Photo-elicitation and the voiceless: Narrating the "lived experiences" perspective of informal street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town

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Abstract

This research delves into the symbolic spaces and everyday practices of street food vendors in Khayelitsha, Cape Town - specifically, how traders interact and negotiate their agency within food systems of the poor and marginalised. A key objective for this study is to gain insight into street food vendors' understanding of the right to food and what it means for them as food system actors. Taking on a gendered lens, findings speak to informal traders existing in a complex space - caught somewhere between exclusionary urban politics, and waiting for the state to address the many governance and political bottlenecks that define the complex environment in which they operate. By focusing on symbolic experiences and actions of vendors in Khayelitsha, the study unveils the often invisible, ordinary, everyday realities of the vendors, through which 'social capital' is produced. The irrelevance of an actual constitutionally codified right to food for informality is also revealed through the qualitative essence of informal food traders' experiences of navigating a livelihood in the fluid and unstable context of the informal economy.

Keywords: right to food; South Africa; informal sector, street food vendors, food justice, food insecurity

Introduction

In social capital-poor countries like South Africa that have significant inequalities and poverty, the costs of public goods are often concentrated while their benefits are diffuse. Economic opportunity in contemporary South African society has been strongly patterned and shaped by the colonial and apartheid legacies of racialised underdevelopment. Three key legacies have been noted (Philip 2009): first, the centralized, vertically integrated monopoly structure of the core economy, with its highly skewed distribution of assets and capital; second, the racialised spatial legacy of township and homelands located far from economic opportunity; and third, the enduring legacy of inequality in the acquisition of skills and education. All of these contribute to a post-apartheid distributional regime marked by enduring poverty and some of the highest levels of income inequality in the world (du Toit and Neves 2014). The governing African National Congress (ANC) has its power base in the urban areas and because of this is particularly sensitive, not to the concerns of the vast underclass of the poor and the landless unemployed, but to those of the urbanized working class and business (Southhall 2014).

Addressing urban poverty in particular, will require strengthening the asset base[1] of the poor, including through improving human capital, augmenting social capital, and strengthening productive assets and household relations (Seferiadis et al. 2015). Potential threats to these assets, such as violence and crime, should also be addressed (Moser 1998). The informal economy offers an opportunity for strengthening the asset base of the urban poor. Social capital in particular is critical to this – the social networks based on norms, reciprocity and trust among the poor and marginalized (Pickvance 2003). Social capital here is recognized as a central basis of the urban economy, cultivated by the poor to sustain their livelihoods and withstand adverse trends and shocks (Rakodi and Lloyd-Jones 2002).

Many workers in the informal sector who have few resources resort to informal street vending, as this activity has few barriers to entry. A total of 2,565,000 individuals worked in the informal economy in 2016 according to Statistics South Africa (Stats-SA 2015). This figure is far lower than in developing countries of comparable size, but is still 16 percent of total employment in the country (Skinner and Haysom 2017). Street traders contribute greatly to the overall economy of South Africa, as demonstrated by the R51.7 billion expenditure in the informal economy in 2004 (Social Law Project 2014). Despite its relatively obscure presence, street trading is one of the largest sectors of the country's informal economy (CDE 2020). Street trading/vending refers to the selling of freshly cooked foods, produce, packaged food, and other products, and the rendering of services such as cutting hair amongst others (Social Law Project 2014). Street traders are generally poor, unskilled people at the lower end of the socio-economic ladder. Informal trading has become a common feature in all urban areas in most major cities and smaller towns and wherever there is traffic such as at the bus stops, train stations, truck stops, and streets.

Most of the informal trading literature about the African context is located in debates that have to do with urban governance in a context of "societal disengagement" driven by extensive informalisation and democratic transitions (Lindell 2010). As a result of this focus there is a lack of attention given to informal trading as an everyday, ordinary practice in which traders renegotiate their existence particularly in South African cities. Ballard (2014) emphasizes that

[1] "Assets" are broadly defined and multidimensional, including not only physical capital and financial assets, but also the knowledge and skills of individuals, their social bonds and community relations, and their ability to influence the policies and institutions that affect them. Low asset levels and the inefficient use of these assets are both causes and consequences of poverty.

'the poor' are not passive recipients of development, nor are they passive victims of practices that have caused their marginalization. And so, too strong a focus on the 'abject' situation of 'the poor' (Harvey 2012) - in this case informal street food traders - ran the risk of concealing the "dynamism, resilience, creativity and resistance of resource-deprived people" (Ballard, 2014: 2) as they respond to a space characterized by complexity.

Notably, a food retail transition has accompanied the urbanisation process in South Africa, changing the landscape in which households and communities access food. Shopping malls and supermarkets have rapidly expanded into erstwhile underserviced, impoverished neighbourhoods (Kroll et al. 2019; Crush and Battersby 2016). Food retail thus offers a lens through which to explore social capital as a mediating variable for food and nutrition insecurity in the ever-changing informal economy. The introduction of formal food retail formats has been simultaneously argued as a driver of food accessibility and as a detriment to informal food economies established in lower income neighbourhoods[2]. Granted, supermarkets account for the greater proportion of food sales in the country; however, they remain a tiny minority of all food retail outlets, the vast majority of which operate in the informal food economy. Although there are no reliable figures for the number of informal food retailers in South Africa, some estimates put the number at around 100,000 spazas (informal convenience stores in residential neighbourhoods) and at 750,000 spazas plus street traders combined (Coetzer and Pascarel 2014). The existing evidence suggests that informal retail is dominated by food trade (Skinner and Haysom 2016).

Informal street trade has traditionally been a bigger component of informal sector employment for women, with an estimated 960 000 women working in the sector (Skinner and Haysom 2017). The role of women in street trade is significant not only due to the prevailing number of women engaging in this occupation (Ligthelm 2005), but because of their noteworthy economic contributions and their position as a vulnerable group. The majority of street traders in South Africa are black women who trade in a range of goods (WIEGO 2013; Mwasinga 2013), including sugar sweetened beverages, offals, 'street meat', processed meats, confectionary and biscuits, cigarettes, clothing, and fruit and vegetables (often produced by someone else). In Cape Town, street traders are working against political, social, economic and structural restrictions. They are socially excluded through others' negative perceptions of them, and political barriers experienced by street traders include lack of government contribution to their street trading endeavours, no security of tenure, restrictive legislation, limited government communication and lack of participation in decision-making affecting street trade (Battersby et al. 2016). Some of the prominent economic barriers include poor growth in the informal sector, high levels of competition with both larger, formal businesses and with other traders selling similar things in a saturated informal market, as well as limited access to financial support systems (Battersby et al. 2016). These bottlenecks hinder informal traders from growing their enterprises, supporting their families and exerting choice and control over their lives.

[2]One study estimated that between 2003 and 2005 the turnover of spaza shops in some areas was reduced by more than 20% because of the encroachment of supermarkets (van der Heijden and Vink 2013). The South African Spaza and Tuckshop Association has claimed that Soweto in Johannesburg lost 30% of its spazas between 2005 and 2014 as supermarkets entered the area (Dolan 2014). Another study found that the impact on small vendors of a mall development was generally negative and that those who survived did so by changing their business model (Ligthelm 2008).

Food insecurity is the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. The food insecurity situation in the country is hampering economic and social development; in particular, good nutrition is linked to investments in education, health, and other development sectors (Grosso et al. 2020). It goes without saying that the nutritional wellbeing of a population is a reflection of the performance of its social and economic sectors; and to a large extent, an indicator of the efficiency of national resource allocation (Bouda 2020). Over half of all South Africans do not have sufficient access to affordable, nutritious and safe food to meet their basic health requirements and achieve attainment of the universal right to food (Shisano et al. 2013). This trend is intriguing because all food security literature points out that South Africa produces and imports enough food to meet the basic nutritional requirements of all citizens. Poignantly, out of a population estimated to be close to 60 million, as many as 13.8 million South Africans, comprising mainly of women and children, fall below the national food poverty line (World Bank 2020)[3].

Food is at the heart of many social relationships and interactions. Food and nutrition represent two essential spheres of human life that can hardly be separated from their cultural context. Social relations can be reproduced and represented through food, and food conversely creates and shapes coherence and identity within and between societal units such as households, kin categories, age classes, professional groups, or informal associations. Social scientists and public health practitioners need to understand the factors these relationships play in wellbeing for individuals and communities. Spaces where people obtain and share food are where they develop much of the "goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy, and social intercourse" that comprise growing social capital (Paul et al. 2019).

The local environment has a substantial impact on population health (Paul et al. 2019). The fulfilment of the right to food is determined not only by the basic availability of food, but also, by social, economic and cultural factors influencing dietary behaviours. The question of the right to food effectively captures how food relates to forms of deprivation including poverty (Fanzo 2015). The major factors that undermine the country's realisation of the right to food and basic nutrition are directly or indirectly linked to the long history of social exclusion of black South Africans, the hallmark of the apartheid system for decades (Ledger 2018). Hunger violates human dignity; it is an obstacle to socioeconomic and political progress and is also linked to the failure of realising other rights such as the broad right to an adequate standard of living. The right to access adequate food as codified in the country's Constitution goes beyond ensuring the absence of malnutrition or starvation and has within its scope "the full range of qualities associated with food, including safety, variety and dignity, in short all those elements needed to enable an active and healthy life" (Durojaye and Chilemba 2018). High levels of poverty and vast inequalities in South Africa make it difficult for many citizens to access food (Pereira and Drimie 2016). As such, the economic empowerment of the most vulnerable populations is critical for eliminating hunger. The consequence of inaction is that the most vulnerable members of the country are unable to realise a right that is enshrined in the South African Constitution (NIDS-CRAM 2021).

The majority of South Africa's food insecure people reside in poor and working-class communities such as informal settlements, townships, peri-urban, and rural areas (Ledger 2018). Endemic poverty is expanding as the country's population grows and the urbanisation process unfolds (Frayne et al. 2009). Under current conditions, the on-going failure of

[3] The South African food poverty line (FPL), also known as the extreme poverty line, is set at R624 at the time of writing.

economic growth to lift the majority of people out of poverty is contributing directly to the inability of the urban poor in particular to access sufficient food, resulting in chronic food insecurity (Drimie and Pereira 2016).

In Cape Town's Khayelitsha informal settlement, urban poverty and closely related food insecurity are prevalent. To illustrate, a 2010 survey conducted by the African Food Security Urban Network (AFSUN) indicated that Khayelitsha suffers from high levels of food insecurity (with 89 percent of households surveyed sampled in Kuyasa and Enkanini sections experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity) (Battersby 2011). The same AFSUN study revealed the important role the informal food economy plays in the food security strategies of the urban poor in Khayelitsha. Further, it reported that while most of the sampled households had used supermarkets to access food in the last month, they relied more heavily on the informal food economy to access food on a daily and/or weekly basis (Battersby 2011). The more food insecure households were, the more likely they were to depend on the informal food economy (Battersby 2011). As such, it becomes evident that the informal economy emerges when formal institutions and operations fail to meet the demands of those living on social and economic margins.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the roles and realities of street food vendors within the informal food system of Khayelitsha (the largest informal settlement in Cape Town) in order to better understand informal food trader's beliefs and practices about the constitutionally-codified right to food in South Africa and what it means for their lived experiences. This research builds on and adds value to informality literature by focusing on how street traders have experienced and responded to the right to food narrative as it relates to the food systems of the poor. By delving into the nature of local food and nutrition insecurity challenges, particularly for poor and marginalised populations, this research allows for domestic local conditions to inform and provide insights for national and global food politics and policy.

Methods

This research presents a narrative inquiry informed by an open-ended interview key and further draws on observational research in the form of photo-elicitation. The findings of this research are presented through the key themes that emerged from a thematic analysis that was conducted to make sense of the narratives. Focusing on survivalist informal food traders and impoverished livelihoods, this paper aligns itself with socio-culturalist analysis (van Donge 1992) of economic action, in order to examine the imperatives and networks that underpin practices of generating, accumulating and managing wealth at the margins of the economy, within the post-apartheid distributional regime.

Research methodologies that were used for this study were narrative-based interviews, participant observations plus the utilisation of photo-elicitation. Narrative research is the study of people's stories in an attempt to get insight of their experiences and attitudes (Creswell 2014). The narrative-based component of this research had a right-to-food focus and asked respondents to tell their stories about what the right to food means to them and what their lived experiences have been as handlers and traders of food in Khayelitsha taking on a public health outlook. In the spirit of allowing narratives to develop, interview questions were open-ended and broad, giving respondents time and freedom to share and elaborate on their experiences (Wagenaar 2011). The use of photo-elicitation as a methodology enabled the researcher to produce different kinds of information that speak to the feelings and memories of interviewees

(Harper 2002). The difference between conventional interviews and photo-elicitation lies in the way participants respond to the symbolic representations in photographs. In other words, photo-elicitation is the use of photographs to generate verbal discussion (Thomas 2009). These visual images can be produced by the respondent or by the researcher. In this instance, the author generated visual images that served as points of departure for dialogue, returning to interviewees and showing them the photos to elicit their responses. Photo-elicitation adds validity and depth, and offers new viewpoints (Bignante 2010). Much of the work and outcome of photo elicitation interviewing is a collaborative effort rather than an individual effort by the researcher and therefore involves joint theorizing, which occurs during the interview. However, the researcher still has a facilitative role, drawing out what is needed for credible dialogue and assisting respondents to frame and formulate their answers (Jenkings et al. 2008). Triangulation between different sources of information (Bignante 2010) was attempted in order to increase rigour.

The interviews focussed on how participants understand the right to food and basic nutrition, the cultural context of their environment, and what their experience of local governance has been. In order to gain access to the street food vendors' natural environment, time was spent in locations where traders are known to engage in their occupation. Having spent a day observing the traders, the researcher considered all vendors they observed against a selection criterion for variation sampling. Notably, subjective sampling was employed to select the people that were included, making the research highly prone to researcher bias. However, qualitative research is rarely based on random samples and thus is usually not intended to be generalized to an entire population. In addition, this judgemental subjective component of the study is only a major disadvantage when such judgements are ill conceived or poorly considered; that is, where judgements have not been based on clear criteria and objectives. Vendors were selected to obtain as much variation as possible for each criterion. Variation was sought in terms of age, gender, education, years of operating in Khayelitsha, average income a month, and association/union membership. The street food vendors were then recruited during a second visit to the trading sites.

In addition, participant observation has to do with the researcher not only observing from an outside-view but also getting involved and engaging in the day-to-day activities of research participants in order to experience and have an in-depth understanding of the environment, social relations, events and ideals of the research context (Yin 2011). Field observations focused on specific aspects of activities of street food trading and participants' responses and actions to events and situations within their environment.

Participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, risks and benefits of the study to ensure that their autonomy was upheld. This autonomy became part of continuous discussion to iteratively test the privacy boundaries of certain information in order to avoid exploiting confidentiality agreements. Ethical management of sensitive information was maintained by creating space for participants to express their emotions comfortably when recounting difficult circumstances around their struggle for economic survival. Ethical clearance for the study was granted by the Biomedical as well as the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape (BM18/7/20; HS19/5/33).

Data were gathered through participant observation and field notes. An initial semi-structured interview supported photo elicitation interviews about experiences of street trading and how these relate to well-being and a concluding participant check interview was conducted to confirm findings. After the initial interviews, a time was made with each participant to describe

the role of the photos in the research project. All participants were shown a collection of photographs that revealed the people, objects, events and situations defining their experience of street food trading and how these experiences impact on well-being. The photographs were shown digitally and used as triggers to formulate photo elicitation interview questions pertaining to participants' understanding of the right to food. The interviews were not transcribed. Instead, all interviews were recorded, with participant permission, using a digital audio recorder. The semi-structured interview guide allowed for a discussion with the partcipants rather than a straightforward question and answer format. The photos depicted in the figures below are not all the photos that were used to elicit discussion, but represent a sample of the photos that were used.

The author participated in activities related to the buying, preparation, selling and eating of food traded by the informal food vendors situated in Khayelitsha's Site B area. Another geographical location where conversations took place was in the Makhaza section of Khayelitsha. There were also other interactions with a select few informal traders on the side of roads within the informal settlement. Neither the narrative-based interviews nor the participant observations took place in a structured manner but simply emerged as and when the moment was ideal. A major compromise in the current paper was that in light of the small sample size, a focus was placed on the social value contribution of these informal street traders to the realisation of the right to food (as opposed to general framings and investigations regarding food security).

In order to analyse the data collected through narrative-based interviews and participant observations, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis uses the content of what is said to identify core themes in the narratives (Riessman 2005). Themes were identified on account of either repetition or if the research participants evoked strong emotion when talking about specific aspects of the narratives. The study sites were chosen because the areas are in a central zone defined by the railway station (in the case of Site B), adjacent minibus taxi ranks and nearby shopping mall complexes. Data were gathered in October 2019.

The study engaged a total of nine participants involved in the street trading of food in 'Site B' and 'Makhaza' in Khayelitsha. 7 women operating from Site B plus 2 males (a father and son operating separate businesses) from Makhaza were interviewed, exclusively in the Xhosa language. Because of this, a limitation of the study is that despite the author's Nguni-background[4], some of the information may not have been interpreted or captured within its intended connotations (undertones) as a result of the nuanced differences in the author's language, which is isiNdebele and that of the participants, which is isiXhosa. However, although the two languages are extremely similar, a Xhosa native speaker colleague assisted in those instances when the author was not certain about the meaning of the dialogue in the recordings.

In qualitative research, subjectivity and bias are considered natural and acceptable as long as they are acknowledged and looked at critically (Greenwood & Levin 2011). The author kept a journal during the research process, which helped manage some of the assumptions and biases, and offered an opportunity for critical reflexivity. The researcher also discussed and reviewed the findings with two other research collaborators to refine the themes and to articulate the findings represented by the photos. The qualitative essence of street food traders' experiences

[4] Nguni people are a group of Bantu peoples who primarily speak Nguni languages and currently reside predominantly in Southern Africa. The Nguni people are Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele and Swati.

of navigating a livelihood in the fluid and unstable context of the informal economy was captured in the thematic analysis that follows, which was carried out inductively. Whilst the right to food played a major role in this research, it must be recognised that this inquiry is essentially a study about human beings who have many needs (and were vocal about them) and that economic poverty cannot and should not be reduced to the realisation of the right to food alone. It must rather be understood, as supported by literature on 'food-ways', that food is a social artefact, used as a conduit for conversation, and food access is inherently linked positively and negatively at times to other vital issues and resources. The following thematic analyses delve into this.

Study site

Khayelitsha (which means "new home" in the Nguni languages), is one of the youngest and most populous townships in South Africa, and the largest in the Western Cape Province (Ndingaye 2005). It was officially established in 1983 by the apartheid regime in response to a severe housing shortage and perceived encroachment of a budding black urban population towards the City of Cape Town (Tshela 2002; Nqadini 2000). From a general human-development perspective and despite the overwhelming dominance of literature on Khayelitsha and informal settlements in general that depicts them as places of poverty, criminality and disease, the impression of the trading areas that became the study sites did not match such descriptions. While infrastructural and material poverty were clearly evident (Figure 1), the area gives an impression of a lively and vibrant community grappling with grave socioeconomic injustices. We should constantly remember that poverty and inequality struggles do not necessarily constitute people's and communities' self-perceptions and they should not be reduced to such descriptions.



Figure 1: Informal food street stall in Khayelistha. There are many barriers to making a living through street vending; one of these is access to public space and public services.

Results and discussion

Insights into Khayelitsha's informal food-ways

Fieldwork results yielded a solidarity rather than competitive economy; and while street food vendors were committed to maintaining their livelihoods through their enterprises, they also placed emphasis on the importance of upholding social cohesion among themselves as a community of street traders by abiding to the status quo and avoiding conflict. Interestingly, what repeatedly came through, from observations and conversations, is that people's choices and preferences for 'street-meat' were an important part of the informal food system of Khayelitsha and in particular were driven by a sense of tradition, nostalgia, and connection to cultural roots of heritage (the rural areas) where they come from. Additionally, customers who frequented the study-sites were conversing with the traders intimately and in some instances people referred to each other by name.

Although street vendors are invested in the production and selling of relatively safe food in Khayelitsha, there is still a need for basic sanitary facilities, such as running water and toilets within their working environments. The author observed participants struggling and having to constantly go back home to their dwellings at certain intervals to get water to cook with. Furthermore, it was evident that traders struggle to conduct business in harsh weather conditions due to a lack of urban infrastructure. Pointedly, none of the interviewees indicated that they used designated municipal trading stalls. Interviews with participants revealed that there is no proper coordination or consultation between the municipality or local government structures and the informal street food traders of Khayelitsha; the relationship that exists between the two is that of exclusion and negligence. In South Africa, local government strategies, such as the Local Economic Development framework, meant to support local businesses and stimulate economic growth, do not directly support the survivalist informal traders, especially the informal street traders selling cooked food in public open spaces and from temporary or mobile shelters within and outside urban areas. Another observation was that there is no energy transition in the informal street food sector, because of its heavy reliance on low quality energy sources like wood and charcoal in the face of a lack of any other affordable and reliable energy supply.

Street-food and the culture and rituals surrounding it appear to be reinforced by social ties in Khayelitsha. For example, during lunchtime there was communal eating, indicating the importance of sharing in this environment. Customers as well as street food traders always shared their plates, utensils, and the food itself. Thus, food plays a crucial and important role, not just as a source of sustenance or commodity for sale, but as powerful social currency that maintains cohesion and ensures food access is broadened (Figure 2).

Although not observed, interviewees also spoke of offering an informal social safety net for hungry persons who were unable to afford food, in that they sell food on credit sometimes in order to ensure that consumers struggling with cash flow can cope. For the majority of women participants, the opportunity to street trade in food demands reciprocal responsibility towards the transformation of others' lives and for greater communal freedom and development, they said. The high value and meaning the women gave to social connectedness portrayed lived



Figure 2: Second-generation informal food trader. Traders are an important part of the way food flows in urban areas.

experiences espoused by favouring, at times, the communal good. This value can be likened to the African philosophy of Ubuntu[5].

Eating healthily insofar as nutrition is concerned was not a stated priority for respondents (Figure 3 and 4). However, there was mention of the importance of safety and hygiene. The underlying motive was that it makes better economic sense for street vendors to trade in highly processed and less healthy foods. On this note, a concern that emanated from observations was the danger of a diet too high in animal fats as a result of the abundance of unprocessed meats on offer in the settlement's informal food value chain.

All the same, Khayelitsha's street food traders remain adept at responding to the needs of poor and marginalised urban residents. For these consumers their income is erratic; they may lack access to reliable energy and storage spaces; and they use public transport or taxis, which limits the quantities of food that can be purchased and transported. Such challenges compel low-income households to rely and depend on street food purchases very often.

[5]Ubuntu is an interactive ethic and way of being that speaks to human interconnectedness and the reciprocal responsibility held by a deep connection to others and through which people can come into their own (Cornell & Van Marle, 2005).



Figure 3: Lunchtime snack (intestines). Types of food items sold by informal food vendors and their nutrition knowledge were not ideal.

Social Capital and the Urban Voice – Understanding the political economy of Informality

For market and street traders of Khayelitsha, social capital – whether formally established through an association, or informal social networks – enables them to manage a competitive trading environment and to negotiate with local government and other powerful actors active in the food systems of the poor in Cape Town through collective action. The role of social capital in supporting traders' activities, together with the inevitability of informal sector livelihoods, is well recognized by agencies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Carr and Chen 2002), and informal workers' organizations are seen as key players in the pro-poor policy debates - unions, cooperatives,

associations or other representative groups (Chen et al. 2002). In particular, small micro-enterprises rarely influence decision-making to their advantage against established interests unless they are organized and mobilise (Rakodi 2003). In Site B and Makhaza, street food traders fell into two groups – those associated to formal associations like the Khayelitsha Station Informal Trader's Association (KSITA), recognized by the authorities, and those who gained their legitimacy through informal kinship, religious and other social networks. Established in 2011, KSITA is the official union of the trading community. As discussed by scholars like Alison Brown (2006), both groups offer a means for civic engagement with institutions and local authorities, but, as corroborated by the Khayelitsha experience, they often focus on self-help and fail to maintain long-term influence.



Figure 4: *Inyama yenhloko* (flesh of the head).

Conversations with participants on their attempts as street food traders to gain a platform for legitimacy to claim their rights as urban citizens revealed that some of their struggles are a product of both history and the political cultures that have informed responses to current crises or need (Figure 5). Due to South Africa's inequality context, poverty in the country has historical, geospatial, regional, ethnic, and gender dimensions. The Khayelitsha case study demonstrated that for successful bargaining, street food trader social capital must have both collective, and individual, value. Social capital is normally viewed only as an individual asset that traders use to support their day-to-day trading (see for example Woolcock 1998). Conversely, in probing street food traders' own understanding of constitutionalism, it was clear that there is no effective legal or institutional framework (or a consistent attempt by local government) that 'conscientises' informal food vendors to mobilise and initiate collective action geared towards amplifying and highlighting the crucial role they play in the food systems of the informal settlement.

Urban Governance and Institutions

The City of Cape Town introduced a revised informal trading policy in 2013, advocating for a 'thriving informal trading sector that is valued and integrated into the economic life, urban landscape and social activities within the City of Cape Town (City of Cape Town 2013: 8)'. Despite this, dialogue with participants about city-level government actions revealed an ambivalent, if not actively hostile, approach to street food traders. Although participants weren't articulate about it, the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) are completely silent on the issue of food planning and almost all Spatial Development Frameworks ignore the food system entirely. This results in a paradox whereby legislation that aims to promote social justice ignores the single biggest socioeconomic challenge faced by poor households. Crush et al. (2015) argue that, although the policy environment in Cape Town varies across parts of the city and between segments of the informal economy, 'the modernist vision of a "world-class city" with its associated antipathy to informality dominates, and informal space and activity is pathologised' (p15).



Figure 5: Partners. Street trading has traditionally attracted less educated, poor urban women seeking cash employment who are least likely to find alternative employment elsewhere. However, men, squeezed from the formal labour market, are increasingly joining the ranks.

Indeed, the commitment by local/city governments to "spatial justice" in particular has become a contested arena, as it has proven problematic for the informal economy. The argument presented herein is that for informal street food traders and the owners of spazas in townships together with the poor households who depend on them for food, the current drive for "spatial justice" as detailed in the Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) gazetted in 2015 does not speak to the rights of these businesses to remain operational in their areas. Instead, there appears to be a move to close down businesses in the interests of 'modern' or 'organised' land-use zoning requirements. In the interpretation of "spatial justice" who has privileged access to space – and who has access to public space? There does not seem to be any clear conceptualisation in either SPLUMA itself or resulting local government regulation of the strong spatial component of household food insecurity, or the importance of incorporating this issue into spatial planning.

Thus the governance and institutional landscape within which informal street food vendors operate has a profound effect on their representational space and the extent to which they can exercise urban voice. In this regard, two trends were evident in Khayelitsha that speak to the struggle around promoting more effective urban governance, with significantly different impacts for traders. On one hand, neoliberal philosophies have encouraged the withdrawal of city governments from direct service provision, moving towards privatization of essential services. Within this view of the 'modern city', the informal economy has little place, and the state is often hostile to street traders (Skinner 2019). This is a reflection of intrenched historical biases against informality, the Africa-wide modernisation agenda, and the power of large-scale food businesses to self-identify as partners-in-development (Battersby 2017). On the other hand, small informal enterprises have very little influence over decisions made by coalitions of public authorities and large private sector interests in Third World cities. In Khayelitsha, street traders' relations with local government can be described by a sense of ephemerality. Most of the referenced interactions with local government were yesteryear accounts driven by a sense

of nostalgia about the responsive posture of previous regimes/administrations. From a public policy lens, street food traders of Khayelitsha live in a legal vacuum outside and beyond the law. What the author experienced and made sense of was that within informal settlements there exists a spectral city government that is present but not active (Figure 6).



Figure 6: Independent fruit & vegetable trader selling from the divisional island on one of the main roads in Khayelitsha. Most informal actors fall outside of government structures. Regulations on informal trade are often suboptimal, unfeasible and even punitive

"Vuk'zenzele" - a narrative present amongst street food vendors

Khayelitsha has almost no jobs of its own apart from informal trade, such as unlicensed taverns known as shebeens, hair stylists and house shops, and scant tourism jobs. It is unsettling to think that, at the moment, the most promising economic path for Khayelitsha is to offer tourists a glimpse of the provisional landscape necessitated by crushing poverty, mass relocation, and government-enforced segregation. It is equally disquieting to realize that urban renewal efforts at normalizing the township's environment could reduce some of the appeal to those tourists. In this research journey, I came across the catch-phrase *"Vuk'zenzele"* which means 'wake up and do it yourself'. This vernacular term was constantly referenced in conversations about what the country's Constitution means for street food vendors - reflecting the ways in which informal traders create self-agency as they renegotiate their existence in conditions of marginalization. Street food traders of Khayelitsha are trying to make ends meet by engaging in what scholars have coined 'street politics' (Bayat, 2010), as they pragmatically respond to a lack of governance. In government policy documents, the informal sector is framed almost entirely as a source of employment and potential entrepreneurialism. While this is important, it is also necessary for informal sector policy to recognize the role that informal food enterprises in particular play in the food system that delivers food to the urban poor. The City of Cape Town needs to recognize the informal food vendors for the services they offer, including food security, and not just their role as a source of employment (Figure 7). Through a better understanding of the geography and economics of how this sector meets the food security needs of the urban poor, it should be possible to refine policies, programmes and by-laws to enhance the sector.



Figure 7: Weekly, the van from the farms arrives in dusty Khayelitsha, with offals, tripe and trotters for sale to street food vendors.

Conclusions

While it was expected that street food traders would describe their struggles as resting on similar concerns to those outlined in scholarship and literature on informality, namely, lack of access to capital, poor infrastructure, lack of local government support and supermarket competition. However, in this case, what was apparent from the onset was that there exists a 'solidarity economy' in Khayelitsha. The solidarity economy is a response to the capitalist logic of expansion that continues to separate control over production from labour impacts and nature (Bennie and Satgoor 2018). The promise of the right to food appears to offer little to nothing for the street traders of Khayelitsha who are deeply entrenched in an established economy that systematically suffers from formal political and economic neglect, mixed with societal ambivalence about its relevance. It survives on vibrant and dynamic "social capital" that is defined by reciprocity within the community based on trust deriving from complex social ties, networks and associations.

Key to understanding the contradiction between the purported importance of a codified right to food in the Constitution and the conspicuous absence of effective policy solutions on the part of the state is the structure and operations of the global corporate food regime. Globally, movements have arisen that aim to address the problem of hunger. Significantly, they are explicitly political in that they situate the causes of global hunger in neoliberal capitalism broadly, and more specifically in corporate control of the food system, lack of land and agrarian reform, ongoing land and resource dispossessions, and public policies that favour the global market rather than the interests of farmers and citizens who require access to affordable and nutritious food (Bennie and Satgoor 2018). As such, the solidarity economy arises out of this capitalist disarticulation, and aims to re-embed labour democratically within human creativity, production and nature (Wainwright 2014). From one point of view, the sharing and borrowing of food seen in Khayelitsha masks the extent of food insecurity amongst the urban poor and obscures the failings of urban food systems (Maxwell 1999). The household scale, the food retail geography of the informal settlement, and the community characteristics then all become vital considerations in determining food insecurity and developing strategies to address it.

It is also important to acknowledge that Khayelitsha was developed and planned as a residential dormitory township, and no provision was made for urban agriculture (Smit et al. 2016). Although there are some community vegetable gardens in the area, there was hardly any visibility of houses with vegetable patches, and none of the interviewees mentioned using

gardens or being involved in urban agriculture for their food supply. This is similar to the findings of de Swardt et al. (2005) who found that only 3 per cent of households in Khayelitsha had home food gardens.

The discussed narratives of informality, social capital and governance have been central in fabricating a wholesome and meaningful reality of what the attainment of the right to food looks like for street food traders who are majority women in Khayelitsha. Khayelitsha is a physically, socially and politically variable and uncertain space, yet simultaneously filled with pockets of agency and hope. Although this research sought to understand what the promise of the right to food means for those actively involved in informal food systems of the poor, ultimately, instead it uncovered some of the often invisible, yet symbolic realities that knit together the fabric of this visibly fragmented space - ordinary, everyday experiences of the street traders themselves in a space defined by grave socioeconomic injustices and complexities.

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