

**Illegitimate voices, peripheral debates, valid alternatives: A
developing world articulation of alternative food networks**

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work, except where I have explicitly stated otherwise. I have followed the required convention in referencing the ideas of others, published or verbal. I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without recognition of the original source) is wrong, and I understand that the University may take disciplinary action against me if it is believed otherwise.

This dissertation is submitted for the Master of Arts degree in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination purposes in any other university.

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ABSTRACT

The theoretical argument that emerges from my empirical study argues that food provisioning systems in Johannesburg, as a potential lens to further investigation of food supply systems in the developing south cannot be classified within a traditional-modern dichotomy. This dissertation proposes a new conceptual device – a food provisioning continuum – which should inform research on African food supply systems in the future. The process of locating this rich case within a broader theoretical paradigm to validate it and to provide it discursive space, however, is not objective or without friction.

I argue that it is possible to choose to locate rich empirical material in different conceptual frameworks, related not only to its applicability, but also to how the research may be valued and seen to extend knowledge. The expectation of the research community and the epistemological demand of new research, for a Masters dissertation is that the scholarly work will build on and extend existing knowledge. It is assumed that thorough research will challenge the boundaries of knowledge and that the candidate, after having undergone this academic rite of passage, will graduate from being a student to being a colleague within a research community. However, the process of creating new theory and advancing existing theory is not quite an objective or frictionless process as it first appears. Research in the south is validated more highly if it is located within, or builds upon international/northern theory even by research forums *in* the south like the NRF. The pressure for researchers from the south to locate their research in conceptual frameworks from the north – in order to be validated – appears to be one of the rules of the game. While this is validation as part of an academic exercise may be necessary, the practise entrenches spatial or geographical hierarchies within academia and academic discourse. The epistemological process of forging new theoretical frontiers is thus a constructed, unnatural space fraught with less critical valuing systems than are expected to be present within academia, no less within the discipline of geography.

Keywords: African food supply systems, Conceptual framework, Academic spaces, Writing a dissertation

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WITSEITD

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THIS DISSERTATION

AFN: Alternative food networks
BSE: Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (Mad Cow Disease)
CAP: Common agricultural policy
DOA: Department of Agriculture
F&V City: Fruit and Veg City
FAO: Food and Agricultural Organisation
HACCP: Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point
JFPM: Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market
JOCOD: Johannesburg Council for the Disabled
MA: Master of Arts
NDA: National Department of Agriculture
NMPM: Nelson Mandela People's Market
NRF: National Research Foundation
PhD: Doctor of Philosophy
PPT: Post-productivist transition
RUAF: Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture and Food Security
UPA: Urban and peri-urban agriculture

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION – WRITING AN ANTI-THESIS

Deviating from the norm

“Why should we regard a particular part of our natural knowledge as scientific, now that it can no longer be seen as commonly validated by a uniquely rational method?” (Barnes, 1974:45)

A traditional MA dissertation demands that students follow a conventional blueprint. According to most sources, the beginning stages should involve the conceptualisation of the research topic, a justification of this study in a concise proposal (De Villiers, 2001), and the actual empirical research. The recommended presentation of the final product should be within a very structured, logical format, which is considered typical (Roberts, 2004), acceptable (Sternberg, 1981), advisable (Rugg and Petre, 2004) and appropriate (Roberts, 2004; De Villiers, 2001). The advised and appropriate format should “follow the style guide adopted by a scholarly organisation” (Brause, 2000:99), make use of an inductive approach to research, and include a number of key chapters, following logically from each other. In the prescribed order, the chapters set the stage, provide a theoretical framework through a wide literature review, present a clear and appropriate methodology, go into detail describing and analysing the empirical information, and finally draw conclusions and argue how this new research may inform policy and further knowledge (Bak, 2004; Grix, 2004; Roberts, 2004; Rugg and Petre, 2004; Dunleavy, 2003; Rudestam and Newton, 2001; Mouton, 2001; Holt, 1998; Cryer, 1996). The five basic chapters may be extended, but, under this rubric, these are considered to be adequate for the conferment of a higher degree. The format of a dissertation is generally taken as a given, and were a dissertation to deviate from this norm, “[it] would not normally be considered to be well written” (Rugg and Petre, 2004:103). The acceptable writing structure of a dissertation is often presented diagrammatically (Figure 1).

An appropriate conceptual structure of a traditional dissertation has been described as a logical funnel (Roberts, 2004; Holt, 1998), and even as the cinematic work of a film director (Sternberg, 1981). It represents a gradual narrowing down or focused delineation of knowledge, and a zoning in on a small case, within a larger backdrop; a broader, more

established framework. The film analogy begins with the broader literature focus as the bigger picture scene, and the proposed research takes on a logical movement as “the camera “pans in” on the specific locations, actors, themes, targets, that will...tell the story” (Sternberg, 1981:93). Although alternative conceptual formats which include case-studies are acceptable, it is not seen as appropriate for a dissertation to begin with the smaller, localised case- study since “the richly descriptive material is “too close” to constitute an acceptable theoretical standpoint” (Sternberg, 1981:93). At this stage, according to dissertation and thesis guides, the candidate is not an active agent in the production (De Villiers, 2001) apart from the gathering of appropriate literature.

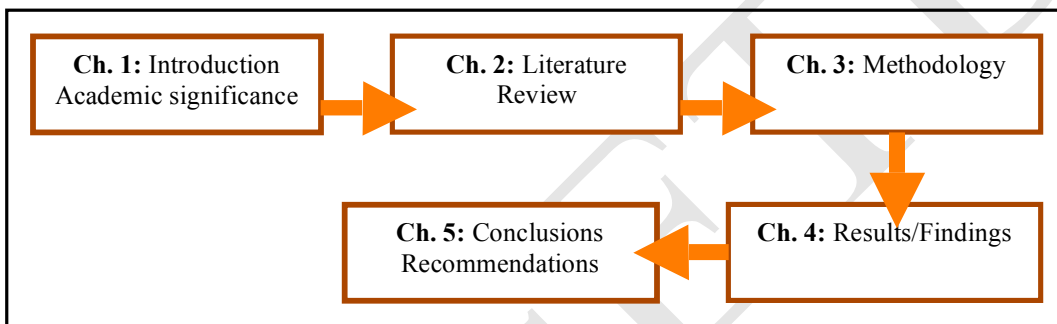


Figure 1: The typical writing format of a dissertation (After Roberts, 2004:17)

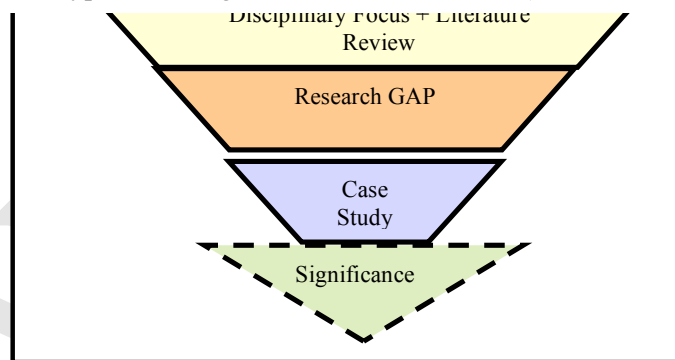


Figure 2: The conceptual format of a dissertation – Logical Funnel (After Roberts, 2004:120)

The format described above is part of the acceptable scientific, positivistic rubric of a higher research degree, which by definition is replicable and verifiable by another astute researcher. The traditional format is not employed simply for the sake of the logical flow of ideas, however. Within a generally accepted idea about what good research means, the epistemology of research demands the normalised (appropriate) practise of academic

inquiry. According to most 'how-to' manuals, the following 'law' makes up the research epistemology: New research needs to build on existing legitimate, published research and further knowledge stores after having critically assessed the knowledge in the more established research and locating a research gap.

Only from this research epistemology does a clear, coherent, structured discursive space emerge. In turn, the discursive space enables the sharing and exchange of knowledge and may be termed 'an ontology of appropriate research practise'. Even though a conception of the system of knowledge, representation and platforms of knowledge exchange is borrowed from computer science (Gruber, 1994), it is useful in understanding the ontology of research as the discursive space that an MA or a PhD candidate encounters in writing the thesis. Within a traditional research ontology, appropriate practise of knowledge sharing occurs through dissemination and critical literature reviews. According to most texts, both research epistemologies – what constitutes good research – and research ontologies – the rules of the research game – are objective, scientific exercises which are part of the acceptable structure of doing a MA or PhD, the most important of which is the literature review. The literature review is seen to be the conceptual methodology of how the new empirical research is framed. It is taken as given that the literature review needs to fulfil certain non-negotiable functions including focusing the research, providing a conceptual framework (Faculty of Science, 1995) and justifying the significance of the new (forthcoming) research (Roberts, 2004).

The literature review, then, is understood to be a key aspect of academic ontologies. The process of building on existing knowledge is foundational to these ontologies, and represents the larger framework of the entire research project. In a traditional dissertation, the core of the research involves situating the case study within a literature review, presenting rich and diverse empirical material within a space carved from an understanding (and critiquing) of the literature - most often a research 'gap' or clear avenues within which to follow (Mouton, 2001). Much later, the empirical chapter will graft unique empirical material into the pre-established theoretical base – highlighted in the literature review – written by published authors whose research has gained

credibility in the field. The literature review includes “only comment and discussion on work by experts and commentators in the field of study” (De Villiers, 2001:23), and establishes what is validated as acceptable authoritative knowledge in the chosen field. It is the evidence of a widely read candidate, who is familiar with the theory and possible research gaps, and presents the “body of accumulated scholarship” (Mouton, 2001:87).

The University of the Witwatersrand, Faculty of Humanities’ guideline document for the preparation of a dissertation argues that “the literature review is not merely a synopsis of material gathered in the library. It is an integral part of the conception of the research since the central research questions as well as the theoretical framework should arise out of a clear and rigorous literature review” (Faculty of Arts: 3). The literature review, in sum, is the foundation upon which the entire dissertation is built. This process is not as innocent and objective as it has been presented in standard textbooks on thesis writing. In the next section I want to argue that this process is neither objective nor unproblematic.

The assumed objective and frictionless exercise of extending knowledge

There are two key themes which are regarded as foundational to the process of writing up the literature review. The first is that the process of doing a literature review is an objective and politically neutral exercise; the second is that the epistemological demand of the literature review is to build on existing knowledge and extend theory. The process of conducting a literature review is assumed to be an objective academic exercise which cannot “produce new or valid existing empirical insights” (Mouton, 2001:180). It is seen as a rational, logical set of proven rules which exist in order to output a normalised product, much like an assembly line. The literature review is then assessed as the objective, exhaustive, scientific and conceptual *guide* to the ensuing research (Bak, 2004), which is not subject to the candidate’s “own value judgements and ideas (unless these occurred in published form)... [since] their own personal ideas, beliefs and feeling on their chosen subject have no place in their research” (De Villiers, 2001:18).

Of course the proven utility of this exercise is never problematised because the process appears objective, scientific, replicable and logical and has formed part of the academic ritual which emerged since the professionalisation of degrees (Barnes, 1974). It is naturally assumed that theory, or a broad literature base, becomes some kind of external truth which is knowable, classifiable, and the ensuing research is (like the format) replicable by another equally discerning academic. It follows that empirical research is out of place and perhaps journalistic if it does not logically follow a literature review. Without the foundation of existing literature, then, the research effort and the process of pursuing a research degree is futile.

The inclusion and exclusion of certain literature, however, is a political process which inherently values certain geographical spaces of academic scholarship, key authors in a particular discipline, and established theoretical paradigms higher than others. This is not an objective process based on a widely accepted belief that this is how research epistemologies function. Neither is it because “new knowledge emerges from a professionally defined field of prior knowledge and is directed toward evaluation by a specialised...body of ...judges who are the first sieve through which any claim to new knowledge must ideally pass” (Appaduari, 2000:12). In countries of the global south, the literature review has been constructed as an academic rite of passage in which “authors outside the UK-US academic world ... have been pushed not only for more theory but for references to particular theories and theorist currently popular in the Anglo literature” (Raju, 2006:161), and citation in the top five ‘international’ journals in the discipline (Visser, 2006). The requirement of an in-depth literature review is then not just the *objective* requirement of including all legitimately published work within one field. Neither is it the inclusion of all authors who have contributed to a particular knowledge base. It is the inclusion of key authors within highly ranked journals from certain geographic academic spaces, and the implicit valuing of certain theoretical debates over others, which is itself highly politicised. Yet no justification is deemed necessary for writing up the literature review, and the exercise is perceived to be objective, the highly subjective process of constructing a valuable and in-depth literature review is hidden under the rubric of prescribed science. Since the literature review-cum -theoretical

base is set up as the conceptual lens through which the object of study is to be viewed, both the space or research gap that emerges logically from a literature review and the actual case study must then be problematised. The reality that the process of constructing a literature review is quite political, thus has quite problematic implications for the writing of a thesis or dissertation given that the literature review is carefully constructed to form the foundational conceptual framework of the entire thesis/dissertation.

The process of framing one's empirical research in one or another theoretical base is *not* a politically innocent, value-free process. The choices of where to conceptually frame one's research, very much tied into the process of doing a literature review, are based on an implicit system of validation and valuation. It is rarely acknowledged that these processes are malleable and constructed. Apart from large social theory, the choice in terms of where to frame one's research is whether to locate the research in a local or international framework. If new empirical research only gains signification through established research, and can never be valued independently, and if the "interest ... is the whole range of research products that have been produced by other scholars...to discover what the most recent and authoritative theorizing about the subject is ... [and to] ascertain what the most widely accepted definitions of key concepts in the field are" (Mouton, 2001:87), then the choice of whether to frame it in international or local literature is a difficult one. Since much significance in the assessment is how important the contribution is, and since that contribution is differentially valued according to its 'international-ness' as opposed to its parochialism, then the choices appear more like do-or-die demands. If the research project depends inherently on the authority of the theoretical base to provide a space within which the empirical case study can be framed and through which it can be understood, and that space is a constructed, subjective, highly problematic space, then the entire process of doing a dissertation comes under scrutiny.

The second normative theme in writing up a thesis or dissertation is the larger role it plays as the vessel which must add to existing theory and to extend knowledge. It is expected that dissertations and theses will naturally extend the theoretical knowledge stores of the chosen field. The review must thus "assist [the candidate] in highlighting an inadequacy in the

literature “thereby justifying [the] particular study’s contribution to research” (Grix, 2004:39). The exercise of writing a thesis or dissertation is understood as making “an original contribution to theory or practise” (Roberts, 2004:15), as making a valid extension of the discipline (Brause, 2000), as adding advancement to knowledge (Grix, 2004), and as bringing meaning back to the previously reviewed literature (Roberts, 2004). Unless this happens, Grix (2004:12) argues that “you do not have a PhD thesis”. The task of assimilation and integration of new ideas, nuanced arguments with existing theory, is seen as the primary responsibility of the researcher (Roberts, 2004; Cryer, 1996; Meloy, 1994; Botha, 1992).

Post-PhD or MA, in the traditional conception, the candidate shifts from being an objective student, listening in on a conversation that began long before she was born, to being “an informed authority and commentator” (Roberts, 2004:174), established “as an expert” (Roberts, 2004:161) within the given field. The research becomes elevated from an academic exercise for assessment, to being an authoritative commentator on global issues of significance and pressing concerns (Morris, 1991), with the potential of having “the last word on the subject” (Roberts, 2004:176). The most strategic and rewarding function of a doctoral or masters research output is to usher the researcher into the academic family (Lombard, 1992), where the researcher will feel part of a larger academic neighbourhood, a force to be reckoned with, which younger researchers will herald forever in theoretical debates from here onwards. The conferment of a higher degree implicitly guarantees the academic community that knowledge has been extended, or that new theory has been created (Brause, 2000; Lombard, 1992). Within the academic community, all future and past research will have to be (re)evaluated in response to the new ground-breaking research (Phillips and Pugh, 1987), and the researcher is seen to enter the hierarchy of proven academics, able to offer valuable perspectives as “the world’s leading expert on the narrow topic [she has] address[ed]” (Rudestam and Newton, 2001:58/9).

An additional step is the immediate publishing of the research. The intrinsic value of the research output is perceived in how the new knowledge is circulated. It is believed that “all scientific results, in whichever discipline, are of use in extending knowledge, *provided* the results are documented and disseminated” (Morris, 1991:19, *sic*). The only limiting factor

to new research reaching the frontiers of highly-valued theory is perceived to be its rigor and clarity. Brause (2000:127) argues thus: provided that the “interpretation is thorough, clear, logical, relevant and cautious ... it will provide the opportunity for an informed discussion, along with any important contribution to [the] academic discipline”.

Apart from adhering to the traditional structural and functional rubric of authoring a dissertation or thesis as a neatly measurable and clearly defined scientific process, there appears to be no other obstacle to recognition of research and researchers within the global academic community. The process of disseminating new research is generally understood to be the subsequent task in the progression of completing a thesis or dissertation. However, this process in the progression is assumed to be smooth; knowledge is assumed to spread frictionlessly across academic space.

Research is assumed to be inherently valuable irrespective of the citation index or familiarity of the name of the researcher. Once the doctoral title or Masters certificate is conferred, researchers are assumed to be welcomed into the academic neighbourhood, and regarded as a fellow expert in a particular field. It is assumed that the reward of being part of a global research community, colleagues with the authors of previously reviewed literature, should be felt amongst researchers across geographical space and all new research is academically significant to this global academic community because all ‘thorough, clear, logical, relevant and cautious’ research is valued equally across geographical space. New research from Johannesburg is assumed to be as valuable as research emerging from London, Tokyo and New York, and research in the English medium as equally valued as research in Hindi, for example. It is assumed that emergent theory should and will ultimately contribute to a universal knowledge store, and cause established members of the academic community, whether in Africa or Europe, to re-evaluate their own research and widely held maxims in accordance with the creation of new theory or the forging of new territory within fields of study, emerging from either Europe or Africa.

Recent geographical scholarship questions these assumptions, particularly in terms of the circulation and valuing of knowledge. We do not live in a frictionless space, and the

smooth progression of ideas into theories into published work into globally valuable knowledge is an idealistic imaginary. The obstacles to being regarded as an equally valued researcher is based on deeply entrenched valuing systems both in terms of academic rating, and which country and institution the researcher comes from. In the past, marginalised regions were relatively voiceless within academia, based on print media technology, electronic dissemination, and education systems, amongst other reasons. Now, however, the disjunctures and frictions which hinder researchers from being part of current discourse in whichever field is associated with the value of the academic geographical space the research(er) comes from.

Gatekeepers and spaces of friction

“We are experiencing ... a period of academic imperialism, in which the particularistic vocabularies of US social science are supposed to be universal representations”(Paasi, 2005:776)

The representation of previously marginalised case studies from the ‘periphery’ has become a distinctive movement within academic inquiry (Timár, 2004; Braun, 2003; Minco, 2003; Timár, 2003; Vaiou, 2003). The rhetoric of researching and understanding material conditions, on its own terms and not in reference to another ‘universalised’ norm, has become the newspeak of geography, anthropology and social studies (Escobar, 2001; Howitt, 2002; Hones, 2004; Kingsbury, 2005; Sundberg, 2005). ‘Giving voice to the margin’ has become a recognisable trend (Garcia-Ramon, 2004; Timár, 2004) within academia. So too has the trend of the ‘exotic’ case-study (cf. Willis, 2004). Voices and realities *are* now heard and represented but often questionably. For the most part, there is increasing ‘visibility’ of material conditions in areas which occupied more marginal positions even though there continues to be opacity in some cases. As Yeung and Lin (2003:120) argue, “intellectually, universalism as one of the defining features of the Enlightenment and modernization school of thought has given way to a more open-ended, plural, and contextually

sensitive perspective on changing geographies in different world regions...[which had been] previously separated”.

The previously disadvantaged south voice and the promotion of critical geographical research coming from non-Anglophone contexts have become important in academic space through ‘international’ academic conferences and progressive journals (Vaio, 2003). They have implicitly become something of the new vogue in academia and no less within politico-academic righteousness. Yeung and Lin (2003:120) argue that “there is a growing interest among economic geographers in investigating territorial formations outside the Anglo-American contexts *not* as an anomaly or “other...” but instead as an original subject in its own right”. This inclusivity does not only remain some kind of romantic token, but also has profound implications about how we are told to write.

This new spatial turn in the ‘geography of geography’ raises questions about the assumption of the frictionless circulation of knowledge. It suggests that the rite of passage to the academic neighbourhood is not as linear and natural as is assumed. There are often territorial obstacles which guard the ‘purer theory’ against the ‘cheapening’ of less important case studies. The rhetoric of new research extending an existing knowledge base does not translate into research from the south actually transforming and advancing theory. This is not because researchers from the south have nothing valuable to say. Neither is it predominantly the case of the lack of communications technologies in academic institutions of poor developing countries. The dilemma exists with the assumption that all new research will/should add to existing knowledge in particular/interrelated fields of thought without friction, and the existence of quasi academic gatekeepers of these academic spaces. This in turn has implications for the way we write, and do research. In a recent international conference session, I wondered at the apparent lack of theoretical discourse of papers emerging from Africa or other developing countries. Most of these presentations told a series of narratives without explicitly showing how their research extends existing knowledge. I do not think it is because researchers do not know how to make these connections, however. It may be

some kind of internalised acceptance of the secondary place of developing world research – which is problematic of course. Or it may be that there is an unspoken perception that the role of developing world scholarship in the world of ideas is to ground these theories to material realities and to policy or development implications.

Nonetheless, the notion that new, valid, meaningful, theoretically discursive and rigorous research *will* unquestionably advance knowledge stores is not as simple as it at first appears. While access to information systems, databases and communications technologies is hugely important, barriers continue to exist in well-equipped universities – like our own. The barriers are not just academic astuteness, where a simple quality process would divide the sheep from the goats. The qualification processes that define researcher rating-systems and peer-reviewed legitimisation are not value-free exercises (Mather, *forthcoming*; Visser, 2006), and are beginning to come under much scrutiny. The conventions which govern the process of knowledge extension are highly regulated and largely exclusive practises, and these have profound implications for how we write, what we say, and where we publish it. The conventions of publishing, peer-reviewing and valuing research represent key passageways in the exercise of extending or creating theory. These conventions are assumed to be infallible, unproblematic and logical processes of knowledge formation, equally open to new researchers, and they promise of equal valuing systems and standardised legitimisation. However, Goss (2004) suggests that trendy consumption of research from certain ‘brand names’ in the industry, corresponds with secular fashionable research interests like celebrating consumption, written by some of these researchers. Within geography, for example, different researchers occupy either higher or lower places within the academic hierarchy based on their individual citation indexes and the citation of the top 50 brand names in their published papers. If you are brand name (that is) at the pinnacle of the hierarchy, you have academic licence to say almost anything and this new knowledge may have a potential ripple effect in the entire discipline. The brand name may say something challenged decades before, or his/her research may methodologically flawed, and still have the status of steering discourse, and the research agendas of entire generations of researchers. Plus, knowledge becomes tied to

a brand name; if a research student discusses agrifood studies, and does not also include say Philip McMichael, Peter Jackson or David Goodman, they are seriously missing something, and their theoretical rigor is questioned in much the same disdain as if a researcher on the unconscious fails to mention Freud. However, if the brand names do not mention each other, it may well be linked to the mortal evils of not wanting to increase their citation index in their highly rated article.

The worth of a researcher is measured not necessary by what I say, then, but by how much of a brand name I am, or how accurately I include the brand names in my research. The self-and peer citation of the small group of brand names guarantees the immortality of the research(er). Tie this to the hierarchy of academic space and you can be sure that exceptional researchers who add incredible wealth to knowledge in the global south or dissident northern authors (of which I am aware) like Charles Mather, Lawrence Berg, Jon Goss, Richa Nagar, Gustav Visser, Christian Rogerson, Gordon Pirie, Zarina Patel, Ansi Paasi, Claudio Minco, Saraswati Raju, amongst many others, are not amongst the top one hundred brand names in geography and are not always included in north-based academic discourse in *their* research fields even though most have years of experience.

Clearly, the academic neighbourhood exhibits a core and a fringe. The core is perceived to be scholars and researchers from the UK and America, who make use of the English medium (Berg, 2004). The valuing of researchers, then, is not as logical as regarding all titled or graduated researchers as harbingers of rich theory. It has been suggested that not all subject matter is academically significant to the global research community. The rewards of being part of an arms-wide-open academic family are not equally felt by all members of the community. Across geographical space, there are territorial barriers to knowledge formation, where research which emerges from the north evolves into theory, while research from the south are viewed as case studies, unable to add to larger global theoretical debates (Berg, 2005). Within global politics, issues of trusteeship have come to the fore (Mercer, *et al.*, 2003). The south is perceived as being unable to reach the echelons of critical global debate, and is frequently infantilised by parental

structures which guide and structure the processes the south has to yield to. Research, likewise, could be argued according to this (rather extreme) perspective. Researchers from the south may either be dependent on the theoretical formation of the northern gatekeepers, or are left out of critical debates which may extend knowledge stores or challenge existing theory. New research emerging from Johannesburg, South Africa is not equally regarded as that emerging from London, or Tokyo or New York – even the city names conjure up images of what is acceptable. Research in other languages is not deemed legitimate in contributing to global academic debates in English, and the excellence of ‘local’ researchers are often not perceived as brand names within any given field. It follows, then, that purpose and process of completing a traditional, normative dissertation or PhD is not as natural, frictionless and free as authors about ‘How to Write a Thesis’ have assumed.

Writing the anti-thesis

These debates have profound implications for the way I have chosen to conceptualise my dissertation, which is strongly opposed to the traditional structure. Cook (2005: in press) argues that “Writing about academic knowledge as a *relational process* rather than a straightforward thing might highlight the politics of knowledge -in academic research”. This dissertation highlights the problematic nature of constructing an academic piece of work. The two arguments which shape the dissertation – interrogating the process of finding conceptual space (framing) and hierarchies of academic space – are not usually interrogated by researchers and research students. I wish to challenge some of the widely-held academic traditions by questioning the circulation of knowledge and by asking what the standards are and where they are formed. The *product* of academic construction needs to engage with some of the problematic *processes* which underlie the normative academic exercise.

The subtext of this dissertation comments on the way in which academic research from a marginalised context is valued. This relates to the perceived lack of academic discourse, which makes significant theoretical contribution, in the global south. This

dissertation argues that the academic ‘rules or the game’ are set up such that universalised theory, in which all new research must fit into, emerges from UK or American, not developing world contexts which are perceived to be more progressive, and research output more accurate and rigorous. This kind of literature will thus be written as the *Literature* henceforth. All other research, or research outputs, must be validated, conceptualised and solidified *within* the ‘established theoretical/literature base’; *literature* for terminological reasons. A fundamental rethink of how empirical material from the south is valued, and what later becomes of it, often requires a type of reflexive aggressiveness. The process itself is highly self-critical. If the new vogue is encouraging authentic representation, then it must be authentic enough not to place empirical research only *in reference* to an (already) internalised standard of validation. How can we possibly engage in an ‘of our own’ struggle, and constantly argue that we need a representation of our own, if we continue to value and validate home-grown research only in reference to ‘international theory’? If we are to begin to conceive of a representation of our own, this must be the kind of conceptual redress we begin with.

The dissertation as a whole, thus, problematises the normative process of placing a unique case within one particular framework. It does this in two ways: first, my dissertation recasts the conventional research structure by problematising the valuing of empirical material as less important than established theory. Second, this dissertation highlights the difficulty involved in the process of finding conceptual space, and not least of all academic space where one is able to make advancement to a theory. Out of step with more conventional dissertations, I do not couch the Johannesburg case study within *one* lengthy literature review. Instead, the engagement with three literature reviews in this paper reflects an anti-reductionist element in relation to understanding the empirical material, and do not function as a fixed space into which the empirical material is slotted. Rather, multiple reviews serve a commentating purpose, which analyses the possible ways of conceptualising the material. There is no ‘*pre-posed*’ theoretical frame of reference within which the empirical material has to conform in order to be understood. The starting point is the empirical material itself: food supply systems in Johannesburg.

Anti-structure or alternative take?

My research initially followed an acceptable path, post-proposal, according to the traditional conceptual structure of a dissertation. It began as a representation of my 'exotic' south-based case study as I gave voice to the particularly fascinating elements of food supply systems in Johannesburg. I wanted to argue that it is an important case study since it defies the logic of the trend of formalisation of food supply chains through the increase of supermarkets in remote areas, and is not typically the argument of increased informality in trade and enterprise in cities of the 'south'. The case exhibited elements which are difficult to pin down and to neatly classify within any one particular theoretical space. It was, and continues to be, a fascinating case of local interactions, representing cultural modes of production and consumption, and traditional transactions. A conclusion framed within literature based in different contexts as that of the 'local' dissertation, in the end may then fail in its functional aim to provide relevant to the socio-economic reality of the case.

My research dissertation argues a fundamental shift in the way empirical research is valued and validated, and how it ought to be. The larger theoretical point of the dissertation centres on arguments of travelling theory and constructed hierarchies of academic space in the context of presenting original research and a unique case study. The conceptual subjectivity in framing rich empirical material is the underlying rationale of my research. I argue that one particular conceptual space may not necessarily offer the only logical and useful framework for understanding and processing a case study. Given that, in a traditional dissertation, the single literature review informs a conclusion about the empirical research, I argue that contrary to the normative formula of a dissertation, it is in fact possible to locate my case within any one of many conceptual literature fields. This dissertation calls for a rethinking of the research process, proposing that highly diverse and empirically rich material should inform theory and not be straight-jacketed within necessarily one self-constructed 'normative' nature of the theory. The underlying rationale of this dissertation has been

to write a piece of work that has mapped my own intellectual discourse throughout this process. This dissertation is the conceptual map of this journey.

The dissertation begins with representing diverse food networks in Lenasia, in the south of Johannesburg. Food supply systems are complex and are neither exclusively informal or formal. The socio-political context of Johannesburg necessitates food supply systems that are inherently cultural. This section argues that Johannesburg's food supply systems are the future face of urban food supply in the contemporary African city, and should best be understood along a food provisioning continuum. The dissertation then goes on to review the various conceptual spaces within which it is possible to logically frame the food systems I observed and researched. This section undermines the unproblematised process by showing that it is possible to position my case study within multiple literature reviews and conceptual frameworks, with consequently completely different implications for my case and research. The first potential conceptual space is within an emergent literature of the formalisation of retailing in a developing world context. The second is within a broader focus on urban and peri-urban agriculture, and the third is within a very recent debate within agrifood geography concerning the alternative nature of food supply. I then go on to argue why these are useful or inadequate, and what the implications each hold for my case, if my case were to be posited in either. These sections highlight the losses and erasures which implicitly fashion a conclusion about the empirical case study. Any of these broad literature reviews would traditionally make up an 'appropriate' theoretical foundation, which would guide the dissertation conclusions, and any of the hinging sections could function as a critical and thorough argumentative conclusion. However, in this dissertation, the process of finding, critiquing or rejecting conceptual space *is* the empirical case study. The problematic assumptions about what the function of a literature review is, and what the significance of new research within the broader academic community in reality means, are threads which run throughout this dissertation.

The literature review chapters engage with the process of framing one's research within different conceptual spaces. This process is shown to be highly subjective and political.

Besides the more trivial matter of what disciplinary literature focus to choose, this section argues that researchers from the south are pressured to locate new research in northern frameworks for the sake of validation. As argued in this introduction, the epistemological aim of a dissertation is epitomised as building on a theoretical foundation by means of a literature review, and then extending that theoretical base is often compromised by differential value placed on northern spaces to extend theory. The literature reviews practically demonstrate that it is possible to locate one's research in different spatial scales – either south-south, or south-north, in different frameworks with significant implications for the empirical research. Politically a south case study in a south theoretical context would make most sense. However, in terms of how research and researchers are valued, a south-case framed in a north theoretical context is worth more. Three literature reviews demonstrate that framing one's research is not a natural objective process. The first two are not as theoretically reflexive or lengthy as the third, and so for this reason, the third literature review is separated into the penultimate chapter of this dissertation and naturally flows into the main conclusion.

My dissertation is thus not reflexive in terms of positionality, but rather in terms of interrogating the process of positioning one's research in established theory. The conclusion does not just summarise the main arguments of the paper, rather, the critique of the framing process (the gist of this research), is drawn into conversation with debates around the applicability of theory within different contexts – particularly across the north-south divide – and around more current critical geography debates which concern the hierarchy within academic space. A fundamental critique of how academic space is valued underscores the conceptual journey of the dissertation. To borrow Escobar's (1995) argument about imagining a post-development era, I argue that within research, this "dialogue goes on and ... we should be thankful less about arriving at the 'right' notion of [research] than at the fact that [this] construct [gives] us the opportunity to undertake the journey in the first place" (Escobar, 1995:3).

CHAPTER 2: JOHANNESBURG'S FOOD SYSTEM

FOOD SUPPLY SYSTEMS BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL-MODERN DICHOTOMY

“I say tell your own story and tell it often” (Brown, 1997:1)

The juxtaposition between traditional and modern economies and spaces of consumption epitomise the imaginary of Southern African cities. Without travelling too far, a consumer may encounter what appear to be two worlds, and two sets of consumption choices. Modes of transport, the city architecture, the dress sense of people, and the type of monetary exchange all appear to display the stark modern-traditional dichotomy. It is not uncommon to observe a state-of-the-art Audi model driving next to an un-roadworthy minibus taxi, or to witness the suave art of a local loan-shark with an upfront payment, just outside a technologically advanced bank where one may make an electronic across-the-globe money transfer. Large office and retail buildings stand in contrast to peri-urban farms in the same residential district, and professional business people walk alongside immigrant bric-a-brac vendors. At every turn, there seems to be one of two consumption choices to be made by different consumers; traditional and informal, or modern and formal.

A surface picture of food supply system in South African cities, likewise, appears to be epitomised by two distinctive features. On the one hand is ‘the modern choice’ which includes online food retail and sophisticated supermarkets -contrary to less amicable images of Africa. On the other is ‘the local traditional option’ which includes wholesale food markets and fresh food street-corner vendors. It is perceived that consumers may only either make use of modern supermarket provisioning systems to purchase high-value foodstuff by choice, or they may purchase traditional foodstuff on sidewalks in an informal, unregulated and lower-quality environment, for the sake of survival. The imaginary may be further reinforced by marrying types of communities with types of consumption choices.

The modern choice within this apparent dual-natured food system is a sophisticated food supply system dominated by supermarkets which offer high quality organic

produce, free-range beef, fine imported cheeses and caviar, and top grade exotic fruit. Most South African supermarkets have large investment profiles and have been listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange for almost forty years, and include social corporate responsibility index listings and detailed shareholder options. These large supermarkets have the dominant market share percentage when it comes to food retail in *some areas* South Africa and the top three¹ have diversified into other Southern African cities and outside Africa. They all have stringent sourcing practises approved by national and international regulatory authorities and follow standardised global procurement practises for sourcing within South and Southern Africa. All of the supermarkets have their own brand products which operated under strict quality regulatory frameworks. They all have, and make use of sophisticated transport infrastructure and networks, and each have state-of-the-art cold storage facilities. Most of these supermarkets cater both for the upper and lower ends of the market, they keep a close eye on consumption trends and cultural distinctiveness, and they all have community outreach projects that facilitate health and wellbeing to consumers.

On the surface, ‘the local, traditional option’ appears the only other accessible choice for people who do not or cannot make use of ‘modern’ food provisioning systems. Informal food provisioning systems are of course assumed to be the direct antithesis of modern food systems which engenders self-provisioning through home-based food gardens, street vendors who sell fruit and vegetables on the sidewalk sourced from a wholesale fresh produce market (Figures 3 and 4) making use of non-sophisticated trading relations, or low quality food from traditional spaza shops.

¹ Pick ‘n Pay, Shoprite-Checkers and Woolworths



Figure 3: A local vegetable vendor in Lenasia



Figure 4: Fresh fruit sale on a sidewalk



Figure 5: Direct sale of fruit in a parking lot



Figure 6: Braaied chicken feet

Over weekends, on street corners and parking lots there are small farmers and entrepreneurs who sell traditional Indian and African fresh produce from makeshift market stalls (Figure 5), large head-held buckets/sacks (Figure 7) or car boots. Fast food vending Women sit in front of large metal drums to *braai* (barbeque) chicken feet (Figure 6), heads and giblets, in order to sell them as snacks during a shopping day in the main CBD. It is also possible to buy and eat half a boiled sheep's head (still in the skull), with a spoon. Local food provisioning may also include the sale of homemade *Maas* (cultured sour milk), traditional African fare, with an un-sliced quarter loaf of bread to school children at a school gate during intervals. Other provisioning systems include the sale of livestock for African or Islamic religious ceremonies.



Figure 7: A woman selling peanuts from a head-carried sack

The fact that these opposing space economies occur in a localised context, lends to an imaginary of the South African city as a contested space between traditional and modern food provisioning systems, which underscores a preconceived image of African cities. Even though dualisms in general have received huge criticism, this modern-traditional dualism is persistent. The constructed narrative around African food supply systems follows the conventional dichotomy; either formal or informal, regulated or unregulated, individualistic or community, quality food or yes-please-for-survival food, distanced professional business relations or local exchange kinship, high-value credit-card payments for dinner or half a hard-earned salary on a week's food, exotically catered themed evenings or 'Africa-has-come-home' cultural ceremonies. This section of my dissertation argues that these juxtapositions hide the complexity of contemporary food systems. It obscures vital elements in the urban food provisioning complex that do not fit in either modern or traditional, and thus, renders these elements invisible to those who research urban food systems within nutritional analyses, food security measures and poverty alleviation strategies or food market indicators. A deeper look at the food supply system beyond the modern – traditional, supermarket – street-corner

dualism/‘contradiction’ highlights a fascinating narrative of hybrid food supply systems which is characterised by private regulation, formal systems of exchange which include cultural food never before considered for commercial value or supermarket sale, religious certification which intercepts highly sophisticated supermarket sourcing complexes and high-value free range poultry products sold from home-based farm stores. This chapter argues that food supply systems can only be understood along a continuum of what has conventionally been *termed* modern and traditional, or formal and informal food systems. While these extremes exist, they do not fully offer the spectrum of possibility for hybrid spaces to be articulated. I argue also that the food systems will, in fact, very often evade categorisation and engender overlapping characteristics, and that what they do is represent a wider narrative of food provisioning in a contemporary Southern African city.

This section begins by highlighting the plight of producers in the Johannesburg region, a mixed land-use area which has been long characterised under the traditional-modern discourse. The discourse has framed the activity of black small scale producers as informal, not economically viable and incidental. One of the effects of this apparent dichotomy has led to difficulty on the part of local government and policy makers to conceptualise the agricultural activity in Johannesburg, and thus the potential contribution of food provisioning to poorer members of the community. However, the invisibility of the direct producer-consumer provisioning complex has led to an unexpected self-sustained vitality in most cases.

The section proceeds to describe food supply systems that do not fit the picture of a modern-traditional economy, and cannot therefore be characterised in these economic terms. The food supply systems are hybrid and dynamic, and are strongly embedded in cultural and religious food provisioning practises, as well as socio-economic conditions, and are driven by contextual factors. In sum, food provisioning may fall along a continuum of formal economic systems which are highly regulated, and informal, survivalist food systems that cater for the urban poor. The contemporary food supply system is far more complex to understand than just employing an either-or dichotomy,

and ensures huge losses if we do. This chapter concludes with the interface between the two extremes of the continuum which has begun to emerge in the past year following the development of a large mall in the area, and the argument that future conceptualisations of food provisioning systems in the south must allow for this conversation.

Invisible Urban Producers: neither modern nor traditional

Food systems of production in the developing south occupy an ambivalent space between formal and traditional provisioning. Food production has also been conceived of under the modern-traditional rubric. Policy makers and government officials appear to perpetuate this dichotomy by basing governmental agricultural reports, social development and food security plans on the commercial, large-scale farming – subsistence home garden agriculture dualism. Despite the fact that evidence in Southern Africa challenges and contests the agricultural dichotomy, this dual-view continues to inform an understanding of agricultural enterprise in Johannesburg. The failure to acknowledge profitable agricultural activity in the area has also meant blind-sighting the role that these farms play in increasing food security and facilitating local food networks.

The result has been invisible agricultural enterprise in the Johannesburg region. The visible extremes of food provisioning include predominantly white-owned large-scale commercial agricultural enterprise, which supplies supermarkets or export markets, and predominantly black-owned informal vending enterprises which make wholesale fresh produce available to people. While favourable terms of export and trade are always on the national agenda, provincial and local governments have been involved in adding value to the informal economy particularly to food vendors. In the past year (2005) fruit and vegetable vendors have been given stalls by the Gauteng provincial government as part of a broader initiative to support small business development and to ‘clean up’ the city centre. While the informal nature of food retail, as one segment of the food system in Lenasia has captured the attention of provincial government, peri-urban agriculture remains invisible. The emerging *Local Economic Development* department at the local government department – City of Johannesburg, Region 11 - has recognised the agricultural potential in

this area, but as the department allocation suggests, in relation to job creation and enterprise development². Government initiatives usually focus on holding workshops for small-scale *commercial* farmers in order to maximise their potential for participating in formal retail markets (DOA, 2004). A rollout of food garden packs has been planned for late July 2006 to combat the food insecurity crisis in some South African urban residential areas³. In other words, government's conception of food provisioning appears to have also followed this kind of rhetoric of modern-traditional: if food provisioning is to successfully occur, then it must either occur within the spaces of formal, commercial agricultural enterprise, or local informal or self provisioning subsistence activity. A deeper look beyond the dualist development rubric articulates the much more complex 'invisible' narrative of food-production provisioning systems.

METHODOLOGY

I conducted the empirical research on an intermittent basis between August 2004 and October 2005. While I was not conducting research throughout this time, I returned to most of the research sites at least twice, and added to the empirical findings on an ongoing basis when I needed added information. Since I am a resident of Lenasia, the research sites were fairly accessible. I limited the on-farm study to a 20km radius of Lenasia (approximate radius: 15km) and acquired information about where farms were located by word of mouth from other farmers and by looking through a number of street and area maps which showed unaccounted-for open space, particularly near streamlets. As such, not all of the farms had legitimate smallholder plot numbers, but the majority did, and obtaining contact information and farm names proved to be difficult since I sometimes encountered those with subsistence holdings or illegally owned land.

The study consisted of ethnographies of a small sample of farms, and semi-structured interviews with over 40 agricultural practitioners, 25 vendors and a number of random consumers in the Johannesburg area. A small number of interviews with farmers in the

² Valerie Gounden, September, 2004: Johannesburg, Region 11 – Department of Social Development

³ Shaun Ruyssehaar, Wits University: Personal communication: July 2006

more affluent northern areas of Johannesburg were also undertaken, as well as interviews with relevant stakeholders in the department of social development, and the agricultural community. During brief personal visits to France and Germany, and during a conference period in England, a number of ethnographic observations and interviews were undertaken at farmers' markets and allotment gardens. The questions to farmers largely centered on their productivity, market and supply chain. A large part of the interview included the value they place on farming and this lifestyle, what the challenges are, why they engage in farming despite these, and how they started. I obtained verbal consent from every respondent, and in most cases, I spent time dropping off a draft of some of the questions I would be asking a week or so before the scheduled interview dates. The identities and contact details of the farmers are hidden in the report, at the request of most. However, these are available, should they be needed.

Research assistants sometimes joined me for language and security purposes – since some farmers spoke either Sotho or Afrikaans, and a few of the farms were relatively isolated.

The study area

The area of study is Lenasia, in the south of Johannesburg, and the surrounding areas within Region 11. Region 11 is the poorest of Johannesburg's eleven regions, and is located in the South West of Johannesburg, in the Gauteng province. Lenasia is a formally racialised Indian community which now is more diverse, and is also home to a growing informal settlement population. Although the Johannesburg region makes up a smaller percentage of the Gauteng province as a whole (Figure 8), a study of Lenasia and the surrounding areas (Figure 9) articulates the narrative of food supply systems beyond the modern-traditional juncture.



Figure 8: Johannesburg, Gauteng Province

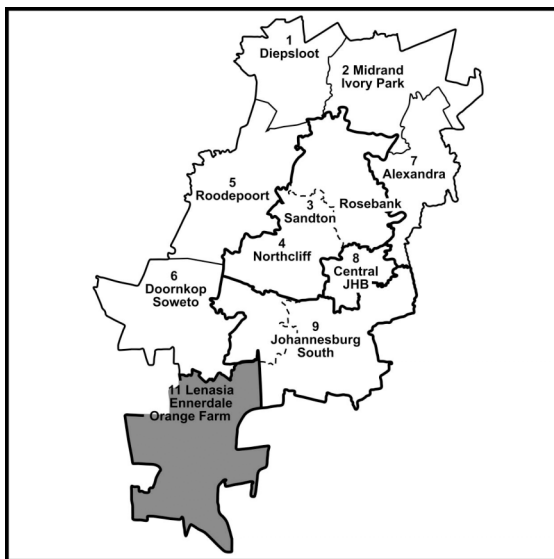


Figure 9: Study area: Lenasia, South of Johannesburg & surrounding areas in Region 11

South Africa's Group Areas Act of 1950 demarcated areas for specific racial groups to reside in. The Apartheid-driven vision of separate development meant that retail was also decentralised into these areas. The areas south of Johannesburg, Lenasia, Soweto and Eldorado Park, were the designated areas in which Indian, African and Coloured people resided. In Lenasia and Soweto, different ethno-linguistic groups resided together, which made these townships a dynamic space of diverse cultural clusters

within a racial group. Although the mono-racialised pattern has changed over the past two decades, these residential areas continue to function as cultural cores, with the majority of people still racially clustered. Thirty years ago, Lenasia housed people of Indian descent, and has been transformed into an enclave for the preservation of Indian culture. Likewise, other racially demarcated residential areas function as cultural centres, particularly in terms of food, and food products. Consumption patterns are spatially distinct, and food provisioning is very often necessarily local. Traditional foodstuff is a key marker of cultural consumption patterns in these communities. All goods and services, which are specifically required in these communities, are available within or around the townships. Appropriately, these areas are the location for the production and sale of livestock and produce for religious and traditional ceremonies. In 2002, the national Department of Agriculture (DOA) commissioned a report (Cooper and O' Reilly, 2002) in order to identify small-scale agriculture in Gauteng and to give evidence about the level of small-scale agriculture in Gauteng. It forms part of a baseline study which was intended to guide the development agenda of the Gauteng Department of Agriculture (GDA). However, this study shows how deeply embedded the dualistic conception of food provisioning systems are.

The hidden face of peri-urban agriculture

The audit on small-holder agriculture in Gauteng (Cooper and O' Reilly, 2002) has not fully represented the economic activity of small-holders in the south of Johannesburg. In the report, all respondents were white, and all were asked to respond to the trend of *black* farmers into the area. One of the notable examples states: “77% of all respondents said that there has not been (or they did not know) movement of black farmers into *their* areas” (Cooper and O' Reilly, 2002:29 – emphasis added).

Twenty-two of the agricultural holdings I visited had not been represented in the audit. Clearly, these holdings were excluded because they failed to fit within the categorisation of commercial farms “for profitable business” (Cooper and O' Reilly, 2002:7). These farms were framed as engaging in petty (but not commercially viable) on-farm enterprise:

“properties [with] signs offering milk, chickens, mielies for sale [.... to an] informal settlement in the area” (Cooper and O’ Reilly, 2002:98). As a result, agricultural activity and on-farm enterprise of black smallholder were not acknowledged in the audit.

One of the closing comments of the audit of this section asserts that “West Rand Gardensare rural [and in a] partly rundown area (Cooper and O’ Reilly, 2002:99),[and that they are] difficult areas ... close to townships and informal settlements [because] all smallholding areas close to townships and informal settlements are ‘going down’ [and there] is not potential for expansion of agricultural activities here... neither...for commercial activities [as] they are too many other commercial activities closer to Johannesburg” (Cooper and O’ Reilly, 2002: 98-100). Lenasia (Region 11), Soweto and Klipspruit (Region 10) fall within the West Rand Gardens area, and all have dynamic, thriving peri-urban agricultural holdings. The area is an energetic space of residence, consumption and cultural activities. While it does have ‘run-down’ areas, the assumption of negligible commercial agricultural activity is flawed. Food supply systems facilitated by peri-urban farms, for reasons relating to the formal-informal dualism within modes of food provisioning, have remained outside of the scope of researchers.

The lack of recognition of black small holder agriculture on Gauteng’s peri-urban fringe within the narrow dualistic conception has significant implications. Since the peri-urban south of Johannesburg escapes the radar of the NDA research into small-scale farming in Gauteng, it is no wonder that the ongoing challenges that some of these invisible farmers expressed are without resolve. If agriculture of significant value is not recognised as occurring in urban Johannesburg, the poverty challenges that some small holders in this area face, will continue to be unrepresented.

Much as the presence of viable economic enterprise should be understood as occurring along a continuum, the experiences of farmers are differentially reflective of the individual farmers’ (mostly economic) resilience to face the challenges of invisibility and the need to self sustain. For this discussion, it is important that we recognise the farmers’ ability to cope with change as strongly related to their potential impact on food provisioning systems.

More successful cases of agricultural opportunity highlight a very positive image of small-scale commercial enterprise. One farmer in the Ennerdale area expressed the experience of many farmers quite succinctly: “It (farming) pays my bills, my kids’ school fess, but there’s only three farmers here farming for business – making a living out of it. It’s definitely a business”. A different farmer who had to find additional income said: “I can’t survive from this. Most of my income comes from my driving school. I use this truck in the farm, then when I’m not using it my son gives driving lessons”⁴. One particularly angry farmer said: “at the moment I have stagnated, because I have no government support. I am short of funds to expand. The department of Land Affairs are a bunch of stupid asses”⁵. Another added: “we see the extension officer once in a while, she asks us what we need, and organises courses for us, but we are basically on our own”⁶. Conflicting with this is the government’s commitment to small-scale agriculture, particularly of previously disadvantaged people, which of course misses the needs of peri-urban smallholders in Johannesburg based on a commercial-subsistence conception.

With the delay in land tenure agreements in Gauteng, not only is land insecurity rampant, but there is rising disillusionment to expand on-farm enterprise or intensify production “I used to milk 14-15 cows, but it’s too much milk, too much to sell here. I would definitely go for it (expanding), it will be great for us, but there is no outlet. Now my outlet is so small, R2, 50 a litre is not enough”⁷. Another farmer said: “we try to keep the cost as low as possible, we have to sell directly to people, or it will be too expensive”⁸, and still another reflected on the market to people from informal settlements, “we sell milk and amasi to the squatter camps, what I call gate buying”⁹. The farmers often have to engage in non-farm activity for an alternative income, and they have to employ new kinds of retail innovations to survive.

⁴ Source: Owner of both a non-farm and farm enterprise

⁵ Source: Owner of a local farm – Anon.

⁶ Source: Owner of a farm and private dairy

⁷ Source: Owner of a dairy and cooperative.

⁸ Source: Owner of a poultry farm

⁹ Source: Owner of a farm and private dairy

Many farmers have diversified on farm activity and they are not convinced to continue to expand because of the lack of tenure security. A farmer who has been in business for over 25 years said “I sold my house and came to Jo’burg. But I still am leasing the land I am on”. Another said the land redistribution “is working so slowly, it is not even expected that it will happen soon. But this is my work; I would do nothing else but farm”¹⁰. Increasing tenure insecurity limits the potential of commercial intensification. Because of this, the reliance on informal farm gate, small-scale retail is a necessity. It is in most cases the only income for farmers, since not all have the opportunity or facilities to diversify. The food supply systems which emerge are thus survivalist and self-sustaining in nature from the side of production in this region.

The larger point of these very diverse experiences is indicative of a continuum along which most small-holder find themselves, the extremes being large fully commercial retailed enterprise, and survivalist subsistence activity. Direct food sale, of farmers who do not have the capacity to enter the formal market, to local communities from car-boots, for example, has become a survival mechanism for some. A considerable percentage of other farmers are relatively well off, and have thriving and growing businesses despite the lack of government support. Some of these farms theoretically have access to formal retail supply chains, by virtue of their quality and output quantity, but choose not to do so. One farmer says “I can sell to Spar [an international supermarket chain], but I have enough people who buy from me and I don’t even advertise. Someone tells someone else and that’s how the word gets around”¹¹.

Amongst reasons motivating farmers’ direct retail, which bypasses lengthy food chains, include the peaceful farm lifestyle, a viable economic activity venture, family expertise, monetary aspects and the knowledge that they are providing a service to the community. One farmer interestingly stated: “we’re not business people; we’re people who try to make eating a little easier for poor people”¹².

¹⁰ Source: Owner of a farm and private dairy

¹¹ Source: Co-owner of a large commercial poultry enterprise

¹² Source: Owner of a dairy and cooperative

Significantly, what surfaced from some of the in-depth conversations with farmers highlighted that the food provisioning role of local farms in these poor and culturally diverse communities is vital. Some consumers are reliant on direct purchases from farms and the direct farm sale of produce plays a significant role in increasing food security. Even though there is still fair market exchange involved, farms are more accessible and foodstuff sold from farms is more culturally specific. In addition, a fair amount of food is given or sold for a far lower price to poor members of the community. Other consumers would have no other channel to purchase some of the foodstuff and ceremonial livestock they offer. One farmer said, “You can’t get guaranteed Halaal¹³ chicken from a supermarket, even if it is, there’s no guarantee that it’s totally separated from Haraam [forbidden] food”¹⁴. Another said: “I want this product to be so available that it’s in all the informal outlets in all informal settlements and townships like Thembisa, Soweto and Thembelihle”¹⁵. Against the trend of cheap, multi-variety foodstuff from supermarkets, fresh fruit, vegetables and meat are available directly from farms, or from outlet stores supplied by farms. Some of this food is available in supermarkets, but is inaccessible to local populations for a number of reasons including the lack of refrigeration and transport of some members of the community.

The failure to recognise this food provisioning system is not surprising given that conceptions of food provisioning are bound within the dualist development rubric, and are not understood to occur along a continuum. Region 11 is the poorest of all eleven regions in Johannesburg¹⁶ and people who live in informal settlements in this area do not always have access to formal supermarket-retailed food, nor do they all purchase from city-centre street vendors. This is particularly significant since the majority of the informal settlements are key target areas in the forthcoming rollout of agricultural food packs, because they are perceived to have no alternative to food provisioning. The invisibility of producer provisioning systems obscures the key role peri-urban farms play in supporting regional poverty alleviation and food security strategies (albeit unwittingly). Local government

¹³ An Islamic food quality regulation certification

¹⁴ Source: Poultry farmer

¹⁵ Source: Owner of a dairy and cooperative

¹⁶ Michael Kundon, March, 2004: City of Johannesburg, Region 11 – Department of Sport and Recreation

commitment to alleviate issues such as poverty and food insecurity overlooks the potential of dynamic local initiatives which already fulfil some of these needs.

Contextualising Lenasia's food provisioning complex

In the past, culturally specific foodstuff was self-produced or sold under informal, word-of-mouth marketing systems within the community. The 1960s saw the increase in the procurement of farmland around the Lenasia Township, which provided Halaal meat and milk for Islamic people and Indian vegetables for the large vegetarian community. Early during the Apartheid regime, black people were denied the freedom to farm commercially and own tracts of productive land. In fact the geology of the land on which Lenasia, Soweto and Eldorado Park is built shows a large dolomite constituency, making the land less productive for farming, and unstable for infrastructure development. Nonetheless, these areas did not initially become productive in farming for commercial value. The impetus for agricultural 'development' came from the need to survive, and to preserve a culturally based food tradition.

Large supermarkets began emerging in Johannesburg toward the end of the 1960s. Until 1988 however, many residents of black areas frequented only one supermarket – the Hyperama in Ormode – just south of Johannesburg, perhaps as a result of the perception that they weren't allowed in 'white' areas. Of course this supermarket, and others, which more cosmopolitan communities purchased foodstuff from, did not cater for the Muslim population who ate only Halaal foodstuff, nor did it supply traditional Indian or African vegetables. Also, black people in general, did most of their food shopping informally in the townships or in the Johannesburg city centre.

Even though post-1990, all supermarkets were theoretically accessible to the diverse public, the foodstuff required by large cultural populations was unavailable in supermarkets, and continues to be so, with a few recent exceptions.¹⁷ Unless traditional foodstuff is bought directly from local farms, there would be no recourse for cultural communities to purchase and consume the kinds of traditional foodstuff they required. Peri-urban (local) farms play the role of supplying traditional, ceremonial and accessible food for African and Indian communities in Johannesburg. Although this supply system was predicated on isolation, formally black townships are now dynamic areas of cultural activity enclaves of cultural food provisioning. Because peri-urban farms facilitate traditional/cultural food systems and food supply for the urban poor, they are integral to the lifestyle, cultural and nutritional survival of the community. These foodstuff are not procured through the 'modern' conventional (formal retailed/supermarket) supply systems. They occupy an alternative space that cannot just be conceptualised as informal trade. The food supply system, as a whole, is largely ambivalent, at times hybrid, but certainly is alternative and evades the crass dualistic classification of modern-traditional food provisioning systems.

Hybrid food supply systems: The case of intercepting the traditional-modern dichotomy

If we are to conceptualise food provisioning systems along a modern-traditional continuum, then we must go beyond the dual imaginary of the food provisioning systems and include archetypes which appear to contradict the neat classification of either. One of the cases which comprise elements of both apparent food systems is the Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market. This case epitomises the hybridity of food provisioning systems and highlights the inappropriateness of dichotomising the urban food system. The Johannesburg Fresh Produce Market (JFPM) is a wholesale market

¹⁷ Supermarkets catering for gourmet 'traditional' tastes like Chinese, Thai, Indian or Greek, for example, have begun to stock certain traditional/exotic foodstuff, following fashionable eating trends. However, this is not always consistent, nor is the produce always fresh. Furthermore, because of the significant poverty of many South Africans, a larger unemployed/ working class cannot afford formally retailed, exotic foodstuff. Also, cf. Conclusion: The Trade Route Mall in Lenasia (2006).

which sources fresh, high quality fruit and vegetables from large commercial farmers all over South Africa and outside national borders.

The JFPM in its present location was established in 1972. It began in 1893 in the centre of Johannesburg, and began as the archetype of traditional food supply which made use of bartering systems, which later moved to Newtown (1913)¹⁸. Since 1972, the market has grown and diversified into the largest fresh produce market in Africa. The JFPM has over the past decade realised the increasing demand in township areas, and has opened an informal trading market selling to vendors and the public, called the Nelson Mandela People's Market (NMPM). Another assignment of the market is to provide fresh fruit and vegetable on a monthly basis under a food box scheme to registered organisations preferably involved in the care of HIV-positive people. The NMPM also supplies a food bank, currently being restructured to supply fresh food to children orphaned by AIDS. This venture is in part supported and driven by the provincial department of Social Development.

Accessibility to the market has, on observation, increased exponentially over the past three years. Local transport networks run regularly to and from the JFPM to townships such as Lenasia which makes fresh produce more accessible for the majority of the community via vendors. But this network goes beyond just informal trading. It is not simply a case of the ordinary street vendor being able to take a taxi to the 'local' fresh produce market, to buy and sell the *same produce* found in a supermarket from market-vendors outside the main market¹⁹. This food system is not simply an informal vending chain that is relatively common in most African cities. The general public and smaller vendors only buy from larger vendors outside the main market, part of the NMPM. The main market is not open to petty traders or to the public. Access cards to purchase directly from the market cost R100 and this is often the total amount small vendors buy for each day. There is also a monthly membership that hinders normal consumers from buying wholesale. Over the past year, the outside market, which sells to vendors and the public, has been dominated by non-South

¹⁸ The Johannesburg Fresh Produce webpage <http://www.jfpm.co.za/content/whatwedo3.stm>

¹⁹ July, 2005: Nelson Mandela People's Market - JFPM

Africans, mainly nationals from other African countries. Purchases are done while the fruit is still on the main market floor, with wealthy non-nationals buying almost all the produce. Prices immediately escalate, and large vendors who buy wholesale often cannot meet the much higher costs. Produce is then sold on black market 'principles', making fresh fruit and vegetable a competitively traded commodity. As a result, smaller vendors either have to invest more, or procure produce directly from local farms. Even though food supply from the market is increasingly complicated, it is still most dominant. Supermarkets such as Spar and Checkers, and the large, but lower quality Fruit and Veg City retailer continue to purchase some of their fresh produce from the market.

Once the epitome of (actually) traditional food provisioning, the JFPM is now the vanguard of the interception of food value chains. It engenders the entire spectrum of characteristics of dualistic perceptions of food provisioning; large-scale commercial sourcing procurement practises, fully traceable value chains; sophisticated cold storage facilities, high-value listed trading practises, regulated cross-border trade, direct trade with consumers, involvement in low cost value sourcing chains, food for community development and wellbeing. They are also at the forefront of empowerment programmes for small-scale black producers, in an effort to add value to their farm enterprise, and to increase their potential of becoming contracted producers.

Another such hybrid system is *Fruit and Veg City* (F&V City), which also epitomises the kind of interception of modes of food supply within the food provisioning continuum. F&V City is a franchise, but operates under independent management. In other words, sourcing is not only done through a small number of large producers/suppliers, which are prescribed by a larger regulatory framework. Local managers have the choice of procuring speciality produce locally or of selling speciality foodstuff on market demand. F&V City in lower income areas sell bulk simple foods like cabbages, leafy vegetables and potatoes. Another F&V City in the Westrand imports a wide range of cheeses and cut flowers, has a large fine wine outlet, and boasts a coffee shop and fully cooled outdoor eating areas. Before June 2006, most F&V City stores were locally managed. The store managers do their best to

include a variety of local, cultural produce of the people it serves²⁰. The Lenasia F&V City opened in 2002. Sourcing takes place, in some cases as far away as Kwazulu-Natal for a variety of up to twenty Indian vegetables, and as close by as 5kms for processed garlic and ginger products²¹. Local speciality foodstuff, and a few low quantity, high-value baby vegetables are in turn sourced from local farmers or the Fresh Produce Market. Other products, also traditional and cultural foodstuff are sourced from a backyard farmer, who has ventured out into small-scale enterprise²². Both these suppliers have front-door sales to members of the community, and are contracted to F&V City on a ‘supply and demand’ basis²³.

A very recent acquisition (June 2006) of F&V City by Pick and Pay, a national supermarket chain which has an annual turnover of over R35 billion²⁴ has implications around the interception of lower-cost/quality wholesale and high-value quality sourcing practises. While F&V City is financially procured by Pick ‘n Pay, this is a five-year arrangement where F&V City continues to operate as a franchise with its own procurement systems²⁵. It is hoped, by Pick ‘n Pay that the market the lower cost F&V Cities attracts would not be the only driving factor of the acquisition. Pick ‘n Pay has plans to tighten up quality sourcing practises and attempt to raise the standard of procurement quality and retail in most of ‘their’ 87 stores.

In some areas F&V City is the equivalent of a low-cost farm store which sells its lower quality produce to lower income communities, in others, a cheaper alternative to high-value supermarkets without compromising on the quality. The recent acquisition captures a consumer market that makes use of supermarkets for other groceries and the discount wholesaler for fresh produce. The quality markers then also follow a type of continuum in relation to where the store is located, and the kind of consumption demand associated with it. The F&V City itself embodies the food provisioning continuum in that it includes

²⁰ March, 2005: Fruit and Veg City

²¹ April, 2005: The Garlic Man

²² April, 2005: Aunty Kamla’s

²³ March, 2005: Fruit and Veg City

²⁴ February 2006 data - <http://www.pnp.taps-nodes.co.za/interimfeb2006/>

²⁵ July 2006: Executive manager – Pick ‘n Pay

cultural produce perceived to be ‘traditional’, home-based food products, speciality high-value food, direct farm procurement, sourcing from a wholesale market and a recent merge with a large supermarket. The consumption and sourcing linkages are not fixed, and therefore evade classification within any one conception whether modern or informal.

The last case is that of a very large hydroponic farm in the area, which boast 11 hydroponic tunnels (Figures 10 and 11), and dedicates two of these just to the production of speciality Indian vegetables, the rest of which is exotic lettuce, spinach and other seasonal vegetables. The agriculture project of the Johannesburg Council for the Disabled (JOCOD) is, according to the manager of the agriculture project, “a profitable venture. At first we started off small. If it could work in a small way, it can work in a big way. The demand was so great”²⁶. The organisation which hosts this agriculture enterprise has also begun, over the past four years, to supply these speciality food items to smaller stores in the area. In the summer months, the variety of traditional Indian vegetables averages at around 20. The demand for good quality Indian vegetables is so high that the project will expand to three tunnels dedicated to Indian vegetables in the new year. The organisation has a ‘gentlemen’s contract’ with an agent who supplies the JFPM, and provincial Netcare hospitals. Interestingly, ‘the gentlemen’s contract’, a distinctly Asian business arrangement, means the sourcing for the Netcare medical facilities is done through informal, word-of-mouth contracts, which are stable and based on a relationship of trust.



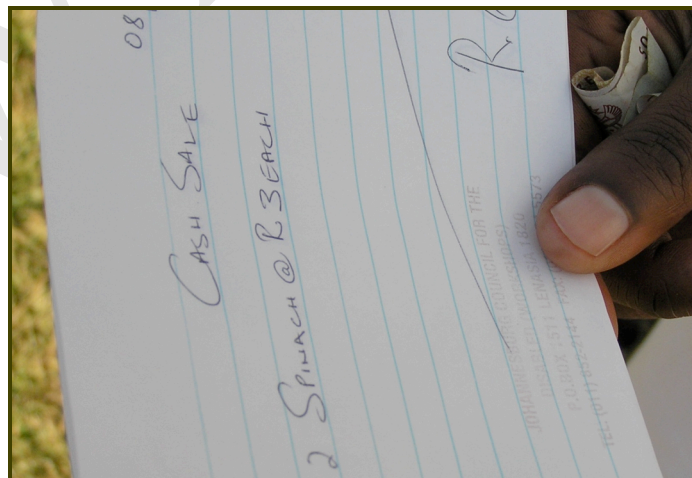
Figure 10: Four of eleven hydroponic tunnels for farming traditional vegetables

²⁶ August, 2005: JOCOD



Figure 11: Traditional leafy vegetables – Methi Bajji (Left) and Watercress Herbs

However, the bulk of JOCOD's sale occurs directly – farm to consumer – (Figures 12 and 13) who either frequent the farm, or visit the thrice-weekly outlet stalls outside a radio station and pharmacy. Many times a day people drive into the centre, and leave with a household supply of foodstuff. One consumer said “it's so convenient, and even if it wasn't, you can't get stuff like this in the shops. It stays fresher for longer and we know it's good and healthy. Plus it's cheaper. I wish I could buy all my fruit and vegetable here!”²⁷



²⁷ Lenasia, vegetable outlet stall: October, 2005

Figure 12: ‘Cash Sale – 2 spinach @ R3 each’



Figure 13: Direct sale to consumers who frequent the farm

Over the past five years an increasing focus of local farm development has been focused around supplying fresh and quality foodstuff to HIV-positive members of the community. While there is still much stigma attached to fresh food packs being handed out to HIV positive mothers and children, there is a trend toward the growth of organic and high nutrient-value production in Lenasia and surrounding areas. The large hydroponic farm, a project of the Johannesburg Council of the Disabled (JOCOD), has begun constructing two tunnels for the express purpose of poverty alleviation and food security to HIV positive people. At present they have just over 50 people who are taught farming skills, and are given land to ‘lease’ from the farm. The people take home all that they produce and either consume it directly, or sell it to members of the community. Around half of the women who come to the farm, supply the food to families who are unable to provide and consume safe and nutritious food. The majority of these families are affected by HIV. The motivation for this kind of service is naturally not monetary. The manager argues that “people are on our doorstep, they are our people. We cannot sit back, and know that we can offer something, and then not do anything. It’s our ministry. If we could just pool our resources and our land, we could make a huge impact here”.

The last type of food supply system is perhaps most characteristic of urban food networks. Supply systems catering for the urban poor have become a necessity in cities of the south. With increasing inflation, and decreasing real incomes, together with the rise in HIV infection, food insecurity has become an urgent policy issue. However, much of the funds to alleviate poverty and increase food security have been slow in reaching communities because they are directed toward building up databases and information systems related to food insecurity. In the meantime, urban residents, particularly in informal settlements are increasingly more vulnerable. The invisibility of peri-urban farms in this national concern, as mentioned earlier, lends to its dynamism. Food supply systems for the urban poor are based on a need for survival. Again, there are a number of driving factors facilitating these networks.

The JFPM and F&V City cases epitomise the fundamental argument of this chapter; that food provisioning systems should not, and cannot, be shaped by a modernist ideology. Hybrid food provisioning systems stand directly in the centre of the modern-traditional food supply dualism. Market networks are not fixed or linear, and they certainly are not informal since they include shareholding options, a fully taxable and regulated income, and a diverse consumer market base; not either higher income leisure consumers or lower income survival shoppers. Hybrid food provisioning systems thus also capture the spectrum of consumers, and attract consumers not necessarily tied to either end of the food provisioning continuum. The complex linkages and network relationships are driven not only by market principles, but by cultural drivers and consumer demand. Most importantly, the hybrid food provisioning systems bears witness to the depth of insight into the complexity of urban food supply systems that would be lost beneath a modernist dualism.

Facilitating food networks for the urban poor

The type of African food supply system that has perhaps most often been characterised as informal and traditional is the food network for the urban poor. It is no doubt that supply systems which cater for the urban poor have become a necessity in cities of the south. With increasing inflation, and decreasing real incomes, together with the rise in

HIV infection, food insecurity has become an urgent policy issue within disciplines of food and nutrition, climate change, environmental vulnerability and development studies. However, much of the funds set aside to alleviate poverty and increase food security has been slow in reaching communities because they are directed toward building up databases and information systems related to food insecurity. In the meantime, urban residents, particularly in informal settlements are increasingly more vulnerable, it is true, but they are also increasingly more active agents in food provisioning. Survivalist food supply systems will persist as long as there are poor people who cannot take advantage of formal retailing opportunities. However, given the food provisioning that takes place within hybrid food networks, survivalist food systems for the urban poor do not occur in isolation.

The first factor that enables the existence and persistence of food supply systems for the urban poor is the rise in informal settlements on the edges of black townships in Johannesburg. As aforementioned, this region is the poorest of all eleven in Johannesburg²⁸. The food networks located here, whether by necessity or by market-drivenness, cater for a relatively poorer urban community. While this is not a cultural grouping, per se, it nonetheless reflects a sub-stream of members within a cultural community. While supermarkets provide theoretically cheaper and more accessible food, the urban poor, mainly from informal settlements and low-income areas do not have refrigeration facilities – in order to store fresh food and meat products – nor do they own private vehicles with which to cart huge quantities of food products. While the urban poor may have to access some non-food items in a supermarket, some do not have access to transport.

The food supply system to the urban poor is not just informal because it occurs outside formalised trading spaces. Most food products are bought either on farms within walking distance where consumers can purchase (for example) a fully feathered live chicken otherwise unavailable, or are self provisioned. The kind of product that communities purchase from urban and peri-urban farms are firstly not available in supermarkets at

²⁸ November, 2004: City of Johannesburg – Region 11

all, and secondly, although consumers pay more, sometimes travel even further, they often get an inferior quality product. The choice of buying directly from farms is therefore not necessarily more cost effective even though it is a direct farm-consumer sale. A live chicken bought at the farm may cost close to double a pre-packed frozen supermarket chicken. The key difference is that to some members of poorer communities the chicken is a different product than just a Sunday pot roast. Mainly women from informal settlements, in and around the farm area, purchase live chickens (the squawking, carry-under-your-arm type), walk back home, pluck, singe hairs and cook every part of the chicken, with the exception of rectal bags, including the head, feet and beak (Figure 14).



Figure 14: Sale of a live chicken from a farm stall

Close to a quarter of all households in the informal settlement in Lenasia engage in some form of garden agriculture. While the plots are small, and people cannot plant everything they need in one garden, it is not uncommon to find neighbourhood bartering systems. If these characteristics serve only to epitomise a traditional system of food provisioning, however, we have an incomplete picture of how the urban poor acquire food. It is not as linear and primordial as it appears. There are fresh food outlets (Figure 15) either in the informal settlement clearly more accessible, or vendors - pushing supermarket trolleys

along the un-tarred streets selling fresh fruit and vegetable (Figure 16) to residents of the informal settlement living in un-electrified shacks. This food is sourced from the JFPM and the NMPM. Small quantity purchases from the nearby mall are regular occurrences.

While there are many people who beg for food, many of the people who live in the informal settlement have jobs in the area and are active agents in their food provisioning strategies. Poor urban communities in the developing south have to be increasingly reliant on community/self-grown foodstuff, which is firstly more accessible, and secondly, more culturally specific. In cases like Lenasia and Soweto this is magnified because of the nature of residential patterns. Cultural communities necessitate a traditional food base, and supply system. In some way the political situation in South Africa provided a good platform for the emergence and reinforcement of alternative food supply systems, which remain clearly unlike large-scale supermarket type food provisioning. Food provisioning in these areas are often facilitated by direct farm sale, and informal vending *outlets* of formally bought foodstuff from wholesale markets. This food system is not isolated and has strong linkages with formal food supply, as well as variable quality food direct from farms. This is not just survivalist food. The sometimes more expensive choice of food is not driven by the need just to eat. The kind of conception that suggests the lack of choice of poor people in their own food provisioning because of their desperation is flawed. In the case of food provisioning systems for the urban poor, cultural modes of consumption very often intercept our conception of informal food provisioning systems.



Figure 15: Fresh food outlet in an informal settlement



Figure 16: Informal sale of fruit

Traditional food supply systems far from traditional imaginaries

The imaginary associated with traditional food may include indigenous crops planted around a homestead smallholding, small livestock and perhaps a stone threshing table. Traditional food for ceremonial and religious purposes may resonate with an image of tribalism and the sacrifice of home grown food and animals to appease the primordial gods. The traditional food chain may be conceived of as self-provisioning or village-based food production, barter and consumption with no modern linkages or monetary exchange. This conception seems to be as far removed from modern supermarket chains as is the imaginary of food types. For culturally diverse urban communities, the traditional food provisioning network is a key aspect to their cultural and religious preservation. However, it is not the kind of traditional food system as described above although for the sake of terminology the *word* traditional will still be employed. The traditional-food system cannot be characterised under these traditional constructs. As other food supply systems analysed in this section, the traditional food chain is an area of intersection between the supply of traditional foodstuff to meet very specific cultural consumption needs and very formal and regulated provisioning systems which meet those needs.

The four categories of traditional food networks evident highlight powerful consumption needs and a very efficient provisioning system. The first is *Halaal* poultry networks which highlights specific religious food requirement and strict quality regulation. The second is the Indian vegetable network, the third is traditional dairy produce and the final is food for ceremonial use. All of these food chains represent a fascinating case of traditional-food meets modern-supply-system. I have not chosen to classify these food systems as hybrid within a conception of the food provisioning continuum because they exhibit particular characteristics of ‘traditional’ systems and very specific ‘modern’ supply chain markers.

Halaal poultry supply systems

A particularly noteworthy food network in Lenasia is the poultry chain. In region 11, there are close to 15 poultry farms, ranging from small to large establishments. Many

of them are family-owned (three – four family members co-owning and managing the farm). What is distinctive about these poultry farms is that they are owned by members of the Islamic community. While the religion of farm owners is otherwise inconsequential, in the case of food, Islamic regulation is particular. *Halaal* is a religious certification (Figure 17) for food products – particularly meat – governing processing.

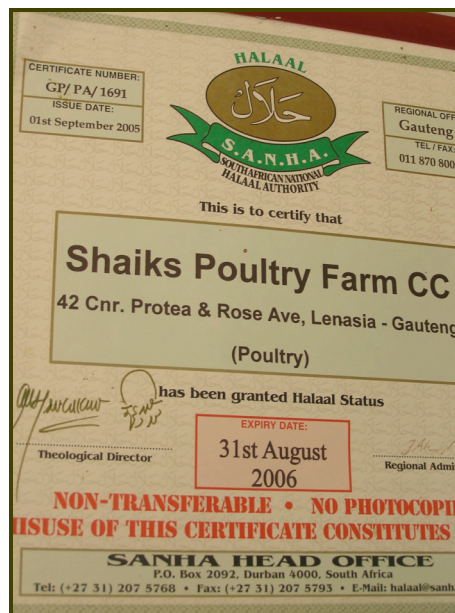


Figure 17: Halaal Certification at a poultry farm outlet store

The word *Halaal* means ‘permitted’, ‘allowed’ and/or ‘legal’ (The Muslim Food Board²⁹) under Islamic instruction. The very rigid quality certification involves “ensur[ing] the product does not contain, is not derived from and does not come into contact with any non-Halaal substance...investigat[ing] all contents...[and] independently communicating with all suppliers of [food] components” (The Muslim Food Board³⁰). This is done extremely efficiently and rigorously by monitoring and appraising the entire process of processing, storage and packaging along the food chain.

Lenasia has a large Muslim population who is forbidden to eat foodstuff not sanctioned by the Halaal authority, according to Islamic regulation. For this

²⁹ The Muslim Food Board, <http://www.tmfnet.net/js/whatishl.html>

reason, Islamic restaurants and food retailers are distinctive from conventional ones. Islamic law states that no forbidden ingredients or utensils tainted with forbidden food may be used at any point during the production, cleaning, processing or consumption of Halaal food. Separate farms, cleaning, processing, cooling and packaging facilities are also set apart, within a religious sanction.

One very large Muslim-owned farm, processes, stores and sells all their products directly from the farm or from one of two farm outlet stores. All their stores and all the nodes along the processing and manufacturing chain are Halaal accredited. They supply local restaurants and have expanded their production to process almost 5 000 chickens per day. They sell organic chicken, live chickens or special³¹ poultry products on demand (Figure 18).



Figure 18: Skinless chickens at a poultry farm outlet store

Other poultry farms also supply Islamic butcheries under strict Islamic regulatory bodies, thereby making this supply system part of a unique and exclusive supply chain. Apart from selling to the public and formal retailers, this farm exports chicken and poultry products to neighbouring countries that have substantial Islamic populations, like Mozambique and Zambia. This is significant because cross border multinational regulatory bodies generally govern international trade. In this case, South African and other international quality regulatory bodies are circumvented (even though under Halaal practises, meat products are often also

³¹ There is a certified technique under Halaal regulation which is used to remove the skin, head and

HACCP³² certified). This food supply system directly counters conventional supermarket networks.

What we see then, is a religious and cultural consumption need (demand) being met through highly sophisticated supply chain management and certification. The kind of resources that need to be available to regulate the supply chain at every node of production, storage and retail, speak to the economic efficiency of this 'traditional' food system. Many residents of Lenasia who are not Muslim prefer to purchase Halaal meat because of the perceived higher quality standard than meat from supermarkets. The Halaal meat and poultry market appears to be taking over consumption practises in Lenasia and in other parts of South Africa. Independent butcheries and poultry shops with legitimate annual certification from the Islamic food authority are guaranteed a captive market. In fact the very presence of the Islamic food standard bears witness to the formality of the food system.

Indian vegetables

The Indian vegetable network is increasingly successful because it provides Indian vegetables common in India to the large South African diasporic community. Traditional food tastes and consumption patterns common in India have persisted for six generations, on average, in some South African Indian households. The sourcing of these foodstuff is rarely inter-continental (India- South Africa), but does occur. Large tracts of land in Kwazulu Natal are dedicated to the production of Indian vegetables. Outside India, Kwazulu Natal has the largest population of people of Indian descent. Vegetable shops which are located in Indian communities all over South Africa source traditional produce mainly from Kwazulu Natal, but also from peri-urban farms in the area or home-based gardens for small herb vegetables, as is the case of most fresh food stores in the south of Johannesburg.

The success of this cultural food network is in the community relationships it fosters. As mentioned earlier, Lenasia is the now cultural centre of Indian people living in Johannesburg. The community includes a large population of Hindu (Hindi, Telugu,

Tamil and Gujarati) ethnic groupings, all of whom form the core market for Indian vegetables. Members of the Hindu population in Lenasia either are totally vegetarian, or fast (eating only vegetables) three times a week. Indian vegetables with varieties well over 40 (Figures 19, 20, 21, and 22), are an integral part of this community's diet. Since the Gujarati community is predominantly vegetarian, and is the most *culturally* conservative group, particularly in terms of food, it is thus understandable that the Indian vegetable network is also a vital part of this community's lifestyle and their cultural preservation.



Figure 19: Giant Chillies



Figure 20: Toorya



Figure 21: Kerela



Figure 22: Dhodhi (calabash)



Figure 23: African tubers

Different Indian food varieties include a number of leaf/herb foodstuff called *bajji* (herbs), and many bean varieties (Figures 24, 25 and 26).



Figure 24: Gadra Beans

Figure 25: Dabla Beans

Figure 26: Valore Paapri

Traditional African vegetables (Figure 23) and foodstuff are not available in supermarkets, and if they were, the food would usually not be fresh, and lacking in variety. Most local farms which grow traditional African vegetables have specialised in tubers and leafy vegetables. The leaves of many other vegetables are also consumed by African and Indian people. The underlying logic of consuming the leaves of the potato, pumpkin, beetroot, sugar-cane and squash plants is that “if you can eat the fruit, you can eat the leaves”. Self-provisioning is another means of cultural consumption, although this usually takes the form of single herb cultivation on window sills.

Dairy supply systems

The African dairy network is a dynamic supply system that has come to epitomise African dairy consumption practises. While the imaginary might suggest the home-brew of milk stout, the African dairy chain is a sophisticated chain of dairy production according to age old traditional consumption preferences. *Inkomasi* – a cultured dairy product forms part of the staple diet of the Black African community. This product is available in supermarkets, but is generally smoother and more refined than the original iMasi. The cultural preference is not always the smoother, more refined one, although more ‘authentic’ inkomasi products are been produced by black cooperatives under independent brands which resonate with African communities.

One dairy producer, in the study area, sells his branded, authentic product to school children during school breaks and to parents after school. He also has a biweekly 'container shop' (outlet store) at the farm and at a school where he sells to vendors and to the public. On average he makes between 500 and 1000 litres per day, and sells the bulk of it in 20 litre cans to vendors for resale. This particular dairy farm has a multimillion rand processing outfit funded in part by the Danish government. However, due to mismanagement, debt and low yields, the output is at least 3 times under capacity. Nonetheless, the farmer "tr[ies] to keep the cost as low as possible" and to "comply with the government regulations according to health standards". The product this dairy sells is of a very high standard, and tastes very much like the original *inkomasi* from indigenous rural areas. His business plan is centred around providing a nutritious traditional meal which is "the stuff [people] grew up with"³³.

The African dairy chain is an interesting case that warrants further research. It too brings together elements of traditional consumption demand and high-tech, quality controlled and supermarket-retailed provisioning systems.

Foodstuff for Ceremonial Use

The final case of traditional food provisioning systems is not for (eating) consumption, but cultural consumption. African and Indian communities in the south of Johannesburg buy livestock and fresh produce directly from farms for ceremonial use. Purchases for annual festivals and larger weddings do not usually take place directly from farms, because of the large quantities required. Also, larger annual ceremonies take place in rural villages where the family ancestry is. Smaller ceremonies which do not only happen during fixed periods in the year, require livestock and produce sourced closer to residential areas. Since Lenasia and the surrounding areas were racially demarcated residential areas and function as cultural zones, the farms located here fulfil this necessary service. African and Indian cultural groups naturally have different ceremonies.

Traditional African ceremonies

African ceremonies for thanksgiving purposes are offered “during exceptional achievements, life stages, or just to say thanks”. This is called *Mpho ya Badimo*, which translates as ‘gifts for the gods’. The sacrifices offered to the gods and to the ancestors are mainly goats and sheep. This kind of offering happens throughout the year and is done by the male members of the family, even if it is done on behalf of females. The baSotho people observe this particular kind of sacrifice. The ceremony also has an equivalent in all African ethnic groups. The produce for these ceremonies come mainly from surrounding farms, which are familiar with the slaughtering rites and sacrifice rituals. There are around 10 farms on the western fringe of Soweto which stock goats and sheep solely for this purpose.

Other sacrifices happen on an annual basis in homeland areas. These include the ‘Rites of Passage’ ceremonies. Local farms, naturally, do not service this. The most common ceremony in recent years has been that of becoming a traditional healer. *Lefehlelo*, translated as the ‘release and graduation from normal life’ represents the rite of passage in becoming a traditional healer. Two goats are slaughtered for the celebration, one for consumption and celebration, and the other for the ritual part of the ceremony where the second goat is hidden, and the candidate has to inquire of the spirits as to its location. When the candidate finds the goat, he/she has to drink the blood, whereby the life force of the animal is symbolically transferred to the healer. Since this ceremony happens throughout the year, goats are sourced mainly from surrounding farms, again displaying alignment with any traditional requirements of the feeding, storage and slaughter of livestock.

Traditional Islamic ceremonies

Islamic ceremonies, conversely, occur at fixed times in a given year. Families slaughter up to twelve unblemished male sheep during special festival times which happens only once a year. Livestock for the annual Eid Ul Fitr festival is not only sourced from local farms, which do not have the capacity to produce this large an

amount of livestock. However, during the annual festival, local farms function as outlets for livestock bought as far off as Namibia. Non-seasonal festivals include the slaughtering of goats, cows and sheep for religious blessing and to dedicate the birth of children, four for male children, and three for female. Livestock for these *Sadkha* and *Akikah* ceremonies are produced on local farms. In fact more than half the farms in Lenasia exist to fulfil this function alone. Again, the rearing of the livestock is done according to heavily regulated Halaal certification standards, without which none of the farms could engage in the sale of livestock. Islamic people of African descent also commute to Lenasia to buy livestock.

Traditional Hindi and Tamil ceremonies

Hindi and Tamil ceremonies happen 10, 16 or 40 days after the death of a family member, where special food is cooked and served to guests. A portion of this food is dedicated and left out for the dead. The food cooked is only vegetarian and includes mainly Indian traditional vegetables, sourced from local farms unavailable in supermarkets.

These ceremonies represent distinctive indigenous supply systems within a strict quality control system. This is not the case of indigenous tribal communities bringing out the ceremonial livestock with chanting and dancing around the fire. Neither is it the case of cultural communities stepping out of their mud hut to select an animal for sacrifice. The practise occurs under intense quality regulations and through modern economic systems. The process is often superintended by a cultural leader, and an expert from the producer segment. The procurement of some ceremonial livestock crosses national borders and thus must comply with health and sanitary cross-border regulations. The ceremonies may be age-old, but the context is significantly different.

While in some regards all four examples may be perceived as ‘specialty’, most occupy a culturally embedded space providing access to food otherwise unavailable. It is true that larger supermarket stores offering cheaper food more proximally accessible than before have, over the past decade, replaced smaller food stores. Access though, isn’t everything when it comes to this case. Supermarkets do not

adequately supply traditional Indian or African vegetables, ceremonial produce, or dairy products that are culturally peculiar. Direct sales are not as a result of poor management, or the lack of marketing finesse. One large, established poultry production owner said “yes, we have the potential to be a large formal chain, but why would we want to? We serve the community”³⁴. This respondent went on to assert the success of the two home outlet-stores which are affiliated with his farm. He has a drive-in establishment, housing a chicken battery, a free-range area, an abattoir, cold storage and packaging facility. A dairy farmer, boasting high-tech dairy production and packaging facilities, while having the capacity for interception into larger retail markets, asserts “we have a niche market here. I sell to people from the informal settlement from the gate or at a school nearby...they don’t sell the proper African *inkomaas*, which people from the rural areas are used to, in shops”³⁵.

The Indian and African traditional food systems are fascinating because they represent consumption needs and cultural preferences that have existed for generations. The persistence of the cultural food chain is based on the fact that most formal food supply systems – like supermarkets – do not cater for these consumption demands. The ‘traditional’ choice is often a cultural necessity. Simply classifying traditional-food needs under a tribal village imaginary, obscures the cultural vitality of consumption practises in an era of unlimited conventional food choices. It is not simply the case of choosing traditional food over supermarket food. The significance of the traditional food supply chain represents the preference of cultural food over mass-produced ‘conventional’ food. These occur under standardised economic exchange and no less strict provisioning regulation. Beyond the ‘African has come home’ imaginary exists formal modes of provisioning to meet traditional consumption needs according to standardised economic and quality procedures. The space of confluence of cultural needs and ‘modern’ provisioning systems allow the African and Indian cultural food supply system to reorganise our conception of indigenous food supply.

³⁴ November, 2004: Shaik’s Poultry Farm

Conclusion: Drawing on the food provisioning continuum debate

To residents living in and around Lenasia, there is nothing particularly noteworthy about the food supply system. The interface between 'traditional' and 'modern' food supply systems is not always discerned because the food system is perceived as ordinary. Cultural modes of production and regulation, have intercepted formal, more conventional retail networks, for as long as the apparent dichotomy has existed. Food provisioning that includes both elements of traditional consumption needs, and modern food supply, are familiar and increasingly becoming the norm. Local provisioning systems, while appearing to be one of two consumption choices, are either preferred or necessary. Face-to-face interaction of producers and consumers are typical, and relationships of trust are increasingly the *modus operandi* of small peri-urban producers to gain access to speciality markets, even in formal retailing structures. The alternative *nature* of the food supply system highlights, for instance, that however accessible formal supermarket food networks may be, they cannot provide an adequate sourcing mechanism for traditional food, and food for the urban poor.

Being unable to logically map the spaces of food supply may prove to be frustrating. The reason is that our understanding of food supply systems has been shaped by a modernist conception. The apparent juxtaposition in the urban food supply system evokes a difficulty in understanding what is happening, and how people acquire food. Key markers of modern food supply systems include high value supermarket food retail, stringent quality measures, sophisticated processing chains and trusted branding. If these 'conditions' are not met, a food supply system is not usually considered modern at all. On the contrary, food supply systems which have elements of cultural embeddedness, informal retail or indigenous food types are perceived as being traditional. The modern-traditional dichotomy unwittingly evokes a conceptual separation of food supply systems exhibiting distinctive markers. If we employ this dualism in order to understand urban food provisioning systems in the developing world, we miss a complex combination of provisioning systems that do not neatly fit either. The boundaries of the rigid and powerful modern-traditional dichotomy, however, have been shown to be increasingly porous in the case of Johannesburg's

urban food provisioning system. This section has argued that the food supply system can best be understood as a continuum (Figure 27).

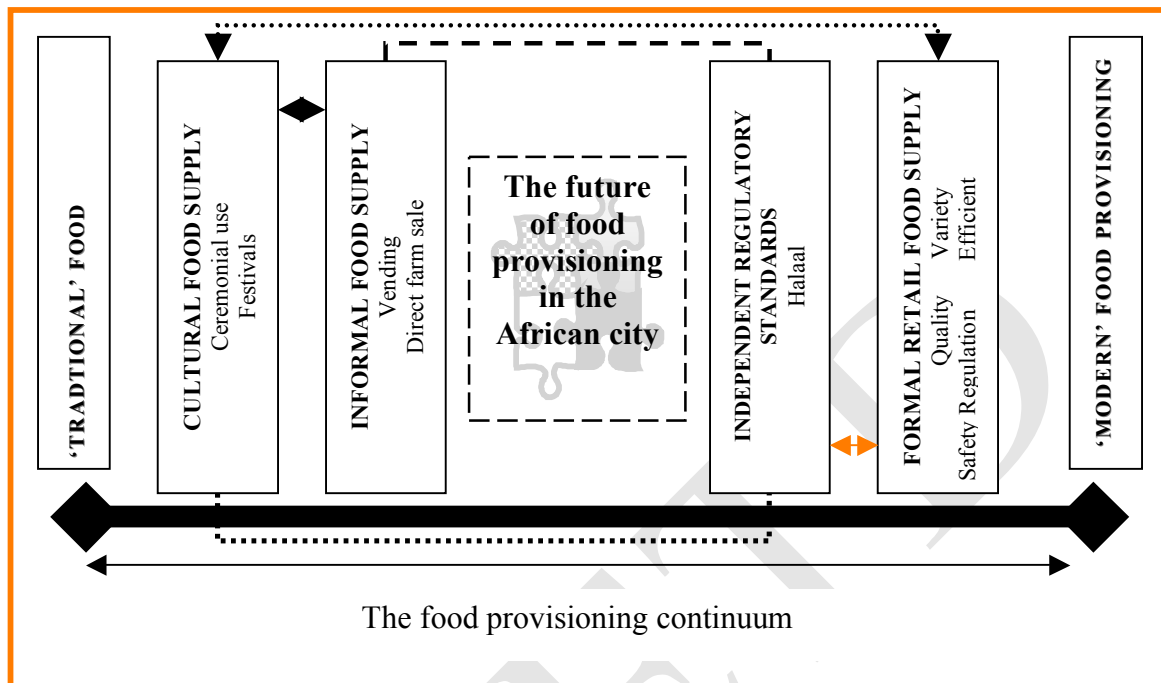


Figure 27: A conception of the food provisioning continuum showing interactions and spaces of confluence

There are hybrid networks and interactions that draw out more modern conceptions of enterprise and retail and highlight informal, cultural methods and drivers of provision. All of these represent fascinating and interconnected networks of food supply often predicated on cultural food types, but still engaging with high value formal quality-based retail. This section argues that this alternative space can best be conceptualised as a continuum, with the conventional modern-traditional extremes on the outside, and more complex consumptions needs linked to varying spaces of provisioning that intersect the neat spaces of classification. At the very centre of the spectrum is what I like to call 'the future of food supply'. Of course this section argues that the 'future' has arrived! However, the term 'future' has been mainly employed to suggest that this is how urban food supply systems in the south should be conceptualised in the future. The dualism clearly is not helpful, since there are an infinite number of interactions between the neatly classifiable boxes suggested in Figure 27.

In Johannesburg, the new (future) conception of food supply has very recent visible resonance. A very recent addition to the Lenasia landscape is the Trade Route Mall, a large, mostly Islamic-owned mall, which boasts two large supermarkets and other national and international clothing stores. The two supermarkets – Pick and Pay and Woolworths – have unique sourcing practises as compared to their other branded supermarkets. Neither stock alcohol, since the sale and consumption of alcohol is forbidden according to Islamic regulation. Most significant is that Pick and Pay does not stock any pork or non-Halaal products. Woolworths have dedicated Halaal shelf-space, and need-less-to-say, is less popular in terms of meat and poultry sale. Both the supermarkets have sourced traditional Indian vegetable as well as spices, making the gap between accessible traditional foodstuff and unavailable cultural produce in supermarkets significantly smaller. Pick and Pay in Lenasia has also changed its meat-sourcing practises. They now source meat from Halaal regulated farms, fully branded under the Pick and Pay label. Anecdotal evidence suggested that in the first few months of the opening of the mall, Pick and Pay's meat section made the most profit.

I predict this model as the future of cultural food provisioning in urban areas, where the interaction between what was considered traditional and modern, will be the intentional driving factor in contemporary food supply systems. Fascinating research questions arise from these recent changes such as cultural forms of regulation, the shifting conception of quality, the power of consumer market over supermarket sourcing practise – the list snowballs. The strict national regulation of supermarkets, now appear to be intercepted (formally) by religious certification, when it comes to meat and poultry. The food supply system has become heavily embedded in local cultural food needs, and this goes beyond the survivalist informal networks. In terms of fresh produce, certainly the convenience and quality of formally retailed cultural foodstuff creates some competition for farms that do not hold a kinship relationship with consumers. But the larger point is that this confluence of food networks highlights that the imaginary of a 'one-model African food supply system' is one which is currently and dynamically being challenged. It is vastly different from stagnant, scrounge-for-food type systems that have been reflected in other studies of African food supply systems. Certainly, the language of remnant, archaic, primitive

food systems. And of course, this dynamism and hybridity suggests that it would be difficult (if not impossible) to adequately frame Johannesburg's food supply systems according to any one given conceptual map. There are complex (wild even), new and vibrant networks occurring that are constantly shifting and taking on the contextual identity of its location.

If classifying the food supply systems under a modern-traditional dualism obscured significant elements in the analysis of food supply systems in Johannesburg, then the subsequent theoretical concern of this dissertation is how to conceptualise the food supply system. The Johannesburg case of urban food supply certainly has profound implications for theorising about food supply in the south in general. For the purpose of a dissertation, a series of subsequent questions emerge: to what end can we steer the rich South African material and the robust contribution to a conceptual debate toward making a contribution to other fields of study? Will the theoretical arguments of this case actually reach the frontiers of extending knowledge? Where do I (or can I) frame this material so that it adds and gains value and signification without losing any of its richness? The sections which follow, engage fundamentally with attempting to answer these questions. Given the earlier debate about how spaces are signified and valued, the theoretical framework into which the case is placed has great significance for the value of the case as to whether the entire dissertation will be just an interesting commentary on the theory or whether it will advance knowledge. The next section explicitly argues the problematic of the academic exercise of conceptually framing one's research.

CHAPTER 3: LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

On positioning new knowledge in politically acceptable theory

“Reliable new knowledge, in this dispensation, cannot come directly out of intuition, revelation, rumor, or mimicry. It has to be a product of some sort of systematic procedure. This is the nub of the strangeness of the research ethic” (Appadurai, 2002:10)

While the empirical chapter argued for a theoretical reconceptualisation of food supply systems in the south, I acknowledge that it cannot be left as an isolated narrative without framing it theoretically. Naturally, new research must also make some sort of advancement to the theoretical knowledge store as a whole. This can only be done when the researcher has a sense of where this research ‘fits in’ to a broader field, and in my case, a broader conception of food supply systems. I am not against the epistemological need to frame empirical research within existing and established theory if it is to extend knowledge or critique current understanding, it must have some point of departure. However, this chapter argues - in practise - that the process of finding conceptual space – framing one’s research – is highly problematic and involves a political choice.

Texts on how to write a dissertation suggest that framing is an objective exercise and that the empirical research is the natural recourse *from* a literature review. This section shows that it is possible not only to reverse the ‘appropriate’ *order* of a dissertation, but also to critique the process of framing by showing that locating one’s research is not a natural process that can employ ‘scientific’ formulae. Within traditional research ontology, the process of framing one’s empirical research is seen as a logical one since the empirical focus and research question is guided by the literature, and in this way the exercise of framing appears to be a natural progression within research. The conceptual framework which a candidate may locate her study in is thus rarely problematised because it is not understood as a choice.

This dissertation problematises the perceived naturalness of framing one's research. This section draws on the introduction which argues that the value system associated with geographical spaces of academia applies significant pressure on what kind of theoretical base a case is framed within – local or international. Clearly this is not a politically neutral process even though it has been constructed as a normalised one. Since the conceptualisation of one's empirical case is not an objective exercise, the choice of the literature framework has explicit implications for the case study, both for how it is analysed, and how much significance it bears on existing knowledge stores. In light of the epistemological demand of building new knowledge upon a strong foundation of existing knowledge, and this knowledge is assumed to be located within a neat, singular space, the chapter which follows is essentially a 'hat trick', where I will show how it is possible to frame the research in very different ways. I do this by constructing three literature reviews and then assessing each of these according to their implications for my case study. Through this exercise, I hope to demonstrate not only that the process of framing is subjective, but also that the geographical scale we choose to locate our case in (or validate our case under) has particular implications for how our case 'looks', and holds certain academic value.

The necessity of validation within these already recognised spaces of academic scholarship, however, somewhat contradicts the rhetoric of a legitimate and original contribution to knowledge since the original research is valued according to the 'internationalness' of the theory. Empirical research from the south is often compelled to be framed within northern, 'international' or Anglo/Americo-centric literature (Raju, 2006). The choice then is not necessarily between different disciplinary fields in which to locate empirical research. Rather, it is about the political significance of the choice. This happens at two levels: first, from a south perspective, it may seem more appropriate to locate one's research in the south as opposed to theory emerging from the north for reasons of socio-economic similarity. At the second level, however, the political significance of the choice is much more complex when implicated in a broader context of academic knowledge building. The 'choice' of where to locate a case study is not about socio-economic similarity but about where the case study can gain most validation and value.

It is instructive and enlightening to consider that way in which South Africa's National Research Foundation (the NRF) might assess this process. From the NRF's perspective, South African researchers must locate their proposed studies in an international theoretical framework since the potential grants must in some way go toward extending global knowledge in some discipline. Also, within NRF rating systems, researchers are required to publish in international journals, to be up to speed with international debates, and to present at international conferences, to gain merit as a researcher (Visser, 2006). What is important is not necessarily the academic exercise of presenting and publishing, but that my merit as a researcher depends on me making the northern connection – presenting, publishing or locating my research in the north. Without this kind of theoretical framework, or international publishing record, researchers are less likely to be highly validated or proposals are less likely to receive support. This, of course, suggests that the process may not include a completely free choice after all. The value and validation of the research is gauged by where the local case study is located and there is an implicit recognition that the extension of knowledge occurs when a candidate engages with 'international' theory.

Critical geography would argue that we should not need to bow to this standard of validation. They would argue that it is politically valid and legitimate to locate one's research in the south in literature from a south context. In fact, according to critical geographers, a south-south conceptualisation may be more valuable than masquerading in a Literature that has very little bearing on its utility. Still, there is pressure to not only include northern theory, but make that theory *the* paradigm into which local the case must fit. As much as a critical geography perspective may incite activist post-colonial tendencies, and as valuable as these challenges are, theory building is not seen to occur in these dissident south-spaces. A south-south framing of a case has inflexible implications for theory building in the discipline. North-centric research becomes the theory that informs the discipline, but it is based on vastly different driving factors as compared to ours. South-based research remains case studies, which has always to be *in reference* to the 'universal' theory, without the potential of adding to the theoretical store (after Berg, 2004). It is not so much the fact that these research hierarchies exist that is problematic, but that this system of validation and naming is taken for granted

Since it remains important that research is situated within a theoretical framework, and since it is almost always preferred that the framework or the literature base is international/north-based, the political choice of where to locate one's case, as aforementioned, involves a cost. This cost may be seen in the erasures of elements within the case that may not fit within the Literature, or it may be a broader loss of utility for the local context if the framework is academically appropriate but fails to address contextual issues.

The three literature reviews within which I could possibly locate my case made it increasingly clear that the authoritative voice of 'The Literature' is an obliquely constructed standard, that I have a great deal of control over. The conceptual space may be regarded as a malleable space, and the entire process of locating one's study may be shown to be a process subject to manipulation. There was no scientific prescription which defined where I should locate my study, only the implicit understanding that certain theoretical spaces make my case more valuable in extending theory. Thus, the process which was a lofty academic rite became a subjective charade which often went against debates of academic spaces within critical geography and rhetoric about 'giving voice to the margin'. The first literature I reviewed – the rise of supermarkets and the formalisation of retailing – was locally appropriate since it comprised of south based political-economy studies in similar context as South Africa's. This south-south conception could be the most logical conceptual space for my case. Yet it is also possible to frame the literature in a second southern dominated literature. Most of the literature was based in the south and made strong utilitarian arguments in regards to poverty alleviation in the south. This south-south function conceptual space was not just adequate and relevant, but also politically chic since poverty alleviation and south-south survivalist grassroots initiatives are trendy subjects in conceptualising food systems in the south. While both these 'choices' would make for fascinating policy debates or practical local solutions and even though my case could be perfectly located in it, my research would not really extend any knowledge, and would remain a case study with fascinating local interactions. For the requirements of a traditional MA these two literature reviews, clearly, would have been adequate.

To be reckoned as a worthy researcher, however, this ‘hat trick’ may not represent an entirely free choice. If this research is to reach beyond its local, parochial implications and extend theory, it would have to be published in international journals and presented at international conferences. To deal with this academic ‘requirement’ in terms of locating one’s case study in an international Literature, I go on to locate the Johannesburg case study in a third possible framework. An emergent northern literature around alternative food networks (AFN) appeared to provide a theoretical validation for my empirical material. In addition, it would satisfy NRF requirements, and made strong arguments for extending knowledge in the discipline. This fit, however, is politically problematic as it occurs in a vastly different context and has markedly different driving factors. Nonetheless, this space offered the very tangible potential of extending knowledge since this section is publication in collaboration with other northern theorists proving the highly political valuing of research framed in a northern literature.

The section that follows is a compilation of two literature reviews, each of which has the potential to steer my research in quite different ways. A composite ‘analysis’ section of the first two literature reviews assesses the literature in light of the case (or is it vice versa), and then comments on the possible costs involved in locating my study with that conceptual. The conclusion also comments on the fact that new theory from a dissertation can only emerge within the parameters of literature, as an advance or disagreement with it. The fourth chapter is made up of one last literature review as well as an in-depth critique of locating my case in this conceptual space. The final literature review is on alternative food networks (AFN), and attempts to meet the requirement of locating local research within a northern, more ‘established’ theory since AFN as an emergent movement within alternative geographies of food are seen as a northern phenomenon. This is a much lengthier literature review that is very theoretically reflexive, and overtly engages with the conclusion of the first two reviews, the question of exporting theory, and the practise of squeezing a case study into the afforded space of a theoretical paradigm – hence its status as a separate chapter.

South-South Location I: The formalisation of retailing

literature review 1

The literature on the formalisation of retailing suggests a secular change toward the dominance of supermarkets, particularly in emerging markets, like South Africa. There has been a shift from informal, fragmented retail structures toward more sophisticated and concentrated formal retail structures like supermarkets and large format hypermarkets. It suggests the progressive demise of small shops and informal food market outlets and the increasing dominance of supermarkets and large discount stores even in remote rural areas of the developing world. The reason for this shift is understood to be in part due to increasing urban incomes and the subsequent increased access to formally retailed food, and the increasing profit potential within emerging market economies. So in the past where people may have done their food shopping at five smaller stores scattered across town and this costing more, consumers are now able to purchase all their food in a supermarket which offers cheaper, safer food.

The evidence for this shift in Latin America is convincing: Reardon and Berdegúe (2002:373) argue that “shares of various types of food retailers in the national retail sectors of 12 Latin American countries...constitut[e] 90% of the region’s economy”, which is by far the dominant share of retail capital in an emerging market economy where economic markets may not be perceived to be advanced. In South Africa, supermarkets represent less than “2% of all retail outlets,[but] a rough estimate of the share of supermarkets in total food retail in South Africa is around 50-60%” (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:4). This means that the balance of food provisioning that occurs in supermarkets far outweighs the informal food provisioning system. The proliferation of formal retailing in Kenya, theorists argue, has meant “34 chain-supermarkets; 10 hypermarkets (100 super-market equivalent [and] 117 small independent supermarkets [in Nairobi]... with a metro-population with about 2, 5 million” (Kenyaweb, 2002 as cited in Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:7). Considering that Kenya is by comparison a late starter as compared with South Africa (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003), Kenya’s supermarket growth is comparable to South Africa’s, which boasts on average “39,5 supermarkets per million people (similar to the rate in Argentina and Chile)” (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:3). Kenya and South Africa are perceived to be relatively wealthy African countries, and

it is significant that a large percentage of their income is through supermarket retail. By 2003, according to ACNielsen South Africa there were close onto 1500 large supermarkets and over 30 hypermarkets, including those in remote areas, but excluding superettes (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003). Three and a half years later, that figure has been far exceeded in Gauteng alone, following global trends in emerging markets.

Farina and dos Santos Viegas (2002) argue the phenomenon of investment by retailers, specifically in relation to Brazil, is in part driven by economic stabilization and liberalisation and the increase in spending in consumer markets. In six years the number of the largest food companies in Brazil had doubled (*ibid.*), and in the past decade, South African market share of the top three supermarkets – Pick ‘n Pay, Shoprite and Checkers have increased exponentially. The phenomenon of large foreign direct investment by multinationals into countries which undergo economic liberalisation has further been argued by Farina and dos Santos Viegas (2002). It is argued that during periods of economic acceleration there is an increase in food demand, decreased national capacity to meet that demand and an open market for cheaper imports. This environment makes emerging markets in the developing south targets for large food companies (Reardon and Berdegúe, 2002)

The concentration of retailers has led to supermarket chains securing purchasing and procurement power in the supply chain (Reardon and Barrett, 2000). One of the negative effects of this has been the increase in rural marginalisation of producers because of retailer-driven sourcing. Small-scale producers who cannot comply with rigorous regulations and quality measures are excluded from the supply chain. Another outcome, suggested in the literature, is the ability of supermarkets to “deepen [the] markets and raise [the] incomes” (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:2) of areas in which they are located. Further, the growth of retailing in areas like South Africa is researched “because of higher incomes and urbanization rates” in these areas (*ibid.*).

The trend toward greater urbanisation and increasing consumer spending, according to recent literature, may be indicative of the “consolidation and multinationalisation” (Farina, 2002:441) of the global economy and patterns of production and consumption, the consolidation of trade (Reardon and Berdegúe, 2002), and the rise

of the supermarket. Not only is this shown in the physical increase in the number and size of supermarkets, but also the power they extend along the supply chain (Murdoch, *et al.*, 2000; Hughes, 2001) regarding particularly quality and sanitary regulations that they ‘enforce’ (Murdoch, *et al.*, 2000; Du Toit, 2001; Gereffi, *et al.*, 2001) in terms of producer “procurement systems” (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:10) and the increasing power of supermarket branded products over traditionally retailed foodstuff.

The Demise of Traditional Retailing

The ‘global’ trend drawn from evidence in emerging markets is based on a particular premise. The underlying assumption is that because of the increased dominance of formal retailing, national economies will benefit and this will result in increased incomes. This is a prevailing idea that informs literature around retailing as well as urban policy development. However, the greater purchasing power of large retailers, has led to the shift from many, decentralised ‘traditional’ stores (Faiguenbaum, *et al.*, 2002; Farina, 2002, Ghezan, *et al.*, 2002) to larger, centralised supermarkets (Farina, 2002; Reardon and Berdegúé, 2002; Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003). The literature argues “that markets shift from fragmented, local markets to larger, centralised wholesale markets” (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:8), which has had detrimental effects on traditional informal stores, as well as consumption choice.

Larger supermarkets replace traditional stores which are “aimed at the poor consumer segment in the local neighbourhood” (Farina, 2002:445) as the “nature of the domestic market changes in general with development” (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:8). Formal retailing has resulted in the demise of state storage facilities and “public distribution centres” in Brazil (Farina, 2002:449), locally-based “*feria libre*” in Latin America (Reardon and Berdegúé, 2002), and “mom and pop stores” in Argentina and Chile (*ibid.*). “[T]he losers have been the small, traditional stores and plaza markets...[and] the winners have been the supermarkets and chains of smaller hard discount and convenience stores” (*ibid.*:374/5). The literature argues that this phenomenon “occur[s] most quickly

in countries or zones exhibiting more markedly those determinants of change” (*ibid.*: 9) and that “supermarkets [take] over ... rapidly growing urban areas where incomes are higher”(Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003:1). This is seen to be a recognisable trend in Southern Africa (Weatherspoon and Reardon, 2003), Latin America (Reardon and Berdegúe, 2002), Brazil (Farina, 2002), Chile (Faiguenbaum, *et al.*, 2002) and Argentina (Ghezan, *et al.*, 2002). This literature shows that while the increase of supermarkets has targeted emerging urban markets where incomes are higher and increasing, this has also had a more broad impact on poor consumers in the developing world.

The Effect on the Urban Poor

Other literature suggests that increased incomes and increased access is not necessarily a natural outcome of proximity to supermarkets. In urban areas in particular the cost of living is higher because access is *theoretically* greater. Real access is constrained by issues of vulnerability and poverty (Pacione, 2001; Rakodi, 2002). This point is argued by Mougeot (1999:14) in the following manner:

The capacity of the urban poor and middle class to purchase the good-quality food they need is undermined by a number of factors: currency devaluations; reduced purchasing power; salary reductions; formal-job retrenchment and the informalisation of employment; elimination of subsidies for needs such as food, housing, transportation, and health care; and the very uneven access of different income groups to retail food within cities...[Furthermore,] [n]o matter how efficient urban food-supply markets may be, rapid urbanization and growing poverty is increasingly an urban phenomenon”

A study conducted in 2002 by the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI – South Africa) argues the increase of basic food prices and the resultant food insecurity in many urban South African households (Watkinson and Makgetla, 2002). Furthermore, while Statistics SA argue that the Consumer Price Index has stabilised according to increased consumer income levels, the CPI “only measures food prices from major supermarket chains in urban areas” (Watkinson and Makgetla, 2002:5). However, this point is contested

because “[i]n urban areas, bread retail margins double when purchases are not made at national supermarkets...[and] more bread is sold from informal outlets than from formal stores” (Watkinson and Makgetla, 2002:5).

Since this is the situation regarding *basic* foods, it is not presumptuous to argue that this is the case for other foods as well. What this indicates is that poor urban populations are in a more vulnerable position than before ‘increased access’ to formal retailing. Alternative strategies are employed to ensure survival, “in response to greatly reduced purchasing power arising from higher prices and reduced incomes following economic structural adjustment” (Zesinma and Chukoezi, 1999 as cited by Meikle, 2002:39).

Urban Poverty and Informalisation

Urban poverty and decreasing access to food and services is a result of national economies’ prioritisation toward economic growth and market liberalisation, all which have implications on inflation and the creation of employment. Maxwell argues that “even as food insecurity is becoming a more serious problem for the urban poor, it has dropped out of political visibility” (1999:27). The focus increasingly, is upon building dwindling economies, through economic development. The increasing visibility of the informal sector is therefore a trend in many developing countries whose main goal is economic growth.

Rogerson provides an extensive review of the rise of the informal sector, as a result of “the demise of the formal economy” (1997:349) or the inefficiency of formal markets to address the needs of the urban poor. The rapid increase in small, informal enterprises and economic activities throughout Africa relates to the need to survive; “in urban South Africa, the demise of the formal economy is, to a large degree, responsible for the surge in the number of survivalist enterprises in already “overtraded” income niches such as spazas and hawker operations” (*ibid.*:350-351). Furthermore, “[m]any urban poor people survive through undertaking a variety of activities which mainly take place in the informal sector” (Meikle, 1999 as cited in Rakodi, 2002:38/9), particularly in informal settlements (Snijder, 2000).

In conclusion, within a broader literature on the formalisation of retailing, there are two main arguments – the increased dominance and market share of supermarkets in emerging economies, and the effect of this dominance on the urban poor. While supermarkets are most successful in areas where incomes are higher, accessible food for all urban residents is not a common benefit. In fact the dominance of supermarkets may represent the formalisation of retail at one end of the urban provisioning spectrum. At other levels of the food economy, we see the persistence of informal food retail. So while the literature suggests the increasing dominance of supermarkets, other literature argues the continuing undercurrent of food retailed in the informal economy based on survival and the inability of certain people to take advantage of supermarkets.

The formalisation of retailing and the Johannesburg case

The suggestion that consumption patterns have been shifted to more formal retailing structures because of higher urban incomes in emerging economies is not always the case. This argument is contradicted by evidence in the Johannesburg case since it obscures complex realities with regard to diverse urban populations. Current literature does not address the prevailing counter-trend toward the informalisation of retailing which is potentially advantageous to the urban poor. In Johannesburg, many of the areas in which the urban poor live are approximately 10-30km from large supermarkets. Although they are located closer to ‘former township’ business districts, high levels of poverty and increasing prices for food perpetuate food insecurity. In these areas, particularly, there is not a general increase in income levels.

While the literature suggests the increasing dominance of supermarkets and formal retail in a context where there are higher urban incomes and its consequences for producers and smaller informal stores, it does not assess the persistence of urban poverty. The literature assumes that the presence of supermarkets in urban areas increases levels of income and household food security. It does not speak to the concern that “[n]o matter how efficient urban food-supply markets may be, rapid urbanization and growing poverty -is increasingly an urban phenomenon [(as opposed to the focus on rural poverty)]” (Mougeot. 1999:14). It is not always the case that

poorer people have more access to cheaper food given the increase of supermarkets, nor are incomes necessarily higher. The Johannesburg case argues that a large segment of the population, even though they are physically close, does not have real access to supermarkets based on decreasing incomes and increasing inflation. The assumption of higher urban income levels and increased access to cheaper food by virtue of the proximal presence of supermarkets is a flawed one.

In Brazil, much like South African, “data from the IBGE³⁶ shows that income distribution ... has not improved its profile significantly in recent years, remaining highly concentrated” (Farina and dos Santos Viegas, 2002:8), despite the rapid increase in supermarkets. Conversely, there are many thousands who experience decreases in income levels and an increase in poverty levels because of macro economic pressures that affect them. The Johannesburg case shows that enclaves of informal retailing have sprung up around informal settlements, where physical proximity to customers guarantees the consumer accessible food, and the informal retailer, a niche market.

Current research around the formalisation of retailing relates only one side of the narrative. Within urban areas, the provision of food to households is far more complex than the increase and increased proximity of supermarkets. In the developing world, the increase in informal retailing has centred on the lack of actual access to more formal modes of retailing. The literature cannot assume the general increase in income and living standards of all urban households, which would facilitate better access to formal retail supermarkets. Neither can it assume that increased proximity and physical access is by any means real or actual access, taking into account issues of inflation, transportation costs and the inconsistent provision of electricity. The provision of electricity in many informal areas is at best unreliable, but mostly non-existent. In regard to access to fresh food this means that buying has to be done daily and accessibly because of the lack of refrigeration. Access to refrigeration, then, becomes a key determining factor in actual access to food. This concern however is not

addressed in the literature, and any attempt to salvage this erasure cannot come from a reading of this literature alone.

The Johannesburg case critiques the notion of formalisation of food systems as the dominant narrative in the developing world. The case certainly does not dispute the formalisation of retailing, nor does it set up an 'either-or' debate; it shows another side of the narrative: that of a simultaneous shift at other levels of the political economy that suggests an increasing informalisation of retailing in certain localities. The case of Johannesburg's food provisioning complex confirms that urban-based production is therefore a much-relied on source of food for those in peripheral areas. Informal retailing in one sense is facilitated by urban agriculture, which serves as an alternative trading mechanism for the urban poor, as shown in the case study. In this light, current literature does not interface with the phenomenon of UPA as one of the ways in which the informalisation of retailing is facilitated. UPA and informal retailing facilitates an alternative supply chain supplying markets that formal retailers do not. An understanding of broader economic changes alone cannot fully explain the Johannesburg case, and a focus on retailing alone does not capture the material conditions within developing world cities. The persistence of informal retailing in cities is facilitated by urban agriculture. The Johannesburg case makes a strong argument for the persistence of informal retailing within a South Africa enveloped by poverty, in which UPA plays an important role in the provision of food and in poverty alleviation

South-south location II: Urban Agriculture

literature review 2

*"While there is not yet a universally agreed-upon definition, Urban and Peri-urban Agriculture - referred to jointly...as UPA - is perceived as agriculture practices within and around cities which compete for resources (land, water, energy, labour) that could also serve other purposes to satisfy the requirements of the urban population"*³⁷.

Although there is strong evidence in the literature suggesting the increasing dominance of formal retailers in emerging markets, as shown in the first literature

review, this literature often overlooks the extent to which informal food markets persist in developing countries. The literature assumes that the presence of supermarkets in urban areas increases levels of income and household food security and does not assess the prevalence of urban poverty (Drakakis-Smith, 1990, 1992). In addition, it does not distinguish the link between informal retailing facilitated by peri-urban agriculture³⁸ and its potential advantage to the urban poor (Rogerson, 2003 Rogerson, 1998), which function as an alternative trading mechanism (Drakakis-Smith, 1992). Current literature does not interface with the phenomenon of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA), as one of the ways in which the informalisation of retailing is facilitated (Drakakis-Smith, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994). UPA and informal retailing facilitates an alternative supply chain which supplies communities in urban areas that formal retailers do not. By integrating the literature of the (in)formalisation of retailing with a smaller literature review of UPA, the scope of the conceptual framework is widened. Viewed in this way, UPA is the other side of the narrative that argues the formalisation of retailing. The new literature review links (in)formal retailing and urban poverty and argues that the presence of more accessible and cheaper food from supermarkets is not a guarantee for greater food security and decreased poverty. An integrated literature review within a sustainable livelihoods framework argues that actual access is far more complex, and that the prevalence of informal retailing is not only a coping mechanism, but also provides a kind of service for the urban poor by acting as an alternative retailing structure (Findlay, *et al.*, 1990).

While food systems in the developing world are characterised by the increasing trend in formal retailing, there is a very definite trend toward the informalisation of the economy (Rogerson, 1993; Rogerson, 1997). Increasing levels of urban poverty have led to the increase in survivalist strategies among the urban poor, and the creation of niche market enterprises as a result. Food networks emerging from informal supply systems are fundamentally linked to urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA). This mode of urban food supply has been vastly neglected in a literature arguing the increase in formal retail.

The practise and increasing importance of UPA has begun to facilitate alternative informal supply systems for the urban poor and culturally diverse communities. Although the literature does not address the latter, literature on food supply systems for the urban poor argues increased accessibility and more culturally acceptable food to marginal populations in cities. Community food-security clubs as in Japan (cf. Sununtar and Gilman, 2002) and Brazil have been encouraged to develop into ‘community businesses’ (Scharf, 1999). The success of these projects lay in their potential to “offer products, delivery and service that are competitive with those offered by a supermarket” (Scharf, 1999:124). The informal economy facilitates “intraurban food-distribution networks” and should always be sustainable (Faeth, 1994) and productive (Leybourne and Grant 1999:110).

UPA and ‘informal’ food supply system

The food system has undergone many changes in the past two decades associated in part with the process of globalisation (Dicken, 2003). The increasing focus on intensified and specialised production has had, and continues to have, varied and broad implications not only for producers, but also for consumers and retailers (Lowe and Wrigley, 1996). Consequently, the issue of formal food retailing has “reduced access to food retailed through the conventional sector [for a number of reasons]” (Drakakis-Smith, 1994:8) and thereby raises concerns about levels of urban poverty. The first concern is partially related to the agro-food complex, but is more related to the global trend of the “liberalisation of trade and production” (Satterthwaite and Tacoli, 2002:55), economic restructuring (Mather, 2005) and the global shift (Dicken, 2003) to market-led/driven trade competition, which have cumulatively increased global poverty and its drivers. The second is related to issues of consumption and access to food (Drakakis-Smith, 1994, 1992), shown in real terms in the proliferation of supermarkets.

Poorer people in many parts of the developing world have not taken, or cannot take advantage of formal retail opportunities and instead rely on informal food markets (Drakakis-Smith, 1992). These informal food retail outlets tend not to

have the same sourcing strategies as large formal retailers and are more likely to source food products from urban and peri-urban farmers who lack the volume or the quality to enter into formal retail supply chains. In fact, many of the peri-urban farms serve as producers *and* informal retailers, contrary to the notion of ‘selling the surplus’ (Drakakis-Smith, 1992). Although the dominant pattern *may* be the increasing formalisation of retailing in emerging markets, informal retail markets supplied by or directly linked with peri-urban and urban farmers, remain an integral component of the urban food system.

The rise of UPA or urban cultivation is intrinsically tied up to the idea of informalisation, “partially as a consequence of the limitations imposed on the development of an ‘informal economy of growth’ or on the operations and livelihoods of survivalist enterprise” (Rogerson, 1997:354). In Nigeria and Cuba, for instance, UPA functions as a strategy “for the urban poor to cope with the household insecurity and malnutrition that have resulted from negative global economic impacts” (Rakodi, 2002:39). Urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) is evidence of smaller-scale changes that have occurred in the local economy, as the result of how communities and enterprise cope with an inability to meet the demands of the formal, supermarket-led economy. The food supply system facilitated by UPA becomes a unique and necessary option for local communities.

In South Africa the marginalisation of certain communities under the Group Areas Act of 1950 necessitated the use of peripheral land for agriculture - alternative forms of income “during the era of late apartheid” (Rogerson, 1997:355). Marginal land within municipal boundaries was either bought or illegally occupied, upon which many forms of urban agriculture occurred. Rogerson (1997:356) argues the phenomenon in this manner:

Accelerating city growth after the removal of influx control measures, escalating levels of food inflation, and the reduced absorptive capacity of a sanctions-weakened formal economy together triggered the appearance of

cultivation on vacant land fringing the formal African townships and especially around the country's mushrooming informal shack settlements".

The township and informal shack areas Rogerson addresses are predominantly areas which have to make use of small informal purchases because of a constant struggle in terms of access to electricity and refrigeration even though formally retailed food is physically more accessible. Decreasing incomes and service provision has resulted in a decrease in food access because "For most families, it is simply a matter of cost – with the rising prices ...being exacerbated by falling and erratic incomes" (Drakakis-Smith, 1994:8). Consumer choice which favours informal provisioning systems has thus "occurred in the face of increased food production" (Drakakis-Smith 1992:39) and the increase in physical access to cheaper food (Drakakis-Smith, 1994).

This is not just a trend in southern Africa; there is increasing incidence of informal retail facilitated by UPA in other parts of the world, in emerging and developed economies. Since there are such divergent contexts, there are diverse arguments for the increasing evidence of UPA and the reasons for which communities or countries promote UPA in both developing and developed countries (Bakker, *et al.*, 2000). There are a few key case studies which highlight some of the diverse purposes of UPA.

Case study: Havana, Cuba

After the demise of Soviet aid, the Cuban Ministry of Agriculture provided land and extension staff specifically for the "develop[ment of] agricultural productivity" (Moskow, 1999:80). The increased focus of local government on the development of UPA in Havana began in 1989 as a local government mandate, so that people would have access to government-owned land in and around the city for personal consumption needs (Nova, 2002). Another significant feature was to make finance and resources more accessible for cultivation and market sale of produce from urban land (Cruz and Medina, 2003). Local-led governmental initiatives functioned as the driving force of formalised UPA development

However, the impetus came from local people, and social movements which were successful in harnessing the support of government.

Case study: Sandwell, UK

Even within a developed country, increasing levels of poverty, and food insecurity have necessitated very vital community programmes. Wrigley (2002) argues the increase of food deserts, where there is rising insecurity and decreasing access to food within poorer communities in the UK. In Sandwell, UPA is driven by a focus on community agriculture, and has started as a result of “high unemployment and long-term joblessness, low levels of job-creation, industrial contraction, poor [town] image, difficulty to reclaim land ...[and the] lack of resources and support to overcome this... but is not an alternative to tackling the structural causes of poverty”(Davis, *et al.*, 1999:47/8 and 52).

Case: New Jersey, USA

Within a multicultural environment where there is high levels of unemployment and social problems, UPA functions as a socio-political mechanism to alleviate the social ills in New Jersey, as part of a community-driven initiative (cf. also Dahlberg, 1999). The New Jersey Urban Ecology Program (NJUEP) focuses on ‘at-risk’ youth, and provides job training in aquaculture and overcoming racial divisions. All these were seen to have “economic multiplier effects” (Hamm and Baron, 1999:63). This project mainly focused on issues of food security and holistic development. The rationale for the programme asserts that “[i]f food security means access to nutritious, affordable, safe, adequate and culturally acceptable food...then the broadest cross-section of our communities must meaningfully participate in efforts to ensure it” (Hamm and Baron, 1999:64).

Case: Zambia

This study mainly dealt with issues of nutritional deficiency and the encouragement of urban food-gardens. In this particular study little mention is made of broader trade-related issues affecting vulnerability. However, it did show how “urban agriculture can act as an alternative income generating activity and as a buffer for household food insecurity” (Drescher, 1999:74). Self-sustaining community projects have emerged to alleviate poverty and provide accessible food for households.

Case: The Heifer Project International (HPI)

The HPI project focuses mainly on issues of development and contends that “[a]ny approach to development must be people centred and responsive to a community’s self-evaluated needs and assets” (Meares, 1999:90). The project includes the subsidisation of livestock to approved beneficiaries and sustained support from experts from HPI. Economic, educational and environmental foci are framed within a drive toward socio-economic empowerment (Meares, 1999).

Case: Seikatsu Club – Japan, Citizen’s Action Against Hunger – Brazil

In these some parts of Brazil and Japan, neighbourhood welfare-type clubs are common, in which residents donated food into “Good Food” boxes, which were later distributed to food-insecure members of the community. Their rationale is that “[i]ncome is not enough! Even if everyone had enough money to buy from a supermarket tomorrow, would our food supply necessarily be safe, stable and geared toward our community needs and individual health” (Leybourne and Grant, 1999:123 - sic)? Both cases involve members of the community who distribute food to poorer members of the community. The fundamental difference in this

case, and other food box initiatives, is that the food is not always sourced through UPA, but also includes formally-retailed food given to people.

Table 1. The varied reasons for UPA in different case-studies

REASON FOR PRACTISING UPA	AREA OF STUDY	
PURELY COMMERCIAL	Tanzania	Sawio, 1994
ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING Demise of the formal Economy	Uganda	Maxwell, 1999
State provided land for economic development and poverty alleviation	South Africa	May&Rogerson,1995
	Zimbabwe (Pre 1996)	Mbiba, 1995
	Havana, Cuba	Cruz & Medina, 2003 Moskow, 1999
	Canada	Winston, 1993
	Sandwell, UK	Davis, Middleton, Simpson, 1999
	New Jersey	Hamm &Baron, 1999
Food Banks		
SUBSISTENCE ACTIVITY	Kenya	Lee-Smit&Memon, 1994
SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS /SURVIVALIST STRATEGY	Zimbabwe	Mbiba, 1995
Buying Clubs/ Neighbourhood food Food Banks	Seilatsu Club – Japan	Scharf, 1999
	Citizens Against Hunger – Brazil	Scharf, 1999
	Zambia	Drescher, 1999

This table provides a list of possible reasons for undertaking UPA (Table 1), grouped according to the area of research. This table is not an exhaustive audit, but merely

provides a few supporting case studies arguing a need for UPA for different reasons. The table, as well as the case studies highlight a diverse number of reasons for engaging with UPA. Amongst others, the dominant drivers are poverty alleviation, economic development food security, urban upliftment programmes, survivalist coping food provisioning mechanisms, and subsistence. Although these are varied themes, they all suggest that UPA provides an alternative option for the urban poor to obtain food and income, as compared to conventional formal retail purchases.

In this sense, another linking theme throughout the literature on UPA is that the channels of food distribution facilitated by UPA occur against the trend of formal, supermarket supply, and many poorer communities, have access predominantly to informal food supply channels (Guyer, 1987). UPA positively influences “food availability, stability, and, to some extent accessibility” (Egal, 2001 as cited in Rogerson, 2003:133) and “is in many cases a response of the urban poor to inadequate, unreliable and irregular access to food and lack of purchasing power” (De Haen, 2002:4). In Nigeria and Cuba, UPA functions as a strategy “for the urban poor to cope with the household insecurity and malnutrition that have resulted from negative global economic impacts” (Rakodi, 2002:39).

A special edition of RUAF’s *Urban Agriculture Magazine* argues that urban agriculture has become the dominant mode of urban food supply in developing world cities. The ‘success’ (or necessity) of UPA is argued for various reasons: “[n]ext to food security, one should mention its ... contribution to local economic and micro-enterprise development, poverty alleviation and inclusion of the poor” (De Haen, 2002:3, see also King’ori, 2004). In Ghana, “90% of the city’s fresh vegetable consumption is from production within the city” (Cencosad, 1994 cited in De Haen, 2002:8), in Shanghai, almost 90% of meat produce is through UPA (Yi-Zhong and Zhangen, 2000, also cited in De Haen, 2002), in Uganda, food security indicators of the population involved in UPA are much higher than those who do not (De Haen, 2002) and in Central and South America, alternative modes of food provisioning, through UPA and direct selling (Mougeot, 2005), become a necessary channel for small-scale farmers to survive (Kwa, 2001; Barraclough, 2000).

In Ghana, Maxwell (2000) argues that sustainable urban livelihoods, and urban food security may be facilitated through UPA. In a publication by RUAF (2004), various papers from the developing world submitted for a special session entitled *Women Feeding Cities*, showed how the role of women in issues of food security – both in peri-urban and urban areas – have become an alternative agenda within agrofood studies.

In conclusion, UPA may be understood as the unique space to meet different needs and it may function as a key tool to alleviate poverty and to increase food security, both in the hands of communities, *and* government, although the reasons and outcomes are varied. Conceptions of the food systems for the poor and marginalised are intrinsically linked to the political economy, as is highlighted in the different cases. The importance of UPA cannot go unnoticed (Mushamba, *et al.*, 2003); UPA enables accessible food supply for poorer communities through informal food retail, and also play a large role in social justice. UPA in a developing world context is shown to play a large role in facilitating survivalist food networks for women in urban areas. Mougeot (2005) argues that UPA will become the dominant channel in reaching the Millennium Development Goals in developing world cities, and is increasingly a major part of the survivalist driven food security initiatives.

UPA and the Johannesburg case

The literature review around UPA and sustainable urban livelihoods provides a good conceptual framework for the Johannesburg case study. The Johannesburg case supports the literature which argues that the socio-economic condition within developing world cities is worsened by inhibited access to food, and decreasing income levels. It goes on to argue that UPA is the dominant factor in alleviating poverty and providing accessible, cheap food to urban communities. The economic context of other cities shown in the literature has relevance to the Johannesburg case in which there are poverty alleviation, food security, community upliftment and economic regeneration concerns. The role of UPA for income generation, subsistence

food supply, social upliftment and gender equity is all evident in Region 11's small-scale farming community. Poor communities in the informal settlement areas surrounding Johannesburg townships predominantly make use of the food supply system facilitated by the peri-urban farms, and as such set up informal provisioning systems as the preferred means of acquiring food.

While the literature around UPA and informalisation appears to be a more viable conceptual space in terms of representing food systems for the urban poor, this literature does not reflect cultural food supply systems at all, which again leaves some part of the empirical material unspoken. Because UPA in the literature predominantly suggests a coping and survivalist mechanism for the urban poor, it does not necessarily address other reasons for UPA, like cultural food supply or income diversification. The comparative table (Table 1) suggested that while there may be varied reasons for the existence of UPA, it is not necessarily or exclusively the domain of the urban poor. Although the dominant reason for practising UPA is food security and poverty alleviation for the urban poor, most of this literature neglects that UPA may also provide a niche market for those who have reasonably good financial resources to secure a 'captive market' (Rogerson, 1997) within urban area, and that is it not always solely relevant "as a panacea for declining social programs... and should not be sold [as such]" (Hamm and Baron, 1999:64) UPA does not only present opportunity for poorer communities. Mougeot argues that "[b]ecause UA [(urban agriculture)] is complex, it is clearly far from being merely a poor person's subsistence, an informal or illegal undertaking" (Mougeot, 1994:53). UPA-related food supply systems are embedded in its socio-economic context, which makes for dynamic and variable cases, as is evident in the Johannesburg case of UPA facilitated cultural food supply. The argument for cultural embeddedness (Krippner, 2001) was also not always explicit in these cases. Food supply systems, and more generally markets of any kind, are shaped by a political, socio-cultural environment (Pottier, 1999). The inclusion of cultural embeddedness to a holistic conception of food provisioning is integral in the Johannesburg case.

‘Conclusion’: Location, Location, Location – what are the implications for my case?

If this was a traditional dissertation, I would go into a much lengthier discussion about how and in which instances the Johannesburg case concurs or disagrees with the current literature, and then I would conclude. Because this dissertation tracks the conceptual journey of framing empirical material within a literature base, however, the ‘conclusion’ of these first two literature reviews does not ask how appropriate or inadequate the framework is. Instead, this conclusion asks what the implications for my case are if it is located in these two conceptual spaces. Each literature review has significant implications for how my case morphs and for what kind of research emerges from this theoretical positioning. Locating my case within either of the south based literatures - the formalisation of retailing or UPA and persistent informal retailing – has very definite implications for how my case looks, and whether I exclude or include certain elements.

Within the conceptual space of the formalisation of retailing, my case would have to fit within a space that not only disregards the formal elements of retail in the case, but also positions itself (the case study) as informal – resisting the dominant formal retail classification. The costs involved in locating the Johannesburg case in the formalisation of retailing would mean that I would have had to concede to my case being little more than an argument on the persistent informal economy even though I knew my case could say more and represent more than just this very parochial and well-researched informal economy case.

The second literature review, on UPA, likewise morphs my case study into something that does not completely reflect the case study’s richness (or my intention). Although the implications of locating my case within a literature on UPA did somewhat extend the very narrow informalisation argument by including issues of poverty alleviation and accessible food for the urban poor, the choice to locate my case within a sustainable urban livelihoods approach had other implications for my case. It located my case as part of much rehearsed broader focus on African food systems as survivalist, subsistence and isolated from the formal economy as if it is some

indigenous primordial form of exchange pre-formal retail – which of course I didn't want.

The process of framing my case study, in either of these *appropriate* south-based literatures, is thus not as straightforward as it at first appeared. In the first instance my research is positioned as a case study of informal retailing networks. In the second literature review my case study is morphed into a survivalist African food system, which would have to be framed in a similar way as the various UPA cases I reviewed – according to its utility and function in a social justice or poverty alleviation space. Both these locally and geographically appropriate literature bases mutated my research into being conceptually bounded without relevance to the north. Because the literature reviews are both south based, the attempt to locate my case study in the south caused my research to encounter (epistemological) friction, and become bounded within and relegated to development studies, even though it may be located in agrofood studies more broadly.

CHAPTER 4: THEORY: EXPORTABLE OR MALLEABLE?

Introduction

From the perspective of the discipline of geography, it appears preferable and most appropriate to locate a local case study within a larger 'global' theoretical framework. South Africa's NRF would also look favourably on a northern connection; the potential of case studies in the south to be associated with northern theory. Given that academic spaces in the north are more highly favoured in research appraisals, in the process of publishing in international journals and presenting international conference papers, the assumption is that if I can legitimately locate my case study within this northern paradigm, it may be best positioned to extend knowledge. The space of knowledge production and its natural progression into universal theory is taken for granted as occurring in the north. Relevant discourse from the south, through case studies, then, needs either to agree or disagree with these knowledges with varying degrees. In any event, the Literature is seen to provide the discursive space. According to this idea, the case study which may be located in this space transmutes only into a *commentator* on the Literature. This section does something different. By locating a south case study in northern Literature, I show how it is possible for the case study to fundamentally challenge the universality of theory and to unveil its (admittedly) contextual boundedness.

The Literature on alternative food networks (AFN) is an interesting north-based theoretical framework to use not only in terms of content, but because this theory is emerging and it acknowledges its contextual boundedness in the north. Given what we know about the world of geographical knowledges, there is always the danger that this bounded theory will become a global norm despite the fact that this literature acknowledges recently emerging from Northern America and Europe contexts. This chapter suggests an attempt for my south-based Johannesburg case study to challenge and rework the emergent northern theory on alternative geographies of food that has already shown signs of redressing global agrofood debates.

The literature on alternative food geographies is broad and encompasses cases which

conventional food supply systems. Since the literature of AFN is an emergent field, the theoretical base is still in the process of being formulated. The potential to allow the Johannesburg case study to add to the theoretical base of AFN was the dominant impetus for choosing this northern conceptual framework given the debates around academic spaces. The arguments toward the end of this chapter after a more traditional assessment of the AFN in light of the Johannesburg case, is particularly enlightening in terms of the epistemological demand of theory making. This chapter concludes by arguing that academic hierarchies challenge the epistemological aim of a new research. This chapter provides a Literature review of AFN by describing its characteristics and tracing its paradigmatic roots. It then demonstrates how this theory is context based, and how AFN is shown to emerge from these contexts. Third, it engages with the possibility of locating the Johannesburg case study in an AFN theory and shows how this 'contextual' northern theory has begun to shape agrifood debates. Fourth, this section argues the implications of my 'case study' for this northern theory by showing how it is possible to 'speak' to the northern theory from a southern location. Finally, the chapter concludes by critiquing academic spaces of knowledge creation and engagement.

South-north location: Alternative food networks

Literature review 3

An emergent literature on alternative geographies of food highlights a transition within food production, supply and consumption. This shift is reflected in the way food supply chains operate. A key starting point of this literature is that changing consumption priorities drive the shift. More frequent food scares, and a greater awareness of food safety and environmental issues have put pressure on retailers to engage in more transparent and sustainable food networks.

Conventional food supply chains are increasingly lengthy and include producers, processors, distributors, wholesalers, retailers and consumers. The chain is remote and often involves mass production and large supermarket conglomerates. Rising dissatisfaction with long supply chains and productivist modes of production has given rise to an alternative paradigm within food networks, for a variety of reasons.

The alternative food paradigm includes element of food supply which are perceived as unconventional; food networks that are shorter, local or direct, and often characterised by organic, fairly traded and high quality foodstuff.

A deliberate contestation of globalisation processes and all it entails – sourcing practises, remote trading relationships, intensification of production – has become an emergent, dissonant paradigm both with academic theory and consumption practise. A greater awareness by the discerning consumer of the modes of production, and the damage often inflicted on the environment has meant revised regulation of production around the globe. A sense of personal safety and wellbeing, and the dangers of pesticide levels, tainted and potentially harmful produce (especially meat) and genetically modified organisms have led to a growing demand for safe, quality, environmentally sustainable and organic produce. AFN is made up of a number of initiatives and ideologies that are oppositional to large-scale food systems and resist global movements of industrialised consumption. Whether it's a case of "green protectionism" (Campbell and Coombes, 1999: 303), short food supply chains (Ilbery and Maye, 2005a; Renting, *et al.*, 2003), local food supply systems (Weatherell, *et al.*, 2003; Winter, 2003; Hinrichs, 2000), and local supply chain sourcing (Ilbery and Maye, 2006), the quality turn in food supply (Stassart and Whatmore, 2003; Weatherell, *et al.*, 2003; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Morgan and Murdoch, 2000; Morris and Evans, 1999), culturally embedded food systems (Hinrichs, 2000), direct farm retail (Renting, *et al.*, 2003; Weatherell, *et al.*, 2003; Brown, 2001), community supported agriculture (Allen, *et al.*, 2003), good food box schemes for urban residents (Sage, 2003), or specialty food networks for discerning consumers (Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Ilbery and Kneafsy, 1999), there is no doubt that the food supply systems (regimes) *or conventional networks* are under a major transition particularly in relation to consumption.

The alternative food networks literature argues that AFN emerges from a crisis-ridden productivist economy (Beus and Dunlap, 1990; McMichael, 2003; Goodman, 2004), which has had harmful environmental and human safety repercussions. An alternative food system has appeared to evolve "in part a consequence of consumer reactions to a range of environmental, ethical and health which are associated with 'conventional food supply systems'" (Ilbery and Maye, 2005:823), agri-business transparency and a

general shift in lifestyle (Goodman, 2004). The literature argues that the increasingly industrialised agri-food system has failed to secure environmental sustainability (Campbell and Coombes, 1999), transparency in terms of production (Doel, 1996; Ghezán, *et al.*, 2002), food safety (in terms of quality measures) (Nygård and Storstad, 1998; Lyons, 1999) and socially responsible sourcing methods (Du Toit, 2001). Deterministically, ‘crisis’ language is conferred on the entire food supply chain of productivist/‘traditional’ or conventional agri-enterprise. Whatmore *et al.*, (2003:389) assert that this transition happens “against the logic of bulk commodity production”.

Despite current dialogue around its theoretical formation, as I will draw attention to later, AFN exhibits certain defining characteristics reflected succinctly in Ilbery and Maye (2005). Defining characteristics of weaker alternatives (material foodstuff) include food that is “fresh...diverse...organic...slow [and/or] quality” (Ilbery and Maye, 2005:824). Stronger alternative agro networks are those that reflect the entire network or supply system, which are “small-scale...short...traditional...local... [environmentally] sustainable [and] embedded” (*ibid.*). All these characteristics are oppositional to conventional food supply systems which are “processed...mass (large-scale) production... disembedded [and engender]...long food supply chains... [formal retailing or] hypermarkets” (*ibid.*). Ilbery and Maye (2005) argue against this dualism, and show the importance of conceptualising emergent ‘alternative’ systems of food production and consumption as hybrid spaces exhibiting various ‘conflicting’ characteristics. However, there is still the need to identify emergent threads within shifting food supply systems, which appear to be in reaction or response to conventional, productivist agribusiness (Clark, *et al.*, 1997) and food supply systems. For this discussion, it is important to assert that ‘alternative-ness’ is reflected in two ways: in terms of the types of produce or production that it is linked to (weaker alternatives) and second, production-consumption systems, networks or supply chains (stronger alternatives) (Watts, *et al.*, 2005). There is a fundamental distinction between consumable goods exhibiting *alternative-ness* to conventional consumable produce, and new ways of distributing, selling, producing, marketing alternative produce. Watts *et al.* (2005) argue for the distinction of weaker and stronger alternatives, weaker including the physical foodstuff, and stronger encompassing systems of production, consumption and provisioning.

Within the broader focus around consumption, major tenets of the AFN movement are therefore focused on various concerns. These include social movements for change (Allen, *et al.*, 2003), sustainable agriculture (Hinrichs, 2000), organic (Hinrichs, 2000; Morgan and Murdoch, 2000; Goodman and DuPuis, 2002) and quality (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002; Morgan and Murdoch, 2000; Morris and Evans, 1999). All these are intrinsically consumer driven. Apart from consumption concerns, more overt economic reasons for embracing AFN include short food supply chains and direct marketing³⁹ and have a strong focus on increasing on and off-farm revenues (Renting, *et al.*, 2003). Still other examples of AFN hail from research around socially sustainable, cultural and local food networks (Brown, 2001; Kwa, 2001; Winter, 2003; Sage, 2003) proposing a research ‘beyond the production-consumption debate’ (Goodman and DuPuis, 2002).

Paradigmatic roots of AFN: Alternative discourses

According to the literature, “alternative discourses have emerged” (Ilbery and Holloway, 1997:184), as an imperative (as opposed to choice) because of the progressive inefficiency of industrialised agri-processes to yield environmental sustainability and the type of quality consumers demanded (amongst other crises). The move away from inherently productivist industry and enterprise in the European experience “has been [largely] conceptualised as the post-productivist transition” (*ibid.*), prompted by state intervention, particularly in the face crises affected by food scares like BSE⁴⁰. While Evans *et al.* (2002) criticise the crass dualism and ‘specific shift’ language associated with the post-productivist transition (PPT), it is unquestionable that a phase of transition has emerged. Wilson (2001:77) argues that another terminology “better encapsulates the diversity...and spatial heterogeneity” other than the “post-productivist agricultural regime” (*ibid.*). Watts *et al.* (2005) citing Evans *et al.* (2002), also interact with this “too crude [an] argument to capture recent developments” (Watts, *et al.*, 2005:24), and makes the assertion that a transition in agrifood systems is indeed evident and is “linked to, if not driven by, policy developments occurring at a variety of spatial scales” (Watts, *et al.*, 2005:24-25), including agricultural policy.

³⁹ Although this is retail-led, it seldom occupies formal retail space as in a supermarket.

Globalised processes of production, most visibly affecting the agricultural sector have transformed agricultural production into a highly industrialised food industry (Buttel, 1996; Marsden and Arce, 1995; Arce and Marsden, 1993). Within the past decade and a half, global commodity chains (Gereffi, 1996) and complex systems of global sourcing and agro-industrial exchange (Buttel, 1996; Goodman and Watts, 1994) have come to the forefront of agrifood theory. AFN is positioned as oppositional to the highly industrialised food complex which is outplayed as either a new policy-driven evolution of agro-food systems emerging from the productivist crisis, or as a response against (reaction to) conventional agribusiness. The emergence of AFN is as a result of “popular mobilisations against US cultural and corporate food imperialism” (Whatmore, *et al.* 2003:389), a shift toward an alternative or post-productivist era (Ilbery and Bower, 1998) or phase of trade relations, opaque sourcing practices (Hughes, 1999), or unsound production and consumption patterns. Within an ‘alternative paradigm’, therefore, the entire food network or chain (Renting, *et al.*, 2003), from production to consumption is problematised and placed under scrutiny.

Monopolies of agribusiness vs. alternative (the thorn in the side)

The emergence of AFN may also be understood within macro-analyses of the food system. Friedman argues a useful concept to analyse food systems that appear to have changed over time: food regimes (Friedman, 1993). The paper argues the idea of food regimes as the governing structure of the political economy of food. It traces the emergence of the industrially-driven second food regime, characterised by intensification of grain and cereal production and the rise of trade-related negotiations which both governing and exert power upon this industry. Towards the end of the paper, Friedman makes an idyllic, yet strangely prophetic recommendation. What is interesting for the emergence of AFN as a new, counter-paradigm is that the food regime debate outlines that certain emergent elements deconstruct extremely powerful prevailing imperatives (Friedman, 1992). It alludes to the possibility of new network relationships being forged and argues that contested areas of focus will emerge. These networks and shifts of focus progressively will be seen to undermine dominant notions of food systems. While the idea that the emergence of AFN is some kind of marker of regime change is a debated one (cf.

McMichael, 2003), Friedman's observation is especially insightful. She argues that all food regime shifts emerged out of a "sense of crisis" (1992:31) and is often "built on tensions" (1992:32) - areas of contestation within prevailing food systems. The paper imagines a future 'alternative ideal'; a democratic food policy conception in which spaces are carved in the 'traditional' or dominant production/consumption structures, to include some of the persistent/emergent counter-movements. According to Friedman (1992:51) "emergent tendencies ... prefigure alternative rules and relations [,] ... corporate freedom [and] ... potential projects emerging from the politics of environmental, diet, livelihoods, and democratic control over economic life". While Friedman debates this issue in the light of the shift from state to corporate power⁴¹ as signalling a regime change, it is useful to pick out this important strand in terms of the development of new agricultural *policy-led* ideals in this transitory alternative food regime.

The contextual emergence of AFN in European and American contexts

The transition to alternative paradigms on food production and consumption is linked to the post-productivist transition (PPT) and is marked by greater environmental, social and quality awareness, as prompted by policy reforms in the North. A characteristic of this transition is "intensification, diversification [and] pluriactivity" (Goodman, 2004:4), and a "weakening of the state's policy-making powers" (Wilson and Rigg, 2003:682). Institution-led support (Clark *et al.*, 1997) and a broad based policy-led transformation provided a solution for the productivist crisis within rural agricultural development, which panned out in diverse ways. This led to a transformed 'salvaged' agricultural landscape.

CAP (common agricultural policy) reforms post 1992 – the Earth Summit in Rio – promulgated sustainability and environmental justice, and effectively "restructure[ed] ...capitalist agriculture" (Clark, *et al.*, 1997: 732). These first reforms set the pace not only for later reforms, but also for changes within agricultural production, and thus consumption practices. In addition, deregulation and liberalisation in Britain

⁴¹ Some may argue that to draw a parallel between a socially sensitive Alternative Movement and the

legislatively have meant a progressive stepping back of state intervention in agricultural production and trade (particularly), but in practice, there has in fact been *greater* interest from the EU and other national structures to “find alternatives for incomes and farm uses” (Clark, *et al.*, 1997:731). Furthermore, there has explicitly been (and some may argue necessary) “protecti[on of] country lifestyles as a positional good and as a source of wealth” (*ibid.*). CAP reforms which have facilitated an alternative food network, then, should be understood as both a mechanism for rural, on-farm support that protects the receptacle of rural European wealth, and as a driver for increased food safety standards.

The European experience of alternative food networks is situated within ideas about food safety, and within rigorous systems of quality and safety trade regulations. AFN has developed as a result of policy and institutional change within a transforming European economy (Ilbery and Holloway 1997; Morris and Evans 1999; Evans, *et al* 2002; Goodman and DuPuis 2002; Goodman 2004). In the context of rural and agricultural restructuring, regionally driven institutions continued to support and diversify rural spaces toward alternative farm enterprises (AFE) (Clark, *et al.*, 1997). These alternative systems were deliberately put in place, and supported overtly. This re-ordered and “altered consumption patterns as well as production systems for the benefit of Northern Pennine producers”, for example (*ibid.*: 742). The roots of AFN which significantly included campaigns for brand-imaging – green, low-intensity and sustainable, and the “prioritising of locality-specific qualities” had begun to emerge (*ibid.*: 743). As a result green, quality and safety measures have become some of the key characteristics which mark the emergence of alternative geographies of food.

Goodman (2004) argues that the 1999 CAP reform that promoted the production of safe, high value, environmentally non-harmful food, is overtly linked to problems inherent to the PPT. He shows that the PPT and the CAP have facilitated a European-wide shift in paradigm which encompasses alternative food geographies. Responses, and oftentimes reactions to the more recent 1999 CAP reforms, as in the post-1992 reforms – like any policy response – “are necessarily embedded in recent historical, political, economic and cultural contexts which, while enabling or encouraging certain

This means that policy reforms, driven by institutional (Clark, *et al.*, 1997) structures (albeit signalled by ‘on the ground’ experience) carve out spaces into which new networks can emerge and exist (Campbell and Coombes, 1999).

In North America, in contrast, the emergence of AFN is directly attributed to oppositional social movements, within activist circles (Goodman, 2003). The emergence of AFN, and AFN literature, gained its impetus primarily from “[its] oppositional status and [the] socio-political transformative potential of alternative agro food networks” (Goodman, 2004:1/2). The North American move to embrace and encourage AFN is as a result of a strong commitment to social justice movements and increasing antagonism toward the hegemony of the productivist complex (Grey, 2000b). AFN is conceptualised as a quasi-revolutionary movement which “returns insistently on the central question of [AFNs’] capacity to wrest control from corporate agribusiness and create a domestic, sustainable and egalitarian food system” (*ibid.*: 2).

A US articulation of AFN represents a lifestyle statement for those adhering to it. This means that AFN or ‘alternative agrifood initiatives’ in California (Allen, *et al.*, 2003), for instance, represent an avant garde, socially reflexive transition, and are ‘mainly for the young, yuppie type who do it because it’s fashionable’. Allen *et al.* (2003:61) accurately question whether AFI are “significantly *oppositional* or primarily *alternative*” (original emphasis), and whether there is “an on-going and potentially transformative process of cultural struggle” (*ibid.*:62) as incited by its rising popularity. The premium paid for local, organic, environmentally sustainable and ethically sourced food is set up as the price to pay for having a social conscience and opposing the global regime, wrought with opacity, and contributing to exploitation and environmental degradation. These initiatives can be perceived (arguably) as being embedded within both a socially reflexive frame of reference *and/or* an elitist one. Within a tradition of social activism marked by hippie movements (Allen, *et al.*, 2003), the particular articulation of AFN emerges out of this conceptual landscape is therefore oppositional.

Whether AFN can be perceived as a ‘rebel’ counter-movement or an emergent agro-food system is a debated concept. The idea of an emergent counter-culture that does not fit, and

for the emerging conception of AFN. Counter culture to conventional agro processes sets the stage for a developing world articulation of AFN where spheres of consumption point to alternative modes of “self-provisioning and informal networks” (Friedman, 1992:55). McMichael (2003) suggests that these alternatives are a potentially threatening emergence for agri-business, so much so that agri-multi national corporations appropriate some of the alternative modes of production and trade to preserve power, control rebel elements and capture a growing demand for alternative – organic, fairly-traded, and environmentally sustainable food. This argument links to Ilbery and Maye’s (2005) discussion about hybrid food supply systems. Emerging strands of the alternative food supply system are in hindsight increasingly visible at this point. Within a dominant retail-led food network, alternatives to their *own* mechanisms of provisioning have come under scrutiny (Cook and Harrison, 2003). Consumer pressure for safer, healthier and less environmentally harmful foodstuff was directed to retailers, particularly for their opaque sourcing practises. Pressure to meet the growing demand of safer food, and to make use of more transparent networks have driven retailers to adopt sourcing and processing mechanisms that went against the logic of conventional agro enterprise. The pressure by consumers for safe food combined with the large market share of retailers and large revenue losses because of food scares in Europe have placed pressure on the agricultural authority to redesign its agricultural policy.

Prospects for engagement

Although the AFN conception is often narrowly Euro-, UK-, or US- centric in nature (Wilson and Rigg, 2002; Wilson, 2000), it nonetheless reflects the fact that a certain articulation of AFN emerges from a particular space whether it is institutional, regional, oppositional or political. As a result, when trying to understand the way AFN is conceptualised, it is inevitable that within a sustained profit-driven environment, where consumption of a certain kind of commodity – be it the countryside, organic produce or literature is fashionable (and perhaps even politically driven) – there is the burgeoning of thought and theorisation around issues of *consumption*; and an apparent ‘celebratory’ ethic in consumption literature. Increasing pressure from consumers for safe produce and ethical trading practises directed to retailers reflect more than just health or social reflexivity. Who are the consumers that

are able to voice these needs? If food is a basic need, then safe food, and environmentally sustainable farming practises is more than just a basic need. Could the fear associated with safe, fresh or organic produce be an affordable fear that is driven by an underlying need to preserve the sanctity of life? Since the choice of healthier, organic food or partaking of alternative food networks is one which not everyone can make, could this turn to quality, increased food-consciousness be seen as class-based? Could the emergent food consumption culture within AFN reflect the position of a certain rank of consumer to buy certain speciality foodstuff, or support oppositional food retail systems that occupy an alternative space? Given that there are emerging arguments around how AFN is redefining the agrifood paradigm (Cf. Maye, *et al.*, *forthcoming*), how inclusive is this theory? Even though the Literature acknowledges its contextual boundedness, there are two reasons for assessing the prospect of AFN engagement with southern spaces. Given the nature of how knowledge circulates and how even contextual theory from the north becomes universalised, the first concern has to do whether this AFN conception can or should be exported to a southern context. The second has to do with the relevance of an AFN conception in the south, as in the Johannesburg case study.

Exporting AFN to the Johannesburg case study

Given the nature of knowledge circulation and the tendency of northern (albeit contextual) theory to define research paradigms in the south, it seems irrelevant to interrogate the applicability of an AFN framework to southern contexts. It does, however, highlight an interesting argument in relation to why the Johannesburg case study may be located within this northern theory. Wilson and Rigg (2003) argue that a conceptual paradigm developed in the north, by researchers from the north, being contextualised by northern-national policies or social attributes means something quite different or is staged quite differently in other contexts, particularly in the south. For example, if AFN is conceptualised as emerging from post-productivism, then any translation to South Africa's context would be problematic. South Africa can then only *unequally* be recognised as post-productivist, and can differentially be understood as pre-productivist; being a commonwealth country, and now striving to become an equal competitor in the global arena.

In contrast, while the PPT has not occurred as a specific socio-historic marker in the south, there are spaces of opposition to conventional, productivist dominated food supply in the south that are not linked with persistent informal networks. The Johannesburg case study shows that in the south food provisioning systems are characterised by alternative religious and cultural food networks that have emerged as a result of the failure of the conventional food system to provide adequate food. It also shows that there are new contested spaces of consumption and provisioning that cannot just be defined as remnant or informal. So should the Johannesburg case be considered alternative after all?

At a presentation at a South African Geography conference, the vehement response from a fellow delegate alluded to this very point. She asked whether the Johannesburg food supply system does not just reflect an already well-researched local literature base on the informal economy (cf. Dewar and Watson, 1990). A similar question was asked in a much earlier review of my forthcoming chapter (Abrahams, 2006); “should these food networks be classified as informal rather than alternative?” (personal communication, October 2005)⁴². A recent work by Coen Flynn (2005:1) is also symptomatic of a conception of African food supply as unable to encompass the same consumption classification as more progressive food networks in the north – like AFN. Rather, the food provisioning system in the south is seen to occupy a pre-modern, non-industrialised resultant pre-formal space which asks “[w]ithout grocery stores, supermarkets, food delivery services, or convenience stores, how do people acquire food in Africa?” The notion that economies “graduat[e] from the informal to the formal economy” as a reflection of their social progress, has been strongly contested within critical economics (Daniels, 2004:507). The myopia of classing certain systems as either informal or not, is linked to the imaginaries associated with what the term ‘informal’ conjures up – for example Africa, poor, illicit, ethnic, exotic and/or chaotic street trade (Samers, 2005). For much the same reason as AFN in the north are not considered remnant and part of the informal economy despite the fact that they too make use of informal car boot sales (Crewe and Gregson 1998; Fisher 1999), marginalised consumption spaces (Crew and Gregson 1998), less technological

⁴² A more critical look at these questions, though, may suggest this (also internalised) idea: Emerging research from the south, no less from a non-established researcher, has to be first be classified within a less theoretical, local paradigm since situating a rather parochial case within international Literature from the north may be out of its league.

production or word-of-mouth marketing, food networks in the south can legitimately not be framed as being part of the theoretical space of 'informal food economies' (cf. Hughes, 2005). Whatmore *et al.*, argue that AFN in Europe are "[f]ar from disappearing ... [and are] diverse and dynamic food networks that had been cast as remnant or marginal in the shadow of productivism have strengthened and proliferated" (2003:389). Unless food supply systems in the south are able to be classified as alternative, the term *alternative*, then, takes on some kind of superior state of late capitalism which (obviously) food networks from the south cannot attain.

This rationalisation is clearly overstated, but nonetheless underscores the argument that food supply systems in the south legitimately argue a different angle on AFN. First, it is possible to locate the Johannesburg case study in this framework because like the characteristics of AFN, the food provisioning system in Johannesburg goes against the logic of conventional, supermarket dominated food and occurs in the space of direct sale, home-based farm stores, street vending or car boot sales of food. The Johannesburg case study also shows that food networks are culturally embedded and consist of traditional food networks for African and Indian communities for normal consumption as well as for religious ceremonies. The food provisioning networks in Johannesburg are not representative of a pre-modern system that can only be understood as survivalist or informal. The food system comprises of food networks that in some instances are formal, but in others circumvent formal retail.

So to answer the question as to whether the Johannesburg case study actually is alternative, many of the key (tick-box) characteristics of AFN are evident; short, direct food supply chains, non-conventional quality regulation and culturally embedded food systems. Hybrid food provisioning systems which consist of direct farm-to-consumer retail and cultural food networks do not occur within the space of formal, supermarket-led retail. Consumers often prefer food provisioning networks that are more (authentically) culturally particular than 'exoticised' indigenous foodstuff in supermarkets. AFN in the south are also oppositional and emerge as the result of these already contested spaces (cf. Zachary, 2004). The landscape of consumption in Johannesburg is alternative to conventional systems and suggests spaces of productivism alongside traditional modes of production and consumption. Food production systems in Johannesburg are privately owned, culturally driven and

they make use of private regulatory markers like Halaal which clearly is associated with high value productivist agricultural and processing.

While Wilson and Rigg (2003) argue against exporting theory, there clearly is evidence of an emergent alternative food network. In a south system, while outward characteristics may suggest an alternative turn, the driving factors are entirely different. In the Johannesburg case they are predicated on a need for survival and for cultural preservation. They are not always oppositional to the conventional food system per se, but are often based on necessity. AFN in the south comprises of more accessible food networks for the urban poor than supermarkets can provide. Not all urban consumers in the south have increasing incomes, and not all are predominantly concerned with consuming quality food. Rather, the urban poor make use of AFN on the basis of survival. It is inadequate to frame the needs of the urban poor merely as a remnant characteristic of developing world food systems. In a context of the dominance of formal supermarket retail and increasing urban incomes, there is a large percentage of people who cannot take advantage of conventional food supply. The Johannesburg case argues that an AFN conception which takes the urban poor and culturally diverse communities into account is not only far less exclusive (for a theory which will potentially become universal), but is also more useful even in a developing world context. The south-based case study implicitly challenges the northern theory and brings a key critique to the fore.

Toward an inclusionary politic of *Alternative Geographies of Food*

The North American and European experience and development of AFN, and the resulting theorisations about it, are clearly north-centric. There clearly is a need for input from other experiences of alternativeness, particularly from the 'south' and the developing world, that do not necessarily 'fit' within the afore-mentioned paradigms. Given the circulation of knowledge, an exclusionary politic of AFN – which will become a definitional standard in agrifood debate – will be constructed if this does not happen. Since all researchers in the north and south are compelled to buy into these arguments, it will not be surprising when northern debates on quality, direct networks or a return to the local begin to shape global agrifood trade and interaction. A south

articulation of AFN raises important questions for the paradigm as a potential global theory and is thus a very necessary voice. The larger critique 'AFN from the south' raises is concerned with the apparent exclusivity of the AFN paradigm and people's participation in alternative networks.

AFN both as an activist, policy-driven, yuppie exercise clearly is not forceful enough to entirely disrupt the 'conventional' food supply system. Since the premium price and lack of volume (in relation to conventional produce) renders the actual alternative network inaccessible to most middle class and poor people, the conventional mode of provisioning will have to prevail. In any regard, AFN is unable to supply the food needs of its own northern populace. AFN conceived *just* as a socially conscious, fair-trade, organic, safe, quality and premium-priced elitist (north-centric) construct, then, *cannot* be a new paradigm for agricultural development, unless it is specific *only* to the above-mentioned conditions catering for a small number of people. If it does ever become the dominant trend in food supply, the disparity between rich and poor, irrespective of whether it is north or south specific will grow exponentially, and the food system would be highly exclusionary. It would mean that 'traditional'/conventional food provisioning systems and oligarchic transnational corporations and retailers, for the most part, would exist only to sell cheaper, lower quality, unfairly traded and environmentally unsustainable food to the rest of the world excluded from the AFN – especially the poor (even in the north), and those in the developing world (cf. Meikle, 2002).

In addition, even within the outwardly socially acceptable practises, there would remain the exploitative relationship in cheaper commodities and produce sourced from the South (Friedberg, 2003). Therefore, for this type of AFN to exist, it must do so within a romanticised bubble where trade relations that are visible and can be ordered *are* socially and environmentally amiable, occluding the perpetuation of unfair terms of trade. Admittedly, this extrapolation is facetious. It nonetheless highlights the necessity for a holistic, inclusive and globally comprehensive conceptualisation of AFN that reflects the move away from food provisioning based solely on the role of supermarkets or industrialised agriculture. Even if the paradigm cannot be changed, it must at least be open to scrutiny.

Goodman (2004:8) argues the very point. He shows that even in places where AFNs are recognised and thriving, they are not subject to “critical sociological analysis”. The kind of romanticisation associated with followers of the alternative mode eclipses these amiable projects from the kind of scrutiny that exposes an exclusory politic in terms of class, race, access to wealth, and other issues like reasons driving alternativity – cultural/religious food networks or issues of food security. This taken a step further has implications for issues of power (McMichael, 2003), equality, exclusion (Berg, 2004), uneven development (Goodman, 2004; Friedberg, 2003) and elitism. If a thorough conceptualisation of AFN is necessary, current notions *must* be up for scrutiny, or at least a critical differential in its applicability to the developing south and to similar spaces in the north.

Celebrating consumption

In the context of the inclusive nature of geographical research, and agrifood research as a part of that, it seems surprising that ‘exclusive’ pockets of consumption research should still exist. In a rather scathing account, Goss (2004) argues that a culture of consumption has dominated policy and market changes and has even invaded critical research. The emergence of alternative food geographies, Goss argues, is a result of an unspoken class-defined food supply system which is essentially the propagation of a consumption culture. He goes on to argue how the celebration of consumption within Northern agro-food studies sets the paradigm for most other kinds of contemporary research. Of course, taking advantage of the increased revelry is not possible for most of the planet, making the celebration of consumption, like the preferred AFN profile, a party to which the large majority of the world’s population is uninvited.

Goss’s (2004), almost exegetic account of current literature, frames the alternative debate and the literature that represents these debates as the ‘celebration of consumption’. This consumption ethic has also invaded academia and the process of theory-making as falling prey to an infatuation with consumerism, both within the agrofood sense, and in the consumption of their own theory product (Goss, 2004). Within this consumption culture there is greater emergence of northern literature

population than before. It is not surprising that issues like food insecurity and poverty in the north, even though they are clearly linked to the provision of food and accessibility to fresh, healthy food, get sidelined to be within the realm of health care and welfare.

To take this idea further: If the consumer, and consumption, now drives policy reforms and academic inquiry, then what kind of consumer drives the transition? How is it possible for an elite, fairly well-off group of people to delineate the globally-driven paradigm of agrofood processes and research? The inclusion of a set of debates around the political economy of what alternative means, and to whom, is precisely the question.

If cheaper supermarket food is understood by certain consumers to be less safe, or supporting large monopolistic agribusiness, then the choice to make use of alternative food networks is essentially a moral choice, which certain classes of people can afford to make. Albeit problematic, there is a distinctive imaginary of consumers who appear able to partake in these AFN. The profile of the preferred AFN customer may include: upper-middle class, professional, socially astute, aware of food safety regulation, quality-conscious, academic, with access to transport and credit. In reference to this kind of AFN framework a conventional consumer is quite the opposite: lower-middle class, uses public transport, pushes large shopping carts through overcrowded supermarkets, purchases and eats lunch on a street corner and returns home fat, unhealthy and reeking of untraceable genes.

AFN catering to people fitting the first profile, and a conception of AFN with this class of consumer in mind, does not only exclude two third of the world's population, but overlooks the presence of socio-economic classes who do not meet the profile of the preferred AFN consumer. This conception fails to acknowledge other legitimately counter-conventional democratic food provisioning system (Friedman, 1992) that may be oppositional to the increased formal retail networks in the south – as shown in the Johannesburg case study. Mostly, this conception of AFN, while masquerading as an emergent agrofood universal paradigm, offers a theoretical conception that excludes two thirds of the world's consumers including the urban poor. Surely this kind of

mapping 'alternative geographies of food' (Goodman 2004; Morris and Evans 2004), and not also *elitist geographies of food*.

Instead of any nuanced critiques to this apparent elitist food geography per se, there are unanswered questions: Besides its apparent southern exclusion, clearly not all consumers in the north are able to make use of AFN. Why is it that this face of consumption appears to dominate the discourse on agrofood studies entirely? In an era where researchers and research agendas are geographically critical, why have the only agrofood debates from the north, which have transformed the echelons of universalised theory, emerged out of a focus on food consumption, and not food insecurity and poverty, and the potential of agricultural development for alleviation, even though the latter *are* on policy agendas in the north? Why have food networks for the urban poor and for marginalized and/or multicultural communities in the north evaded the perception of contemporary research agendas within agro food studies?

Wrigley (2002: 2030) argues that "worsening access to food" for the poorer part of the UK population and this type of "social exclusion", is becoming increasingly important to policy makers in the UK. In the US, it is argued that "without access to supermarkets, which offer a wide variety of foods at lower prices, poor and minority communities may not have equal access to the variety of healthy food choices available to non-minority and wealthy communities" (Morland, *et al* 2001: 23). So clearly, there is a need for a policy focus on access to food for poorer communities. However, in the north, this kind of research does *not* emanate within agro-food studies. It emerges from concerns around welfare and national longitudinal nutritional studies (Cummins and Macintyre 2002; Morland, *et al* 2001; Lacy, 2000). If increasing poverty and access to food is on such an urgent future policy agenda in some areas of the north, why do alternative food studies not *overtly* engage with these issues? The failure to include poor and culturally diverse communities in a 'broad' theoretical conception does not only implicate the research agendas, but also the systems that validate it. Certainly, holistic research into AFN – that by definition is not conventional and *cannot* therefore assume a conventional customer – must include these (northern) communities. This conception is thus not just exclusionary to the south – where the argument of contextual specificity may easily refute it – it is also

to do with issues traditionally understood as southern issues – like poverty and food insecurity – are thus also sidelined within agrifood debates.

The Johannesburg case study as part of the theoretical paradigm with different contextual concerns offers a useful critique to the AFN paradigm in light of Appadurai's (2000) argument that theory cannot be divorced from the dynamic outplay of the theory in other contexts. A southern articulation of AFN has a much needed empirical and theoretical richness to offer an emerging theoretical base of alternative food geographies since it includes survivalist strategies, poverty alleviation and community development initiatives not just evident in the south. The alternative food provisioning networks evident in the south do not just fulfil the hankering for the rural idyllic, or the often elitist quest for conscience-quenching food. Like promoting economically declining regions in Europe and the US, AFN in these contexts have the potential to reflect broader agricultural transformation in respect to food security. More recent alternative food initiatives (Allen, *et al.*, 2003) in the some parts of the US recognise the need to cater for the urban poor – particularly low income Black and Hispanic groups, engendering issues of empowerment and education; homeless people's gardens, school garden projects and skills-based training (Allen, *et al.*, 2003; Dahlberg, 1999). In New Jersey, youth empowerment projects include using UPA as a tool to teach responsibility, financial independence and to increase food security of at risk youth (Hamm and Baron, 1999). In Paris, farmers markets function as an accessible source of fresh produce and fish. In Sandwell, UK, food banks accumulated through UPA are used to provide for poorer people (Davis, *et al.*, 1999). More than ever before, evidence of larger multicultural communities such as the large Turkish community in Germany, and the increasing Indian and Caribbean populations in the UK is visible. Increasing poverty in communities in the north is also an emerging trend.

Wrigley (2002) argues that within areas where poorer residents do not have access to transport or to supermarkets it is important to address “issues such as how low-income families living two bus rides from a grocery store get access to fresh fruit and vegetable” (Wrigley 2002: 2032). An AFN from the south has implications in a northern context where access to retail food should be higher although there is still

caters for the urban poor even in developed countries is becoming a necessary ideal. Furthermore, allotment gardens in the urban and peri-urban areas of the UK could arguably facilitate culturally driven types of AFN, and cater for increasingly large migrant communities. The potential is far greater than just community-supported agriculture (Grey, 2000a; Hinrichs, 2000), which is based on mutual business support for on-farm produce.

By using the European AFN paradigm based on agricultural transformation, and through US social reflexivity as the “critical impulse of social resistance in everyday life” (Harvey, 1996 as cited in Allen, *et al.*, 2003:62), AFN could be seen as a transformative tool with which to guide agricultural policy, social development, poverty alleviation, and cultural modes of provisioning (Banks and Marsden, 2000). Ethnic Caribbean communities in the UK consume traditional foodstuff (Cook and Harrison, 2003) that could be more accessible in an alternative food stream within the broader UK food supply system, without it being a part of a marginalised cultural food network. More importantly, since “the alternative food stream is also a value-based reaction” (Grey, 2000a:147), AFN has the potential to be more than a theoretical construct, engendering all of the issues mentioned above. Most significant is the fact that while a developing world conception of AFN is contextualised in the south, its significance is not only valid within a developing world context. Issues like cultural food networks and accessible, alternative food provisioning for poorer populations are increasingly applicable to other contexts and in this sense, it is vital within American and European conceptions (and markets), to broaden the paradigm of AFN to include a continuum of food provisioning networks which include food for the urban poor and cultural modes of provisioning.

Thus, the question: why have ‘other’ AFN from the south, and questions of survival and poverty alleviation in the north, not found conceptual space with what is considered as mainstream theory, may be the wrong question to ask, in some sense. The real points of contestation are whether this south-based articulation of AFN or any theory from the south will/can speak back to the larger theory to challenge and extend it, and whether southern theory will ever become the referent theory into which northern cases must find validation? The real issue is how to extend or refigure

AFN at a more theoretical level, so that as a body of work it is inclusive, holistic and geographically sensitive. While the contextual argument is that a developing world perspective on AFN is useful to countries and theory in the north since rural and urban poverty is an increasing trend all over the world, the answer to why these debates have not ‘reached’ wider agrofood debates is less about what is contextual and more about the theoretical exclusionary politics dominant in geographical inquiry.

Conclusion: Universal theory beyond contextual boundaries

If the predominant reason that valid and legitimate empirical material from the south does not extend existing theory, or become a theoretical referent, is based on contextual exclusion, then it of course questions whether any theory is contextually free. The suggestion within social geography at least, is ludicrous since social theory is by definition contextually embedded. ‘Theory’ from the south, is not seen as theory at all because southern cases are perceived to be contextually bound and their parochial concerns may not fit within a broader, less contextually bound paradigm. Most northern theory, strangely enough, is seen to transcend contextual barriers to become the Theory, or the Literature, which defines global thinking and academic critique. Certainly within geography, the ‘contextual theory’ on alternative food geographies has steered most agro food research agendas even in outside the UK and US – which now is concerned with the quality turn within food systems or private quality regulation. In this way theory coming out of the UK has defined the way researchers all around the world are conceptualising food systems – I for one, am a case in point.

However, since⁴³ no theory is contextually free and there few concerns that are bound within one context, then the usefulness of theory from the south must be recognised. The notion of theoretical utility links back to debates within critical geography (Yeung and Lin, 2003) which argues, like me, that research and discourse from the south in ‘othered’ academic spaces need to speak back to the Anglo-American ‘core’ theory against the apparent hierarchy of academic space because theoretical knowledge bases are poorer without it. While it may be “messy...to talk across worlds

– worlds that are separated not just socially, geopolitically and materially, but also in their understanding of what constitutes relevant theory and politics” (Nagar, 2002:182), it is vital for this exchange to happen in order to “form the core of transnational [research]” (*ibid.*:184).

Gatekeepers of knowledge

In epistemological terms, the Johannesburg case study clearly furthers a conception of alternative geographies of food despite the arguments against exporting theory. However, the point is far bigger than just the applicability of theory to different contexts or its universal utility – it relates to the perceived territorial command of certain spaces to certain theory and the questionable right of others to impinge on this exclusive theoretical space. A chapter submission to the editors of *Constructing Alternative Geographies of Food* (Abrahams, *forthcoming*) which has to do with extending a narrow conception of AFN in light of some of the debates from a developing world perspective has been commented on by the editors like this: “We have no problem with you labelling these foods/food outlets alternative, but would like you to reflect on this term a bit [so a couple of extra sentence]. This might only be to recognise that 'traditional foods' may be more accurate to 'alternative foods', but we'll leave it up to you” (personal communication, *sic*). What this suggests is that since the term or the original theoretical framework emerged in the north, the theorists who are at the forefront of these debates, more than just being editors, seem to be the gatekeepers of this knowledge. This dialogue, then clearly has wider significance to the epistemological requirement of an MA dissertation than a critique on appropriate or useful theoretical frameworks and locating one's case study.

Theory mills of the North

“Research ... resists conscious scrutiny” (Appadurai, 2000:9)

Why is not all theoretical literature open to evolution as much as it is open to critique or debate? Appadurai (2000) argues that within area studies, the paradigm is so concretised that it is now an established theory even though, by definition, area studies have to constantly be in a state of flux. He argues that “so often in academic

inquiry, the heuristic impulse behind many of [the dynamic proponents of area studies] was soon forgotten and the [then current research – maps and cartography] were enshrined as permanent” (Appadurai, 2000:7). In other words, he argues that the very nature of academic *inquiry* is stunted by a definitive theory that comes to encapsulate all there is to know in a specific field.

Since AFN is an emerging literature field which has yet to be established, one assumes that the above concerns articulated by Appadurai (2000) would be negated. However, the failure of ‘the paradigm’ to be open to theorisation from outside cannot be simply innocently framed as the quest for a knowledge store to become exclusively controlled. For researchers not based in the north – Europe, the UK and the US – this is certainly not incidental. Within the emerging research on AFN and alternative geographies of food, the theory is being built by a small group of researchers in the UK who are not only proximally close, but constantly have knowledge exchange between them, be it at conferences, guest lectures or co-written papers. Although this factor may come into play at one level, it is not always “because of uneven access to recourses of knowledge production” (Raju, 2006:155). In fact the implicit statement in Raju’s (2006) assertion is that somewhere, outside of the imaginary of where there is uneven access, “the so-called ‘Third World’ countries” (Raju, 2006:155), there is a place where knowledge is produced.⁴⁴

In assessing the nature of research, it is evident that certain trends are recognisable only in reference to the theory. Although the phenomenon is visible, it fails to be significant because there is no structure which names and classifies it. If the only thing that signifies my research is the validation from a parochial group of researchers, then I am strongly against it. Did my ‘alternative’ case study exist before I classified it as an ‘alternative food network’? Is there potentially much other research out there in unTheorised non UK-US spaces that could feed into a growing

⁴⁴ At a recent (2005) conference held in London at the Institute of British Geographies, researchers presented independent research within a broader focus on alternative food geographies. The more established researchers were perceived to define the paradigm and the theory. ‘Other’ alternatives, classified from non-UK researchers included dodgy research like ‘Parsnip Pie and Memory in the Rural Countryside’ and another project which consisted of an empirical sample five beans grown organically by the light of the moon. My presentation titled “AFN in the developing world” was placed in this session.

literature on alternative food geographies? If it is only natural that cutting edge critical researchers who are geographically proximal to each other, and have access to the same resources and mindsets, establish a new theoretical base, as the UK editors of *Conceptualising Alternative Food Geographies* argued, why is their theoretical discourses not critical enough to resist being exclusionary? And why doesn't research from the south, equally valid and legitimate in terms of theoretical advancement, ever reach the spaces of "the theory making mills of the north" (Appadurai, 2000:5)?

SETPD



CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Illegitimate voices, peripheral debates, valid alternatives

“Legitimate new knowledge must somehow strike its primary audience as interesting. That is, it has to strike them not only as adding something recognisably new to some predefined stock of knowledge but, ideally, as adding something interesting. Of course boring new knowledge is widely acknowledged to be a legitimate product of research, but the search for the new-and-interesting is always present in professional systems of assessment” (Appadurai, 2000:10)

Answering the question at the end of the previous chapter – why research from the south, which is equally valid and rigorous, fails to reach the spaces of theory making in the north – is the larger rationale of this conclusion, and brings the initial debate full circle. While more traditional dissertations conclude with a concise summary of the research aims, the findings and the analysis, this dissertation steps back and assesses the process of constructing this research product, and research exercise. So at the end of this very unconventional dissertation, I have to reflect on the epistemological aim of the MA research endeavour.

If the intention of undergoing the academic rite of a higher degree is to produce new, critical knowledge, and to extend knowledge stores, then I am not sure how fully this dissertation meets the mark. However, I think the larger contribution of this dissertation has been to unveil some of the epistemological assumptions of the MA or PhD project; particularly the assumptions about the scientific objectivity involved in extending knowledge, and the assumed frictionless world of ideas that enables the natural progression of valuable research to larger theory.

The introduction argued that the process of creating new theory and advancing existing theory is not an objective or frictionless process. It highlighted the unspoken pressure for researchers from the south to locate their research in conceptual frameworks from the north in order to be validated. Also, it argued the existence of very obvious spatial or geographical hierarchies within academia and academic discourse. The aim of forging new theoretical frontiers was shown to be a constructed

space fraught with less critical valuing systems than are expected to be present within academia.

The second section was a critical representation and analysis of my empirical research – food provisioning systems in Johannesburg – within what I argue should be the way food supply systems in the developing should be conceptualised. By representing food networks that are neither traditional or modern, this section proposed a new conceptual device – a food provisioning continuum - which I argue should inform research on African food supply systems in the future. The point about presenting the empirical chapter before the literature review section was twofold. Firstly, I wanted my case to (in)form a conception of food supply in the contemporary African city that was not prescribed by literature gaps. Secondly, I wanted to demonstrate the very subjective process involved in situating the empirical research within different literature reviews, and the implications this framing had for enabling a discursive space for my case.

The third and forth chapters showed how it is possible to locate rich empirical material in different conceptual frameworks, and how these different literature reviews cause the empirical material to be differentially valued. The three conceptual locations proceeded as follows:

- South-south location I – which positioned a south case in political economy theory about the south – the formalisation of retailing.
- South-south location II – which positioned the case study within development theory from the global south – Urban and peri-urban agriculture and the informalisation of retailing.
- South-north location – which positioned my south case study in a northern theory – Alternative food networks

The significance of this is that I have demonstrated the possibility of having a ‘choice’ of where to locate ones research. The ‘choice’ however, is not an entirely free one. While choosing to locate my research in any of the three frameworks was relatively straightforward, the process highlighted that the inherently political choice has implications for my research that goes beyond just what my case is able to say. The

case study into saying something and being something that perhaps was never intended or did not fully articulate the breadth of the research. The third literature review argued that northern Literature which acknowledges its contextual boundedness has the potential of becoming a universalised theory that will remain contextually exclusive. The choice of where to locate a case study, however, has larger implications than just how the case study transmutes and what it is enabled to say. Within academia and the epistemological requirement of knowledge building of a higher degree, a north-based framework is a more highly valued conceptual location that has implications for how the researcher is valued and the potential of that research to extend knowledge.

Framing spaces of signification

“For most researchers, the trick is how to choose theories, define frameworks, ask questions, and design methods that are most likely to produce research with a plausible shelf life. Too grand a framework or too large a set of questions is ... much less [likely] to produce the ideal shelf life. Too myopic a framework ... and the research is likely to ... sink without a bubble in the ocean of professional citations” (Appadurai, 2000:12)

To conclude, a reflection on the process of finding a conceptual framing space is necessary. This will not only draw on some of the arguments from this dissertation, but also on key debates within critical geography. The above quote underscores this dissertation by arguing that the process of framing empirical research reflects how the research will be signified and valued. This dissertation showed that the necessity of finding adequate conceptual space within which to frame empirical, independent research often involves compromise, and not just choice. Likewise, Paasi (2003) argues that “geographers operating outside this [the US and UK] context become ‘others’, whose research may be defined as marginal or irrelevant and who are seen as importers rather than exporters of theory” (Paasi, 2003:769). What we see, is a discursive context where theoretical assertions from the south have no other choice but to be framed within postcolonialist theory (cf. Cook and Harrison, 2003), or feminist theory (cf. Nagar, 2002) for it to speak across boundaries. The realisation that there is no omnipresent Theory, and no set of ideas that should be universalised, was a

liberating, though disconcerting fact. Most jarring is the fact that a space differential exists in academic literature. Even though this is constantly a concern for southern and reflexive theorists, the nature of assessment is often in opposition to these discourses.

Certainly assessment is legitimate and necessary. However, a growing literature predominantly within critical geography is constantly at loggerheads with north-centric standards of validation and signification. Appadurai's (2000) article hints at this self-proclaimed standard, but remains rather idealistic, although it does make a larger point in relation to the academic exercise. He argues that new research should extend knowledge stores, and that literature bases should be dynamic spaces which are always in a state of flux. However, he fails to recognise that the process of extending an established literature field is a political exercise and not just a case of academic broad-sightedness. He agrees that hierarchies of academic space existed, but only in the "1950s and 1960s...where [t]heory and method were seen as naturally metropolitan, modern and Western. The rest of the world was seen in the idiom of cases, events, examples, and test sites in relation to this stable location for the production or revision of theory" (Appadurai, 2000:4). The fact is that this was not just a Post World War II phenomenon. This hierarchy of power is very much alive and well in this era of globalisation, postcolonialism and flows of knowledge, and affects non UK-US theorists greatly. Also, Paasi (2003) argues that "it would be all too easy to label recent criticisms merely as reactions of frustrated but ambitious scholars from 'peripheries' calling for recognition...and their share of the symbolic capital and prestige in the field of 'international geography'" (Paasi, 2003:770).

Spaces of academic hierarchy

The odds are hugely against theorists from outside the perceived centre. Spaces of signification are pre-ordered, and emerging researchers like me, have to submit to these hierarchies of validation within academia, a most unlikely place, even though we attempt to rage against the structure. The fact that this happens is a much debated issue in postcolonial literature, and is not the focus of this research, although I do affirm that position, and my final argument emerges from this theoretical paradigm.

It is telling and even ironic that the most open critical discursive space is within postcolonial studies (cf. the argument of Cook and Harrison, 2003). Nonetheless, I wish to suggest two foundational quotes – written by northern theorists – which represent my final argument succinctly. In doing so I wish to illustrate the complexity for southern theorists to find adequate conceptual space that is not based in the north, within which to frame theoretical (critical) arguments.

“[A number of recent geographical reviews have argued], the main aim of postcolonial scholarship was to help to undermine and resist colonial forms of domination, and that there were three main ways of doing this. First, European colonial discourses (e.g. of ‘modernization’ and ‘progress’) could be de-legitimized and de-centred. Second, the messy, mixed-up, interconnected nature of histories, geographies and identities neatly compartmentalized and opposed in these discourses could be revealed. And, third, alternative, hybrid histories, geographies and identities that did not need to be anchored to Europe to be considered legitimate could be put together” (Cook and Harrison, 2003:297).

“Theory is no longer naturally “at home” in the West--a powerful place of Knowledge, History, or Science, a place to collect, sift, translate, and generalize. Or, more cautiously, this privileged place is now increasingly contested, cut across, by other locations, claims, trajectories of knowledge articulating racial, gender, and cultural differences. But how is theory appropriated and resisted, located and displaced? How do theories travel among the unequal spaces of postcolonial confusion and contestation? What are their predicaments? How does theory travel and how do theorists travel? Complex, unresolved questions” (Clifford, 1989).

While these unequal spaces *are* challenged, and critical geographical debate does happen, the discourse either emerges from southern researchers now based in the north, or is based on a series of conversational pieces in journal editorials⁴⁵. Within critical debates in geography particularly (not necessarily in the field of critical

geography) it is unfortunate that the north-south conceptual divide in academic spaces, between theory formation and case study, is not problematised.

Berg (2004) raises broader questions around the valuing of research experience. He problematises the 'normative character', and the 'taken-for-grantedness' of the Anglo-American theoretical perspective and voice in a rather contentious paper. He argues that ideas are valued in terms of where they hail from, and highlights the double-problematic of "hierarchical spaces and scale of knowledge" (Berg, 2004:553) within *geographical* debate and thought. His article entitled "Scaling knowledge: A critical geography of *critical geographies*", critiques critical geography and geographers who *seem* oblivious to these hierarchies yet have the professional requirement to output to 'international journals', the very practise which perpetuates the academic hierarchy. The paper argues that north-centric cases, which evolve into theory, are held up as the rule by which other, particularly south-centric, cases are valued. South-centric research forever remains cases, which bows to, agrees with or positions against the established order. Irrespective of the angle, the perceived order is still upheld. The process of framing and finding adequate/legitimate/significant conceptual space is linked fundamentally to the scaling of knowledges. Berg's (2004) dialogue highlights that Anglo-American experience (also cases) becomes the theory-forming experience, to which every other case is held up to. According to this argument, disjointed, isolated, or even unrelated *cases*, within the accepted parameters of academic merit, become the tenets of a theoretical underpinning. Research that emerges from the south will and *can* only be in reference to the existing Anglo-American (northern) perspective (Berg, 2004), making argument that either concur, disagree with or disregard the 'theory'. This is even more problematic when a theoretical canon like AFN is still *being* established.

While it is problematic enough that the hierarchy exists and is accepted as true, correct and natural, this idea is alarming but not surprising given the fact that this hierarchy is enforced on researchers from the south by their *own* national or regional research organisations like the NRF in South Africa and a similar organisation in Brazil. This has larger implications for the nature of emerging research from the south, and the way in which research is taught. Courses in research methodologies

acceptance within a discipline as long as it is validated within a 'larger' north-centric theoretic space. The north-centric literature is not valued equally with research that comes from the south since there may not be enough theoretical foundation to the local literature. Besides the fact that the point of research is to effect change in the world, south-centric literature is deemed to be a case study of a more practical, experiential nature, and does not feed back into the theory.

The point, clearly, is that any kind of grass-roots speak is unable to find academic credibility without situating it *within* an established order of academic acceptability. What this translates to is: grassroots-speak will remain an exotic story unless it is understood and conceptualised within an accepted theoretical paradigm, where it will be validated and legitimised as a case study in reference to the theory, even if the research coming from the south is effecting real change in environments where ivory tower theorising is irrelevant. Voices *are* being heard, so long as they occupy the spaces neatly relegated for them to occupy; not just another contextual take on the universal theory, "but also to measure off a different distance from the presumed centers of Anglo-American academic production" (Hones, 2004:549). Their very nature being 'from the margin' guarantees that they can only tell an exotic marginal *story*, and may not make any assertion to change the 'Larger Theory', only to situate itself in reference to it – and of course within it. We may speak the same academese, we may be reading the same literature, we graduate with the same letters behind our name and we sometimes have the same access to resources. But what is it worth if all of our research is just kicking up the dust of a concretised theoretical hierarchy? What is the point of doing a conventional dissertation in which all the elements necessary for a rigorous research endeavour are present if these questions are left unspoken? Hones (2004) suggests that this situation may not be worth getting into an aggressive huff about. The very nature of academic research should be committed to being political, and to challenge the value hierarchies, and to continue, in our persons, to negotiate the spaces that we share with those who are perceived to be the landlords of the space (Hones, 2004).

What kind of research product and research practitioner are we churning out, if all we are supposed to do is fit within the pre-existing mould of a prior-determined self-constructed standard? Of what significance is original thought and research if it has to be checked, mined and tweaked to fit the boundaries of a theoretical base that is not

always adequate? Escobar (1995) argues toward a post-development era where we (if we use this term for research and practise) will be able to move toward a place that does not seek to strait-jacket communities. He argues that we don't need systems which enforce these ideals anymore; researchers are mass-produced by institutions that propagate a north-centric standard of validation.

This conceptual narrative showed in part how the Literature/literature has incredible power to morph a unique case study into articulating a marginal argument. The larger point, however, is that research assessment forums in the south place pressure on researchers to continue to make a northern connection by locating one's research in theory from the north, presenting at international conferences and publishing in international journals *despite* the evidence that suggests that southern theory may never legitimately extend knowledge. Researchers from the south have far larger obstacles to overcome than simply finding adequate avenues to represent new research. Exclusionary spaces within academia are reflected in differential access to resources, attendance at north-based academic conferences, academic exchange between northern institutions and citation indexes in 'international' journals. Even if research from the south reaches the International Ivory Tower, the research is relegated to being case studies in reference/deference to the theory, never extending it.

At the close of this dissertation there are more questions than assertions and more respect for the structures of local research. As a young academic new at the research game, I fear that years of research will dull this activism, and that I will one day concede to writing case studies, or to have valid and useful theory relegated to case study evidence. I hope that my growing frustration with conventional research perimeters will some day pave the way for researchers after me to conduct research, to publish and to extend theoretical paradigms in an academic space where the remnant of the empire is less strongly felt, and where a global community of academics will enjoy the right of shared academic space. Hones (2004) appropriately suggests a 'good-naturedness' around the critique of academic spaces, acknowledging the legitimate shared space of the 'other' and the lifelong critique that academics to engage in. I would like to close with a quote that argues that the role of academia and new research is precisely to challenge hierarchical academic spaces and that the

nature of research should remain politically dissident in relation to apparent imperialistic systems of validation.

“The utility of theory...is entangled with ... the question of accountability and the specific nature of our political commitments: who are we writing for, how and why?..[A critical research need is to] interrogat[e] ... the structure of the academy and the constraints and values embedded therein, [and] to challenge and reshape those structures and values”

(Nagar, 2002:179).

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