

Kumusha and masalads

(inter)generational foodways and urban food security in Zimbabwe

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1. Problem statement

- Understandings of urban foodways in Zimbabwe and other African countries have been dominated by food security frameworks.
- The focus on material scarcity and measurable health outcomes within these frameworks has often obscured the socio-cultural dimension of foodways and the historical and political structures that have shaped, and continue to shape, everyday relationships with food among different groups of urban residents in cities.

2. Goal & method

- Addressing these often-overlooked aspects, my research focuses on intergenerational contestations over foodways in a mid-sized high-density Zimbabwean town.
- Based on participant observation and semi-structured interviews,
- my research explores meanings and practices of food in a postcolonial urban setting using three generational groups as a point of departure – youth aged 15 to 25 years old, a post-independence generation aged 26 to 43 and a (pre-independence) middle-aged generation aged 43 to 65.

3. Theory

- 6-pillar food security framework (High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition 2020)
- Food sovereignty (Edelman et al 2014)
- Critical nutrition studies (Scrinis 2008)
- Hybrid cuisines and culinary practices in Africa (Legwegoh & Hovorka 2016)



4. Findings (ASK ME FOR INTERPRETATION AND CONTEXT!)

Rural-urban and socio-ecological connections among the post-independence and middle-aged generations

- "If you have *kumusha*, and if you are not busy planting in this season, it shows your life is not really in order ... how can I say ... that you do not take your culture seriously" (Baba, in his fifties)
- "Ours (potatoes) are the originals. Our soil is red. You see (gesturing at the brown/red water). It has all the nutrients, that's why everything tastes rich. Food doesn't need much – just our nature. It's not that difficult. It's just natural" (Katie in her 40s)

The post-independence generation: straddling in between rural/traditional and urban/modern spheres

- "The thing is ... they say they want to eat roadrunner because it is the best, while they are sitting in Chicken Inn, devouring a chicken wing" (Tapiwa in his 30s)

The youthful generation: urban masalads

- "My parents, they grew up eating this ... what do you call it, weird stuff. Let's call it weird stuff, the *dereres* (okra) and the *madora's* (mopane worms) and stuff. I don't see myself eating all that. I don't want to live a life like my parents! I'm looking for the *masalads*, *chi chi* (what what/etcetera), the good stuff. I look for the good stuff that's the thing, like lasagna ... foreign foods" (Taku in his 20s)

5. One of many conclusions: implications for food sovereignty

- The different positions towards traditional and modern foods in the findings could raise discussion around the tension between culturally appropriate food and self-determination in the food sovereignty framework
- When taking seriously the youth's perspective and agency, food that is not traditionally produced and 'non-local' would be part of what they consider their culturally appropriate food. Yet, the emphasis in food sovereignty lies on 'defending, reinvigorating and rebuilding food cultures' as well as 'enhancing food literacy and modifying consumer tastes' (Edelman et al: 917).
- Such a normative stance could go against food sovereignty's principle of self-determination. It raises the question whether there is space within the food sovereignty discourse for hybrid food cultures in which people combine and appropriate different types of foods to form their own food cultures, which are, in turn, shaped by not only one's generational position in society, but also other intersecting factors such as gender, class and racialized cultural, social, environmental and spatial hierarchies stemming from colonialism.
- To highlight that culturally appropriate food is dynamic and contradictory, food sovereignty could therefore benefit from more studies of everyday foodways among city dwellers in African countries, opening up perspectives beyond the many existing studies of organized (alternative, agroecology) food initiatives and projects that (implicitly or explicitly) align with food sovereignty.

References

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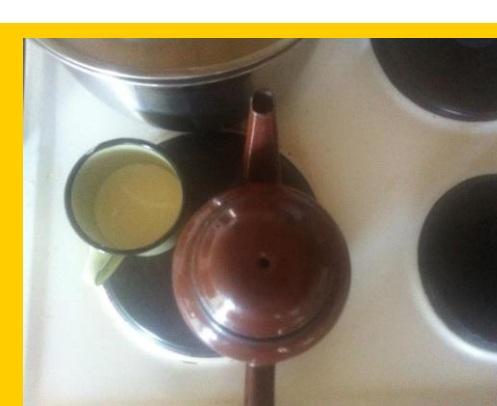
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- All photos: S. Brouwer

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