

A troubling view of food: tensions across matters of fact, concern, and care through the case of raw milk

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ABSTRACT ORIGINAL

This paper explores the relationships, tensions, and contradictions inherent in the phrase “food is political.” The concepts of “matters of fact,” “matters of concern,” and “matters of care” play critical roles in the argument. Arguing that agrifood debates arise from diverse relationalities that sit in tensions according to their “style” of fact and concerns, a thought experiment is conducted, proposing a figure and four archetypes. While the exercise may seem contrived, its value lies in surfacing the various ways these matters—of fact, concern, and care, respectively—interrelate, often in tension. To convey this value and further illuminate each archetype, the conceptual framework is employed to unpack the raw milk debate, which has recently gained national (US) attention. The paper concludes by suggesting the abandonment of the view that agrifood systems must be “fixed,” proposing recommendations that embrace ambiguity and tension. We must stay with the trouble, representing a significant departure from agrifood imaginaries that continue to present phenomena such as food, health, disease, and nutrition in black-and-white (e.g., good/bad, safe/unsafe) terms. © The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2025.