



## EXPLORING RESILIENCE THROUGH THE STORIES OF FOOD INNOVATORS IN THE WESTERN CAPE

By: Megan Lindow, Reinette Biggs, Rika Preiser, Laura Pereira





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# Foreword



This short book is excerpted from an MPhil in Sustainable Development completed by Megan Lindow in December 2017 through the Sustainability Institute and the Centre for Complex Systems in Transition at Stellenbosch University, which was supervised by Dr. Rika Preiser, Assoc. Prof. Reinette ('Oonsie') Biggs and Dr. Laura Pereira.

The full MPhil thesis can be accessed online at <http://scholar.sun.ac.za/handle/10019.1/102910>


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We also acknowledge the valuable contributions of five participants in this research:

- Chuma Mgcoyi, educator, performing artist and permaculturist
- Kobus van der Merwe, forager and chef
- Loubie Rusch, wild food innovator
- Zayaan Khan, seed activist and coordinator of the Slow Food Youth Network South Africa
- Nazeer Soday, farmer and founder of Philippi Horticultural Area Food & Farming Campaign

We also thank Gwendolyn Meyer, Theresa Wigley and Jac de Villiers for providing many of the images used in this book.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a bunch of veldkool. The plant has long, green, asparagus-like stalks and a small, developing flower head. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a grey stone wall.

*Seasonal, asparagus-like veldkool is one of several wild edible plant species with potential for wider cultivation in the Western Cape*

Credit: Gwendolyn Meyer





*Volunteers help to plant a local wild food garden in the township of Khayelitsha*

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# INTRODUCTION



This short book builds on the work of the Seeds of the Good Anthropocenes project, presenting the stories of five social innovators who are seeking to change the food system of the Western Cape, South Africa.

In sharing these stories, we also explore what it means to tell stories and whether the stories people tell can be analysed in such a way as to deepen and enrich our understanding of resilience.

Resilience, in its most basic usage, means the ability to respond to change and disturbance.

As a field of study, social-ecological resilience recognises that people and nature are interdependent (Folke et al. 2016). It looks at how social-ecological relationships,

reflected for example in the farming practices, cultural values, and consumption habits of our food system, may both respond to and influence different levels of adaptation and change.

The term Anthropocene, or 'Age of Man', describes a proposed new geological era in which humans are recognised as primary drivers of change on the planet. The idea of the Anthropocene raises urgent questions for humanity: how will we respond to anthropogenic climate change, a Sixth Mass Extinction, and other forces of nature which we have unleashed but do not control (LaTour 2014)?

We explored such questions by engaging with food innovators, gathering their stories, and analysing some of the subjective, symbolic and value laden meanings of resilience that surfaced in these stories. Through this process, we developed a method of storymaking, which enabled us to gain insight into some of the different capacities that may contribute to resilience in its many forms.

This idea of 'resilience capacities' builds on the work of resilience scholar Katrina Brown (2015), and reflects an understanding of resilience as being dynamic, complex and highly sensitive to context. Responsiveness to change -- both long, slow processes of change, and unexpected shocks -- will always be shaped by context; How does power operate in a community? What are its values and cultural practices? Who has access to resources? (Brown 2015; Folke et al. 2016).

The relationships that influence resilience are complex. Factors such as diversity within a social-ecological system, for example, or the particular ideas and values that shape the way a community interacts with the natural world, may contribute towards



the capacity for resilience in a system (Biggs et al. 2012). Thus a new policy, or an emerging set of societal values, may build resilience under some circumstances, but weaken it in others. And changes in a system may increase the resilience of some people, while weakening the resilience of others.

This work proposes the art of storymaking as a method for gathering insights into some of the different capacities that may contribute to resilience.

This is because our values and our ways of seeing the world and responding to it are reflected in the stories we tell. Our stories contain troves of insight into how we change and develop over time (Clandinin 2007). As we continuously adjust our beliefs and our mental models over time, we shape the emergence of new stories (and the re-interpretation of old ones), which in turn may powerfully influence our sense of reality (Kurtz 2014).

The Seeds of the Good Anthropocenes project recognises that the emergence of new human values, beliefs, assumptions and worldviews will almost certainly be necessary for people to thrive in an Anthropocene future (Bennett et al. 2016).

Our stories both shape and reflect our values, beliefs, assumptions and worldviews (Kurtz 2014). Through telling stories, we share and build our mental models, make sense of our experiences, and plan for the future (Miller & Solin 2015). The stories we tell can thus be analysed to give powerful insights into our strategies and motivations for both responding to change and shaping it.

We chose to focus on the stories of food innovators, because we believe that food, like story, is such a powerful feature in all of our lives, that it can be equally powerful in shaping our future.

Food, like story, reflects our values, our identity, our fears and aspirations, and our relationships with the land, animals and each other (Steel 2009). Most of us interact directly with the social-ecological world through our daily choices about what to eat (Gordon 2017).

Yet food also has a much deeper story. The Cape, for example, is a biodiversity hotspot, home to the unique and intensely threatened biodiversity of the Cape Floral Kingdom, and to an incredibly diverse cultural mixture of indigenous, African, Asian and European heritages. Painful histories of colonisation, slavery, and apartheid extend into the present, in the forms of extreme social inequality, poverty and the 'slow violence of hunger' (Moyo 2017).

Every aspect of this complex story of the Cape reverberates in today's food system. Deep legacies are imprinted on the land itself, for example through a dominant system of industrial agriculture, heavily reliant on imported crop production models whose vulnerabilities are currently being exposed by severe, multi-year drought.

The five participants in this study were selected in part for the unique and innovative ways in which they are responding to such enduring challenges in the food system.

These individuals are:

- 1) Chuma Mgcoyi, performing artist and founding member of Tyisa Nabanye permaculture farm;
- 2) Kobus van der Merwe, forager and chef serving innovative, hyper-local seasonal food representing the Saldhana strandveld fynbos landscape of the west coast of South Africa;
- 3) Loubie Rusch, indigenous food activist pioneering the cultivation of local

wild edible plants, and forging innovative collaborations to bring these little-known foods into the local economy;

- 4) Zayaan Khan, seed systems and indigenous food activist, coordinator of the Slow Food Youth Network for Southern Africa;
- 5) Nazeer Sondag, farmer-activist who is developing a model of small-scale agroecological farming on the Philippi Horticultural Area, a unique farming area within greater Cape Town which produces much of the city's fresh produce and plays an important part in securing access to healthy food among the urban poor.

In focusing on the stories told by these food innovators, we open a window into the intricate, incremental and value-laden processes of responding to Anthropocene challenges through shaping food system change in the Western Cape.

# Locations of interviews with food innovators



**A** = Signal Hill, Zayaan Khan

**B** = Moya we Khaya, Loubie Rusch


**C** = Kommetjie, Loubie Rusch

**D** = Philippi Food & Farming Campaign, Nazeer Soday

**E** = Tyisa Nabanye, Chuma Mgcoyi

**F** = Cederberg Mountains, Loubie Rusch

**G** = Wolfgat Restaurant, Cape Columbine Nature Reserve, Kobus van der Merwe

A woman with dark skin and black dreadlocks is the central figure. She is wearing a vibrant red, textured knit sweater. She is looking slightly off-camera with a gentle smile. The background is a lush, green hillside with various plants and trees. In the distance, a city with numerous buildings is visible, nestled at the foot of a large, rugged mountain. The sky is bright with some light clouds. A semi-transparent grey box at the top of the image contains a quote.

*You can start something from nothing, because we all have this abundance in nature. You just need people and ideas of what to do' - Chuma Mgcoyi*

Credit: Megan Lindow



# Chuma Mgcoyi



founding member of Tyisa Nabanye permaculture farm,  
performing artist

Tyisa Nabanye, also known officially as ERF 81, is a permaculture farm in the Cape Town City Bowl which operates 'informally' on under-utilised land owned by the South African Military. The land has unofficially hosted a farm since the 1990s, but in 2013 became the focus of a more concerted effort to develop a space for urban farming and community building, connecting two very different neighbourhoods, one affluent and predominately white, the other a Muslim community with deep historical roots facing contemporary pressures of gentrification (Onishi 2016, Mgcoyi 2016).

Mgcoyi threads her way along a narrow pathway leading up the hillside towards Signal Hill. Reaching a small clearing hidden in

the trees and shrubs, she finds a spot to sit amongst deep green spinach plants, and begins her story.

Mgcoyi describes a lifelong passion for the performing arts, which led her to move to Cape Town from the Eastern Cape, and take part in forming Tyisa Nabanye with a small group of friends. Growing up in the Eastern Cape, Mgcoyi was always inspired by her grandparents' stories of rural life, and she speculates that it may have been partly these stories that inspired her to a career in performing arts. She recalls of her grandmother's stories:

*When she tells her stories, I have a picture of an ancient way of life, you go to the river and you take water. Because I grew*

*up in the city, I was never exposed to living off the land... what came out is how it wasn't like a job to them, it was fun... they would go fetch water in the river and there were games around that.*

She came to ERF 81 as a struggling performance artist, and joined a small community of friends who were becoming increasingly interested in permaculture. Fortuitously, she was awarded support for a two-week intensive training in permaculture through the organisation SEED (also in the Seeds of the Good Anthropocenes project database). She describes learning about permaculture as being transformative of her own life values as well as how she relates to life itself:

*I got to go into detail, just connecting and understanding the microorganisms, what is happening in the soil, the plants and what's indigenous... I've actually noticed that I was so ignorant not to know, not to even ask about the trees that surround me.*

Among this small group of friends, the vision of Tyisa Nabanye developed. As Mgcoyi learned and connected to permaculture principles through her participation in Tyisa Nabanye, she also connected to other organisations and networks involving food sovereignty and justice. She landed an internship with the Environmental Monitoring Group, and she (along with Tyisa Nabanye as a whole) were closely connected with the emerging Slow Food Youth Network. Working with Slow Food in

particular, Mgcoyi also began to appreciate the cultural and social dynamics of food, and particularly their impact on poverty. She says:

*We don't see that actually to have a seed is important. Actually to grow your own food is important, and understanding another issue which is land. People will say they don't have land, but permaculture taught me, even if you don't have a huge piece of land, there are so many alternative ways of growing food in your own small space that you have. You can grow some few spinaches to feed yourself even if you don't have money to buy food.*

Mgcoyi explains the vision of Tyisa Nabanye as follows:

*We didn't have money when we started (Tyisa Nabanye), but now people are starting to be entrepreneurs... It's showing people that even if you don't have something, you can start something from nothing, because we all have this abundance in nature, you just need people and ideas of what to do. I think it's an important thing for this place to be kept like this, because it's also about diversity, about bringing people from different backgrounds together, and with the different areas it's the same thing, because we are between Tamboerskloof and the Bo Kaap, but this place brings both sides into one place, and also people from Khayelitsha... People can share knowledge and celebrate Mother Earth, which is important. Sometimes*

*we get caught up in politics and everything, and we're not actually looking at what we're doing to the soil, what we do to ourselves. There should be a time when we just stop and say thank you to nature for these surroundings, the air we breathe, all the stuff that's around us.*

Mgcoyi continued to describe how she had begun working to integrate her work on permaculture and Seeds with her performing arts background. She describes a theatre piece she has been developing:

*This year it's time to integrate with my performing side of things... having a theatre piece that's coming soon, that's talking about seeds and culture and which will show the history that has had an impact on our daily lives through the migration and movement of leaving the rural areas, and going to the city we tend to forget how we lived. I started writing about those things, and about how even my family and my grandparents used to share these stories with me.*


She describes how she has created a performance around the rich live potency of heritage and seeds:

*I work with seeds, I save seeds from the garden to plant for the next season... I'm trying now to conserve more heritage seeds, and for me integrating this with performing arts is also telling the story of what a seed can be. A seed is like a crop, but a seed can also be information that is planted in you...*

*For example there was a seed that was planted in me when I started knowing about seeds. For me sharing this knowledge, a seed was planted in me. I know that more people will be aware of climate change, will be aware of environment and nature, and letting nature teach us, not actually controlling it. So seeds to me mean so many things: it means knowledge, it means collective minds that will share the same theme of working with nature, understanding nature.*

Mgcoyi reflects on what she has learned from being part of the community:

*My journey, when it comes to food, started on the farm, the interaction of the communities, people coming together and sharing knowledge. I learn from people, also being at this organisation, I wouldn't be here now doing what I'm doing with the schools if it wasn't for the permaculture training. It created opportunities for me, and actually taking charge of my life to build a life. It has actually made me to be curious, what is my life about, and the style of my life. What is cool, and what is important, not only in food, but what am I wearing, the curiosity of what am I drinking, everything. It makes me be so conscious of how I am now, and what I am living for, what's my purpose.*

A close-up, slightly low-angle shot of a chef with a full, dark beard and curly hair. He is wearing a white t-shirt and a brown leather apron. He is looking down intently at his work, which is partially obscured by a large plume of white steam rising from a stove. In the background, shelves are visible with various jars and containers, and a window on the left shows a glimpse of the outdoors. The lighting is warm and focused on the chef.

*'What I wanted to present at the eatery was something that's truly local and representing the landscape... The moment you start noticing what's growing around here, and what's edible, it's amazing' - Kobus van der Merwe*

Credit: Jac de Villiers

# Kobus van der Merwe



Forager and chef

Meeting chef Kobus van der Merwe in his soon-to-be opened new restaurant, Wolfgat, in the West Coast fishing village of Paternoster, it does not take long to get a sense of an avid forager at work.

The restaurant is named for the Wolfgat Cave which is partially situated underneath the property – an underground labyrinth of 'immense archaeological and geological significance' where sheep bones, ostrich shells, marine shells, ceramics, beads and stone artefacts dating from the past 2,000 years have been found (Wolfgat 2017). The restaurant, like the cave, opens a unique window to the past, present and future of this particular place.

By way of an introduction to the unique seasonal flavours of the local indigenous flora that are essential to his cooking, van der Merwe has laid out several small bowls containing fresh inflorescences of asparagus-like veldkool (*Trachyandra cillata*); fresh sprigs of a scrubby plant known as dune celery (*Dasispermum suffruticosum*) that grows along the southern African coastline; as well as toasted dune celery seeds. For a person native to this coastline, the sight of these plants growing prolifically on sand dunes, along municipal sidewalks, along train tracks, would most likely be familiar. Yet still most people probably do not think of these plants as vegetables and herbs to be eaten.



When van der Merwe arrived in Paternoster in 2010, his plan was to spend a year helping his parents, who had bought the cafe Oep ve Koep for their retirement, to establish a small garden bistro in the historic building that had once been a shark-liver oil factory (van der Merwe 2014). For him, this move offered an escape from an unfulfilling desk job as an online food editor, and a chance to apply his rusty culinary training in a new unexplored context. Van der Merwe explains:

What I wanted to present at the eatery was something that's truly local and representing the landscape. So that was the starting point, and I got completely sucked in. The moment you start noticing what's growing around here, and what's edible, it's amazing.

On this particular day, van der Merwe is brimming with excitement because he has discovered, for the first time, the *Asparagus capensis* in full flower, a wild indigenous species related to cultivated asparagus, growing on the farm property which he rents nearby. As he continues to explain, this accidental discovery of the *Asparagus capensis* shoots has been all the more exciting, because the species is growing on disturbed land where wheat used to be farmed, and where a road and water pipelines running to an adjacent property for oyster farming have created further disturbances. Here, *Asparagus capensis* is demonstrating the hardy resilience of a good pioneer establishing its foothold in

harsh, inhospitable surroundings. 'It's got the asparagus flavour, intensified like a hundred times, but in a bitter way,' he describes.

Working as a chef, creating food that reflects the deep ecology of place and the intricate, temporal rhythms of season, is a process of continuous discovery. As van der Merwe describes, the excitement of that continuous discovery is held and shared across a small network of foragers, botanists, researchers and indigenous food enthusiasts, living in Cape Town as well as up the West Coast. These are people who initially helped van der Merwe to develop his local knowledge of the relationships of food, ecology, landscape and plants -- and it is to this small, close network that he has turned today in order to share the pictures and the excitement of this latest discovery of the *Asparagus capensis*.

Like Rusch, whose story follows, van der Merwe recalls absorbing the ideas of living off the land and seeing wild food as part of the landscape from childhood. These ideas were particularly formed during childhood visits to his grandparents' cattle farm in the Northern Cape Province:

*I did grow up with a bit of that in my family, being interested in things that grow. On my grandfather's farm... he had the most amazing knowledge of indigenous grasses in the Northern Cape. Even though he was a cattle farmer, he was very passionate about the indigenous things that grew on the*

*farm... He had beautiful files he kept, clippings (of the grasses), in his handwriting the botanical name. I think those things lay a foundation in a way.*

In Paternoster, van der Merwe says he began to discover knowledge of local edible plants, through books, such as Louis Leipoldt's classic *Cape Cookery* (1976) and through developing relationships with local people, as well as with experts such as 'foodie botanist' Rupert Koopman, who visited his restaurant and shared his passion and knowledge of indigenous wild edibles, planting the seed of an ongoing friendship and collaboration that continues to this day:

*He would actually show me things that weren't really recorded as known wild edibles, but that he himself had been nibbling on. One was dune celery. It's become one of our main sort of indigenous flavour components... we started experimenting with using it in different ways and then toasting the seeds as a spice... it's almost coffee-like, a little bit bitter, a little bit sweet... it's one of the most precious commodities in my kitchen. Luckily this is one of the things that grows weedy in certain areas. On the farm where I stay, it's not actively being farmed, but they laid a pipe pumping seawater into dams where they grow the oysters. All along that pipe is dune celery. They like the disturbance somehow.*

He continued to learn, inspired both by a sense of fascination with

and connection to nature, and at the same by a wish to resist what he refers to as the 'commodification of place' -- encapsulated in the image of quaint seaside restaurants serving fish and chips in postcard perfect settings, concealing the harsh realities, and stories, of collapsing fish stocks, gigantic trawlers halfway around the world, struggling local fishermen, and resource injustice that perpetuates in persistent cycles of entrenched poverty over generations:

*I think I really disliked the misrepresentation of a place when people claim that the calamari and chips you've just been served have been plucked straight from the ocean. Nothing could be further from the truth, it's Patagonian... (I wanted to create) something that truly represents the area and where we are now... I don't think we have something like a South African cuisine. But I think I kind of like the idea of trying to figure out if there's a way of redefining that, or slowly discovering that. It will never be an absolute thing; it's a living, organic thing.*

Later, on an exploration of the nearby Cape Columbine Nature Reserve, a local municipal nature reserve on the coastline four kilometres south of Paternoster, where he visits almost daily, he begins to reflect on the dramatic seasonal changes that he witnesses day by day:

*There's always something happening with the plant life. Every single month of the year there's something flowering. Even in*

*summer when it's dry and a lot of things go dormant, one of the mesembryanthemums will push out these white flowers... And sometimes there are almost these waves of colour. At the moment it's spring, middle to late winter, and there are all sorts of colours and an abundance of everything flowering. But then you get a yellow time towards the end of the year in summer, when the asteracia are flowering, and then in March and April all of a sudden all of these beautiful red things.*

For van der Merwe, these intricate seasonal dramas that unfold through the turning of the seasons, the arrival of the rains, the dances of flowering plants attracting insects and birds, and the explosions of colour all find their way onto the plate. He says: 'I like the creativity of just interpreting the landscape: it appeals to my artistic side. I grew up in a family that loves food and cooking, and in my family the men are always in the kitchen.'

But this deep immersion in and attention to the landscape has also raised for van der Merwe a painful awareness of its fragility:

*It's one of the last spots of slightly pristine Saldhana strandveld fynbos that remains. People often seem to think that the West Coast is still fairly untouched, but if you look at Google Earth of Cape Town and up the West Coast, it's remarkable to see how little we have left of pristine untouched fynbos. Everything's been developed and ploughed. From an aerial point of view you can just see straight lines. It's quite easy to see the rough patches that are still intact, and they are tiny tiny dots, which is quite scary and sad to me.*



Credit: Megan Lindow

Van der Merwe points out one of his regular spots, at an intersection point between granite and limestone soils, where he says there is always something interesting or surprising – whether it's tiny flowering orchids emerging from cracks in the rocks; bright, variegated splashes of lichen on rock; or a strange new fragrance exploding at a particular time of day, it does not feel like we are in a tiny, vulnerable last fragment of an ecology. The landscape feels immersive and expansive. Waves crash in the distance, and a light mist hangs in the air, with mingled smells of salty sea and delicately honeyed fynbos and flowers. The honey scent comes from a little yellow flower, the *Senecio aloides*. Says van der Merwe:

I just love the texture of this landscape in winter. It's crazy, I mean things that really looked like graveyards of dead twigs in summer have all of a sudden sprouted lush soft green foliage. It's really cool, (you find) tiny little gardens in rock crevices. There's barely soil sometimes in those little cracks, but there will be a little *crusula* growing in there... This is quite a harsh environment, with salty air, only a little bit of rainwater, harsh very dry hot summers. It's a very specialist group of plants that can thrive here, I find that very inspiring.

People who don't know the West Coast will often just drive at 30km per hour and think hmm nothing special and sort of whiz through the landscape. But the thing is, with this vegetation you have to stop and get out and notice detail, and you'll be blown

away. You have to really zoom in and then you see magical things happen.

Taking this walk with van der Merwe provides a glimpse of how these highly seasonal variations in the landscape are then interpreted onto the plate:

Visually, obviously I find it extremely inspiring whether it's green and colourful like at the moment, or whether it's harsh and dead and twiggy in summer -- one could almost sometimes literally interpret that into a plating or something. And then next it's thinking about the edible plants and their textures and their flavours. Often the succulents have a sort of oceanic brininess built in; they're kind of self-seasoned, and that's always a nice thing to think about, because we're at a coastal location, I find that pairs with seafood<sup>1</sup> extremely well in and of itself. It's layers of inspiration for me, literal, figurative, conceptual.

He then reflects on what he has learned from his immersion in this landscape:

To me, one of the starkest contrasts is coming into Paternoster, driving through wheat fields. People often react to it at the moment being completely green, a beautiful landscape. But in actual fact that's quite a hectic destructive agricultural thing -- and before, that used to be an edible carpet of biodiverse

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<sup>1</sup>van der Merwe says he sources fish from local sustainable sources

indigenous endemic water-wise plants. And in summer, even though the veld can be dry and quite twiggy, there's still stuff growing and covering the soil -- whereas those wheat fields are just one big cloud of dust storms. It's heart-breaking to see that we go to these huge scaled operations to provide food, when we actually took out the food that was there inherently, that we didn't have to water or manage or anything... Maybe my opinion is quite romantic, but it's quite hectic if you think of it that way. If people could see what it actually should have looked like, it should be quite shocking to compare the two.

Clambering over the rocks, van der Merwe stops frequently to point out something interesting: flowering pelargoniums with subtle flavours and textures, beautiful silky leaves. An orchid that releases a powerful perfume at dusk to attract a certain moth. An edible tuber that produces a large, black and white orchid-like flower which blooms only for 24 hours, releasing a pungent scent which van der Merwe compares to rotting meat. Even a red geranium, of which van der Merwe remarks:

There's a slight rosewater-y undertone. Not many people know this is actually the red cultivated geraniums that people have in pots, that you see in windowsills in Greece. But this is its natural habitat.

Other plants he points out are remarkable not because of how far and wide they have travelled, assimilated and reinvented

themselves as part of a faraway local aesthetic, but for the hyper local ranges to which they are limited. He points to a rock crevice: That is *Lampranthus vredenbergensis*, a little succulent that only occurs here. If you look at the map of distribution it's like a little dot, in this reserve... So that's quite scary as well, thinking of habitat loss. We can literally see things becoming extinct due to our negligence.

Converting conventional farmland to the cultivation of diverse indigenous edible plants could help to reverse such trends and regenerate degraded land, van der Merwe says:

When Rupert and I walk around on the farm where I stay we see fallow land that's been left alone for quite a while, it's amazing to see how certain things are coming back. It will take years and years to restore, but often the first pioneering plants that come back are the edible ones... I think it's just literally thinking about the landscape differently, and again coming back to diversifying your diet, expanding it... We have such diverse abundance we can actually live off of.



*‘The process of discovery just makes you realise that there is so much out there that is untapped’ - Loubie Rusch*



# Loubie Rusch



Wild food innovator

Walking amongst the tangled tendrils of veldkool, dune spinach, soutslai and other edible plants indigenous to the Western Cape, Loubie Rusch displays a sort of tender pride and enthusiasm for all the different plant species she is cultivating here, on a sandy patch of a community farm in Khayelitsha.

It is no accident that she has chosen to experiment with farming edible indigenous plants here at the Moya we Khaya farm, a cooperative of farmers located on a large piece of land in the township of Khayelitsha where perhaps a dozen primarily Xhosa-speaking farmers linked to the urban farming non-governmental organisation and social enterprise Abalimi Bezekhaya have plots, growing spinach, carrots, spring onions and other more

conventionally known and farmed vegetables, helping to sustain livelihoods and household access to fresh vegetables in a densely populated community affected by HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and poverty. This place, in short, offers 'a marvellous opportunity to shift thinking' about what food is and how it can be grown, says Rusch.

Rusch explains:

*If you look across this fence, we're in the middle of sandy Khayelitsha, and yet there is food growing right there that people actually walk by and have no idea that it's actually wild food, and if you knew about it, it would be accessible to you.*

The plants growing here are what Rusch refers to as the 'edible carpet plants': hardy, dense low-growing perennials that are endemic to the area and proliferate in poor sandy local soils. The Western Cape, home of the smallest yet most biodiverse (and intensely threatened) Cape Floral plant kingdom, boasts perhaps hundreds of edible plants. Unlike so many other parts of the world, however, farming never developed as a local indigenous way of life, but was introduced by European settlers to the Cape, displacing indigenous hunter-gatherers on the land with cultivated food plants from around the world adapted to the dry summers and rainy winters in the Mediterranean. As a result, few if any of the Cape's wild indigenous foods have been farmed -- which makes Rusch something of a pioneer -- within the context of a broader indigenous food movement, both local and global.

Rusch describes herself as an indigenous wild food innovator, working to bring indigenous foods into the local economy of the Western Cape. As she explains, this work has developed as a natural progression over a 30-year period, in which she began to see food and landscape differently herself, and at the same time began to experiment with new models of working with food and landscape, while forging a role for herself through promoting the cultivation and appreciation of the Western Cape's indigenous wild foods, in a variety of interventions involving chefs, farmers, researchers, entrepreneurs and other food enthusiasts, for example through the Slow Food Movement<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup>Rusch is actively involved in the global Slow Food Movement, and is coordinator of Slow Food Mother City locally.

Rusch traces the roots of her enthusiasm for indigenous wild foods to a childhood of long days of outdoor exploration, snacking along the way on fruit plucked from trees and other edible things. From her archeologist stepfather, she had learned early on to see food as a natural part of the landscape. However, as she now relates, it was reading the books *One Straw Revolution* and *The Road Back to Nature* by twentieth-century Japanese farmer and philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka, in her twenties, that truly started to shift her thinking:

*He described how you could actually look at how healthy or how whole a landscape was by what was growing there, and it made me actually see monoculture as a desert. That was very instrumental in me starting to look at my environment with very different eyes.*

Rusch calls herself 'an instinctive cook', and also applies this descriptor to her processes of exploration, experimentation, observation and feedback, discovering edible indigenous plants and flavours and experimenting with how to prepare with them.

*I love going into nature and finding new things to try, or talking to other people and hearing something that they've tried... One of those was the Slangbessie, which is related to the goji berry, and can be found growing up the West Coast. Years ago, somebody would have said to me, have you tried such and such... And there these bushes with these gorgeous bright*





*Rusch gathers indigenous vygies from a municipal plot near Kommetjie beach*

Credit: Gwendolyn Meyer

*orange berries were, and then you know spending an hour and a half to collect enough to make 12 little jars of jam, and then discovering actually they could be used in a savoury way as well, a bit like a tomato, because it's from the tomato family... the process of discovery just makes you realise that there is so much out there that is untapped.*

Rusch then reflects on how landscape triggers memory through a story of her encounters with a woman in her eighties living near the West Coast town of Churchhaven:


*She knew I liked food and she likes food, so she would be making something with limpets and give me some to taste... or she would harvest veldkool and let me taste her version of veldkool bredie... So I said, can I come and have a long chat to you about wild foods... To start with I just sat with her in her cottage and we chatted a bit... And I said come on let's go walking, and as soon as we were walking virtually every bush we passed, suddenly her memories were being triggered by actually walking in that landscape again... It's as if the memory came back into the front and could spill out of her mouth as she told me about eating tortoise and the best thing was when her mum used to make tortoise. So that kind of being in the landscape is such an important part of actually triggering memory.*

A subsequent interview with Rusch takes place near Kommetjie beach, the landscape where she herself first learned about foraging.

At a municipal parking strip near the beach, Rusch has spotted hardy carpets of dune spinach which she wants to harvest both for our lunch and to show a prospective indigenous food collaborator in the food business. As she snips off pieces of dune spinach with secateurs, she reflects:

*Dune spinach is very pervasive. It's a real pioneer... This is part of my deep interest in wild foods: you find things that grow themselves and are less resource-intensive to grow, so that farming starts to become less destructive. I want to find different solutions to use the land, to grow crops that are endemic to places, and don't displace the endemic biodiversity, using fallow lands, conservation areas, find ways to make farming less destructive to local areas... When people learn about foraging you see the lightbulbs go on. It's the first step in getting people discovering and being interested in what grows in the wild... I want to take the next step, getting to know what can feed us on a larger scale: climate resilient crops that can be cultivated widely.*





*'It's amazing how all these things just perpetuate and survive, all the birds, all the animals, but all the people as well' - Zayaan Khan*

Credit: Megan Lindow

# Zayaan Khan



Seed and indigenous food activist, coordinator of Slow Food  
Youth Network Southern Africa

Unlike several of the other Seeds explored in this body of work (e.g. Tyisa Nabanye, Vegkop Farm), and the people associated with them, Khan's work and life as an activist is not rooted in any one particular place, but rather in a larger conceptual landscape of food in its many forms of relationship.

Therefore Signal Hill, with its panoramic views of Table Mountain, the City of Cape Town and the Atlantic seaboard, is the location Khan has chosen for sharing her story.

She explains:

*What I love about Signal Hill is the proximity to biodiversity.*

*I can see the sea, so it gives me this idea of awareness into the landscape, which is fundamentally something we've lost living in the city. But also the fact that there are so many forageable things here, and it's an edible landscape. That is one of the fundamental things that is important for the (Slow Food Youth) Network: we're trying to look at food beyond dependency, look at food in terms of sustenance, but also in terms of curiosity, art, colour -- all the different ways that food is experienced.*

Khan's adventures in food over the past 10 years have encompassed the politics of food, seeds and land reform in South Africa, the relational dynamics of ecology, the deep cultural and philosophical roots of food processing techniques such as

fermentation, the revival of indigenous food, explorations into entomophagy (the consumption of insects) -- and underlying all of these things, a deep fascination with the potency, poetry, resilience and feminine generative power of Seeds. She has explored the complexity of 'food beyond dependency' through a multimedia blog, the Apocalypse Pantry, and for the past three years has formed and coordinated the Slow Food Youth Network Southern Africa, as part of a global youth network under the Slow Food Movement. These adventures have prompted her to see the world through the eyes of an insect, through the potent indigenous mythologies of Seed, and through the fragmented post-apartheid, pre-'apocalypse' landscape of District Six, from where members of her own family were evicted under the apartheid Group Areas Act.

In the biodiverse surroundings of Signal Hill, floating above the city in the clouds, invites an expansive perspective on time, heritage, awareness, and one's sense of responsibility to the land. Picking up on the latter, Khan says:

*I've always felt that, because we're in such a biodiverse hotspot... it's amazing how all these things just perpetuate and survive, all the birds, all the animals, but all the people as well, and all the different cultures of people... I really believe that knowledge comes from the land... We know we can take plants that we don't have recipes for, but we know they're edible but bitter, and we can transform them in different ways.*

*That knowledge through dreaming and intuition and hard work and experimentation has become something intrinsic to the land and then knowledge comes from the land.*

For Khan, social activism was the gateway to food. Always curious, she had initially been drawn to journalism, but then decided to study horticulture instead. She knew nothing of indigenous plants, but had inherited a love and appreciation for gardening from her grandmother. She learned landscaping and horticulture, and worked at Good Hope Nursery near Scarborough. Then, someone she was dating who worked as a researcher at Surplus People's Project, an NGO focused on land reform, was involved in teaching farmers about micro-organisms to support livestock health. Khan was fascinated, and applied for a job there. Moving next to work as a researcher at Surplus People's Project, she gained new perspective on the struggles of many South Africans for economic redress, land reform.

Shortly after Khan joined Surplus People's Project in 2012, she attended a workshop given by Prof. Rachel Wynberg from the University of Cape Town on seeds and intellectual property legislation affecting seed sovereignty both globally and in South Africa. As she recalls, the workshop struck a powerful chord:

*We were shocked and appalled that these laws were in existence in the world, but nobody knew about them... This was something we needed to do something about.*

She travelled up the west coast of South Africa in order to find out what people's actual seed practices were. The findings were not encouraging:

*Hardly anyone was using seed that they'd saved themselves, and if they were it was because they were far removed from supermarkets and highways and roads. It was saving seed out of necessity because they were living in a very rural mountain region or something. Not one person knew about the seed laws, no matter who they were. We found such a stark contrast to what we had hoped to find.*

Following that trip, Khan fell into a depression. As she reflects now, however, it was at the same time inspiring to observe the ways in which ancient knowledge still persisted in remote areas:

*If I go up the west coast, it's white sand, it's white plain... it's really not easy to grow food... How then were people eating and developing into the humans we are now... because when you go into Namaqualand and you see how people have been surviving there for so long, you see that you need to have a particular knowledge in order to do so.*

Another pivotal event which shifted thinking in a more empowering direction, and opened up new ways of seeing, was the Terra Madre Salon del Gusto in 2012, a gathering of farmers and food producers from around the world convened by the

Slow Food movement in Turin, Italy every other year. Khan recalls:

*My mind was blown wide open... That was the first time I saw how much diversity we have in the world... and how much indigenous food people are eating, from seaweeds in Chile to different woods and fruits and leaves and berries to make tea in Belarus... the most diverse flavours and tastes... When I first went to [Terra Madre] in 2012, I was of the understanding that the world is screwed, that there are all these monocultures, the hegemony, the oligarchs and all this stuff... And then I go there and ... there was so much diversity, and not just so much, but SO MUCH, so many breeds and species of animal, in vast really specific agroecological conditions, like the deep freezing highlands of Iceland, to the lowlands of Uganda.*

She continues:

*... The survivorship that happens, the complete diversity and adaptation and resilience that exists. It was so inspiring to see that all of that was just around food... It was enough momentum to keep me driven for four years.*

Meanwhile, the opportunity of creating an arena and a network for this new thinking came along in 2013, with a new Slow Food Youth Network that was starting up globally, a spin-off of the Slow Food movement. For Khan, it was a powerful opportunity to involve young people in the evolving food story of South Africa, with all





*Khan gathers plant roots and pollen for experiments in wild food preparation*

Credit: Megan Lindow

its unresolved tensions over land, seed regimes, exploitation and inequality -- alongside all of the empowering possibilities of agro-ecology and indigenous food she had glimpsed at Terra Madre. As Khan recalls:

*In Slow Food it was about sharing that information with younger people, but also about giving access to younger people, because at that stage I was entering the end of my twenties, getting towards 30, and I was like wait, I can't still be the youngest person in the room.*

Khan describes the Slow Food Youth Network as providing an important space for young people to overcome challenges they face of social exclusion and unemployment through engaging in the food system. She elaborates:

*You can't survive as a farmer unless you're doing it very sexily... otherwise it doesn't pay off and you have to do other things, and so this narrative sits with everyone. All of a sudden you realise you're a movement of artists, so you're a farmer, but you also have to teach your skill through poetry. You also have to realise your ability and need to dance and illustrate and play music. One of the huge narratives that's come out is we're also a movement of artists... because what's happened is we can't follow the same path as our parents. As a collective, the people who are closest to me, hardly any of us has a retirement package. A lot of us are supporting our own parents while also*

*having our own children. There's a lot of family politics and a big need for people to express their creativity and drive and that cultural side of themselves... It feeds us, each other and ourselves, so that we can continue doing the other work.*

A narrative of indigenous food and experimentation has also grown in the network, she explains, born out of community gatherings that relied on feeding many people cheaply from donated food, a dynamic that necessitated spontaneity and creativity in being able to assemble various ingredients together on the spot to feed everybody:

*Ultimately I think in order to be an artist, you have to have the art of storytelling in whatever way it manifests. If you look at the narratives around indigenous food revival and all the ways it manifests, in collecting stories, connecting people, creating new recipes, farming these things, there are all these trajectories that cross over and connect. If you look at the consumption of foods that are created, and the different moments that they cross, and how people collaborate and the different kinds of meals that come out, and the trends that come out in the group through one person's innovation, and the stories of how the recipes move, that is fascinating.*

Khan describes these narratives as being grounded in places such as Tyisa Nabanye, as well as in a global set of ideas and relationships that draws people together through, for example,







the Slow Food Youth Network. She describes a sense of rich interplay between the physical spaces and the networks that link them, and elaborates:

*That is what I mean about building solidarity through friendship. You introduce people to one another, and friendships emerge that continue... Businesses spring up... there's a definite community-ation that springs up, a connection to place and space, I guess, around activation, and having these things (referring to Tyisa Nabanye) like pegs to hold down the movement, the network. They're all over the country and all over the world.*

Khan also highlights a more spiritual dimension to the ways in which people connect through a place:

*What place does is connect you immediately to all the people and things and life that flow through it... There's this kind of deep connection, because all around food, especially if it's good food, there's some sense of life in it. There's bacteria, there's microbial activity, there's intention, all those things that have much gravitas.*



*'It took a whole long painful journey for me to move from that kind of chemically dependent industrial farmer to where I am now' - Nazeer Sondag*



Credit: Gwendolyn Meyer

# Nazeer Sondag



Farmer and leader of the PHA Food & Farming Campaign

Nazeer Sondag is a man with a plan to disrupt the stranglehold of the dominant industrial agricultural system and trajectory of urban development in the unique area of farmland on the urban edge of Cape Town where he lives, farms a one hectare plot, and runs the Philippi Horticultural Area Food and Farming Campaign.

His aim is to promote small scale agroecological farming as a viable economic alternative and land reform model for the PHA, starting with his own one-hectare farm, known as Vegkop farm, on which he is experimenting with crop diversity, crop rotation, indigenous plants to attract pollinators and support biodiversity, selling his produce through markets and other alternative

channels. In order to build his own vision for the PHA, however, he must also organise resistance to a plethora of alternative developments and land uses proposed for the area, including housing and sand mining.

In a sense, Sondag's own journey as a food and farming activist has roots in his childhood, growing up in a close-knit and civic-minded Muslim family of small business owners in the PHA. He and his family were forcibly removed from the PHA to Kuilsrivier, a town located about 25 kilometres outside of Cape Town, under the apartheid-era Group Areas Act when he was 6 years old. As an adult, memories of the freedom of vast open space and farmland attracted him back to the PHA, in spite of conflicted

feelings about his family's history of forced removal from the area. For many years, he owned a bakery in Manenberg, and finally in 1991 he bought one hectare of land in the PHA, where he and his father contemplated growing tomatoes commercially.

The PHA is a 3000 hectare parcel of land that has been under cultivation since German settlers arrived to farm in the 1800s, and which continues to supply a significant share (as much as 80 percent for some types) of fresh produce such as cabbages, spinach, onions, tomatoes and the like consumed by Capetonians (Battersby-Lennard & Haysom 2012; Sondag 2016). The landscape is a curious mixture of the bucolic -- cows graze, tractors roll through green fields where farm workers are busy weeding -- and the derelict, interspersed with abandoned plots of land strewn with rubble and waste dumped illegally, the odd house with its roof caved in, huge open pit sand mining operations, commercial warehouses, including a massive SPAR depot, and informal housing settlements.

Increasingly over the last eight years, developers have come calling, and Sondag has found himself fighting battles with the city to block major new housing and commercial developments on the land, which he says would destroy a unique farming area that is vital to the city's future food security, not least because the massive Cape Flats Aquifer underneath this soil provides free and abundant water year-round for farming in a water-scarce region with scarce rainfall for the summer growing season; and the PHA constitutes one of the last remaining open floodplain areas on the

densely populated Cape Flats, where the water soaks through unpaved fields to recharge the aquifer.

Sondag began farming here in 2006. He had done the calculations and thought he could turn a profitable business growing tomatoes in hydroponic tunnels on this land. A grant from the Department of Agriculture provided the capital to install the tunnels. What he did not anticipate was being locked into dependence on chemical fertiliser inputs -- and when the financial crash of 2008 came, he found that his production costs multiplied while the price he earned for his produce stayed the same. His business failed and he suffered a breakdown, and nearly lost his land. He says:

*Something was wrong with the whole business model and my approach. It took a whole long painful journey for me to move from that kind of chemically dependent industrial farmer/ grower... to where I am now. The journey led me to rethink my own values, actually... Context is so important for me now, because you can't farm or do anything outside of the context of the environment.*

Credit: Courtesy of PHA Food & Farming

*The Philippi Horticultural Area is vital to the city's food and water security, but faces multiple threats of development*





Sonday describes the experience of having his whole model collapse as a kind of awakening:

*What happened was that actually I started looking around me. And then I realised that actually I've been staying here since 2001, but I don't know the area. I may know one or two of my neighbours, but I don't know the condition of the area. That put me onto a journey where we started to say, look, we have issues of crime in the area, issues of lack of services... so let's get organised. So me and a couple of neighbours started the ball rolling, getting politically active in the area... so we organised a non-racial civic<sup>1</sup>... the idea was to get organised in a way that we could start to engage with the council and government, to say this is what we want in terms of service delivery.*

He and his neighbours organised the Schappenkraal civic group, which brought together the PHA's remaining white commercial farmers, a handful of emerging non-white farmers, landowners and informal settlement dwellers to address issues of farming, housing, crime, lack of services, illegal dumping and commercial, industrial and residential development of the PHA. Just as this new civic formed, a developer submitted a proposal to the city to build a 472 hectare housing development on PHA land. Sonday recalls:

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<sup>1</sup>Prior to this, Sonday says, a white commercial farmers' association was the only voice representing the area.

*As a civic, this was one of the first things we had to deal with: do we want this? Is it good? Is it bad? ... I was head of the planning committee... We spoke to a bunch of people, to farmers, to farm-workers, to property owners, to informal settlement people... and the outcome was that people didn't actually want the development. People wanted services more than development... So we opposed the development as a civic, but more than that, we kind of put down a blueprint of what do we want this area to develop into... we developed our own spatial plan of the area... We knew people needed housing, we knew people needed jobs, but we knew also that we wanted this area to remain as a farming area.*

He laughs:

*You know, deep down, I think I discovered I was like my mother and my father, also community-oriented. My father was a businessman, but he was also somebody who made sure that the people around him are also uplifted. My mother is one of the founders of an old age home... (He laughs) So I think the inspiration for the craziness comes from them. I blame them.*

Sonday also says he felt it was important to him to be part of a process that was not only pointing out problems and complaining to the city, but also offered constructive, proactive solutions.

At the same time, he began reading authors such as Raj Patel

and Michael Pollan, whose critiques of commercial food and farming systems resonated with his own experiences, and led him to embrace agro-ecology. Sondag's descriptions of the influences of these authors on his own thinking reflects Sage's view of such activist-academics as 'shaping cosmologies' that come to define broader social movements (2014). As an emerging farmer himself, Sondag began to think of agroecology as a more viable model for small emerging farmers and land reform beneficiaries, and he began to see the PHA as a potential testing ground for these new approaches. Of reading *Stuffed and Starved* by Raj Patel, he recalls:

*One of the things I learned from his book was the externalities of the food system. He's talking about on a global level, but it also happens at a local level. I've experienced it myself.*

Sondag's tour of the PHA includes a site where a new commercial and housing development of 40,000 units has been proposed (Sondag 2016). According to Sondag, PHA farmers produce 150,000 tonnes of fresh produce and flowers a year, and play a crucial role as suppliers to the local informal food economy (Battersby-Lennard & Haysom 2012). Sondag counts some 50 crops being grown here, such as cabbage, spinach, potatoes, onions and carrots. A thousand head of the cows, sheep and other livestock raised here supply the informal economy, and also are slaughtered in cultural religious ceremonies and rituals held across Cape Town.

According to Sondag, the city supports a broad narrative in which the PHA is a derelict zone in which no one really wants to farm, which supports their view of the PHA as a site for new housing developments to ease the strains of local population growth and growing demand for housing. Sondag, on the other hand, presents a narrative in which the PHA performs vital ecosystem services, particularly through the recharge of the Cape Flats Aquifer and the production of healthy, local, affordable food. In this narrative, an emerging new cadre of black smallholder agro-ecological farmers would become the custodians of this unique social-ecological resource, resisting the current dominant patterns of maldevelopment in the city, driven by an extractive neoliberal mode of governance.

This narrative extends to the political system, as Sondag interrogates the state of participatory democracy in South Africa, through relating his own experiences of poor service delivery and opaque consultation processes about new developments proposed in the PHA. 'A lot of the issues we touch on are actually poor governance,' he says.

Returning to Vegkop Farm, Sondag explains more of his thinking about developing new agro-ecological models of farming for emerging black farmers in the PHA. It is Tuesday, and several volunteers are weeding in the fields. A one-story structure nearby houses the Food and Farming Campaign centre, the concrete walls adorned with posters and pickets carrying such slogans as

'Resistance is Fertile'. This is a space for events, gatherings, sharing knowledge among farmers, activists and policymakers. The space has hosted public seminars on the aquifer with scientists, meetings with policymakers, even a book launch.

Sonday describes this as a multifunctional space, aiming to generate diverse ecosystem services and income streams, while likewise bringing together diverse communities of people: currently he and a small group of volunteers are building a dam, piling up mounds of earth as windbreaks to shelter plants from harsh, dry summer winds. The farming system under development here is aimed at generating multiple income streams and diverse ecological inputs, for example fish, eggs, birds for meat and manure, as well as indigenous fynbos to maintain functional biodiversity and harbour beneficial insects. He plans to introduce between 75 and 100 species of vegetables, fruit, flowers, medicinal plants, and nut trees. 'One of the things is you don't want to delete your local environment, your local grass species, your local trees... You make it part of your production system', Sonday explains.

The goal is to develop a financially viable model of diversified, small-scale farming, which can then serve as a template for other emerging black farmers, Sonday says. This means things like identifying a small shredder as an important resource to have on every farm to ensure steady supplies of compost, which according to Sonday is far more important than having a tractor. The idea is

to build this model, demonstrate that it works, and then advocate for appropriate forms of governmental support to enable others to replicate it. He says:

*There's no doubt about it, small farmers need to have support from government. But we're thinking we need support on the farm in terms of infrastructure and to help put systems in place, but actually the farm is supposed to take care of itself... We want to see how we can do this model with very little resources, because farmers are in that situation... We're developing a model to replace the industrial farming model in the future... We see in future that this area will have 1000 one-hectare or two-hectare farms and a diversity of what is produced and the way it's produced. It's a dream we're fighting for.*

Sonday then tells a story which underscores ways in which farming practices have adapted over time in the PHA to serve the changing needs of a fast-growing city:

*You see, this area is very interesting. It started off in 1885 as a highly intensive food producing area. Before that, the Khoi and the San used this area for grazing, for the animals. So because the city was growing, we needed more vegetables, this area was developed to a vegetable farming area. So that history of starting off small, those farmers you know they were from Germany. They were promised paradise (laughs) they had a big problem! They washed away in winter and they baked and*

*blew dry in summer with the south-easter. But they overcame all the odds and developed a food production model, which served the city and which served them well. Gradually they moved into a large scale industrial setup and that's not working anymore for them either. So now we are carrying the new vision for how we want to see it in future again, you see it's very interesting, and we're also starting off in a difficult position.*



*Fascinated with seeds, Zayaan Khan has developed the Seed Biblioteek, a local seed exchange to preserve seed sovereignty and diversity*

# Discussion



The stories in the previous section highlight diverse ways in which a small number of food innovators are responding to particular challenges of the Western Cape food landscape, in the Anthropocene.

The stories were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a method by which a researcher tries to make sense of participants' efforts at making sense of their own experiences, resulting in a 'double hermeneutic' through which rich and complex layers of meaning carried in stories and experiences can be explored (Smith et al. 2009).

In that process of interpretation, three key resilience frames --

Rootedness, Resourcefulness and Resistance (Brown 2015) emerged as useful 'resilience capacity' lenses through which to view the stories and explore ways of linking them with resilience concepts.

## Rootedness

Rootedness is concerned with the relationships that hold people within a community, culture, identity and place (Brown 2015). Rootedness deals with the physical, emotional and conceptual qualities of these relationships.



In all five stories gathered for this work, for example, heritage surfaced as an important theme in people's attachments to their communities and their environment, which gave meaning to their work. As Mgcoyi relates, for example, a sense of connection to her grandmother's old stories about life in a bygone rural community enriched her own experience of permaculture farming and community building at Tyisa Nabanye.

Bringing out another aspect of heritage, Khan, meanwhile, narrates how learning about local and global seed laws, aimed at promoting commercial, proprietary seed systems, raised powerful feelings of opposition that fuelled her activism, aligned with deep personal values of diversity, freedom, the custodianship of ancient heritages, and even the sacredness of life itself.

Perception and awareness also surfaced as strong 'Rootedness' themes in the stories, as participants described how their own thinking and ways of seeing the world were sometimes influenced by a particular experience, such as Sondag's failure at commercial farming, which he then describes as helping to spark his turn to agro-ecology, a key principle of his activism.

Several of the participants expressed a strong sense of 'responsibility to the land', and related how this developed through a deepening awareness of the intricate visible and invisible relationships that support life. This was particularly palpable in van der Merwe's story of immersion in the unique *strandveld fynbos*,

and developing a keen appreciation of all the intricately timed relationships among different insects and flowers that sustain the fragile biodiversity. Khan and van der Merwe both underscore the importance of connecting to the land and ecology through the different flavours, herbs, salts, clays, resins that make up its unique character and identity.

These Rootedness themes highlighted in the stories suggest powerful possibilities of reconnection between people and nature in the Anthropocene.

Weber proposes the idea of 'Enlivenment' as a term reflecting the 'freedom as individuals and groups to be <<alive in connectedness>><sup>1</sup> - the freedom that comes only through aligning one's individual needs and interests with those of the larger community. Only this integrated freedom can provide the power to reconcile humanity with the natural world' (2013: 12).

Participants' stories captured both the joyful possibilities of this idea, as well as some of the difficult tensions and conflicted meanings of such reconnection, on a planet of disturbed ecologies, and in societies scarred by long legacies of dispossession and injustice.

In the Rootedness theme, there is a key aspect of connection and recognition – through one's intimate attachment or connection to a place or a community, one recognises changes which may

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<sup>1</sup>The author's style of punctuation is preserved here from the original text.

be critical to forming responses to change, as in a story Rusch tells of finding edible wild pioneers amidst failing wheat crops.

The idea of Rootedness may thus shed light on some of the particular values and relationships that inform a person's or a community's particular ways of responding to change.

## Resourcefulness

Brown's definition of resourcefulness considers how different kinds of resources including 'capacities, knowledges, innovation and learning' may be 'accessed and used in response to change' (Brown 2015: 3).

The role of intuition, or as Rusch called it, instinctiveness, surfaced as an important resource that food innovators draw upon to shape their own independent approaches to making change, working at the margins and liminal spaces between formal governance mechanisms and centres of power.

This intuitive dimension of resourcefulness resonates somewhat with the resilience principle of managing complex adaptive systems from a complexity worldview (Biggs et al. 2012), as their stories of working with fluidity, sensitivity and responsiveness to their particular context suggest mental models that are attuned to complexity and resilience thinking.

'Sympoeisis' is a term, borrowed from Donna Haraway (2016) that reflects the generative and community-oriented qualities of the approaches brought by Khan and other participants to developing the projects in ways that both draw on and enrich their diversity. This refers to the capacity of a community to draw on its diverse resources and relationships, to build and generate rich forms of response to various opportunities and challenges. This idea also speaks to the resilience principle of broadening participation to enable learning and sharing (Biggs et al. 2012). It encompasses different themes of inclusivity, collaboration, participation, social capital and collective wellbeing.

Khan, for example, describes the Slow Food Youth Network as being a space for meeting the challenges faced by young people, particularly in accessing education and employment. Khan's stories highlight the resilience and vulnerability of young people, as she describes how the network serves as a vehicle through which young people are 'changing the game' and broadening the diversity of options and strategies for developing communities and livelihoods, for example through linking cultural work, artistry and small industries to food system change. The result is a movement being built 'on the one hand through friendship but on the hand through artistry'. This anecdote reflects also the importance of self-organising informal social networks of social support and inclusion as a resource which may help the adaptive capacity of communities, and their ability to thrive amidst uncertainty (Berkes & Ross 2013: 6-11).

One generative practice in the Slow Food Youth Network that Khan highlights, is the practice of cooking, developing new recipes, and sharing food together in the network, which stemmed from a need to feed many people cheaply, often from donated food or food waste, at gatherings. This practice reflects 'how people collaborate... and the trends that come out in the group through one person's innovation, and the stories of how the recipes move... so you learn about a particular leaf (like) dune spinach, and all of a sudden you see lots of people using it in the community, in different ways'.

Khan's stories of group experimentation with combining and substituting different indigenous food ingredients into the pot speaks to some of the emergent, unplanned, spontaneous, generative, adaptive qualities of the network, and the ways in which such qualities may become rooted in the identity of the network through food (Khan 2016, Haider & van Oudenhoven 2015). It also speaks to the different forms of diversity -- in diet, in livelihood strategies, in forms of participation -- that are supported as communities co-create and find ways to enact the values of care and responsibility for the land and each other, as discussed under the Rootedness section.

## Resistance

Brown (2015: 3) conceptualises resistance as a process of opening up fertile new spaces and sites for change to be 'shaped and mobilised'. In this work, the idea of resistance emerged as a way of framing how participants employ their agency in working towards what they envision to be positive change, particularly in subtle ways such as through shifts in values.

Resistance was about activating small transformative spaces and places, and introducing small transformative shifts -- towards eating a more diverse local diet incorporating indigenous food; towards changing people's perceptions and experiences of food; towards growing indigenous food in small spaces ripe for cross-fertilisation of ideas; towards shaping new opportunities for youth to become bakers, farmers, food processors and artists within a network of mutual exchange and support.

The resistance theme also encapsulates participants' descriptions of their efforts to make these changes in the face of maldevelopment, land insecurity, unresponsive bureaucracy, poverty and injustice, and livelihood struggles, and sometimes in confrontation with powerful interests (O'Brien 2012; Moore et al. 2014). Important questions are raised in the idea of transformation, especially deliberate or purposive transformation: who decides? What is challenged? How strong is the resistance to change? (O'Brien 2012: 670).

All of the participants' different stories reflected a view of resistance as being partly about engaging in change as a process. While exploring the *strandveld fynbos*, for example, van der Merwe describes his process of interpreting the landscape onto the plate in different literal, figurative and conceptual layers.

In the interpretative process, this interaction revealed itself to be a highly creative act of generative resistance -- creating a radically different experience of food, and shifting one's relationship with food from that of a passive consumer to that of an active participant in experiencing different dimensions of food, the 'enlivenment' of all its connections and relationships in the landscape.

This insight at the same time reflects Khan's statement of food being about so much more than 'flavour and fullness'. The meal itself becomes an expression of the complex, dynamic relationship between food and landscape -- and thus plants a seed of possibility for more enduring transformations of dietary and cultural practice to begin to take root, connected to a far more intimate sense of place and ecology that is rooted in adopting value systems attuned to the natural environment.

For Khan, Rusch and van der Merwe, acts of bringing food to life through creative engagement with the landscape thus becomes powerful resistance to the placeless commodification of industrial food, and a powerful means of reclaiming a sense of respect for

the land, learning from the land, and appreciating how we are supported by the land.

The idea of 'refugia' expressed in Brown (2015), Haraway (2016) and Folke et al. (2016) resonates with participants' descriptions of finding generative niches to practice indigenous, resilient urban agriculture, or to build new models of agroecology to inspire others. In a sense, these niches may serve as autonomous spaces (Haider & van Oudenhoven 2015; Wilson 2014) the spaces created through engaging with food, in which the dominant power dynamics so often attached to food can be circumvented.

In this light, narrative diversity becomes another resource to draw upon in creating rich future possibilities in the diverse refugia where the Seeds projects described in this work are germinating.

Khan speaks about finding the necrotic spaces in these dominant systems and harnessing the potential of alternative spaces to regenerate new forms of life. As Khan observes, this metaphor of transformation, in which death rots away old structures which give birth to new life, is another lesson from nature, taken from the *funghi* kingdom (Tsing 2012). It resonates with ideas of alternative geographies and networks that grow new food systems in parallel with the old. They persist, and through their persistence they retain the potential to grow into the necrotic spaces of the 'dying' system - reflected also in Rusch's story about walking up to the top of the sacred hill and seeing indigenous edibles growing where industrial wheat crops had failed.

# Conclusion



We conclude with reflections on the storymaking process and the further potential contributions of this method towards an understanding of social-ecological resilience.

Storymaking was an approach that emerged through the exploratory design of the study. The encounters with participants had an open, flowing, emergent feel which we observed allowed for richer, more spontaneous and unscripted stories to flow, than had we stuck to a script.

Place also served as an effective prompt in guiding the emergence of the interview towards 'invisible' value systems, and in grounding some of the stories in ideas of lived resilience. Being

on Signal Hill with Khan for example, surfaced an ancient story about past abundance and about knowledge being developed from the land that provided important context for understanding Khan's values and approaches to change through the SFYN. In Mgcoyi's interview at Tyisa Nabanye, and in Sunday's interview in the contested landscape of the PHA, there was a palpable sense of the fragility and vulnerability of the Seed, which is inextricably part of its identity and its location on a contested site in the middle of a gentrifying city.

Using the IPA process, we found that rich insights emerged, particularly as we gravitated towards the three themes of Rootedness, Resourcefulness and Resistance. We found these



concepts struck many chords with our interpretations of the experiences of the food innovators, and pushed us to deeper levels of insight.

In a resourcefulness capacity, for example, diversity was expressed as a resource that could be drawn upon: which on the one hand contributed to learning and innovation (for example, the ecological diversity of the strandveld inspired and shaped van der Merwe's innovative cuisine) and on the other hand, social diversity and inclusion was an important value, for example in the Slow Food Youth Network, through which the identity and culture of the network were shaped through creative processes.

In a resistance capacity, the storymaking and analysis processes enabled us to recognise diversity as a quality that was supported and was able to persist and thrive in narrative networks and in marginal refugia. In this capacity, Seeds projects could be understood as refuges of narrative diversity, as well as other forms of diversity: for example ecological, cultural and socio-economic diversity.

Through this interpretation process, we find stories to be an effective way of teasing out some of the more subtle aspects of resilience, as well as perhaps the subjective nature of resilience capacities, reflected in the prominence of particular themes such as creativity and intuition, for example, in the stories of some participants more than others.

These findings indicate that the storymaking approach may have rich potential for further development and use as a social-ecological resilience tool -- potentially both in contributing towards assessing the less tangible aspects of resilience in particular contexts, for example through doing a similar study with a particular group that has particular resilience 'aims'; and as a tool to help communities purposefully understand and build resilience through interpreting their own stories through resilience frames.

We believe that more participatory approaches could be brought into the process, so that for example communities or individuals are involved in gathering their own stories and generating the frames for analysing these stories. A more targeted approach to storymaking, i.e. in a particular community, and even potentially as a follow up study to one of the Seeds that was part of this study, could yield more tangible or directly applicable results, for example as people gain insight through storymaking to the particular qualities that influence their resilience, and how to support these capacities.

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