
THE PRESENCE/ABSENCE OF NOSTALGIA: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE CULINARY AND GASTRONOMIC ENCOUNTERS OF FILIPINO MIGRANTS WITH “AUTHENTIC” FILIPINO FOOD

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*Food has always been tied to identity. It allows us to locate people and make sense of who we are. However, with the advent of globalization—wherein human mobility is inevitable, the process of “locating” things and persons becomes no easy feat. With the Filipino palate continuously acquiring new tastes, I argue that there is both a presence and an absence of nostalgia in the varying encounters of Filipino migrants with “authentic” Filipino food. In this paper, I examine two generations of the Filipino diaspora. The first generation is comprised of Filipinos who moved out of the Philippines and settled in different parts of the globe. The second generation is comprised of the children of these Filipino migrants. This group is further divided into two categories: a) children of two ethnically Filipino parents and b) children of multicultural families. This particular study asks the following questions: 1) What criteria are involved in considering a specific food to be “authentically” Filipino? 2) Is there really such a thing as “authentic” Filipino food? 3) How does the presence/absence of nostalgia affect the two generations’ identity formation processes? To answer these questions, I shall look into the history of Filipino migration, and specifically how food acts as a driving force behind migration. I will also analyse an episode of *The Migrant Kitchen* and a short story published in *Moving Portraits: Life Stories of Children of Migrant and Multicultural Families in Asia* in order to contextualize my study on the second generation’s encounters with Filipino food. Both of these texts look into the presence and absence of nostalgic longings for the homeland through culinary and gastronomic discourses, particularly through the second generation’s creation and/or consumption of fusion dishes.*

Keywords: *diaspora, authenticity, nostalgia, alienation, identity, migration*

Introduction

Food has always been an intrinsic part of our lives. Every time the stomach grumbles and demands to be fed, we satiate this hunger by fixing up meals or visiting our favourite restaurants. Often, we find ourselves craving a particular food. In the Philippines on hot summer days, *halo-halo* [shaved ice dessert] topped with *ube* [purple yam] ice cream becomes a staple and during the rainy season, bowls of piping hot *sinigang* [sour stew] is paired with rice. Come the holiday season, *puto bumbong* [purple rice cake cooked in bamboo tubes] and the classic Christmas ham, the Filipino counterpart for America's turkey, is served. The gastronomic experience is very much an affective and sensual experience. Food tickles our senses. It is an experience that allows us to travel places and occupy spaces without the need to move physically. Food allows us to travel through time, as it acts as a trigger for memories.

Considering the affective power of food and its ubiquity, it is thus important to also look at it as an important area of discourse. What we decide to cook or crave to eat invites us to look into the mechanism behind our choices. Food, for the most part, has always been tied to identity formation, and thus, the coining of the popular saying, "You are what you eat." We must note, however, that this saying follows from the idea of an authentic self. For instance, in Hindu Indian culture, food is "closely tied to the moral and social status of individuals and groups. Food taboos and prescriptions divide men from women, gods from humans, upper from lower castes, one sect from another."¹ From this, we can consider how our food choices are influenced by our notions of identity.

Early in 2018, local actress of Filipino-American heritage Liza Soberano, was criticized by many for her lead role in the fantasy series *Bagani*—a show set in pre-colonial Philippines. She made waves on the internet after defending herself in a tweet saying "I loooooove sinigang I think that's as Pinoy [colloquial term for Filipino] as Pinoy can get."² By blatantly stating her love for *sinigang*, Soberano hoped to justify her Filipino-ness. In this situation, we see how the actress used food to try and "legitimize" her ethnic identity. What prompted her to give such statement? According to anthropology Professor Martin Manalansan, "Being able to 'place' things and persons is a way to legitimize one's own knowledge and to assess the relative strangeness and/or acceptability of the thing or person in question. It is also a way of differentiating oneself from others."³ Considering Manalansan's argument, we can say that the relationship between food and identity exists through the notion of locus, specifically that of origin. When we meet someone new or unfamiliar, we

1 Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (January 1988): 10.

2 Liza Soberano, Twitter post, February 2018, 4:51 a.m., <https://twitter.com/lizasoberano>.

3 Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Beyond Authenticity: Rerouting the Filipino Culinary Diaspora," in *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader*, eds. Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin F. Manalansan IV, and Anita Mannur (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 290.

always ask, as if by reflex, the question: “Where are you from?” as an attempt to make sense of what the person is like. The same thing happens when we encounter a dish unfamiliar to us, unconsciously, we somehow always try to “locate” it. However, given the diasporic tendencies of humans, the process of “locating” things and persons becomes difficult. At this point, certain questions arise: what exactly makes dishes like *sinigang* distinctly Filipino? What criterion is required for a specific dish to be authentically Filipino?

Considering the terms “distinct” and “authentic,” both of which pivot on the idea of purity and a fixed identity, it is interesting to note that Filipino cuisine is no stranger to fusion dishes. Even before the diaspora of Filipinos, through cruel yet vibrant colonial history, a complex palate developed. Before the arrival of the Spanish in 1565, Filipinos’ staple foods included chicken, pork, goat, *carabao* [water buffalo], meat, milk, seafood, rice, coconuts, bananas, and mangoes.⁴ During their conquest, the Spanish brought with them olive oil, ham, sausages, tomatoes, and wine.⁵ Soon after, Chinese traders arrived, introducing the Philippine archipelago to noodles, bean curd, bean sprouts, soy sauce, and dishes like *lumpia* [fried spring rolls, now a common Filipino party dish].⁶ Filipinos have since indigenized the foods brought by these colonizers and created “Filipinized” versions of them.

During the American occupation, the colonizers did not just bring food with them, they appropriated the American palate into Filipino taste buds. With the goal of “shaping loyal servants of the empire,”⁷ one of the main initiatives of the American regime was to establish a national public school system focused on teaching home economics. This institutionalized the American palate by teaching students the “nutritional superiority of refined sugars, red meats like beef, animals, hydrogenated fats like shortenings, and highly processed foods.”⁸ Students were prevented from practicing certain Filipino eating rituals such as having *merienda* [afternoon snacks] and eating with bare hands. Instead, they were taught to eat three square meals a day and to use a spoon and fork. This appropriation of American taste was further fortified by the entrance of American food corporations into the archipelago. Companies like Nestlé, Lea & Perrins, and Heinz “encouraged a generation of Filipinos to crave canned products such as corned beef and SPAM, white bread, pies, chiffon cakes, cookies and biscuits, salads made of American canned fruit, and mayonnaise-slathered macaroni salads.”⁹ We can understand this as the Americans’ means of colonizing the Philippines through food.

4 Doreen Fernandez, *Tikim: Essays on Philippine Food and Culture* (Manila: Anvil Publishing, 1994), 224.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Dawn Mabalon, “As American as Jackrabbit Adobo: Cooking, Eating, and Becoming Filipina/o before World War II,” in *Eating Asian America: A Food Studies Reader*, eds. Robert Ji-Song Ku, Martin Manalansan IV, and Anita Mannur (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 152.

8 Ibid., 153.

9 Mabalon, “As American as Jackrabbit Adobo.”

Indeed, much of Filipinos' culinary and gastronomic practices changed throughout the colonial years. Now, with the advent of globalization—wherein human mobility is understood as inevitable,¹⁰ the Filipino palate continues to acquire new tastes and preferences. In this paper, I shall examine variations in the Filipino palate brought about by diaspora.

Rogers Brubaker's seminal article, "The 'diaspora' diaspora" delves into three core elements of diaspora: 1) dispersion, 2) homeland orientation, and 3) boundary maintenance. These three elements work hand-in-hand explaining the concept of authenticity. Authenticity mainly stems from the idea of homeland orientation, wherein displaced people continue to adhere to ideas and practices of their "conceptual homeland" despite existing outside of it. Authenticity becomes a massive point of debate when we consider whether or not migrants would choose to maintain the borders of their "authenticity." In his article, Brubaker specifically pointed out that "the interesting question, and the question relevant to the existence of diaspora, is to what extent and in what forms boundaries are maintained by second, third, and subsequent generations."¹¹

My main argument is that there is both a *presence* and an *absence* of nostalgia in the varying encounters of Filipino migrants with "authentic" Filipino food. In my discussion, I specifically examine two generations of the Filipino diaspora. The first generation is comprised of Filipinos who moved out of the Philippines and settled in different parts of the globe. This group, more often than not, tends to keep ties with the homeland. They constantly try to relive memories and certain experiences through "nostalgic" food. The second generation is comprised of the children of these first-generation Filipino migrants. This group is made up of Filipinos who have been born and/or raised outside the country. Unlike the first generation, these people are those who experience a feeling of alienation when they encounter "authentic" Filipino dishes. This feeling of alienation prompts them to create new spaces for themselves, as illustrated in the Filipino episode of Emmy award-winning food series, *The Migrant Kitchen*. This group is further divided into two categories: a) children of two ethnically Filipino parents and b) children of multicultural families. The children of multicultural families try to come to terms with their *plural* identities through their encounters with food. In probing this issue, analysis of the short story written by Hanna Norimatsu, published in *Moving Portraits: Life Stories of Children of Migrant and Multicultural Families in Asia* provides necessary context. Both of these texts look into the presence/absence of nostalgic longings for the homeland through

10 According to Castles et al., "a key indicator of globalization is a rapid increase in *cross-border flows* of all sorts, starting with finance and trade, but also including democratic values, cultural and media products, and – most important in our context – people."

Castles, Stephen, Hein De Haas, and Mark J. Miller, "Theories of Migration," in *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: Guilford Publications, 2014), 33.

11 Rogers Brubaker, "The 'diaspora' diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (August 2006): 7.

culinary and gastronomic discourses, particularly through the second generation's creation and/or consumption of fusion dishes.

First Generation

Filipino Migration to the United States

The colonial food history of the Philippines is a narrative of how Filipinos acquired the taste for more extravagant foods such as wine, noodles, cakes, biscuits, red meat, and mayonnaise-slathered macaroni salads. We must note, however, that not all Filipinos had the opportunity to enjoy these extravagant foods. For lower-/middle-class Filipino families with small landholdings and who relied on subsistence-level farming, seafood, rice, bananas, corn, or anything that was locally available constituted their daily diet. These families mostly came from the provinces of Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, Pangasinan, Tarlac, La Union, and the Visayan islands of Panay and Cebu.¹² Crop failures, typhoons, and droughts negatively affected families who relied on subsistence farming and caused a massive emigration of Filipinos. According to history Professor Dawn Mabalon, "For Filipinas/os in the province, a diet of fish, rice, and vegetables was not monotonous and tiresome; only hunger was unbearable."¹³ An example raised by Henry T. Lewis in his book, *Ilocano Rice Farmers*¹⁴ illustrates how the proto-typical family of Alberta Alcoy Asis of Cebu was recruited to work in the sugar plantations of Hawaii after a 1904 drought killed their crops. The family initially farmed five acres of sugarcane, corn, and vegetables such as *munggo* [mung beans], *langka* [jackfruit], *sitaw* [long beans], and *ube* [purple yam]. Following both the drought and their father's death in 1908, the Asis family thus decided to emigrate. Much like the Asises, other Filipino families from Ilocos and the Visayan region decided to respond to the burdens of hunger, poverty, colonialism, and land loss by finding employment opportunities abroad. Thus, we can argue that food, or rather the shortage of it, was one of the main driving forces behind the Filipino diaspora for lower and middle class families who relied on farming.

The emigration of Filipinos before and during World War II was mediated not only by their desire to escape hunger and poverty in the Philippines, but also by the drive to move into places where food was abundant. During this period, American food advertising portrayed "America as a paradise in which macaroni chicken salads, steaks, biscuits, pies, cakes, and frozen fruit salad were abundant."¹⁵ The advertised image of this irresistibly delicious country, the influence of the institutionalized home economics curriculum, the socio-economic suffering in the Philippines, and the

12 Mabalon, "As American as Jackrabbit Adobo," 151.

13 Ibid.

14 Henry T. Lewis, *Ilocano Rice Farmers: A Comparative Study of Two Philippine Barrios* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1971), 24-25, quoted in Mabalon "As American as Jackrabbit Adobo," 152.

15 Mabalon, "As American as Jackrabbit Adobo," 153.

appealing prospect of attaining a college degree in America have prompted a large scale movement of Filipinos to the United States. In 1906, the first Filipino migrants moved to the islands of Hawaii to work in the sugar plantations and fruit orchards. By 1934, more than 100,000 Filipinos were based in America.¹⁶ Aside from Hawaii, Filipinos also worked in the salmon canneries in Alaska and the farmlands of California and Washington State. Those in the navy stayed on bases in Brooklyn, Vallejo, and San Diego while others who worked as domestics and busboys settled in Los Angeles, Seattle, and San Francisco.

However, these Filipino migrants soon found out that the projected image of the “American food paradise” advertised by food corporations was a far cry from the reality they faced in the United States. Instead of feasting on the extravagant foods they had initially fantasized about, Filipinos, especially those working in the *campo* [Filipino nickname for the farm labor camp], had to resort back to their initial diet of fish, vegetables, and rice. Luckily, rice was an abundant produce in the States. Other familiar food products like noodles, soy sauce, coconuts and vegetables such as tomatoes, okra, *patola* [Filipino squash], *tanglad* [lemongrass], eggplant, and sweet potatoes were also accessible, as they were either grown in the *campo* or imported by their fellow Asian immigrant farmers. Even though the reality in America was different from what these Filipino migrants initially had in mind, they still “occasionally afforded a richer and more varied diet than what they had subsisted on in the province.”¹⁷ As a response to the limitations on food, Filipinos took to their surroundings in order to feed themselves. When scholar Dawn Mabalon interviewed Filipina migrant Rizaline Raymundo about her family’s migration experience, Raymundo shared “You name it, we ate it.... Filipinos have a knack for making any kind of food edible and delicious.” This was how these Filipino migrants survived and thrived—by making the best out of what was available to them. Using local meats, they whipped up familiar Filipino dishes, some of which included jackrabbit *adobo* [meat marinated and cooked in soy sauce, vinegar, garlic, and pepper], bear *nilaga* [meat broth], and salmon head *sinigang*.

When the Depression hit, Filipino workers stayed together in tiny rooms in residential hotels, and shared food expenses in order to save money and survive. American exclusionists like Judge D.W. Rohrback of Watsonville, California criticized these Filipinos for eating unfamiliar foods in poor conditions and thus deemed them “morally and culturally unassimilable and racially unfit for citizenship.”¹⁸ In response, Hilario Moncado, founder of Filipino Federation of America (FFA), prompted his fellow members to avoid the American red meat diet and opt for vegetarian options instead, as an act of defiance. Brubaker’s concept of ‘boundary maintenance’ is recognisable in this situation. Here, we see these Filipino migrants attempting to

16 Center for Migrant Advocacy, “History of Philippine migration,” <https://centerformigrantadvocacy.com/philippine-migration/history-of-philippine-migration/>.

17 Mabalon, “As American as Jackrabbit Adobo,” 157.

18 Ibid., 155.

preserve a “distinctive” identity—a certain Filipino-ness tied to their culinary and gastronomic choices—in a host country which denies them. The rejection and non-acceptance of American exclusionists towards these migrants prompted them to find spaces of their own, particularly by choosing to cook and eat food which connects them to their Filipino “roots.”

Filipino Migration to Other Parts of the Globe

The blatant non-acceptance of the host country could be one of the triggers for boundary maintenance. Moreover, the mere unfamiliarity in terms of food—the taste, could make one feel like an outsider, which prompts one to identify with something closer to home—food that brings nostalgia.

After World War II ended, the United States implemented strict immigration restrictions, thus limiting the migration of Filipinos to America. This prompted Filipinos to move to other parts of the globe. During the 1950s, Filipinos started moving to other Asian countries. Approximately 250,000 Filipinos migrated to Sabah and Sarawak to work in the logging industry.¹⁹ By the 1960s, others moved to Western Europe to work as domestic workers and nurses.²⁰ Come the 1970s, Filipinos migrated as technicians and engineers to Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Iraq.²¹ These movements introduced Filipinos to a plethora of new tastes, most of which were unfamiliar to Filipino taste buds.

Encounters with the unfamiliar can leave one feeling disconnected and searching for food that one can easily identify with is an automatic response. A case to consider is the predominantly Catholic Filipino migrant community in Seoul, South Korea. Reacting to the unfamiliar language, culture, and cuisine of Korea, Filipino immigrants eventually formed an ethnic enclave around the Hyehwa-dong Catholic Church. Hyehwa-dong became a cultural nexus—a space of familiarity for Filipino migrants—where practical conveniences and social services such as “shopping, banking, legal counselling on their rights and status as migrant workers, shelter, and medical treatment” are provided.²² Among these practical conveniences is the establishment of the Sunday market, dubbed Little Manila. According to Hyung Chull Jang in his study for the Korean National Commission for UNESCO, there occurs a certain shift in locality, wherein Hyehwa-dong, as part of the larger Korean society, is temporarily deterritorialized and subsequently reterritorialized as a Filipino site on Sundays.²³ Every Sunday, the place transforms into a hub where

19 Center for Migrant Advocacy, “History of Philippine migration,” <https://centerformigrantadvocacy.com/philippine-migration/history-of-philippine-migration/>.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Hyung Chull Jang, “Practicing Filipino Catholicism in Korea: Characteristics of Hyehwa-dong Filipino Catholic Community (HFCC) in Seoul,” in *Korea Journal* (Seoul: Korean National Commission for UNESCO, 2017), 93.

23 Ibid., 92.

Filipinos congregate. It is a market where one can purchase familiar products—from vegetables and fruits to snacks and skincare products. In Little Manila, you can hear various Filipino dialects being spoken as vendors and customers, originating from different parts of the Philippines, converse with each other. Little Manila is the perfect place to grab a nostalgic Filipino lunch. The menu usually consists of the famous chicken *inasal* [roasted chicken], pork barbecue, *pancit*, *nilaga*, *ginisang monggo* [sautéed mung bean soup], *piniritong bangus* [fried milkfish], *kare-kare* [stew made of oxtail, vegetables, and peanut sauce], *menudo* [stew made of pork and tomato sauce], and many more. Ate²⁴ Vee (not her real name), one of the pioneer vendors in Little Manila, offers her customers free *papaitan* [soup made of cow or goat innards]. Her customers are a mix of Filipinos and Koreans, but mostly Filipinos, who come to eat after the mass. The wooden chopsticks placed at the tables remain untouched. Filipino customers have abandoned the chopsticks—the common eating tools in Korea—and instead opted to use the more familiar spoon and fork. This cultural switch can be perceived as the Filipinos' way of maintaining boundaries.

I sat down with Ate Vee for an interview and asked her how Little Manila in Hyehwa-dong came about. I also inquired about how she ultimately decided to sell Filipino food in Korea. Ate Vee has lived in South Korea for fifteen years now and she runs her stall together with her Korean husband. “I do most of the cooking,” says Ate Vee. “I spend the whole Saturday cooking up these dishes and then I set up my stall early Sunday morning.” She also owns a Filipino restaurant and a meat shop, both of which are located in Hyehwa-dong as well.

With a pensive smile, she recalls how her thriving Filipino food business in Korea all started with her hauling a suitcase full of Filipino goods to sell near the Hyehwa-dong Catholic Church. Life wasn't very easy back then, according to her. Her husband did a lot of manual labor but was eventually forced to stop after an accident prompting Ate Vee to help out. With the large number of Filipinos attending mass at Hyehwa-dong, she figured she could set up shop near the Catholic Church and sell Filipino goods to her *kababayans* [countrymen]. At first, the City Hall apprehended them for selling unfamiliar products. Ate Vee shared that her husband had to speak with the authorities several times in order to clear her name. Eventually, the City Hall permitted Filipinos to set up shop in Hyehwa-dong and Ate Vee, along with other Filipino vendors, grew into what would make up the Little Manila we know today.

“When I first got here, I found the food really spicy, especially kimchi,” she laughs. Ate Ligaya, another Filipina migrant and a friend of Ate Vee's who was with us during the interview, quips “I even got an ulcer [from eating kimchi]!” However, Ate Vee says that she has now acquired the Korean taste. “I enjoy kimchi now. It's very healthy for the body.” Before she learned to love the spiciness of kimchi, she often cooked up Filipino meals at home. Ate Vee shares that she always had

24 “Ate” is a Filipino term for older sister, often used as a sign of respect for referring to older women (not necessarily within biological family kinships).

an affinity for food, and back in her Filipino hometown of Cauayan, Isabela, her family owns a vegetable stand and a meat shop. I talked to several of her Filipino customers and most of them remarked: “Her food tastes really authentic!”, “It tastes just like the food back home,” and “I feel like I’m back in the Philippines.” Indeed, Ate Vee’s food does not fail to induce nostalgia. However, this brings us back to the question of authenticity. How can we say that a certain food is authentically Filipino? Is Ate Vee’s food considered Filipino because it was cooked by her—a Filipina? Is it because we’re eating the food in Little Manila—a Filipino environment? Or is it authentically Filipino simply because, as her customers remarked, it reminds them of home?

It is hard to describe what a distinctly “authentic” Filipino taste is to begin with since most Filipino cuisine consists of fusion dishes—products of our colonial history. While most Filipinos would claim *adobo* as the “unofficial” national dish of the Philippines, some would counter this by saying that it is not representatively Filipino since we got the *adobo* recipe from interactions with Mexico during the Spanish colonial era. Others, like actress Liza Soberano, would argue that *sinigang* is the representative dish of the Philippines.

According to cultural historian Doreen Fernandez, the four main flavors that dominate Philippine cooking are salty, sour, sweet, and bitter.²⁵ These flavors vary depending on which part of the country you are visiting. The Philippines, a country made up of over 7,000 islands, a fairly vast territory, means there exists an abundance of culinary and gastronomic variations. Similar to how Arjun Appadurai describes Indian national cuisine as a cuisine “in which regional cuisines play an important role,”²⁶ Filipino national cuisine is also very regional. When tourist guide Ivan Man Dy tours Anthony Bourdain around Manila for his show, he describes food from the North as fairly “bitter” and food from the south as “spicy.” Considering these variations, it becomes even harder to pinpoint exactly what components make up an authentic Filipino dish.

Another important point of discussion to consider is whether the ingredients that constitute a dish make it authentic. During the interview, I asked Ate Vee where she gets her Filipino ingredients from. She says that she imports some of her ingredients, such as vegetables and spices, from the Philippines through connections with Korean businessmen. However, she sources meat locally. I particularly noticed that she uses *Sinigang* Mix in cooking up her *sinigang* dish. While this isn’t uncommon in Filipino culinary practices, it does, in a way, raise questions about authenticity. Mixes have allowed us to whip up dishes that taste like the “real” thing without having to source a whole lot of other ingredients. These instant mixes are especially convenient for migrants like Ate Vee, who do not have easy access to many Filipino ingredients. With just one sachet of *Sinigang* Mix, she can recreate the “authentic” taste of *sinigang*.

25 Fernandez, *Tikim*, 224.

26 Appadurai, “How to Make a National Cuisine,” 5.

On a similar note, Robert Ji-Song Ku, in his book *Dubious Gastronomy*, talks about MSG (monosodium glutamate)—which, like *Sinigang Mix*, instantly adds “authentic” flavour to dishes. He contends that for contemporary diners in the US, “MSG is an apocryphal flavouring agent and the antithesis of culinary authenticity at a time when the seemingly unstoppable forces of technology and globalization appear to threaten both the sanctity of indigenous foodways and the integrity of the human food supply.”²⁷ MSG, as a “dubious” food/ingredient, pushes forward the notion of culinary inauthenticity, which can feel troubling to immigrants who “often invent an image of the homeland as an *unchanging* and enduring cultural *essence* and are often singular about the ontological coherency of their national cuisines.”²⁸ Here, we can observe the interaction between nostalgia and the authenticity of food—how nostalgic longings for the familiar tend to create imaginary fictions posed as “authentic” memories.

According to Indian American cultural critic Ketu Katrak, “culinary narratives, suffused with nostalgia, often manage immigrant memories and imagined returns to the ‘homeland.’”²⁹ These memories of the familiar, however, are fragmentary, partial and “irretrievably lost.”³⁰ Nostalgia is thus structured more as “feelings”: “the search for a past and a place leads them to reconstitute their lives in narrative form, a story designed to reassemble a broken history into a new whole.”³¹ For immigrants, culinary culture is equated to “feelings” that take on monolithic and mythological proportions. There exists an “anxiety to reproduce authenticity while trying to create a sense of home and belonging in adopted homes and kitchens.”³² Therefore, for first generation Filipino migrants, nostalgic longings for the familiar turn into attempts to achieve or fabricate authenticity in their preparation and consumption of Filipino food.

Second Generation

Alienation

Unlike the first generation of Filipino migrants, the second generation consists of those who did not necessarily leave the country, but rather, were born or raised outside of

27 Robert Ji-Song Ku, “MSG Monosodium Glutamate,” in *Dubious Gastronomy: The Cultural Politics of Eating Asian in the USA*, (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2013), 163.

28 Anita Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora,” in *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12.

29 Ketu H. Katrak, “Food and Belonging: At ‘Home’ in ‘Alien-Kitchens,” in *Through the Kitchen Window: Women Writers Explore the Intimate Meanings of Food and Cooking* (Boston: Beacon, 1997), 263-75, quoted in Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia,” 11.

30 Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* (London: Granta, 1991), quoted in Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia,” 12.

31 Kathleen Stewart, “Nostalgia—A Polemic,” in *Rereading Cultural Anthropology* (Durham: Duke UP, 1992), 261, quoted in Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia,” 15.

32 Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia,” 15.

the Philippines. These second-generation Filipinos grew up in a different country, adapted to that country, and acquired the taste for their food. They usually do not speak Filipino, as learning the language is not necessary in their given environment. When asked about their identity, they usually refer to themselves through a duality, for example Filipino-American, Filipino-Australian, Filipino-Canadian, etc. In short, they have a hybridized identity. However, despite this duality one identity is usually preferred over the other, deliberately or not. For second generation Filipinos who grew up outside of the country, a certain disavowal of Filipino-ness occurs. When this group encounters someone or something “authentically Filipino”—like food, they fail to identify with it. A feeling of alienation occurs, as they are expected, in some way, to intrinsically be able to connect with their Filipino “roots.”

A case considered by Martin Manalansan in his essay “Beyond Authenticity: Rerouting the Filipino Culinary Diaspora” regarding the alienation of the second generation Filipino is the Philippine episode of *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations*. Here, the author takes particular notice of the show’s “unusual rendering of a young Filipino American as ‘uneasy’ about being back in his parents’ homeland, his place of ‘origin.’”³³ *No Reservations*, at the time, opened a video competition where fans could submit videos of themselves persuading Anthony Bourdain to feature the food of their respective countries on the show. Filipino-American Augusto gained the attention of the producers with his energetic promotion of the “culinary desirability of the Philippines.”³⁴ Augusto meets with the food host after passing the initial cut. To Bourdain’s disappointment, however, during their meeting, Augusto does not exude the Filipino-ness portrayed in his video submission. The man lacks familiarity and ties with his Filipino roots, as he confesses that he has actually only spent a total of one week in the Philippines. The host expresses even greater disappointment when Augusto admitted to not having seen *Apocalypse Now*, an American movie filmed in the Philippines. This particular *No Reservations* episode evidences this expectation from Augusto to naturally be able to connect or identify with his ethnic origins despite having been born and raised in Long Island, New York.

When the two met in Cebu for the filming of the episode, the city where Augusto’s family resides, Bourdain takes note of the differences in Augusto’s behavior. Gone is the enthusiastic kid in the videotape submission, and instead there is this “decidedly toned down”³⁵ man who seems uncomfortable in his country of origin. The two share a meal of fried crabs, *bulalo* [beef shank soup], and rice at a local eatery in town. It is during this time when we see Augusto absently looking at his food, clearly alienated by the unfamiliarity of the Filipino dishes laid in front of him. His encounter with Filipino food is not that different from Anthony Bourdain’s. Augusto is as much a foreigner to Filipino food as Bourdain is. It is also during this time when the Filipino-

33 Manalansan IV, “Beyond Authenticity,” 296.

34 Ibid., 295.

35 *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations*, “Philippines,” directed by Zero Point Zero Production, aired February 16, 2009 on Travel Channel.

American admits feeling a sense of insecurity growing up because unlike his other Asian friends who have strong ties with their ethnic roots, he felt disconnected from his Filipino origins. Augusto expresses shame for his feelings of alienation.

In his concern for the melancholic Augusto, Anthony Bourdain sets up a grand Filipino feast. Where, *lechon* [whole roasted pig] is served as the main dish. *Lechon*, for the longest time, has been a great source of pride for Filipinos, especially for *Cebuanos* (people from Cebu, Philippines) who consider it their specialty. Perhaps, because of its massive size and “indigenous” cooking method, some Filipinos claim it as the representative dish of the Philippines. Bourdain, taken by the concepts of “authenticity” and “representativeness” entangled with the *lechon*, believes that this is exactly what Augusto needs. Bourdain believes that *lechon* would be the very dish to help him reconnect with his intrinsic Filipino-ness. Confirming the host’s expectations, Augusto enjoys the roasted pig. However, Augusto’s enthusiasm for the food does not necessarily mean that it had triggered a re-awakening in him. It could mean that the lechon was just *that* good to elicit such a response. Or perhaps it is because Augusto has an acquired American taste for meat, which makes it easy for him to enjoy the meal before him.

This episode of *No Reservations* continuously attempts to thrust an authentic Filipino identity onto Augusto through encounters with his “home” food. Its problematic that the in/authenticity of “Filipino” food and the correlated in/authenticity of the Filipino identity raises the traditional hierarchy issues that exist between “home nation” and the diaspora. By contrast, the diaspora is characterized as “the bastard child of the nation—disavowed, inauthentic, illegitimate, an impoverished imitation of the originary culture.”³⁶ Here, the diaspora and the immigrants are framed as imitations of the “real” citizens in the homeland, who must therefore constantly prove their authentic ethnic identities. Manalansan, in his essay, unpacks this hierarchy by dismantling the notion of authenticity in food scholarship. He regards authenticity “as a kind of constructed ‘settledness’ or static adherence to origins, identity, and belonging”³⁷ and inauthenticity “not as a lack of authentic elements (whatever they may be) but as a historically and cultural negotiated state and process of emotional discomfort and affective refusal to adhere to an easy mapping of identity.”³⁸ By using Augusto’s case to show the second generation Filipino immigrant’s uneasy encounters with what is deemed to be “authentic” Filipino food, Manalansan dismantles the static notion of “Filipino-ness.” Instead, he argues that “Augusto’s awkwardness is not due to the failure of food to do its work of authenticating homecoming natives. Rather, this situation speaks to the indeterminacy and instability of diasporic links among body, desire, place, and time.”³⁹

36 Gayatri Gopinath, “‘Bombay, U.K., Yuba City’: Bhangra Music and the Engendering of Diaspora,” *Diaspora* 4.3 (1995): 317, quoted in Mannur, “Culinary Nostalgia,” 23.

37 Manalansan IV, “Beyond Authenticity,” 297.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*, 298.

Creating New Spaces

Unlike Augusto, there are other second generation Filipino/a/x, who explicitly claim a clear connection with their Filipino roots, specifically through food. Famous LA pastry chef Isa Fabro shares in the Philippine episode of the Emmy-winning documentary series *The Migrant Kitchen* how her parents really wanted her to fit into society. This, according to her, is very common for immigrant families: “I actually don’t speak the language. I was told to speak English. But if anything, I’ve always had the food. I always grew up eating that, and that’s always the main connection to my culture.”⁴⁰ This connection, however, cannot be necessarily considered a form of nostalgia, as opposed to the culinary and gastronomic experiences of first generation Filipino migrants. It’s more of an attempt to “connect” to this constructed essence of what it is like to be Filipino. In this episode of the series, several Filipino-American food entrepreneurs in Los Angeles, California are interviewed regarding their journeys in establishing Filipino-fusion restaurants, catering not only to Filipinos, but to the American market as well.

Despite such claims of connection to an ethnic origin, driven by the home nation/diaspora (authentic/inauthentic) hierarchy, there remains a feeling of alienation for the second generation. Food is an interesting starting point in analysing the identity formation of these second-generation Filipinos. According to sociology Professor Oliver Wang, “Food, I think, has always been one avenue for economic survival and success amongst immigrants because other kinds of businesses may succeed and fail but in the end everyone has got to eat at some point.”⁴¹ Food is an intrinsic part of everybody’s lives, which is why there is always the tendency to associate food with identity. For these young Filipino-American entrepreneurs, food not only becomes their avenue for economic survival and success, but also their way of “connecting” to their roots. This desire for “re-connection” stems from the unsettling feeling that comes with their encounters with the unfamiliar Filipino culture. This is also why these chefs are not necessarily concocting “authentic” Filipino dishes but rather Filipino-*fusion* dishes. Isa Fabro, for instance, created a Filipino-inspired dessert called *malas*— “a hybrid Filipino donut crossed between a *malasada*, which is a Hawaiian donut, and *carioca*, which is a Filipino fritter, and it is coated in *latik*, which is caramelized coconut milk.”⁴²

Creating spaces has become a main priority for these displaced Filipinos. The lack of a distinctive place and the desire to of belong prompt them to create spaces of their own. In this process of creation, we must take particular note of how these people try to remain ambivalent towards both the “host” and “home.” The

40 *The Migrant Kitchen*, “Episode 2: Barkada,” produced by KCET Online, published in September 27, 2016 on YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=scoqj9FvoFg&list=LL3kAWJGP4tP_koUlibNcBQQ&index=2.

41 *The Migrant Kitchen*

42 *Ibid.* *The Migrant Kitchen*

second generation is literally a “hybrid”—a fusion of two different cultures. Chase Valencia, co-owner of Lasa restaurant located in LA’s Chinatown, claims that they use the produce available in Los Angeles and then integrate this into the food and flavor profiles of their “memories from childhood growing up eating Filipino food.”⁴³ The ambivalent culinary creation process enables these fusion dishes to serve as literal embodiments of the mixing of different traditions and tastes of the second generation.

In comparison to people of the first generation, like Ate Vee, who serves up “authentic” Filipino dishes for a majorly Filipino market abroad, the second generation and their Filipino-fusion dishes cater to a more global market. Their hybrid dishes are created not to induce nostalgia from diners, but rather to introduce new tastes to them. What these Filipino-American chefs are trying to do is bring the “Filipino” taste onto the global stage.

Children of Multicultural Families

This episode of *The Migrant Kitchen* specifically illustrates the culinary and gastronomic experiences of the children of two ethnically Filipino migrant parents, who, despite growing up in the United States, are somehow still able to identify with their Filipino roots through food served by their parents. This television series perfectly encapsulates the way second generation Filipino immigrants negotiate their place within the home and diaspora hierarchy. These Filipino chefs, through their culinary creations, try to assert their “Filipino-ness” while incorporating the hybridity of their dual identities by creating fusion dishes instead of purely authentic Filipino food.

Hanna Norimatsu’s short story entitled “Pininyahang Tonkatsu Dinner Rituals” published in *Moving Portraits: Life Stories of Children of Migrant and Multicultural Families in Asia* epitomizes multicultural children’s ambivalent relationship with food. Norimatsu is of Filipino-Japanese heritage, as her mother is Filipino and her father Japanese. Like most other children of multicultural families, she possesses two identities partly due to the fusion of cultures imposed by her ethnically different parents. These children are thus subject to a much more complex process of identity formation.

In her short story, she shares that having parents—one who is Filipino and another who is Japanese, meant that they always had more than one kind of dish prepared for every meal. The people of their house “learned to jump between [her] father’s Japanese cuisine and [her] mother’s Filipino creations over the decades.”⁴⁴ Dinners are particularly tricky, according to her, as she, along with her siblings and

43 *The Migrant Kitchen*

44 Hanna Norimatsu, “Hanna: Pininyahang Tonkatsu Dinner Rituals,” in *Moving Portraits: Life Stories of Children of Migrant and Multicultural Families in Asia*, eds. Maruja M.B. Asis and Karen Anne S. Liao, (Manila: Scalabrini Migration Center, 2017), 46.

her father, ask for “special orders” from her mother. Her brother, who takes after their father’s Japanese taste, would often ask for *tonkatsu* [fried pork coated in breadcrumbs]. As for Hanna, she particularly enjoys *pininyahang manok* [Filipino dish of chicken with pineapple sauce]. With these variations in requests, she describes the usual dinner preparation in their house as a situation where “mother will try her best to cook the food that she thinks will best satiate us all.”⁴⁵

However, it is problematic when Norimatsu contemplates her grandmother’s claim that they [the children] have “sworn allegiance to different generals though we’ve taken a liking to our enemy camps’ cuisines.”⁴⁶ Here, she tries to make sense of her plural identity—one as a Filipino and one as a Japanese. Similarly, both second generation Filipinos (children of two ethnically Filipino parents) and the children of multicultural families undergo a kind of displacement, which forces them to try and choose one particular identity over the other through food preference. Norimatsu points out in her work, that this disavowal of one identity is not simple, and not possible. By growing up in an environment where two distinct cultures are being practiced, Norimatsu argues that she, along with other children of multicultural families, must not be forced to choose one identity over the other. Rather, they should be able to create a certain hybrid identity, or a hybrid space within the practice of eating and cooking food. In her case, as both Filipino and Japanese, she states: “Why should we only be likened to one? Aren’t we the products of both? At the same time, are we not our own? The food laid out on the table is to be enjoyed, and thanked for regardless of where they originated, I say. The table isn’t a battlefield; children shouldn’t be forced to choose.”⁴⁷ This evidences the absence of nostalgia in the second generation’s encounters with Filipino food. Instead of identifying with just one “authentic” national cuisine, they create food of their own by fusing together the culinary/gastronomic cultures they have acquired and grew up with. For Norimatsu, this is embodied by her mother’s *pininyahang tonkatsu*—the fusion of the Filipino *pininyahang manok* and the Japanese *tonkatsu*.

Conclusion

Food is an intrinsic part of our lives part of our daily routine. Thus, it is often overlooked as a possible starting point for discussions regarding identity formation within the context of migration. Ubiquitous as it is, it asks us to re-examine the Filipino identity. Is being Filipino an intrinsic aspect—something we’re born with? Or is it a process of “becoming”—the same way our palate acquires new tastes? What we decide to cook or eat ultimately invites us to look into the mechanism behind our choices.

This paper demonstrates the contrasting encounters of first generation and second-generation Filipino immigrants with “authentic” Filipino food. For the first

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 50.

47 Norimatsu, “Hanna: Pininyahang Tonkatsu Dinner Rituals,”

generation, there exists a nostalgia, as these Filipino immigrants grapple with the unfamiliarity of their new homes in their respective host countries, they attempt to maintain their connections to the “conceptual homeland” with fragmented memories of their national cuisine. This phenomenon equates to nostalgic longings for the past, embedded in the Filipino food they create and consume. With the presence of nostalgia in the first generation’s culinary and gastronomic encounters with food, their criterion for the authenticity of Filipino food is its essential identification with home—the Philippines.

On the other hand, for both categories of the second generation there lies the absence of nostalgia in their encounters with Filipino food. While the first category—the children of two ethnically Filipino parents might feel the urge to “re-connect” with their ethnic Filipino roots, it is important to note that they do not necessarily try to associate themselves with just one type of national identity or national cuisine. Through their creation and consumption of Filipino-x *fusion* dishes, they negotiate their position within the home nation/diaspora hierarchy. These second generation Filipino migrant chefs thus incorporate the hybridity of their dual identities by creating fusion dishes instead of purely authentic Filipino food. The difference between the two categories of the second generation is that for the second category—the children of multicultural families, the desire to assert their “Filipino-ness” does not exist. Being the product of biological and cultural diversity, they inherently disavow the need to associate themselves with just one national identity or just one national cuisine. Synonymous to the first category of the second generation, they create and consume fusion dishes like *pininyahang tonkatsu* which embodies their hybridity—the “fusion, diffusion, or confusion”⁴⁸ of their dual identities. In conclusion, the criteria for the authenticity of Filipino food differ among generations of the Filipino diaspora. For the first generation, as long as the food served before them reminded them of the “conceptual homeland,” they would consider it authentic. For the second generation, the concept of authenticity may remain contestable. As they associate themselves with more than one national identity, their perceptions of a distinct and authentic Filipino cuisine constantly and continuously changes.

Is there really such a thing as “authentic” Filipino food? Although food and identity will always be tied to each other, we must acknowledge the fact that culinary and gastronomic experiences are continuously evolving. Therefore, what are nostalgia and in/authenticity but ideational romantic notions that assist us in going through the complex process of becoming Filipino in the age of globalization.