Eating from One Pot

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As poverty and unemployment deepen in contemporary South Africa, the burning question becomes, how do the poor survive? Eating from One Pot provides a compelling answer. Based on intensive fieldwork, it shows how many African households are on the brink of collapse. That they keep going at all can largely be attributed to the struggles of older women against poverty. They are the fulcrum on which household survival turns.

This book describes how households in two different areas in KwaZulu-Natal are sites of both stability and conflict. As one of the interviewees put it: “We eat from one pot and should always help each other.” Yet the stability of family networks is becoming fragile because of the enormous burden placed on them by unemployment and unequal power relations. Through careful analysis, the experiences of survival are discussed in relation to the restructuring of the country’s welfare and social policies, and the extension of social grants. Mosoetsa argues that these policies shape the livelihoods that people pursue in order to survive under desperate conditions, but fail to address the root causes of poverty and inequality.

"Eating from One Pot tells a tale of fragmentation and resilience, impoverishment and survival, despair and hope. In many ways therefore this book tells the story of post-apartheid South Africa where inequality and dire poverty have blighted the celebratory mood that followed the 1994 democratic breakthrough and dashed the hope for the egalitarian future that so many people fought for. This book is a superb illustration of the importance of rigorous social science research to understand and unravel the dilemmas of our rapidly changing times."
— Sakhela Buhlungu, Professor of Sociology, University of Pretoria. Author of A Paradox of Victory - COSATU and the Democratic Transformation in South Africa

"Sarah Mosoetsa investigates the fall out of plant closures in the garment and footwear industries of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa ... She entered the hidden abode of household production to discover a very different world from the one painted by the merchants of social capital and livelihood strategies. Rather than the romance of poor people struggling together to survive, she found a fractious and often violent world."
— From the foreword by Michael Burawoy, Professor of Sociology, the University of California, Berkeley.

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