Storying Memories, Storying Ourselves:

Autobiographical Explorations of Mixed Race Identity and Belonging

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There are more and more 'mixed' people, we are of course all different from each other, but at the same time, it's still nice to know and see that maybe there are others who know what I mean and what I'm trying to talk about.

— Artist statement excerpt from a 2006 exhibit on my mixed race identity

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Above: Two Eyes: Asian/Caucasian: A Family Tree (acrylic on canvas, family photographs)

From my *It's not BLACK & WHITE: I am WHITE-YELLOW/YELLOW-WHITE* exhibition at York University, February 2006

Abstract

How do family stories shape our lives and identities, and influence our sense of home and belonging? What might it mean to seek out such stories in the context of mixed race heritage, intergenerational migration, and language differences? Perspectives and experiences of mixed race are understudied in Canada, and the scholarship that exists tends to focus on questions of governance, multicultural policy, and directions in multiracial discourse. In contrast to these outward-looking tendencies, my paper centres reflexively on my own experiences as a mixed race woman, maintaining a more intimate scale in its exploration of the connections between identity and family. Through an autobiographical case study that places my memories and experiences alongside the personal narratives and stories of eight family members, I explore my 'mixed' identity within the interstices of racial and other categories; my ongoing relationship with Chinese food and food practices; and my shifting understanding and senses of family, belonging, and home. In the process, frames of anti-oppressive and anti-racist feminism, relationality, embodiment, and an ethic of care and love are applied to family interviews, cooking as inquiry, journaling, and arts-based methods such as drawing, poetic writing, and photography. Emphasizing women's voices and concentrating on the Chinese, paternal side of my family, my work is guided by the following interconnected questions:

1. What is the context and history of my family members – especially women – who have migrated, and/or who are part of the Chinese Diaspora in Canada?
2. How do my siblings and I experience and negotiate mixed race identity from our differing positions?
3. How are my understandings of and connections with family, culture, and ancestors influenced by family stories, food practices, and thinking through water?

My research speaks to the importance of personal and autobiographical narrative – and the spaces for such narrative – for attending to perspectives that are less commonly heard, including mixed race experiences. In doing so, I contribute nuance and complexity to what might otherwise be understood as Chinese identity and the Chinese Diaspora in a Canadian context. Meanwhile, I also add to knowledge on creative family-based research practices by considering what it means to undertake this very personal work and accountably engage with research involving family in an academic context. I conclude that belonging, in my case, can be sought through stories, knowledges I already hold and can expand, and embodied experiences of home – rather than only looking in physical places, specific types of identity, or language.

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This work is dedicated to

my grandparents and ancestors

especially the women

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My appreciation also extends to others in the more-than-human world, whose presence, song, breeze, light, and beauty nourished and sustained me throughout the research, writing, and creating process.

Foreword

I offer a preface to my paper in the form of a letter to my parents, sharing some of my personal motivations and the path that has led me to this work. I am inspired here by Shawn Wilson (2008), who wrote to his sons (and readers) as a way to embed his research in the context of relationships and their importance. Likewise, a letter allows me to speak directly and personally. This work is more than simply an intellectual exercise; it is a process of relationship-building.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I'm writing this letter to you, even though I know it will also be read by others. Addressing it to you is one way I can 'keep it real' and remind myself that I've been doing this work for reasons that are grounded in the life and world of which I'm a part, and to which I am accountable. We're sometimes not that good at communicating as a family, and this letter seems like a good opportunity to share with you some of what's been going on for the past couple of years since I started my Master's. I know I tend to be vague about what I've been learning in graduate school, and I suspect that you don't quite know what I've been doing all this time - even though you ask me every once in a while. Usually when we're in the kitchen.

You probably remember that my program is almost entirely self-directed, meaning that – with the support and guidance of my Advisor, Supervisor, and various professors – I have been able to decide what my learning objectives are, and how I want to fulfill them as part of my 'plan of study'. This project, my course work, and all other activities I've taken on (and stressed over) as a graduate student relate to three main focus areas, within the broadest sense of the 'environment'. In a nutshell, these three areas concentrate on: 1) education and how we create and share knowledge; 2) the intersections between food and water systems; and 3) the connections between social and ecological systems. While these might seem pretty different from one another, there are some common threads that run through them. For example, I have been especially interested in equity, and in developing my understanding of and ability to promote positive change, whether that's through teaching, policy change, being creative, or connecting on an interpersonal level.

It took me a while to realize that my major research did not necessarily have to bring together all three of my focus areas - though in the end, that happened anyway. Several of my later courses focused critically on questions of race, identity, gender, and social environments, and allowed me to explore these issues in creative and thoughtful ways. In late summer or early fall 2016, it dawned on me that I could use my major research as a chance to dedicate time and attention to a subject that has preoccupied me for many years: my own mixed race identity, and connections with family and Chinese culture. (You probably remember – I did some work on this topic when I was doing my BFA, and you and a bunch of the family came out to my art show.)

I really wrestled with this idea, mostly since I was afraid of what others would think. What would it be like to delve so openly into such personal subject matter? Would I be taken seriously by my professors, my peers, and by you? I finally decided to go for it, since that's what felt best in spite of my fears. I still often feel nervous when I am asked what I'm doing in school. This work definitely does not fit the mould of the 'objective' scientific research that so many people expect and

respect, and doesn't seem to easily call profitable career options to mind. However, I have had no regrets since taking on this work, and have received so much encouragement and positive feedback from all sorts of people. I've also since learned that there are quite a few academic fields dedicated to the areas my major research addresses, some of which were unexpected.

As I mentioned, this research and work connects with all three of the main focus areas of my plan of study. The primary learning objective it fits with centres on identity and self. I wanted to investigate and unpack my identity as a mixed race woman in Canada, in the context of belonging, family, community, heritage, and diaspora. Doing this, I hoped, would give me a better sense of self-understanding and connection with my family, my community, and my cultures. This work also links an objective I had to think and learn about social constructs and systems (like racism, and government policy) that influence power dynamics and the degree to which any person or group can act without being oppressed. Although the scope of my research is narrowly focused on myself and our family, the bigger picture of these objectives is that exploring and understanding personal identities and positioning in different social systems can help us relate better to one another, and find ways to change on individual and collective levels.

My work supports some of my other learning objectives as well. One, for instance, is my intent to become more familiar with experiences, meanings, values, and activities related to food and water for different groups in Canada. Another example includes my goal to build experience with various forms of creative production, such as incorporating artistic practices in this academic paper, in order to expand my familiarity with diverse ways of engaging with knowledge. This work has also helped me towards my objective of jumping into theories and practices that promote equity, accessibility, transformative learning, dialogue, and action around social and environmental justice issues. Finally, I can't pretend that this entire project has not been an opportunity for professional development. It's given me important (and sometimes frustrating) experience with interviewing, research, and independent project planning and management. No matter what the focus of my project, the experience of undertaking it has been a valuable one.

My research has been a big part of my journey as a graduate student, where I have both learned and unlearned so much, grown and developed as a person, and created a space for myself within a much-loved community with similar interests and values. I've found many teachers who inspired, challenged, encouraged, and influenced me, either in person or through the written word. Their traces are woven throughout this project and I hope that you come to know some of them a little bit better as a result. Returning to school has been one of the best decisions of my life so far, and I feel as though I'm just at the beginning of many more good things.

It goes without saying that I am thankful for your support and love in general, and for your interest and willingness to participate in my project. The same goes, of course, for Grampa, my aunts, and my siblings. However, this 'going without saying' means that it is even more important to actually express my gratitude clearly. So—Thank You! This work is, in part, for you. It would not have been possible without you, and I hope we can talk more about it sometime...in person.

Much love,

Katherine

Storying Lives: An Introduction

"All these little moments," he thought. "Who knows which ones are going to count and which ones will be forgotten. It's never the things you think; it isn't the fishing trip or even the fish – it's the fish head. It's the smoke, never the fire. And the smoke is wily and wispy and the smell of it gets in your hair and your clothes, and no matter how much you try to duck around the flames, the wind always changes. It always gets in your eyes."

— Stuart McLean, *The Vinyl Café*

Aunt: "My grandma liked the wing tips.
And then my mom loved the chicken feet – and the fish head!"
Me: "All of it? All the head? Did she eat the eyeballs?"
Aunt: "You know who loves the eyeballs? Estelle loves the eyeballs!" (laughter)

— Interview with my Second Aunt

*

What ended in tears began with the question, "Are we having macaroni and cheese for supper?" I remember this exchange clearly: me, at five years old or less, standing by the fridge one evening while my Mother prepared pre-packaged macaroni and cheese in our kitchen. Perhaps I asked this question for confirmation, to allow myself to anticipate the meal; I loved macaroni and cheese. However, instead of the expected affirmative, my Mother said, "No, I'm making this for our neighbours. We're having Chinese food for supper." Hearing this, I began to cry; I emphatically disliked Chinese food and couldn't understand why the neighbours would get to eat what I liked, while we had to eat something else – it seemed so unfair. We were, in fact, going to have the pasta for dinner, and my Mother explained through her hugs and laughter that she had just been teasing.

*

I have no memories associating either of my grandfathers with cooking, although it was obviously a part of their lives as eaters, at least. In one memory, I am little, and in the living room of my maternal grandparents' house in Tweed, Ontario. I don't know what comes before – perhaps my Brother and I are fighting again – but in a rare moment of anger, Grampa loses his temper with me, and is yelling. (So loud! So scary!) I recall crying and ending up in the kitchen, down the hall. There, Gramma comforts me at the kitchen table, and invites me to stay there with her while she cooks – maybe she even suggests I help, or offers me one of her homemade cookies. Either way, I am comforted and feel better. I seem to recall there being a turkey, so it must have been around Christmas time.

Why Start with Stories?

I wonder: How do we remember, know, and share? What do we remember, when, and why? Where do senses of self and identity fit into our self of senses – bodily, affective, and otherwise? What roles do stories and food play in families, and finding a space of belonging or home? What is it about food that allows it to take such hold of our memories and stories?

I have offered two brief memory-stories to begin exploring such questions. Why does the macaroni and cheese incident stand out so clearly from my other early childhood memories? It's unlikely that this was the first time I had been teased or unintentionally upset by a parent. Instead, I suspect that such clarity has more to do with the experience evoking a combination of strong

emotions around the subject of food itself; I recall feeling genuinely upset. I was a very picky eater growing up. My intense dislike of seafood, mushrooms, and many cuts or parts of meat was the result of a texture-based aversion that verged on physical intolerance. I also disliked the strong flavours of frequently used ingredients in our home, such as ginger, and in my childhood carried negative associations with much of what I understood to be Chinese cuisine. In the story of the macaroni and cheese, I knew through multiple senses that it was being prepared. It didn't matter that the idea of my Mother making dinner for the neighbours was unprecedented and improbable. Being confronted so palpably with pleasurable food, only to have it displaced by the prospect of food I deemed disagreeable, must have seemed too much for my young self to bear – and underscores the strength of my distaste for Chinese food at that age.

The second memory I offer is set in the southeastern Ontario home of my maternal grandparents. That memory was not immediately recalled, and in fact arose during the process of deliberately working to remember experiences involving both food and at least one of my grandparents. Rather than my fear and distress resulting in some way from food itself, this story highlights the comfort and peace I received through the nurturing care of my Grandmother in the space of the kitchen, around activities of cooking and eating. Intentionally recalling these memories in more detail also brings to mind further elements of the spaces I occupied. In the kitchen at home, colourful magnets decorated the fridge near where I stood, down at my level. In my Grandmother's kitchen, it was sunny and warm, with friendly light coming in from the tall window on the side wall. In both spaces, I felt safe and loved and at home, despite any upsetting incidents.

These memories act as examples of how our everyday experiences with food – in which we tangibly relate to the world around us – can form important landmarks in the way we live and remember through time and space (Holtzman, 2006). Yet, food is a small part of a bigger picture. More broadly, my life experiences thus far have contributed to my living in the world as a mixed

race woman born, raised, and educated in Canada, and situated in a blended history of working class family migrations. My Chinese father and white Canadian mother both were born and lived in East Asia before migrating permanently to this country, though my Mother's family has long been rooted in Canada. My lack of basic proficiency in the language of my Father's family has presented barriers to my accessing familial and cultural knowledge through oral histories and other avenues, and strongly informs my positionality and identity. This absence of family and other stories due to rifts of language, time, and geography shapes my own stories and senses of self, even as the same barriers work to influence and construct other stories and understandings – such as which stories I share with others, and how I pursue my research. In this case, a lifetime of not seeing myself easily reflected in the world around me – of not being 'at home' in my own skin (Yee, 1993, p. 15) – spurs my interest in mixed race identity in Canada. Meanwhile, a desire to better connect to my family and ancestors, and to advance respectful research with women and marginalized perspectives, compels me to pay particular attention to the stories and experiences of the women of my family, especially on my paternal, Chinese side.

All this is part of my story – and "stories are all we are", according to storyteller Thomas King (1993, p. 2); their connection to and power over us is lifelong and strong, even if the stories themselves don't seem special. As storyteller Stuart McLean tells it, in our daily lives,

> in the midst of all of the moments in the middle of all the movement, you don't often stop to commit things to memory. You never imagine there's anything about anything that's going to be of any historical importance – that someone's going to come along one day and quiz you about things. (McLean, 2009)

Usually, people take stories for granted – and can't attend to everything anyway. As I write about 'quizzing' both myself and my family, I am curious to see what stories emerge, and where they may parallel, touch, or diverge from one another. In the process, I am influenced by the position that

> [o]ur views of the world are a web of interconnected stories, a distillation of all the stories we have shared. We connect to these interconnected past stories in order to understand new

> experiences. This web of stories becomes our interpretive lens for new experiences so that story is our means of constructing the world – of world making. (Short, 2012, p.10)

The fluid nature of memory means that our stories and memories change as they are remembered differently over time and reinterpreted in different contexts. In this way, notions of self and others are also shaped as part of an ongoing process in which we play an active role in our own stories and storying – that is, the ways we story our memories and ourselves. As suggested above, humans are so deeply enmeshed in stories that it can be difficult to consciously recognize how important a role they play in our lives, and the extent to which they influence the ways we think, feel, and act (Short, 2012, p. 9). The constructive nature of memory is particularly noticeable when dissimilar memories of a shared experience lead to the telling of divergent stories – or even none at all, if the experience is forgotten. The same sort of dynamic occurs when different story or detail types are emphasized in different people's memories. Unlike some of those close to me, for example, I have a range of vivid 'first time' food memories, such as the first time I tried Caesar salad.

Remembering is not a static endeavour, nor is it a solely individual activity. Indeed, as argued by oral history scholar Naomi Norquay (1999), "[s]ocial or collective memory of historical events is constructed and held in place by collective practices of both remembering and forgetting" (p. 4). Applying this notion to both significant and mundane events and experiences, Norquay goes on to say that practices of remembering and forgetting do "not only occur within social contexts, they are also mapped onto and get reproduced in the stories people tell about their lives" (p. 4). Through this lens, while different memories could have been substituted as opening stories here, each selection is more than 'just' a story, or an insignificant, isolated event. For one, my refreshed memory of a loving experience in the kitchen with my Grandmother can now be incorporated into my future thoughts and understandings of our relationship. Meanwhile, the macaroni and cheese incident has remained a part of my storytelling repertoire, and I have shared it in the context of food experiences and preferences, and early childhood lessons and memories. In this (re)telling, these

memory-stories become an entry point to my major research paper, where I uncover and offer other stories through a process of considering my ongoing relationship with Chinese food and food practices, my identity within the interstices of racial and other categories, and my shifting understanding and senses of family, belonging, and home.

I have been guided in this endeavour by several overarching questions:

- What is the context and history of my family members – especially women – who have migrated, and/or who are part of the Chinese Diaspora in Canada?
- What are the experiences of mixed race identity held by my siblings and I, and how are questions of identity and belonging negotiated from our differing positions?
- How do family stories, food practices, and thinking through water each influence my understandings of, or felt connections with, culture, family, and ancestors?

As I address these interconnected questions, I also consider layers of meaning in some of my central themes, especially as related to story. For instance, I reflect on how 'home' is where we live, "at the center of the world, as defined by [our] poets and storytellers" – and yet, home is not our family, and not a place (Le Guin, 2004, p. 208). Instead,

> [h]ome is imaginary. Home, imagined, comes to be. It is real, realer than any other place, but you can't get to it unless your people show you how to imagine it—whoever your people are. They may not be your relatives. They may never have spoken your language. They may have been dead for a thousand years. They may be nothing but words printed on paper, ghosts of voices, shadows of minds. But they can guide you home. They are your human community. (Le Guin, 2004, p. 208)

My research, in this light, is ultimately about my search for voices and stories from various sources that can help me imagine and story myself, and find a place I can call home.

*

Involving my own stories, and those of my family, in academic work raises questions and concerns. Is my focus on the Asian experiences and side of my family self-Orientalizing? What does it mean for me to research my family, and how might I undertake such efforts in a way that honours and potentially even furthers my relationship with those who take part? When asked to participate, how do they respond, and do they feel pressure to help further my education in doing so?

One of my motivations in this learning process is that of praxis – the merging of theory and practice. I hope to find ways to bridge the typical and sometimes challenging theory/practice divide, and meaningfully apply what knowledge I gain in a way that shares it responsibly with others. What might this look like? What are the ethical demands and possibilities of the concepts and approaches I have decided to use, particularly as they relate to my being simultaneously the researcher and a relative? Dealing with family stories and relationships in my research, I strongly feel that such questions must be considered, and that I must seek ways to be extra *accountable, including defining what that might mean.*

Approaching My Research

To address my research questions, I employ mixed qualitative methods in an interdisciplinary approach, including oral history interviews, theoretical analysis, personal narrative, cooking as inquiry, and arts-based practices. My research involves interviewing eight family members: my immediate family, including my Mother, Father, Brother, and Sister; my three aunts, who are my Father's siblings; and my maternal Grandfather, who is my last living grandparent. I spoke with each person for an average of three to four hours in total, in addition to time spent eating and sometimes cooking together. I also read for the first time my maternal Grandmother's unpublished memoir, from which I include excerpts. With this paper, however, I prioritize my interviewees over existing archives. This decision is to acknowledge the time and work of my participants, and to recognize that their various identities position most of them as members of marginalized groups such as women, the working class, and people of colour – categories of people who are responsible for knowledge production and other labour that is often under-credited in research (M. Smith, personal communication, November 18, 2016).

From the start, I recognized that involving family members in my research adds layers of complexity of the researcher-subject relationship – not least because most of the individuals in question are living relations. It was only much later in my project that I discovered other scholarship dedicated to family methodologies and its inherent challenges (e.g., Bailey, 2009; Bailey, 2016). Hopeful about the possibility that working with my family could contribute in a meaningful way to our relationships, I am at the same time concerned about the harmful potential for my relatives of poorly-considered or -executed methodologies. My taking an ethical approach as a researcher is a given, and is further bound in my mind to an imperative to honour and respect the pre-existing relationships of granddaughter-grandparent, daughter-parent, niece-aunt, and sister-sibling. The regard I have for these relationships as a researcher-family member motivates me to approach my research with them in a caring way – that is to say, through an ethics of care.

When exploring the question of how we represent the intimate life stories, and how to identify and understand the responsibilities and higher stakes that are inherently linked to such representation, ethics can be seen as simultaneously a part of our processes, practices, and products (Heddon, 2008, p. 155). An ethics of care revolves around the roles of care and justice in making ethical decisions, such as how to undertake research with family that contextually considers interpersonal accountability and relationships (Gilligan, 1993). Beyond and within an ethics of care is the dimension of love, which is often ignored in academic contexts. Following critical scholar bell hooks (2000), I seek to foreground love in addition to care as a cornerstone of my research approach. This stance is supported by felt theory, which reinforces the power of emotion, affect, and subjectivity to enact transformation and balance thought- or mind-based knowledges (Million, 2013, p. 57). A personal degree of transformation has been underway as I attempt to more actively embrace care and love as a practice myself – where I treat my capacity to love and perceive with compassion and care as an abundant rather than scarce resource – and bring this mindset to my

theoretical work by "thinking feelingly" (L. Fawcett, personal communication, November 15, 2016). My shifting attitude and behaviour have increased the depth of my reflexivity, and added nuance to my understanding of the world; importantly, this process has also directly and positively influenced my capacity and courage to undertake this very personal and family-based research.

Not all personal or family stories are easy or pleasing to tell or hear. However, whatever my participants choose to share, I am compelled to attend with care, because of both our relationships and the importance to me of learning about their experiences. As suggested by María Lugones (1987), love and 'loving perception' involves an active, compassionate form of knowledge that helps us to understand one another's experiences (p. 17). While the content of my family's stories provides insight into the shape and feeling of their lives, our time together and the story*telling* itself illustrates the power of embodied intersubjectivity. As part of my research process, I noticed the variable levels of physical and emotional energy that I would feel and respond to during my almost exclusively in-person interviews, as well as when transcribing afterwards. Writing on the relationality of talking and listening to one another, essayist and speculative fiction author Ursula Le Guin (2004) describes intersubjectivity as the phenomenon in which bodies affect one another through in-person communication. For instance, physical bodies begin to mirror one another unconsciously in body language and expression, while sound vibrations from another's voice enter our body through our ears, making aurality one of the most intimate sensory experiences (Le Guin, 2004, p. 194).

Understanding the body as a site for grounding and locating experiences and communication, it becomes impossible to achieve complete and disconnected objectivity. Despite common and strongly-held claims to the contrary, "[w]e cannot remove ourselves from the world in order to examine it" (Wilson, 2008, p. 14). The very materiality of all entities, including human and non-human bodies and environments, speaks to this inseparability, as "matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency" (Barad, 2007, p. 151,

emphasis removed). Underscoring the above motivations for an ethical approach to my research, the relational 'entanglement' of meaning and matter in the ongoing process of becoming calls for respectful, detailed, and ethical engagement (Barad, 2007, p. 394). Within this context, it is important to remember that "[m]ost intellectual encounters entail a confrontation of bodies, which are differently inscribed" by relationships of power (Ng, 2012, p. 346). The power dynamics that exist within my family – both as part of this project and beyond – are influenced by my filling the roles of learner, in the research process and interviews; and educator, through my intent to share and help make my exploration of identity and family stories more accessible to myself and others.

Besides interviews and other time spent with family participants, my research approach involves my own self-reflections and autobiographical story-gathering through journaling and memory work, and creative engagement with research processes and outcomes. Inspired by the genre-defying works of such figures as Dionne Brand (2001), I include creative elements of poetic writing, photography, and drawing, in order to expand the critical potential of my work and its accessibility to various ways of knowing (marino, 1997). Drawings, for example, invite an intimacy that can be understood as "a three way conversation [that] is going on between the drawer, the thing drawn, and the hypothetical viewers", in part because they encompass time (Taussig, 2009, p. 265). Through drawing, I engage with my subjects and thoughts in a non-verbal, embodied way. The quality of attention involved in drawing differs from that of the other creative forms included here, yet each contributes to a multi-faceted exploration and understanding of my work.

As an autobiographical case study, my research is intended to support and advance knowledge on mixed race in Canada, and within the nascent field of Asian Canadian Studies, by adding nuance and complexity to what might otherwise be understood as Chinese identity and the Chinese Diaspora in a Canadian context. Although much critical work has been produced around Asian, Chinese, and diasporic experiences in Canada, there is a lack of visibility of such scholarship,

due to an "absence of widespread institutional support for [Asian Canadian Studies, which] coincides with the lack of academic journals, scholarly associations, and annual conferences that are dedicated to advancing research about Asians in Canada" (Pon, Coloma, Kwak, & Huynh, 2017, p. 12). On the other hand, the wide array of texts on mixed race from an American viewpoint contrasts with how relatively understudied mixed race is from a specifically Canadian perspective (Mahtani, 2014, p. 7). Despite some similarities, these national settings and histories provide very different contexts for expressions and experiences of identity. As such, my reading in this field is concentrated on Canadian sources, although I also selectively refer to writers from other regions as well. Canadian mixed race scholarship tends to focus on broader scales of governance, multicultural policy, and directions in multiracial discourse (e.g., Mahtani & CERIS, 2002; Mahtani, Kwan-Lafond & Taylor, 2014). In contrast to these outward-looking tendencies, my paper centres reflexively on my personal experiences as a mixed race woman, maintaining a more intimate scale in its exploration of the connections between identity and family. Autobiographical explorations of mixed race exist in other contexts (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1999; Ifekwunigwe, 1999), yet when personal narratives are included in Canadian mixed race studies, they tend to stem from individuals unrelated to the authors – even when the researcher's interest is motivated by their own mixed race experience (e.g., Mahtani, 2014; L. Taylor, 2009). While such work is important,

> Asian women living in the West still have a long way to go in theorizing the complexities of our lives, as do all [mixed and] non-white peoples here [in Canada]. But this is a task we must begin ourselves. This theory can only truly come out of the heart of our experiences, the depths of our historical struggles to survive and resist. This is the dialectic that moves us into, against and beyond our various oppressions. (Yee, 1993, p. 43)

From within overlapping gaps of setting, scale, and voice, my research thus speaks to the importance of personal and autobiographical narrative – and the spaces for such narrative – for attending to perspectives that are less commonly heard. It is significant that, in the absence of such voices,

> readers and scholars residing elsewhere could perhaps justifiably conclude from published evidence that: a) Canada does not or did not have a significant non-white [or mixed] population; or b) if they at all existed, women (or men) among them were/are incapable of writing or are not significant enough to be written about; and c) understanding Canadian society is possible without any consideration of colonialism and (sexist) racism. (Bannerji, 1993, p. xiv)

Bearing the above quote in mind, I situate my research within an overarching framework of anti-oppressive and anti-racist feminism. I embrace the value of different subjectivities, and engage this framework with the understanding that "feminist theory is about multiple and potentially contradictory locations and differences among, but also within, different women" and others (Braidotti, 2003, p. 198). In particular, I employ critical race feminism as an analytical framework that integrates the perspectives of anti-racist feminism with anti-colonial and other anti-oppressive frames from the particular geo-political context of Canada as a settler state (Razack, Thobani, & Smith, 2010, p. 2). As such, it is a useful frame for my work on the identities and stories of women and racialized people who migrated to or were born in Canada – including myself – and as context for the broader themes of home and belonging. My particular voice, alongside those of my family members, contributes to the diversity of mixed race and Asian Canadian scholarship. Importantly, and although this paper emphasizes women's voices, I recognize that

> to refer to a liberatory project as "feminist" cannot mean that it is only for or about "women," but that it is informed by or consistent with feminism. It seeks, in current feminist parlance, to unmake the web of oppressions and reweave the web of life. (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 4)

I undertake this work not only for myself, but for the benefit of others.

My Writing Style

You will notice that my paper contains a blend of personal stories, reflections, and theoretical discussion – sometimes woven together, and other times separated visually by space or format. Different fonts are used throughout to help distinguish between more academic-style

writing, creative pieces, and the voices and stories of myself and my participants, which enliven this work by grounding it in lived experience. The integrated nature of these styles and voices means that font changes are not strictly employed, but rather are intended as visual (and aesthetic) cues. Similarly, as above, I often preface subsections with italicized context-setting passages meant to frame the content in a way that remains connected to the personal nature of my ongoing research process.

My personalized approach and relationship to this work extends to the treatment of my family members. Although each participant consented to the use of their name, I have chosen instead to refer to them by their position in my family, reflecting how I might speak of or to them outside of an academic context. For instance, referring to my 'Third Aunt' parallels how I would address her in person with the Cantonese kinship term for third-eldest paternal older aunt, *saam gu ma* (三姑媽). This practice calls persistent attention to the past and current relationships participants and I have beyond that of researcher-subject. Any other family members named have been given a pseudonym.

Further, I also wish to be open about my approach to transcription and the presentation of my family's voices, since the ethical representation of stories involves transparency of motives, positionality, and voice, as well as a consideration of 'truth' and 'authenticity' (Heddon, 2008, p. 131). One question I continue to ponder revolves around how to reconcile the existence of peoples' many-layered identities with their (inevitably?) static and bounded representation in my writing; is such a reconciliation even possible? For these individuals will be represented in a limited way to readers through the very act of committing their words or stories to the page. How can I bolster the strength of individual voices representing one aspect of themselves – at a certain point in their lives, at the specific time of our conversation, and in the context of their particular relationship with me

and my project – in the face of simplified, hegemonic, homogenized, and sometimes oppressive understandings of identity and place?

Even when care is taken to showcase participant voices through quoted passages instead of paraphrasing, transcription is not a neutral or meaningless act. Readers will inevitably glean meaning from both content- and format-related elements such as how the transcript is laid out visually and whether or not it reflects standard English (Lapadat, 2000, pp. 205-206). A useful distinction to bear in mind is that

> [s]poken language is structured and accomplished differently than written text, so when talk is re-presented as written text, it is not surprising that readers draw on their knowledge of written language to evaluate it. (Lapadat, 2000, p. 206)

Nevertheless, it is important for me to allow my family to speak for themselves as much as possible in this paper, given my focus on the relational nature of memory, story-sharing, and identity. However, I also grapple with how to work with the transcripts of family members whose spoken English is not 'proper', and the implications of either 'standardizing' and correcting their speech, or leaving it alone. I am sensitive to Steinar Kvale's reminder that the presentation of seemingly "incoherent and repetitive verbatim interview transcripts may involve an unethical stigmatization of specific persons or groups" (as cited in Lapadat, 2000, p. 206). The element of translation, which was sought by two of my family members, adds further layers of complexity and meaning to questions of transcription, for the speaker's words and meanings are filtered through the translator's own experiences, understanding, and ways of seeing and communicating (Tymoczko, 2010). I have decided to maintain the speech styles of my participants, to both avoid erasing the knowledge, manner, and idiosyncrasies of each person. This decision also recognizes the important role that questions of language and language acquisition (or a lack thereof) play in my work, and in the lives of my family members. The voices in my paper have been only slightly edited for smoother reading flow and clarity.

Structure of the Paper

Reading my paper, you will find separate but interconnected essays, reflections, and creative works. The essays focus on clusters of themes, and on the processes I have used to explore them. Themes of memory, story, food, and identity are woven throughout the paper, alongside others that are clearly grouped into sections exploring: a) my developing perspectives on research conducted 'on' and through mixed race identity; b) the intimate connections between family, food, and food practices; and c) the quartet of language, home, migration, and belonging.

Between each section is a colour panel that includes the title of the subsequent essay. These panels are collages of *lai see* – red envelopes common in Chinese culture that contain monetary gifts, with the red colour symbolizing luck. Typically, older married members of the family gift these 'red pockets' to younger, unmarried members for important days or celebrations such as Chinese New Year and birthdays. However, specific customs do vary, even on a per family basis; my Second Aunt made a habit of taking part in this tradition despite remaining single, for example. I have kept many of my red pockets, and admire their variation. The collages are created from my collection; their inclusion here serves as an archive of a single, gift-giving aspect of my family's "ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice" (D. Taylor, 2003, p. 19). My red pockets are like envelopes of love and belonging through time – a tangible reminder of my place in family and heritage, even if the money within them was taken out or used long ago. Deliberately showcasing these objects and sharing their current meaning for me threads my family's presence more visibly throughout the paper, and is another way to recall, keep alive, and celebrate their importance in my life and in this work (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004).

In the spirit of inquiring, sharing, and celebrating, let me tell you another story…

Who Am I? Where Am I?: Placing Myself

Above: Red pockets are usually given by couples as a matching set of two;
these ones I received as singletons, perhaps from my Second Aunt

Mirror

What is she saying?
Oh, I thought you spoke Korean.

Can you speak Chinese?

Your babies will be so cute!

I see Asian hair! Are you here for the wedding?
Really? Let me see your eyes. Can you speak Chinese?

It would be great if we had someone here who was Chinese
I knew right away that you were mixed race –
that's why I sat next to you

We're all white in this room

What's your background?
Italian or Greek?
Oh, is your name Chinese?
I thought maybe you were Native American
Can you speak Chinese?

You look like your mom!
You look like your dad!

Is that your daughter? She doesn't look like you.
Are you her babysitter?

No.
No.
No.
No.
No.

*

I am the first woman in my family to pursue a Master's degree. As far as I know of, anyway. Regardless, it feels significant that even within the span of three generations, women in my family went from choosing to not attend school or attending secondary school at most, in the case of my grandmothers; to my Mother attending college before marriage and then university once her children were well into school themselves; to myself, here and now, having completed an undergraduate degree right after high school, and returned for graduate studies over half a decade later. My Bachelor's degree was in fine arts, and I remember my Father having a serious talk with me beforehand about job prospects after art school. Coming back to school, further questions about job and career prospects from anyone who isn't a faculty member or fellow student have usually been allayed by my referring to course work on education and policy, and timely questions of environment, food, and water. However, the departure of my major research focus into potentially less marketable, more ambiguous areas of personal narrative, family stories, and identity, have led to questions that are harder to answer. When I first contemplated following this new direction in my work, I was terribly nervous about telling my Father, in particular, but also about how it might be received by fellow academics. Would it be seen as valid work, worthy of study? Would I be taken seriously as a researcher by my family and my colleagues? How might I challenge my own fears and deeply-held biases in pursuing such work?

Creativity and Working with Personal Stories in the Academy

Throughout my project, I remain mindful that this personal family work is situated in a university context, albeit within the progressive sphere of my interdisciplinary and social justice-oriented faculty. Thinking about the challenges and implications of this location for my research, I turn to critical race feminist scholarship, which applies its analysis to knowledge production and experiences in academic settings. I am influenced by the work of Malinda Smith (2010), who examines issues such as equity and the representation of women of colour and Indigenous people in neoliberal universities, and who suggests that we disrupt typical modes of knowledge production with an "unapologetic use of creativity" (p. 44). Embracing creativity within scholarly work, such as by including drawings in an essay, can be taken as an anti-colonial act, given the emphasis on

rationality, objectivity, language, and text that so strongly characterizes the modern Western colonial and imperial paradigms embedded within different academic disciplines (Taussig, 2009, p. 264).

Despite my undergraduate experience in visual arts, I arrived slowly at the decision to include such work in my paper, although I planned early on to incorporate poetic writing. Broadly speaking, the relationality and multi-dimensionality of creative work is well-suited to exploring and expressing the inherently political nature of personal stories. According to Smith (2010), personal stories from those who are perceived as Others by wider society – especially women, Indigenous people, people of colour, and people with disabilities – are important sources of connection between the individual and the collective, and are needed to challenge imbalances of representation and power (p. 43). My oral history and personal narrative work thus follow what Smith calls a critical storytelling methodology (p. 42). Besides creativity, it is important to highlight the writings and theories of women scholars and scholars of colour, which I also consciously attempt to do here (M. Smith, personal communication, November 18, 2016). It is validating to discover and read the work of such scholars; in my research, I see the inclusion of their work, and of myself as a subject, as a way to further resist oppressive academic norms.

Patricia Monture (2010) is another thinker who writes explicitly from the lens of critical race feminism. Drawing upon Indigenous knowledge systems from her perspective as a Mohawk scholar, Monture outlines 'survival strategies' for racialized and gendered people learning and teaching in Canadian universities, which are structures and patriarchal expressions of colonial oppression (p. 26). This analysis is pertinent to the shape of my own experiences as a (sometimes) racialized woman in the academy, as well as to the form, expectations, and reach of any knowledge I produce therein. The intent of Monture's survival strategies is to challenge the alienating and depersonalized physical, structural, and intellectual spaces of the university by fostering solidarity, community, self-care, and the collective sharing of stories and struggles. The survival strategies

themselves are based on understanding oneself; understanding one's location and space – physical, social, and otherwise; and understanding experience as knowledge (Monture, 2010, p. 27). These ideas have guided my understanding of and approach to academic knowledge sharing and production. Indeed, the reflexive, relational, and personalized character of my research attempts to mirror the embodied, deeply situated, and placed nature of these ways of knowing – which are forms of high-context knowledge often devalued in the academy (Rasmussen & Akulukjuk, 2009, p. 293).

Although discussed in the context of teaching and learning in universities, the survival strategies promoted by Monture also serve to remind me of the importance of interrogating and bringing awareness to my location and actions as a settler with some white privilege – and the related implications for both my scholarly work and my life and relationships in general. My understanding in this regard has been furthered by bell hooks' (2013) contention that both academic and mainstream discourses around race are limited by their focus on racism (i.e. intentional or overt discrimination) rather than the more pernicious paradigm of white supremacy (i.e. pervasive unconscious bias) (p. 159). Reading and thinking about these different approaches to knowledge and experiences in the university in fact bolstered my confidence in undertaking research based upon oral history and personal narrative. Despite insecurities about how others in the university would respond to my work, I have received interest and positive feedback about my research from faculty and colleagues across the social sciences, liberal arts, humanities, and sciences. This was especially notable through my experiences as a participant in York University's 2017 3-Minute Thesis competition. There, as the only contestant with work focused on autobiography, family, and oral history, I was vastly outnumbered by graduate students from the sciences. However, I was gratified to discover that learning about my research encouraged some of these colleagues to begin thinking critically about identity and family stories, and view these as possible subjects of study. At

the same time, I am myself continually discovering the scholarship that has been and is being done on these subjects.

As I proceeded with my research, I wondered about how to make my scholarly work more accessible to non-academics, particularly given that I wanted this project to give back in some way to my family. I wondered: How might I present rigorous theories from the academic sphere in an intelligible and engaging way to a lay audience? How is such an endeavour complicated when there are language barriers between the writer and reader, as is the case between myself and some of my aunts? How might the limitations of the written word be circumvented altogether? Exploring these questions through visual art and food practices, for example, furthers my engagement with this form of praxis. As for fears about how my family would receive this work, I felt relieved and encouraged to hear my Eldest Aunt – the last person I interviewed – suggest that I turn my family stories into a book, and that because "this material is more lively…", "…a lot of people would want to read it".

*

The notion of writing myself, and my family, is what motivates and rings true for me, but I sometimes question its value outside of my own interest. I feel conflicted about focusing on myself – solipsism is a danger, no? Also, who cares but me? I can look within for possible responses to this question. Much of the point of this project is the idea that family stories are important and valuable. I am so grateful that Gramma wrote a memoir, regardless of its content. I am so grateful that I interviewed Grampa a little bit last year, even if he is uncertain about doing more due to his illness and memory. The thought of what it would be like to have access to my paternal grandparents' stories – in their own words – fills me with emotion. Perhaps someone will one day feel the same about my own stories.

I am also grateful for this opportunity of my privilege – the space, time, and luxury of attending graduate school (don't forget: the first woman in my family to do so) – and chance to use it to look for and think about family stories in a way that is focused and considered. In a way that values them for their meaning and importance on multiple levels, including their potential to resist 'objective' ivory tower norms of the academy. Now is also the right time – why put off learning these stories? I have seen how easy it is

to run out of time to do so, and the passing of my grandparents means it is already 'too late' in some respects.

Locating My Mixed Story

I am of mixed East Asian-white heritage. My Father was born and raised in Hong Kong, and my Mother – who is a descendant of generations of white Canadian settlers originating from England, Scotland, and Ireland – was born and raised in South Korea. They both migrated permanently to Canada in 1975, and met while attending college in Toronto. I was born and raised in Brampton, near Toronto, along with my younger Brother and Sister. My memory of growing up includes often being the only kid in class who was visibly mixed, at least of East Asian and white heritage. In part because of the geographic, cultural, and linguistic distances between myself and earlier generations – the intergenerational influence of transnational migrations – I have long felt different and somewhat disconnected from a broader sense of family and ancestry. I don't recall either of my parents discussing race or identity with me. However, being 'mixed' is a core part of my identity, and I have thought of myself as such for almost as long as I can remember – a deliberate, perpetual balancing atop the binary fence of race. While I think of myself as 'mixed' or 'mixed race', there are many other terms used for and by people who descend from different 'races' or ethnicities, such as:

> …mixed heritage, mixed parentage, *mestizo, mestiza, mulatto, mulatta*, creole, colored, "mixed racial descent," mixed origins, dual heritage, dual parentage, "multiracial," "bi-racial," multiethnic [as well as] the more derogatory half-caste, zebra, half-breed, mongrel, *oreo*, [and banana]. (Ifekwunigwe, 1999, p. 16, emphasis original)

The consistency of my self-definition is not representative of a universal experience for those of mixed race heritage. The ways mixed race people define themselves in terms of race or ethnicity often changes over time and depending on context; although self-definitions and descriptions are related, "it is important to remember that descriptions are always partial, and related

definitions may shift" (Bettez, 2010, p. 146). Identifying as mixed has been a way for me to manage my own Otherness, akin at some times and in some ways to what Silvia Cristina Bettez (2012) describes as "my struggles of feeling like an "other" while simultaneously feeling bad about calling myself a "woman of color" as a white skinned woman" (p. 20). Despite my long-time preoccupation with my own mixed race, I only realized in the past year that others were also addressing it, and in a scholarly way; reading Bettez's descriptions of her own identity struggles, I felt a visceral shock of recognition.

While similarities may be experienced as part of a shared or collective cultural identity such as Chineseness or being part of a diaspora, there are also inevitably "critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather – since history has intervened – 'what we have become'" (Hall, 1990, p. 225, emphasis original). For instance, those of mixed race heritage do not always identify as such. Indeed, even at the micro-level of a family, individuals may not share common identities. Like me, my Sister claims her mixed heritage as central to her sense of identity, commenting that "…personally, I put it as one of the Number One things […] Partly just because that's been such a strong part of me growing up, and me interpreting things and understanding things, and learning." In contrast, my Brother does not place as much emphasis on his being mixed, saying that "I wouldn't say it's a huge part of my identity." These perspectives show how the sharing of kinship, a similar history, and a common home can still be complicated by personal and experiential particularities that shape and contribute to different senses of identity.

It is important to bear in mind that individuals can exert agency over their senses of identity even as external factors play a part. Referring specifically to the embodied and relational experience of Chineseness, Ien Ang (2001) discusses this difference as an identity that is "inscribed […] on the very surface of my body" (p. 28). However, Ang (2001) also asserts that "if I am inescapably Chinese by *descent*, I am only sometimes Chinese by *consent*. When and how is a matter of politics"

(p. 36, emphasis original). The visual ambiguity of many mixed race people can provide greater flexibility of self-identification, allowing for variation in how people define themselves "racially or ethnically […] both situationally and over time" (Bettez, 2010, p. 146). My own experience is that, while others often do not know how to (accurately) define me racially, it seems that I also 'pass' as white at times – which signals a degree of privilege I automatically benefit from in contrast to other, more visibly racialized people and those whose mixed race heritage may stem from a combination of non-white ethnicities. Indeed, Mahtani (2014) suggests that the benefits of visual ambiguity, and the resulting flexibility of self-definition, are particularly present for mixed-white people (p. 5). Notably, this same flexibility can allow narratives of mixed race to perpetuate false notions of racial purity, and embody interracial sexuality and mixing in ways that do not threaten whiteness, thereby re-inscribing anti-blackness and white supremacy (Sexton, 2008, p. 20).

While I cannot change the fact that I am half-white, I remain aware that this status places me firmly within the conventional assumption and understanding that being mixed race means being partially white (Mahtani, 2014, p. 5). Gender issues and norms – or the perception of them – are also relevant here; in my experience and observations with both popular culture and 'real' life, mixed East Asian-white couples often consist of a white male and racialized female. This pairing could be essentialized as a relational embodiment of the (white male) colonization and consumption of an exotic and passive (female) Other. Likewise, in the context of norms of ideal beauty and desirability that privilege whiter and lighter skin tones, it might be tempting to rail against racialized individuals who are perceived as reinforcing such ideals by having romantic or sexual relationships with white people. Despite the degree of influence these positions likely have on some mixed pairings, both impulses reduce such relationships to factors of race and power. It is important to not neglect the complexities and dynamics of mutual attraction, interpersonal compatibility, circumstance, and feelings of love or care that can exist between partners regardless of ethnic or gender stereotypes.

The case of my parents, where my Father is Chinese and my Mother is white, resists what I see as stereotypical gender norms and assumptions. The topic of this less common pairing came up in discussion about others' perceptions of our family with my Brother, who commented that,

> it seems to be more common with mixed race, like Asian-white, that the dad is the white one and the mom is the Asian one. So, I always found that to be kind of cool, like, "Oh, good for Dad." I guess I could say I was a little bit proud that we were different that way.

Experiences like these reflect the intertwined nature of embodiment and relationality within the socio-political structures of our lives, and the value in recognizing different constructs such as identity. My understanding is influenced by feminist scholars who have invested much thought in this area. For instance, Trinh Minh-ha (1989) questions the notion of authenticity and unique 'specialness' by blurring the relational boundaries between our self/ves and others, arguing that there are simultaneous 'infinite layers' of each. This sense of inherently political and multi-faceted identity is echoed elsewhere, such as when Emily Woo Yamasaki states, "I cannot be an Asian American on Monday, a woman on Tuesday, a lesbian on Wednesday, a worker/student on Thursday, and a political radical on Friday. I am all these things every day" (as cited in Tong, 2009, p. 217). These ideas are relevant to my own examination of mixed race identity, and to my motives, position, and work as a researcher and graduate student. As in Bettez's (2010) investigation of epistemologies of belonging for mixed race women, I recognize that, for anyone

> of mixed heritage to claim particular identities, questions about what constitutes "legitimate" identities must be asked. For example, what constitutes black identity? Is it skin color and phenotype? Does one have to "appear" black to claim a black identity? If so, who decides what black looks like? Can black identity be formed and claimed through culture, and if so what is black culture? (p. 157)

Questions such as these easily apply to my consideration of Chineseness, and my own claims to a mixed race identity. Any answers seem to hold tensions of both the externally ascribed and personally asserted identities discussed by Ang (2001).

*

My Brother has come over to my place for his interview. It's a Wednesday – one of his nights off from work. We decide to set up upstairs where it's quieter, and he sits in our paternal Grandfather's wooden rocking chair, which now belongs to me. I'm halfway through my interviews, and feeling somewhat more comfortable and practiced with them. He, on the other hand, is nervous at the prospect of talking about himself 'on the record'. He visibly and audibly relaxes after we get into the process, however – back to the self-assured person I'm more familiar with, who came over to make samosas together just a couple of weeks ago. Although I have not asked my interviewees to do advance preparation, my Brother expresses regret at not having had a chance to find and review his journals and notes. He has done some of his own research into our family tree, looking at our maternal side through census records and such.

I wonder what kinds of formal government records might exist for our paternal side, other than identification documents. How do we identify ourselves beyond such documents? As a result of my beginning research into Chinese history in Canada, it is sinking in that we Chinese were the only ethnic group to be formally excluded from the country. I am not relationally part of a Chinese community here beyond my family, but I feel a part of this history. Although my Chinese family began migrating here in the 1970s, can I still claim this longer history as part of my own story?

As someone who is mixed, where do I fit into notions of diaspora or Chineseness? I was interested to hear Allen Chun discuss the increasing numbers of Asian scholars who are studying their own societies, and thus resisting the Othering impulse underlying anthropology and Asian studies. My work aligns with this movement towards reflexivity, albeit on a very intimate and personal scale. This is partly because of my consistent pre-occupation with being of mixed race heritage within the geographical location of Canada, and my having a primarily oral history-based understanding of the Asia(s) my family experienced. Asia in this sense – specifically Hong Kong and Korea – is both unknown and familiar.

Chineseness and Chinese Diaspora in Canada

My research focus on identity and Chinese diaspora reflects my 'on the ground' framing for the subjects of belonging and home; they are the site upon which I explore an ethics of embodiment and relationality. Questions of identity and place are embedded in notions of diaspora and migration. Canada is often thought about in relation to its diverse population, many of whom have

migrated here from around the world, or descended from past generations of migrants. While white colonial settlers fit this description of migrants, they are more commonly thought of as the foundational base of this nation, with "migrant" more frequently serving as shorthand for "people of colour" (Razack, 2002, p. 4). In fact, it can be argued that Canadian nation- and subject-making relies on the 'exaltation' of white citizen settlers over Indigenous peoples and non-white immigrant Others (Thobani, 2007). In the same vein, dominant binary-based notions of gendered and racialized identity and belonging are complicated by intersecting questions related to diasporic identities and growing numbers of mixed race people. We can understand diasporic identity as inherently hybrid because of the intermingling and layering of different cultures and geographies (Ang, 2001). Neither this layering nor the hybridity of social category embodied by those of mixed race are accommodated by reductionist, simplistic frames of understanding. However, some scholars argue that

> [h]ybridity as a point of view is meaningless *without* the prior assumption of difference, purity, fixed boundaries. Meaningless not in the sense that it would be inaccurate or untrue as a description, but that, without an existing regard for boundaries, it would not be a point worth making. (Pieterse, 2001, p. 226, emphasis original)

Others note the imperative to recognize hybridity, based on the ongoing presence of social and ecological hybridity in nature and all stages of human history, and the very real political – and at times life-threatening – nature of crossing different boundaries, such as national borders or anti-miscegenation norms or laws (Pieterse, 2001, p. 230). What does it mean for me to be a Canadian who is part-Chinese and part-white? How can I navigate identifying as *both* mixed and Chinese? Aspects of both Anglo-Canadian and Chinese culture, such as food and festivals, have always been part of my life. Meanwhile, it sometimes feels like I exist in and embody a perpetual contact zone – a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (Pratt, 1991, p. 34).

Recently learning, for instance, that my maternal Grandfather's lineage can be traced to United Empire Loyalists who migrated to Canada after the American Revolutionary War ended in 1783, I have begun to consider the complexities of my lineage. I descend from a combination of white settlers who were part of the colonization of Canada, and from Chinese who were under British rule in Hong Kong, and who survived the territory's occupation by Japan, before eventually settling in Canada themselves. Contact zones can be temporal as well as place-based. In a recent example, the date of July 1st, 2017, marked the Canadian state's 150th anniversary, with Canada Day celebrations countered by widespread dissent regarding the state's colonization of Indigenous lands and peoples (e.g., Coyle, 2017). This date coincided with the 20th anniversary of Britain's handover to China of Hong Kong, after over 150 years of colonial rule – a milestone that was met with pro-democracy protests (e.g., Reuters, 2017). Historically, part of the Chinese experience in Canada is also tied to July 1st, dubbed 'Humiliation Day' in response to the Chinese Immigration Act that passed on the same date in 1923, which excluded the entry of Chinese into the country until its repeal in 1946 (Chan, 2011). These layered anniversaries simultaneously touch different threads of my mixed heritage and history, speaking to the influence and 'aftermath' of events that ripple across distances of time and space to shape our identities and senses of place. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999) 'borderlands' also speak to contact zones, and my experiences of space and self:

> …the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. I am a border woman. (preface to 1st edition, para. 1)

This bordering extends to my appearance. I look like neither my parents nor my siblings, and seem to visually convey a racial ambiguity that draws out the curiosity of others with variants of the typical question, "What are you?". I have variously been misread as being white, indigenous to North America, or from the Mediterranean. Some people – including other Chinese – have even openly doubted my ethnic claims, rendering invisible my self-defined partial Chineseness. We must

remember that the 'viewer' is always at least in part implicated in and responsible for racial (mis)perceptions and their consequences for those who are 'viewed' (Compton, 2010, p. 23). People of mixed race are seen as continually occupying ambiguous and contested spaces in terms of race and place – if they are considered or 'seen' at all (Mahtani, 2014). Regardless of self-identification and -definition, one's being mixed can be subsumed by essentialized racial binaries, such as with the one drop rule historically determining Black status in America (e.g. Sexton, 2008, p. 12). Another example of this essentialization lies in my Mother's recollection that, "I know my parents said that some people said to them, "What's it like to have yellow grandchildren?"" However, if and when individuals identify as mixed race, or are perceived as such, such identities can "disrupt essentialized notions of family, reveal oppressive patriarchal norms, overtly destabilize constructions of fixed racial categories, and highlight epistemologies of belonging and exclusion" (Bettez, 2010, p. 143).

Canadian scholar Minelle Mahtani (2014), who is of mixed race heritage herself, argues that critically considering mixed race is only possible with an anticolonial lens that is attuned to historical, political, personal, and geographic specificities; my work is designed with this in mind. Similarly, critical scholars Sherene Razack (2002) and Doreen Massey (1994) argue that space and place – as opposed to being neutral, empty, and innocent – is a social product involving symbolism, materiality, systems of oppression, and bodies. This construction may not be easy to see, but that very invisibility is simultaneously a function of hegemony, the ongoing ways in which we are socialized, and national narratives such as the welcoming fairness of Canada as a country. Razack asks certain questions to reveal ideologies bound up in space, such as:

> What is being imagined or projected on to specific spaces and bodies, and what is being enacted there? Who do white citizens know themselves to be and how much does an identity of dominance rely upon keeping racial Others firmly *in place*? How are people kept in their place? And, finally, how does place become race? (2002, p. 5, emphasis original)

The ways that spaces and places are used and inhabited may be unconscious or deliberate, both on the part of governmental bodies and the wider public, and yet are always political and historically specific (Thiong'o, 1997, p. 13).

In terms of Chinese identities in the spaces of Canada, they are part of how Asians may be seen as "a persistent problem" resulting from "the current placelessness of the Asian within the Canadian social imagination [that] is produced by complex histories of colonialism, cultural imperialism, and immigration" (Kim, 2016, p. 19). Confronting and remembering the structural hierarchies embedded in spaces around us can help us to address and transcend inequalities and erasures. For instance, while it is significant to recall racist exclusionary practices such as the head tax imposed by Canada on Chinese migrants, it is also important to be aware of past and present colonial practices of the Canadian government with groups such as Indigenous peoples. This critical consciousness helps to balance the backward-looking focus of diaspora studies, which tends to focus less on the new 'home' country than the place(s) from which migration stems (Haig-Brown, 2012). How aware were and are my family members of colonialism in Canada? This is a question I have yet to ask, though these types of histories and events are part of my own story and context. Being mindful of various histories within histories adds to the challenge of building awareness of the political and historical nature of space and place, yet can be helped by the sharing and learning of individual people's stories, including family oral histories.

A word of caution is useful, however, when storytelling; the way in which a story is told, and by whom, makes a difference. Allow me to illustrate with a story of my own:

> *Two years ago, in the summer before attending graduate school, I took a cross-country road trip through Central and Western Canada along with two companions of colour, including a male cousin. At one point, we stopped in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, to take a tour on the history of marginalized Chinese immigrants who often had little option but to work in laundries located in tunnels below the city. The theatrical tour was conducted by a charismatic young white man, who warned the group that he would alternate between sharing information as a guide and performing as an aggressive white laundry*

boss, occasionally 'inviting' active participation. The tour was interesting, and at least one minor task was assigned to a middle-aged white woman, who chuckled. Closer to the end of the tour, I recall that the 'boss' became more irate, and shouted at my cousin to run back to a place we had left, to retrieve a lamp. He then shouted at me to do something manual like shovelling. My cousin and I both obliged, though I could tell we both felt uncomfortable. It was only when I went to start, and said in a small voice that I didn't know what to do, that the guide laughingly told me it was unnecessary.

I was disturbed by this experience, but put it out of mind; it wasn't until a couple months later that I consciously recognized the Othering, race-based implications of what took place. Given the context of the tour – racism and discrimination against Chinese people in the very tunnels we were touring – and that fact that my companions and I were the only visibly racialized members of the group, it seems especially troublesome that the two of us who looked most Chinese were targeted by the intimidating 'boss'. It did not feel socially acceptable to refuse participating, since this took place in the context of theatricality. Regardless of other issues, it also did not feel comfortable to be addressed in such an aggressive manner. While we may have been chosen simply to engage our obviousness as tourists and relative youth compared to the rest of the group, the race-based optics of this incident remain poor at best and the experience felt unsettling on a personal level.

When we share stories, it is important to be mindful of how we do so – both in terms of others' stories and our own. My memory work and writing for this paper has involved a process of constant negotiation and reflection, in terms of deciding how much of which stories to include; it is sometimes surprising to notice which stories or parts of stories feel too raw or vulnerable to expose. Nevertheless, stories remain a powerful way to learn about and contextualize the spaces we inhabit.

Ever since reading the first book to document stories and experiences of Chinese-identifying women in Canada – including those of mixed race – who had either migrated to or been born in this country, I feel more connected to a broader historical context of Chinese experiences in Canada. As a collection, *Jin Guo: Voices of Chinese Canadian Women*, published in 1992 by the Chinese Canadian National Council, serves as a counterpoint to much of the male-dominated history of Chinese people in Canada – which was at least in part a product of realities resulting from the aforementioned immigration and labour policies. I now realize that, through their embodied

experiences and relations in this country, Chinese Canadians from the past have contributed to the structures, contexts, and consciousness(es) that now exist and inform my family's and my own experiences here through time. As a result of my active interest, my growing awareness occurs despite the typical oversight of such contributions and histories from mainstream popular and institutional narratives. This learning means that I can indeed recognize a connection with past generations of Chinese people even if they lived here long before my family migrated, and we are not actually related by blood.

My sense of connection, and the self-driven effort required to achieve it, relates to the notion of the minor public, which is examined by diaspora and cultural studies scholar Christine Kim (2016), whose work focuses on Asian Canadians. Distinguishing publics from communities, Kim differentiates minor publics from the dominant or hegemonic public by recognizing that

> while all publics emerge by virtue of their engaged participants, there are few, if any, structures in place to sustain minor publics, and many (such as mainstream news outlets […]) designed to ensure the longevity of a dominant one. (2016, p. 4)

Arguing that spaces of and for public intimacy are intended for major publics, Kim goes on to write that "racialized bodies are […] implicitly encouraged to keep the intimate details of their existences to themselves when the dominant public seems uninterested" (p. 44); I write here in the face of such apparent disinterest. Million's (2013) felt theory is evoked when Kim (2016) asserts that the concept of publics helps us to theorize about the definition, feelings, and mobilization of collectives, since "feelings matter and, moreover, […] feeling is core to the construction of minor publics" (p. 5). My research into the relational, autobiographical narratives of racialized and mixed race bodies resists the invisibility of related minor publics and suppression of their affective intimacy.

Meanwhile, beyond connecting to a broader sense of history, the personal narratives in *Jin Guo* allow me to feel a new sense of belonging to a minor public of Chinese-identifying women in my country. I have been largely unaware of experiences of uncertain and tenuous Chineseness

beyond my own, especially from a Canadian perspective. As such, these women's voices resonate with me through experiential threads of gender, race, class, and language, while providing insight into lives and times different from my own. It has been helpful to see evidence of identity struggles from the past, and reflections of my own questions around Chineseness. In the voice of one woman in *Jin Guo*,

> I always felt sympathetic to the identity problems of Canadian-born Chinese. I remember being very upset when I first came here and I went to a party. Somebody – he was white – asked me where I was from. When I said, "Hong Kong," he replied, "You're not Chinese!" I got mad and confronted this person. "What do you mean, only Chinese from Communist China are true Chinese?" You can extend this question further. Is a Chinese born here even less Chinese? Are the Hong Kong Chinese less Chinese than those from Taiwan? This whole business of Chineseness is very silly. How do you define it? (Chinese Canadian National Council, 1992, p. 171)

Such questions are taken up by Ang (2001), who also employs personal narrative to explore identity and ethnicity. Ang (2001) problematizes understandings of diaspora and Chineseness, proposing that "Chineseness is a category whose meanings are not fixed and pregiven, but constantly renegotiated and rearticulated, both inside and outside China" (p. 25). In other words, we may all have differently-situated definitions of Chineseness; the key thing is that such definitions are based on self-identification as opposed to the political imposition of a homogenizing label by others (A. Chun, personal communication, March 24, 2017).

**Family Stories /
Food Stories**

Left: Some designs, such as these, are more common in my collection. Many designs include symbols, such as peaches for longevity.

A Shifting Relationship

my father hurt-
ing at the table
sitting hurting
at suppertime
deep inside very
far down inside
because I can't stand the ginger
in the beef and greens
he cooked for us tonight
and years later tonight
that look on his face
appears now on mine
my children
my food
their food
my father
their father
me mine
the father
very far
very very far
inside

— *untitled poem, Fred Wah*

Chinese food for me is the Cantonese cuisine of my Father's family. In my home, both of my parents have traditionally done the cooking, either individually or together. As the family became busier over time – notably when I was in high school, when my Mother began attending university and subsequently worked full-time – a greater quantity and variety of non-Chinese convenience foods became more common as part of our diet, such as frozen chicken strips.

Living away from my parents, I eat even less Chinese food than before. I am still a somewhat picky eater, but to a lesser degree, and with a greater appreciation of the privilege that gave space for my pickiness; I have never feared going hungry. I love to eat and share food, and have the means to do so. My relationship with Chinese food has also changed for the better; I am no longer against the ginger in our food.

Growing up, I learned some things about cooking by observing and helping my parents – especially my Father, who seems to enjoy sharing knowledge. From an early age, I also loved to watch cooking shows. I particularly remember watching two Canadian programmes from the 1980s and 1990s: with my Father, and probably other family members, Stephen Yan's *Wok with Yan* (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation [CBC], 1980); and, a bit later, James Barber's *The Urban Peasant* (CBC, circa 1982), with my Brother. I have less clear memories of *Wok with Yan*, but recall that it

was funny, and that I liked how an audience member would join Yan at the end of each show to eat what had been prepared. *The Urban Peasant* was warm, approachable, and friendly, and gave me a strong sense that cooking can be enjoyable, flexible, and simple.

From my memories of these shows, I see them as both promoting home cooking, which can metaphorically be understood as "a cuisine grounded in familiar, shared history and in common knowledge of places and people. Home cooking is always concerned with quality because people you care about will eat the meal" (Wilk, 2006, p. 202). I am comfortable trying to cook new dishes, yet I have little experience and skill in preparing what I think of as Cantonese home food, and feel somewhat intimidated by the possibility of not getting it 'right'. The frustration of a dish not turning out as expected or hoped seems to me especially strong when it falls in the category of home food. I find that I miss many of the Cantonese dishes I might have had at home, and have difficulty preparing them myself, even with advice from my parents. Some common dishes we would have include *ma po tofu*, dumplings, steamed salmon, and chicken curry with potatoes.

I know I am lucky to have my parents available for advice at all; my Father has bemoaned the fact that he never learned from his mother how to cook many of the dishes that she made, and that recipes for these dishes from other sources have not resulted in the same tastes he holds in his memory. Part of this challenge arises from the powerful connection between our senses and our memories, such as how "the significant quality of smell and taste is that it is possible to recognize them, but much more difficult to recall them" (Sutton, 2005, p. 131, emphasis removed). I hope in time to lessen the similar discrepancy that exists true between my own cooking and taste memories.

Besides missing the tastes and smells of home cooking and certain home foods for their own sake, I notice that my distance from Chinese food – and my thinking deliberately about it in relation to identity – has given the cuisine a heightened degree of meaning. This shift relates to the notion of cultural home, which focuses on the link between cultural practices, identity, and belonging (Liu,

2015, p. 51). Given that I am unable to understand, speak, or read the language of my Father's family, food is one of the aspects of my Chinese heritage most accessible to me. This is significant, since my identities are dominated by experiences and embeddedness in Anglo-Canadian 'Western' culture, and some of the other links I have with my Chinese background are distinctly negative. My mixed ethnicity means that "I am a plurality of selves" (Lugones, 1990, p. 14). This is true in terms of both felt and experienced identities, and those that are projected upon me – my "double-consciousness" (Du Bois, 1903, chapter 1, para. 3).

To address some of the challenges I face around identity and belonging, I can seek out and concentrate on food practices that I find positive and meaningful. To do this, I need to consciously and critically consider my past and my present, and the stories that stem from and contribute to my experiences and understanding of the world. Recognizing that stories are active forces, I can choose how to frame, enact, and bound my own stories, since "[b]ecause we use them to motivate and explain our actions, the stories we tell change the way we act in the world" (Cronon, 1992, p. 1375). I can also be more conscious of my construction of reality, my choices, and of myself, if I work to be mindful within my ongoing experiences (Starhawk, 1987, p. 89). In other words, I can story my memories and myself. Despite sometimes feeling out of place, I thus reinforce my sense of cultural home, supporting the Chinese parts of my identity. Instead of feeling hindered by and ashamed of my pickiness or abilities, I can expand the foods I enjoy and develop the skills to make them myself.

My food preferences and persistent, residual, and texture-based pickiness are often a source of embarrassment, and mean that I cannot easily finish a meal in the sense of eating all that is possible on a chicken leg, for instance. This 'waste' feels shameful in the face of family stories representing material and food-based want. On a more relational level, my pickiness means that I cannot partake as easily in meals with my family, which can conspicuously set me apart from the others in terms of the quantity and variety of dishes I eat.

Beyond the enclosure of my family, my already-tenuous sense of identity is sometimes challenged, leaving me feeling unmoored. When I go to Chinese restaurants without them, I am often automatically given a fork, which I interpret as an assumption of Otherness based on my sometimes 'passing' as white. However, although I can use chopsticks, I don't use them 'properly'. Perhaps related to my being a picky child, my parents were more focused on my eating, and being able to eat using them, regardless of technique. This means that my cousins, as well as many of my non-Asian friends, are more adept than I at using these utensils, which is embarrassing as an adult. My eating less Chinese food has also led to my chopstick skills worsening from lack of practice. Speaking with my siblings, both raised experiences related to identity, food, and eating, in the context of their spending time in places with a high density of Chinese people; my Sister moved last year to Burnaby, British Columbia, while in 2005 my Brother visited China and Hong Kong, where being surrounded by people who looked like himself made him "feel a little more at ease".

Overall, my food-related experiences frame my uneasy sense of place, which influences the form(s) of my identity as well as my experiences of "the subtleties, often difficult to convey, of what it means to belong" (Huff, 2006, p. 82). I often don't consciously realize how much I seek others like me – and the sense of belonging that presumably could come of such a meeting. My desire for belonging and community is complicated by the connections I have to conflicting aspects of my multi-faceted heritage, such as simultaneous histories of colonizing/colonized peoples. Who do I seek belonging and identification with, and what might such a connection mean? Appreciating, cooking, eating, and learning about Chinese food on my own terms allows me to engage with my history and heritage in a more positive and tangible way. These food practices can validate my ethnic identity by helping me embrace, assert, maintain, and perhaps strengthen my sense of Chineseness, and the associated ties to my Chinese family and culture (Holtzman, 2006, 366).

I don't think I've ever been surrounded by so many Asians as I am right now in Vancouver. (laughs)

Right – and by Asian, you mean East Asian?

I mean a mix of things. There's a lot of mainland China. There's a lot of Hong Kongers. And there's a lot of slang, when we talk of people. […] But that's how they talk of people – like 'Honger' is somebody from Hong Kong. Or 'CBC', is Canadian-born-Chinese. […] Who's FOB ['fresh off the boat'], or who's CBC, or who's Canadian-born. There's a differential of Chinese, or how Chinese you are. […]

What's that like? How have they classified you? Do they talk about it to your face, or is there any sort of judgement?

Oh yeah. I'm sure they talk about it when I'm not around, too. But they'll make jokes, like saying, "Are you even Chinese?" sometimes. It's kind of sad. I get where they're coming from; I know I'm very Canadian. I just make a joke about it – like, "You know I'm white, you know I was born here!" But it can be frustrating sometimes. If I hear it enough in one day, it's like – "Just stop."

And these would all be full Chinese people, right?

Yeah. […] It can be frustrating sometimes. There was one time when we went out for sushi, and one of the rolls I picked up, it fell apart. My one friend, right away, was like, "Do you even know how to use chopsticks?" I was like, "Shut up – yes, I do." So even, for example, how much I use chopsticks now – [it's] a lot more than before.

Bringing up Chopsticks: My Sister

Bringing up Chopsticks: My Brother

Having that full month of only eating with chopsticks, and basically eating rice and fish and whatever; duck, whatever. This and that, and the mushroom feast that we had. That kind of broke my intolerance of mushrooms forever. […] I was already having to start eating different things and then to be on that trip, and you kind of have to just eat what's there, right? […] I mean, there's still certain things I don't like, but if I have to force myself to eat things, I can pretty much force myself to eat anything.

I admire that.

Not that I would like it. There's things that I would have to choke down still, but I could do it if I have to, out of courtesy. That was nice to have all that practice with chopsticks. I still remember, by the end of the trip being like, "I haven't used a fork in like four weeks, and this is so cool." You know?

Do you feel like your chopstick skills are still the same?

I feel like I'm a little rusty, but that I have still retained that modicum of skill.

Talking Together: Pass the Stories, Please

My food practices and attitudes towards food have been influenced by family stories, especially those told by my Father. He has often shared stories – many of them food-related – about his childhood and youth in Hong Kong. Through such food stories, food is portrayed as worthy of storying in its own right, alongside the more typical family story themes of work, play, family, and economic experiences (Martin, Hagestad & Diedrick, 1988, p. 534). I think that hearing these stories from an early age taught me to be invested and interested in food and eating, even if I was a picky eater in practice. Very often, I have been told food stories in the kitchen and at mealtimes – both important sites for "socialization processes that promote continuity and change across generations in the sociocultural life of food" (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 35).

Sometimes the stories are about how, as the family's youngest child and only boy out playing with friends, my Father would often forget to come home for meals – forcing his family to search for him as the food on the table got colder and colder. Many other stories convey a love and nostalgia for the diversity, quality, freshness, and affordability of street food in Hong Kong, including foods that are harder or impossible to find here in Canada. Though there are exceptions, these food stories tend to focus positively on the experiences of buying and eating these foods, the admirable skills of food vendors, or on simple dishes prepared by my Grandmother. At the same time, these stories often contain an undercurrent that recognizes the challenging reality of my family's economic situation, or mourns ways of life that have disappeared or been lost. For instance, a frequently-told story revolves around the general absence of birthday celebrations in my Father's family except for the treat of a whole salty egg to eat with one's rice. To this day, he enjoys receiving food as gifts over other objects or experiences.

Family stories have effectively promoted my understanding of food as a key element to the practice and enjoyment of daily life, and as something important to pay attention to and appreciate.

Left: Table where I interviewed my Third Aunt, in her home

Indeed, some research has studied how, through the praise of food and of the preparer or purchaser of food, and through the recounting of positive childhood memories related to the food being eaten, "food items were not only imbued with positive sentiments but also served to link family members across generations, and in some cases to bring family members no longer alive into family members' consciousness" (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 41). Certainly, my Father's stories have fortified a connection between us and brought his past to life, while providing insight into my grandparents; they influence the ways I understand my Father's experiences and how they differ from my own. This interconnectedness illustrates the assertion that stories "serve as the foundation for shared identity, and hold the ability to elucidate sense of place and to transmit cultural understandings, both within and across cultural boundaries" (Huff, 2006, p. 79). Indeed, over time, these values have grown to occupy a central place in my own food practices and attitudes, regardless of the dishes or cuisine in question.

The element of time in our life stories is important to consider, since

> [w]e need stories of the past to locate ourselves and to envision a reason to take action for social change to create a better world [for ourselves or others]. Without the stories of the past, we are unable to see the possibility of change. (Short, 2012, p. 11)

Such understanding can arise through self-reflection, or it can be triggered by our exposure to the ideas, information, and stories around us. Sometimes this exposure can have an immediate effect. For instance, it is only in the past year that I came across the poem that starts off this section, by mixed Canadian poet Fred Wah (1985). My embodied response to its resonance with my experiences was instant, and reflected intergenerational tensions and fears that I had not consciously realized. In speaking to the intermingling of identities, the poem lent a new perspective to my evolving relationship with Chinese food and, by extension, with my Father and his family's culture. The poem also evokes and implicates future generations in the cultures and food practices of my family and myself; what will be their relationship and understanding?

Food was a theme that arose in my family research, regardless of whether or not I raised the subject intentionally. Within the subject of food, a few sub-themes emerged, including nostalgia for foods and food experiences, perceptions and forms of abundance, and experiences of want, where there was not enough food or resources to get food. To illustrate these sub-themes, I have included excerpts below from my interviews with my parents, aunts, and Grandfather, as well as from my maternal Grandmother's memoir. In the first, I was learning about the Chung family history. My paternal grandparents and Great-Grandmother had survived the Second Sino-Japanese War – which merged with World War II – and were once again living in Hong Kong, after having fled the conflict and devastation. The family, though poor, had a history of helping others in need, and continued this form of sharing and care, as recounted by my Third Aunt. Following this memory are experiences of a more personal nature from several different family members.

These excerpts of want and plenty speak to the layered complexity and contradictions so typical of life. As Carolyn Steedman (2010) argues, in writing about working class people "living in conditions of material distress" (p. 12), we must both resist romanticising and acknowledge the experience of varied emotional and mental landscapes that is often denied this demographic under the assumption of simplicity and "emotional sameness" (p. 12).

The contrasting family stories shared here are thus glimpses of specific moments in time, place, and memory, that speak to and play off one another as stories, rather than representing and generalizing experiences of class, gender, or race. At the same time, it is important to recognize the ways that lives are shaped by such experiences and conditions, and how these effects can extend through time and across generations. I have learned well the thriftiness of my parents, which –

Third Aunt on the Family Practice of Feeding Strangers in Hong Kong

At that time my mom always make a lot of rice. We always wondering "why so much rice?". Always have leftovers, […] always. My mom told me that because a lot of those people coming down from China – even though we are not rich, we are poor – but those people are hungry, they don't have money, they don't have a place to stay, don't know where to go. [...] [We were] so close to the railway, people coming and walking down [...] follow the railway going down to Hong Kong. [...] So my mom always make a lot of rice and also always have some salty dish. Steamed fish […] or anything with preserved vegetables and then with meat and then this sauce, is very tasty. […]

My mom said even though we don't have enough food, we still have those sauce. If people coming from those places, they don't have anything to eat, at least have some rice. But it is hard to eat just rice, so have some sauce on top, at least the stomach will be full. So we always have that. Every day for a long time. Until there is not many people coming down anymore and until everything settled down. That's quite a few years. I was very young at that time [around the mid-1950s], but that is the only thing that stuck in my head. […]

When my mom wasn't working anymore [because of having more children], it's a bit tight because two incomes now become one. It's a bit tight. More mouths to feed too, but my mom still doing it. Rice is not expensive at that time, not too expensive. And even though we only always have two dishes: one is vegetable dish, the other one is salty dish. Always. These two is always.

At that time, we have six people, six mouths to feed. Seven – your dad is just babies. But we always have this. That is why we always using the sauce for the rice, because we don't have a lot of meat or vegetables to eat. You know, rice always there, so you will be full but not really. Now, that is why I love to eat, all of us love to eat. We know what is not eating like.

while valuable – is a hard lesson to unlearn. What I see as my working class origins have until now taken a backseat to my long-term concentration on questions of mixed race identity, but through this project are beginning to come forward in my attention and consciousness, even as I am "aware of much self-censoring, evasion, resistance and shame as my psychic defenses try to screen me from past memories and trauma" (Spence, 1990, p. 28). This consciousness exists within the realm of food, amongst others, and sometimes arises unexpectedly. I have always loved peanut butter mixed into hot rice, for example, yet recall my discomfort at the surprise of one of my aunts upon discovering this taste a number of years ago. Perhaps from personal experience, she associated this combination with 'poor food'. Similarly, my enjoyment of SPAM® – the tinned meat that is the butt of many jokes – is heightened by how much better it tastes than the cheaper, knock-off versions we would eat as fried slices with scrambled egg and rice. In my mind, and although I never sensed that we lacked meat, our starting to buy SPAM® instead of these other brands was a step up. The intersections of food, class, and identity are a rich line of inquiry that I have just begun to explore.

Slim Pickings

Dad at College

I ran out of money - after the first semester. The things are expensive, right? School books are expensive, and this and that. I bought them, but everything is expensive. I don't usually take lunch. Either no food left, or... I don't remember. But I usually just buy french fries - that's all I can afford, have the french fries. Sometimes I cooked a hard boiled egg with it, but that's it - for a long time.

After the first semester, I was in a panic mode, because I don't have enough money to pay for the following semester. I don't think I have enough. I can't ask [my sisters] for money because they are tight too. Especially [Third Aunt and I] are living there [with Eldest Aunt and Uncle], we don't pay them anything.

So what am I going to do?

Gramma Away at High School

Food was pretty slim pickings for me at times. I had little or no money, and Mother would write a letter and send a dollar, once in awhile if she had it. I was always watching for the letter and hoping for a dollar. I would never have dreamed of asking Mother for money, for I knew if she had it she would give it. A tin of tomato soup was good, for it lasted so long, just adding water and a little of the tomato soup made it coloured anyway.

I sure was not fat in those days. In fact I was anemic until after I was married. It was hard attending school like that, young and away from home, and always short of food. I did not do well the last couple of years either, my marks showed it, some were pretty brutal. I passed that was about all. As I mentioned, I worked out [at a job] as many Saturdays as I could. I ate well those days and earned .25 cents. I needed that .25 cents badly and depended on it.

I was the only student attending High School [in Denbigh] who worked out on Saturdays.

Second Aunt as a Child

Aunt: I can remember what hungry was... [...]

Translator: At that time, we don't have a lot of food in the house, so every time you feel hungry you have to go downstairs [and leave the apartment] to buy something to eat. We don't have fridge, all those things, so we don't have anything. No snacks.

When she was around six or seven, one day she was feeling *so* hungry, and sweat, because of the hunger pain. My mom was buying groceries. My grandma was downstairs somehewere, and when Grandma came back and saw her, she was so cold because she feels so hungry, and sweating and all this, so she bring her downstairs and she eat a lot of porridge, and *joong* [sticky rice] - you know *joong* - and a lot of food for her to eat.

She just remembers that.

Third Aunt in Canada

At first, when I came over, my Mom already told me, "When you go over to Canada, first thing, you find a job, and then you move out [of your sister's place]."

At that time, money's tight, you know? And, I remember, I buy - I think it's a dollar for five of those noodles. Yeah, instant noodles. A dollar for five.

I ate those for lunch every day. Just pour hot boiling water in, and then cover it, and then eat it. Every, every week. (laughs) It is not easy. That's why afterwards I have a stomach ulcer. And then the doctor said "Don't eat that anymore, you have to stop."

So I did stop.

Forms of Abundance

Third Aunt Buys Bananas

I remember when I first came here, I was working in Honest Ed's. The first job I had, in Honest Ed's for a day or two. I was walking out of the store, and then next door there's a grocery. You know, a little grocery store. It's really just for vegetables or fruit. Five cents a pound for bananas. Never heard of it in Hong Kong. Because those bananas we have now [in Canada] is very expensive in Hong Kong. And really my grandma doesn't like us to eat those [big] bananas. So I said, 'This cost, how?' I buy a whole bunch. I think at least 10 pounds. I carry it.

By the time I was home, literally, I already give half away. (laughs) I ask everybody, "You want some banana?" Everyone, when I see somebody on the street, "You want some banana?" Too much, too heavy. I think they still remember that. That was a funny story that I buy so much. In Hong Kong, it's not that easy to find those bananas and also expensive, very expensive. Well, that's the first time I saw it. So, "Wow," I said, "It's on sale!"

Gramma on Maple Syrup

We felt so put upon for we so seldom had brown sugar in the house. [...] We always had a loaf pan size of maple sugar, and as soon as it was nearly gone, Mother would put on more syrup, and make another loaf. How I do love the smell of boiling maple syrup. We would not have cows milking at this time, so we used the big bowl off the [milk] separator to put the fresh syrup in. [...] We were always on the look out for bottles, for we hardly ever had enough bottles, and we could not buy syrup tins, because it would cost money. The syrup was such a blessing, for it was a sweet for us the whole year. Mother and Dad were always generous with syrup, and everything we had. If anyone came who found the syrup a real treat, Mother and Dad did not hesitate a minute, but gave them some to take away. [...]

We hardly ever had breakfast cereal like oatmeal or even cornmeal. We loved oatmeal so much, but money was needed to buy it. For breakfast we had warmed up potatoes, or beans with bread or toast but never jam or marmalades, but always maple syrup. Still we were so much better off than those in the cities who had no garden or sugar bush or wild berries.

Dad's Second Day in Canada

I think it was the next morning, [my older sister's husband's] father and mother came over to take us out for *dim sum*. I just came over, so they want to-- you know. So we went to Chinatown for *dim sum*. [...] Anyway, not just him, I think with [my brother in law's] brother too, and his wife and their kids. I don't remember.

That was the first time I went to Chinatown, with food, and some of the *ha gow* - shrimp ball - is *so* big. Not much shrimp, but the skin is *so* thick. (laughter) The Chinese food [in Toronto] is not that good at the time. First, I look at it, and, "Wow! So big! But then how come it's not translucent?"

I said, "Well, I am lucky to have *dim sum* here, at least - even though they're not too good." It was in Chinatown.

Grampa on Family Eating and Food Shopping

Among other things, the family would grow: beans, carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, potatoes, and onions – the green tops of which would be a "tasty part of the early season harvest". They also grew a lot of 'mangels', a type of sugar beet they fed to the cattle in wintertime. Foods they couldn't grow, the family would buy, including oatmeal and any kind of cereals, flour, and sugar; they would also "always have cheddar cheese from the cheese factory".

"Mother always baked, usually once a week, baked a lot of loaves of bread, and then possibly once a week our dad would go to town with a team of horses. Mother always made butter too, so there was always lots of excellent butter to slather over it." Grampa's father would sometimes buy baker's bread, the change of which would be a "treat to us." Other times, his father would bring home some bologna, or other kinds of cereal – such as Red River Cereal, which gave the family "a break" from oatmeal porridge.

Besides these themes of plenty and want, missing certain types of food and food experiences emerged as a source of nostalgia and occasional disappointment in my conversations with my parents and aunts. My Third Aunt spoke of her growing avoidance of foods from China, due to health and safety concerns, despite missing the taste of certain foods such as preserved vegetables. A different sort of nostalgia is present in my Mother's account of how the meaning and experience of Christmas and other holidays has changed over time, in part because of the loss of food-related traditions and skills across three generations.

Mom on Christmas being Different Now

I guess what's different is like when I was young in Korea, everything was—I think where it comes to it, is Christmas and holidays. Now, I don't want [to celebrate] them anymore. [...] I try to think about why: Why do I feel this way? Because when we were growing up, those were all so special, and we always did special things, and what I *think* is, I guess I've lost all that.

[...] I never learned how to make pie or anything, so it was always all of those things that were missing. We used to have divinity fudge, and popcorn balls, and special cookies, and all at Christmas time, and I never did that. So, it was always missing, missing, missing.

[...] So I just feel all torn up, I guess. And then I feel bad because it's taking away from other people – then you guys don't have that, and then I feel bad. I guess that's partly what's different.

In contrast, from the memories of my Father and his sisters, a food's preparation, characteristics, and context – such as the vendor of stinky bean curd you could hear and smell coming – were often described in detail, followed by an comment underscoring the food's connection to them as both positive and lost. For example, my Third Aunt spoke of missing red-coloured chestnuts roasted in a black sand-sugar mix:

> They have sugar in the sand, and that's why the sand is turning black colour. But when they stir with the big paddle, and the chestnut in there, they cook it this way, using the sand to cook the chestnut. Smells so good, and when they pop – Wow! Heaven. *That* I miss.

Similarly, describing the cooking process of sweet potato roasted in sugar cane, the same aunt said, "They are sweet, and smell so good. Very good smell. And sweet. Very sweet, because [of] the sugar cane. Never seen those things [here]." Some of the memories indicated a general love of food, such as when my Father recalled that, "Everything is my favourite. There's a lot of [...] food

that you never see here." In his case, vivid recollections of food-related memories peppered our conversation, particularly at the beginning of our interview when he didn't think he could recall his youth in the 1960s, such as:

> We like to eat, so when I was growing up, […] we always go out past some food vendor to have some clams, or porridge, congee, or noodles before we go home. A lot of street vendors, you can buy 10 cents of this, 10 cents of that.
>
> So *that* I remember, when it comes to food. […] I just remember that food vendors is everywhere. […]

However, starting in the 1970s, development in Hong Kong meant that the common low-rise buildings of five or six storeys, such as those of the compound where my Father's family lived, were torn down and replaced with high-density, high-rise buildings of 20 storeys or more that completely changed the social and community dynamic of the area. The subway was being built, and times were changing. Permanent food stalls now exist in some places, but the street vendors of these histories are gone.

For the most part, these types of family food stories inhabit a rich and tasty-seeming place in my imagination, despite the knowledge that any visit I make to Hong Kong will be totally different. The food I hear about in these stories "floats" across place and time, as part of the "mobility of memory and

Dad on (some) of the Food Vendors' Wares

They sell hot oranges; they have a burner, they put oranges like a mound, and steam – and the oranges would be hot, especially in the winter time. [They sell] all things: toast, fried squid, like the barbecue, roast octopus – you name it, they have it. It's a lot of those egg rolls, so to speak […] what we called egg rolls, not like you go to restaurants [here], you have these egg rolls. No, those are not egg rolls! […]

What they did, they have this hot plate – round, this folded thing. They put a little bit of batter in the middle, and they closed the lid, like a pan, they close and squeeze it, and then they turn it, open it, and then it's still soft but it's cooked. Then they use a tube or something, they roll it, and take it out […].

Actually, we saw it in Markham. A few years ago, when we went to Markham Mall – me and [your] Mom went there – they actually made it in front of you over there. I said, "Oh! This is *exactly* what they did in Hong Kong in the old days!" […] When they are finished, they have different bowls of things; some are shredded coconut, sugar, some are peanuts. It depends on what you want, or a combination. They put it in the middle and roll it, […] it's still warm, you let it cool a bit, and it becomes crispy. Oh, it's delicious. Everything fresh is delicious, of course.

imagination for charting foodscapes of belonging and intimacy, allow[ing] new places for temporary anchorage and, perhaps, different forms of identity re-alignment" (Duruz, 2010, p. 48). I feel familiar with this place of their memory, especially given the rich sensorial descriptions that can make my mouth water, closing the distances of oceans. Yet, while my Father and aunts can never relive their memories, I simply will never experience the food scenes of their youth, as different as they are from my own memories of food scenes from home. This realization is part of the process of taking in these stories and making them my own, and means that stories also contribute to feeling my own sense of loss and nostalgia – despite both recognizing material privileges I hold that they never had access to, and appreciating the richness these stories add to my life. Unlike scenarios where people can literally feed their nostalgia for home foods through the purchase of commodified, packaged food (Srinivas, 2006, p. 210), the difference in time, location, climate, and food systems mean that I can only imagine my family's experiences from my life and perspective here in Canada in my own present moment. My feelings of 'false' nostalgia are reflected in the notion that "in contrast with viewing nostalgia as a re-experiencing of emotional pasts it may also be seen as a longing for times and places that one has never experienced" (Holtzman, 2006, p. 367). Such feelings are likely also affected by representations and performances of Chinese identity I enact and see – or don't see – in my life and through the media.

My false nostalgia is compounded by the sense of loss I feel around the seeming inaccessibility of my Chinese heritage and family history, due both to the deaths of my grandparents and the stories and knowledge they took with them, and to my lack of Cantonese language skills, which remains a barrier to communicating with some of my family members. One of the ways that I can deal with such sensations is to value and try to make do with what is accessible to me. Besides actively seeking more family stories, I can find ways to continue experiencing home-grown Chinese food experiences that are "translocal" in their inclusion of foods and dishes that bridge international

borders by bringing the 'local' of my nostalgia into the 'global' sphere of my home (Srinivas, 2006, p. 194).

*

Menu and instructions for visiting your Eldest Aunt on a summer day:

Even if you've come directly from a BBQ lunch, have a bowl of potato salad (from the family recipe) while the mah-jong game plays out; accept a bowl of the fish congee and a few of the mini green onion pancakes that your Third Aunt made and brought for lunch; taste dragon fruit for the first time that your Third Uncle cuts for everyone (it looks beautiful but tastes very mild – apparently not as good as 'back home'); and sample the dense but tasty Filipino cake made of sweet rice flour your cousin just brought home to try.

Continue snacking and standing around as other food is being cooked.

Transition into a sit-down supper of Chinese broccoli with oyster flavoured sauce; saucy soft bean curd; cauliflower with fungus and mushroom; black vinegar spare ribs made especially for you; scrambled egg with shrimp, pork, and Chinese chives from the garden; and don't decline a second bowl of rice.

Drink tea or hot water.

Eating Together: Feeding Relationships

Intentionally spending time with individual members of my family, and speaking with them about subjects that might not otherwise get raised, was both an unusual experience and a good one overall. Although food often arose as a topic, I wanted to do more than just talk about it. Food is such an important part of my family's culture, and such a dominant aspect of our time spent together, that it seemed like an obvious and natural element to include in my work. An important feature of our talking time became sharing and eating food together – also known as commensality (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 37). Besides serving as a way to define and sustain the social unit, commensality involves participants' "socialization into sociocultural embodiments of generation, gender, and other social positionings" (Ochs & Shohet, 2006, p. 39). Researching kinship processes

in Guangdong (formerly Canton) – a province in southeastern China from which some of my ancestors hail – anthropologist and sociologist Gonçalo Santos (2009) notes that familial units here, or "stove-families", are strongly defined by the "phenomenon of resource-sharing as symbolically epitomized in the practice of food-sharing around a common stove" (p. 122). Santos (2009) goes on to suggest that such relations position the familial system, alongside other identity and power dynamics, "somewhere in between the public and the domestic, the ritual and the practical, [and] the political and the economic" (p.122). This centrality of food sharing to kinship, intimacy, and relatedness resonates with my own experiences and understandings of the multilayered, critical importance of food in my own family. Such resonance is also reflected by my Sister, who spoke specifically about what the 'tradition' of food in our family means to her in the context of both sides of our family.

My Sister Answers the Question:
Which Family Traditions are Important to You?

Food. The ceremony of food is a massive one. (laughs) I think, through and through, […] whether it's my friends or my family, one of the minimum things for spending quality time with someone is sharing food with each other. Nothing makes me happier than feeding my friends, feeding my family. (laughter)

I think the reason I tie it more to our Chinese side than our Caucasian side is that we've done it more with that side of the family than with Mom's side. But also, just seems to be more important. Whereas, with Dad's side we either go out to eat at a restaurant, or we make the food. […] I find that when we do it with Mom's side of the family, when Gramma and Grampa were all around, when it was everybody, I think it was more home-cooked food, but what I've been noticing – and I can't say much, because I've missed a bunch of the family gatherings – but what I've noticed […] There's less effort being put into making food, and it's more just, "OK, we're having a gathering, so buy a fruit platter, a veggie platter, this and that, and whatever." Know what I mean? To me, it's just losing its value on the Caucasian side, versus on the Chinese side it's still the same. […] We're still sticking to it, you know what I mean?

That feeling, and the tradition of it. Like, the classic-ness of it is still there. […] Just the general feeling of everyone being content, that everyone is around, and a general love for each other. Just happiness. And too, I find that more often on Dad's side than Mom's side – curiosity about what are you doing in your life, what's happening right now; intent to be involved in each other's lives. We connect.

Eating together as part of this project has been a way for me to connect with family members by evoking and reinforcing our existing family tradition of commensality while

at the same time providing opportunities for us to build relational closeness by sharing food. I have not previously had much opportunity to eat with my aunts outside of the context of a full family gathering, so the dynamics of these meals were marked by a difference in scale and intimacy. Most of our eating took place in a home setting, yet feeling at home with food and in a particular setting does not necessarily mean being in one's home. Below, I share a vignette of eating with my Sister, where a visit from across the country allowed for a taste of 'home'. Exploring conversations on food and transnationalism, Jean Duruz (2010) refers to the

> intimacy of the kitchen table and, as well as to its pleasures, to the analytical potential of "table talk", especially during those embodied moments of eating together and of remembering. In these spaces – if not of friendship, at least of amicable acquaintance and trust – stories rich in nuance and ones unexpectedly messy, sometimes quirky, might emerge. Here, the dynamic of storytelling itself – not only what is told, but how this is told as an exercise in continual meaning-making – provides a geography of places, emotions and hauntings. (p. 49)

Storytelling dynamics such as these may be intensified when the participants are family members. Interviewing people in a place where they felt at home was intended to promote comfort and informality during our conversations, while also keeping space and time for all the other types of relating that occur while visiting relatives. From the start, it has been important to me to respect, honor, and further our familial relations in this research process – particularly since the majority of my interviews are with my elders. Such "politics of obligation" are an inherent part of the "methodological and interpretive complexities [that] shape work "with" and "on" "family" [members and] documents, both complicated and perhaps nourished by the conflicting roles a researcher/family member/archivist simultaneously inhabits in the endeavour" (Bailey, 2016, p. 35). In creating opportunities to both connect and eat with family members, the 'nourishment' possible with this project is thus both relational and nutritional.

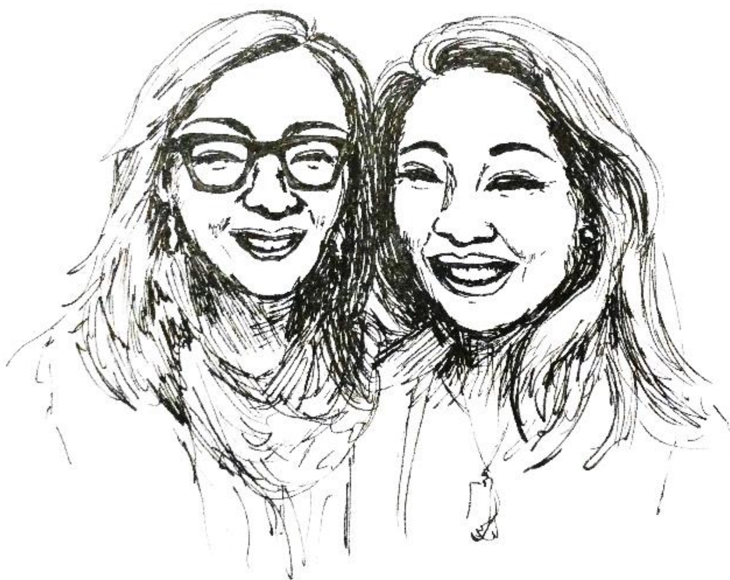
*

A Taste of Home, but Not Home Cooking

My Sister came back home today, somewhat unexpectedly, for a very brief visit. She was in the Greater Toronto Area for the weekend, and hadn't been sure if she'd be able to make it out to see family before having to fly back to Vancouver, where she moved to last autumn after living for years in Ottawa. Our interview had been over the phone due to the distance. When I picked her up from the train station, she suggested that we have lunch at MacKay Pizza, her treat.

MacKay Pizza is an independent pizza joint, just a three-minute walk from our parents' house. It's been a fixture at the nearby plaza for as long as I can remember. MacKay Pizza is unlike the well-known chains both in their offerings and interior. There's a flaking mural on the side wall, and a bit of a dingy, run-down feel to the place – but their food is tasty and we love it.

Growing up, pizza in my family was homemade. We'd use the Kraft-brand dough kits, and top it with tomato sauce, ground beef, cheddar cheese, pickle slices, and a sprinkle of parmesan cheese. I liked to help my mom with the toppings, but always had trouble stretching the dough to reach all four corners of the rectangular pan. 'Outside' pizza was a treat, and still holds a certain allure for me – although I now eat it more frequently.



My Sister told me that it's become normal for her to crave MacKay Pizza whenever she's coming home. This time, she orders two cheese slices – her childhood go-to– and I get one pepperoni, and one Hawaiian.

Above: Pepperoni (top) and cheese (bottom) slices from MacKay Pizza

Left: My Sister and I after our pizza date

A Recipe for Research: Cooking as Inquiry

Besides talking and eating together with those I interviewed, I arranged to spend some time cooking with a few members of my immediate family. My suggestion to cook together seemed easily accepted, though I registered a bit of surprise on the part of my parents. Although I would like to learn how to make what I think of as Cantonese-style home food, I did not want to direct the process of these particular cooking sessions. As such, decisions of what to cook were made jointly, or arose in an organic way. I helped my Mother make rice pudding, which we both enjoy and which she makes only rarely. Together with my Father, I made banana cake, which he had already planned to bake the day of our talk together. My Brother and I made samosas – his suggestion, and an opportunity for him to make good on a promised Christmas gift for me that had never materialized.

I share these cooking experiences in more detail below, with the help of photographs and drawings. Capturing visual depictions of food practices I have shared with my family is a form of food mapping, which is "an image-based approach to research that pays attention to the way people relate to food in the interaction of senses, emotions, and environments" (Marte, 2007, p. 263). As such, these images are simultaneously illustrative and representational, and themselves serve as sources of information and knowledge that can be analyzed, potentially able to "show […] the aesthetic impressions and sensory moments that food helps generate" (Marte, 2007, p. 263).

It was only after planning this project that I discovered – to my delight – that such research and food practices situated my processes within the framework of cooking as inquiry. Writing on ways to undertake cooking as inquiry, Jennifer Brady (2011) defines it as a "methodological approach that understands food not simply as an object of study, but makes foodmaking the means of garnering understanding about food, identity, and the body" (p. 323). In essence, this approach "recognizes bodies and food as sites of knowledge and engages researchers as researcher-participants in reflexive, collaborative study that explores the ways in which the embodied self is

performed relationally through foodmaking" (Brady, 2011, p. 322). Brady goes on to illustrate how both consuming and preparing foods – as in who cooks and eats which foods – are actions that shape how we are seen by family and others, and how we see ourselves – whether this is through the reinforcement or production of gender roles, ethnic identity, family position, skills, or knowledge. Such meaning-making takes place at the same time as food is being prepared, adding layers of complexity to notions of food made or eaten for reasons including pleasure, health, ritual, and survival. In reflecting on the practice of fruit canning in her own kitchen, Brady (2011) suggests that

> [c]anning is a preservation of many things, only one of which is the delicious foods that make their way into the jars. Preserving foods, is for me, also an act of preservation of knowledge, specifically women's knowledge. It is also an act of remembrance; remembering the hardship and necessity with which women developed and passed on this knowledge. I also remember my mother line; I learned to can from my mother; my mother learned to can from her mother who undoubtedly learned it from hers. (p. 328)

Cooking as inquiry thus acknowledges and explores the various ways that the physical processes of cooking can create meaning and be meaningful for individuals and groups, who are recognized as being embedded in broader social and ecological systems through time. These processes are inherently sensorial, engaging sight, smell, texture, movement, temperature, and of course taste – as such, they involve knowledge that has traditionally been disregarded (Curtin, 1992, p. 9).

The embodied, everyday nature of cooking also means that this method is accessible and relevant to a broad range of people. Lisa Heldke (1988), one of the earliest proponents of cooking as inquiry and the philosophical investigation of cooking and food, comments on this accessibility in the context of academic theory:

> …discussions of theory have come to be framed almost exclusively in terms of scientific models. I'm not a scientist, but I am a cook, and my familiarity with cooking methods […] allows me to speak with more knowledge and flexibility about this activity than about science. (p. 18)

Heldke's exploration of cooking as inquiry in fact deliberately resists the tenets of positivistic science, thereby underscoring the importance of this method in work that focuses on groups who

tend to be marginalized in the academy. In this way, such a method could serve to promote an understanding of the interconnectedness of the more-than-human world by being one of the "experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily, and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject" (Whatmore, 2006, pp. 606-607).

Cooking as inquiry is described by Heldke (1988) as a "coresponsible option" of research and theory-making, where

> [t]he term "coresponsible" embodies the atmosphere of cooperation and interaction which characterizes inquiry activity. Whether we acknowledge it or not, we enter into relationships when we engage in inquiry; relationship with other inquirers, and also with the things into which we inquire – the things labelled "objects" on a traditional account. The model of inquiry I'm suggesting rejects the strict subject/object dichotomy, with its emphasis on hierarchy and separation. In its place, I suggest we think of inquiry as a communal activity, that we emphasize the relationships that obtain between inquirers and inquired. (p. 17)

In this context, cooking as inquiry includes the evolving relationship between cooks and their recipes – whether written, improvised, or recalled. Philosopher Deane Curtin (1992) argues for a participatory relation to food, rejecting an objectifying understanding of food as a self-contained, absolute Other that merely "recharges the body while leaving the mind untouched" (p. 11). Instead, we are in a "*participatory* relationship to what we choose to count as food […]. We become persons through connecting in relation to other beings. Our connections with food partially define who we are" (Curtin, 1992, p. 11, emphasis original). Curtin makes a case that our health and wellness depend on understanding that we literally are what we eat in a bodily way, and that we are also what we eat in ways that are social, political, spiritual, and symbolic (pp. 11-12). This understanding, and thus our wellness as individuals and groups, can be furthered through cooking as inquiry.

Cooking Together: Sharing (Kitchen) Space

As a family, we never built a habit of cooking together. Seeking family and food stories alongside intentional opportunities to cook together are ways to practice cooking as inquiry in my

project. My living away from my parents' home has added to the intentionality required for such a sharing of time, space, and knowledge. In this way, our cooking together shares elements of the interview-conversation process where the shared experience is unusual compared to our typical familial relations. As my Sister commented at the end of our interview, "it's weird to talk about this out loud, not just in my head – *especially to a family member*; it's kind of strange. Because we never—I've never really talked about this before" (emphasis mine). The intergenerational aspect of my family (not) cooking together extends into the past as part of my parents' relationships with their parents; neither learned to cook from their parents. However, just because we have not made it a habit doesn't necessarily mean that we don't want to cook together, or *never* have. What counts as 'cooking together' can also be expanded beyond the embodied sharing of tasks for food preparation. Watching televised cooking shows together could be a shared form of imagined cooking. In a different way, as evinced by my Mother's experiences – and recalling the dynamic nature of relationality – the activity of cooking together may take the form of observation rather than more obvious forms of active participation.

Mom Talks about Cooking…and Not Cooking

On Cooking with Gramma:

[My mom] did a lot of cooking and baking, but if I tried to help, sometimes she would get impatient, so I didn't usually help. I might watch a little bit, but… I never really did that.

On Staying with her Aunt Mabel during College:

She usually cooked. I guess I didn't really know how, that much. I think I helped a bit, and I certainly washed dishes.

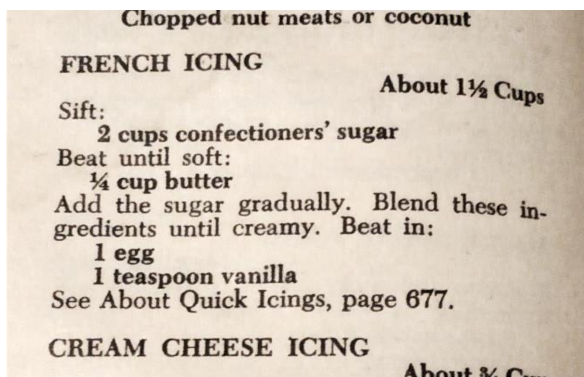
On Learning in her Own Home:

I used to watch Mah Mah cooking a lot, so I learned most of those dishes – so I knew how to do that. After [Mah Mah and Yeh Yeh] left, I did the cooking. Your dad was always pretty fussy. He didn't like macaroni and he didn't like too many store-bought frozen foods, you know? I always got complaints about that kind of thing.

Left: My Mother's well-used *Joy of Cooking* cookbook.
Right: My own (newer) edition of the book.

My Mom bought this 1964 edition *Joy of Cooking* cookbook as a reference to use when cooking. What recipes did she try out first? Did she flip through the tome to find inspiration, or search for specific dishes? My own 2006 version of the cookbook was a Christmas gift from my Sister, received once my cookbook collection was already underway, and inspired by my interest in learning about and imagining ingredients and the seemingly magical processes of cooking. Besides observing and hearing 'how-to's' about cooking from my Dad, I would say that I'm self-taught in the kitchen.

Among other things, my Mom loves the rice pudding recipe in her volume of *Joy of Cooking.* My edition isn't exactly a copy; for instance, it doesn't include the white vanilla icing (with raw egg) that we've always used for banana cake. I only know this because I've searched, looking for a taste of home.



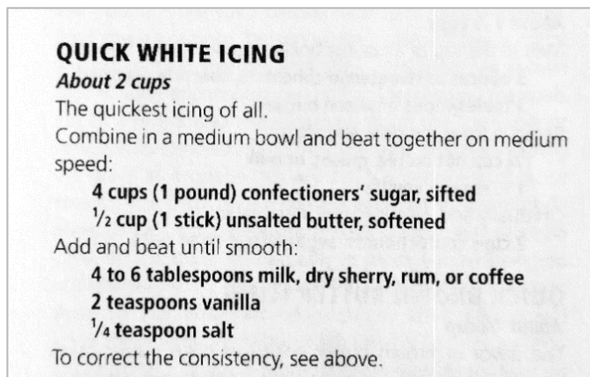
Chopped nut meats or coconut

FRENCH ICING
About 1½ Cups

Sift:
2 cups confectioners' sugar
Beat until soft:
¼ cup butter
Add the sugar gradually. Blend these ingredients until creamy. Beat in:
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla
See About Quick Icings, page 677.

CREAM CHEESE ICING
About ¾ Cup

Left: Icing recipe (our preferred) from Mom's *Joy of Cooking* book (Rombauer & Rombauer Becker, 1964)

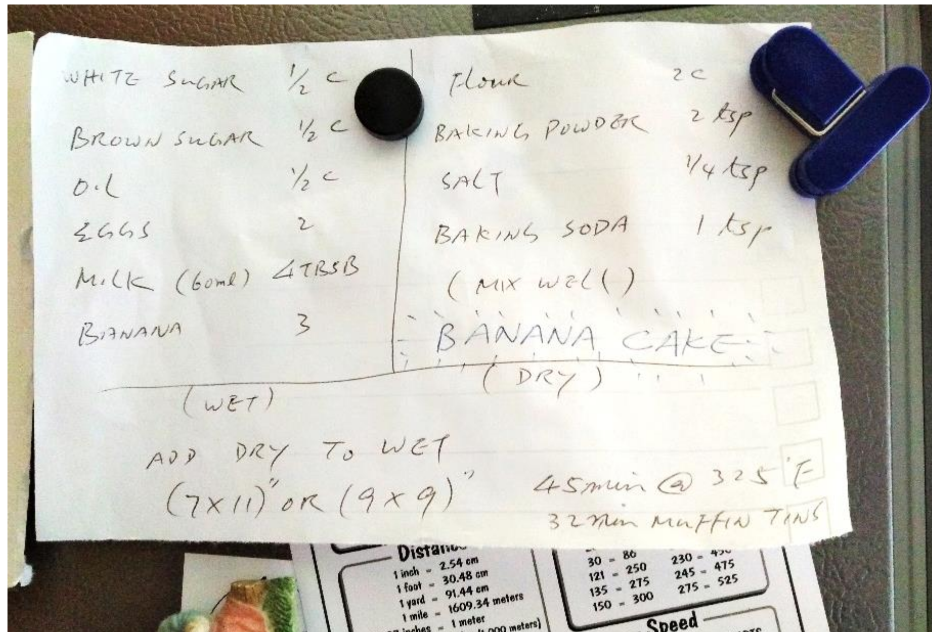


QUICK WHITE ICING
About 2 cups
The quickest icing of all.
Combine in a medium bowl and beat together on medium speed:
4 cups (1 pound) confectioners' sugar, sifted
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened
Add and beat until smooth:
4 to 6 tablespoons milk, dry sherry, rum, or coffee
2 teaspoons vanilla
¼ teaspoon salt
To correct the consistency, see above.

Right: Icing recipe (less tasty) from my *Joy of Cooking* book (Rombauer, Rombauer Becker, & Becker, 2006)

Making Banana Cakes with Dad

The afternoon that I interviewed my Dad, we made two banana cakes together, easily co-ordinating ourselves and jointly preparing everything, putting the pans of batter into the oven before we started. As we sat talking at the kitchen table, the aroma of the cakes filled the kitchen, our conversation eventually becoming interspersed with the sounds of the timer and our checking the cakes for doneness. We all enjoyed some of the moist cake after supper.



BANANA CAKE

WHITE SUGAR	1/2 c
BROWN SUGAR	1/2 c
OIL	1/2 c
EGGS	2
MILK (60ml)	4TBSB
BANANA	3

(WET)

Flour	2c
BAKING POWDER	2 tsp
SALT	1/4 tsp
BAKING SODA	1 tsp

(MIX WELL)

(DRY)

ADD DRY TO WET

(7x11)" OR (9x9)" 45min @ 325°F

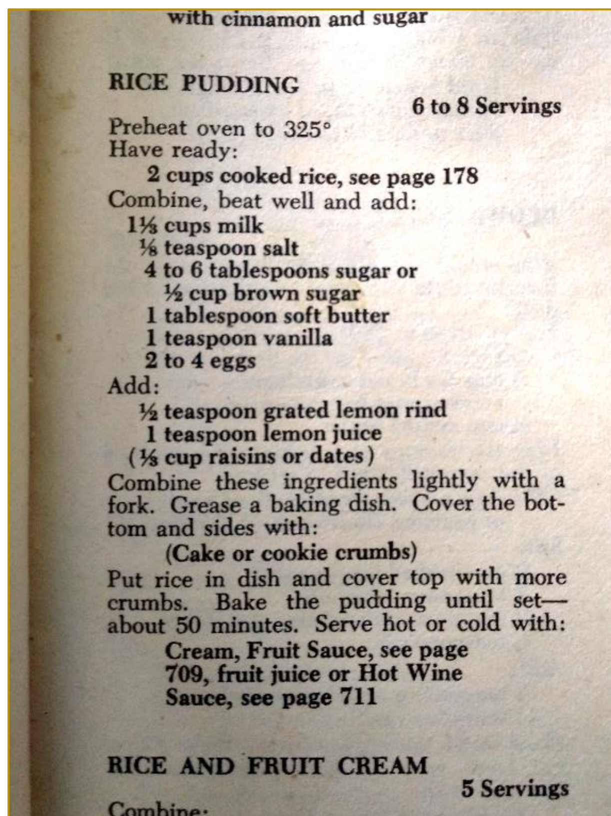
32min MUFFIN TINS

Our recipe for banana cake came from my Aunt Mabel, the second oldest of my Grampa's sisters. Banana cake is a mainstay in my family, since it's easy to make, tastes very good, and is an easy way to use up the overripe bananas that inevitably pile up in the freezer. The recipe is just one copy of several that we have in different locations. It's such a mainstay that this copy of the recipe – in my Father's writing – is fastened with magnets to the fridge in my parents' home, the only recipe with such a visible place in the kitchen. Indeed, the cake is so common in our family that baking one (or two) would sometimes end up on our list of chores in order to reduce our stock of excess bananas and create more freezer space. This time, we added fresh walnuts, which my Dad crumbled by hand into chunks.

Making Rice Pudding with Mom

My Mom took the lead here, as I had never made this recipe before. Based on experience and preference, she adjusted the recipe to increase the quantity (e.g. using ten eggs instead of two to four), and substituting dates to make up for a lack of raisins. She had never used dates for this pudding before, and I thought this adaptation was tastier. We have only rarely cooked together, and are not used to sharing the kitchen; on this day, I chopped the dates and watched her work.

This *Joy of Cooking* recipe from my mother's 1964 book makes a smooth, pale yellow eggy custard that settles into soft rice and a buttery sweetness of sugar, vanilla, and dried fruit. It's especially delicious served warm, topped with maple syrup. Different from all other rice puddings I've tasted, this is the only version we make at home, and was the first version I ever knew.



with cinnamon and sugar

RICE PUDDING

6 to 8 Servings

Preheat oven to 325°
Have ready:
2 cups cooked rice, see page 178
Combine, beat well and add:
1⅓ cups milk
⅛ teaspoon salt
4 to 6 tablespoons sugar or
½ cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon soft butter
1 teaspoon vanilla
2 to 4 eggs
Add:
½ teaspoon grated lemon rind
1 teaspoon lemon juice
(⅓ cup raisins or dates)
Combine these ingredients lightly with a fork. Grease a baking dish. Cover the bottom and sides with:
(Cake or cookie crumbs)
Put rice in dish and cover top with more crumbs. Bake the pudding until set—about 50 minutes. Serve hot or cold with:
Cream, Fruit Sauce, see page 709, fruit juice or Hot Wine Sauce, see page 711

RICE AND FRUIT CREAM

5 Servings

Combine:

This page: Stages of rice pudding preparation, from breaking of eggs to finished dish (served hot from the oven)

Making Samosas with My Brother

My Brother enjoys cooking and saw my invitation to cook together as an opportunity to make homemade samosas. Good and cheap samosas are easy to find in Brampton due to the large South Asian population, so I had never bothered to make my own. He had made them with a friend in university, and we based our recipe off a truncated list of spice ratios my Brother had kept in cryptic text form on his old flip phone, on which "the notepad character limit was very small. I had to short form everything.":

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wagar w jeeru&Rai sm onion potat=mixed veg marchu dhanna jeeru salt haldi med heat ½ time w/ lid. heaping tsp m d j salt ¼ tsp haldi over .5 tsp pureed ginger  2 tsp lemon juice .5-.75 tsp garam masala (lj&gm @end)*
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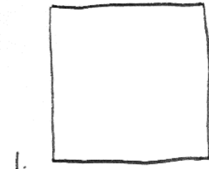
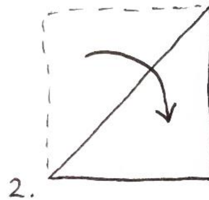
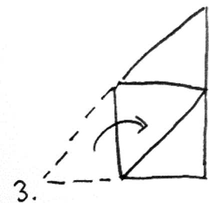
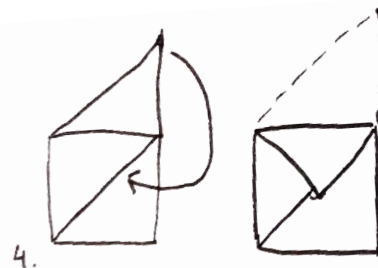


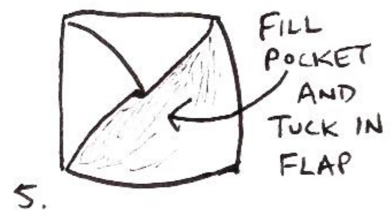




We've cooked together before, but since it was my Brother's idea and recipe, he took the lead in our co-operative working process, which ended up reminding me of the labour of collaborative food preparation that only occasionally happens in our family, such as for wontons. Using my kitchen, we both contributed ingredients. The samosas turned out pretty well, except they were bland – we must have used much more filling than he and his friend had.



My Brother and I chatted as we cooked, and at some point, he wondered aloud at how some men have little idea of how to cook anything – leaving themselves with little sel-sufficiency, independence, and choice when it comes to feeding themselves. I know this is true in some cases, but it certainly is not in our family!

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*decoding the spice mix:

jeera – cumin seed
rai – brown mustard seed
haldi – turmeric
marchu – red chili powder
dhanna jeeru – coriander/cumin mix
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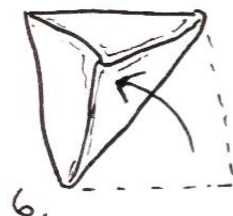


Top Left: Vegetables ready for the pot

Top Right: Spice container

Left: Cooked samosa filling

Bottom Left:
My Brother and I filling samosas

Bottom Right:
Samosas just out of the oven

During the cooking process with each person, it was interesting to observe how the dynamics of our bodies and behaviours played out. I noticed, for instance, that I deferred to my Mother and Brother as I had no experience with the recipes we used, and we seemed to work more smoothly as chef and sous-chef. In contrast, making the cakes with my Father felt more collaborative, perhaps because we are both so familiar with the recipe. These dynamics were inevitably influenced by pre-existing family roles, relations, and patterns of communication (Goodall, 2005, p. 508). As part of our ongoing and evolving relationships, our kitchen dynamics were also unavoidably affected by the context of our time together. For instance, I interviewed my Father as the cakes baked, and we both anticipated the familiar pleasure of the cakes as we talked and laughed about his experiences; he often shares stories and is comfortable in this role. Making rice pudding with my Mother was part of a break we took from interviewing, which was needed to give space for recovery from a discussion run through with themes of regret and loss, and the cooking process held echoes of negative feeling in its uncertainty around how the pudding would turn out with the adapted proportions and substitution of ingredients. Meanwhile, my brother visited me specifically to cook and spend fun time together, and we interviewed on a different day. Shifting existing family dynamics requires effort and a shared desire to do so, as well as time, space, and capacity for change. While I recognize the challenge this endeavour can present, I am curious about what it might be like to build a practice of cooking together with family, as a possible way to (re)shape existing relations and identities while creating embodied knowledge together around the transmission and creation of recipes, regardless of their origin or significance.

Abracadabra

The allure, the mystique
Recipes like codes for the senses
Cookbook-y repositories of possibility and the unknown, signalling
            Abundance
                        Desire
                                    Pleasure
Cook/Magician of edibles
Transforming, creating behind the scenes

The most wondrous acts
Performed without prompts

Audience appreciation through participatory gustation
Bringing together of teeth, not hands
A final disappearing act of polished dishes

My Family Recipe for Potato Salad – from my Eldest Aunt

Boiled potatoes, cut into chunks
Hard-boiled eggs, cut into quarters or eighths
Apples (a crispy/juicy type, e.g. Gala), cut into smaller chunks
Chunks of canned pineapple
Salt and mayonnaise to desired taste and consistency

Use more potato than egg or fruit; chunk size and ingredient proportions are flexible depending on taste and preference. Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl. The egg yolks will break down and add creaminess and a pale yellow colour to the salad dressing.

*

I came over to my Eldest Aunt's house tonight for our interview. I had offered to pay for some take out food or noodles, but she laughed that off – "I have food. Come, and we will have supper." When I arrived, there were numerous bowls of prepared ingredients waiting, cut up, shelled, or steamed. My aunt declined my offer of help, so I hovered behind, watching her cook. I enjoyed this, because I haven't watched others cook in a long time, and I appreciated the opportunity to share kitchen space with my aunt in some way. It's neat to see how different people cook. For instance, how my aunt used the same wok for three different dishes as opposed to bringing out multiple other separate pieces of cookware. It was also interesting to watch how she would check to see if things tasted good or not. She would dab her finger onto the spatula to taste a dish before deciding if it was done. A dab, a taste, a little nod to herself. I was watching her movements: how to navigate in the space, where to put things. I was by the fridge and had to quickly move out of her way at times.

There would be five of us eating together, and my aunt made five dishes with ease, some simultaneously. There were no formal measurements, just adding by experience the salt, sugar, oyster sauce, garlic, and sesame oil. It smelled really good! I felt touched; my aunt said that she had made the spareribs particularly for me – that it's one of her special dishes and she wanted to make it for me to try. To be honest, I was a little worried, because of how picky I am about meat and fat textures. I resolved that I would find a way to eat it no matter what, because of her gesture and my appreciation. It turned out that there were a few pieces that were just the meat, and it was delicious. I like the tastes of that dish even though I find it difficult to deal with ribs. It was different from the stronger version my dad makes, which is blacker and has drier sauce. My aunt didn't have much time, though – besides prep, everything was made in 40 minutes. My dad's spareribs are cooked longer, so of course it's different.

I got to watch her cook and maybe I can do that again sometime; what might I learn from her? I've now had all three of my aunts' cooking in the past two years – even just a little bit. That's unusual, so it's a nice feeling – a privileged feeling. The time, work, and food my aunts and other family members have contributed to my project reflects a generosity of care that is felt if not spoken. I hope the care I am bringing to this work is felt in return.

Food Practices and Practising Food

Through stories, observations, and lived experience, I have gained a strong and enduring sense of how to practice food, as it were, in the sense that sharing with others is essential, leftovers are desirable, and wasted food is anathema. While I still struggle with the learned imperative to

'clean my plate' at each meal, concerns about food security and food waste, on both an intimate and global scale, were in fact instrumental in my decision to pursue graduate studies. My former dread of Chinese food has generally shifted (sometimes tentatively) towards anticipation and pleasure, both in the greater number of foods I enjoy and in terms of the implied opportunity that eating Chinese food has for connecting with friends and family. For my family, meal time is a time to talk, share stories, and share food. In my immediate family, we mostly eat at home, and 'ordering in' most often means ordering various noodle and fried rice dishes from a local Chinese restaurant. Similarly, going out to eat usually means one thing: going to a Chinese restaurant for either *dim sum* or dinner, often with the extended family, and especially for special occasions, or in conjunction with cemetery visits. Christmas centres on Western food, as do Easter and Thanksgiving – though these latter two are celebrated with my immediate family only. Our Chinese New Year tradition has shifted in recent years, from a hot pot meal hosted at my parent's house to eating out at a restaurant.

We follow the Chinese custom of eating from communal dishes, sitting around the table with all the food collected before us, taking from this dish and that as the meal progresses. In restaurants, table size may dictate our being split into 'adult' and 'kid' tables – a distinction that persists despite the second generation having 'grown up'. At home, there also often isn't enough room for the extended family to all sit together, so the set up is more buffet-style, with people standing or sitting in a more dispersed manner. It is proper to take less of everything and go back for more, rather than taking a large quantity of a dish all at once; the relatively small size of rice bowls encourages this practice, though we also use Western-sized plates. In restaurants, a multitude of dishes is arranged in the centre of a circular table, which positions everyone visually and physically at the same distance from both the food and each other. It is common for the tabletop to be crowded with food, teapots, and dishware. It is also common for the table to be crowded around by

us, eating elbow-to-elbow with chair corners butting up against one another. Navigating this set up and the Lazy Susan (if the table is large enough) requires co-operation and co-ordination.

These experiences are characteristic of Cantonese restaurant dining 'back home', and illustrate Tulasi Srinivas' (2006) notions of food being a connection to cultural – over national – identity, and of foods and food practices serving as "symbolic anchors on which identification can unfold" (p. 207). In restaurants, my siblings and I may provide input on what foods are ordered, but as the youngest of the cousins, we play a minor role at best. My brother referred to this with me, contrasting it with his experience of eating Chinese food with friends:

> Chinese food will always have a certain place in my heart. […] It was interesting at the end of high school to be going to *dim sum* with my friends and having to be the one who was the expert, or to be the one who knew what things were, versus when we're usually with [family], we're kind of like the bystanders or we leave that to the more experienced people.

In consequence, although a sizable degree of my Cantonese vocabulary relates to food and eating, I recognize more foods by sight, smell, and taste, than what I can name.

Our focus on communal eating is so natural for me that, in going out "for Chinese" in my early twenties for the first time without my family, it came as a shock when my (white) companions each ordered their own dish, and were reluctant to share. Unanimous resistance countered my suggestion to approach our food ordering and eating collectively. While I was accustomed to how this individualism is normal and expected in many 'Western' restaurants, it never occurred to me to order and eat in this way in a Chinese restaurant, where dishes are typically prepared and served with communal sharing in mind. Indeed, being confined to a single dish detracted from the gustatory experience. Moreover, the demarcation of my cultural Otherness was sudden and uncomfortable. Through this example, the powerful connections to meaning that arise through the "extent to which food intrinsically traverses the public and the intimate" (Holtzman, 2006, p. 373) are also evidenced in the way that food experiences can bridge or remain isolated within different spheres of identity. Looking back, it is interesting to consider how strong and unconscious a distinction I made between

Chinese and Western cuisines in terms of expected food practises, and how surprised I could (and still can) be at the difference between my own assumptions and sense of 'normal', and those of others.

Apart from everyday and restaurant eating, Chinese food also plays an important role in my family's rituals of remembrance. Symbolic food and tea offerings are shared with my paternal grandparents both at home and at the cemetery where they are buried, and family gravesite gatherings invariably culminate in our going to a Chinese restaurant to eat. In this way, food and food practices are linked to the ways that I honour and remember my grandparents. Deliberate "re-membering" of those who have died in body renews their presence in our life, in other ways, for "[t]o remember is to include them in our daily lives, in our conversations, in our celebrations, in our decision making, and in our resources for living" (Hedtke & Winslade, 2004, p. 10). Various food practices related to both daily life and family traditions are vehicles for me to remain connected with both my family members and culture in a vital, ongoing way, contributing to my storying of self. Indeed, "[r]itual has been viewed as a potent site for constructing food-centred memory" (Holtzman, 2006, p. 372).

Considering that I rarely eat Chinese food apart from my family – mostly because I don't know how to cook the dishes I would want, or haven't tried – our ritual-related and quotidian food practices have both helped me understand and strongly value food as a social medium that promotes family closeness, continuity, and sharing – and thus constitutes part of my identity. I have experienced in multiple ways the powerful social function of stories, which can keep us morally engaged with the world and caring about the connections between the past, present, and future (Cronon, 1992, p. 1375). While some food stories and experiences have had an immediate impact, other stories and forms of expression can have a more gradual, but no less profound, effect on senses of identity and place in the world. For instance, having learned about hunger and the loss of

food practices in my family has helped me to realize how fortunate and grateful I am for the life I have, and to have a clearer understanding of my family's individual experiences within larger geopolitical forces and transnational movements. At the same time, bearing witness to stories told with laughter and self-deprecation, as well as vulnerability and honest emotion, has been a humbling experience that reinforces for me the importance of openness, sharing and relationality. Learning some of my family's memories also motivates me to continue to seek out more stories, and take on a more active role in learning how to perform food practices that are meaningful to me, and in my family. The examples above illustrate the pedagogical value of food (Kepkiewicz, 2015, p. 193).

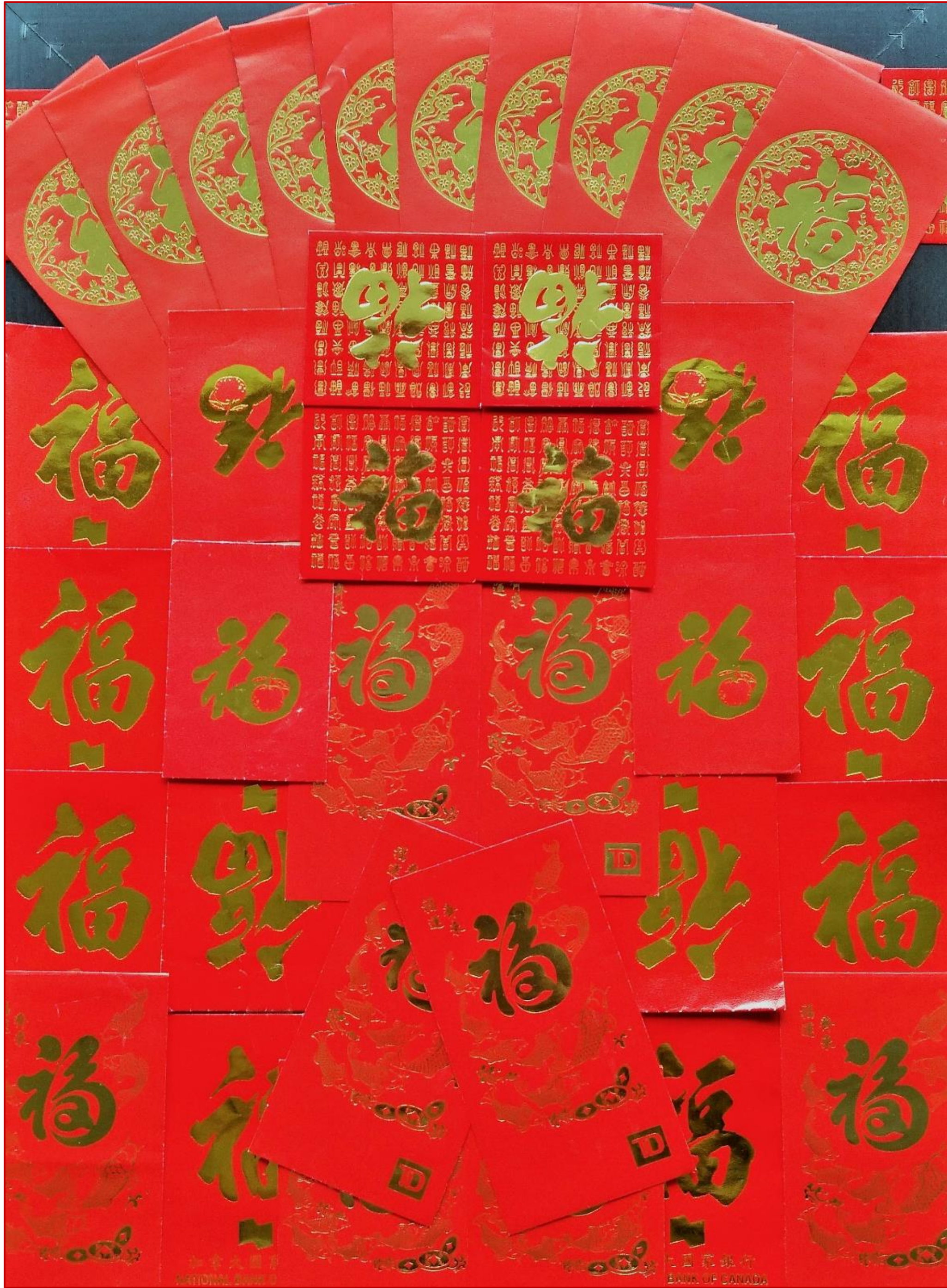
My reflections in this essay make clear that I would like to deliberately embrace family methodologies and food as an important part of my identity, and give up the desire to hide it or protect myself from ongoing feelings of shame, incompetence, and not being good enough to belong. This active attitudinal shift is a small part of my increasing efforts to foster personal and wider change by refusing isolation, and building bonds of connection, caring, and community (Starhawk, 1987, p. 84). Through these efforts – including the use of personal narrative in an academic context – I have challenged myself to be more critically self-aware and open about my histories, identities, and stories, about food and otherwise. In doing so, I may be able to positively influence others or the spaces around me, even if such change is not obvious or known to me. Changes I make to my food practices can mark significant moments in my life, while intersecting and aligning with shifts on a larger social scale. My stories and the stories of my family intertwine with those of others, forming a tapestry through which we are all linked. The ripple effects of our large and small decisions and directions over time move this tapestry in multiple ways, such as through storying. Shari Stone-Mediatore (2003) says that in telling a "story as a story, we confront our audience as co-storytellers, people who will continue the narrative from their own perspective"

(p. 63), while promoting inquiry. The effect of this interconnected relationship is underscored by the suggestion that:

> …when we understand ourselves to belong to a community of storytellers, we recognize that we are each responsible for the pasts we own up to, to the heritages we claim, and the futures we foreground in our own continued storytelling. (Stone-Mediatore, 2003, p. 64)

Thus, the efforts I make to challenge and shift the way I think, act, and share – through food and otherwise – are part of my ongoing story. Although it can be difficult to deliberately make myself more openly vulnerable, my doing so increases my ability to do so again, and to learn in the process. In the words of educator Kathy Short (2012), "[w]e tell our stories to others to invite them to consider our meanings and to construct their own, as well as to better understand those experiences ourselves" (p. 10). Furthermore, by countering the dominant valuing of reason, rationality, and objectivity, the very sharing of personal stories and the expression of their attendant emotions can be acts of resistance (Stone-Mediatore, 2003). Our interconnectedness amplifies such acts, making possible wider change in the face of dominant, problematic paradigms that work against such ideals as equitable communities and food sovereignty. In this way, sharing and listening to food stories that are reflexively linked to our identities and personal practices has the power to promote agency and spark both instant and gradual change through the relationships we have with ourselves, each other, and the world around us. As with my opening memories of the macaroni and cheese story and finding comfort in my Grandmother's kitchen, these stories continue to evolve and generate meaning; they are not self-contained. In noticing the power of narrative, we can recognize that all stories are "part of a cycle of life, dropped in and looking backwards and forwards, reframing and recreating multiple meanings and identities, all in interaction and intersubjectivity with each other" (Davis, 2009, p. 450). What other changes will occur as I continue to embrace and bolster my Chinese identity?

Memories, Migrations, and Mother Tongues



Above: 'Luck', in various forms

*

It's a long process to do all this transcribing, but it makes me value even more that I have had these conversations, and that I am within a process of taking the time and initiative to speak with my family members and learn about their histories, the places that they've come from physically and emotionally, and what they've thought and experienced. To witness the process of them remembering and not remembering, or remembering differently from one another. The intentionality of these talks is so different from the kinds of conversations that we normally have together, and makes me think of how stories emerge differently depending on setting, context, and the presence of others. What might be shared instead, and how, in a different situation? How can we understand and be accountable to stories we receive in fragments? Though it's meaningful to me, what will it mean to other people that I'm collecting these memories, narratives, and voices?

Making Memories from the Middle

Over the past few months, I have been informally interviewing my family at home, most often with food and drink, and sometimes alongside shared cooking time. I have recorded over 30 hours of audio, yet feel as though I'm just scratching the surface. What are my family's stories? What might it mean for me to learn and tell (some of) them? These questions lie at the heart of my project. I am especially keen to learn more about my paternal, Chinese side, of which I both know less and have less access to, language-wise. Identifying as a woman myself, I am also particularly interested in stories from and about the women in my family. The patrilineal structure of my family tree on both sides means that my female family members and ancestors are sometimes missing from such documents – omitted. I feel fortunate to have family tree documentation at all, as even names and bloodline linkages hold possibility and meaning for one who seeks connection with ancestry. Yet, one must be able to read what is written on such documents to even discover the names recorded, and I cannot – though I can ask for help with translation. What we do have recorded is from my Grandfather's memory, and his request that my Second Aunt document this knowledge, shortly after my brother's birth – perhaps in a nod to my brother being the next (male) Chung in line. The tree is useful, yet at another level, knowledge stored in memory and experience can be so

much richer than the bare-bones linearity of a simple genealogy, no matter how many generations are known. Seeking this richness motivates me to interview my family.

> ***Third Aunt on the Origins of our Family Tree***
>
> (pointing to ancestor's name) This is the lady that gave this information to my dad. She was oldest and married to a fisherman. When my dad is around [his] early teens, sometimes my dad visit her. She spoke in the dialect from our village, and my dad is not really completely understand sometimes, but [other times] he did […], so that's why my dad get all this. Because my granddad doesn't know how to read and write, so my dad is the one who keeps all this, because she said, 'Well, you have to keep it because your dad doesn't know all this.' When my granddad was around five years old, his parents passed away. […]

What might I learn about the women and other family members and ancestors by asking for and listening to stories? What might I learn about myself? Thomas King (1993) asks us, "Did you ever wonder how it is we imagine the world in the way we do, how it is we imagine ourselves, if not through our stories"? (p. 95). We are always in the middle of stories, and it is impossible to extricate ourselves, though reflection and self-writing can generate insight and other ways to engage with storied memories (Foucault, 1983). Stories are intertwined with our senses of self – our identities – and stories about and from family, especially, are often woven tightly through the fabric of our lives. Christine Davis (2009), who writes about stories told by her mother, suggests that

> [f]amily storytelling is a joint construction of reality. My mother's story is really our story, in an intermingling of our lives in which it is hard to separate the "me" from the "us". I see myself through my mother's stories, through the stories she told and the ones she didn't. (pp. 435-436)

Not only are the narratives we know already a part of us, but learning more holds the potential for exploration and further knowledge, even if the stories we discover are difficult or unsettling (e.g. Bailey, 2009; Goodall, 2005). I am drawn to the notion of family stories as "narrative inheritance", which can be described as "the afterlives of the sentences used to spell out the life stories of those who came before us. What we inherit narratively from our forebears provides us with a framework for understanding our identity through theirs" (Goodall, 2005, p. 497). The threads of narrative inheritance influence how our lives play out in conscious and unconscious ways, for there are

"narrative reasons for what we do and narrative motives locked into who we are. Identities are indeed the stuff such stories, such life sentences, are made out of" (Goodall, 2005, p. 504). My project to collect present and past stories about my family and ancestors is a mission to find ways in which I can inherit and feel better connected to different aspects of my heritage and those who came before, and in the process perhaps gain a clearer sense of home. Regardless of what I discover, I seek mooring in such narratives, as I navigate my mixed race heritage and identities as a woman who is variably and simultaneously seen as racialized and white. The very fact of my mixed ethnicity sometimes casts a shadow of self-doubt on my having the 'right' to publicly access and claim such connections; this is especially true given that I do not have the Cantonese dialect of my Father's family.

*

> *We're visiting family and there's leftover fried turnip cake to snack on. ("Ooh! Lo bak goh!") Into a bowl it goes. "Where is the soy sauce?" An uncertain look from my older relative in response. Maybe he didn't hear me clearly. "…Um… the soy sauce…?" No, only the Chinese words will do, and I don't have them. I feel silly at this impasse in a kitchen which most certainly houses soy sauce; I have unintentionally introduced awkwardness into the space. Then, the communication dilemma is solved with the arrival of another: "What are you looking for?" My relief at the translation is short-lived; the follow-up comment is a half-joking rebuke at my ignorance—"You should know that!" Indignation is an electric bolt through my body. Why* should *I know that, the Chinese name for soy sauce? I don't. We* always *only speak English at home, and I've never had occasion to know or even recognize what that term would sound like. My Cantonese food word knowledge is more focused on larger dishes and ingredients, not condiments or flavourings.*
>
> *I don't actually recall my response, but know I said something – this time.*

I attended 'Chinese school' through much of my childhood, yet only as an adult did I realize the intent of these classes was not to teach the language itself, but to teach students who already had the language. Chinese school was an intensely negative experience with long-term impacts to my self-worth. Perpetually occupying a position as the only child in class who could not understand

spoken Cantonese, I felt looked down upon and snubbed by most of my peers, and singled out as either a dunce or curiosity by my teachers, some of whom would talk at length *at* me in Cantonese, in front of the class. Complemented by the occasional race-based taunt in public school, the humiliation of this experience was compounded by the shame and regret I felt in not being able to learn the language or communicate verbally with my paternal grandparents.

While I have, for the most part, reconciled these experiences and worked to practice compassion for myself, the sense of inadequacy and shame they engendered have been hard to avoid, and have hindered my ability to feel positive connections to my Chinese heritage – or to even feel that it is at all accessible to me. How can I seek and claim connection to stories I do not understand? Upon discovering my mixed ethnicity, many people immediately ask if I can speak Chinese; my (in)ability to speak – or at even understand – the language seems to carry a weight of cultural authenticity that I risk being judged as lacking. While the notion of authenticity is admittedly problematic (e.g., Ahmed, 1999; Heldke, 2003; Trinh, 1989), I refer to it here in terms of both *feeling* belonging and being *seen as* belonging, rather than being out of place. I am always 'Other' – not Chinese, not white – and unaccustomed to being around other people who look like me. I don't fully fit into or belong to any one culture, and am not completely 'at ease' in any of the 'worlds' I straddle (Lugones, 1987, p. 14). I am also not connected in any way to a mixed race or Chinese community outside of my family, which might have mitigated my sense of cultural dissonance or, conversely, reinforced a sense of difference. To an extent, I can relate to Anzaldúa's (1999) assertion that "[e]thnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p. 81). Not possessing 'my' language has been a barrier to self-confidence in my own skin. Anzaldúa code-switches between languages at will without translation, to both express herself and resist the expectation that English-only speakers always be accommodated. In contrast, my own lack of linguistic knowledge means that option

simply is not open to me, although I can reach for it in creative ways, and through recollecting the ways it shapes my life. Within the knowledges I do hold, I can 'code-switch' between writing styles and the use of text and visual modes of expression to access and engage with multiple meanings (K. Lui, personal communication, July 16, 2017). Unfamiliar with the experiences and perceptions that my younger siblings have of being mixed and not having the Chinese language, I made sure to raise questions about this in our interviews. Through their reflections and responses, I have come to realize the similarities and differences of our experiences, as well as gain perspective on how we can think about them.

*

Writing - Home - Work

Top to bottom, left to right

position
in space
in line with
in similar sizes, so

the characters evenly
on the page
each other
it looks nice

The character for
is the same as for
what

family
home
surprise…recognition?

I still have
the grid you
made for me
my writing

the paper with
made by hand
so I could practice
my writing

Practice

Remember

Top to bottom, left to right

A passage I had to memorize in Chinese school lies below, along with rough translation and personal pronunciation notes – accomplished with the help of my Father. Reading direction is top to bottom, right to left. As some characters don't have a pronunciation note, I assume I knew them well enough at the time; now, only a few ghosts of these live in my memory. This is the only example I seem to have kept of what I recall as a weekly practice. Why this sample? Time passed allows me to see this anew, and recall the multilayered challenge of these regular sessions. I am also intrigued by the passage itself, and the message it alludes to, through my sparse notes:

後悔也來不及了。

從以上的寓言，可見一個人雖然天資優越，仍要態度謙虛，不斷奮鬥。相反地，一個人如果天賦的條件欠佳，祇要不怕困難，有恆心，有毅力，也會有成功的一日。

I regret but too late to do anything.

From above fable, you can see a person although born very good/smart, still has to have a humble attitude, and continue to fight for it. On the other hand, if a person is born without this good, the only thing you don't need to be afraid of is difficulties, you have the will, you have to keep working hard, you will still be successful one day.

In Conversation: My Brother on Being Mixed

Me: How do you identify yourself? Do you even think about yourself as being mixed? Because some people don't, right?

Brother: Right now, I guess it's kind of different than how I used to think [...] When I was younger, like high-school or whatever [...] My view at that time was kind of like, 'Well, obviously, race is not really– If you look at the actual science, [...] there's no basis for it, technically. [...] How I thought for a long time was: it doesn't mean anything, so I'm just going to pretend it doesn't exist, really. Just don't even acknowledge it and act as if that's the case. I mean, obviously I would still probably have had whatever deep biases. [...] But that is how I thought for a long time. [...] "It should not be an issue, so I'm going to not act as if it's an issue" – and then if everyone thought that way, the world would be a better place, right? All done.

And then, after a while you kind of realize - if other people are going to make it an issue then you have to acknowledge that even if it's not even a real thing, that they've made it a thing, right? It's not really helpful to ignore it. I don't know. I'm still kind of ambiguous on how I think of myself, but I just acknowledge that that's a thing other people think of, so I kind of have to accept it to a certain degree. It is true that I always will tend to perk up my ears a bit if there is a story about Chinese or Asian issues or whatever. [...] I guess that's still kind of a bias, that I'll pay attention to that more, but I do also consider myself more just like a person of the world […]

I do kind of think of myself as mixed, but not... I don't know. It's hard to explain. I guess I don't know how to explore it to the extent that I used to.

Me: I guess one way of thinking about it is, how big a role does the idea of race play in your identity? Some people are really focused on their gender, or focused on class, right? And that is the most important kind of signifier to their identity, as opposed to other aspects.

Brother: I wouldn't say it's a huge part of my identity. I do think something like class I would think would be more… not important, but more something that comes up and then that whatever I'm going through my day to day life that whatever is happening will make me think of that versus race. I mean, I do get people asking me about [my racial identity], […] I'll answer them and then it doesn't really make me think about it a whole lot. I don't really get ... It will be a little irritating some times, but it doesn't make me dwell on it, you know?

In Conversation: My Sister on Being Mixed

Me: You've talked a little bit about being mixed growing up, and now that you've grown up – as an adult – what's it like being mixed, other than what you've told me?

Sister: It's nice…. It's just a different perspective. To be honest with you, I don't think about it as strongly as I used to. I went through a really strong period of fierce pride that I was mixed, whereas now, in my mind, it's– I think it's been a personal journey as well. Getting to know who I am, and different parts of myself and what I think I should practice in my Chinese, and what I think I should practice in my Caucasian, and whatever.

Me: Can you talk about that? What kind of journey has this been for you and what kind of decisions are you making because of that?

Sister: It's been confusing. I was really confused when I was younger. I felt really out of place, I felt really kind of lost.

Me: Do you have an age range that you're thinking of?

Sister: Maybe Grade 4 or 5, up until university. I was really trying to find out who I was, and what that meant. Being mixed was the biggest part of it. [...] Especially because I didn't know as many mixed people, especially not Chinese mixes. Because I thought we were such a rarity, it was hard for me to figure out– what does that mean, then, that I'm mixed? Does that change anything for me, in terms of the way I interact with people, or the way that I am? Does it matter that I'm Chinese and that I'm mixed? And that I'm Chinese and that I'm Canadian – does that matter? Is it important? Does it come out in my mannerisms or behaviours? Does it influence my food choices, or the style of clothing, or the style of music that I want to choose? I had so many questions, that I just… explored into, because I didn't know...

But it wasn't just that, either. It wasn't just figuring out who I am as a mixed person. It was like figuring out who I am. So mixed came into play – it played a huge part just because it comes up all the time. But it was tricky. I think really it started coming out when I went to [high school] and I saw so many strong cultures there. [...] Especially the West Indian and Indian collision [there] was such an eye opener, in terms of having pride for your culture, having pride for where you're from, having pride in the food that's from your culture. I think that really opened my eyes to having pride for where you come from. [...]

In Conversation: My Sister on Being Mixed (continued)

Me: As you've gone through this journey of figuring out who you are and what's important to you, what kinds of decisions have that led to in terms of how you express yourself, what [...] you prioritize, or especially in terms of this balance of the different cultures.

Sister: Hmm. (pause) It's pushed me to want to make more open-minded decisions. To be more spontaneous. To stop having such a belief that– of a super-systematic way of doing things is the only way that you can do things. [...] Like, you know, in high school, I used to make a lot of jokes like, "Oh, I'm like this because I'm white, or I'm like this because I'm Asian." Whatever bad connotations, it would be the opposite. Let's say I'm bad at math – well, it's because I'm white. Or because I'm eating with chopsticks, it's because I'm Asian. I would just make jokes like that.

I still kind of make jokes like that sometimes, but not as much as I used to, because I realized that I was really dividing myself into two, of my white and my Asian side, instead of mixing them together. For a long time, I think that was part of my struggle. Was being two sides of a world, but not putting them together. Seeing them as separate sides of a world, and trying to live in both, and trying to exist in both, and not really realizing that I should be pushing them towards each other.

And I think before, I *wanted* to live my life like that. It was like, "No, my Chinese side is my Chinese side, and my white side is my white side – don't want them to collide." So then when it comes to identity, it's kind of like, "*No*, I have to be both. Both." Not just one, not just the other, not just if I like one more than the other, or whatever, it's *both*. I'm *both*.

These are both my world, it's all one world. But it's weird to look at one world from two different views, so much, and not really put them together, if that makes sense. It's—Kind of forces you to open your eyes to certain things that maybe you wouldn't realize before. Whether that would be to do with how people treat other cultures, or how socio-economic status [...] plays a role in society, or how the combination of them even play a role in placement in society. It's been interesting. (laughs)

What gives what helps the intuition?
I know, I'll know
I won't have to be shown
The way home

— Feist, "Intuition"

Migrating Home

In the interviews I held with my older family members, themes that arose included family, school and education, economic class and survival, and home and migration. Speaking in depth about each of these themes will need to wait for another time. I will focus here on examples of how themes of home and migration emerged and what they mean for my own sense of belonging and identity as a member of a younger generation of the family, situated in Canada. This sharing is a way to honor and recognize family members for their experiences, as well as their influence on and importance to my life. When educator and life writing scholar Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2014) asks her student teachers to write about a person who has influenced them, the chosen subject is "quite often" the person's mother or grandmother (p. 61). In Elbaz-Luwisch's experience, these mother stories tend to focus on three of the five typical plots that occur in life narratives: establishing a home, enduring suffering, and engaging in struggle – such as for survival. Few stories, in comparison, centre around the two other main life narrative plots: seeking self-actualization, and taking a physical or psychological journey. In contrast, the stories I have learned from the older

generations of my family depart from these trends, in the sense that transnational migration has played such a significant role in the lives of each of my parents, aunts, and grandparents, that the presence of other themes was often threaded through with that of migration. Indeed, within oral history research, one of the most important themes that emerges is that of migration (Thomson, 1999). This phenomenon may arise because "[t]he experience of migration, which by definition is centred around a process of acute disjuncture, presents both an urgent need for, and particular difficulties in, the construction of coherent identities and life stories, of a past we can live by" (Thomson, 1999, p. 35).

My Mother's story of her childhood is structured around the repeated migrations between South Korea and Canada that took place as a result of her father's missionary work for the United Church of Canada. These migration cycles initially involved five years overseas alternating with one year back in Canada. Through my Mother's telling, this structure is presented as a series of repeated disjunctures that shaped her socially and personally. In 1957, her parents and two older siblings first went to Korea, where my Mother was born in 1958 and another sibling was

Grampa on United Church Mission Work

I've always been proud of our church for being progressive, and for its outreach, and promoting progressive policies of outreach to the whole world. […] The United Church of Canada has been quite advanced in its mission policy. It has never, in all its short history, promoted the idea of establishing what you might call United Churches of Canada, around the world. We've always worked on the basis of approaching missionary work as fellow workers. So we've always gone to work with some local denomination there – some denomination that's congenial in its thinking, but trying to promote work with as wide a range of people as possible. […]

And I've always admired and tried to promote that kind of approach, because that, *to me*, is what our faith is all about. And—well, I don't know how else to illustrate it, it's meant that our missionaries have always worked with the idea of *not* enlarging our role, but rather diminishing it. And going to work as fraternal workers with people of national churches, with a view to preparing them to work on their own. Of course, that kind of mission approach – it was kind of at odds with the approach of so many other Christian groups working there [in Korea]. […]

By the very nature of its mission theology, it kind of tended to work itself out of a job, and therefore has the appearance of weakness. So, (laughs) it's a funny situation that Canadians find hard to understand. But I've been proud to be part of the process.

born two years later. When she was four years old, the family returned to Canada, where my Mother vaguely recalls meeting her maternal grandmother for the first and only time. In Canada, her father would get speaking engagements at different churches and the family would often be called upon to sing a song or answer questions, which "was kind of weird; you're put on the spot and you're different."

The next time they returned to Canada, my Mother was ten years old, and she distinctly recalls *feeling* different from everyone else, even though they blended in, appearance-wise: "Thinking about it, I wouldn't really look out of the ordinary, but everybody would have been in the same school and knew how everything worked, and we didn't, really." Attributing her shy personality to these regular experiences of childhood discomfort and dislocation, my Mother commented, "that's why I've always been quiet, because I don't want to be the centre of attention, and that's how it was when we came back to Canada as a kid. […] It was just… uncomfortable." At the same time, a sense of difference and discomfort were also a regular part of her life in South Korea.

Mom Remembers the Stares

When we were in Korea as kids, it was kind of the same thing. When we would be going places, sometimes we would go as a family to some kind of Korean gathering like [at] the church or even just driving somewhere like downtown [Seoul] and park the car. I remember sitting in the back of the Land Rover, and there would be a little crowd gathered, staring at us in the car. (Laughs)

That was strange because you're different, and they're curious, but I guess that must have had some effect on me as well. Especially kids - but any age would stare. Especially with [some of us having] red hair – that was different, a draw. […] They wouldn't say anything, just stare, so it was really awkward.

As my Mother finished primary school, the required migration frequency changed to a pattern that arguably was even more destabilizing for a child: three years 'away' in Korea and six months at 'home' in Canada. She spent the first half of Grade 9 in Canada, before the family returned to Korea. My Mother was nearly finished high school by the time it was decided the family would return to Canada permanently, and she was unhappy with this

change. Apparently, so was my Grandmother, who, as my Grandfather recalls, "felt very loath to leave Korea." "But," he also remembers,

> work was changing, and of course our family situation was changing. I've told you before about our concern for [our older] children being here [in Canada] alone, and seeming to need us. But also, because our work had changed considerably, it seemed an appropriate time to come home.

Mom Leaves Home for 'Home'

I felt bad because I only had one year left of high school. You know, my graduating year there, it was Grade 12, and I was missing that – but it was never mentioned of any other possibility [than leaving for Canada]. I don't know if my parents realized that or not. I think they were worried about [...] my brother; I think he was having a hard time, and didn't communicate, and they were worried about him, so they wanted to get back here. They decided to stay [in Canada], because it had been 20 years. So that was it. That time, we knew that we weren't going back [to Korea].

Every other time, [...] we always knew we were going back – and that was home for me. We lived in the same house from Grade 2 until we left, so that was home. Even if it wasn't the same house, Korea was home [...] so that was hard, especially when [my other brother] and I came separately. Mom and Dad were going on a little trip on the way back, so we just came separately.

Instead of a metaphoric, universalizing understanding of migration and 'the migrant', talking literally about migration as bodies physically moving within and across space recognizes the complexity and variability of the experience, and introduces "questions of contexts (postcoloniality/globality), historicity, temporality and space" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 333). Attending to individual voices and stories of migration, such as those of my family, allows nuances to emerge. For instance, feminist theorist Sara Ahmed (1999) writes about those who identify as "global nomads" – typically "internationally mobile" families who spend a significant amount of time overseas – and thus a possible descriptor for my Mother's family (p. 336). Critiquing the ways that privilege is enacted by such groups, Ahmed (1999) suggests that "by refusing to belong to a particular place, the world becomes the global nomad's home, granting [them] the ability to inhabit the world as a familiar and knowable terrain" (p. 337). Noticing my Mother's story brings complexities and contradictions to this narrative, since her sense of origin resists expected norms, and her status as a child involved a lack of agency; rather than refusing to

belong to a particular place, my Mother desired belonging and continuity in Korea. There – and in contrast to her father's sense of home being Canada – she *felt* at home, despite being seen as different.

Home is a metaphor for the need to belong, and having a sense of home situates the self within the flux of migration (R. A. Chansky, personal communication, May 24, 2017). My interest in my family's perceptions of home stems in part from the ongoing influence that their migration stories – as part of my narrative inheritance – have on my own fluid and somewhat uncertain sense of home. Deepening our understanding of mixed race experiences calls for attention to "cartographies of multiraciality", explained by Mahtani (2014) as looking

> at the "Where are you from?" question, which invites us to go beyond superficial analyses of the experience of the first generation by paying much closer attention to those complex diasporic life histories that inform the process of identifying as mixed race. The emphasis on experiencing multiple diasporic geographic locations, on the *where*, is a redirection from the "What are you?" question. (p. 4, emphasis original)

Reflecting upon the relationship between home, belonging, and identity, Ahmed (1999) suggests that 'home' can variously and simultaneously mean one's country of birth, and the places where one lives, or where one's family lives. Arguing for a more complex and embodied definition of home, Ahmed (1999) asserts that the "question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being at home here is a matter of *how one feels or how one might fail to*

Grampa on Going to Live in Korea

I wouldn't have missed it for anything. Oh yes – the greatest experience of my life. Theologically, and many other ways too, to see a people and a country rebuild itself out of absolute destruction [from the Korean War], is a wonderful privilege. To be associated with an ancient culture and language is a wonderful privilege. I could never have even visualized or imagined what a wonderful experience [it could be], until I went through it myself. And yet, (laughs) I was told by colleagues when we volunteered to go to Korea, "Morley, you must be crazy to go to Korea!" […]

I've told you before about the wonderful new world of Oriental art that opened up for me. That was a tremendous revelation. You see the world in a whole new way, and of course, after you're away from your homeland for a number of years, when you come home, I suppose you're something of a fish out of water, but at the same time, you can see your own country and your own culture in a different way. That changes you.

feel" (p. 341, emphasis original). For Ahmed, feeling 'at home' is intimately connected to a sensory experience of place that speaks to the permeability of the boundary between self and home – and thus also the permeability between home and 'away'. For my Second Aunt – the last of the family to migrate to Canada – the presence of family is an important part of what 'home' means *because* of the feeling involved. As my Third Aunt translated,

> the feeling is whatever [place is] home is comfortable. So she is here, or she is in Hong Kong, it's the same way – that's the comfort, that is home. It doesn't matter where. Even if [you] go somewhere else, that is home. Wherever [your] families are, that is home.

Considering home as a matter of embodied sensibility aligns with the notion that senses of 'place' are not static and universal, but rather are changeable and dependent on whomever is experiencing, perceiving, and thus creating the multiple identities of a place (Massey, 1994). Thus, my Mother's sense of Korea as home may differ radically from what her siblings perceive(d) as home. Similarly, what I perceive and feel to be as home, and how I experience a sense of the place where I live, may be wholly different from that of my parents, even if there are some overlaps in our collective understandings of the place we share.

Given the power and prevalence of stories in our lives, it is unsurprising that migration stories play a central role throughout the migration experience, including "in the imagination of possible futures; during the physical process of passage; and as migrants have lived with and made sense of the consequences of their migration" over time (Thomson, 1999, p. 35). Listening to migration stories, I noticed the sometimes-parallel experiences between family members of what it was like to arrive in Canada, such as shock or surprise at the seemingly empty streets and lack of technological

Eldest Aunt's Second day in Canada
(translated through Third Aunt)

She came in October 28 [1972]. October 29, they went to Chinatown [in Toronto]. There is two restaurants there—*yum cha*. Morning tea [*dim sum*]. And she is wearing a long leather jacket with fur inside that she was particular tailor made in Hong Kong. But it is *so cold* for her, her jaw got stuck! (laughter) Just chatter! It's very cold for her – the feeling. Because in Hong Kong, it's very hot – October still hot. It's hot there and very cold here, and so she could not adjust to it at that time.

advancement compared to Hong Kong. Perhaps predictably, some of these overlaps directly related to the place and climate of the country. For instance, in anticipation of the cold winter, both my Father and Eldest Aunt had brought with them tailor-made leather coats lined with fur, which proved inadequate for Toronto temperatures. Preparing to arrive three years after my Eldest Aunt, my Father recalled that,

> We know it was going to be cold. Because [Eldest Aunt] sent pictures back a lot – the snow and everything. So we know it's cold, but… I remember the first night we got snow. I was living with [Eldest Aunt and Uncle]. Same thing with [Third Aunt]. We're living with them. We had supper in the kitchen. You know, at home we wear undershirt and everything; after school, got home, have supper. Right after supper, they said, 'Oh, it's snowing!' So we look at the backyard: 'Oh, it *is* snowing!' So we *rushed* outside, because it's the first time we seen snow – me and [Third Aunt]. With my undershirt on (laughter), feeling the snow. You don't feel cold because it's just starting to snow, those temperatures are not too cold at that time, just below zero. And we just feel the snow, and exciting about it, because you've never seen snow before. That was the first time…

Incidentally, my Eldest Aunt also happened to recall this night, and laughingly told me that, "When your dad first came – first winter – there's a lot of snow at the back, he just jumped right in without any shoes. (laughter) So excited."

Hearing about how different a place is, is not the same as experiencing it for oneself. The above memories reflect how "the experience of moving often to a

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Dad Prepares to Migrate to Canada in 1975, at age 22

I bought a lot of stuff. You never been here and you don't know what you need, so some of the stuff you buy, you think that they don't have it here – kind of stupid, but… […] They're probably cheaper over there, I don't know. But you stock those things up. And some of the things too, I bought a lot, but it end up useless or no need. But you don't know the place, at that time you're young, it just happens.

I custom made a leather coat. I don't know you've seen it or not. With a rabbit fur lining. Cheap! I mean, at that time in Hong Kong it's quite cheap. We all tailor-made suits, but they're cheap, not like here; they're dirt cheap. So you think, 'Oh, leather will be good! *So cold* in Canada, then you'll be really...you know, [it's] good for you!' (laughs)

Oh my goodness. I only wore it a couple times, and gave it away because it doesn't fit anymore. And the style that you made, it's just like Kojack-style, the big thing [lapels], and the neck is all open. ...It's just no, no, no use for this weather! Absolutely useless, so the speak. Except maybe in the fall or spring, will be OK. (laughs)

You did something like that... But you didn't know at that time.

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new home is most felt through the surprises in sensation" that are experienced in an embodied way (Ahmed, 1999, p. 342). Other stories speak to more profound experiences of unexpected personal adaptation.

My Third Aunt spoke freely of the how migration to Canada has affected her sense of home. Returning to Hong Kong for the first time, she discovered that 'home' had changed. People she used to know had left, low-rise apartment buildings had been torn down in favour of tall condos, and the geography itself had been altered; while the family used to live relatively close to the harbour, the former coastline had been filled in to create more land, which disrupted my aunt's ability to navigate the area based on spatial memory.

Third Aunt's Shifting Sense of Home

[At the time,] I still think I have a home to go back to, I'll always have something I can rely on, I can go back – but I find out I cannot go back. […]

After that, I never thought, "Well, if I cannot make it here I will go back," never thought that way anymore. I will make it here. […] I don't belong there anymore. It seems like everybody is moving on. […]

What I miss is I thought I was going home to see the same old place. That is home, but there is no people that I want to go back to and the place is changing completely. I don't recognize [it] as a home anymore. […] My home will be here [in Canada] because my parents are here. My children are here, so here is home. Before the first time I went back, I always saying that I can go back, I can go back, that is home; I can go back. But after that, I feel a kind of loss. That's why I cry so much – I feel the loss of home […] For me, the old pattern of my life is lost. My youth was there, my birthplace is kind of lost now.

I'm grown up and I have my own family to raise and I have my own family to take care of and don't think that anymore. Before, I was thinking about Hong Kong a lot. Talking about Hong Kong a lot – and then after that I was kind of, 'OK, I'm done'. So, I just left, and whenever I go back, it's just another place I visit.

Having always heard about Hong Kong through family stories, and mentally tying it to my family's place in the world, I feel a connection to this place, which I have yet to experience in person. To a much lesser degree, I also feel some connection to the area of southeastern China that my known paternal ancestors came from. My Third Aunt went to this area in an attempt to find the Chung ancestral home – which would have been a building with an altar-type area holding meticulous records of

the family lineage. Although my aunt ran into some other Chungs who had heard the same stories of this place, she could not find any other evidence or documentation of our ancestral home, which may have been moved, or destroyed by Maoists in the 1950s (Santos, 2009). My aunt told me that, closer to wartime – decades before her attempt – her father had found the Chung ancestral home, and saw three descendent branches of the patrilineal bloodline. Upon receiving conflicting responses from each of the three lines about where our specific family belongs, he said, "Forget it. Hong Kong is our ancestral home now, not this place." The early death of his own grandfather – the furthest back we know about in terms of our family tree – may have meant that the next generation was never added to the official lineage records, resulting in this later confusion around belonging.

I did not know of my Grandfather's unilateral designation of Hong Kong as our ancestral home before hearing this story. However, it adds a layer of meaning to my pilgrim-like sense of desire and obligation to visit this place for myself. This desire persists despite knowing that the 'home' of my Father and aunts has changed dramatically. Their stories serve as the basis for a collective memory that allows me to 'remember' where 'we' come from as a family, and "fit in by being assigned a place in a forgotten past" (Ahmed, 1999, p. 330). Migration, in this way, is also a question of intergenerational storytelling and dynamics (e.g., Ahmed, 1999; Thomson, 1999).

(Re)Framing the Picture

I have been hoping that learning and relating through a process of intergenerational storytelling might help me develop a stronger sense of belonging in the face of my contested and fluctuating experiences of ethnic identity. In some ways, however, a connection with my heritage and past is already a given, and can be found in reframing my thinking and understanding of the

nature of how stories and lives intersect and flow into one another through time. It is interesting and helpful for me to consider water in this context, and the notion of 'tidalectics', which

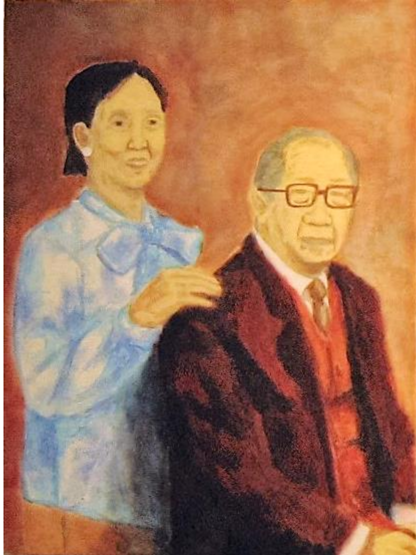
> describes a way of seeing history as a palimpsest, where generations overlap generations, and eras wash over eras like a tide on a stretch of beach. There is change, but the changes arise out of slight misduplications of the pattern rather than from essential antagonisms. (Compton, 2001, p. 17)

This term is discussed by Wayde Compton (2001), a mixed race poet and theorist in British Columbia, who further asserts that "[i]n a [Western or] European framework, the past is something to be gotten over, something to be improved upon; in tidalectics, we do not *improve upon* the past, but are ourselves *versions* of the past" (p. 17, emphasis original). I have often thought that "[t]o know who I am, I have to know where I come from" (Alvarez, 2000, p. 823). While I believe this position carries weight, tidalectics opens up additional possibilities. Perhaps, by understanding myself better, I can find new ways to understand where I have come from, and how I belong. In the course of interviewing my Brother about his own curiosity about our family history and previous generations, an idea similar to tidalectics emerged through his metaphor of echoes.

My Brother Echoes Tidalectics

You want to know: What was this person like? And you find a lot of it is upbringing, right? [...] Like, our mom was very influenced by how she was brought up, by her parents, and then our grandma was very influenced by her parents, so it's not just a genetic thing, it's a personality thing, right? It echoes down, I guess. It's kind of interesting to think – were our great-great-great-great grandparents having that same personality conflict of the mom was like this, and the daughter was like this, and the dad was like this? How much of that has been passed on? [...] How many hundreds of generations has led to me? It's kind of interesting to think about.

I find the metaphor of water to be meaningful in other ways, as well. Water evokes the geographies of my parents' and aunts' childhood homes, as well as the oceans my family members crossed in the course their migrations. The persistent nature of water's flow, and ability to take various forms in different conditions, are reminders of the possibility of transformative change in the face of barriers. Water is also a substance that unites us all as beings of this planet, with the power to both sustain



and harm. Stories can have the same power, and an absence of stories, as with water, gets noticed – in one way or another.

I have been missing stories of my family, and of others with experiences of being mixed race. Moreover, stories I have been told by older generations hold elements of unfamiliarity and mystery, in part because they are often set in geographies unknown to me, and are shared in a non-linear, piecemeal fashion. Having begun to intentionally collect family stories, and seeking to make more sense of them, I face challenges piecing them together in the context of family and socio-political histories, including the absence of dates on my Chinese family tree. Some stories may be recovered, but others are lost, having barely been spoken of – such as those relating to an aunt and uncle who died as children during the Japanese invasion and occupation of Hong Kong in the early 1940s, before any of the other children were born. Though never met by myself or my parent's generation, the absence of these relatives is felt. My Second Aunt expressed sadness around their absence, a feeling complicated by the sense that, had they lived, these older siblings could have contributed to the family in a very real material way:

Left: 1989/2001/2003 (acrylic on canvas)
Triptych of my paternal grandparents from my *It's not BLACK & WHITE: I am WHITE-YELLOW/YELLOW-WHITE* exhibition at York University, February 2006

> If they're still alive, maybe we wouldn't have so much of a hard time. They would be a lot older, so by the time we come along, they maybe already working, help out [with] finances. They are older by more than 10 years, at least, so it would be a lot easier financially, for us. It's quite tough – we are one person working, and seven people eating. (laughs) So it's not easy, right?

As it was, until my two older aunts could finish school and find work, there was just one income from which the family could eke out a living.

According to Avery Gordon (2008), exclusions and invisibilities through time which are felt and recognized, but neither seen nor easily articulated, can be understood as hauntings. In the context of recognizing and valuing the complicatedness of life, and the ways that language and socially-constructed categories such as race, class, and gender reduce this complexity, Gordon describes haunting as the presence of the seemingly invisible – a mediation between individual and institution, subject and social structure, biography and history that is felt and sensed. In this way, haunting relates to the variable visibility of power structures and how the complexity of our lives – with individual yet interconnected experiences and subjectivities that are embodied and contradictory – informs the ways we interpret and understand the world. For example, when asked about her experiences as the oldest girl, my Eldest Aunt immediately denied being the oldest, because of the two siblings who had died earlier; their absent presence shapes her identity.

Also in question for me is the tension between oral histories and the written word, including what Gordon (2008) calls "ghost stories" – written stories that signal the occurrence of haunting, by making known or apparent that which is "lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes" (p. 8). In some cases, such stories can be both 'real' or imagined, due to an absence that cannot otherwise be filled, such as the speculative family stories that Maxine Hong Kingston (1989) shares in her intergenerational memoir, *The Woman Warrior*. Despite the problematic dominance of writing in the Western culture in which I am embedded, maybe scribing or otherwise representing haunting can help challenge dominant discourses and ways of knowing –

by making ghosts and hauntings more visible, tangible, and accessible than if they only remained in memory, orality, and feeling. Such writing need not replace orality, but could complement it. In relation to the seeking of connection, belonging, and senses of self over ruptures of time, distance, and history, a degree of haunting seems inevitable when it comes to family stories, especially when there are stories not shared due to chance or secrecy, or differences in language (Goodall, 2005). Indeed, the wellsprings of my own haunting are missing family stories and missing language.

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Language is something that has always been complicated for me. Reading voraciously, a relative sense of ease in writing; I'm lucky in those ways. Books were a constant and sought after companion in childhood. Speaking is harder, especially on the spot, or when precision is called for – though I've improved in confidence, at least. 'Fake it 'til you make it' has its merits. As does building a practice of deliberate discomfort. (They're not always the same thing.) But all this is only in English. The dominant, colonizing/er language of my country, education, and daily life that itself is such a hybrid. Not having Chinese is and always has been a sense of lack, like a something that should be there but never is. A misfortune. The conviction that you are stupid, that you can't learn – are not good enough to learn, or have something wrong with you. I don't think anyone ever said these things to me… but it was learned, implied, felt.

You can't lose something you never had, but you can lose the hope of it, and the space(s) that would otherwise receive that something can go on being empty. Even if words float in and around your understanding by chance like dust motes in sunshine. Longing and loss can fill up the spaces instead – and all the feelings and intuitive ways of knowing I have grown up relying upon to help me understand beyond words, without words. Nuances of communication and mood. The overall meaning rather than the specifics. Not everyone understands or sees this.

Not having Chinese is also a thread of shame that winds all around and within me, deep to the very core. There, it is an impossible knot. I don't always notice it, but I am used to its variations of feeling: dull embarrassment; flaring anger; pained sadness; awkward discomfort. Silence can be a refuge when you feel the fool; it can also be the frustrated retreat of an inability to express oneself. Silence is also the private home of my shame. I am used to it.

This is my life, my family, my heritage – and I don't have that huge piece of it that is language. I still do want to learn. Even though my grandparents are gone, it is important to me, especially while older relatives still live, and if I want to continue this work of collecting stories, building relationships, and being able to share with others – even if just within the family.

Speaking Stories

When interviewing family members about their own stories, and what they know of our family more broadly, I can communicate easily in English with my maternal Grandfather, my Third Aunt, and immediate family. I also have access to my maternal Grandmother's memoir, which focuses on her own family, and her childhood and youth. She wrote it twelve years ago, and I have finally read it for the first time. Accessing other stories is not as easy. My paternal Grandmother couldn't write, and more importantly, I was unable to speak with my paternal grandparents, beyond a few basics. They both died when I was a teenager, and I still feel a sense of loss even as I find ways to maintain their memories and presence in my life.

The only way I can learn about my paternal grandparents and their stories is by speaking with family members. My Father, the youngest, seems to know and recall very little, leaving my aunts as repositories of knowledge. Geography also has a role to play in who holds which stories. My Second Aunt, for example, remained in Hong Kong longer than her other siblings, and so has more memories and experiences with their paternal grandmother – my Great-Grandmother – who lived with the family until her death in 1977. There is much I can learn about this figure and her family as well.

Again, the question of language arises. My two older aunts wanted translation support for their interviews, and my Third Aunt was willing to fill this role, though my Father was also willing to help and I offered to make alternate arrangements. While speaking with my aunts, I was pleasantly surprised to understand more than expected, even if it was just a word or phrase here and there.

The embodied aspect of communication made a difference, serving as a reminder for word nuggets I would be unable to recall on my own, but recognized in a specific context. These experiences make me hopeful about the Chinese language and the possibility of my learning and understanding more. This hope is a new, unfamiliar feeling. Perhaps if I spend more time with my aunts – just listening to them speak Cantonese – that would help. Listening to them is a comfortable feeling, even in my ignorance. Having said that, it feels wonderful when I *do* understand, and can respond to what is said without it having to be translated. I wonder, how do I know these things? How did I pick up these little tiny bits of the language without even realizing it, when so many other bits were not retained? How is this process different from making a conscious decision to learn? The relative success of the embodied communication I experienced with my aunts calls to mind critiques of language and the excessive power it is granted as a construct that supposedly represents reality (Barad, 2007, p. 133). I have always seen my non-acquisition of Cantonese as a gap or failure, so removing or lowering the pedestal I have placed language upon may help me help me connect more freely and meaningfully across linguistic difference, and mitigate my current sense of loss and inadequacy. This reframing is still new for me, yet I hope it will prove useful. When interviewing my siblings, I specifically asked about their relationship to the Chinese language. Passages below reflect some of their thoughts and perspectives, which revealed parallels with and divergences from my own experiences of (not) learning the language, going to Chinese school, and negotiating the relationship between language, belonging, and identity.

In Conversation: My Sister on the Chinese Language

Me: What's your own relationship to Cantonese– Chinese language?

Sister: (laughs) Terrible. I don't know much.

Me: How do you feel about that, though?

Sister: I hate it. I don't feel good about it at all, because...that's half the reason why I couldn't talk to Mah Mah and Yeh Yeh, because I just didn't know the language. And at the time, I wasn't interested to learn. So when they passed away, I was really pissed off at myself. I had a lot of self-loathing at that time, just because I had gone to the counselling, and because I didn't have to go to Chinese school anymore, and then Mah Mah and Yeh Yeh passed away and I didn't learn anything, and I didn't get to talk to them.

And just knowing that Dad was really disappointed that I didn't continue, and knowing that he was disappointed that I didn't learn and that I couldn't talk to them. It was a really– I didn't want anything to do with Cantonese for a while. I didn't want to think about how bad that made me feel. Now it's different because I want to know [Cantonese], just so I know. It's not even necessarily to speak with family, it's just so I know. So I can feel better, myself.

But I know there was one point when I was talking to Dad about it, and he was like, "What's the point?" He's like, "If you want to learn an Asian language, you should learn Mandarin, because it's more common." And it stung when he said that, it stung pretty bad. (laughter) It's like, "OK, thanks, Dad. Cool." In my eyes, it kind of shows me that he's kind of given up on me in that kind of sense.

Me: Did he ever say anything about being disappointed in you, or that's just the feeling you got?

Sister: No, that's just the feeling I got. And maybe possibly the things that he said, that I maybe misinterpreted...

In Conversation: My Brother on the Chinese Language

Me: Do you have any thoughts about what it was like to be mixed growing up or now, as an adult?

Brother: Well, I guess we can go into the whole language thing. That's one of my regrets about— That we went to Chinese school and everything, but it never really became a thing with us. Even with our cousins, even if they aren't very good speakers, they at least will be able to understand rudimentary things. Whereas for us, […] you might hear a word or two and know it, but that's really it. Yeah, I do regret that that didn't turn out differently. I still will be a little uncomfortable if I'm around Cantonese-speaking people. […]

I think it did used to bother me more, of feeling left out of both cultures. That if you're around the Cantonese people, you kind of feel excluded. Then, if you're around Westerners, they're always like... You feel a little bit different. But it's another thing that doesn't bother me as much anymore. […] Even non-Cantonese people who are asking me about it like, "Oh, how do you say this? What's your name?" I get a little embarrassed and a little hesitant to talk about it.

I guess at this point, I've gotten materials to learn on my own. It's always been something that I've put off, so I guess it's myself to blame, too. That I haven't taught myself more. I don't know.

Me: Well, don't be too hard on yourself.

Brother: Yeah. I know, I know. We all have things that we always want to do and we never do it, right? I do feel that is something that's still important to me that I want to be able to do sometime. [...] I think it's also being more mature and coming to terms with certain things. I don't know. I haven't really dwelled on that recently, either. Maybe it would still bother me the same amount if I thought about it more. I don't know.

I'm still kind of a little mad. I used to feel very mad about the teaching methods. That it was more rote learning and that they wouldn't really try to help with someone who's clearly behind the rest of the class. I can also see now that it's like, what can you really do as a teacher if there's not really that basis of practice at home and being able to have those basics? Once it's at a certain point, it would need a lot of intensive work. [...]

In Conversation: My Brother on the Chinese Language (continued)

Brother: I still have some lingering upset with how we were taught. How can it be that, having basically zero comprehension skills, I was able to have A's on dictations and stuff. It doesn't really make sense. You can just memorize it all and you'd still get by. Nobody really does anything about it. I don't really remember much about the younger years. […] Mostly, what I can remember is it was all the same. We would learn some chapter and then have to write it out a bunch of times. Then, you'd have a test where you'd write it out, and then that was it. Then, you move on to the next chapter [...]

I don't remember it being unpleasant, just unsatisfying. Then, thinking of it afterwards, getting mad about it. At the time, it was more of a chore. "Oh, we gotta go to Chinese school. Yeah, yeah, yeah." Saturday morning. It's just what we do. […] It's good to be around different people. It was nice, now that I think about it, it was a little refreshing to be around Chinese kids for a little while.

Me: So were you saying that now […] you now still get angry about it.

Brother: I don't get as angry, but I do feel regret and a little bit of anger that it didn't turn out differently. […] I do still feel a little bit that they could have had that [the teaching] organized better in terms of like helping the kids who were behind. But, I mean, […] I don't really know how it worked. [...]

The better word now would be like resentment, a little bit of resentment, but not a lot. And a lot of it now is like, to do with self too, not that I resent myself but like that I feel like I could've been at a different point now, if I had put the work in. I remember when Mah Mah was [living] at our house, we would have the TV on all the time, that I was starting to pick up a lot of stuff, and being able to understand – and I felt like if that had continued, that would've been like the first step.

But, it turned out that that was more like the end of something rather than the beginning. After they died, then it was kind of like we didn't spend as much time with the family anymore. Only like a few times a year... I feel like when we were younger it was a lot more then, and then that would've been a better time to be learning. Also, just because, you know, kids learn better, right, so... [...] I don't know.
I haven't given up yet.

She said / She said

She remembers something!

She said…
She said that…

See, we have a different memory about that.
She remembers when she was…
She said…
She said…
This is a new one for me – I never heard of it! She said that…

She said maybe it's… She remembers…
I don't even remember that!

That is her take on it. But my mom told me a different story.
She doesn't remember exactly…

I don't know that! This is the first time I heard!

She said that…
What she said is…
That I don't know – I never heard of it.

She didn't remember I dressed like that – she didn't remember that.
She remembers she did that, but she didn't remember I did that.
She doesn't know.
She has to think about it.
She said that, at that time…
When she was…

I forgot to tell her about that.
She understands what you are saying

She doesn't remember who told her. But my story is from my dad, so I don't know who's telling her.
Another one she remembers…

She said…
That's what my grandma said. I was here already so I didn't know.
She said that's why…
So our stories are different now. She doesn't even know this story about…

Usually she remembers that…
I never heard about that!
She said…

Her story is…

*

When language itself is in question, poetic forms of expression can evoke experiences and hauntings. The lines of the above poem, and the stories it hints at, come from the conversations I had with my Eldest and Second Aunts, who were only comfortable interviewing with translation support. The poem stands as a reminder of the different ways that stories can move. Storytelling is as much about process as it is about sharing ideas, lessons, or experiences. My concerns and issues around not having the Cantonese dialect means that the process of seeking and sharing stories with these two aunts plays an important role in our interactions both within and apart from this project. I feel our language barriers in my body – nervous alertness and the heat of shame present while I try to comprehend. In a rare intimate moment alone with my Second Aunt a couple of years ago, we embraced and she told me, "I wish we could talk deeply" – a sentiment I share in part because we already share an emotional connection.

There were moments during our interviews, and in retrospect, when I wondered what might have been misunderstood and which nuances were lost, in both directions. Without a secondary translation of my audio recordings, it is impossible for me to know for sure, since I cannot know how my questions were translated. However, I occasionally understood words in Cantonese that did not make it into the English translation – though it seemed more difficult to pick up the other way around, perhaps because the quality of my attention was different for translations of my own words. My aunts also understand English well enough that they would sometimes intervene in the translation process. Further, I am certain that a percentage of what I was told in Cantonese went untranslated, since there were times when the speaker would talk for a while, and I would be told a translation that was brief in comparison. I am at peace with this potential for discrepancy, since I am aware of the fluidity of memory and story. I understand that in the moment – especially if unaccustomed to it – translation is difficult, and it is work. I imagine that if the speaker says a lot, it

is particularly challenging to remember all the content, never mind fully conveying the specific nuances. At one point, my Third Aunt even 'translated' back to me in Cantonese instead of English – which resulted in much laughter. Speaking of the process and challenges of translating consistently, my aunt laughingly exclaimed, "You don't realize! You don't realize when you are on a roll, you just keep doing it. If you don't think about it, then you're fluent. But whenever you think about it, it's just going back to the old way." I have witnessed this happen with others as well, and at the time shared a story from my childhood: relatives from Hong Kong had come to visit, and my Father was regaling my maternal Grandmother, who only spoke English, with a story – but accidentally told his story entirely in Cantonese.

While translating through other family members could increase the challenge of communicating clearly and precisely together, it does not necessarily lessen the value of the exchange; such clarity is not guaranteed even when all parties share comparable fluency in a language. Further, the very flexible, informal translation that occurred during my interviews allowed us to talk and communicate in a much easier, and potentially more open way than what otherwise might have been possible. This context also allowed for comfort, flow, and naturalness within the spaces of the interview, and our existing relationships. In these conversations, I was less concerned with the accuracy of stories than I was with how and what was remembered and its perceived importance to the speaker, for:

> [w]hen we say we remember an event, do we actually remember the actual event, or do we simply remember that the event happened? Memory waxes and wanes. Memories can be embellished or distorted, and we reconstruct the past to fit the present, retrospectively, through narrative, unifying our lives through meaning, coherence, and interconnection. (Davis, 2009, p. 438)

I was glad that my Third Aunt took on the role of translator, in part because I guessed that the sisters together would have more closely related experiences of gender, age, and home life than they would with my Father's experience of being the youngest and only boy – though this is not to erase

the differences of experience, perception, and knowledge between them. The dynamic of these women being the story holders in our family was all the more powerful with them telling stories together. In addition, the shared knowledge and unique vantage point of my Third Aunt being a sibling-translator shifted the nature of the labour she was performing, since the sisters' sharing of stories and perspectives led to their own knowledge development. At the close of my Eldest Aunt's interview, I asked her to comment on the experience of talking to me about her stories and my questions. Through my Third Aunt, she said, "Remember something old, *way* back when. She never thought about she'd remember, but now she remember. Let us know what happened to her when she was little – we never know." Over the course of our conversations, my aunts were able to learn new stories, revisit and debate shared stories, and tap into their memories in different ways.

Left: (Clockwise from top right) Eldest Aunt, me, Third Aunt, and Second Aunt, the night of my interview with my Eldest Aunt

^^^^ Tree

^^^^^^^^^ the tree
^^^^^^^^^^^^ of my name
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ from a father's roots
^^^^^^^^^^^^ spread deep
^^^^^^^^ and far
^^^^^^^ a part
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ of a forest with canopies twined
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ now razed and gone
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ missing to time
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ or hidden from sight
^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^ roots obscured by shadows
^^^^^^^^^^^ from above
^ the tree grows taller, wider
^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ dispersed

++ one tree one name one line through time
++ one tree one name one line through time
++ one tree one name one line through time

what happens with the grafts?

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ the wind rustles my leaves
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ grown bold in the sun
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ blown about from below
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ as aged branches groan
~~~~~~~~~~~~ a whispering
~~~~~~~~~~~ a searching
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ stirring the dust
~~~~~~~~~ Particles
~~ In
~~~~~ Under
~~~~~~~~~ its breath

wh
ere

i s

S h e ?

*

The other day, we happened to be driving near the cemetery. It was too late to visit, but that didn't stop my desire and sense of obligation to visit Mah Mah and Yeh Yeh, or the wave of grief that felt unexpectedly fresh. I had recently been doing memory work and feeling down about having realized how fuzzy my memories of my grandparents had become. I spent the rest of the ride home working through my memory to recall their apartment in as much detail as possible. The space, colours, textures, arrangements, layout, and general sense of it all; deliberately placing myself there in mind eased my sadness. I wonder if and what photos we have of this place as it was, and I wonder where my photos are of my other grandparents' house. Both are recurring settings for my dreams. I am lucky to have memories and stories of each of my grandparents, to have both parents still living and well, and to have other elders with whom to talk and ask questions of. How easy it is to take this for granted.

Concluding Thoughts: Finishing this Story, Looking Towards the Next

Although the nature of a written paper lends itself to a linear presentation of content, I draw upon related metaphors of nets and webs to help me grasp the encompassing connectivity of the stories and conceptual intersections discussed as part of my major research, as I collect family stories and insight. Pulling on one part of a web affects other areas, and no one point of connection in a net is more important than the others; meanwhile, the fibres of the netting run through the entire thing, literally entwined. The beginnings and endings of stories and experiences are linked points in a wider web of related interactions. My exploration of family, memory, stories, food, and identity, through a feminist approach to love, care, relationality, and embodiment is by no means complete. Likewise, I feel I have just embarked on a journey of learning and working with family stories.

Even with the stories and experiences I have accumulated over the course of this research so far, there are directions and themes that simply could not fit within the limits of this project. For instance, I would like to address the interconnected themes of class, schooling and education, and survival that emerged in most of my interviews, as well as work more closely with stories I have learned about my grandparents and previous generations of ancestors. I think it is important to

develop a clearer sense of how these family stories fit with one another, and into broader socio-economic and geopolitical contexts and histories. Similarly, I am curious about what would come of a more intentional search into formal and private archives. Further, there is the question of what stories and experiences are missing from this work, in terms of having limited the number of my participants. How might the stories of uncles and cousins enrich this work? What could be learned from extended members of the maternal side of my family? Besides food, how could a deeper treatment of water as an analytical framework bring forth other nuances and meanings?

I feel my responsibilities as story holder are to continue this work, and try to do justice to the complexities of the stories I learn and share, and the truths of the people who share them with me. I still have work to do around storying these memories – finding ways to share family stories and family trees in a bilingual manner, and transferring this knowledge into a digital context for greater accessibility. Overall, my work contributes to knowledge on creative family-based research practices, and understandings of identity and diaspora in Canada. It seems that I can seek belonging through stories and embodied experiences of home rather than only looking for it in a physical place, type of identity, or even specific language. I have come to realize that there are many parallels, resonances, and connections between the overarching frames of feminist relationality and embodiment, and concepts of ethics, love and care, identity and diaspora, and critical race feminism. Returning to metaphors of nets and webs, my web of understanding here is not flat, but has a spatial quality that is three-dimensional in the sense that my understanding not just conceptual, but also embodied and relational. Meanwhile, my increased understanding remains in tension with questions of how to put these concepts into practice for the benefit of my research subjects – who, as my family, are one of the intended audiences of my work.

How do stories move? We talk-listen-ponder, we write-read-reflect, we create-experience-live. We remember and forget. We keep secrets, or don't make sharing a priority, for various

reasons – some more conscious and deliberate than others. We change, and our stories change with us. The stories of people from the past connect into a web that creates our present, (in)forms our archives, and links places and people across time and space. In my ongoing process of unearthing stories of myself and my family, I am gaining a clearer sense of the connections between us, and of who we are collectively and as individuals. In Julia Alvarez's (2000) words, "I'm mapping a country that's not on the map, and that's why I'm trying to put it down on paper. It's a world formed of contradictions, clashes, cominglings – […] and it is precisely that tension and richness that interests me" (p. 822). Inspired by the notion of tidalectics (Compton, 2001), I can see my family's stories as echoes that move across the generations, ready for another receiver to bounce off of so as to regain momentum; distortions in the echoes haunt our perceptions. Stories could also be like starlight; what we see now has travelled a great distance through time, and the light particles we receive are different from whatever is being emitted by the star *right now* – an output that we in this time will never know. How strange to think of light as tangible – yet we can feel its warmth, it can change our moods, and it is such a source of life. Stories as life – received and changing in the same way…because after all, "stories are all we are" (King, 2003, p. 2).

Grasping the threads of stories revealed alongside the line(s) of my storied net, I can better wade through the waters of my inquiry, looking towards shorelines of possibility.

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