



***Communiqué on the “Futures of Food”
Panel Discussion:***

***By
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Together with the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the Food Politics and Culture Project (FPCP) convened an interactive knowledge-sharing platform, which attracted a sizeable audience of academics, students, intellectual activists and members of the general. The event was initiated as an outcome of conversations among Professor John II Stanfield, a distinguished Research Fellow at the HSRC, Professor Desiree Lewis, the principal researcher of the FPCP and Dr. Lynn Mafofo, a postdoctoral researcher on the project who shared their interests in collaborative spaces and sites for thinking through the interdisciplinary and intersectorial meanings of food in our current political economy and cultural context. The theme of the “futures of food” seemed suited to inputs from intellectuals from very diverse backgrounds. The panelists were (1). Donna Andrews, a feminist intellectual activist with years of research experience in NGOs and women’s organisations such as the Rita Edwards Collective, Rural Women’s Assembly, Feminist Table, WoMin and in academic institutions. (2). Angelo Fick, a resident current affairs and news analyst with several years of academic teaching and research experience on the South African media, the politics of cooking and cuisine; and popular culture. (3). Ben Cousins a SARCHI chair at the School of Government at the University of the Western Cape and a leading scholar on land struggles and agrarian politics. (4). Stephen Greenberg who has had many years of involvement in NGOs, with his research focusing on food, agriculture, land and agrarian studies. With such diverse backgrounds, these selected panelists divulged different but eye opening points ranging from land to issues pertaining to distribution of food, ecology, marketing and consumption practices.

The panel discussion aimed to mark the beginning of food related conversations that bring together academics, policy makers, activists and many others. This vibrant discussion was, as termed by Stanfield, “an appetizer” for the possible upcoming discussions around food. Audience and followers interacted with the discussants during and after the discussion on both physical and virtual communication spaces in which this website was the main vehicle disseminating the information.

As senior researcher in the Food Politics and Culture Project, Donna Andrews, had this to say: “... food is life” in which “women and nature are the source ...” She discussed the importance of demystifying women’s imposed “labours of love” and care of household work as an important contribution in understanding food politics. She argued that “problematizing the

kitchen and the home as private and off-bound, brings unequal social class reproductions and relations to the centre of [food] study.” In making the audience aware of the gendered ideology underlying food production, transportation, cooking and consumption, she drew attention to power struggles that are often ignored by “experts” who focus on masculine realms. Her style of delivery was also significant. By incorporating poetry and biographical fragments into her talk, she enlisted registers that often convey a great deal about how marginalized groups (especially women) experience food as politics. She drew attention to the way that food is often spoken about by experts – both on the left and the right in ways that remove knowledge about food from the hands of the women who have traditionally been the appropriate traditional custodians of food production and consumption. Bemoaning the cunning industrialization controlling ideologies that marginalise women when it comes to innovative food production, distribution and consumption practices, she highlights how regardless of being left out, women in the rural areas are still striving in showing that food is part of the “body, nature and community” and taking it away in disguise of global management of food is just a capitalist agenda that creates inequalities in the society.

She brought to the fore an extremely important argument on how capitalism together with patriarchy destroy women’s most eco-friendly interaction with nature in the process of providing food to their families, and how the dominant patriarchal and industrial food economy makes us all dependent on the capitalist market.

In short, she highlighted the importance of women’s contribution to food production and to *knowledge about* how to change existing environmentally dangerous, economically exploitative and authoritarian ways of providing solutions to the so-called global food crisis.

Her talk provided a powerful complement to some of the ideas raised by the next speaker: Ben Cousins, a well-known scholar on land and agrarian studies and the author of many influential studies in this field. Donna Andrews drew attention to the kinds of connections between ecofeminism and anti-capitalist struggle, that many land and agrarian radical scholars ignore when they focus on political economy without fully taking into account gendered dynamics and feminist insights into subjectivity and nature.

On the other hand, Fick was more concerned about encounters with food on individual and political angles. He emphasised this when he said: “food is about that encounter between the private and the political, the individual and the world, and eating even in communal situations is about the self and the larger group...its ideological reproductions...” Fick tackled the issues from the individual level. He noted that the broader food handling space undoubtedly has an impact at the level of the individuals in terms of what they consume as food. As such, “food is therefore not just that large political debate but it is actually a deeply intimate and personal and universal human experience.” Fick further elaborated on these points in his speech that can be accessed on this website as well.

Cousins and Greenberg’s central points were around larger political and economic spaces when it comes to food. Drawing on a few examples and among them an instance of President Zuma opening an enquiry on corrupt officials in land distribution process, Ben Cousins started off by stating that food is about politics. The problem of food politics starts with the politics around land ownership. He reiterated that people of power grab the land and justify how it should be used, what it should produce and who benefits from the produce. Cousins emphasised that the themes around the futures of food can be looked at from the understanding that both land and food are political instruments used to oppress and control others in the name of democracy, capitalist economy and globalisation. Cousins discussed the evolution of the various models of policy and activist response to the food crisis, drawing attention to how the food justice model is a more productive one than food sovereignty at present. Food Justice promotes access to land and food production and consumption at a local level. This allows fair exercise of rights to communal access to healthy, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate food.

He called for a need to relook and revise the capitalist system that which is another drive behind the destruction of food justice since the focus is more on profits than serving the people justly. This revision starts by problematising economic discourses around food in which food is no longer a cheap or affordable commodity as it was in the past and the fact that though the prices are skyrocketing, the quality of food is getting poorer and poorer. In his words, “much of the food we eat is not really good for us... low nutritional value containing high levels of sugar full of additives preservatives and in the case of meat, full of antibiotics...”

In terms of food production, he lamented on how mechanical agro- industrial systems, are “often causing damage to the environment.” At the center of the capitalist system food ways, less access to ecologically health and nutritious food, rise in food prices and quality of food is a huge cause of concern. The capitalist system, which is reflective in the way food is produced, distributed, sold and how people become slaves of this system in order to ‘eat’ is just remarkable. Though it seemingly offers, cheap food, the quality is drastically getting poor. This system also has major ramifications on humans as it “is also destructive of human beings, of social relationships of the natural world and these two sides of the coin of capitalism are very much evident in relation to food” systems. Taking us back to the 1950s when agro-chemical revolution spiraled and become the dominant system in food production, Cousins, posits that this kind of farming also gave birth to stiff competition in food retailing with many individuals and nations becoming giant corporations, which some researchers have termed “Big Food” dominating the world food market.

Contributing to the table of futures of food, Cousins encourages us to start responding to the futures of food crisis:

- By fixing the capitalist system in terms of how it functions as a market driven system through fixing the property rights, the efficiency of the system.
- Changing the consumer demand in the supermarket by instead of mechanically produced more food, we increasing production of organic foods through the local supermarket.
- Regulation through imposing standards, surveillance and giving attention to enforcements. State regulation of production, processing selling of food and public regulation
- Follow a radical approach to food by involving food activists around the world argue that food sovereignty and agro-ecology are feasible alternatives to the food regime and liberalism. For instance, Via Campesina which is “an international movement that coordinates organizations of peasants, small and medium-sized farmers, farm workers, rural women, and indigenous communities of Asia, Africa, America, and Europe” (<http://www.mstbrazil.org/content/campesina>).

Looking at the notion of food justice as an alternative which “involves activism against the inequalities and oppression and distortions of the capitalist food regime including the competitive strategies of agri- businesses... he ends by posing a question: “is there an alternative beyond capitalism?”

In addition, Greenberg focused more on one of the pressing issues related to the theme of the futures of the food. He highlighted the control on land in terms of land ownership and food production. Food production in South Africa is mainly in the hands of commercial farmers who are dominantly white. A few black farmers are involved in commercial farming at the periphery side. Having a few people producing food for the whole population is problematic as they determine the kinds of foods they would grow, distribute to the food industry which again is further processed in different ways for the human consumption. Besides the commercial farmers as noted about, Greenberg also noted that the larger population in South Africa is involved in subsistence farming for their own households needs. He calls for transformation of all three sectors of farming: large scale commercial, horticulture and subsistence farming. Giving examples of sugar, poultry, pork and cattle, he highlighted the problematic practices that keep impeding the process of fair land reform in South Africa. One of the unbelievable practices at the moment is the changing of farming land into property development scheme with better profits as a justification as compared to returns on farming. Thereby continuously permitting injustices around equal access to land in light of food justice. It is therefore imperative for all arable land to be considered as a country’s asset and have the government on the forefront in ensuring that landowners do not solely make private decisions on land use as this on its own impacts badly the production and distribution of food for the whole nation. As recommendations to all involved, Greenberg then emphasised the need to:

- Monitor land distribution and use
- Involve skilled people who are readily available to impart their knowledge on land use and production of food
- Revisit the larger white owned commercial farms with the aim to redistribute the land fairly of some of the land; making sure there is enough access to water for the divided parts.

- Have equitable integration of the black farmers into the larger white owned commercial farms and transferring of skills that would help in increasing the black farmers' contribution to food production as well as vying for more equitable practices in terms of land ownership and usage.
- Urge land redistribution to enhance more access to land for the peasants and diverse small holder farmers
- Facilitate farmer to farmer sharing of resources and knowledge
- Decentralise markets

In conclusion, the panel discussion opened very important issues central to land and food ways such as food production, distribution and consumption from different fields. Building a powerful community, these ideas will also be published in well renowned journals for wider consumption and sharing of such very intriguing yet important discussion that are central to human survival. Calling for sustainable systems that challenge the social, cultural and ecological destructive capitalists' self-serving practices in food systems, the food politics and cultures project and the discussants, invite more people interested people to join this discussion on much needed alternatives to futures of food practices. Part of this invitation is further extended through the public event titled: Food Politics and Cultures Festival: A Festival of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences to be held at District 6 Museum from the 10th to the 12th of November 2017.

See more details on this website.