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**A gendered inquiry into South Africa's agrarian question
and agro-food system trends**

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Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.*

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DECLARATION

I, Khwezi Mabasa, declare that this dissertation is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology) at the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or for examination in this or any other university.



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Khwezi Mabasa

15th of March 2022

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's agrarian question has been shaped by the evolution of racial capitalism for nearly four centuries. Dispossession, commodification, and social stratification continue to characterise the country's agrarian system and broader social structure. However, these three structural features exist in a 21st century finance-led racial capitalist system, which has decoupled socio-economic development from rural-based agrarian livelihoods and exacerbated uneven spatial development across the country. Sixty-seven per cent of the population resides in urban areas and deagrarianisation continues to expand. The country's agro-food system is highly industrialised, with strong upstream and downstream linkages to other economic sectors dominated by large corporates along value chains. Yet these structural shifts, created through centuries of dispossession and racially segregated industrialisation, have not totally obliterated the role of agrarian livelihood practices in households or community social reproduction.

This study used a gendered lens to explore the agrarian political economy structural changes mentioned above, drawing primarily on the experiences of black African women from low-income communities. The discussions elevate gendered socio-economic and sociological impacts of structural agrarian changes in South Africa, which are often underplayed in agrarian political economy literature focusing on transforming race or class relations. More importantly, the study examined the women's individual and communal agentic agrarian livelihood practices. The main aim was to explore significant lessons for contributing towards debates on alternative agro-food systems in South Africa. Feminist and extended case methodology framed the overall methodological approach in the study, and data was obtained from semi-structured individual and focus group interviews. I relied on Marxist feminist and black feminist political economy literature to develop the study's theoretical framework and analytical concepts.

The central argument of the study is anchored on the following three points. Firstly, South Africa's post-apartheid agro-food system structural change logic advances narrow agrarian transformation goals, which seek to change racial ownership patterns and integrate 'emerging' women farmers into existing commercial agro-food system market structures. This approach has led to negative gendered socio-economic impacts because it fails to address structural social reproduction dimensions that cause gender disparities in the first place. Secondly, black African women have created dynamic agrarian subsistence practices in response to their structural socio-economic challenges, which form part of multiple livelihood and income sources. Their contribution towards local economic

development through these subsistence livelihood practices is overlooked because it takes place outside formal markets. Thus, it is imperative to examine and study these livelihood practices with the aim of obtaining key lessons on how to support marginalised black African women who view agrarian development as an importance source of social reproduction in their communities. Thirdly, black African women-led agency goes beyond orthodox productivism approaches in studying agrarian and non-agrarian livelihood strategies. This study revealed other essential elements in the women's agentic practices such as solidarity building, experiential learning, indigenous knowledge sharing and creating spaces for formulating women-led public policy demands.

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ACRONYMS

ADC	Agricultural Development Committee
BFAP	Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy
CoGTA	Cooperative Governance and Traditional Authority
CASP	Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme
CWP	Community Works Programme
DARDLEA	The Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs
CPSA	The Communist Party of South Africa
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
CCHIP	Childhood Hunger Identification Project
DAFF	Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
ECD	Early Childhood Development
GHS	General Household Survey
GNP	Government Nutrition Programme
GVA	Gross Value Add
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFSS	Integrated Food Security Strategy
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
LED	Local Economic Development
NAMC	National Agricultural Marketing Council
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PSE	Producer Support Estimate
PPPFA	Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act of 2000
R&D	Research and Development
SMME	Small Micro and Medium Enterprises
SACP	South African Communist Party
SANHANES-1	South African National Health and Nutrition Examination
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa's

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*Abafazi Bayazbambela*¹

A gendered inquiry into South Africa's agrarian question and agro-food system trends

Introduction: research problem and core argument

Historic and contemporary agrarian policy discussions in South Africa mainly explore the evolution of the formal agricultural sector (Bernstein, 1994; Bundy, 1988; Sihlobo and Kirsten, 2018). These discussions draw attention to commercial agriculture, with a focus on socio-economic indices such as South Africa's food security level, price trends, trade patterns and technological innovation (Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries [DAFF], 2013; Kirsten, 2006; Sihlobo and Kirsten, 2018). A major theme in this literature is transformed market structures across value chains caused by agricultural sector policy reorientation since 1994 (Greenberg, 2015; Makhaya and Roberts, 2013). Another prevalent focus area is the state's role in agrarian political economy regulation and its impact on food commodity markets (Greenberg, 2015; Hall, 2011; Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009: 18). Additionally, some policy attention has been directed towards achieving racial redress and resolving historic class inequalities in South Africa's agrarian structure (Cousins, 2005; Greenberg, 2015; Sihlobo and Nel, 2016).

These accounts have not sufficiently explored agro-food systems debates from a gendered perspective. Historic and contemporary agrarian literature contributions have largely underplayed gender analytical perspectives and power relations (Bradford, 2000; Razavi, 2011; Tsikata, 2015). Razavi provides an example of this: "the unpaid (non-commodified) provisioning of household members has been invisible to political economists of agrarian change and continues to be invisible in research on livelihoods" (Razavi, 2009: 200). The

¹ A powerful agentic Zulu phrase expressed by the women throughout the interviews. This phrase basically means that African women can engage in subsistence farming without male or state assistance. The direct translation in English is 'women hold their own'. I have also used this title for a chapter in an edited book on land.

overall aim of this study was to explore South Africa's agrarian question through a gendered lens, with a specific focus on agro-food system trends. It investigated the connection between gender disparities, food security, and market power relations in the agro-food system.

I examine the extent to which the agro-food system exacerbates underlying gendered political economy disparities. This includes examining how working class black African women experience and respond to gendered structural barriers and socio-economic challenges developed in the agro-food system.² These areas of inquiry are summarised into the following three core research questions: *How has the agro-food system deepened gender inequalities? How do black African women from low-income communities' experience gender disparities in household food security? What can we learn from black African women's responses to the agrarian crisis in South Africa?*

The study's main argument is that South Africa's agrarian political economy structure and overall agrarian policy impact and exacerbate gender socio-economic disparities in society. Large-scale commercial farming, agro-processing, and retail interests still dominate South Africa's agrarian political economy, even though state support has been scaled down since 1994. The country's post-apartheid agro-food system structural change paradigm prioritises limited agrarian transformation goals, these being to alter racial ownership patterns and integrate 'emerging' women farmers into established commercial agro-food system value chains. This approach has not adequately resolved the underlying class and gender disparities that have co-existed with racial inequalities in South Africa's agrarian political economy, as it relies on a limited conception of racial redress, which often neglects the needs and interests of women from low income households.

The existing macro trends produce adverse gendered socio-economic impacts because they do not significantly address the structural social reproduction dimensions that inform gender disparities in the first place. These include women's unpaid labour, gender differences in food

² The study uses the Marxian political economy definition of working class, which is drawn from both classical and neo-Marxian literature sources. This includes the Marxist Feminist and Global South Marxist (particularly African Marxist) conceptions of the working class. These two Marxian traditions amplify the centrality of race and gender in the making of South Africa's working class.

insecurity patterns, women's barriers to land access, the ecological crisis, and differences between male and women headed households participating in the agro-food system.³ Consequently, the contemporary agrarian political economy reproduces gendered socio-economic disparities, especially for black African women residing in low-income households. The current study highlights how the contemporary agrarian structure sustains and reproduces systemic gendered socio-economic inequalities. This unfavourable agrarian political economy structure has not stopped black African women in low-income communities from developing dynamic responses. They continue to engage in subsistence farming and agro-food system retail livelihood practices. These agro-food system practices constitute a critical component of several household and community livelihood strategies, which include other income sources.

This thesis finally contends that food production livelihood practices strengthen women's socio-economic agency and collective contribution towards local economic development. The phrases socio-economic agency and collective contribution towards local economic development describe the multiple agentic livelihood strategies used by the women interviewees in daily social reproduction. These strategies include subsistence farming, selling surplus produce, baking, knowledge sharing and providing food for vulnerable households in the community. The women are not employed or running enterprises in the formal local economy, yet their labour and agentic livelihood strategies in the agro-food system are essential for social reproduction. These livelihood practices are often overlooked because women's agro-food system participation largely takes place on the margins, outside formal economy value chains.⁴ This ultimately leads to further marginalisation in the agrarian political economy. It is, therefore, imperative to understand, and then share insights on transforming South Africa's agrarian structure so that it can support and respond to the gendered informal agrarian economy. The following sections discuss the policy context and

³ I used the Statistics South Africa (2021) definition of a household head. It defines a household head as the "main decision-maker, or the person who owns or rents the dwelling, or the person who is the main breadwinner". The black African women interviewees in this study described themselves as household heads using these criteria.

⁴ An agro-food system refers to the "set of activities which combine to make and distribute agri-food products, and consequently act to meet human nutrition needs in a particular society" (FAO, 2009:16)

socio-economic trends informing these core research questions and arguments developed throughout the thesis.

Policy context: food systems and intersectional inequality

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines food security as a state when “all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (The Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 1996).⁵ Several studies such as the Global Food Security Index (2019) rank South Africa as the most food secure state in the African region. The country was ranked number 48 out of 113 countries compared in the 2019 study. It produces enough food to export varied commodities in global agricultural markets, and national food security has been maintained in the post-apartheid era (DAFF, 2013; Global Food Security Index, 2019). The National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security concludes that “South Africa is presently able to boast national food sufficiency through a combination of own production and food imports” (DAFF, 2013: 3).

The literature sources cited above, including the Global Food Security Index (2019), suggest that South Africa produces and imports enough food to meet the basic nutritional requirements of all citizens. Yet, a study conducted by Shisana et al. (2014) revealed that only 46% of the population in South Africa is food secure (South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey). This research further concluded that 28% of South Africa’s population are at risk of going hungry, and 26% of citizens experience hunger on a daily basis (DAFF, 2013; Shisana et al., 2014). In other words: over half of South Africans did not have sufficient access to affordable, nutritious and safe food to meet their basic health requirements by 2013/14 when the study was published (based on the FAO definition). This points to a significant discrepancy between national food security in markets and household hunger levels. It equally highlights the limitations of market-orientated food system analyses

⁵ This is the conventional definition used in food security policy documents and research. However, it is important to note that the concept is interpreted differently by various actors within the agro-food system. In addition, there are different methodologies used to measure food security as described in some sections of this chapter.

that often underplay household food security trends. Nonetheless, the number of households experiencing absolute hunger (everyday) decreased drastically from 52% in 1999 to 26% by 2013/14 (Shisana et al., 2014: 145). There have been improvements in food security levels since 1994, but these are not adequate as a significant portion of the South African population still experiences food insecurity. Table 1 captures the findings from different national food security surveys informing policy government policy from 1999 to 2012.

Table 1: The findings of different national food security surveys conducted in South Africa

Variable	NFCS 1999 (n = 2 735) (%)	NFCS 2005 (n = 2 413) (%)	SASAS 2008 (n = 1 150) (%)	SANHANES 2012 (n = 6 306) (%)
Food security	25.0	19.8	48.0	45.6
At risk of hunger	23.0	27.9	25.0	28.3
Experiencing hunger	52.3	52.0	25.9	26.0

NFCS, National Food Consumption Survey; SASAS, South African Social Attitudes Survey; SANHANES-1, South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey

Source: (Shisana et al., 2014: 145)

The disaggregated data findings in the Shisana et al. (2014) study were equally significant, as they alluded to glaring race and geographic inequalities in the food system. The authors highlight that “the largest percentage of participants who experienced hunger (food insecurity) were in urban informal (32.4%) and rural formal (37.0%) localities” (Shisana et al., 2014: 146). Black Africans constituted the largest proportion of food insecure residents in SA by 2013/14, with the “black African race group having the highest rate of food insecurity (30.3%), followed by the coloured population (13.1%)” (Shisana et al., 2014: 146). While the study demonstrates the racially skewed dimension of food insecurity, the survey did not have a specified disaggregated category to track gendered food security disparities. In other words, the survey did not examine the inequalities in food security access between male and women headed households. And the underlying socio-economic and sociological factors that shapes these inequalities.

Other literature sources, however, reveal that gender disparities do in fact impact food security access in household and communities (Reddy and Moletsane, 2009; Hart, 2010;

Oxfam, 2014). For example, Oxfam's (2014: 14) hidden hunger report explains how women-headed households are "more likely to run out of money to buy food" and women cut or skip meals to maintain food insecurity in households. Reddy and Molestane (2009) point out that women's food security is further compromised by additional social reproduction duties and care labour. They cite responsibilities of black African women in rural areas such as fetching wood, water and caring for sickly family members that decrease time available for subsistence farming (Reddy and Moletsane, 2009:13). Tibesigwa and Visser's (2016) study on gendered food disparities in small holder farms (both rural and urban) is equally instructive. It concluded that women-headed households experience higher food insecurity.⁶ This trend is attributed to factors such as differentiated household sizes, income, assets and access to agricultural extension services (Tibesigwa and Visser, 2016: 40).

Statistics South Africa's (Stats SA) (Stats SA, 2019b) General Household Survey and food security reports are also important to consider. They measure food security using an index called the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale (HFIAS). This is different from the index used by Shisana et al. (2014) in the South African National Health and Nutrition Examination (SANHANES-1) study cited in preceding sections. That study employed the Community Childhood Hunger Identification Project (CCHIP) index. The CCHIP questionnaire comprises broader questions which delve deeper into the nutritional aspects of food security. This is significant in light of the high malnutrition levels which exist in South Africa. The Global Nutrition Report (2020) amplifies this point in the following words: "South Africa has made no progress towards achieving the target for stunting, with 27.4% of children under 5 years of age affected" (Global Nutrition, 2020).

This document raises similar concerns regarding life-style or 'diet-related' non-communicable disease (NCD) trends in South Africa, especially the prevalence of diabetes (Global Nutrition, 2020). These findings amplify the nutritional quality dimension in food security studies, which is equally important for examining household hunger. The FAO food security concept cited in

⁶ The National Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (2012) defines "smallholder farmers as those farmers owning small-based plots of land on which they grow subsistence crops and one or two cash crops relying almost exclusively on family labour". The empirical chapters in this study explored the definition articulated by the local government interviewees in the interviews. And the thesis findings provide a gendered critique of these two definitions, drawing on the experiences of the women interviewees.

preceding sections incorporates the effect of food consumption on human health. This link between food consumption, health and the structure of the agro-food system is explored further in sections investigating household food security throughout this dissertation. The Stats SA food security report (2019: 14) states that “78,7% households reported that they have adequate access to food, about 2,5 million (15,8%) reported that their food access is inadequate and almost 0,9 million (5,5%) of households described their food access as severely inadequate” (Stats SA, 2019a: 14). More importantly, the report details how women-headed households experience higher food insecurity levels than those headed by men. Households headed by women had more children experiencing hunger (Stats SA, 2019a: 21).

This gendered inequality does not only exist on the consumption side of the agro-food system. It is prevalent in the production and labour trends in the formal agricultural sector as well. Clear examples include the gender pay and decent work gaps amongst agricultural labourers. Women receive lower wages or salaries than men occupying the same jobs. Additionally, they experience higher employment insecurity than men. Studies on labour market trends in the agro-food system highlight these two points. One of these is the economic analysis conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) in 2010. This analysis concluded that the average income of female farm workers was significantly lower than male farm workers. Devereux and Solomon’s (2011) study on farm workers’ levels of social protection shows how most women employees were in precarious short-term employment and received little labour related social protection.

National labour market reports suggest a continuation of these trends, with the Stats SA (2020) agricultural census report indicating that there are more men occupying full-time employment than women (Stats SA, 2020:30). The number of men employed in full-time employment is 267 809 while women constitute 139 590 of this cohort in commercial agriculture. Similarly, women agricultural workers are in more insecure employment than men. The figure of part-time/seasonal women employees is 153 057 while the male count is 142 867 (Stats SA, 2020:31). Visser and Ferrer’s (2015) study (commissioned by the International Labour Organisation) highlights a gendered pay gap in the sector.

The food security reports discussed in preceding sections have shaped national food policy frameworks in several ways. South Africa's government has attempted to coordinate the country's food security policy instruments through two macro-planning documents: the Integrated Food Security Strategy published in 2002 and the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security (DAFF, 2013). The food security trends cited in various reports and policy advocacy documents illustrate the shortcomings of both national policy strategies. Research and policy analysis of the specific programmes implemented under these frameworks is limited. Most research reports and surveys focus on food security trends without examining the efficacy of the state's general policy strategy for ensuring food security.

Overall, there are other research and policy gaps in food security literature that deserve attention. I will briefly describe them here before proceeding to unpack them further in the following sections dealing with the study's justification and methodological approach. A primary concern, which emerges from the literature cited above, is the lack of data on the relationship between gender and food security. The statistical household analyses do not provide an in-depth explanation of the gender-based sociological factors determining differentiated access to food security. The emphasis is on household size, income, assets and access to agro-food system support. There is minimal attention devoted to the relationship between gender, food security and structural social factors shaping power relations and inequalities between genders. Thus, it is imperative to explore how overall systemic gender disparities emerged and persists in the agro-food system. This study aimed to document how black African women experience these disparities beyond what is presented in statistical household indicators.

An additional gap is the absence of a substantial critique on how the broader food system impacts food security in households and communities. Food security trends are explained without sufficiently examining in the first place whether the current agro-food system is adequate. This point is salient because South Africa is classified as being nationally food secure with a modernised agrarian structure. Yet, the country cannot provide food security for all its residents, especially black African working class women in both rural and urban areas. The industrial agro-food system is primarily assessed against its ability to produce for commercial domestic and international markets. However, the state policy literature

frameworks and reports do not adequately interrogate its shortcomings in the area of gender, local community and household food insecurity. This link between the agro-food system structure, gender, household food security and government policy requires further exploration. The current study examines the agro-food system experiences of black African women in low income households, and connects these themes.⁷ The agro-food system's efficiency is discussed beyond the trends observed in national commercial markets.

National food security policy frameworks and surveys do not sufficiently explore the livelihood agentic practices of people residing in low income households. They fail to provide detailed insights on how these citizens respond to hunger and other livelihood barriers in their homes or communities (DAFF, 2013; Shisana et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2020). An examination of the relationship between food security, people-led livelihood strategies and political responses to the food crisis is essential for addressing this gap. This dissertation specifically focuses on black African women-led agency in working class communities. All the preceding observations which inform the justification for this study are summarised below.

Justification and rationale

The value of this study is informed by the following research, policy and theoretical observations. Firstly, food security studies in the past 27 years illustrate how race, class, and geographic disparities determine access to food security. This relationship between structural intersectional inequality and food access is cited in various reports (DAFF, 2013; Shisana et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2019a). Consequently, transforming race and class inequalities in South Africa's post-apartheid agro-food system features prominently in policy reforms (Cousins, 2019; Hart, 2008; Hart and Aliber, 2012). What is missing in this literature, though, is a systemic gendered examination, which moves beyond the household consumption reports. This dissertation broadens gender investigations into South Africa's agro-food system by

⁷ I use the Statistics South Africa (SA) General Household Survey definition of a low income household in this study. This is important for highlighting that the study purposively focuses on the experiences of black African women from low income households (in working class communities), rather than the general 'women' category used in official public policy documents discussing gender and agrarian reform in SA.

using food sovereignty and radical feminist political economy literature sources (Park, White and Julia, 2013, Fakier and Cock, 2018; Shiva, 2015).⁸

These two sources elevate the structural sociological gender factors omitted in existing agro-food and food security reports. Issues such as the relationship between racial capitalism, agro-food systems and gender disparities will be explored. I equally aim to connect agro-food system trends with women's unpaid labour, gendered food disparities, land redistribution and debates on how women-led informal food economies intersect with formal agrarian structures. All these themes are important for unpacking the underlying political economy factors which shape gendered agro-food system disparities in South Africa. Radical feminist political economy and food sovereignty paradigms connect food security trends with systemic gender inequalities in a capitalist society. This intersection between gender disparities, the agro-food system and structural tenants of the contemporary capitalist system features prominently in this dissertation.

A second justification of the study relates to the salience of peoples' agency in agro-food systems (Miraftab, 2004; Wittman, 2009). This contribution builds on the works of feminist and agrarian political economy writers which highlight that working class people engage in agentic practices in the context of a neo-liberal political economy (Kroll, 2016; Wittman, 2009). The emphasis in South Africa's existing agro-food system literature is placed on structural change in formalised markets and national food security. Subsequently, agency is mainly reduced to the economic activities of producers, agro-processors, retailers and upstream input suppliers in commercial value chains (Kirsten, 2006; DAFF, 2013; Sihlobo and Kirsten, 2018). There are some in-depth studies on subsistence producers (mostly in rural areas), and they draw attention to household consumption trends and livelihood sources (Aliber and Mdoda, 2015; Mtero, 2012; Stats SA, 2016b). But they are not sufficiently gendered and provide little insights on how women's socio-economic and political agency develops around agrarian livelihood practices. One of the core research aims in this thesis is

⁸ Radical feminist political economy in this study includes Marxist feminism and black feminist political economy contributions. I used both feminist traditions in order to capture the structural gender, class and race disparities that have shaped the women interviewees lives and livelihoods. However, emphasis was placed on Marxist Feminism and social reproduction debates.

to deepen the analysis on working class women-led agency, drawing from the experiences of black African women producers who reside in low-income households and communities. This is significant for illuminating the differentiated experiences amongst women who come from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in agro-food system gender policy debates. Women's agency in the agro-food system is often reduced to the experiences of individuals who participate and compete in commercial markets.

Thirdly, several writers have advanced a case for restructuring South Africa's agrarian political economy and agri-food system (Cousins, 2019; Bennie, 2014; Greenberg, 2015). These contributions can be classified into three heterodox development approaches: solidarity economy, eco-socialism, and neo-Marxian perspectives (Bennie and Satgoor, 2018; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Jara, 2019). These heterodox perspectives challenge neo-liberal agrarian writers, who limit agrarian reforms to integrating black commercial companies into the existing agrarian structure (Kirsten, 2006; Sihlobo and Kirsten, 2018; Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009). These debates on alternatives are salient in light of recent major policy developments on land and agrarian reform in South Africa (Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019). Policy stakeholders are currently debating different policy options for transforming South Africa's agrarian political economy so that it produces less socio-economic inequalities.

This study seeks to contribute to this policy discourse that is shaping the future of the post-apartheid agrarian structure. The contribution is twofold: elevating the voices of working class black African women in agrarian political economy debates, and, more importantly, shifting the focus from narrow agrarian productivism (Yeni, 2021). The productivism approach reduces land and agrarian reform to food commodity production or efficiency in commercial markets. It misses Ferguson's (2013) poignant observation on different values attached to land and agrarian power structures in society. He states that "attention to the broader question of land's multiple uses and meanings can help to explain why land is valued and desired in ways that agricultural utility alone cannot" (Ferguson, 2013: 168). I draw from Ferguson's (2013) observation and highlight the deeper political, cultural, and sociological values associated with black African women participants' agency in the agro-food system. All

the points mentioned above are explored using the methodological assumptions and research design outlined below.

Methodological approach

Core assumptions

I employed the core assumptions from the interpretivist and critical social science methodological approaches, with an emphasis on extended case study and feminist methodology (Burawoy, 1998; Brooks, 2007; Harding, 1987). Statistical evidence on food security and other household human development indicators was examined in the light of participants' lived experiences. The research interview questions about participants' personal experiences of agro-food systems allowed them to express their interpretations of the South African agrarian crisis. In addition, I developed an in-depth understanding of the social setting shaping participants' lived experiences through preliminary research site visits and interviews. This was crucial for addressing several gaps in literature sources describing research sites. In-depth interviews also uncovered the underlying values and normative meanings associated with household food security and the agrarian system broadly. These meanings transcend what is observed in quantitative data on gendered food production or consumption in society. For example, interview responses illuminated how food production is intertwined with culture, identity and historically constructed gender roles. These issues highlight two fundamental principles of interpretivist and critical social science research paradigms: examining social contexts, 'natural settings' and humans' daily lived experiences when framing research approaches (Neuman, 2014).

My methodological approach also placed primacy on understanding the participants' agentic practices, within the structural context of power relations in the agro-food system and broader political economy. I aimed to understand how structural conditions create opportunities and set limits for the women's livelihood practices and agency. The notion of "bounded autonomy" was useful in this study because it describes how "free will, choices, and decision making are not unlimited or open ended; rather, they either must stay within restricted boundaries of options or are confined within limits, which can be cultural or

material boundaries” (Neuman, 2014: 113). The exploration of the participants’ agency was equally essential for linking my methodological approach with social change, which is a core research theme in the study. Sheppard (2020: 22) amplifies how the “critical social science paradigm focuses on power, inequality, and social change”. The social change is aimed at addressing inequality and transforming power relations in society.

The social change theme was expressed in the core research questions of the dissertation and interview discussion guides. I framed questions (Annexure A) in a manner that encouraged participants to freely express their livelihood, collective organising and agentic resilience practices. I also probed where this agency takes place and which social networks are employed in developing it. The study also contained probing questions about the future of livelihoods and the agro-food system to participants. These questions revealed insights on how the participants perceived socio-economic and local governance transformation. The responses also illuminated some ideas from the women on the necessary steps required for attaining more equal relations in the agro-food system. Some examples of interview questions (see Annexure A) that amplified the social change research theme include the following: What policy interventions are required to decrease gender inequality in the agro-food system? Does your communal garden farming contribute towards local socio-economic development and women empowerment?

The theoretical framework used in the study complemented the overall methodological assumptions and research design. It is based on Marxist and radical feminist political economy literature. Both schools of thought elevate the salience of structural analysis, agency, social change and valuing participants lived experiences in the process of conducting social research. I used Marxian agrarian political economy to explore how power relationships between state, market and social institutions shape structural transformation in agro-food systems. Marxist agrarian political economy also assisted me to investigate the themes of human agency and social change in agro-food systems. The radical feminist political economy was crucial for broadening essential analytical concepts and centring women’s experiences in my research approach. Core analytical concepts such as labour, social identity, power and agency were studied through a gendered lens. I gathered and interpreted data in a way that attempted to capture women’s differentiated experiences in the capitalist agro-food system.

I did not impose the ideological and conceptual underpinnings of the theoretical framework during interviews. This was essential for avoiding biases and allowing participants to use their own categories and interpretation when explaining the gendered impact of agro-food system inequalities. For example, none of the participants identified themselves as feminists; however, they provided deep explanations about the value of women-led agentic practices, which are not dependent on the state, males or non-governmental organisation support.

Participants might not have used established concepts contained in political or academic theory to describe their agency and beliefs. But the concepts they do use, and the actions they take, often complement fundamental tenets of a particular ideological worldview employed in research and general societal politics. I was compelled to reflect on this when applying theoretical frameworks and analytical concepts in the fieldwork process. Fakier and Cock's (2018) reflections on their activist-orientated research in the *Eco-Feminist Roundtable* provided some insights on how to overcome this challenge when I was examining women's leadership, collective organising, and creation of livelihood alternatives. They place primacy on exploring the nature of women's agentic practices and perspectives, and on identifying the core transformative principles driving their actions. As Cock (2016: 123) explains:

Black working class and rural women often predominate in the organisations addressing the food crisis but the majority do not describe themselves as feminists. There are many different forms of feminism, but if feminism means women acting collectively, often with women's leadership, to challenge existing unequal power relations, then many of these initiatives represent a form of transformative feminism – at least in analytical terms.

Similarly, Seppala's (2016) empirical work with women-led social justice movements in Nepal and India also assisted me to address this conceptual challenge. The author suggests that researchers should appreciate how women activists from the global South experience patriarchy differently. These differentiated experiences of patriarchy in the political, socio-economic and cultural sphere impact how women activists understand resistance or agency (Seppala, 2016: 37). There are different ways of articulating and engaging in feminist activism, which may not conform strictly to established academic theory or political frameworks. Thus,

it is imperative to acknowledge the varied approaches to feminist activist agency and activism in different social contexts.

In addition, Seppala encourages researchers to engage in dialogical learning throughout the research process. This ensures that concepts and theories employed in research are grounded in lessons obtained from participants' worldviews, social activism and experiences. The author summarises this view as follows: "I also hope to have illustrated that learning from movements is an invaluable, yet, an underestimated method for theorists where the aim is to transform the relationship between theory and political practice into something more reflexive and dialogical" (Seppala, 2016: 41). The preceding points on the core methodological assumptions are expressed further in the following two methodologies used in my research: feminist and extended case methodology.

Feminist methodology

I employed several lessons and principles from feminist methodological literature in this study (Brooks, 2007; Clemons, 2019; Harding, 1987). A core premise in feminist methodological approaches is the nexus between ontology and research. These writers argue that andro-centric research approaches and designs have not examined the question of the human subject critically. This has subsequently led to developing research designs that are based on masculine readings of a human research participant. Harding (1987: 3) describes this fault line by saying theory and methodology "have been applied in ways that make it difficult to understand women's participation in social life". Cook and Fonow (1986) support this contention and argue that orthodox research methods elevate males as primary reference points. They believe "taking men as the normal subjects of research is a way of ignoring gender that results in equating the masculine with the universal" (Cook and Fonow 1986: 6).

These critiques push researchers to factor in gender at the onset of designing research approaches and designs, and encourage researchers to not overlook or peripheralise gendered disparities, experiences, and social relations. I considered these factors when developing my research design and methods. Central to my approach to this study was acknowledgment and sensitivity to the participants' specific gendered experiences in their

communities. This involved me engaging participants in a manner that amplified my awareness of gendered sociological issues such as gender-based violence, women's unpaid labour, and gendered social reproduction crises in communities. This informed my choices on interview location and how I engaged participants in the discussion. For example, I interviewed most of the women participants in their homes, so that they did not have to spend time or money travelling. This was based on recognising that they have several domestic duties to perform in their households, and additional travelling would be expensive and cumbersome. I also phrased the food security and livelihood interview questions in a manner that acknowledged gender divisions of labour within households and communities.

An additional point made in feminist methodological debates is the need for critical reflection on the researcher's and the participants' social positions (Brooks, 2007; Doucet and Mauthner, 2006). De Shong (2013: 3) succinctly describes this reflexivity in the following words: "the process of documenting, analysing and (re) presenting the lives of others involves acknowledging our own social location as researchers and how this affects the type of knowledge we produce". This reflection is important because it compels the researcher to be aware of the social differentiation between the research investigator and participants (Clemons, 2019; De Shong, 2013). This differentiation can take several forms such as class, race, gender, nationality or culture (Doucet and Mauthner, 2006: 41). The researcher is examined as a human subject rather than an "invisible, anonymous" research authority who is disconnected from the sociological themes explored in the study (Harding, 1987: 8). Reflecting on this observation deeply also encourages the researcher to think about how data is gathered, interpreted and contrasted with theoretical frameworks. Doucet and Mauthner (2006: 41) propose a "notion of 'reflexivity in retrospect' as a way of viewing research and the knowledge produced as a continuous and open-ended process that changes as researchers revisit their data".

Drawing from these points, I continuously reflected on my personal social location as a black African male researcher in this study. My sociological perspective or 'imagination' is influenced by socialisation in black African urban working and middle class contexts. Political activism has equally shaped my worldview and conceptions of social justice. Here I need to emphasise my parents trade union activist stories and my direct personal political activism in

student and trade union movements. My class position as a black African educated male who spends time in urban townships and suburbs is also important. I had to ensure that this personal sociological background did not produce biases or adverse research integrity effects on the study. This necessitated comparing my interpretation of the interview data with findings in other literature sources exploring the relationship between gender and food security.

The literature on Marxist feminism and black feminist political economy equally shaped the categorisation and interpretation of data findings. This feminist political economy literature assisted me to comprehend essential concepts such as labour and social reproduction through a gendered lens; as a result I minimised the use of male centric conceptualisations when synthesising interview findings with the literature sources. Finally, I produced regular fieldwork reports after conducting interviews, which were shared with my supervisors, fellow postgraduate students and my fieldwork assistant (mostly women). Their collective feedback ensured that I corrected and addressed preliminary findings that reflected analytical gender biases or oversights. Ortiz (2005) encourages male researchers to critically reflect on their positionality and masculinity when interviewing women. The author states that “male sociologists should not continue to distance themselves from their experiences in cross-gender fieldwork. Instead, they should carefully and thoughtfully examine the nature of their experiences in cross-gender fieldwork and learn from such ethnographic analyses” (Ortiz, 2005: 282). Ortiz (2005: 282) reflects on how this conception of “muted masculinity” was essential for facilitating “collaborative relationships, interview interaction, and trust” in the research he conducted on wives of professional sport athletes (Ortiz, 2005: 282). This type of masculinity is markedly different from the “ultra-masculinity” viewed negatively by the women interviewees.

The response to my social positionality in the interviews reflected the women participants’ views on young and old black African men in society. Some participants explained the negative behaviour of males in society and encouraged me to be a different male figure. This included humorous comments about the laziness of males and inquiries into my personal work ethic in the household. Other participants focused on different dimensions such as my age and passion for research. These comments expressed a recognition of my individual progress in

education and professional roles. This was juxtaposed with the participants' generalisations about the delinquency, poor work ethic and anti-social behaviour of young black men.

The participants' responses to my social positionality as a male added value to the research undertaken in this study. I obtained further insights on how the participants perceived and related to men in their local settings. These perceptions about male counterparts mainly focused on men's contribution to non-wage social reproduction in the household and community. They also drew attention to other gender dimensions such as unequal socio-economic opportunities in the local economy, which is generally structured around sectors that are biased towards male employment. Overall, the reflexivity advanced in feminist methodology readings shaped my research journey in several ways and ensured that I connected interview findings with gendered differences in social reproduction processes.

This reflection on social location relates to the another essential lesson from feminist methodology. Dialogical learning from participant agency is highlighted in most texts discussing gendered research and methodological approaches (Clemons, 2019; De Shong, 2013; Harding and Norberg, 2005). These authors call for co-creation of knowledge and dialogical learning in research processes while challenging the 'knowing' researcher and subject dichotomy. Epistemology and research are perceived as processes that facilitate learning for all parties. Researchers learn from the freedom afforded to participants who "talk back to the investigator" during interviews (Cook and Fonow, 1986: 9; Seppala, 2016). Additionally, the lived experiences, history and social reproduction activities of women are regarded as a core knowledge source (Brooks, 2007: 58). Brook summarises this view succinctly in the following phrase: "women's concrete experiences provide the starting point from which to build knowledge" (Brooks, 2007: 58).

Otto and Terhorst's (2011) discussion on activist research in the global South also amplifies co-creating knowledge with research participants. These authors outline several prerequisites for developing this 'collaborative' approach when conducting studies (Otto and Terhorst, 2011: 200). A primary one is acknowledging that activist researchers can sometimes be complicit in exacerbating inequalities within research processes and society in general (Otto and Terhorst, 2011: 200). It is, therefore, important to create strategies that ensure that social

activist voices are not marginalised in the process of ‘translating’ and integrating them with academic theoretical frameworks (Otto and Terhorst, 2011: 207). Additionally, Otto and Terhorst advise that activist researchers reflect on their positionality as discussed in previous sections, and “engage already existing and recognised forms of social organisation and articulation of the subaltern” (Otto and Terhorst, 2011: 213) In summary, emphasis is placed on both researchers and participants learning from research process, with the aim of contributing to social change.

The theoretical framework in this study emphasises building knowledge from the participants’ concrete livelihood experiences. It draws from the contributions in Marxist and feminist political economy combining knowledge production with material conditions in human life. The theme of social reproduction as developed in Marxist feminist literature features prominently throughout the study. This theme illuminates the class power trends underpinning overall gender relations and sexual divisions of labour in capitalist societies. It also highlights the centrality of women’s unpaid labour in reproducing life and livelihoods. Social reproduction provides a materialist understanding of women’s lived experiences which are intimately connected to the structural evolution of racial capitalism in South Africa. In addition to choosing an appropriate theoretical framework, I elevated the women’s voices in the empirical chapters to highlight their contribution towards insights discussed in the thesis. Learning from the participants’ indigenous agricultural knowledge was equally important throughout the research process. This point comes out strongly in both the literature analysis and sections discussing the fieldwork findings. The dialogical learning approach encouraged me to test the theoretical and policy frameworks against the women’s lived experiences. It also opened up opportunities for constructing alternative agrarian structures and livelihoods using the knowledge obtained from participants.

The preceding points on feminist methodology are expressed in the extended case methodology which is in the second part of my methodological framework. I elaborate on how it was used in the study in the following sections.

Extended case study methodology

Burawoy's (1998; 2009) extended case methodology complements the core methodological assumptions outlined in preceding sections in several ways. The author emphasises connecting micro-level social experiences with various external structural factors shaping the capitalist political economy (Burawoy, 2009: 21-22). The aim, according to Burawoy (1998: 17), is to study "the everyday world from the standpoint of its structuration, that is by regarding it as simultaneously shaped by and shaping an external field of forces". The "context is the point of departure" in extended case study methodology (Burawoy, 2009: 25). I explored the core research questions within local and national political economy contexts. This was essential for linking household/community gendered agro-food system disparities with structural trends in South Africa's racialised capitalist social structure. The intersecting relationship between local agro-food system trends, gender and the overarching political economy structure shaping livelihoods was examined throughout this dissertation. I also employed extended methodology to illustrate the different ways in which gendered agro-food system disparities amplify systemic gender power imbalances in the macro-political economy.

Additionally, extended case methodology views dialogical learning between researchers and participants as a crucial step in undertaking sociological research. Burawoy (2021: 19) describes this as a "reflective science" that revolves around "a hermeneutic axis involving a dialogue between observer and participant". This methodology does not accept the 'detachment' imposed by positivist research paradigms, and rather advances a case for 'engagement' in knowledge production processes (Burawoy, 2009: 20). It urges researchers to embed themselves in the experiences and views of participants. The author's emphasis on dialogical learning and knowledge accumulation supports the epistemological assumptions articulated by various authors cited in previous sections of the chapter. All authors concur that embedded knowledge from participants shapes the observer's findings (Burawoy, 2009: 22). I applied this approach in framing the core research questions of my study, especially the question aimed at drawing lessons from the participant's agentic practices in the agro-food system. It assumes that participants have useful knowledge that impacts developments in South Africa's agro-food system. Some of the interview questions encouraged participants to provide in-depth details on how family history, socialisation and culture shaped their personal knowledge of farming and agro-food systems. The participant responses articulated in the

individual and focus group interviews added value to the knowledge produced in this study. These responses confirmed and challenged arguments expressed in the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I also gained insights on how to position my interview questions in a manner that drew links between this knowledge and daily agentic livelihood practices. This compelled me to reformulate some questions during the research process, so that they could facilitate additional in-depth discussions on the women participants' historic participation in the agro-food system and its relation to indigenous knowledge.

Another core principle of extended case methodology is appreciating the limitations of adopting fixed or rigid analytical frameworks. Burawoy (2009: 53) explains this principle using these words: "In our field work we do not look for confirmations but for theory refutations. We need first the courage of our convictions, then the courage to challenge our convictions, and finally the imagination to sustain our courage with theoretical reconstruction". This quote illustrates the importance of examining how participants' concrete lived experiences expand and challenge established theoretical frameworks. It equally elevates the importance of factoring in the social context, on both macro and micro levels, when applying theoretical constructs. Fieldwork research findings become useful tools in critiquing theories and the core concepts that accompany them.

I considered how the participants' interview responses expand or question agrarian political economy theory throughout the study. This involved interrogating the extent to which core arguments and concepts in these theoretical frameworks capture the lived realities of the participants and South Africa's context. A clear example was examining how agrarian political economy theory engages with the gendered labour and livelihood themes in South Africa's racialised political economy. I also reflected on how to apply core concepts in agrarian political economy theory to historic class formation and structural political economy debates in South Africa. These reflections are most clearly expressed in the literature review and empirical chapters of the dissertation. In addition to the above, I explored how the social change advocacy articulated in the interview responses relate with essential agentic theories in Marxian and radical feminist political economy. This was important for determining how these theories can be expanded or nuanced to capture the participants' perspectives on alternative livelihood and political governance models.

These points highlight that the extended case approach supports critical social science methodology, which emphasises linking theory and research to social change. Theory is positioned as an “intervention into the world it seeks to comprehend” (Burawoy, 2009: 53). The following sections provide a detailed description of the extended case study, which forms the basis of this thesis. Ermelo is the research site and it is important to discuss and describe this community. I particularly focus on the demographics, agrarian political economy structure and general socio-economic profile in order to use the “context” as the primary “point of departure” (Burawoy, 2009: 25). I conclude this chapter by explaining how the extended case study and feminist methodology principles were used to choose the research methods and instruments for this study. The discussion connects methodology and methods to amplify how the former shapes the latter.

Extended case study and research site: Ermelo in Mpumalanga

The black African women interviewees reside in the community of Ermelo, which is located in Mpumalanga province. This province has 2823 commercial farms and is ranked 4th in terms of its contribution towards national income derived from commercial agriculture (Stats SA, 2020). These farms operate on 32% of the provinces’ total land area, with the Gert Sibande (maize), Ehlanzeni (sugarcane) and Nkangala (maize) districts leading Mpumalanga’s agricultural crop production. The top crops produced in the province are maize, sugarcane, soya beans and bananas (Stats SA, 2020). Mpumalanga forms part of South Africa’s maize triangle comprising three high maize producing provinces in the country (Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy [BFAP], 2012; Stats SA, 2020). The province produced a total of 2 456 543 metric tons of maize in 2018 and is the second highest maize producer in South Africa (Stats SA, 2020). Close to half (46%) of the nation’s high potential arable land is located in Mpumalanga and 78% of commercial farmers own their land (Simpson et al., 2019; Stats SA, 2020). Twenty four percent of the households in Mpumalanga were involved in agricultural activity by 2011, and they were mostly engaged in crop (32%) and livestock production (45%) (Stats SA, 2011). The 2019 figure for households engaged in agriculture stood at 28% and most of the farming activity is undertaken to obtain extra food (Stats SA, 2019b: 61).

Yet, agriculture only accounts for 3% of the province's overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) figure (Stats, SA 2020). A province with high potential natural agricultural endowments still encounters production and food security access challenges. It had the third highest rate of food insecurity in the country by 2014, and the latest Stats SA General Household Survey (2019b) indicates that 24% of Mpumalanga's households are food insecure (Shisana et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2019b). The Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy (BFAP) (2012) report found that coal mining in the province is a leading cause of agricultural production decline over the years (BFAP, 2012). It highlighted that household food security and the agro-food system's sustainability are threatened by two core factors: coal mining and droughts (BFAP, 2012).⁹ This finding is corroborated in other studies, which discuss negative ecological impacts of acid mine drainage and mining related water contamination on agro-food systems (Forrest and Loate, 2018; Simpson et al., 2019).

This negative impact of coal mining on agro-food systems is related to Mpumalanga's political economy structure. Mining contributes 25% to the province's overall GDP and the sector employs close to 53 000 people (Global Africa Network, 2020: 32). The coal production in Mpumalanga is essential for South Africa's energy system, as it accounts for 83% of the national coal output (Global Africa Network, 2020: 32). This province is the third biggest regional coal exporter in the world, and houses "the country's major power stations, three of which are the biggest in the southern hemisphere" (Republic of South Africa, 2015). These power stations are "strategically situated near the mines that supply them" and supply "Sasol's coal-to-liquid fuel plant" (Simpson et al., 2019: 1). The coalfired power stations and Sasol consume the largest amounts of coal. South Africa's public policy debates on shifting towards a low-carbon economy have not deterred private and public sector coal mining expansion in the province. Eskom and private companies such as Exxaro Resources, Pan African Resources and South32 are still investing billions into coal mining related economic activities (Global Africa Network, 2020). As mentioned earlier, several studies have illuminated the adverse impacts of coal mining on Mpumalanga's agro-food system (BFAP, 2012; Forrest and Loate, 2018; Simpson et al., 2019). These investigations link coal mining with the food-water-nexus. Some sections of this study in Chapters 4 to 6 add to this

⁹ Bureau for Food and Agricultural Policy Study on impact of Coal Mining on Maize Production

literature. The sections examine how the women and other targeted key local informants in Ermelo experience coal mining impacts on the food-water-energy nexus, with an emphasis on community food security.

Ermelo

Ermelo is located in the Gert Sibande District Municipality in Mpumalanga, comprises seven local municipalities. This town falls within the jurisdiction of the Msukaligwa municipality. Gert Sibande District's general population expanded from 981 561 in 2008 to 1 135 410 by 2016. Msukaligwa municipality has 164 608 residents. Africans make up 91.7% of the population, whites 6.8%, coloureds 0.6% and Indians 0.9%. It is comprised of the following seven admin towns, which are still largely segregated along racial lines: (a) Ermelo : Wesselton (b) Breyten : Kwazenale; (c) Davel : Kwadela; (d) Warburton : Nganga; (e) Sheepmoor; (f) Lothair : Silindile; (g) Chrissiesmeer : Kwa Chibukhulu. Each town has a corresponding township or black rural/ farm area. Ermelo is divided into the following areas: Ermelo (CBD/ Town) and a township called Wesselton. The Msukaligwa municipality also has peculiar and significant ecological characteristics. It has water catchment areas that supply water to major rivers like the Vaal and is identified as an important site for biodiversity by the provincial government.

Women make up 49% of the total population while men account for 51%. Thirty seven percent of citizens in Msukaligwa municipality live in poverty and the Gini-coefficient is 0.61 (cited in Msukaligwa IDP, 2016). The figures from the municipal surveys indicate that women-headed households account for 37% of homes in Msukaligwa (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 62). Msukaligwa's overall unemployment rate is 25%, but this socio-economic challenge has a significant gender dimension, with unemployment higher amongst women (36%) than men (19%) (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 68). The municipality is dependent on "trade, community services and agriculture for employment" (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 70). In 2016, agricultural employment contribution stood at 11% while mining accounted for 7%. The agricultural sector's Gross Value Add (GVA) in local economic development is also higher than mining (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 70). The updated 2019 municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP) report illustrates minimal change in these socio-economic indicators. General unemployment

in the municipality dropped slightly to 24% while female unemployment figures (31%) remain higher than males (18%). Additionally, agriculture's contributions to employment and GVA are still higher than the mining sector contributions (Msukaligwa IDP, 2019: 16).

The site visits (Ermelo CBD and Wesselton township) enhanced my understanding of the major economic activities and livelihood sources in the town. This was crucial for gaining additional insights into the research area, which are not fully explored in the Msukaligwa IDP document. For example, the significance of coal mining and energy production in Ermelo. There are two major coal mines: Labrie Mine and Vunene Mining. Vunene Mining is one of three subsidiaries owned by Ichor Coal, which is a foreign enterprise with a primary business listing in the Netherlands. The other two entities: Universal Coal & Mbuyelo are also operating in Mpumalanga & Limpopo. Ichor Coal acquired 74% of Vunene in 2012. Eskom has a major power station in the area called Camden. This power station was established in 1967. It was shut down in 1990 and this had a major effect on Vunene because it supplied most of the coal for the power station. However, the station was opened again in 2003 with an estimated cost of R5billion. I did not encounter or see informal economy miners during my several site visits, but some women interviewees in the study explained that they obtain coal for their stoves from traders who work with these informal miners (they operate in abandoned mines). The discussions in the empirical chapters on the women's household livelihood strategies reveal that some of them still rely on coal for cooking and space heating.

Agriculture equally plays a significant role in the local economy. This includes farms, milling operations and companies selling farming machinery or equipment. The major crops in the area are beans, wheat, maize, and sunflowers. Other important agro-food system economic institutions include major food retailers such as Pick n Pay, Checkers/Shoprite, and the Fresh Produce Market. It is important to note the significance of non-formal economic activity in the agro-food system, which includes both crop and livestock farming. There are also several small informal economy food retailers (both locals and international residents). They sell a variety of goods but the main source of income is food. Some even operate as wholesalers for other entities. The food items vary and include the following: fruits, vegetables, full plate (meat, pap and salad), beverages, chips, and other foods. There are no big corporate retailers in the Wesselton township, which is peculiar because large corporate retailers have

permeated most townships (even in largely rural provinces). Several small retailers (popularly referred to as spaza shops) are located within households or small buildings in the township. The township also has several informal food traders who mostly operate on the streets with no formal infrastructure. The Wesselton community members consume food from four main sources: large corporate retailers (selected items), small informal traders in towns, small formal township retailers, and informal traders who operate on the streets.

The Gert Sibande District Municipality is a significant agricultural region in the Mpumalanga province. It generated the highest district commercial agricultural production income in 2017, with a total figure of R18,5 billion (Stats SA, 2020). The region employs 18 086 agricultural workers and accounted for the “second biggest income” amongst South Africa’s agricultural districts after the Cape Winelands. Maize is the most important agricultural product produced in Gert Sibande and the region grew over a million metric tons of this crop in 2017 (Stats, 2020). Over half the province’s commercial agricultural farms ($n = 1524$) are located in the district, and they derive commercial income from producing field crops, animals/animal products, horticulture and other agricultural income (Stats SA, 2020). The region also hosts agricultural companies in the other segments of the agro-food system value chain. These companies operate in the upstream and downstream subsectors of South Africa’s agricultural sector. Additionally, the Mkhondo agri-hub, which is one of the provincial government’s flagship agri-hub projects, is located in this area (Mpumalanga Provincial Treasury, 2021).

Overall, the research site description highlights two crucial factors that relate to the study’s extended case and feminist methodologies. First, the importance of structuration in this study as it amplifies the connections between micro, meso and macro levels when studying structural trends in South Africa’s agro-food system. This includes exploring both structure and agency when examining the agro-political economy context and how it shapes agro-food system trends. Second, the research site description provides insights into livelihood strategies that are often overlooked in local economic development public policy documents. Particularly informal economic activities (non-wage labour and livelihood strategies) that take place on the margins of formal markets. Both feminist and extended case study methodologies emphasise learning from the concrete lived experiences of interviewees in order to expand traditional theoretical or policy frameworks.

Research design: methods and instruments

Qualitative method

This study employed the qualitative research method for several reasons. Firstly, Greenstein Roberts and Sitas (2003: 49) argue that this method is suited for documenting the experiences of small targeted groups. Qualitative research equally ensures that a researcher “understands human and social interaction from the perspectives of insiders and participants in the interaction” (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003: 49). These qualitative research characteristics support the emphasis on participants’ experiences expressed in the core research questions and methodology arguments discussed in previous sections. A qualitative research approach aligns with feminist methodology principles such as dialogical learning, paying attention to peculiar experiences of targeted groups, and reflexivity in the research process. All these elements are well suited for exploring the underlying structural causes and experiences of gendered disparities in South Africa’s agrarian structure.

Secondly, qualitative methods place emphasis on understanding the context framing the study. This is essential because social phenomena occur within the limits of structural sociological contexts. These contexts include historical, social, geographic, economic and political factors that deserve attention when gathering or interpreting data (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas et al., 2003; Neuman, 2014). Neuman (2014: 177) highlights the dangers of overlooking the context as follows: “if we strip social context from an event, social action, or conversation, it is easy to distort its meaning and alter its social significance”.

Extended case methodology amplifies the importance of studying social contexts in qualitative research. Human behaviour and social interaction are studied within the systemic contextual features at macro and micro levels. I related the women’s experiences and socio-economic developments within the local state to macro societal changes in the post-apartheid context. Emphasis was placed on examining how national level agrarian political economy policy shifts impact agro-food system experiences in communities. These policies are crucial because they determine how state resources are deployed in the agro-food system and the orientation of regulatory policy instruments. State resource allocation and regulatory

interventions provided additional insights into the structural conditions that shape participants' interaction with the agro-food system.

Thirdly, qualitative research fills the gaps and shortcomings in quantitative data (Ritchie, 2003: 26). This is achieved through generating what is described as a “thick description” of social action or events in research. This concept is defined as “a rich, lengthy description that captures actions as they occur. It entails a lot of detail and a lot of quotations. Because of this, qualitative reports are often rich in description, colourful detail and unusual characters, which gives the reader a feeling for social setting” (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003: 50). Thick descriptions uncover the underlying catalysts shaping social trends and power relations (Ritchie, 2003: 27). This in-depth approach was pivotal for my study as it aimed to explore agrarian and agro-food system trends beyond what is provided in statistical analyses. Such studies only provide insights into household food consumption or production, without probing the broader political economy and sociological relations driving food politics in society. In addition, they afford participants minimal space to share their experiences and views on the agro-food system.

Fourthly, qualitative research is essential for examining policy outcomes in society. It strengthens policy evaluation by providing in-depth details of implementation in communities. Government policymakers often rely on reports and research that has not explored the context or perspectives of intended policy beneficiaries adequately. Qualitative research remedies this challenge, and provides in-depth data for holistic policy impact assessments. It identifies “different types of effects or consequences that can arise from a policy and the different ways in which they are achieved or occur” (Ritchie, 2003: 27). These nuances and differentiated policy effects are often underplayed or missed in studies using structured quantitative methodology. I am not dismissing the value of quantitative studies, but rather illustrating that they do not provide holistic analysis. The qualitative approach was implemented using the following research instruments.

Research instruments

Documented literature analysis

The documented literature analysis in this study includes exploring both relevant primary and secondary literature. It commences with an examination of the existing agro-food system and food security trends. Then I proceed to discuss these documented trends within the broader literature on the agrarian political economy and its relation to neo-liberal capitalism. This is essential for locating my study within systemic political economy developments while appreciating connections between micro, meso and macro level social relations. The sections dissecting agro-food system and food security data are drawn from national surveys and researched reports on food security in South Africa (Oxfam, 2014; Shisana et al., 2014; Stats SA, 2019a). The data in this literature is based on government reports, publications from research institutes and studies conducted by reputable non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a nation-wide reach.

The literature review on agrarian political economy is drawn from orthodox and neo-Marxian political economy (Cousins, 2005; Mafeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013). This includes journal articles, book chapters, civil society policy education material and agrarian political economy books. In addition, I employ Marxist feminism and black feminist political economy literature to augment the gender gaps in Marxist agrarian studies and agro-food systems analyses (Davis, 1981; Ferguson, 2020; Fraser, 2012). These sources are mostly drawn from journal articles, book chapters and NGO publications.

Sections in the study exploring policy developments and implementation are not limited to food security policy. Salient policies such as the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (2002) and the National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security (DAFF, 2013) are examined with other policies affecting South Africa's post-apartheid agrarian structure. Prominent examples include the Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) and the Government's School Nutrition Programme (GNP). This approach is crucial for highlighting connections between household food security and shifts in the macro-agrarian sector policy context.

In addition, I use literature on household human development indicators to examine policy implementation effects. This includes reports such as the Stats SA General Household Survey

(Stats SA, 2019b) and localised reports such as those produced by the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA). These reports on household socio-economic indicators, which include hunger levels, complement the qualitative data obtained from interviews. The primary value of documented literature analysis is that it allows a researcher to compare field work evidence with data from other sources (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003: 54). The balance between fieldwork data and documented reports ensures consistency in the findings, and illuminates instances when there is a disparity between research findings and lived experiences in different cases. Chapters 5 to 7, which explore fieldwork findings, examined these research insights with documented sources from other studies. Additionally, documented literature analysis complements the qualitative method by assisting to illuminate the policy context that impacts the study. The salient contextual factors in this study include socio-economic, spatial development, political governance and geological trends that should be considered when examining field work data. Documented literature analysis also supports the study's qualitative method through examining significant policy outcomes, which draw from intended policy beneficiaries lived experiences. These policy outcomes are predominately captured in the engaged research and policy documents of non-governmental organisations working in the areas of food security and sovereignty.

Another strength of documented literature analysis lies in examining texts (Neuman, 2014: 176-177). This analysis of documents provides the researcher with additional insights about the research problem, bringing to the fore different perspectives, experiences and interests when examining a social phenomenon. Document content analysis is a useful source for obtaining background data about the research site and participants (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003: 65). This type of analysis allows the researcher to contextualise participants' values, responses and beliefs within this broader backdrop. The documented sources on socio-economic development trends in my research site and Mpumalanga as a whole provided context for understanding the participants' core political demands.

Finally, document analysis allows the researcher to obtain information/data in research contexts where it is difficult and impossible to conduct in-person interviews or participant observation (Ritchie, 2003: 35). For example, I had limited access to all the extension officers operating in the research site, so I had to supplement the interview data with documented

sources on extension services. The interview structure and purpose are spelled out in the following paragraph.

Interviews

The primary purpose of interviews is to provide 'rich data' that can only be obtained from allowing participants to explain and engage in detailed discussions. This enriches data because a researcher gains insight into historical, cultural, social and political factors informing responses from participants (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003: 72). In addition, interviews are essential for allowing a researcher to investigate contradictory findings and seek more clarity on responses that seem unclear. This improves the processes of interpreting data and linking findings to the analytical framework employed in the study (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003; Sheppard, 2020). Interviews are suited for studying the details of complex social phenomena that cut across different areas of human development. They make it easier for the researcher to obtain the finer details, which assist in comprehending complex socio-economic and political systems (Ritchie, 2003: 36).

The interview functions cited above complemented the research questions and objectives of this study. The interviews sought to understand how participants perceive and experience the gendered disparities in the agrarian political economy. This necessitated understanding the historic, socio-economic, cultural and political contexts informing their responses. The Interviews also assisted in helping to answer questions or address gaps in previous agro-food system studies. This study specifically focused on the omissions in the area of explaining gendered agro-food system and food security disparities. Additionally, the interviews facilitated a deeper examination into some of the inconsistencies in household and community food security data.

I interviewed a total of 63 participants using both individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) between 2017 and 2018. The interview questionnaires and FGD discussion guidelines were framed around semi-structured questions (see Annexure A for the interview guidelines). This format allowed the participants to add more details when responding, and ask for clarity if they did not fully comprehend the questions. Semi-structured questions

provide the researcher with some flexibility in the interview process. The researcher can obtain insights from the interview that were not factored into the original questionnaire (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas, 2003: 56-57). The use and structure of the interviews complemented the overall methodology in several ways. First, this facilitated in-depth researcher and participant dialogue articulated in feminist and extended case methodology. Secondly, I used interviews to examine the extent to which participants' experiences support or challenge theoretical concepts and frameworks. Thirdly, interview responses encouraged me to reflect on my positionality as a researcher, especially the gender and class differences between myself and the respondents. Fourthly, I used the interviews as an instrument for learning about the indigenous knowledge that the participants use daily in the local agro-food system.

These in-depth interviews were conducted with the following participants: black African unemployed and seasonally employed women (40); local and provincial government officials (8); the leadership of a local civil society group (8); local farmers (3); black African women involved in the state's public employment programme (3) and a local businessperson (male) (1). The black African women participants included 30 unemployed individuals and 10 seasonal farmworkers. Most participants fell within the age range of late 30s to 60, with four participants in the 70-80 age cohort. These women lived in different types of low income households (formal/semi-form/informal) in Ermelo. The general socio-economic profiles of the households in Ermelo was provided in previous sections, and more detailed descriptions are explored in chapters of this study that discuss household livelihoods. The participants came from families with a peasant or labour tenant history. This historical background was articulated in various interviews, with the women sharing stories of their participation in different forms of subsistence farming from early childhood years. These accounts on historical agrarian livelihood practices elevated how family labour, cultural practices and socio-economic conditions impacted the women's early experiences of South Africa's agro-food system. The indigenous knowledge that participants possess on producing crops, ecological sustainability, and food related nutrition, stems from this historical background.

Most of the participants had a primary schooling education background, and they did not study beyond standard five (grade seven). Only eight participants proceeded to secondary

school, but they also dropped out in standard six and seven (grade 8 and 9). The interviews revealed several reasons that impeded the participants from obtaining higher education levels. In most cases, it was household poverty, death of family elders, migration and evictions from geographic areas with schooling facilities that accounted for poor education. Nonetheless, some unemployed interviewees had obtained additional skills from previous short term employment in agriculture, forestry, and domestic work. Chapters 6 and 7 provide detailed descriptions of how the interviewees still use some of these skills in their daily livelihood practices.

Only three of the black African women participants in this study are members of political parties. The other participants are not involved in political party activism, but they are active members of a local agricultural group called the Agricultural Development Committee (ADC). Participants in the group share knowledge about farming, assist each other with livelihood practices, engage in collective subsistence farming, and support members when they experience family grievances. This organisation is affiliated to the Khuthala Environmental Care Group, which is a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) that mainly organises around ecological justice. The leadership of Khuthala is relatively young, with participants aged between 20 and 40. But the broader membership, which includes most of the black African women interviewees, is made up of individuals above the age of 40. I provide a detailed description of the group's working areas and campaigns in Chapter 4, which examine Khuthala's perspective on the local state. The leadership cohort have different levels of education and work experience. But only two of the participants were employed when the interviews were conducted.

The government officials interviewed in this study had different qualifications from agricultural colleagues and/or universities. Only two government officials were specialising in agriculture-related subfields and pursuing further postgraduate studies. I interviewed five officials from the local state and three from the provincial level. I also interviewed three types of local farmers: a white large-scale commercial farmer (woman), a part-time small-scale young black male farmer; and a black woman full-time small-scale farmer. The socio-economic and farming profiles of these farmers is unpacked in Chapter 6 when discussing agro-food value chains and food prices. The interview with a local male businessperson was

important because he heads one of the local business forums. This interviewee provided valuable insights into the successes and shortcomings of businesses in the local state, with a particular focus on tourism, mining and agriculture.

The sampling choice in this study was guided by the methodological assumptions, research questions and justification of the study. I employed a purposive sampling method for the following reasons. Firstly, this study aimed to explore the experiences and perspectives of a particular social group, namely, black African women in low income households. Purposive sampling is the most suitable sampling technique for research targeting a specified group (Greenstein, Roberts and Sitas 2003; Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016 Palys, 2008). Secondly, purposive sampling is appropriate when “researchers begin with specific perspectives that they wish to examine in mind, and then seek out research participants’ who can provide these perspectives” (Sheppard, 2020: 169). I am particularly interested in the food security and agro-food system experiences, and perspectives of working class black African women. This includes both socio-economic challenges and the views on alternative/transformed agro-food system.

Thirdly, this sampling technique is employed in studies where the aim is to obtain an in-depth understanding of a case study (Etikan, Musa and Alkassim, 2016). I have foregrounded this research in a particular geographic location and case study. The participant groups who fall outside the black African women low-income group included in the sample assisted me to get a better understanding of the local political economy and agro-food system context. They are not the primary targeted participants; however, it essential to include their experiences as they illuminate the social setting that shapes the women participants livelihood strategies.¹⁰

Ethical considerations (ethics number: H16/05/02)

I protected the identity of participants by using a participant coding system for recording interview responses. A participant coding system was used in the final report in order to maintain confidentiality, and all the data will be disposed of in due course according to

¹⁰ These groups were not included in the ethics forms. I added them during the fieldwork process

university research regulations. The main aims of the study were explained to participants, who then decided if they wanted to participate in the research. Participants were required to record their informed consent in writing, and verbal consent was used for illiterate participants using a recording device. No explicit or implicit coercion was used, and participants clearly indicated on the consent form that they were participating voluntarily.

CHAPTER 2: MARXISM, FEMINISM AND THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

Literature review and theoretical framework

The literature review and theoretical framework of this study will be based on two main areas of scholarly inquiry: Marxist agrarian debates and feminist theory. These two ideological traditions are essential for developing the overall theoretical framework, which will guide the inquiry into the main research questions of this dissertation. The Marxist theory section will discuss the orthodox and neo-Marxian agrarian debates. The section on feminism focuses on various strands in this ideological tradition, and ultimately links the themes with this study's main research questions. I primarily draw from Marxist feminism and black feminist political economy debates on the relation between gender, race and class in capitalist societies. Social reproduction features prominently in the gendered exploration of racial capitalism. The chapter's discussion commences with an analysis of the agrarian question in orthodox Marxist political economy. I then proceed to examine Neo-Marxian contributions in the debate, with a specific focus on analyses from the African and global South contexts.

The Marxist debate sections are augmented with a detailed discussion on feminism, with an emphasis on Marxist and black feminist political economy. These sections build on the theoretical insights obtained from the classical and neo-Marxian agrarian literature sources. However, they address a fundamental shortcoming in this literature, namely, the absence of a detailed gender discussion in both schools of thought. The chapter concludes with a gendered agrarian political economy framework that will be used throughout the study. I describe the key themes that constitute the framework, and illustrate that they are drawn from agrarian Marxist and feminist political economy literature.

Marxism and the classic agrarian question

The agrarian question has been at the centre of debates in various fields of the social sciences. This discourse has not been confined to academia, and has shaped theory on revolutionary political practice and activism as well. A number of scholars and activists have drawn from

this debate, using key lessons to further their conceptualisations of the agrarian question (Cousins, 2005; Mafeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013). The most prominent accounts have been derived from theorists within the orthodox and neo-Marxist paradigms. This section will explore both traditions in discussing agrarian political economy debates.

Most scholars agree that the classical agrarian question places emphasis on five central areas of inquiry. The first is the introduction of capitalist relations in the agricultural sector (Byres, 2009; Lerche, Alpa, S. and Harriss-White, 2013; Neocosmos, 1993; Marx, 1867). This dimension mainly traces the transition from feudal to capitalist agro-political economies in Europe. According to Marx (1867), this evolution was essential for developing the productive forces or making necessary technological advancements in broader economic restructuring. Marx viewed pre-capitalist agrarian economic structures as backward and argued for their dissolution. Capitalism, according to Marx, is pivotal for rapid modernisation and bringing about the necessary economic conditions required in transitioning towards socialism. His main focus was on the introduction of capitalist agriculture in England (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009: 6-7). This backdrop informed Marx's (1867) theory on primitive accumulation that he described as:

The process which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations, whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers (Marx 1867: 874).

Primitive accumulation was also essential for developing the proletariat, which Marx identified as the most progressive revolutionary strata in society. The expansion of this social group was associated with the materialist transition into a capitalist modern industrial society. This explains the pejorative perspective that orthodox Marxists have on traditional peasant production, which is associated with economic backwardness (Jacobs, 2010; Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011; Moyo et al., 2013). Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga (2011) capture this pessimism by stating:

It remains true that Marx did not think that peasant farming could survive in the long term. He argued that it was only compatible with a limited development of industrial capitalism and insisted that in the longer term the peasantry would be destroyed through impoverishment (Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011: 10).

The second theme in the classic agrarian question is the contribution of agriculture to capitalist industrial expansion (Cousins, 2005; Kautsky, 1899; Lerche Alpa, S. and Harriss-White, 2013; Lenin, 1899; Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009). This facet in the debate transcends relations within the agricultural sector, and focuses on path dependency development associated with modernisation economic theory (Mafeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013; Oya, 2010). According to this school of thought, societies can only achieve economic dynamism by decreasing the share of agriculture in their national production. This transition from the over-reliance on the agro-political economy should coincide with an expansion of manufacturing and economy-wide value addition (Lewis, 1955; Rostow, 1960). The intermediate goal is to build an industrial economy that produces secondary goods, and then, ultimately, a knowledge service-based political economy. Modernisation theorists argue that agriculture should contribute to the above-mentioned economic restructuring through providing the capital, raw materials, food and labour for industrial expansion (Lerche Alpa, S. and Harriss-White, 2013). In other words, agricultural development should primarily serve the economic needs of building a modern industrial capitalist economy.

The third area of inquiry in classic agrarian debates relates to Lenin's (1899) and Kautsky's (1899) accounts on the agrarian question. These two theorists were not only preoccupied with modernising the agro-political economy; they explored how the agrarian question shaped capitalist development and social class formation in general (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009). Kautsky (1899) focused on the various types of farming units which developed as a result of capitalism. His analysis was anchored around examining differences between small and large-scale farms. According to Kautsky, the latter group was "much better equipped to benefit from capitalist production because they had the appropriate instruments of labour" (Kautsky, 1899; Richard-Nelson, 1988: 11). This observation was important because the author believed that agriculture should complement capitalist industrial expansion. Furthermore, his account placed primacy on ensuring that capitalist technological

advancements were utilised in the agricultural sector (Kautsky, 1899; Richard-Nelson, 1988: 11).

Kautsky provided a number of economic reasons why large-scale agriculture was more suitable for capitalist development, and included the following justifications: a bigger proportion of cultivated land, advanced division of labour, increased market power, efficient resource utilisation, and enhanced access to finance (Kautsky, 1899; Konstantinidis, 2013; McLaughlin, 1998; Richard-Nelson, 1988). However, this bias towards large capitalist holdings was challenged by the prevalence and resilience of small family farming in most European regions. This questioned the long-held belief by orthodox Marxists that the peasantry would disappear with the advancement of capitalism (McLaughlin, 1998: 30).

According to Kautsky, the smaller farming units' resilience was based on traditional non-wage "forms of labour associated with family bonds" (Jacobs, 2010: 6). This was different from larger farms, which required 'hired' wage labour and other more costly advanced forces of production (technology, crop management etc.). The author further argued that:

Statistics indicating no decline, or even an increase, in small farms do not themselves tell us anything about the direction of capitalist development in agriculture. They are simply a challenge to carry out more research. On first examination, what they do show is that development is not quite as simple as originally supposed, and that the situation in agriculture is more complex than in industry (Kautsky 1899: 141).

The most significant finding in Kautsky's (1899) account was his acknowledgement that small-scale farming was integral for the reproduction of large-scale capitalist agriculture. The expansion of economic concentration and subsequent social differentiation amongst the peasantry was producing a rural proletariat, which had to sell its labour on the big capitalist farms in the countryside. In other words, the inevitable destruction of the peasantry was not taking place because of the need to produce a "semi-proletarianised" peasantry for large-scale farming (Moyo et al., 2013: 107). Kautsky described this well when he states that:

Agricultural wage-labour represents the most immediate form of supplementary employment for the small farmer. It has existed from as early as the feudal period, once inequalities in the village had reached a point at which some farms had grown too small to feed their owners adequately, whilst others had grown too large for adequate cultivation by the labour-power available within the peasant family (Kautsky, 1899: 179).

Lenin (1899) also placed emphasis on social differentiation by arguing that the peasantry is not a homogenous group; it is stratified and divided into various classes, as a result of capitalist development in agriculture (Lenin, 1899; Neocosmos, 1993). Lenin stated that the peasantry was divided into the following groups: affluent (kulaks), middle and impoverished peasants. This social stratification was based on unequal access to land, essential inputs and the type of labour used for social reproduction (Jacobs, 2010; Lenin, 1899). Capitalist development, according to Lenin, was deepened through accelerating socio-economic differentiation in society. He viewed intensified “class demarcation” as a salient prerequisite that brings about political contestation required for the ultimate transition to socialism (Neocosmos, 1993:17-18). Lenin (1899) highlights the importance of land redistribution in “democratising peasant production”, which subsequently creates a conducive environment for “free capitalist” agricultural development while simultaneously ensuring that the feudal aristocracy is eradicated (Mafeje, 2003; Neocosmos, 1993).

This logical conclusion of Lenin’s arguments encouraged a reframing of the political or revolutionary subject in Marxist thinking. His conception on social differentiation amongst the peasantry, and the subsequent need for developing the class struggle in the countryside, was crucial. This laid the basis for expanding the revolutionary socialist political agent to include the impoverished peasantry (Mafeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013). In sum, Lenin’s contribution was a catalyst for addressing the fourth area of inquiry in agrarian question debates: the political role and future of the peasantry in the class struggle. As argued earlier, Marx had a very negative view of the peasantry. This was largely informed by his conception of modernisation, which characterised the peasantry as conservative and backward (Jacobs, 2010; Akram-Lodhi, 2007; Mafeje, 2003; McMichael, 2006). Lenin and Kautsky’s work on social differentiation was a catalyst for reframing this perspective. However, it should be

mentioned that both theoreticians still held the view that the proletariat is the primary revolutionary agent for pursuing the class struggle required in transitioning towards socialism.

The recognition of the peasantry as a potential ally in the struggle was informed by historical materialism, and the political context of late 19th century Europe. According to Akram-Lodhi and Kay (2009: 7), the structure of the global food system in the 19th century was producing economic challenges for the peasantry in Europe. The settler colonies had developed a comparative advantage in the agricultural sector, and this shifted the international division of labour in agriculture value chains (Friedmann and McMichael, 1989; McMichael, 2009). Cheap imports of grain were competing with the peasantry's produce, and ultimately led to a loss of land because they could not compete. This dispossession—based on capitalist expansion—compelled socialist movements to consider the peasantry as a political ally in the class struggle. Engels (1894) argued that:

The greater the number of peasants whom we can save from being actually hurled down into the proletariat, whom we can win to our side while they are still peasants, the more quickly and easily the social transformation will be accomplished. It will serve us nought to wait with this transformation until capitalist production has developed everywhere to its utmost consequences, until the last small handicraftsman and the last small peasant have fallen victim to capitalist large-scale production.

But the above-mentioned allegiance described by Engels was not based on accepting the peasantry as being politically equal to the proletariat or party membership. In this view, peasants had to be clearly informed regarding the realities of modernisation and inevitable destruction of pre-capitalist agrarian production. As Engels (1894) explains:

It is the duty of our Party to make clear to the peasants again and again that their position is absolutely hopeless as long as capitalism holds sway, that it is absolutely impossible to preserve their small holdings for them as such, that capitalist large-scale production is absolutely sure to run over their impotent antiquated system of small production as a train runs over a pushcart. If we do this, we shall act in conformity with the inevitable trend of economic development, and this development will not fail to bring our words home to the small peasants.

Another key factor which influenced a reformed political view on the peasantry was the democratic transitions. The emergence of universal suffrage (for males) in various European states presented a political challenge for orthodox Marxism. Social democratic and communist parties had to try and garner support from a broad working class strata that included peasants. Lenin equally called for a comprehensive working class strategy in transforming Russian politics. He stated that “the only force capable of gaining a decisive victory over tsarism, is the people, i.e. the proletariat and peasantry” (Lenin, 1905: 52). He argued that both groups were most adversely affected by authoritarian feudal landlordism. Thus, it was logical to develop an alliance between the two working class strata. The main political objective was to end the political dominance of the feudal aristocracy and develop a bourgeois democracy, which would consequently deepen the social differentiation required for accelerating class struggle in society (Mafeje, 2003; Neocosmos, 1993).

This question on the politics of the peasantry is linked to the fifth area of discussion in the classic agrarian question which deals with the nature of the transition to capitalist agriculture. Most scholars use Lenin’s (1907: 356) models of “accumulation from above and below” to describe the above-mentioned transition. The first is led by the propertied feudal lords who convert themselves into capitalist farmers. This is achieved through the suppression of the peasantry—with the aid of authoritarian state power—in order to meet the labour demands of capitalist agricultural expansion. As Byres explains (2009: 48): “between the 16th and 19th century the Junkers expanded their demesne at the expense of the peasantry. They further imposed ever new burdens on an enserfed peasantry”.

Byres’s analysis is based on the Prussian case, which embraced feudal political characteristics within a capitalist economic framework (Byres, 2009). These characteristics were oppressive and included measures such as “increasing curtailment of peasant’s freedom to move, the imposition of mandatory maximum wages, an assault on fixed money rents and finally a concerted move to extend mandatory labour services” (Byres, 2009: 47). Lenin argued that this type of transition was not conducive for developing democratic capitalism, which he viewed as a useful mode of production in the transition towards socialism. This explains

Lenin's preference for the accumulation from below model discussed in the following section (Neocosmos, 1993: 17-18).

According to Lenin (1899; 1907), the peasant transition from below was the most preferred route. It was characterised by the developing democratic capitalist relations of production in the agricultural sector, and necessitated substantial land reform within the countryside. This land question was not based on political redistributive justice, but a need to dismantle the institutionalised dominance of landlordism. As Neocosmos (1993: 15) explains: "for Lenin the land question was not the primary issue, it was not a question of providing land to the peasants but, through the provision of land, of destroying the politically repressive relations of landlordism".

All five themes in the classic Marxian agrarian question literature influenced various strands of political and academic thinking. These themes have raised a debate about the applicability of the theoretical frameworks and conceptions in the global South. This is related to the failure of orthodox Marxian agrarian theory to incorporate the experiences of African, Asian and Latin American societies adequately (Mafeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013). In addition, orthodox agrarian Marxian accounts analyse the process of agrarian change without exploring social relations that fall outside the capital and labour dichotomy. Gender and other variants of social differentiation such as race are absent in these debates (Kerr, Lupafya and Shumba, 2013; Park, White and Julia, 2013; Tsikata, 2015). The following sections examine the critiques that emerged from different writers and activists regarding the shortcomings of orthodox Marxian agrarian political economy.

African and global South perspectives on the agrarian question

Proponents and theoreticians of classic Marxist approaches on the agrarian question have made a substantial intellectual contribution. However, there are a number of shortcomings in their accounts. The first is related to the view of the peasantry, as explained here by Moyo et al. (2013):

The whole weight of European Marxism had always been disparaging of the peasantry. In this sense, it remains hypocritical by an assortment of Marxists, including purists, to demonise Stalin for a tragedy that was written into the anti-peasant logic of the European convention, if not also the genocidal tendencies of European society (Moyo et al., 2013: 108).

Classical Marxist agrarian theorists underplayed the dispossession encountered by the peasantry in the transition towards capitalist agriculture. It was viewed as one of the inevitable necessities in modernising an agricultural sector that contributes to economy-wide capitalist accumulation (Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011: 10). Critics argue that orthodox Marxist agrarian approaches partially legitimised the subjugation of the peasantry on the basis of economism and modernisation imperatives (Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011; Moyo et al., 2013). They point out that the necessity of developing “productive forces” in agriculture superseded the legitimate struggles of the peasantry in most orthodox Marxian agrarian accounts (McMichael, 2006: 33-4).

An additional criticism is raised regarding hierarchical political positions within the working class strata. This relates to orthodox Marxists treating the peasantry as inherently inferior to the proletariat in political organisation and struggles. Classic Marxists elevated the role and political status of the proletariat because of its daily labour in capitalist production. They believed that the proletariat had higher levels of class consciousness because it was at the heart of industrial capitalism (Marx, 1867; Engels, 1894; Kautsky, 1899). Cedric Robinson (2000: xxix) explains that “Marx tossed slave labour and peasants into the imagined abyss signified by pre-capitalist, non-capitalist and primitive accumulation”. This perspective limits the possibilities of autonomous peasant agency outside the leadership of an urban-based proletariat party.

Several neo-Marxists writers/activists, especially from the global South, highlighted the shortcomings of this political paternalism for broad working class solidarity. They argued that the peasantry and other working class strata were the main driving force for challenging imperial capitalism in their societies (Cabral [1979], 2007; James, 1963; Robinson, 2000; Mao, 1980). Black communists in South Africa equally emphasised the importance of peasant-led struggles against racial capitalism in South Africa (Mbeki, 1964; Kotane, 1934). Govan Mbeki

(1964) and Moses Kotane's (1934) contributions should be highlighted, as they encouraged the South African communist party to look beyond the class schema provided in orthodox Marxian literature and political analyses.

In addition to the above, some detractors of the orthodox Marxian agrarian tradition question the over-reliance on a monolithic path-dependent agrarian political economy development vision (Mafeje, 2003; McMichael, 2006; Jacobs, 2010). This linear conception of modernisation and economic restructuring places primacy on large-scale industrialised agriculture while marginalising other models of agrarian development. In this framework, productivity is solely based on large-scale concentrated commercial production, and peasant or community-led small-scale farming is perceived to be backward or inherently inefficient (Mafeje, 2003: 14). This uniform path-dependent paradigm ignores context-specific factors that determine the success or failure of various types of farming production. As McLaughlin (1998: 30-1) explains: "Kautsky's attempt to establish the superiority of large farms, independently of specific contexts, is extremely problematic; in fact, many of the advantages which he argues are inherent to larger farms, actually depend upon specific historical contexts".

This criticism has equally been raised by Neo-Marxist agrarian scholars such as Nabudere (2013) and Moyo (2011a). They link the destruction of small farming in the global South to the international expansion of agri-business and its prescriptive production technologies described as "modern agriculture" (Nabudere, 2013: 107). Moyo et al. (2013) specifically encourage Marxist scholars to question the agriculture and industrialisation development pathway prevalent in the classic agrarian tradition, with a specific focus on its elevation of large-scale industrialised agriculture. This agro-industrial link reduces agrarian questions to modern capitalist development and the labour requirements required in transitioning from pre-capitalist economic structures. McMichael (2007: 33) expresses this observation using the following words: "the problem with formulating the agrarian question as one to be resolved by capital and/or labour is that it reproduces the reductionism in conventional conceptions of development". The author goes on to suggest that the classic agrarian question is being extended and reframed to capture the sociological nuances of the 20th and 21st centuries (McMichael, 2006: 33-34).

The preceding critique highlights the plurality and complexity of agrarian questions in different parts of the world. According to Byres (1991), historical specificity and appreciating the material political economy contexts is salient in studying these varied transitions. The author drew this conclusion from his study on agrarian transformations in Asia where he observed different models of evolutions into capitalist agriculture. Other scholars have extended Byres's (1991) analysis by illuminating additional socio-economic and political factors which have shaped agrarian questions across the globe (Moyo et al., 2013; Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011; McMichael, 2006; Shivji, 2009). These include the nature of the state, gender relations, differentiated class relations, divergent agrarian structures, and, most importantly, "the world-wide process of capital accumulation" (Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011: 9).

McMichael (2008: 208) argues that the latter factor is omitted from orthodox agrarian Marxist discourse because "the original, classical formulation of the agrarian question, now problematic in the twenty-first century, was governed by a state-centrism, reflecting the nation building focus of the late-nineteenth century". Food regime or system theorists such as Friedmann (1993: 30) have attempted to address this shortcoming through exploring the historical development of the "rule-governed structure of production and consumption of food on a world scale". This work has been laudable and provided an integral structural framework for exploring the global agro-political economy. However, it has not sufficiently integrated the historical colonial agrarian transformations in Asian, African and Latin American countries. Contemporary neo-Marxist agrarian scholarship emphasises integrating the nuances of agrarian questions from the global South.

Emphasis is placed on unpacking the intersecting relationship between the agrarian question and colonialism in these regions. As McMichael (2008: 209) explains "the colonial peasantry was a pedestal for metropolitan wage-labour, this role was invisibilised in social theories concerned with modern social forms of accumulation, predicated on a Eurocentric model of development as a national process". Analyses of imperialism are a central feature of global South agrarian transitions because they amplify how former colonies were forcibly integrated into global capitalism. These accounts equally help us dissect the class politics informing

national liberation political advocacy (Shivji, 2009; Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011; Moyo et al., 2013).

This connection was first raised by Mao in his conception and discussion of the national democratic revolution in China. Mao argued that China's society was "colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal with a flabby capitalist sector and the chief enemies of the revolution are imperialism and feudalism" (Turok, 1980: 72). Thus, class struggle in Mao's political strategy was about the twin tasks of destroying colonialism and the feudal mode of production (Turok, 1980:73). Agrarian questions in the periphery of the colonial global political economy had to be understood as anti-imperialist in nature. Consequently, they transcend the confines of class agrarian questions premised on the necessity of "agrarian questions of capital" or transitions to industrialisation (Bernstein, 2004; Bernstein, 2006).

These observations are essential for this study for several reasons. First, this study investigates the agrarian question through a gendered lens in order to illuminate the experiences of black African women in South Africa's agrarian political economy debates. Thus, it is important to draw from the critiques cited above, which advocate for an approach that considers the colonial historical context that has shaped black African women's experiences in agrarian political economy studies. Second, the social differentiation analyses in the current study factor in how class, gender and race power relations have evolved since the 19th century. These relations have a significant impact on South Africa's overall political economy and agro-food system structure. Thirdly, the global agrarian political economy still has a significant impact on agro-food system trends in South Africa. It is, therefore, essential to examine how this relationship between global and domestic agro-food system value chains affect food security experiences in low income households. The neo-imperial food production system, which is dominated by multinational corporations, is at the centre of society's contemporary agrarian structure.

The next section provides some insights on how to augment the theoretical and ideological parameters of the orthodox agrarian question, with the aim of exploring it from experiences in the global South. This includes developing theoretical frameworks based on the critique discussed in preceding sections. Orthodox agrarian Marxists laid a solid political foundation,

but their approaches need to be reformulated so they accommodate differentiated sociological experiences from across the globe. In addition, it is salient to highlight the structural factors that go beyond the class and capitalist industrialisation themes that dominate classic agrarian debates.

Reimagining the agrarian question

The first step in reformulating the agrarian question is challenging the political subordination and pessimism directed towards the peasantry and other segments of the rural working class in the classic Marxian agrarian political economy (Moyo et al., 2013; Robinson, 2000; Patnaik, 2011). As stated in previous sections, this critique was initiated by neo-Marxian writers such as Cabral ([1979] 2007), Mao (1980) and Mbeki (1964) in the global South context during the 20th century. These authors' interventions, amongst others, has led to an alternative view, which legitimises the peasantry as a revolutionary political subject that can lead genuine struggles against global capitalism (Akram-Lodhi, 2007: 555-6).

Peasant resistance to coerced integration into the international capitalist political economy has been perceived as a necessity in political activism aimed at pursuing national liberation and socialism. This alternative perspective on peasant agency is still prevalent in the post-colonial era, albeit in varied forms across different former colonies in the global South (Bennie, 2021; Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009). It is equally important to note that contemporary peasant livelihoods and political agency have been significantly impacted by changes in the structure of global capitalism. This political economy has evolved, but the structural changes sustain the primitive accumulation, enclosure of global commons and social reproduction crises documented in classical agrarian debates (Nabudere, 2013; Shivji, 2011; Jara, 2014). Contemporary peasant and rural working class agency has to be explored within the context of 21st century capitalist restructuring.

The second element in reframing approaches to the agrarian question is critiquing the path-dependent capitalist transition, which is largely based on modernisation development theories explaining European economic history (Engels, 1894; Kautsky, 1899; Lewis, 1955; Rostow, 1960). The path dependency from agrarian-based political economies towards highly

industrialised and diversified economic structures has not been uniform across the globe (Chang, 2003; Mkandawire, 2012). There is no consensus amongst agrarian and political economy scholars on whether the agrarian question has been concluded in the global South. Some scholars such as Bernstein (2011; 2013) argue that the classic agrarian question has been addressed throughout the world. The author justifies this position by stating that modern industrial capitalism is not reliant on agricultural surpluses or inputs as in earlier periods of capitalist development. Additionally, the contemporary global political economy has reconfigured class formation in rural and urban areas substantially, which decreases the usefulness of analytical class categories such as peasants (Bernstein, 1996; Bernstein, 2013). Bernstein (2013: 15), therefore, concludes “that there are no ‘peasants’ in the world of contemporary capitalist globalisation”.

Patnaik (2011) and Moyo et al. (2013) disagree with the proposition explained above. They contend that the agrarian political economy remains central for world-wide capital accumulation (Patnaik, 2011; Moyo et al., 2013). These authors cite ongoing land grabs in the global South, which are facilitated through state violence and neo-liberal developmentalism, as proof that modern capitalism still depends on agrarian surpluses and inputs (Patnaik, 2011; Moyo et al., 2013). This view is equally prevalent in other scholarly texts on the agrarian question in Africa and other countries of the global South (See Bennie, 2021; Hall, 2011; Matsinhe, 2021). Another criticism of Bernstein’s argument is his emphasis on reducing the agrarian questions to the inner workings of capitalism, with a specific focus on capital and labour.

Patnaik (2011:12) states that Bernstein overlooks salient political economy factors that have shaped agrarian transitions in both historical and contemporary eras. The author specifically cites the centrality of imperialism and neo-imperialism in developing capitalist agriculture. Thus, revolutionary political activism directed towards challenging neo-imperialism is an important aspect of the contemporary agrarian question, especially agency led by rural working movements in the global South (Ahmed, 2018; Jara, 2014; Moyo et al., 2013). Agrarian questions, according to Patnaik (2011), have always been internationalised because of the role colonies played in supporting capitalist development in colonising states. The differentiated experiences between imperial states and their colonies question the totalising

linear path-dependent capitalist transition presented in classical agrarian texts and Bernstein's writings (Moyo et al., 2013; Patnaik, 2011). This criticism levelled against the path-dependent capitalist transition thesis in classical Marxian agrarian political economy is important. It highlights the necessity of examining South Africa's agrarian question from a global South perspective, which appreciates some contextual differences in the country's capitalist development during different eras. Chapters 3 and 4 highlight these differences in the evolution of South Africa's capitalist agrarian political economy.

Thirdly, it is imperative to insert intersectional analyses and political struggles into agrarian political economy debates. The Neo-Marxian critiques discussed throughout this chapter illustrate the political and ideological dimensions that transcend class analysis. These accounts place emphasis on land, the national question, and race in examining the evolution of the agrarian question (Kariuki, 2009; Mafeje, 2003; Neocosmos, 1993). However, both classical and Neo-Marxian debates omit differentiated gendered experiences and power relations (O'Laughlin, 2007; Park, White and Julia, 2013; Razavi, 2009; Razavi, 2011; Tsikata, 2015). Theorists from both traditions debate agrarian reform without addressing gender power dynamics in capitalist agriculture sufficiently. The value of unpaid labour, which contributed towards introducing capitalism in agriculture and other sectors, is largely overlooked (O'Laughlin, 2007; Tsikata, 2015; Razavi, 2011).

Some examples of unpaid labour include care labour undertaken in households to produce the next generation of agricultural workers (Bradford, 2000; Razavi, 2011). In some cases, women's household or homestead labour has played an essential role in subsidising low male migrant worker ages (Wolpe, 1972; Akram-Lodhi, 2007). The South African case study epitomises this example, as rural women homestead labour supplemented male migrant workers low wages for decades (Bradford, 2000; Walker, 1982). These super exploited employees were paid like workers without families and black women in rural areas had to carry the externalised costs (Ntantala, 1958). Chapter 3 of this dissertation provides a more detailed account on gendered dimensions in South Africa's agrarian political economy history.

An additional gender blind spot in orthodox and Neo-Marxian agrarian literature is a limited focus on the state-market-relationship. These accounts mostly focus on power relations

between the state and the market in agrarian development, without exploring other social relations or institutions shaping resource allocations in society. Agrarian feminist theorists have highlighted the importance of studying relations within households and other meso-level institutions in agrarian political economies (Park, White and Julia, 2013; O’Laughlin, 2007; Razavi, 2009). These institutions equally determine household food security and social relations of production in agro-food systems. Tsikata (2015:6) explains this crucial factor:

Social relations are defined here as the structured and systemic interactions of different social groups and individuals within those groups for production, exchange, consumption and reproduction, which are governed by institutions such as markets, states, civil society and households. The key social relations within the agrarian political economies of sub-Saharan Africa are class, patron–client, gender, kinship and generation, as well as the host–stranger relations of race, nationality and local citizenship

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide more details on the gendered inequalities embedded in South Africa’s agrarian model. The discussion centres around barriers encountered by black African working class women. These include the following factors: access to land, finance, crucial inputs and markets (Njobe and Kaaria, 2015; Walker, 2002). All the preceding criticisms highlighting the subordination of the gender aspect are spelled out in detail throughout the dissertation. And, more importantly, we are encouraged to broaden orthodox and Neo-Marxist agrarian political economy with an alternative theoretical framework, which is embedded in gendered political debates. The following sections provide some basic principles that are considered in the proposed framework. These principles are drawn from an exploration of overall feminist debates (Dietz, 2003; Gross, 1992; Weeks, 2007) and literature on radical feminist political economy (Federici, 2010; Fraser et al., 2018; Mies and Shiva, 2014; Shiva, 2014). I begin the discussion with a summary of the major debates in feminist literature, then I proceed to link some salient themes with social reproduction in radical feminist political economy.

Feminist theory: major debates and contributions

Liberal equality feminism

The literature on the evolution of nascent feminist theory identifies the following two major influential phases in this school of thought (Dietz, 2003; Fraser, 2012; Gross 1992; Weeks, 2007). First, early feminism that shaped gender struggle discourses from the 19th to the early 20th century. These scholars and activist were preoccupied with “equality feminism”, which primarily emphasised inclusion and equality (Gross, 1992: 355). This type of feminism sought to obliterate the exclusion of women from political, social and economic institutions by illustrating that they are equal to men (Gross, 1992: 355). The liberal feminist strand pursued the following liberal political rights: universal suffrage, equal access to property, and ending gender-based discrimination in education systems. Wollstonecraft’s (1792) classic publication entitled: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* is a foundational text in liberal feminism.

Wollstonecraft’s account on gender debunked the long-held societal belief that women are innately inferior to males. She argued that the exclusion of women from socio-economic and political institutions on these grounds could not be justified. This criticism laid a basis for advancing political activism aimed at ensuring that woman accessed rights (equally) enjoyed by their male counterparts. Wollstonecraft’s work and the subsequent advocacy by liberal feminist activists produced some gains for the gender struggle. The most prominent achievement was the extension of the franchise to women in Anglo-Saxon and European countries in the first half of the 20th century (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006; Heywood, 2007). The evolution of these struggles and liberal feminist political victories are documented elsewhere (e.g., Ferguson, 2020; Heywood, 2007). But it is equally salient to highlight the following theoretical and ideological drawbacks in liberal feminist theory and political activism.

Classical liberal feminism was framed within a gender biased notion of equality (Vogel, 1995; Ferguson, 2020). This was captured by the over-arching goal of illustrating that women are equal to men. Equality was defined, and, subsequently, measured against historical

patriarchal conceptions of freedom constructed by males. In addition, proponents of this paradigm were mainly concerned with middle class gender struggles. It was silent on the plight and challenges encountered by women from working class backgrounds or organisations (Davis, 1981, Ferguson, 2020). Ferguson explains that “contributors to this debate did not, in most cases, directly or substantially address the issue of women’s work” (Ferguson, 2020: 23).

Another shortcoming is its colonial political assumptions and inability to appreciate additional social differentiation such as race. Classical liberal feminism emphasised the rights of white women in the United States and West European countries (Fraser et al., 2018; Davis, 1981). Consequently, experiences of black women in the global North and women from colonial parts of the world were absent in liberal feminist discourse. Davis’s (1981) historical analysis of the 19th century early women’s rights campaign in the US exemplifies this point. She argues that “the Seneca Falls Declaration all but ignored the predicament of white working class women, as it ignored the condition of Black Women in the South and North alike” (Davis, 1981: 53-54).

Similar criticisms were articulated regarding the absence of an anti-imperialist critique in liberal feminism (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Butt, 2011). Women’s emancipation politics were not sufficiently connected with world-wide gendered experiences and struggles. This limited the politics and ideological underpinnings informing early liberal feminism (Perry, 2011, Fraser et al., 2018). Transnational feminism started to emerge in radical feminist theory, albeit with some shortcomings regarding capturing women’s voices from the global South adequately (Perry, 2011). The debates concerning strengthening transnational feminist solidarity continue today, with an emphasis on the balance between universalism and social stratification. I explore these discourses in later sections of the chapter. All the criticisms spelled out in preceding sections catalysed a shift towards more radical feminist theories discussed in the following sections.

Marxist feminism and the new radical left

Debates on socially constructed gender roles became prominent in the second, radical, phase of feminism, with an emphasis on women's work, sexuality and social reproduction in society. Vogel (2000) states that these writers aimed to "provide a foundation for understanding women's differential positioning as mothers, family members, and workers" using a "materialist analysis of women's subordination" (Vogel, 2000: 152). This literature stemmed from a debate about labour and social reproduction explored in Marxian political economy (Engels, 1972; Kollontai, 1980; Marx, [1867] 1976). Marx ([1867] 1976: 178) acknowledged that reproducing different generations of working class people is essential for sustaining capitalism. Marx referred to this as the "maintenance and reproduction of the working class" (Marx, [1867] 1976: 178). Marx's ([1867] 1976) social reproduction conception emphasises the necessity of not limiting capitalist production to market institutions or the "sphere of exchange" (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 44). It is also important to examine how non-market institutions sustain capitalism over time, with a focus on reproducing labour power in societies. This holistic understanding of capitalism is captured in these words:

The capitalist process of production, therefore, seen as a total connected process, that is, a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value but it also produces and reproduces the capital-relation itself: on the one hand the capitalist, on the other the wage-labourer (Marx, [1867] 1976: 724)

Engels (1972) also understood the importance of examining how human life and labour are reproduced in capitalist societies. Engels stated that:

According to the materialist conception of history, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a two-fold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species (Engels, 1972: 71)

Marx and Engels's observations on the connectedness between production and reproduction in capitalist societies laid the foundations for social reproduction analyses. Their writings highlighted why labour power in capitalist political economies had to be understood broadly. This entailed unpacking the various dimensions of labour, which include work undertaken to produce commodities and other forms of work that are essential for sustaining human life (Marx, [1867] 1976; Engels, 1972). Both authors perceived the dual characteristics of labour as equally important in explaining how capitalism functions. They built on Marx's ([1867] 1976) general texts on the labour theory of value, which illuminate the different functions of work in capitalist societies. Marx drew a distinction between labour required to maintain workers' basic livelihoods and work performed to secure profits for companies. The former is referred to "necessary labour time" as it covers the basic livelihood needs of workers and their families, while the latter is referred to as "surplus labour" because it is primarily aimed at securing capitalists profits (Masondo, 2007: 67). The reference to labour required for sustaining individual worker and broader working class family livelihoods is a core foundation of social reproduction analyses.

Additionally, early social reproduction theory in Marxian political economy encouraged discussions on the material conditions shaping reproduction of labour power in society. Class power relations and inequalities featured prominently in the analyses, with a particular focus on the contradictory logic of capitalism. The capitalist political economy requires generations of workers in order to sustain itself, yet the systemic socio-economic inequalities embedded in capitalism undermine social reproduction in various ways (Marx, [1867] 1976; Engels, 1884). Poverty, limited access to social welfare, low wages and other adverse externalities in capitalist societies erode the human development and well-being of the working class. The costs of these externalities are mostly not covered by capitalists and place extra livelihood burdens on states or households. This contradiction lies at the heart of social instability and crises characterising different stages in capitalist development.

Furthermore, general social reproduction theory in early Marxist political thought elevates the necessity of analysing "society as a totality, a totality in which social reproduction is central at various levels" (Cock and Luxton, 2013: 135). It is essential to examine social reproduction in different institutions and processes determining distribution, consumption

and production in capitalist societies. This integrated approach uncovers the relationships and overall social conditions shaping the human agency involved in reproducing life. A thorough understanding of capitalism challenges the superficial dichotomy created between economic, social and political structures. Emphasis is placed on understanding the dialectical and mutually constitutive relationships between these structures as they evolve within the capitalist system. Social reproduction also raises important political questions about wealth and income distributions patterns in society. The need for sustaining profits through labour exploitation and minimising social reproduction costs deepens class disparities. These structural inequalities amplify the conflicting interests between working and bourgeois classes. They also compel working classes to engage in livelihood and political agentic practices aimed at dealing with the negative consequences of capitalism. This, in turn, sets the scene for developing consciousness around alternative systems of organising production and social reproduction in society to address fundamental inequalities.

The preceding sections illustrate how Marx and Engels laid a basis for social reproduction analyses in Marxian political economy. However, they did not specifically spell out how this process unfolded, and its relation to gendered labour divisions that reproduced varied generations of workers (Fakier and Cock, 2018; Fraser, 2014, Vogel, 2000). Engels (1884) attempted to address this gap in his later writings on social reproduction. He connected gendered labour divisions, sexuality and family relations to different political economy structures, with an emphasis on private property ownership. He argued that different family structures and gender roles were determined by the “material organisation of societies” (Ferguson, 2020: 63). The introduction of private property relations in society created production and distribution systems that set conducive conditions for a male-dominated society. A primary element of the private property regime was displacing pre-capitalist egalitarian wealth distribution laws with patriarchal ones. Engels (1884: 30) explains the transition using these words:

A simple decree sufficed that in the future the offspring of the male members should remain within the gens, but that of the female should be excluded by being transferred to the gens of their father. The reckoning of descent in the female line and the matriarchal law of

inheritance were thereby overthrown, and the male line of descent and the paternal law of inheritance were substituted for them (Engels, 1884: 30).

According to Engels (1884), women's oppression was innately linked to the materialist transition described above, as it created unequal gender relations within the capitalist social reproduction system. These inequalities are most stark in the modern monogamous patriarchal family structure:

The overthrow of mother-right was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude, she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children. This degraded position of the woman (Engels, 1884: 30-31).

The emancipation of women in Engel's (1884) writings requires restructuring the dominant patriarchal monogamous family structure and abolishing the private property relations that brought it into existence (Engels, 1884: 43). Engels also encourages women's increased participation in wage labour to free them from domestic labour in monogamous family institutions. This sets the scene for his overall proposition of socialising domestic labour and converting it into what he calls a "public industry" (Engels, 1884: 88).

We can already see from this that to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time. And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labour over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends towards ending private domestic labour by changing it more and more into a public industry (Engels, 1884: 88).

There are three significant points to draw from Engel's (1884) contribution in early Marxian social reproduction debates. One, the materialist basis of women's exploitation as expressed in the simultaneous emergence of private property and patriarchal family structures. This

enunciates early theorisation on the relationship between gender and class formation in Marxian social reproduction analyses. Two, his writings also question gender roles and sexuality in family structures. This discussion is connected with social power relations and the general control over women's sexuality in capitalist societies. In other words, Engels (1844) points to the social construction of gender which deserves equal attention. Three, the solution of abolishing private property while participating in wage labour politicises women's emancipation. This suggests that liberation for women lies in anti-capitalist agentic practices aimed at altering property relations in society and supporting general proletarian struggles. Engel's (1884) arguments cited above extended social reproduction theory by highlighting gendered aspects.

Overall, Marx (1976) and Engels (1844) contributions to the general debate on social reproduction are laudable. Both writers emphasised the need to study capitalism holistically, drawing attention to different yet connected spheres of production and reproduction in a capitalist society. In addition, they posited theoretical insights that deepened conceptions of labour in society and their roles in reproducing human livelihoods and life. Engels (1844) augmented classical Marxian social reproduction analyses by positing a gender analysis located in historical materialism. His gendered perspective on social reproduction raised important considerations for subsequent generations of Marxist, especially Marxist feminist. However, Engels (1844) and Marx's (1976) theories on social reproduction had several significant shortcomings.

They did not develop an adequately detailed theory on the relationship between women's unpaid labour, social reproduction and the overall maintenance of capitalism. Cock and Luxton (2013: 127) explain that "they left this untheorised and ignored the fact that 'maintenance' and 'reproduction' involved a great deal of work done by women". Marx and Engels elevated wage labour class struggles by the general proletariat in anticapitalism political agency. This perspective often overlooked patriarchy or sexism in the socialist organisations and workplaces (Ferguson, 2020: 64). The emphasis on absorbing women into wage labour also underplayed the importance of gender or race in class and social reproduction analyses. These forms of social differentiation are implicitly subsumed into an overarching class struggle that is insufficiently gendered or acknowledging of racial

inequalities (Cock and Luxton, 2013; Ferguson, 2020). Finally, an explicit logical conclusion drawn from Engel's (1844) analysis is the dualistic understanding of gender roles in the family and broader economy. Women are associated with reproduction within family structures while men's social function is tied to "production and labour in the economy" (Luxton, 2006: 27).

Marxist feminist such as Kollontai and Zetkin explored these shortcomings in Marx and Engel's social reproduction theories. These early 20th century activist theoreticians linked women's subordination and exploitation with the overall structure of capitalism. They particularly focused on how women's dependence on men for economic survival reinforces gender subordination in a capitalist society. Kollantai (1980: 63) states that "only by taking this path [of paid labour] is the woman able to achieve that distant but alluring aim—her true liberation in a new world of labour ... step by step she transforms herself into an independent worker, and independent personality, free in love". Zetkin supported this view and believed women experience gendered class oppression because they are "not economically independent" (Zetkin, 1984: 27). Both activists viewed economic freedom as an essential prerequisite for decreasing women's livelihood dependency on males and creating more opportunities to engage in socialist-led anti-capitalist struggles (Ferguson, 2020).

However, they equally acknowledged the class stratification created by capitalism amongst women. Their writings highlight how the experiences of proletarian women differ from their counterparts who have access to more wealth and income. According to Zetkin (1984: 77),

the proletarian woman has gained her economic independence, but neither as a human being nor as a woman or wife has she had the possibility to develop her individuality. For her the task as a wife and mother there remain only the breadcrumbs which the capitalist production drops from the table.

Working class proletariat women are still exposed to super exploitation in a capitalist society even when they are employed. Thus, emancipation for this working class strata is naturally tied with broader political struggles to create a post-capitalist society (Ferguson, 2020: 67). These observations distinguish Zetkin and Kollontai's views from the early 19th century liberal

feminist tradition, which advocated for women's equal economic participation without providing class or anti-capitalist analyses.

Their theoretical contributions to debates on women's economic freedom and labour were not confined to waged labour. Both activists dedicated equal attention to the work women performed in the household. They concluded that society creates a gendered division of labour, which burdens women with domestic chores and care work in homes. This limits women's participation in economic, political and leisure activities outside households. Consequently, Zetkin and Kollantai advanced an argument for the socialisation of housework (Kollantai, 1980; Zetkin, 1984). Kollantai put this theoretical argument into practice when she was leading the Bolshevik government's Social Welfare department in the post-1917 revolution period. She established several institutions such as communal kitchens and child care centres to decrease women's household care work during her tenure (Ferguson, 2020: 67).

Additionally, Kollantai and Zetkin highlighted that capitalism introduced technology and trade that made housework less cumbersome and valuable. The tasks women performed in households could be carried out more efficiently by domestic appliances, tools and household work equipment. Capitalist markets also sold goods that women traditionally produced in households as part of their domestic labour. Zetkin (1984: 47) summarises this perspective in the following words: "large-scale industry has rendered the production of goods within the home unnecessary and has made domestic activity of women meaningless". Their intention was not to overlook or degrade the social value of housework entirely, but rather illuminate how it operates around an exploitative gendered division of labour in a capitalist society.

The points cited above laid a solid foundation for anchoring gender in socialist debates. However, Cock and Luxton (2013) point out that political economy and theoretical developments in middle and later parts of the 20th century added new insights into Marxist feminist analyses. Communist and social democratic states failed to substantially eradicate gendered socio-economic inequalities. Furthermore, new theoretical perspectives emerged in feminist activist movements and academic contributions from the 1950s onwards. These extended the contribution of early Marxist feminism and brought in significant political

themes, which were either overlooked or not sufficiently explored in earlier periods (Cock and Luxton, 2013: 123-124).

A primary addition in this regard relates to the household labour debate instigated by Kollantai and Zetkin's arguments. Vogel (1983; 2000) discussed how household labour debates placed too much emphasis on women's work within family units and its reproductive role. She concluded that "labour power is not invariably associated with private kin-based households, as the domestic labour debate commonly assumed" (Vogel, 2000: 158). Her observations extended the discussion of women's oppression beyond the confines of unpaid household work, which is associated with patriarchal relations in families. Vogel (2000; 1983) encouraged feminist movements to not use unpaid labour in homes as the "universal" analytical lens when studying women's experiences in capitalist societies. As Ferguson (2020: 112) explains:

Like others before her she (Vogel) argues that labour power is produced and reproduced (primarily) within the family, which is structured internally through social relations based on age and gender difference. But rather than make the family's internal structure and dynamics the focus of her investigation, she examines the nature of interaction between it and capital. That is, the subject of her investigation is not the patriarchal household. It is the socio-historic logic through which capitalism and the patriarchal household are co-constituted

This perspective had three main significant implications for Marxist feminist political economy. Firstly, it challenged the dualism that characterised previous analyses, which superficially separated household unpaid labour and patriarchy from the overall social relations that underpin capitalism. This dualism created false dichotomies between gender and class. It also disconnected the different spheres of social reproduction in a capitalist society (Cock and Luxton, 2013; Ferguson, 2020; Vogel, 2000). Vogel (2000), Luxton (2006) and other Marxist feminist presented an alternative to dualism by illustrating that unpaid household labour, patriarchal family relations and economic structures are inherently connected. They argued for an integrated or "expanded" conception of a mode of production, highlighting the ways in which labour undertaken in different social institutions creates economic value. In other words, the spheres of reproduction and production in society are

different but interconnected constitutive structures of the capitalist system. Cock and Luxton (2013: 130) explained that “the way in which the population as a whole is produced is as critical to the organisation of any mode of production as the organisation of objects (raw materials) and forces of production (tools)”.

Secondly, Vogel’s (1983; 2000) contributions echoed the black feminist political economy criticisms, which amplified the historical racialisation of domestic work. These activists highlighted that black women worked as domestic employees in white households for centuries (Davis, 1983; Jones, 1949). Their experiences of gender oppression were not confined to unpaid work in black family households and patriarchal relations. In addition, racialised capitalism created intra-gender social stratification, which made white women complicit in the exploitation of black women in society. I examine and discuss this point later on in the chapter using black and post-colonial feminist critiques.

A third significant lesson to draw from this perspective is a wider notion of social reproduction. This term describes labour undertaken to reproduce human life and livelihoods in society. It includes examples such as food preparation, child rearing, cleaning, home-based care provision, community health care, and subsistence food production. These activities reproduce different generations of workers, supplement low wages paid in formal wage labour markets, and act as a buffer for the externalised human costs in capitalist production. The sexual division of labour in capitalist societies exploits women’s work to sustain social reproduction over different eras (Collins, 2000; Ferguson, 2020; Fraser, 2012).

Angela Davis (1981: 224) draws from Engel’s classical work on the *“Origins of the Family Private Property and the State”* ([1884] 1987) and posits that sexual divisions of labour are socially constructed. She states that the gendered division of labour within families and society is not natural or biological; it has evolved throughout history in different political economic structures and cultural contexts. Davis (1981: 224) explains that “sexual inequality as we know it today did not exist before the advent of private property. During early eras of human history, the sexual division of labour within the system of economic production was complementary as opposed to hierarchical” (Davis, 1981: 224). This statement amplifies how the sexual division of labour in society is innately connected with the broader material power

relations produced by capitalism. Society's construction of gender roles cannot be separated from the political economy context that shapes and organises labour.

Engels (1884) explains this relationship in his discussion on the *Conditions of the Working Class in England*:

[W]e must admit that so total a reversal of the position of the sexes can have come to pass only because the sexes have been placed in a false position from the beginning. If the reign of the wife over the husband, as inevitably brought about by the factory system, is inhuman, the pristine rule of the husband over the wife must have been inhuman too (Engels, 1884: 147)

Several Marxist feminist political economists have explored the varied dimensions of social production in both global South and North contexts (See Cock and Luxton, 2013; Fraser, 2014; Federici, 2016; Ferguson, 2020). They argue that it takes place in different social institutions in communities. Social reproduction is not limited to the shop floor or family household, but several locations where livelihoods and human well-being are being sustained or reproduced. Chapter 6 provides a detailed analyses and description of social reproduction institutions in communities, within the context of feminist political economy alternatives. The main point to emphasise in this chapter is that holistic social reproduction analyses transcend the household and workplace.

Both private and public institutions are involved in various activities that contribute to social reproduction in society. The private organisations are not limited to market institutions and include other civil society institutions such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), child care centres, mutual associations, community-based cooperatives, and informal community networks. Public organisations include government bureaucracies (national/local), public health care facilities, public schools, state-run child care institutions and other government organisations mandated to provide basic public goods equitably. Class relations and inequalities determine populations' access to these institutions and their socio-economic impact. In addition, there are several gender disparities in social reproduction activities in the contemporary era. These are based on sexual divisions of labour in society and overall

gendered socio-economic inequalities. Chapters 6 and 7 elaborate on how the participants in this study experience these disparities.

Social reproduction also entails understanding the sociological and political economy context under which reproductive labour takes place. This is essential for unpacking connections between social reproduction and the overall logic of neo-liberal capitalist accumulation (Vogel, 1983; Davis, 1983; Ferguson, 2020). Capitalism has evolved over the years, and this subsequently changes the socio-economic conditions facing working class populations. Thus, social reproduction labour is not static because it evolves as capitalism produces varied socio-economic crises amongst working class populations. One clear example is the erosion of accessible public services in most societies, coinciding with the rise in commercialising public goods (Harvey, 2003; Williams and Satgar 2017).

The externalisation of public policy failure costs are most vivid in essential social reproduction areas such as food security, water, energy and health care. Low income households and communities have to contend with poor public good service provision or minimal access to such services. These trends undermine social reproduction generally while deepening class divisions in society. The material impact also has a gendered dimension because it increases the care work burden for women. Public policy failure costs are externalised onto households, which rely on women's unpaid labour in the first place (Benya, 2015; Cock, 2016). Women are the coalface of the modern social reproduction crisis and often devise alternative measures to ameliorate the negative consequences of gendered class exploitation and oppression. In some cases, the women-led livelihood practices illustrate anti-capitalist forms of organising economic production and social production in society (Ahmed, 2018; Shiva, 2015). Fakier and Cock (2018: 44) highlight this agency as one of the central features of social reproduction theory. It amplifies and legitimises grassroots "struggles" aimed at building "alternative social forms" (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 45).

Marxist feminist social reproduction literature debates highlight women-led agentic practices in both historical and modern contexts. This literature originates from standpoint theory which elucidates how exploited women have capabilities to exercise agency (Weeks, 2007: 236). This resistance emanates from daily experiences when undertaking social reproduction

activities in homes and communities (Dietz, 2003; Jackson, 2001; Weeks, 2007). Jackson (2001) captures the logic of standpoint theory well by stating:

We need also to account for subjectivity and agency; for patterns of gendered interaction in everyday life as well as the institutional hierarchies within which they take place; the ways in which such interaction is endowed with, and shaped by, the meanings it has for participants; the micro levels at which power is deployed and resisted (Jackson, 2001: 287)

Women's exploitation and subordination can bring about common consciousness, build solidarity and lay the basis for social transformation (Dietz, 2003: 404-405). This solidarity can take the form of knowledge sharing, joint economic empowerment and organising around collective demands (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 12). This political action has, in some cases, led to feminist social movement formation at micro, meso and macro levels. These organisations examine contemporary gendered exploitation and develop clear proposals for addressing gendered socio-economic and political disparities. Dietz (2003) explains this succinctly when she argues that:

As a historical movement, feminism is geared toward action-coordination and social transformation, interrogating existing conditions and relations of power with a view toward not only interpreting but also changing the world (Dietz, 2003: 399).

Weeks (2011) relates the agentic aspects of social reproduction to the Autonomous Marxist paradigm. She points out that this tradition questions the productivism and determinism embedded in orthodox Marxist labour debates. According to Weeks (2011:92), "the official socialist movement also treats the imposition of work as if it were a title of nobility and continually attempts to suppress its refusal". The author argues that this approach reduces labour to its functional use in the capitalist productive system. It equally minimises the potential for acknowledging and supporting working class agency not tied to wage labour (Weeks, 2011: 93-94). In the author's view, too much emphasis is placed on productivist labour elements and how capitalism organises this work.

Weeks (2011) advocates for a broad notion of working class, which is "defined by its struggle against capital and not by its productive function" (2011: 94). Additionally, the author engages

Marxian labour value theory debates to develop a case for subverting moral and cultural work ethic frameworks imposed by capitalism in society (Weeks, 2011: 124). Her views encourage agentic practices challenging “work's domination over the times and spaces of life and of its moralisation, a resistance to the elevation of work as necessary duty and supreme calling” (Weeks, 2011: 124). The preceding arguments raise two important points in feminist political economy social reproduction debates: first, exploring the transformative power of women-led working class agency that resists or responds to capitalist structural oppression and, secondly, acknowledging that “any meaningful transformation of capitalism requires substantial change in the organisation and social value of work” (Weeks, 2011: 97).

Feminists of the second radical phase also linked gender struggles to overthrowing oppressive macro-structural power systems such as imperialism and racism (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 8). They drew their theoretical insights from Marxism, anti-colonial, and psychoanalytical literature (Fraser, 2012; Gross, 1992; Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006). Fraser (2012) captures the ideological underpinnings in the following passage :

Feminists joined with other currents of radicalism to explode a social-democratic imaginary that had occulted gender injustice and technicised politics. Insisting that “the personal is political,” it exposed capitalism’s deep androcentrism and sought to transform society root and branch (Fraser, 2012:4).

This quote is linked with an additional noticeable character of radical feminism: dismantling the private and public divide. Radical feminists highlighted how gendered cultural exploitation was not confined to the private household, as it was connected with developments in public institutions and politics. Societal issues such as the right to abortion, marital/non-conventional relationship legislation, and divorce became very prominent during this epoch (Collins, 1998: 67). Feminist cultural activism played a significant role in politicising personal aspects in gender power relation debates. Feminist writers illuminated how culture and societal norms sustained patriarchy in several ways. De Beauvoir’s (1949) seminal statement captured this perspective succinctly: “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (cited in Leboeuf, 2016). The discourses on linking patriarchy with hegemonic societal culture

questioned naturalist assumptions about the difference between men and women. As Dietz (2003) explains:

The disentanglement of the concept of gender from the dichotomous variable of biological sex, with which it had previously been considered synonymous, was an emergent property of second-wave feminist philosophy and social science (Dietz, 2003: 401).

Overall, the radicalism characterising second phase feminist debates contributed to feminism in several ways. This phase was largely influenced by Marxist feminist political economy debates on labour and social reproduction. These discourses connected women's exploitation to the logic of capitalist development, and how it structures gender power relations in private households and public institutions. The materialist approach in examining women's experiences also highlighted that patriarchy and class oppression were not mutually exclusive systems of domination. Capitalism relies on this intersecting relationship between gender and class exploitation in society. The exploitation of women's labour and sexuality is at the centre of this relation. Social reproduction highlights "class-based material realities" shaping the daily activities of women in society (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 44). It radicalises conceptions of gender oppression and exploitation by linking them to structural characteristics of a capitalist society. This lays a basis for locating gender emancipation within a post-capitalist framework in which labour and economic production are organised differently.

Furthermore, Marxist feminism extended the conceptualisation of social reproduction in society. Marxist feminism illuminated that socially reproductive labour does not only take place in households. This perspective does not treat the gendered sexual division of labour in society as an issue confined to household family power relations and structures. Social reproduction is underpinned by the general social relations in a capitalist society, with an emphasis on several community institutions which include, but are not limited to, family households. There are several connected "spheres of social reproduction" in a capitalist society where women experience exploitation, but equally form different types of resistance and agency (Ferguson, 2020). This agency elucidates the political dimensions of social reproduction, which place emphasis on working class agency in response to capitalist inequalities and crises.

The preceding discussions also linked the sexual division of labour and socially constructed gender roles to the political economy. This was essential for debunking naturalist and essentialist assumptions about women's labour in society. The criticisms around tracing the evolving nature of labour undertaken in social reproduction encouraged a debate on the possibilities of reorganising sexual labour divisions. This theme featured prominently in the advocacy campaigns of several feminist movements. These organisations drew from theoretical debates in the academy as well as student organisations and women's lived experiences. Learning from the agentic practices and experiences of women was crucial. A gendered understanding of women's exploitation also created different forms of resistance and concrete proposals on how to reconstruct labour, sexuality, and gender roles in a post-capitalist society.

I have illustrated how feminist responses developed in the radical tradition during the early and mid-20th century contributed to gender activism. These perspectives still shape contemporary feminism aimed at ending women's exploitation in society. However, black and post-colonial feminist advocates have extended the critiques of capitalism, sexuality and labour developed in previous waves of feminism. These contributions are discussed below and they pivot around three cardinal themes: race, colonialism and racial capitalism.

Black and post-colonial feminism

Post-colonial feminists argued that the radical feminist perspective was built on male-centred classical theories which had excluded and overlooked women's experiences from the outset (Gross, 1992: 22-24). They also pointed out that conceptual categories (especially gender binaries) used in these theories were based on the epistemological and ontological principles of Western modernity and history (Brah and Phoenix, 2004: 82). Detractors from post-colonial feminist traditions questioned the radical feminist school's understanding of non-Western gender experiences, and warned against employing universalism without paying attention to contextual differences in former colonies (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1985; Tyagi, 2014). Mohanty (1984: 334) argues that the "West is treated as the primary referent in theory and praxis" in Western feminism. This approach, according to post-colonial feminist theorists,

overlooks other forms of social oppression and exploitation that co-exist with gender exploitation in colonial settings (Mohanty, 1984, Tyagi, 2014; Seneviratne, 2018). The primary ones cited in these texts are race, culture, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Additionally, post-colonial feminists argued that feminist women from coloniser countries can be complicit in marginalising women in other parts of the world. Tyagi (2014: 45) explains that women in colonies “suffer at the hands of Western feminists from the coloniser countries who misrepresent their colonised counterparts by imposing silence on their racial, cultural, social, and political specificities, and in so doing, act as potential oppressors of their sisters”. The potential for complicity rests on the differentiated positions women hold in the international division of labour and global political system (Brewer, 1999; Deepak, 2014; Seneviratne, 2018).

These criticisms equally permeate the questions around feminist organising, resistance and political action. Post-colonial feminists criticise radical Western feminist literature for developing prescriptive feminist agency models which are based on gender struggles and stereotypes in colonising states. This restricts the appreciation for diverse forms of feminist agency across the globe and supports pre-existing theories that “have been represented in colonial and development discourse as passive victims of unchanging religious and cultural traditions in need of being saved by Western men and women” (Deepak, 2014: 155; Syed and Ali, 2011). Syed and Ali (2011:352) posit an argument which relates this criticism to what they perceive as a civilising mission embedded in Western feminism. They traced its origins to the primary aim of civilising non-Western colonial subjects embedded in euro-centric epistemological foundations (Maloka, 2014; Magubane, 1979; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012). These authors summarise the agency argument in the following manner: “in the process of campaigning for ‘Other’ women, whom they considered to be more badly treated than themselves, Western women often overstepped indigenous women’s subject position and sense of agency” (Syed and Ali, 2011:352).

Similar arguments around appreciating varied histories, structures of oppression, and social differentiation feature in black feminism (Davis, 1983; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989, Hooks, 1984). Proponents challenged the universal and monolithic conceptualisation of women in

second wave feminist theories (Anderson and McCormack, 2010; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, 2013; Denis, 2008). They highlighted how a narrow universal definition of women did not assist in comprehending complex social relations underpinning gendered oppression, and how these manifests themselves in different sociological contexts. Crenshaw (1989: 140), who is a leading pioneer in black feminist history, described the monolithic women category as a “single axis framework”. However, black feminism predates Crenshaw’s seminal contributions and those of fellow scholars and writers in her generation. This theoretical approach can be traced back to the mid-19th century.

This approach was first articulated by African American slave feminist, Sojourner Truth (1851) in her famous speech at a women rights conference in the United States of America (Anderson and McCormack, 2010; Davis, 1983; Brah and Phoenix, 2004). But it became hegemonic in the late 1980s after the publication of Crenshaw’s (1989) seminal work entitled: *“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”*. The author’s main argument placed racialised gender oppression at the centre of feminist discourse and how it engages systemic racist oppression. She argued that mainstream feminist theory did not capture the various forms of discrimination experienced by black women adequately (Crenshaw, 1989:145). Davis (1981) develops a similar argument in her book entitled *Women, Race and Class*, but she locates the theme of racialised women’s oppression within a racial capitalism framework, which starts with a gendered analysis of slavery. Her work shows how black women’s exploitation requires an analytical lens that transcends gender and class oppression (Davis, 1983: 53). Davis illustrates the varied ways in which racism equally shaped black women’s subjugation in the history of the USA. She suggests that “racism and sexism frequently converge—and the condition of white women workers is often tied to the oppressive predicament of women of colour “ (Davis, 1983: 94).

Davis’s perspective is grounded in a materialist conception of history, which appreciates how race, class and gender oppression reinforced each other in racial capitalist societies. In addition, Davis (1981) traces the historic agency and political contributions of black women in American socialist movements from the 19th century onwards (Davis, 1983: 152). Her accounts discuss the views and writings published by black women leaders of the USA

Communist Party and labour unions, which advanced political arguments capturing their racialised experiences of class and gender suppression. For example, she notes that

Claudia Jones was very much a Communist-a dedicated Communist who believed that socialism held the only promise of liberation for black women, for black people as a whole and indeed for the multi-racial working class. Thus, her criticism was motivated by the constructive desire to urge her white workers co-workers and comrades to purge themselves of racist and sexist attitudes (Davis 1981: 169).

The black feminist political economy tradition captured in Davis's (1983) book is also found in the writings of Hill Collins (2000). This author also focuses on black women's oppression within the context of racial capitalism. Hill Collins (2000) discusses the nexus between black women's labour in the family household and the overall economic system. She contends that "African American women have long worked outside the home, their paid labour in the labour market as well as their unpaid labour in their family households do not fit within prevailing understandings of work and family as separate spheres of social organization" (Hill Collins, 2000: 45). This quote builds on the arguments cited in previous sections, which call for a wider notion of social reproduction that goes beyond household family labour analyses. The racialisation of domestic work and its value for racial capitalism features prominently in black feminist analyses (Davis, 1981; Jones, 1949). This is one example of how black women's wage labour outside their family structures have underpinned racial capitalism for decades. Black women's oppression is structured by historic and contemporary racial power systems that shape public institutions and legislation. Thus, the black feminist tradition emphasises the centrality of examining black women's exploitation within the hierarchical socio-economic context characterising racial capitalism (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1981; Hill Collins, 2000).

Hill Collins (2000: 47) advances a case for examining gender and sexual oppression with other forms of societal oppression. Her perspective articulates the points advanced in Davis (1981) and Crenshaw's (1989) contributions that identify black women's subjugation with a mutually reinforcing relationship between different systems of oppression. Hill Collins (2000: 47) opposes "examining gender, sexuality, race, class, and nation as separate systems of oppression" and employs intersectionality to show "how these systems mutually construct

one another". This relation is explored further by another important contributor in black feminist thought, Hooks (1984, 2000). In her book entitled *"Feminist Theory from Margins to Center"*, Hooks (1984: 3) points out that

Past feminist refusal to draw attention to and attack racial hierarchies suppressed the link between race and class. Yet class structure in American society has been shaped by the racial politic of white supremacy; it is only by analysing racism and its function in capitalist society that a thorough understanding of class relationships can emerge.

Hooks's critique draws attention to the limitations of liberal and second wave feminism in the second half of the 20th century. The main point relates to the imposition of a rigid "common oppression" description in feminist movements that often oversimplifies differentiated experiences among women in society. This approach "provided the excuse many privileged women needed to ignore the differences between their social status and the status of masses of women. It was a mark of race and class privilege" (Hooks, 1984: 6). Hooks equally discusses the importance of standpoint theory and varied forms of feminist agency. She draws a distinction between liberal/'bourgeois' and radical feminism. According to Hooks (1984: 7-9), the former divorces feminism from aiming to end macro systems of oppression such as capitalism, patriarchy or racism. It allows individuals or groups to participate in feminist movements while having no interests in connecting women's liberation with dismantling the systems of power cited above. A radical feminist lens recognises that women's emancipation is a constitutive element of a wider struggle to obliterate patriarchal racial capitalism in society.

In addition, Hooks (1984) emphasises the importance of drawing on black women's historic experience of patriarchy and acknowledging that it builds consciousness about sexism. She criticises past feminist movements for ignoring how "black women, as well as other groups of women who live daily in oppressive situations, often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience" (Hooks, 1984: 10). She draws this conclusion from observing paternalism in the conduct of some white activist in feminist movements. This point resonates with the post-colonial feminists cited in preceding sections, which equally

cautioned against overlooking black or indigenous women's organic knowledge experiences when developing feminist theory (Syed and Ali, 2011).

The black feminist authors cited above draw a clear distinction between black feminist analyses and narrow essentialist identity politics. Indeed, intersectionality has often been reduced to identity politics in both its practice and its conceptual framing, often highlighting the affective nature of experiences rather than the underlying causes that produce multiple oppressions. Narrow essentialist intersectional approaches in feminism eliminate the possibility of forming solidaristic women-led political movements. Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, (2013) explain an alternative conception of black intersectional analysis that facilitates solidarity, as follows:

Crenshaw's intersectionality promotes struggles that are race-based but not race-bound, feminist but not essentialist, always pro-black and pro-woman but never only pro-black and pro-woman. Seeking unity without uniformity, mobilising identities without demanding that people be identical. Intersectionality matters from Crenshaw's perspective because it is an indispensable tool for creating new democratic institutions, identities, and practice (Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, 2013: 924).

Overall, the black and post-colonial feminist critiques raise the following significant points for this study's discussion on feminist theory. Firstly, inserting the theme of shared but diverse identity in defining women categories in feminist debates (Dietz, 2003: 402). Women do not experience the same form of discrimination or exploitation in a racial capitalist society. Some women enjoy more socio-economic, political and cultural privileges than others. Therefore, writers and activists must broaden classical women categories and concepts in feminist theoretical frameworks. Brah and Phoenix (2004:78) described this process as one based on "decentring of the normative subject of feminism". This observation is important in light of perspectives that homogenise feminist struggles or women in some orthodox and neo-feminist accounts. Gender analysts are encouraged to study social stratification amongst women in order to appreciate similar and different experiences of patriarchal domination.

A particular emphasis is placed on connecting gender, race and class inequality in society. Authors such as Davis, (1983) Hooks (1984) and Crenshaw (1991) have shown the limitations of analysing patriarchal domination without factoring in this multi-layered social stratification. Bowleg (2012: 1268) supports this approach, and further notes how it captures a dialectical relationship between divergent micro-level “social identities” and macro structural power systems such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy. Women are offered “many different points of entry and engagement at the intersections of their plural identities” (Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, 2013: 918).

Secondly, black feminism rejected the hierarchy of oppression debate which characterised earlier feminist discourse (Denis, 2008: 681). The authors mentioned in preceding sections do not attempt to elevate racism, class exploitation or sexism. They do not believe in the hierarchical organisation of different forms of oppression, but rather view them as interconnected systems of subordination, which manifest themselves differently in various social contexts. In other words, it is more analytically valuable to see racism, sexism and class domination as interdependent rather than mutually exclusive (Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Chun, Lipsitz and Shin, 2013; Denis, 2008).

Thirdly, black and postcolonial feminist authors amplify standpoint theory and experiential knowledge. Hooks (1984) and Davis (1981) highlight the varied ways in which black women’s oppression provides them with insights on how patriarchy and racial capitalism reinforce each other. Black women develop political consciousness from their common lived experiences and exploitation, which lays the basis for resistance and collective organising. There are several forms of black women-led resistance taking place within and outside feminist movements.

Additionally, postcolonial feminists have employed standpoint theory in highlighting the different positions women occupy in the hierarchy of global capitalism. This hierarchy is mainly shaped, according to them, by the power structures and social stratification that underpin colonialism and neo-colonialism. Feminist activists and movements have to appreciate these contextual and positionality differences when advancing joint struggles for women’s liberation (Mohanty, 1984; Spivak, 1985; Tyagi, 2014). South Africa’s political

economy history and contemporary social structure exemplifies the race, class and gender stratification discussed in feminist political economy debates. Colonial racial capitalism has shaped South African society for over three centuries. Black African women's experiences in this country cannot be fully comprehended without locating them in the colonial history of racial capitalism. There are several accounts of black African women's experiences and resistance throughout South Africa's colonial racial capitalist history in literature sources (see Cock, 1980; Ntantala, 1958; Mashinini, 1989; Walker, 1982). I discuss these experiences further in the following chapter, with a particular emphasis on the agrarian political economy.

Several Marxist feminists critique intersectionality in feminist ideological and political economy literature debates. Luxton (2014) argues that the claim of class reductionism which underplays women's racial or colonial oppression is not historically accurate. In her view, "many contemporary histories of the Left leave Marxist feminism out of the discussion altogether, while feminist histories tend to distort and misrepresent it" (Luxton, 2014: 139). Luxton (2014: 139) advances a case for "reappropriating" the history of feminist struggles that took place during the 1960s and 1970s. This proposition highlights how "Marxist feminism often refers to politics that link gender, race, and class and prioritises women's issues, while recognising the diversity of women's situations and advocating an openness to non-monogamous sexuality and various sexual orientations" (Luxton, 2014: 144). The author cites several women-led campaigns in the 1960s and 70s organised around political issues capturing the race and class dimensions of women's oppression. In addition, Luxton (2014) emphasises how women from diverse class, race and national backgrounds participated in these campaigns. "Ignoring the history of those struggles denies the political activism of anyone who isn't white and middle class" (Luxton, 2014: 141).

An additional point raised in Luxton's (2014) article is the anti-imperialist character of Marxist feminist struggles. This challenges criticisms levelled against second wave feminism by the post-colonial and black feminist sources cited in previous sections. She asserts that "both Marxism and feminism as theoretical projects and political movements have been international and transnational in orientation since their beginnings" (Luxton, 2014: 145). Luxton (2014) draws attention to the role of Marxist feminist women movements in struggles against imperialism from the 1960s onwards. These women were largely influenced by

different Marxist and socialist political formations advancing anti-imperial campaigns across the globe.

As a movement, women's liberation activists had close ties to the socialist, communist, and other Left-wing progressive political movements of the time. They were inspired by the anti-imperialist struggles in places like Algeria, Mozambique, and Vietnam; by the mobilisations of Indigenous peoples over land claims and self-determination. (Luxton, 2014: 146)

Mojab and Carpenter (2019) take the critique of intersectionality further with an emphasis on historical materialism. Their primary argument illustrates how intersectionality elevates multiple identities without relating them to class analysis in society (Mojab and Carpenter, 2019: 277). They propose using a class analysis when engaging debates about intersecting identities in society. These authors capture this point in the following way: "forms of social differentiation and oppression on the basis of race, gender, ability, nation, language, and more must be understood in their relationality to class as a social relation of exploitation, not merely another form of identity" (Mojab and Carpenter, 2019: 277). This approach avoids a "purely discursive analysis characteristic of post-modernism/poststructuralism" (Aguilar, 2015: 211). It draws from the historical contribution of political economy theorists who connect social stratification with the world-wide system of racial capitalism (Cox, 1959; Cabral, [1979] 2007; Davis, 1983; Magubane, 1979). Social identity cannot be analysed outside the socio-economic context that shapes social stratification around racialised class relations. As Aguilar (2015:212) explains, "It is in the context of capitalist social relations that these identity categories are activated as mechanism to facilitate exploitation".

Intersectionality, according to Mojab and Carpenter (2019), also fails to adequately explain social relations. It does not relate social relations to historical dialectical materialism and modes of production. The latter term refers to how a society organises the reproduction of human life and general material existence. This includes the productive forces (labour, machinery, tools, buildings) and social relations (material relationships governing production, wealth/income distribution and trade amongst classes). The authors contend that intersectionality does not explain how race, class, gender and other forms of identity sustain the capitalist mode of production. In their arguments, social relations of difference or

stratification are inherently connected with historical materialism and human consciousness within a specific mode of production. Mojab and Carpenter (2019: 278) elaborate on the relationship between social differentiation and the capitalist mode of production in the following statement

Social relations of race, gender, sexuality, class, and colonialism existed prior to the rise of capitalism, but in the emergence of capitalism these relations became integral aspects of the expansion and consolidation of the capitalist mode of production. The transformation of these relations into capitalist modes of patriarchy and racism is the result of this historical process. Thus, within the capitalist mode of production, we experience class as differentiated through relations of gender, race, ability, and sexuality. (Mojab and Carpenter, 2019: 278)

Fakier and Cock (2018: 45) also contribute to the critique of intersectionality developed in preceding sections. They highlight that intersectionality fails to acknowledge the primacy of class in driving women's oppression. These authors criticise intersectionality for "flattening" forms of oppression, which then does not adequately explain why gendered disparities continue in the current era (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 45). According to these authors, the solution lies in elevating class and capitalism as the fundamental causes of women's exploitation and subjugation. "Class analysis has an explanatory primacy—it enables us to comprehend race and gender oppression in how these identity categories are activated as mechanisms facilitating exploitation" (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 46).

In summary, the Marxist feminist response to intersectionality draws attention to the history of solidarity within feminist struggles from the mid-20th century onwards. This solidaristic political agency illustrates how second wave feminism acknowledged different forms of oppression and anti-imperialism in advancing struggles for women's liberation. Additionally, Marxist feminists point out that discussions on social stratification or differentiation have a material basis. Multiple forms of identity and exploitation are understood within an overarching theory of exploitation characterising capitalist society. This analysis locates identity formation in systemic structural trends that govern how humans reproduce their material existence. Thus, women's emancipation is innately connected with challenging capitalism and how it shapes social reproduction in society. Class is afforded primacy in

Marxist feminist analyses, highlighting its explanatory value for unpacking the structural conditions and social relations underpinning women's oppression. The emphasis is on the "relational" and "exploitation" features embedded in class theory (Mojab and Carpenter, 2019: 281). This form of class analysis is explained below:

Class is not another category of identity nor form of subjectivity; class is a process and relation of appropriation and exploitation. It is formed through relations of oppression based in social constructions of race, gender, sexuality, ability, culture, and origin as a means of concretising, to use Bannerji's analysis (2005), forms of class relations. (Mojab and Carpenter, 2019: 281)

The literature review of agrarian Marxist and feminist political economy in this chapter has laid a theoretical foundation for a gendered political economy exploration of women's oppression. More importantly, I use core concepts from this literature in developing a gendered political economy theoretical framework for this study. It is drawn from three primary literature sources: Marxist agrarian debates, Marxist feminism and black feminist political economy. The concluding section of this chapter describes the framework's main pillars, with a specific focus on a gendered agrarian political economy approach. This framework is designed to explore the following core research questions of this study: *How has the agro-food system deepened gender inequalities? How do black African women from low-income households experience gender disparities in household food security? What can we learn from black African women's responses to the agrarian crisis in South Africa?*

Conclusion: A feminist agrarian political economy framework

Women, agrarian change and work

The primary element in this framework is anchoring wider conceptions of labour and work in studying South Africa's agrarian question through a gendered lens. Preceding discussions in both the agrarian Marxist and feminist sections amplify the necessity of stretching work and labour conceptions in society. This allows us to understand and appreciate how women's labour is a constitutive element in domestic and global capitalism. It was crucial for developing agriculture and other sectors within the context of transitioning towards industrial

capitalism from the 19th century onwards in South Africa. Women's paid and unpaid labour continues to subsidise racial capitalism and social reproduction in the contemporary epoch. I centre this broader definition of work in all chapters in order to ensure that the study captures a gendered perspective of agrarian labour debates. The concepts and analytical categories employed will be derived from the Marxist agrarian and feminist political economy literature explored throughout this chapter. In addition to the above, I will explore labour value beyond its contribution towards addressing socio-economic and material needs. This entails framing women's labour as a potential source for non-material needs such as solidarity building in communities. The main aim is to examine how the women's work challenges hegemonic commodified or materialist understandings of labour in society.

Social reproduction, class and the neo-liberal food regime

An additional element of the framework is social reproduction and livelihoods outside formal markets. Drawing from the chapter's Marxist feminist political economy discussions, I highlight the class dimensions shaping the participants' livelihoods. This grounds my gendered analysis in the material socio-economic context that informs the women's location in South Africa's class structure. It connects the women's exploitation and oppression with historic and contemporary developments in South Africa's capitalist system. In addition, class analysis distinguishes the participants' experiences from those of other black African women who have access to better livelihood options as a result of their middle class or capitalist socio-economic status in society. A gendered agrarian investigation builds on the social reproduction theoretical lessons discussed in this chapter. This includes examining women-led livelihood activities and work undertaken in varied spaces or social institutions. All livelihood activities contribute towards reproducing human development and different working class generations in communities. These are studied with due consideration for qualitative changes in the capitalist political economy like financialisation. In addition, I link several social reproduction structural features in the contemporary global agro-food system, which is referred to as the neo-liberal corporate food regime in literature sources.

One of these characteristics is a reorientation of the state's role in the food system (Bernstein, 2014: 1033). Chapter 4 explores this trend extensively, which has ultimately resulted in

increased privatisation, economic concentration and corporate dominance in the entire food value chain (Alkon, 2013; Bernstein, 2014; McMichael, 2008). As Hilary (2013: 118) explains: “the production, distribution and consumption of food is already dominated by a small number of giant transnational corporations who seek to determine what is grown and what is eaten in all corners of the globe”.

The neo-liberal food regime has introduced a new phase of the green revolution, which has accelerated the development of the agro-industrial complex (Nabudere, 2013). This market-driven process includes the rapid utilisation of newly created privately-owned biotechnologies (McMichael, 2008: 209). Additionally, a global food and fuel nexus has developed alongside this new green revolution phase. The production of fuel from agricultural produce and transportation’s essential food value chain epitomise this nexus (Nabudere, 2011: 91). The long food miles, associated with large-scale extractive agriculture, have intensified the connection between fuel and food. The neoliberal food regime has also deepened the climate change and ecological crises through the use of fossil fuels for pesticides and artificial fertiliser (Bernstein, 2014; McMichael, 2009; Nabudere, 2013).

Financialisation is another important feature of the neo-liberal corporate regime and the general capitalist political economy. Krippner (2005: 174) describes this phenomenon as a “pattern of accumulation in which profit making occurs increasingly through financial channels rather than through trade and commodity production”. This trend has also permeated the agricultural political economy, with “food traders and processors diversifying into – and earning an increasing share of their revenues from – financial activities” (Isakson, 2013: 13). Financialisation increases the influence of financial institutions such as private banks in the food value chain. These actors direct the patterns of investment and production in the political economy of food. They exert most influence in the retail and agro-processing subsectors. Private financial enterprises determine the level of access to crucial inputs such as land and hold most of the producer debt in agriculture (Isakson, 2013: 1-2). Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion on the additional impacts of financialisation in the contemporary food system. The most significant effects include commodification of food, market dominance in value chains, high and/or volatile food prices, marginalising small

producers, and prioritising shareholder interests in the entire food value chain (Isakson 2013: 5-6). Isakson (2013) summarises this point succinctly :

Food manufacturers have become increasingly beholden to shareholders demanding returns of 20 – 30 per cent. Rather than offering healthier food, for example, food processors have opted to produce products laden with salt, sugar, and fat that stimulate overeating and thereby maximize dividends for stockowners (Isakson, 2013:14)

Social reproduction in communities is significantly shaped and limited by all the structural features mentioned in preceding paragraphs. It is, therefore, salient to analyse and link the participants' livelihood and food security practices with the macro-political economy trends. This ensures that the investigation appreciates how structural inequalities in the formal political economy intersect with the women's livelihood activities. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 show this link through examining household trends, the state's role, and women-led agency in communities. In all these analyses, emphasis is placed on understanding how the participants' labour, resilience and agency responds to the socio-economic challenges presented in the neo-liberal food regime.

Women-led political agency and agrarian livelihoods

Women-led agency and resistance featured prominently in the literature debates explored in the chapter's previous sections. This theme emerges from standpoint theory and social reproduction debates in feminist political economy. The gendered agrarian political economy framework employed in this study elevates black African working class women's agency. This analysis accommodates personal, socio-economic and political agentic practices, while relating them to South Africa's agrarian question and citizenship. Wittman (2009) encourages society to explore popular demands and actions from working class communities in debating the agrarian question. The author states that the "ability of a diverse array of rural actors to articulate and act on political demands constitutes an active citizenship that provides the foundation for improved access to material and ecological resources" (Wittman, 2009: 811).

Wittman's (2009) observation resonates with other writings on peasant-led political agency in overall agrarian debates (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009; Cabral [1979], 2007; Mbeki, 1964). This agency has existed since the introduction of capitalist agriculture to the present era, albeit in different forms influenced by the peculiar political economy context in a society (Alkon, 2013; McMichael, 2008). Alkon (2013: 1-2) has categorised the various forms of agency in the 21st century into four broad agrarian political agency paradigms. Firstly, a paradigm advocating for creating food systems that produce less negative ecological effects. These organisations mainly focus on the environmental degradation and unsustainable natural resource use associated with large-scale industrial agriculture. They view the introduction of more organic methods of food production as the panacea for both the hunger and nutritional crisis (Alkon, 2013). The second type of agrarian political agency places primacy on maintaining food security within local communities. Advocates highlight the food and nutrition insecurity challenges experienced by impoverished or low-income communities. The remedy, according to this view, is dedicating resources, infrastructure and procurement for decentralised local food system models. These decentralised food systems take many forms within communities, and, in some cases, develop around solidarity or social economy principles (Bennie, 2014; Jara, 2014).

The third group emphasises the correlation between food insecurity, racial and socio-economic inequality. Advocates argue that broader racial and economic disparities are reflected "within the production, distribution, and consumption of food" (Alkon, 2013: 1-2). The policy proposals advanced by exponents of the second and third approaches are similar. They all call on governments to rapidly support the following key policy programmes: expansion of urban farming, development of cooperatives in the retail sector, localisation and establishing local farmers' markets. The fourth group argues for a total overhaul of the entire global food system. Organisations who follow this approach elucidate how economic power concentration in the entire neo-liberal food regime causes both hunger and malnutrition. They also link food insecurity to broader structural factors such as unequal access to land, water and other crucial agricultural inputs (Bennie and Satgoor, 2018; Cooperative and Policy Alternative Center [COPAC], 2014; Jara, 2019; South African Food Sovereignty Campaign [SAFSC], 2018). These groups argue for localised and collective forms of ownership and control in the agricultural sector (Alkon, 2013).

Their calls for the development of local systems are linked with a broader class struggle which seeks to restructure the neo-liberal developmental paradigm and the concentration of economic power it produces. This is what distinguishes the fourth school of thought from the other three mentioned above. The fourth school of thought connects the goals of agro-ecology and localisation to challenging corporate dominance in the global food system (Alkon, 2013: 2). This dissertation examines the participants' agency within the context of debates and praxis on alternative food systems. The contemporary capitalist system shapes the environment that determines the success and shortcomings of food system alternatives. It is, therefore, important to draw connections between the alternatives and broader political economy restructuring.

Racial capitalism, gender and food systems

The criticisms posited in the black feminist and post-colonial contributions highlight the necessity of centring racial, cultural and other forms of social domination in feminist analyses. This position has been advanced in neo-Marxian political philosophy and political economy writings, which explore how capitalist exploitation intersects with racial or cultural subjugation (Hall, 1980; Magubane, 1979; Robinson, 2000). Gendered studies investigating South Africa's 19th and 20th century contexts also discussed the connection between gender, colonial and racial exploitation (Bradford, 2000; Cock, 1984; Ntantala, 1958; Mashinini, 1989; Walker, 1982). This tradition addresses the criticism levelled against second wave feminism by black and postcolonial feminist writers. This study will use the theoretical insights from racial capitalism theorists, and contributions made by several feminist writers who connect gender oppression with structural racial inequalities. Race is very important because food system development in South Africa was largely shaped by the introduction of capitalist agriculture that supported colonialism and apartheid. It is salient to factor in racial exploitation and inequalities in dissecting the agrarian question from a gendered perspective.

Bernstein et al. (2013: 4) argue that the historical context cited above has produced a peculiar agrarian question based on "the historical span of South African colonisation, the scale of its transition to capitalist agriculture and industry, the extent of African dispossession, the

extreme racialisation of its colonial political order and the uneven course of the post-apartheid political settlement”. In other words, racial capitalism is the core feature of South Africa’s agrarian question. This political economy connects gender with racialised patterns of inequality that persist in the contemporary post-apartheid food system.

The South African National Health and Nutrition Examination (2014) study revealed that South Africans experience food insecurity differently, with hunger more prevalent amongst certain social groups. It is imperative to explore why certain social classes and racial groups in society are more food insecure than others. The SANHENS (2014) survey and other food security studies highlight that black Africans, who reside in townships and rural areas, are more at risk of going hungry (DAFF, 2013; Oxfam, 2014; Stats SA, 2019a). Food security studies equally point out that black African working class women experience more hunger than their male counterparts (Dodson et al., 2012; Oxfam, 2014). In addition, there are clear differences in food security levels between urban, peri-urban and rural areas (SANHENS 2014; Stats SA, 2019). This historical context shaping class, race and gender disparities mentioned above is discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 3: REFRAMING THE HISTORICAL AGRARIAN QUESTION: A GENDERED PERSPECTIVE ON SOUTH AFRICA'S AGRARIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY

Introduction

This chapter discusses South Africa's agrarian political economy history, which has largely been shaped by racial capitalism. It draws from the theoretical literature debates and framework explored in the previous chapter. The chapter begins with investigating how colonialism structured South Africa's agrarian political economy. It focuses on land dispossession, labour debates, segregated development and agricultural sector structural shifts within the context of racialised capitalism in South Africa. Then I proceed to develop a gendered critique of seminal literature sources on South Africa's agrarian history, with an emphasis on centering women's socially reproductive labour, indigenous knowledge and livelihood agentic practices.

These gendered themes are developed further in the sections of the chapter examining agrarian political economy transformation under apartheid rule. I elucidate how the structural changes experienced in South Africa's agro-food system throughout different areas had significant gendered dimensions and policy impacts. The exploitation of women's paid and unpaid labour features prominently throughout the chapter's discussion of capitalist agricultural development in South Africa. Equal attention is afforded to examining black African women's agentic practices. This includes discussing livelihood practices and political agency developed while contending with apartheid's labour exploitation and systemic land dispossession. The chapter ends with a discussion on the structural changes that occurred in the agrarian political economy from the 1970s until the early 1990s. A gendered analysis of important themes such as labour market change, migration and land dispossession is conducted to elevate black African women's historic experiences.

Colonialism and the agrarian question of the dispossessed

Colonialism and apartheid have shaped the history of the agrarian question in South Africa (Bernstein et al., 2013: 4). Both forms of authoritarian governance systems facilitated the introduction and evolution of racial capitalism, with its primary manifestations in the agriculture and mining sectors (Bundy, 1988; Magubane, 1979; O'Meara, 1983). Some writers, political organisations, and activists in Marxist literature debates describe South Africa's imperial experience as colonialism of a special type (CST) (Jordan, 1997; Mawbey, 2014; SACP, 1962). This description illuminates how race, class, gender and spatial inequalities undergird South Africa's loaded agrarian question, which cannot be fully explored without considering the historical features of a capitalist settler colonial society. The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) (the forerunner of the South African Communist Party) expressed the link between racial capitalism and the agrarian question in its 20th century "native republic" resolution. It states that the CPSA should be "calling for an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic with full, equal rights for all races" (CPSA, 1928). The emphasis on black African peasants is derived from a calibrated working-class analysis, which factors in the importance of an agrarian question underpinned by the following structural policy economy features.

First, the creation of dual agricultural systems that supported segregation and colonial settler capitalism. This entailed developing large-scale highly mechanised agriculture in arable regions reserved for white citizens alongside small-scale subsistence farming on degraded land not conducive for sustained crop production in the reserves (Wolpe, 1972). Most of the black African population resided in the reserves and used traditional methods to produce crops largely for survivalist consumption (Kariuki, 2009; Mafeje, 2003). This agricultural dualism is a common trait in what Moyo (2011b: 64) describes as "Africa of the labour reserves". The "settler colonial states" developed "commercial farming systems based on private property rights. These were assigned mainly on individual family-operated farms, which were spatially segregated from black African communal areas" (Moyo, 2011b: 64). Several scholars have highlighted how the land power relations shaping this dual agrarian system distorted black Africans' historical land tenure systems (Delius, 2018; Beinart, Delius and Hay, 2017). The emphasis was placed on traditional leaders' dominant role in overseeing

land use and tenure in the reserves using colonial constructs of customary law and governance (Mamdani, 1996; Ntsebeza, 2005). Several peasant revolts took place in the former homelands during the 20th century challenging this system (Mbeki, 1964; Drew, 2011; Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2011). These revolts were organised around land access, agrarian development and democratising governance in the reserves.

Secondly, South Africa's transition into capitalist agriculture was characterised by accumulation from above. Several Marxist agrarian writers and scholarly literature accounts describe this phenomenon using political economy theoretical frameworks (Bernstein, 2011; Cousins, 2005; Moyo et al., 2013). They depict the transition towards capitalist agriculture as a violent transformative process that emerged through destroying the black African peasantry, which had sustained agrarian livelihoods outside and inside (small elite) colonial markets between the 17th and early 19th centuries (Bundy, 1972; Simons and Simons, 1983). According to Atkinson (2007), a number of factors related to racialised capitalist expansion informed the dispossession of land and livestock belonging to the self-sufficient black African peasantry. White settler farmers advocated for the elimination of independent small African producers because of economic competition and labour supply shortages (Magubane, 1979; Simons and Simons, 1983). Jack and Ray Simons (1983) explain the connection between nascent industrial capitalism in South Africa and early forms of dispossession using the following words: "Wars, conquest and annexations provided one of the primary requisites for industrialism – an uprooted peasantry available at low cost for rough manual work" (Simons and Simons, 1983: 31).

Emerging mining corporations in the late 19th century supported using authoritarian state power to increase black African wage labour supplies (Magubane, 1996; Magubane, 1979). The labour factor was important because it subsequently shaped the entire debate amongst colonial political leaders and emerging capitalists (especially mining and agricultural capital) on how to integrate black Africans into an expanding settler political economy (Maloka, 2014; O'Meara, 1983). Bundy (1988) provides an accurate description of the challenge facing white settler farmers and the late 19th century colonial political economy:

The import-export sector of the Cape economy demanded an increased production of natural and agricultural resources in return for an expanded sale of manufactured goods, and the potential producers of agricultural commodities – cattle, wine (increasingly important throughout the second quarter of the century) and sheep – needed a greater labour force. Increased trade, freer access to land (artificially scarce because of the activities of land speculators) and an expanded labour supply would only be forthcoming if the relative self-sufficiency of the Nguni economy were disturbed, if the existing balance were disrupted so as to release cattle, land and labour from their non-commercial employment in Nguni homesteads and villages. (Bundy, 1988: 32)

This explanation in Bundy's (1988) work on the underlying colonial political economy interests shaping accumulation from above is insightful. It provides historical context for understanding the class interests which pushed the state towards destroying the black African peasantry (Atkinson, 2007; Cousins, 2005; Neocosmos 1993). Terreblanche (2012) discusses varied forms of repressive legislation implemented since the 1800s to achieve this goal. These laws were primarily aimed at meeting the labour requirements of both colonial and apartheid era capitalist expansion. The legislative measures included, amongst others, authoritarian regulation of labour migration, decreasing the minimal freedoms of black African peasants residing on white settler farms, increasing livestock dispossession, and limiting Africans' access to land (Atkinson, 2007; Magubane, 1996; Maloka, 2013; Terreblanche, 2012). This evidence points to the significant role played by the state in subordinating the black African peasantry.

This observation is related to the third dimension of the historical agrarian debate in South Africa: connections between national and agrarian questions. Both colonial and apartheid capitalist agriculture emerged as a result of systemic land dispossession, and national struggles against colonialism have historically placed primacy on land reforms or restitution (Moyo et al., 2013; Fanon, 1963). Cousins (2005: 5) describes this connection between land appropriation and the struggles in nation formation and capitalist agriculture as the "agrarian question of the dispossessed". Most scholars concur that the unresolved land question is a central component of agrarian debates in Southern Africa (Cousins, 2005; Jacobs 2010; Kariuki, 2009; Mefeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013; Neocosmos, 1993; Oya, 2010). Land

expropriation was crucial for developing the agricultural dualism described in preceding sections, which supported the expansion of capitalist settler agriculture. Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga (2011) highlight the importance of connecting land and agrarian questions in the following statement:

One needs not only a sound knowledge of the necessary economic and social theory in order to examine the agrarian question, but also an accumulation of knowledge on the history of land and other forms of land use in the country under consideration. In order to achieve a detailed analysis and examination of the matter at hand, the dynamics of land tenure systems and the perceptions and responses of land users need also to be considered. Land and its control and use are considered as significant elements of the agrarian question (Maghimbi, Lokina and Senga, 2011: 9).

The fourth feature of South African agrarian historical agrarian debates is class formation and how it relates to the peasantry. There are two contending views: the proleterianisation and peasant differentiation theses (Mafeje, 2003; Neocosmos, 1993). Proponents of the first view argue that the peasantry in South Africa was converted into a wage dependent proletariat by the mid-20th century (Bernstein, 2011, Wolpe, 1972). They attribute this trend to authoritarian laws and dispossession of both land and livestock that systematically destroyed black African peasant production. As stated earlier, the emerging mining and settler agriculture sector capitalists were the main beneficiaries of this peasant livelihood destruction (Neocosmos, 1993: 26). Wolpe (1972) explains the proleterianisation thesis in the following words:

It is, nonetheless, true, that by not later than 1920 the overwhelming economic and political power of the capitalist sector had succeeded, whether through unequal terms of trade or otherwise, in under-developing the African economy so that it no longer presented any significant competitive threat to White farmers. Production, in the African Reserves, of a marketable surplus became increasingly rare, finally disappearing altogether. (Wolpe, 1972: 433)

This statement reflects one element of Wolpe's (1972) cheap labour thesis. The author linked this peasant livelihood destruction to the overall structure of South Africa's racial capitalist

political economy. The other central aspect in Wolpe's (1972) account is the connection between cheap labour, segregated development and the economic dualism described in earlier sections. The author's analysis of economic dualism explored the intersecting relationship between the subsistence reserve and the urban formal economies, which developed during colonialism and apartheid, describing it as follows:

The relations between the two sectors were, indeed, reduced to the provision by the backward sector of a supply of labour-power to the capitalist sector. The peculiar feature of this labour-force is that it is migrant and temporary, returning to the Reserves in between periods of work, and retains means of production in the African economy or has a claim on such means. The exploitation of migrant labour-power of this kind enables the capitalist sector to secure an increased rate of surplus value (Wolpe 1972: 433).

Peasant differentiation advocates highlighted several shortcomings in the views articulated in the preceding statements. They emphasised how class differentiation within rural populations is overlooked by the proletarianisation school. The peasantry is examined as a homogenous social stratum without any contradictory class or political interests (Jacobs, 2010; Lenin, 1899; Neocosmos, 1993; Oya, 2010). These writers essentially argued that both liberal and radical political economy agrarian traditions "homogenise black people in rural areas" (Neocosmos and Levin, 1989: 231). Neocosmos and Levin (1989: 231) explained how "black rural areas tend to be viewed as being inhabited by a conglomeration of undifferentiated black masses, vegetating on the periphery of the centres of capitalist development in South Africa". They offered a different approach that emphasises social stratification within South Africa's rural population in the historical context of capitalist development (Neocosmos and Levin, 1989: 256).

This social stratification was determined by differentiated access to land and inequalities in agrarian-based livelihood assets (Jacobs, 2010; Neocosmos and Levin, 1989). Oya (2010: 8-9) specifically connected rural class stratification with the agrarian political economy structures in sub-Saharan Africa. The author discussed the differences between different types of farming to illuminate how agrarian structures shape class formation. For example, large-scale farms depended on hired labour and made use of mechanised modern production systems

on large land parcels. Smaller farming units, which operated on smaller pieces of land, used non-wage labour and were not mechanised. These differences have informed class inequality within rural populations. This trend is summarised by Oya (2010: 7) who argues that “the variety in forms and scale of rural accumulation is also marked, especially if one compares extremes such as the settler economies of South Africa, Kenya and Zimbabwe with the predominantly pastoral societies of parts of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa”.

Several agrarian writers have discussed the varieties of rural accumulation in South Africa between the 18th and 20th centuries. These authors document how colonial capitalism created a socially differentiated peasantry, which consisted of the following strata: “relatively well-off African peasants”, a small group of African commercial farmers, chiefs, headman, migrant labourers, poor peasants, an educated administrative class, and homestead subsistence producers (see Beinart, 1982; Bundy, 1972; Drew, 1996; Lewis, 1984). The social differentiation cited in South African agrarian political economy literature is connected with debates on the relationship between capitalist and pre-capitalist political economies in the country’s racialised capitalist social structure. Historical social stratification with the peasantry cannot be fully comprehended outside this two-tiered capitalist economic framework (Lewis, 1984: 2).

Lewis (1984) and Bradford (2000) argue that seminal accounts of South Africa’s agrarian history in Marxist political economy do not provide an adequate discussion on the pre-capitalist modes of production. These two writers criticise Wolpe (1972) and Bundy (1972) for lacking an “adequate theory of pre-capitalist modes of production” (Lewis, 1984: 3) They attribute this shortcoming to the authors’ flawed assumptions on how production was organised in black African pre-capitalist economies. Lewis (1984: 4) specifically points out Bundy’s (1972; 1979) incorrect conceptualisation on the “productive unit” in pre-capitalist agrarian structures. Lewis challenges Bundy’s assertion that production was organised around a “family household” by presenting evidence on the centrality of a homestead (*umzi*). “The *umzi* was a group of households, each of which having one or more wives, who lived together and who recognised the leadership of the head of one of the constituent households.” (Lewis, 1984: 4). Bradford (2000) raises criticisms against peasant historical accounts that focus on black Africans’ abilities to adapt or compete in colonial markets. She amplifies how this logic

sets the scene for a male centric historical account on the development of the black African peasantry within a colonial capitalist framework (Bradford, 2000: 88).

Bradford's (2000) criticism supports the gendered critique of Marxian agrarian political economy developed in Chapter 2. It shows how both liberal and radical Marxian political economy analyses of South Africa's capitalist agrarian transition overlook gender and social reproduction outside formal markets. This omission is evident in the proletarianisation and peasant differentiation perspectives discussed in the preceding sections. These schools of thought have not incorporated gender relations into their respective historical agrarian accounts. The contributions have largely focused on a limited notion of social differentiation organised around black African male class formation debates. This historical literature underplays the centrality of black African women labour and social reproduction in South Africa's agrarian development (Bozzoli, 1991; Bradford, 2000; Drew, 1996, Lewis, 1984; Walker, 1982). I will address this shortcoming in the following sections by merging the feminist agrarian political economy insights developed in Chapter 2 with literature discussing black African women's historical role in agrarian reform.

Gender and invisible labour in South Africa's agrarian discourse

Black African women have shaped the historical development of South Africa's political economy in several ways. The most vivid example of their contribution is unpaid labour and its importance for social reproduction. Helen Bradford (2000) emphasises the historical significance of black African women's labour in agrarian livelihoods in both pre-colonial and colonial eras. She argues that black African women were primarily responsible for agricultural production in the pre-colonial South African economy while their male counterparts led subsistence pastoral farming (Bradford, 2000: 86-87). The early 19th century colonial government state officials prioritised transforming this gendered division of labour. They were preoccupied with integrating black African men into agricultural activity in order to break down pre-colonial economic structures, land tenure systems, and encourage them to "take up the plough and the spade, instead of the gun and the assegai" (Bradford, 2000: 87).

Bradford (2000: 87) explains that “turning African men into agriculturists was an imperial project”. The historical contribution of black African women in pre-colonial subsistence agrarian economies is captured further by Walker (1982). Walker (1982: 13) points out that “women in pre-conquest societies had a clear economic function. With it had gone a degree of economic independence and hence a relatively high personal status” (Walker, 1982: 13). She details how the 19th century colonial state undermined this degree of economic autonomy through authoritarian legislation, which decreased women’s access to land used for agricultural production in the reserves (Walker, 1982: 13).

The contribution of black African women agrarian labour continued despite the expansion of colonial capitalism in the 19th century. But this labour is largely overlooked in literature discussing the agricultural sector’s historical role in South Africa’s political economy (Bundy, 1972, Wolpe, 1972; O’Meara, 1983). This omission begins with Bundy’s (1972 and 1988) seminal work on the black African peasantry in the 19th century. Bundy’s thesis challenged conservative historical accounts, which argued that black African peasant livelihood strategies were inherently backward and failed to adapt to colonial market conditions. He debunked this view using evidence from his extensive case study in the Eastern Cape (he also refers to similar developments in Natal).

Bundy (1972) argued that “there was a substantially more positive response by African agriculturists to market opportunities than has been usually indicated” (Bundy, 1972: 370). Black African peasant societies managed to maintain subsistence production outside formal markets, which made indigenous communities not dependent on wage labour. This was achieved through merging traditional agricultural production practices with “the adoption of the plough and other implements, crops and methods” (Bundy, 1972: 375). This thesis further highlighted the social stratification which emerged in rural areas, as a result of the successful peasant livelihood strategies in the first half of the 19th century. His primary focus was on the development of a small group of commercially orientated black African agriculturists who competed with white commercial farmers in essential product markets such as wool (Bundy, 1972). Bundy (1972) attributes the black African peasantry’s demise in the late 19th century to three essential political economy factors: labour shortages, white farmers’ opposition and the discovery of minerals. All these dimensions of South Africa’s racialised capitalist system

nudged the colonial state to increase land dispossession and subvert economic development in the reserves further. Black African peasant economic autonomy and the emergence of a commercial African farming class contradicted the colonial economic goal of securing cheap wage labour for both white-led mining and agriculture sectors.

Bundy's seminal contribution, like most classical accounts, overlooks the centrality of unpaid black African women labour in South Africa's agrarian political economy (Bradford, 2000; Lewis, 1984). As Razavi (2009: 200) explains: "the unpaid (non-commodified) provisioning of household members has been invisible to political economists of agrarian change and continues to be invisible in research on livelihoods". The gender blindness in his thesis primarily stems from an institutional bias towards markets. Black African peasant development and adaptability are positioned around agricultural market competition in a 19th century colonial economy (Bradford, 2000: 108).

Feminist agrarian scholars cited in Chapter 2 of this study highlight how this approach limits social reproduction analyses. It reduces agrarian capitalist relations of production to markets while overlooking other social institutions, which contribute equally to reproducing labour and profits for capital accumulation (Razavi, 2011; Tsikata, 2015). Lewis (1984) and Bradford's (2000) critiques provide some insights on how to include other social institutions that reveal underlying gender relations in historicising the 19th century black African peasantry. These authors encourage readers to focus on the homestead as an essential site of peasant social reproduction during the 19th century. There was a clear sexual division of labour in homesteads with males controlling "cattle herding" and women "arable agricultural work" (Lewis, 1984: 7). The prosperity of the black African peasants cited in Bundy's work needs to be located within this broader institutional approach. Women labour within the homestead was an essential part of the black African male peasant's success. This labour included child rearing, land cultivation and other domestic work within the homestead. It is, therefore, important to include family labour when examining the political economy underpinning black African peasant production during this period (Bradford, 2000; Du Toit, 2017; Lewis, 1984).

In addition, the focus on successful black African male peasants trading in commercial agricultural markets oversimplifies social reproduction costs. The broader livelihood costs

carried by women and other family members to meet market produce trade targets are not sufficiently addressed in Bundy's (1972; 1988) work. Bundy asserts that black African peasant males used surplus production to trade after meeting household needs. But several scholars point out that hunger and malnutrition were prevalent in homesteads during the same period (Drew, 1996; Bradford, 2000; Lewis, 1984). These authors rely on statistical evidence and reports from various studies (including censuses) conducted in the 19th century. Assessing "peasant prosperity" within the confines of male-driven trade in markers conceals these broader social reproduction costs. It overlooks how women, younger men and children in homesteads had to endure poverty or hunger to meet market demands.

The literature on the relationship between black African reserves and an emerging colonial capitalist political economy takes debates on social reproduction costs in South Africa's historical agrarian transitions further (Wolpe, 1972; Magubane, 1979). As stated earlier, Wolpe's cheap labour thesis was influential in neo-Marxian debates during the 1970s. Wolpe pointed out that the subsistence reserve economy and households were important for reproducing the cheap migrant labour system in several ways. The reserve economy provided an additional source of income for the families of migrant male workers who received low wages, which were insufficient for maintaining household livelihoods (Wolpe, 1972: 434). Reserve households also provided social security for exploited migrant male workers who had lost their jobs because of illness or unfair dismissal within a racist industrial relations system (Wolpe, 1972: 435). Wolpe (1972: 435) explained other social security duties carried out by "reserve families" such as child rearing, care work for the elderly and sustaining migrant workers' livelihoods during work holidays. However, he does not provide a specific gendered analysis of what his article describes as the "social security functions" performed by the reserve family (Wolpe, 1972:435). The family/household gender power relations and sexual divisions of labour underpinning Wolpe's (1972) proletarianisation thesis were not fully interrogated. He primarily focused on how general social reproduction activities in the reserves supported black African male migrant labour and capitalist profit accumulation (Bozzoli, 1983; Manicom, 1992).

Scholars such as Drew (1996) elevated the specificities of gender political economy relations in the reserves. She argued that women's agricultural production in the reserves was more

salient for social reproduction than migrant labour in the late 19th and early 20th century periods (Drew, 1996: 57). This women-led subsistence farming increased as male migrant labour expanded because of rural poverty during the early 20th century. According to Drew (1996: 57), “growing numbers of older and married men engaged in migrant labour, and agricultural production shifted even more to women, 'the widows of the reserves', who worked in increasingly arduous conditions as access to land was squeezed and soil depleted”. Ntantala (1958) and Walker (1982) explain how black African women sustained the subsistence rural economy in hostile context characterised by landlessness, droughts, and minimal household incomes.

The colonial state understood the importance of maintaining a women-led agrarian subsistence economy in the reserves, and it introduced several measures aimed at preventing black African women migration into urban areas (Walker, 1982: 7). These interventions succeeded until the early 20th century when more black African women left the reserves to reside in urban areas that offered diverse livelihood opportunities or work in the “white countryside” (Walker, 1982: 14). The migration was inspired by material socio-economic factors and the need to escape patriarchal chieftaincy governance systems. Social reproduction in the reserves had deteriorated further because of limited access to land, soil depletion, insufficient remittances and growing authoritarianism from chiefs (Bozzoli, 1991; Cock, 1980; Walker, 1982). Most African women who migrated were employed in the domestic and agricultural sectors in the early 20th century (Cock, 1980; Walker, 1982). However, it is important to note that non-wage domestic service was a central feature of South Africa’s colonial capitalist development even before this period (Cock, 1980: 197).

Most political economy accounts focus on the underlying class and political interests, which developed commercial agriculture during the apartheid capitalist era. The labour debates largely discuss black African men entering agricultural wage employment from the beginning of the 20th century (Magubane, 1979; Morris, 1977; O’Meara, 1983; Terreblanche, 2012). I elevate the paid and unpaid work of black African women that shaped South Africa’s agrarian political economy in the 20th century. South Africa’s agricultural sector employed 66 868 black African women by 1921 and this amount was very high when contrasted with other sectors (Walker, 1982: 15). This employment must be discussed within the broader context of the

black African labour tenant and wage-earning agricultural labour systems, which prevailed during different periods of the 20th century.

Black African labour tenancy on white farms was introduced when the frontier wars ended in the 19th century (Atkinson, 2007: 24). Continued land dispossession and underdevelopment in the reserves converted some black Africans into labour tenants who resided on privately-owned white farms (Atkinson, 2007; Williams, 1996; Yeni, 2021). The tenants provided labour for white farm owners who granted them access to land so they could grow crops, keep livestock and build homes. In some cases, tenants paid rent to the owner with no labour obligations (Atkinson, 2007; Hathorn and Hutchinson, 1990). This system provided some minimal benefits for the tenants and white farmers. As Atkinson (2007: 24) explains: “gaining access to relatively fertile farm ground was often the prime or sole reason for black tenants’ submission to white landlords, either by paying cash rents or by sharing their produce with the landowner”. The rights to grazing were also important for the tenants’ cultural and socio-economic capital. Cattle ownership was a basis for wealth, social stratification and cultural practices such as marriage negotiations. On the other hand, white farmers gained from the access to cheap labour and crops produced by the labour tenants. They also relied on the black African tenants’ “means of production” such as “oxen and implements” (Atkinson, 2007: 24).

Black African women and family labour were essential for reproducing the tenancy system described in preceding sections (Atkinson, 2007; McClendon, 2002). The white farmers relied on the individual labour of the black African male tenant and the rest of the family members in the homestead. These agricultural landlords were able to access additional cheap labour without any significant wage costs (Atkinson, 2007; Bradford, 1987). It is equally important to mention the findings articulated in the *“Native Farm Labour Committee Report 1937-39”*. They highlight the importance of black African women farmworkers’ social reproduction activities on white-owned farms during the early decades of the 20th century. Yeni’s (2021) paper on labour tenants in Natal amplifies the women’s double work in ‘farmers’ fields and the farmworker residence. All this labour was negotiated with the black African male patriarch who was compelled to discipline the family labour or face eviction (Atkinson, 2007: 34). There are two crucial points to note in this discussion. First, the embryonic white-led commercial

capitalist agricultural sector relied on black African women's unpaid labour. Secondly, an emphasis on reasserting patriarchal supervision over the labour tenancy agreements, which incorporated women and other family members into contractual obligations.

Atkinson (2007) describes black labour tenancy as a form of "unfree labour" underpinned by land dispossession and unequal race relations. The white farmers preference for labour tenancy in the 19th and early 20th centuries waned from the 1930s (Morris, 1977: 4). Several motivating factors caused this antagonism towards the system. One of them was the heightened labour shortages caused by the farmers' response to the crisis in agriculture during the 1930s. Prices fell, and this created significant economic challenges for farmers who encountered rising operating costs and debt. This sector took long to recover from the economy-wide effects of the global economic depression. Struggling farmers introduced measures that "squeezed labour tenants" in order to cope with the agricultural crisis, and this exacerbated the labour shortage problem as many labour tenants migrated to urban areas (Morris, 1977: 4). Some labour tenants also left farms in search of alternative tenancy contracts. A conflict ensued between agricultural, mining and industrial capitalists over access to labour. An additional motivating factor for eradicating the labour tenant system was the land issue. White farmers argued that black African labour tenants' land should be used for commercial purposes. Commercial land development was seen as a crucial step towards reviving the hard-hit agricultural sector (Morris, 1977: 5). Labour tenancy was viewed as impediment to the development of a competitive modern agricultural sector (Atkinson, 2007; Morris, 1977). The farmers believed that it "was retarding the development of more efficient agricultural production" (Morris, 1977: 5).

The farmers advocacy pushed the state to introduce extensive legislative and institutional frameworks, which were aimed at resolving the farmers' grievances. This commenced with legislation such as the Native Service Contract Act of 1932, the Natives Trust and Land Act of 1936 and various iterations of the Masters and Servants Acts (Atkinson, 2007; Morris, 1977). The advocacy for resolving the labour crisis in agriculture reached its highest put in the 1940s. Chapter 4 in this dissertation provides a detail account of the underlying class and political interests which drive this lobby.

The main aim was to use state power for transitioning from labour tenancy towards a stable wage-based proletarianised agricultural labour regime. Farmers encouraged state authorities to strengthen control over labour migration and the general movements of natives between different areas of the country. This included setting up a labour bureau that would manage the distribution of workers. It was designed “to distribute the labour force properly between town and country, as well as within the urban and rural areas” (Morris, 1977: 16). All these measures were introduced with supporting authoritarian legislation that limited any space for resistance or subversion from the farm labour tenants or squatters. Most importantly, these measures sustained white farmer control over the family labour of black African families working and residing on their farms. For example, the Native Service Contract Act of 1932 allowed farmers to evict an entire family if one member failed to meet labour output targets (Atkinson, 2007: 35). The number of black African wage dependent farmworkers increased rapidly during the first half of the 20th century as a result of state inventions. It expanded from 488 000 in 1918 to 963 000 in 1958 (Atkinson, 2007: 222). This trend emerged alongside the gradual destruction of the labour tenant system, which was fully eradicated by the mid-1970s (Atkinson, 2007; Morris, 1977). These changes in the agrarian structure were based on the gendered political economy dimensions discussed below.

Gendering agrarian political economy history

The transition to capitalist agriculture in the 19th and first half of the 20th century reveals important points for a gendered historical discussion on South Africa’s agrarian question. These arguments must be contextualised within the five main structural political economy features discussed in the chapter’s introductory sections. The first point is linking colonial capitalism with changes in the sexual division of labour in South Africa’s agrarian structure. This section has presented evidence that illustrates the centrality of women’s labour in pre-colonial agrarian societies (Walker, 1982; Bradford, 2000). Black African women sustained agrarian production before conquest and their male counterparts were engaged in pastoral activity. These women were allocated sufficient land to produce crops for their families while engaging in other labour activities required for homestead social reproduction. Colonial authorities imposed a new sexual division of labour and encouraged (and pressurised) black African men to increase their participation in agricultural production. This transition was

facilitated through state intervention and market-centric masculinity based on a “Eurocentric notion of a male breadwinner” (Bradford, 2000: 88). Bradford cites a 19th century British military commander who expressed the colonial state’s desire to transform pre-colonial sexual divisions of labour in agricultural production when engaging Xhosa men, who said: “it is the duty of men to work in the fields, not of women; they ought to make and mend your clothes” (Bradford, 2000: 87).

The second significant observation relates to the omission of black African women’s unpaid labour in seminal literature discussing transitions towards capitalist agriculture in the 19th century. This oversight is primarily caused by agrarian political economy analyses that focus on the move from subsistence agriculture to commercial markets. These studies’ obsession with commercial trade and production leads to gender blind debates on how capitalist agriculture developed in the 19th century. The authors do not dedicate sufficient attention to other institutions involved in social reproduction, which shaped African peasants’ integration into colonial agricultural markets. These include essential non-market institutions such as black African homesteads that supported the development of the African peasantry. Black African women’s unpaid labour sustained the African peasantry’s agricultural production during the 19th century. Women were responsible for managing crop production within a homestead that was comprised of different households. The thesis of the competitive and successful black African male peasant trader or producer ignores this crucial element.

Thirdly, the social costs produced by “prosperous” black African peasant production during this period were gendered. Homesteads carried the brunt of African peasant males competing in colonial commercial agricultural markets. This deepened social stratification and exacerbated poverty or malnutrition in some cases. Women, children and young males experienced the adverse impacts of the early shift towards a colonial agrarian political economy. This trend continued in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when segregated development was expanded by colonial authorities in order to develop industrial capitalism and secure cheap black African male migrant labour. The evidence presented in preceding sections show how African women’s agrarian-based livelihood strategies and social reproduction activities supported this first phase of industrial capitalist accumulation. It places women’s agrarian labour at the centre of debates on South Africa’s dual agricultural

system, with white-owned commercial agriculture developing alongside subsistence or petty commodity production in the black African reserves.

Fourthly, South Africa's labour tenant and sharecropping systems survived through the reproductive and household labour of black African women. White farmers relied on the black African male homestead head's ability to discipline family labour so that it complied with tenancy contractual obligations. This caused conflict between male tenants and white farm owners because the former wanted to limit the use of women and broader family labour. State intervention and authoritarian legalisation ensured that whiter farm owners had stable access to additional labour from the labour tenant's family. Black African women had to provide domestic labour in homesteads and on the farmer's crop fields. They absorbed the social reproduction costs of the labour tenant system and reproduced additional generations of labourers.

Fifthly, state intervention and its orientation towards the development of colonial capitalist agriculture is important in a gendered agrarian historical analysis. I have illustrated throughout this discussion how state power was employed to shape the transition towards a colonial agrarian capitalist structure. This intervention included land dispossession, authoritarian labour legislation, influx control, and state support for an emerging white agricultural capitalist class. The colonial state instituted different measures during the 19th and first half of the 20th century, which extracted unpaid labour from black African women.

This labour sustained the reproduction of migrant cheap male-dominated African labour required for capitalist industrialisation in urban areas. It also benefitted white farmers in the countryside who needed additional labour at a very low cost. The labour tenancy system that prevailed throughout the 19th century was dependent on black African women's social reproduction activities on white-owned farms. In addition, colonial state authorities shifted the social reproduction costs of early capitalist accumulation on to black African women in the reserves. They had to provide the social security and broader livelihood support for migrant black African male workers and families. The state only provided labour and social security benefits for white male workers. Overall, this section has illuminated a gendered

analysis of the history of South Africa's agrarian question in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The discussion revealed the centrality of black African women's unpaid labour and broader social reproduction work in shaping the agrarian political economy during this epoch. Historical debates in neo-Marxists agrarian political economy have largely focused on class and race dimensions. This section purposefully adopted a gendered lens, with the aim of elevating the role of black African women in South Africa's agrarian historical development. In the following discussions, I take this theme further by analysing the evolution of the agrarian political economy from the late 1970s to the current era.

Gender and modernised apartheid agriculture

South Africa's agrarian political economy experienced significant structural changes from the late 1970s onwards. These changes were driven by the need for increased modernisation in the agricultural sector, which was crucial for expanding industrial capitalism (Atkinson, 2007; Bernstein, 1996; Cousins and Scoones, 2009; Kraak, 1993). State intervention played an important role in modernising South African agriculture during this period (see Chapter 4). Incentives such as subsidies and cheap credit spurred the shift towards capital intensive agricultural production (Atkinson, 2007: 53). The need for cheap unskilled black African labour became less significant as there was a focus on developing highly skilled agricultural workers. White commercial farmers lessened their efforts aimed at sustaining the "coercive labour framework" and rather pushed for "reducing the size of black rural population, and, in particular, the many underemployed and unproductive family members living on farms" (Atkinson, 2007: 59). This call for removing what the farmers and government called "surplus" black people to the reserves led to mass evictions (Davis, 1990; Platzky and Walker, 1985).

Most of the evictions took place in the 1970s and left large sections of the rural black African population with limited livelihood options (Atkinson 2007; Kraak, 1993). A Surplus People Project research report (1983) explained that:

In many respects, this massive movement of agricultural workers and small peasant producers off the land is not unique to South Africa. It has been a feature of the capitalisation of agriculture worldwide. The intervention of the state to force this movement into the

bantustans and away from the urban areas... is, however, specific to South Africa (cited in Davis 1990: 7).

The Surplus People Project published a book entitled *"The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa"* in 1985. This publication provided a detailed account of forced evictions in South Africa and their impacts on black African family livelihoods (Platzky and Walker, 1985). It concluded that 3.5 million people had been evicted by 1985 and highlighted the threat of further evictions. This figure included different types of forced removals that occurred in urban, peri-urban and rural areas since the 1960s. However, agricultural workers accounted for a significant portion of these evictions. Davis states that "between 1960 and 1982 over 1.1 million farm workers were expelled from their homes on white farms – a third of all removals of black people during this period" (Davis, 1990: 6). She obtained this finding from studying the various reports produced by the Surplus People Project in the 1980s

An important point to highlight is the state's coercive role, which is central in land dispossession and forced removals of agricultural workers. This authoritarian state intervention amplifies the emphasis on 'accumulation from above' discussed in the agrarian theoretical framework of this study. Historic changes in South Africa's agrarian structure have been driven by oppressive laws that subjugate different working class strata within the agrarian political economy. Furthermore, these evicted agricultural employees were restricted from exploring employment opportunities in other parts of South Africa (especially urban areas). The restrictive migration laws ensured that most evicted agricultural employees and their families stayed in underdeveloped and overpopulated Bantustans. But some residents managed to circumvent these laws and secured employment elsewhere in urban areas. This point emphasises the link between land dispossession, controlled migration, labour market shifts and separate development in South African racial capitalism history. The apartheid state used forced removals for political, economic and social purposes. Evictions supported the state's broader strategy of creating a segregated South African society, which was (and still is) underpinned by the race, class, ethnic and spatial development disparities that characterise racial capitalism (Platzky and Walker, 1985; Wolpe, 1972).

The shift towards a capital-intensive mechanised agrarian political economy model also created substantial job losses. This reduction in the agricultural workforce started in the 1970s and continued into the early 1990s (Atkinson 2007; Kraak, 1993). Employment figures in agriculture decreased from 1.6 million in 1970 to 1.2 million by 1990. Some black African rural residents who were retrenched or evicted resettled in the reserves while others sought employment in other industries in urban areas. An additional structural change during this period was the increase of part-time or non-permanent employment in the sector. Gender played a significant part in expanding this atypical employment as women agricultural labour increased substantially from the 1970s (Bernstein, 1996; Davies, 1990; Kraak, 1993; Kritzinger and Vorster, 1996). Davies (1990: 25) explained this trend using the following words: “The shift away from permanent and towards casual labour on the farms has also meant increased female employment. Full-time jobs have been broken down into 'part-time' components, and dirt-cheap female labour recruited to carry out the various tasks as and when necessary”. This gendered demographic change in the workforce was complemented by the use of extensive child and prison labour on commercial farms (Bernstein, 1996; Davies, 1990; Kraak, 1993).

White farmers’ preference for part-time black African women farm labourers from the 1970s was not benign. It decreased labour costs because the women received lower wages and their employment conditions were more precarious than their male counterparts. They could be dismissed and evicted from the farms easily because of their employment status (Davies, 1990; Kraak, 1993; Kritzinger and Vorster, 1996). In some cases, women’s ‘recruitment’ into farm jobs was negotiated through a male husband/spouse farmworker (Kritzinger and Vorster, 1996: 344). The woman employee was expected to provide supplementary labour during harvesting periods and prohibited from accepting another job. This restriction was codified through influx and labour bureaux laws, which outlawed black African women’s employment in other sectors (Kraak, 1993: 31). The casualised women farmworkers encountered inhumane working conditions on the farms that violated basic labour and human rights. They often worked without protective equipment and received minimal training (Kraak, 1993). Sexual exploitation was also rife and underreported because of employment insecurity (Davies, 1990: 25). An important point to note here is that modernisation and technological advancements in the agricultural sector did not create better working conditions for farm employees, especially black African women. The

conditions of super exploitation persisted with the assistance of authoritarian state authority. Farmworkers were excluded from the various changes in different iterations of the Labour Relations Acts and other employee socio-economic benefits.

The gender shifts discussed in preceding sections must be contextualised within the structural agrarian political economy features discussed throughout the chapter. Low levels of economic development in the reserves and limited access to land left women in the rural areas very vulnerable to exploitation. They were prohibited from seeking employment elsewhere and wage remittances were not sufficient for maintaining family livelihoods. This socio-economic context coerced many “women and children drawn from rural townships or Bantustans” into modernised capitalist agriculture under exploitative conditions (Bernstein, 1996: 33).

Apartheid state authorities exacerbated rural poverty and underdevelopment in reserves through the introduction of betterment schemes. The government argued that these interventions would promote more productive and efficient land use in the Bantustans. These schemes reorganised land tenure systems in the rural areas and compelled families to reduce their livestock numbers. Communities were forcibly moved and relocated to smaller landholdings, with the aim of freeing up land for large commercial agricultural businesses investments. These betterment schemes exacerbated landlessness, poverty and social differentiation within Bantustans. Only a few elites with patronage networks linked to the Bantustan administration or tribal authorities benefitted from these programmes (Kraak, 1993: 42-43). This resulted in large-scale resistance across different Bantustans in Mpondoland, Tembuland, Zeerust and Witziehoek during the 1960s. The tactics of resistance included subverting traditional authority, boycotting trade linked with the Bantustan administration and setting up localised autonomous governance systems (Mbeki, 1964; Drew, 2011; Kepe and Ntsebeza, 2011). These “peasant revolts” signalled rural residents’ intent to challenge the imposed colonial land tenure reforms, land use regulations and governance structures led by traditional authorities (Mbeki, 1964).

The state’s authoritarian role was equally significant for maintaining gendered disparities within the dual agricultural systems, which supported segregation and settler capitalism. Rural women experienced socio-economic challenges in both the reserve and commercial

agrarian economies because of state restrictions. The restructuring of land tenure systems and perversion of customary laws limited women's access to livestock or land (McClendon, 1995; Mnisi Weeks, 2018; Mamdani, 1996). Influx control and labour movement regulations made it difficult for black African rural women to obtain employment outside the highly exploitative modernising agricultural sector and domestic work. Laws regulating on-farm employment sustained gendered inequalities through facilitating labour market entrance using the family structure headed by the male farmworker (Kritzinger and Vorster, 1996).

But this gendered exploitation on farms was not received or experienced passively. Several black African women from rural reserves violated the pass laws in search of alternative livelihoods in urban areas (Bozolli, 1991; Atkinson, 2007). Kraak (1993) provides further evidence on other forms of rural resistance led by black African women, for example, the different strikes that took place during the 1980s led by women farmworkers mainly in the Transvaal. These protests occurred over wage disputes, working conditions and farm owner assaults (Kraak, 1993: 47). It is important to highlight the political influences and context, which underpinned this resistance. There were previous isolated farmworker strikes during the 1960s and 1970s in different parts of the country. These were mostly suppressed through mass dismissals or state violence, and this made it difficult for unions to organise farm workers. But the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) did organise a successful boycott of potatoes produced using prison labour during 1959, and the women-led farmworkers strikes in the 1980s were organised with the assistance of the African Food and Canning Workers Union (Kraak, 1993: 46).

By the mid-1980s South Africa's agrarian political economy had been transformed. Increased modernisation and commercialisation of the agriculture sector led to significant structural changes. Large-scale farming enterprises with highly skilled employees displaced smaller farming units that retained some elements of feudal production relations. This led to concentration in the sector as the number of farming units dropped from 100 000 in 1964 to 50 000 by 1984 (Kraak, 1993: 30). According to Bernstein (1996: 30), this development signalled the resolution of the classic agrarian question for South Africa's white farming capitalist class. The depth of concentration, agro-industrial complex linkages, technological upgrading and transformed labour processes illustrated how capitalist relations of production

had reconfigured South Africa's agricultural sector (Bernstein, 1996: 30). This deepening of capitalist relations in the agricultural sector is a common feature of Marxist agrarian political economy debates. Chapter 2 provided several examples amplifying how the agricultural sector supports industrialisation within an overarching capitalist political economy context.

Previous sections in the chapter have shown that this transformation was underpinned by extensive state authoritarianism and policy support. These state interventions were primarily aimed at supporting emerging white capitalist farmer interests. Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of historic and contemporary state intervention in the agrarian political economy. In this chapter, I emphasise how the government's role in the agrarian political economy was reoriented during the 1980s. Several important political economy factors caused this reorientation. The power of the white commercial agricultural lobby had decreased by the 1980s and the National Party was not overly dependent on this political constituency. An additional factor informing this shift was pressure from non-agricultural capitalists in the economy who viewed the government's continued support for agriculture as an impediment to efficient market-led development. Their contentions were developed within a broader market-orientated policy advocacy framework, which sought to integrate South Africa into global value chains through "deregulation and market liberalisation" (Bernstein, 1996: 41).

Atkinson (2007: 53) describes the period discussed in this section as the "second phase of commercial agriculture". It was primarily distinguished by the transition towards a modern mechanised agrarian political economy. This transformation cannot be separated from a gendered agrarian perspective on agrarian political economy history for the following reasons. Firstly, the massive farm evictions which occurred during this period cannot be interpreted through a gender-neutral lens. Evicted families resettled in the reserves, but the social costs of these evictions were mainly carried by black African women. These women had limited alternative livelihood options because of restrictive influx and labour migration legislation. Land disparities in the reserves worsened this gendered socio-economic precariousness. Black African males who were evicted from farms were permitted to seek alternative employment or livelihood opportunities elsewhere in urban areas. Women had to carry the burden of maintaining family livelihoods after the evictions took place, within a context of underdevelopment in reserves. Secondly, I presented evidence that amplifies the

gendered exploitative labour regime, which expanded under conditions of modernisation in the agricultural sector. Black African women constituted the majority of precarious workers who provided labour for the structural changes in agriculture since the 1970s. This gendered labour exploitation in agriculture still persists in the contemporary era. The development of racial capitalism in South Africa's agrarian political economy is inherently gendered and it reveals black African women's exploitation throughout the different epochs.

Thirdly, the few black African male farmworkers who kept their jobs in the transition towards modernised agriculture in the 1970s still relied on unpaid women labour to ensure employment security. Black African women undertook reproductive labour in the farmworker residence and the white farm owner's household. They also engaged in additional field labour during harvesting periods with no formal agreements between themselves and the white farmers. Gendered labour exploitation has been sustained throughout the different structural transitions in the South African agrarian political economy from the beginning of settler colonial capitalism. This point is not afforded much attention in the seminal agrarian political literature. Fourthly, it is necessary to go beyond gendered exploitation and equally focus on black African rural women's economic and political agency. The evidence presented in this section illustrates some level of women-led agency in the form of rural resistance to exploitation on farms in the 1980s. This is significant for elevating the role of women in historicising transformative agrarian politics. The politics of agrarian reform cite examples of rural resistance such as the 1960s 'peasants' revolts' without discussing the black African women's agency. Further, agency must be broadened to incorporate the historical livelihood strategies undertaken by black African women in rural and urban areas in response to the socio-economic inequalities developed during different phases of racial capitalism in South Africa. This dissertation emphasises black African women agrarian-based livelihood agency in Chapters 6 and 7. This is discussed within the structural context of the neo-liberal corporate food regime described in Chapters 2 and 4.

Conclusion: gender and South Africa's agrarian history: key lessons

Chapter 4 provides an extensive discussion on how the South African state and its policy orientation facilitated the transition towards a corporate dominated neo-liberal agrarian

political economy. The features of this agrarian model are outlined in Chapter 2 which presented a case for linking food systems analysis to structural reconfigurations of both global and agrarian political economies. Agrarian questions are shaped by historical materialism and the dominant mode of production in a particular epoch. Capitalist relations of production, and the hegemony of neo-liberal economic policy frameworks, characterise the current era. The gendered effects of this corporate market-orientated food regime are discussed extensively in other chapters of the dissertation. This section specifically focuses on salient lessons for agrarian literature and policy debates emerging from the gendered historical analysis. The primary one is the need for elevating black African women's historical role in shaping South Africa's agrarian political economy transitions. Most neoclassical and neo-Marxist political economy literature sources focus on race and class dynamics without examining gender. The historical structural debates on the development of capitalist agriculture prioritise class and race exploitation with an emphasis on states, markets and commercial production. They largely marginalise other spheres of social reproduction and the power relations shaping their development. This subsequently reduces important agrarian political economy themes such as exploitation, land dispossession, labour and food systems to the experiences of black African males. I have purposefully historicised South Africa's agrarian economy transitions with a gendered lens in order to elevate black African women's experiences.

An additional insight from previous sections is the importance of subsistence agriculture in black African women's livelihoods. The historical analysis revealed how women-led crop production in homesteads and households played an important role in the country's agrarian political economy. It also supported the development of industrial capitalism in several ways. This trend points to a connection between gendered agrarian analyses and examining small-scale subsistence production. Black African women's experience in South Africa's capitalist agricultural model cannot be fully understood without paying attention to the evolution of the subsistence agrarian economy. This dissertation specifically examines black African women's production in the informal subsistence economy, with the aim of tracing its historical and contemporary significance. The dominant agrarian political economy policy debates primarily focus on formal markets that are organised around large-scale mechanised

agriculture. This approach misses the gendered nuances because black African women primarily participate in small-scale agricultural production.

Historical analysis equally highlights the necessity of expanding classic agrarian question approaches in political economy. South Africa's agrarian question needs to be reframed so it places gender power relations and dynamics at the centre of structural reforms. It must transcend the class and market-orientated analyses expressed in liberal neo-classical and neo-Marxist literature. This dissertation widens the classical agrarian question in the South African context through applying a gender lens. The aim is to highlight the significance of gendered power relations in shaping agrarian development throughout different decades. And these gender power relationships persist, albeit in different ways, in the current era.

The chapter traced the history of South Africa's agrarian question through a gendered lens. It augmented the critiques of neo-classical and neo-Marxist agrarian political economy discussed in Chapter 2. A structural political economy approach was used to show how seminal literature on South Africa's agrarian question underplays gender. Historical debates on the agrarian question mostly examine class formation and racial exploitation, with an emphasis on black African male experiences. I presented an alternative account that sketched how black African women participated in agrarian development throughout different historical periods. The main aim was to reassert and highlight black African women's economic agency throughout South Africa's agrarian history. This commenced with the presentation of evidence on the pre-colonial subsistence economy and the sexual divisions of labour organised around it. And then I proceeded to show how this economic agency continued during the colonial periods, in both the reserves and white-owned farms. These women-led agentic livelihood practices illuminate the social reproduction themes explored in previous chapters. The unpaid labour within homesteads and communities was essential for sustaining families experiencing poverty as result of land dispossession, political authoritarianism and economic exploitation. It was largely organised around subsistence farming and food trading within these communities. Black African women's historic agrarian labour and broader agentic livelihood practices are essential elements of historicising the development of capitalist agriculture in South Africa.

The discussion of these agentic livelihood practices also broadens structural change discussions in South Africa's agrarian political economy literature. It factors in the significance of social reproduction and elevates the centrality of non-wage livelihoods in contributing towards agrarian structural change throughout history. This is particularly important in the context of South Africa, where racialised capitalism externalised structural change socio-economic costs onto black African women in several ways. This point is often overlooked in literature that predominantly examines agrarian structural change by focusing on male wage labour, state legislation and formal market power relations. This chapter has shown that black African women's labour was pivotal throughout different agrarian political economy structural change periods in South Africa, especially the transition towards modern commercial industrial agriculture.

Finally, the agency in this chapter also points to some political elements of black African women's resistance. The discussions on the peasant's revolts in the 1960s and women's struggles against farmworker exploitation in the 1980s are important. They allude to forms of agency that go beyond steps taken to secure essential livelihood sources for homesteads or communities. This is significant for exploring how black African women responded to the gendered and racialised exploitation in the development of capitalist agriculture in South Africa. The current study does not explore this topic extensively, yet it cites and discusses some examples of women agency that transcend securing livelihoods.

CHAPTER 4: THE STATE AND AGRARIAN REFORM

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the state's role in agrarian reform, which is a prominent theme in the literature and empirical evidence. States play a central role in shaping and restructuring the political economy of food in both domestic and international contexts. South Africa's agrarian evolution has been largely determined by state intervention that created conducive policies for developing a white-dominated agricultural capitalist class. Analysing the state is particularly salient in this study because it examines South Africa's agrarian question from a gender perspective. The main aim is to investigate the gendered social relations in the agrarian political economy, with a specific focus on food security and system trends. In this chapter I explore the impact of state resource allocation and policy orientation on gendered disparities in South Africa's food political economy. This is essential for uncovering the relationship between gender power relations, agrarian reforms and government policy choices. The main aim is to illustrate the gendered impacts of the state's policy choices and paradigm in the agro-food system. The chapter also draws from the Marxian agrarian and feminist political economy themes discussed in the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2.

This exploration of the state's role commences with a discussion on colonial and apartheid agro-food systems. It builds on the themes discussed in Chapter 3, which investigated the historical development of South Africa's agrarian relations. I proceed to examine the shift to a post-apartheid corporate food model and its relation to state policy and resource allocation. This section will refer to the corporate neo-liberal food regime described in Chapter 2. It links national policy shifts with the local state and agrarian political economy. Then I conclude the chapter with significant insights that emerged from examining the shifts in the state's role in the agro-food system since 1994.

State and agrarian reform: colonial and apartheid agro-food systems

The South African state has played a central role in the construction and transformation of agrarian relations. Literature on the evolution of South Africa's political economy highlights this point (O'Meara, 1983; Simons and Simons, 1983). In this chapter I will draw from the major themes in the literature on state intervention in the agrarian political economy. The state's role in agrarian relations must be examined on three levels: global, national, and local. Emphasis will be placed on connecting developments on the national level to sociological trends in the local state, household, and community levels.

South Africa's contemporary agro-food system has all the characteristics of the neo-liberal corporate food regime described in previous chapters. The main feature of this system is market-orientated state regulation, which facilitates corporate dominance in the political economy of food (Bernstein, 2014; Greenberg, 2015). This development started in the late 1980s and is peculiar when compared with South Africa's pre-democratic agrarian development path. Both colonial and apartheid agro-food systems were anchored on strong state intervention. This commenced with the transition to capitalist agriculture that took place from 1870 onwards (Simons and Simons, 1983: 22). The authoritarian nature of the transition towards capitalist agrarian political economy structures is described in the Marxian agrarian theoretical framework, which was outlined and unpacked in Chapter 2.

The theoretical framework illuminates how coercive state power was central in developing capitalist agriculture, especially in the colonies of the global South. It questions neo-liberal historical accounts that emphasise market-based developments without adequately discussing the state's role in structuring capitalist agriculture. The colonial state intervened to support South Africa's overall system of racial capitalism that developed on the basis of race, class, and gender stratification in society. Chapter 3 highlights that South Africa experienced 'transformation from above' in the 19th century agrarian political economy, characterised by land dispossession, black African peasant repression, state authoritarianism and the conversion of "small white rentier landlord estates into capitalist farms" (O'Meara, 1983: 23).

South Africa's late 19th century agrarian structure was based on the exportation of commodities such as wool, wine and fruit (O'Meara, 1983: 23). British imperialist trade and industrialisation was dependent on agricultural produce from dominions (Nabudere, 2013: 29). As Patnaik (2011: 14) explains: "there was very high import dependence for primary products on colonies and subjugated tropical lands from the very beginning of the transition in today's industrial Europe". The emerging agricultural capitalists aligned themselves to the British colonial state, which created conducive conditions for their dominance in South Africa's colonial agro-food system. State power was deployed to address the farmers' challenges. Colonial authorities introduced repressive labour legislation, destroyed self-sufficient African peasant economic structures and formulated "racially discriminate private property rights" to appease the farmers (Moyo, 2011b: 64). The emergence and growth of mining in the late 19th century strengthened these interventions. This development enhanced agricultural produce demand for both food consumption and industrial processing. The complimentary mining and agricultural capitalist interests, facilitated by extensive state intervention, continued in the 20th century. But this relationship between the two fractions of capital was also riddled with contradictions, which were exacerbated after 1924 (Magubane, 1979: 164)

According to O' Meara (1983: 26-27), the interests of maize farmers dominated state agrarian policies in the early 20th century. The author develops this argument by tracing the class composition of the South African Party (SAP), which was dominated by two powerful groups: affluent farmers and mining capitalists. The agricultural lobby ensured that state intervention was sustained after the formation of the union in 1910. Some prominent examples include the creation of a state land bank and formulating various Land Acts. Hertzog and Creswell's pact government deepened state support for agriculture from 1924 onwards (Magubane, 1979; O'Meara, 1983). The state enhanced credit provision, supplied inputs, regulated exchange, and deepened efforts to create a black African proletariat (O'Meara, 1983: 27-28).

Magubane (1979: 164) contextualises this state intervention within the contestation between two dominant capitalists: British-dominated mine owners and an Afrikaner agricultural petty bourgeoisie (Magubane, 1979: 164). The aim of the latter stratum was to ensure continued support for emerging agricultural capital using state power. This could only be achieved by

transferring the public revenue generated from mining taxes to agrarian development. The mining capitalist were opposed to this because they “operated in an almost foreign enclave economy based on mineral extraction, which was ruled by the Chamber of Mines” (Magubane, 1979: 164). So, the pact government attempted to curb British dominance by supporting the Afrikaner nationalist development path through state intervention (especially in agriculture).

The preceding paragraphs highlight the relationship between state intervention and class formation in the agrarian political economy. This discussion builds on the theory of class formation that emerges during capitalist agrarian structural reforms, which is explored in this study’s theoretical framework. The literature draws from Marxian political economy debates dissecting varied forms of class formation underpinning agrarian capitalism. These debates illustrate that state power, colonialism and technological changes are essential factors for unpacking class composition and evolution in agrarian reform. South Africa’s 20th century government used state resources, policy frameworks and regulatory instruments to support an emerging Afrikaner agricultural capitalist class. This class needed government intervention to pursue its racialised class interests such as securing cheap exploited black African labour and obliterating the economic competition created by black African farmers.

This trend continued in the post-World War Two era. It was epitomised in the National Party’s agricultural policies implemented after 1948 when it ascended to power. The apartheid government introduced various marketing acts to regulate pricing, movement, and quality of products. Furthermore, it expanded concessional state finance and subsidies for critical inputs such as machinery. The state also played a prominent role in establishing agricultural cooperatives across the agro-food value chain. Protectionist agrarian trade policy interventions such as high tariffs complimented this agrarian strategy (Edwards et al., 2009; Greenberg, 2015b; Makhaya and Roberts, 2013).

Both Magubane’s (1979) and O’Meara’s (1983) accounts illustrate the centrality of these interventions in developing agricultural capital from 1948 onwards. The emerging capitalist farmers benefitted from the measures and accumulated substantial returns. This evidence challenges neo-classical economic historical accounts, which underplay the state’s role in

developing South Africa's agrarian capitalist class. Magubane (1979: 172) captures this point in the following words: "The Afrikaner capitalist farmer remains important to the Afrikaner political class. In no country in the world have such sacrifices been made in support of agricultural capital as in South Africa". This development laid the basis for diversifying the composition of Afrikaner capital in the apartheid era. Agricultural surpluses were used for developing finance and industrial Afrikaner capitalist classes (Magubane; 1979; O'Meara 1983). Prosperous farmers, influenced by economic nationalism, diverted their profits into centralised Afrikaner finance institutions, which were investment arms subsidising the establishment of finance, manufacturing, and agricultural enterprises.

The link between the emergence of an Afrikaner agrarian capitalist class and the development of Afrikaner economic interests in other economic sectors is crucial. It amplifies the Marxian agrarian political economy argument that connects agriculture with economy-wide industrialisation. This literature draws attention to how capitalist agriculture complements general capitalist development by providing capital, raw materials and food. In addition, capitalist industrial agriculture functions through developing forward and backward linkages with other sectors. For example, the machinery, infrastructure and inputs used in agriculture are manufactured in other sectors of the economy. Magubane (1979) and O'Meara's (1983) writings on 20th century racial capitalism in South Africa discuss how Afrikaner political economy interests emerged around these multi-sector linkages.

State intervention also resolved challenges related to two essential factors of production: labour and land. The authoritarianism discussed in Chapter 3 and previous sections was crucial for racialised exploitative agrarian development. This pattern of accumulation required large amounts of black African labour, which increased rapidly from the late 1930s. Chapter 3 explored the underlying structural factors informing this trend extensively. Here I need to emphasise that these relations of production were highly exploitative, and in some instances, displayed feudal characteristics. According to O'Meara (1983: 188), the number of black African men employed in agriculture expanded from 403 491 in 1937 to 636 794 by 1950. However, it is important to note that farmers in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State still experienced labour shortages. Migration to urban areas, which provided better income, was largely responsible for labour shortages in agriculture. These farmers advocated

for more stringent measures to control the black African labour force's movement and its transition between various sectors.

The state also used its authority and policies to facilitate these farmers' increased access to land. This was achieved through institutionalised segregation, land dispossession and forced removals (Magubane, 1996; Maloka, 2013; Terreblanche, 2012). As Moyo (2011b: 64) explains: "Africa of the labour reserves (which includes South Africa) had by the 1960s witnessed the first African wave of extensive land grabbing by European settlers". Chapter 3 highlighted historical connections between the labour and land questions in South Africa's agrarian development path by relating these factors of production to the underlying social structure: racialised capitalism. Apartheid agricultural accumulation epitomised this form of domination based on land alienation. This explains the emphasis on land tenure systems in historical and contemporary accounts on South Africa's agrarian question (Cousins, 2005; Jacobs, 2010; Kariuki, 2009; Mefeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013; Neocosmos, 1993; Oya, 2010). These scholars explore two themes: the centrality of state dispossession in agrarian development and how this relates to racial subjugation. In other words, literature and theoretical debates on the agrarian question in the global South highlight the importance of state sanctioned imperialism, and how it emerged on the back of labour exploitation, land expropriation and livestock dispossession. Additionally, global South agrarian writers add different dimensions to Marxian agrarian political economy analyses, which relate capitalist agrarian developments to other forms of social stratification outside traditional class divisions. This approach connects the classic and contemporary agrarian questions to neo-imperialism, racial capitalism, redress and land restitution. The underlying aim is to reclaim the indigenous communities' commons appropriated by former colonial states or private capital during different phases of imperial rule (Mefeje, 2003; Moyo et al., 2013).

Another salient discussion in historical agrarian scholarship is what Moyo (2011b: 64) describes as "functional dualism". This term refers to a form of accumulation largely based on segregated development. The apartheid government institutionalised this system to fortify control over black African migrant labour patterns and peasants through indirect rule. Furthermore, it ensured a steady supply of cheap African labour (Wolpe, 1972; Mamdani, 1996). Agrarian development was central in this social structure, as subsistence black African

farming supplemented low wages, and facilitated externalisation of social reproduction costs to the reserves (Wolpe, 1972; Mamdani, 1996; Magubane, 1979). The state's historical role in establishing and maintaining functional dualism is explored in detail in other chapters. I am mentioning it in this chapter to highlight the different pillars of historic state intervention in South Africa's agrarian political economy.

While historical and contemporary research on South African agro-food systems highlights the structural and racialised patterns, it assesses racialised capitalist agrarian social relations within a limited labour conception, underestimating the importance of gender relations. Black African women's experiences, historical agency and unpaid labour in the agrarian political economy are largely overlooked. This oversight is equally prevalent in historical accounts on the state's role and interventions in the sector. This dissertation addresses this gap by highlighting the gendered dimensions in agrarian political economy developments. The next section uses central themes emerging from preceding discussions on state policy orientation to address the study's main research questions. These areas of inquiry include the following themes: agrarian policy, resource allocation, class formation, land tenure and connections with the global agro-food system. This discussion is contextualised within the transition to a corporate post-apartheid agro-food system.

Government policy in the corporate post-apartheid food model

Post-apartheid macro-economic policy choices have created a system of self-regulation in South Africa's agrarian structure (Greenberg, 2015; Hall, 2011). This phenomenon started in the 1980s and accelerated during the early years of South Africa's transition to liberal democracy (Makhaya and Roberts, 2013: 559). Greenberg (2015: 7) describes this process as a "reduction in state regulation of private interests in agro-food production and distribution". There are four major policy shifts that determined transitioning towards a market-based corporate agrarian structure. First, government introduced a Marketing of Agricultural Product Act in 1996, which removed marketing control boards and their coordination of prices, marketing, and commodity distribution (Greenberg, 2015; Hall, 2011).

This policy intervention created an agricultural price commodity regime governed by volatile market trends and fluctuations (Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009: 17). Post-apartheid farmers are thus exposed to price instability in both domestic and global markets, which compels them to introduce varied risk mitigation strategies such as contract farming, income diversification and price hedging (Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009: 18). The agricultural price hedging takes place in the South African Futures Exchange (SAFEX) with parties trading various agricultural derivatives. It complements the increased financialisation in global agro-food systems and ensures that “profits in agriculture are increasingly obtained from speculation in food and agricultural materials” (Nabudere, 2013: 33-34).

This practice is one of the main causes of price escalation and volatility in the post-apartheid agricultural political economy (Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009: 18-19). The other drivers of price increases are price fixing and anti-competitive behaviour cited in several Competition Commission rulings (Makhaya and Roberts, 2013).¹¹ South Africa’s food price inflation is a constant barrier to increased food security in the post-apartheid era (Oxfam, 2014; National Agricultural Marketing Council [NAMC], 2014; NAMC, 2017). The country’s food inflation stood at 6.7% by 2017 and “the cost of a food basket expressed as a share of the average monthly income of the poorest 30% of the population was 79.2%” (NAMC, 2017: 7). The estimated monthly cost of a healthy and nutritious food basket for a household of four individuals in 2020 is R2655 (BFAP, 2019: 104).

The price increases and instability have been worsened by extensive trade liberalisation (Vickers, 2014). During the 1990s South Africa’s government implemented a number of policy decisions which supported a market-orientated trade regime. Vickers (2014: 60) captures this succinctly by arguing that:

The second lever for encouraging greater liberalisation was unilateral tariff reform under the liberal supervision of the country's first post-apartheid trade minister, Trevor Manuel. This unilateral reform programme saw the government cut tariff protection for industry, including

¹¹ The Competition Commission has made several rulings since 2006 that exposed collusion by large food processing businesses in maize meal, wheat flour/ bread and other staple food value chains.

the sensitive clothing, textiles and auto sectors, at a faster rate and ahead of the country's mandatory requirements under the newly established WTO.

Trade liberalisation largely benefitted enterprises in the downstream segments of the agricultural value chain (Kirsten, 2006; Vink and Van Royen, 2009). This trend explains South Africa's ascendance to a leading exporter of some essential "agro-food products such as wine" (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2006: 3). According to Vink and Van Rooyen (2009: 8), the post-apartheid agro-food trade regime places more emphasis on providing protection for "value-added" products rather than commodities. Market power has shifted to agro-processors, large retail groups and marketing companies because of trade liberalisation (Jara, 2014; Mtero, 2012). The structural shift exacerbates the price pressures farmers encounter in post-apartheid South Africa (Jara, 2014: 233). These farmers must negotiate pricing and agricultural product standard regulation with large agribusinesses which are dominant in "oligopolistic markets" in different downstream subsectors (Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009; Jara, 2014; Mtero, 2012). For example, South Africa's wheat and maize milling markets are dominated by four main companies: Tiger Brands, Pioneer Foods, Premier Foods and Foodcorp. These companies have admitted to engaging in collusion in different market investigations and inquiries (Makhaya and Roberts, 2013)

Some researchers argue that an export-orientated agro-food system produces positive socio-economic outcomes such as employment, agro-industrialisation, and higher incomes for agricultural sector businesses (Mlambo et al., 2019; Zalk, 2019). This view is also supported within government because agro-processing is identified as an essential sector in the Industrial Policy Action Plans (IPAP). Companies in agro-processing have received several government subsidies and industrial support incentives since the introduction of IPAP in 2007. According to the Department of Trade and Industry, state support for agro-processing amounted to one billion and created 283 000 jobs between 2007 and 2018 (Department of Trade and Industry, 2018). The emphasis on exports, especially agro-processing, is important for this study as it points to the state's orientation towards an agricultural industrial model that prioritises large-scale farmers and corporate agro-processors who produce high volumes.

Chapters 2 and 3 discussed the concentrated ownership patterns in South Africa's agro-food system. This trend is prevalent in both down and upstream segments, with a few companies dominating each sub-sector in the food value chain (Pereira, 2014; Oxfam, 2014; Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute [SPII], 2015). For example, there has been significant consolidation in the farming or producer segment of the value chain since the democratic transition (Aliber and Mdoda, 2015; Oxfam, 2014). Most farmers have struggled to sustain their enterprises in a market-orientated agro-food system, characterised by global competition from subsidised farmers and volatile commodity prices. Many farmers sold their farms to big companies in the agri-business sector, which has subsequently led to a decrease in commercial farming units across the country. The number of units decreased from 60 000 in 1996 to 40 000 by 2010 (Hall, 2011: 89). This figure remained stable in the past decade, as illustrated in the Stats SA (2020) commercial agriculture census report. The document states that there were 40 122 commercial farming units by 2017 (Stats SA, 2020). It is important to note that these commercial farmers also rely on exports for income. According to Daya (2006: 7), "exports of agricultural products grew on a compounded basis by 8.7% between 1995 and 2005". This trend continued after 2005 with exports growing by an average of 11% every year from 2005 to 2011 (Trade Niche Area, 2013: 9). The most recent data indicates that "South Africa's agricultural exports grew by 7% y/y (2018-2019) to US\$+10.6bn, a record level in a dataset starting from 2001" (Sihlobo, 2019: 1).

These asymmetrical market relations also affect upstream input costs for essential items such as fertiliser, feed and pesticides. Trade liberalisation has "allowed multinational agribusiness to dominate the input market" in post-apartheid South Africa (Jara, 2014: 233). The market dominance of large multinational firms is particularly evident in fertiliser and pesticide sector market structures (Greenberg, 2015; Jara, 2014). Four companies, namely "Yara, Omnia, Foskor and Sasol Nitro" account for most of the market share in the fertiliser sector while "eight of the ten largest pesticide multinationals such as Bayer, Dow etc. operate in South Africa" (Jara, 2014: 235). The input market structure in the agro-food system places additional financial pressures on farmers and customers. A number of research papers identify high input costs as a major source of food inflation and a decline in the number of commercial farmers in South Africa (Hall, 2009; BFAP, 2014).

Several literature sources cited in this dissertation highlight the gendered impacts of market deregulation and extensive trade liberalisation discussed above. Food price escalation and volatility affects black working class women more negatively than men (Oxfam, 2014; Tibesigwa and Visser, 2016). These women are primarily responsible for buying food because of the sexual division of labour in households and communities. They buy a significant portion of this food from retailers and experience the negative impacts of price escalation directly (Oxfam, 2014; Reddy and Moletsane, 2009). In addition, the data presented in this study's chapters illustrate that women-headed households experience higher levels of food insecurity. One of the primary causes is the increasing cost of a basic nutritional food basket. These households receive lower incomes than male-headed households and have to contend with price fluctuations in food markets. Limited access to food produces health risks associated with poor nutrition, and it is mostly women who look after the sickly (old and young) in communities. Ultimately, the scale and burden of care work placed on women in households and society is increased as a result of food insecurity caused by high prices. The escalating cost of a basic nutritional food basket also decreases the impact of social transfers in women-headed households. Government's annual increases on social grant expenditure for impoverished households is nullified by food inflation.

The second policy shift is a decline in state funding for commercial land use and agriculture support. South Africa's agricultural sector was particularly affected by the ratification of the World Trade Organization's (formerly GATT) Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) in 1993. This policy ensured that government withdrew tariffs and intervention (especially producer support) in the agro-political economy (Greenberg, 2015b). As Greenberg explains: "the Land Bank rates were no longer subsidised, and commercial finance shifted from the Land Bank or coops to commercial banks" (Greenberg, 2015: 7). The private banks' portion of overall farming debt escalated rapidly from 31% in 1984 to 54% by 2012 (Greenberg, 2015: 7). This illustrates how private finance capital increased its share and economic interests in the agrarian political economy. Chapter 2 discussed the impact of financialisation on pricing and nutrition in the agro-processing sector. The state's reorientation towards a market-orientated regulatory regime facilitated the increased share of private finance capital in the post-apartheid food system. This has a significant impact on food pricing, nutrition, farming practices and market structure composition.

Kirsten (2006: 2) argues that the decrease in state funding produced several adverse policy outcomes. The ministries responsible for supporting agricultural development have limited policy instruments to support emerging farmers. This explains the low rates of success among black African small-scale commercial farmers, who compete with white large-scale farmers many of whom emerged during a period in which they received extensive state support (Greenberg, 2015b; Kirsten, 2006; Makhaya and Roberts, 2013; Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009). In addition to the steep domestic competition, South Africa's Producer Support Estimate (PSE) decreased rapidly since 1994 and is lower than most countries in the global agricultural market (Kirsten, 2006; OECD, 2006).

South Africa's PSE "equalled 5% of gross farm receipts on average from 2000 to 2003. This was well below the average level of support for OECD countries (31%)" during the same period (OECD, 2006: 4). The figure dropped to 3% by 2014 and currently stands at 4%, which still falls short of the OECD average of 17% (DAFF, 2014; OECD, 2013; OECD, 2019). Thus, South African producers were integrated into the global food system and expected to compete with subsidised farmers from developed countries. Moyo (2010: 293) argues that asymmetrical trade relations produce adverse effects for Southern African agriculture. Food import dependency, high rates of hunger, and balance of trade challenges exemplify this trend. Unequal exchange between the world's core and periphery states characterise the global food trading system (Moyo, 2010: 295).

This decline in state funding for agriculture affects all farmers in the agrarian political economy. However, the impact is not the same because of market access, income, capital investment, household food security and technological differences (COPAC, 2014: 10). As alluded to in the preceding sections, large-scale commercial farmers (mostly white males) have developed alternative forms of income generation and risk management strategies to deal with the main policy shifts mentioned above (Sihlobo and Nel, 2016), but their counterparts involved in small-scale farming in both commercial and subsistence agro-food system sectors have limited options for income diversification. COPAC's reports (2014, 2015) amplify the challenges encountered by small farmers, highlighting the government's inability to provide extension services for small farmers not engaged in industrial agricultural

practices. These reports also point to the failures of government's farmer mentor system, which largely relies on the time and resources of large-scale commercial farmers. According to COPAC (2014: 10):

Instead of giving direct, good quality support to farmers who have received land, the government is often getting the old white farmer to 'mentor' the new black farmers or is linking them to big agricultural business to help them. The model that new farmers are taught is therefore large-scale commercial farming, but many new farmers prefer to farm on a smaller scale and with techniques like organic and agroecology.

In addition, COPAC (2014, 2015) raises several structural barriers encountered by small farmers such as limited access to markets, input infrastructure (water etc.), finance and support for climate related disasters. These findings are drawn from the extensive evidence provided by COPAC'S agro-food system civil society network, which includes different types of small farmers who engage in agricultural activities across South Africa. Their perspectives are corroborated in the evidence presented in subsequent sections and chapters of this dissertation. Most of the small-scale household producers in South Africa are black Africans, with women constituting the largest proportion of this group (Sihlobo and Nel, 2016; Stats SA, 2016; Stats SA, 2019a). Hart and Aliber (2012: 1) explain that most women "involved in agriculture do it primarily as a main source or extra source of household food". Thus, the decreased state support for land use and agriculture has a gendered impact because small-scale black women farmers have less resources to deal with the state's decreased support. Their households have less income, assets, and limited options for diversifying livelihood strategies (Stats SA, 2019b; Tibesigwa and Visser, 2016: 40).

Thirdly, South Africa's post-apartheid government amended the state institutional architecture, which provided historic support to the agricultural sector. The sector's pre-democratic governance was organised around the homeland bureaucracies and their economic development imperatives. The apartheid state built an institutional design comprising specialised agricultural colleges, research and development (R&D) centres, the Land Bank, public extension services and state supported agricultural cooperatives (Edwards et al., 2009; Greenberg, 2015b; Makhaya and Roberts, 2013; O'Meara, 1983). This

institutional design was an essential catalyst for the emergence and sustenance of South Africa's commercial white-dominated agriculture sector during the 20th century.

Kirsten (2006: 2-3) explains how the post-government reoriented this institutional design so that it was aligned to the overall goals of deregulation and liberalisation in agriculture. The author specifically cites the examples of policy mandate changes within the Agricultural Research Council, and the Land Bank. An additional point raised in Kirsten's (2006) discussion of the shifts in the state's institutional make-up is the movement of staff employed in former Bantustan agricultural bureaucracies to new positions in the post-apartheid state's provincial and national offices. Liebenberg's (2015) paper on extension services also points to changes in the agricultural extension post-schooling system. The author found that "there are nine universities that have faculties of agriculture in South Africa. Only three of which has programmes dedicated to extension training. The total researcher capacity in Full-time Equivalent staff was reported to be only 140 persons, or 18 percent of the total researcher capacity in agricultural sciences in the country" (Liebenberg, 2015: 17). Kirsten (2006: 2) captures the overall policy effects of the institutional transition in the following way:

The new institutional structure for agriculture, as well as the process of deregulation, has resulted in some disconnect between national and provincial structures and also left the Ministry of Agriculture with few policy instruments (and budget) to achieve the many empowerment objectives at grassroots level

The weak policy coordination between different spheres of government is a significant challenge. Government support measures have produced minimal impacts in the absence of coordination amongst agricultural departments at national, provincial, and local levels (Kirsten, 2006; Aliber and Hall, 2012; DAFF, 2018). This weak coordination has been exacerbated by budget cuts and the rationalisation of employment in the public sector in important front-line services such as extension services (Greenberg, 2015b: 17). South Africa's National Policy on Comprehensive Producer Development Support summarises the extension service challenge in the following words:

National extension and advisory services in the country are plagued with a number of structural and counterproductive challenges that limit the efficiency and effectiveness of efforts and investments in the development of smallholder producers in particular (DAFF 2018: 4).

Aliber and Hall's (2012) study on South Africa's small farmer support programme provides insights into the underlying reasons for poor extension service provision. These authors raise concerns regarding the limited extension service capacity and expenditure within provinces (Aliber and Hall, 2012: 552). They argue that producer support is constrained by several factors in provincial agriculture spending. Resource allocation is skewed towards administrative functions rather than extension service provision or technical support. A significant portion of funds in provincial agricultural departments is directed towards bloated bureaucracies with high human administrative resource costs. For example, "between 1997 and 2010 the annual expenditure by the provincial agriculture departments increased by 49%" (Aliber and Hall, 2012: 550). Yet, the extension service staff component accounted for less than 10% of the provincial agricultural departments' salary costs. This constrains the budget available for agricultural front-line services, which are essential for small farmer support.

Another cause is long-term support focusing on the same group of beneficiaries over the years. Aliber and Hall's study illustrates how small-scale farmer support policies in South Africa reproduce concentration in markets. These policies failed to broaden the number of beneficiaries and "continued to benefit more or less the same number of people" (2012: 555). And finally, commercial smallholders receive more support than households engaged in subsistence farming. This has race, gender and class implications because black working-class South Africans are mostly involved in subsistence production (Aliber and Hall, 2012: 552-555). Subsistence black African farmers receive very little support when compared with other types of producers in post-apartheid South Africa. Other studies cite the unequal distribution of extension officers using variables such as sector participation, skill capacity, geography, extension officer to producer ratio, and the private and public differentiation (Raidimi and Kabiti, 2017; Tshinsta Amakhaya, 2012; Liebenberg, 2015). These factors will be analysed later in the next chapter when examining the experiences arising from the local state case study.

The most important thing to note is how the transition to a new post-apartheid agrarian political economy model reoriented state support in agriculture. This transition's impact is most clearly expressed in the negative extension service trends and its gendered policy impacts.

Hart and Aliber (2012: 4) highlight the gendered impact disparities of extension support provision within South African communities. Their analysis on agricultural support for women found that

Overall, a male-headed farming household is about 14% more likely to receive at least some kind of support than a female-headed one. For grants – which, of course, very few farmers receive anyway – a male-headed household is three times more likely to benefit than a female-headed household.

These authors' report provides several insights explaining the differentiated gender experiences in agricultural extension services. A primary observation is the inability of extension officers to understand the specific challenges encountered by women household subsistence farmers. This stems from a skewed gender ratio, with males dominating the extension service staff component in different provincial departments (Hart and Aliber, 2012). The authors encourage government to hire more "qualified female extension officers" and introduce gender sensitive training for all extension officers so that they develop an adequate "understanding of the different, gendered needs of men and women farmers" (Hart and Aliber, 2012: 7). Additionally, state and private sector technology transfer strategies need to be calibrated. These strategies need to factor in the different agricultural support needs of the diverse types of farmers in South Africa. Interview findings from research on household women farmers illustrate that commercial technologies employed in large-scale farming cannot be duplicated in household settings (Hart and Aliber, 2012).

A further major policy shift is the decline in state support and investment for Research and Development (R&D) (Kirsten, 2006; Liebenberg, 2013; Ntombelo, 2020). This trend is in line with global trends, as most countries prioritise R&D investments that create quicker "short-run politically visible returns" (Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009: 28). These are more attractive

than the agricultural sector's risk-based research and technology investments, which produce profits after longer periods. The minimal state support for R&D is also caused by government's fear of "spill over effects". Policymakers argue that investment into R&D might benefit other countries that have not dedicated resources to this area. State authorities, therefore, are discouraged from investing additional resources into agricultural R&D (Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009: 28). There has been a decline in public R&D expenditure globally, but South Africa has experienced significantly lower investments in this area when compared with other middle-income countries. According to Vink and Van Rooyen (2009: 29), "from 1993 to 2000, agricultural R&D investment as a percentage of agriculture GDP increased from 2.63% to 3.04%". The latest figures estimate that "gross expenditure on research and development (GERD) in agriculture amounts to R2,62 billion, which is less than 0,5% of agricultural value added" (Ntombela, 2020: 1).

The minimal investment in R&D decreases the competitiveness of South African farmers because their global counterparts receive higher R&D support (Kirsten, 2006: 3). Furthermore, it limits farmers' capacity to introduce new technologies that can lessen the ecological footprint of the industrial agricultural model (Ntombelo, 2020). Private sector expenditure on R&D has increased and this presents several challenges for agricultural stakeholders. Private sector-led R&D is not accessible to all farmers because of intellectual property rights and is largely shaped by the imperatives of market competition or profit accumulation (Nadudere, 2013; Ntombelo, 2020).

All policy changes discussed above are essential for this study as they provide insights into the state's policy shifts and resource allocation in the post-apartheid food system. State intervention determines political economy power relations in the agro-food system. These power relations shape patterns of social reproduction and levels of food insecurity in community. I have illustrated the overall agro-food system and gendered impacts produced by all policy shifts throughout this chapter. The analyses of the policy shift impacts is taken further in the following chapters, and it commences with experiences within the local state.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the state's role in South Africa's agrarian political economy. It commenced with a historical discussion on the colonial and apartheid agrarian structures. This section demonstrated the centrality of state intervention in the development of colonial and apartheid agro-food structures. I argued that state intervention organised around authoritarian legislation, land dispossession, segregated development planning, and rents supported emerging white agricultural capitalists. This support guaranteed access to cheap labour, land and finance while creating a dualistic agricultural political economy. My account counters neo-liberal economic history, which conceals this coordinated government support throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. I drew from the major theoretical and historical themes discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, highlighting the political economy interests shaping state intervention in South African agrarian political economy. These include power relations formed around class, race, and imperialist socio-economic interests in society.

Thereafter the chapter proceeded to discuss the state's policy and institutional reorientation in the democratic era. It focused on agrarian political economy policy shifts and the subsequent institutional changes. I presented documented evidence which illustrates a transition towards a neo-liberal corporate food model. This entailed extensive market deregulation and trade liberalisation that produced an export-driven agro-food system dominated by large corporations, particularly in the downstream segments of the value chain. Large companies operating in the agro-processing, retail, and marketing subsectors are the main beneficiaries of transformed state intervention in the post-apartheid era. In addition, the transition towards a largely market-orientated agro-food system has led to commodity price instability, high food inflation, concentrated market structures and the overall financialisation of South Africa's food system. The chapter illustrated how these trends, which are outcomes of market deregulation and extensive trade liberalisation, produce gendered socio-economic impacts in the agro-food system. Emphasis was placed on the effects of enhanced financialisation and food prices on black African women's household food security status and care labour.

Another policy shift explored in the chapter is the state's downscaling of substantial farmer support and public funding for agriculture since the early 1990s. The chapter argues that subsidies, capital finance, market control measures and tariffs, which supported farmers during apartheid, were significantly scaled down in the early 1990s. Consequently, South Africa's farming sector has become more concentrated and producers have to contend with market power shifts to other companies in the agro-food system value chains. Most commercial farming household units that survived the policy shift resorted to a variety of income diversification strategies. The chapter highlighted how the reduced farmer support has affected small-scale producers more adversely, especially those who farm for subsistence purposes within households. This segment is mostly comprised of black African women-headed household subsistence farmers who operate on the margins of South Africa's agro-food system. They have minimal alternatives for diversifying household income and maintaining food security without producing their own crops or livestock. These households experience higher poverty, unemployment and food security rates than ones headed by males. Thus, decreased state support and budget allocations for farmers has negative gendered socio-economic impacts in the agro-food system.

In addition to the above, the state's institutional capacity, especially in the areas of research and extension services, has been diminished in the past twenty-seven years. These extension services were a core pillar of the state's intervention in the agro-food system during the 20th century. The chapter amplifies the extent to which crucial factors such as changes in the government's bureaucracy, agricultural training skills system and budget allocations have contributed towards the decline in extension services. It equally illustrates the system's ability to respond to the different types of farming in the country and demand within communities for these services. Subsequently, there are huge disparities in terms of the reach and quality of extension service provision in the country.

I presented evidence showing how this trend perpetuates the marginalisation of small-scale producers generally, especially subsistence farmers. The chapter cited the gendered socio-economic impacts of structural fault lines in extension services. Black African women farmers

receive less extension service support than their counterparts, and the design of support systems overlooks the specific challenges encountered by women farmers. The technologies and methods are not well-suited for the farming needs of black African women household and community farming. Overall, the chapter has illustrated significant state policy and institutional shifts while documenting their effects on market power and gender inequality in the agro-food system. The next chapter discusses the state's policy and institutional shifts further with an emphasis on the local state. It links the national trends examined in this chapter with local community experiences.

CHAPTER 5: THE LOCAL STATE AND AGRO-FOOD SYSTEM

Introduction

In the following sections, I explore how agrarian sector national policy shifts affect local state intervention in the agro-food system by drawing on documented literature sources and empirical data obtained from fieldwork in Ermelo. The links between global, national, and local state experiences are essential to understanding the post-apartheid food system and provide a corrective to the existing agrarian debates that focus on macro-level trends in the agrarian political economy without sufficiently connecting them with local trends. It is, therefore, important to examine how national policy shifts shape social reproduction and food security in the local state. The main aim of this chapter is to highlight residents' perspectives, with a particular emphasis on the views of the black African women participants regarding developments in the local agro-food system.

The chapter commences with a discussion on a general overview of the local state's role in the agro-system, drawing on literature sources and government interviewee responses. Then I proceed to examine how the black African women interviewees and leaders from the ADC local civil society organisation experience local state interventions. This analysis is focused on the core programmes led by government in the municipal agro-food system. It discusses the following programmes: supporting home and community food gardens, Government Nutrition Programme (GNP) and the Community Works Programme (CWP) food gardens. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main arguments that emerged from investigating the above-mentioned programmes. I draw out the main policy lessons, based on a gendered analysis of the socio-economic impacts of South Africa's agro-food system.

The local state and agrarian development: an overview

Ermelo is located in the Gert Sibande District Municipality in Mpumalanga, which comprises seven local municipalities. Ermelo falls within the jurisdiction of the Msukaligwa municipality.

The population in the entire Gert Sibande District grew from 981 561 in 2008 to 1 135 410 by 2016. Msukaligwa municipality has 164 608 residents. Africans make up 91.7% of the population, whites 6.8%, coloureds 0.6% and Indians 0.9%. Females make up 49% of the total population males account for 51%. Chapter 6 on household and social reproduction trends in the community provides further socio-economic data on poverty, inequality, food security and employment. The municipality comprises the following seven administrative towns, which are still largely segregated along racial lines: (a) Ermelo : Wesselton (b) Breyten : Kwazenale; (c) Davel : Kwadela; (d) Warburton : Nganga; (e) Sheepmoor; (f) Lothair : Silindile; (g) Chrissiesmeer : Kwa Chibukhulu (Mskaligwa IDP, 2017: 66). The demarcation is illustrated in the Figure 1 below.

Map1:GertSibandeDistrictMunicipality

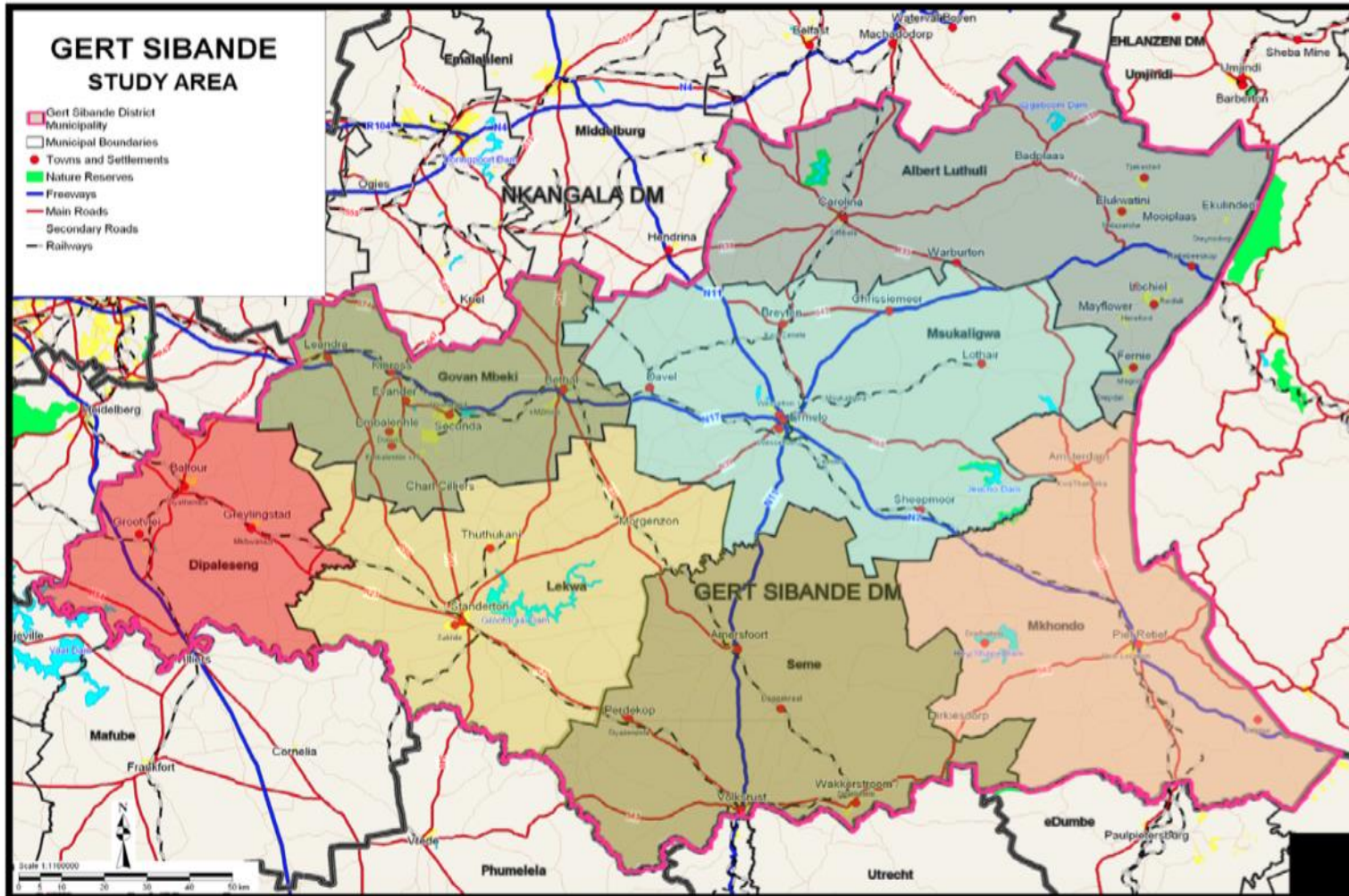


Figure 1: Gert Sibande study area

The Gert Sibande District agriculture department, the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs (DARDLEA) is responsible for implementing the following important functions: (a) monitoring and evaluating state agricultural programmes; (b) managing budget transfers to local municipal agricultural offices; (c) farmer support for different producers; and (d) maintaining food security. The next sections discuss how the local state carries out these functions, with an emphasis on government officials' perspectives.

Agricultural policy implementation in Ermelo is shaped by the relationship between the local municipality and the district office like many district-based local municipalities. The DARDLEA district office in Ermelo is responsible for overall agricultural coordination in Gert Sibande. This district office services all the local municipalities and works closely with the Agricultural Development and Research Centre (ADRC) in Msukaligwa. A district government official explains this institutional relationship in the following words:

We are responsible for coordinating agricultural support throughout the district. Our office services all the municipalities that fall within Gert Sibande's jurisdiction. The main office is in Ermelo, but we work with all the local municipalities. We ensure that government's programmes are running and provide advice on agricultural support. The local municipalities rely on us, so we always must be responsive. All municipalities have agricultural extension service officers and a sectional head responsible for coordinating their work. (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo)

This response highlights the overarching coordinating role played by the district office in agricultural policy implementation. It explains how the district office engages with the local municipalities in actioning the government's agricultural development policy. The relationship with local municipalities is not limited to technical advisory functions. One official explained that the district office also coordinates funding transfers received from the provincial department. These resources are limited because of budget constraints within provincial governments, especially in rural and peri-urban areas (Financial Fiscal Commission, 2016: 3). For example, Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal account for the highest provincial equitable share from the national fiscus while largely rural-based provinces like Mpumalanga

and Northwest receive less (National Treasury, 2021: 73). State intervention and support for agricultural development in the post-apartheid era is minimal when contrasted with the apartheid government's role. Chapter 4 discussed the subsidies, cheap credit, research support and extensive extension services provided by the apartheid state. The reorientation of the state's role has significant negative implications for the local state's capacity to support commercial and subsistence small-scale farmers (Aliber and Mdoda, 2015; DAFF, 2018). A government employee explained the process and challenges in executing the function of coordinating funding transfers:

The district office is responsible for distributing the budget given to us from the province. We normally ask the government officials from municipalities to give us a budget based on an agricultural needs list. This list contains several agricultural inputs such as seeds or food garden tools. This task is difficult because there are serious budget constraints in the provincial agricultural department. Government does not have a lot of money like companies in the private sector or some non-governmental organisations. We always prioritise the basics like seeds because we are working with tight budget lines. (Interview 9, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

The officials also assist to monitor and evaluate the implementation of agricultural programmes in the district. They rely on documented submissions, progress reports and site visits. They stress the importance of visiting the different municipalities and advising extension officers on the ground. One official summed up the policy implementation monitoring using this explanation:

You cannot rely on written submissions only. It is important to go out there and see how agricultural programmes are running in municipalities, especially the community and household food gardens. This line of work is very sensitive because you are dealing with food security issues. People can protest or even become violent if the department's programmes are not implemented properly. So, we must be hands on because food is matter or life and death. (Interview 10, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

This monitoring of the government's programme is undertaken with a limited human resource and skills base. Mpumalanga falls within the top three provinces with the highest shortfalls of extension officers (Liebenberg, 2015: 13). Government officials are stretched and

there is a demand for more specialised skills to support municipal agricultural programmes. The local municipal government official respondents interviewed in this study obtained entry level diplomas from technical agricultural colleges. Only one of these interviewees has a specialised degree in agriculture. An official admits that the monitoring of agricultural policy implementation in the municipalities requires additional human resource. He says these additional employees can bring more specialised skills required for supporting different types of producers.

We need more specialists in areas such as crop extension services, soil science and water management. This will allow us to conduct some additional advisory work for all types of producers and give extension officers the required support. You must remember that our agricultural support programme services all kinds of farmers. The different types of farming require varied extension support and agriculture advisory services. (Interview 11, 28 August 2017, Ermelo)

The human resource challenges in the post-apartheid state's agricultural departments affect several policy implementation areas. The two most important weaknesses are farmer support and extension services (Hall and Aliber, 2010; Aliber and Hall, 2012; Satge, 2020; SPII, 2018). Several documented sources capture the local government official's complaints about the connection between human resource challenges and extension services (Hall and Aliber, 2010; Liebenberg, 2015; Raidimi, and Kabiti, 2017; Satge, 2020). The major shortcoming in this area is the disparity between commercial and subsistence household extension services. Satge's (2020) comprehensive study on all types of farmer support programmes reveals that "market-oriented large-scale producers are serviced through a higher extension/producer ratio than those involved in household food production" (2020: 37). This finding amplifies the points raised in the previous chapter, which highlight how the decreased support for post-schooling agricultural extension service training has produce adverse effects in the sector.

In addition, the extension service model is based on large-scale industrial agriculture and over-emphasises market supply. It has failed to support policy imperatives such as ecological sustainability and diversifying the agricultural producer structure through broadening the number of smallholder beneficiaries. The in-service training and skills development systems

in extension services are not adequate. Liebenberg (2015: 13) points out that “overall 8 out of 10 extension officers are insufficiently qualified to operate as agricultural advisers or subject matter experts”.

The local state divides farmers into four main categories: household (home gardens), collective subsistence farmers (mostly small communal gardens), smallholder (1 or half a hectare/ commercial), and commercial (large-scale commercial/more than one hectare). This differentiation is based on land ownership, volumes of produce and the purpose for farming. An official explained that the department runs a municipal farmer support programme which aims to provide extension services, inputs, technical support and create demand for smaller farmers through state procurement. He also cited financial support for the winners of annual communal and smallholder farmer competitions (R300 000 for 1st prize). Ermelo’s farmers are also assisted with climate change and broader ecological adaptation in the drought relief programme. The details of this municipal farmer support programme were unpacked further by an extension officer:

We provide household, communal garden and smallholder farmers with support. This support includes the provision of inputs such as seeds, fertiliser, pesticides, JoJo tanks, fencing and water infrastructure. We even hire out tractors and buy diesel when there is enough money. The agricultural extension officers and advisers teach people how to plant crops properly. This is important because farming requires knowledge on how to plant and manage crops until the harvest period. Most household, communal garden and smallholder farmers need this technical assistance. These farmers use old farming methods and there is a limited understanding of how to use pesticides or fertilisers efficiently. (Interview 12, 30 August 2017, Ermelo)

But there are several challenges encountered when implementing this municipal farmer support programme. An important impediment is a limited budget, which subsequently leads to reductions in the amount and types of inputs provided. Sometimes officials cannot provide basic inputs such as JoJo tanks, fencing material, diesel, and water infrastructure because of budget constraints. In these cases, government prioritises the provision of seeds, fertiliser and pesticides. Allocation in any one instance is limited to ensure that all those who applied

for input support receive some assistance. Another significant frustration amongst officials was the lack of control in determining the final choice on input budget allocation. Budget allocations for municipal offices are determined centrally at the provincial level and fiscal support for essential producer programmes has been declining (SPII, 2018; Satge, 2020).

The SPII (2018) analysis of budget allocations for food security reveals a decrease in real expenditure on the “Comprehensive Agricultural Support Programme (CASP) over time from R2.173 million in the 2014/2015 financial year to R1.645 million in the 2017/18 financial year” (SPII, 2018: 26). The state funds allocated for ILIMA/LETSEMA, a programme ring fenced specifically for supporting subsistence producers, also declined between 2014 and 2018. There is evidence of some provinces using this fund for commercial black farmer support instead of assisting subsistence producers (SPII, 2018: 30). The challenges discussed in preceding sections are expressed in this statement:

It is very difficult to explain input budget constraints to citizens. They always complain about receiving little input support and think the municipal application system is either corrupt or favours select beneficiaries. But we are doing the best we can under difficult circumstances. These farmers need to understand that the final budget allocation is determined by the provincial office. We coordinate the list based on information received from the different municipalities as a district office. But the final decision is taken by the programme officials at the provincial level. (Interview 12, 30 August 2017, Ermelo)

One government official argues that ecological knowledge is an additional challenge. In his view, some household, communal and smallholder farmers do not have sufficient agro-ecological information. He gave an example of farmers using the incorrect seeds and not considering environmental conditions. This official says this problem is most prevalent amongst smallholder farmers who are partially or fully involved in commercial agriculture. The result, according to him, is lower crop outputs. He expressed these words to substantiate his views:

It is important to improve the smallholder farmers' knowledge of climatic and environmental conditions. Most of them buy seeds from salespersons telling them that a miracle seed will

produce more tons. This decision often overlooks the agro-climate conditions of an area or field, and this decreases crop production because the seeds are incompatible with climatic conditions. Additionally, these farmers occasionally mix crop and animal farming without enough knowledge on mixed farming. You cannot do mix farming without clearly designated grazing areas for the livestock. (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo)

A successful farmer support programme cannot attain its objectives without effective extension services. There are different views on the efficiency of the services and how to improve them. One government official believes these services could improve if the extension officers were provided with adequate support. He thinks the department should pool its human resources towards supporting extension officers operating in local municipalities. According to this official:

Crop specialist, soil scientists, agroecologist and water specialists should be deployed to agricultural offices in municipalities, so they assist extension officers. These specialists should be available when the truck comes to deliver essential agricultural inputs in the municipality and provide guidance on how to distribute the inputs based on their knowledge of the area-specific climatic conditions and how crops respond in this ecological environment. I do not see the value of these specialists performing administrative functions in offices (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo)

Additional suggestions were raised in discussions with extension officers who put forward reasons which transcend the point about technical assistance cited above. The main one relates to the population and extension officer ratio. These officers support many small-scale farmers and it is difficult to provide equal assistance to all of them. They urge government to hire more extension officers and provide them with the necessary training. Extension officers understand citizen's frustrations but believe that the primary responsibility of addressing this challenge lies with state authorities. The suggestions emerging from the responses on how to improve extension services relate to the policy shifts and institutional challenges discussed in previous sections. There are several structural problems identified in the policy literature, which resonate with the government officials' experiences and proposals. The primary one is the need for more specialised and diversified skills within local agricultural departments, with a particular emphasis on front line areas like extension services. An additional salient

observation is the extension service officer and producer ratio. It is clear that the ratio is not adequate for servicing small-scale subsistence farmers and the levels of support between commercial and subsistence farming are unequal. Budget constraints have also been raised sharply in the responses. These affect the municipal farmer support programme in several ways, but the two crucial areas are extension services and farmer input support.

The officials interviewed in the study alluded to women's participation in the farmer support programme. Women-headed households dominate small-scale subsistence farming as illustrated by the Stats SA (2020) report cited in preceding sections. A government official who works directly with farmers says most of the small-scale farmers in the municipality are women. His explanation for this gender dynamic was similar to the views articulated by black African women subsistence farmer participants. Chapters 6 and 7 discuss this gender difference in small-scale farming in detail. He explained this gender dimension in the following manner:

The men here are obsessed with wage labour in the mines. They want something that guarantees quick money every week and payment after a short period. These men do not have the patience to wait for agriculture, especially subsistence farming, which brings low income after a longer period. I also think that men in the area perceive small-scale farming as something most suitable for women. They do not take it seriously at all and do not see it as an economic activity that can sustain household livelihoods for a long period (Interview 12, 30 August, Ermelo)

There is no explicit gendered approach in implementing the local government's farmer support programme. But policy officials acknowledge that most subsistence producers are women. These officials perceive their programmes to be gender sensitive because of the support provided to household and community gardens. This programme, according to officials, shows government's awareness of the gender disparities in community food security.

We do not have an explicit gender programme in the local municipality for food security or supporting farmers. But we know that most subsistence household and community garden

farmers are women. So, women are the main beneficiaries of government's subsistence farming and food security programme. It will never be enough because most people in households are unemployed and the population size is growing. Government knows that food support is important for women because they are taking care of everyone in the household. You feed many people when supporting women leading subsistence farming in communities.
(Interview 9, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

Yet, there is an acknowledgement amongst some officials that supporting women subsistence farmers cannot be reduced to food security or hunger prevention in households. It is important for government to think about developing black African women into self-sufficient commercial producers. The major limitations are a decreased agricultural budget and minimal support from the private sector.

We cannot teach people to farm in their household and small community gardens only. These are unemployed women producers who rely on social grants and have no other source of income. It is understandable why they always come back to government for crucial inputs such as seeds or fertiliser. They have no other option, so government must think bigger and produce more farmers like those ladies who are now exporting crops. We do not have the budget or money to sustain what we are doing forever. The government must help people to help themselves. I know that black African women are not lazy. (Interview 12, 30 August 2017, Ermelo)

For these government officials, there are two critical markers of success in the municipal farmer support programme: small-scale producers producing enough crops for selling in formal markets, and linking them up with commercial export-orientated producers. Significant emphasis is placed on the transition from subsistence farming to producing enough crops for markets. This was revealed in several discussions with state officials who were very proud of the few success stories. In these cases, women subsistence farmers were assisted with technical advice and inputs from government, which were crucial for their transitions towards small-scale commercial farming. The emphasis on developing subsistence small-scale farmers into producers who compete in commercial domestic and foreign markets is revealing. It illuminates South Africa's market-orientated agrarian political economy structure, which prioritises developing small-and-large-scale commercial producers.

The local government's vision for success is explained in the following words:

It is not all bad. We have some success stories from this municipality which developed from our programmes. This is a big thing for us because we do not have a large budget and it is difficult to get some support from big farmers and agricultural companies. The large-scale producers mostly assist black African small-scale farmers who display potential to produce large crop volumes. We have some few cases of small-scale black African women subsistence farmers who have grown and developed into competitive commercial farmers. The Deputy Minister visited the district a couple of months ago and we invited these farmers so he can see them. I know the leadership of government wants this number to grow, especially among black African women. (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo)

Most black African women participate on the margins of the post-apartheid agrarian political economy as subsistence farmers and retailers. While integrating and supporting black women farmers from low income households into existing commercial markets and value chains is prioritised by local government officials, it does not address the underlying structural gendered socio-economic disparities and policy impacts in the agro-food system. South Africa's industrialised commercial agriculture is capital intensive and operates through the use of several upstream inputs. Black African women, especially those from low income households, have very limited access to crucial inputs such as development finance, land, seeds and other production equipment used to sustain livelihoods in the agro-food system (Njobe and Kaaria, 2015: 9). In addition, the previous chapter discussing the effects of the state's policy shifts cited examples of adverse gendered socio-economic impacts in relation to food prices, extension services and increased care work for women in society.

The preceding discussion on the local state's agricultural policy mandate and government officials' experiences in implementation reveals the following insights. First, budget constraints have negative effects on agricultural support for small farmers in the municipality. These financial constraints impede agricultural input support and officials highlight that this is a systemic challenge in government. This trend is related to the reduced funding for the agricultural department's essential front-line functions such as extension services and input

provision. The state's policy shift has limited the extent to which local authorities can assist small-scale subsistence farmers. Government's resource and institutionalised policy support for agriculture in the post-apartheid era is substantially lower than the apartheid period. This decreases access to crucial inputs for small-scale farmers, especially those participating in the subsistence economy.

Secondly, this discussion highlights how several factors constrain agricultural extension services within the municipality. The different government officials raise some challenges identified in the literature on extension support. These include human resource constraints, skills shortages, and weak coordination. Some officials provide additional guidance on how the institutional design in government agricultural departments can be altered to improve extension services. All these observations reflect the arguments presented in the previous chapter's discussion of literature on the shortcomings of post-apartheid extension services.

The third lesson is the emphasis on integration into formal markets and possibilities of partnering with large-scale established commercial farmers. It reveals the ideal farming model, which epitomises successful policy implementation from the point of view of the government. The officials place emphasis on developing subsistence producers into commercial farmers that permeate domestic and export markets. But there are some different opinions among government officials regarding the ideal agrarian development model. Some government participants emphasise transitioning towards organic farming methods, while others believe that subsistence farmers should be taught how to expand their production using typical agro-industrial methods. This notion of catching up to large commercial farmers using modern agro-industrial methods and knowledge informs the latter perspective.

Fourthly, the local state acknowledges that most household black African women subsistence farmers are women. These women are recognised as the intended beneficiaries of the local state household food security programme. Additionally, the government's respondents aim to develop some of the women household producers into small and large scale commercial farmers who compete in formal agro-food system markets. The literature sources on macro trends cited in the previous chapters illustrate how gender disparities in the agro-food system

persist, despite policy support interventions aimed at women household subsistence farmers and the few successful case studies of black African women entering commercial agro-food markets. These reports illuminate the negative gendered socio-economic impact of the structural agrarian policy shifts since the 1990s, especially in the areas of food prices, extension services, household food insecurity and access to crucial inputs (Oxfam, 2014; Reddy and Moletsane, 2009; Tibesigwa and Visser, 2016).

The following sections and chapters of this study explore the gendered socio-economic impacts of South Africa's agro-food system structure and policy frameworks further. I aim to highlight the experiences from the local state using both literature sources discussing state policy shifts, and interviews with respondents from Ermelo who are mainly engaged in varied forms of subsistence farming. These include black African women participants and members of the Agricultural Development Committee (ADC), a local non-governmental organisation that organises small-scale subsistence farmers in the area. The main aim is to compare the local government officials' responses with residents experiences of food security policy implementation. The examination begins with discussing the local state's policy implementation and coordination duties in supporting household and community gardens. Then I explore two additional food security policy interventions: the GNP and CWP. These programmes were identified as key pillars of the local state's food security strategy by government officials.

The state's food security strategy

The local state's food security programme is divided into the following three areas:

- Supporting home and community food gardens
- Government Nutrition Programme (GNP).
- Community Works Programme (CWP).

The three pillars of the local state's food security strategy are implemented with a variety of stakeholders. This stakeholder group includes subsistence farmers, commercial farmers, non-governmental organisations, schools, the Provincial Departments of Education, Agriculture,

and Cooperative Governance and Traditional Authority (CoGTA). This research focuses specifically on the experiences of black African women engaged in subsistence farming. Thus, the discussions below will place emphasis on their experiences and views on government's food security strategy. These women also participate in the local agriculture and ecological justice organisation called ADC. As stated previously, the main aim is to compare the government officials' accounts on food security with the women's lived experiences.

Food gardens

The preceding sections in the chapter discussed how government officials support home and community garden farming within the general farmer support programme. This discussion covered the main objectives and challenges encountered by officials when implementing the home and community garden support measures. In this section I expand the discussion through investigating how black African women subsistence farmers and ADC members perceive the government's food security strategy. Some black African women subsistence farmers complained about the municipality's input support allocation system and the officials' decision-making processes regarding the amount of inputs beneficiaries received. One woman participant cited an example of seed allocation:

The seeds we get from government are not enough. I still do not understand why they give us a small amount of seeds. The system is not transparent or fair! One can see that they only take the commercial farmers seriously. Ask any subsistence farmer who has been to the local municipal agricultural office, and they will tell you that the big farmers get better treatment. We always get minimal support and it does not make sense because we need it the most. But we must always think of plans to ensure that we plant enough seeds. Most of us use a portion of our grant money for buying additional seeds. (Interview 1, 14 July 2017, Ermelo)

The input support challenges are not limited to seed allocation. There are also challenges in accessing garden tools such as spades and garden forks. Some women borrow these garden tools from women employees in the CWP. Other participants also rely on women involved in community gardens, that have a more stable supply of garden tools.

We are lucky that some of our friends work in both home and communal gardens. Those who engage in subsistence farming in community gardens access tools easier. We sometimes ask them to bring tools for us so we can use them in our own gardens. And I know that some women lend tools from their friends who are employed in the Community Works Programme. The government must make a plan and increase the number of garden tools it provides to subsistence farmers. A lot of women have the energy and will to farm in this area. Our government must support them with quality water and tools. I know the municipality has tried to provide garden tools, but it is not enough. (Interview 2, 14 July 2017, Ermelo)

Access to suitable municipal-owned farming land in the area also featured prominently in the discussions. The women engaged in household subsistence farming want more land because their gardens are small. Participants involved in the community gardens complained about poor fencing, which allowed animals or criminals to access gardens easily. Some respondents had requested the municipality to lend them a tractor which they could then use on unoccupied land to farm. The land issue in this context was articulated with demands for fencing and access to tractors. Chapter 6 provides a detailed discussion on these structural impediments for women subsistence farmers in households and community gardens. The main point to note for this discussion is how government's food security strategy is experienced by residents on the ground. As one participant explained:

The women who love farming need more land, and we've seen many land sites that are not used around here. Women can produce more if given access to land that is suitable for farming. I can even show you a piece of land that we have identified for farming. The government must bring a big tractor to clear the land so we can do our thing. Fencing is also required because animals just come in and out of peoples' gardens. The animals are a serious problem for small subsistence farmers because they destroy crops. So, the land from government must also come with fencing to protect our crops. (Interview 3, 15 July 2017, Ermelo)

The participants were not satisfied with the quality of extension service provision. Some had never interacted with extension officers while others had only encountered them in community gardens. The latter experiences were not regular because the black African women subsistence farmers stated that officers only came once or twice a year. In some cases, a year and half passes without these officers returning to provide feedback on

subsistence farmers' demands. The black African women provided several reasons for this poor extension support, which relate to bureaucratic changes in government and training challenges. A black African woman subsistence farmer who is part of an old community garden group explained that they received support in previous years. But this has changed since some officials left the department.

We have been farming here for a very long time since the late 1990s. This garden used to produce different crops and many small traders would come here to buy produce. I remember winning a competition one year and the government invited people to come interview us so we can describe our work. There were dedicated officers in government during that period, who had a passion for supporting black African women-led sustenance farming in community gardens. Things have changed now, and it is not good for us. I wish those old officials did not leave. Government must train young people in schools and colleges so they can come support us. This will solve the big youth unemployment problem in the community. (Interview 4, 15 July 2017, Ermelo)

The gender dynamic in the extension officer workforce is highlighted as an important factor. Several black African women subsistence farmers stated that male extension officers discriminate against them.

The male extension officers do not see us as serious or committed farmers. They think only men who produce crops on big farms are credible farmers. This explains why they do not give us the required service and attention. We see some of them driving around the area with the municipal vans and wearing the uniform. But black African women subsistence farmers never get enough support from them. We have raised this problem with the municipal agricultural office when they convene workshops on food security and agriculture. The responses we get from the male extension officers show that they see us as inferior producers. I doubt they understand some of the challenges we face as women-headed household farmers with less land and resources than successful male farmers. (Interview 5, 15 July 2017, Ermelo)

The theme of privileging formal sector commercial farmers also featured prominently in discussions with members of the ADC. These male members argued that the local state's approach and engagement is biased towards commercial white farmers. The prime example

cited was the responsiveness of the local agricultural research municipal office. Respondents in the study referred to this office as 'nooitegedacht' or 'stadtfarm'. This name is derived from an old description used during the apartheid era. Members of the ADC explained how the local agricultural research office had an advanced extension service programme and agricultural research support centre. They described how this institutional design was crucial for supporting farmers during the apartheid years. One ADC member explained the historic state intervention as follows:

This municipality used to have one of the best extension services and research support centres in the country. The government supported different farmers with a host of agricultural services. It even had a farm for research purposes, but things changed when the new government took over. I have heard from some people that the farm was sold to a big mining company. White farmers benefitted from government in different ways during apartheid.
(Interview 1, 21 August 2017, Ermelo)

The ADC members argued that the post-apartheid state's capacity is limited, and the responsiveness is not efficient. They also believed that government support is not consistent or fair. In their views, commercial white farmers received preferential treatment at the local municipal agricultural office.

The level of support and service is not the same. We know that government does not have large resources like the apartheid state. But they must have a transparent and consistent system of support for all types of farmers. The commercial farmers are prioritised over the small subsistence farmers, especially black African women who farm in home and community gardens. This is not justified because they need more state support than the commercial farmers. (Interview 2, 21 August 2017, Ermelo)

Another significant concern raised in discussions with the ADC members was the negative effects of mining on farming in the municipality. Coal mining is identified as an important sector in the municipal Integrated Development Plan (IDP) 2017-2022. This document describes the sector's importance in the following statement:

The economy of Msukaligwa Municipality is predominantly based on coal mining, agriculture, forestry and timber processing. The municipality is also hosting Eskom's Camden power station which is being fed by surrounding coal mines stretching from Albert Luthuli Municipality and coal haulage is being transported by road from the different mines. Coal haulage/transportation is also contributing a lot in terms of employment and support of local businesses. (Msukaligwa IDP, 2017: 99)

ADC members believe coal mining has negative effects on subsistence farming in both households and community gardens. The most prominent complaint was the contamination of water sources. Participants explained that water used in the coal refinement process pollutes drinking water sources and infrastructure which communities rely on. This issue has been raised in several organisational meetings with subsistence farmers complaining about the water quality in the area (Interview 1, 21 August 2017, Ermelo). Yet, only two government officials cited this water pollution issue in discussions on threats to food security in the area. This response regarding water quality echoes the findings cited in other reports about the negative effects of coal mining on agriculture in Mpumalanga (BFAP, 2012; Forrest and Loate, 2018; Simpson et al., 2019). This trend necessitates greater efforts from local government to create a conducive ecological environment for subsistence and commercial farming. Regulatory oversight over the use of the province's natural resources is sacrosanct. The state's overall local economic development policy framework needs to be aligned and well-coordinated. Operations in the coal mining sector should not impede the development of other sectors cited as crucial drivers of socio-economic development in the state's local economic development strategy.

The soil quality in the area is also affected by wind erosion. Some participants from different social groups or organisations in the study identified mining as a major challenge for farming and ecological sustainability. The nature of this impact is outlined in Chapter 6, which discusses ecological degradation as one of the factors causing household food insecurity. The discussion relies on black African women's accounts on their livelihood strategies and how they shape social reproduction in households. I also engaged three different types of farmers on this mining and agriculture challenge. An ADC member captured the frustrations and negative impacts coal mining has on household and community garden farming.

We do not understand why the regulation of mining is not more stringent. It is clear that our water is polluted and contaminated because of mining. The government knows this, but they continue to provide businesses people with coal mining licences. Household and communal gardening in Ermelo will not develop because of this water problem. Some community farmers complain about crop destruction because of wind erosion. The land given to all the mines can be used for agricultural purposes. But mining is always prioritised over every other form of livelihood source in this area. Mining companies are just acquiring more rights to use land for digging and destroying the earth. (Interview 3, 21 August 2017, Ermelo)

The ADC is affiliated to a larger environmental justice group in the area called Khuthala. This non-governmental organisation works with Groundwork on climate change and ecological justice projects. Khuthala's organisational mandate covers varies social, political and economic development areas, but the agricultural development, ecological justice and youth development programmes are the main drivers of the movement. This advocacy on mining is not limited to water as it covers other important areas of human development as well.

Our advocacy around mining in the area covers several important points. One, the concerns regarding water access and sanitation in the municipality. This also applies to water rights for both household and communal garden farmers. Our members always complain about water quality and access. Two, air pollution and land degradation caused by mining. Residents believe that mining destroys fertile agricultural land and big companies do not make significant efforts to rehabilitate land. Three, electricity rights and energy because the quality of energy access in the municipality is poor. And this does not make sense because we have all these big coal mines around us. (Interview 6, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

Groundwork's (2016) report on the ecological destruction caused by mining in Mpumalanga's highveld area echoes the ADC's concerns. The report draws from documented literature analysis and interviews with farmers, local environmental activists, experts in the areas of water management, soil preservation and mining law. It found that coal mining has adverse effects on food production and household food security because of several environmental impacts. The first is the destruction of soil that is essential for sustaining food production over different generations. Mpumalanga's highveld soil potential loss is estimated to be between

70 and 90%. This soil potential loss is exacerbated further by the methods mining companies use in attempts to rehabilitate the land (Groundwork, 2016: 162). “One of the mechanisms of fertility loss is compaction during the rehabilitation process due to the use of heavy machinery. Compaction reduces the spaces in the soil, taking away oxygen supply for life in the soil” (Groundwork, 2016: 162).

The second ecological impact cited in the report is persistent water pollution, which destroys national water assets identified in government’s policy documents (DWS, 2013). For example, “the Enkangala grassland area forms part of a chain of 21 strategic water sources areas – 8% of South Africa’s surface area that provides 50% of its water” (Groundwork, 2016: 186). Coal mining has polluted most of these water sources, which flow into catchments that are essential for supplying clean water used in households and industrial activities. The farmers and local environmental activists interviewees in these areas also highlight the externalised social reproduction costs. Surrounding communities cannot use local water sources for livelihood purposes while mining companies are not sufficiently held accountable when they destroy strategic water sources. The authors explain how “land and water are ruined and will never be restored to a condition where they can support people’s livelihoods. And the places where it is possible are being eaten away as mining advances across the land and the dark shadow of its impacts falls across a much wider and expanding area” (Groundwork, 2016: 194).

The third ecological effect cited in the report is the relationship between climate change and air quality. This finding resonates with other studies conducted on the relationship between coal mining and climate change patterns in South Africa (AIDC, 2016; WWF, 2017). All these reports point to negative climate shock impacts as such as droughts, floods, and other severe weather patterns experienced over the past years. These climate shocks produce several socio-economic outcomes that threaten different areas of human development. A significant example is the increased household food insecurity caused by climate change related ecological factors. The documented literature sources and interviewee responses cited in this study elaborate on the connection between climate change and food insecurity in Mpumalanga (BFAP, 2012; Forrest and Loate, 2018; Simpson et al., 2019). Groundwork’s

(2016) report corroborates the crop production decline (especially maize) cited in these reports, and amplifies the inevitable food insecurity outcomes for poor households.

Overall, the preceding discussions illuminate how black African women in low-income communities still experience the gendered socio-economic impacts of the post-apartheid agro-food system structure and policy shifts cited in literature sources (Hart and Aliber, 2012; Njobe and Kaaria, 2015; Reddy and Moletsane, 2009). The interviewees cited challenges in accessing crucial inputs such as seeds, land, clean water, tools and extension services at the local level. Women involved in household and community agrarian livelihood practices require more arable land to develop their farming. Interviewees' frustrations about having limited access to land resonate with the general disparities in land ownership between males and women in South Africa (Presidential Advisory Panel, 2019; Walker, 2002). Several studies on the country's agro-food system identify black African women's limited access to land as one of the primary causes of gendered food insecurity (Hart, 2008; Oxfam, 2014; Rakolojane, 2015). Therefore, the call for more land articulated by the women interviewees deserves attention in local state policy interventions aimed at decreasing gendered food security disparities.

The interviewees responses regarding their experiences with agricultural extension services are equally instructive. A primary concern expressed by them was their limited success to these services as a result of the training, staffing and technology challenges alluded to in previous sections on state capacity in the agro-food system. This literature indicates that state support for extension services has generally declined, but women's access to these services is significantly lower than their male counterparts (Hart and Aliber, 2012; Sagte, 2020). In addition, the black African women interviewees raised their discomfort about male extension officers' patriarchal attitudes towards them, and their inability to understand the specificities of women's agricultural support needs. All trends mentioned above point to the gendered socio-economic impact of bureaucratic changes shaping the state's role in the agro-food system's extension services since the early 1990s.

Lastly, the interview data in this section also highlights the adverse impacts of coal mining on the local state's food security programmes. The policy contradictions and weak coordination

alluded to in earlier sections impact household food production directly. Water contamination in communities limits households' abilities to grow sufficient healthy crops. The data from various sources indicates that more women-headed households engage in subsistence farming than their male counterparts. This production is mostly undertaken to provide additional sources of food for households and plays a crucial role in food security. Thus, water pollution from coal mining worsens the gendered socio-economic disparities in household food security within communities by limiting women's access to clean water. Chapters 6 and 7 provide further evidence of how the water contamination affects women-headed household farming.

The next sections focus on the second pillar of the provincial and local state's food security strategy: the Government Nutrition Programme (GNP). This policy is an important state intervention in South Africa's food political economy, as it aims to improve household food security in low income households. The examination of its implementation at the local level will reveal whether this programme ameliorates the country's household food insecurity problem. This analysis will specifically focus on how black African women perceive and experience this intervention.

Government Nutrition Programme

The state relies on the GNP to increase local levels of food security. This initiative is extensive and includes the following institutions: schools, hospitals, Early Childhood Development (ECD) organisations, correctional services and community care centres. There are four main policy goals in the GNP: encouraging these social institutions to establish their own gardens, providing them with nutritious food, decreasing community food insecurity and supporting agro-food system SMMEs. The food provision in schools is coordinated by the Department of Education (DoBE, 2013). Government officials working in the Social Development Department are responsible for food security in ECD organisations and community care centres. The DARDLEA district office in Ermelo assists both departments with establishing gardens in the social institutions mentioned above.

According to Devereux et al. (2018: 1) “the government has implemented the National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP), which provides daily meals to about 9 million children in over 20,000 public schools across South Africa.” Most of the public schools in Mpumalanga province participate in the NSNP. Sibanyoni’s (2017: 39) study on the province’s school nutrition programme found that 74% of the schools provide meals to students.

Chapter 6 discusses the household and community socio-economic trends in Ermelo extensively. I just want to note these socio-economic challenges in the current chapter, so the reader understands why the NSNP is important for household food security. A government official explained that the NSNP is a necessity in Ermelo because of high unemployment and poverty rates. This view is also substantiated by the data obtained from interviews with black African women. They all acknowledged the centrality of the school feeding programme. The government official described the importance of feeding students at school:

Hunger is a serious challenge in the municipality because of population size and declining agricultural production. The number of people in households is growing while agricultural production is decreasing. Unemployment and poverty exacerbate this food insecurity challenge. Our school feeding scheme is very important because some kids only get a decent meal at school. And we all know that a student cannot be expected to perform well on an empty stomach. (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo)

The overall GNP procurement is coordinated at the provincial level and service providers are sub-contracted through the Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency (MEGA). The agency follows public finance management policy prescripts in administering the procurement processes in the NSNP. A government official outlined the process:

The nutrition programme procurement is managed by the provincial agency MEGA. It follows the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act (PPPFA) of 2000 and has a bidding committee to select service providers. This process is intended to accelerate transformation through supporting black service providers in the agricultural value chain. I support this process because black small companies face many market barriers in the agricultural sector. It makes sense to have a central procurement system because regions in the province specialise in specific crops or livestock production. This system allows government to access all these

different types of producers. Centralisation is also important for getting lower prices for goods or services. (Interview 9, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

According to MEGA's spokesperson, Desiree Ntshingila, this process ensures that "government spend supports smallholder farmers and SMME manufacturers (for dry products), and SMME transporters in the province. The MEGA programme is rolled out in such a way that it benefits businesses in the [whole] of Mpumalanga" (Ntshingila cited in City Press 2018). Ntshingila's account was substantiated by other local government officials who said that centralisation is intended to benefit smaller producers and suppliers in the food system. It also guarantees lower prices for the state because of scale. But one official held a different view, citing the dominance of established agri-business in this programme. He questioned whether marginalised small holder farmers and agribusinesses genuinely benefit from the NSNP.

The aim is to provide markets for small farmers and other SMMEs in the agricultural value chains. But I am not sure whether this process has achieved its policy goals. Several small black farmers and agribusiness companies want to participate in the NSNP. But we always receive complaints when we facilitate stakeholder engagements with small farmers and businesses about the programme. Some of them feel excluded, especially because they have very limited access to markets. (Interview 10, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

This point is articulated in a DoBE report on Mpumalanga's NSNP. It concludes that "a major outcome of this tender-based procurement system, as cited by provincial DBE officials, was that instead of empowering the poor as stated in the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act, larger companies are sub-contracting thereby perpetuating inequity" (DoBE, 2013: 20). Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies are based on formal sector transformation and they do not create opportunities for informal economy entrepreneurs. The data on enterprise demographics in SA illustrates that black African women dominate informal trading, but they are excluded from procurement benefits (Dooms, 2020; MISTRA, 2020). This feeling of exclusion was also articulated by several black African women subsistence farmers interviewed in the study. Some of the African women interviewees want to be integrated into this programme, so they can provide food to local schools or hospitals.

But the centralisation of the programme's administration and formal commercial business criteria used in government's service provider bid allocation system excludes them. A black African woman subsistence farmer explained her vision for an alternative system using these words:

Government must support us because our farming can develop into a substantial livelihood source. We do not have money because we are unemployed, but we are fighting hunger with our gardens. Some of the women in the area produce enough crops to supply the ladies who cook at the taxi rank. Imagine what they could achieve with more state support. We want our produce to be bought by the government one day and people eat our crops in schools, hospitals, and day care centres. But it is very difficult because the system works with formal agricultural businesses which have access to land, finance, inputs, and information. (Interview 6, 16 July 2017, Ermelo)

Members of the ADC criticised the decision to centralise the entire procurement process. They argued that local municipalities should be afforded more autonomy to procure food from producers within the municipality. These members viewed centralisation as a barrier for building localised food systems. An ADC member made this point passionately during the interview:

We do not understand why government has decided to centralise the process of participation in the nutrition programme. How will the small producers and business in local municipalities qualify for the programme? It does not make sense because we have people farming some essential crops in Ermelo. They must be prioritised because they do not have employment and rely on social grants. The apartheid government used to provide many market access opportunities for farmers in Ermelo using state procurement. But this new government always talks about complying with PPPFA and other business bureaucratic measures. Most small subsistence farmers will never meet these criteria. (Interview 4, 21 August 2017, Ermelo)

There are additional complaints about the administering of Mpumalanga's GNP. Private businesses, opposition parties, trade unions and non-governmental organisations criticise the programme citing maladministration and corrupt practices (Democratic Alliance (DA), 2018; NEHAWU, 2019). These detractors cite governance challenges in MEGA and the legal cases

opened by various service providers against the government. Some even cite the financial irregularities, which have increased since MEGA took over the procurement administration of the GNP. The school feeding scheme used to be administered by the Mpumalanga Department of Education and its specialised procurement directorate (DoBE, 2013: 20). But this process changed in 2017 when the provincial cabinet appointed MEGA as the primary implementing agency. The shift did not address the long-standing procurement challenges in the programme.

These governance challenges impact food security in the largely rural province because 874 000 learners benefit from the school feeding scheme (DPME, 2016: 8). Recent reports suggest that the provincial government has moved the procurement responsibilities to the DARDLEA (Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Land and Environmental Affairs [DARDLEA], 2019 Yende, 2020). The department of agriculture wants to use its agri-hub programme to supply the province's GNP. This decision was confirmed in the DARDLEA budget speech in 2019 by the MEC who stated: "In order to accelerate access to markets by farmers, through the GNP we will be supplying produce to the Department of Education, Health, Safety Security and Liaison and Correctional Services" (DARDLEA, 2019: 7)

A senior government official from the department explained this institutional shift as a game-changer, which will improve the programme's governance drastically. The official cited additional benefits of the new governance model such as bringing in smaller agro-food system black-owned businesses and linking the NSNP with the department's agricultural development plan. He said the province is planning on using agri-hubs to ensure that small producers and companies benefit from the GNP.

We hope that the new model will resolve our past governance and food quality assurance challenges. The Department of Education reports show how MEGA's governance challenges impacted the NSNP. We are fixing this with the new strategy. It also ensures that smaller business benefit from the large budget allocated to the GNP. We cannot have the same large market players in the agricultural sector benefitting. The new model must create opportunities for black-owned women and youth companies, which participate in the agricultural value

chain. The focus is on smallholders as directed in government's national policy framework.
(Interview 13, 29 August 2017, Ermelo)

Sibanyoni (2017: 92) conducted an extensive study on Mpumalanga's NSNP and found systemic challenges in food preparation, storage, and management. The author concluded that this trend contravenes the basic prescripts of food quality management. This finding is important because quality and nutritional elements are central pillars in food security measurements. The author's conclusions echo the findings of a DoBE report (2013), which identified food storage as a challenge in some schools in Mpumalanga (DoBE, 2013: 55). This report also raises concerns regarding inadequate access to water in certain schools and hygiene practices. A Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) policy case study of the NSNP explained this nutritional challenge further. This study argues that "schools tend to prepare higher quantities of starch and lower quantities of vegetables and protein than they should, for the number of learners approved for the NSNP, meaning that learners are receiving less than the recommended daily amount of certain food groups" (Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation [DPME], 2016: 4).

I raised this issue in the focus group and individual interviews with the black African women participants who are unemployed and engage in some form of subsistence farming. Their households have children who benefit from the school feeding scheme. Participants acknowledge the NSNP programme efforts in terms of providing children with basic food items required for nutrition. Some participants, however, think the programme should add variety in the food scheme. As one participant explained:

We are generally happy with the meals served at schools. I always ask my children about what they ate, and the answers show they consume basic food items such as samp and vegetables. It is tough, hunger is very prevalent in households and we can sleep at night knowing that children will eat at school. The government is really assisting the community because we know some children skip meals during the day. All mothers would like to ensure that school children have a lot more variety in their meals. But there is no income to achieve this and we are happy that children are eating basic food items at school. I know what food items are required for a

healthy diet because the nurses and community health workers always tell us which food items to prioritise. (Interview 8, 18 July 2017, Ermelo)

Other participants wanted to exercise more oversight over the food preparation process. This points to a suggestion for more opportunities that encourage citizen participation in the programme. And follow the community-led model in other programmes such as the CWP. The participants are concerned about the hygiene and methods used to prepare the meals. One mother described this need to be reassured in the following words:

I know that the department and schools hire women food workers who prepare meals for our kids. I hope there are strict rules on how to prepare meals and handle the food in schools. Most caring mothers exercise extra caution when preparing food for children, so they do not get exposed to any health or hygiene dangers. I control and oversee how food is stored, prepared, and handled in my own house. But I cannot do the same in the school feeding scheme. I hope the teachers and school management is putting our kid's health first when running this support programme. (Interview 6, 18 July 2017, Ermelo)

The point about the gender demographic and working conditions in the school feeding programme is important for this study. It highlights the gendered nature of labour in the state's food security strategy, which is very precarious. This point is emphasised in the next discussion on the women-led CWP food security programme in the municipality. The working conditions factor is also essential because the definition of food security includes nutrition. The voluntary food handlers (VFH) are mostly women from the surrounding community (DoBE 2013; Mpumalanga Department of Basic Education [MDoE], 2019). Mpumalanga's education department contracted a total of 4920 VFH in the 2018/19 financial year (MDoE, 2019: 66). According to the DPME (2016: 6) monitoring report, "Mpumalanga had the highest proportion of VFHs who had been trained (86.9%)". But the provincial officials complained that the yearly rotation system nullified this training because new entrants do not have institutional memory. This subsequently increases cases of food quality complaints and challenges in schools (Interview 13, 29 August 2017, Ermelo).

These precarious employees are responsible for preparing meals, cleaning the cooking equipment, washing dishes, and maintaining the food preparation stations. They receive training from the DoE and their stipend in 2013 was R720 a month. However, some urban schools pay a higher rate with VFH receiving R1800 per month (DoBE, 2013: 53). The VFH stipend increased to R960 in 2016 according to the DPME (DPME, 2016: 6). The DoBE (2013) and DMPE (2016) reports highlight several points for the policy makers to consider.

Voluntary food handler's working and employment conditions are poor. The monthly stipend does not cover the scope and amount of work performed by them. In addition, there is no employment security because of the yearly rotation system. Both reports raised concerns regarding the training of VFH and the impact it has on food nutrition. These studies argue that the training is largely insufficient and requires more attention from policy makers. Safety concerns featured prominently in these reports because VFH arrive in the early hours of the morning and, in some cases, leave very late (DoBE, 2013).

The preceding discussion reveals several important points for this study, which relate to the state's role mentioned throughout the chapter. This data illustrates how state regulation and intervention affects food security in households. The GNP is an essential component of community food security. But the state's capacity challenges have impacted its effectiveness and implementation negatively. This undermines food security, especially for children, and places additional socio-economic burdens on women because they are primarily responsible for food security in communities. Another significant point emerging from this discussion is the emphasis on a centralised market-orientated procurement system in the programme. This procurement model is largely aimed at integrating commercial black African farmers and other downstream agribusinesses into government supply chains. It is centralised and excludes the black African producers and businesses in informal markets.

Several participants criticised the government for implementing this model, which excludes local producers engaged in subsistence farming. This exclusion is gendered because most of the subsistence farmers are women with minimal government support. The exploitation of women labour also featured prominently in this discussion. Most of the VFH are women who work in poor conditions, have little employment security and receive low wages. Their work

is central in the implementation of the GNP. But the work under exploitative conditions and this amplifies the gendered labour disparities in South Africa's food system, which are explored throughout this dissertation. The discussion on the relationship between gendered labour and the local state's food security strategy is taken further in the following CWP food programme section.

Community Works Programme and Community Food Security

South Africa's Community Works Programme (CWP) was launched in 2008. It has several project areas and is focused on local or community-based development needs (Masondo, 2018; Philip, 2010). This programme falls under the authority of the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Authority (CoGTA) department at the national level. But it is managed by local CWP offices in municipalities, which consult a community reference group on project identification (Masondo, 2018). Philip (2009; 2010), one of the CWP pioneers, explains that South Africa's CWP was designed as "an employment safety net and not an employment solution, providing a minimum level of regular and predictable work while wider policy processes to create sustainable employment take effect " (Philip, 2010: 15).

The working areas in the CWP include care work, food gardening, maintaining public spaces, education, and landscaping (Masondo, 2018). There were 280 000 beneficiaries in the 2019 financial year and 78% of them were women (CoGTA, 2019). The national wage rate in 2017 was R56 per day and at the time of writing stood at R98 per day (Masondo, 2018, Mail and Guardian, 2019). This translates to R780 a month because CWP beneficiaries only work for two days a week (national wage rate). Women's labour is central in the government's food security strategy and it is very precarious.

Home and community food gardening are essential elements of the CWP programme. Participants establish food gardens in schools, repurposed public land or spaces, and community centres for vulnerable groups (Philip, 2009). The activities in the food security programme include constructing fencing for crop protection, setting up water infrastructure and transforming unused public land for farming purposes. Community Works Programme employees also prepare meals for vulnerable groups in communities such as child-headed

households (Philip, 2009, Masondo, 2018). Masondo's (2018) comparative case study on the socio-economic impact of CWP in community livelihoods illustrates the programme's significant food security impact. The CWP food gardens supplement the GNP and provide some food items for impoverished households (Masondo, 2018).

These findings corroborate results from earlier CWP socio-economic impact assessments, which highlight additional benefits such as income generation and training (TIPS, 2011). The most distinguishing feature of the CWP is its emphasis on local development needs and community participation. It functions on the basis of residents participation and the establishment of local committee to identify projects. This section will only focus on the experiences of government officials and three CWP food garden women workers in Ermelo. The municipality's Integrated Development Plan (IDP) states that Msukaligwa employed 1070 CWP workers by 2017 (Msukaligwa IDP, 2018: 103). This number increased to 1292 in the 2018 financial year (Msukaligwa IDP, 2019: 101). The reports do not provide a gender breakdown, but the data discussed below from government officials and CWP workers indicate that women constitute a majority in the CWP food garden programme.

A government official explained the Ermelo CWP food security programme in an interview. He said it is primarily organised around assisting communities with the establishment of communal gardens. These gardens are located in the following three main places: schools, converted public land parcels, and community centres or recreation facilities (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo). Women who work in the municipality's CWP programme lead this intervention. Their task is to prepare the land for farming and it usually involves removing waste, constructing fencing, and landscaping in some cases. These beneficiaries also assist with farming activities once the garden is established. A CWP beneficiary describes her duties as follows:

Our main job is to establish many food gardens in the area so that people eat healthy food. There are many pieces of land that can be used for food production in the municipality. Some of the land just needs to be cleared, provided with water infrastructure, and proper fencing. We have established several gardens in open spaces in communities and now residents help

us manage them. The other important part of our job is to help establish gardens in schools, clinics and churches. (Interview 1, October 2017, Ermelo)

The crops produced in these gardens are used specifically for public purposes, especially assisting poor and vulnerable households. Community Works Programme gardens play an important role in alleviating hunger in low income households. The participatory model allows the CWP area coordinators and workers to identify vulnerable households and social groups. One CWP worker explained her experiences and views on the programme's impact:

The food garden programme is very important for the community. We know that people are unemployed and social grants are not enough. Food and other household necessities are expensive these days. Our programme supplements social grants, government's nutrition programme and other social development initiatives. We have identified the poor households in the community, and they have access to our produce. These gardens are also important for assisting the sick and elderly who cannot buy or prepare their own food items. (Interview 3, 18 October, Ermelo)

The most valuable theoretical insight from the local CWP food security programme is women's collective agency. All three CWP interviewees emphasised the solidarity and autonomy developed through this women-led subsistence farming and food security strategy. Women's leadership and participation are important because it highlights the gender question in agrarian policies. Officials acknowledge that women's labour is central in the food garden, CWP and GNP initiatives. One of the CWP workers highlighted the gender dynamic in the food security programme:

The CWP in this area is dominated by hard working and dedicated women. It is great because you feed a nation when you give an African woman a source of income. We also use this network to build solidarity amongst working class women in the municipality. I have learned a lot of things about farming and other sources of making income from fellow workers in the food security programme. Imagine if we pass and share this knowledge with other women in the community who are not CWP workers. The impact will be very significant. (Interview 2, 18 October 2017, Ermelo).

The importance of female-led solidarity networks in the agrarian system is explored further in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Ermelo's CWP food security programme has budget constraints and the women workers encourage government to enhance state funding. However, it is important to note that the funding for the CWP does not come from the provincial agricultural department. It is administered by the Mpumalanga Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. The CWP women workers believe that the programme will have a larger socio-economic impact on households if more women are employed in the CWP. Another concerning area is the stipend received by the CWP employees in the municipality. Participants believe it is not sufficient for sustaining their livelihood needs throughout the entire month. The Ermelo CWP participants received a monthly stipend of R540 a month, which translates to R67 per day (Msukaligwa IDP, 2017:102). These two concerns are expressed in the following response:

Yes, everything is not perfect in the CWP food programme because of government budget constraints. We have asked the coordinator and councillor to engage the government so we can get more workers and income. There is a lot of potential for growing gardens all over the area, but we have a small cohort of workers. Government needs to hire more women from the community because of the high unemployment rate. We also need an increase because our stipend feeds big families in our households. Everyone is dependent on us and it is stressful. Some of us have started our own food gardens at home so we can decrease food costs.
(Interview 1, October 2017, Ermelo)

Unemployed black African women participants complained about the recruitment process in the CWP. They say it is not fair and, in some cases, recruitment is based on patronage facilitated through political, family, or tribal networks. There are several studies and reports which found that the CWP is susceptible to corruption (MISTRA, 2013; Philip, 2013; Puwana, 2015). But these findings are not limited to the recruitment process and cover other areas in the programme's governance. The feeling of exclusion by some unemployed participants is summarised in the following statement:

I know the programme involves community members and organisations in choosing projects. It is good that the CWP prioritises people from the community first because unemployment is too high in this municipality. The rate of unemployment is even worse for us women. But I do not think that the final decision on who gets employed in the CWP is taken fairly. I think they choose women are part of political organisations or who work closely with government.
(Interview 9, 24 July 2017, Ermelo)

A government official contested this view and said citizens do not have full information on how the CWP operates. He urged disgruntled community members to approach their councillors and local CWP coordinators for further information.

Masondo's (2018) comparative study on the CPW highlighted how CWP food garden projects use organic farming methods. His findings stated that "the CWP also addressed environmental threats by adopting eco-friendly methods in the food gardens. Instead of using chemicals, all CWP homestead and communal gardens in the two townships used organic methods – thus reducing dependence on the chemicals and improving the quality of the soil" (Masondo, 2018: 159). The women in the Ermelo CWP programme used a combination of organic and synthetic fertilisers. Organic fertiliser include animal manure, food waste and old plant material obtained from surrounding communities. The synthetic fertiliser is procured by the state from commercial producers in agricultural value chains. But the supply of synthetic fertiliser is limited because of budget constraints in the programme (Interview 2, 18 October 2017, Ermelo). Chapter 6 highlights how most women use organic methods for fertilising seeds in home and communal gardens. These women do not have resources for buying synthesised fertiliser and they use historic family framing knowledge to create organic fertiliser.

The discussion of the CWP's food security programme within the local state is important for several reasons. The programme highlights the importance of women's labour in the government's community food security policies explored throughout the chapter. This labour is undertaken within a context of limited department budgets, which impacts working conditions and the effectiveness of food security policy interventions within communities. Black African women workers in the CWP highlight some of the structural challenges in

implementing this policy programme, related to state capacity and fiscal constraints. An additional point arising from the preceding discussion is women's agency in shaping local food security programmes. The interview responses point to forms of knowledge sharing on farming and broader livelihood strategies amongst participants. In addition, interviewees perceive their participation in the CWP food garden programme as an act of women-led citizenship, which alleviates communal food insecurity challenges. These responses are important because they illustrate other values of local state food security interventions that go beyond social security or poverty alleviation. They include crucial elements such as developing women-led citizenship and solidarity around food-based livelihood strategies. This theme is explored further in Chapters 6 and 7.

Conclusion

The chapter explored the local state's food security programme and its links to the province's agro-food system. I relied on empirical data from interviews and documented literature sources. These interview participants included government officials, members of a local non-governmental organisation and black African women participants. I investigated different components of the local state's policy mandate. The examination began with discussing the local state's policy implementation and coordination duties in agrarian development. Then I focused on three food security programmes: supporting household and community gardens, GNP and the CWP food gardens. These programmes were identified as key pillars of the local state's food security strategy by government officials. The discussion revealed the following four essential findings for deliberations on the state's role in the agrarian economy and how it affects local food security.

First, the post-apartheid government's policy shifts discussed in previous sections have impacted local state food security strategies significantly. State support for small farmers, especially those classified as subsistence producers, is insufficient because of budget cuts for farmer support. This subsequently leads to reduced access to essential inputs such as seeds, land, fertiliser, garden tools and fencing for small food producers. The budget cuts also limit the human resource capacity within the local state, which is important for quality agricultural extension service provision. The government is constrained by the neo-liberal corporate food

model's fiscal regulatory regime. This produces negative outcomes for food security at community and household levels because subsistence farmers need state support for accessing essential inputs and efficient extension services.

Black African women interviewee responses in this chapter illuminate the gendered socio-economic impact of the above mentioned trends. Budgets cuts in the department have led to them receiving reduced support for crucial inputs such as tools and seeds. The women rely on these inputs to grow extra food in their homes or community gardens to supplement their household food sources. The limited access to inputs, as a result of limited state resources, exacerbates the existing food security, poverty and income challenges encountered by the black African women. These women have less livelihood alternatives or household resources to deal with the increased food insecurity than their male counterparts. The gender disparities in food security are an outcome of these structural policy shifts in the post-apartheid agro-food system.

Secondly, South Africa's post-apartheid state uses a multi-layered farmer categorisation system which differentiates farmers on the basis of market access, land ownership, turn over and purpose for farming. It attempts to assist all farmers, but evidence from literature sources and interviewee responses indicates that large-scale commercial farming is elevated within the state's limited agricultural support system. Some authors even argue that subsistence farming has been relegated to a welfare-based social policy intervention (Cousins, 2005; Greenberg, 2015). Government officials interviewees from this study use a similar farmer classification system in policy planning and implementation. This determines the nature of policy support, sector planning and long-term policy goals within government. The evidence from preceding discussions illustrates how local state officials perceive commercialisation and entry into formal private sector agrarian markets as key markers of success.

This approach marginalises local subsistence farmers and their participation as suppliers in the GNP and other forms of state procurement. Interview data from different participants and documented sources describes this structural exclusion in several ways. Subsistence farming is relegated to welfare provision in the informal local food economy while large agro-food system suppliers benefit from state procurement. The commercial policy orientation

locks South Africa into a centralised corporatised agrarian model with large agri-business dominance. Government's attempts to shift this trend through emphasising black smallholders does not address this problem because it still privileges scale and access into existing market structures as essential policy aims. It does not present an alternative agrarian model which is decentralised, supports local food system value chains, and recognises subsistence farming as a sustainable livelihood source for households. This policy paradigm maintains current levels of gendered food insecurity in low-income communities because the centralised model only guarantees national food security. It has failed to decrease the race, gender and class disparities in South Africa's food political economy.

The interviewees' responses and literature sources indicate that black women subsistence farmers who manage to produce extra crops after fulfilling household food needs struggle with accessing local markets for their produce. This limits opportunities for expanding household income sources by selling surplus crops and participating in local economic development programmes. The state's procurement budgets and processes are deepening the marginalisation of these women producers in South Africa's agro-food system. Government's role in the agrarian political economy is crucial for addressing several structural encountered by women subsistence farmers, which include localised market access. An effective state response from the local state to ongoing gender inequalities in the country's agro-food system needs to reorientate the local state's procurement system. Black African women subsistence farmers interviewed in the study are calling for a more inclusive decentralised localised agro-food procurement system.

Thirdly, another crucial area for addressing gender disparities in the agro-food system is labour. All the evidence points to the centrality of women's labour across all three municipal food security programmes, especially in the CWP food gardens and government nutrition policy interventions. However, the literature sources and interviewee discussions revealed some levels of exploitation and insecurity in the employment offered in the two state-run food security policy interventions. Additionally, most household and community gardens, which are not run or supported by the CWP food programme, rely on unpaid female labour. The produce is shared amongst family and community members. Yet, women's labour is essential for sustaining this subsistence farming in communities. These findings build on the

women's labour debates explored in previous chapters of the study. The literature cited the importance of women's paid and unpaid labour in maintaining South Africa's agrarian political economy over the past decades. This corroborates arguments advanced in feminist agrarian political economy analyses, which highlight the different ways that the capitalist agrarian political economy functions on the back of women's exploited unpaid labour.

Fourth, state governance capacity affects food security in several ways. It determines policy orientation and the efficiency of all three local state food security programmes investigated in the discussion. The state's food and community garden farmer support strategy require additional human resources and certain specialised skills to achieve maximum policy impact. Data from the interviews illustrates various shortcomings in this programme emanating from local state institutional capacity challenges. The GNP has also experienced many problems because of institutional changes and governance deficiencies within the state's bureaucracy. This presents a significant challenge for food security, especially considering that many households depend on the school feeding scheme. These governance challenges are not limited to the local state or the Department of Agriculture. The municipal food security programmes cut across different departments on the local, district and provincial level. This requires efficient policy formulation and institutional coordination to avoid the type of governance challenges experienced over the past years.

An additional shortcoming in the local state's governance of the agro-food system is the inability to decrease and prevent ecological degradation. The negative impacts of mining on the local agro-food system were elevated during interview discussions cited in the chapter, with a particular emphasis on water pollution, arable land destruction and soil quality. As alluded to in previous sections, Mpumalanga is one of the provinces in the maize triangle and it has several conducive natural resources for high agricultural production. Yet, the household food security trends and environmental literature sources illustrate the negative ecological effects of coal mining on the province's agro-food system. This amplifies the poor policy coordination and alignment within provincial and local state spatial development plans. Both mining and agriculture are identified as key drivers of socio-economic development. But the state's regulatory frameworks have failed to ensure that mining economic activity does not erode the environment required for agro-food system production.

The governance failures in the local state's food security programme have a gendered impact. They increase the risks of food security within women-headed households. Black women interviewees cited the important role of the government's nutrition policy in ameliorating food insecurity amongst family members. This social policy intervention provides an additional source of food for these impoverished families. It also decreases the mental, physical, and financial burden placed on women to ensure that family members obtain three nutritional meals every day. Further, the ecological crisis impact of mining on household food production and general environmental degradation equally leads to adverse gendered socio-economic impacts. It destroys the land, soil, and water resources that Black African women use in their subsistence production. This, in turn, exacerbates long-standing gender disparities household food insecurity within communities. Overall, the local state's governance challenges in the agro-food system deepen the existing food security disparities between women and male headed households in South Africa. The following chapter elaborates on the gendered socio-economic impacts by focusing on household social reproduction trends.

CHAPTER 6: HOUSEHOLDS, FOOD SECURITY AND SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Introduction

The previous chapters discussed South Africa's local and national post-apartheid state's role in the agrarian political economy. They investigated how macro policy shifts shape government food security programmes at both national and local levels. I illustrated the importance of connecting national food system policy orientation to developments within the local state. This chapter takes the discussion further in its exploration of macro agrarian policy effects on working-class households. The aim is to study household food security and food sovereignty using Marxist and black feminist political economy theoretical approaches.¹² These theories ground household social reproduction analyses in structural trends associated with the development of racial capitalism. They emphasise gender as a core theme in the chapter's discussion on household food security. I examine the local food system within a political economy context in order to understand how the national agrarian crisis determines household food insecurity.

But the discussion is not limited to identifying structural drivers of food security and poverty. The chapter is also concerned with how black African women cope and adapt to the ongoing agrarian crisis using different livelihood strategies. The chapter discusses both structure and agency in order to highlight the participants' view that they "fight hunger and poverty through food gardens and other livelihood strategies" (Focus group 2, 23 February 2018, Ermelo). Agency in this chapter is understood as the various livelihood strategies employed by the black African women interviewees from low-income households. These strategies are used to respond to and overcome the discriminatory structural conditions, which produce gendered household food insecurity and unequal gender relations in the agro-food system.

¹² I included food sovereignty to highlight that the chapter also examines the agency undertaken by the women in dealing with food insecurity in households and communities.

Kroll (2016) cautions food security researchers to avoid structural reductionism. The author contends that “this perspective portrays the poor as passive victims of 'neo-liberal' transitions, negating their power and agency” (Kroll, 2016: 1). The study of food systems, according to Kroll (2016), needs to recognise “food insecurity as the result of the interplay between food systems structure and the agency of poor people who negotiate this system, albeit from a position of relative powerlessness” (Kroll, 2016: 1). It is, therefore, important that the chapter makes reference to how the black African women from low income households “contest and shape the food system in their own interests by leveraging different degrees of knowledge and power” (Kroll, 2016: 1).

The chapter begins with an examination of household income sources and food expenditure that illuminates black African women interviewees’ social reproduction experiences. I then proceed with investigating access to basic public goods in households in order to uncover additional social reproduction trends. The focus is on water and energy because these two public goods are inseparable from food security and system studies. It is important to explore how the food-water-energy nexus determines household food security in working class communities. This includes discussing social infrastructure and its connection with local food security. I mention the participant’s food security and broader livelihood strategies throughout the chapter, with the aim of highlighting their agency. To further elaborate their agentic activities, a detailed discussion on the women’s subsistence farming in their household or community gardens is undertaken in Chapter 7, focusing on feminist agrarian agency as part of a broader livelihood strategy. This chapter’s discussion on how the unemployed black African women participants experience household food security is augmented with perspectives from local government officials and farmers. The chapter concludes by linking household food security and livelihood trends with the overall thesis discussion on the gendered agrarian crisis.

Household income, gender and food Insecurity

Women’s challenges in the food system are related to, and caused by, the general gendered socio-economic inequalities in society. Williams and Satgar (2017) highlight this connection in their discussion on feminism and class. They observe that “social reproduction draws

attention to how neoliberal capitalism undermines social reproduction and explores ways to advance class struggles against transnational neoliberal restructuring” (Williams and Satgar, 2017: 45-46). The neoliberal policy framework has limited access to quality health care, water, housing, energy, and food. Women carry the social costs of this socio-economic inequality in several ways and take varied livelihood measures to deal with the ongoing crisis of social reproduction (Benya, 2015; Cock, 2018; Cock and Luxton, 2013). I will employ the Marxist and feminist political economy conceptions of social reproduction in the following sections, which are organised around the following pillars: (a) The reproduction of capitalism is dependent on unpaid female labour; (b) The household is essential for examining the gendered division of labour, but social reproduction takes place in various social institutions; (c) livelihood security and producing the next generation are central elements of social reproduction; and (d) Black African women’s social reproduction challenges are different from their white counterparts (Brewer, 1999; Collins, 2000; Cock and Luxton, 2013; Williams and Satgar, 2017).

The Stats SA (2015) Living Conditions Survey found that women-headed households are more dependent on social transfers and family allowances. It states that “29% of women-headed households receive income from pensions, social insurance, family allowances and imputed rent, compared to the 19.7% of male-headed households earning an income from these income categories” (Stats SA, 2015: 14). These figures reveal the structural gendered income disparities between male and women headed households in South Africa. Through interview data and documented literature sources, the discussion of the household complements the quantitative data that allows us to show overall trends. While I draw on statistical analysis to demonstrate the more general phenomenon, I am particularly interested in illustrating how the participants experience, and react to, food security within the context of a broader household livelihood strategy. I connect national trends with local state experiences with a particular emphasis on the household.

South Africa’s national poverty figure (upper-bound poverty line) stood at 49% when Stats SA released its Living Conditions Survey in 2018 (Stats SA, 2018: 13). This report also concludes that “poverty headcount tends to be higher for women than males and this is observable across all age cohorts” (Stats SA, 2018: 13) Thirty seven percent of citizens in Msukaligwa municipality live in poverty and the Gini-coefficient is 0.61 (cited in Msukaligwa IDP, 2016).

The municipal IDP identifies the public works programme and the Majuba and Swaziland Rail Coal Lines as catalysts for job creation (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 102). However, the document does not provide disaggregated gendered data on the labour absorbed during the implementation of these programmes. Msukaligwa's general unemployment rate is 25%, but this socio-economic challenge has a significant gender dimension with unemployment higher amongst women (36%) than their male counterparts (19%) (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 68). The industrial structural make-up of the local political economy is biased towards sectors dominated by male employment. As one participant explains:

Most women in the municipality do not have jobs because employment at the power stations, mines and Transnet is more suitable for males. The bosses and managers at these companies prefer to hire men and women are expected to give more than a man when looking for a job. For example, sexual favours, bribes etc. Some of the few lucky women find employment in government, household domestic work, retail, seasonal farming or the public works programmes. (Interview 16, 16 November 2017, Ermelo)

The figures from the municipal surveys indicate that women-headed households account for 37% of homes in Msukaligwa (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 62). Participants in this study largely come from women headed households with a few exceptions. The three women residing in male-headed households have partners who are migrant employees in mines. This differentiation between male and female headed households is important for agrarian political economy studies. It provides opportunities to explore how gender differences and disparities shape community and household food security trends.

The Stats SA food security report found that "more than half (52,8%) of the households involved in agricultural activities were headed by females whereas just below a half (47,2%) were headed by males" (Stats SA, 2019a: 10). However, agricultural activity is not the main source of income in these households; it accounts for less than 1% (Stats SA, 2019a). The main source of income amongst women-headed households engaged in agricultural activity is social transfers (Stats SA, 2019a: 12). The number of individuals in each household in my study ranges from between 7 to 10 members of the immediate family, which includes children and grandchildren (Focus group 2, 23 February 2018, Ermelo). A participant highlights her concern

about the household size in a low-income socio-economic context and the impact it has on food security in the following statement.

We have many mouths to feed back in our homes and food is so expensive. Unemployment is high and there is little income coming into households. Things would be better if we and our older children had jobs. Then each family would be able to put together some money for essentials such as food. But things are bad now because the numbers in households are increasing whilst hunger and unemployment rise. (Interview 10, 24 July 2017, Ermelo)

The relationship between household size and increased hunger also featured in discussions with government officials. They reported that high population growth in the community accelerates poverty and hunger. One official expressed concern about “the decline in agricultural production while population numbers in the community increase. Households are growing rapidly and the availability of food is not matching this demand. This is a national problem which causes a food crisis all over South Africa. The recent droughts in past years have made things worse” (Interview 9, 23 August 2017, Ermelo). Msukaligwa’s population grew by 31% between 2001 and 2016 according to official municipal sources (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016:62). The point emphasised by various participants regarding the connection between large households, food insecurity and low household income is highlighted in the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) (2014) local government brief, which illustrates low levels of annual household income in the municipality. There are multiple sources of income in these women-headed households; however, social grants constitute the primary income source. A participant described the importance of social grants in her household:

The social grant is the most stable income in my household. I engage in other livelihood activities to put food on the table and buy essentials for the household. But the social grant from government is helpful because it comes every month, and it is guaranteed. Some people complain that the government is spending too much money on grants and young girls abuse it. They do not understand how important it is for us. It is not good to depend on charity from the state, but there is nothing we can do because there is no employment. I use the grant for buying essential household items and seeds for my garden. The money contributes a little towards our efforts to make a living from our gardens. (Interview 13, 26 July 2017, Ermelo)

The additional sources of income include the following activities: selling clothes, sewing, baking, selling chickens, borrowing from friends, and selling surplus food produced in the garden. Subsistence farming is one component of a broader livelihood strategy. It is not the main source of income for these women, but the evidence presented in Chapter 7 illustrates their vision about developing subsistence farming into a main income strategy. Most studies on poverty and inequality fail to adequately examine “the contribution of household production to household livelihoods” (Rogan and Reynolds, 2017: 2). This oversight is attributed to the ongoing debates in the poverty literature, which underestimate or even dismiss small scale agrarian production as a sustainable livelihood strategy (Rogan and Reynolds, 2017: 3). I explore this theme further in the following section in discussion on the women’s agentic practices, which reveals how they deal with food insecurity using a wide range of livelihood strategies.

Women, agency and household livelihoods

This section illustrates the diverse nature of working class women’s livelihood practices, which take place within and outside households. These livelihood practices highlight the broad conceptualisation of social reproduction developed in the chapter discussing feminist political economy theoretical frameworks. It emphasises women-led agentic practices within the context of an exploitative political economy that deepens gendered socio-economic inequalities (Ferguson, 2020; Vogel, 1983). The conception includes women labour in communities, local public institutions, non-governmental organisations and varied forms of employment. Susan Ferguson (2020) expresses this view of social reproduction in the following words:

It includes all those who work to reproduce the lives of workers—whether their labour is paid or unpaid, whether they do so within households, in state institutions, or as community organisers. Social reproductive labour here is then broadly defined. It includes the daily and generational work women have typically performed of giving birth to and raising and caring for children. But it also includes the work people do to sustain themselves and others as human beings more generally. (Ferguson, 2020: 111)

Participants in this study criticised women who develop a sense of passive helplessness as a result of food insecurity, illustrating the importance of agency in the women's lives, and their willingness to create means for dealing with gendered structural inequality and food security. This view is captured in the following words from one participant:

Women should not just sit around on empty stomachs waiting for something to happen. Our society has changed, and it is not like the old days when families used to provide communal social security. No family would go hungry or be ashamed in the past because the community would assist them before they even ask for help. But things have changed in our community life. Women must stand up and fight hunger collectively through food gardens and other means of surviving. We have the skills to farm and engage in other informal economic activities such as baking. (Interview, 12, 26 July 2017, Ermelo)

The description of these varied livelihood sources influenced by the women's agentic efforts was equally emphasised in a group discussion on household social reproduction.

We are not employed but women in this area work hard to fight hunger in different ways. Some of the women sew clothes and sell them to members of the community. Others bake different food items using the little income they receive. The farming in gardens, in both homes and community land sites, is important for supplementing the food groceries that we can afford in shops. In some cases, when everything goes well, we produce extra food and then sell it within the community. A household cannot survive from one source of income, especially impoverished households. (Focus group 2, 23 February 2018, Ermelo)

The burden of dealing with this social reproduction crisis is primarily placed on women, especially when it comes to household food insecurity. Women's labour and economic agency is essential for understanding food security and livelihood patterns in households. As Cock (2016: 122) explains: "women's unpaid care work, includes preparation (and often production) of food, care of the young, the old and the sick, and for the millions of Africans living in rural areas and informal settlements without basic services, collecting water and fuel". Her analysis concludes that these women are the "shock absorbers" of the ongoing global agrarian crisis (Cock, 2016: 122).

The burdens placed on women by the externalisation of social reproduction costs and the food crisis are captured in the following words of a participant:

All family members expect the woman in the house to make a plan when there is no food on the table. They do not even think hard about her employment status. But a woman must always make a plan to get something on the table for family members to eat. A strong and hardworking black woman works hard to ensure that everyone eats. Women's work is the source of food security and livelihoods in all households. (Interview 11, 24 July 2017, Ermelo)

The women face this burden regularly as hunger is a perennial challenge for households in the community and, in some instances, family members have to skip meals. This dilemma seemed to be most prevalent during school holidays when children are not receiving school feeding schemes. Participants were particularly concerned about securing enough food for family members to consume before they sleep. Evening meals were prioritised during the discussions and the interviewees acknowledged the importance of the NSNP. Chapter 5 discussed the importance of the GNP in municipal households. It is an additional grant provided by the state in attempts to improve household food security. Securing three meals a day consistently is a continuous struggle for these households. This challenge was summarised in the focus group discussion.

There is a collective hunger problem in this community and many families go to bed hungry. We are grateful for the school nutrition programme because our kids are guaranteed two meals a day and we only have to worry about late afternoon and evening meals. The most important thing for a woman is to ensure that her children and other family members have something to eat before they sleep. (Focus group 1, 15 November 2017, Ermelo)

Some of the women take up short-term employment (if opportunities arise) when they are really desperate for additional income and friends inform them about potential opportunities. This survivalist livelihood strategy includes domestic work, farm employment during harvest periods, forestry employment and short-term community development projects run by non-governmental organisations. All these forms of employment are atypical and not formalised

through contracts. One of the few women who occasionally uses this ad-hoc employment livelihood strategy explains:

Sometimes things get really bad and all the other sources of income do not come in. Then one has to survive on the social grant, which is not sustainable for the entire month. So, some of us take up ad-hoc jobs on farms or domestic work in people's houses when our other means of generating income fail. We are lucky because most of us have the basic crop production skills and I know some ladies who used to work in the forestry sector. For example, I come from a very rural background and we used to farm with my grandmother and mother from a young age. They taught me and my siblings how to grow different crops. I use this knowledge for food production in my garden and when I take up occasional employment during desperate times.
(Interview, 12, 26 July 2017, Ermelo)

Scully's (2016) work on the relationship between precarious employment and household social reproduction is also important. The author's study finds that the costs of increased precarious employment in the neo-liberal political economy are increasingly externalised onto households. The significance of non-wage livelihoods in low-income households has become more important in this era. These households rely on multiple income streams such as remittances, subsistence income and social grants (Scully, 2016: 304-306). The term subsistence income highlights how a "household produces some of what it requires to reproduce itself" (Scully, 2016: 305). The interview data in this study illustrates that women labour in households is essential for agrarian and other survival livelihood activities. It connects the subsistence food production to broader livelihood income-generating strategies which are important for social reproduction.

The minimal income in these households is spent on a number of essential household items. Food is prioritised and the women spend between two to three hundred rand a week on food consumption. The women could not provide a constant monthly figure because of household income and expenditure fluctuation. According to Stats SA (2015: 23), food accounts for a higher proportion of total expenditure in women-headed households. Chapter 4 cited several studies showing the perennial challenge of food inflation and its heightened effect in working class households (Oxfam, 2014; NAMC, 2014; NAMC, 2017). The estimated cost for a healthy

and nutritious food basket in a household of four members is R2 655 per month (BFAP, 2019: 104). Participants identified maize and red meat as the two most expensive food items. A participant described her frustration with high maize and red meat retail prices:

The costliest item in the food basket is red meat. This food item is very expensive, and the prices increase every year. It is also expensive in the smaller retail shops; meat is expensive everywhere. Most impoverished household rely on chicken, which we buy from both formal retail shops and informal chicken traders in the community. The maize also hits hard on the pocket and no household can survive without this item. I normally spend R400-500 on maize every month to feed everyone in the household. (Interview, 13, 26 July 2017, Ermelo)

The high cost of red meat and staple food items is related to structural factors discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. These include, amongst others, financialisation, price collusion, droughts, and centralised market structures in the post-apartheid agrarian political economy (Nabudere, 2013; Makhaya and Roberts, 2013; BFAP, 2019). This food inflation trend cannot be read through a gender-neutral lens because it primarily affects women in households. They carry the burden of high food prices in several ways and increased food costs “mean women working harder and longer to stretch resources further” (Cock, 2016: 122).

The NAMC (2016) states that “from October 2015 to October 2016 the cost of basic urban food basket increased by R64.38 (+12.1%) in nominal terms”. The national food inflation was high during this period, as it stood at 11.7% by October 2016. Pricing for important food basket items such as maize meal increased rapidly (Super maize meal [2.5kg] increased by 36.69% and special maize meal [2.5kg] by 63.80%, in urban areas). A longitudinal NAMC (2017) food price study identified two salient points for tracking food prices between 2012 and 2017. First, food and non-alcoholic inflation rates were higher than general CPI between 2012 and 2017. Second, the largest cost drivers were meat, fish and sugar (NAMC, 2017: 1-2).

More worryingly, disaggregated figures indicate that food consumption costs accounted for 70% of the total income in the poorest (30%) households (NAMC, 2017: 7). The Stats SA Living Conditions Survey (2015) revealed other important findings relating to household food

consumption. Household food expenditure declined from 2011 to 2015, as a result of inflation and other structural factors. The national average expenditure on food and non-alcoholic beverages was 12.87% in 2015 (Stats SA, 2015: 23-24). Household food consumption was the highest as a proportion of total household expenditure in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. There are varied reasons provided by interviewees for the sustained rises in food prices over the past decade. I explore these perspectives in the following sections through engaging with the responses from state officials and farmers. Then I connect the food price issue to its effect on household livelihoods.

Food prices, nutrition and household livelihoods

Municipal officials attribute the high food inflation rates to drought-driven agricultural production shortages and exponential input costs (Interview 12, 30 August, Ermelo). The high input costs are caused by the input market structure, with a few companies dominating the essential commercial farming input sector (Greenberg, 2015; Jara, 2014). Chapter 4 provides a detailed discussion on how oligopolistic agrarian market structures affect food prices. One official thinks it is “imperative for government to consider starting its own company to lower input costs for small emerging farmers” (Interview 8, 22 August 2017, Ermelo). This issue also featured in interviews with three different types of farmers from the local municipality. These farmers complained about the lack of regulation over input costs and minimal state assistance.

The first female producer interviewed was a white commercial crop and livestock farmer. Her experience was extensive, drawn from intergenerational farming within her family (150 years). This farmer was dependent solely on agriculture for social production and supplies both international and domestic markets. The global market accounts for her wool demand and she sells maize, meat and soya beans in local value chains. She has two large properties, farming assets, and employs wage labour. She explained her views on who should take responsibility for food price hikes.

People cannot blame us for the rising food costs because we are powerless in this system. The farming input companies and food processors are the powerful players in the food system. We

have little control over the prices we pay for inputs and the food processing companies dictate prices and contract terms when engaging farmers. Government should be focusing on this challenge instead of land policies which are going to destroy the entire sector. The previous government used to guarantee farmers a fair deal through state participation and regulation in the farming input sector. (Interview 2, 24 February 2018, Ermelo)

Her perspective draws attention to the discussions of the changing power balances within the agro-food system market structures highlighted in Chapter 4. The shifts in the state's policy framework and bureaucratic design have weakened commercial farmers' historic advantages in the agro-food system value chains. Large companies, which mostly operate in the downstream value chain segments, have more market and bargaining power than farmers. This trend is exacerbated by the policy impacts of trade liberalisation which exposes these farmers to competition from subsidised producers from other countries. The asymmetrical market power relations in both crop and livestock value chains dominated discussions with farmers. This was particularly raised in relation to auctions and agro-processing. Auctions facilitate engagement between various market players: commercial farmers, livestock feed agents, traders and subsistence farmers. The contentious issue is minimal control over price determination in auctions.

All these structural agrarian political economy challenges are further compounded by climate change and droughts. South Africa has experienced several droughts over the past decade as a result of climate change patterns. These natural disasters produce negative effects on food supplies, price trends and farmers' business operations (Amoah and Simatele, 2021; Piesse, 2016). The district agricultural department engaged and assisted large commercial farmers throughout the 2015/2016 droughts. This included financial assistance and providing drought adaptation advice. There was broad consensus amongst officials that climate change causes droughts. However, only two government interviewees connected climate change to the industrialised agricultural structure and fossil fuels. These officials specialise in soil and crop science respectively (Interviews 11 and 8, August 2017, Ermelo).

This observation is salient because large-scale farms are reliant on an agro-industrial complex, which uses fossil fuels in producing pesticides and artificial fertilisers (Nabudere, 2013: 28).

This farming model accelerates climate change and the broader ecological crisis (Nadudere 2013:39). Nabudere (2013:68) uses Marx's theory on the artificial reduction of production time to explain over-dependence on pesticides and synthetic fertilisers in modern industrialised agriculture. The author argues that capitalist farmers use these industrial inputs to shorten production time and accumulate more profits through altering natural production cycles. According to Nabudere (2013), we cannot separate the ecological crisis from the capitalist agrarian structure. Therefore, state drought policy interventions should not be reduced to financial assistance or adaptation measures. They should also raise inquiries about the fossil-based agro-food complex and its role in causing climate crises. The perspectives on the underlying causes of escalating market food prices and subsequent discussions on climate change related droughts are crucial. The structure of the agrarian political economy, which includes the production methods and market power relations, is a core driver of high food prices. While society acknowledges the adverse effects of inflation on food insecurity, there are divergent views on the primary causes and how to address them. This dissertation argues that policy and state bureaucracy shifts introduced in the early 1990s are the fundamental causes of high food prices and financialisation in the country's agro-food system.

The discussions above on what drives food inflation from government officials and farmers perspectives points out the structural policy impacts on food pricing. It is imperative to examine how these trends shape livelihoods in homes. The women participants in this study contend with the socio-economic costs of high food prices on a daily basis, and this exacerbates the burden of household social reproduction. This experience is captured in the following response:

Food takes up most of the household income, even when one counts the other income sources outside the social grant. I have to spend money on food for my family because it is life and gives everyone energy to engage in other activities. No women can sit and watch her family go hungry because of high food prices, especially the young children. But it is difficult because you pay a lot of money to get the food from retailers. This affects us more as women because it is our duty to maintain food security in households; food is a women's area in life. I spend two to three hundred a week on food when things go my way. But sometimes it is between R150 to R200 during bad months. (Interview 14, 28 July 2017, Ermelo)

This amount is minimal when it is contrasted with the costs of a basic food basket cited earlier. The participants purchase food from both formal and informal sector retailers. Shoprite is the preferred formal sector retailer for both economic and logistical reasons. That shop's food prices are cheaper than other large food retailers and transportation to Shoprite costs less. It is located in the middle of the CBD close to the taxi rank in the working-class area of the CBD (see research site description in methodology chapter). Some important food basket items such as rice, cake flour, white sugar and cooking oil are bought from small informal retailers in the community. All these products are identified as 'high inflation' items in the NAMC (2017) food price monitor. The informal retailers sell these goods at a cheaper price and participants have easier access to these traders. These shops are run by both South Africans and non-South Africans, but the latter group constitutes the majority.

This reliance on both formal and informal segments of the food economy is intriguing. It highlights the economic dualism discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. South Africa's agrarian structure developed historically on the co-existence of informal and formal sectors along the entire food value chain. It is most evident in the farming and retail segments of the food value chain (see Chapter 3). In this case, participants source their food from different types of retailers in an attempt to save costs where possible. This food consumption strategy serves as a buffer against escalating formal sector prices and enhances consumer choice. However, participants raised several challenges encountered when buying from smaller informal retailers. This complex strategy of depending on both types of retail was expressed in the following manner:

Women in rural areas and townships cannot buy all food products from formal retailers. Their incomes are minimal and food is very expensive these days. It also costs a lot of money to travel to town where retailers operate. So, most women also buy some household food items from informal traders, especially non-South Africans. Foreign-owned retailers' prices are generally lower, but sometimes these prices fluctuate and change overnight. It seems like the retailers change prices when they see people demanding a certain product. (Interview 15, 30 July 2017, Ermelo)

The evidence discussed and unpacked in the preceding sections on household incomes, food access and livelihoods reveal important points for this dissertation. It illustrates how social reproduction and the burden of food insecurity is gendered. Working class households, which primarily depend on social transfer incomes, struggle to maintain social reproduction and food security. Women carry both the hunger and broader social reproduction household crises and undertake varied forms of labour to cushion their families. These livelihood strategies supplement the social transfer of income provided by the state. The interviewees use these livelihood strategies to reassert their economic agency in a neo-liberal policy economy, which perpetuates gendered socio-economic inequality. They use their skills to engage in informal economic activities that secure minimal income for mainly food and other social reproduction necessities.

These gendered food and social reproduction crises in households cannot be fully understood without connecting household developments with macro structural trends. The discussion illustrates that market structure relationships in the food system and climate change affect local working-class households negatively. High food prices limit the extent to which low-income households maintain food security and social reproduction. But this impact is inherently gendered because of the division of labour in households and communities, with women dealing with the food crises on a daily basis. The interview data highlights how this crisis shapes access to food in households and the varied responses from the women.

This gendered impact elevates the importance of avoiding class or race reductionism when studying developments in South Africa's capitalist agro-food system. Several feminist agrarian political economy sources in the theoretical framework chapter highlight this point (O'Laughlin, 2007; Park, White and Julia, 2013; Razavi, 2011; Tsikata, 2015). Park, White and Julia (2013: 6) summarise the argument succinctly using these words: "In focusing on class relations as the main unit of analysis, agrarian political economy tended to overlook the role of other social relations in shaping relations of production and social reproduction". South Africa's agrarian political economy development has produced unequal gendered socio-economic impacts throughout the country's racialised capitalist history. The most stark examples are in the areas of household food security and labour exploitation illustrated in different chapters of this study.

The definition of food insecurity is not limited to access, which is largely determined by household income and proximity to retail centres. It also includes food quality and its nutritional value (FAO, 1996). Participants raised additional concerns regarding the quality of food obtained from both commercial and informal retailers. The main issues are storage, shelf life, chemical use, and hygiene practices in the retail premises. This complaint was raised more sharply in discussions on the food items bought from informal traders, and it fuels resentment towards non-South African traders in the community. The interviewees expressed a desire to grow more vegetable in households rather than relying on both forms of retail. Homegrown vegetables are perceived to be healthier because the participants have direct control over storage, the farming process, and inputs. The following words from the focus group discussion capture this point:

Another problem is food quality because some retailers keep the food items on shelves for long periods. This even occurs at big commercial retailers' premises with certain food items. You get into a shop, look at a food item, and see that it is not healthy for food consumption. But this problem is worse in the small informal retailers in our community. We've had to return some items because they were off and not healthy for consumption. Some of the non-South African informal retailers sleep in the dirty shops. This is not healthy at all. (Focus group 1, 15 November 2017, Ermelo)

Participants derive their food nutrition knowledge from two main sources: indigenous nutrition knowledge and advice from health care professionals or social workers (especially for those who have non-communicable or lifestyle diseases). Some of them use this knowledge to assess the quality of food given to children in the school feeding scheme. Access to vegetables is central in the participants' conception of food security and carries significant symbolism associated with a healthy life. One participant explained how "a woman's task is to ensure that she grows or obtains money for important vegetables. These vegetables are essential for maintaining a healthy life and supporting a sickly body. I am happy when I see enough vegetables in my household meals" (Interview 16, 16 November 2017, Ermelo). The focus group discussion on the benefits of food gardening emphasised the same point.

We know what is required to maintain a healthy body and life. Our parents and grandparents taught us which types of crops and food items are important for human growth and treating certain physical ailments. Food gardening and crop production gives people life because it feeds and cures them. The nurses and community health care workers also give us information on nutrition, especially for the children or sickly family members. We also share this information with other community members. Many sick people will benefit from starting their own household gardens like us. A food garden gives people life. (Focus group 1, 15th of November 2017, Ermelo)

A few participants, especially those with farming employment history, raised concerns about the chemicals, fertilisers, hormones and industrial farming methods. One participant believes people must be wary of food bought from shops.

The food we buy from shops is not totally healthy because farmers use too many chemicals, hormones, pesticides and fertilisers for both crop and animal farming. All these things cannot be good for the human body because they have chemicals and my old boss used to say we must be careful when using them. Community members have little control over how food is produced, and this is dangerous. One of the things I love about farming in my own garden is that I have total control and I watch how my small crops grow. I use natural fertiliser and there are no chemicals used in my garden. (Interview 16, 16 November 2017, Ermelo)

Household daily meals usually include some of the following items: pap, rice, spinach, cabbage, chicken/chicken parts, bread and potatoes. The composition of vegetables in daily meals is determined by the crops growing in specific seasons. For example, participants explained that the spinach consumed in Ermelo mostly grows well in winter and has a different taste from spinach produced in other regions. Red meat was not mentioned as a regular item on the daily food plate. The women normally buy live chickens from community members. It costs between R80 and R100 and is more financially sustainable because “live chicken is fresh and comes with other internal body parts not contained in the frozen pack bought from large retailers, and these can be spread over different meals” (Interview 17, 17 November 2017, Ermelo).

The government officials and farmers raised additional concerns about nutrition, especially in meat processing and production. They say cattle are injected with growth hormones at the feedlot because weight is significant in price negotiations and determination along the value chain. The motivation for attaining higher profits informs this practice. A young black African male farmer with twelve years of experience explained this connection between poor food nutrition and profits in animal farming. He is a part-time farmer who is also employed in the municipality's technical division. This farmer is only engaged in livestock production which includes sheep, cows, goats and cattle. He rents land from another farmer with a large property and uses the labour from this farm. This farmer's agrarian knowledge is derived from both formal schooling and previous employment as a farm labourer. He says "the animals must grow within a short period of time (normally 90 days) to meet profit margins. So, the middlemen inject them with hormones and synthetic feed. This is not healthy for the animal or human consumption" (Interview 3, 25 February 2018, Ermelo).

This food nutrition discussion illuminates how the structural make-up of the industrialised agro-food system overlooks some crucial health factors. Different enterprises in the formal food political economy control how food is grown, processed, stored and packaged. All these processes present food nutritional dangers, which eventually affect family members in households. These businesses operate across a profit-driven food system value chain that privileges returns over consumer nutrition. Consumers, especially the study interviewees, have minimal control over food nutrition practices in the market value chains. Food nutrition is gendered because the women interviewees perceive it as an essential element of their household care work. This intersects with the health status of family members, which is closely related to food nutrition according to the women interviewed in the study.

The unemployed black African women interviewees also highlighted the costs associated with the natural resources used to prepare food. This reflects the inherent connection between food, water, and energy in agrarian political economy debates. Farming and food preparation processes highlight how the food-water-energy nexus determines household hunger in low-income communities. This nexus is gendered because of the division of labour in household and community social reproduction (Cock, 2016). Women from low-income communities deal with limited access to water and energy on a daily basis. The ecological and energy crises

which undermine food security affect black working-class women more because they “are the shock absorbers of the current climate crisis, experiencing most intensely the health hazards of exposure to carbon emissions and the devastating impacts of rising food prices, water pollution and energy poverty. These factors all mean that women have to work harder to stretch inadequate wages and social grants further” (Cock, 2018: 212).

This challenge is expressed further in national studies on household expenditure. According to the Stats SA (2015) living conditions survey, “expenditure on housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels accounted for the largest contribution of any of the main expenditure groups to total annual household consumption expenditure in South Africa for 2015” (Stats SA, 2015: 12). I examine and discuss how the participants experience the food-water-energy nexus crisis in the following sections.

Household Infrastructure: Food-Energy-Water-Nexus

Water, subsistence farming and mining

Participants in the study reside in shacks, poor quality RDP houses and semi-formal housing.¹³ These homes are located in underdeveloped parts of the community and there is minimal social infrastructure in close proximity. The number of informal settlements in the municipality has grown over the past years and informal dwellings constitute 15% of all municipal households. Government documents cite insufficient resources to buy land and constant migration as primary challenges for accurate spatial planning, which is a prerequisite for increased access to formal housing (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 91-92). This point is salient in light of migration trends in South Africa, which illustrate that over 60% of residents reside in urban areas.

Ninety two percent of households in the municipality have access to water either through household connections or communal sources according to municipal reports. Water backlogs have been reduced by 9% and sanitation levels are steadily improving with 97% of households

¹³ Housing structures set up by residents using bricks and other materials.

using hygienic toilets (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016 80.82). However, state officials concede that universal water access and adequate sanitation are still challenges in some areas (especially rural) (Interview 9, 23 August 2017, Ermelo). Interviewees in this study obtain water from a communal source using wheelbarrows. This water is collected twice a day and requires an individual to make several trips (3-4) in both the early morning and late afternoon/evening session. Participants raised serious concerns regarding stable supply and water sanitation (Interview 18, 17 November 2017, Ermelo). They complained about constant water cuts, absence of adequate water infrastructure, and pollution. A participant expressed her concern regarding water quality and access in the following description:

You wake up one day and the water has been cut or the colour has changed. This is how we live around here, with constant water challenges. We have raised this issue several times with government officials and I can definitely confirm our dissatisfaction with the response. The officials always come with stories about burst pipes or contamination caused by industrial processes. But we need the problem resolved because water is used for several household chores, food preparation and gardening. This water problem affects us directly as women because we are responsible for maintaining livelihoods in households. (Interview 18, 17 November 2017, Ermelo)

Her concern was echoed by one government official with extensive experience in soil and water science. He said:

I think the municipality has done a great job in terms of connecting people to water sources. Most people have access to basic water sources (through household and communal taps), infrastructure and connections. But the main problem is water quality and the capacity of the municipality's purification systems. I am very concerned about the water quality in the area for both household consumption and use in varied farming processes. This challenge is exacerbated by the growth and expansion of mining in the municipality. The government must definitely find ways of ensuring that mining and other industrial processes do not pollute drinking water sources. (Interview 9, 23 August 2017, Ermelo)

This connection between water pollution and industrial processes was highlighted in a discussion with one participant who used to live close to a power station. She was married to

someone who worked there for a number of years before they separated. She says the coal cleaning process is one of the main sources of water pollution and this problem requires urgent attention from government officials. Her concern is that “people do not understand how the coal purification process creates water problems in the municipality. A lot of water is used to purify coal, and this pollutes drinking water sources. There is a clear link between what happens in these power stations, mines and our water problems” (Interview 17, 17 November 2017, Ermelo). This concern about the relationship between coal mining and water pollution illustrates the contradiction in local state development policies. Government highlights that agriculture is important for food security and economic development. But it fails to adequately regulate mining activities in such a way that they do not have adverse effects on subsistence and commercial farming. This respondent was one of two black African women interviewees who connected the water problem with coal mining and the energy producing system. The dominant view among participants was that municipal water challenges were due to governance failures, which are mainly caused by maladministration in the local state.

However, a black African women farmer interviewee with seventeen years of experience emphasised the connection between mining, water pollution and agriculture. She is involved in both livestock (cattle) and crop production (spinach and potatoes). Agricultural production is not her only source of income, and she has a small farming property which is dependent on family labour. She relies on formal and informal markets to sell her crop produce or livestock. This includes direct sales (to farmers or traders) and the local auction for formal income generation. She also sells her crop produce to informal traders who operate in the CBD. According to this participant, “mining activity is polluting water, destroying arable agricultural land and there is very poor rehabilitation. These companies are not held accountable for land rehabilitation or destroying our water resources” (Interview 3, 24 February 2018, Ermelo).

The black African woman farmer’s ecological concerns were amplified further by the commercial white woman farmer. She informed me that land surrounding her community was declared as an “agro-tourism” protected area. But the state’s enforcement of this legislation is poor. She criticised government heavily for issuing additional mining licences and poor environmental regulation in the sector while agricultural water is destroyed. This

highlights a contradiction within the local state's socio-economic development policies and regulatory weaknesses discussed in previous sections. The state has not succeeded in regulating mining activity in a manner that ensures environmental sustainability for subsistence and commercial agriculture. This is illogical and irrational according to the white farmer. Her views are captured in the following statement:

Mining activity is very short-term and it has limited socio-economic impact in the surrounding communities. Mining employment is very low when one compares it with our sector, and we are responsible for feeding the nation. I can assure you that farms in this community employ more people than the mines, which destroy agriculture by polluting water and eroding arable land. (Interview 2, 28 February 2018, Ermelo)

Her perspective is substantiated in the documented data on sector profiles in the municipality. This documentation shows that agriculture accounts for more labour absorption than mining. Agricultural employment contribution in 2016 was 11% whilst mining accounted for 7%. The agricultural sector's Gross Value Add (GVA) in local economic development is also higher than mining (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016: 70). The latest figures in the 2019/20 municipal IDP strategy point to a continuation of this trend. The women farmer's views are similar to those articulated by ADC civil society members cited in Chapter 4. They also believe that mining has created minimal socio-economic benefits with large social costs such as environmental degradation.

These concerns regarding water supply and pollution are further corroborated by the StatsSA (2016) General Household Survey findings. This study found that over half of Mpumalanga households reported interruptions and the province had the lowest levels of improved sanitation (Stats SA, 2016: 41-42). This study also highlights the noticeable decrease in the quality of water services. The quality rating of services amongst national households decreased from 76% in 2005 to 63% in 2016. This decline is expressed in the following words: "dissatisfaction with the quality of drinking water was most common in Eastern Cape, Free State and Mpumalanga in 2016" (Stats SA, 2016: 43). The recent Stats SA GHS report points to a continuation of water quality service challenges in Mpumalanga. It concludes that

“households in Limpopo (48,0%) and Mpumalanga (47,7%) reported the most interruptions” (Stats SA, 2019b: 45).

However, the challenge of water access is less severe in the communal gardens. The water infrastructure and supply stability are slightly better in these gardens. Most of the communal gardens have better water supply because the sites were supported in previous years as part of government’s targeted food security projects. And some of the gardens still use this infrastructure for current subsistence farming. These communal garden water sources are also used to supplement household water access when supply interruptions occur (Interview 17, 17 November 2017, Ermelo). These supply challenges also affect access to electricity in households, as explained in the next sections.

Food-energy-nexus in households

Figure 9.5: Percentage distribution of main sources of energy used for cooking by province, 2018

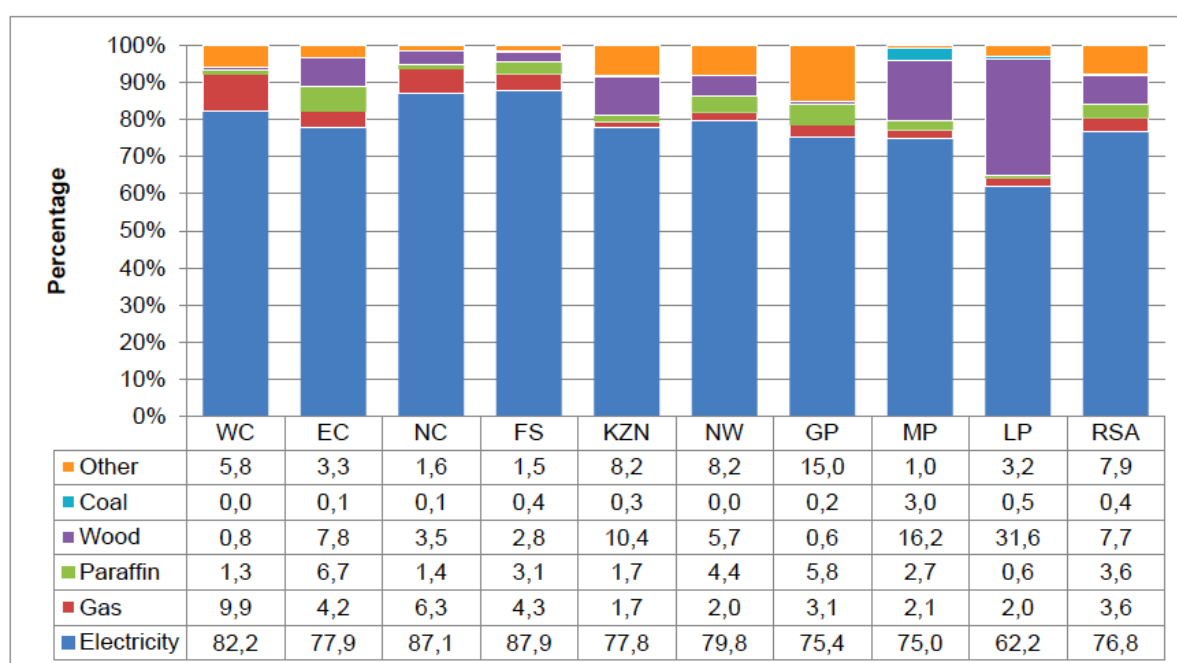


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of main sources of energy used for cooking by province, 2018

Source: Stats SA General Household Survey (2018)

One participant who does not have access to electricity in her household describes her frustrations as follows:

We have had several meetings over the past years discussing building electricity infrastructure in our area. Community members, non-governmental organisations, and government officials attend these gatherings. There has been minimal progress because some of us still do not have access to electricity in our households. We need this electricity to cook our meals and perform different household chores. This problem is more prevalent in our areas, which are largely semi-formal or informal. We rely on coal, paraffin and wood to heat our homes and prepare food. (Interview 18, 20 November 2017, Ermelo)

The women are aware of the dangers associated with using coal, paraffin and wood for cooking and space heating. But they have limited choices and refuse to watch their families get cold or experience hunger.

I know it is dangerous to use sources such as paraffin or coal for cooking or space heating. But other women and I whose homes are not connected to the grid have no choice. These energy sources are the only means we have to protect our families from the cold or hunger. The government is also aware of the dangers associated with these energy sources because of several accidents over the years. They must connect our households to the grid, so we use electricity. (Interview 18, 20 November 2017, Ermelo)

The second dimension of the electricity crisis, for the small group of women who reside in households connected to the grid, is electricity pricing. They explained that it is not financially sustainable for them to use electricity for cooking or space heating during the entire month. The Msukaligwa municipality offers “free basic electricity of 50 kWh to indigent prepaid consumers and for the 2019/2020 financial year, an amount of R 2,751,000 has been allocated for indigent support” (Msukaligwa IDP, 2019: 82). But, according to participants, this indigent subsidy is not sufficient for the entire month because electricity is required for different household chores. The two most important ones are space heating and cooking. A participant explained that “managing household electricity is not easy because it is expensive. The government helps out with the indigent subsidy but the monthly demand for household electricity is too much. We only survive by choosing how to use it sparingly and supplementing electricity with other energy sources” (Interview 19, 20 November 2017, Ermelo).

Participants emphasised the usefulness of traditional coal fired stoves because they believe it is less costly. Coal is priced as follows: R20 for a bucket, R80 for a dustbin and R700 for a van. The bucket lasts a day and the dustbin a week or two depending on usage. “A van package is most sustainable because the coal finishes quickly, but there is little money left for food if you choose this option. Most women go with the bucket option because it is more affordable” (Interview 18, 20 November 2017, Ermelo).

The women prefer stoves because they are suitable for space heating, especially during winter. Some interviewees believe coal stoves prepare certain food items better than electric ones. The coal used in these stoves is bought from small-scale miners popularly referred to as ‘Zama Zamas’, which can be loosely translated as ‘chance takers’ in the English language. These miners operate illegally on abandoned or closed mines and have a constant demand for their coal in the black working-class community. A participant explained how she and other women support amaZama Zama because “these men are trying to make a living and have no other option during these tough times. Some of them used to work in the mines, power stations and farms. But now there are few jobs, what must people do? They can make a living from selling coal to us and other community members” (Interview 18, 20 November 2017, Ermelo)

Firewood is an additional energy source in the households and participants purchase it from local wood suppliers. A large packet of wood costs between R35 to R50 (lasts for a week depending on consumption). Mpumalanga is one of five provinces with an abundance of forestry plantations and a significant portion of households rely on wood for energy. This is stated in the Stats SA GHS report (2018), which says “the use of wood was particularly noticeable in Limpopo (31,6%), Mpumalanga (16,2%), KwaZulu-Natal (10,4%) and Eastern Cape (7,8%)” (Stats SA, 2018: 29). The wood comes from both informal and formal forestry economic activities. Some of the forestry sector wood is used to produce charcoal. None of the women interviewed indicated that they forage for wood in local forests.

National households using electricity as a main source for cooking grew from 58% in 2002 to 76% by 2016. However, Mpumalanga was one of the three worst provinces when comparing the number of households using electricity as the main source for food preparation (Stats SA,

2016: 34). This trend continues in the current era, with 75% of households in the province using electricity as the main source for cooking but it is still one of the three worst performing provinces in this area (Stats SA, 2016: 38). The interviewees complained because they live close to a power station and there are several mines in the municipality. But the electricity supply and service to working class households is still not universal or stable. This has a significant impact on households because electricity is essential for food security. The challenges related to stable and universal electricity supply are gendered because of the sexual divisions of labour in homes and communities. Women need these basic services to carry out several tasks such as cooking, cleaning, farming, and looking after the sickly. This labour contributes to household and community social reproduction in different ways.

Eskom has a major power station in the area called Camden, which was established in 1967 but later shut down in 1990. This had a significant impact on surrounding mines because they supplied most of the coal to the power station. A clear example is the Vunene mine, which was the largest producer of coal in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s with an estimated monthly production of 450 000 tonnes. The power station was opened again in 2003 at an estimated cost of R5billion (Eskom, 2019). Yet, residents in the municipality still experience energy poverty and unstable access to electricity. An interviewee expresses this challenge:

We have several coal mines in the area and a very big power station, but we still experience energy poverty. It does not make sense because we live in close proximity to the power station producing the electricity. The government must explain what happens to all this electricity because people from low-income households complain about energy poverty or unstable supply. We also need to find out why it is so expensive when the coal and infrastructure is in our municipality. (Interview 20, 21 November 2017, Ermelo)

Msukaligwa municipality has additional institutional and infrastructure structural problems in the area of energy services. Eskom interrupted electricity supply to the municipality throughout 2017 because of debt and non-payment (Eskom, 2017). According to Nel (2017), the debt amounted to R108 299 337 by October 2017. This culminated in regular interruptions between specific hours on a weekly basis. The municipal energy infrastructure in Ermelo is not adequate to meet community demand and it is aging. Local state officials

have initiated a project to build an additional power sub-station to increase electricity distribution capacity (Msukaligwa, 2019: 82). These institutional and infrastructure problems also affect women in low income households:

Electricity cuts are common in this municipality and they cause serious problems for both households and businesses. These cuts are felt in households because women plan their daily work around energy use. These interruptions disrupt the daily social reproduction routine in homes and this sometimes affects food preparation. This problem also damages communal electricity infrastructure and government takes a long time to repair it. (Interview 20, 21 November 2017, Ermelo)

The third challenge is related to inadequate information on alternative renewable sources of energy. None of the women interviewees had knowledge of solar water heating systems or other forms of renewable electrification infrastructure. Municipal reporting on electrification infrastructure does not explore or discuss renewable sources either. The women's demands on electrification and energy access are limited to conventional generation. Their conceptions of energy security is centred on cheaper and stable access to the current grid. Discussions on alternative energy sources only emerged in the interviews with the Khuthala NGO members, who were men. Chapter 4 discussed how these members criticise coal mining, especially its negative effect on farming.

The preceding sections on the food-water-energy nexus highlight several important points. Insufficient access to water and energy influences the levels of food insecurity in households. These two factors (access to water and energy) cannot be separated from food security debates because they are necessities in farming and food preparation. The poor quality water provision discussed earlier affects both household social reproduction and home or community food gardening negatively. It decreases food security in homes because the women rely on home gardens to supplement food items procured from retailers. Water contamination also poses several health risks because water is used extensively in food preparation. As stated earlier, food security is multidimensional because it includes both access and quality. Having access to clean water for farming and food preparation is important for food nutrition. It is equally important to factor in the structural ecological risks

posed by industrial processes, which contaminate water resources when examining household food security.

The discussion further points out how energy infrastructure shapes social reproduction and food security in working class households. The energy poverty challenges expressed in the interviews compromise food security and the women's safety in several ways. The interviewees expressed how they use harmful and dangerous methods for food preparation because of electricity access challenges. These methods require more labour and pose health risks for all household family members. Women engage in this additional labour and put their health at risk because food preparation is their responsibility. Overall, the sections on the food-water-energy-nexus reveal how capitalism is dependent on women's role in social reproduction. But it simultaneously erodes access to the public goods and services required for reproducing human livelihoods. This process also involves extracting this unpaid labour from black African working class women and externalising socio-economic and ecological costs onto households. Susan Ferguson summarises these points succinctly: "because competition compels capitalists to keep wages and taxes as low as possible, the social reproduction of labour presents them with a dilemma: they require human labour power but must constrain the conditions of life that generate it" (Ferguson, 2020: 112).

Conclusion

The chapter examined the patterns of food insecurity in black African working class households. It specifically focused on the experiences of the unemployed black African women participants from Ermelo. The main aim was to explore how the agrarian crisis causes household food insecurity and the impact this crisis has on women interviewees. These experiences were related to national and local state trends, with a particular emphasis on South Africa's post-apartheid agrarian structure. The chapter discussed both the experiences of food insecurity and the varied income generating activities women undertake to improve household food security. I used Marxist and feminist political economy theory to frame the discussion, so the chapter draws out the gendered impact of household food security analysis. The conception of social reproduction articulated in the study's theoretical framework sections was employed in unpacking the different themes. These themes explored the

gendered impact of the household and community social reproduction crisis, with an emphasis on important aspects such as labour and women's agentic livelihood practices. I focused on women's labour and agentic practices in the examination and discussion of the data throughout the chapter.

The chapter commenced with a section on household income sources and food expenditure. This section was centred around household income because we live in a neo-liberal political economy, which has exacerbated the financialisation of food. High food prices, within a context of increased household inequality and poverty, deepen gendered food insecurity within communities. I examined how the women interviewees experience this phenomenon, drawing links between national and local contexts. Then I proceeded to connect household food security with access to basic public goods and services. I chose to focus on water and electricity because the food-water-energy nexus is essential for understanding household food security. This discussion investigated the women's access to these basic resources required for food production and perpetration. I relied on findings from the interview data and documented literature sources. The discussions on household income sources, food security, energy, and water access illustrate several points for understanding South Africa's gendered agrarian crisis.

The primary observation relates to causes of food insecurity in households, which accommodate several family members. The women interviewees come from large households with minimal income. This limits access to food because their incomes are too little for buying all the necessary food items. It also impacts the type of food consumed in households and its nutritional value. The required nutritional variety in meals is compromised as a result of insufficient household incomes and minimal control over food production processes. These trends are exacerbated by market structure factors in the agro-food system, especially commodification and subsequent high food prices. Data from the interviews describe the participants' daily struggles to source sufficient income for food in a context with high food prices. Macro-trends in the political economy of food affect households' food security levels in the local state. This amplifies the importance of connecting national political economy food system trends with sociological trends in households.

All these negative impacts on food security have a gendered impact because women are primarily responsible for maintaining household and community food security. As one participant explained “when there is no food on the table everybody looks at the woman in the house. It does not matter whether she is working or not”. Furthermore, the burden of dealing with structural factors such as high prices is placed on women because they shop for food from varied retailers. Food price inflation at a national level determines the daily material struggles encountered by black African working-class women. The food purchasing problems include encounters with both formal and informal traders who do not always comply with food handling requirements.

The interview data elucidate an additional gendered impact that revolves around the food-water-energy nexus. The broader communal water and energy crises are externalised onto women and they have to create varied means to cushion families against energy poverty and limited water access. In summary, food security challenges cannot be interpreted and examined without a gendered lens, which takes into account the food-water-energy nexus. The interview data has revealed the systemic causes of the food-water-energy crisis, which are related to the local political economy structure. This is an important point that connects socio-economic social reproduction in the household with the local economy.

However, the preceding discussions do not reduce the interviewees livelihoods to structural impediments, poverty and food insecurity. I departed from a “perspective that portrays the poor as passive victims of 'neo-liberal' transitions, negating their power and agency” (Kroll, 2016: 1). The women engage in a variety of livelihood strategies in order to ameliorate the negative effects of the post-apartheid neo-liberal order, which undermines food security. This agency includes, amongst others, subsistence crop farming, sewing and selling chicken. Women’s labour and solidarity is essential for the sustenance of these livelihood strategies. It also sets the foundation for thinking about food systems and production in a different way. Social reproduction and feminist political economy analyses emphasise that working-class women still exercise some forms of agency, which help them deal with socio-economic exclusion.

The livelihood agency straddles between formal and informal forms of economic activity. It is evident that black African women from working class households rely on varied livelihood strategies. But the local state places primacy on activities related to exchange in the formal economy and social protection systems. This limits government analysis on the structural causes of food insecurity and subsequent policy intervention. The chapter addresses this shortcoming by investigating non-formal livelihood strategies and what opportunities they present for eradicating gendered hunger. The neo-liberal state food paradigm does not pay attention to working class women-led agency and assumes that all impoverished black African women are economically passive recipients of social transfers. Fourteen percent of South African households are involved in agricultural production, and most of this farming (92%) takes place in back gardens. These households engage in farming in order secure an additional source of food. Seventy six percent of homes in Mpumalanga stated that they farm in gardens for food security (Stats SA 2016: 62). The nature and extent of the participant's farming activities are explored in the concluding chapter, which unpacks the agency exercised by these women.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: WOMEN-LED AGENCY, LIVELIHOODS, AND ALTERNATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS

Introduction

Previous chapters discussed the differentiated gender experiences in the evolution of South Africa's agrarian political economy. The analyses revealed the underlying structural causes of historic and contemporary gender disparities in the country's food system. These inequalities were discussed within the broader context of South Africa's racialised capitalist social order, which creates social difference and hierarchy along class, gender, and racial lines (Cock, 1980; Magubane, 1979; Wolpe, 1972). Chapters 5 and 6 deepened this investigation through examining how these gendered disparities in the agrarian political economy affect food security and livelihoods within households at the local state level. This concluding chapter summarises the differentiated gendered experiences in South Africa's agrarian political economy. Additionally, it highlights the black African women-led agency and responses to the neo-liberal social reproduction crisis, which externalises social costs of contemporary capitalist accumulation onto black African women from low income households in South Africa (see Benya, 2015; Cock, 2016; Cock and Fakier, 2009).

The emphasis on women-led agentic practices draws from the feminist political economy theoretical insights discussed throughout this dissertation (Cock, 2018; Ferguson, 2020; Razavi, 2009; Tsikata, 2015). Agency is understood as the various livelihood strategies employed by the black African women interviewees from low-income households. These strategies are used to respond to and overcome the discriminatory structural conditions, which produce gendered household food insecurity and unequal gender relations in the agro-food system. I merge the agentic themes identified in the literature with the lived experiences of women interviewees from my case study. The women interviewee agency is framed within the context of ongoing debates in Marxist and black feminist political economy literature on what Ferguson describes as "life-making beyond capitalism" (Ferguson, 2020: 120). These debates focus on the relationship between gendered agency, responses to neo-liberal social

reproduction crises, and alternative livelihoods practices initiated by women-led movements. These propositions are discussed within the context of the following emerging heterodox development paradigms: food sovereignty, solidarity economy, feminist eco-socialism, and transnational anti-capitalist feminism (Ahmed, 2018; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Williams, 2014). All these development paradigms emphasise working class women's agency and livelihoods that challenge society's dominant market-orientated political economy (Federici, 2010; Fraser et al., 2018; Mies and Shiva, 2014; Shiva, 2014).

This chapter is divided into three main sections. It begins with a brief discussion on the major themes from the literature examining women-led agency, alternative livelihood practices, and social reproduction. This part of the chapter builds on the Marxist and feminist political economy theoretical framework laid out in Chapter 2. Then I proceed to examine and discuss the women interviewee responses to the ongoing agrarian and social reproduction crises, which mostly affect black African women in low income households. The main aim is to draw lessons from their experiences, with a particular focus on contributing in contemporary debates on alternative livelihoods and restructuring South Africa's food system. I mostly rely on the interviewees' policy demands for understanding of their visions of future livelihoods and food systems. Thereafter, the chapter concludes with some essential takeaways from this dissertation.

Radical feminist political economy, livelihoods, and social reproduction

Views on women-led livelihood practices in response to the unfolding crisis of social reproduction in the contemporary era are not monolithic. There are different strands of feminist responses, which illuminate varied ideological and political assumptions about the world (Davis, 1981; Fraser, 2012; Weeks, 2007). Chapter 2 provides comprehensive analyses on feminist debates and an analytical framework for this study. I purposively used Marxist and black Feminist political economy lenses to investigate the differentiated gender experiences and power relations in South Africa's agrarian political economy. Emphasis was placed on connecting food system trends at the macro, meso and micro levels. In the following sections, I want to employ this analytical framework in exploring women-led agency within the context of livelihood responses to neoliberalism. The feminist political economy

literature on this topic is dense, and I cannot cover all the themes debated by various authors or social movements (Ahmed, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018; Federici, 2018; Shiva, 2015). But I intend to discuss four selected core themes, which are useful for addressing one of the essential research questions of this study: What can we learn from black African women's responses to the gendered agrarian crisis in South Africa?

The first theme emanating from this literature is the importance of studying and comprehending different spheres or "spaces" of social reproduction (Ferguson, 2020: 126). This study's feminist political economy theoretical framework highlights the varied ways in which social reproduction takes place in social institutions outside markets and industrial workplaces (Davis, 1981; Vogel, 1983; Wainwright, 2014). These spaces include, but are not limited to, households, community-based organisations, churches, and other social institutions providing care labour. This discussion on a wider notion of social reproduction broadens society's conception of work and amplifies the gendered invisible exploitation of women in racialised capitalist societies.

At the same time, it equally directs social reproduction analyses towards the potential for building some level of autonomy and agency within an overarching dominant racialised capitalist system (Ahmed, 2018; Federici, 2016; Miraftab, 2004; Williams, 2018). This agency affords marginalised women some freedom from the structural limits and super exploitation imposed by capitalism. Ferguson summarises this point succinctly: "much life-making takes place in times and spaces beyond the immediate imperatives of capitalist value production, and thus beyond the supervision of bosses and their production quotas and disciplining practices" (Ferguson, 2020: 126). This life-making takes many forms that cut across material and political aspects of women-led agency (Miraftab, 2004: 2). There are several examples across the globe of this "life-making" agency in marginalised low-income communities, which are carrying the externalised costs of contemporary dispossession and super exploitation. The costs include weakened public services, rising income inequality, limited access to land, ecological degradation, gendered socio-economic disparities, poverty, and food insecurity (Fraser et al., 2018; Williams and Sagtar, 2017).

Women-led organisations are leading these forms of subsistence and livelihood strategies operating on the margins of a capitalist-dominated society (Ahmed, 2018; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). Contemporary racial capitalism reproduces gendered inequalities and women (especially from the global South) carry most of the externalised costs mentioned above (Federici, 2010; Ahmed, 2018; Perry, 2011). Some contemporary examples of women-led subsistence livelihood strategies include communal kitchens, localised farming, community-led health care provision, informal retail, and socialised child care (Daskalaki and Fotaki, 2017; Bennie, 2014; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). These co-exists with other formal poverty alleviation measures within communities and households that are derived from states, NGOs, and private sector philanthropic interventions.

Miraftab (2004: 2-3) stresses the importance of not creating a superficial dichotomy between formal and informal livelihood strategies when examining social reproduction in low-income communities. The author explains that a rigid “separation of informal political actions implicitly establishes a bifurcated civil society: an ‘authentic’ one associated with the invited citizenship spaces and an ‘outcast’ and ‘extremist’ one associated with the invented spaces” (Miraftab, 2004: 3). Several researched accounts on households and livelihood strategies in South Africa illustrate this connection between informal and formal sources of livelihoods (Stats SA, 2019b; Scully, 2016; Williams, 2018). These sources include state social transfers, public employment programmes, informal trading, household/community food gardens, sewing, and at times, ad-hoc atypical employment when opportunities arise (See Chapter 6). Williams’ (2018) study on women’s livelihood practices in rural villages of Keiskammahoek in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa elucidates this point. The author concludes that:

With the various livelihood activities, these women are demonstrating that they are surviving and, in many ways, carving out independent spaces for their activities. While they may be excluded from wage employment and the formal economy, the state is providing some basis for basic economic activity. (Williams, 2018: 402)

The life-making livelihood examples cited above cannot be separated from a second prominent theme in Marxist and black feminist political economy literature on women-led livelihoods: preserving and protecting the commons (Ahmed, 2018; Caffentzis and Federici,

2014; Fakier and Cock, 2018). One central feature of racial capitalism is enclosure and privatising global commons such as land, water, food, forests, rivers, public services, and knowledge systems (See Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Nabudere, 2013). This “primitive accumulation” started with the transition towards industrial capitalism in the 16th century and continues in the contemporary era with modern forms of dispossession (Marx, 1867; Harvey, 2003; Moyo, 2011b). The state-private-capital nexus that drives modern primitive accumulation is most prevalent in the global South, especially in South America and Africa. Moyo describes this as a “A new scramble over African lands for agriculture, mining and natural resource extraction, entailing a growing East-West-South rivalry to gain footholds on the entire content” (Moyo, 2011b: 73).

The enclosures of commons discussed in preceding sections are not gender neutral. Women in marginalised low-income communities are most adversely impacted by this form of dispossession, which erodes natural resources essential for women-led subsistence livelihoods (Ahmed, 2018: 28). Ahmed (2018) employs an eco-feminist theoretical framework to detail how indigenous African women’s socio-economic survival strategies are constantly under threat from extractivist capitalist accumulation. She states that “commons and biodiversity are replaced with private property and monoculture. Enclosure has undermined women’s knowledge of traditional crops and influence over food production, their care responsibilities, and the continuation of cultures” (Ahmed, 2018: 26). Males have been the main beneficiaries of this trend, as they obtain increased access to land titles and get drawn into the industrial cash-based economy (Ahmed, 2018; Federici, 2011).

A similar account is advanced in the work of Fakier and Cock (2018) in their analysis on eco-feminist struggles in South Africa. They argue that South African women in working class areas carry the burden of dealing with the country’s deepening ecological crisis (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 51). They describe the gendered impact of water pollution, air quality degradation, and destruction of arable lands. Black women residing in areas exposed to ecological destruction because of extractive capitalism engage in varied social reproduction activities to ameliorate the negative community and household impacts of this political economy (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 51). This gendered impact of ecological destruction also features in literature that examines the enclosure of commons in other regions of the global South like South America

and Asia Pacific (See Shiva, 2010; Shiva, 2015; Fraser et al., 2018). Fraser et al. (2018) specifically point out that “women occupy the frontlines of the present ecological crisis, making up 80% of climate refugees. In the global South, they constitute the majority of the rural workforce and shoulder the burden of social-reproductive labour” (Fraser et al., 2018: 130).

This gendered impact of commons enclosure is not reduced to violence, exploitation, and subjugation in the literature. All the authors emphasise women-led agency that is aimed at resisting the total “commodification” of nature and the commons (Ahmed, 2018: Federici, 2011; Fakier and Cock, 2018). The examples and case studies amplify the resistance through a myriad of responses. Ahmed (2018: 28) traces the gains and struggles of the Green Belt Movements (Kenya) and the Niger Delta Indigenous Women’s groups (Nigeria). In both contexts, women find ways to protect and nurture ecosystems in their daily livelihood practices. They draw on their collective labour, indigenous knowledge, and cultural beliefs about the relationship between nature and human life (Ahmed, 2018: 29).

Similarly, Fakier and Cock (2018) explore the eco-feminist advocacy led by black African women from different working-class communities in South Africa. Their research highlights how women-led activism is at the centre of exposing externalised ecological costs caused by the expansion of mining and other extractive industrial economic activities. The emphasis is on water pollution, land degradation, poor air quality, destruction of livelihoods and social infrastructure. These women organise around demands for ecological justice and engage in alternative livelihood practices such as agro-ecology to amplify different forms of social reproduction (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 51-53). Prominent examples are women leading resistance against titanium mining in a rural Eastern Cape village of Xolobeni, and the women-led community activism in Somkhele in Kwazulu Natal around the negative ecological effects of coal mining. In all these case studies, women are at the centre of protecting and preserving the global commons in their respective communities. This defence cannot be separated from the gendered differences and disparities produced in the contemporary capitalist system. Women rely on natural resources for maintaining livelihoods on the margins of capitalist accumulation. It is, therefore, imperative that they create different strategies to

decommodify and reassert collective control over global commons (Park, White and Julia, 2013; Federici, 2011).

The varied agentic practices cited above lead us to the third pillar of the feminist political economy theoretical framework, which explores women organising, collective labour and solidarity building in social reproduction activities (Ahmed, 2018; Ferguson, 2020; Wainwright, 2014). There are several debates within feminist political economy literature on how to build women-driven political agency and solidarity (Davis, 1983; Federici, 2012; Fraser et al., 2018; Miraftab, 2004). I will not explore all the intricacies in the literature, but rather highlight points relevant for assisting me to address the dissertation's core research questions. The primary one relates to the importance of creating livelihood practices in both "invited" and "invented" spaces (Miraftab, 2004:2). The former refers to formal opportunities created by bureaucratic state and non-state actors (corporations/philanthropic groups) to alleviate poverty, ecological degradation and women's exploitation through sponsored programmes and interventions. Cooperation and working with authorities within the limits of their policy framework are the core value of invited spaces.

Invented spaces are slightly more autonomous because they are initiated by women activists without assistance from bureaucratic authorities in state and non-state organisations. These activist spaces create opportunities for community-led livelihood responses, which often operate outside formal state or private sector policy implementation processes. In some cases, the livelihood responses show the shortcomings of existing policy frameworks and encourage structural reforms (Miraftab, 2004: 1-2).

Evidence from both the literature and interview data illustrates that working class women rely on both formal and informal sources of reproduction. In addition, they engage in varied forms of agentic practices when dealing with the neo-liberal social reproduction crises that cut across the invented and invited space differentiation (See Chapters 4 and 5, Ahmed, 2018; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018). The social reproduction agentic practices include, amongst others, women-led community farming groups, informal trading, participation in local NGOs, lobbying state officials directly, and socialising care labour in communities. This multi-faceted agency cannot be reduced to a superficial invited and invented space

dichotomy, as this limits the different options for alternative livelihood practices. The dichotomy equally overlooks the agency undertaken by women who work within the confines of capitalist accumulation, but still manage to achieve minimal socio-economic and political gains for addressing gendered inequality (Ferguson, 2020: 134). A suitable analytical framework for investigating this agency asserts that feminist struggles take place within different spheres of production and social institutions. It also appreciates the diverse forms of women-led collective labour and solidarity that operate within a hostile market-based society (Wainwright, 2014; Ferguson, 2020).

The fourth radical feminist political economy pillar is related to the principle of recognising diversity in feminist agency mentioned in the previous paragraph. Chapter 2 in this dissertation explored this diversity using Marxist and black feminist political economy. This outlook appreciates that gendered structural inequality across the globe cannot be separated from race and class disparities amongst women (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 1981; Perry, 2011; Fraser et al, 2018). Fraser et al. (2018: 128) caution feminist activists against approaches that over-emphasise universalism and subsequently overlook the context-specific dynamics in women's exploitation across different societies. They state that "even when not intentionally racist, liberal and radical feminists have defined 'sexism' and 'gender issues' in ways that falsely universalise the situation of white middle-class women" (Fraser et al., 2018: 128). The authors remind us that "capitalism has created classes of racialised human beings, whose persons and work are devalued and subject to expropriation. A feminism that is truly anti-racist and anti-imperialist must be anti-capitalist as well" (Fraser et al., 2018: 128)

This observation is important because it facilitates transnational feminist organising around alternative livelihoods and anti-capitalist struggles (Perry, 2011: 31-32). Additionally, it helps us comprehend the structural position of the women interviewees in the global and domestic racial capitalist social order. Their livelihoods, agentic practices and forms of organising are significantly shaped by underlying race, class and cultural dynamics that co-exist with gender disparities (Ahmed, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018, Perry, 2011, Shiva, 2015). This connection between gender differentiation, race, class, and culture comes out strongly in household food security analysis in South Africa. It is also discussed in studies on structural inequalities within the broader South African agrarian political economy (Centre for Women's Global Leadership

[CWGL], 2011; Walker, 2002; O’Laughlin, 2007; Oxfam, 2014; SANHNES, 2014; Stats SA, 2019b).

Overall, this summation of essential arguments advanced in discourses on Marxist and black feminist political economy points to several lessons for discussing women-led livelihood and organising agency in this dissertation. The primary lesson is understanding and investigating social reproduction in different spheres, spaces, and social institutions. This broadens labour analyses and allows us to appreciate different “life-making” practices that exist within and outside capitalism. An additional takeaway is locating black African women’s working-class advocacy within the context of protecting global commons. The case studies cited in the discussion from the South African and African contexts elevate how women-led activities in social reproduction are dependent on global commons. It is, therefore, important to merge women’s livelihood agency with discussions on ecological justice, especially in relation to the food-water-energy nexus.

Finally, researchers studying agentic practices must factor in the myriad forms of collective organising and solidarity led by working class women across the globe. It is equally important to consider structural diversity amongst women centred on race, class, culture and nationality. These differences shape agency and experiences of gendered disparities across communities in several ways. The sections that follow employ these lessons in examining agentic practices of the women interviewees in this study. The main aim in the current study was to comprehend how the participants’ livelihood practices contributed to contemporary debates about alternative livelihoods and food systems.

Abafazi bayazbambela: women-led agency and social reproduction

Life-making and varied spaces of social reproduction

Chapters 5 and 6 described how the women interviewees from Ermelo contend with household poverty, insufficient income, limited access to public goods, weak state responsiveness and ecological degradation. Certain aspects of their experiences are like those of women discussed in case studies explored in previous sections (see Ahmed, 2018; Fakier

and Cock, 2018). They carry the externalised social reproduction costs associated with an extractive capitalist system, which produces gendered socio-economic and ecological inequalities. And they must deal with state authorities who downplay gender disparities and power relations in shaping development policies. An additional shared experience is that their social reproduction activities are mostly undertaken on the margins of formal capitalist economic activities. Nevertheless, several women interviewees in this study emphasise their collective will and autonomy in leading community responses to socio-economic challenges.

This point was highlighted in both the individual and focus group interviews, with a particular emphasis on black working-class women's resilience and abilities to not be over-reliant on male counterparts or the state. Government social transfers, assistance from large (national) formalised non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and labour from male counterparts play a role in community social reproduction. But the women interviewees also engage in livelihood activities that are initiated and governed without the participation of state authorities, large NGOs, or men. This latter agency is similar to the "invented" spaces description used in Miraftab (2004) and Williams's (2018) work. The Zulu phrase *abafazi bayazbambela* was used frequently in these discussions.¹⁴ It basically means that women engage in some livelihood practices independently without significant assistance from men, non-state actors or government authorities. A participant summarised this powerful agentic phrase in the following way:

Black African women in poor households from Ermelo are very resilient, hardworking and industrious. They face significant challenges in both their households and communities such as hunger, joblessness, lack of basic services and violence. But look around, there are several livelihood practices initiated by these women without support from the state, private companies, and men. The subsistence farming is a good example, and it is led by women doing it for themselves. We have no choice because poverty and hunger hits women the hardest! So, we are standing up and showing everyone that Ermelo women can create autonomous livelihood sources. (Interview 16, 16 November 2017, Ermelo)

¹⁴ The direct translation in English is 'women hold their own'.

The livelihood activity take places in different spheres or spaces of social reproduction in the local state. It is not limited to a single institution and straddles both the formal and informal spheres in very dynamic ways. The literature on analysing social reproduction from a feminist political economy perspective provides concrete examples of varied working class women-led agency in different geographic contexts across the globe (Ahmed, 2018; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018). This agency takes place at different levels of state governance and mostly operates outside formal markets (Daskalaki and Fotaki, 2017; Bennie, 2014; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014). The interviewees in this study engage in livelihood practices in different social institutions which include the household, community gardens, local NGOs, and occasional ad-hoc employment on farms when opportunities arise. This diversity was captured in the following focus group discussion response:

We work and reproduce livelihoods in different places. Some of us have food gardens and breed chickens in our homes. Sewing and baking are equally important livelihood sources in households. All these activities are important for household consumption and earning some little income. Other women only farm in communal gardens and work together to get income when they produce enough for household consumption and selling food to community members. There is also little income derived from those who get ad-hoc employment on farms for a short time span during harvesting periods. (Focus group 2, 23 February 2018, Ermelo)

The statement above elucidates the multiple livelihood sources and different spaces where social reproduction takes place. But household food gardens featured prominently in the interviews as an important livelihood source. Black African working-class women engage in subsistence farming in their home to supplement food obtained from formal and informal retailers. They cannot afford to obtain all essential food basket items from shops because of escalating food prices over the past decade (NAMC, 2017: 1-2). Food inflation has exceeded the general Consumer Price Index (CPI) because of structural market failures within the agrarian political economy and ecological factors such as droughts (Makhaya and Roberts, 2013; BFAP, 2019). South Africa's food inflation reached 6% by December 2020 while general CPI was 3% (Stats SA, 2021). The discussion in Chapter 6 highlighted how this impacts working class households, especially those headed by women. Women participants responded to this gendered food insecurity through their household farming as expressed by one interviewee:

It is impossible for women who reside in rural, peri-urban and townships areas to obtain all their household food items from formal and informal retailers. We do not have enough household income and we all know that food is very expensive these days. I also worry about the quality of food because some shops keep their food items for very long periods. A wise and hardworking black woman starts her own garden to cushion a household against high prices and minimise food nutrition health risks (Interview, 12, 26 July 2017, Ermelo).

The active farming within households headed by women is a national trend, which highlights the agentic livelihood practices of black African working class women. Data from Stats SA (2019: 10) indicates that more women-headed households engage in subsistence farming than male headed households. The trend is also noted in other literature on community subsistence farming in Africa and the global South (Ahmed, 2018; Tsikata, 2015; Oxfam, 2019). An African regional study conducted by the UN Food Agricultural Organisation (FAO) on gender dynamics in agri-food systems across 40 countries found that most African “women are also involved in household food security and nutrition through the education and care of children, the preparation of safe and nutritious meals, and the diversification of household food intake through their home garden and income” (FAO, 2018: 3).

Women’s knowledge on how to engage in household subsistence farming is derived from a variety of sources. The interviewees in this study emphasised the knowledge they obtained from their socio-economic and historical cultural backgrounds. This embedded knowledge is also cited in Chapter 3, which emphasises black African women’s leadership role in agricultural production within homesteads during pre-colonial eras (Bradford, 2000: 86-87). This continued during colonialism and apartheid, albeit in a different form, as result of land dispossession and structural changes in South Africa’s political economy (Ntantala, 1958; Walker, 1982). This historical knowledge has been preserved in the contemporary era, even with increasing migration to peri-urban and urban areas. A participant expressed how this indigenous knowledge empowers women:

None of the women in this community attended specialised farming or agricultural schools. But we know how to grow crops, breed livestock and use natural resources sustainably. This

knowledge comes from our family and cultural practices. We grew up farming with our mothers and grandmothers. We farmed in the family or community fields in the early hours of each morning. This tradition continues in our extended family homesteads in rural areas. I am surprised when people ask me who taught us how to produce crops. We come from families with a deep peasant history and cultural tradition led by women. (Interview 16, 16 November 2017, Ermelo)

Walker (1982) and Ntantala (1958) discuss how this knowledge on agrarian livelihoods played an essential role in assisting black African women to deal with the negative socio-economic effects of colonial and apartheid political economy restructuring. Women's leading role in developing historic and contemporary indigenous knowledge of food production is not a unique South African trend. It also features in the literature on transforming agri-food systems in other countries across Asia, Africa, and South America (Ahmed, 2018; Nabudere, 2013; Shiva, 1988). This literature discusses the importance of indigenous agricultural knowledge in social reproduction over different generations. Nabudere (2011: 143) captures this point by stating that indigenous food production systems "have enabled millions of people to subsist for thousands of years in some of the most hostile environments all over the world". Shiva (1988: 198) provides a gendered perspective on the value of using indigenous farming methods and women's central role. According to Shiva (1988:101):

Women were the world's original food producers and continue to be central to food production systems in the Third World in terms of the work they do in the food chain. In agriculture - as in other sciences and areas of economic activity, women's scientific and economic contribution has been obscured by the male writing of history and anthropology, and by the use of the market and profits as a patriarchal base for the evaluation of the significance of technologies.

Shiva (1988) and Nabudere's (2011) arguments are important for highlighting the following points related to understanding black African women's household agentic practices in South Africa's agrarian political economy. Firstly, women's knowledge contribution in building an equitable global food system, which can be preserved for future generations and social reproduction, is largely overlooked or perceived to be backward in public policymaking. But this market-orientated productivist policy bias has not destroyed indigenous food production

systems in communities (Ahmed, 2018; Shiva, 1988; Nabudere, 2013). Several studies from rural and peri urban areas in South Africa detail how women still use indigenous methods in household food and community gardens (COPAC, 2014; Masekoameng and Molotja, 2019). An interviewee provided an example of using organic methods in her household food garden:

We do not have money to buy fertiliser and all the inputs used in the big farms. So, our culture, history and skills from our peasant backgrounds are valuable in developing alternative food production methods. One of these is using different forms of waste materials and animal manure in our gardens. This works well and is less costly than trying to buy fertiliser in shops. I normally use household waste or manure from the various forms of livestock that you see running around our community. Women around Ermelo do not have money or enough support. But we are equipped with enough knowledge and skills on how to make things work under these difficult circumstances, especially food production in home gardens. (Interview 18, 20 November 2017, Ermelo)

Secondly, this evidence also questions statements uttered by government officials regarding what they perceive as citizens insufficient knowledge on maintaining household and communal food gardens. Chapter 4 explained that the theme of capacitating black women to produce food efficiently for both households and markets featured prominently in discussions with local government officials. This was particularly emphasised when discussing the need to convert women subsistence farmers into competitive producers for export and domestic markets.

Yet, data obtained from the interviewees illustrates the women have sufficient knowledge on small-scale subsistence food production and nutritional dimensions of household food security (Chapter 6 in this dissertation). This knowledge might not meet market-orientated criteria for efficiency and a productivist agrarian development policy framework but understanding that this knowledge exists and is practised is essential for understanding how women-led food production livelihoods operate in varied low-income communities. The focus group discussion highlighted this point:

Government officials only interact us with us once or twice year, but they come with a wrong attitude because they think we know very little about farming. This is very irritating because they do not understand the full picture because we produce food in different spaces. They must come and see how we are managing our food production, without a lot of financial resources or sophisticated technological resources used by white farmers on their big land. Women know how to produce food using different methods and these skills are innate amongst black African women with our socio-economic and cultural background. These skills are a source of life and power in the community. There are no jobs, but we are still manging to put some food on the table for our children. (Focus group 1, 15th of November 2017, Ermelo)

The discussion on women's livelihood agency, indigenous knowledge, and food production, is not limited to households. As argued earlier, it is equally employed in other "life-making" spaces or social institutions. The next sections explore the women's agentic practices in communal food gardens to reveal additional dimensions of their livelihood practices. The interviewees are unemployed, but they argue that their work is essential for maintaining both household and community livelihoods. This theme on women's labour came out strongly when discussing food production, distribution, and governance within communal food gardens. Interviewees did not limit their conception of labour or work to exchange value. But rather amplified how their labour contributes to multiple dimensions of human development such as food security, knowledge sharing, social security, health, and building of solidarity amongst women within the community. The value of the women's labour in poverty alleviation and decreasing community food insecurity was expressed as follows:

We do not have formal jobs in the mines, Transnet, government or farms. But the women of Ermelo work to protect their families and communities from hunger, especially the young children and sickly old citizens. The home and community gardens are very important because there is no life or happiness without food in households. You can see that poverty and unemployment are significant challenges in this community. But the women's work is helping government to increase household food security and we are not getting paid for it. People normally think that the jobless citizens in our communities just sit around and wait for government to do everything for them. These people have not seen the livelihood impact and contribution of a black African women's labour in low-income communities, especially fighting

hunger through labour in household and community gardens. (Interview, 12, 26 July 2017, Ermelo)

The livelihood impact cited in the interviewee response goes beyond ensuring food security within homes and communities. Women in this study also use their collective food gardening as a means to teach and share knowledge on subsistence farming. This knowledge sharing is derived from their historical backgrounds (as discussed earlier) and recent experiences of food production in the community. The value of labour in communal gardens has an additional use value, which transcends meeting basic human survivalist needs. Marxist feminist literature points to several examples of working class women using labour in communities for a variety of human development purposes that transcend formal labour market spheres and commodification (Ahmed, 2018; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018; Shiva, 1988). A participant expressed her appreciation and significance of learning from others through collective labour:

I have some knowledge on how to farm and grow food in a garden. But I have learnt a lot from the other women who work in this community garden. They have provided me with varied ecological and food growing life lessons. It is amazing to come across women who are willing to share their knowledge with others. I am especially grateful to the few older strong women who work with us. Their historical knowledge is incredible and I do not know how they manage to still come here given their old age. They understand which food types grow well in this area during different seasons and how to nurture them. This is free training and you learn through working with other women. (Interview 3, 15 July 2017, Ermelo)

Wainwright (2014: 74) highlights the importance of this type of solidarity community work. The author advances an argument for transitioning “from labour as a commodity to labour as a common”. The latter helps society appreciate labour as a shared community asset, which can be employed for more equitable social reproduction (Wainwright, 2014: 74). The author summarises this paradigm shift in the following way: “the perspective of labour as a commons opens up ways of seeing and understanding the wider potential of existing practices in the solidarity economy in achieving transformative gains in the broader social, public and private economy” (Wainwright, 2014: 77).

Collective labour in the communal food gardens gives us some insights into the proposition advanced by Wainwright (2014). Such labour serves as a means for linking the women's production with other black African working class women in the informal food economy value chain. This potential for linkages is important for initiating discussions on how to reconfigure food systems within local states. Interviewee responses from this study illustrate that respondents perceive their labour as a mechanism for assisting other women in informal food markets.

Our work is not only helping us and the other impoverished families in the community to fight hunger. Sometimes things go well and we produce enough to help the ladies who sell food at the taxi ranks and other public spaces in town. We only ask them for a small amount of money in exchange for the produce we give them. This amount depends on the vegetables they buying and how many of them they want. We normally charge them R20 for a bag of cabbages, R20 for potatoes and R15 for the special spicy spinach grown here in Ermelo. I doubt these women who sell at taxi ranks can afford to buy all their food ingredients from the formal retailers because of food prices. We are helping them by providing an additional option, especially when they experience financial difficulties. Our work is building the community. (Interview 4, 15 July 2017, Ermelo)

The mainstream agrarian development policy approach focuses on improving residents access to formal food markets, without considering labour and “life-making” on the margins of capitalist agro-food structures described in the interview response (Kirsten, 2006; DAFF, 2014; Sihlobo and Kirsten, 2018). This policy framework emphasises national food security and efficiency in formal markets without paying sufficient attention to household distribution and the informal food economy (Skinner and Haysom, 2016: 15). This omission is significant because survey data estimates that over 70% of households in low-income township communities obtain some essential food items from informal retailers (PLAAS, 2020). The finding is echoed in other studies, which highlight the importance of the informal economy in maintaining community and household food security in South African working-class areas (Battersby, Marshak and Mngqibisa, 2016; Skinner and Haysom, 2016; Petersen and Charman, 2018; Pereira, 2014).

Wegerif's (2020) paper on South Africa's Covid-19 food security response highlights that the "informal food sector still accounts for 40 to 50% of sales and is worth around R360 billion (US\$20 billion) a year. It employs more people than the formal food and grocery sector" (Wegerif, 2020: 797). Data indicates that 2 921 000 South Africans are employed in the informal economy and there are 1.8 million enterprises in the sector (CDE, 2020: 2). Most of the entrepreneurs operate businesses in the food economy such as spaza shops, street food vendors and food outlets (CDE, 2020; IEJ, 2018). The interview responses presented in Chapter 5 illustrate how the women rely on these enterprises for household food security. But some of them equally participate in the supply side through selling vegetables (as illustrated above), sewing clothes, baking, and selling chickens which they breed. A participant who has a food garden and sells chickens explained how she manages this livelihood source:

I have been breeding and selling chickens from my house for many years. Even my little ones know how to manage this livelihood source. I buy the feed from Alzu and ensure that my chickens and the chicks are well fed. But I really struggle to obtain the 'special medicine' that is used to make the chickens grow stronger and faster. It is very expensive, and I cannot afford it because I have other household priorities. My chickens still grow well because I keep them warm, and they receive chicken feed regularly. People buy chickens from me all the time and they are surprised that I keep most of the chickens in the house. The only assistance I need is for someone to help me build a proper chicken cage and get access to the special medicine so they can grow quicker. Then I can make real money! (interview 5, 15 July 2017, Ermelo)

The agentic activities discussed in preceding sections highlight several points for comprehending the spaces where the women's social reproduction work takes place. They also reveal important findings, which illuminate how the women conceptualise their social reproduction work and its socio-economic impact in the community. The women engage in varied livelihood activities, but subsistence farming featured prominently during the interviews. It takes place within households and communal gardens, which operate outside formal food systems or markets. Women's labour is essential for reproducing this food production and it is not understood when viewed from within a limited commodified paradigm. Interviewee participants emphasised the broader poverty alleviation impact of

their subsistence farming for households within communities. In addition, they perceived their work in the food gardens as a source of building community links around active citizenry aimed at creating livelihood options for women. This deeper understanding of labour value is articulated in a variety of feminist political economy literature sources (Ahmed, 2018; Fraser et al., 2018; Federici, 2018; Shiva, 2015).

The emphasis on indigenous knowledge sharing is also significant for understanding the women's agentic practices. It highlights how indigenous knowledge plays a significant role in shaping social reproduction activities within communities. The use of this historical and cultural knowledge challenges assertions in mainstream policymaking about working class women's incapacity to maintain food systems. This policy outlook perceives subsistence farming as unproductive while elevating "commercial agriculture as real agriculture" (Greenberg, 2015; Cousins, 2007: 7). It has substantial class and gender implications because black African women constitute most subsistence farmers in South Africa (CWGL, 2011; Hart and Aliber, 2012; Walker, 2002; Stats SA, 2016; Stats SA, 2019a). The women do not reject the need for further training or learning in farming. But they point out that this training must accommodate their pre-existing skill and livelihood practices obtained from intergenerational knowledge transfers.

An additional takeaway is the emphasis on solidaristic livelihood practices in spaces of social reproduction. Interviewee responses cited in preceding sections illustrate how women learn from each other's farming livelihood practices within communal gardens. The sharing of resources is not limited to knowledge. They also share garden tools, inputs and crop produce through their autonomous governance systems. Wittman's (2009: 806) conception of "agrarian citizenship" amplifies the active agency and control undertaken by residents in shaping how natural, ecological, and material resources are used in food systems. This agency takes many forms and requires some level of collective citizenship. A woman interviewee from one of the communal gardens explains their collective agrarian citizenship:

The women from our garden try to maintain a fair and orderly system of sharing seeds, tools, water, income and crops. This governance system only succeeds when we all comply with the rules. It is also about teaching everyone that farming in our garden is about serving the groups

and community interests. We learn from each other, promote trust, cooperation, and mutual accountability. This does not mean that everything is perfect. Conflict is normal in all places or organisations where humans attempt to work together. It is mainly caused by some members not following the rules or just a simple misunderstanding. But we always eventually find a solution during our weekly meetings where we discuss and address issues. (Interview 6, 18 July 2017, Ermelo)

Wittman's (2009) notion of "agrarian citizenship" is not limited to understanding collective agency in response to socio-economic challenges. It also places primacy on developing political agency and demands directed towards improving social reproduction in rural and peri-urban areas. The author argues that the "ability of a diverse array of rural actors to articulate and act on political demands constitutes an active citizenship that provides the foundation for improved access to material and ecological resources" (Wittman, 2009: 811). The following sections examine the interviewees' agrarian citizenship through the lens of political agency and policy demands. I aim to understand the women's demands within broader food system and social reproduction political economy debates. Thus, the discussion explores participants' views on food systems within the context of a food-water-energy livelihood nexus. This approach builds on the earlier sections of the chapter, which explored connections between feminist policy economy and access to global commons (Ahmed, 2018; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Shiva, 2018).

Women, agrarian citizenship and global commons

State intervention and support

Most women interviewees were not members of political parties, but three of the participants stated that they were active in the African National Congress (ANC). All the women participants are affiliated to the Agricultural Development Committee (ADC), which is a sub-structure of a local NGO called Kuthula. Chapter 4 provided a detailed account of Kuthula's activism that largely focuses on small-scale farmer support and the food-water-energy nexus. Women make up most of the membership in both NGOs. The interviewees' agrarian citizenship, expressed through their collective demands, is not limited to participation in ADC

meetings. They also organise meetings and discussions about their communal social reproduction challenges in households, informal women-led street committees, and communal gardens. These varied forms of agrarian citizenship are essential for building solidarity and community-led training.

We do not need to be members of a political party to address our community socio-economic challenges. There are different ways of coming together to discuss problems and taking decisions that will resolve issues through collective action. We all learn from our participation in Khuthala and our own meetings in houses, community gardens and women's street committees. Then we use this knowledge to approach and engage government for assistance. We equally employ the knowledge to engage in our own women-led activities that help us fight household and community hunger. These structures also build a culture of trust and support amongst members, which is very important for us impoverished people. We are facing unemployment, poverty, hunger, crime, and violence. No women can deal with the above-mentioned issues individually, especially these days when you find households led by women who survive on their own. But these socio-economic challenges can be resolved if government listens to our policy demands. (Interview 8, 18 July 2017, Ermelo)

I explored the interviewees policy demands for addressing pertinent socio-economic challenges in both individual and focus group interviews. One of the major themes was state support for the women's small-scale farming and its links to choices about future livelihood options. The women value farming and see it as a sustainable long-term livelihood source if government addresses their major socio-economic demands. Their notions about future work and development are anchored around women-led small-scale farming. This point was amplified in a discussion on local state intervention to support community socio-economic development:

The government officials always speak about organising wage employment for residents in the mines or farms around here. Our community members have been waiting for employment for years now. But not everyone wants to work in formal wage employment, especially the mines or farms. Most males who are employed in the coal mines earn little money and they eventually get sick. The few women who get a chance to work (part-time) on farms during different harvesting periods also receive low wages and farm managers treat them badly. The

future is in our own household and community farming. The women in this group do not want the exploitation, bad health or mental stress that accompanies mine or farm employment. Government needs to realise that our future livelihood, work, and well-being depends on the success of these food gardens. They must support us to develop this livelihood source. (Focus group 1, 15 November 2017, Ermelo)

This response raises some interesting policy considerations, which question existing paradigms on how to approach local economic development (LED). The orthodox LED policy paradigm presents wage employment and entrepreneurship in formal sectors as the panacea for systemic community socio-economic challenges. This is expressed in the emphasis on public employment programmes, mining, agriculture, and Transnet in the municipal integrated development plans employment strategies (Msukaligwa IDP, 2016; Msukaligwa IDP, 2019). The outlook is prevalent throughout the country and is codified in different socio-economic development policies. Yet evidence suggests that many people excluded from the formal political economy are nevertheless engaging in varied forms of self-employment and entrepreneurial activities in informal sectors (Dooms, 2020; Fourie, 2018; Scully, 2016).

The women interviewees clear preference for government supporting their existing small-scale farming instead of pushing them towards formal wage employment in mining or agriculture, amplifies these findings. More importantly, it suggests that policymakers need to consider multipronged LED pathways that accommodate employment and livelihoods in different spheres of social reproduction. This approach is crucial for addressing systemic socio-economic inequalities in society, and equally conducive for supporting women-led livelihood activities that fall outside formal markets or industrial production sites (Davis, 1981; Ferguson, 2020; Vogel, 1983; Wainwright, 2014). Data on informal economy trends in post-apartheid South Africa illustrate that black African working-class women constitute the majority in the informal economy. They mostly participate in the informal food economy as street vendors who sell vegetables or cooked food to different community members (Rogan and Alfes, 2019; WIEGO, 2021). Local economic development policy frameworks largely overlook women-led informal food economic activity driven by black African women subsistence farmers and street vendors. This subsequently leads to black African working-class women receiving minimal assistance from government. Several interviewees called on

the local state to provide more support, especially in the areas of procurement, infrastructure, and inputs.

Government runs several food security programmes in different schools, hospitals, and social welfare centres. But we are not sure where they get the basic food items to prepare the meals. You always hear about tenders and other complicated laws that allow big food business suppliers to participate in the government's interventions. They ignore people from this community who are farming and produce crops like our healthy local spinach. We know that we cannot supply all the basic food items for government's nutrition programmes, but the local state must at least procure some food items from us. Imagine if some hospitals and schools got crops from the women in this area. Our farming would grow, and the community would benefit because more income will be placed in women's hands. (Interview 6, 16 July 2017, Ermelo)

The procurement challenge for small-scale black African subsistence and commercial women farmers is prevalent throughout the country (Lemke et al., 2012; Makhetha and Hart, 2018; Rousell and Kesselman, 2021). Food markets are controlled by large corporate retailers and agro-food processors which dominate both public and private sector procurement value chains (Greenberg, 2015; Makhaya and Roberts, 2013; Mtero, 2012). Case studies undertaken in different South African communities emphasise the importance of local community food markets for women farmers that operate through direct sales (Cousins et al, 2018; Lemke et al., 2012). Civil society groups have echoed the interviewees demands on transforming public procurement regulations and policies to facilitate greater access for small scale farmers, who are largely women (Andrews, 2019; SAFSC, 2018; Jara, 2019)

Similar demands were articulated regarding the state's role in providing additional infrastructure and farming inputs

We need more seeds to grow our subsistence farming and make significant income for our households. Government tries to provide us with some seeds, but this is not sufficient because we want to go far with this thing. And we have raised several complaints about the number of seeds we receive. In addition, infrastructure such as fencing is required to protect our crops from the animals that destroy them. Many households have animals, and they just roam

around without proper supervision. So, it would be helpful if government helped us construct proper fencing in our communal gardens. (Interview 6, 16 July 2017, Ermelo)

The seed provision demand is also expressed in other civil society policy advocacy documents in South Africa. But it goes beyond the advocacy for increased provision and highlights the need for alternative practices such as seed saving, developing seed banks and promoting indigenous seed protection methods (Andrews, 2019; Bennie and Satgoor, 2018; COPAC, 2014; Jara, 2019; SAFSC, 2018). The interviewees in this study did not mention or discuss any of the above-mentioned alternative seed management interventions. Rather, emphasis was placed on obtaining more seeds from government and highlighting how costly they are in shops. As stated in Chapter 4, some of the women use their grant money to buy seeds and they must contend with high prices in food system markets. Thus, their demands on seed provision are anchored on state assistance and regulation over seed prices in varied retailers (Focus group 1, 15 November 2017, Ermelo).

An additional demand raised in the interviews was access to land, especially municipal owned land for farming. Several interviewees highlighted that their home and communal gardens are useful but too small for growing their food production. They believe that the local state should provide them with additional land:

I think we can develop our communal farming if we get access to more land. There is plenty of unused land in the municipality and the government should hand it over to the women farmers. Everyone has enough land to farm except us. Many people mistakenly think that only women in deep rural areas need land to farm. They forget that we also need more land to grow our food production and improve our livelihoods. (Interview 16, 16 November 2017, Ermelo)

The literature on gender and agrarian reform in South Africa amplifies the general need for improving black African women's access to land. It mostly discusses gendered land redistribution and access within the context of rural geographic areas, where land access is determined through meso level institutions such as traditional authority structures, Community Property Associations and community trusts. These authors mainly discuss the role of customary laws and governance in perpetuating structural gendered land inequalities

(Claassens, 2014; Jacobs, 2004; Makhetha and Hart, 2018; Walker, 2002). This evidence is useful for ongoing policy reforms around land use, tenure and redistribution in the former homelands. But it largely omits the gendered aspects of land tenure in peri-urban and urban areas (Mabasa, 2021; Delius and Beinart, 2021; Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019). Msukaligwa municipality is mostly rural, but the respondents from this study reside in Ermelo which is a peri-urban area. The response cited in the interviewee excerpts in preceding sections elucidate the importance of adopting a calibrated land access approach, which accommodates the land needs of women in peri-urban and urban areas.

This proposal cannot be separated from spatial development debates raised throughout this dissertation and the many recommendations from land and agrarian policy literature, which call for a dedicated focus on peri-urban and urban land tenure reforms (Beinart, Delius and Hay, 2017; Kepe and Hall, 2016; Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019). Gendered structural inequalities in land power relations have a significant impact on community and food insecurity across different localities in post-apartheid South Africa (Cousins et al., 2018; Chitja et al., 2010; Lemke et al., 2012). Land demand from women is increasing in different communities because land plays an essential role in household livelihood strategies alongside state social transfers, ad-hoc employment, and remittances (Cousins et al., 2018). Thus, efforts aimed at ameliorating gender disparities in both the agro-food system and broader agrarian political economy must dedicate sufficient attention to the land question (Cousins et al., 2018; Njobe and Kaaria, 2015; Rousell and Kesselman, 2021).

The final demand around state intervention is a need for improved extension services at the municipal level. Interviewees emphasised that they have indigenous farming knowledge which assists them with maintaining their livelihoods. However, they want this knowledge to be complemented with advisory services from extension officers. Chapter 4 discussed the extension service policy implementation shortfalls at both national and local state levels. All these relate to macro-policy shifts that occurred since 1994, which have had negative effects on state support services in agriculture (Hall and Aliber, 2010; Aliber and Hall, 2012; Satge, 2020). The women interviewees expressed several concerns that relate to gender and state responsiveness in their interviews. They demand that government improves agricultural

extension services at the municipal level to address their long-standing grievances, as expressed in the following statement:

The extension officers do not provide us with the adequate support and sometimes long periods can pass without seeing them. And sometimes you get a sense that they do not take us seriously because we are women farmers. The local state should increase the number of extension officers because they always tell us that they cannot provide adequate support as a result of high farmer numbers. The apartheid state used to support farmers in several ways, and we deserve the same treatment from our government. (Focus group 1, 15 November 2017, Ermelo)

Previous chapters and sections explored the extension service system weakness within the wider context of inadequate state support for farmers in the post-apartheid era. This trend has both institutional and monetary dimensions, which have more adverse socio-economic impacts on small scale commercial and subsistence farmers than mainstream farmers (Liebenberg, 2015; Raidimi, and Kabiti, 2017; Satge, 2020). The weak state support has gendered effects in the agrarian political economy because black African women constitute the majority of small-scale subsistence farmers, and they receive less support than their male counterparts (Walker, 2002; Hart, 2008; Stats SA, 2019b). Criticisms in agrarian political economy literature that explore post-apartheid state intervention shortcomings do not factor in gender disparities sufficiently.

Agrarian political economy discussions largely pivot around neo-liberal productivist agricultural paradigms and the neo-Marxian agrarian political economy responses (Cousins, 2019; Hall, 2011; Greenberg, 2015; Sihlobo and Kirsten, 2018; Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009). This literature privileges market factors, transforming racial ownership patterns and structural class inequalities associated with state intervention in South Africa's post-apartheid agrarian structure. I have purposefully focused on how black African working-class women experience state failures in agriculture to elevate the gendered implications throughout this dissertation. This includes examining how women respond to state failure at the local level through their myriad livelihood subsistence strategies. Ahmed (2018) describes this agency as a response to "capitalist violence against African indigenous women" (Ahmed, 2018: 23).

In summary, interviewee demands on state intervention and responsiveness highlight several important lessons emerging from this dissertation. Firstly, general patterns of structural de-agrarianisation in the country have not totally obliterated subsistence farming as an important livelihood source in working class households (Cousins et al., 2018; Jacobs, 2004; Mtero, 2012; Rousell and Kesselman, 2021). It still plays a significant role in alleviating food insecurity and poverty, even though farming is supplemented by other sources of income in households as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. More importantly, women in low-income communities still demand support from the state in pursuing subsistence farming in household and community gardens, viewing this support as crucial for maintaining social reproduction and deriving more income from crop production or trade. This can only be realised if the local state addresses their long-standing socio-economic demands.

Secondly, food security policy interventions in working class areas must not be restricted to formal agro-food system markets and value chains (Battersby, Marshak and Mngqibisa, 2016; Wegerif, 2020). The evidence presented in Chapters 5 and 6, and previous sections, illustrates that informal subsistence farming and food trade are equally important for enhancing food security in communities. These livelihood practices take place on the margins of capitalist accumulation with minimal state support. Black African working-class women play a leading role in initiating and running these informal food value chains. However, this contribution to food security and social reproduction is largely overlooked in formalised food security programmes. Thus, it is imperative to examine food system and security trends in different spheres or institutions of social reproduction.

Thirdly, land is a central component of enhancing and supporting localised food security. Women interviewees in this study raised the land access issue sharply because it impacts their abilities to produce crops and increase their production. Their demands emphasised a gendered perspective on land access, which takes the discourse beyond the dominant focus on rural women's land rights in former homelands. Their demands also broaden the gendered land access policy discourse to accommodate land needs in peri-urban and urban areas as well. This finding is important because urbanisation is increasing in South Africa, with over 60% of citizens residing in urban areas. Land tenure in these locations is very complex and

precarious because most black African citizens in urban and peri-urban areas hold tenure rights that fall outside the legislated mechanisms for registering land. The Presidential Land Advisory report estimates that close to 31 million South Africans hold informal land tenure rights, and existing legislation has not protected these citizens' tenure sufficiently (Beinart, Delius and Hay, 2017; Mabasa, 2021; Presidential Advisory Panel on Land Reform and Agriculture, 2019). The interviewees demand for land resonates with broader women-led advocacy around increased land access in localities outside the rural former homelands. Their demands add a strong gender dimension that is not discussed adequately in the generic peri-urban and urban land tenure governance debates.

Fourthly, state failures informing the interviewees demands cannot be separated from structural agrarian political economy shifts discussed throughout this dissertation. The transition to a neo-liberal agro-food model has had significant impacts on the policy orientation, capabilities, and interventions of South Africa's post-apartheid state (Greenberg, 2015; Hall, 2011; Vink and Van Rooyen, 2009). Previous chapters detailed the transition's impacts on state support policy mechanisms in agriculture, especially for farmers. Therefore, interviewee complaints about inadequate seeds, land and corporate dominated public procurement practices must be examined within this larger macro-structural trend. The subsequent demands emanating from these grievances are primarily directed towards the local state because it is at the coalface of socio-economic support and service delivery. But local governments abilities to respond to these demands is, and will continue to be, shaped by the broader policy choices developed at the national and provincial levels.

Fifthly, demands raised in the interview responses amplify themes discussed in Marxist and black feminist political economy literature (Ahmed, 2018; Federici, 2016; Miraftab, 2004; Williams, 2018). They illustrate that subsistence livelihoods are not only crucial for survival, they also create opportunities for reasserting socio-economic agency for women excluded (structurally) from formal economic participation in capitalist markets. Furthermore, these livelihood strategies facilitate varied forms of organising and communal coordination in creating localised social reproduction strategies. Agency and livelihood making are crucial for understanding how women cope with the gendered agrarian crisis in South Africa. This dissertation has illustrated the myriad ways in which women respond to food insecurity in

households and communities. It shifts the analysis from the focus on passive poverty stricken communities with no agency to one that appreciates that working class citizens exercise remarkable levels of active citizenship. They use their minimal monetary resources and indigenous knowledge to carve out some autonomous spaces for improving conditions of social reproduction. Turner et al. (2020: 4-5) emphasise the importance of studying “everyday agency” using the following words: “looking at the everyday creativity, actions and tactics people employ to ensure their survival, and analysing how they craft resilient food systems while pursuing lives they value, may also point to gaps in the architecture of control exercised by the neoliberal food regime” (Turner et al., 2020: 5).

These five major lessons on the relationship between the interviewees demands and state intervention are important for addressing the dissertations main questions. They also provide some insights into the women’s vision about future socio-economic development pathways. But these demands are not limited to land, public procurement, infrastructure and informal economy themes; interviewees also raised demands around global commons such as water and energy. The next section explores these demands within the broader context of a food-water-energy nexus using both the interview data and documented literature sources.

Global commons and the food-water-energy nexus

Chapter 6 provided a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the water and energy challenges encountered by the interviewees. It further related these trends to documented literature on basic service access and quality in Mpumalanga. Then the chapter examined how service access and quality impact food security because water and energy are essential for understanding hunger in communities (Chitja et al., 2010; Bennie and Satgoor, 2018; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Rousell and Kesselman, 2021). In the following sections, I want to shift the discussion to the women’s demands around the food-water-energy nexus. This discussion will examine the extent to which the interviewees’ demands provide alternative propositions for restructuring the food-water-energy nexus. It will commence with a discussion on demands related to improving the quality and access to water.

Interviewees in the study access water from different sources which require additional labour. Some obtain water from communal taps while others rely on household water tap connections. All three communal gardens have taps and one has a corroded irrigation system that was set up in the 1990s. Interviewees' primary water demands relate to increased access, especially for informal housing structures and communal gardens:

Water is important for farming in households and communal gardens. But not all women in this area have adequate access to water. The women residing in informal housing struggle the most with accessing water. I think government must dedicate more attention to this issue and ensure that all women farmers obtain increased access. In addition, the water tap connections in the communal gardens are not enough for maintaining our crops. We definitely need government to assist us with more tap connections or water irrigation infrastructure. (Interview 18, 17 November 2017, Ermelo)

The theme of water quality featured prominently in both individual and focus group interviews. Participants mainly raised issues about water cuts and pollution (see Chapter 5 and 6). But there was no general consensus on the underlying causes of poor water quality in Ermelo. The dominant view attributed this shortcoming to poor and non-responsive governance while the minority perspective connected it with mining ecological degradation. Interviewees who emphasised the link between mining expansion and water source pollution have lived or worked close to mines in past years. They demanded that government authorities regulate mining activities more stringently to prevent water pollution. This view was also articulated in the interviews with the three different types of farmers cited in Chapter 5. The women's water quality demand was expressed in the following way:

The colour and funny smell of the water illustrates that there is a huge problem in this area. Several women who access water through household and communal connections have raised this issue. Government definitely needs to improve its methods and systems for water management otherwise we will encounter serious health challenges. And our crops will never grow properly if we have to use polluted water daily. Mining companies use a lot of water in their industrial processes and we suffer the pollution consequences here in the community. The municipality must put in more efforts towards managing how mines use water so they do not continue polluting our water. (Interview 17, 17 November 2017, Ermelo)

Water cuts are an additional disruptive challenge in households (formal and informal) and communal gardens. This problem is historic and affects social reproduction across the municipality. The women interviewees described how this trend makes it difficult to plan daily social reproduction activities, including household and communal farming. This challenge is compounded by the cost-recovery methods in municipal water management systems. One of the elderly interviewees who leads a communal formal garden explained that they have been at loggerheads with municipal authorities over the communal garden water bill. She farms in the garden that was initially established in early 1990s as a community garden next to an old prison. Then it was handed over to community members when the prison was shut down and different subsistence farmer groups have used it over the years. The municipality has been cutting water supply regularly citing unpaid bills, and the women who use the community garden have been challenging this while demanding free water:

The government knows that we do not work and this garden keeps us alive because we farm here and even manage to sell some crops. Other unemployed people are sitting at home and not doing anything to help themselves. We are at least trying to make some living and not placing the entire burden on government. They cannot expect us to pay for water here because they know we have no jobs or money. In fact, they should be providing us with more water and water infrastructure for free because this garden is helping out with food insecurity and poverty in the community. (Interview 18, 17 November 2017, Ermelo)

The women's water advocacy takes places in two forms: direct engagement with government officials and engagement through the Khuthala NGO. The main aim, according to interviewees, is highlighting that water affects different areas of social reproduction in the community. Women's work and interventions aimed at addressing household socio-economic challenges require access to stable and healthy water. Thus, municipal water access barriers are gendered and must be read within a communal sexual division of labour lens articulated in this interviewee policy demand:

The water issue, just like food, hits women the hardest in the community. You can see who does all the hard work in both households and communities. Women are holding out

communities together through different livelihood activities that include cooking, childrearing, farming, socialised child care, health care and other activities. You cannot pursue any of these without sufficient basics like water. Women are definitely feeling it the most. The government must prioritise water access for women who are holding things together through their hard work and helping government protect our people from hunger or bad health. (Interview 17, 17 November 2017, Ermelo)

Chapter 6 discussed how the documented literature and surveys on Mpumalanga's household water trends amplify the interviewee demands and concerns (Stats SA, 2016; Stats SA, 2019b). The women's experiences around water provision and quality are similar to experiences in other South African working class communities, where women highlight the connection between water and social reproduction problems, particularly in the area of subsistence farming (Chitja et al., 2010; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Rousell and Kesselman, 2020). In some cases, women lead the advocacy and engagement with local state authorities on improving water management and access in their communities (Fakier and Cock, 2018: 51-52). This amplifies the point highlighted in earlier sections of the chapter, which place primacy on understanding the ecological crisis through a feminist political economy lens (Ahmed, 2018; Caffentzis and Federici, 2014; Fakier and Cock, 2018; Shiva, 2018). This paradigm appreciates the gendered nuances raised by the interviewee cited above on how water shortages and water pollution "hits women the hardest in communities" (Interview 17, 17 November 2017, Ermelo).

Several civil society groups in South Africa and abroad have presented alternative ways of managing water resources in society. These propositions are coupled with calls for introducing alternative farming methods such as agro-ecology (SAFSC, 2018; Turner et al., 2018; Jara, 2014; WWF, 2014). The main water demands in this advocacy and civil society literature focus on sustainable interventions such as water harvesting, stricter regulatory oversight of commercial water usage, stopping commodification of water, improving water purification infrastructure, and using farming inputs that cause less water pollution (AIDC, 2016; COPAC, 2017; WWF, 2014). The women in this study did not raise or call for demands that cover all these long-standing water policy shift proposals. But some did highlight the need for protecting water resources from mining and improving infrastructure. There were

no significant proposals on alternative water governance methods or practices and their links to agro-ecology raised during the different views. This finding does not mean that the participants were not interested in different water and food system governance structures. Rather, it shows that they have not developed a structural systemic analysis that connects their food system proposals with a new water management approach. Their participation in the ADC and Khuthala NGO activities provide opportunities for building this broader analysis that connects all dimensions of their food security challenges and subsequent agentic practices.

The agentic livelihood strategies are equally affected by another important global common: access to energy. Chapter 6 explored how energy issues impact food security in households. In this section, I transition towards an analysis that examines the women interviewees' perspectives on how to improve energy access in communities. This analysis bears in mind the energy security barriers cited in Chapter 5. One of these is the uneven access to electricity connections within the community, which was mentioned in several interview responses. The municipal electrification rate currently stands at 86% and local government documents highlight that electrification programmes focus on formal housing structures (Gert Sibande IDP, 2019). Several women in this study reside in informal or semi-formal housing structures and they demand that government dedicates equal attention to their energy security needs:

Government must also take care of families who reside in informal housing structures because we are citizens of this country. Sometimes I feel like we are invisible and the state does not see and care for women who reside in these areas. We have been demanding to be connected to the grid for years and we are always told about the need for formal housing first and proper infrastructure. It is frustrating because we have to use other methods for carrying out household duties that require electricity. The government needs to make a plan and connect us to some form of electric infrastructure so we can use it for cooking, lighting and other domestic household chores. (Interview 19, 20 November 2017, Ermelo)

The women who reside in households that are connected to the grid have slightly different demands, which emphasise lowering the cost of electricity:

The cost of electricity in this country is totally out of control honestly. Government has tried to support us with the indigent policy, but this subsidy is not enough for maintaining household social reproduction throughout the entire month. A woman needs enough electricity to carry out important household activities such as cooking. The need for more food in households cannot be separated from electricity because you need it to prepare meals. They do not come ready made for us poor people who cannot afford takeaways from the shops. Government must introduce measures to increase the amount of free electricity allocated to households every month. (Interview 20, 21 November 2017, Ermelo).

High costs of electricity for the few households connected to the grid co-exist with the service quality problems cited in Chapter 5. Ermelo experiences regular electricity supply interruptions as result of demand and infrastructure factors. The interviewees in the study emphasised the disruption caused by poor energy supply in the local state. And they demand that this issue be addressed:

You cannot plan your daily or weekly household activities with this type of electricity supply. One does not know when it will go off and come back on again. Sometimes it even goes off for days and we are left in the dark with no energy in households. Women's work is seriously compromised in these situations, especially food preparation. Government needs to understand that electricity interruptions cause hunger in our homes. The municipality must improve its management systems so that we experience less interruptions in this area! (Interview 20, 21 November 2017, Ermelo)

The demands emerging from the interview responses cited above cannot be examined outside the local spatial development context. Previous chapters have highlighted the significance of coal mining and large scale energy infrastructure in the municipality. However, this coal-based energy network has not guaranteed equal and stable access to electricity. The contradiction is captured in this interviewee statement:

Our area houses big coal mines and one of the largest power stations in South Africa. The coal trucks use our roads and cause a lot of damage, and the municipality has not been able to fix the potholes. We all know that the mines and trucks are important for producing electricity. But the people of Ermelo are struggling to get stable and sufficient access to energy. This does

not make sense at all! The municipality must ensure that the electricity infrastructure in this area provides energy security for the local community, especially impoverished households. This demand is only fair because all the coal is taken from our land and it should serve our community. (Interview, 12, 26 July 2017, Ermelo)

All these demands resonate with the historic citizen and NGO political activism around energy rights since democratisation. Civil society groups in post-apartheid South Africa have led a myriad of campaigns aimed at addressing community energy security failures since the early 2000s. This advocacy has primarily focused on experiences in black African working class communities. These organisations have relied on both mass mobilisation and using the judiciary to advance their struggles. This tradition continues in the contemporary era, however, different layers have been added to civil society energy security campaigns in South Africa. Emphasis has shifted towards an approach that does not only challenge privatisation and maladministration, but equally pushes for alternative energy sources such as renewables (AIDC, 2016; COSATU, 2011; WWF, 2017). In some cases, renewables are presented as an alternative to the shortcomings and externalised costs of fossil fuel based energy systems in South Africa (Ashley, 2018; Williams, 2018). These proposals agree on the need for transitioning towards a low-carbon economy. But there are some contradictions and differences regarding the form and underlying political economy logic informing this structural shift. The debates are covered elsewhere in publications on alternative energy systems and economic restructuring (Bischof-Niemz and Creamer, 2019; Sagtar et al., 2018; MISTRA, 2015).

The women interviewees in this study did not articulate demands about renewable energy sources. Their emphasis was on accessing safe and reliable energy supply from the existing energy infrastructure. This low knowledge on alternative energy sources is exacerbated by the municipalities reliance on coal-based energy supply. The IDP does not mention future plans for introducing and establishing renewable energy sources. However, the leadership of the Khuthala NGO, which the women interviewees are affiliated to, spoke about introducing renewables during a focus group interview. They argued that the existing energy system has failed community members and it creates ecological destruction. These discussions focused on the prevalence of power interruptions, high electricity costs, limited access for low income

households, and the pollution caused by coal mining operations (Interview 1, 21 August 2017, Ermelo)

Another crucial change in South Africa's long standing electricity activism amongst civil groups is the heightened emphasis on gender. The previous protests largely focused on privatisation and class issues related to electricity provision in low income households; they did not dedicate sufficient attention the gendered impact of the electricity crises in different communities. Contemporary NGO-led energy security activism focuses on women's experiences in South Africa's energy crisis (Earthlife Africa, 2020; Oxfam, 2013; Womin, 2017). This development has raised the voices of women from varied low income households who are directly impacted by energy poverty. Some of these women have managed to organise and advocate for energy restructuring within their communities (Womin, 2017: 23). The women interviewees in this study did not provide evidence that illuminates their participation in energy justice related political activism. But they did, nevertheless, raise energy security issues that feature in women-led campaigns in other parts of the country.

The preceding sections on the women's demands on the food-water-energy nexus reveal important findings for this dissertation. One of these is the gendered impact of water and energy security challenges in working class communities. The responses from the interviewees illustrate that the women are fully conscious about carrying the externalised costs of service delivery failures. Their demands implore local state authorities to acknowledge, and be responsive to, electricity and water supply instabilities affecting women's social reproduction activities in households. These gendered demands nudge local state governance towards a more gender sensitive paradigm. In addition, these demands show the connection between access to water, electricity and food security within households. South Africa's household food insecurity crisis will not be resolved without addressing water and electricity access challenges in working class communities.

An additional finding emanating from the interviewees demands relates to the effects of mining on water and food security. Some of the women (although few) highlighted the corrosive impact mining has on water quality in the community. They went further and called for improved state regulation of mining activities to prevent more water pollution. This

demand illuminates how poorly regulated mining activity can have adverse implications for household food security, as a result of limiting access to clean water. It equally highlights some policy contradictions within the local state's socio-economic development and poverty alleviation plans. Agriculture, which is at the heart of community food security, is identified as an essential sector for economic growth and poverty alleviation. Yet the municipality fails to regulate mining activity in way that does not corrode the natural resources required for maintaining food security. This policy incoherence has gendered implications for social reproduction activities in households and the broader community.

Improved access to water and energy infrastructure also featured prominently in demands articulated in previous sections. This issue amplified why the local state needs to improve infrastructure access within local working class communities. The intervention is not only useful for meeting constitutional obligations and complying with good governance prescripts. It shapes livelihood and food security activities in the municipality, especially subsistence farming and food preparation. South Africa's weak municipal infrastructure is at the core of the food-water-energy nexus, and women are the ones who feel its negative impact daily when carrying out their social reproduction activities. The women's demands cited earlier also encourage government to not forget women living in informal and semi-formal housing when planning for municipal infrastructure development. They have the lowest access to stable and safe water or electricity supplies. And their demands highlight that gender considerations should feature prominently in local service delivery analyses and reporting. There were no suggestions that point us to alternative ways of governing and restructuring water and energy systems in communities in the interviews. The women did not cite renewable energy alternatives or developing more ecologically sustainable water management systems.

Conclusion: gendering South Africa's agrarian reforms

The demands and agentic practices discussed throughout this concluding chapter highlight the dissertation's core arguments in several ways. Firstly, they illuminate the importance of anchoring gender dynamics in food security and agrarian policy impact discussions. The interviewee demands articulated in the chapter are a response to the gendered impacts of

agrarian policy shifts and agro-food system structural changes. These demands cover essential areas such as input costs, access to land, extension services, public procurement, and the food-water-energy nexus. The evidence presented throughout this dissertation highlights how South Africa's agrarian structure and policies produce impacts that deepen gender disparities in the areas mentioned above. However, the dissertation equally provides policy interventions and lessons for addressing the gendered disparities using insights drawn from the interview data.

One of the crucial proposals is examining food systems and social reproduction trends in different social institutions. These include households, informal food markets, community gardens, and local NGOs running food security interventions in municipalities. Black African women from low income households mainly participate in the agro-food system through these institutions, with their work and historic farming knowledge providing a buffer against increased food security. In addition, some of the women produce enough crops to sell in communities or share with impoverished households. A gendered food and agrarian policy regime has to connect macro-trends with developments in the local sphere, especially livelihood trends unfolding outside formalised state processes and food markets. This proposition elevates the experiences of working class black African women while highlighting the structural socio-economic barriers reproducing gendered inequalities in the agrarian political economy. Additionally, it amplifies the theoretical arguments expressed in the feminist political economy literature used in this study. These arguments advance a case for a wider social reproduction analytical lens, which appreciates the various institutions that form part of black African women's livelihood practices. Feminist political economy contributions from Marxist and black feminism elevate exploring capitalist development within and outside formal market structures.

Secondly, state authorities prioritise transforming race ownership patterns and developing commercial 'emerging' black women farmers in male-dominated commercial agricultural value chains. They acknowledge that women constitute the majority of small-scale subsistence farmers in communities, operating on the margins as household or community garden producers. Further, government authorities have set up programmes aimed at supporting subsistence producers. Yet, gendered inequalities in household food security and

the broader agro-food system persist, especially in low income households. The evidence presented throughout this dissertation illustrates the limitations and adverse gender outcomes of elevating black African women's integration into established commercial value chains, without removing underlying structural impediments that cause systemic gender disparities in the first place. Moreover, several shortcomings in the state's subsistence farmer programme were discussed, with an emphasis on the gendered impacts. The dissertation presented several systemic factors such as unequal access to extension services, limited to access to land, state budget constraints, and the gendered impacts of the ecological crisis as core drivers of gendered disparities in the food system. In addition to the above, the women who produce surplus crops feel excluded from state procurement processes, which could provide them with increased household income. According to the interviewees, the local state's food security programmes should accommodate different types of farmers so that black African women can also receive public procurement support.

The state's interventions in the form of bureaucratic and policy shifts are essential, as they assist society in understanding the macro-context which shapes household and community food security trends. Several literature sources trace the impacts of these shifts on formal market structures, particularly the developments and power relationships between different actors in the value chain. Some of these accounts investigate efforts aimed at building a class of black commercial farmers and SMMEs in specific downstream segments of the agro-food system. I attempted to contribute towards the gendered dimension of the agrarian political economy analyses of structural policy shifts. The dissertation focused on the gendered socio-economic impacts of the bureaucratic and policy transitions.

The state needs to reconsider its women's upliftment or empowerment approach in the agrarian political economy. An important aspect in this process is recognising the class and racial disparities amongst women in South Africa's agro-food system. This dissertation highlights how class, race, historic factors, and geographic location impact gendered experiences in the agrarian political economy. Thus, it is important to develop a calibrated women farmer support strategy, which accommodates the different types of support needed by women farmers. It is equally important to understand the specific socio-economic trends in women-headed low-income households when developing food security interventions. I

specifically advanced a case for efficient and increased state support for working class black African women based on the core research questions and methodological choices. The reformulation of women support in the agro-food systems also needs to address the underlying causes of gender disparities in the food system.

There are several structural impediments discussed in the study that require the state to reorientate its role in the agrarian political economy. This dissertation examined the state's role in South Africa's agro-food system using the theoretical framework developed in Marxist and Neo-Marxist agrarian political economy debates. The shift towards a neo-liberal corporate food model in South Africa is a product of state intervention in the interests of a private sector dominated food regime. While several sources have documented the class, formal labour market and market structure changes resulting from this type of state intervention since the early 1990s, they do not dedicate much attention towards the gendered impacts. I have purposefully related the structural and policy transitions within the state to the experiences of black African women. The state's reconfigured role in the agrarian political economy is one of the main drivers of the continued gender disparities. Therefore, any attempt to address the gender inequality in the country's food system has to advance a case for reorientating the state's role.

The neo-liberal corporate food regime, which is underpinned by the overall power relations of racial capitalism, reproduces race, class and gender inequalities observed in other human development areas. Participants interviewed in this study exemplify the race, class and gender exploitation matrix discussed in the feminist theoretical framework. Their status as black African working class women ensures that they experience the triple oppression characterising racialised capitalist system. The evidence produced in this dissertation suggests that the market-orientated agrarian model has failed to substantially decrease their exploitation and socio-economic marginalisation. In addition, this industrialised agrarian model has worsened the ecological crises, placing an extra burden on women in social reproduction livelihood practices. Reorientating the state's role is necessary to address all these market failures, and possibly restructure the agro-food system so that it addresses gender disparities. Demands articulated in the interviews and literature sources point society to some crucial considerations for changing the state's role and policy direction in South

Africa's agro-food system. These include, but are not limited to, improved regulation over food prices, altering public procurement practices, establishing more state-owned enterprises in the food system, promoting localised food systems, and efficient regulation over mining environmental impacts.

Thirdly, interviewee policy demands and agentic practices in this dissertation challenge existing notions of work and local economic development. A clear example is how the women connect their agrarian work with broader socio-economic goals such as knowledge sharing and improving general human development within community households. Their perspective and value of work is not individualised or reduced to a materialist need for survival. Black women participants in this study amplify radical meanings of work discussed in Marxist and black feminist literature cited in this dissertation. One of the meanings articulated by the women is the emergence of livelihood and gender autonomy derived from their agentic socio-economic activities. Their ability to use the minimal resources they have to engage in subsistence farming and other livelihood practices based on their leadership and collaborative organising is elevated in the interview data. It signifies the possibilities of working class black African women pursuing advocacy and women-led socio-economic programmes in communities without male participation or support. Black African women participants in the study amplified this point several times, highlighting that their labour in the agro-food system has deeper sociological and political meanings for gender relations within communities.

This dissertation has further highlighted how South Africa's overall gendered disparities in formal labour markets and other human development areas manifest in low income households. Interview responses from black African women participants in this study exemplified these systemic inequalities in various ways, especially in household social reproduction and food security discussions. The main approach in the country's national and local development plans is to resolve gender socio-economic inequalities by integrating more black African women into formalised wage employment. These formal sector employment interventions are very important; however, they ought to be complemented by alternative livelihood development pathways that build on residents' existing socio-economic activities.

The contemporary finance-led MEC structure in South Africa has produced one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, with black African women and youth joblessness higher than the national figure. In addition, the expansion of AI-driven digital and low-carbon technological shifts in the political economy will likely exacerbate unemployment if implemented within the confines of the contemporary capitalist framework. Thus, South Africa needs a diverse set of employment and livelihood development strategies that deal with the socio-economic exclusion in formal labour markets as discussed above. The black African women interviewees aim to develop their future livelihoods around localised food production if the local state addresses their grievances. This is significant because it shifts the local economy livelihood policy debates from a narrow focus on wage employment in mining, agriculture or other formal sectors. The case for a women-led localised agrarian model catalysed through improving access to land, infrastructure, procurement and global commons emerged strongly from the interview responses. It builds on their existing labour and livelihood practices while encouraging local economic development policy makers to recognise the diversity of development pathways. The interviewees demands for supporting existing women-led localised informal food economy production and trade are equally supported in literature sources. Further, they can be used to produce more positive socio-economic multiplier effects through links with other social policy interventions. For example, Cawe (2021) advances the case for connecting social grant expenditure demand with localisation and decentralised municipal-level agro-food systems. This will ensure that parts of the social wage support residents (especially women) are engaged in agro-food system livelihood activities. The women interviewed in this study have been excluded from formal wage employment structures, and they have observed the adverse exploitative conditions encountered by workers on farms or mines over the past years (particularly males). Yet, their vision for socio-economic emancipation does not emphasise future integration into formal wage labour markets. It rather rests on controlling their own labour and trade within the local agro-food system, with some support from state authorities in addressing long-standing structural barriers. Overall, the emerging themes of women-led autonomous control of labour, trade, and collective livelihood practices in every day social reproduction support Marxist and black feminist political economy theoretical perspectives articulated throughout the dissertation.

Finally, the women's agentic practices develop a base for pursuing food sovereignty beyond the limits of conventional food security policy interventions. They expressed interest in coordinating and growing their food production. Hence their advocacy for state intervention that creates a conducive policy context, which will allow them to develop their localised food production and trade while maintaining autonomy over the entire process. In addition, demands were raised regarding creating opportunities for developing local food system linkages amongst women. These propositions support a central tenet of the food sovereignty paradigm: enhancing community control over food systems. This perspective provides an alternative to the dominant centralised food model, which leaves little room for community-driven agrarian development models. The over-reliance on national market-based food value chains presents several human development shortcomings as highlighted in the study. South Africa is lauded as one of the most food secure countries in Africa (at a national level) in global food security indexes. Yet, half the population experiences some form of food insecurity. A possible solution to this ongoing agrarian crisis is supporting the socio-economic agency of women engaged in building localised food systems.

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Annexure A: Research Guidelines for Interviews

1 Semi-structured individual interviews with key policy-making organisations in the agro-food system

- 1.1 What are the main objectives of your organization?
- 1.2 What do you think are the main causes of food insecurity in South Africa?
- 1.3 What do you think are the fundamental causes of food insecurity in low income households ?
- 1.4 Which factors are primarily responsible for the high food price increases?
- 1.5 Do you think the Competition Commission has done enough to stop food price fixing?
- 1.6 What penalties should the Competition Commission impose for food price fixing?
- 1.7 Who are the most influential players in the South African food system?
- 1.8 Do you think that there was sufficient stake-holder consultation during the formulation of the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (2002) and National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security (2013)?
- 1.9 How effective was your organization's participation in the formulation of the Integrated Food Security Strategy for South Africa (2002) and National Policy on Food and Nutrition Security (2013)?
- 1.10 What role should the state play in the agricultural sector?
- 1.11 Do you think that the food crisis is caused by poor policy? If so, is this problem related to the nature of the policy or implementation?
- 1.12 What policy interventions should be introduced to resolve the food crisis?
- 1.13 Do you think that a national food act would improve food security in South Africa?
- 1.14 How should the state regulate the private sector in the agricultural political economy?
- 1.15 What in your opinion would be the main features of an alternative food system?
- 1.16 What is your perspective on the development of small scale farming?
- 1.17 Which aspects of the country's trade policy should be altered to in order to improve food security?

2 Focus group discussion questions: Black African women interviewees

- 2.1 Where do most community members access food?
- 2.2 Do you rely on subsistence agriculture for access to food?
- 2.3 What challenges do you encounter when participating in subsistence agriculture?
- 2.4 How has the drought affected food production in your area?
- 2.5 Is the government providing enough drought relief support for the community?
- 2.6 Do you sell the agricultural produce from subsistence farming? If yes, why and where are you selling it?
- 2.7 Do you use indigenous farming methods?

- 2.8 Why do you think are the main causes of food price increases?
- 2.9 What do you think are the fundamental causes of hunger in rural areas?
- 2.10 Do any of you participate in food stokvels? And how do these function?
- 2.11 Do you have a community food garden?
- 2.12 Has the community food garden decreased hunger in the area?
- 2.13 Does the community adopt collective strategies to deal with the challenge of food security? If yes, how do these work?
- 2.14 Has mining affected food production and nutrition in the area? If so, how?
- 2.15 How much access does your community have to crucial agricultural inputs:
 - seeds
 - water
 - fertilizer
- 2.16 Do you have access to adequate land to engage in subsistence farming?
- 2.17 Do you have any knowledge on alternatives like agro-ecology?
- 2.18 What in your opinion would be the main features of an alternative food system that empowers women?

3. Individual semi-structured interview questions: Black African women interviewees

- 3.1 How many people live in your household?
- 3.1 Where does your family access food?
- 3.3 Where and how does your family obtain the money for purchasing food in your household?
- 3.4 How much do you spend on food for the household in a week?
- 3.5 Is anyone in the household receiving a social grant?
- 3.6 Who is responsible for buying food in your household?
- 3.7 How is the food in your household prepared?
- 3.6 Do you have enough energy and clean water to make food for your family?
- 3.7 Where do you get water for preparing food in the household?
- 3.8 What do you think are the main causes of food shortages in household?
- 3.9 How often do you experience food shortages in the household?
- 3.10 Do individual members in the household ever go to bed hungry?
- 3.11 Who is responsible for dealing with food shortages in the household?
- 3.12 What are the best survivalist strategies to deal with hunger in the household?
- 3.13 What in your opinion are the successes and challenges of the survivalist strategies employed?