

Navigating Identity Through Food: A Second Generation Sinhala Australian Diasporic Experience in Sydney

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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ABSTRACT

Narratives of food can reveal the rich dimensions of how people construct or repackage ethnicity in the diaspora and identify their place within multicultural Australia. My research centres the everyday cooking and eating practices of second generation Sinhala Australians who have moved away from their parents' home and are in families of their own. By doing so, I will explore the cultural transmission of foodways from generation to generation in a multicultural Australia.

Using ethnographic methods, this study takes place in the kitchens and eating areas of the homes of the second generation. The kitchen can be viewed as a space that caters to the performance of social values and behaviour of the occupants. Furthermore, material items in these spaces can provide insights on cultural realities.

For the second generation, they experience a reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001) for familiar foods are sparked by contemplating familial relationships, longing of a childhood that is no more, and through the images, sounds and smells in their everyday life that reminds them of the culture that their immigrant parents so adamantly tried to raise them with.

In this thesis, I illustrate that the second generation's everyday cooking and eating practices are shaped into something that works within and reflects their present cultural reality. The embodied sensory memories of Sri Lankan food serve as the catalyst that enables the second generation to make sense of feelings of longing for identity. These nostalgic memories do not represent a yearning for their parents' homeland, but rather for the socialisation of home.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

When people eat, they not only ingest nutrition but also symbolic meanings (Fischler, 1988). Food practices are a deeply sensorial act that encodes very profound ideas about the past as well as the future. Furthermore, food is a “powerful boundary maker” for communities, particularly diasporic communities, as it can signify ethnicity and class (Beagan and D’Sylva 2011: 219). Through the repeated daily act of eating, people can come to articulate not only their distinctiveness, but also their membership to larger constructions of family, ethnicity and nation (Counihan 1999; Wilk 1999) as well as encoding culture and cultural transformations. Moreover, eating and cooking are reflexively embedded in everyday life. Studying everyday food practices adeptly positions scholars to connect the intricacies of everyday experience to broader social, cultural, economic and political structures and patterns (Appadurai 1981). Therefore, I have centred my own research on the everyday eating and cooking practices of diasporic people.

This thesis centres the everyday cooking and eating practices of middle class second generation Sinhala Australians who have moved away from their parents’ home and are in families of their own. I am interested in how the second generation negotiate the homely practices of food that they supposedly inherited from their family, with the ideas about food that are prevalent in dominant society.

Counihan (2009) centres her research on “food-centered life histories” (see Counihan, 2004; 2009). She laments that “food provides a powerful voice and sparks meaningful memories for people” (2009: 7). Food is a strong cultural expression of identity. The stories we tell ourselves about food related practices are bound by the physical act of eating. Inspired by this approach, my aim for this thesis is to centre the voices of my participants to reveal their lived experiences of food preparation, cooking, consumption and exchange.

The gap in the theorisation of foodways in a diasporic context are generational distinctions. While migrants themselves may elevate food traditions in their new cultural space, it is the way they communicate and inculcate these traditions that is interesting. The second generation do not simply embody the culture they were raised in but are shaped by their present cultural reality. Focusing on the second generation provides a fresh focal point to unpack ideas about the permanency and evolution of diasporas in a multicultural Australia.

A Brief Overview of the Sinhala Diasporic Community in Sydney

The Sinhalese are one of the ethnic groups in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is an island located approximately thirty kilometres from the south-east coast of India. According to the Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2014), the earliest record of emigration from Sri Lanka to Australia was in the late nineteenth century. These migrants sought employment in cane plantations in northern Queensland. In New South Wales and Victoria, government reports indicated that Sri Lankan migrants worked as pearl divers and in goldfields (Australian Department of

Immigration and Citizenship, 2014). These records do not specify the ethnic groups the migrant workers belonged to.

The Sinhala diaspora in Sydney has established a number of institutions that foster a sense of community. These institutions were mostly founded in the 1990s largely due to the fact that Sri Lankans migrating to Australia increased significantly. The Sinhala people who migrated during this time were mostly skilled migrants belonging to the middle class (Australian Department of Immigration and Citizenship 2014). The Sinhala Cultural Forum of N.S.W was established in 1990 to cater to the cultural needs of Sinhala migrants in Sydney. The organisation is responsible for many projects such as publishing a quarterly magazine and the ‘Bak Maha Rangana’ which is an annual performance night that seeks contributions from Sri Lankan Australians in Sydney. As a child, I, too, have performed in the Bak Maha Rangana as a student of a Sinhala dancing school, and a Sinhala language school. Which brings me to the establishment of language schools. Language plays an important role in cultural retention in subsequent generations (Hussain, 2005: 27). There are three prominent Sinhala language schools that are still operating in Sydney. The North Parramatta Sinhala School was established in 1990, the Minto Sinhala School was established in 1993, and the Blacktown Sinhala School was established in 2006. These language schools also offer Dhamma lessons. All three schools are partly funded by the Community Languages Program of the Department of Education of New South Wales.

In my research, many Sinhala people referred to their Sinhala culture as Sri Lankan culture. This is largely due to the fact that Sinhala people are a privileged ethnic group in Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan nationhood post-independence was built on

Sinhala-Buddhist chauvinism. Therefore, taking cue from Arjun Appadurai (1996: 18), I do not use ‘Sri Lankan’ as a “reified social fact or crude nationalist reflex” but rather as an optic to examine the everyday lives of second generation Sinhala Australians.

Methodology

Over the course of three months, I have observed the food practices of six households in the broader area of Sydney. The participants were adults who had moved out of their parents’ home and live with families of their own. At least one adult member of each household identified as second generation Sinhala Australian. My fieldwork included attending one weeknight meal and one weekend meal in the participants’ home. Therefore, ‘the field’ that I entered was that of the kitchens and eating areas of the participants’ home. On some occasions I was invited multiple times to observe special events or situations such as Nadisha’s home blessing, or to follow up with the participants.

My background in anthropology drew me towards ethnographic methods. The focus area of my study coupled with my background in anthropology compelled me to take an ethnographic approach. Interviews on its own cannot fully encompass the unconscious dynamics of people’s food practices. Therefore, participant observation is ideal to access and understand the rituals and experiences of the everyday life of people. I used participant observation as a way to record information beyond what participants verbally tell me. Eating and cooking is an embodied experience. How we procure, prepare, cook and ingest food involves the interaction of our senses and

memories. Implementation of participant observation elicits a fuller knowledge production and positions us to better understand the intricacies of the everyday food practices in people's lives. As Tim Ingold (2017: 23) argues "participant observation, in short, is not a technique of data gathering but an ontological commitment". When conducting this method, the researcher needs to be intimately embedded within the community they are conducting research in by being present and involved in the participants' lives. However, due to the time restrictions of the Master of Research year, I could not conduct a fully immersive participant observation.

To supplement participant observation, I used the diary method as a way to gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants' eating and cooking practices. The diary method allows for data to be collected over a longer period (Bartlett and Milligan 2015:8) which was appealing for this study's short and tight fieldwork schedule. Furthermore, gathering data over a long period of time maximises the researcher's ability to understand the everyday practices and experiences of their participants. As I could not do so in a thorough way through participant observation, the diary method helped to partially fill that void by deepening my understanding of the lives of my participants.

The semi-structured, recorded interviews were conducted in the participants' home on the second day of observation. The empirical data I gathered during participant observation allowed me to alter my tentative interview questions to suit the interesting themes that I extracted as well as focus on aspects that I wanted further clarification on. The interview questions were used to guide participants when necessary. The aim of the interviews was not that of a formal sample survey, but rather to allow the participants to raise a variety of issues. Therefore, the interviews

did not, at large, elicit quantifiable forms of information but rather allowed me to survey for general trends or themes. Informal interviews were carried out when participants invited me to their home for follow up visits.

I am a middle class, second generation Sinhala Australian who was born and raised in Sydney. As an insider-ethnographer, I am intimately embedded within the community I conducted research in. However, I must reiterate that I do not have insider insight of the lives and experiences of my participants. Therefore, it was imperative to illustrate shared vulnerability and trust with the participants especially when they shared very intimate details of their lives. I avoided shouldering the role of ‘researcher as a stranger’ (Clifford, 1986). To do this, I disclosed my relevant personal experiences where warranted. I do want to emphasise that I do not perceive all experiences of diasporic people to be the same. Nor did I aim to render their experiences as being insignificant by sharing mine. Rather, I was engaging in the conversation as an active listener who responds accordingly.

I also use observations that I made from my visits to Sri Lanka in 2011 and 2014. These visits have collectively lasted for seven months. During my 2014 visit, I wrote extensive fieldnotes with the intention to use them for a potential Honours thesis. I used these fieldnotes to refresh my memory when writing about my observations on Sri Lankan kitchens, cooking practices, and food.

Writing autoethnography disrupts the historically dominant forms of social science knowledge production where so called objective forms of knowledge is championed. In my research, I will follow Chang’s (2008: 65) third conceptualisation of autoethnography where the researcher “study[s] others as the primary focus, yet also

as an entry to [their] world” or otherwise known as ‘analytical autoethnography’ (Leon Anderson, 2006). The autoethnography in my research was informed by critically reflecting on my personal experience as a second generation Sinhala Australian. I positioned these reflections to unpack, analyse and supplement existing research and original data. In this way, the boundaries between the personal and the public becomes less apparent (Harrison and Lyon 1993). When used appropriately, employing autoethnography as a method allows sociologists to “turn the eye of the sociological imagination” (Clough, 2000: 179).

Using the combination of participant observation, interviews, diary method and autoethnography has amply positioned me to extract qualitative descriptions, survey recurring themes and patterns, and develop theories to conceptualise the phenomena that I have observed whilst engaging with the participants in this study.

Situating the Study in Existing Literature

A holistic approach to the study of food should involve a dialogue across and between various disciplines and sub-disciplines. Therefore, I will be situating my research in literature from a variety of disciplines, but I largely draw from the anthropology of food, sociology of food, cultural studies, and migration studies. In this section, I define key terms and survey the literature that grounds my thesis.

The conceptualisation of diaspora that I will be employing follows the theorists of diasporas such as Naficy (1993), Brah (1996) and Clifford (1994). These scholars use the concept of diaspora as a sociocultural condition and assert that diaspora

cannot be regarded as a discrete concrete entity. Rather, diasporas are a product of the convergence of people, discourse and cultural forms.

Brah (1996:628) emphasises that location is central to analysing diasporic communities as diasporas are never identical. Hussain (2005: 7-8) notes, “each diaspora is a formation of many journeys and therefore has its own history and its own particularities”. Even within Australia, Sinhala diasporic communities across cities have their own uniqueness. Nassy Brown’s (2005) ethnography on Liverpool-born Black people, illustrates the importance of place in aiding diasporic people to construct personhood within their community. This is why I emphasise that the Sinhala Australian diasporic community that I refer to in my research is situated in the suburbs of the broader area of Sydney.

The term ‘generation’ has a multitude of meanings. Within the literature of migration studies, it is generally accepted that the term ‘generation’ represents various cohorts of migrants in the host country (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). The first generation represents those who immigrated to the host country (Ellis and Goodwin-White, 2006). On the other hand, categorising what constitutes as second generation is highly debated due to the complexities of certain variables. Are second generation migrants only those who were born in the hostland? Can those who migrated to the hostland at a young age be considered as the second generation? How do we define ‘young age’? My thesis does not aim to solve these definitional problems. For the purpose of my study, I define the second generation as the immigrants’ children who were either born in the hostland or migrated with their family but were socialised and educated in the hostland at an early age (Portes and Rumbaut, 2001; Crul and Vermuelen, 2003; Ellis and Goodwin-White, 2006).

Modood et al. (1994) argues that South Asian British youth form their identity by reflecting on how they identify with their parents' cultural values and their imaginings of the homeland (Anderson, 1983) within the dominant British culture. It is rare for the second generation to completely reject their parents' cultural values (Drury 1991). However, that is not to say these cultural values are accepted as it is. It is common for the second generation to partially accept, repackage as well as reinvent their parents' values (Drury, 1991). Although the context of Modood et al's (1994) and Drury's (1991) research differs from this study, these ideas of repackaging and reinventing their parents' cultural values strongly emerges through the investigation of the food practices of the second generation. It is important to note that this does not mean that one identity is chosen over the other (Modood et al; 1994). Baldassar (2001: 25), in her research on second generation Italian-Australian's visits to their ancestral home, points out that since ethnic identity is socially constructed, it cannot become 'diluted'. Instead, she argues that "ethnic identity must be considered as a dynamic social resource, a set of processes that change over time" (2001: 25).

A sense of home, whether that be in the homeland or hostland, is formed through emotion and memory intermingling with the tangible world (Rapport and Dawson; 1998: 8). The imagination informs how first generation migrants construct the homeland they left behind (Anderson, 1983). In the memory of the first generation, their homeland remains unchanged when in reality the homeland changes through the passage of time. Food is an avenue that first generation migrants, particularly South Asians (Appaduari, 1981), use to aid place-making practices (Ray, 2004).

Holtzman (2006) has comprehensively documented literature on the relationship between food and memory. This particular study, centres arguments around how the evocation of memories is the result of sensorial engagements of food. In this thesis, I employ an embodied sensory approach to unpack ideas about the cultural transmission of foodways in the Sinhala diasporic community in Sydney. Bourdieu's (1984) habitus, Connerton's (1989) bodily memory, and Stoller's (1994) embodied memories, have been drawn upon in studies of food to conceptualise the relationship between gastronomic memory and the body. One such scholar is Sutton (2000, 2001) whose work emphasises that the sensuous experiences of food conjures recollection that is cognitive, emotional and physical. Ben Highmore (2011:139) emphasises that the act of consumption imbricates the five senses. When contemplating our experiences of food, each sense converges, and as a result, they are at times indistinguishable. Highmore (2011:140) furthers this idea by arguing that emotions and sensory experiences are also imbricated. When analysing the embodied sensuous memories of food, it is important to remember to rely on culturally specific notions of sensuality itself, as analysis centred around food in academia has the tendency to yield to Western epicurean cultures (Holtzman: 2006; 365).

According to Abarca and Colby (2016: 5), "a unique quality of food memories is that although their sensory and emotional implications function within the individual, they are always socially and culturally grounded". In addition, "The sensory landscapes of 'home'" (Duruz, 2010: 47) and the implications on memory, place and diasporic identity has been extensively explored through the lens of food. For example, Ghassan Hage (1997) illustrates the importance of the feelings of familiarity in home food for Lebanese immigrants in Western Sydney. He argues that

home food provides a sense of security as immigrants are aware of the eating and cooking specifications of these foods. This is also seen in Lisa Law's (2001) research on the weekly gathering of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong. Law argues that the women share stories whilst consuming 'Filipino home cooked' food as a way to ground their present transnational reality. In a similar vein, Simon Choo's (2004: 203) sensory driven account illustrates that Malaysian food is an everyday expression of nationhood for Malaysian migrants in Australia as food fosters the "remembrance of things past". While the above studies illustrate examples of nostalgia evoked through sensory engagements with food, Lee (2000) shows a different perspective. Elderly Korean migrants in Japan who have difficulty eating spicy Korean food due to old age have interpreted the change to their taste as a threat to their identity as they feel they are losing their 'Koreanness' in Japan.

Nostalgia is a form of memory. Svetlana Boym's (2001), describes nostalgia in two ways. The first is restorative nostalgia which "stresses *nostos* (home) and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home." The second is reflective nostalgia which "thrives in *álgos*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wistfully, ironically, desperately". The nostalgia that first generation migrants experience could be described as restorative as they work towards reconstructing the imagined homeland in their new home where familiar cultural rituals and symbols can be practiced and performed. Whereas, reflective nostalgia can help make sense of the deep longing that the second generation feel. Boym's conceptualisation of nostalgia is stimulating and provides an avenue to examine how the second generation experiences nostalgia.

Background Information of Participants

Family One:

Nadisha is a second generation Sinhala Australian. She was born in Sri Lanka in 1985 and migrated with her parents, Anoma and Lal in 1990. Nadisha married James in 2016. The couple live on their own in an apartment in the Inner West of Sydney. James, born in 1987, identifies as a Hong Konger. His parents sent him to Australia at the age of eleven to obtain an Australian education. Both Nadisha and James work full time in the field of science.

Family Two:

Nayani is a second generation Sinhala Australian who was born in Sri Lanka in 1986 and migrated with her parents in 1990. Nayani lives with her partner, Brad. Brad was born in Australia in 1978 and identifies as Anglo-Australian. The couple live in a single level home in Western Sydney. Nayani works in the art sector whilst Brad is a hiking guide.

Family Three:

Ayomi, born in 1991, and Thehan, born in 1989, are both second generation Sinhala Australians. Ayomi was born in Australia whereas Thehan was born in Sri Lanka but migrated to Australia with his family in 1991. The couple married in 2015 and live in a townhouse in the Inner West of Sydney. Ayomi is a mechanical engineer and Thehan is a lawyer.

Family Four:

Oneli is a second generation Sinhala Australian who was born in Sri Lanka in 1987

but migrated to Australia with her family in 1992. Her husband, Bavinda is a first generation Sinhala Australian. He was born and was socialised in Sri Lanka but lived in Cyprus as a university student three years prior to migrating to Australia in 2016. The couple married in 2017 and live in an apartment in the North West of Sydney. Oneli is an early education teacher and Bavinda works in recruitment.

Family Five:

Harsha is a second generation Sinhala Australian born in 1988 in Sri Lanka. She migrated to Australia in 1991 with her family. Her husband, Charlie, is a second generation Burmese Australian of Chinese descent. He was born in Australia in 1988. The couple married in 2017 but have been living together for six years in their apartment in Western Sydney. Charlie and Harsha are both chemical engineers. However, during the time of our interviews, Harsha left her job as a chemical engineer.

Family Six:

Therushi is a second generation Sinhala Australian born in 1983 in Sri Lanka. She migrated to Australia in 1989 with her family. Her husband, Kevin is a second generation Filipino Australian who was born in 1980. He and his family migrated to Australia in 1986. The couple live in a single level home in Western Sydney with their five-year-old daughter, Paiya. At the time of the interviews, Therushi was seven months pregnant and worked part time at her family's medical centre. She left her job as a lawyer in 2017. Kevin works full time as an IT manager.

CHAPTER 2

Remembering My Mother's [Two] Kitchen[s]

For the children of Sinhala migrants, the kitchen is a space that is reserved for their mother. Conversations with the women in my research revealed many stories of their mothers and their kitchens. As these women shared their memories, the stories triggered feelings of annoyance, disbelief and a tinge of amusement, but ended with acceptance and understanding. These feelings echoed in my own memories of my mother's kitchen.

One such vivid memory was when I was fifteen. My parents were preparing for a dinner party for the 'Botany crowd' at our new home. When my parents first migrated to Australia in 1990, they settled in an apartment in Botany Bay. In this apartment block were rows of newly migrated, young Sinhala families. Many homes later and their children grown, these families remained in touch. My mother carefully crafted a menu and began preparing a few dishes a couple of days in advance. As my mother always said, Sri Lankan food always tastes better after sitting in the fridge a day or two. I remember crouching beside a makeshift stove, handing ingredients to my mother as she called for them. An array of spices in repurposed jars and bottles were scattered across sheets of newspaper. The newspaper proudly wore specks of oil that marked where the *polkatu handi* (coconut spoons) rested. Coughing from the fumes of spice that escaped from the simmering clay pots, I cursed at my current predicament. Helping my mother prepare a labour-intensive feast was not a problem for me. In fact, my father and I often looked forward to it as there were ample opportunities to sneak a few delicious bites of dishes that were only

cooked on occasion. My problem was that we cooked not in our spacious kitchen, but in our cramped garage. There has been one question that has haunted me since my childhood, why did my mother have two kitchens?

Today, in the middle class homes of first generation Sinhala migrants, having two kitchens is an ordinary affair. Some families with more disposable income have fully equipped second kitchens in the garage or as an extension to their home. Others, like my mother, create makeshift kitchens on patios, in backyards, on balconies, or in the garage.

On my visits to Sri Lanka in 2014, I observed the kitchens of the Sinhala homes I visited. The homes I visited ranged from urban to rural areas and the members of the home came from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds. All the kitchen I visited were located at the back of the home. Walls separated the kitchen from the living quarters of the home and access to the kitchen was often through a hallway. To put it plainly, the kitchen was completely out of sight. In the kitchen space there were many windows and a door that leads to the backyard. If there was anyone home, the windows and backdoor in the kitchen remained opened. The appearance of kitchens in Sri Lanka are often plain yet highly functional. For example, many kitchens displayed exposed concrete and brick walls and floors. Clay and stainless steel pots were often stacked by the stove, and cups and plates of each of the family members remained within reach of the sink. The kitchen space is filled with activity. Young children play by the feet of their mother and grandmother, and ants crawl up and down the walls. Any left-over food is covered with newspaper to prevent the many flies from taking a bite, and the pungent smells of delicious food penetrate the air and eventually are swept away by the tropical breeze.

I describe the typical kitchens of Sri Lankan homes to make a point about how the design and layout of the modern kitchen in the Australian context is a constraint for first generation Sinhala women.

Srima is a 63-year-old first generation Sinhala woman and the mother of Oneli. During one of my visits to Oneli's home, her mother popped by to drop off a few items. As she showed great interest in my study, I asked her a few questions after I gained her verbal consent¹. Srima has two fully equipped kitchens. After many decades of cooking in a makeshift kitchen in the garage, her husband built her a fully covered external kitchen.

***Srima:** Our home is open planned. If the kitchen is not clean, then everybody can see it. This is very stressful for me because other people do make judgements about how you present your home. If it is messy, people will talk. It is much easier for me to leave our inside kitchen for small preparation tasks like breakfast and use the outside kitchen to prepare lunch and dinner.*

¹ Our exchange was recorded with her consent. There were times where we both spoke in Sinhala during the informal interview. As I am fluent in Sinhala, I translated those sections into English.



Figure 3 A village kitchen in Sri Lanka (Photo courtesy of Dr Rohith Gunawardena)



Figure 4 Steaming clay pots (Photo courtesy of Dr Rohith Gunawardena)

As Ray (2004) points out in his study of Bangladeshi migrants to America, breakfast is usually the first meal that migrants transform when they settle in the hostland. For Srima and her family, lunch and dinner are when they eat Sri Lankan food. Through Srima's account, we can see the clear demarcation of the two kitchens. The 'inside' kitchen remains clean and presentable for guests and the 'outside' kitchen is where the cooking actually occurs. Srima notes that her main motive is to avoid the judgements others may make about her by viewing the state of her kitchen. Grier (1992: 56) argues that in the rooms that other people see, decorative objects and furniture exists "to persuade others (and, it can be argued, also ourselves) that we actually are what our possessions claim us to be".

In Australia, the early modern kitchen was envisaged as a space that is functional but with the potential to be "invested with pleasure" (Lloyd and Johnson, 2004: 264). The opening up of the kitchen, that occurred since the 1960s, has reconstructed the kitchen from a place where design promoted functionality, thus productivity; to one of sociality and performativity (Hand and Shove 2004; Munro 2013). The use of colour and decorative elements of the kitchen conveyed the same decorative ambience of living areas (Lloyd and Johnson, 2004; Supski, 2006). For Sinhala migrants to Australia, the opening up of the kitchen does not evoke pleasure but rather a feeling of discomfort.

When I was invited to Nadisha's home blessing, her parents Anoma and Lal were there to assist her. Again, after obtaining verbal consent from both Anoma and Lal, I asked a few questions about their kitchen².

Lal: *Yes, we do have two areas where we cook. We cook our everyday meals in our proper kitchen. If we are cooking fried foods or foods that are with lots of spice and oil, then we cook outside or in the garage as we have a portable gas stove.*

Anoma: *I would have preferred if I had a kitchen outside! I do not like cooking in our kitchen. We have white marble tops, so it is very difficult to keep white because of turmeric! Grease sticks to the cupboards so I have to wipe it down all day. But worst of all is the smell. It stays in the house for a long time; it even goes upstairs. When I finish cooking, I do not want to rest in our living room with the smell of spice.*

Kavya: *Is the smell of spice something you don't like?*

Anoma: *I like it when I am cooking and when I am eating but not when it stinks up the house.*

² Again, our exchange was recorded with the consent of both Anoma and Lal. There were some parts of informal interview where we spoke in Sinhala. As I am fluent in Sinhala, I translated those sections into English by myself.

In the seminal monograph, 'Purity and Danger', Mary Douglas (1966: 35) demarcates dirt as 'matter out of place'. From my conversations with the Sinhala diasporic community in Sydney, the smells and stains of spices saturating the home can be described as 'matter out of place'. In Sri Lanka, the kitchens remain separated from the living quarters of the home and are designed in a way to stimulate ventilation. The women who spend their time cooking in the kitchen can leave the space into a new one without having to experience the same sensorial environment of the kitchen. With the increased popularity of open space design in modern homes in the West, first generation Sinhala women find themselves creating new ways to continue the separation of the kitchen space and the living space.

I want to draw attention to the fact that these women are cooking in their hostland, Australia, where the stigmatisation of the smells of the Other is prevalent.

“Stink of Spices”

When reporting on food poisoning in eateries, the Australian media has a strong tendency to associate such incidents to certain ethnic cuisines (Edwards et al., 2000: 304). In Australia, food cultures derived from the Indian Sub-Continent is often categorised as simply Indian food. Although recently, Sri Lankan street food has become a new craze in Sydney for 'foodies' to 'discover'. However, the second-generation adults in this study grew up in a time when Sri Lankan food was Indian food in the eyes of White Australia.

Indian food is often under scrutiny by Australian public discourse. Sensory regimes

can evoke discomfort, confusion, violence and disgust (Degen, 2008; Longhurst et al., 2008; Low, 2013;) and ultimately sustain racism. Miller (1997: 8) notes that disgust is followed by “the danger inherent in pollution and contamination, the danger of defilement”. Low (2009) explains how racial prejudice against Malays and Indians in Singapore are associated with smell as their bodies are stereotyped as emitting strong and unpleasant aromas. Similarly, Nayak’s (2010: 2385) research illustrates how young white men in suburban England validate their racist attitudes towards Pakistanis in England by negatively denoting brown spaces as reeking of “curry and shit”. Manalasan (2006: 41) argues that, “the immigrant body is culturally constructed to be the natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experiences and is popularly perceived to be the site of polluting and negative olfactory signs”. This idea was reflected in the accounts of many of the participants.

Nadisha shared how she hated eating Sri Lankan food in public spaces when she was growing up.

***Nadisha:** To my very core, I hated eating Sri Lankan food outside. According to my mum, I wasn’t always like that. I became picky about my food when I started school. The primary school I went to was private and Catholic and I was one of the handful of South Asian kids in the entire school. I have so many memories of kids making fun of my lunch. It wasn’t just white kids though, even Chinese, Greek and Middle-Eastern kids made fun of my lunch. I still remember the things they said about my food like how it looked like dog’s shit and smelt like it too.*

The stigmatisation of Sri Lankan food was echoed in Nayani’s account of her

experiences with micro-aggressive comments made about her mother's food.

***Nayani:** When I moved out at eighteen years old, I moved from sharehouse to sharehouse in and around my art school in Darlinghurst. The people I lived with were often people I met from school and you know... they were mostly white. I don't have any art school friends who are ethnic like me. I don't know if you know about sharehouse ethics, but usually we buy groceries together as a house and take turns cooking for one another. I didn't eat Sri Lankan food at all. We mostly ate your typical meals like lasagna, steak, mash, pies, and salads.*

***Kavya:** Did you ever try to make Sri Lankan food when you were living in the sharehouses?*

***Nayani:** No, I never felt like cooking Sri Lankan food in the house. I remember I visited my mum's house for the first time after secretly moving out (laughs). My mum was really cold towards me. As I was leaving, she gave me a lot of containers of homemade Sri Lankan food. I remember on the train ride home how the smell of the curries was so irresistible. At that point, it was nearing almost 6 months since I had any Sri Lankan food. I honestly couldn't wait to go home and eat it. When I got back home and started plating my food one of my housemates asked what I was eating because it smelt really funky and then opened the windows. It wasn't a tone of curiosity. Yeah sure, Sri Lankan food doesn't look the best, but I don't know... I just remember feeling really sad about his reaction especially since what my mum gave me were some of my favourite foods. It triggered a lot of negative*

memories of my child self, begging my mum to give me ‘normal’ food instead of Sri Lankan food.

When their existence (whether that be their food or themselves) is repeatedly being associated with negative smells, they can succumb to “the internalisation or the epidermisation of this inferiority” (Fanon, 1967: 11). Nayani, now at the age of thirty-two, has begun undoing years of internalising stereotypes about South Asian food. She started by making one of her favourite foods from her childhood; *pol roti*. Nayani’s reflections, illustrate the ways negative stereotypes, images and ideologies perpetuated by the dominant society are internalised (Pyke, 2010) and often done so without their conscious consent (Osajima, 1993). This process is what hooks (2003) coins as ‘mental colonisation’.

Both Nadisha and Nayani’s accounts of racism sheds light on how the Sri Lankan food they grew up eating conjured unwanted and unwarranted attention. How their home foods smell and look to the dominant society, preoccupies their mind and adversely affects how they perceive and engage with Sri Lankan food as well as food centred spaces like the kitchen.

The Rebellious Spirit of the Second Generation Kitchen

Janet Floyd (2004: 6) discerns that the kitchen has historically been viewed as a space that permeates the oppression of women. However, the kitchen has also been reimagined as a domestic space that possesses rebellious potential (Floyd 2004). The rebellious spirit of the kitchen is an interesting direction to examine how the second

generation of a diaspora may partially reject or accept their parents' food related practices through the way they design, organise and aestheticise their kitchens.

Participants, of each household, reflected on the designing and organisational process of their current kitchen. When describing their kitchens, I noticed that it was usually in relation to their mother's kitchen.

***Nayani:** When I was organising the kitchen, it was really important for me to have everything organised. One thing that drove me insane about my mum's kitchen was that everything was out of place in the cupboards and pantries and the bottles were mismatched so nothing really fit properly.*

***Therushi:** When I was living at home, I didn't really have much interest to learn how to cook because it was done for me. Whereas, now, I have independence... like to decorate the kitchen and buy new appliances. I like to spend time in the kitchen and experiment with food without Ammi always watching me and commenting on what I do in the kitchen. It was always Ammi's domain not mine. I didn't feel welcomed in the kitchen (laughs).*

Another common sentiment was how this process was a source of contestation between their parents and themselves. One couple, Nadisha and James, had recently purchased their first home after years of renting. The first place that they began to decorate and organise was the kitchen. Both Nadisha and James are avid cooks and enjoy indulging in new foods that they have cooked together. The kitchen space for them, and for many others, is imbued with meaning that goes beyond the act of cooking (see Bennett, 2006).



Figure 3 Nayani's spice rack.



Figure 4 Nayani's cupboards.

Nadisha's mother, Anoma, insisted on performing Sinhala-Buddhist rituals to bless the home. Nadisha recalled how she wanted to honour tradition but was bothered by the inconvenience some of these rituals entailed.

***Nadisha:** We couldn't move in when we wanted to. My mum gave us an auspicious time for us to first enter our home and it was in the middle of the night. We had work the next day!*

I was kindly invited to observe the blessing of the home which included the *kiri ithirilla* (milk over flowing ceremony). The ritual revolves around the kitchen. In Sinhala-Buddhist culture, the first item that should be brought into a new home is a Buddha statue and milk. The milk³ that was brought is boiled on the stove until it overflows from all the sides of the *kiri muttiya* (milk pot). Buddhist chanting for blessing the home are sung throughout this process. The intention of the ritual is to bless the house and the occupants with abundant prosperity, health and wealth (Weeramunda, 1983). The overflowing of milk symbolises this abundance. After the milk had overflowed on to the stove top, Nadisha groaned as she cleaned the milk stains. On a later occasion, I asked her how she felt about the ritual.

***Nadisha:** Honestly, I remember feeling a little annoyed. I'm ashamed that I felt that way now, but I was cleaning the house all morning before we unpacked our stuff... and having to clean the stove again really frustrated me.*

³ Traditionally, milk refers to coconut milk however cow's milk is now used as an alternative.

*I want to respect tradition... and I do in some ways believe in them... but...
I'm not sure if I want to do things my mum's way...*

Nadisha's reflection illustrates the tensions between the generations on how these spaces should be designed, organised, and lived in. The space that is the most contested is the kitchen. When the rituals ended, Anoma took a good look around the kitchen and advised her on how to maintain the cleanliness and integrity of the space. Some suggestions were to line the cupboards and drawers with cupboard liners; use newspaper table mats and towels to protect the kitchen bench when cooking, and stack pots and pans in cupboards with the bottom facing up or lids securely on to prevent cockroaches and other insects from contaminating the inside. She then preceded to give cooking tips. For example, she suggested to pour each spice into two separate containers – one big container and one small. Use only the small spice container for daily cooking and refill it using the contents of the big container. The reason for this is to keep the spices as airtight as possible to conserve its freshness. Anoma then went onto the balcony and examined the space. Gleefully, she exclaimed, "This is a perfect place to keep a portable gas stove!"

Nadisha and James were both confused. Anoma continued by stating that cooking foods with lots of spice and oil inside the house could cause the house from "stinking of spice" for a long time. She especially emphasised how meat and any type of frying should be cooked outside. Nadisha then replied, "Ammi, we can't do that on our apartment balcony! It's against strata rules. Our neighbours will complain about the smell. We can't follow these things like you."

Four months into their move, I visited Nadisha and James' home for the last time.

After a month or two of cooking in their kitchen, Nadisha acknowledged that maybe she should have listened to her mother's advice.

***Nadisha:** The more Sri Lankan food I cooked, the more I realised why my mum told me all those things. My white kitchen bench is already stained with turmeric... I was so careful too! It looks kind of gross. My mum has this soft glass plastic cut to cover her entire white marble kitchen bench. I always thought how it was so inconvenient to clean and more importantly how it made the kitchen look old fashioned and messy, but I can understand her now.*

***Kavya:** Does that mean you'll be buying soft glass to cover your kitchen benches?*

***Nadisha:** No way, I understand her but not enough to get some for myself. I think I'll start using more table mats and towels to cover the kitchen bench when I'm cooking.*

Here we see that the second generation do not entirely shun the transfer of their parents' values and ideas about the kitchen space. This is also seen in Oneli and Bavinda's kitchen. Oneli and Bavinda were one of the few couples that made a meal that can be considered as typically Sri Lankan by the first generation. They prepared the curries in their kitchen, but I later found out that they do not normally cook Sri Lankan food inside the apartment but actually cook Sri Lankan food on their balcony with a portable gas stove. They cooked inside because they thought that was what I

wanted to see. Their portable gas stove was a gift from Oneli's mother, Srma. Srma insisted that they cook Sri Lankan food outside on the balcony. Oneli and Bavinda never followed through with Srma's suggestion because they always thought moving from the main kitchen space to the other was a hassle. Until one day after cooking Sri Lankan food inside the home, Bavinda decided to go to the gym. He changed into his gym clothing that was in a pile of freshly washed clothes on the sofa. When he was about to leave after an intense workout at the gym, he heard a man whisper to his friend about how he reeked of curry and sweat. Bavinda and Oneli now rarely cook Sri Lankan food inside their home. Whether Bavinda reeked is not the point. The prevailing stratification of the smell of spice, "creates an ideological representation of the West as odourless and therefore neutral and the norm" (Banes 2006: 35). We can see here how the racialisation of the smell of spice impacts the consciousness of the second generation which ultimately influences how they reinterpret and engage with the kitchen space.

Earlier, I suggested that first generation Sinhala women do not view open design kitchens as having great potential to be "invested with pleasure" (Lloyd and Johnson, 2004: 264). However, this is not how many of the second generation participants felt about the kitchen space. Before moving into their newly purchased townhouse, Ayomi and Thehan renovated the entire house. The space that took much of their time to design was the kitchen. Visually, Thehan and Ayomi's kitchen is contemporary in design. According to Thehan, this was the result of him wanting to avoid having a kitchen like his mother's. He described his mother's kitchen as not only disorganised but plain and boring.

Both Ayomi and Thehan's parents are very religious and frown upon the consumption of alcohol as well as displaying it for guests. However, they themselves are social drinkers and enjoy creating cocktails for guests when they entertain on the weekends. It was important for Thehan to display their expensive and impressive alcohol collection so when they began designing and organising their kitchen, Thehan ensured that their collection could be easily hidden in a matter of moments in the case of surprise visits from both sides of their family. Thehan demonstrated this quirky feature of their kitchen. On the kitchen bench, a three-tiered step shelf displayed local and foreign alcohol that glistened under a warm spotlight. Thehan gingerly pushed the shelf backwards into a cubbyhole in the kitchen shelving system and then slid the opaque cabinet door until the bottle vanished from sight. Interestingly, above the secret cabinet, a small Buddha statue that was placed on top of the highest shelf overlooked the kitchen. The Buddha statue was a gift from Thehan's parents on the day they moved in. Even though Thehan wanted to create a kitchen that was the opposite to his mother's he still caters to their sensibilities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I make a few distinct points about how Sinhala diasporic people engage with the kitchen space across generations. I began by examining the first generations' kitchens to understand the different ways the second generation engage with their parents' ideas, to either reject, adapt or reinterpret their ideas in their own kitchens.

The first generation have distinct ideas about the kitchen space. They separate the kitchen from the living area which is a direct juxtaposition of the open space designs of modern kitchens in urban Australia. Spice smells in kitchens are pleasant but as they leave the kitchen and into the living quarters of the home, these smells are deemed as “matter out of place” (Douglas, 1985). To negotiate this, they create a second kitchen.

As smells of spice travels beyond the home, the Sinhala diasporic community begin to realise the racialisation of smell and how others perceive. In particular, the second generation’s engagement with Sri Lankan food and food practices as well as spaces associated with food are influenced by the dominant society’s constant stratification of the smell of spice.

Finally, I illustrate that the second generation conceptualise their kitchens in relation to their mother’s kitchen as there is a deep longing to find their own place in a kitchen they can call their own.

CHAPTER 3

“Sri Lankan Food is Just Not Healthy!”

Arranged on a ten-seater dining table were an assortment of dishes that I had watched Oneli and her husband, Bavinda, prepare for two and a half hours on a Friday night. The savoury aromas of cinnamon, cardamom and curry leaves, the fresh scent of coconut milk, and hints of lime wafted from the piping hot dishes.

The three of us sat down to enjoy what I would describe as a typical Sinhala meal; flavourful and filling. Bavinda gestured for me to start plating my serving of the food. I placed only a spoonful of basmati rice onto my plate. Observing this, Bavinda chuckled with bemusement, “Are you sure that’s enough rice?”. I could hear my mother’s voice in his words.

A spectrum of colours occupied my plate. On the far right was the beetroot and potato curry, reduced in spice infused coconut milk and oil. Next to it was a tender piece of pan fried salmon, coated in olive oil and sitting on a bed of spicy caramelised red onion, green chilli and minced garlic. Bavinda made the red lentil curry. The red lentils ballooned in the thick coconut milk, absorbing copious amounts of delicious salt and spices. Floating on top were chunks of dried red chillies that contrasted with the bright yellow of turmeric. The curry was glossy from coconut oil that fried the onions, black mustard seeds, chilli, curry leaves, garlic and

spices. Lastly, Bavinda had whipped up a quick tinned tuna salad with fresh cucumber, red onions, tomatoes and lettuce, doused with the perfect amount of lime.

“We don’t eat like this everyday. Maybe once or twice a fortnight,” began Oneli.

“With all the rice, oil and coconut milk, Sri Lankan food is too filling for everyday.”

Nodding in agreement, Bavinda joked, “If we ate like this everyday, our bellies would continue to grow”.

“It’s just not healthy.”

Oneli and Bavinda’s remarks about Sri Lankan food resembled my conversations with other second generation participants. Why is Sri Lankan food considered unhealthy? Where did this popular perception originate from? These questions positioned me to consider what we could uncover about the social worlds that we inhabit by viewing health and nutrition as a cultural system. While changes in eating and cooking practices and their impacts on health is a dominant theme in food studies, this chapter focuses on how second generation migrants negotiate popular health discourse in Australia with nostalgic cravings for Sri Lankan food.



Figure 5 Oneli and Bavinda's Friday night dinner.



Figure 6 Oneli's pan fried salmon with caramelised onion.

Calories, Macronutrients and Micronutrients: Nutritionism in Everyday Life

The discourse surrounding nutrition is connected to the construction of modern subjectivities, as it fosters a moral framework that directs people how they should think and live (DuPuis 2007; Veit 2013). Over time, nutrition science experts began to dismiss the relevance of sensory experience when examining food consumption and bodily health (Kimura, 2013). To determine various states of health, the concepts of calories, vitamins and antioxidants, to name a few, were unearthed and eventually monopolised nutrition discourse (Kimura, 2013). The ‘discovery’ of macronutrients and micronutrients by nutrition scientists further disconnected nutrition talk from embodied experiences of food, cultural and historical significance, and the other ways to determine the quality of food such as method of agricultural production (Scrinis, 2013; Pollan, 2008). Gyorgy Scinis (2008; 2013), an Australian researcher, has mapped the development of nutrition science to coin the term ‘nutritionism’ to refer to this reductive idea that food is essentially a vessel for supplying nutrients to the body. In this perspective, improving one’s health becomes the most pressing purpose of food consumption. Ultimately, nutritionism can lead to homogenised ways of engaging with and understanding of food.

When I first met Harsha, she had just finished washing up after an intense workout with her husband, Charlie. Like most new apartments, the kitchen was part of the open space plan of the home. Items were neatly hidden away in glossy cabinets and cupboards, and anything displayed had its designated place. Brows furrowed, Harsha

carefully scanned a recipe that she had printed out beforehand. She pulled out seven freezer bags, each filled with a pool of translucent liquid that had a yellow tinge. They were individually packaged single egg whites that she had purchased from a local grocery store. Harsha explained, “Lately, we’ve been using a lot of egg whites for our meals. It’s so much easier to buy them already separated and they last a long time in the freezer”.

She began beating the egg whites with a balloon whisk, adding various carefully measured quantities of ingredients such as almond milk and gluten free flour until it turned into a thin silky batter. On the stove, flames began to heat a frying pan with no oil or butter in sight. As the batter bubbled in the pan, the scent of crepes laced the air. Our conversation quickly moved beyond small talk as Harsha apologised for offering me a ‘bland’ breakfast. She continued:

“This crepe has no sugar and is low in fats, carbs, and is dairy free. We’ve made it before and the taste is eggier than a normal crepe. When you get over that, it’s actually pretty good, especially if you serve it with fresh blueberries, which are rich in antioxidants and vitamin C, and then drizzle a little bit of a natural sweetener. Actually, we bought an organic honey almond butter from Katoomba last week. Let’s have that. I’ve been dying to try it.”

Harsha was not the only participant who used nutrition jargon when describing their food. Even those who do not follow a strict health regime in their everyday lives easily understood and incorporated such language in the way they talked about food. Being knowledgeable about the nutritional properties of food has become increasingly common over the last few decades (Scrinis, 2014). Food is understood

as a composition of a vitamins, minerals, fats, proteins and carbohydrates; all of which have physiological effects.

Drawing from Michel Foucault (1975), Kimura (2013) situates nutritionism as a ‘technique of power’ that is used to problematise people’s food, eating and cooking practices, and consequently their bodies. A person’s body is under surveillance by not only external forces such as medical professionals, fitness trainers, insurers, food producers, but also by themselves. Ayomi and Thehan were another couple who exhibited health consciousness. On the first night that I ate with them at their Inner West home, Thehan joked that they should have ordered takeaway like they had done for the last few nights but decided against it, saying “I don’t want you think that we’re unhealthy”. His laughter belied his fears about being judged by his diet.

Hayes Conroy (2013: 3) argues that hegemonic nutrition is produced and proliferated through multiple intersecting streams, such as mainstream nutrition science discourse, medical and health practitioners, schools, family and the media. For example, much of the ideas about health and nutrition given to new Australian mothers are “direct and prescriptive state messages about health diets” from health care facilities and the media (Wright et al., 2015: 433).

Harsha and Charlie had recently completed their first F45 eight week challenge program. That particular Saturday was the start of a second round. F45, a fitness company, have designed intensive fitness programs that monitor their clients’ exercise and diet with the ultimate goal of promoting a healthy lifestyle. Their most popular program is their eight week challenge. Weekly meal plans and training routines for fat loss and muscle gain are administered by a specialised team from the

client's chosen centre. The meal plans are specific for male and female body compositions with a strict number of daily calories and details on the macronutrients and micronutrients of each meal. Furthermore, information about nutrition science is written and disseminated in an easily digestible way to help the client understand their body as well as the properties and roles of certain foods. Inspirational videos and seminars are shared every week to motivate clients. There are prize incentives for the best transformation, with the biggest prize valued at \$7500. The heavily curated fitness program appealed to Harsha and Charlie not only due to its convenience and holistic approach to health but also because fitness instructors and mentors closely monitored their progress, holding them accountable.

Harsha: *I think our generation is more health conscious. There's a lot of information out there about health. We understand that poor diets and a lack of exercise can lead to illnesses. A plus is that you lose weight and feel and look a lot better. So many people in my parents' generation have diabetes and other illnesses that could have been prevented.*

Charlie: *We're not health freaks though. It's hard to be 100% healthy all the time especially when our group of friends like to socialise over a meal together. We'll indulge in food in those situations but it's all about self-control and discipline.*

Younger generations have come to frame the pervasiveness of illnesses aggravated by lifestyle and consumption practices as societal and personal disarray. Harsha and Charlie emphasised that to maintain a healthy diet it was important for them to have self-control and discipline. Restricting corporal cravings and desires is a prevalent

idea in Western medicine and notions of the body (Metzl and Kirkland, 2010). Furthermore, the dominating Western idea is that of the rational mind and the irrational body (Birke, 2000). This Cartesian split of mind and body impacts how nutritional knowledge is formed and promoted in countries like Australia. Bodily actions that are performed due to the influence of cravings and desires are considered mindless actions and as a consequence of poor character. However, it is important to note that similar ideas are also prevalent in Buddhism which is a dominant religious ideology in Sri Lanka. Although, not all Sinhala people are Buddhist, Buddhist dogma is embedded in the cultural beliefs and mores of Sinhala people. In Buddhist ideology, detachment from one's desires and passions should be one of the fundamental goals of a person's life.

The popularity of specialised diets such as keto, paleo and veganism illustrate how many people seek an alternate way of eating and often draw from a “nostalgic hankering for a cleaner, healthier, better, bygone age” (Fiddes 1991: 193). These specialised diets implement strict taboos for what is consumed and why. Nadisha confided in me about her endometriosis and the miscarriage that she experienced last year.

***Nadisha:** I can't help but think how doctors have failed me. Nothing they say and do actually works, and I feel my body is out of control. I was devastated after my miscarriage. What helped me was being a part of endometriosis groups on Facebook. Lots of people who had experienced what I experienced suggested natural diets like a plant-based diet and low carb and sugar diets, and to stop pumping artificial hormones into our bodies. I started cleaning my diet by not eating any processed foods, animal products, salt and sugar. It*

made me feel a lot better. I mean, the pain from endometriosis is still there but I feel less bloated and less inflamed. Just eating simple foods and not all the processed junk that you get these days.

Nadisha's miscarriage occurred in December 2017. At the time of our meeting in May, she was no longer strictly eating according to the 'endo diet'. I asked her why.

Nadisha: *Oh my god, it's so hard to eat with no flavour! Can you imagine growing up eating Sri Lankan food, which has so much flavour, and eating just steamed vegetables without even any pepper and salt? The recipes are so bland and mainly Western meals. I'm trying really hard to change Sri Lankan recipes to fit the endo diet, but the flavours are just not the same. You need a lot of salt and oil for Sri Lankan cooking for it to taste right. Since I know what real Sri Lankan food is supposed to taste like, it's hard to digest the more healthier versions.*

Therushi, who loosely follows a ketogenic diet because of her husband, also echoed similar concerns.

Therushi: *One of the biggest problems with the keto diet is that the recipes in keto books are not what I'm familiar eating. It's quite plain. It's always a chunk of meat with a side of steamed veggies. There's no Asian flavour to it which is what both Kevin and I are used to eating. When we started out, we ate according to the recipe because we were still learning all things keto. It was really challenging for me. Kevin managed to keep to the diet but because I become pregnant again I'm not strictly keto. Kevin is now more of a lazy*

keto as they call it, he's not very strict because I crave a lot of spicy and salty Sri Lankan foods and it's hard to cook separate meals for everyone in the family.

What is noteworthy about both Nadisha and Therushi's reflections is that they see Sri Lankan food as a strictly separate category from their specialised health diets. There is acknowledgement that Sri Lankan food has the potential to be healthy, but the food that they grew up eating does not reflect their conceptualisation of nutrition and health. Almost all participants emphasised earlier generations' lack of knowledge of what constitutes healthy eating, and intergenerational tensions when it comes to what they eat.

Harsha: *My mum just can't understand why I eat what I eat.*

Therushi: *My parents avoid eating at our house because if they don't eat rice and curry for lunch and dinner, they think they haven't had a wholesome meal.*

Oneli: *I try to get my parents to eat more salads as a meal, but they're always complaining.*

Nadisha: *I tell my parents to eat less rice because of all the carbohydrates but they don't listen. I get so worried about their health. I've managed to get them to make a rice mix which is half quinoa and half rice instead. It's better than nothing.*

Nayani: A lot of the curries my mum makes has a pool of oil that floats on top. I tell them to use less oil... and they do so maybe once or twice after I've talked to them about it, but they always go back into their bad habits.

For the second generation, the struggle to reconcile nutritional knowledge with nostalgic cravings for the food they grew up eating leads to interesting changes to foodways of the Sinhala diaspora in Sydney. Before I delve into this, it is important to understand why Sri Lankan food is considered unhealthy by the second generation.

From Gamme Kahma to the Urban Plate

In this section, I will briefly overview key points about the cooking and consumption practices of people in Sri Lanka with an emphasis on *gamme kahma* (village foods). I use the term “curry” very loosely to describe dishes cooked in Sri Lanka. The vocabulary of the English language cannot truly encapsulate the variety of techniques and ingredients that are used to make these dishes. I largely draw upon my own knowledge of Sri Lankan food that I have gained over many years of observations I have made whilst visiting various parts of Sri Lanka as well as through informal conversations with elders in these regions.

Historically, Sri Lankan food was sourced from what was growing naturally in surrounding environments (Punchihewa; 2015: 50). The foods that Sri Lankans consumed were mainly plant-based, heavily relying on legumes, vegetables and fruit. Meat was not an everyday staple. If meat was eaten, it was always game meat such as porcupine, jungle fowl, hare, fish and wild boar. However, protein was mainly

derived from plant-based sources. Common protein rich foods that were consumed were kidney beans, wing beans, and velvet beans. In both sweet and savoury dishes, the oils used were extracted from coconut, sesame and *mee* (*mahua longifolia*) (Perera; 2008: 57-59). These foods not only sated hunger and increased energy but were also for therapeutic purposes (Perera; 2008: 57). Certain plants and vegetables that were believed to have medicinal properties under ayurvedic beliefs were cooked into traditional Sinhala dishes for daily consumption. For example, certain varieties of rice were eaten for specific therapeutic needs. The food, particularly rice, that a person ate depended on the intensity of their daily activities, their physiology and age. For example, pregnant mothers ate a variety of rice called *maa wee*. Those who could not easily digest food, such as young children and elders, ate varieties of *heenati*. Most meals usually contained at least one wet dish. There are two variations of wet dishes: *hodi* (watery gravy) and *maluwa* (reduced gravy). These two variations can be made in three different ways: *kiri* (white curry), *miris* (red curry), *badapu thunapaha* and *kalu pol* (two types of black curry). *Kiri hodi* has turmeric for colour and unroasted spices to lightly season the gravy, *miris hodi* has a large quantity of chili powder or ground red chilies and uses other unroasted spices sparingly, and *kalu hodi* has roasted spices and ground roasted rice to achieve a deep flavour and colour. Prior to colonisation, *goraka* (*garcinia cambogia*) and *siyambala* (tamarind) were usually used in dishes for special occasions, but regularly consumed by upper class people (Perera, 2008).

How these ingredients were prepared, cooked and eaten were dependent on geographical location. Even in the current context, the cooking and consumption practices of different Sinhala communities in Sri Lanka are still rooted in location

and class differences (Jayatissa et. al., 2014: 93). For example, *kos* (young jackfruit) is eaten as a staple meal in most regions in Sri Lanka, however, cooking methods and how it is served varies. In the upcountry around Kandy, *kos* is cooked in coconut milk with light spices. The *kos* curry is eaten with rice and other accompanying sides. By contrast, down south along the coastal area, *kos* is boiled. Freshly grated coconut is sprinkled generously on top and eaten as it is or served with fish curry for added flavour and texture dimension. In Colombo, *kos* is boiled and eaten with *pol sambola* and dry fish curry. Jackfruit is not prevalent in the east and north parts of Sri Lanka.

During the latter half of the twentieth century, curries in middle class to upper class urban areas began to include a higher number of ingredients in spice mixes and used larger quantities of oil. Dishes that gained popularity were fried rice, *kade appam* (processed wheat and rice based foods such as pastries and bread), and oily pork curry (pork fat cooked in curry). More and more people began to eat multiple meat dishes in one meal on a regular basis, with the most common types of meat being fried seafood, curried sausages and chicken. These dishes reflect the influences of colonisation, trade, and globalisation over centuries, as my interview with Lal suggests.

Lal, a 65-year-old Sinhala man, migrated to Australia as a skilled migrant with his wife, Anoma, and 4-year-old daughter in 1990. I was welcomed into their home to have a chat over some tea. Lal described lunchtimes working in a notable transnational company in Sri Lanka in the 1980s.

***Lal:** At work, there was an unspoken competition on who brought the best homemade buth (rice) packet for lunch. The best buth packets were always the ones that had four to five different types of curries and must include large chunks of meat, at least one fried food, a pickle or sambol, and a lot of rice. If there was a fish cutlet in there well... that was what made it most desirable. You needed to have a buth packet that was kata-ta raha (tasty). You were quietly judged on the food that you ate even if it was in a joking manner. The more fried and oily food you had the richer you appeared. The fried and oiler foods were what you would have on special occasions. At the time, gamme kahma was looked down upon. If you ate gamme kahma, it was an indication that you were poor.*

Anoma echoed similar sentiments. When she married Lal, she moved into his family home that housed eight family members. Her mother-in-law made rice and curry every morning for the entire family to take to either school or work for lunch. By the time she packed her lunch, the only curries left were *gamme* style vegetables. Anoma was embarrassed to eat her lunch at work because her colleagues would frequently comment on the “poor” quality of her lunch. Her good friends would even bring food from their homes to share with Anoma with the intentions to help her save face.

Lal and Anoma’s accounts illustrate the attitudes towards *gamme kahma* amongst urban middle class people in Sri Lanka towards the end of the twentieth century. Food is a ‘powerful boundary maker’ for communities, as it can signify ethnicity and class (Beagan and D’Sylva 2011: 219). At the time, *gamme kahma* was associated with poverty. Eating food that was usually reserved for special occasions because of the intensive labour that goes into preparing the food as well as the cost of

ingredients, had now become a symbol of wealth, modernisation and becoming cosmopolitan. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) argues that preferences in taste is a form of social capital. Taste preferences can be extended to taste preferences of food. It can be argued that during this time, eating *gamme kahma* hindered modern subjectivity. Exhibiting ‘taste’ (Bourdieu, 1984) for certain foods was a way to affirm middle class identity. Similar themes are echoed in Lewis’ (1988) research on the ‘gustatory subversion’ of local foods in Kiribati. New foods are championed over local cuisine and established as superior modernity.

The first generation, cooking and consuming ‘the urban plate’ in their new home presents a ‘feeling of familiarity’ (Hage, 1997), and reunites the past with the present (Supski, 2013). The attitudes, values, and practices of food explained above, travelled with those who migrated to Australia between 1970 and 2000. The generation of Sinhala migrants who arrived during this time are the parents of the second generation who participated in this study.

Food is a strong medium for cultural transmission in diasporic communities (Hage, 1997). This cultural transmission cultivates the second generation’s habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), a “system of dispositions acquired by implicit or explicit learning which functions as a system of generative schemes, generat[ing] strategies” (Bourdieu, 1993: 76). When people eat, they not only ingest nutrition but also symbolic meanings (Fischler, 1988). Cultivating a food related habitus is an important way for families to symbolically incorporate their offspring into their culture and community (Devault, 1991). However, food practices are “not automatically ‘transmitted’ from one generation to the next; they are adapted,

adopted, transformed or generated in the practices of everyday life” (Forero and Smith, 2010: 79).

All second generation participants stated that they usually ate Sri Lankan food for dinner growing up, and that their mothers or other maternal figures like aunts were responsible for cooking. For Bengali-Americans, Ray (2004: 48) asserts that “dinner remains in the realm of tradition” as his survey revealed that more than half of the participants consumed rice and curry for dinner. The same could be said for the Sinhala diasporic community in Sydney. The first generation did not make fresh meals every day. Most curries were made in bulk with meat dishes lasting the entire week. New vegetable curries were made every few days. Meals on weekends involved more labour-intensive dishes. These dishes were often made in excess for the coming week and frozen. As dinnertime was one of the only meals of the day that was ‘Sri Lankan’, there was a need for the meals to be ‘*kata-ta raha*’ to satisfy their nostalgic cravings. *Kata-ta raha* implies that the food is heavily seasoned with spices, salt, chilli and oil to create a rich flavour. For the urban palate, *gamme kahma* is arguably too simple to elicit this feeling of *kata-ta raha*.

Harsha has fond memories of Sri Lankan food made by family members like her aunt and her late father. Her parents migrated to Australia in 1993 followed by her aunt’s family in 1995.

Harsha: *My dad’s roti had the perfect amount of salt, curry leaves, green chili and onion and were thin but soft... Whenever I eat roti, I think of him. It makes me miss him a lot.*

But when I think more generally about Sri Lankan food, I think about my aunt's food. My aunt made really delicious Sri Lankan food like eggplant moju, mango curry, and polos curry. Her cooking was always flavourful with lots of spice.

The food Harsha describes as being traditional Sri Lankan food is often considered celebration food or food described as *kata-ta rah*. I will briefly describe the dishes that Harsha denotes as being typical Sri Lankan dishes. *Wambatu moju* is a side dish where thin eggplant strips are fried in hot oil then caramelised in a pan with oil, onion, chilli, curry leaves, light spices, sugar and *siyambala*. For *amba maluwa*, green mangoes are cooked with spices in a decent amount of oil and coconut milk to create a tart and spicy flavour. *Polos maluwa* is young jackfruit that is cooked with spices in oil and coconut milk to make a 'dark' curry. Finely grounded roasted spices and *goraka* are used to create a rich and sour flavour. In diasporic communities these dishes are considered iconic Sri Lankan foods.

Other dishes that second generation participants classified as commonly eaten Sri Lankan foods were: *pol sambola* (grated coconut flesh pounded with a chilli, pepper, maldivian fish, garlic and onion paste and then doused with lime); *parippu* (dhal cooked in spiced coconut milk); *kukul mas hodi* (chicken curry), *haalmesso thel dala* (dried sprats stir fried with heavily spiced caramelised onion); *gotukola mallung* (centella asiatica, red onion, and chilli finely chopped then combined with maldivian fish, fresh lime juice and grated coconut flesh); oily black pork curry; spiced potatoes either tempered in oil or cooked in a turmeric coconut curry; spicy sausage curry, beetroot curry, *wattakka curry* (pumpkin cooked in spiced coconut milk); *bonchi thel dala* (tempered spiced green beans in reduced coconut milk and oil); *karawala thel*

dala (salty dry thora fish stir fried with onions and chili). Although some of these dishes utilise region-specific methods, many of these dishes are deemed to be urban food because of the ingredients used. The dishes that can be classified as *gamme kahma* are *parippu*, *gotakola mallung*, and *pol sambola*. Here we can see that for first generation Sinhala Australians, their nostalgic memories of home have informed their everyday food choices thereby shaping their subjectivity (Silva, 2009).

Food cultures in Sinhala diasporic communities around the world are flexible and incredibly innovative. In the wider Sydney region, a popular dish amongst members of the Sinhala community is cauliflower *mallung*. *Mallung* is a dish that is made of a finely chopped vegetable, usually leafy greens or jackfruit, lightly wilted in heat and combined with grated coconut, onion, lime juice and a few spices. Cauliflower *mallung* is unique to diasporic communities, particularly ones in Western countries, as cauliflower is not easily available nor widely used in Sri Lanka. The reason cauliflower is used in diasporic communities is because it mimics the texture of jackfruit when made into a *mallung*, and because fresh jackfruit is incredibly hard to find in supermarkets and speciality grocery stores across Sydney. Although tin jackfruit is available, the freshness of cauliflower is appealing to many. Sinhala diasporic communities innovatively recreate Sri Lankan food using ingredients and utensils available in their new home whilst still paying homage to the taste of the food they ate in the homeland. This type of innovation and the ability to see fluidity of certain dishes is emerging in the second generation⁴.

⁴ This dynamic is further discussed in Chapter 4.

Searching for a Balance Between Nostalgic Cravings and Health

I will return to the kitchen of Therushi and Kevin, a couple who were committed to a ketogenic diet. At the time of my observations, Therushi was six months pregnant and was therefore not following the diet as strictly as Kevin. Both Therushi and Kevin cook together, but Therushi is the one who leads the preparation of meals.

By the time Kevin came home from work, Therushi had already finished making a spicy fried rice. The fried rice was made to suit her cravings for chilli and salt.

Rolling up his sleeves, Kevin squatted behind a large mortar and pestle and began pulverising garlic, onion, and ginger into a paste. The vinyl floors of the kitchen shook rhythmically with every pound of the pestle. Meanwhile, Therushi prepared the chicken for cooking. The chicken breast was tossed in a sizzling pool of olive oil then doused with keto approved soy sauce. The paste was then added to the pan. Therushi took a taste and paused. Opening the overhead cabinet, she pulled out a bottle of *kaha* (turmeric) and added half a teaspoon to the chicken followed by a teaspoon of *thunapaha* (unroasted curry powder), then finally half a teaspoon of ground cinnamon. She stirred until the chicken wore a glossy coat of the sauce.

Kevin washed a bunch of silverbeets and chopped it into thirds then wilted the greens, maldivian fish and a quarter of an onion in a pan with a bit of water. Therushi seasoned the greens with a pinch of pepper, half a teaspoon of *thunapaha*, and then squeezed half a fresh lime before Kevin gave the silverbeets one last stir. Therushi and Kevin adamantly refused my plea to assist them, but I insisted on setting the table. Therushi joked that it was such a Sri Lankan characteristic to want to help in some way.



Figure 7 Therushi and Kevin's Tuesday night meal.

On looks alone, there was nothing very Sri Lankan about the meal, nor did Therushi and Kevin suggest otherwise. However, in all of the dishes, from the fried rice to the chicken stir fry to the wilted silverbeets, the most prominent flavour was that of Sri Lankan spices. All of the dishes, except for the fried rice, also fit the parameters of the ketogenic diet.

What interested me about their cooking process was Kevin's use of the mortar and pestle. Freshly pounding spices as well as garlic, onion, chilli and ginger is standard practice for cooking *gamme kahma* in Sri Lanka. I was even more shocked to find out that Therushi made her own Sri Lankan spice mixes. Therushi said she did not learn this from her mother, as she told me that her mother has always minced garlic, ginger and onion by knife, and brought premixed ground spices. In fact, many first-generation women do not practice these traditional techniques, because the cooking

methods and techniques in the urban suburbs of Sri Lanka these women grew up in was short-cut oriented and significantly less labour intensive. Therushi said she started incorporating *gamme* techniques after a visit from her great aunt who lives in a rural area in down south Sri Lanka. Her great aunt cooked her family a meal in their home and she was bewildered by the difference in taste.

***Therushi:** The food was so different to what my mum cooks at home. My mum makes pumpkin curry all the time...but then I ate my great aunt's pumpkin curry and to me it was more flavourful yet not overbearing with spice and also less greasy! We realised that the flavour came from pounding the ingredients in a mortar and pestle, and also because she grounded her own spice mix. Ever since then Kevin and I insist on doing the same.*

Certain experiences with food can elicit the process of reconnecting with a forgotten past. Pollock's (1992) study on Polynesia demonstrates how traditional Polynesian foods have transformed from having negative connotations to being revalorised as the foundation of Polynesian tradition. For the second generation, experiencing Sri Lankan food that exists outside the realm of their diasporic community creates an understanding of what Sri Lankan food is, and positions them to discover what Sri Lankan food can be.

As I mentioned in the first section, Therushi initially struggled to eat according to the recipes that they found in ketogenic blogs and cookbooks. Now eating ketogenic came easily, because Therushi and Kevin found a way to unite Sri Lankan flavours with the ketogenic diet. The first generation's flair for innovation is seen in the way the second generation prepares their meals, as the food that the second generation

makes utilises not only familiar Sri Lankan flavours and cooking techniques, but also regional specific techniques, methods and flavours that they have unearthed in different ways.

Therushi is not the only one to experiment in this way. One of the meals I shared with Nadisha and James was a green soup. She happily proclaimed that it was low carb and rich with antioxidants and vitamins. She found the recipe on the website Pinterest, under 'healthy soups'. Initially, she carefully followed the recipe but according to her, the taste left much to be desired. For her second attempt (the soup I tasted), she cooked with much more flexibility and rummaged through her spice cabinet to see what kind of spices she could add to elevate the flavours. I watched as she sprinkled turmeric, paprika, *thunupaha* from her mother, ground cumin, and cinnamon bark into the soup that was bubbling in a *gamme* clay pot she bought from a Sri Lankan store. With each new addition she stirred with her coconut shell spoon and then paused to taste. She then heated up some *papadums* in the microwave to serve on the side for some crunch.



Figure 8 Nadisha making her green soup.



Figure 9 The green soup served.

Others, like Nayani and Harsha, have asked their parents for Sri Lankan cookbooks to learn cooking techniques that goes beyond the knowledge of their parents with the desire to negotiate mainstream health discourse with their Sri Lankan ancestry. Interestingly, Peter Kuruvita's Sri Lankan cuisine cookbooks are not popular amongst second generation adults. Ayomi could not help but notice that he uses ingredients for Sri Lankan cooking that are 'really strange' such as mirin. Harsha echoed such sentiments by saying that a lot of the ingredients and methods he uses are very foreign to Sri Lankan people. Although many of second generation people do not make or eat Sri Lankan food in the same way as their parents for everyday consumption, they still seek for 'authenticity' when learning about and adopting *gamme kahma*.

Conclusion

The everyday foods of the second generation are not traditionally Sri Lankan. The foods that they choose to eat in their adult lives are influenced by mainstream nutrition discourse in Australia. For second generation adults, Sri Lankan food as they know it, is only eaten occasionally as they perceive it as being too unhealthy for everyday consumption. I have illustrated this conceptualisation of Sri Lankan food is due to the cultural transmission of foodways from the first generation to the second generation. First generation Sinhala Australians cooked meals for their family based on their nostalgia for the 'urban plate' which are richer in taste and oilier in texture. The cultural transmission of foodways caused the second generation to homogenise Sri Lankan food to that of an urban taste sensibility that their parents were socialised in when they were in Sri Lanka.

The dilemma that the second generation face is that their nostalgic cravings for Sri Lankan food inhibit them from becoming fully satisfied by the food they eat every day for health. Upon further examination of some of the participants' cooking practices and meals, we can see that they are experimenting with food by incorporating common methods, techniques and flavours that are associated with Sri Lankan cooking to prepare meals that fit within the restrictions of their diet.

Renewed interest in *gamme kahma* and techniques and reviving regional specifications of Sri Lankan food enables them to reinvent what they eat and satisfy their nostalgia for socialisation of home thereby reflecting the cultural reality of the second generation.

Reducing food to its macronutrients and micronutrients ignores the pleasures people experience when they eat. Second generation Sinhala Australians are beginning to understand this. The challenge for them is to reconcile how food is framed through nutritional discourse with the taste cultures and rules of consumption of foodstuff of Sinhala food that they have been socialised in with.

CHAPTER 4

Confusion or Fusion? Everyday Cooking Practices Inside the Homes of Mixed Couples.

I grew up in Eastwood, New South Wales in the early 2000s. In my primary school, there were a number of children who were from a variety of cultural backgrounds but not enough for my Anglo Australian teachers to not pair me with the only other Sri Lankan Australian kid in my year. My school buddy who taught me how to tie my shoelaces was of Chinese ancestry, and my best friend who vowed to marry me was a mixed raced Japanese and Irish boy. I learnt how to use chopsticks in the home of a close friend whose parents immigrated from Hong Kong. It was also where I tried octopus for the first time. My most distinct first memory of bonding over what I thought was Sri Lankan food was with a girl who was a second generation Malaysian Australian of Hokkien descent. During recess, we were eating together behind our Year 1 classroom when she pulled out a container of deep-fried cookies that took the form of an ornate flower. To me they looked like *kokis*, but she called them *kueh lobang*. Excited by our revelation, we both told our mothers after school which led to our mothers meeting and becoming friends. Whenever her mother made *kueh lobang*, she packed an extra container to give to me. The everyday intimacies expressed above can be theorised as ‘everyday multiculturalism’ (Wise and Velayutham, 2009).

In the case of my study, everyday intercultural encounters were seen through intimacies such as romantic relationship. When I started my fieldwork, I did not expect to be writing about inter-ethnic relationships and family dynamics (what I call mixed couples and mixed families). However, of the six households I observed, four of them were of couples in inter-ethnic relationship. When analysing my empirical data, thematic ideas emerged in each of these families.

Within domestic kitchens of mixed families, ingredients, flavours and culinary techniques of multiple cuisines are innovatively appropriated to make palatable everyday dishes that satisfy the nostalgic cravings of the members of the family. They call these dishes ‘fusion food’. In this chapter, I suggest that the notion of fusion food has been used to assert the uniqueness of their identity, reflecting the cultural reality of belonging to an inter-ethnic relationship. As Fortier (2008) indicates, everyday intimacies of romantic relationships can blur ethnic boundaries. Blurring these ethnic boundaries can lead researchers to “imagine different politics of eating and different “entangled” cartographies of transnational belonging’ (Duruz 2010: 48). These boundaries complicate traditional notions of multiculturalism employed by the state, where ethnic communities must remain distinct. I take Fortier’s (2008) idea further to suggest that ‘fusion food’ is a marker of identity.

Australian Context: Food Multiculturalism

In Australia, intercultural acceptance is most visibly touted through the celebration of food from various cultures. Food, as Gunew (1993:13) aptly argues, is an “‘acceptable face of multiculturalism’”. The idea that the consumption of food of the

Other can help people learn about another's culture was largely promoted by the local and federal government (Flowers and Swan, 2012:1). Food associated with different ethnic groups are heavily used in community cohesion programs "to bring people together and foster intercultural conviviality" (Wise, 2011: 83).

Eating "ethnic" food as a way to understand the Other is also prominently seen in the Australian mediascape. The most notable television show being *Food Safari*, presented by Maeve O'Meara, which is a show devoted to exploring and informing viewers about ethnic cuisines. The show was first aired on SBS in 2006 and is in its seventh season. More recently, online lifestyle and entertainment sites such as *Broadsheet* have garnered attention as a trustworthy destination for acquiring culinary news and eateries that are trending in major Australian cities. A large proportion of the audience for both *Food Safari* and *Broadsheet* are the white urban upper to middle class. For the urban middle class, acquiring an eclectic palate is a form of cultural capital (Warde et al., 1999). Hage (1997) uses the term 'cosmo-multiculturalists' to describe those who obtain and display cultural capital by consuming food and cultures of the Other without truly engaging with them in any kind of intimate way. The popularity of such television shows and online content sites evinces how the ethnically diverse foodscape of Australia is successfully marketed as a poster for multiculturalism, particularly for middle class consumption.

Over the last three decades, scholars (Hage, 1997; Duruz, 2010; Wise, 2011) have critiqued the alleged positives of using food to showcasing multiculturalism policy. Gabaccia (1998) asserts that 'culinary acceptance' cannot necessarily be regarded as accepting the Other. Eating metaphors can often mask underlying racism (Probyn, 2000: 2). This is notably seen when particular ethnic cuisines are presented as food

of the Other whilst other cuisines are not (Lindenfeld, 2007: 315). In fact, Hage (1997) posits that multiculturalism can exist without migrants as the white middle class can engage with and consume ethnic food without acquiring any intercultural understanding.

Much of the literature on everyday multiculturalism focuses on spaces outside the home in the public sphere. Notable works are by Australian scholars such as Wise and Velayutham (2009), and Noble (2009) who have extensively researched on the intercultural encounters that occur between people in their daily lives in public spaces such as neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, markets, and food courts. Everyday multiculturalism is an approach that can position researchers to explore “how social actors experience and negotiate cultural difference on the ground and how their social relations and identities are shaped and re-shaped in the process” (Wise and Velayutham, 2009: 3). But what about intercultural practices in private spaces like the home? By centring the narratives of mixed couples, I will now draw attention to how the everyday practices inside the home can shed light on intercultural relations and belonging in urban Sydney.

Nadisha and James: The Cabinet Dilemma

When I visited Nadisha⁵ and James⁶ a few weeks after they had finished moving into their new apartment, Nadisha informed me that she was in a bit of a dilemma. She

⁵ Nadisha is a 33 year old second generation Sinhala Australian woman.

⁶ James is a 31 year old first generation Hong Kong Australian man.

was uncertain of how to best organise their spices, oils and condiments in their kitchen but had now found a solution.

With their permission, I opened the cabinet. Immediately, the trapped aroma absorbed the air. The aroma was pungent and faintly reminiscent of my mother's spice rack. I noticed a visible distinction between the two sides of the cabinet. Displayed on the right side were mostly bottles and jars that had the very recognisable red lid of the *Lee Kum Kee* brand. Deeper into the second shelf were some miscellaneous dried ingredients that were contained in sealable bags. On the left there, too, were bottles of sauces and condiments, mostly from the brand *Derana*. However, what occupied many of the racks were various spices that found their home in clear jars of different shapes and sizes. Remnants of old labels clung to a few of the jars. It was clear that the jars had a previous life. Ingredients were separated according to what was used for Cantonese cooking and what was used for Sri Lankan cooking. Spices or condiments that were common for both cuisines were kept closer to the imaginary line. I queried about her rationale for wanting to make this distinction.

Nadisha: I just hate searching for my spices in such a huge pile of ingredients when I'm cooking. James cooks Chinese food and I cook Sri Lankan food. I think separating the spices from the condiments might make things easy when we're cooking.

I visited their home again two weeks after my previous visit. I asked whether she had managed to find a solution to her cabinet problem. She sighed and led me into the kitchen to reveal the current situation. The cabinet's contents were no longer

organised according to cuisine. Instead, the ingredients were scattered on the shelves. The plum sauce was now next to the unroasted curry powder, and the dried curry leaves were beside the oyster sauce. Some ingredients such as ginger powder, light soy sauce, roasted curry powder, sesame oil, turmeric, and aniseed were closer to the front of the shelves.

Nadisha: Look, it's a bit of a mess! James doesn't put things back in its original place. It's really hard to keep things organised with him.

Although Nadisha and James both share cooking responsibilities, it is James who does most of the cooking. He is usually the one to take control of their weeknight dinners as he often is the first to come home from work.

James cooks mostly Chinese dishes that his parents would often make back in Hong Kong. However, the flavours of his dishes are sometimes wildly different. He would rummage through the cabinet and test out different ingredients in his cooking. James proudly described his creations to me such as using bottled *lunu miris* to make chili oil as a condiment for dumplings. The first time James thought of using *lunu miris* to make chilli oil was when he was preparing some frozen dumplings he bought from the local Asian grocery. To James' dismay, they had run out of chilli oil. He had just come home after spending long hours doing research in his lab. For James, chilli oil and dumplings are comfort foods. Together, they remind him of the times he spent eating the dumplings that his mother prepared for him after long hours of studying. She would always serve it with chilli oil to help relieve his stress. After rummaging through the fridge one last time, he spotted a bottle of *lunu miris* that Nadisha bought from a Sri Lankan spice shop. *Lunu miris* is a slightly wet sambol that is made from

using red onion, chilli powder and pieces, dried maldivian fish, and lime juice. The *lunu miris* recreated the taste and aroma of the chilli oil. What is interesting is that James no longer buys chilli oil. He continues to eat his childhood comfort food of dumplings and chilli oil by using *lunu miris* instead. It could be argued that through the repeated action and enjoyment of eating the reinterpretation of a dish, can eventually replace the sensorial memory of the original dish which results in the reinterpretation of this dish becoming the original.



Figure 10 James' dumplings with *lunu miris*.

On weekends, Nadisha takes control of meals to cook some of James' favourite Sri Lankan dishes like crab curry and beetroot curry. Unlike James, Nadisha does not experiment with Sri Lankan food by using unique ingredients that exist in Cantonese cuisine. However, the way both James and Nadisha present and consume Sri Lankan food could be considered fusion by their standards.

Consider the following meal that I ate with them on a weekend night: Nadisha made, *parippu* (Sri Lankan dhal curry); Sri Lankan basmati fried rice flavoured with biryani mix and spices and garnished with roasted cashews; and kale chips seasoned with unroasted curry powder. James made Cantonese braised eggplant and chicken mince in garlic-soy sauce; and a radish and avocado salad lightly tossed in rice vinegar. This is a typical Sunday meal for them. Before we ate, we all took photos. James took photos to show his parents who live in Hong Kong, I took photos for my research and Nadisha took photos to post on her Instagram. She captioned the photo as: "When James and I cook together is it confusion or fusion? LOL"

Here, it is clear that fusion food is not just food that mixes cuisines in the process of cooking but also the way in which food is presented, eaten and perceived. Kale chips flavoured with unroasted curry powder is not too far off from what first generation Sinhala women in Sydney would make. When Kale was marketed as a 'superfood' in Western food markets, first generation women began using kale for *mallung* (finely

chopped leafy vegetables with grated coconut, maldivive fish, lime juice and chilli) to substitute the taste and texture of *gotu kola* (centella asiatica)⁷.

The utensils used to present food, serve food as well as consume food, add to the imaginings of fusion food. Chopsticks and a coconut shell spoon were used to serve the salad, a clay pot was used to present the *parripu*, and wine was served with the meal. Fusion food is an everyday cultural reality of couples who belong to inter-ethnic relationships.

Let us return to the cabinet dilemma. Just like how the ingredients could not remain in the distinct categories of their associated cuisines, Nadisha and James could no longer demarcate their ethnic identity. Coming to terms with difference is what, Amin (2002: 926) argues as “a matter of everyday practices” and these practices “needs to be inculcated as a habit of practice (not just co-presence)”. As a mixed



Figure 11 Nadisha and James' meal.

⁷ Gotu kola is now being marketed as a superfood in Western food markets.

couple who are living together, Nadisha and James are inhabiting their difference on a very intimate level.

Therushi and Kevin: Adobo Chicken Curry

Adobo chicken curry, as Therushi and Kevin calls it, is an inconceivable dish for many. But this frankenstein-esque experiment of cooking techniques and flavours is the result of countless attempts to cater to the taste cultures of their family members. Kevin's favourite food is Filipino adobo chicken. Therushi's favourite food is a spicy Sri Lankan chicken curry. And their 5-year-old daughter, Paiya, just likes anything salty. Both chicken dishes have very distinct flavours. Adobo is a cooking technique where the ingredient (commonly meat) is marinated in soy sauce, garlic, vinegar then simmered into a stew like marinade. The Sri Lankan chicken curry that Therushi enjoys is a chicken that is simmered in coconut milk and infused with hot chilli powder and roasted curry powder. Both chicken dishes result in the chicken to be tender and moist. For adobo chicken curry, the simmering technique in both dishes remained. The chicken abode that Kevin grew up eating did not use coconut. However, as Therushi read more about Filipino food she found that in some regions coconut milk is used as well. Using this adobo recipe as a basis, she began experimenting with the various ingredients in both dishes. After a few attempts of trial and error, Therushi found a perfect combination that suit all three members' tastes. Therushi described the flavours of adobo chicken curry as salty, garlicky and spicy.

When eating the adobo chicken curry, Kevin forgoes his ketogenic diet to eat the dish on a bed of fluffy white rice whilst Therushi enjoys it with soft white bread. In Kevin's childhood, adobo was an everyday food for their family of meat eaters. Abodo was always served with fresh steaming white rice.

Kevin: *Whenever I eat adobo...even when I smell it... I remember my brother and I fighting over who gets to put his rice in the leftover gravy in the pot. It would get pretty heated (laughs). Everyone in my family loves adobo. Instead of watching us fight further, my mum took the pot and put both of our leftover rice, mixed it and fed us in turns. Adobo, for me means family.*

Therushi echoed Kevin's sentiments. Up until she was 19, Therushi did not eat rice. Rice was substituted with bread. Her diet mostly consisted of bread, a meat curry and *lunu miris*.

Therushi: *I don't eat like that now. I think I use to be a fussy eater. I didn't like trying new food. But every time there's chicken curry or fish curry in the fridge I eat it with bread and lunu miris without fail. The white bread soaks up all that flavour in the curry like a sponge...it becomes an interesting texture... kind of like eating a sponge of curry. It's so delicious. Whenever I eat, smell, or think about chicken curry I'm reminded of my mum. No-one's chicken or fish curry beats hers. Thinking about her and my childhood makes me really happy.*

Kavya: *Does eating adobo chicken curry elicit similar memories?*

Therushi: *Oh yes, it does for me.*

Kevin: *Yeah it does but it also reminds me of Therushi and Paiya.*

Therushi: *This kind of fusion food is really unique to us.*

The embodied experience of eating their respective favourite foods is replicated through their consumption of adobo chicken curry. Both evoke memories of the past that were pleasurable for both (Sutton, 2001; Choo, 2004). Although, Therushi and Kevin belong to different ethnic groups, the dish they ate together sparked a reflective nostalgia for their socialisation of home which allowed them to relive the experiences of the past in the present, together. Adobo chicken curry symbolises their new family whilst, at the same time, remembering the family they grew up with which ultimately connects the past with the present in very interesting ways.

However, Therushi's innovative experimentation was driven by a force stronger than wanting to please her family's individual taste preferences.

Therushi: *As much as Kevin may want to eat Sri Lankan food, he can't handle the amount of chilli that I love. It was something he didn't grow up with and I was quite disappointed when Paiya refused to eat chilli. I really wanted her to eat chilli, you know, have someone else to share it with. It just feels a little disappointing that there isn't someone in the family that can share that with me.*

Adobo chicken curry was invented in her attempts to come to terms with cultural difference. What needs to be emphasised here is that being in an inter-ethnic relationship does not disrupt ethnic boundaries and abolish feelings of difference. It is how the couple came to terms with cultural difference that disrupts ethnic boundaries.

Fusion Food as a Marker of Identity

Both Harsha and Charles are self-confessed ‘terrible cooks’ (after eating their food, I disagree). As mentioned in Chapter 3, during their time of participation in this study, the couple were on a strict diet for the F45 challenge, so their meals were planned for them according to the dietary guidelines of the program. Prior to their ‘healthy lifestyle journey, they mostly ate out and prepared no fuss meals like salads and steak. If either of them had a nostalgic craving for their ancestral foods, they visit their parents’ respective homes. However, the one occasion that Harsha and Charles did cook was for Sri Lankan and Burmese New Year. Harsha likes to celebrate the new year as both Sri Lankan and Burmese people share the same new year calendar. Harsha makes very labour-intensive Sinhala sweets and Burmese savoury foods that Charles likes.

***Harsha:** We like to celebrate our cultural new year together. We’ve been doing it for years. I just feel that day represents us as a couple.*

In their childhood, both Harsha and Charles’ families celebrated their respective New Year by preparing a feast. In their home, these traditions converge and are deemed as

fusion practices. The couple imbue meaning to this convergence as representing their cultural commonalities and identity as a mixed family.

During a conversation about my study, Harsha and Charles were both shocked but excited to find out that most of my participants were also in mixed relationships.

Harsha: *I think our culture [Sinhala culture] emphasises the importance of marrying within the culture. It's exciting to hear that we're not one of the only few... and that in fact there are so many! All my Sri Lankan friends who are married are married to other Sri Lankans. It's sometimes so hard to relate to them.*

Other participants echoed similar sentiments.

Therushi: *Kevin and I always talk about how what we eat is fusion. I think it's really cool. It's our reality, isn't it? Because of our differences we're always doing things with each other's culture in mind. To me, our fusion food is a product of our love, it defines our relationship, and it makes us unique.*

Nadisha: *I think our entire relationship is just one big fusion of all the things we like about each other and our cultures. James is not Sri Lankan and I'm not Chinese so naturally we do things and eat things that are different. Everyone is always pointing out our difference when we're together as well. I think the fusion of our cultures is what makes us special and I'm proud to share that especially through what we eat.*

We can see here that learning about one another's cultural identity in mixed relationships begins by acknowledging commonalities and differences between themselves (Marotta, 2009). For mixed families, this acknowledgement leads to distinguishing themselves from intra-ethnic families. Therefore, it can be argued that fusion food is a marker of identity for mixed families. A marker represents easily recognisable norms (Bicchieri 2006). I want to emphasise that their 'mixed couple' identity does not replace their ethnic identity. They do not forsake one identity over the other. They are completely aware of their cultural differences. Framing their food as fusion food presents mixed couples with a way to make sense of their present cultural reality.

It is important to note that mixed families are the ones to describe their food in this way. It could be argued that Ayomi and Thehan, who are both second generation Sinhala Australians, also cook food that could be described as fusion. On the first night of my observation, Ayomi made ravioli. While she let the ravioli boil, she minced five garlic cloves, diced a red onion; and sliced three red chillies and browned them in a pan with coconut oil. She then put some sliced vegetarian sausages into the pan and added cinnamon powder, paprika, chilli powder and unroasted curry powder and stirred until the sausages browned in colour. The ravioli was then added to the pan and chilli oil was drizzled on the top before giving one final stir. Thehan then grated some parmesan on top to serve. The ravioli that Ayomi made was served with Sri Lankan flavours. Could this not be considered fusion food too? In our interview, Ayomi said she has yet to make Sri Lankan food. I found out that every Sunday, her parents cook enough Sri Lankan food to last them four days. Moreover, first-generation Sinhala mothers do not consider their experimentation

with food as fusion. My own mother liked making pasta. Some of her memorable pasta dishes were left over pumpkin curry hidden in the pasta sauce, and left-over fish curry in the pasta bake. When I asked her if she considered this fusion food, she replied with a strong, “No! This is Australian food.” The difference in how second generation inter-ethnic couples view their experimentation, compared to how second generation intra-ethnic couples is interesting. Mixed couples easily see the ways in which cuisines converge in their cooking because they are constantly faced with one another’s differences.



Figure 12 Ayomi's ravioli.

Conclusion

Fusion food is symbolically important for mixed couples. They use fusion food to make sense of their present cultural reality and grapple with difference that emerge in

their relationships. By distinguishing the food that they cook and eat from that of others, mixed couples take pride in the uniqueness of their identity. Through fusion food, they are also able to create a sense of community by articulating their experiences with the experiences of other mixed families.

The everyday food practices and narratives of mixed couples are valuable for exploring the dynamics of intercultural encounters that occur in private spaces. The homes of mixed couples are everyday spaces where intercultural learning and dialogue are intimate which allows them to envision new social and cultural identities for themselves. As a result, mixed couples see themselves differently.

There is still much more to be said about the food practices of mixed couples, and the ideas I have suggested here have the potential to be developed further. It should be noted that the mixed couples described in this chapter do not belong to ethnic groups of the dominant society in Australia. What can we say about mixed couples when one member belongs to a marginalised ethnic group whilst the other belongs to a dominant ethnic group in society? What are the food dynamics of mixed couples if one member is a third or fourth generation Australian? What can be said about couples in relationships where both members identify with ethnic groups originating from the same geographical region as South Asia? These are interesting things to consider and hopefully illustrate the potential of studying the food practices of diverse mixed families.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion: Remembering the Past for Hopeful Futures

After the completion of my fieldwork, I was pleasantly surprised by how many of the participants reached out to me to talk more about their food and identity. Nayani started a reflective blog that documents her journey to confront her self-Othering, and to relearn aspects about herself and her family. This was something that she longed to do but did not know how. Harsha went to her local Asian grocer and bought a tin of *polos* (jackfruit). She wanted to try and make a ‘healthier’ version of *polos ambula* to satisfy her intense longings for Sri Lankan food whilst still adhering to her healthy lifestyle. Therushi initiated a conversation with her friends about food and identity and came to the realisation that they all shared the same longing to attend Sri Lankan food lessons if such classes existed. The reason being was so that they could learn to cook Sri Lankan dishes, without the judgement and pressure that they experienced while learning under the watchful eye of their mother’s kitchen.

The longing that the second generation describe is the experience of reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2001). They long for familiar foods; they long for independence in the kitchen; and through the sights, sounds and smells of their everyday life that remind them of the culture that their immigrant parents so adamantly tried to raise them with.

The second generation's relationship to their ancestral home, Sri Lanka, vastly defers from the first generation. The first generation's nostalgia is restorative (Boym, 2011). They work towards reconstructing the imagined homeland in their new home where familiar cultural foods, rituals, practices and symbols can be consumed, practiced and performed for not only themselves but also for their children.

In Chapter 2, the first generation attempted to transfer their cultural knowledge values and ideas to the second generation in the form of advice. The first generation have distinct ideas about the kitchen space. They separate the kitchen from the living area which is a direct juxtaposition of the open space designs of modern kitchens in urban Australia. However, the second generation do not fully accept their parents' cultural values, rituals and ideas without question (Drury, 1991). In fact, many second generation initially rejected their mothers' imaginings of their kitchens. This is because there is a strong longing to find their own place in the kitchen. However, I have illustrated that some adapt or reinterpret the characteristics of their mothers' kitchens for various reasons.

Another example is in Chapter 3. To many of their parents' dismay, Sri Lankan food was rejected as everyday food by the second generation because they saw it as unhealthy. But slowly through their own realisation, experiences and coming to terms with their nostalgia, they begin to rework their imaginings of Sri Lankan food into new imaginings that negotiate the health discourses they were socialised in. Furthermore, some of the second generation long to revive techniques and regional specifications of Sri Lankan food to further reinvent what they eat and satisfy their nostalgia.

As smells of spice travels beyond the home, the Sinhala diasporic community begin to realise the racialisation of smell and how others perceive them. In particular, the second generation's engagement with Sri Lankan food, food practices as well as spaces associated with food are influenced by the dominant society's constant stratification of the smell of spice. This also results in the second generation internalising these stigmas (Fanon, Date). They begin to believe that this is true which further problematises their identities.

The homes of mixed couples are everyday spaces where intercultural learning and dialogue are intimate which allows them to envision new social and cultural identities for themselves. As a result, ethnic boundaries are disturbed but not dissolved. Their new identity as a mixed couple is asserted by distinguishing their food as fusion. However, their ethnic identity is not 'diluted'. For them, identity is a social resource that is subjected to change over time (Baldassar, 2001) depending on their lived experiences.

Centring narratives of food can reveal the rich dimensions of how the second generation struggle to come to terms with their multiple identities and identify their place within multicultural Australia. The second generation's everyday cooking and eating practices are shaped into something that works within and reflects their present cultural reality. The embodied sensory memories of Sri Lankan food serve as the catalyst that enables the second generation to make sense of their feelings of longing, and to reflect and conceptualise their identities. The nostalgia that the second generation experience does not represent a yearning for their parents' homeland, but rather an intense yearning to make sense of their identities and for the

socialisation of home. They are remembering the past through food, to connect them to a future that is hopeful.

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APPENDIX

Final Ethics Approval Letter

Ethics Application Ref: (5201800081) - Final Approval

Dear Associate Professor Wise,

Re: ('Navigating Identity Through Food: A Second Generation Sri Lankan Diasporic Experience.')

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Arts Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval of the above application has been granted, effective (9/03/2018). This email constitutes ethical approval only.

Please note: The Committee has requested that the applicants are informed that they need to conform with the fieldwork risk assessment process implemented in the Department of Sociology, which might include approval from the HoD.

If you intend to conduct research out of Australia you may require extra insurance and/or local ethics approval. Please contact Maggie Feng, Tax and Insurance Officer from OFS Business Services, on x1683 to advise further

.
This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf.

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Associate Professor Amanda Wise
Ms Kavya Chethanee Kalutantiri

NB. STUDENTS: IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS APPROVAL EMAIL TO SUBMIT WITH YOUR THESIS.

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 9th March 2019

Progress Report 2 Due: 9th March 2020

Progress Report 3 Due: 9th March 2021

Progress Report 4 Due: 9th March 2022

Final Report Due: 9th March 2023

NB: If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources>

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources>

5. Please notify the Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<https://staff.mq.edu.au/work/strategy-planning-and-governance/university-policies-and-procedures/policy-central>

<https://www.mq.edu.au/research/ethics-integrity-and-policies/ethics/human-ethics/resources/research-ethics>

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Faculty of Arts Research Office at ArtsRO@mq.edu.au

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mianna Lotz
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