

The background features abstract, overlapping geometric shapes in various shades of green, ranging from light lime to dark forest green. The shapes are primarily triangles and polygons, creating a dynamic, layered effect. The text is centered on a white background within this design.

The Agrarian Question and Food Crisis in SA

Tshisimani Activist School
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Historical Context

- ▶ Agrarian question is inherently linked to capitalist colonial conquest and slavery
- ▶ The peasantry played a central role in challenging colonial dispossession
- ▶ The African agrarian question is gendered
- ▶ Class, race and gender inequalities are embedded in the production /consumption patterns in the political economy of food (food justice)
- ▶ The African democratic revolution = addressing the agrarian question

Defining The Agrarian Question

- ▶ What is the nature of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist agro-political economies?
- ▶ How does agriculture contribute to industrialization and economic development ?
- ▶ Which social forces have been driving the global and domestic transformations in the agro-political economy? Accumulation from above or below ?
- ▶ What is the future of the peasantry ?

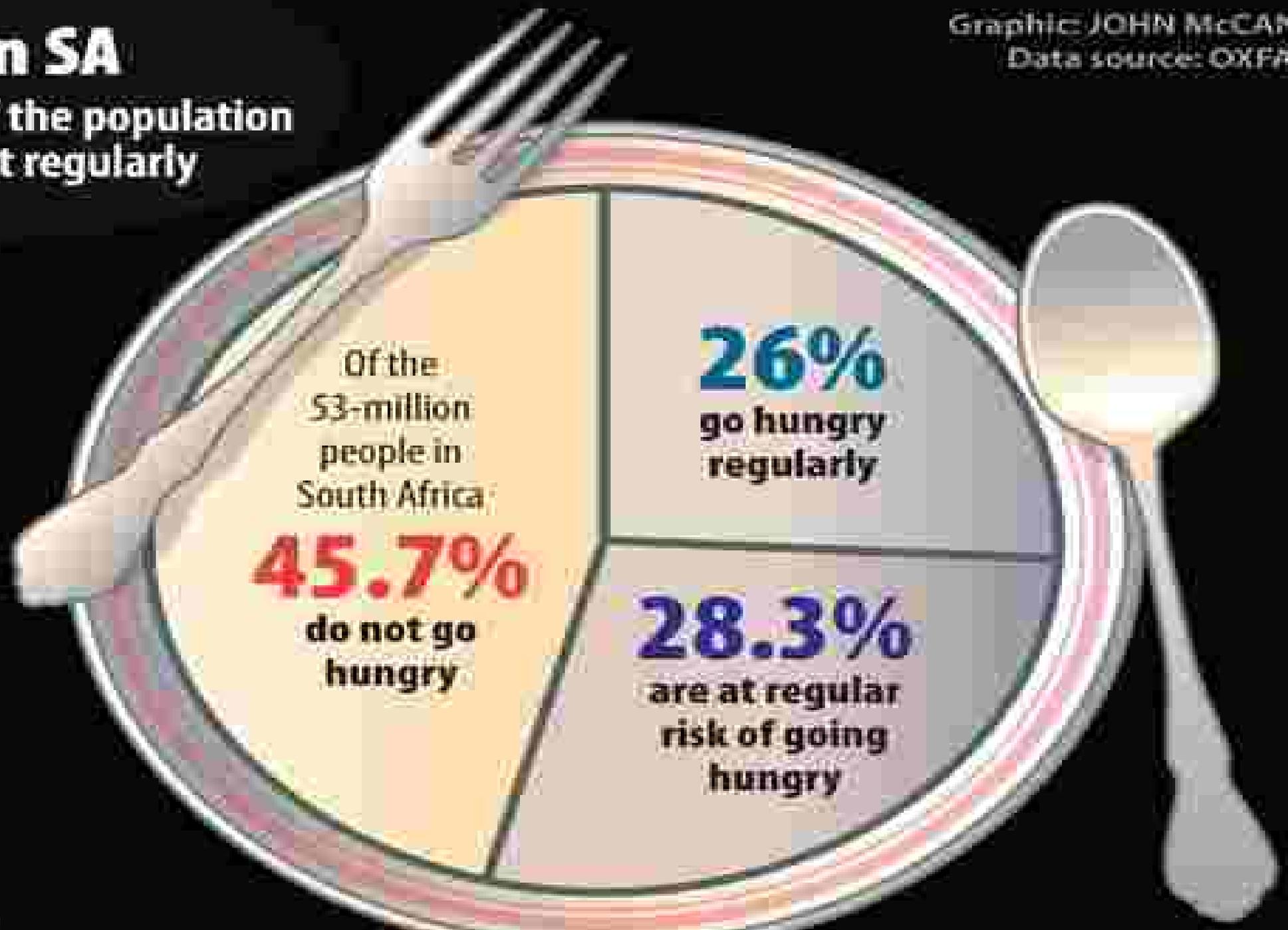
Defining a Contested Concept: Food Security?

- ▶ Food security “*all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.*”(World Food Summit 1996 ;FAO 1996)
- ▶ This definition over-emphasizes consumption; ignores production
- ▶ Reduces food crisis to a social security or welfare issue = food aid or programmes
- ▶ Silent on the nature of power relations that reproduce international food regimes and systems
- ▶ Gender blind
- ▶ Definitions are important!!!! They shape policy proposals and state intervention in food systems

Hunger in SA

More than half the population struggles to eat regularly

Graphic: JOHN McCANN
Data source: OXFAM



The top tenth of households spend **10%** of their income on food



The bottom quarter spend **48%** of income on food

Social Differentiation & Food Crisis

- ▶ Recent research reports indicate that 46% of the population is food insecure.
- ▶ 28.3% of the population is at risk of going hungry, and 26% experiences hunger on a daily basis.
- ▶ Half of South Africans do not have sufficient access to affordable, nutritious and safe food to meet their basic health requirements
- ▶ These food insecure citizens reside in working class communities such as townships and rural areas:
- ▶ The largest percentage of participants who experienced hunger (food insecurity) were in urban informal (32.4%) and rural formal (37.0%) localities
- ▶ Africans constitute the largest proportion of food insecure citizens in SA.
“The black African race group had the highest rate of food insecurity (30.3%), followed by the coloured population (13.1%)” (SANHENS 2013)

Structural Causes of the Food Crisis in SA: (A) Neo-Liberalism

- ▶ Government has implemented neoliberal macro economic policy = deregulation, privatization, minimal state intervention
- ▶ The state has a constitutional obligation to ensure that all citizens have sufficient access to food(Section 27 RSA Constitution)
- ▶ Mainstream liberal economist/ government officials have adopted a narrow conception of food security= reduces food crisis to **production shortages** or **social security**
- ▶ Emphasis on narrow development targets: GDP, national food security and capitalist modernization

Structural Causes of the Food Crisis in SA: (B) Financialisation of Food

- ▶ food traders and processors mostly accumulate profit from financial activities
- ▶ Pressure on manufacturers from shareholder movement demanding 20- 30% returns
- ▶ Private financial enterprises determine the level of access to crucial inputs such as land
- ▶ Result: high food prices : cost of a basic food basket rose from R 394 in October 2010 to R 486 in October 2012. Commodity prices of staple food increased by 50 % between February 2013 and 2014
- ▶ farm workers and their families cannot afford a “balanced daily food plate” even after sectoral determination in 2013, which increased the daily minimum wage from R69 to R 105

Structural Causes of the Food Crisis in SA: (C) Corporate Control

- ▶ By 2014 35 000 mostly large-scale commercial farming enterprises operated on 82 million hectares which is equivalent to 67% of the total land area.
- ▶ Agro-processing is dominated by a small group of large enterprises: Tiger Brands, Premier Foods, Foodcorp, Clover, and Nestle
 - ▶ These companies have also been charged by the Competition Commission for price fixing and collusion in the past couple of years.
- ▶ The retail sector four companies account for 90 % of the market share. These enterprises share of sales in the sector amounts to 97%
- ▶ four enterprises control the fertilizer sector, and South Africa houses 8 out of the 10 biggest pesticide multinational corporations

Structural Causes of the Food Crisis in SA: (D) New Imperialism :Extractivism & Accumulation by dispossession

- ▶ Extractive economic activity such as mining is expanding in rural areas, and this has subsequently led to coercive land dispossessions
- ▶ Agricultural land is being used for non-agricultural capitalist economic expansion
- ▶ Access to land in rural localities is limited by the existence of powerful traditional leaders, who exercise authority on communal land
- ▶ post-apartheid government has largely pursued an export-orientated agricultural strategy
 - ▶ agricultural exports grew by 70% between 2007 and 2012. In 2007 agricultural exports were valued at R 29.8 billion, and this figure reached R50.8 billion by 2012

Colonial-Apartheid Wage Structure

- ▶ The share of wages in the national income has declined since 1994; even though SA experienced its longest period of sustained economic growth
- ▶ Median wage rate in SA is R3600; well below the ILO recommended minimum living level of R4500
- ▶ Post-apartheid Neoliberal food system is characterized by precarious work and apartheid/colonial wages
- ▶ *“the commercial farming sector houses the lowest paid workers in the formal economy, with black agricultural workers, especially women, receiving lower wages than white co-workers”*
- ▶ Gender biased employment security and wage structure
- ▶ Minimum wage: R2778. Compliance?

Alternative Food Systems Debate

- ▶ Alkon's (2013) categorization of alternative policies on global food production
- ▶ Environmentalist approach:
 - ▶ creating a food system that produces less negative ecological effects
 - ▶ Organic farming ; less environmental degradation and unsustainable natural resource use
- ▶ Community approach
 - ▶ ensuring food security within local communities.
 - ▶ food and nutrition insecurity challenges experienced by poor or low-income communities.
- ▶ Food Justice approach
 - ▶ broader racial and economic disparities are reflected “within the production, distribution, and consumption of food
- ▶ Food Sovereignty movement

FOOD Sovereignty Movement

- ▶ Total over-haul of the neo-liberal food regime, which benefits the few
- ▶ Citizen's control over the production, distribution and consumption of food.
 - ▶ 1. Give landless people /farm workers ownership and control over land they work
 - ▶ 2. Promote localization = production and consumption
 - ▶ 3 . Environmental justice = end dependence on chemical inputs / promote sustainable usage of seeds, water & land
 - ▶ 4. Challenge neo-liberal trade and industrial policy= end economic dominance of MNC/ TNCs
 - ▶ 5 Restructuring the political economy in order to decommodify food= constitutional right over profit. Citizens right to food must be central in agricultural policy