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Halleh Ghorashi
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Transformative Engaged Scholarship in Migration

Toward a Co-creative, Caring, and
Reflexive Migration Studies

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Halleh Ghorashi · Tara Fiorito ·
Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki · Elena Ponzoni
Editors

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Migration Studies

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Chapter 10

A Taste of Humbleness: Food Practices and Co-creation with LGBTQI+ Forced Migrants in Johannesburg



Miriam Adelina Ocadiz Arriaga, Thomars Shamuyarira,
and Phoebe Kisubi Mbasalaki

Keywords Care · Food · LGBTQI+ forced migrants · Co-creation

10.1 Introduction

It all started with food, steak and ravioli to be specific. We, Thomars and Miriam (Mimi), were having dinner at a restaurant in Maboneng, Johannesburg, in March 2022, trying to get to know each other. That dinner was our first face-to-face encounter, after having one Zoom meeting arranged by a contact in common. As we ate, we discussed our different positionalities and our shared desire to support the lived realities of forced migrants in South Africa. Thomars is founder and director of The Fruit Basket (TFB), a Johannesburg-based organization that supports the needs and concerns of forcibly displaced LGBTQI+ people (an acronym we will explain later). TFB's activities include legal counseling, skill development training, and judicial support in cases of deportation and harassment. It also offers an emergency shelter and works as a referral system to guide its beneficiaries to other relevant organizations. TFB's work is a response to Thomars's lived experience as a transman

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and forced migrant from Zimbabwe who has faced persecution and discrimination. Mimi at that time was a Mexican PhD candidate in the Netherlands working on the Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change¹ project, which addressed how academia can contribute to social and epistemic justice for forced migrants. Aiming to decolonize her own research, Mimi strives to challenge power imbalances in academic research. The third author, Phoebe, has worked in South Africa for over 15 years, focusing on the intersections of critical race, gender, sexuality, and migration. She worked online as Mimi's co-promoter and assisted as a collaborative researcher and guide. Our collaboration, bound through food, led us to unpack hunger beyond a physical need for nutrients. Instead, we regard hunger as a pedagogy (Freire, 1987; Hoosain Khan, 2014) with the potential to teach us about LGBTQI+ forced migrants' cravings for a well-being that includes basic needs such as housing and healthcare as much as a sense of belonging and connectedness (Matchett & Kisubi Mbasalaki, 2020; Zielke, 2021).

In this chapter, we use the term LGBTQI+ to name the TFB community—a group of forced migrants with non-normative sexual and gender identities. We are aware that this acronym was first coined in a western context and thus may not encompass the diversity of non-heteronormative lived experiences in (South) Africa. As Matebeni and Msibi (2015) argue, non-normative sexualities and gender diversities in Africa “go beyond asking who is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, pan-sexual, queer” to instead listen and recognize “[t]he ways in which people name themselves and their relationships, such as *kuchu* in Uganda or Kenya, or *supi* in Ghana, [that] extend beyond identity categorization” (p. 4). However, and most importantly, we use the LGBTQI+ acronym because the TFB community prefers it as a group self-identifying terminology. Noting the importance of self-identification within the broader dynamics of the politics of representation, TFB uses this terminology to position the organization within an international struggle against the oppression of every person who does not follow a heteronormative, patriarchal status quo (Wilkinson & Kirey, 2014).

In the beginning, we sought to build a trustworthy and reciprocal partnership that questioned academia's role in collaborating with LGBTQI+ forced migrants. Thomars's input as a community leader was fundamental; he recognized the importance of research and scholarship in advancing social justice and promoting equality. However, he also highlighted that many scholars have approached him to gather information without returning results meaningful to his community, a common critique of South African academia, which is located within a colonial history. In response, Mimi explained her desire to work with TFB by jointly finding alternative ways that challenge top-down research approaches. This culminated in ongoing discussions about the different positionalities and how Mimi could support TFB's work. Their collaboration began with Mimi volunteering at TFB two days a week from March till May 2022. She helped facilitate workshops on documentation and managed TFB's

¹ Engaged Scholarship Narratives of Change is a project that aims to better understand how scholarship can have a more critical and transformative role in the lived realities of forced migrant communities in South Africa, the Netherlands, and the USA.

database. In addition, the Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA) based at the University of Witwatersrand, a partner and ally of TFB that often provides it administrative and financial support, offered office space for both Mimi and Thomars.

As we spent more time together, our friendship flourished alongside our work. For instance, after a long day preparing for TFB workshops, we would often go out to grab some comfort food, allowing time and space to get to know each other's stories about family, friends, and dreams about the future. However, a collision of positionally based power was always entangled in our friendship. For instance, Thomars rightfully noted that because Mimi is a foreigner—she was likely to be read as white because she was studying at a western university—and thus could possibly be perceived to have more authority by the community within and around TFB. An example of this occurred at an academic event at a historically white university: Mimi was welcomed openly and was asked for her feedback on researchers' projects, whereas Thomars was mostly ignored throughout the entire event. Such moments left Thomars feeling challenged, ignored, and disrespected by scholars just because he does not hold an academic degree. Their behavior showed the hierarchy that often values academic credentials more than embodied and other forms of knowledge. Such situations led to tensions within our collaboration, and our friendship, placing a higher emotional burden on Thomars due to the pressure to constantly prove himself. Meanwhile, Mimi had to be reflexive and negotiate when to step back to acknowledge Thomars's leadership and when to step in to offer feedback and support. These power imbalances often forced us to have difficult conversations such as how Thomars is in a more precarious situation that requires more than just academic support but also financial, legal, and psychological assistance, which Mimi could not always help with. Our experiences exemplified how the social axes of race, class, gender, and nationality continue to complicate relationships between forced migrants and scholars despite their best intentions. For us, the bottom line was a hunger for justice, with an emphasis on working toward a meaningful collaboration.

Guided by decolonial praxis and frameworks, we knew it was important to not only acknowledge our positionality and major differences but also take specific actions to unsettle power. We therefore worked within the framework of being cognizant of LGBTQI+ forced migrants' needs, bringing in Mimi's previous experience on food practices with forced migrant women in Gqeberha (Ocadiz Arriaga, 2023). To engage with TFB's focus on community well-being, while destabilizing modes of data collection that tend to play within the potent binary of researcher/researched, we developed the Chakalaka Sessions, a project in which recipes from different African countries² were used to nourish the bodies of LGBTQI+ forced migrants while engaging in conversations. The Chakalaka Sessions were aimed at "doing" research together while elevating moments of enjoyment.

In this chapter, we weave enjoyment in and through food practices using a theoretical framework on the pedagogies of craving and the methodologies of nourishment to explore the hunger for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. First, we locate

² Nigeria, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa, as well as two recipes from Mexico.

this within Paulo Freire's (1987) work on pedagogies of the oppressed, focusing on LGBTQI+ forced migrants in South Africa (Hoosain Khan, 2014). We elaborate on how we approached this group's bodily experiences of hunger and cravings through methodologies of nourishment informed by decolonial, Afro-feminist scholarship. Then, we analyze pedagogies of craving and methodologies of nourishment through two case studies that reflect the challenges, limitations, and major contributions of the Chakalaka Sessions.

10.2 Food Practices and Well-being

At the beginning of the collaboration, Thomars and Mimi joked about one of their favorite South African relishes: Chakalaka, a catchy name for a heartwarming relish. This South African dish is made with baked beans, grated carrots, finely chopped peppers (usually green and red), onions, garlic, curry powder, and sometimes small pieces of green chili and pickles. It is a delightful, nutritious, and affordable vegan meal. Chakalaka was developed in Johannesburg townships in the nineteenth century, when migrant mine workers from neighboring countries mixed canned beans from the British with curry from the Indian diaspora, as well as spices and vegetables accessible to migrant workers (ImmaculateBites., 2014; Rawson., 2017). Chakalaka has been a meal that supports working class (South) Africans on the move, and thus it is an emblematic meal for one of TFB's key goals, namely, supporting a sense of well-being among LGBTQI+ forced migrants.

We approach the concept of well-being as an overall sense of "happiness, life satisfaction and positive state of consciousness such as feelings of self-worth" (Matchett & Kisubi Mbasalaki, 2020, p. 76). From this angle, well-being goes beyond fundamental access to material needs, such as housing or healthcare, to include people's experiences of happiness, contentment, and enjoyment in their lives, as we will demonstrate in this case study. A personal sense of well-being is a response to a concrete context that results from socioeconomic and structural circumstances, which determine who has access to achieving and sustaining well-being. In other words, well-being is not (only) a personal quest but a complex process entrenched in the (often unequal) distribution of power and resources (Zielke, 2021). This is particularly relevant for LGBTQI+ forced migrants, as their well-being is affected by homophobia, transphobia, racism, classism, and other forms of structural oppression that systematically diminish the living conditions of LGBTQI+ people worldwide (García et al., 2020). The well-being of LGBTQI+ forced migrants in South Africa is disrupted by blatant and invisible forms of discrimination, violence, and oppression due to histories of colonialism and apartheid (Dill et al., 2016; Hoosain Khan, 2014).

TFB aims to address and mitigate these forms of oppression by offering short- and long-term relief such as shelter, skill development, and legal counseling to LGBTQI+ forced migrants. Due to the nature of this work, emotional and psychological supports are needed to engage with well-being. These were especially important during our project due to the increasing sense of isolation and disconnection that LGBTQI+

forced migrants experienced during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In South Africa, LGBTQI+ forced migrants were excluded from governmental interventions for food, healthcare, and housing, while they also experienced rising anti-migration, homophobic, and transphobic aggression and violence. This combination along with the isolation resulted in inhumane conditions and decreasing levels of both physical and mental well-being (Mukumbang et al., 2020). The Chakalaka Sessions were therefore meant to offer support to the TFB community's well-being. The sessions were designed in line with the kinds of activities TFB does. The project enabled a co-creation process through three brunch sessions in which LGTBQI+ forced migrant community members were able to cook and eat together. Co-creation enabled facilitating informal spaces in which TFB beneficiaries came together and shared their lived experiences, such as stories of how oppressive structures operate, with the idea of (re)centering their hunger for well-being. Knowing that a limited number of sessions would not change any structural aspects in LGBTQI+ forced migrants' conditions, we hoped for moments of meaningful engagement through food that would contribute to TFB's work in addressing the pain and disconnection caused by those structural forms of oppression, which were aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

At its core, this project spoke back to a tradition of social and epistemic activism in (South) Africa that acknowledges that every person, including members of marginalized communities, are experts of their own lives and thus should be acknowledged as active agents of knowledge (see Hoosain Khan, 2014; Oliveira, 2016). Such approaches recognize that knowledge is not something (only) produced in academic spaces where marginalized communities are seen as subjects of study. Instead, an engaged approach to knowledge considers how recognizing, respecting, and dialoguing with the knowledges of marginalized communities enables processes of reflection through which people enhance their capacities to understand and challenge power structures. This, in turn, has deep repercussions for social change because knowledge "can potentially enable learners to act 'in' the world in order to transform or reshape structural and social processes that serve to exclude the poor and the working class" (Sinwell, 2022, p. 8). Hoosain Khan (2014) refers to LGBTQI+ activism in South Africa, which took up Paulo Freire's work (Freire, 1987), to demonstrate that engaging with communities' knowledge is a form of education that can enable political praxis that has the potential to contribute to social justice. The following section describes the relation between Freire's work and the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ forced migrants, focusing on the hunger and craving for social and epistemic justice.

10.3 On Hunger and Cravings

For Brazilian philosopher and activist Paulo Freire (1987), education, which he regarded as a process of knowledge co-creation, is about engaging with people's daily experiences and their understanding of human existence and then (re)shaping

their lives toward social justice. Freire argued that those who experience oppression do not lack knowledge; indeed, the oppressed have the capacities to deconstruct and transform unjust power structures because their understanding of oppression emerges from their own lived realities. He argues for a pedagogy in which those oppressed reflect on the sources, structures, and consequences of their own injustice and oppression. Pedagogy thus becomes a process of conscientization, the development of critical awareness (Freire, 1987), which transforms education into a liberatory practice. In using food practices, we situate pedagogies of the oppressed, as a political praxis, in the lessons that emerge from the very real sensations of hunger and craving in the everyday lives of LGBTQI+ forced migrants.

Thomars argues that for him and his community, hunger implies much more than a physical need for nutrients. Instead, hunger is grounded in everyday struggles for a dignified life in which he is seen (and feels) like a human being instead of (only) a member of a marginalized community. He describes how his life as one of the many LGBTQI+ forced migrants in South Africa, is constantly threatened by homophobia, transphobia, and anti-migrant sentiments, which leads him and other LGBTQI+ forced migrants to be seen (and feel as if they are seen) as a problem and burden to society. Thomars describes this situation as a sort of double-edged position. Because he lacks proper documentation to stay in South Africa, he is denied access to services such as education and employment, and he often struggles to afford basic services such as the food needed to resist oppression. In addition, everyday hardship is paired with a constant state of fear of deportation and violence that reinforces a sense of disempowerment. However, that very position of hardship is what feeds his fire to fight for the freedom and justice that comes from his hunger for a dignified, fulfilled life that is worth living, for both himself and his community. Both types of hunger motivated the Chakalaka Sessions as an initiative that engaged with the LGBTQI+ community's experiences to create a space in which individuals could not only find nourishment for their physical and immediate needs but also address their cravings for justice, belonging, and recognition as human beings with dignity and worth. While we locate hunger, for both food and social justice, as a result of oppression, we also consider craving as a visceral desire to thrive and flourish.

To do so, we first consider Lélia (Gonzalez, 1984, 2019, 2020) work in relation to the pedagogies of the oppressed. Gonzalez, a black Brazilian activist and scholar, unsettled white feminism in the 1980s countering it with the experiences of black Afro-Brazilian women, who simultaneously experienced racism and sexism. Similarly to Freire, Gonzalez called for a praxis of political education (Gonzalez, 2019); however, she used conscientization as a way to challenge the notion of "racial democracy"—a term used to describe Brazilian society as a melting pot, and thus absent of racism. Admired by fellow black feminists such as Angela Davis, who publicly recognized Gonzalez for developing scholarship that engaged with intersectionality even before Crenshaw "officially" coined that term in the United States (see Boitempo, 2019), Gonzalez took the idea that education can be a tool for transforming injustices and translated it into the Black Education Movement in Brazil, proposing a decolonial education that centers the lived experiences of black working-class women and thus highlighting the intersections of race, class, and gender.

Similarly, African feminisms unsettle power by connecting theory and action so that the voices of the oppressed inform scholarship in order to “subvert the boundaries that alienate and fragment knowledge and the pedagogies that reproduce inequalities instead of transforming them” (Mama, 2017, p. 4). This speaks to the work of Hoosain Khan (2014), who analyses education as a form of resistance for LGBTQI+ communities in Southern Africa. Because this community faces simultaneous, overlapping oppressions regarding their race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and document status, Hoosain Khan (2014) adds a gendered reading of conscientization to the pedagogies of the oppressed. This means that centralizing the voices of LGBTQI+ communities provides space to unsettle normative and oppressive discourses of gender and sexuality.

In the Chakalaka Sessions, we observed how food stimulated bodily capacities to (self-)reflect and address multiple forms of oppression while also allowing a sense of well-being rooted in interconnectedness, community, and enjoyment. That is, in enabling the cooking and sharing of food, the Chakalaka Sessions were about learning from the community’s craving for deeper physical, emotional, and spiritual appetites for wholeness, as Thomars stated earlier. We call this approach a *pedagogy of craving*, in which co-creation of communal knowledges and practices is rooted in the qualities of eating, which—“due to its sensual, visceral nature—is a strategic place from which to begin to understand identity, difference and power” (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008, p. 462). Inspired by Freire’s (1987) notion of conscientization and Gonzalez’s (1984, 2019, 2020) call to undo all forms of oppression, we posit that the pedagogy of craving is the process in which recollection, preparation, and sharing of food connects knowledge to practice. This process allowed LGBTQI+ forced migrants to share stories about their lived experiences that, without ignoring hardship, emphasized elements of creativity, resilience, and joy, as we explain below.

10.4 Methodologies of Nourishment

We approach food not only as a pedagogy but as a methodology with decolonial potential. Tamale (2011) unpacks how in colonial contexts, scholarship has been constructed around imbalanced relations between researchers (who are often part of an elite group descended from or connected to colonial settlers) and researched “subjects” (namely, native people of color who have been systematically oppressed). Such can be seen in how the voices of LGBTQI+ communities in Africa are often sidelined because western discourses of gender and sexuality are privileged in academia. This then “ultimately produces the notion of ‘the homo-sexual’—a visible, fixed and universal (western) creation, which often becomes a strategic entry-point for homophobic African leaders who disregard such a positioning as ‘unAfrican’” (Matebeni & Msibi, 2015, p. 5). Instead, these leaders suggest that “homosexuality” is a modern and western import onto the African continent and is therefore unAfrican. In response, African feminists have called for using decolonial approaches of self-determination as a process in which African (LGBTQI+) communities “‘rewrite’ and ‘re-right’”

their position in history, to “tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes” (Smith, 1999, p. 28, quoted in Tamale, 2011, p. 36).

To counter western hegemony, African feminists have highlighted historically silenced narratives on gender and sexuality to unsettle homophobic and transphobic discourses in African contexts. Matebeni and Msibi (2015), as noted earlier, argue that these counter discourses foreground knowledge production on historically silenced experiences that do not fit western categorization. Such efforts also build upon a long tradition in black feminism, in Africa and the diaspora, of challenging the research-subject dichotomy by recognizing how knowledge emerges from the interconnections of personal and collective experiences in oppressed communities, including LGBTQI+ forced migrants. We argue that food practices can also enable decolonial methodologies through what we call “methodologies of nourishment.” Because food is a fundamental part of everyday experiences, we recognize its centrality in forming relational processes between bodies and power structures, mediating embodied political subjectivities (Hayes-Conroy & Hayes-Conroy, 2008) and offering sensorial and sensual channels to oppressed bodies (Lewis, 2016). Thus, in the case of the Chakalaka Sessions, we see cooking and eating as political acts (see Nyamnjoh, 2018; Ocádiz Arriaga, 2023; Probyn, 2003) that draw (dis)connections between the everyday bodily experiences of LGBTQI+ forced migrants and the power structures that constrain their complex lived realities.

The Chakalaka Sessions approached food practices as a form of decolonial methodology, ensuring that TFB’s LGBTQI+ migrant community was involved in each step of the project. We, Thomars and Mimi, started by reaching out to TFB’s community, asking who was interested in joining the initiative and gathering input on organizing each brunch. Because the budget was very limited, only three sessions were facilitated, each with five to eight community members. We invited different participants to each session so more people could be part of the project. A mix of participants with different gender identities, sexualities, and nationalities were included in each brunch. We also considered people’s availability and preferences to join one session over another. All participants were remunerated financially for their time and travel expenses following TFB guidelines.

For each brunch, we contacted one community member versed in cooking skills,³ who was paid extra for their expertise. This person offered various dish options and shared them with the other brunch participants via WhatsApp, allowing the group to select the menu together. Thomars and Mimi met the designated cook in Braamfontein on Friday morning to gather the needed ingredients and cooking tools, storing them at GALA, and have lunch together. On Saturday morning, we (the designated cook, Thomars, and Mimi) brought all ingredients and tools to the Holy Trinity Church, located next to GALA. TFB events often took place there, so it was a familiar place for the participants.

Aiming to destabilize hegemonic methodologies in which scholars lead and control research projects, we respected how every community member participated as

³ Cooks had previously received one year of vocational training provided by TFB to increase their employability.

they felt comfortable. For example, some participants wanted to prepare the meals in the kitchen, helping with peeling, chopping, or frying certain ingredients, while others opted to arrange the table and run any errands needed, such as buying extra drinks. Around noon, we all sat and ate together, aiming to build a space that “encourage[ed] participants to share personal constructions of self and identity, rather than teaching queer people about their identity and their problems based on analysis from elsewhere” (Hoosain Khan, 2014, p. 130). This led to rich conversations, which made food practices a process of storytelling. After each session, Mimi took notes on the stories that had emerged while cooking and eating and later shared and discussed them with Thomars and Phoebe. We thereby analyzed how food practices became a process of communal, co-creative knowledge-making. Below are our findings from the second brunch, in which Mickey and Leona shared their stories and the group discussed gender roles and food practices.

10.5 DJ Mickey in th’ Kitchen

At the Chakalaka Sessions, several participants described how few things provided a sense of fulfilment as fufu did. Its earthy taste and fluffy texture make it the perfect comfort food. Accompanying it with a thick egusi soup of balanced flavors (onion, palm oil, crayfish, crushed melon seeds) provides a kaleidoscope of sensations that awakens the whole body. Fufu with egusi was suggested by Mickey, a rapper, cook, tattoo artist, TikToker, and transwoman from Nigeria. Thomars and Mickey had worked together since 2020, when Mickey took TFB’s vocational training and acquired a diploma as a cook. Mickey’s pre-brunch session took place on Friday, 29 April 2022. Thomars and Mimi met her in Braamfontein, downtown Johannesburg. Mickey was cheerful and took the lead in gathering the necessary ingredients to prepare her dishes, as well as chakalaka, which was a signature dish at every brunch. As she led us to a corner store that specialized in products from Central and West Africa, Mickey’s excitement increased because she perceived the store as a “piece” of Nigeria and thus a reminder of “home.” She shared childhood memories of her father teaching her how to cook, passing on family culinary secrets, such as making fufu with cassava instead of with plantain or corn. She described how food helped her to build a special bond with her father, as cooking was a way for them to spend quality time together. Also, because fufu with egusi is a staple dish “loved by everyone,” as she often said, preparing it in South Africa meant that she could recreate an important expression of her culture and perhaps continue an aspect of family lineage—and kinship—that was highly appreciated by her father.

We consider this connection between food, memories, and kinship as a manifestation of the pedagogies of craving. Mickey’s leadership in gathering ingredients and cooking fufu with egusi, centering her culinary knowledges, is, according to Freire (1987) and Gonzalez (2020), a fundamental step in developing conscientization. The food practices involved in (re)creating the dishes allowed Mickey to reflect on her identity as a Nigerian, a transwoman, and a forced migrant. For her, cooking was

more than preparing a healthy and delicious meal; it was a way of learning about her own hunger for connection and belonging. Feminist scholarship has emphasized that food works as a pivotal bridge connecting people's sociohistorical and political context with their personal experiences and life (hi)stories. For forced migrants, this is particularly true, as bodily sensations such as smells, touch, and taste are crucial in supporting people as they approach new environments while remaining attached to how their body feels/thinks back to their place of origin (Longhurst et al., 2009; Ocádiz Arriaga, 2023). This was demonstrated in the way Mickey narrated her memories of cooking and sharing this meal with her family, particularly her father and brothers, and how this made her feel (re)connected, recognized, and respected by her loved ones, especially those back in Nigeria.

This brings us back to the idea of kinship, which we consider as a network of practices and relationships that respond to people's needs and demands throughout life and death, supporting the human need for belonging and interdependency (Morison et al., 2019). While in several societies, kinship is marked through marriage and situated within blood ties (Van Zyl, 2011), for Mickey and other participants, the notion of "queer kinship" (Morison et al., 2019) is much more significant as a way of developing relationships of care and belonging that move beyond hetero-patriarchal structures of bonding (Morison et al., 2019; Van Zyl, 2011). This was seen in how Mickey acknowledged her family and ethnic ties in Nigeria while also enacting bonds of care and connectivity with fellow LGBTQI+ members of TFB, who she described as her family in South Africa. This LGBTQI+ community became Mickey's "chosen family," a notion embedded in queer kinship studies (Kisubi Mbasalaki, 2023; Morison et al., 2019; Van Zyl, 2011). Mickey's capacity to prepare fufu with egusi nourished a sense of well-being, without dismissing hardship, enabling an experience of enjoyment, contentment, and interconnectedness, which in return reinforced the already existing sense of queer kinship within TFB's LGBTQI+ forced migrant community. This was particularly important given the alienation and oppression Mickey, and other forced migrant participants, experience.

Here we see food practices overlapping hardship and enjoyment to demonstrate connections between what seems disconnected and, in the process, destabilizing traditional gender norms. Mickey exemplified this by juxtaposing her childhood memories with different elements of her current gender identity as a transwoman. She was proud that it was her father who taught her how to prepare fufu with egusi, showing the importance of male figures in food practices, which are traditionally seen as female tasks. She also considered cooking as a way to perform her complex gender identity. This was seen in how Mickey described herself as a "lady" but dressed as a "tomboy," as she described it, which is often considered non-ladylike. Sporting a Bantu Knots hairstyle and wearing an oversized blue blouse, satin trousers, and golden jewelry, she rapped and played hip hop as she cooked, making cooking a time and space for creativity. Thus, Mickey's approach to food practices playfully linked and mixed elements associated with gender roles, blurring the boundaries of what is supposed to be feminine or masculine to perform her complex gender identity in her own terms. Mickey assembled different elements of her worldview and identities, making cooking an opportunity to be herself, with all her apparent contradictions.

This helped create an informal, energetic ambience that welcomed other LGBTQI+ community members to cook, dance, sing, and share stories.

We see all this as a manifestation of the pedagogies of craving, as Mickey used food practices to unpack her intersecting, complex, and fluid location as a forced migrant transwoman. Hoosain Khan (2014) approaches this process of self-reflection as an education of “dislocation,” which is “the act of challenging the status quo of an assemblage of inequality”; “dislocation is about moving against the grain, outside the boundaries of the normativity of a particular location” (p. 127). For instance, Mickey used food practices to reaffirm her gender identity beyond traditional gender roles that fixate food labor as a (cis) female task. From this angle, she brought different elements of her identity, including race, class, gender, and nationality, to show how she challenged the expectations and categories imposed on her. For instance, being Nigerian and following in her father’s steps is incompatible with being a stylish, tomboy lady. This process of dislocation was enabled by food’s capacities to go beyond recreating what people self-identify with, but cooking and eating are also processes that “refract who we are” (Probyn, 2003, p. 33). Through cooking and eating, Mickey involved hands, mouths, and all the senses to ingest, digest, and share food. She transformed food as much as food transformed her body, allowing an experience of dislocation that led to a pedagogy in which her craving for wholeness, connectivity, and self-worth nourished a critical consciousness of her self beyond categories.

10.6 “Un/Doing” Gender at the Table

Another manifestation of pedagogies of craving took place at the table, where sharing delicious and nutritious food opened a space for participants to engage in conversation. As we enjoyed Mickey’s chakalaka and fufu with egusi, Thomars started talking about the relationship between gender roles. We debated whether LGBTQI+ couples stick to traditional power relations in gender roles, with the (self-)identified female partner doing the cooking and the (self-)identified male partner providing other elements, such as money or safety. Coco, a gay man, argued that cooking and eating must be organized according to who is “top” and “bottom” in a “sexual” relationship, which is a dominant discourse in LGBTQI+ sexual encounters. However, for Coco, this discourse also extended beyond the bedroom. For him, the top is the person considered the dominant partner irrespective of their gender identity or sexual preference. Being top is about holding power (at least to a certain degree), while bottoms are seen as a more submissive figure. To exemplify this, Thomars shared a story about one of his ex-partners, a cisgender woman who followed traditional Zimbabwean patterns—cooking whatever he liked, washing his hands before dinner, kneeling to give him food, and eating less than him—even though he asked her not to because it made him uncomfortable. For Thomars’s ex-partner, this was a way of showing that she “praised her man,” reinforcing the idea that Thomars, as a

transman, was the top in the relationship. While she considered this a sign of love, Thomars perceived it as a sign of an unhealthy unbalance within the relationship.

Coco argued that because tops are already in a position of power, they need to take charge of acts like cooking to show love and care and to meet their partners in a “middle-way.” For him, cooking could change power dynamics between tops and bottoms in non-hegemonic, heterosexual couples. A counter-narrative on gender roles was further explained by Zama, a cisgender woman, and her partner, Hope, a transman. They did not agree that one of them must be more dominant than the other, instead preferring to be playful and disrupt categories of tops and bottoms through their food practices. Hope, who self-identifies as the male in the relationship, does the cooking, while both contribute to finances and housekeeping. Hope explained that he enjoys cooking elaborate, tasty dishes, such as *iDombolo* (steamed bread), that he learned to prepare at home in Eastern Cape. As both described details about *iDombolo* (its soft texture, its smooth taste), they used their hands, they salivated and smiled, evoking the sense of enjoyment that food brings in their relationship. Hope was positioned as a male figure who willingly and gladly does the labor around food without questioning his masculinity, which goes against traditional notions of masculinity in certain contexts. Both Hope and Zama highlighted that Hope’s cooking abilities strengthened his position as a partner and a lover, as he was able to evoke pleasure.

We see this conversation as a process of knowledge co-creation, in which members of the LGBTQI+ forced migrant community shared personal experiences and their understanding of gender, food, and power, thereby generating pedagogies of craving—a process in which people self-reflect on their own stories. Just as Hoosain Khan (2014) used art to offer a journey in which LGBTQI+ youth learned from each other’s stories, the Chakalaka Sessions used food to facilitate new understandings: as participants ate, talked, and enjoyed, they shared their own ideas about relationships between gender and food practices, and new pedagogies of gender emerged. Probyn (2003) argues that the “sensual nature of eating” provides “a privileged optic through which to consider how identities and the relations between sex, gender and power are being renegotiated” (p. 7). The discussion about tops and bottoms illustrates how participants both conformed to traditional gender roles and renegotiated them by challenging notions of cooking as a female-only task. Food practices also allowed participants to perform their gender identities beyond expectations, just as Mickey used cooking to present herself as a “lady tomboy,” interweaving feminine and masculine elements. These overlapping stories show that there are multiple narratives within the LGBTQI+ forced migrant community on how to un/do gender.

The discussion about gender also demonstrates the relationship between food and power. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008) posit that bodily experiences linked to food are deeply connected to political struggles—“what to eat, where to eat, who gets to eat, and so on—have come to be understood as political questions with implications for diverse struggles of ecological and social justice” (p. 463). In the Chakalaka Sessions, as participants described the roles of tops and bottoms, they used the capacities of food “to generate new, anti-oppressive and humanising relationships” (Lewis, 2016, p. 7). They thereby demonstrated their agency to use their

culinary knowledges to channel power through food's capacity to bring nourishment, enjoyment, and pleasure.

10.7 Leona's Cravings for Food and Sex

The connection between pleasure and food in LGBTQI+ intimate relationships was further addressed by Leona. As we continued enjoying the food and talking about food and sex, Leona stated, "I will only cook good food if the sex is good," causing everyone to burst into laughter. We laughed because Leona talked openly, with sincerity, and without any shame about expressing her hunger for sexual pleasure. Leona's story was not so much about using cooking to control her lovers but about her desire to cook because she was getting good sex. She mentioned that in a relationship, there needs to be balance, which she described as a mutual sense of care, reciprocity, and pleasure. For Leona, good sex is fundamental for a successful relationship, because it addresses cravings for connection, recognition, and (self-) love. She added that if the sex was outstanding, she would cook more delicious and elaborate dishes as a way of increasing the pleasure shared in the relationship.

The power of food to evoke and provoke pleasure brings to mind African feminists' argument that food can be used both to impose power and to draw unexpected forms of resistance. We see resistance in how Leona crafted her romantic relationships by learning from her own hunger for sexual satisfaction, claiming her capacity to renegotiate by sensing and sharing pleasure. Lewis (2016) affirms that there is agency in how a cook provides gastronomic pleasure that supports a sense of connectivity, nourishment, and contentment, highlighting how food enables well-being at various levels.

In the specific case of LGBTQI+ forced migrants, their agency to negotiate pleasure and power disrupts heteronormative food practices. Ehrhardt (2018) points to queer food by engaging with the way non-normative sexualities change the meaning of food and the gender roles around it. In her writing about lesbian Chicanas, Ehrhardt (2018) argues that lesbians use food to represent themselves as "food eater in addition to food preparer. They present [a lesbian Chicana] as a woman with appetites that deserve to be satisfied, even if they do not fit heteronormative patterns, rather than as one who must deny her own hunger so that she may feed others first" (p. 96). Similarly, we argue that Leona's story pushed the boundaries of heteronormative approaches to food by emphasizing how food works as a channel to take ownership of one's pleasure and from that to exercise agency. Leona finalized her story by stating that her use of power was not intended to reinforce categories of tops as the dominant partners and bottoms as the ones cooking. Instead, she preferred more reciprocal and egalitarian relationships, in which neither partner "lags behind." Like Hope and Zama, she saw food as a fundamental element in creating intimate bonds.

In the way Leona links food and pleasure, we note another manifestation of the pedagogies of craving. Her story exemplifies how her appetite for wholeness, love, and sexual contentment led her to reflect on how she could take ownership of her

pleasure and thereby unsettle power. Leona characterized this by challenging the expected submissive feminine role of cooking, making an unashamed call for pleasure through sex and food, which we see as resistance to silences relating to female sexual pleasure. There was something disruptive, fresh, and spicy in Leona's story, as she used humor to contest expectations put upon her and to instead emphasize how she negotiated the relationship between food, sex, and pleasure. Also, by making other participants laugh, Leona—and Mickey—enabled a sense of connectivity, ease, and contentment that promoted well-being. This facilitated a space in which everyone could eat and share their stories, thereby satisfying individual and communal cravings for a deep sense of nourishment.

However, the problem with cravings is that, if nourishment stops, hunger comes back. Participants continued to face multiple forms of oppression, often leading to physical, emotional, and psychological forms of hunger. Although there was a sense of connectivity and enjoyment at each Chakalaka Session, the project was not meant to, nor was it capable of, addressing all the challenges that led to different forms of hunger among the community. Instead, the Chakalaka Sessions were meant to ease the consequences of oppression by providing elements that supported people's well-being. For example, in other TFB activities, Mickey shared painful difficulties she faced with relatives and co-workers who made her feel discriminated against, unaccepted, and unloved, which contrasted the stories of her loving relationship with her father. However, she noted how these complexities do not erase the enjoyment she shared when cooking fufu with egusi. This denotes the layered nature of belonging and (queer) kinship for LGBTQI+ forced migrants and the urge to develop more long-term forms of support. Thus, after the project ended, Thomars developed follow-up activities, with support from Mimi. For instance, in September 2023, TFB facilitated a Solidarity Space that aimed for a safe(r) space in which LGBTQI+ forced migrants could share their lived experiences. This session included a "Queer Quirky Quiz" that allowed the community to play, laugh, and feel more connected. According to Thomars, this event aimed to build upon the Chakalaka Sessions by inviting some brunch participants along with newcomers to further contribute to a sense of enjoyment and connectedness among LGBTQI+ forced migrants. We see this as a critical way to engage with the pedagogies of craving, to keep supporting well-being while also enabling stories to be shared.

10.8 Conclusion

Inspired by the work of black African feminist scholars, we view food practices as a space in which to address power structures. We argued that LGBTQI+ forced migrants' cravings have the potential to teach us about their capacities to evoke and share connectivity, pleasure, and nourishment in order to transgress power imbalances in daily life. We saw how participants took cooking and eating as opportunities to unsettle power, often through caring and sustaining relationships that were important to them. In the way Mickey connected to her father, Hope and Zama expressed

their love, or Leona interacted with her lovers, food worked to offer recognition, respect, and reassurance for themselves and for those they care about most. Food also supported the tensions and contradictions in LGBTQI+ forced migrants' lives. As Mickey demonstrated, it is possible to have different cravings connected to kinship, to adapting to a non-normative gender identity, and to blurring the boundaries around femininity. This illustrates that while LGBTQI+ forced migrants face multiple forms of hunger, they are capable of using their cravings for a dignified life to channel diverse forms of resistance. Our findings show how through gathering ingredients, cooking, and eating, Chakalaka Sessions participants centralized their knowledges and expertise, enabling a more humble, less top-down process of knowledge cultivation. By doing so, they explored their own understanding of being LGBTQI+ forced migrants beyond imposed categories and expectations. Thus, the Chakalaka Sessions engaged with the following question: how "[c]ould something as common as eating contain the seeds of an extraordinary reflection, a visceral reaction to who and what we are becoming?" (Probyn, 2003, p. 14). We observed this engagement with the lived experiences of the TFB community through dislocation of the status quo.

Although the scope and nature of the Chakalaka Sessions was rather small, we present this initiative as a taste of pedagogies of craving that enabled processes of (self-)reflection starting from bodily yearnings for well-being. As we gathered ingredients, cooked, and ate together, we were able to bring nourishment to LGBTQI+ forced migrants' physical, emotional, and spiritual cravings for well-being. This enabled a process of knowledge co-creation, particularly regarding how participants perceived and contested gender, a process that involved knowledge as much as practices, with the body as a central element. We chopped and peeled, ate, tasted, and digested, involving all our beings to learn through doing food practices. We therefore call for further initiatives addressing the hunger of non-normative bodies for well-being and connectivity, making of research a space for unsettling power through care and nourishment.

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