

## **Bodies, Matter and Feminist Freedoms: Revisiting the Politics of Food**

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### **Introduction**

Writing and research about food in South Africa has generated a wave of work on the gendered dimensions of access to affordable food as well gendered labour exploitation in cooking and food production. Like the increasing work on gender and food in other postcolonial contexts<sup>1</sup>, this research reflects diverse political and theoretical foundations. Some scholarship tends to endorse a development paradigm, explicitly or indirectly showing that dominant models for producing, processing, thinking about and distributing food should be mainstreamed or adapted to address the “food security” needs of subordinate and exploited groups, especially women (see, for example, Dodson, Chiwerza and Riley, 2012). However, as Megan Carney (2016) argues, “‘food insecurity’ as a concept stems from an ongoing politics of knowledge” that naturalizes or ignores “political-economic or social problems ...all the while dehumanizing those who suffer” (2014: 2). This broader socioeconomic context is confronted in research into food *sovereignty*, rather than *security*, with scholarship and intellectual activism addressing the oppressiveness of dominant developmental, global, national and domestic food systems<sup>2</sup>, as well as the need for socially marginal groups, rather than experts or dominant paradigms, to drive liberating food systems. In many ways, then, food security and food sovereignty studies provide divergent views about the causes of and politico-economic solutions to injustices (especially gendered). Yet the determinist focus on causality in both food security and food sovereignty

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Bellows, A, Valente, F, Lemke, S and de Lara, M, 2015; and a recent special issue on land, gender and food security for the journal, *Feminist Economics*, 2014

<sup>2</sup> see, for example, Ngcoya and Kumarakulasignam, 2016

studies underplays the fact that food is not only a functional and nutritious source for ensuring productive bodies; food is also linked to feelings, agencies and pleasures that extend our conventional understandings of the dimensions of freedoms.

This article reflects on these expansive freedoms, attempting to rethink liberating relationships around foodwork, eating and the materiality of food at a time when a fixation with human economic productivity seems to dominate even progressive research and activism. As the work of postcolonial feminists such as Jacqui Alexander (2005)<sup>3</sup> indicate, feminist intellectual activism, especially in contexts where gendered oppression is intimately embedded in colonial, racial, neo-imperial and homophobic violence, seeks to explore threatened or denied existential freedoms. Reconsidering the politics of food could therefore entail much more than challenging injustices around rights to control, eat and manage a source of bodily sustenance. It could also explore the liberating ways of knowing and senses of self that certain practices and relationships around food yield.

In developing this exploration, I draw on new materialist phenomenology, which focuses on the productive freedoms of bodies and organic matter without abandoning attention to their situation place within and influence by dominant relationships and discourses. Elizabeth Grosz, whose work exemplifies feminist new materialism, argues that the concepts of autonomy and struggle invoked in feminist, race and class politics often function as “a mantra of liberation” (2010, 139). Anchored in discourses of political philosophy, these concepts are mobilized in the interests of eliminating oppression. Grosz proposes a more productive approach to power as “the condition of or capacity for action in life”; consequently, she identifies the capacity of human bodies, material things as well as the interaction between bodies and matter to generate new, anti-oppressive and humanizing relationships. I draw on Grosz’s reframing of political freedoms in my treatment of food and politics. I show especially how

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<sup>3</sup> Jacqui Alexander’s *Pedagogies of Crossing* offers compelling arguments about connecting personal, psychological, emotional and spiritual quests for well-being to socio-economic struggles for justice.

productive freedoms are embedded in socially neglected practices (such as gendered foodwork and care) and discursively codified cognition (constructs of “feeling”, “sensory experience” and “the body” as feminized). I refer to my own memories of food events, as well as my knowledge of others’ representations of and engagements with the materiality of food. My rationalization for this eclecticism is that, because food is so quotidian, it provides an entry point for connecting autobiographical, informal and specialist knowledge in ways that deepen understanding of food’s apparently commonplace, but densely philosophical, political and cultural meanings.

### **Agencies in foodwork**

These dense meanings often surface in women’s domestic cooking, an activity often seen simply as part of women’s socially prescribed (and often coerced) care work. In fact, a variety of feminist critiques analyze women’s cooking only in relation to socially prescribed gendered divisions of labour (see Cairns and Johnstone, 2015). From the perspective of these critiques, the preparation of food for families and communities exemplifies the naturalized roles that women are socialized into or pressurized to perform.

In the face of this explanation, some studies focus on the creative dimensions of cooking and eating, arguing that women’s cooking often involves their authoritative and creative agencies. Stressing these creative meanings does not mean denying that women’s foodwork is usually prescribed in patriarchal societies. Nor does it entail refuting how women’s acquisition of identities can be repressively shaped by beliefs about their “naturally” needing to nurture others. But it does mean acknowledging how women’s agencies as cooks and feeders can create sustaining relational bonds, generating a sense of security, wellbeing and contentment both for the cooks themselves, as well as for those they feed.

My childhood memories of women who cook have taught me a great deal about the ambiguities associated with women’s cooking and feeding, but left me with a strong sense of the powerful impact of this work. My mother, who had a full-time job as a nurse, and eventually as a matron, cooked meals daily and

devoted much of her energy to ensuring that they were varied and enjoyable. She attached tremendous importance to making dishes “from scratch”, refusing to buy, for example, shop-made pastry or jam. Importantly, she usually modified the recipes she used, so that their original form would be given a distinctively personal slant. Her improvisation and eclectic use of various recipes, cookbooks and culinary traditions illustrate a dynamic transformation of food items with distinct trajectories into personalized dishes that expressed her imaginativeness and knowledge.

My mother’s meals and cakes were well-known among extended family members, my parents’ friends, and friends of my siblings and I. Rather than registering overt appreciation for the thanks or congratulations she received, she responded as though others’ gratitude were her due. Her dedication as a cook included frequent hunts through cookbooks, magazines and from friends and acquaintances, so that by the time she reached her sixties, she had acquired a vast collection of cookbooks, cooking magazines, as well as her own and others’ hand-written recipes, a number of which were collected in notebooks and files.

Many would be able to recount memories, similar to mine, of women - who seem to have very little time inbetween paid and reproductive work - whose determination and zeal resulted in their finding the time and energy to cook with care, skill and passion. While their activity reveals their agency, responses to their cooking illustrate its potential to define and transform relationships. My mother’s enthusiasm and culinary skills, for example, led to her being recognized within our family, as well as among friends, neighbours and colleagues as a creator and custodian of taste, a specialist who determined what good food was and how to make it. Her cooking could therefore be understood as epistemological: a way of knowing, understanding and communicating about sensory pleasures. Claude Levi Strauss’ *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969) persuasively argues that cooking functions as a language, enabling social beings to transform the “raw” into collectively appreciated meals through productive processes that both shape and are shaped by culture. Seen in this way, many cooks, despite the raced, gendered or classed statuses

confirming their social marginality, perform powerful social roles in fashioning cultural tastes within families or wider communities.

Arguments that women acquire respect through cooking sometimes suggest that cooking expertise, among various feminized tasks of reproduction, is what many women pursue in the absence of other skills or creative outlets. Popularized images of women and cooking in the mass media reinforce the idea that women complacently or humbly seek others' approval for and through their foodwork. Certain feminists also make this assumption. For example, Arlene Avakian and Barbara Haber argue that "like the gardens of poor southern African American women which served as an outlet for their creativity when no other existed, cooking may have provided a vehicle for women's creative expression" (2005:2). The implication is that women would turn to other avenues for acquiring recognition or expressing creativity if they could access these. Yet the autobiographical example I have given illustrates that some women turn to cooking as a source of authoritative and creative meaning-making, and in ways that instill others' respect, rather than condescension. Cooking can therefore be experienced and responded to not merely as socially necessary labour, or as what women do well in realms within which they are expected to do well, but in creative processes that determine how groups acquire both gustatory standards and desires, as well as the other appetites that are often connected to these. I deal with the potential of these processes to generate transformative relationships, consciousness and sensibilities in the following section.

### **Feeding, care and relationality**

In the field of food studies, it is mainly within literary studies or psychology that "hunger" is understood in ways that transcend physiological need. Sarah Sceats' *Food Consumption and Contemporary Women's Fiction* (2008), for example, deals with Doris Lessing, Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter to demonstrate how fictional representations of food cravings and eating signal certain women's existential responses to social experiences. Developing this analysis of eating, Mervat Nassar, Melanie Katzman and Richard Gordon

(2002) draw on social psychology to deal with global examples of binge-eating, bulimia and anorexia nervosa.

This discipline-specific work distinguishes between the literal hunger for food on one hand, and emotional and psychological hunger on the other. Since eating is perceived to fill the place of some other desire, hunger is seen to result not only from food deprivation, but from other denied or withheld yearnings. Differentiating literal from metaphoric hunger obviously enables an understanding of the various forms of social, psychological and emotional distress that food seems to fulfill. And since both “normal” eating and eating disorders often occur in gendered, authoritarian and violent relationships, literary and psychology-focused studies help to explain the complexity of gendered subjects’ displaced, sublimated and projected needs. At the same time, our understanding of what food means to human beings is surely weakened by the assumption that affect is either not connected to real hunger, or that affect is of relatively peripheral importance in considering real hunger.

A less disarticulated way of exploring “hunger” would address the value of cooking and eating in relationships of care, responsiveness and conviviality. These relationships are rarely manifested in the frenzied celebration of culinary expertise under commodity capitalism, where the proliferation of speciality cooks alienates human subjects from matter through market-driven patterns of consumption, commodification and production. Experts in the hospitality and restaurant industry as well as those who work for media programmes acquire authority in very different ways from the women cooks whose expertise is valued in families or communities or by friends. The gastronomic knowledge of professional or celebrity chefs moulds taste for paying customers or viewers. These are figures of mastery, and their roles, whether they are men or women, involve masculine demonstrations of expertise in relation to others. It is in fact the gladiatorial contest to “be the best” that has led to the media hype around cooking contests, and the valorizing of celebrity chefs on television.

Professional cooking expertise is therefore significantly different from the social recognition of those who cook and feed in non-commercialized settings, such

as the home, among friends or within communities. Here, women's cooking is affirmed without its being yoked to economic and social statuses determined by the market. Its reception is not bound by financial exchange; nor is it mediated by impersonality or anonymity. The domestic cook who shapes taste and gastronomic pleasure is also the giver who shares what she produces with others. Relationships of giving and receiving are therefore cemented on the basis of memories of intimacy and care. The food maker's relations with those she feeds also extend beyond the occasion of feeding or being fed. Food consumption is therefore connected to networks of interdependence and communication through acts of generosity and sharing, as well as through responses of gratitude that are intrinsic to the food that is given. This intangible content is of course wholly absent in the food created under contemporary commodity culture and its related technologies.

In the context of the commodification of cooking, "poor diet" can therefore be seen not only as a result of eating unhealthy food. It can also be symptomatic, reflecting a fundamental hunger for the sustaining interpersonal connections and social communion that are intrinsic to food created and shared in networks of giving and receiving. Raj Patel argues that the social problem of poor diets is often seen to have an individual solution, rather than being seen as a result of an "impoverished range of choices" (2012:279). Thus, responses to problems such as obesity or diabetes take the form of moral panic: the targeting of individuals and groups as those who don't eat properly and must be brought in line. Founder and managing director of the Centre for Diabetes and Endocrinology Larry Distiller, testifies to this moral panic in declaring: "The diabetes tsunami is here. And we in South Africa are in trouble." <sup>4</sup>

In countering this alarmism, Patel (2012) emphasizes the structural reasons for diabetes or obesity in technology-driven capitalist production that popularizes addictive toxic foods. Yet what may be as important as these structural reasons are forms of psychosocial or spiritual deficit, a hunger for food that embeds the unquantifiable care and personal connection often associated with women's

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<sup>4</sup> (see <http://www.health24.com/Medical/Diabetes/About-diabetes/Diabetes-tsunami-hits-South-Africa-20130210>).

prescribed care and food work.

Certain feminists' endorsement of women's responsiveness to others has been criticized for recuperating prescribed gendered roles and identities (see Larrabee 1992). This critique, however, might miss the extent to which the nurturing associated with women's disparaged roles challenges masculinist ethics that reinforce and are consolidated by market-driven food systems. Unhealthy eating habits can be seen as a form of "hunger", an embodied "emptiness" that results from eating food that is disconnected from relationships of responsiveness, care and intimacy. And many women, in providing this care, demonstrate an agency that disturbs more impersonal ways of consuming and valuing food and eating.

The disconnection of food from relationality involves the severance of food not only from human relationships, but also from our physical environment. Jacklyn Cock describes this separation in the following way: "The act of eating illustrates both our direct relationship to nature and our ignorance of it, because we seldom know where the food we eat comes from (2007: 9). Arguing that "nature is not external, separate from the world of people" (207: 1), she draws attention to a dehumanizing alienation that results from not seeing, experiencing or feeling a connection between food and the conditions of its growth, production and preparation.

A childhood memory comes to mind in my thinking about the value of this connection. Together with my family, I am visiting my mother's birthplace in rural Kwa Zulu-Natal, an environment where obvious evidence of how food originates from the earth comes as a shock to my urbanized knowledge of milk in bottles or vegetables in plastic bags. Having grown up in an urban area, I encountered for the first time the actual connection between milk products and their source in living, breathing creatures, between vegetables and fruits and their growth in the landscape one saw and inhabited. The most vivid recollection of food's connection to nature was eating a porridge served for breakfast in place of rice krispies or cornflakes, together with sour milk, a squeeze of lemon and a spoonful of honey. In stark contrast to the anonymity and disarticulation

of the breakfast cereals I consumed in town, I remember eating what I felt I intimately knew: the mealies that I saw growing and being picked; the sour milk made from the living and breathing creatures I observed, the hives that I knew actually existed and that I was warned to keep clear of, and the lemons which I was often able to pick myself.

This memory, confirmed in many subsequent experiences of eating, reinforced my realization that food (consciously or not) is experienced not only as matter in itself, but also as sustenance with a story of production, a legacy of human re-creation and a source in nature. It seems worth stressing here that eating involves taking something into the body. When the human body ingests what is experienced as anonymous or disconnected, it seems inevitable that some vital source of sustenance is lost. By turning to the pleasuring body, the following section explores this vital source as an expression of freedom that Grosz conceptualizes as “a noble morality, unconcerned with the other and its constraints, directed only to its own powers and to the fullest affirmation of its own forces” (141).

### **Eating and the Pleasuring Body**

Feminist food studies scholar, Carloyn Sachs (2013), argues that feminist food sovereignty must encompass women’s rights to appropriate food, the valuing and recognition of women’s contribution to production, and women’s frequently unrecognized knowledge of food plant breeding and seed selection (Sachs, 2013:7). For Sachs, and for many other progressive food studies scholars, the assumption is that radical food discourses are concerned primarily with the socio-physiological needs of the socially productive body, rather than the sensory needs of the feeling body. The pleasuring body, the body that experiences visceral and sensory satisfaction, or the body that is not fulfilling or preparing for a social purpose is not a recognizable body in much food justice politics. Paradoxically, then, leaving pleasure out of food activism reinforces a social hierarchy in which certain bodies are valued for their productive and contributory capacity only, rather than recognized as having human desires for human pleasures.

Responding to this neglect of desire, the international Slow Food movement links food politics to taste and pleasure. In taking up Carlo Petrini's (2007) call for food to be good, clean and fair, the Slow Food movement critiques the damaging effects of agribusiness and the Big Food industry while also foregrounding human rights to visceral pleasures in what amounts to an expanded understanding of food justice.

But it is necessary to reflect critically about who benefits from this seemingly expansive definition, and which bodies are deemed to be worthy of the sensory, affective and relational pleasures endorsed by the Slow Food movement. Many of the slow food convivia in South Africa provide an answer to this question. All formally endorse the international movement's commitment to food that is "fair", namely, that is, grown and produced by those with the right to choose what they produce, and who are fairly remunerated and respected. At the same time, the majority concentrate on aesthetic and life-style solutions, offering members access to privileged enclaves of connoisseurship and elitist food buying and eating. For example, the events page of Slow Food Cape Town's website depicts a group of white visitors to an abalone farm in Hermanus, as well as three-course meals (available at a small discount to the organization's members) at specialist restaurants in areas outside the city. The home page of "Slow Food Mother City" uses conventionally tasteful images of elite leisure and culinary appreciation, and showcases member activities such as tastings at charcuteries and specialist distilleries.

Like numerous slow food convivia in the North, then, several South African ones are underpinned by very specific assumptions about taste cultivation, appealing to an audience that has learned or aspires to a culturally specific aesthetic appreciation of food. As symbolic capital, this learned taste entitles the discerning eater to various privileges. Since many Slow Food movements develop in classed societies where dominant groups' aesthetic standards become hegemonic, they also reinforce notions of "universal" taste. They consequently entrench consumer capitalism's regulating of entitled bodies with purchasing power and whose lifestyle and taste defines the "norm", and excluded bodies with no economic power or "taste".

Moreover, the slow food rhetoric of environmental consciousness and social justice often mystifies guiltless elite consumption, so that a sense of social consciousness also becomes a marker of superiority and becomes another form of symbolic capital. This pattern is becoming increasingly pronounced in present-day South Africa, with slow food sold in specialist markets or restaurants in Johannesburg and Cape Town, for example, reproducing boundaries between rich and poor, albeit in ways that reassure the rich that somehow the responsibility for others' suffering lies elsewhere.)

What might it therefore mean to explore the need for food to be “good and pleasurable” from a perspective that acknowledges the social construction of taste, and that recognizes how easily taste refinement can reinforce class hierarchies? Many of the films made by the film-maker Shelley Barry have encouraged my critical thinking about this. Her documentary about the activist, Charlene Maslomoney, whose battle against cancer involved her experimentation with nutritious and tasty foods, is especially significant. *I'm Not Done Yet* (2014) links considerations about pleasure to concerns about injustice and marginalization. The documentary conveys the pleasure of food through its attention to visual and tactile senses, as well as to emotions. This sensory emphasis coexists with a comprehensive exploration of Charlene's embodied struggles as a black lesbian with cancer in a world that privileges healthy bodies. It is therefore made clear that multiple experiences of marginalization shape her struggles for dignity and freedom. Significantly, the film focuses on a subject who is obviously not preparing herself for one or other form of productive contributory citizenship. In fact, she is preparing herself for death. But it is stressed that the unproductive diseased body has a right to the visceral, spiritual and sensory freedoms that food sovereignty and food justice discourses seem unable to take into account.

Also worth stressing is that Charlene's multiple experiences of discrimination do not function as a central victim narrative in which her response is reduced

to reacting to oppression. Instead, the film focuses on her struggle for freedom in the form of health, social justice and spiritual well-being. Charlene tells stories of nutritious and healing foods, recounts her experiments with affordable foods suited to dietary and medical needs, and connects her work as an artist, poet and storyteller to her creativity as a cook. The documentary therefore traces a comprehensive journey towards bodily, spiritual, existential and political freedoms. As is the case with many of Barry's other films, the sensual and tactile elements of food items and cooking powerfully invoke a sense of the autonomy and pleasure that seem to exceed cognitive understandings of what freedom from constraints (such as disease or political oppression) means.

In focusing on food rights and agencies that allow people to be healthy, productive and contributing members of society, food sovereignty discourse inadvertently cedes considerations about pleasure to the Slow Food Movement. Since many manifestations of this movement reinforce elite tastes, events and pleasures, the result is a deepening divide between entitled and illegitimate pleasures of food and eating in classed, raced and hierarchical societies. Barry's film and its protagonist's quest remind us that by limiting progressive food activism to justice and rights, we reduce our understanding of what radical food activism might be. In this final section, I turn to the collective possibilities that this amplified conception can offer.

### **Food activism, food work and public participation**

Individual and collective experiences of food are always accompanied by affect, such as being sated or hungry, or feeling gratification or pleasure. Despite the fact that eating involves both cognitive and corporeal responses, the body's feelings remain profoundly neglected in radical food politics. In their provocative research on the slow food movement, Alison Hayes- Conroy and Deborah Martin (2010) argue that the slow food movement's attention to the feeling, tasting and experiencing body foregrounds a distinctive connection between the cognitive and the corporeal in political struggles. By drawing attention to what they call "visceral identification", they focus on how "SF attempts to resist environmental and social injustices through public workshops and events, celebrations, family meals, gardens, conversations and connections made

between producers and consumers” (2010: 273).

Hayes-Conroy and Martin acknowledge the limited influence of their Northern examples. The slow food movement members in Canada and the USA are generally white and middle-class, and the exclusivism of their goals and methods reflect those in the South African movements discussed previously. They therefore concede: “while visceral feelings are central to the unfolding of SF, firmly sedimented feelings, or unquestioned modes of visceral identification can impede the movements’ chances to engender social and ecological change by stagnating relations with socio-space/environment along strictly uncritical and apolitical lines and preventing the formation of new/other body-environment relations” (2010: 13). Visceral politics in at least one segment within the slow food movement in South Africa, the Slow Food Youth Network, appears to have galvanized a very distinctive political energy.

While the Slow Food Youth Network is international, it seems to be evolving along very distinct lines in South Africa. At a global level, the Slow Food Movement’s youth networks reflect the elitism of the broader international body. However, the membership, organized activities and political identity of the Slow Food Youth Network South Africa revolve largely around the agencies, spaces and food events of poor black South Africans. One manifestation of this is the networking and advertising evident on its facebook page, which advertises the recently-launched Impilo market in Khayelitsha, the second largest black township in South Africa and the home of many poor, unemployed and shack-dwelling South Africans. The market was started by two unemployed South African youths, and each month sells organic and healthy foods. Many of the vendors, cooks and gardeners from the area are young, and have recounted the connection between the food they sell and its social value.

One of the market’s founders has testified to the social value of the Impilo market in the following way: “We also wanted to involve people in food production because we feel it is important due to the circumstances such as

climate change and drought.”<sup>5</sup>

It is also significant how traders at the market have articulated the slow food emphasis on good food in relation to consumers’ basic needs for sustenance. One vendor at the market, Ludwe Qamata, has said “I used to help people with my mobile gardening business and help people to use empty spaces to plant veggies. I came here to sell different vegetable seeds to the household gardener and to provide services like helping people who want to maintain their gardens.”<sup>6</sup>

Reinforcing this validation of organic and local food, Vuyokazi Majiya has stated that “My pizzas are totally different from other usual pizzas, they are made with fruits and vegetables”, while Sophumla Ntoyanto, a seller of fruitjuices, has said: “I started gardening when I was in the Eastern Cape. My grandmother taught me how to plant, produce food and to maintain a garden. I came here to sell my fresh juice.”<sup>7</sup> These testimonies are all from South Africans between the ages of 20 and 28, and testify to a resilient interest in cooking and gardening that not only transcends the dominant food system but that is also a source of pleasure.

Self-employment through the growth and sale of certain foods might provide a materialist explanation of the ingenuous ways in which certain young South Africans are responding to rising unemployment, spiraling food prices and cost of living, as well as the growing divide between rich and the poor in neo-liberal South Africa. However, Hayes-Conroy and Martin’s exploration of visceral

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<sup>5</sup> IOL business news. <http://www.iol.co.za/business/news/khayelitshas-impilo-market-promotes-healthy-eating-2061972>

<sup>6</sup> IOL business news. <http://www.iol.co.za/business/news/khayelitshas-impilo-market-promotes-healthy-eating-2061972>

<sup>7</sup> IOL business news. <http://www.iol.co.za/business/news/khayelitshas-impilo-market-promotes-healthy-eating-2061972>

politics seems to offer a necessarily nuanced explanation of why food work and activism can become especially compelling and satisfying. The growth, production and preparation of certain foods and in certain contexts can be instrumental in bringing about distinctive social connections and personalized experiences of satisfaction.

As self-defined activists, or as vendors, gardeners or cooks, many young South Africans engaged in foodwork seem to be developing imaginative and dynamic ways of transforming the meanings of food by seeking to establish its connection to personally and socially sustaining relationships. As evidenced in the SFYN-SA's attention to knowledge-building about seed, the environment and gardening, emphasis is also placed on building respectful and sustaining relationships between people and the environment. It is as though a spirit of public participation were being prompted by the scope to imagine new relationships promised by thinking and responding differently about food. As an embodied experience of collectivism, foodwork and food activism appear to animate participatory citizenship more deeply than any purely cerebral or literal identification of social challenges and pursuit for solutions.

It is noteworthy that an intensifying involvement with food work and activism among many young South Africans coexists with a growing disaffection with formal public participation and political mobilization. In this context, food, with its feminized connotations of sustenance and responsiveness, conceivably offers a more compelling source for public participation and being active as a citizen. It is undeniable that the SFYN-SA, like other strands within the movement, will continue to be politically fissured. Pressures to emulate the entrepreneurship models and practices of the broader economy, and uneven or eroded collectivism in the face of the market's stranglehold are some of the forces that will inevitably influence SFYN-SA's effort to create alternative food systems. Structural and internalized gendered and racialized relationships will also inevitably affect power dynamics among activists and food workers. At the same time, emerging youth energies around food activism and foodwork signal a refreshing intervention into more easily identifiable forms of progressive

political agency that ultimately react to domination, rather than produce alternative ethics, social relations and practices.

These energies also suggest the subterranean political agencies that feminists, critiquing male-centred understandings of citizenship, have explored. As Miraftab (2006) argues, formal citizenship is often meaningless for multiply oppressed subjects, and evidence of their public participation and civic engagement requires nuanced attention to action and spaces beyond formal domains of political involvement. Developing the feminist critique of formal understandings of citizenship and participation Miraftab (2006) invokes the symbolic meanings of political space by distinguishing between the “invited” and “invented” spaces of citizenship. She argues that spaces of invitation are not only exclusionary, but permit limited opportunity and access to those who are invited. “Invited” spaces often exhibit a hierarchical political power structure and have fixed views of participatory citizenship. She urges the recognition of “informal” and “invented” spaces of citizenship, and their effectiveness in transcending “formal” discourses and expressions of “the political”: “the fluidity of grassroots collective action across both the invited and the invented spaces of citizenship and knowledge, as well as the significance of the invented spaces of insurgency and resistance” (2006: 1). political sites. as weapons for challenging the status quo and resisting it. The seemingly banal bodily experiences of foodworkers ranging from cooks in the domestic realm to vendors and food activists in small-scale slow food movements can be seen as invented spaces associated with certain bodies’ dynamic crafting of alternative ethical, sensory and relational worlds. They expand our understanding of public participation and the liberating rather than reactive dimensions of agency.

Through embodying an understanding of the dominant food system’s injustice and oppressiveness, the SFYN-SA’s alternative food practices are connecting practical, spiritual, economic and creative strategies that fundamentally challenge oppressive relationships among persons, destructive relationships to the environment as well as the self-abnegation of the body’s desires.

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