


FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo

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Where:: Future Africa

Who: Vasu Reddy



Stirring the Pot. Food Studies in the Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
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- ***Why* the topic?**
- ***What* is Food?**
- ***What* is Food Studies?**
- ***Why* Food Studies?**
- ***Some* conceptual parameters & existing knowledge**
- **Theory, Method and Scope**
- **Potential topic areas within Arts, Humanities and Social Science**
- **Frontiers of Food Research & Some Journals**
- **Closing comments**




WHAT IS FOOD ?

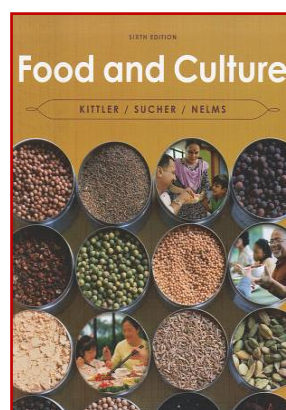
- A necessary condition for survival in our daily lives.
- Has wide-ranging implications for our health and well-being.
- Is not only about diet, nutrition and calories but is also a sociocultural product (*The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power*; Counihan, C.M. 1999)
- Food is both macronutrient and metaphor, “an object of culture and performance” (*The Gender Archeology*, 2000)
- Food important to self-definition
- Food in a global context becomes a sort of museum for cultures (Dwyer, 2004: 6)



WHAT IS FOOD ?

“Eating is central to daily life. Our relationship to food is one that is built on necessity and repetition. Because of this cyclical relationship, eating becomes a familiar and intimate part of our lives. Yet the foods we eat, and the circumstances under which we consume, extend beyond our biological need for fuel. They are also based on an individual's cultural, political, and familial heritage. Thus, the symbolic importance of food and consumptive rituals arises from the fact that these choices are representative of our individual and collective identities”

(Food for Thought: An Analysis of Power and Identity in Prison Food Narratives. Rebecca Godderis. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 50; 2006: 61-75) (page: 61)

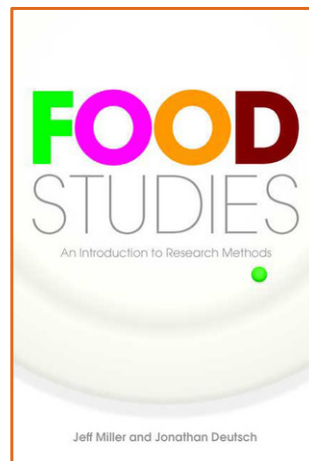


WHAT IS FOOD STUDIES ?

Food Studies emphasizes the ways individuals, communities, and societies relate to and represent food within a spatial, cultural and historical context. **Food studies examines the political, economic, and geographic framework of food production, while attending equally to the study of consumption, including gastronomy, and media portrayals of chefs and cuisines, along with attention to problems that follow consumption, the re-making of bodies, accumulation of waste, and burdens of externalizing costs.** Food Studies offers an interdisciplinary approach to the study of food as a bio-cultural system and employs approaches from the humanities and the social sciences.

(<http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/nutrition/food/ma/>)

In other words FS is not really about EATING and the study of food itself but rather the study of the *relationships* between food and human experience



WHY FOOD STUDIES ?

- Epistemological enquiry and what Arjun Appadurai (1986; *The Social Lives of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*) calls “the social lives of things”
- Understanding of food habits: how we produce, procure, and consume food – represents powerful systems of symbols.
- Peoples’ relationship with food: (tells us about their beliefs, assumptions, background, personalities (Source: *Food Studies: An Introduction to research Methods* (2009); Jeff Miller & Jonathan Deutsch. New York: Berg; pp. 6-7)



SOME GENERIC CONCEPTUAL IDEAS

- Food enables understanding the human condition in all its complexity; it offers a key to various types of social organisation, uses of technology, expressions of a market economy, and patterns of daily life.
- Food opens up the nature/culture debate.
- Food is always part of an elaborate symbol system that conveys cultural messages (ANTHROPOLOGY = *food taboos; sacrifices; religious aspects; value of food*; LEVI STRAUSS = *food serves in social relations towards a means of analysing structural relations in society*) --- SYMBOLISM OF MEAT, MILK AND BLOOD in Maasai diet while vegetable food is considered inferior food) = **diet as an ideational system - a system of meaning - rather than a behavioural practice.** (Maasai Food Symbolism: The Cultural Connotations of Milk, Meat, and Blood in the Pastoral Maasai Diet. Kaj Århem. *Anthropos*, 84, 1./3. (1989), pp. 1-23.)



SOME GENERIC CONCEPTUAL IDEAS *ctd.*

- *Culinary rules* are shared ways of preparing and eating food that are **socially patterned**. The rules guide behaviour. They are socially learned and shaped and often transmitted through familial relations (e.g., mother to daughter) and various other social networks. This results in a **shared food system** within bounded groups .
- Food also generates conventionalized social meanings that serve commercial interests: Coca Cola; KFC; McDonalds; Pepsi (particular affiliations we have and provide a new sense of identity). **Food is also an index of power relations.**
- Food also represents ephemeral personal qualities (Tastes for specialized items such as SQUID; OYSTERS; WHALE; SHARK FIN; RAW TUNA; KOPI LUWAK COFFEE – speak of claims to cosmopolitanism; whereas a meal of hamburger and fries *possibly* does the opposite).

FOOD IS NOT
RATIONAL. FOOD IS
CULTURE, HABIT,
CRAVING AND
IDENTITY.

JONATHAN SAFFRON FORD



SOME GENERIC CONCEPTUAL IDEAS *ctd.*

- Food is always ASSOCIATIVE
– travel also provokes ideas about appetite and cuisine (when we travel)
- The ancient Inca dined alone using elaborate gold and jeweled utensils (Lingis, A. (1994). *Abuses*. Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Interpretation of a dream about smoked salmon : that it is less about fish and more about the anxiety of being socially acceptable. (Freud, S. (1900). The interpretation of dreams. In J. Strachey (Trans. and Ed.), *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 4, p. 147).

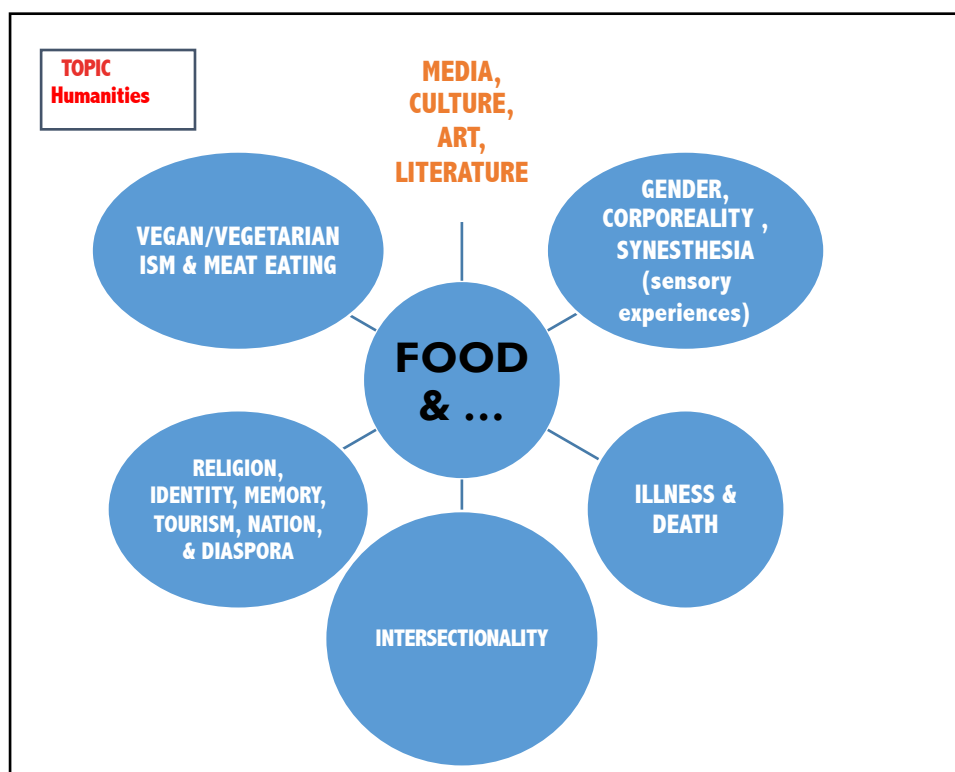
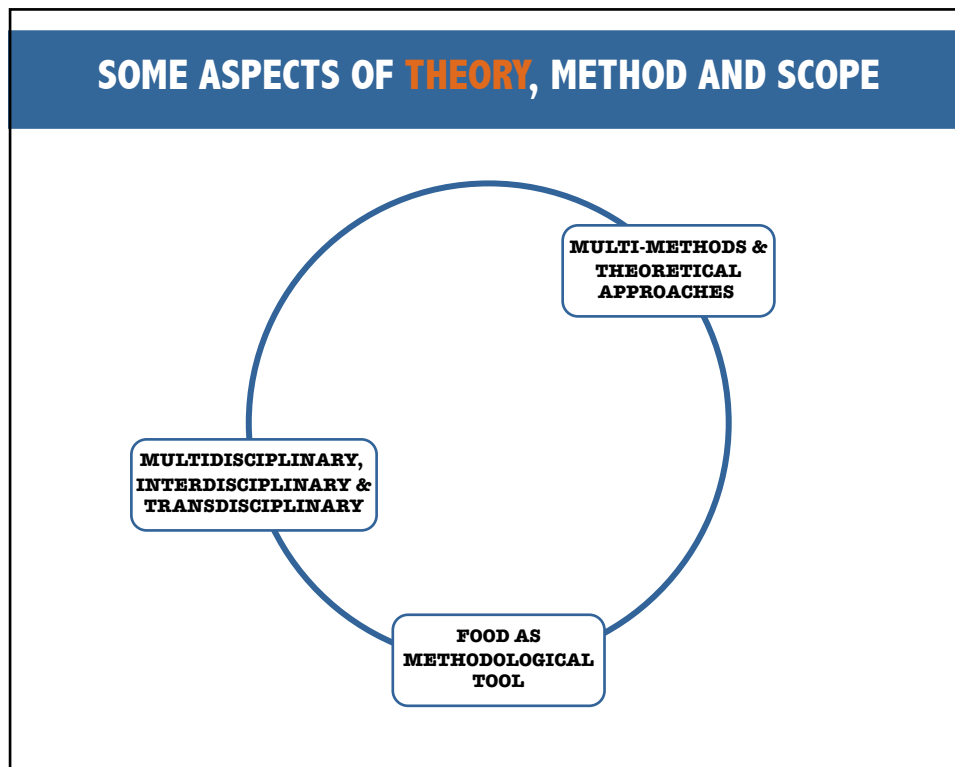


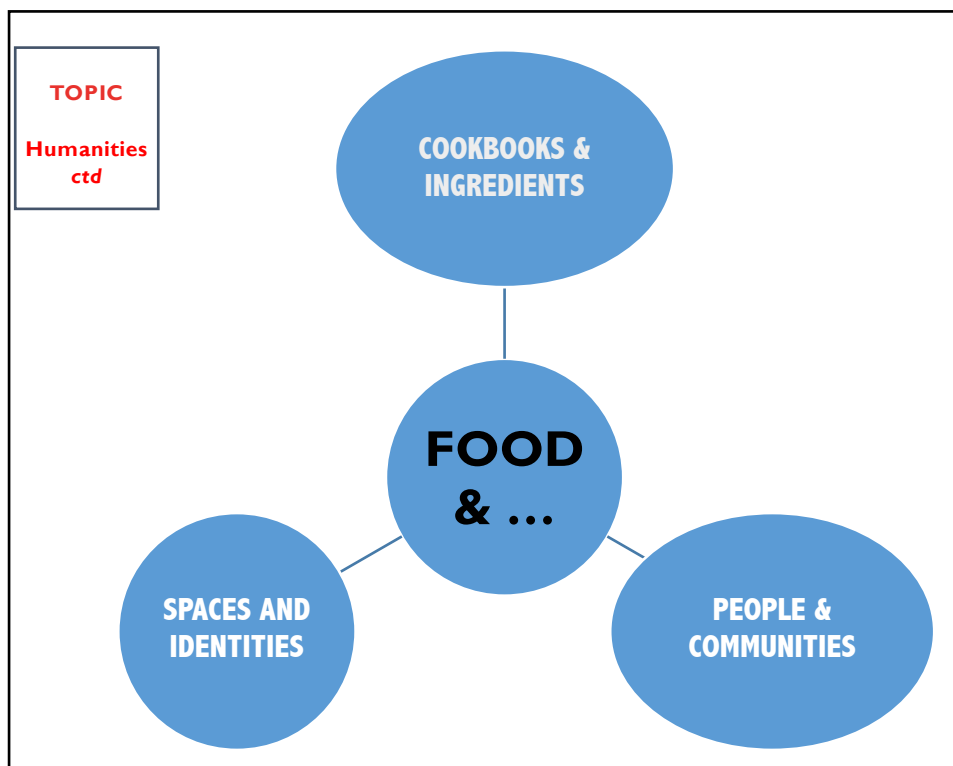
SOME GENERIC CONCEPTUAL IDEAS *ctd.*

- Food practices is also marked by what Alice Juliet terms “food events” – as they offer a prime and relatively unexplored site for social re(production) *Eating Together: Food, Friendship, and Inequality* (2013: 14). (e.g. formal dinner; buffet, ??)
- Food geographies: spatial politics of food, food security, food justice movements – including consumption and embodiment of food (*interests and politics*)
- Food is as exclusive a human behaviour as language. Lévi-Strauss pointed out that:
 - *Cooking, it has never been sufficiently emphasized, is with language a truly universal form of human activity: if there is no society without a language, nor is there any which does not cook in some manner at least some of it's food* (The Origin of Table Manners, 1978: 471)
- Clifford Geertz described food as “an ensemble of texts” (*The Interpretation of Cultures*, 1973: 24)



THE GEOGRAPHY OF FOOD





FOOD RESEARCH

- The biotechnology Revolution: genetically modified food (**farmaceuticals** or **nutriceuticals**)
- The organic revolution: the idea of embracing 'natural' foods free of pesticides and insecticides
- Food and ideology: placing emphasis on individuals and personal responsibility
- The politics of obesity: long-term health consequences of over-consumption and over-indulgence
- Fast food versus slow food
- *Appetite*
- *Food and Foodways*
- *Food, Culture and Society*
- *Journal of Food Research*
- *Nutritional Anthropology*
- *Food Studies*



Foodways and Foodscapes

- Food is a network of activities and systems: physical, social (communicative), cultural, economic, spiritual and aesthetic
- Choices and meaning behind what people eat
- Elucidates connections between what people eat, how they identify themselves through consumption and food products
- Enables study of food in two streams: the cultural and structural (Norah Mackendrick, "Foodscape", *Contexts*, 13(3): 16-18, 2014)
- Extension of Appadurai's concept of the dynamics that shape global cultural movements and transnational consumer societies (*Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. 1996. Minnesota Univ. Press)
- Food environments
- Seeing relations
- Place/space where you acquire food, prepare and talk about it
- Institutional arrangements, cultural spaces, and discourses that mediate our relationships with food
- Boundaries shift; never fixed (gastronomic heritages)

Foodways in Literary, Visual, Performative and Popular Cultural Texts / The Materiality of Food and its Visual Representation

- Nomenclature
- Conceptual clarification
- The idea and meaning of food
- Relationships, responsibility, and possibilities that exist for defining what is understood by food knowledge
- Interpretations and understanding about the emergence, genesis, development, evolution and frameworks of food histories
- The representation and framing of the food in a variety of formats.
- Representations and framings of the meanings of food items, food events food systems and eating practices in a variety of formats and genres are evident in:
 - *the techniques of the mass media* (Rousseau, 2012a & 2012b; Leer & Povlsen, 2016)
 - *literature* (Mannur, 2010; Notaker, 2017; Palmer, 2013; Shahani, 2018; Theophane, 2002; Tigner & Carruth, 2018; Wilkins & Nadeu, 2015),
 - *cinematic* (Ferry, 2003; Harrison & Honesty, 2018)
 - *Drama & performance* (Chansky & White, 2016; Goldstein & Tigner, 2016; Hunt, 2018; Packard, 2018)
 - *visual arts and design* (Goldstein, 2016)
 - and *visual sociology* (Mitchell, De Lange and Moletsane, 2017)

ISSUES: Topics

- Food consumption (social processes)
 - Food mobilities (spaces/places of eating)
 - Food cultures (choices made and food as cultural capital)
 - Social Inequalities and life experiences
 - Practices of eating (eating as a unit of analysis)
 - The role food industries play in shaping the way we eat
 - Cuisine
 - Field to table
 - Social justice and food activism
 - Food Design
- **Less about what food issues *communicate* and more about what food issues *constitute* (in performances, social/cultural conventions, sociomaterial relations, and embodied activities)**

CLOSING COMMENTS

- Food is a central element of our social, historical, cultural, political and economic identities
- Food as idea, concept and practice opens up a plethora of epistemological possibilities
- Food opens up maps of meaning, what Bell & Valentine (*Consuming Geographies*, 1997: 3) noted that “every mouthful, every meal, can tell us something about our selves, and about our place in the world”
- Opens up much possibility for intellectual enquiry in respect of Humanities, Art & Social perspectives.



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- Thank You!
- Ke a leboga!
- Ngiyabonga!

