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## **The trajectory of food security policies in South Africa, 1910-1994**

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**Clement Chipenda, Alex Veit, Jonas Pauly**

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The trajectory of  
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1910-1994

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# ABSTRACT

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Related processes of capitalist development, apartheid, and political contention determined South Africa's public food politics and policies during the 20th century. This paper provides a chronological and comparative analysis of the emergence and transformation of food-related policies from South Africa's foundation as a semi-independent settler state to the democratic revolution. We centrally argue that while apartheid ideology, capital interest and liberal and democratic opposition often conflicted, interests also converged in some regards. To explain policies that both confirmed and contradicted a seemingly unambiguous racist ideology, we employ a process-sociological figurational approach that reveals the interweaving of political, economic and symbolic developments. Based on primary sources from the archives and secondary literature, we compare two food security policies: school meals and food subsidies. We show that a highly symbolic conflict about school meals ended with excluding African students, part of a welfare state trajectory that gradually abandoned non-whites. However, a much costlier, non-discriminatory redistributive food subsidy system did meanwhile strive and expand. The apartheid regime reclined responsibility for African children's welfare. Simultaneously, a vast food subsidy system included the non-white population as consumers and labour force.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

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Verknüpfte Prozesse der kapitalistischen Entwicklung, der Apartheid und der politischen Auseinandersetzung bestimmten die öffentliche Ernährungspolitik Südafrikas im 20. Jahrhundert. Dieses Arbeitspapier liefert eine chronologische und vergleichende Analyse der Entstehung und Transformation der Ernährungspolitik von der Gründung Südafrikas als halb-autonomer Siedlerstaat bis zur demokratischen Revolution. Im Mittelpunkt steht die These, dass Apartheid-Ideologie, Kapitalinteressen sowie liberale und demokratische Opposition zwar oft im Widerspruch zueinanderstanden, die Interessen aber auch in mancher Hinsicht konvergierten. Um Politiken zu erklären, die eine scheinbar eindeutige rassistische Ideologie sowohl bestätigten als auch ihr widersprachen, wenden wir einen prozessoziologischen figurativen Ansatz an, der die Verflechtung von politischen, ökonomischen und symbolischen Entwicklungen aufzeigt. Auf Grundlage von Primärquellen aus Archiven und Sekundärliteratur vergleichen wir zwei Politiken der Ernährungssicherung: Schulspeisungen und Nahrungsmittelsubventionen. Wir zeigen, dass ein hochsymbolischer Konflikt um Schulspeisungen mit dem Ausschluss afrikanischer Schüler endete, Teil einer wohlfahrtsstaatlichen Entwicklung, die Nicht-Weiße weitgehend ausschloss. Ein viel kostspieligeres, nicht-diskriminierendes und umverteilendes System von Nahrungsmittelsubventionen existierte unterdessen jedoch fort und expandierte sogar. Das Apartheidregime negierte seine Verantwortung für die Wohlfahrt afrikanischer Kinder. Zugleich schloss ein umfangreiches Lebensmittelsubventionssystem die nicht-weiße Bevölkerung als Konsumenten und Arbeitskräfte ein.



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# CONTENTS

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1.	Introduction .....	1
2.	Food policies in the Union of South Africa, 1910-1948 .....	4
2.1	Dairy welfare: The introduction and expansion of the school feeding scheme ..	6
2.2	Centralising food markets: The age of subsidies I .....	9
3.	Food policies during apartheid, 1948-1994 .....	11
3.1	Food or teachers? The end of the Native School Feeding Scheme .....	12
3.2	Consumer welfare: The age of subsidies II .....	18
4.	Conclusion .....	24
	References .....	25





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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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What was the trajectory of food security policies in South Africa from 1910 to 1994? This paper explores different public policies aimed at dealing with the problem of poverty-induced hunger and malnutrition between South Africa's foundation as a semi-independent settler state and the democratic revolution. We posit that food security policies, an overlooked form of public welfare provision, provides important insights into public welfare as a central aspect of state-society relations.

Over this period, South Africa underwent dramatic changes, most importantly in terms of how the state related to different population groups. Between the World Wars, South Africa's political institutions pushed for a policy of increasingly centralised food security. Food scarcity and insecurity became a political concern, with administrative and welfare institutions developed to address the problem. The central topic of contention between political factions was the inclusion or exclusion of the black African majority from state-organised nutritional security policies. While parts of the White political establishment refused to acknowledge the state's responsibility for the welfare of all of the population, exclusion and disengagement was contested by modernizing, progressive, democratic and philanthropic actor groups inside and outside the state apparatus.

The watershed period around World War II saw the increased inclusion of the African population in the context of a general expansion of the South African welfare state. Yet after the electoral victory of the National Party in 1948, the incoming apartheid government tried to divest itself of its responsibilities towards the African population. In a highly symbolic and contested move, African children were excluded from school feeding schemes. The forces of racist disregard, dispossession and exploitation seemed to have prevailed. However, even the apart-

heid government found a complete welfare disengagement to be undesirable. Political, economic and social considerations led the National Party, which governed the country until 1994, to allow the poor majority to profit from redistributive food subsidies.

How can such policy changes, both confirming and contradicting a seemingly unambiguous racist ideology, be explained? This is the central research question that this paper addresses. We employ a process-sociological approach that seeks to understand these dynamics across the different political regimes by way of figurational analysis. The concept of figurations, developed by Norbert Elias to overcome the artificial differentiation between structure and actors, directs the analytical scrutiny towards the interdependencies that connect actors (Elias, 1978, 1987; see also Bauman, 1979). Several authors applied the approach to welfare state policies and politics, pointing out the entanglement of integration, marginalisation, violence and care (Gilliam & Gulløv, 2017; Krieken, 1999; Rodger, 2012). A process-sociological approach reveals the interweaving of political, economic and symbolic developments (Elias, 1976; Mennell, 2004, p. 161) such as the increasing capacity of the state to enforce property laws across the territory, to control and regulate markets, to assume responsibility for the nutritional situation of the population, and to define categories of people with different roles, obligations, rights, and places of legal residence. These processes, despite their long-term directedness, did not unfold linearly: at their core, contradictions, detours and impasses have been generated by the increasingly dense, but highly conflictual, web of interdependencies between the actors involved in South African politics.

Food (and, closely related, agricultural) politics in South Africa involved a large set of interdependent actor groups: dominant conservative and nationalist parts of the White political establishment, who refused to acknowledge the state's responsibility for the welfare of all of the population; liberal, dem-

ocratic, philanthropic, and church groups contesting exclusion and disengagement, arguing for the state's responsibility for the food security of the whole population; different industrial factions, most centrally mining and agricultural capital, also weighed in, protecting their interests in a capable labour force and dependable profits.

The conflicts about food security led to broader societal debates, in particular until the apartheid state successfully suppressed most opposition voices. Contestation also took place within the narrower confines of the different political institutions, including between and inside political parties, parliament, and the ministerial bureaucratic apparatus. The outcome of these conflicts about inclusion and exclusion was a process of recalibration, away from minuscule 'charity' for non-whites, by the much-discussed introduction and subsequent abolishment of public school meals for African school students towards food subsidies profiting consumers across racial divides until the 1980s.

Food policies, as many redistributive welfare instruments, attempted to remedy effects of other political decisions and economic developments. The South African state, throughout the period under consideration, actively contributed to African food insecurity through its regime of land alienation and labour exploitation (Bundy, 1972; Higginson, 2015). It progressively sought to disengage from its responsibilities towards the African population, which it sought to shut away into reserves, homelands, and townships. However, South Africa's economic development also depended on African labour working the mines and factories. Fear of social unrest and the need for a reasonably healthy workforce influenced the trajectory of food policies towards the centralised regulation and subsidisation of agricultural production and food distribution. The persistence of the food subsidy system was based on the broad constellation of supportive actor groups that otherwise were unaligned or even antagonists: the influential group of White agricul-

turalists, the food processing industry and retailers found the regulation of their markets favourable, as it shielded from the uncertainties and competition in the global food market and guaranteed dependable profits. Trade unions, the democratic movement, religious, philanthropic, and progressive groups valued the benefit of food subsidies for consumers with limited means. This peculiar figuration allowed the food subsidy and price control system to last for more than 50 years. The school feeding scheme for African students, to the contrary, mustered the support of only a limited and increasingly powerless coalition of liberal, democratic and religious groups. Moreover, African school feeding was portrayed especially by White nationalists as a negative example of bureaucratic waste and charity for an undeserving group, while the subsidy system was neither interpreted as welfare nor charity, but as economic policy.

Despite its significance for the health and survival of poor South Africans, not much has been written on the history of South African food politics. This contribution attempts to fill some of the lacunae in tracing the country's agricultural and food policy trajectory, with a focus on welfare for the (African) poor, over an extended period. The works speaking directly to our topic and informing the paper are Tinley (1942, 1974), which provide insights into the institutionalisation of a centralised control system and close partnership between state and industry on matters of food production and distribution. Moll (1984, 1985) and Kallaway (1996) discuss bread subsidies as well as the school feeding system. Wylie (2001) sheds light on political figurations and ideologies of White paternalism that shaped food policy trajectories, while Stanwix (2012) aptly summarises the bread subsidy system in an M.A. thesis. Notwithstanding the dearth of literature on food policies and politics before 1994, the literature on South Africa's political and economic history which informs this article is excellent and broad. To name only a few,

Duncan (1993, 1995) provides historical background with a focus on public health and the welfare system. The publications of Posel (1987, 2011) are used as a foundation. Through her work, we can see the emergence of a repressive racialised labour system, ethnic mobilisation, the creation of a White ethnocracy, black proletarianisation and social mobility during the apartheid era. Seekings and Nattrass (2005) provide a broad picture of racialised social inequality and the limits of distributional welfare during apartheid.

While South Africa's food policies have been debated and decided mostly on the national level, its instruments and concepts developed in larger contexts, namely the imperial and international discourses on food politics. This study, therefore, adds to the field of historical studies on global food policy and food security. The key interest of previous studies often revolved around the question of how the dominant understanding of food security developed over time (cf. Worboys, 1988). Vernon (2007) traces how hunger emerged as an issue of humanitarian concern and as a problem of the (welfare) state in Britain until the 1940s but touches on imperial policies only in passing. Shaw (2007) as well as Jachertz and Nützenadel (2011) explore how thinking about food security developed at the level of international organizations since World War II.

Our study speaks to such historical approaches by illustrating how ideational and economic developments at the international level materialized in the domestic context. The introduction of marketing boards, food subsidies and school meals in South Africa was embedded in a global historical trend, with similar measures being implemented in other parts of the British Empire, the Anglophone world, and beyond. The economic background of these new instruments was the global Great Depression and the 'war effort' of World War II, its political context the expansion and increase of states' infrastructural powers (Mann, 1984). South Afri-

ca's peculiar context of transition from settler colony to nation-state, characterised by radically conflictive ideologies on which racialized groups belonged to nation and state, overshadowed imperial and international influence. Developments in Britain and reports of international organizations featured as points of reference, but their elements were taken up or rejected by actors as they saw fit for the domestic discussion.

This study is based, additionally to the secondary literature mentioned above, most centrally on the archives of the Rand Daily Mail (RDM). The RDM was among the leading English-speaking national newspapers during its existence from 1902 until its controversial termination in 1985. Its liberal perspective, which developed into an increasingly oppositional stance to the apartheid regime from the 1960s, allows insights on political positions and debates from the right-wing ruling parties, capital factions, churches and other civic societal groups, to the progressive, mostly White liberal parties and organisations. For this project, we draw from about 350 articles that the electronic archive's search engine produced for different combinations of the search terms 'food', 'subsidy', 'wheat', 'bread', 'milk', 'school', 'scheme'. For the period from the newspapers dissolution in 1985 to the start of the political transition in 1990, we found sufficient secondary sources confirming continuity in the trajectory of South Africa's food security policies.

We further consulted fifteen relevant government documents, produced at different historical junctures. Among them, five reports of commissions of inquiry, which were set up to look at food, health and education policies and interventions, are of particular importance. The membership of these appointed commissions, tasked with providing policy advice, usually united politicians and academics. While often producing high-quality research, these commissions were not open-ended inquiries, but rather political arenas. Our interpretive approach

is thus based on a triangulation of three different sources: official documents, media reporting, and secondary literature. Our material, however, is relatively silent on the matter of the anti-apartheid movement's actions and positions, particularly after it has been outlawed in the 1950s and 1960s. This is one area on which further research should be undertaken.

The paper follows a chronological order and is divided into two sections, detailing the periods of before and after the introduction of apartheid respectively. In the first main section, we detail the school feeding scheme, which in its early years profited only White, Coloured and Indian school students, but in the context of World War II was expanded to black African children (albeit with racially hierarchized benefits, as typical in the South African welfare state until 1994). In the following part of this section, we look at the emerging food subsidy and marketing control system, which was also set up shortly before World War II and expanded during the war effort. In the second main section on the apartheid period after 1948, we again look at both school feeding and the food subsidy system. We show that while the school feeding of African students became a contentious and symbolic issue and was subsequently abolished by the apartheid regime against much contestation, the food subsidy system not only persisted but even grew. Our analysis demonstrates that while the comparatively small school feeding system did not fit into a racialised perspective of welfare, the food subsidy system—despite its distributional character that benefitted all consumers and especially the poor—was carried by a broad constellation of otherwise non-allied forces reaching from White agricultural capital to trade unions, and from reactionary 'housewives' organisations to the anti-apartheid movement. The subsidy system played an important role in maintaining the apartheid regime's economic, social and political cohesiveness, while at the same time providing a crucial lifeline to the expropriated, exploit-

ed and excluded, that is, the majority of the population.

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## 2. FOOD POLICIES IN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA, 1910-1948

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The Union of South Africa, as a self-governing dominion of the British Empire, was founded in 1910 on the ashes of a century of warfare and dispossession, rapid urbanisation and rural impoverishment (Terreblanche, 2002). In the rural spheres, hunger and malnourishment had already been widespread, particularly among rural African populations alienated from land and permanently excluded from new regimes of land property. The 1913 Native Lands Act abolished African access to land outside the overcrowded reserves, turning the rural African population outside the reserves permanently dependent on White landowners profiting from cheap labour. The original cause of food insecurity in South Africa was the expropriation of land, which choked "Africans' own agricultural revolution" (Hendriks, 2014, p. 2; Wylie, 2001, p. 63, p. 250). The reserves themselves were economically unviable throughout their history. Many Africans took up inadequately paid labour in the expanding industrial centres of gold and diamond exploitation (Iliffe, 1987, pp. 114–142; Wylie, 2001, pp. 52, 68; Yudelmann, 1984). One important aspect of this economic regime became 'migrant labour', i.e., temporary occupation in the mines and subsequent return of the workers to the reserves and other rural areas. This system effectively imposed the welfare costs of reproduction, sickness and old age on the workers' families. Other Africans, despite waves of legislation abolishing freedom of movement and settlement, managed to permanently reside in the emerging mining centres. In these sprawling urban areas, however, "the path from poverty to destitution lay through insecurity", including illness and cyclical unemployment (Iliffe, 1987, p. 130).

Food had been a long-established concern in the broader field of poor relief in the British empire, including in South Africa, but for an extended period remained the primary domain of religious charity (Iliffe, 1987, pp. 120–121, pp. 193–213). After World War I, however, the nutritional situation became a concern of the state and a matter of both economic development and social order. In South Africa's racialised setting, governmental concern initially focussed almost exclusively on the so-called 'poor White problem'. The poverty of White South Africans was understood as both a problem of absolute deprivation as well as relative racial status. In the countryside, some (descendants of) European immigrants had been hit by the crisis in rural farming after the Boer Wars, and economic depression following World War I. In the mixed inner-city areas, poor Whites tended to live and work side-by-side with African and Coloured people of the same marginalised class, a social closeness that alarmed racist sentiments among the White middle and upper-class. There was concern that social proximity would lead to physical, moral and mental degeneration. This was seen as a threat to White supremacy and the White population, requiring immediate remedial action (Duncan, 1995, p. 107; Jochelson, 2001, pp. 50–55). Tayler (1992, p. 40) argues that "...the term [White poor] had been used to refer to White people who were not merely poor, but whose standards of living had degenerated to be considered inimical to White society as a whole." Although White poverty had been debated already in the late 19th century, it became strongly politicised only in the 1930s. About 300,000 persons, a considerable part of the white population segment,<sup>1</sup> was considered poor in 1929 (Carnegie Commission Report, 1933, pp. 605–618; Devereux, 2007, p. 541; Sagner, 2000, pp. 525–526).

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1 The White population numbered between 1.5 (1921) and 2 million (1936) persons (Statistics South Africa, 2000, 1.4).

The poor White problem was of significance in the development of early policies on food, especially concerning children. Provincial governments and charitable organisations, at the time the major actors in poor relief (Iliffe, 1987, pp. 120–121), set up different measures to provide food assistance and meet the nutritional needs of poor White children (Duncan, 1993, 1995). The Transvaal Provincial Council's Executive Committee from 1916 onwards provided funds to feed needy White children in schools during the winter months (Kallaway, 1996, p. 3; Moll, 1985, p. 3).

That public concern about the food intake of poor persons was initially largely limited to White people reflected the figuration of political parties and the strongly limited voting rights of non-whites.<sup>2</sup> The political landscape was rife with conflicts between the Afrikaans- and English-speaking White population, themselves originating in the earlier wars between the British Empire and the independent Afrikaner republics. However, as neither side could muster electoral majorities on its own, cross-ethnic alliances prevailed. The leader of the South African Party and prime minister (1919–1924 and 1939–1948), Jan Smuts, represented the reconciliation of Afrikaner and English elites, at the expense of both the non-White population as well as the White labour movement. On the other side of the parliamentary aisle, in 1924, Afrikaner nationalist J. B. M. Hertzog led his National Party (NP) into a coalition with the Labour Party. This so-called 'Pact coalition' married Afrikaner rural interests and the Anglophone share of the White urban working class to create the foundations of a racially hierarchical welfare state. Another White cross-ethnic alliance of the interwar period began in 1934, when Hertzog and Smuts

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2 The Pact and the Fusion government extended the right to vote to all White men and women, and abolished historical voting rights of non-White persons except for a handful of 'native representatives' (see Dubow 1989; Elphick, 2012; Lodge, 2002).



formed the Fusion government and then the United Party, merging the majority faction of the National Party and the South African Party. During World War II, Hertzog's nationalist faction returned into the National Party, yet Prime Minister Smuts in 1943 won an electoral majority on his own (Duncan, 1993; Posel, 1983, 1987; Seekings, 2007; Worden, 2008).

In the context of World War II, the last Smuts government extended the welfare state, which so far had provided racially graduated benefits to the White, Coloured and Asian population groups, in very limited ways also to the African population (Devereux, 2007, pp. 542–543; Duncan, 1993, pp. 106–119; Marks & Andersson, 1992; Sagner, 2000, pp. 535–537). Four political forces counteracted the previous (and subsequent) tendency to exclude the African majority from food security policies: First, the ministerial bureaucracy, led by the liberal minister Jan-Hendrik Hofmeyr, took bold steps to modernise and centralise the South African welfare state. Hofmeyr, who ran several ministries including finance, health and education simultaneously, acted as prime minister during the war-related prolonged absences of Smuts. Inspired by British and American post-war plans as laid down in the Beveridge Plan and the Atlantic Charter, the Smuts/Hofmeyr ministerial bureaucracy pushed for the liberal 'radical moment' of the South African welfare state (Seekings, 2005). Second, the non-racist, democratic and worker movements led by the African National Congress (ANC) and the anti-racist section of the trade unions agitated for extending welfare services to the African population. While the ANC's and trade union's demands may not have been directly heeded, they fed into, third, the mining industry, and its concerns about social unrest labour shortages (Padayachee & van Niekerk, 2019, pp. 9–13).

Fourth, the agricultural sector, consisting of increasingly large and dominant ventures, discovered that state subsidies and price controls could benefit their interests

better than previous laissez-faire policies. Historically, from the promulgation of Land Act in 1913 onwards, African farmers had been systematically side-lined from productive activities, while a lot of investments were channelled to White commercial agriculture. A dualistic agrarian system emerged, which enhanced White commercial farming interests, while suppressing the potential of African farmers (Greyling & Pardey, 2019; Hendriks, 2014; Vink & van Rooyen, 2009, p. 4). From the 1920s, several agricultural and credit policies with food production objectives benefitted White commercial farmers (Makhura, 1998, p. 573). In particular, the National Party made concerted efforts to uplift the farming Afrikaner (White) poor. The emerging modern commercial farming sector subsequently became a key base of the party and the apartheid state. Until 1980, some 80 acts of parliament were passed to strengthen the commercial farming sector. State support saw commercial farms becoming bigger, more industrialised and mechanised (Hendriks, 2014, p. 2). Commercial farmers became pivotal in agricultural and, by extension, food politics.

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## 2.1 Dairy welfare: The introduction and expansion of the school feeding scheme

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One example of a racially hierarchized social provision, initiated by the agricultural sector, was the school feeding scheme. From 1935, primary school children of European, Indian and Coloured origin received government-subsidised milk and cheese. Overproduction in the dairy industry had resulted in a surplus which was given to these school children (Kallaway, 1996; Moll, 1985; Smit Report, 1942). The 'free milk' scheme was thus both a subsidy for the agricultural industry as well as a contribution to the pupils' nutritional needs. It came about after the Dairy Industry Control Board, which assembled cabinet members and representatives of

the dairy industry, drafted the Dairy Industry Control Bill on 9 April 1935. It proposed to redistribute half a pint of milk and butter to 310,000 European primary school children on every school day. For these children, it was estimated that two-thirds of their parents would be able to pay part of the cost. The remaining 100,000 children were expected to receive free milk with the government paying £90,000 for it ("1,000,000 LBS of Cheap Butter a Year", 1935; Political Correspondent, 1935b). Such an arrangement was considered ideal in solving the problem of surplus milk ("Dairy Industry Threatened", 1934; Political Correspondent, 1934). The Bill also empowered the Board to set levies on urban milk sales and to subsidise the sale of surplus milk (Political Correspondent, 1935a). Profits were to be channelled towards supplying free milk to schoolchildren (Political Correspondent, 1935b). The Board proposed full control over the scheme while it expected full co-operation of the provincial administrations, local authorities and charitable organisations in its huge redistribution task ("1,000,000 LBS of Cheap Butter a Year," 1935).

Due to its sweeping proposals, the Bill was considered contentious. There was concern over the powers which it gave to the Board in setting prices and controlling schemes ("Bill to Give Dairy Board Wider Powers", 1935). There was also opposition and questioning of the practicality of its proposals, especially in regard to the large scale of the distribution program and the unavailability of schoolchildren during weekends and school holidays. Funding was also of major concern (Own Correspondent, 1935; "School Milk Hitch", 1935). Some voices queried its efficacy with suggestions that it would be better to provide the children with soup or bread ("Soup or Milk", 1935). The Bill was by many seen as industrial or economic policy and not as a social or welfare policy. By November 1935, the Bill had still not been passed, but the milk scheme was already running, with the government deciding to side-track the pol-

icy and implement it using its own finances (Political Correspondent, 1935c). By decree, the government had extended the scheme to include 'coloured' and 'Indian schools' ("Free Milk for Coloured Schools", 1935). In terms of funding, it had been expected that funding would come from the government, parents and the Dairy Industry Control Board (through levies on urban milk sales). However, as the Bill was not passed, it was the government which initially met the expenses ("No Escaping State Politics", 1935; Political Correspondent, 1935b).

The school feeding of African students was envisaged only during World War II. The 1942 'Inter-Departmental Committee on the Social, Health and Economic Conditions of Urban Natives', named after its chairman D.L. Smit, argued for communal or school feeding schemes, and urged that "the needs of the urban Natives, among whom there is probably a higher incidence of malnutrition than among any other under-privileged groups, should receive recognition on their intrinsic merits, regardless of any racial distinction." (Smit Report, 1942, pp. 5–7). Generally, the report indicated, the problems the country was facing would culminate in a socio-economic and political crisis if not immediately addressed (Smit Report, 1942). The rapidly mounting concern of the government was illustrated in a speech by Prime Minister Smuts at a meeting convened by the Institute of Race Relations (SAPA, 1942):

*If there is one thing we have to do in this continent, and do pretty soon and pretty thoroughly, it is to look after native health. There is a death rate among the children, a sickness rate among adults which we cannot tolerate if we want to see South Africa a prosperous, good and happy country.*

Featuring prominently in the so-called 'native problem', Smuts argued, was food insecurity. "A start had been made by giving milk to children, but this would become more of a public duty", the RDM reported. Smuts

speech revolved around the notion of White 'trusteeship' for the African population, which summarised the prevailing paternalist welfare concept of the ruling elite. Between 1938 and 1948, Smut's United Party government began several measures to both improve African welfare and to further separate the White from African poor. The wartime reform government aimed to improve residential conditions for Africans in the urban areas but also emphasised racialised residential separation (van der Spuy, 1960, pp. 68–69). While it aimed to counter structural causes of 'White poverty', it also looked at improving the conditions of Africans.

In this context, authorities considered providing food at school for African children (Wylie, 2001, p. 217). School feeding, critics remarked, would reach only a limited number of African children, because less than 30% among them received any schooling. Less than two per cent advanced to the post-primary stage of schooling, and the majority failed to get further than Standard One. With so many African children not going to school, a large majority of African children would automatically be excluded from a school-focused scheme (Hoernlé, 1938, p. 119, citing the 1936 'Report of the Native Affairs Commission'). Nonetheless, from February 1943 African primary students in native schools began receiving subsidised milk and butter as recommended by the Smit report (Moll, 1985, pp. 7–11). One of the pioneering initiatives was the Binfield Milk Scheme in Victoria East (in the Eastern Cape) where 1,200 pupils received a pint of milk a day ("Native Affairs Department of the Union of South Africa", 1943, p. 219). Other African schools followed. The financial burden of the Native School Feeding Programme was shared between the Union government's Department of Social Welfare and the provinces, with the central government contributing two pounds per child per day while the Provinces contributed one pound per child a day (Kallaway, 1996, p. 4; Moll, 1985, p. 4). A year after the inclusion

of African children, the National Nutritional Council, which was a product of a proposal by the League of Nations for countries to have a multi-sectoral advisory committee on the government nutrition policy, reported that the scheme reached 982,000 students (Boudreau, 2005, p. 618). These comprised 322,000 European, 485,000 African and 175,000 Coloured and Indian children (Moll, 1985, p. 4).

During the inception phase, the scheme suffered from a lack of administrative planning, regularisation and formalisation. Some of these challenges were later traced to hasty political expediency when formulating and implementing the programme (Union of South Africa, 1951). In 1945, the Native Education Finance Act (No 29) moved financial control of the African education sector, including the Native School Feeding Programme, to the central government. The scheme was reorganised through the development of new procedures and the appointment of local organisers. The aim was to make the programme less bureaucratic, but more effective and responsive to specific local needs (Kallaway, 1996, p. 5).

The period after 1945 saw the growth of the school feeding scheme. However, it remained racially biased with African school feeding being underfunded and catering only to a minority of African students. European students received three times more funding compared to African students; hence, the latter received less or less nutritious food (Wylie, 2001, p. 218). Nonetheless, the nationalist Afrikaner camp derided the Native School Feeding Scheme as expensive and misappropriated. National Party representative Jan Christoffel Greyling Kemp, for example, protested a four-fold increase in the 1946 budget in African education compared to the previous year. For him, if "the native" wanted to be educated, "let him pay for himself and not the White man" ("They said in Parliament yesterday", 1946). On the Native School Feeding Scheme, he said it was "keeping native labour off the farms because



the food was taken to the kraals, where the men enjoyed 'lekker lewe' and would not do any work" ("Hofmeyr will try to widen Gap Between Income Tax Demands", 1946).

Contrarily, many non-state actors embraced the programme and were willing to complement it in addition to the state. An example of one such initiative was the proposal by two White schools in Zeerust, who in 1948 offered to forgo their allocation under the government school feeding scheme (this included their entire grant as well as bread and butter allocations) so that more support would go to African schools ("Schools offer their Allocations to Feed Native Children", 1948). Others, such as Jeppe Preparatory School were active in fundraising campaigns for African schools. Schools like St Cyprian's in Johannesburg's Sophiatown were running holiday feeding schemes targeting children in and out of school. They took into account that only one in three African children could be accommodated in schools and were able to reach 7,000-8,000 children a day. They even had plans to establish permanent feeding schemes in areas like Newclare ("Schools Offer their Allocations to Feed Native Children", 1948).

The programme had some success in the fight against poverty, hunger, disease and malnutrition among children. An important legacy of the school feeding scheme during this period was that it provided lessons to the Union government that foodstuffs could be distributed to vulnerable groups at affordable prices.

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## 2.2 Centralising food markets: The age of subsidies I

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The increasing activity of the South African state regarding food security during the 1930s and 1940s was not restricted to the school feeding programme. Succeeding governments set up much larger structural changes that linked agricultural production and consumer food availability. These mea-

asures first aimed to mitigate the consequences of the world economic crisis. The initial objective was to protect the White commercial farming sector, which had been hit hard by the 1930s global depression. During World War II, the stringent agricultural and food regime served to control and ensure the food supply as part of the war effort. Providing consumers, least of all the non-White poor, with home-grown nutritious food at affordable prices remained a complementary objective. However, even if unintended, the system of subsidies and price controls would turn out to become the longest-lasting and most impactful food security programme in the 20th century.

The central state increasingly tried to control producer and consumer prices in the 1930s through control boards modelled on the contemporary British example. The 1937 Marketing Act is one example of this trajectory. The act regulated the production and sale of agricultural products. It laid the procedures and legal framework under which marketing boards<sup>3</sup> could be established, and it standardised them while investing them with considerable powers ("Milk Scheme Set Aside by Supreme Court", 1940). In the Marketing Act, there was a provision to represent certain interest groups, and it saw the creation of the Producers Advisory Council, the Consumers Advisory Council and the National Marketing Council. These bodies had investigative and advisory functions with their members being seconded to the marketing boards to represent their interests (Rees, 1979, pp. 16–17). On the boards, White commercial agricultural producers were heavily overrepresented, while (White) consumer representatives had been added only reluctantly ("Laissez Faire," 1962; Tinley, 1974, p. 47). This stemmed from the Marketing Act which stated that on every board,

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3 There were numerous marketing boards which were created by this legislation. Examples include the Wheat Board, the Citrus Board, the Banana Board, the Oil Seeds Board, the Wool Board and the Tobacco Board.

producers were to have a majority. Initially, there was a single consumer representative in 1937.<sup>4</sup> This was later increased, but they remained a minority (“Laissez Faire,” 1962). In a report, the National Marketing Council described the intention behind creating the Marketing Act as the promotion of producer interests, with an expectation of improved producer returns (National Marketing Council, 1947, p. 7).

The Act thus institutionalised a close partnership between government and White farmer co-operatives, which became the sole sellers of different products, including staples (wheat, maize, dairy and meat) (Beinart, 2001, p. 118; Hunt, 1955; Tinley, 1974, p. xii, p. 138). The marketing boards fell into two categories: those that controlled products for domestic markets (which are the focus of this article) and others for the export market, mainly citrus and deciduous fruits (“Laissez Faire”, 1962). Boards were empowered to regulate production and provide the Minister of Agriculture with recommendations regarding supply, demand and marketing, as well as imports and exports. The Marketing Act empowered boards to function without being controlled or sanctioned by parliament. They were thus able to fix producer prices (with ministerial approval) and to determine consumer prices. They did this after taking into consideration the volume of current harvests relative to local demand, handling and storage costs, export possibilities and other economic conditions. Different boards functioned differently. For example, the Maize Board bought maize at a predetermined price from farmers through a system of agents, mainly co-operatives, and it had a monopoly. The board then either sold locally, exported, or channelled the

produce into a buffer stock (storage facilities for grain were collectively built by producer co-operatives created by the Marketing Act) (Rees, 1979, pp. 24–25). There were checks on the transportation of controlled crops as well as privileged access to certain crops for industrial millers and distributors, creating oligopolies in which there was limited competition and the market was restricted to a few players (Jayne, Hayek & van Zyl, 1995, pp. 4–6). The act and the numerous boards stifled the free-market economy while providing White commercial farmers with considerable influence over government policies on agriculture, and indirectly, food security (Distribution Cost Commission, 1947). Boards received a levy from producers and consumers, and contributions from the state. The income allowed boards to finance market stabilization measures (Rees, 1979, p. 24).

During the war, in 1941, the state resumed stronger control, especially as the Minister of Agriculture doubled as the Controller of Food Supplies. In these roles, the minister had wide powers over production, distribution, rationing and prices. To counter shortages, in 1942/43 he limited the quantity of maize, rice and samp<sup>5</sup> which could be bought at one time by consumers (National Marketing Council, 1947, p. 19; Tinley, 1974, pp. 51–52). After heavy criticism by trade and consumer representatives, the combination of food supply and agricultural production control was dissolved again in 1944 (Albertyn, 2014, p. 16; Tinley, 1974, p. 28). The control of agricultural production came under the Secretary of Agriculture, while an independent Controller of Food Supplies was to be appointed by the Minister of Agriculture. To ensure some linkage, a Food Supplies Advisory Board was tasked with the responsibility of assisting and advising the Controller of Food and the Secretary of Agriculture (Tinley, 1974, pp. 28–29).

Central to the food management policies during this period (and thereafter) was

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4 Rees (1979, p. 24) gives an example of the Maize Board in the 1950's which was comprised of 21 members, including producers of maize and grain sorghum (12), consumers (2), maize and grain sorghum dealers (2), maize and grain sorghum millers (2), stock feeders (1), exporters (1) and a representative of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Marketing.

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5 Dried, stamped corn kernels.

bread production and distribution. Following a recommendation by the Wheat Board, the Union government in November 1939 introduced a subsidy on wheat production. Further measures protected producers against the negative effects of World War II (Wheat Industry Control Board, 1952, p. 2). The Wheat Board argued that “an increase in the price of bread at the present stage cannot be contemplated. It has accordingly decided to pay producers a subsidy out of its funds to compensate them for the increased costs” (“No Rise in the Cost of Flour, Meal or Bread”, 1939). In the war context, agricultural production costs steeply increased. The subsidy served to compensate producers and provide an incentive to grow wheat, which was considered an essential commodity. A secondary intention was to keep the prices of wheat products affordable and available to consumers.

The Wheat Board initially paid 1 shilling per bag of wheat, which in 1939-1940 amounted to £173,000. The next season (1940-1941), there was an increase in subsidies to two shillings per bag, with the government paying one shilling and the other shilling coming from the Board (Moll, 1984, p. 26). In 1942, the Minister of Agriculture announced the enlargement of the group of receiving enterprises beyond the wheat farmers. £600,000 had been voted for assistance to the wheat industry. £82,000 was to be provided to millers, while £46,000 was to be given to bakers (“Millers Defended in the House of Assembly”, 1942). Despite the tax subsidies, the government was to repeatedly increase the bread prices between 1943 and 1945, forcing consumers to bear the costs incurred by the Wheat Board (Tinley, 1974, pp. 51–52).

While initially intended as temporary, the bread subsidy continued and even increased after the war. The nature and extent of the subsidies can be ascertained in its proportion to the GDP. Between 1939 and 1942, its average share in proportion to GDP was 0.231%, a number that rose to 0.417% for

the period 1947-1960 (and a subsequent average of 0.201 from 1960 to 1980) (Moll, 1984, p. 12).

Closely related to bread subsidies were the introduction of coarser bread and a governmental directive forbidding the production of foodstuffs which required large amounts of wheat. This intervention was guided by two objectives. Firstly, it also sought to deal with the challenges posed by the outbreak of World War II. Secondly, the introduction of coarser bread in particular, but also other interventions in the food industry, had nutritional objectives. During the war, the production of white bread was abolished except at military and civilian hospitals. A ‘rougher’ standard loaf was produced from unsifted wheat flour. This new loaf not only had nutritional value but was reduced in size and therefore cheaper. To maximise the available wheat, the government forbade the production of some products requiring wheat meal (macaroni and some confectionery products). In the post-war years, the policy was continued with a special subsidy in place aimed at encouraging the consumption of nutritionally enriched bread. This intervention also aimed at reducing the amount of imported wheat in favour of local production. This was expected to reduce the price of brown bread over white bread, thus benefitting both producers and consumers (Distribution Cost Commission, 1947; Kallaway; 1996; Moll, 1984).

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### 3. FOOD POLICIES DURING APARTHEID, 1948-1994

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At the eve of WW II, the National Party reunited its different factions and resumed its role as the second pivot of South African parliamentarianism. Campaigning on the message of ‘White bread for a White South Africa’ (Stanwix, 2012, p. i), it won the 1948 elections and began 46 years of rule. Its official ideology, ‘apartheid’, aimed at retaining South Africa as a ‘White man’s country’

(Henry Verwoerd quoted in Dubow, 2014, p. 64), administered the Coloured and Asian minorities separately and segregated the majority African population into the existing 'native reserves'. In 1959, the latter were turned into self-governed, ethnically defined 'homelands' (also known as *Bantustans*). While the permanent settlement of Africans in 'White' areas was discouraged, the migration of workers between rural reserves/homelands and urban industries continued to guarantee the steady supply of cheap labour.

Premised on these points, National Party (NP) governments pursued racial discrimination socially, economically and politically. Economically, the NP embarked on a successful state-centric industrialisation path, making sure that both the public service and major parastatals were dominated by ethnic Afrikaners and specifically members of the 'Broederbond' male secret society (Lester, 1996; Posel, 2011, p. 312, p. 326; Worden, 2008). In the agricultural sector, White farmers running large, increasingly mechanised farms received ever more lavish subsidies. In 1967, subsidies for 100,000 White farms were almost double the amount spent on education for more than 10 million Africans (Deininger & Binswanger, 1995, pp. 502–503).

During the first decades of apartheid, parliamentary opposition was dominated by the United Party, which also managed to hang on to some provincial governments. Given its lukewarm criticism of apartheid, the formerly almost hegemonic party went into a slow demise. From 1960, more liberal and outspoken splinter parties increased their share of the White vote. While a space of 'official opposition' continued to exist, non-White and anti-apartheid political organisation was increasingly suppressed, including bans on the Communist Party (1950), the ANC (1960) and related trade unions (SAC-TU 1961). Only in the 1970s did underground and tolerated organisations again succeed in domestic mass mobilisation and labour action against apartheid. In 1990,

the ban on the ANC was lifted, and in the first fully democratic elections in 1994, it ousted the NP as the majority party in parliament.

For Seekings and Nattrass (2005, pp. 35–36), the apartheid state had policies that were tailor-made to buttress the standard of living of Whites, including by furthering the pre-existing racialised discrimination in health, education and other welfare spending. While much of this wealth was produced through the labour of non-Whites, apartheid ideology was based on the premise that each racialised group was responsible for its own development and welfare. Hence, the school feeding scheme for African students fell victim to this thinking, as we show in the following section. As we further argue, a broad constellation of very different political groupings nonetheless favoured the food regime established during WW II, which therefore persisted and even grew.

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### 3.1 Food or teachers? The end of the Native School Feeding Scheme

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Both for the National Party and opposing voices, the Native School Feeding Scheme served as an early symbol in the emerging apartheid political context, triggering an out-sized debate compared to the rather modest size of the scheme ("Jansen Says State Will Try to Improve Native Reserves", 1948; Kallaway, 1996, p. 6; Kingma, 1948; "Swart Criticises Lawrence", 1949; Wylie, 2001, pp. 216–219). For apartheid ideologues, using public funding (misleadingly understood as paid by only 'White taxpayers') to feed African students counteracted their agenda of reversing the inclusion of Africans into the emerging welfare state. The liberal, progressive and anti-racist political forces, still a visible political force in the early years of apartheid before the 'banning' of many organisations, took up the symbolic meaning of school feeding. While economic arguments played a role, Christians, liberals and communists primarily deplored the moral

iniquity of letting students go hungry based on their skin colour. Eventually, the NP government succeeded in abolishing the scheme by forcing newly created school boards to choose between funds for school expansion or school feeding programmes.

Immediately after assuming power, in November 1949 the new government set up a committee of enquiry into the Native School Feeding Scheme, citing concerns over rising costs as well as alleged abuse ("Stals Announces Inquiry into Native Schools' Syllabus", 1948). Moreover, the NP Minister of Education and Health Albert Stals introduced measures which negatively impacted on the scheme, thereby forestalling the commission's work. Stals' measures included a reduction of funds, with the government withholding subsidies for the first quarter of the next year. As he argued during a parliamentary debate, the scheme was working "at the expense of the European taxpayer [and] must be counteracted because it fails to observe the important educational principle of self-help and creates the danger that the Bantu community may become accustomed to the dole" (cited in Wylie, 2001, pp. 217–218). Allowances for the schools were either ceased or cut by half. Private charity organisations provided funds to make up for shortfalls. Non-African school feeding schemes were not affected and continued to operate normally ("No State Funds for Native School Feeding", 1949).

In the meantime, the committee investigated the necessity of the scheme, its financial and administrative needs and requirements, and linkages between nourishment and learning ability (SAPA, 1948; "Transvaal Nat. Congress", 1948). The 1949 report's baseline was that the Native School Feeding Scheme constituted an undue financial burden on the White population but should not be phased out immediately as to avoid further malnutrition, disease and a general deterioration of African physiques (bodies) (Kallaway, 1996, p. 5; Union of South Africa, 1949). In the longer run, however,

African parents, communities, local school committees, and Native Authorities should be made responsible. The report thus fit well and contributed to the infantilising apartheid trope of African dependence on White charity, to be countered by the full separation of the racialised groups, a restoration of the supposedly traditional African community, and the teaching of modern nutrition to Africans (Kallaway, 1996, p. 5; SAPA, 1949b).

The committee's conclusions were received ambiguously. While the NP felt confirmed in its general opposition to the Native School Feeding Scheme, opposition parties and social actors saw the NP contradicting the recommendations ("M.P.C.s Attack Abolition of Native School Feeding", 1949; SAPA, 1949c; "Teachers Want Native Feeding Cuts Reviewed", 1949; Wylie, 2001, pp. 218–219). In parliamentary debates, NP representatives underlined their racialised culturalist positions, arguing that the programme was 'spoon-feeding' 'spoiled' African children and allowed their parents to spend their money on luxury goods and fancy foods rather than ensuring a healthy nutrition for their children. The 'White man's food', they argued, was disturbing the healthy customary diet. Among the underlying political arguments, however, was the idea that the Native School Feeding Programme would add to the influx of Africans into urban areas (where many more schools existed than in the rural areas), thereby undermining the central apartheid aim of expelling the African population from the cities (SAPA, 1950b). Another constant argument was expressed by Labour Minister Senator D.W. Schoeman, who complained that "the cost of school feeding is rising year by year, and the European taxpayer is bled dry to assist the native. Non-European parents should be compelled to contribute towards the cost" ("Schoeman Patted on the Back for His Apprenticeship Bill", 1951).

The Ministry of Education implemented further severe cuts to the scheme, restricting it to children under the age of fourteen in larger urban and peri-urban areas while



ceasing school feeding in farm schools and the 'platteland' of small towns and villages. Schools and communities were expected to make personal and labour contributions (this was in contrast to White schools which continued receiving funds including those to pay cooks' salaries), while African parents were to be provided with guidance on how to properly feed their children. Minister Stals declared that the scheme would be decreased gradually and eventually terminated altogether (Staff Reporter, 1958; SAPA, 1949b; Steyn, 1950).

The government's actions triggered "strong public protests" (Kallaway, 1996, p. 6). The parliamentary opposition as well as civil society reacted with disdain, questioning both the morality and the economic wisdom of the government's decision. At the forefront of civil society, protests were led by volunteer organisations, many of them associated with Christian churches and some led by women. Hitherto partnering with state authorities in the organisation of the scheme, they protested the new government's policy. The National Council of Women continuously called for the extension or restoration of the Native School Feeding Scheme ("M.P.C.s Attack Abolition of Native School Feeding", 1949; "N.C.W. Protests at Style of School Card", 1948; "N.C.W. to Press for more State Mental Hospitals", 1950; "Resolutions for N.C.W. Conference", 1948; Staff Reporter, 1956b). Other women's organisations voicing their opposition to the government policy were the South African League of Women Voters ("Native School Feeding Must be Continued", 1949), the National Council of Native Women (SAPA, 1949a), and the Federation of Women's Institutes of Natal, Zululand, East Griqualand, Pondoland (Own Correspondent, 1950). In South Africa's diverse landscape of churches, some churches such as the Anglicans and Presbyterians were strongly opposed to the reduction of African school feeding ("Bishop Urges Restoration of Native School Feeding", 1949; "Plea to Continue Native School Feeding Subsidies",

1948; Staff Reporter, 1959a; van Schalkwyk, 1954). In some cases, clerics spoke from a threefold position as a moral societal voice ("We Are Seen as an Ethically Second Rate, Divided Land-Dean Palmer", 1949), administrators of mission schools (Webb, 1948), and administrators of private school feeding schemes ("S.A.'s Native Policy an Affront to God", 1949). Among the most prominent voices was the Anglican bishop and British citizen Trevor Huddleston, head of the African Children's Feeding Scheme ("Meeting Condemns School Feeding Grant Reduction", 1949; Steyn, 1950; "Synod Will Collect Facts on Native School Meals", 1949; Urquhart, 1949).

In parliament, the United Party's previous Native Affairs minister Piet van der Byl said that European South Africans could no longer "look our Natives or the civilised world in the face", while Labour frontbencher T.W.B. Osborn called the gradual reduction and planned abolishment of the scheme "the most shameful thing the government has ever done" (Parliamentary Correspondent, 1949; see also "M.P.C.s Attack Abolition of Native School Feeding", 1949; Political Correspondent & SAPA, 1957; "Rule of Law Upheld by U.P. Speakers", 1950; SAPA, 1959; "Strauss Calls for Harder Work to Meet 'Time of Decision'", 1949; "Sullivan Wants Controller of Social Security", 1949; "Transvaal U.P. Congress Ends on Note of Confidence", 1949). E.J. Brookes, a liberal White politician representing the African population in the Senate, portrayed the moves towards "the abolition of school feeding as one of the most ill-judged and inhuman measures ever taken, and indefensible from the health point of view" (SAPA, 1949c). Other White 'native' representatives described the plan to cut the Native School Feeding Scheme as a "mean and miserably (sic) action of a mean and miserable government" ("Mrs. Billinger Moves Cut in Jansen's Salary", 1949; SAPA, 1951b; "Swart Criticises Lawrence", 1949). Communist member of the Lower House of Assembly, Sam Khan, described the policy

change as a “catastrophic and dangerous decision”, adding that Minister Stals was now “being referred to contemptuously by the natives as the Minister of disease and malnutrition” (“Nat View of School Feeding”, 1949). The policy change also filled the reader letters and opinion columns in the liberal RDM. “A disgusted South African” argued in a letter that the Native School Feeding Scheme kept the ‘labouring masses’ healthy (Disgusted South African, 1949). A comment in the same paper called the hardship resulting from the cuts “unworthy of a humanitarian and enlightened state” (“Unworthy”, 1949).

Conspicuously absent from the debate, meanwhile, were the White teachers’ unions. While the Afrikaans ‘Onderwysersvereniging’ was severely split over the issue (“Split Among Afrikaans Teachers on School Feeding”, 1950), the Coloured and African teachers’ unions protested and subsequently split over the general ‘Bantu education’ policy debate (Hyslop, 1999, pp. 22–50). A position of the Anglophone teachers’ organisations is mentioned nowhere in the sources. However, White teachers’ organisations entered the debate and advocated for feeding subsidies a few years after the Native School Feeding Scheme had already been dismantled, once school feeding for White children was targeted for abolishment by the government (News Service, 1958; SAPA, 1958; Staff Reporter, 1957a, 1957b, 1957c, 1958; “The Hungry”, 1958).

In response to the criticism, the government disclosed plans to modify the policy changes (“Native School Feeding System Being Modified”, 1949; “School Feeding for Natives Not to Be Abolished”, 1949). In June 1949, Stals announced that school feeding would continue in both rural and urban areas, including in African reserves, where it would cater to primary school children between six to thirteen years. To save costs, however, African children were given artificially enriched, but starchy foods such as bread, mealie products and cheap items such as jam and sugar. European children

meanwhile were to be provided with milk and cheese. Native school feeding on European farms, where conditions were often the most squalid, was terminated. The budget on school feeding in 1950/51 decreased from the previous budget’s £560,000 to £310,000 (SAPA, 1950b).

#### ANOTHER STUDY: THE CILLIÉ COMMISSION

Confronted with dissenting voices over the general school feeding scheme, in January 1950 the apartheid government set up another commission to comprehensively investigate the school feeding scheme. The commission and its report were named after its chairman, Gabriël Cillié, a former professor of education in the Afrikaner academic stronghold Stellenbosch University.<sup>6</sup> Besides Cillié, six other male Afrikaners were part of the commission (SAPA, 1950a; van der Merwe, 1950).

The Cillié Commission investigated whether undernourishment actually existed in the country, its prevalence among the racialised groups, and its link to effective education among primary school children. It also looked at the desirability of food provisioning to families, the organisational structure and financial control of the scheme, and whether there should be different schemes for the racialised groups (SAPA, 1950a). In its report, the commission noted several shortcomings in the original organisation of the school feeding programme, for which it blamed the previous United Party government and especially former finance, health and education minister Hofmeyr, who, despite his death in 1948, remained the liberal nemesis of the Afrikaner nationalist establishment (Kallaway, 1996, p. 7; Union of South Africa, 1951, p. 78).

The committee nonetheless noted that despite the abundant public criticism, the vast majority of headmasters, especially of African and Coloured schools, supported the scheme wholeheartedly as an import-

<sup>6</sup> Another, unrelated “Cillié Commission” investigated the Soweto Uprising in 1976.

ant instrument against hunger, malnutrition and disease. Undernourishment, which the commission believed stemmed from poverty, lack of nutritional knowledge and bad eating habits, affected 27.4 per cent of Whites, 44.8 per cent of Coloureds, 85.6 of Indians and 65.3 per cent of Africans (Alexander, 1959; Kallaway, 1996, p. 7; SAPA, 1951a). While there had been many rumours that the scheme would cause wastage and abuse, no evidence to support this was found, hence such claims were regarded as baseless (Kallaway, 1996, p. 12). It recommended continuing school feeding programmes in general for all racialised groups, albeit only as an interim measure until the country had developed a comprehensive nutritional policy. If such a policy was in place, it would render school feeding schemes redundant (Union of South Africa, 1951, p. 65). Food, which would be given to all children, should be comprised of fresh fruit or vegetables as well as milk, cheese or groundnuts at an estimated total annual cost of £2 million (Moll, 1985, p. 12).

In the aftermath of the presentation of the committee report, debates in Parliament centred on the alleged dependency created by school feeding schemes among Africans. As supporters of the National Party argued, the African community and family systems of duty and obligation were generally undermined by state charity, giving way to a process of moral decay and 'detrivialisation'. The Cillié Report supported such perspectives, in that it argued that "in South Africa as well as abroad school feeding has smothered and eliminated private initiative" (Union of South Africa, 1951, pp. 78–80). To counter such tendencies, the commission proposed that in a universal feeding scheme, communities should contribute either 40 per cent, 25 per cent or 10 per cent according to their ability, and additional community "volunteering" (Kallaway, 1996, pp. 12–13; Moll, 1985, p. 12; "Race Relations Committee to Meet 'Confidentially'", 1951; "Shorter

School Days, Subsidised Feeding, Advocated in Report", 1951).

Despite the committee's overall positive evaluation of the school feeding scheme, the government almost immediately began piecemeal steps to abolish the programme by cutting back subsidies for African schools (while the same was not done for 'European' schools). This was most evident in the Transkei Territories reserve (Wylie, 2001, p. 219).

In 1956, finally, the government instituted a new policy giving Bantu school boards, responsible for overseeing 'Bantu community schools' (primary schools created by the 1953 Bantu Education Act), the option of receiving funding either for the school feeding scheme or the enlargement of school infrastructure and the employment of new teachers (van Schalkwyk, 1954). From then on, only state-subsidised schools were eligible to benefit from the Native School Feeding budget, while farm, mine, factory and church schools were excluded. The government actively encouraged school boards to upgrade their facilities to accommodate more children. It was portrayed as a double privilege for African children to receive formal primary education while also benefitting from the feeding scheme ("A Slice of Unbuttered Bread", 1957; "Food or Schools?", 1955).

The policy imposed the responsibility for the abolishment of school feeding on local school authorities, letting them face a dilemmatic choice: Either feed those pupils already in school or employ more teachers and enlarge buildings to welcome additional children. In the end, most schools boards, given the dire shortage of school places, opted for more teachers and infrastructural development. Moreover, as the speaker of the African National Council of Women pointed out, school boards were afraid that all other payments for facilities and staff would be stopped if they opted for school feeding funds (Clement, 1957).

By August 1956, within eight months of the directive, 80 per cent of African schools had followed the government's recommen-



dation (Staff Reporter, 1956a). Their involuntary choice factually terminated the Native School Feeding Scheme for the large majority of African students. By 1957, the Minister of Native Affairs reported that the school feeding scheme was operational in only 20 per cent of the Bantu School Board areas for £3 million annually (most of which was financed by communal African taxpayers). In June 1957, the Minister of Native Affairs Verwoerd announced a further reduction of the central government budget for school feeding schemes from the previous sum of £650,000 to a meagre £100,000 (Political Correspondent & SAPA, 1957). To compensate for the reduction, teachers were reported to be setting up ad hoc school feeding programmes at individual schools. These included Coloured schools. Such private initiatives were eventually undermined by efforts of the city councils of Johannesburg and Pretoria to abolish the collection of funds for and the distribution of private school meals ("Bad Taste," 1959; "It Looks as if Park-Feeding Proposal Will be Dropped," 1959; News Service, 1958; Special Correspondent, 1959; "The Hungry," 1958). Nonetheless, voluntary school feeding initiatives continued to exist but were never able to reach the scope of the abolished Native School Feeding Scheme (Kallaway, 1996, pp. 9–10).

#### FOOD ENRICHMENT AND FORTIFICATION

While state-sponsored school feeding of African school students came to an end, the problem of malnutrition persisted. 90 per cent of non-European South Africans were suffering from malnutrition, causing illness and "inefficiency" (SAPA, 1952). Even if its ideology excluded the provision of welfare to Africans, the NP government still saw a need to address the poorest population's nutritional deficits. Among the policies substituting the school feeding scheme were food 'enrichment' and 'fortification' programmes. 'Improving' staple foods by adding milk powder, calcium carbonate, soy meal or

fish flour demonstrated the government's acknowledgement of political criticism, and the adaptation of both new scientific insights and transnational policy trends.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, in contrast to school feeding schemes, food enrichment seemed a way to improve the nutritional health of Africans without providing something 'for free'. Malnourished Africans were addressed as consumers, rather than welfare recipients. However, therein also existed the reason for the policy's failure, as most consumers turned to other choices.

The NP government started this enterprise by producing enriched brown bread, meant for lower-income consumers. In July 1952, the enriched bread initiative was launched. Speaking to the creation of the new 'Department of Nutrition', Minister of Health Karl Bremer announced that "we are beginning this month the production of brown bread". The "enriched" loaf, the minister promised, would be acceptable to the public because it maintained the normal taste and appearance. The product, which became known as the 'Bremer Bread', was distributed through government agencies, the ordinary commercial channels, and other state-controlled institutions ("Bremer Announces Plans for Fortified Brown Bread", 1952). It immediately replaced the standard brown loaf in what remained of school feeding schemes at the time, as well as in hospitals and prisons. State subsidies paid for the cost of enrichment (Wheat Industry Control Board, 1952, 1953, 1956). While initially sold at the same price as non-treated brown bread, its price was later reduced to encourage consumption (Stanwix, 2012, p. 20). In 1955, 10,300,000 Bremer loaves were being produced each month ("10,300,000 Bremer Loaves a Month", 1955).

Despite efforts to make it "very palatable" so that the Bremer bread was just as tasty and indistinguishable from an ordinary loaf

<sup>7</sup> Similar programmes, based on nutrition science, in the period were underway in the US and Western Europe (Wylie, 2001, pp. 219–220).

("Fortified bread made in test said to be very palatable", 1952), it proved a challenge to persuade poor people to consume any brown bread, 'fortified' or not. Already in 1952, at a meeting of the National Council of Women, there was a call to also "reinforce white bread with [vitamins] as was now done in Britain and the United States" (SAPA, 1952). A survey noted that enriched bread constituted only one-sixth of urban Africans' overall bread consumption (Eiselen, 1956 cited in Stanwix, 2012, p. 21). Fortified bread was being referred to as 'apartheid bread' by Africans, who believed that it was of inferior quality made for non-Europeans ("People on the Breadline", 1952). An NP member in parliament concluded that "The natives do not eat brown bread, they eat white bread [and] the moment you add anything foreign to our bread the Natives will not have it" (Stanwix, 2012, pp. 21–22). Concerns further mounted when, in 1957 and 1958, the Wheat Board noted that the enriched bread was being consumed more by people of higher incomes. According to the Board, the benefits of enrichment were not well known or appreciated, hence consumption was low (ibid.). Africans, apparently, preferred white bread as it 'kept well' ("Causes of Malnutrition, Bread Contents", 1955). Nutrition education in poor communities, it was argued, could help to raise acceptance ("Bremer Announces Plans for Fortified Brown Bread", 1952). Nonetheless, opposition members of parliament soon criticised the waste of state resources (South Africa House of Assembly, 1959).

Moreover, it seemed increasingly unclear whether tests clearly showed that the Bremer loaf's nutritional value was truly superior to enriched white bread produced in the USA ("Bremer Loaf Good, But Can be Better, U.S. Experts say", 1954). Members of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and the National Nutrition Council concluded that the enrichment programme should be terminated ("Pointless", 1959; Stanwix 2012). Another study in 1955 noted that "in many

ways, the far less heavily subsidised refined white bread is just as nutritive, just as body building as the enriched brown bread" and experiments had shown that in poor communities with poor diets, there were no advantages over refined white bread unless the diet was one exclusively of bread ("Has Cost of 'Bremer Bread' been Wasted?", 1955). After recurring debates in Parliament, in 1959 a decision was made to discontinue the programme, leaving South Africans to consume regular white and brown bread (South Africa House of Assembly, 1959; Wheat Industry Control Board, 1959).

From a policy perspective, the government's intention in providing enriched bread was twofold. The immediate concern was to counter challenges brought on by malnutrition, which was leaving communities susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis (Packard, 1989, p. 249). This initiative stood in the context of a profound commitment on the part of the government to tackle the historical 'poor white problem' but was also meant to supplement poor Africans' diets, thus avoiding the social and economic costs of disease and malnutrition in the black labour force. Children were also targeted in this initiative to balance diets and increase their body weight. The second objective was to support local farmers and bread and enrichment industries, who were in support of the initiative as it benefitted them. While the enrichment of bread had nutrition and health-related concerns, it also had an economic objective, but given the population's resistance to the Bremer loaf, it was ultimately abandoned.

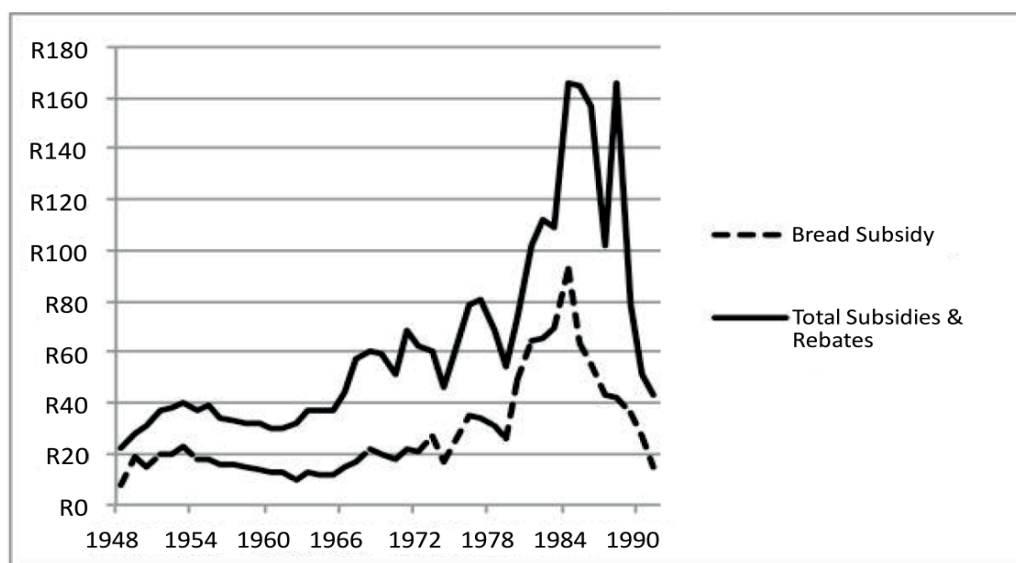
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### 3.2 Consumer welfare: The age of subsidies II

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While the apartheid government publicly vowed to divest itself of its responsibility to provide food security to Africans, it actually did not (Wylie, 2001, p. 225). Indeed, from the 1950s to the 1980s, the apartheid government invested large sums into subsidies

Figure 1. Agricultural subsidies (1948-1991), real 1960 prices, Rm



Source: Stanwix, 2012, p. 44. The author consulted the annual Abstract of Agricultural Statistics and the Wheat Industry Control Board Annual Reports.

with food security and nutrition objectives. Government subsidies were not restricted to the provision of food for nutritional purposes, but were embedded in a broader set of subsidies targeting the general economy. Nonetheless, for the NP government, agricultural subsidies remained a central issue at least until the 1970s (Davies et al., 1976). Farm production and milling were heavily supported. In 1967, for example, R67 million<sup>8</sup> was provided by the government for bread, maize, wheat and fertiliser subsidies (Wylie, 2001, p. 224). In 1971, a subsidy of R27 million aimed at keeping bread at a minimum price. Of this amount, R700 000 went to wheat farmers, the remainder benefiting millers, bakers and dealers (“Minister Warns on Bread Subsidy”, 1971). In the late 1960s and 1970s, the amount spent on subsidies for food-related costs had more than doubled compared to the 1930s and 1940s (Wylie, 2001, p. 224). In 1980, food subsi-

dies totalled R124 million, with R70 million going to bread, R50 million to maize products and R4 million to butter (“A Fair Slice of the Budget”, 1980). As Figure 1 shows, agricultural subsidies rose steeply from after World War II to the end of apartheid.

The longevity and rise of subsidies over time have undoubtedly been heavily influenced by the broad actor constellation that supported the subsidy system. At its institutional core, capital-dominated Control Boards facilitated the agricultural subsidy system. As indicated in earlier sections, in the context of World War II, Control Boards had been formed to actively determine the prices of agrarian products. The most prominent were the Dairy Industry Control Board, the Deciduous Fruit Board, the Wheat Control Board and the Mealie Meal Control Board.<sup>9</sup>

The boards were active in determining producer prices, subsidies and related decisions. In effect, not the market but they controlled the prices of agrarian products. Their role ensured that a particular sequence

8 The South African Rand was introduced in 1961, replacing Pound Sterling as legal tender. For an extended period, it exchanged at US\$ 1.40. During the same year, the country became a republic and left the Commonwealth of Nations following a Whites-only referendum.

9 Mealie meal is cornmeal or coarse flour that is made from maize and is a staple food in many Southern African communities.

was created in which decisions about increased producer prices preceded decisions about consumer food prices. The interests of consumers were represented in the boards but had little say (Political Correspondent, 1946). In influencing policies, the boards could be seen following the agenda of producers (“House Debates White and Brown Bread Subsidies”, 1949) and were central actors in the subsidy architecture. They were the ones that administered financial allocations and had a degree of independence with limited accountability (“Coal Not Traded for Mealies”, 1946; “Debate on Agriculture Vote Resumed”, 1947). Control boards ensured that food prices, as broader political instruments, monetarily served primarily the modern agricultural and food-processing sector. It was only in the late 1970s that the power of control boards began to fade (Emdon, 1976). In retrospect, it was noted that, in addition to attempting to create a balance between production and consumption, control boards also (but unsuccessfully) sought to improve the standard of agricultural production. Over two decades, however, there was little improvement in yield per acre for cereal crops and neither was there an increase in the yield of milk (“Laissez Faire”, 1962). Not only control boards wielded influence over subsidy policies. Also, retailers like the supermarket chain Pick’n’Pay supported high subsidies, arguing that milk became unaffordable for many customers who, thus, needed subsidisation (Staff Reporter, 1974a, 1976).

Besides capital interests, labour unions were also favourable to the food subsidy system. While some organisations like the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA, organising 61 unions representing White, Coloured and Indian workers) (South African History Online, 2017) indicated that in principle they did not agree with food subsidies, they saw no alternative but to support subsidies to aid low-income groups in light of conditions prevailing in the 1970s. TUCSA and the South African Confederation of

Labour (SACL, a group of conservative to right-wing trade unions) frequently stood up to maintain prices of mealies which were critical for the African poor (Staff Reporter, 1975b). The position of TUCSA had to be understood in a context where it was sympathetic to unions which represented black Africans. In 1968 it had resolved to include African unions, but it had reversed its decision after pressure from the government and its own conservative White member unions. Despite this setback, it supported unions representing Africans and encouraged the formation of the Federation of Free African Trade Unions of South Africa (FOFATUSA) (Historical Research Archive, 1964). Some of the sentiments raised by TUCSA and SACL were shared by the Garment Workers Union, the National Union of Clothing Workers, the National Union of Distributive Workers, the Commercial and Allied Workers Union, and the Artisan Staff Associations. They also believed that subsidies protected the country against instability and urban unrest (“A Fair Slice of the Budget”, 1980; “Minister Says Bread Price Will Increase”, 1977; Reilly, 1975; Staff Reporter, 1977). They saw this as especially important in a distressing situation in the townships, where an estimated 1.5 million Africans were unemployed (“A Fair Slice of the Budget”, 1980).

Also, women’s civil society organisations weighed in. The ‘South African League of Women Voters’, the ‘Housewives League’ and the ‘National Federation of Women’s Associations’ (FEDSAW) joined discussions on food policies. These organisations came from ideologically very different positions: the multi-racial FEDSAW, from its founding in 1954 until its organisational demise under state repression in the mid-1960, brought together women based on their common identity of motherhood to demonstrate their opposition to apartheid and racism (Healy-Clancy, 2017; Magubane, 2010, p. 1010). The Housewives League, on the other hand, united Afrikaner women clubs, understood itself as a bearer of Afrikaner culture,

and secretly supported the Broederbond (Callinicos, 1993, p. 117; Meintjes, 1996). While ostensibly apolitical and eschewing public protest, the Housewives leaders regularly criticised governmental attempts to decrease food subsidies (Reilly, 1959; Smith, 1976; Staff Reporter, 1976). Equally vocal on the need to keep subsidies going was the otherwise more liberal and feminist all-White League of Women Voters ("Rises in Prices of Essential Foods Expected", 1951).

In parliament, support for food subsidies came from the United Party, and later also the Progressive Federal Party ("New Milk Prices Criticised in Assembly", 1952; Reilly, 1979). The importance of food subsidies during this period can also be inferred from its politicisation during general election campaigns (Reilly, 1952). Until the 1980s, black leaders, opposition political parties, trade unions and other concerned citizens, citing soaring food prices and rising black unemployment, also called for prioritising subsidies in state budgets ("A Fair Slice of the Budget", 1980).

The strategic value of the food subsidy system was manifold: First, the subsidies acted as a form of consumption stimulus without creating 'dependency'. Those who benefitted were expected to contribute something, there was no welfare 'dole' for free. Still, welfare effects were provided: the subsidies addressed malnutrition among the impoverished classes (the African and the poor Whites). Second, and connected, the subsidies served to tie important stakeholders to the apartheid state. The boards were effective in influencing food prices with a bias towards the interests of producers. They favourably changed the producer's market conditions. Subsidies served to both keep food prices low, and farms and the food industry profitable. Third, just like previous governments, the apartheid state sought to provide a reasonably healthy black labour force to the manufacturing industry, the mines and agriculture. Relating thereto, the ideology of separate development paradoxically heightened the need to provide for the food and nutrition needs of

the African population confined to the economically unviable Bantustans. Consequently, the apartheid state continued in some regards where it took over from the wartime era and played an active role in food and nutrition policies.

Food subsidies were thus persistent despite governmental attempts to impose cuts. Indeed, right from the early 1950s, the government was hesitant to increase food subsidies. Also, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the government made plans to totally cut the food subsidy bill (Staff Reporter, 1959b). In the late 1960s to early 1970s, government advisers and control boards increasingly argued for bread and other foodstuffs to reach their market price (Staff Reporter, 1966). The government argued that subsidies, in light of economic downturns and budget constraints, had become too expensive (Own Correspondent, 1976). Moreover, subsidy cuts were justified with the termination of food subsidies in other countries, with South African bread said to be cheapest among Western countries like the USA and Great Britain (Pretoria Reporter, 1962). In the 1970s, an increasingly dire economic situation at the same time depressed the governmental budget and increased demands for higher subsidies to meet the growing needs of consumers and industry. The food subsidies entered a pendulum situation, in which the volume of subsidies switched back and forth (Reilly, 1974, 1977; Staff Reporter, 1974b).

Dairy products provide an example of government reluctance to provide subsidies to specific products or to impose cuts on others. Under the Dairy Industry Control Board, as a means of controlling malnutrition, the 'More Butter Scheme' became operational from 1961. It targeted White areas as well as African consumers in the townships. In 1967, the 'More Butter Scheme' was discontinued due to concerns that traders in many townships were charging higher prices than envisaged (Staff Reporter, 1967). The government continued subsidising butter production, but more funds were channelled to



agricultural producers instead of traders. In 1971, the government was spending an estimated R5 million a year on butter (Reilly, 1971), making it one of the most affordable dairy products.

While butter was subsidised, the government resisted pleas for fresh milk to be subsidised as well. The South African Agricultural Union and the Dairy Industry Control Board periodically requested a review of milk prices in the 1970s. They argued that profit margins in the industry were being eroded due to production costs. Milk subsidies should be provided for consumers as well as farmers (“Dairy Products May Cost More”, 1971; Staff Reporter, 1975a). The government, however, considered milk subsidies to be too expensive. As Minister of Agriculture Hendrik Schoeman calculated in 1975, to subsidise fresh milk by a cent a litre, R9 million would have been needed. A more meaningful subsidy of five cents a litre would have cost R50 million. The minister maintained that it was difficult to see where this money would come from (SAPA, 1975). The subsidy on butter thus continued although research by the Natal University found that it made more sense to switch to milk production, as there were price increases and shortages in that area (Staff Reporter, 1975c).

#### INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AND THE POLICY OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

At the end of the 1970s, the South African government followed other Anglophone industrialised countries in their turn to neoliberalism, including in economic, health and educational regards (Padayachee & van Niekerk, 2019; Veit, 2021). Despite the increasing chorus in government and boards to phase out the subsidy system, agricultural and food policy, however, remained heavily state-centric. As van Zyl and Kirsten (1992, p. 179) argue, the policy of heavy preferences for White commercial farming continued in the 1980s. Support to White farmers included protection from foreign competition,

various subsidies, producer prices above the world market, and “an impressive research and extension network.” The background to this protectionist reversal, which extended into manufacturing, was the increasingly hostile and antagonistic international setting. Starting with African frontline states in the 1960s and extending finally to Western states by 1985, economic sanctions threatened apartheid’s economic viability. Subsequently, the export share in the agricultural sector fell from 17.5% in 1978 to 6.7% in 1985 (Becker, 1988, p. 65; see also Levy, 1999; Manby, 1992). To safeguard the farming industry, but also to be able to withstand expanded sanctions, food ‘self-sufficiency’ became an official governmental aim (Van Zyl & Kirsten, 1992, p. 179).

In 1984, the government passed a ‘White Paper on Agricultural Policy’, which focussed on agriculture, but also contained food and nutrition security objectives (South Africa, Department of Agriculture 1984, pp. 8–9). Self-sufficiency, the paper stated, was to be achieved at affordable prices in the production of food, beverages, fibre and agricultural raw materials needed by the domestic industry. Self-sufficiency, the paper argued, was fundamental to the general social and political fabric (ibid.):

*For any country, the provision of sufficient food for its people is a vital priority and for this reason it is regarded as one of the primary objectives of agricultural policy. Adequate provision of this basic need of man not only promotes but is also an essential requisite for an acceptable economic, political and social order and for stability.*

The White Paper further stressed the importance of agriculture in the national economy, arguing that the sector needed to be backed by a policy “aimed at making agriculture an independent and financially sound industry” (“Protection, Debt, Drought – and Farmers Go in Fear”, 1984). In Parliament, Minister of Agriculture, G. Wentzel explained that the

White Paper was not a magic formula for the pricing of each of the country's more than 50 agricultural products. Neither did it spell out how the farming industry should be financed. Rather, he said according to the RDM, "what the White Paper does mean and contains are pointers for the road ahead and these should not be tampered with unnecessarily. This means that decisions taken in future about production, marketing and financing and so forth should be tested against the guidelines laid down in the Paper" ("No 'Magic Formula for Agricultural Prices'", 1984). The policy, as some observers argue, was pushed forward by a lobby of parliamentarians backing agricultural interests (Van Zyl, 1989).

The liberal Progressive Federal Party by now criticised the inefficiencies of subsidisation and 'overprotection'. It argued that while self-sufficiency should rightly be attained, taxpayers should not have to shoulder the cost of surplus production ("Protection, Debt, Drought – and Farmers Go in Fear", 1984). The largest opposition party also felt that the farming community was ready to be weaned from the grosser forms of protectionism and subsidisation ("No 'Magic Formula for Agricultural Prices'", 1984). As Van Zyl (1989, pp. 213–214) agrees, especially the farmer support programme benefitted producers at the expense of consumers and taxpayers, presenting a net welfare loss. Moreover, South Africa's policy of self-sufficiency geared towards maximum production resulted in "environmentally unsound and unsustainable farming practices (...) these measures made the cultivation of maize so profitable that large stretches of marginal land in South Africa was planted to maize" (Van Zyl & Kirsten, 1992, p. 179).

Despite these reservations, the White Paper marked an important milestone in which the government re-emphasised its political resolve to keep farmers on the land, ensure profitable producer prices, and safeguard national self-sufficiency. Due to this governmental support, the country managed to produce most of its basic commodities, yet

uneven distribution across racialised and class divides continued. The agricultural sector benefitted from subsidies, investment in research and development, infrastructure, extension, protection from domestic and international markets (Vink & van Rooyen, 2009, p. 4). The agricultural policies in the late 1970s and early 1980s ran concurrently with the policy of food self-sufficiency, as there was increasing pressure from sanctions and a hostile international environment. The policy of self-sufficiency was seen as being relatively successful except in the red meat and oilseed subsectors (Makhura, 1998, p. 573). The early 1980s saw what has been termed a 'watershed' moment in South African commercial agriculture. The government reluctantly began reducing the subsidies which had supported White farmers for over three decades. Liberalisation and deregulation of agricultural production began, but continued opposition slowed the process (Bernstein, 1994; Greyling & Pardey, 2019, p. 22).

It was only in the late 1980s that the economic non-viability of the state/industry/agriculture co-optation at the heart of the apartheid system became fully evident through the falling Rand and ever higher budget deficits. The state-centric self-sufficiency policy was eventually exchanged for a free-market approach. The symbolic bread subsidy was abolished, after 52 years, by the last White-only government in 1991. Government price controls, the Wheat Board and all state organised marketing followed suit.

The post-apartheid government controlled by the African National Congress (ANC) subsequently focussed on income transfers to certain groups in the poor population and refrained from a permanent re-institutionalisation of producer or consumer food subsidies (Stanwix, 2012, p. 2, p. 27). School feeding programmes, however, were reintroduced as part of a 'First 100 days' programme of the incoming democratic government in 1994 (Devereux et al., 2018, pp. 10–12).

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## 4. CONCLUSION

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From 1910 to 1994, South Africa underwent dramatic changes in response to divergent class interests and ideologies which influenced policymaking, including food policies. The most important food policy, subsidies coupled to marketing boards, persisted from the interwar to the apartheid period. School feeding programmes for African children, however, were discontinued. We sought an explanation for these different dynamics. Our findings suggest that to make sense of the continuities in food policy trajectories, it is important to look at the figuration that defined South African food politics, formed by a growing central state apparatus, dynamic political parties, capital factions, and different forces of political extra-parliamentary opposition, philanthropic groups, churches, trade unions and others. This figuration, we note, was heavily polarised due to divergent class interests and allegiances to the hegemonic concept of apartheid and its accompanying principle of separate development, which was as fiercely opposed as it was embraced by different sections of society. Once the forces of apartheid prevailed, the state rescinded its responsibility for the food security of African school students.

However, the country's economic prospects were also heavily dependent on the African labour force, which was cheap, but also food insecure due to land alienation and labour exploitation. While politically, the state, especially after 1948, attempted to divest itself of its responsibility of providing for the African population and protecting it from starvation, malnutrition and disease, economically also the apartheid state and supporting capital had an interest in a sufficiently stable, fed and healthy African workforce. Although there was a push for a policy of total segregation, African labour remained an economic necessity. To a limited extent, African welfare had to be catered for through public provisioning. The state need-

ed to commit to providing some support. Interventions then linked economic objectives with welfare interests. The welfare measures catered to both the White and non-White poor, with the former gradually lifted out of poverty and the latter living on subsidised food which in turn allowed for the payment of abysmal wages.

During the interwar years, settler colonialism and the processes of land expropriation and primitive accumulation turned the Union government into a central actor for the advance and protection of the interests of White agriculturalists and industrialists. African rural livelihoods were further distorted. The racialised bureaucratic state machinery allied with capital (in agriculture, mining and industry) to enforce non-White wage labour while providing support for the productive sectors of the economy. The agrarian, mining and industrial elite pushed their interests through political institutions.

Confronted with the 'poor White problem', the initial welfare systems were reserved for selected groups. During World War II, liberal politicians and bureaucrats, who realised that welfare and poverty challenges confronting the African population could undermine economic development, succeeded in easing the barriers to the emerging welfare state. The school feeding scheme and the food subsidy regime exemplified such depression and war-related initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges of hunger and malnutrition also among the non-White population. We have noted that there were strong linkages between these policies and the aims of increasing agricultural production, ensuring consumer food availability and providing food relief which did not inculcate 'dependency'.

During the apartheid period and despite the ideology of White supremacy, the food subsidy system persisted and even grew financially. As in the interwar period, these interventions into the market economy had both welfare and economic objectives. Its architects sought to curtail the challenges



of disease and malnutrition among the impoverished classes whom they wanted to continue contributing economically but also guaranteed White agriculture, the food processing industry and retailers' dependable profits. Food policies thus supported consumers as well as producers. The interests of capital in non-White labour and fear of unrest culminated in the creation of a modernised and centralised, yet racially biased and exclusionary welfare system.

The particular form of apartheid food welfare—subsidies and market regulation—constituted a surprisingly consensual system in a society strongly polarised by class and racism. Virtually no relevant political actor group opposed the subsidy system as such until the late 1970s (distributional conflict within the subsidy system notwithstanding). The school feeding system, on the other hand, ran against the ideological brick wall of apartheid erected by the National Party, which opposed 'free meals' that could supposedly create 'dependency' among Africans. Subsidies, meanwhile, addressed consumers rather than welfare beneficiaries. Most relevant in the policy design and distribution of public food subsidies, given its institutionalised power in the marketing boards, was White agricultural, processing and food trade capital. The state continued to be a central actor in food policy trajectories, ensuring that it interfaced with different actors and that it had the bureaucratic machinery in place to guide policy development and implementation.

Our findings speak to the literature in at least two regards. In the framework of the racialised South African welfare state, food policies seem to have been largely coherent with other welfare policy developments. The apartheid state walked a contradictory course between ideological commitments to disengagement from welfare for Africans and economic considerations that suggested a stronger (if still unequal) incorporation of the African population into the welfare system (Sagner, 2000; Seekings, 2007, 2020).

In a comparative political-economy perspective, South African food politics have been part of a larger trend of food market regulation that swept the globe during World War II. The country's ideological development, however, ran counter to global trends: apartheid, a system of racial inequality and disenfranchisement, was installed in a period of global decolonisation and desegregation. While global trends have been eagerly taken up in South Africa, the domestic political figuration remained ultimately decisive for the trajectory of food policies.

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