"We Eat Sushi Now": Targeting Hungry Students at South African Universities

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Abstract

Media reports, research, and student support services are paying an increasing amount of attention to the hunger experienced by students at South African universities. This article demonstrates that most of this attention is rooted in a food security paradigm, or in approaches that mitigate the effects of student hunger. It avoids addressing the causes of hunger, which lie in oppressive systems such as the neoliberal world food system and the operation of the entrepreneurial public university. Our discussion of trends at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) takes two trajectories: We explore the ways in which universities' practical and research priorities reinforce hegemonic responses to hunger, and we reflect on explicitly politicised currents of critical work around students and hunger. What certain scholars and activists have termed "critical food system literacy" signals how transformative strategies and knowledge production are being developed at some universities—sometimes beyond the parameters of what is conventionally seen as food-centred advocacy, activism, or research.

Keywords: critical food literacy; food justice; food security; food sovereignty; hunger; South African universities; neoliberalism; students; world food system

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Introduction

When one of this article's co-writers arranged a quick meal of soup during a workshop at the end of the day, a student responded: "But I eat sushi." This declaration revealed the performative enactment of an identity that is cosmopolitan and middle-class, rather than parochial and working-class. In reflecting on the performative force of this declaration, we began to think about how often South African university students' relationships to food have been defined monolithically, rather than in ways that illustrate the complex and sometimes contradictory nature of these relationships. We also reflected on what motivates the current wave of research, advocacy, and practical interventions into student hunger. Is this only a response to what one recent journal article identifies as an "emerging and alarming problem among university students" (Sabi et al. 2019, 144)? Or does the upsurge in work on hungry students warrant critical scrutiny of the multiple discursive, political, and economic influences that shape university research agendas and student support services?

The aims of this article are twofold. On one hand, we examine dominant trends in the research and practical work around food and university students in South Africa. Guided by feminist, materialist, and discourse analysis theory, we reflect on how the notion of the "hungry student" has been constructed in the context of neoliberal universities. On the other hand, we map out trends at the university with which we are most familiar, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), to illustrate how universities' managerial and financial imperatives can actively undermine students' ability to eat nutritious food. We also explore some of the marginalised conceptual and practical strategies around students' relationships to food. We show that this knowledge is richer and more productive than the findings and solutions provided in much of the recent research and practical work on student hunger undertaken at South African universities and universities elsewhere.

Explaining Student Hunger

Universities in South Africa have been focusing increasingly on research into student hunger. Furthermore, many are now driving interventions into food access for students as their primary constituency. South African work in this area includes studies in journals and books (Munro et al. 2013; Rudolph et al. 2018; Sabi et al. 2019; Van den Berg and Raubenheimer 2015) as well as postgraduate theses (Drewett 2018; Sabi 2018). It also includes advocacy and practical action. Several South African universities have launched programmes for combating hunger experienced by students. These include the "Stop Hunger Now" initiative at the University of Johannesburg, the University of the Free State's "No Student Hungry" Programme, and the launching of a farmer's market at the University of the Witwatersrand (see Makwela 2018).

Intellectual work straddling advocacy and scholarship has led to initiatives such as Stellenbosch University's task team report on students and hunger in 2019 (see Dunn-Coetzee and Foflonker 2019). The combination of research and advocacy has also been

demonstrated in seminars and talks such as a roundtable titled "Curbing Student Hunger Challenges", hosted by UWC's Dullah Omar Institute in October 2017 (see UWC 2017), and a seminar hosted by the University of Pretoria's Centre for the Advancement of Scholarship in November 2019 (see UP 2019). The National Research Foundation-funded Centre of Excellence in Food Security, housed at UWC, has also highlighted hunger among students (see Makwela 2018). In 2019 the topic was covered twice on the website The Conversation, which seeks to circulate the findings of academic research among a wide audience (see Sabi 2019; Wegerif and Adeniyi 2019).

The burgeoning postgraduate research, scholarship, advocacy, and practical work on different campuses has taken a variety of forms. Especially noteworthy in much of this work, however, is the centrality of "food security". Foregrounded in the titles of many articles and theses, or central to the description of programmes, food security discourse currently provides the conceptual and analytical framework for what has become an industry of scholarship and practical work around students and food.

In her analysis of three influential food research sites at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Anne Harley explores the politics of food security paradigms and identifies three main flaws in them (2019, 90–92). One is their fixation on tracing hunger to individual and symptomatic causes. This leads to solutions focusing on ameliorating the hunger experienced by individuals or groups. As Rupert Alcock (2009) shows, food security methodologies and analysis involve the quantitative and specialist-driven analysis of access to food of groups experiencing deprivation. A second, related flaw of the food security model is its neglect of the structural determinants of hunger. Rather than confronting the histories and socio-economic circumstances that create hunger, food security paradigms concentrate on reforming the symptoms of these legacies (Harley 2019, 90–92). A third distinguishing characteristic is these paradigms' origin in global governance under neoliberalism (Harley 2019, 90–92). Food security approaches did not emanate from social justice movements or the perspectives of those who are hungry. William Schanbacher (2010) emphasises that the post-World War II period ushered in a global food regime steered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Promoting what came to be defined as "food security" was a top-down measure, with "security" seen to be achievable "through economic policies including trade liberalization, privatization, deregulation of national industry and the opening of markets" (Schanbacher 2010, viii).

As Harley (2019) shows, the dominant food security lens, which focuses on hunger among university students, indicates how university-driven research can work to legitimate the dominant food system. Consequently, prominent and frequently used concepts, explanatory frameworks, and solutions in influential work on food and hungry students attend "to the ongoing repair work necessary to prevent the cleavage between structure and superstructure from becoming openly visible" (Harley 2019, 92). Recognising food security paradigms as hegemonic does not imply that those who draw on them consciously set out to validate systems of oppression; instead, the dominance

of the approach reveals how certain understandings and concepts simply become "common sense". The ubiquity of the model works to drown out other perspectives from which to understand hunger and from which to develop research and practice attentive to its socio-economic and political origins and effects.

Among these perspectives are food sovereignty and food justice models, which emerged out of activist struggles and which challenge the reformist orientation of food security discourses. They also propose transformative changes based on understanding how social subjects are situated in exploitative global food systems (see Holt-Gimenez 2010, 2). The current world food regime operates to control food production and consumption on a global scale. Supported by institutions like the World Bank and the IMF, large global corporations monopolise food resources and generate profits by controlling the industrial production and the selling of food, and inflating prices through their control of the markets. The global food system therefore entrenches power relations at the national level, with access to food as a commodity being determined by entrenched inequalities within countries.

Food justice and food sovereignty movements are usually differentiated in terms of the latter's focus on the global capitalist exploitation of rural resources and subjects around the world. The food sovereignty movement originated in a global peasants' movement, La Via Campesina, between 1993 and 1996 (see Holt-Gimenez 2010, 2). Following its origins in social justice struggles, food sovereignty has come to constitute a politicised paradigm for challenging global corporate capitalist monopolies. Food justice movements are primarily urban-based and concentrate on localised and urban forms of exploitation, dominance, and access in food systems controlled by corporations (see Holt-Gimenez 2010, 2).

Despite certain differences in orientation and emphasis, food justice and food sovereignty approaches share a concern with tracing the causes of hunger to the global dominance of multinational corporations, as well as the political and ideological systems that support their power. Consequently, certain research and activist analysis, often without referencing food justice or food sovereignty, echo these approaches in challenging the reformist orientation of food security paradigms. For example, in a short article for The Conversation, Marc Wegerif and Oluwafunmiola Adeniyi (2019) acknowledge "some positive impact" of food assistance provided to students at different campuses. But they also highlight the necessity for critical, publicly disseminated knowledge production about food systems in universities, policies that stress food as a right, and political efforts to hold the government and tertiary institutions responsible for addressing students' rights.

Earlier efforts to challenge or transcend short-term solutions are also important. In fact, it is noteworthy that in South Africa, both research and practical interest in hunger among students mushroomed in the wake of student protests in 2015. Until this time, few South African universities, student support services, or research projects paid much

attention to how students experienced food, or the lack thereof. Concern about hunger from the mid-1990s until well into the new millennium focused primarily on food access for learners in schools. This reinforced a perception that university students, by virtue of their status, had successfully extricated themselves from lives of want and were well on the way towards financial well-being and lives of affluence.

Only small pockets of progressive researchers dealt with the detrimental impact of apartheid and capitalism on students' access to nutritious food and other "non-academic" learning resources. Writing about the period between 1996 and 2001, for example, Terri Barnes argued that post-apartheid proposals to "address the problems of institutional inequality … relied more on notions of developing institutional fitness for mandated missions within given financial constraints than on reparation for past discrimination or injustice" (2006, 160). Charlton Koen (2007) identified specific factors influencing students' ability to complete their studies and to graduate. Drawing attention to the inadequacy of foregrounding student intake, he showed how the majority of students' academic experiences at South African universities were affected by inadequate housing and living conditions, sub-standard educational backgrounds, inadequate nutrition, and the psychosocial effects of constantly "living as poor" (Koen 2007, 78). In similar ways to Koen, Nazneen Firfirey and Ronelle Carolissen (2010) analysed UWC students' experiences of poverty at the individual and structural levels. They draw attention to the ways in which alleviating students' hunger is connected to higher educational transformation and macro-level interventions.

The protests that were organised alongside and in the name of #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall also politicised hunger among students. Protestors developed critical analysis of hunger in the context of social injustice and economic exploitation. Within their activist discourse, the violence of a "colonial education" failed to address their political, intellectual, and psychosocial needs. This violence also included neoliberal capitalism, which was seen to drive escalating fees at public universities and obliged students to pay for essential services such as accommodation, transport, and food alongside their tuition fees (see Booysen 2016, 1–20).

Among the many issues that students raised between 2015 and 2016 was the need for adequate food, thus bringing the "shameful secret" of hunger among many students (often formulaically categorised as middle-class) to light in campus and public debate. This laid the problem squarely before university managers and, of course, the state. Significantly, students sought to render hunger visible *in relation to* broader efforts to unravel how public universities are being affected by neoliberal restructuring. For example, their attention to the outsourcing of workers as well as spiralling tuition fees confronted a specific form of economic exploitation: the institutionalising of privatised services defended by key institutional actors and the state's withdrawal of support for universities (see Dominguez-Whitehead 2017).

Harley (2019, 89) describes a five-day festival at UKZN as an important effort to wage "a war of position against hegemonic discourse of food security". By foregrounding a food sovereignty approach, as well as dialogue and debate around politicising strategies and hunger, this event questioned influential reformist food security teaching and research sites at the university. In the face of the national growth of food security perspectives on students' experiences, this "war of position" against dominant approaches to student hunger has become extremely important.

Patterns in UWC's Food Culture[1]

It is ironic that the upsurge of work about hungry students undertaken in universities co-exists with institutional legacies, stakeholder partnerships, and planning that actively intensify many food-related challenges for students. Examples of such challenges that have been seen repeatedly at UWC are the high cost of food at outlets on and close to campus, the prominence of low-nutrient fast food, and the privileging of economically and politically powerful stakeholder interests in university planning related to food.

Like many other universities, UWC responded to national demands to outsource food services for students by closing dining halls in its residences, making students reliant on a reduced number of outsourced dining halls, as well as shops and supermarkets. UWC is located on the periphery of the city of Bellville, and is surrounded by industries and housing developments. Amenities such as restaurants and shops are remote, and canteens located on university premises close in the late afternoon. The closest supermarket providing groceries is a SPAR, situated in a small mall approximately one-and-a-half kilometres from campus. Apart from this basic supermarket, the mall has several fast food outlets, including McDonalds, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Steers.

Students' access to food is also affected by the limited availability of outlets on campus from the late afternoon. The only outlet available in the evening is a bar, The Barn (open from midday until the early hours of the morning), where students are able to buy gatsbys,[2] hamburgers, and chips. Students' reliance on store-bought food requires them to make elaborate arrangements to purchase and store food. Because many purchase groceries to reduce their spending on bought meals, they need to invest in stoves, microwaves, and fridges. Since student loans are often stretched to include supermarket vouchers for purchasing food, many can ill afford the additional expenses of appliances for cooking and food storage.

The university's eating ethos mirrors the entrepreneurial priorities now normalised at UWC, as well as at other universities nationally and globally. For example, after the

1 The discussion in this section is based on the observations and knowledge of the authors as well as interviews conducted by Mary Hames with student volunteers at the Gender Equity Unit (GEU).

2 A gatsby is a long sandwich filled with chips, lettuce, polony, spicy sausages, calamari or fish, and topped with a variety of sauces. It is usually cut up into pieces and is meant to be shared.

university signed an agreement—which included the university receiving financial support—with the Chinese government, a Chinese restaurant opened on campus. This outlet explicitly caters for students with buying power, indicating that its establishment was motivated entirely by the need to secure diplomatic and funding alliances.

Fast food services have become increasingly wide-ranging, with many promoting millennial designer foods. One of the oldest sit-down restaurants, Aunty Val's, closed at the end of 2019. After providing balanced meals and local dishes for staff and students for many years, this source has been replaced by new ventures catering for "global" tastes. Trendy chains such as Vida e caffé now sell expensive speciality coffees, snacks, and sandwiches aimed at "millennial" consumers. Feedem, another of the new food vendors, has two outlets on campus with vastly different menus: the outlet at the residences offers cheap, high-carbohydrate burgers, chips, large pieces of chicken, and rice, while the other, located in one of the new science buildings and often used by academic staff, offers wraps, salads, and balanced meals.

The privileging of corporate food ventures to the detriment of many students' food needs is also evident in the thwarting of certain student-led efforts to buy, cook, or sell cost-effective and local food. Since the closure of dining halls run by the university, several women students have sought to cook and sell food to other students. This food is usually cheaper than other foodstuffs available to students. It has also often been valued as traditional and "home-cooked".[3] (The only outlet on campus that sells local food is located close to the train station. The location of these facilities at the margins of the campus reveals the erasure of the food tastes and needs of a large percentage of the student population.) However, because these food-sellers have operated informally and are not registered vendors, their initiatives are considered illegal and have been prohibited. This situation highlights the inability of key institutional actors to respond seriously to student-centred needs and strategies around food, and it is ironic given that one of the newly established graduate attributes is entrepreneurship.

Universities and Neoliberalism

The alignment of UWC's provisions for students with entrepreneurial, private-sector, and donor priorities reveals how universities can "currently act as instruments of hegemony" (Harley 2019, 93). In what follows, we deepen our explanation of this hegemonic operation by showing how the food security approach "becomes the means of upholding relations of power and maintaining the authority to control the knowledge of which it speaks" (Alcock 2009, 5).

Commenting on global trends, Margaret Thornton (2015) draws attention to the current role of the public university as both the engine and locus of neoliberal transformation.

3 This information was revealed in discussions among students and Mary Hames, as the director of the GEU, in workshops during 2019.

By vocationalising courses and overtly defining education as a marketable commodity, universities have been promoting education primarily as an investment. Higher education is made available to a few who are destined to increase their employment opportunities once educated; at the same time, the content of education has been instrumentalised in line with a neoliberal understanding of social needs. Explaining how neoliberal standards are reconfiguring the purpose of higher education in South Africa, Ivor Baatjies (2005, 25) writes: "Education, formal and non-formal, is increasingly being packaged according to qualifications, delivered through prepackaged curricula based on predetermined outcomes, and integrated within the economic agenda—an integration framed within a discourse of improving competitiveness, jobs, standards, and quality." He also argues that the packaging of higher education to meet the needs of the market is accompanied by university audit cultures and bureaucracies that mirror those of business corporations. South African universities are therefore being restructured to ensure that academics and students acquire or use "knowledge, skills and dispositions to compete efficiently and effectively in a ruthless global economy" (Baatjies 2005, 25).

In accordance with the market-driven imperative to maintain an efficiently functioning society of economically contributing citizens (rather than a socially just one of participating citizens), the reformist thrust of food security alleviates some of the debilitating effects of hunger. At the same time, a food security lens fails to pay attention to the broader contexts in which those who are hungry live and work. What could be seen as a research, advocacy, and policy industry around student hunger can therefore be located in the context of a university's neoliberal social engagement.

Alcock (2009, 10) notes that food security paradigms have a "pervasive predilection for empirical clarity … symptomatic of traditional positivist epistemologies". This is strongly evident in much of the scholarship on university students and hunger. For example, Louise van den Berg and Jacques Raubenheimer (2015, 160) use a toolkit and quantitative methods to conclude the following:

> The prevalence of food insecurity according to the one-item measure was 65%. Using the 10-item measure, 60% of the students experienced food insecurity "with hunger", and 26% food insecurity "without hunger" … Using the regression model, the strongest significant predictors of food insecurity were race, gender, being a first-generation student, not having enough food money, having borrowed food money from parents, having asked for food and having sold belongings to obtain food.

This positivist approach is typical of research in the natural sciences. What is striking, however, is the spread of these positivist approaches in the social sciences and humanities. Gary Anderson (2017, 1007) attributes this to the global depoliticising of research in universities, which leads "critical and qualitative researchers [to be] marginalized within the academy and by gatekeepers who fund research". He goes on to show that some social science and humanities researchers and students are increasingly embracing positivist frameworks and methodologies to meet dominant

standards of value as defined in many journals, by university auditing mechanisms, and by the external funders who now often support academic research. It is therefore noteworthy that Nicholas Munro et al. (2013) adopt a similar methodological strategy to that of Van den Berg and Raubenheimer in their contribution to dietetics. Publishing in the journal *Perspectives on Education*, they summarise their work on student hunger in the following way (Munro et al. 2013, 168):

> Data to assess vulnerability to food insecurity in a sample of 1083 students from UKZN (Pietermaritzburg Campus) was collected between 2007 and 2010 via a questionnaire developed specifically for this purpose. The results indicate that 20.8% of the sample experienced some level of vulnerability to food insecurity, with 16.1% reporting serious levels of vulnerability, and 4.7% experiencing severe to critical levels of vulnerability to food insecurity.

As these studies reveal, food security approaches descriptively confront a socially created problem through extensive, technical, and seemingly "objective" categorisation and measurement. This labelling impulse is evident in the constructed binary between experiences defined as "insecure" (deviant) and those that exemplify the "norm" (food security). "Food security" implies a measurable standard that allows people to be fully "functional" within the existing status quo. In contrast, "food insecurity" mechanically signals that others are lacking and require salvation from this "lack". This binary pathologises those who are hungry as problems requiring fixing, rather than as social subjects within a system that causes injustices.

Related to the pathologising of hungry people as social problems are welfarist, remedial, and philanthropic solutions. One example is the rise of private sector assistance to students. Big food companies such as Tiger Brands have been highly visible in efforts to combat student hunger (Tiger Brands 2019). By offering donations of food to several South African universities, Tiger Brands has appeared to declare its commitment to equalising food access, yet its financial success relies on sales of essential items, such as bread, at prices that many cannot afford. It is significant that in 2007 the company was ordered to pay a R98.7 million penalty when it admitted to bread price-fixing (Nisselow 2018). By illegally colluding with other companies to raise bread prices, Tiger Brands demonstrated the ruthlessness of its profit-making goals and revealed the primarily strategic purpose of its philanthropic work. The role of big food companies in drives to alleviate hunger has in fact become overtly manipulative. Companies often provide funds for supporting research at universities, and the hidden agenda in such donor-sponsored work is for research to elevate sponsors as relevant and supportive stakeholders, rather than to critique corporations' social impact. Since universities now often rely on donor support for research, academics can easily be led to pursue research agendas that boost or protect the image of donors, rather than addressing the priorities of the subjects of their research. This political regulation of research can occur through seemingly academic institutional regulation, such as ethical requirements and research screening committees. It is therefore noteworthy that the Tiger Brands Foundation

partners with the University of Johannesburg's Africa Centre for Development as well as the University of the Free State (Tiger Brands Foundation 2021).

Another welfarist solution is the development of food or vegetable gardens that allow students to plant their own food. Tiger Brands, in addition to its food donations for students, began partnering with Siyakhana Community Gardens in 2017 to establish food gardens to "empower students with life-long skills in growing their own food" (Tiger Brands 2019). Yet food gardens—within the broader context of a world food system in which a few global corporations control most food resources and markets—merely mitigate glaring injustices. As Marie Beth Pudup (2008) has argued, the institutionalising of gardens has become a widespread strategy within new forms of governmentality. Gardens have been seized on as therapeutic spaces for establishing "positive" connections between citizens, space, and nature, and often function to regulate citizens as docile bodies.

Many welfarist approaches to hungry students in South Africa enlist models developed in North America. South African universities often collaborate with institutions in the north and co-create projects that reinforce conservative solutions. Numerous North American studies in various disciplines have turned to students' experiences of "food insecurity" at various colleges (see, for example, Henry 2017; Meza et al. 2019; Payne-Sturges et al. 2018). This work has been accompanied by the establishment of food banks and pantries, the handing out of food parcels, and, more recently, using social and print media to advertise food handouts. Like the food pantry concept, the North American practice of packathons[4] has been taken up on certain South African campuses. Connected to the spreading of Christianity (and the feeding of spiritual hunger), young people are urged to pack food parcels as part of a project of gifting to others. In 2018, UWC students joined the "Rise Against Hunger" organisation as part of the 67-minute challenge on national Mandela Day. The idea of linking physical hunger to spiritual hunger feeds into Christian morality and appeases the neoliberal social accountability ethic adopted by for-profit organisations. Like many gestures of benevolence, these reassuringly create a collective sense of contributing to the social good without addressing what social injustice really means.

The shallowness of charitable acts as responses to hunger has raised public debate in North America. Hilal Elver, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, recently argued, "Do not confuse food charity with 'right to food'" (UN 2020). Elver suggests that welfarist tactics such as food banks and food charities reinforce the vulnerabilities and powerlessness of food buyers, while also displacing the responsibility of the state.

The call to universities to address student hunger reflects many neoliberal governments' demands that research and teaching at universities should be augmented by public

4 A packathon is a food packing event where participants pack meals for distribution. See Feed the Hunger (2021).

engagement. At face value, this seems positive, yet the current demands are in fact a requirement that they deepen their participation in the market economy, through "relevant" teaching and research and by supporting the political apparatus for reproducing this economy. In the USA, this was made evident when the governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, mandated that all public colleges and universities in the state should have food pantries (see Smith 2019). Responding incisively to this, Bridget Huber (2019) argued that government is shirking its responsibility to provide equitable access to higher learning. She also drew attention to the dehumanising impact of food handouts, citing the practice of alerting students via apps and social media when there is food left over after campus events.

Building "Critical Food Literacy"

The term "food literacy" has been used to refer to the ability to assess the nutritional value and health benefits of particular foods, as well as the skills to select and prepare these (see Yamashita and Robinson 2016, 272). Like the efforts to politicise struggles around food in food justice and food sovereignty movements, the term "critical food literacy" conveys an understanding of how social experiences of food systems and food access are connected to oppressive economic, ecological, and political contexts. Lina Yamashita and Diana Robinson (2016, 270) describe it as "the ability to examine one's assumptions and grapple with multiple perspectives that underlie food systems, understand the larger sociopolitical contexts that shape food systems, and take action toward just, sustainable food systems".

In the context of dominant conservative approaches to food, Harley (2019, 98) remarks that "there have been very few signs that food sovereignty is gaining traction" at UKZN. However, she also states that alternatives do exist. Her remarks are likely to be applicable to many other universities, where critical knowledge is constantly challenging systems of power, both in and beyond the university. In this final section, we review some of the efforts to politicise the subject of students' food access at UWC.

As the director of the Gender Equity Unit (GEU), which took responsibility for making food a campus citizenship issue, one author has directly worked with students on the politics of hunger. In response to the prevalence of hunger among undergraduates, the unit started its Food Programme (GEUFP) in 2007 through the initiative of one of the volunteer students, Liansky Bestenbier. Believing that UWC should take responsibility for giving students full access to the institution, Bestenbier worked with other student activists to organise food drives involving staff and students. These drives were accompanied by awareness-raising talks, film festivals, and discussions about human rights, social justice struggles, and the contexts of hunger. Built into this programme, therefore, was the understanding that hunger among certain groups is a direct result of others' unjust privileges—what Raj Patel (2008) describes as the dialectic between "stuffed and starving". The global food industry produces enough food for the world's population, but corporate greed for monopolies and profit, high levels of food waste, and excessive consumption among certain groups create starvation among those with

histories of economic and social subordination. By probing the world food system, corporate food industries' greed, and elite entitlement, the programme challenged the objectification of hungry students as "problems". Instead, it emphasised collective responsibility and action, guarding against the degradation that accompanies singling out "needy" students.

Certain students involved in the GEUFP undertook academic work in the area they were practically involved in. In 2010, one of the co-founders of the GEUFP, Nazneen Firfirey, completed her MPhil degree in psychology on the UWC-based food programme at Stellenbosch University. Even though the research was undertaken at Stellenbosch, this was one of the first in-depth studies on students and food related to UWC, and it led to a journal publication (see Firfirey and Carolissen 2010).

For the GEU, access to food has also been a feminist concern, with various programmes addressing ways in which gendered access to the university involves much more than women's entry into the institution. The gendered dimensions of food access were addressed in a play written and performed by women student volunteers in 2019, performed on campus, at the Magnet Theatre in Cape Town, and at the Grahamstown Arts Festival. Titled *My Daily Bread*, the production surfaced the gendered politics of food, eating, and hunger both at the university and in broader society, while also critiquing the way in which research can objectify black women. Far from neutralising hunger as a fact in society, the play stressed that black women's attempts to access food are often underscored by social violence. The title invokes the Lord's Prayer, in which the speaker, positioned as a supplicant in the way that many hungry people are in socially unjust societies, pleads for daily sustenance. The opening scene quotes John 6:35: "Then Jesus declared 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty'." Christian affiliation and belief play a major role in many students' lives, with many religious bodies being registered at the university as student organisations.[5] The play was therefore courageous in seeking to encourage an awareness of the limits of religious faith in securing the basic necessities to ensure women's survival.

The performance also showed how black women's bodies are continuously under surveillance, and how punitive measures are applied when women disobey patriarchal strictures to subordinate their hunger to the hunger of others. It also shifts from the rural to the urban context, stressing the persistence of systemic violence and the food deprivation experienced by black women with different occupations and from different classes. Some scenes describe rural women needing to feed their families in the absence of their husbands, who are migrant workers. Others reveal young women trying to conceal their desperate hunger in the context of the middle-class ethos of the university at which they are students. The play also touches on the callousness of a class-obsessed

5 This situation is not unique to UWC and affects many other South African universities. Our research suggests a similar situation exists at many universities in North America.

world, where those with class privileges often express their superiority through attitudes towards food. One privileged young woman character, for example, self-righteously urges others to avoid the food they usually buy and instead eat Greek salad and tuna because it is healthy. This conveys how students can be humiliated by those who presume to teach them how to eat "correctly" without understanding their social situation. The theme of humiliation is extended in a scene describing a white academic food security expert, who exposes her racist and simplistic findings in a scene illustrating how academic research is aired on public television and becomes hegemonic in national debates.

Issues of cultural identity and food are also raised in relation to the marketing of traditional foods. In a scene titled "Cultural Appropriation", the performance exposes how traditional food has been repackaged as exoticised cuisine on the menus of many restaurants; at the same time, the dominant food culture in South Africa continues to disparage indigenous food knowledges and the foodwork of many poor black women. The following lines comment on this paradox:

> I find it funny how they mock our cultures but imitate it so much.
> Not only through buying *ischolo*, taking a picture and captioning it with words like "motherland", "Africa" or some other bullshit.
> But they do it with our food as well
> Under some guise of it being "traditional cuisine"
> Serving it with plates and cups
> Calabashes that have significance in our culture
> But to them it is just another day in the office
> Another culture being appropriated, erased and commodified.

My Daily Bread demonstrates the way in which food can be used a lens for exploring forms of power and privilege that are both specific and localised, and also historical and global. Beyond the question of who is "stuffed and starving" (Patel 2008) and why, questions about food tastes, the dominance of certain foodways, the use of food as cultural capital, and the marketing of food can unravel intersecting power relations and dominant discourses.

Conclusion

The hungry university student is in many ways a negation of neoliberal myth-making. According to capitalist logic, the university-trained student should be the future driver of society, poised to lead it to ever-increasing heights and to reap its material rewards. The fact of the widespread hunger experienced by university students undermines this fiction. It is a reminder that neoliberalism's impact—the spiralling cost of higher education, increasing unemployment despite constant evidence of "development", and the stress of securing daily needs in the face of soaring prices for basic necessities—can make the experience of being a university student traumatic. Yet the obvious evidence of neoliberalism's effects continues to draw mainly moderate and reformist responses

to student hunger, which have started to function like an industry of what Thornton (2015, 7) terms "research compliance" within universities. Carlos Torres (2011, 182) explains this routine work in the neoliberal public university by stating that

> neoliberalism … has been able to formulate a new common sense that has percolated deeply into the social consciousness … Common sense … becomes incorporated into the language, affects people's sense of identity, modifies their perceptions, alters the constant dialogue between perception and action and ends up constituting a course of action, almost an unchallenged set of principles that need to be duplicated or replicated tout court.

Harley (2019) rightfully stresses the difficulty of intervening in these sedimented common-sense responses to food-related social challenges. Drawing attention to the way that the various institutional actors at universities can actively depoliticise critical work around food, she alerts us to universities' reproductive role under neoliberalism. Yet alternatives to dominant practices have precedents, often in discourses and research that do not explicitly or consistently address food, such as the previously mentioned #FeesMustFall protests and research undertaken by progressive scholars. We may, therefore, find that the challenges to the hegemonic understandings of food are more robust than some assume. Stuart Hall and Alan O'Shea (2013, 10) alert us to this in their reactivating of Gramsci's notion of "good sense", the opposite of hegemonic common sense, as "the apparently obvious taken-for-granted understandings that express a sense of unfairness and injustice about 'how the world works'".

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