

# Food choices at the intersections of race, class and gender struggles in post-apartheid South Africa

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## Danone Southern Africa



GLOBAL  
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CENTRE DANIEL CARASSO

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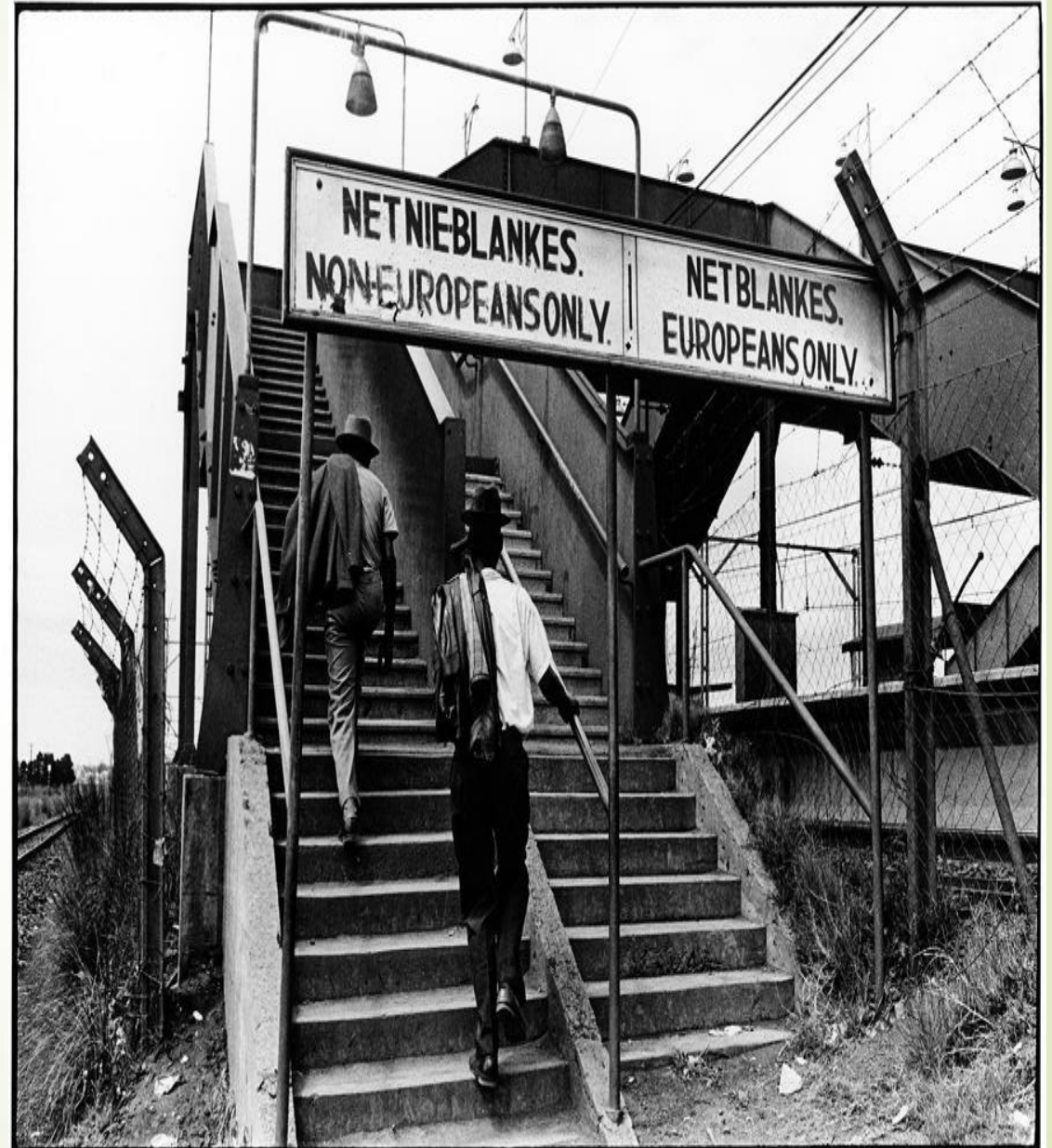




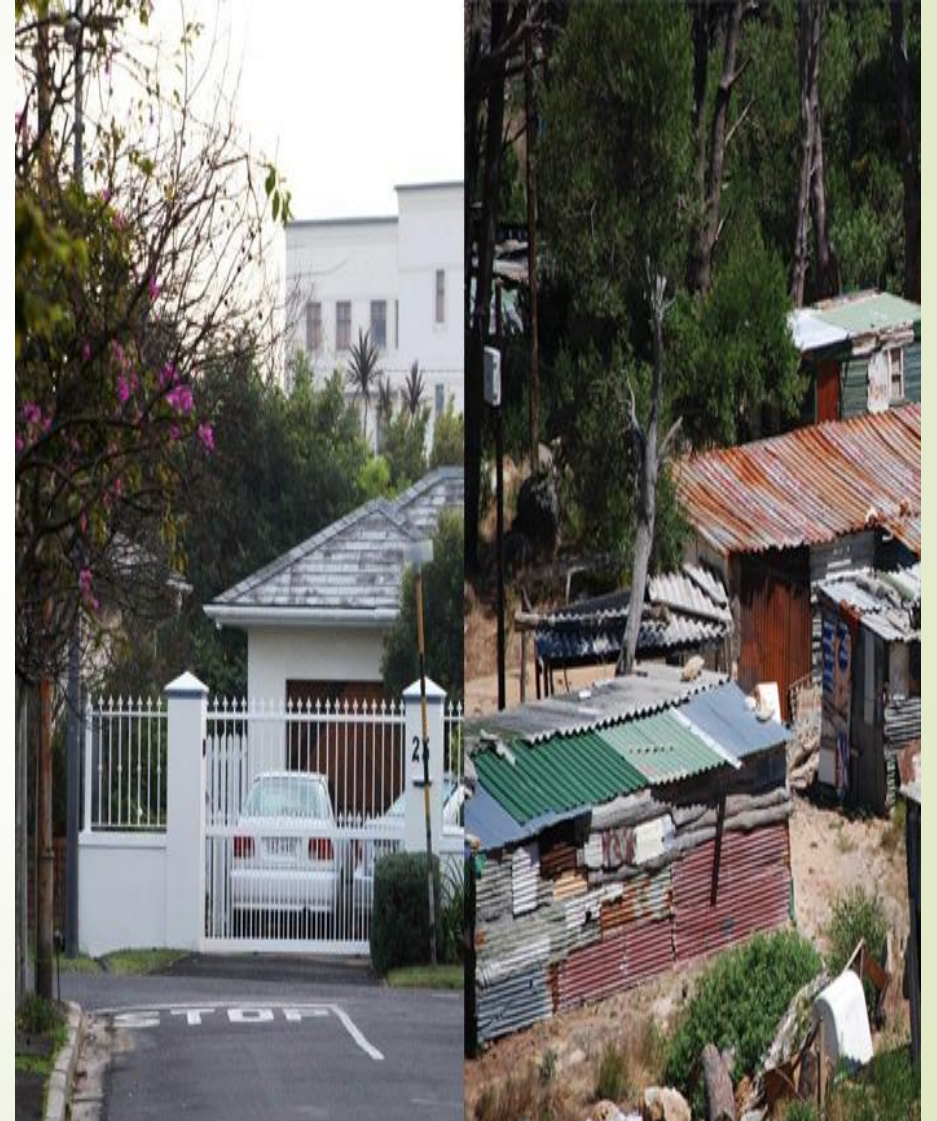
- 55 million people
- MIC
- 4 major race groups
- 11 official languages

# Background

- ▶ South Africa's historical socio-economic inequalities
  - ▶ Racial and wealth inequalities set in motion during colonial and apartheid periods
  - ▶ 113 pieces of legislation that segregated people, regulated Black life, and ensured differential access



- Lack of redistributive economic policies
- Macro-economic policies have widened the gap between rich and poor
- Black Africans account for 90% of South Africa's poor
- White families earn 6 times more than Black families (US\$24 984 versus US\$4 124 per annum)



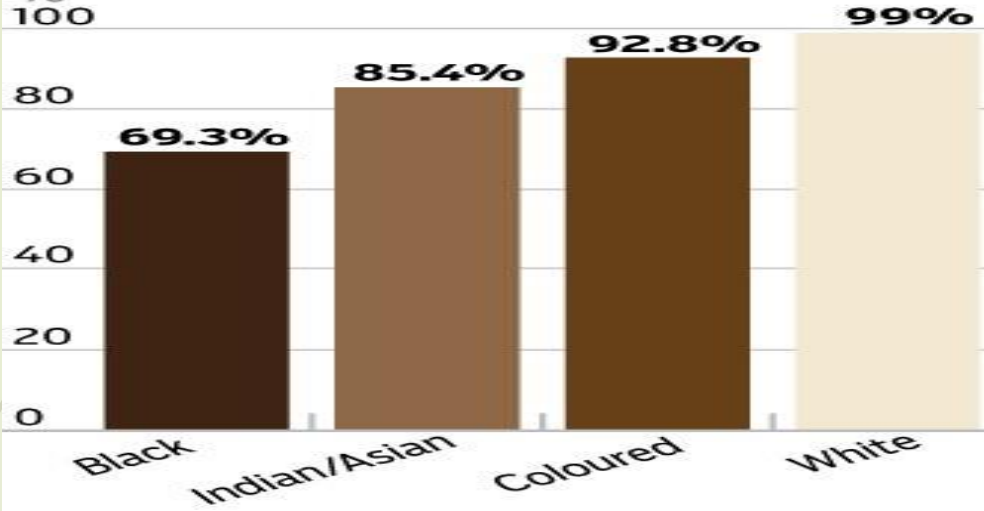
# The Quality of Life of South Africa's Race Groups

The South African Institute of Race Relations yesterday released the Quality of Life Index, which seeks to track the country's progress in improving living standards by comparing indicators across South Africa's nine provinces and the four major race groups.

### Matric pass rate, 2016



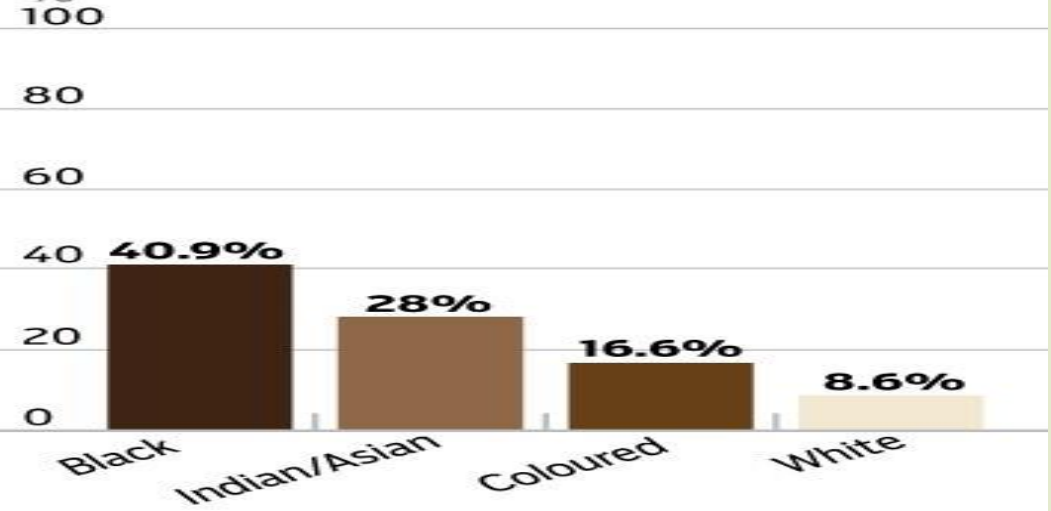
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### Unemployment rate



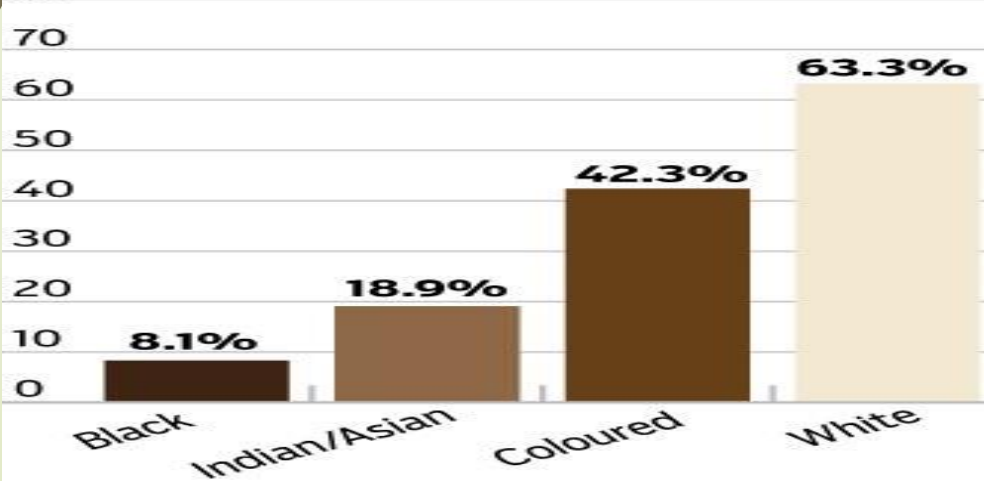
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### Households spending more than R10 000 per month, 2015



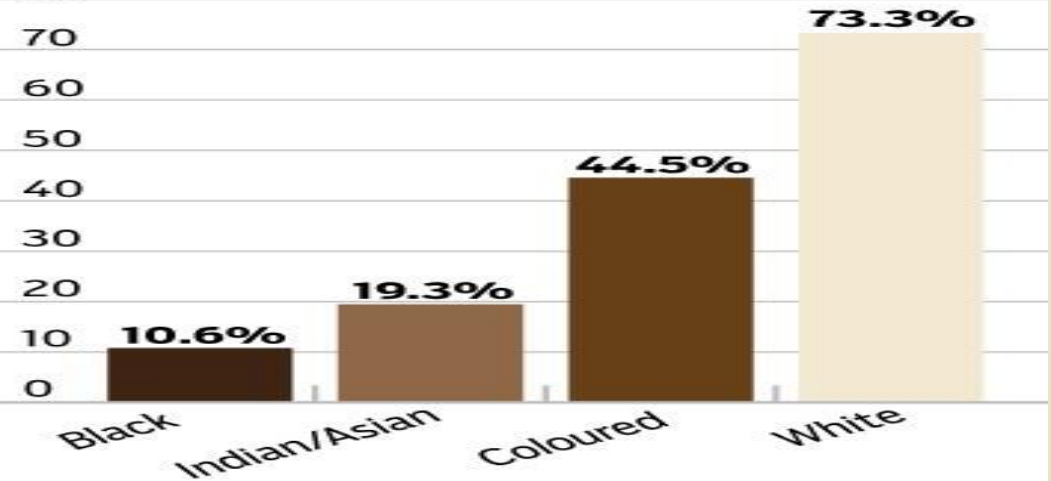
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### Medical aid coverage




%  
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# Food inequality

- Nowhere does inequality play out most visibly than in the arena of food
- National food availability exceeds needs in South Africa
- 7.4 million people reported hunger in 2016
- High levels of both under and over nutrition
  - 27% of children are stunted
  - 53% of women are overweight

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- Food research skewed towards epidemiological malnutrition studies
  - Little is known about how food is used by South Africans to navigate their unequal, uncertain social worlds
  - Racial tensions and divisions are more pronounced
  - How do South Africans, through food seek to be part of each other's worlds?





## Aim



To reflect on the use of food to navigate race, class and gender struggles in South Africa



# Research methods

- Qualitative study exploring the drivers of food choices among South Africans of different race, age, gender and socio-economic groups
- Conducted in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg/Pretoria & Pietermaritzburg
- Purposive & snowball sampling
- 48 in-depth individual interviews and 15 focus group discussions
- Measured socio-economic status using Living Standards Measure (LSM)
- Respondents drawn from both suburban and peripheral areas of the city




# Demographic profile

- Socio-demographic distribution was largely in the lower middle and middle classes
  - Respondents belonged in LSM 5-6 (40%), LSM 7-9 (40%) and LSM 10 (20%)
- 30% Black, 25% Coloured, 25% Indian, 20% White



# Findings

- Food shown to have multiple uses going beyond satiating hunger
  - Food choices take on various social struggles that characterize life in urban communities in South Africa
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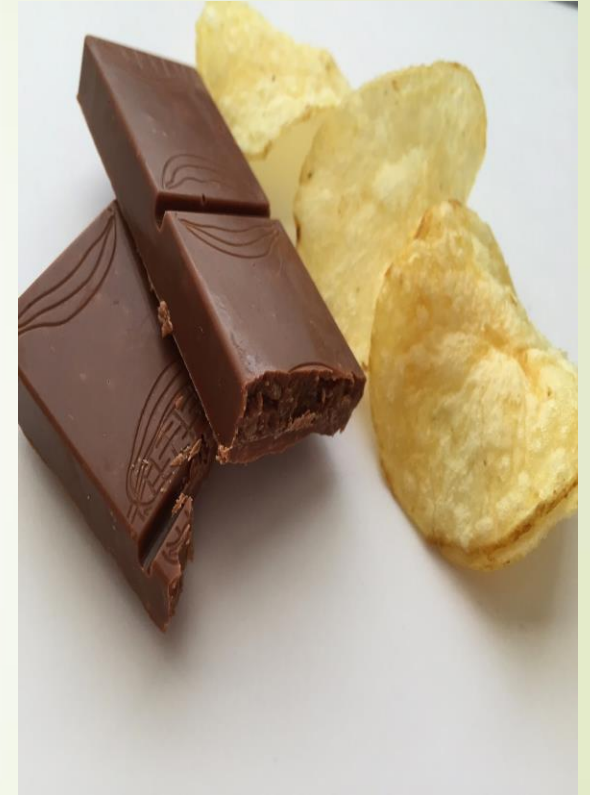
# Mothers' uses of food

- ▶ High levels of absent fatherhood: 64-70% of fathers unaccounted for
  - ▶ Food used by single mothers to assuage guilt
    - ▶ Compensatory
    - ▶ Excessive
    - ▶ Permissive
- ▶ Single mothers' own food choices characterized by self-denial and never separating from their identity as mothers of fatherless children

Because their father is not here, I give them too much...95% of the time I leave them to eat what they want. Whatever they leave on the plate, I let them...because I feel guilty of his absence, that's why. That's [also] why I do not eat out alone, their father is not here, I must be there for them.

# Mothers' uses of food

- Food used to make up for material deficiency
- Desire for healthy foods to avoid nutrition deficiency, stood in tension and competed with the need to address other needs



We cannot afford to buy our children so many nice things that they want, you know, so at least if [the child] wants nice foods, even if they are not the most healthy foods on earth, you let him/her. You cannot keep saying no, no, no to your children all the time; you have said no I cannot afford to get you that takkie (sneakers), now at least let him have the chocolates, or whatever.


# Mothers' uses of food

- Food used to pursue notions of modern motherhood, and to contradict harsh experiences of being mothered
- Modern motherhood associated with giving children choice





# Mothers' uses of food

- Mothers keenly aware of societal expectations to go the extra mile for their children
  - Different expectations for men
  - Mothers preoccupied with doing their best
  - Doing their best sometimes means combining bad foods with good foods
  - In the face of multiple deficiencies and contesting children's needs, nutrition not the main priority
- 





# The use of food to navigate race, class and gender struggles

- Food practices differentiated by time and space
  - At home food practices more aligned with who people are
  - At work more about who people aspire to be



# The use of food to navigate race, class and gender struggles

- **People of Colour:** avoiding judgment, shame and exclusion, as well as upward social mobility
- **White people:** distancing from ecological concerns about food, and therefore White privilege, seeking acceptance, and integration into Black worlds
- **Black men:** adhering to prescripts about masculine behaviour when it comes to food
- **Black women:** resisting patriarchy and regulation of women

# People of Colour

AT HOME



AT WORK



# People of Color

AT HOME



IN PUBLIC





# People of Color

Status does influence how Black people eat—even myself, I try to familiarize myself with foods associated with high social status. For instance, I do not like sushi but I would like to like it... when eating out with friends it shows a certain class...if you come off as belonging to a certain social class, that could get you access to bigger things, [e.g.] a lucrative contract. It could determine if you get a yes or a no...Let me put it this way, it's a step closer to Whiteness, and Whiteness is associated with class and prestige. Practically, what that means is that the closer you get to Whiteness the more you will be accepted in certain spaces, and the more your Blackness will be numbed...It won't be visible...Blackness in White spaces is rejected, not explicitly, but you may be told that certain restaurants are closed because of the colour of your skin.

# White People

AT HOME



AT WORK



# White People

AT HOME



AT WORK





# White People

I mean specifically in my decisions about food, me no longer being a vegetarian, it definitely has a lot to do with that and being in Jo'burg (Johannesburg). And I--part of it is weakness you know, the fact that I do eat meat; it is very nice to sometimes eat meat, you know. But also, it is a very conscious decision of not further othering myself at work. And by that I don't mean that if I go into a meeting and say I am not gonna eat that, I don't eat meat, that people would judge me or ostracize me, but it is an othering. And it is especially where power dynamics come in to play, dynamics of class and kind of giving the impression that you don't want to engage in the same class struggles that affect the majority of people in this country.



# Black Men

- Adhering to socio-cultural rules about appropriate performances of masculinity in public spaces
  - Avoidance of fast foods in public
- Using food to uphold gender hierarchies at home



# Black Women

- ▶ Food used to regulate women, their bodies and sexual behaviour
- ▶ Through consumption of culturally prohibited foods for women, such as sheep's head (*smiley*), *resisted these oppressions*





**THANK YOU!**