouped for presentations and discussions to provide meaning and narrative to the collages. Organically, the presentations took a fun and fantasy-play format where participants, as presenters, would self-identify with the people and activities taking place in their chosen images. For example, instead of identifying what the person in the image is doing, the women would pretend to be the people in the pictures, presenting self-narratives around their choices of images in the first person as below:

Figure 8.1: A woman with shopping bags and a picture of a man

'This is me coming from the shops ... I bought things for the house ...
This is my husband coming from the garden', participant MaMbambo, aged 63.

Overall, the collages reflected participants' priorities regarding their use of food and related food work, also exploring their idealised or perceived ideal food practices as reflected in the magazines. The discrepancy between the older rural women's lived experiences and the images portrayed in the magazines expose significant age, racial and class divides between the women and their urban counterparts. This exemplifies how the older women navigate mainstream popular culture (and centres of knowledge in general), which construct standards of labour and achievement that are simply not accessible to them. Participants were able to bridge the racial and class divides during group discussions by creatively repurposing mainstream representations, imaginatively using language to speak to their narratives. This multi-layered process of constructing narrative through images, narration and interpretation generated several important themes related to a key concern in all the women's lives: the cooking of affordable food for those under their care, these often being their grandchildren.

The women discussed at length the differences and commonalities between meals they grew up on and what children eat today. The main difference centred on breakfast foods which they called "soft foods". These are manufactured foods like noodles and cereals which take a shorter time to prepare than their traditional equivalents and are perceived by the women to be easier to digest. Noodles and cereals are reserved for children and often prepared for them to have in the morning for breakfast before going to school. The ritualising of breakfast for children in the South African context has been explained by Viljoen, Botha and Boonzaaier (2005), who argue that the early-morning meal was introduced in African families in the 1950s. Breakfast catered mainly for school-going children—as is often the case among black families in the present. Prior to the mid-1900s, when schooling for children had become widespread, Africans traditionally had two meals in their daily diet. The main purpose of breakfast is to feed children quickly, with the morning meal prioritising convenience and deviating significantly from the traditional repertoire of foods. Breakfast mainly comprises of manufactured and convenient foods that were not familiar to the women when they were growing up or raising their own children. One participant stated: *'The cereals, eggs, apples, and bananas are new to us. We started having these things when our children became [working] adults. We give them to the grandchildren because they build the bodies of young children.'* Here, participant MaKheswa not only confirms how "soft foods" that are easy to cook acquired a place in African

homes, but also how they were associated with the buying power of working adult children, and therefore signalled the financial status of the extended family. Participant MaGwensa reiterates the need for money to afford the newly introduced meal and its soft food preference when she says, *'now that I can afford them, I buy them for my grandchildren, so they can have better than what I had'.* However, the participants not only take affordability and efficiency into account, they also consider choice and variety important. As participant MaGumede says, '*what will the children use to alternate when they only have one kind of cereal? … You can't expect children to eat only one kind of cereal'*.

Equally significant is the fact that even though the participants did not necessarily prefer "soft foods"; they found them efficient for feeding schoolchildren in the morning, yet simultaneously believe that "traditional foods" are healthier. Participant MaKhweswa attests to this when she says, '*cereals are easy to digest for young children and provide a quick meal in the morning before school, but mielies (corn) porridge is more important because it is more nutritious for a child's growing body. Porridge is a very important traditional staple'.* Participant MaKheswa refers to mielies porridge as a *'traditional staple'*, confirming the status of maize as an *'indigenised'* crop in South Africa, and widely considered a traditional crop. This thinking is consistent with the definition offered by Mabhaudhi et al. (2019), that traditional crops are those that have been extensively cultivated in a society even if it is not indigenous. Maize was introduced into Africa in the 1600s, and has been farmed privately and commercially in South Africa since 1655 (Sihlobo 2022). Mabhaudhi et al. (2019) consider a crop indigenised when it exceeds 100 years of extensive cultivation in a society, which maize has been for well over three decades.

Participant MaKheswa's statement implies the older women's concern with children somehow needing foods associated with what are seen as traditional values and those linked to modernity. In the participant's comment, "tradition" conveys continuity between generations; while modernity represents progress and status. The participants recognise both as necessary measures of success in this and future generations. For the participants, young children's ability to eat traditional foods and have access to new foods like cereals, provides an overall sense of balance, progress and wellbeing. Participant MaKheswa stated *'you must teach her to have porridge. It's important'*. *'I also teach my [grand]children to eat traditional food, even though they don't like some of it. But whatever we have out of the garden generally they will eat it'* (Participant MaGcwensa, 61). Both women highlight the importance of socialising children into indigenous knowledge by teaching them to eat traditional foods.

Older rural women's indigenous knowledge

Whilst the women encourage a balance in children's knowledge of traditional and modern foods, their overall belief is that traditional foods have superior health value.

> *'I'm sickly now because of these new things like garden vegetables that last only a day in the sun and start to wilt. That's why we are also wilting. We're buying lamthuthu [non-organic chickens] that grow in a day! I believe we are wilting now because we didn't use to eat all this.'* (Participant MaMbambo)

Figure 8.2: Garden vegetables wilt after a day and cause "wilting" [illness]

In the above statement, participant MaMbambo associates abundant health with locally grown vegetables whose cultivation has been consistent in rural communities over generations; which vegetables are considered natural and healthy. For example, participants consider wild herbs and

pumpkin leaves more nutritious than commercial spinach or carrots. These are herbs and vegetables that the elderly women used to eat from childhood or that they have eaten for a long time which they consider nutritionally healthier than the "new" crops, such as garden vegetables that have become popular in recent times. A discourse analysis here reveals the participant's incisive view that commercial vegetables are inherently fragile and "wilt"; even though according to modern western standards they are deemed healthy because they are vegetables. Their wilting quality affects the consumer, whose body responds negatively to lifeless food.

On the other hand, the participants view traditional food as having the opposite effect to "wilting" in their bodies, and consider their childhood diets as responsible for the strong bodies they enjoyed in their youth and early adulthood:

> *'I grew up healthy and strong. I only started having health problems in my elderly life ... I had a good upbringing. Maybe if I was sickly, I would have felt abused by my diet. But I never suffered. I didn't have any food sensitivities ... I learned to do as they* [parents] *had done to my own children. I raised my children on the same diet I grew up on. And they grew strong. The most I appreciate about my childhood diet is that when it was time for my pregnancies, I had very healthy pregnancies and I had all my children here at home naturally. Which confirmed that my diet was healthy even though it was simple.'* (Participant MaMbambo)

For participant MaMbambo, the proof of traditional foods being superior is that firstly, she did not suffer any allergies or sensitivities when she was young. Secondly, when she became a young adult having children, her strong body enabled her to enjoy healthy pregnancies, she was able to deliver naturally at home without the need for hospitalisation or operations. Thirdly, participant MaMbambo raised her own children on a similar traditional diet, which resulted in them growing up healthy and strong as she had.

Therefore, traditional food is considered more "authentic" and seen to endow positive benefits. This also conveys the women's resistance to the powerful messaging of modern and western nutritional, public health and mass media discourses. These are insistent with linking commercial, sanitised and "safe" foods to good health, especially among middle-class urban-dwellers. Therefore, older women like participant MaMbambo—even as they acknowledge negative childhood food experiences linked to poverty and sometimes repression—retain a stronger belief about traditional

diets as being healthy food that served their bodies well. It is these traditional diets that they want their grandchildren to remain familiar with and benefit from.

Therefore, for the women, traditional foods symbolise "hard foods" that produce strong, healthy and resilient bodies, whereas "soft" foods might represent modernity and financial success, however, have insufficient nutrition that produces sickly and "wilting" bodies in their old age. While there is much public health and medical information teaching older women about health and nutrition, they often rely on indigenous knowledge to inform them of what is good for the body, and this is the knowledge they strive to preserve and transmit to young children.

Grandmothers as custodians of alternative food knowledges and practice

Children's access to breakfast enables them to participate in modern cultural and economic life. By attending school, they prepare for participation in the modern job and financial economy at a later stage; which are benchmarks of successful developmental outcomes in the neoliberal sense. This path to success seems to be strongly evidenced in the following collage made by participant MaMbambo.

Figure 8.3: School-going children surrounded by modern foods including cereals, bread and banana

Whilst grandmothers consider access to education and good nutrition as important and complementary aspects to children's development; they displayed an understanding of development outcomes much broader than nutrition, education and the possibilities of class advancement. The ability to participate in the modern economy which is enabled by access to education, together with knowledge of indigenous ways of sustenance makes for a well and fully developed person. That is why the grandmothers encouraged their grandchildren to learn to eat traditional foods and to learn about subsistence farming and crop production as seen in participant MaKheswa's collage below.

Figure 8.4: MaKheswa's collage – notice traditional values reflected in women harvesting cabbages and children learning about gardening

The top left image of the collage shows *'women coming from a healthy harvest of cabbages from their own garden'*. The middle picture shows *'an adult and child teaching and learning on the lawn'* and the top right image and the image below the harvesting women are both of *'children learning to garden'* presumably under the guidance of a nearby adult. These images succinctly capture the consistent argument in discussions, that modern education, depicted in the middle image of participant Makheswa's collage, must happen in tandem with learning indigenous knowledge, especially about subsistence farming, depicted in the first and third images. In other words, they consider a person who can cultivate their livelihood through both modern and traditional means as reflective of an optimally developed individual. Conversely, they consider someone who relies only on employment to earn a living as potentially coaxing poverty by relying on an unpredictable source of livelihood. For instance, when participants say, *'they know they will rely on their education; staying wherever they will be staying [urban settings]"* (participant MaBlose). '*It's fine for those who have an education, but some of them don't have an education. How are they going to live? ... A hoe in the garden will make sure you don't lack everything. You will lack other things, but you will also have something.'* (participant MaKheswa)

For these women, urban living and the pursuit of employment, represent a precarious future for youth who insist on this singular approach to survival. The elderly women often lambasted their children moving to urban areas where there is limited access to land and no culture of practicing crop cultivation. For them, this represented a loss of traditional lifeways and inherent means of subsisting that cushion against abject poverty. It is significant that the women associated real poverty with urban spaces, rather than with rural areas. The latter are constantly seen as spaces offering the opportunity to feed oneself independently, whereas urban spaces are seen to make one vulnerable and one's life precarious.

To demonstrate, one of the participants selected an image of a man sitting on what looks like a makeshift bench, flanked by young children, one leaning on crutches in what seems to be a peri-urban setting.

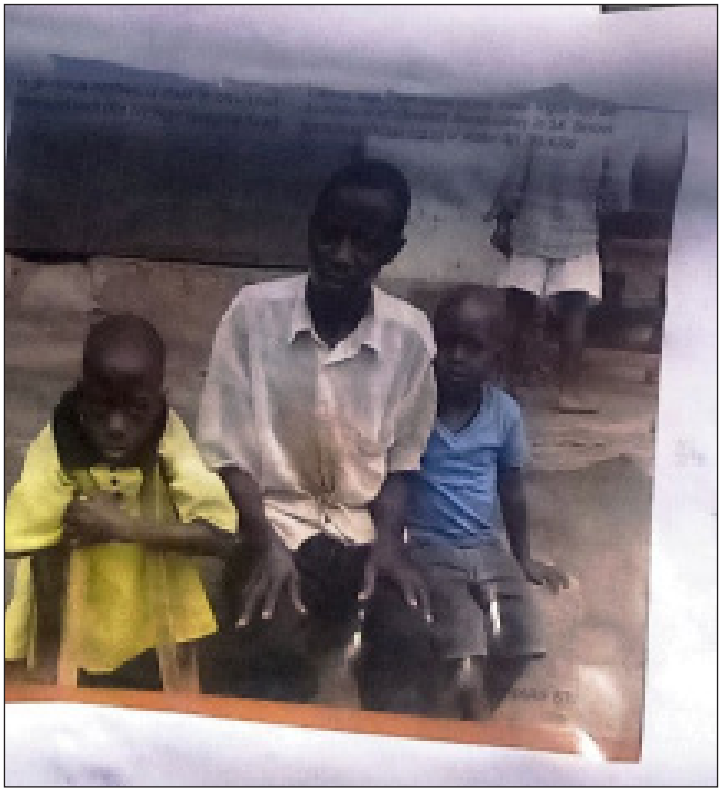

Figure 8.5: Poor man and children in an urban setting

According to the participants, the above picture represented abject poverty experienced by people in urban areas who are unsuccessful in the job market. There was often a strong sense of distress conveyed in the discussion of the participants' impression of urban poverty—ironically among rural women who are often identified as especially marginalised. The participants commented:

MaGcwensa: *'I also wanted to put another picture of a poor man with his children ... they are sitting there on the road and he* [the boy] *leans on a walking stick. It broke my heart because it* [poverty] *means their bodies don't get some nutrition ... they also need to eat fruit and vegetables to get good nutrition.'*

MaGcwensa: *'Here's the poor man I was talking about.'*

MaMbambo: *'Oh, my lord!'*

MaGumede: '*Oh shame!*'
Researcher: ' *Yes, it looks very sad.*'
MaBlose: '*Where is his woman* [the mother of his children]*?*'
MaGumede: '*Maybe she's deceased.*'
MaGcwensa: '*I think she's deceased. That's what I think, I don't know ... he's really in the hard times.*'

In this exchange, the women express sympathy for the poor man sitting by the side of the road with one of his children leaning on crutches, which indicates poor health and the father's inability to provide adequately for his children. The women's misgivings about urbanisation focussed on the sole reliance of urban people on employment due to the lack of land to cultivate food gardens. The problem of access to productive land in urban and peri-urban areas and its contribution to high levels of food insecurity in townships and peri-urban areas, is well documented. Frayne et al. (2010) found a positive relationship between a lack of subsistence farming and food insecurity in poor urban areas. This finding is consistent with the participant's apprehension towards urbanisation which clearly overturns popular ideas of modern, urban spaces being settings for health and wealth or "limitless opportunity". The participants are cognizant of the fact that to secure a livelihood in these spaces, one often does so without the dependable cushion offered by crop cultivation which fosters self-reliance, regardless of employment status. Participant MaKheswa is aware of the advantage held by having access to productive land in rural areas compared to urban areas, if employment prospects are low.

Older women's critical engagement with gendered and classed food knowledges

The discussion above has sought to highlight how knowledgeable and powerful grandmothers are in the context of rural food provision, especially for children. It is significant that this results not only from grandmothers having time to spend with children or having resources which other adults and children do not have (such as government pensions or grants). It is because of the knowledge acquired through their experiences; they are, therefore, obviously not only oppressed or silenced in gendered, ageist and classed systems. Grandmothers have also critically confronted these systems and sought to produce subversive meanings. Moreover, they often refuse to accept what is now a modern norm of connecting good eating to being efficient and economically productive.

The above subversive meanings can be seen as a response to dominant medical, nutritional and health discourses in South Africa which are often very prescriptive, especially for rural children and older women. For example, in biomedical research, elderly black women are often reported as placing the heaviest burden on the healthcare system, as most affected by diabetes and hypertension as well as being at risk of heart disease and stroke. Despite this, they have the least access to healthcare because of the long distances they must travel; they are the most under-researched group and their pain and symptoms are often undermined by health practitioners (Jacob Arriola, Borba and Thompson 2007; McKoy 2023). Whilst research shows that incidence of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes increase in this population, their eating shifts from traditional (high carb, high fibre) to western (high fat) diets (Bourne, Lambert and Steyn 2002), the women in this study have shown an understanding of the healthfulness of their traditional diets and continuously explore strategies to preserve traditional diets in the face of westernisation.

This research uncovered ways in which women navigate dominant food knowledge in practice. This is crucial, since it shows that marginalised groups' critical engagement is not necessarily explicit or immediate; it may often be a gradual, collective, negotiated process in which marginalisation, based on age, race and class, prompts subjects to "chip away" at extremely dominant and resilient knowledge systems. As indicated, foremost among these systems for rural women are gendered food taboos.

Early on in this research process, the grandmothers who were the study's participants did not believe children, especially adolescent girls, should be given eggs, chicken, milk and dairy products, since these foods make girls *'hot for boys'*, meaning these foods stimulate sexual desires prematurely in girls and promote promiscuity. The participants generally agreed that when they were young girls, their own grandmothers and mothers would say these foods would make them *'hyperactive'*, or sexually aroused which in traditional societies is shunned in adolescent girls and young women. Similar restrictions have been observed in other African countries and in India. In rural Kandhamal district, India, girls are creatively pushing back on the taboo of eating eggs and chicken (Mahapatra 2020). In Zimbabwe's rural districts, women and children are discouraged from consuming cow's milk (Cosminsky, Mhloyi and Ewbank 1993). Notably, no restrictions for boys were mentioned in the reviewed literature, and none were practiced in the community of the research. Foods thought to be "bad" take on this label only in relation to girls, who are affected by the foods' "hotness". Therefore, the perceived adverse effects of "hot foods" were seen to only affect adolescent girls,

whilst the effects of "hot foods" on boys is not discussed, implying that boys are either immune to the effects of "hot foods", or that such sexual activity is encouraged in boys.

In the context of limited resources, dominant groups popularise ideas through value systems and cultural beliefs that naturalise their unfair access to more resources and advantages over subordinate groups. In a patriarchal society such as a rural South African community, it is no surprise that food taboos disadvantage adolescent girls and young women, and are used to socialised them to value sexual restraint, submissiveness and to idealise marriage (Oyowe and Yurkivska 2014). As women age beyond their reproductive years, they become arbiters of norms and traditions responsible for (re)producing the same discriminatory values such as food taboos on younger women and adolescent girls, thus inadvertently co-opting into the patriarchal project of restricting the freedom of adolescent girls and young women and preparing them for domination by men (Ngidi, Moletsane and Essack 2021; Oyowe and Yurkivska 2014).

During both the collage-making and discussions, the participants reflected quite thoughtfully on the way that certain traditional food habits seemed unfair from a girl's point of view. Consequently, although the women consistently praised their traditional food socialisation, questioning some food beliefs started to emerge by the second session, especially pertaining to "hot foods" and their presumed impacts according to gender and age. For example, the participants expressed doubt about the efficacy of food restrictions on the younger generation, *'(...) we grew up not eating eggs. Eggs were reserved for adults ... They said it also makes your private parts weak. But I don't know if it's true, but that's what my grandmother raised us to believe'* (participant MaGumede, 52). Whilst participant MaGumede expresses doubt that eggs made girls' genitals "weak", participant MaMbambo is more certain that food restrictions are ineffective in instilling sexual restraint since she implemented them, however, her girls still displayed poor sexual discipline; *'I never bought them cheese and all these other things ... it's all the same because even though I didn't feed them all that [cheese, eggs, chicken, and milk] they still like boys'* (participant MaMbambo, 62). Considering food and the changes in food practices in the participants' homes over time, the grandmothers constantly vacillate between positive and negative associations relating to traditional foods and practices, such as food restrictions on girls. Their belief in the efficacy of food restrictions wavered when they critically engaged with the topic, although they held on to the belief that remaining sexually conservative was important for girls and young women, especially in aiding them to attain the highly prized status of marriage.

Conclusion

There are various instances where the elderly participants' long-held indigenous knowledge reflected insights that are of late gaining momentum in work that holistically addresses rural peoples nutritional and social needs. On one hand, the older participant's views often registered explicit or indirect suspicion towards prescriptive medical, nutritional or public health messages. On the other hand, they expressed firm views about desirable views that are in synch with public health and medical knowledge and practice that takes health eating in consumerist society seriously. For example, the participants insistence on the superior nutritional value of one-ingredient foods such as *mielies* (corn) porridge over cereals is fully in accord with current research. South Africa is currently mooting warning labels on cereals for containing high levels of sugar and salt (Mahomedy 2023), which confirms their lower health status compared to a single-grain food, like traditional porridge. Similarly, their preference for locally grown vegetables and indigenous herbs over commercial vegetables precedes recent debate by agriculturalists advocating for the use of 'neglected and underutilised indigenous crop species' (NUCS) (Chivenge et al. 2015: 5685) to counter the negative effects of agri-industrial crops on the environment, health and economic wellbeing of local communities and domestic farmers. It is noteworthy that emergent academic knowledge seems to be confirming indigenous and intuitive knowledge that the women and their communities have known for generations (Chivenge et al. 2015; Mabhaudhi et al. 2019).

We also learn that for these women, development outcomes can be understood as much broader than nutrition, education and the possibilities of class advancement. Whilst these are widely espoused by international organisations such as the UN's WHO and Sustainable Development Goals, the women's indigenous knowledge goes further to incorporate the ability to self-sustain through traditional means which do not rely on access to the cash economy. In other words, their worldview accommodates possibilities for livelihoods independent of modern capitalist systems, and in people's own hands. Consequently, for the participants, urban living and the pursuit of employment represent less glamour and success and more of a precarious future for youth who insist on this singular and uncertain approach to survival. It is significant that the women associated real poverty with urban spaces, rather than with rural areas. The latter are constantly seen as spaces offering the opportunity to feed oneself independently, whereas urban spaces are seen to make one vulnerable and one's life precarious. The participants insights on urbanity clearly overturn popular ideas of these spaces being settings for health and wealth or "limitless opportunity". They

are cognizant of the fact that to secure a livelihood, one often does so without the dependable cushion offered by crop cultivation which fosters self-reliance, regardless of employment status.

Through engaging in critical reflection during the workshops, participants started to consider traditional food practices from girls' perspectives and questioning assumed effects of "hot foods". This questioning, as critical theorists argue, is the first step to developing a clear vision of what just and equitable socialisation might be for the adolescent girls and young women under their guidance.

The older women's agencies and knowledge explored in this chapter is in many ways typical of the knowledge and action of other historically marginalised groups. Rendered invisible through ageist, classist and racist hierarchies as "old" and "illiterate" women in rural areas, the grandmothers in this case study, evidently have much to contribute to the world of food distribution and food discourses. Having learned about, for example, recipes and cooking, or the nutritional and health benefits of certain foods from their own mothers, the participants are frequently important repositories of knowledge in the present day, as this chapter exploring methodological work has tried to show. However, it is important for scholars to engage effectively with marginalised subjects to truly listen to and understand the value of the older woman's voice and actual agency. Connecting visual and food literacy can, as suggested, greatly facilitate reflexive and sensitive research engagement and scholarship.

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