Chapter 16

Mass and Social Media, Food and Navigating "Being Black and Middle Class" in South Africa

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Introduction

Racial division and racism continue to plague South African society almost 30 years into democracy. However, post the 1994 democratic elections, classism, racism and segregation operate in a mostly covert and symbolic manner. Classed prejudices and racial tensions persist to shape subjectivities along racial lines, inhibit class progress by black people and affect how black people occupy and experience being middle class. Among the struggles, the black middle class must endure pressures from both the 'white gaze' and the 'black gaze' that continually monitor, police and judge them (Canham and Williams 2016: 25). Affixed to this policing and accompanying judgements are racist and colonially distorted discourses (in academia, the media and the public) regarding the black middle class. These discourses often characterise the black middle class as a one-dimensional, materialistic, lazy, impressionable and immoral group. Additionally, these discourses insist on lumping black people into one homogenous group with homogenous experiences and history. The black middle class consists of different sub-cultures with distinctive origins. Therefore, rather than there being one homogenous black middle class, the black middle class comprises several middle classes, each with its own sub-culture, values, habitus and coding (see Gysman 2022).

The dominant discourses on the black middle class of South Africa often give a false impression that this group developed after the democratisation of South Africa in 1994. However, sociologist Roger Southall traces the genesis of the black middle class to the late 1800s (Southall 2016). Although small, the early black middle class demonstrated its resilience and resolve to survive by thriving, despite attempts by the apartheid government to stymie them and replace them with a comprador black middle class controlled by the state. This indicates that the black middle class is an agential group with a history of thriving independently from "mainstream" society or the

resources it provides. They also have a history of balancing navigating racism, their aspirations and maintaining their dignity, cultural heritage and identity by living a hybridised lifestyle. Figure 16.1 depicts subjects of apartheid engaging in modern culture despite the difficulties and constraints of apartheid. Rather than the typical images of black people under apartheid that exhibit violence and oppressed figures in need of help, these images are evidence that black people have always been determined and agential in their objective to enjoy life and access the privileges of liberty and middle-class life, such as parents supporting and celebrating their children's milestones, pursuing entrepreneurial endeavours and engaging in leisure activities, such as ballroom dancing, ladies socialising and friends spending the day at the beach.

Stylish women dressed in the latest fashion
Location: East London (1950s)

Caption under the photo:
Mrs F.M. Matikinca, a wife of the proprietor of a new trading station at Ngewazi, Middle-drift, looks proudly at the site after the station had been officially opened last week. With her is Mrs G.M. Matikinca, wife of an elder brother of the proprietor.
(**source:** *African Edition* **of the** *Daily Dispatch* **– the 1950s)**

Leisure activities included spending the day at the beach and socialising with friends, family celebrations of milestones and high-culture cultural activities such as ballroom dancing.
Location: East London (1950s)

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Figure 16.1 Visual snapshots of 1950s East London under apartheid: Showcasing fashion, entrepreneurship, and leisure against the backdrop of forced removals and societal upheaval. Source: Morolong (2018)

This study contends that a transgenerational transfer has occurred between this early group and the contemporary black middle class. Contemporary black middle-class aspirations, determination, ethos and lifestyle build on those of the earlier black middle class. Despite the decades that separate these two middle-class groups, beneath the surface of democracy, they still share multiple similarities and must contend with similar colonial pressures that challenge their aspirations and their pursuit of them. As with the early black middle class, the contemporary black middle class has developed strategies to navigate their raced and classed identity and assert their blackness as belonging in society, while also determining and affirming their individualised identity. One of the strategies used by the black middle class is the construction of a distinctive and independent hybridised culture that consists of distinct symbolisms and codes. For black people, symbolic messaging and encoded performances have become essential tools to navigate racism and classism and to communicate affiliation, affinity and belonging. Globally, studies conducted on the black middle class (Meghji 2019; Rollock et al. 2011) reveal that the black middle class feels pressure to develop creative strategies to keep safe and help navigate their black middle-class identity, especially in white public spaces. Middle-classness for a black person, especially of African nationality, is often treated as an extraordinary identity. Perhaps this is because it adheres to neither colonial nor postcolonial imaginations or definitions of "black" or "Africa". Like Lamont and Molnár (2001), this study considers black middle-class consumption a political act. The black middle class utilises consumption and tastes to communicate their class, affiliations and belonging in public spaces. Consumption is used to share their collective identity, defy racism and assert their dignity and agency. Most studies on the black middle class often fail to fully consider the complexities attached to black identity. Even fewer of these studies explore the black middle class as bona fide bearers of cultural capital (Wallace 2018) or address how the black middle class legitimises their wealth and social mobility (Krige 2015). These studies often portray an image of a group that inhibits democracy and economic progression and is obsessed with status and frivolous consumption. Another common problem is that while the world evolves, the character and ambitions of black people are assumed to have not evolved despite the social, economic and political changes that have taken place. Discourses on the black middle class persistently view black people, their experiences and their aspirations as always reacting to whiteness, white history or other external stimuli instead of ideas generated within the group. These are echoes of colonialism in that these discourses strip black people of their independent thought and independent existence outside of European reality.

Food has long been central to black South Africans' communal style of social organisation. Historically, black communities have used food to show love, *ubuntu* (humanity to others), belonging and acceptance, and to build and maintain social relationships (Puoane et al. 2006). Colonialism, apartheid, violence and the displacement experienced disrupted indigenous culture, lifestyles and historical foodscapes such that food and food practices became raced and classed. As a communicant, food utilises a semiotic network of interconnected systems that shape, create and transmit meaning and are shaped, created and transmitted by meaning in return (Parasecoli 2011; Stajcic 2013). Food connects individuals to each other and to society at large. Thus, food can be a political agent that transmits messages relating to identity and belonging, facilitates power and social interactions, and navigates social positions. Therefore, food and foodscapes as an analytical lens can be a powerful lens that offers fresh approaches to analysing class, identity, power, social structures and cultural performances (Ceisel 2018). This chapter is based on a larger study, which took a phenomenological exploration of black middle-class engagements with foodscapes and food culture as expressions of identity (see Gysman 2022). Centring foodscapes and food culture, the study placed a critical food studies lens on black middle-class consumption and tastes. The study was interested in exploring the politics of black middle-class consumption and nuanced dynamics within a group that has developed its own meanings, class dynamics and food rituals. As such, two intersectional lenses that drew on Bourdieu (1973) positioned the study. A system-centred intersectional lens (Choo and Ferree 2010) was used to explore objective structures such as racism and structural socio-economic challenges faced by black South Africans. A process-centred intersectional lens (Choo and Ferree 2010) was used to explore how the black middle class is constructing and scripting—simultaneously—a distinct black identity, a middle-class identity, and their self-determined group symbolisms, meanings and habitus. Earlier, this paper established that black middle-class consumption patterns can be complex political statements. What follows is a discussion on black middle-class tastes and engagements with food culture as expressions of identity and belonging. This chapter is organised as follows: a discussion on black middle-class experiences of racism in dining spaces; followed by an examination of the transition and influences of evolving food culture and tastes in the black community and last, an analysis of select popular Instagram accounts as case studies to analyse how the black middle-class use food to construct code and perform identity.

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Dining while black in South Africa: Black middle-class engagements with food-scapes and food culture

Several examples by African authors highlight the socio-political significance of food, food culture and food symbolism in post-colonial African societies. For example, Ama Ata Aidoo's *Dilemma of the Ghost* (Aidoo 1987) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's semi-autobiographical *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga 1989*)*. These works of fiction on post-colonial African life and experiences engage food in critical ways. Food and food symbolism are used to navigate the characters socially and highlight the politics and power dynamics of identity, race, class, gender, social position, culture, status and nationhood. The *Dilemma of the Ghost* draws out cultural differences and shifting African, global and gendered identifications by demonstrating how different characters relate to the same food items or how characters respond to various food items and food rituals. In *Nervous Conditions*, food is palpable in articulating race, status, upward mobility, oppression and class within Zimbabwean society and family structures. All the women in the novel navigate the complexities of being black, female and *Shona* (African tribe) in Zimbabwean society. Food describes the women and navigates and inscribes their femininity, womanhood and social positions both in the family and in society at large. Dangarembga's (1989) work vividly demonstrates how food constructs and articulates cultural customs, power and status. *Nervous Conditions* also articulates the psychological connection between people, food and society. For example, Harper's (2016) observation that trauma can manifest in bodies through relationships with food is exemplified in *Nervous Conditions* by Tambu's anxiety when eating "good" food for the first time and Nyasha's bulimia. Both are young women at a precarious stage in their lives and of the same family, whose relationship with food articulates their anxieties stemming from differentiated gendered, classed and raced experiences.

Food and dining as a symbolism of identity, authority and belonging are visibly observable in a contemporary South African dining culture. For black people, dining and food culture are experiences of both invisibility and hyper-visibility. In Cape Town, for example, the dining culture in certain parts of the city and at certain establishments is visibly racially imbalanced and non-reflective of the South African population. Black people (including black international tourists) have made numerous complaints about the racist dining culture in Cape Town. It is not uncommon for black diners to experience exclusion and discrimination via various schemes, such as policing and sexualisation of black women's clothing and bodies (for example, see Figures 16.2 and 16.3) and

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racialised classism. The classist and racist lenses of the white gaze are often quick to assume black people's economic and cultural capital. Racialised classism often involves profiling black subjects and either making them invisible or hyper-visible. Whether the black subject is made invisible or hyper-visible, the message is the same: the black subject does not belong in the space. In the following recollection, well-known South African author Ndumiso Ngcobo recalls he and his wife's experience while waiting patiently to be seated at a restaurant in Cape Town:

> They literally did not see us, for seven minutes. We were just invisible; we were just standing there. And then a white family came, I mean they had not been there for literally 15 seconds and someone [white waitress] came and, "Hi, table for five?" My wife and I are like, "Excuse us, we have been standing here for almost 10 minutes" and then she says, "I'll be with you in a moment." And then back to the family of five. (Ndlovu 2021: 8)

However, as described earlier, black diners do not endure racial profiling, discrimination and judgement only from white people. The "black" gaze also influences how the black middle-class experiences or occupies their middle-class status. Figure 16.4 shows examples of how, sometimes, black diners must endure discrimination, racial profiling and prejudicial assumptions from other black people. In 2016, Scott Magethuka shared on X (formerly known as Twitter) his dining experience at The Bungalow in Clifton, Cape Town. Magethuka and his partner were marked on their bill by their waiter, Mike Dzenga, a Zimbabwean national, as '2 blacks' rather than marking their table number. The offence some people took to this description indicates black people are sensitive to being reduced to simply a racial marker. Thus, for black people, being stripped of any other identifier (and subsequently, markers of success) and being reduced to a racialised identifier (which has low social status) is personal and sensitive, regardless of who the perpetrator is. Linked to the prejudicial assumptions and reactions of the black gaze when the object of its gaze is the black middle class or a black person in a "middle-" or "upper-" class setting are transgenerational traumas and internalised messages about race, class, cultural capital, status and belonging. Most of these messages have placed blackness at the bottom of the social hierarchy, devalued aspirations and cultural capital carried by black people and glamorised black struggle and poverty as badges of honour.

It's a shame that one of my favourite restaurants in Cape Town had to literally discriminate, sexualise and profile me in such a way. According to the manager, what I was wearing was too revealing.
We left the restaurant because there's no way we will spend a dime in such an establishment.

@zenzerorestaurant is located literally in front of the beach. And I can't wear this?
So what's going to happen in summer.

After sitting down and receiving the most half assed apology ever from the manager, we left.

Figure 16.2: Nigerian model, influencer and television personality, Adeola Ariyo was reportedly turned away by the manager at ZenZero, a beachside restaurant in Camps Bay, Cape Town for being dressed "indecently". The manager is reported to have stated Adeola's crop top was a bra
Source: Pasiya (2021)

@Mazikhali_Veto commented: "Cape Town restaurants do that all the time, two weeks back, I was turned away at Bungalow Clifton by the bouncer saying my dress code wasn't meeting their standards. I respectfully left because I just couldn't understand."

@HlumelaFinca wrote: "This happened to me and my friends in a restaurant called Bilboa in Camps Bay. They said that we were dressed provocatively and that their restaurant doesn't allow that. We were wearing summer dresses."

Another user, @Acesotshisa said: "This also happens at Bobo's, and they said that my friend's shoulders were exposed when she was wearing a simple black dress."

Figure 16.3: Twitter users recount experiences of discriminatory dress codes in Cape Town restaurants, highlighting instances of refusal based on ambiguous standards

Figure 16.4: A controversial bill from The Bungalow in Clifton sparks outrage on social media after customers are described as "2 BLACKS", raising questions about racial sensitivity and accountability in hospitality establishments. Source: Sethusa (2016)

Although African cuisine is popularised and celebrated in contemporary global food culture, the continent's culinary landscape and food traditions emerge from a torturous, violent, dehumanising and oppressive history (Mellett 2020). Secondly, despite this "celebration" of African cuisine, Africa and Africans on the continent still carry a stigma and negative connotations. African cuisine, like other ethnic cuisines, is acceptable in mainstream society only as far as it pleases "white" tastes. In South Africa, colonialism and apartheid have strongly influenced and racialised food choices, tastes and knowledge. The history of race and class in South Africa includes colonial regimes using food and foodways to construct racial and ethnic identities, stratify society, justify segregation and cement racial biases. The following argument by colonial administrators demonstrates that food tastes and "ethnic" diets in South Africa were fabricated and justified through colonial policies aimed at dividing South African society:

> The nationalities you mention are none of them in their own countries accustomed to European diet. The St. Helena lives on yams and fish. The West Indies Negro on plantains, yams and fish (chiefly salt). The Chinese on anything he can get and the Arab on rice, dates, etc. Why then should... they be fed on the same diet as the flesh eating Europeans? (Peté and Devenish 2005: 15)

> The Cape men, Creoles, St. Helenas, etc. now grouped under the name of Hottentot are the best labourers in the Gaol. Many of them have European blood in their veins; all have been, equally with Europeans, accustomed to animal food. It appears to me most unreasonable as well as unjust, that these people, only on the grounds of colour, should be reduced to a diet, which in comparison with that of Europeans is near to starvation. (Peté and Devenish 2005: 15)

The above quotes reflect how ethnic diets and stereotypes about different ethnic groups were created by European colonists. The pronouncements about the Chinese and Arabs demonstrate and reinforce colonial prejudices surrounding Orientalism and racist descriptions of Eastern diets, while the seemingly "positive" points about racially-mixed Cape men indicate that due to their partial "white blood", they should be entitled to a "more superior diet" that includes eating meat. The quotes above reflect how colonisers encoded and racialised the culinary scape in South Africa, thereby laying the structures for future culinary "scapes" and racialisation of food and social structures. Certain keywords, such as "unreasonable" and "unjust" are used by the administrators

to justify and reinforce the racialisation of food and diets and to lay claims of exclusivity to certain foods (in the case of the above example, meat). These distinctions are constructed to differentiate and create great distance between the "master" (who is European) and the "savage native". The description of non-European diets as being "near starvation" encodes all the non-European diets as lacking and sub-par, while simultaneously scripting the European diet as being superior. Congruently, these narratives racialize and class-encode diets by scripting race to foods and encoding hierarchical symbolic value to foods. Contemporary black middle-class engagements with food and global food culture, both online and offline, evidence Africans (and Africans in diaspora) are interested in reconfiguring their imaginations of themselves and their cultures (in this case symbolised by food and food practices), reclaiming their tastes, and reconstructing their identity. Thus, contemporary black middle-class engagements with food can be read as political resistance or warfare against these colonial constructions of race, taste and diet. Black middle-class engagements often decode white symbolisms as a strategy to inflect and deploy "white" symbolic codes in ways that configure racially distinct black middle-class identification (Henderson 2007; Meghji 2019; Rollock et al. 2011).

South Africa's culinary landscape has many influences that have hybridised cuisine, tastes and food preparation. The transformation and adaptation of black people's lifestyle and culture can be traced to influences from other cultures and the adaptation thereof into black people's lifestyle during apartheid (Southall 2016). This transformation and adaptation include black people's identity, tastes and food preparation. For example, the practice of slavery in the western world introduced slaves into South Africa, and some have noted that this entailed tremendous cultural and culinary fusion (Mellet 2020). Through colonialism and apartheid, western culture was enforced upon black people and imported slaves into South Africa. Imported slaves brought with them their own culinary tastes, knowledge and food culture. This, together with the enforced dominance of western culture (including food culture) and the consequences of apartheid on indigenous social and physical structures, radically interrupted indigenous foodscapes, food knowledge and food culture. In contemporary times, the migration of Africans from other countries on the continent, as well as migrations by other nations from the global north, has also had an impact on the national culinary landscape. This has resulted in an eclectic kaleidoscope of cultures in South Africa that influence the modern black person's lifestyle, including the food they consume, are exposed to and subsequently have developed tastes for. Modern technology and globalisation have also impacted local culinary tastes and food preparation, including the preparation of indigenous food.

Constructing black middle-class tastes and identity

Icon Mama Dorah Sitole is considered a pioneer not only for bringing evolution to dinner tables in black homes, but also for bringing a culinary revolution to the local mass media landscape. Sitole entered the culinary industry as a junior home economist at the Canned Food Advisory Service. While working there, she trained as a chef at *Le Cordon Bleu*. After her time at the Canned Food Advisory Service, Sithole became the food editor for the national lifestyle magazine, *'True Love'*, which targets middle-class black women (Hartebeest 2019). Sitole and *'True Love'* magazine's influence significantly contributed to creating a distinct cuisine that unified indigenous South African cultures to create a distinctly modernised African identity (Sitole and True Love Magazine 1999). With *'True Love'*, Sitole merged African cuisine with modern culture and influences from other cultures to create a distinctive hybrid cuisine that, in many ways, echoes *'Ebony'* magazine's agenda and contribution to the development of African American "soul food" and the construction of an African American identity that cuts across economic classes. *'Ebony'* magazine and the concept of "soul food" had a political and social agenda: to unify the black community, express black identity and economic progression, commiserate a shared history, inculcate cultural pride and construct a unified and distinct black identity (Henderson 2007). Placing food and recipes at the centre, *'Ebony'* and *'Ebony Jr.'* reconstructed imaginations of blackness, black family life and black identity. These reimaginations included gendered and generational imaginations of the black family (Henderson 2007). As the first black food editor in South Africa, Sitole developed creative, modernised and inspired recipes that were clearly influenced by her training at *Le Cordon Bleu*. Sitole's recipes have been a great influence in the black community and have influenced upcoming young black chefs and the average home cook alike. Using standard ingredients and food already familiar in the black community, Sitole inspired reimaginations of traditional dishes and the average weekday meal. For example, Sitole and *'True Love'* magazine's cookbook, *'Cooking from Cape to Cairo: A Taste of Africa'*, features Sitole's take on indigenous dishes on the continent (Sithole and True Love Magazine 1999). The recipes featured in the cookbook demonstrate Sitole's creative hybridisation of cultures, traditions and global culture. Sitole's recipes often involve upscaling and re-coding food items conventionally coded as "black people's food", "staple" or "poor people's food" (for example, maize meal). Sitole's recipes frequently create an "exotic" and interesting dish that gives new symbolic value to common foods or dishes. Her recipes borrow flavours and tastes from other cultures. Sitole would then merge these borrowed tastes or flavours with a simple staple that is commonly found in a black household to create a new and interesting dish—for example, chocolate pudding made

with maize meal. Another signature characteristic of Sitole's recipes is how "simple" and easy her recipes are to replicate. Perhaps due to knowing the stresses black people experience and the unique challenges of being a black woman, Sitole desired to make cooking less of a stress and more of a joy for women. Her ingredients are also relatively cheap, easy to source and staples an individual can easily find in their pantry. Mobility and access continue to be challenging for black people in South Africa; however, most of her ingredients are easy to find in the township. Thus, even mobility-challenged and township-bound people are able to reproduce middle-class tastes. Sitole also used presentation and staging to infuse and communicate African culture and black identity, thereby encoding a distinct ethnic identity in the recipes.

Sitole's influence (along with global culture) can be observed in the general modern lifestyle of both rural and urban black people. For example, Sitole's recipes have influenced meals served at special events and traditional ceremonies both in urban and rural areas. Volunteer cooks at ceremonies create with pride and personalised creativity "modernised" versions of even simple dishes such as *umngqusho* (samp and beans). Thus, standard ingredients found in black homes are turned into prestigious culinary adventures and cooking at home or catering for traditional ceremonies into proud moments of self-expression. Sitole's recipes not only reimagined "traditional" dishes; they inspired women to feel pride and joy over their creations and shaped tastes in the black community. Therefore, these recipes are a form of political work that re-inscript the symbolic value of black dinner tables and pantries. They also reclaim the dignity of the black dinner table and pantry, black tastes and black identity. Sitole has always maintained that her biggest inspiration is the preservation of indigenous culture and foods. This in many ways makes Sitole and '*True Love*' magazine's agenda like that of the political agenda and work of African American "soul food" as well as '*Ebon'y* magazine's contribution to this agenda in the United States (Henderson 2007). The "upscaling" of "black" food and the black dinner table is both a political revolution and a renewal of culture and knowledge within the black community. Often, the "upscaling" is perceived as westernisation, assimilation or code-switching. When a black person demonstrates modern culture, they are immediately perceived to be aspiring to be "white". However, this paper contests that an expanded understanding is needed. This paper argues that black middle-class performance of modern culture is an agential revision and adaptation of established norms within black culture.

The process involved in "upscaling black food" replicates Lévi-Strauss's bricolage (Schmidt and De Kloet 2017). Within cultural studies, the concept of bricolage has been used to describe 'the

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remixing, reconstructing and re-using of separate artefacts, actions, ideas, signs, symbols and styles in order to create new insights or meanings' (Schmidt and De Kloet 2017: 3). Like Lévi-Strauss's bricoleur, the black community is limited by political and social structures and cultural tools at their disposal for the construction of cultural capital and identity; thus, they must utilise tools that already exist and are available for them to use, including repurposing codes and artefacts that exist in the white community as well as other communities. "Borrowing" from other communities does not by any means mean that practitioners have been "enlightened". Rather, it means that practitioners have undertaken an agential choice and an agential decision on how to incorporate that choice into their lives. While this may not be true for all who follow modern culture, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that practitioners of this practice are not aspiring to "whiten" their identity; rather, they are preoccupied and engaged with cultural diversity in the present and affirming a sense of being black in relation to this diversity. There are several factors that set limitations on black people's agency, and the desire to adapt whiteness to blackness does not hold true for everyone. Numerous examples of dishes, recipes and advertisements support the idea of black cooks and eaters exploring culturally diverse food in ways that do not amount to "claiming whiteness". These practices sometimes consist of engaging in or incorporating something strongly connoted as black or African with ingredients, presentation styles, or adapted dishes that are associated with, for example, north Africa, Mexico or India.

Performance, identity and social media

The evolution and growth of technology as an integral part of life in the second decade of the new millennium have led to social media's growing dominance. Technology and social media have become the norms of an individual's contemporary lifestyle. Black middle-class predilection for popular culture and social media is one of the indicators of this group's evolution alongside global evolution. For this group, social media has become a space for learning and exchange, both from group members and from others. One of the attractions of social media is the perceived agency it allows the user. Sutherland (2019) describes social media as a safe space that liberates black people to enjoy leisure pastimes. The digital food space consists of a range of communities that provide discourses, knowledge and the sharing of food culture. In line with Bourdieu's (1973) field theory, for black people, social media is also a political field where members of the community can vie

for power, recognition and social position. Digital food spaces provide safe spaces for the black middle class to engage in political work revolving around food knowledge and politics, identity politics and the politics of culinary authority and visibility. The autonomy provided by social media has provided ground for the rise of food politics that trouble and question mainstream practices and knowledge. Social media allows the black middle class to communicate and express their successes, legitimise their economic and cultural capital and assert their belonging in the global society, both to the world and to the group. What follows is an analysis and discussion of black middle-class engagements and online practices on social media platforms, such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and X in relation to how black middle-class people navigate food cultures and invest meanings in certain foods and food rituals. The online practices of black middle-class people constitute what could in many ways be described as a form of political agency that aims to configure a distinct, but also hybridised "black" identity. This rebellion against normative (white and western-centric) middle-class taste is sometimes deliberate and is at other times an organic outcome of acquired tastes. Black middle-class tastes are often characterised by an unidentifiable, elusive and intangible sense of creating something "new". These "new" tastes are expressed through hybridised cuisines, food events, dishes, food flavours and foodways. The "new" black middle-class tastes engage in silent warfare against established norms that have often worked to persuade them that their food and cultural practices are "backwards", "unsophisticated" or "crude". The evolving food culture among the black middle class—in all its complexity and diversity—often destabilises and discombobulates established whiteness. Thus, whiteness is placed precariously in what appears to be a stable hierarchy of food standards and taste.

Digital expressions of black identity are performed in various ways; for example, social media accounts may include claiming cultural or African identity in captions and presenting food that is associated with an African cultural identity. These African-themed identity performances are staged within a modern aesthetic (see Figure 16.5 for examples). Figure 16.5 demonstrates how existing codes and coded artefacts or aesthetics are repurposed to create new narrations and new meanings. These coded narratives do not only communicate group tastes or African identity, they are also used to communicate personal identity and tastes. Lorna Maseko's post (Figure 16.5), for example, expresses that her taste buds are particular to certain tastes; thus, even common foodstuffs in the black community, such as tripe, must meet her tastes. To give a further indication about her identity and dispositions, the way Maseko prepared her tripe (which is discernible by its presentation) suggests her class position and cultural capital, expressed as knowledge and familiarity with other

food cultures, and therefore, her "cultured" tastes. The Lazy *Makoti's* presentation of soup (Figure 16.5) also communicates a similar message. However, whatever distance from "blackness" these messages potentially create is mitigated by incorporating curated African symbolism. These images use different symbolisms to connect the performances with African identity. For example, Lorna Maseko uses *pap* (a traditional porridge/ polenta) and how it is presented (both are identifiable symbols in southern Africa) to connect her "non-traditional" preparation of tripe to southern African culture, thereby demonstrating she still identifies with her African identity. In contrast, the Lazy *Makoti* uses her body and traditional jewellery (ostensibly connecting her being) to connect her African identity to her cultural capital and tastes, which are symbolised by her soup.
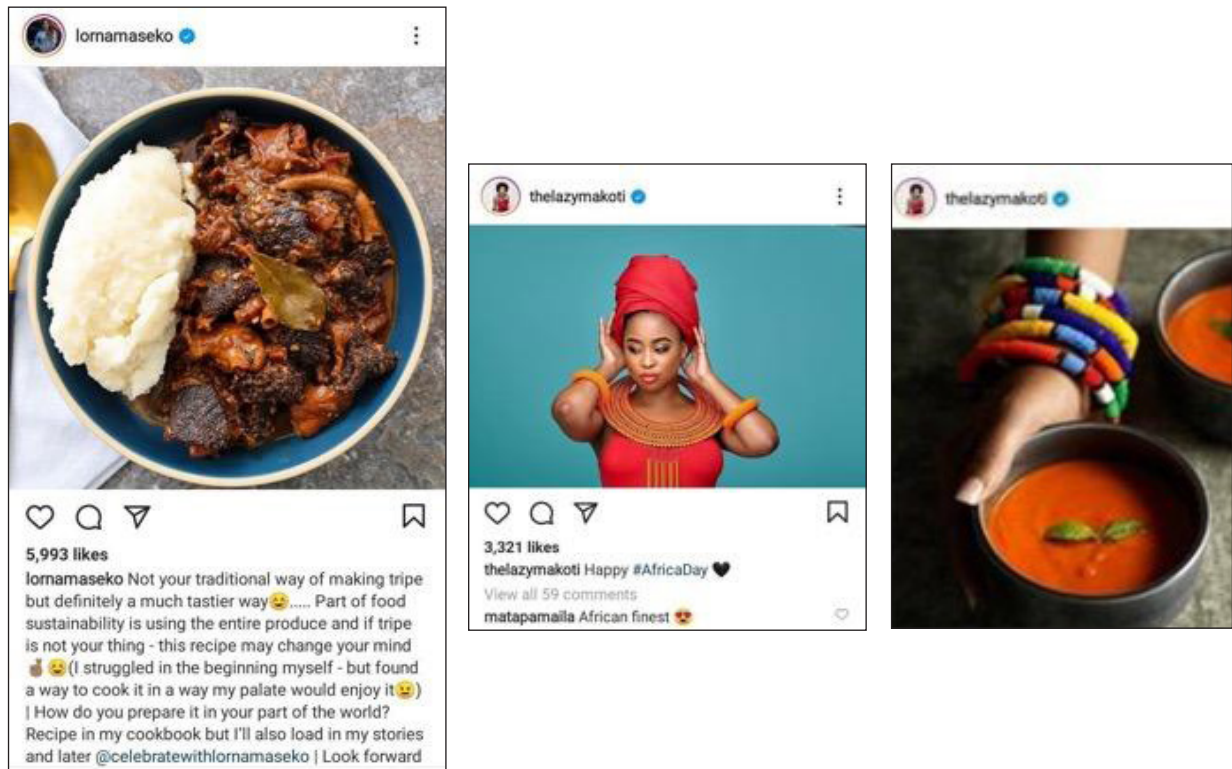
Figure 16.5: Digital expressions of black identity on social media platforms like Instagram showcase a fusion of modern aesthetics with African-themed performances
Source: Maseko (2021); Seshoene (2021a, b)

It is not always the case that practitioners of this practice will use coded African symbolism or artefacts to connect African culture or their African identity to their performance. Figure 16.6 below, of Instagrammer Jozi Foodie Fix exemplifies what may perhaps be described as high-level black middle-class cultural capital. Rich tastes, decadent food, travel and cultural exposure are highly emphasised. Economic capital is also encoded in these pictures, which adds credibility to the authenticity of her performance. Unlike Figure 16.5 above, Jozi Foodie Fix does not use African-coded artefacts or captions. She still does, however, communicate her African identity in other, more subtle ways, such as how she wears her hair.

Figure 16.6: Instagrammer Jozi Foodie Fix embodies high-level black middle-class cultural capital through her curated feed, emphasising rich tastes, decadent food and cultural exposure. Source: Jozi Foodie Fix

Jozi Foodie Fix's account is strongly focussed on food. Yet, one is still able to sense her identity. Figure 16.6 (and most of her Instagram account) does not say much about her African identity; other aspects of her identity, such as her blackness and being a mother, have an undertone. Like The Lazy *Makoti*, Jozie Foodie Fix uses her body and tastes to connect herself with global culture. She successfully merges her black identity with a contemporary culture that is often ascribed as "white". Her lack of use of "African symbolisms" may indicate that she views her race and ethnicity as inherent and self-evident, not just because of her physical appearance, but by virtue of her way of being, even in engagements with "whiteness". Thus, Jozie Foodie Fix connects her black identity to middle-classness in a way that involves assimilation into mainstream middle-classness. This is in line with the strategies adopted by Africans in the diaspora described by Henderson (2007), Meghji (2019) and Rollock et al. (2011). Another possible explanation, perhaps one Bourdieu would use, is that Jozie Foodie Fix's expression of self does not use coded artefacts because she relies on her cultural capital to communicate with others and navigate her belonging. Cultural capital performances require a set of markers; thus, relaxed poses suggest this lifestyle is her norm; select food and drinks; gorgeous landscapes; and different exotic spaces are brought together to create the perception of an affluent, cultured, and well-travelled individual. Even her captions and the staging of her body are designed to emphasise her cultural capital, while at the same time relaying her individualised identity. Bourdieu (1973) contends that society is made up of political fields, where members of society acquire and accumulate capital to gain power and position themselves in power positions. The economic and cultural capital coded in Jozie Foodie Fix's performance suggests a large economic and cultural capital endowment. According to Bourdieu's (1973) theory, this large endowment affords Jozie Foodie Fix the power to navigate and position herself in the field freely. In other words, her cultural and economic capital is large enough to give her the power to position herself to belong both in western society and African society without her legitimacy being questioned in either society.

Other ways in which the black middle class has been involved with food and the culinary terrain provided by mass and social media are the explosion and growing visibility of African chefs, self-professed "foodies", food bloggers and vloggers. Black South Africans' interest in and engagement with food can be witnessed in mass media and social media. It is common to find viewers commenting and discussing food with each other on social media platforms after an episode of TV shows, such as '*Date My Family*' and '*Come Dine With Me SA*'. Viewers engage online during and after the shows, discussing the participants and the food, in particular. Luxury lifestyle magazines,

such as *'Visi Magazine', 'The Insider SA'* and *'Taste Magazine'* as well as TV shows, such as *'Siba's Table', 'Masterchef SA'* and *'The Expresso Show',* feature black chefs who share their knowledge, skills and recipes. These features mark the rise of young black celebrity chefs, such as Siba Mtongana, Wandile Mabaso and The Lazy *Makoti*. Black chefs and food gurus have been influential in shaping tastes in the black community and disrupting foodways and mainstream imaginations of "black" food as well as expressions of black culture in contemporary society. The growing influence of black celebrity chefs has disrupted the South African culinary scape, restaurant industry and culinary training in several ways. For instance, Wandile Mabaso's restaurant, *Les Créatifs,* entry into the high-end dining industry has been described as 'creative', 'shaking up the Johannesburg food scene', 'world-class' and 'first of its kind' (Cardova n.d.). *Les Créatifs* is the materialisation of head chef and owner Mabaso's accumulated cultural capital, embodied as skill, knowledge and expertise as well as his cosmopolitan experiences as a black middle-class person and international chef. Smit (2018) describes Siba Mtongana's evident agency and joy of performing "traditional" femininity in Siba's Table as troubling northern feminist views on traditional gender roles of women and the kitchen as being oppressive. Much like *Ebony* magazine did for the African American community with soul food, Siba and her husband, Brian, a prominent feature of her cooking show, demonstrate reimagining's of gendered roles in the modern black family. Siba's performances of modern mother and housewife demonstrate modernised "black" femininity that echoes The Lazy *Makoti*. The Lazy *Makoti's* cookbook, social media presence and cooking classes (among other services she provides) inspire her followers and create a reimagination of how the modern working African woman can balance her working life (in and beyond the home) and her modern lifestyle and tastes with her African identity and cultural heritage. Her recipes include creative and modernised preparations of "traditional" South African cuisine.

The work that is performed by these three chefs influences the development of food rituals, specific food tastes and dishes that are "prestigious" but not "white" or "western". Although their work is encoded to appeal to mainstream sensibilities, it is also encoded with a distinctive African identity that hybridises blackness and whiteness, constructing a distinctive Afropolitan identity, as exemplified by *Les Créatifs'* decor and ambience which blends African culture through art with cosmopolitan menu offerings (see Figure 16.7). Figure 16.7 illustrates the various ways that distinct African identity is weaved into global culinary culture through encoding. Following Lévi-Strauss's bricolage theory, these images also illustrate how the black middle class re-uses existing codes and coded artefacts that have at times been used to disempower and discriminate against them.

This re-use and how it serves to re-script, re-empower and re-dignify African identity, black culture and black capital, are very important. For example, the strategic use of certain artefacts, colours, artworks and even certain food items, such as game meat from animals found exclusively in Africa, is arranged to communicate and distinguish African identity. Added together with certain aspects of globalised food culture, both African identity and black capital are revalued and re-coded.
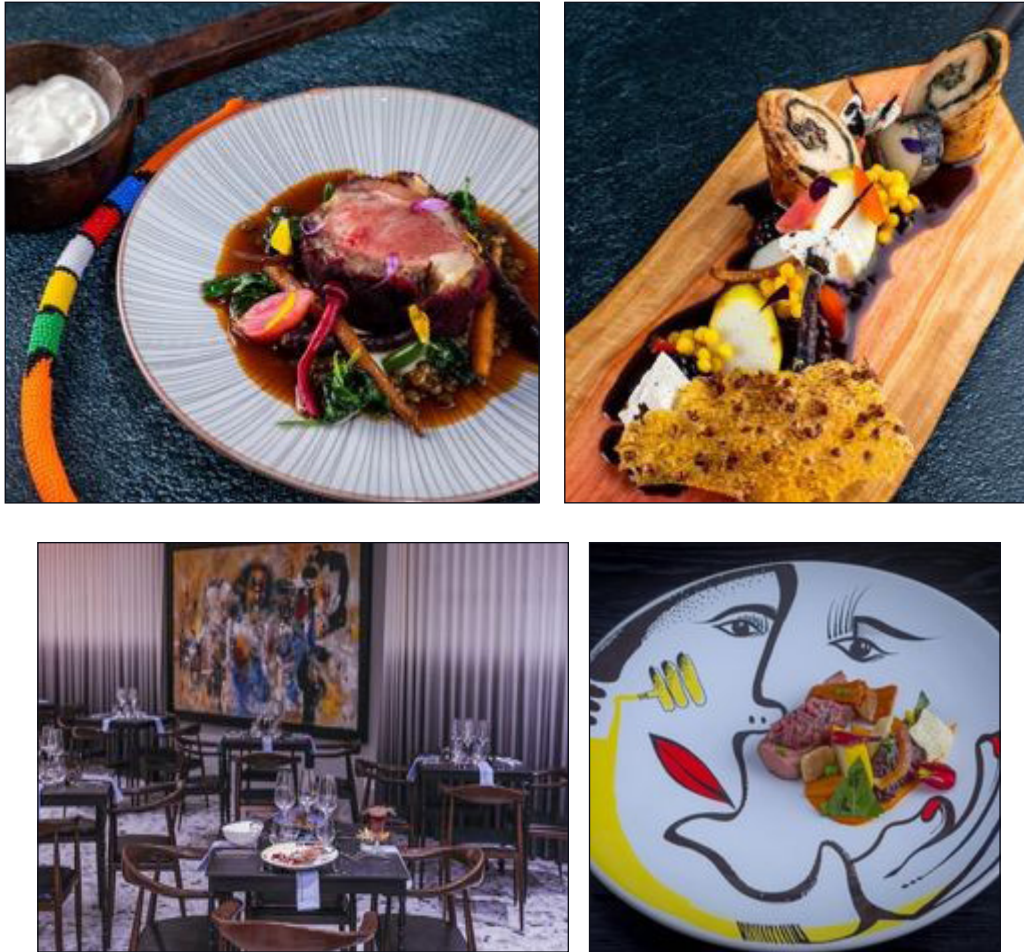
Figure 16.7: The culinary creations of Les Créatifs not only influence food rituals and tastes but also weave a distinctive African identity into global culinary culture. Through a blend of African-inspired decor and cosmopolitan menu offerings, they construct an Afropolitan identity that hybridises blackness and whiteness. Source: *Les Créatifs* (n.d. a, b) (website and Facebook)

Conclusion

Although there is a vast body of discourse on the black middle class and its consumption patterns, there is still little that is understood about this group. This is because most of the discourses on this group are racist echoes of colonial perceptions and readings of Africa, Africans and black culture. Very few academic studies explore black people (of both Africa and the diaspora) as bona fide cultural capital bearers who are creative, industrious and enterprising (Krige 2015; Wallace 2018). However, the problem is not limited to pro-white supremacy and racist discourses. Scholarly practices mean non-western communities are still confined to white hegemonic standards and meanings. For the black community, this has resulted in them always being read in very narrow ways by researchers. The past two decades of the millennium have seen an unapologetically loud and growing demand to decolonise scholarship. Historically marginalised communities have been calling for new epistemologies and expanded readings of cultures and communities that do not subscribe to dominant hegemonic western-centric standards. As it has been demonstrated in this chapter, the black middle class is highly complex, and their consumption, tastes and performances are more nuanced than they may first appear and are traditionally read by researchers. The black middle class is confronted daily by racism and multiple pressures, both from the white gaze and the black glaze. To mitigate these pressures and to navigate the white gaze and black gaze, this group has developed elaborate performative acts anchored on tastes and consumption. Consumption for the black middle class is both an act of leisure and a political statement. As a political statement, black middle-class consumption confronts western-centric claims of dominance through symbolic narratives that assert African identity alongside contemporary global culture, which is often dominated by western-centric culture.

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