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Nourishing place? : immigrant children's "ethnic food" experiences

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NOURISHING PLACE?: IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S "ETHNIC FOOD"
EXPERIENCES

by

Kerith Paul, BA, Trent University, 2006

A Major Research Paper
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in the Program of
Immigration and Settlement Studies

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NOURISHING PLACE?: IMMIGRANT CHILDREN'S "ETHNIC FOOD"

EXPERIENCES

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Master of Arts, 2009
Immigration and Settlement Studies
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationship between food and identity in a sample of ethnically diverse 1.5 and second generation Canadians residing in Toronto. The primary question of this research is what challenges do immigrant children face around "ethnic food" in the home and school settings and how do they affect immigrant children's ethnic identity as adults. This paper is an extension of a study by Lessa and Rocha (2007) that examined how food mediates the processes of settlement and new identity formation in newly immigrated women to Toronto. I applied the authors' thematic analysis to the data from this study to compare the similarities and differences of experiences with "ethnic food" between immigrant women and immigrant children. Food studies provide a window into the lives of immigrant children who experience othering processes in mainstream Canadian society and occupy a difficult space in between the dominant and their parents' cultures.

KEYWORDS: "ethnic" food; immigrant children; identity; othering; intergenerational relations

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Introduction

This paper is based on an exploratory research study that focused on immigrant children's experiences, more specifically tensions and challenges with "ethnic food" in the home and school settings. Food is of central importance for immigrants in the diaspora (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006, Vallianatos & Raine, 2008). Food is an important marker and symbol of culture and/or ethnicity, and thus it plays a large role in the identity of an individual (Isajiw, 1990). Looking at the complex symbolic meanings and associations of food "provides a window into understanding how individuals construct subjectivity, and how various kinds of sociocultural boundaries (e.g. based on class, caste, religion, etc) are demarcated" (Vallianatos and Raine, 2008, p356). In this sense, food not only connects immigrants in myriad ways, but it is also used to single out, or "other", immigrants.

Children of immigrants, who were either born in Canada or not, occupy an interesting space in these issues. Childhood and adolescence can be a challenging time for children and their families. Physical, social, and psychological changes occur as people leave their childhood behind and begin the process of becoming adults. The processes of migration complicate an already challenging time in a young person's life. It may force them to renegotiate not only their individual identities, but also their cultural identities (Scott, 2003). One of the greatest settlement issues immigrant children face is the negotiation between two cultures, that of their parents and that of the mainstream (Janzen and Ochocka, 2003). Furthermore, many immigrant children are moving from countries where they are the majority to one where they are the minority. Therefore, their settlement issues may be compounded by discrimination based on cultural differences

(Desai and Subramanian, 2003). The question that this study aims to address is how “ethnic food” is involved in these processes of settlement, integration, and identity formation in the lives of immigrant children.

Through nine individual interviews with children of immigrants, aged eighteen to thirty-five, from various ethnic backgrounds, I attempted to explore the tensions immigrant children may experience surrounding “ethnic food” at home and at school. How were these experiences dealt with and how did these experiences influence, affect, or help in their identity formation?

The term “ethnic food” is employed with the understanding that this is not a homogeneous category. “Ethnic food” is used to differentiate from “non-ethnic food”, that is, food that is consumed by the dominant culture in Canada. “Ethnic food” will be discussed as a marker of difference in this paper, and so it is important to articulate what a marker of sameness would be. “Canadian” or “Western” foods, as defined by the participants in this study, include foods such as pasta, sandwiches, barbeque, “meat and potatoes”, pre-packaged foods, etc.

I have always been interested in food and food issues. In my own life, I make many connections through food. Stemming from this, I wanted to find out how food could be important to the lives of immigrants who undergo such extreme transformations and dislocations through the migration and settlement processes. It was in this search that I read a research study conducted by Lessa and Rocha (2007) that examined how food mediates the processes of settlement and new identity formation in newly immigrated women to Toronto. My research is an extension of their work. I applied the authors’ thematic analysis to the data from this study to compare the similarities and

differences of experiences with “ethnic food” between immigrant women and immigrant children. The themes discussed are: food as a tool to express narratives of displacement and dislocations, diasporic healing, food in othering processes, integrating the loss of home into a transformed new life, and new identities formation.

The following literature review illuminates specific areas of identity as well as the ways in which food and identity are connected. It provides a context and serves as an important starting point for an exploration of the ways in which “ethnic food” plays an important role in the lives of immigrant children.

Literature review

Exploring ethnic identity

Ethnic identity has been conceptualized in many ways. It is a complex, multidimensional construct that refers to an individual’s identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group (Phinney, 2003). Broadly defined, an ethnic group is a subgroup within a larger context that is bonded by a perception of common ancestry, a shared history and shared symbols (Cornell and Hartmann in Kibria, 2000). The pioneer sociologist Max Weber defined an ethnic group as a social group whose members “entertain a subjective belief in their common descent” (Weber, 1968, p389).

Phinney (2003) asserts that ethnic identity is not a fixed categorization but is instead a dynamic and fluid understanding of self and ethnic background. This is evident by the fact that ethnic identity is modified and constructed and individuals become aware of differences among ethnic groups and attempt to make sense of the meaning of their ethnicity within the larger context (Phinney, 2003). Similarly, Sollors argues that any “ethnic system” relies on an opposition to something “non-ethnic”, and that it is this

antithesis that is more important than the interchangeable content (1989, xiv). Ethnic identity is not a tangible thing but a process – it is a constructed modern and modernizing feature that we would now perhaps call an “invention” (Sollors, 1989, xiv).

As argued by Gans (1979), ethnicity has become an expression of symbolic ethnicity, or an expression of the way in which an individual wants to subjectively self-define their identity and to share it with others. Similarly, Richard Alba observed that “ethnic identity is...a choice by an individual, even if there are social influences on that choice...Thus, for the person who chooses to identify, an identity can be expressed by a curiosity about the immigrant experience...by a fondness for ethnic cuisine, or by myriad other outlets” (Alba, 1990, p303).

Exploring second generation identity

The term “second generation” is broadly applied to children of immigrants. Some scholars use the term to mean children with either one or two foreign-born parents, others include children who immigrated at a young age, while others argue that the country of origin is an important signifier (Ali, 2008). However it is widely accepted that the second generation is a demographic group that includes “both children born in Canada to immigrant parents and those (often referred to as the 1.5 generation) who immigrated to Canada as children” (Kobayashi, 2008).

A recurring theme in the literature on the second generation is that they see themselves, and are seen by others, as a cultural bridge between two cultures or societies: their parents and the Canadian way of living (Kobayashi, 2008). This can be a positive and/or negative experience in many ways for second-generation immigrant youth. They are agents of sociocultural change in that they have the ability to negotiate their identities,

however they are also overwhelmingly from racialized minority groups and may experience racism on an everyday basis (Kobayashi, 2008). Some scholars argue that the second generation are caught between “two worlds” and so do not fully belong to either culture (Anisef and Kilbride, 2003).

Second-generation identity is varied and complex and may be very different from the first generation. Evidence indicates that second generations develop subjective identities and patterns of behaviour that are not present in the first generation (Isajiw, 1990). Gallant (2008) found there is a large diversity of feelings of belonging and identity: some may identify with their parents’ culture of origin, others may not, while some allegiances may operate at many different levels.

Although Lalonde and Giguere (2008) acknowledge the diversity among individuals within the second generation, these authors argue they very often share the feature of being bicultural. Although these bicultural immigrants usually negotiate their lives between the two worlds with ease, there are situations where conflicts arise because of incompatibility of the two cultures’ norms (Lalonde, and Giguere, 2008). Some second-generation immigrants try to establish a non-stigmatized identity in the “bicultural middle of a spectrum bounded by terms like “fresh off the boat” and “whitewashed”, meaning too ethnic and too assimilated, respectively (Pyke and Dang, 2003).

Constructing identity through food

Tensions surrounding ethnic foods in the home and school setting for immigrant children are very often the result of coming into contact with the mainstream Canadian culture, and its values and norms around food. Food is an important marker and symbol of culture and/or ethnicity, and thus it plays a large role in the identity of an individual

(Isajiw, 1990, Vallianatos & Raine, 2008). The food choices that immigrant parents and children make have a profound affect on their identity. Therefore, the most significant aspect of this literature review is my discussion of articles that study the intersections between food, immigrants, and identity.

Food is widely considered a marker of identity, and therefore identity change. In her work researching second-generation identities of the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto, Hernandez-Ramdwar (2006) argues that people are “forever changing, shaping, shifting, amending, constructing, reconstructing and deconstructing our identities” (p4). She argues that for the second-generation who may have never visited ‘the homeland’, food can serve as a “root and/or route” of culture as well as being a marker of difference growing up (p137). First-generation immigrants may base the identity of the second-generation on how much of their ‘original’ culture was retained. If second-generation immigrants are not able to ‘take the heat’ of Caribbean food, or are not able to name Caribbean foods such as *pelau* and *callaloo*, they were seen as “‘soft’, ‘white’, and/or ‘North American’” (p118). Second-generation or children of immigrants may feel discrimination from within their own communities because they may not fit the definitions of ‘authentic’ ethnic identities, defined by first-generation immigrants.

In their study looking at Arabic and South Asian immigrant women’s identities and how they are tied up with food, Vallianatos and Raine (2008) found that “family meals may be an important place where shifting gender and ethnic identities are negotiated between generations and genders” (p357). The authors mention Appadurai’s (1981, p495) notion of “gastropolitics”, which are the tensions between family members over access and distribution of different types of food (p361). Women often have the role

of teaching their children the social meanings of food. However, this is difficult in Canada since many immigrant children’s friends and society at large do not share the same food meanings therefore most socialization occurs within ethnic/religious group boundaries, as such decreasing the potential difficulties associated with “cross-group food transactions” (p367). Women bear the burden of teaching values like dietary rules of consumption, and migration may further stress parent-child relations, “as children are exposed to a variety of foods through the media, school and peers, and want to fit in by consuming these foods” (p370).

Lessa and Rocha (2007) focus on how food mediates the settlement process and experiences, and what role food plays in the changing of women’s roles, responsibilities, and identities. The authors argue that along with race, class, and gender, food also participates in discrimination and oppression, an example of how food is a part of the ‘othering’ process for immigrants. Lessa and Rocha further argue that in the context of the dominant group in Canada, home food can single out particularly men and children in the workplace and at school (2007). Another aspect of food as ‘othering’ is the way in which immigrants can encounter what Lessa and Rocha call “forbidden food habits”, which function to segregate and regulate the lives of immigrant families (2007, p.2). In reference to a novel by Vassanji in which a Muslim immigrant feels forced to eat pork, Padolsky, who looks at how Canadian writers articulate how food becomes a way of engaging the complex issues of group relations, gender, class, individual belonging, and race and ethnicity, argues that ethnicity can be challenged by food, and in some ways the ingestion of forbidden food represents a “clash of cultures” that immigrants experience in myriad ways (2005, p.22). Lessa and Rocha discuss the relationship between women and

the acculturation process, however they found that new immigrant women resisted acculturation by creating a hybrid space, in which they utilized traditions of food from both their home country and the receiving country. They argue that this happens because women begin to “assume a different centrality in the life of the family, which finds expression in food practices” (2007, p.4). This shift in the role within the family can have a profound affect on personal identity.

Changes surrounding food after immigration can affect perceptions of self, relations with others, and physical and mental health, and these changes can affect identity (Koc and Welsh, 2002). To create a feeling of welcoming and home to immigrants, it is important to not only provide equal access to good quality food, but to “culturally appropriate” food (2002, p.47). As a counter-argument to acculturation, Toronto’s cosmopolitan food introduces diversity, creates a sense of home for immigrants, and challenges ethnocentrism (Koc and Welsh, 2002). Padolsky similarly notes how immigrants are having a positive affect on the receiving society by the diversification of national and local cuisines and foodways, and the creation of hybrid restaurants and meals (2005).

Gunew’s (2000) research looks at how intersecting with both food and cultural difference is the image of assimilation, and the relationship between food and subjectivity especially where the subject is positioned at a “tangent” to the dominant culture (p227). Gunew discusses how because of immigrants experience with mobility and loss of home ground, diaspora groups often attempt to retain “maintenance of social regulation” through food because of the fear of being overwhelmed and assimilated into the dominant society (p228). However, the author also notes how diasporas are as much about

breaching and blurring boundaries as about their maintenance and cultural purity. That is, rules surrounding food can be negotiated as is demonstrated by the way immigrants gain agency by selling their own invented ethnic cuisines to the dominant group.

In the poetic article describing a teacher’s collaboration with an immigrant student in her class, Gingras and Tiro (2008) argue that since power relations between and among race, class, and gender are quick to surface as people engage in conversations regarding the connections between culture and food, self and ‘Other’, it is important to acknowledge that subjectivity, food, and belonging are related and need to “talk back to each other” in ways that resist subordination and silence (p378). The authors state that one’s subjectivity is mutually constituted with and by her/his eating and therefore, the “inner lives” of students and teachers are rich resources from which to understand cultural food narratives (p379). In discussing identity, the authors talk about how “manipulation of identity through embracing the food habits of ‘other’ can result in the appropriation not only of culture, but of power” (p386). The authors wonder how this plays out for immigrants new to Canada in how they make decisions to accept or reject food and methods of food preparation as an attempt to preserve and/or perform ethnic and cultural subjectivity. The authors are good to remind us of Deutsch’s (2004) argument that the ‘food voice’ commonly “tells stories of migration, assimilation, resistance, changes over time, and personal and group identity” (p396).

In her study that looks at acculturative stress experienced by South Asian women in Canada’s Atlantic provinces, Samuel (2009) demonstrates resistance in the settlement experience: resistance of immigrant parents to assimilation, and resistance of immigrant children to their parents desire to retain cultural customs and values. The author states

how a Eurocentric pattern of education may create feelings of inferiority about other ethnic cultures and languages which may result in children perceiving their ethnicity as a symbol of backwardness while they come to define their parents, and everything they do, such as food habits, as inferior.

Cultural beliefs may play an important role in the dietary practices of ethnic minority populations. Satia-Abouta et al. (2002), for example, found that Chinese immigrants in North America may experience pressures from both the culture of origin as well as mainstream culture about what foods are appropriate to eat. The authors refer to this as a “cultural crossroad that may exhibit elements of bi-culturalism” in that Chinese immigrants may eat Westernized foods outside the home but then feel the need to eat Chinese foods in the home (p34).

“Ethnic food”, children, and the school setting

Tensions surrounding “ethnic food” are also experienced in arenas outside the home for immigrant children. The Canadian public education system, meant to be a safe place for all children to learn, can be a place where multiculturalism and diversity are not actively promoted. The public education system can in fact be a place where immigrant children experience discrimination and/or racism due to their ethnic or cultural background. Tensions surrounding “ethnic food” can occur through encounters with peers at school, with the staff at school, as well as with policies and rules enforced by the school. Apart from the research done by Greves et al. (2007), I have not encountered any literature specifically looking at immigrant children’s experience with “ethnic” and “non-ethnic” food in the public education system; however some scholars touch on this topic through their research of diversity in schools. In their study looking at American

immigrant families’ perceptions on walking to school and school breakfast programs, Greves et al. (2007) discuss the need to address the community, institution, and environmental barriers that make it difficult for different ethnic groups to fully participate. One of the barriers to full participation in the breakfast program is the lack of “culturally-appropriate” foods which demonstrates the need for improved communication between the public education system and immigrant families to ensure that school meals meet children’s religious, cultural, or other dietary restrictions (Greves et al., 2007, p7).

Zine (2007), whose work provides a critical examination of negative claims associated with Islamic schools in Canada, discusses the “Eurocentric practices” pervasive in the public education system (p76). Islamic students spoke of disenfranchisement and a lack of belonging in public schools and that “trying to ‘fit in’ and accommodate to the social and cultural mores of the public school environment involved various aspects of cultural identification and practice, such as what kind of food it was ‘safe’ to bring to school that would not lead to ostracism from other students (Zine, 2007, p76). Zine states how Islamic students’ experience of having to eat peanut butter instead of samosas is a powerful metaphor for the Eurocentrism within the culture of public schools and any deviance from these norms results in the need to conceal any evidence of “ethnic-ness” (p76). Furthermore, encounters like these have a “profound effect on the identity and cultural self-esteem of ethnically minoritized students” (p76).

In sharp contrast to Zine (2007), Grover (2007) argues that the denial of public education to minority groups (such as immigrants) “infringes upon children’s fundamental human right to free association” (p59). The author argues that Canadian courts have been inconsistent in protecting the right to a tolerant educational setting

(which, the author believes, is the public education system) since the courts regard children's rights as subsumed under parental liberty rights to place their child in a different school setting (2007). Grover argues that being "completely segregated from children belonging to the dominant group underscores the fragility of the minority child's status, often on the margins of the larger society, and maintains a sense of victimization" (p63). Although this may be true, Grover fails to recognize how the public education system may not, in fact, be a "tolerant" environment for all students who belong to minority groups, as demonstrated by the examples in Zine's study. It is essential to acknowledge how tolerance and other values promoted by Canada's multiculturalism policy are often only tolerated instead of being actively promoted in the Canadian public education system.

Several scholars use the research method of narrative inquiry to investigate immigrant students' educational experience (Phillion, 2009; Zhao, 2007; Xu et al., 2007). By applying a critical multicultural theoretical framework to the story of a mainland Chinese student who immigrated to Hong Kong, Phillion (2009) was able to demonstrate how his experience of discrimination based on place of origin parallels that of ethnic minorities experience in schools in North America. Phillion (2009) argues that it is essential that teacher education programs and discourse acknowledge the importance to understand privilege and socio-economic status and how it affects the lives of students, in particular, immigrant students.

Incorporating the immigrant family into the research, Zhao (2007) argues that is important to inquire into immigrant students' "intergenerational family stories" to see how they shape and/or ease tensions in the "school stories" of immigrant children. Some

immigrant parents are desperate for their children to 'fit in', and so this can become a 'story' for immigrant children to live by in their public school experiences. Zhao also asserts that, as Canadian schools become more diverse, teachers may need to give up present understandings of teaching and "travel the worlds of many children" who have been shaped by lived stories and need to make meaning of new lives in new schools (2007, p62).

By understanding the narrative of a young Chinese immigrant and his experience in a Canadian public school, Xu et al. (2007) argue that in order to avoid immigrants placing their children in boarding schools, thus isolating them from their communities and homes, it is crucial that public schools bring the immigrants' home and community into close connection with the school. Furthermore, the authors discuss how immigrant students' questions and difficulties surrounding identity, given that many are hyphenated Canadians, are not easily resolved in Canada's public education system (Xu et al., 2007). As a marker of identity, food must pose a special challenge for immigrant students who are unsure of their place in Canadian mainstream schooling and society.

Connecting children with food

Haden (2006), who writes about the increasing need to address food issues and their connections to children, states that there is a need to understand food as an integral part of social and cultural life, as intimately a part of human and social communication, and a shaping force of children's subjectivity and self-image. Moreover, the author argues that food helps children negotiate and in some ways challenge the cultural order of things within which they must take their place (2006).

In a study that focuses on how Nordic children describe and reflect on their everyday lives with food, Johansson et al. (2009) discuss how taste is constructed within social and cultural settings and that “taste communities” may be formed and be strong in a school class setting (p35). These “taste communities” are a result of the relations of not only children and parents, but also between children who compare and discuss their lunches (p35). This demonstrates how children’s food choices are highly influenced by peer pressure, which results in tensions surrounding food and identity, health, and parent-child relations. The authors also emphasize how food and eating are deeply embedded in culture: “what we eat, the contexts in which we eat...what the social interactions around the food is like, and the values and norms connected to food and eating – all this is rooted in time, space, and social context in specific ways, which tend to differ between different times and places” (Johansson et al., 2009, p47).

Dyck (2006), whose work looks at place, health, and healing with South Asian immigrants in British Columbia, Canada, found that “ethnic” and “Canadian” foods were essential in the making of family and individual (including children) identity. Dyck states that while children and husbands tastes are catered to, immigrant women and mothers deliberately cultivate the inclusion of what they consider Canadian food, as some think this is necessary for immigrant children to feel like they belong. Furthermore, Dyck found that immigrant children have a new role as “conveyors of ‘new’ food knowledge” who transmit information regarding dietary advice as well as requests for different foods (p9). These examples demonstrate the influence children may have on the food choices of their parents, and call to mind the need to question where those influences are coming from and why they exist.

Summary of literature review

Phinney (2003) asserts that ethnic identity is not a fixed categorization but is instead a dynamic and fluid understanding of self and ethnic background. As argued by Gans (1979), ethnicity has become an expression of symbolic ethnicity, or an expression of the way in which an individual wants to subjectively self-define their identity and to share it with others.

A recurring theme in the literature on the second generation is that they see themselves, and are seen by others, as a cultural bridge between two cultures or societies: their parents and the Canadian way of living (Kobayashi, 2008). This can be a positive and/or negative experience in many ways for second-generation immigrant youth. They are agents of sociocultural change in that they have the ability to negotiate their identities, however they are also overwhelmingly from racialized minority groups and may experience racism on an everyday basis (Kobayashi, 2008). Some scholars argue that the second generation are caught between “two worlds” and so do not fully belong to either culture (Anisef and Kilbride, 2003).

Food is an important marker and symbol of culture and/or ethnicity, and thus it plays a large role in the identity of an individual (Isajiw, 1990, Vallianatos & Raine, 2008). The food choices that immigrant parents and children make have a profound affect on their identity.

Some immigrant children experience disenfranchisement and a lack of belonging in public schools, and “trying to ‘fit in’ and accommodate to the social and cultural mores of the public school environment involved various aspects of cultural identification and

practice, such as what kind of food it was 'safe' to bring to school that would not lead to ostracism from other students (Zine, 2007, p76).

Haden (2006), who writes about the increasing need to address food issues and their connections to children, states that there is a need to understand food as an integral part of social and cultural life, as intimately a part of human and social communication, and a shaping force of children's subjectivity and self-image.

Methods

This study was approached from a qualitative social research orientation, because these qualitative methods allow for the breadth and depth necessary for an exploration of how people assign meaning to certain constructs such as identity and "ethnic" identity. Much of the published research on second generation and 1.5 generation youth involves large-scale quantitative analyses with large samples. Wilkinson (2008) states that, while very useful in determining general trends, this type of research does not provide much information on individual lived experiences. Capturing and understanding the stories of immigrant children in their own words could be done best using a qualitative approach. It should be explicitly stated that the results of this research cannot be generalized. Rather, the aim is to allow for space for a small number of immigrant children's voices, and to highlight and acknowledge the lived experiences of these children. Exploratory qualitative interviews were conducted. These were open-ended and utilized an interview guide.

To be eligible to participate in this study, respondents had to be between 18 and 35 years old, had to be a child of (an) immigrant(s) (either the second or 1.5 generation), and had to have gone through the Canadian public education system for at least 5 years.

To begin the recruitment process, emails were sent to each student in the Immigration and Settlement Studies Masters Program cohort at Ryerson University, the program in which I am a student and for which I am conducting and writing this research project. I chose to recruit from my cohort not only because I knew many of them would fit my participant criteria, but also because my recruitment methods included snowballing, and I suspected they would be a good source of potential participants. This proved to be true, as many of the participants in my study were from outside the initial group. Recruitment presented an initial challenge, with few respondents. However, after a follow-up email was sent, I received many responses and suggestions of participants.

The interviews were one-on-one and took place in a reserved room at the Ryerson Library or in another location chosen by the participant. Light food was provided for several reasons: as small compensation for taking the time to participate, to build rapport, and to relax the academic environment. One of the challenges during the interview process was trying to create a relaxed atmosphere so that the participants would feel more comfortable and therefore more willing to talk about their experiences. The interviews were audio-recorded, and lasted from a half hour to over one and half hours. In one case, I conducted a "follow up" interview, in order to gather more data. All participants gave informed consent to participate in the interviews, and had the option of ceasing participation at any point.

In total, I interviewed nine participants, all of them female. Countries of origin of either the participants or their parents include El Salvador (1), Romania (1), Taiwan (1), China (2), Sri Lanka (1), South Korea (2) and Eritrea (1). One of the participants is a second-generation immigrant (born in Canada) while the other eight are part of the 1.5

generation (arrived in Canada before the age of sixteen). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, all names have been changed and in some cases, ethnicity has been concealed.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio-recordings. To analyze the data, thematic analysis was employed. I employed a flexible framework directed by the words of the participants. The data was arranged and cross-referenced according to the themes that emerged from the narratives (Mason, 2002). In addition, the study by Lessa and Rocha (2007) was employed to help organize the data. These authors' study, which looked at how "food mediates the processes of settlement and new identity formation" in immigrant women in Toronto, was integral to how I approached my own research question. I was interested in the connections between "ethnic food" and identity, however, there was a gap in the literature. My study would attempt to address this gap by exploring the children's experiences with "ethnic food", their thoughts on these experiences, and how it mediates or affects identity formation. In a sense, my research is an extension of the study by Lessa and Rocha (2007). Therefore, the identified themes from the data analysis were compared with the five main themes in that study. However, while Lessa and Rocha focused on immigrant women, my study focuses on 1.5 and second generation immigrant women reflecting on their experiences as children. For the purpose of differentiating between the two study's participants, the participants in this study will be referred to as "immigrant children".

Theoretical Framework

The notion of food as a tool of exclusion was highlighted in several narratives and so I was able to tailor the follow-up interviews to address this issue. Furthermore, an

anti-racist framework was employed to understand and report on the issues surrounding immigrant children, "ethnic food", and identity formation. This framework can be very useful in "understanding how the interlocking social constructs of and categories of gender, class, ethnicity, and race affect people's lives in an overlapping and cumulative manner" (Desai and Subramanian, 2003). It can also be useful in understanding the complexities of the lives of immigrant children living in a racialized society because it moves beyond a narrow preoccupation with individual discriminatory beliefs and actions to examine the ways racist ideas are entrenched and supported in institutions (Dei, 1996).

Self-reflexivity is especially important in this anti-racist theoretical framework context because I come from a place of privilege. As a Canadian-born, white, university-educated woman, it is important that I acknowledge how my own "whiteness" is constructed in relation to the participants in this study who fit the Census definition of "visible minority" groups. Sheth and Handa suggest to the white researcher and reader that she needs to constantly position herself not within the text but in relation to the text: "she must recognize her position of whiteness and how it falls outside the experience of the text but not outside the power dynamic of her relation to the history of racial domination relevant to the experiences in the text" (1993, p49). I have experienced and felt the effects of racism only once in my life (some would even argue this is not possible given that I am white). I have never experienced racism, discrimination, or exclusion based on food. My initial interest in researching immigrants and "ethnic food" was because of my own history of making connections through food. Also, my hopes were that food would act as a way to bridge my outsider status with the Canadian immigrant community, and that I would be able to explore how food and identity are connected.

Findings/Discussion

Theme 1: Food as a tool to express narratives of displacements and dislocations

Some immigrant women feel the need to connect with other members in their diasporas to express feelings of loss, displacement, and dislocation. Food is a tool that allows them to do this in that it facilitates the expression of feelings, the ability to discuss home foods in relation to Canada, and it provides imagery of their lost home (Lessa and Rocha, 2007). Regardless of how old they were when they migrated, some immigrant children may experience similar feelings of loss. Those that immigrated at a later age have much more tangible memories of, and sometimes longing for, "home". One interviewee, who immigrated to Canada when she was twelve years old, describes how her family would engage in narratives of longing:

"Sometimes we have cravings for food that is only available in Korea. We would talk about it like 'Oh I miss that dish I miss having that'...we would say when we go back to Korea 'I'm going to have that...it's one of my top priorities.' And the dishes have different tastes and feels to it. They use different ingredients I guess."
(Hae)

Similarly, this immigrant child, who migrated between Canada and Taiwan several times, misses the access and atmosphere that home food represented:

"I think it's different in Taiwan compared to here because in Toronto everything is so clean. Food is always kept inside...Food is everywhere [in Taiwan]...it's probably really unsanitary but it's delicious...It's also very accessible to get food inexpensively in Taiwan because it is everywhere. It's not very cheap to go out to eat in Toronto...Everything is so contained in North America...in boxes and

buildings. You are so limited to hotdogs..." (Margaux)

These immigrant children have very real memories of the food from home and find comfort in acknowledging the differences between their home food and the food that is available in their new location.

To some immigrant children, narratives of home foods help to create an almost fictional home country. The following narrative demonstrates how home foods can be used to recall a place (fictional or not) that is free of the challenges of building a new home in Canada, and finding your place in it:

"You try to replicate what you have at home but it wasn't the same...To have a lot of the fruit that we wanted and that we were nostalgic for. We missed it...all of us missed it. [Canada is] more of a home than El Salvador believe it or not...El Salvador is my imagined home where your desires could be a reality." (Alex)

Although some immigrant children recall the foods from home, and relate those foods to their sense of dislocation, for the most part, immigrant children do not reflect on the trauma of displacement. Immigrant children use food to connect them to their place of origin, but it is rarely used to express suffering or to challenge uprooting from their home country. For the most part, immigrant children's struggles around "ethnic food" are rooted in their new home, in Canada, as will become evident in the following thematic discussions.

Theme 2: Diasporic healing

The term diaspora encapsulates a group of people who have a common geographical origin, have trans-located through migratory patterns, and share a collective consciousness, identifiable markers (such as ethnicity), and common experiences in their

new locales (Tettey and Puplampu, 2005). Food practices are tied to space and time, and for some women in the diaspora, food maintains or recreates home through myriad ways (Lessa and Rocha, 2007). Food may bring a healing effect to the lives of immigrant women by “maintaining the presence of the old world in the present” (Lessa and Rocha, 2007, p3).

Connecting to the old world is also important for some immigrant children. Hernandez-Ramdwar (2006) argues that for the second-generation who may have never visited ‘the homeland’, food can serve as a “root and/or route” of culture, which can also be true for immigrant children who have memories of their country of origin. This immigrant child recounts how she and her sister wanted to learn how to make food that has been made in her family for generations:

“She [her sister] makes lots of... her big thing is she makes a lot of dumplings. Which is what I wrote about in the anthology. Which was passed down from my grandmother and my mother. We used to bother her a lot...we wanted our mom to teach us how to make them and fold them. That was a big deal for us to learn how to make them right. It made us really happy. And she is very proud of herself to be able to make them look so pretty and taste really good.” (Margaux)

The connection that she makes with the old world is both symbolic and literal. Whenever she successfully recreates these foods in Canada, she phones her parents (who moved back to Taiwan) to tell them. She talks of how her need for the recipes that come from her mother and grandmother are so desperately wanted that she will phone her family at three in the morning Taiwanese time, to understand exactly how something is made, or what ingredients are used.

Doring et al state that “in the complexity and plight of diasporic situations, cooking performs cultural memory: food and recipes are links to cultural ‘roots’ and are, at the same time, testifying on the contact zones and ‘routes’ which their producers and consumers have gone through” (2003, p7). Cultural memory is performed in different ways. “Ethnic restaurants” play an important role in connecting immigrant children to food experiences that remind them of home.

“When I go out and buy Korean food at Bloor and Christie...like, Koreatown, it really brings back all those memories I used to have in Korea. On certain occasions I would like to go eat spicy chicken and then that memory comes back and I will search for those restaurants and go and eat there, right? So I guess it does bring a lot of memories from Korea...” (Hae)

Immigrant parents do not always instigate the need for a connection to countries of origin by way of “ethnic foods”. Some immigrant children noted how they were the ones to encourage their parents (more often mothers) to make the foods from home.

“My mom didn’t come from a social economic place where she was cooking all the time...so when we came to Canada she felt the pressure from us because we wanted the food from back home. She had to learn how to make things here...She did learn to cook...so here she would make the stuff that she knew how to make back home...So, the staple food. But making *pupusas* or *tamales* was really difficult for her. Which is why whenever we get it we were like, ‘oh yes!’” (Alex)

It is clear that immigrant children have a voice when it comes to the ways in which they want to remember and recreate their home. This quote also demonstrates that

the downward social mobility that her mother encountered in Canada had a great effect on the culture and food habits of the family (to be discussed further).

Food may bring a healing effect to immigrant women by having the opportunity to explain and educate others about culture and food habits (Lessa and Rocha, 2007). This is not the case for immigrant children when they are young. Instead, the experiences of racism and discrimination related to “ethnic food” that immigrant children face (primarily in school) leads them to hide the foods from home and eat the ubiquitous sandwich. However, some participants discussed how now that they have grown up they have become more confident in sharing their cultural foods.

“It’s an opportunity to expose part of who I am to them, but also allow them [members of other ethnic and non-ethnic communities] to expand their horizon as to the different types of food that there are in the world and you don’t have to always eat macaroni and cheese.” (Aatifa)

This experience of sharing is a stark contrast to the shame that many immigrant children associate with their “ethnic foods” when they are young. They feel confident that not only are they educating others about different types of “ethnic foods”, but it also asserts their identity and membership in a particular ethnic group. However, not all immigrant children grow up to enjoy the experience of sharing elements of their culture with those from mainstream Canadian society.

“I didn’t have any friends of color in Peterborough. I was constantly having to explain what I was making. People weren’t repulsed...like, they never looked disgusted but I always had to explain what I was making...I’m more comfortable here in Toronto... there’s more exchanging of stories and recipes with other

people of color and immigrants. There is more give-and-take here than in Peterborough. It was a lot of me giving and explaining.” (Margaux)

For some, it is important to have the connection, if not with their own diaspora or ethnic group, then with people of colour and immigrants who may have shared similar “ethnic food” experiences. Furthermore, the discomfort of educating members of other groups about food and other markers of difference calls to mind Razack’s (1993) argument that people of colour are always being asked to tell their stories for white people’s benefit, which we cannot hear precisely because of the benefit we derive from hearing them. For some, diasporic healing can come only from within the diaspora, that is, the larger conceptual immigrant diaspora.

Food may bring healing to the lives of immigrant women by the promotion of gatherings with members of the diaspora around food (Lessa and Rocha, 2007). For some immigrant children, these gatherings help to connect them to a community, time, and place that they may have lost in some ways.

“My mom’s friends who were other Taiwanese or Cantonese women... we would have meals together and they would bring their foods from where they were from. [They] were positive times...it was fun. They were good memories for me. It made me a part of it... the Asian community.” (Margaux)

This woman emphasized that these experiences helped her to feel strong in situations when she may be discriminated against. Therefore, these gatherings are healing in that they reinforce the pride that they may feel for their culture and ethnic identity. Immigrant children not only experienced gatherings with adult members of their ethnic group around food, but also other racialized and/or immigrant children. Two of

the immigrant children discussed how they sought out other children at school who ate similar lunches.

“It helped me connect with another girl who became my best friend. She’s Japanese-Canadian and we used to share lunch because we had similar lunches. Rice-based dishes. We would share lunch... and I think she also had that sense of pride too.” (Margaux)

The shared understanding about the “ethnic foods” that they ate provided them not only with security in the face of segregation from non-racialized children, but also with a sense that there are others who want to express the pride that is felt about their ethnic identity. Anisef and Kilbride argue that as a result of discrimination, “many learn to cope by seeking peer groups from their own cultural background as a way to create a sense of belonging and cultural identity” (Anisef and Kilbride, 2003, p253). Some immigrant children also seek out gatherings with members of their diaspora when they have grown up. These experiences allow them to connect with their immediate family, the ways in which they eat, and their larger ethnic community.

“And my grandparents...when they used to visit we would always go back to dim sum. At dim sum we would see a lot of different families...so even now I will try to go to dim sum on Saturdays and Sundays...It’s one of those things that we do.” (Rose)

Diasporic healing has significance for some of the participants both as children and as adults. Food may act as a conduit for experiences that serve to connect diasporic members.

Theme 3: Food in “othering” processes

“I hear people sometimes... ‘ew curry’ or ‘ew Indian food’... and some of these people are my best friends...and it’s like...oh my god. I guess what they would call it is harmless prejudice. But it’s not...especially when you’re a child. To me it’s racism...a different form of it. Food is more important than people think.”

(Alex)

The most common “ethnic food” experience the participants had as children was a feeling of being ‘othered’, being discriminated against or excluded in the classroom. The Canadian public education system is meant to be a safe place where all children can learn and grow. Although many schools now recognize ethnic and cultural diversity in order to prevent discrimination, “visible minority youth will continue to be at risk unless the system as a whole is actively working to accommodate their differences and needs” (Anisef and Bunch, 1994, p9-10). The participants’ narratives demonstrate that racism is all too common in the education system and that cultural diversity may not be as promoted as it should be.

Since food is a marker of identity, then it is also a marker of sameness and difference. For most of the immigrant children, it was more important to “fit in” than it was to continue to take their “ethnic foods” to school. Whether they were witnesses or victims of discrimination because of the food they ate, it was known that their “ethnic food” was an obvious marker of difference and cause for castigation. Two immigrant children never had the experience of taking their home foods to school because of that knowledge. One of those immigrant children, who arrived in Canada when she was twelve, did not take food to school until she knew what kind of food was the norm.

“I would kind of tell my mom ‘this is what people eat’. So I would bring that instead of Korean food in school which would stink up the place.” (Hae)

However, most immigrant children have felt the effects of discrimination based on their “ethnic foods” at school.

“Initially I would bring my food... normal soups and stuff that you warm up... it’s evidently different, right? It wasn’t a big deal for people would always ask me for that smells interesting or what is that... there was maybe a little bit weird for them so I felt a bit weird about it (laughing). So I started bringing sandwiches...which is something pretty universal so nobody looks at you funny about that. So I started bringing sandwiches instead and buying things from the cafeteria.” (Dana)

The need to take sandwiches to school is a powerful metaphor for the Eurocentrism within the culture of public schools and straying away from these rules results in the need to conceal any evidence of “ethnic-ness” (Zine, 2007, p76). Most of the immigrant children were able to switch to mainstream foods, or more “socially acceptable foods” as one participant called it, such as pizza and wraps. In those cases the parents were happy to comply with their children’s wishes because often, immigrant parents want their children to fit into Canadian mainstream society more than the children (Zhao, 2007).

“So no they never forced me to take any kind of ethnic food to school. They put a lot of effort so that it wasn’t so different from others. Because when I first came to Canada I didn’t speak much English, and that was a reason enough for us to be

alienated from the rest so they tried to do anything or everything so I can blend in.” (Hae)

However, not all were able or chose to change the types of food they brought to school and ate. Some simply chose to live with the feelings of exclusion.

“Bringing in the lunchboxes that migrant parents made in elementary school was kind of embarrassing. Because mine would be different from other peoples’. I would have a full meal whereas others would have a handy-dandy sandwich. And it was kept in a thermos so it would have a smell. At some point I hated that feeling of being different...I never expressed it with my family. I endured it.” (Meghan)

Whether she chose to endure the othering as a result of eating “ethnic food”, it is important to acknowledge the resiliency of immigrant children in these types of situations (Boyd, 2008). Beiser, Shik, and Curyk (1999) suggest that family stability may help foster personal resilience. It is important to consider where confidence in one’s own ethnic or cultural identity comes from. Zhao (2007) argues that it is important to inquire into immigrant students’ “intergenerational family stories” to see how they shape and/or ease tensions in the “school stories” of immigrant children. This immigrant child discussed how it was the “pride” that her parents instilled in her at a young age that helped her deal with being discriminated against at school:

“Chinese dumplings are filled with chives and they tend to get off a very strong odor. So when I opened my lunchbox the whole room filled with chive smell and the other kids would say ‘ew, that’s so gross.’...I just remember feeling bad because of how much work my mom put into it...I saw her make them, it’s really

labor-intensive. And then to see these white kids making fun of it, I was so offended and angry. I don't think I was really that embarrassed... maybe a little embarrassed to have a smelly lunch... but mainly I was angry because I saw how much work my mom put into it." (Margaux)

Experiences such as these come at a price for racialized or immigrant youth.

These kinds of encounters can greatly affect cultural self-esteem and identity formation. In reflecting on their own experiences as Indian youth in Canadian schools, Sheth and Handa express a repercussion of racism and exclusion: "the emotional distancing, the desire to become invisible, the self-silencing all become protective mechanisms of survival for her in an all-white school....self-hatred and shame of her India/n culture were the outcomes of internalizing the dominant white Canadian discourse" (Sheth and Handa, P76). Many of the immigrant children reflected on doing very similar things in order to deal with the discrimination they faced from peers. When asked about how she felt about her taking "non-ethnic" foods to school, this participant states:

"It was like a survivalist strategy. Kids want to be accepted... they don't want to be picked on. You blend in. Or you want to stand out for good reasons, like you're cool." (Alex)

In the face of these experiences of exclusion, immigrant children devised realistic and necessary strategies in order to cope. As children, one of these strategies was to stop eating "ethnic food" in order to conceal ethnicity. Some immigrant children discuss how these experiences have affected them as adults, and how coping strategies are still employed. The following narrative illustrates the ways in which traumatic childhood experiences may leave a real impression:

"...There was always that fear in the back of my mind that they would say something [about what I was cooking]. They never did but there was always the fear. That is probably because I was made fun of as a kid. And I really make that known now. I warn people that they should never talk about my food. Don't ever comment on it. I will f--- you up. There's also a lot of self-deprecation and qualifying everything I eat. Like, oh sorry this stuff really smells...sorry, I'm so sorry...set that up first so that nobody can say it for you. You say it first...which really sucks. But I think that that is one coping mechanism...for you to voice it first before anyone else can." (Margaux)

Her experience as a child not only led her to feel fear about what people may say about her "ethnic food" today, but it has also led her to develop ways in which she can avoid racist comments. These strategies, which include being apologetic for her "ethnic food", are ones that she wishes she did not have to employ.

Cultural or ethnic shame is also a repercussion that is created from experiences of discrimination. Samuel (2009) proposes that Eurocentric pattern of education may create feelings of inferiority about other ethnic cultures and languages which may result in children perceiving their ethnicity as a symbol of backwardness while they come to define their parents, and everything they do, such as food habits, as inferior. Some immigrant children discussed these feelings of shame as children.

"...I remember my father making this chicken soup... and I remember that the chicken's feet were still in there and I was just so disgusted... I just couldn't eat it, you know?...you slowly becoming aware...you just become aware somehow that you are an immigrant...there are differences..." (Robyn)

Immigrant children's feelings towards their families and their ethnicities may slowly change as their awareness of "otherness" becomes greater. Those who feel a sense of belonging do not ask these questions of identity and self-doubt.

Theme 4: Integrating the loss of home into a transformed new life

Change and transformation are key themes in the lives of all immigrants.

Although identities are not static, immigrant children have a very different immigration experience than their parents due to the fact that their identities are being developed and formed for the first time. Immigrant children are faced with significant pressures from their family and from mainstream Canadian society. These two forces have a tug-of-war effect on immigrant children as expressed by one participant: "we definitely lived in two different worlds [from their mother]...it was home and then school...there were different expectations from both" (Alex). Food helps to mediate those expectations and the resulting identity negotiation. The changes and transformations in food habits and practices that either the immigrant parents or children instigate help to create a sense of adaptation and belonging. Most participants discussed change in their families' food habits as the "variety", "diversity", or "incorporation" of "Canadian", "non-ethnic", or "Western" foods.

For some immigrant children, there was a clear frustration at the lack of change or adaptation that they expected from their family. Some immigrant children found that the family members who would not eat "non-ethnic foods", out at a restaurant for example, were hindering their desire to try new things. The second-generation participant, who expressly stated that she was not an immigrant, discussed her frustration at her parents who "whole-heartedly" identified with their country of origin. Their food habits and

practices demonstrated the disconnect that was felt between the participant and her parents.

"...Home was sort of unchanging. But I certainly wanted things, yeah. Oh I want to try that or...or I would try to mix Canadian foods with [home] food. I would mix, like, [my "ethnic food"] with tomato sauce just to see and...because I think to be honest I really do think of my family as being so different...and so...that was just the way that they were. And I would just go elsewhere or do my own thing, you know? And whenever we would go out, which was never, I would try to suggest certain places but we would always end up going to most of the time a [country of origin] restaurant. And my parents would always bring their own food when they would come and visit me." (Robyn)

Immigrant women create a "borderland space" in the home by way of cooking hybrid creations. This plays a role not only in the maintenance of their ethnic identity, but also in creating a connection with their new environment (Lessa and Rocha, 2007). Hybridization practices were common among the immigrant children's experiences in this study. The majority of them discussed how their mothers slowly incorporated new foods into their diet and "experimented" by mixing these new foods with their "ethnic food". Having a variety of foods facilitates immigrant children's dynamic identities that are constantly being negotiated both within and outside the home. One participant discussed how she and her sisters began to demand the incorporation of new tastes after her mother had been making only "ethnic food" for six years after arrival in Canada:

"She'll put spice on a chicken, you know, mixing it up. She does a lot of that.

It's great because she's upholding both. Because Canada is our home now, and

you know our culture is...was Sri Lankan. To have both...it's great. Dual identity is great." (Melinda)

Her assertion that the hybrid food they eat "upholds" her identity points to the importance that food plays in the lives of immigrant children and how it helps to cement the way they want to present themselves. Furthermore, this example demonstrates the agency that immigrant children have in influencing their parents' decisions and in transforming family food habits.

Lessa and Rocha (2007) argue that the ambiguity of the home space as a result of hybrid food practices helps family members deal with discrimination and facilitates belonging. Although hybrid foods may do this within the home, they may not be "safe" foods for immigrant children when interacting with others outside the home. Two participants talked about their experiences of taking hybrid food to school and the resulting ridicule they faced from peers.

"But I do remember one time I didn't have anything to eat...there was no rice or pasta, but we had bread. So we took that Eritrean beef stew and we put it into the sandwich...into the bread. And that was my sandwich (laughing). I remember I went to school, and there was an Eritrean friend of mine there...and [she said] 'you don't eat that beef stew with bread, right?' My friend looked at me...she was Eritrean... 'What are you doing? Why are you having it with bread?'...I think that impacted me a bit." (Aatifa)

Encounters like these may have a "profound effect on the identity and cultural self-esteem of ethnically minoritized students" (Zine, 2007, p76). Immigrant parents may think that they are helping their child to 'fit in' by sending them to school with hybrid

foods, but the reality is that anything straying from the norm may place immigrant children in a vulnerable position. Furthermore, this encounter highlights the fact that 'othering' is a phenomenon that occurs within ethnic groups, as well as coming from mainstream Canadian society (this will be discussed further in terms of "authentic identities").

For many immigrant families that arrive in Canada, employment is one of the greatest experiences of change in their lives. Whether it is a lack of credential recognition or Canadian experience, discrimination, or language barriers, many immigrants experience downward mobility in the Canadian labour market (Preston et al, 2003). Furthermore, this is compounded with the need to keep up with the Canadian pace of life. This has a profound affect on the lives of immigrants and their families. Lessa and Rocha (2007) discuss the effects in terms of changed food practices and subsequent changed family dynamics. These effects were also articulated by immigrant children. Four participants discussed the struggles their parents endured as immigrants in the labour market and the impact it had on their family, including their family food practices.

One participant discusses how her mother's tiring schedule resulted in the children not being able to take "ethnic foods" to school.

"No, like, for lunch I don't think she ever made curries... because she worked a lot mostly... So she always prepared us like, sandwiches mostly... yeah, mostly sandwiches she made and she left it... it was for her convenience ...because she works during the night so... it worked out for her. She would make it, leave it, we would take it. She was always sleeping when we were leaving." (Melinda)

Another immigrant child reflects on how her friends from within the same ethnic group, who were the majority at her school, sought her “ethnic food” because their parents did not have the time to make it.

“...We would exchange things at school. Because they wanted mine and I wanted theirs. My Chinese friends wanted mine...Because their parents didn’t have the time to make them noodles or rice they would make them sandwiches... inevitably they hated it and they wanted with real food.” (Meghan)

The experience of not seeing parents during meal times was also very common due to the pressures of their under-employment situations.

“[Eating] just kind of united us after a day of separate lives [in Romania]. Which is different from how it is here... we don’t get together as much. I think mostly because when we first came here my parents worked a lot of precarious jobs. They worked maybe three or four part-timers. And then we were in school... everyone was just going different ways at different times of day and different shifts so we mostly never came together [to eat] except on the weekend.” (Dana)

These examples illustrate the kinds of systemic inequalities that immigrants face in Canada, and how they can affect even the ways in which families eat. The inability to eat “ethnic food” due to employment conditions upon arrival to Canada points to a kind of forced assimilation. One participant reflected on how her family used a food bank for a period of time, and “made do” with whatever they could get. Furthermore, the changed food practices have other outcomes, such as changed roles for immigrant children within the family. The following narrative of the second-generation participant is extremely

telling of the kinds of situations many immigrant families may be forced to endure as newcomers to Canada:

“When I think about the food questions, there is context there because [my parents] had to work a lot and very...their hours would change quite a bit. So my memory of childhood when we lived in [Toronto suburb] was that they were not home very often. So we had to really take care of ourselves...we being me and my siblings. It really shaped our home life. And then, you know, my parents... they were well aware of what their situation were their chances... where they stood in their chances in Canada... it was very clear that the only work that they could do was manual labor... it was really physically difficult. And the compensation was really... it wasn’t enough... [When we moved to the country] my parents had this...store which required immense amounts of time...their time continued to be devoted to their work which had a real impact on our family life...it basically meant that we didn’t have one...So I would cook my dinner...and in part I had to because everyone was busy working so I had to take care of myself and my brother.” (Robyn)

There are many repercussions from these types of changed roles and responsibilities within immigrant families. Janzen and Ochocka discuss how immigrant youth struggle to deal with the pressures their parents face as newcomers, and saw the pressures on them as negatively affecting their ability to be parents (Janzen and Ochocka, 2003). Some participants discussed the resentment they felt towards their parents due to the expectations that were placed on them. “Expectations” and “guilt” were common themes when talking about responsibilities within the family unit. Parental expectations

are something that all youth must deal with. However, for immigrant or racialized youth, this takes on special significance. Immigrant children are under tremendous pressure to succeed, to retain their culture, but to also “fit in”, because their parents endure many unwarranted burdens as marginalized people, “especially when seeking employment in a society that does not recognize their credentials or experience” (Desai and Subramanian, 2003, p155).

Another important aspect of changed roles within the family is the new power and agency that immigrant children may find when, for example, taking on the role of cooking. The second-generation participant discussed how she chose to “reject” her family’s “ethnic food” and instead chose to make “non-ethnic foods” for herself and her sibling. It is important to recognize the variety of reasons that may have contributed to this situation. The resentment could have been felt towards her parents because they were caught in a system that forced them to find employment that required most of their time. Furthermore, the pressures from mainstream Canadian society, including experiences of discrimination in schools, need to be considered in contributing to immigrant children’s need to eat “non-ethnic foods”. The second-generation participant expressed this by her assertion that “the level of acceptability of ‘ethnic food’ is still rooted in if the ‘real’ Canadians accept it.” This is also asserted by Sheth and Handa who argue that “white Canada” “systematically teaches non-white people to deny their cultural heritage” (Sheth and Handa, 1993, p66).

Another participant discusses the circumstances that surrounded her need/desire to cook “non-ethnic food” as an immigrant child.

“At first she was given overnight shifts so that was really hard for her and my sister and I because we would never see her...I think I made more of the effort to try to learn how to bake a turkey or to learn how to make a roast...I would feel more pressure to introduce those types of foods than my mom did because...my experience growing up was very different from hers. [My mother] lived at the standard of living that I have not known. So for me it was like... I was always cooking when I was young...I would learn how to make cabbage rolls and meatballs...I would introduce that to my mom and my sister...so it’s really strange I don’t know why I did it. Maybe I felt the pressure to introduce it and become more Canadian when I was younger.” (Alex)

This immigrant child describes her responsibility as a cook in the family in three ways: she takes on the role that her mother finds difficult because of her different social position in the home country, she takes on the role due to her mother’s absence from the home due to precarious employment, and finally, she takes on the role to help to negotiate her Canadian identity.

Moving from immigrant children’s experiences of cooking when they were younger, present cooking practices for immigrant children vary. However, some common forces are at work. For six out of the nine participants who cook, it seems the Canadian pace of life affects their ability to cook at home for themselves, let alone cook their “ethnic food”. These participants discuss how their time commitments to education lead them to cook foods that are “fast” and “cheap”. Similar to their parents struggle, immigrant children are faced with a society that is based on success, achievement, and production. The expectation, coming from themselves, their parents, and society, to get a

college or university degree has a profound affect on their food practices and consumption patterns.

“...we ate more outside than at home because we were working so much. And university is another thing - I was never home because I was working here and there. I was working three jobs and university and I was never home ...even weekends I was working so I was home at night and go sleep and get up in the morning and it was either school or work.” (Melinda)

Education was also a factor in how three of the participants had a very limited knowledge of how to cook, let alone how to cook their “ethnic foods”. For all of these immigrant children, this was a source of worry for them and their parents.

“I eat but I don’t cook...I guess I’ve never been expected to. My mother has always been, like, ‘just do your schooling and do your work, I’ll take care of everything, don’t worry about anything.’ So I never had to...” (Aatifa)

These immigrant children all ate both their “ethnic food” and “non-ethnic food”. They also all asserted how it was important to them and their families to know how to make their “ethnic food” not only because of their emotional attachment to those foods, but also because it is either “a part of the culture” or a part of “who they are”. One participant stated that she would need to take a “crash course” in how to make her “ethnic food”, while the other two stated, partly in jest, that they hope their mothers will continue to make their “ethnic food” for them even after they have moved out of their parents’ homes. These experiences and sentiments of not being able to cook demonstrate the difficulty for some immigrant children in retaining certain aspects of cultural and ethnic identity in Canadian society.

Theme 5: New identities formation

Racism and discrimination occur both vertically and horizontally, that is, both within and across cultural and ethnic groups. It is clear that racialized and immigrant children face vertical racism in their day-to-day lives and that many are constantly attempting to display their identification with “Canadian-ness” to the dominant Canadian culture. However, it is just as important to address the issue of horizontal racism, that is, racism within cultural and ethnic groups. Looking at this issue from an anti-racist perspective, Sheth and Handa argue that “race” seeps into the system that reproduces social relations and that racism becomes an integral part of all social living. Therefore, “in participating in the system by the mere fact of living in it, non-white people internalize and act upon categorization based on the colour of skin, thereby executing, and consequently reproducing the social relations of racism among themselves that are primarily designed by the dominant whites to exclude all of them. They thus become cultural and political workers supporting the daily reproduction of white racism” (Sheth and Handa, 1993, p79). The authors argue that it is crucial to recognize the role the dominant culture plays in horizontal racism (within an ethnic group).

The notion of the “authentic identity” is a theme that appeared in many immigrant children’s narratives. They find themselves confronted with questions of “ethnic and cultural authenticity”, and as not belonging enough to their ethnic group in the way they conduct themselves, their lifestyles, and/or by the food that they eat (Tuan, 1999, p105). Their interactions with members of their particular ethnic group reveal how much they differ from their parents, from others that grew up in their country of origin, or peers who had a more traditional upbringing in Canada. Interactions involving “ethnic food” may

result in being looked upon, or feeling like “less than” versions of others in their ethnic group. These feelings have a tremendous affect on one’s sense of belonging.

The following narrative demonstrates how parents can attempt to define the “authentic identity” by way of what kinds of food are consumed:

“And then there comes this moment... okay, I remember when I was young... you know how [“ethnic food”] is the staple part of [ethnic group] food... and I couldn’t eat it as a child without burning my tongue and I would... and I remember my father saying to me... who knows if this is real but this is how I remember it... but I remember him saying that...yeah, basically the idea was that you were not really [ethnic group] because you didn’t eat it...um...and...you know you feel, well I felt...I felt inadequate in some way.” (Robyn)

Her inability to consume a spicy “ethnic food” resulted in her feeling “inauthentic” in the eyes of her parents. Similarly, some parents criticize their children’s attempts at cooking their “ethnic foods”. When asked if her sister, who learned how to cook “non-ethnic foods” that are enjoyed by the family, could cook their “ethnic food”, this participant states:

“No, actually, she just can’t. She’s tried but she just can’t. She’s terrible! But she makes some kind of chicken or whatever it just doesn’t taste right, you know, this is not the way. My mom was like, ‘this is not Sri Lankan food!’...My mom kind of likes it because my sister can’t take all the spotlight!” (Melinda)

Again, this calls to mind Zhao’s (2007) assertion that we must look into the intergenerational stories that may shape family members identities. In terms of identity formation, Lessa and Rocha (2007) discuss how many immigrant women assume a

different centrality in the family after migration, and that their skills in terms of food practices may provide them with increased confidence. Some immigrant women may be reluctant to share that role with their immigrant children, as they attempt to demonstrate their own skills, and their identification with their culture, in making the foods from home. Another immigrant child discussed how she seldom cooks her “ethnic food” because she is afraid that it will not taste the same as her mother’s.

“Authentic identities” are tied up with cultural retention. First-generation immigrants may base the identity of immigrant children on how much of their “original” culture was retained (Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2006).

“I don’t speak a lot of Tamil, so I think food is the only thing I would say... because there is a lot of gap in culture the way I think is way different than how the culture wants me to think. The way I behave is really odd for them. I get a lot of criticism from my family. Even food wise I’m a little distant because [of my] allergy to spice...” (Melinda)

In this case, food clearly served as a way for her to connect to her Sri-Lankan identity, which was important considering her loss of language. However, this connection was challenged due to her inability to eat spicy Sri-Lankan food.

The notion of cultural or ethnic authenticity and its connection to food is explicitly questioned by an immigrant child.

“I have a problem with authentic food...what is it that makes it authentic? Is it the ingredients or the people making it? That bothers me...just because I am only half Chinese does not mean that I can’t make a mean chow mein. That bothers

me. I can make a mean tabouli. But that doesn't have to have a bearing on what my identity is." (Alex)

She challenges the notion that she has to belong to a particular ethnic group to be able to make that group's "ethnic food". She rejects the concept of "authentic identity" by way of rejecting the concept of "authentic ethnic food".

Immigrant children's peers from within the same ethnic group may also espouse the notion of the "authentic identity". This was seen above when an immigrant child was a victim of ridicule from her friend who criticized the way she combined her "ethnic food" with "non-ethnic food". Minh-ha states that "inauthenticity is condemned as a loss of origins and a whitening (or faking) of non-western values" (Trinh Minh-ha, 1989, 89). One participant discusses the role "ethnic food" plays in creating an "authentic identity" for someone who she considers to have become too assimilated:

"I consider him very whitewashed... When I see him eating Korean dishes and he loves it so much I see that as him being Korean and it makes me feel like, that's right, he is Korean even though he doesn't speak Korean or think about the culture, but just because he's eating the food and he likes it...it makes me feel like yes he's one of...Korean...Koreaness." (Hae)

Some immigrant children try to establish a non-stigmatized identity in the bicultural middle of a spectrum bounded by terms like "fresh off the boat (FOB)" and "whitewashed", meaning too ethnic and too assimilated, respectively (Pyke and Dang, 2003). In the previous example, eating "ethnic food" helped to create a non-stigmatized identity.

The notion of "authentic identities" is also espoused by those from the dominant, or mainstream Canadian culture. A common complaint by many immigrants, and in particular immigrant children, is the constant need to answer the question 'where are you from?' asked by non-racialized people. When asked how she deals with this question, this second generation participant states she will often reply with what she thinks the person wants to hear.

"Some people have problems [when I say I'm from Canada] but...I know what they want and sometimes when I know that I'll give it to them because it's easier..." (Robyn)

For many members of the dominant culture in Canada, a racialized person who claims to be or identify as a Canadian, is not an "authentic identity".

The struggle to find the middle ground (between FOB and whitewashed) is demonstrated by this immigrant child whose way of conducting herself is different, or more 'Western', than her cousin's:

"For me, I have to introduce myself and say, 'nice to meet you'. For her she laughs at me when I do that. She says, 'why are you so whitewashed?'...And, I'm like, no, social mannerisms...this is what you do when you meet people [in Canada]... They intimidate you they say you don't know your own culture...I have trouble identifying which is my actual culture because I know so much more about Canadian life than Sri Lankan life." (Melinda)

Being stigmatized by terms such as "whitewashed" can have a profound affect on the way someone feels about their membership in an ethnic group. It can create a sense

of being excluded from their ethnic group, which is extremely difficult for immigrant children who try to find a balance between the “two worlds”.

This attempt to find balance was reflected in participants’ narratives concerning how they would educate their own children about food practices. In their discussion of women’s new identity formation, Lessa and Rocha argue that immigrant women resist acculturation by “reinforcing the tastes of home and actively educating children and others through food related opportunities” (2007, p4). Similarly, the majority (six out of nine) of the immigrant children expressed their desire to teach their children (should they have any) about their “ethnic foods” (in fact, two of the participants suggested it would be their own mothers who would ensure that “ethnic food” knowledge would be passed down). However, the majority of the participants also emphasized that they would also educate them about “non-ethnic foods”. These immigrant children have experienced the difficulties of growing up and negotiating their identity in separate spaces and so they acknowledge the need to create a “hybrid space” for their children.

“My kids are definitely going to be exposed to both. I like the way my little sister is growing up because she’s getting a bit of both. It’s the best of both worlds I would say...She goes to Tamil schooling... so she learns language, culture...but we never got that opportunity...So, I think the way my sister is growing up is wonderful because although she was born in Canada, I think she’s a little bit more Sri Lankan than I am. Which is good [laughing] and you wouldn’t expect it. I expect my kids to be exposed to both. I want that. I like the way my sister is growing up. Because she understands what both cultures bring already.” (Melinda)

Her admiration for the way her sister was brought up compared to her own upbringing sheds light on the importance for cultural maintenance and retention for some immigrant children. Her emphasis on making sure her own children are taught foods from “both” cultures reflects her need to resist the level of acculturation that she experienced as an immigrant child.

One immigrant child hopes that “ethnic food” and her writings about “ethnic food” and migration will help to teach her children about family experiences:

“I would want to cook them the food that my mother cooked...and I would cook other things as well that my mother never taught me...I would tell lots of the stories around food. Hopefully make connections and fill in the gaps...family stories and history is lost so hopefully I would fill those gaps because of my writing. I think it is important to have that family knowledge and stories.”

(Margaux)

These stories are an important aspect of who she is and she does not want this knowledge lost on her children. This calls to mind Bardenstein (2002) who argues that the complexities around food give form to and recapture lost and fragmented stories for people who have been displaced.

It is important to note that there is a wide range in terms of the importance that is placed on passing on “ethnic food” knowledge to children. For some immigrant children, not having “ethnic food” and not passing that on to their children would have an effect on their own identity:

"I definitely would want to pass that along. For me not to have Eritrean food would just be bizarre...I think I would not feel Eritrean if I didn't have those meals. I think it would impact my identity". (Aatifa)

For other immigrant children, the importance to educate children about "ethnic food" is not as great:

"I like exploring different kinds of things. I'm not stuck with the Romanian community or identity...I don't really care much about that...but I know it's important to my family. I wouldn't put too much emphasis on [cooking for and teaching children about Romanian food] but I would definitely introduce them to it...because it's a part of me, right?" (Dana)

This immigrant child recognizes the role "ethnic food" plays in her family's life, however she is more ambiguous about its role in her own life and identity. This ambiguity is found in some of the narratives of the three immigrant children who expressed that they do not feel the need to pass on "ethnic food" knowledge to their children.

"...It's not that important to me...I have very mixed feelings about that - food...I don't cook it...I don't think I've lost anything, you know? I mean, maybe I will...maybe when I have kids I might have that... 'oh I really wish I knew how to make this'...I don't feel strongly about that. I don't really know much about [ethnic group] traditions. I don't buy this whole thing of this is who you are because of your parents... for me my story has been that I was born and raised here." (Robyn)

Some immigrant children acknowledge the very different circumstances and experiences in their life from the lives of their parents, which leads them to think differently about the importance of cultural maintenance, specifically through "ethnic food".

"I guess it's really up to them. I guess if I were to have a family it would be here in Canada instead of Korea right? So they would have a different experience instead of being exposed to those types of food only, right? So I wouldn't really force it onto them..." (SM)

This acknowledgement of their children's different experiences to their own points to many of the participants' understanding and connection with identities being fluid and being constructed according to individual experiences.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the tensions 1.5 and second generation immigrants face surrounding "ethnic food" in the home and school settings in an attempt to understand how food is implicated in immigration and settlement processes and identity formation. Although it is not possible to generalize the findings, the food narratives point to the various complex ways in which "ethnic food" may play a role in settlement, belonging/othering, and identity formation in the lives of children of immigrants.

When comparing the participants of this study's experiences surrounding "ethnic food" with the experiences of immigrant women from Lessa and Rocha's (2007) study, there are many similarities. These include the need to connect to their country of origin through food, the sharing of "ethnic food" and food knowledge, the need to connect with other members of the diaspora, adaptation through food, the creation of a hybrid space,

changed roles within the family, and new identity formation. However, it is clear that they also experience many differences.

The majority of these differences stem from the very different circumstances in which the two groups experience "ethnic food". For immigrant women, who most likely had a formed identity upon migration, their need to adapt and change came less from a place of discrimination. For immigrant children, the tensions surrounding "ethnic food" that they experienced in the home and school settings primarily came from their experiences of being (or having fear of being) othered, and the subsequent need to negotiate their belonging in two worlds. The themes that were implemented to frame the children of immigrants' food narratives, which came from the study by Lessa and Rocha (2007) are: food as a tool to express narratives of displacement and dislocations, diasporic healing, food in othering processes, integrating the loss of home into a transformed new life, and new identities formation.

Lessa and Rocha (2007) discuss the ways in which food can be used as a tool to express narratives of displacements and dislocations for immigrant women. Food allows for the opportunity to express and recount the negative effects of loss, which comes from uprooting and relocating the home. Some immigrant children, who immigrated at an older age, do use food to express similar feelings of loss. However, for the most part, immigrant children have less of an attachment to their country of origin than do their parents. Therefore, most immigrant children do not reflect on the trauma of displacement. Immigrant children use food to connect them to their place of origin, but it is rarely used to express suffering or to challenge uprooting from their home country.

Many immigrant women experience diasporic healing in that "ethnic food" may maintain or recreate home in the new location. Experiences with "ethnic food" may be healing by maintaining the presence of the old world in the present, searching for home ingredients, justifying the need to speak to relatives about home foods, promoting gatherings with fellow members of the diaspora, and educating others about culture and food practices (Lessa and Rocha, 2007). In many ways, diasporic healing help immigrant children to cope with the challenges they face as young people trying to negotiate the space in between their parents and the mainstream culture.

For some immigrant children, "ethnic food" can serve as a way to connect them with their country of origin, which in turn serves as a way for them to understand or connect with their parents' culture and identity. However, it is important to note how diasporic healing changes over time for immigrant children. As children, several participants expressed feelings of shame, the need to hide their membership in a particular diasporic group, and fear of sharing "ethnic food" knowledge with peers. Over time, many immigrant childrens' growing confidence and pride in their ethnicity resulted in pleasure in educating others (including those from mainstream society) about their "ethnic food". However, this is not true for all. Some immigrant childrens' experiences of discrimination had a profound affect in how they approach "ethnic food" and those from without their ethnic group as adults. As adults, some immigrant children feel they can experience diasporic healing only from within their own ethnic group. Also, most immigrant children sought out members of their diasporic or ethnic group as children and as adults. As children, it allowed them to feel safer in the face of discrimination and racism at school, while as adults, it helps to reinforce the pride and enjoyment they find

in expressing their ethnic identity. Furthermore, it helps to maintain that part of their identity, which may have been suppressed as children.

Lessa and Rocha (2007) discuss food in othering processes by the ways in which it participates in oppression and discrimination for both immigrant women and their families. It is clear that immigrant children are targets of racism and discrimination, and that these experiences have a profound affect on the ways in which they express their ethnic identity, as children and as adults.

In the face of these experiences of exclusion, immigrant children devised realistic and necessary strategies in order to cope. These strategies include concealment of ethnicity by refusing to eat "ethnic food" and avoidance of anyone other than those who were members of the same ethnic group. Even though most participants feel a certain pride in their ethnicity, some of these strategies are still employed as adults. Experiences of exclusion and racism can have the ability to create fear of being different that goes far beyond childhood. Cultural or ethnic shame is also a repercussion that is created from experiences of discrimination. The processes of othering may lead to some immigrant children never developing feelings of pride for their (or their parents') culture and result in a complete lack of identification with that culture.

Lessa and Rocha (2007) discuss integrating the loss of home into a transformed new life in the sense that "great movements occur within the self, the home and the family through immigration" (p3). These movements include hybridization practices that help to move beyond feelings of loss and the capacity to act in ways that are empowering (Lessa & Rocha, 2007). Transformation, movement, and change are also key themes in the lives of immigrant children. Some of the ways in which food contributes to these

experiences for immigrant women are similar for immigrant children. However, due to their very different position in the family and experience outside the home, immigrant children experience some of those foodways very differently.

Immigrant children experience significant pressures and expectations from both inside and outside the home. Food helps to mediate those expectations and the resulting identity negotiation. The changes and transformations in food habits and practices that either the immigrant parents or children instigate help to create a sense of adaptation and belonging.

For some immigrant children, transformation and change within the family are too slow to occur or they are not sufficient in terms of what immigrant children need to feel a sense of inclusion. Immigrant children who perceived or experienced a lack of change resented the added difficulty of trying to fit into mainstream society. In some cases, immigrant children would instigate change in the family themselves, or they would begin to disassociate from their family to create their own "new life". Lack of change may have a profound effect on how immigrant children choose to approach their ethnic identity.

Hybridization practices of "ethnic food", either employed by either immigrant parents or children, were for the most part, seen as a positive change by immigrant children. Having a variety or a mix of "ethnic and non-ethnic" foods facilitates immigrant children's dynamic identities that are constantly being negotiated both within and outside the home. However, some immigrant children had negative experiences with hybrid foods. Although hybrid foods may help family members deal with discrimination within the home, they may not be "safe" foods for immigrant children when interacting

with others outside the home. This is a clear example of how immigrant children experience and interpret food practices differently from their parents, and that may in fact lead to rejection of their parents' culture and/or ethnic identity.

A common "movement" for the families of immigrant children is the move down the social and economic ladder. Changes in "ethnic food" practices were indicators of experiences of unemployment, the need to work precarious jobs, and the stress associated with being a newcomer to Canada. Changed roles within the family were often a result of the time and money pressures immigrant parents experience associated with employment. As part of their new life as immigrant children, some participants took on the role of cooking. For some, this was an opportunity to negotiate their need to express a more "Canadian" identity. As adults, immigrant children begin to experience the pressures of the fast-paced Canadian society that stresses the importance of production, success, and material wealth. Many immigrant children either cannot (because they were never taught) or do not have time, money, and/or energy to cook "ethnic foods". While some immigrant children emphasize the importance of "ethnic food" in maintaining their ethnic identity, many are simply unable to express their identity through "ethnic food".

Similar to the immigrant women in Lessa and Rocha's study (2007), new identities formation finds expression in food practices for immigrant children. Identity formation is of central importance and can be a major challenge for 1.5 and second generation immigrants. The notion of the "authentic identity" is a theme that appeared in many immigrant children's narratives. Interactions involving "ethnic food" may result in being looked upon, or feeling like "less than" versions of others in their ethnic group.

"Authentic identities" are not only espoused by members of a particular ethnic group, but also by members of mainstream Canadian culture.

The choices that parents make in terms of what aspects of their culture they will pass on to their children points to how they identify with their culture and the importance that is placed on ethnic retention. Many immigrant children acknowledged the importance of passing on "ethnic food" knowledge to their children. However, it is clear that 1.5 and second generation immigrants' experiences provide them with a unique perspective on cultural retention. Many immigrant children acknowledge their own children's different experiences which demonstrates the participants' understanding and connection with identities being fluid and being constructed according to individual experiences.

The findings from this study clearly demonstrate that in order to grasp the full magnitude of the problems and challenges facing children of immigrants in Canada, and of the challenges the mainstream society faces in addressing these issues, it is necessary to recognize and probe these youth's experiences with complex problems in various ways. Looking at their experiences with "ethnic food" is one of these ways. The findings from this study, as well as further research on this topic, could help schools and immigrant service providers to develop initiatives that could help in the process of settlement for immigrant youth.

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