

CULTURE, HISTORY, PLACES: **A SOCIO-HISTORICAL STUDY OF FOOD CONSUMPTION IN URBAN MALAYSIA**

Presented by:

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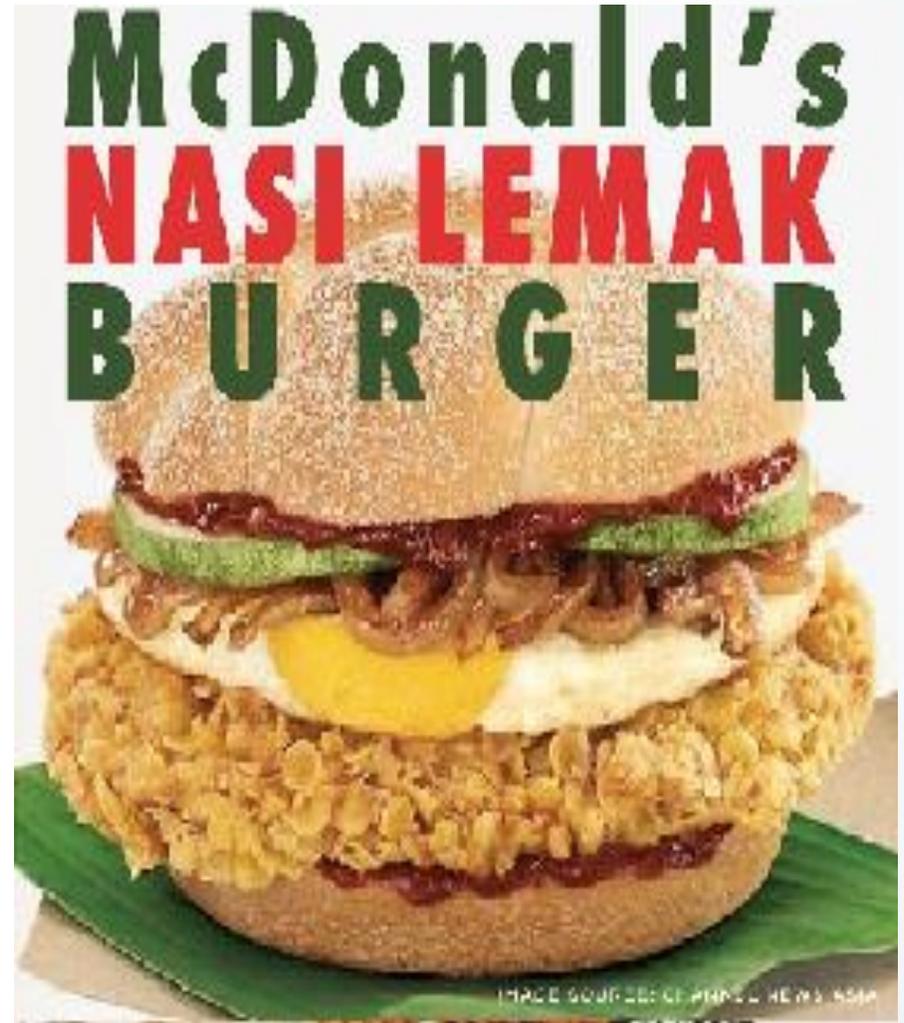
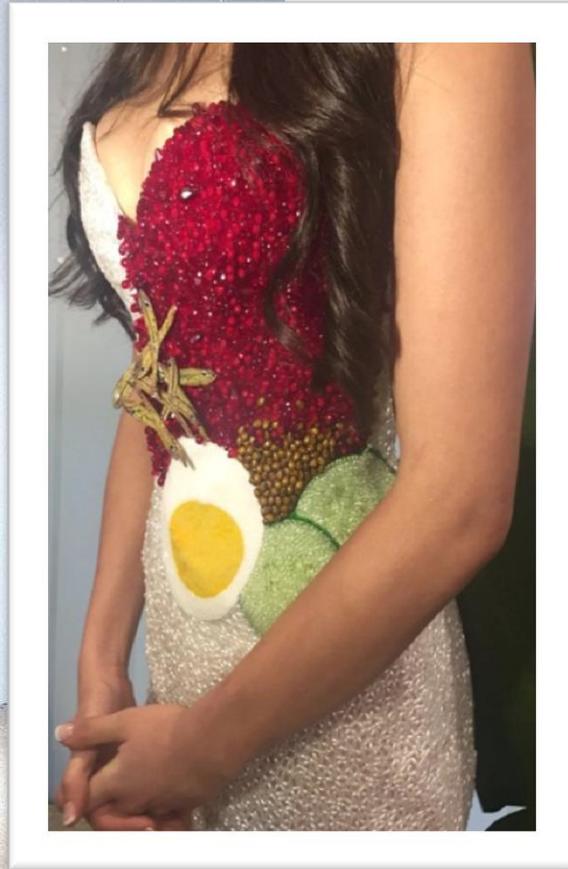
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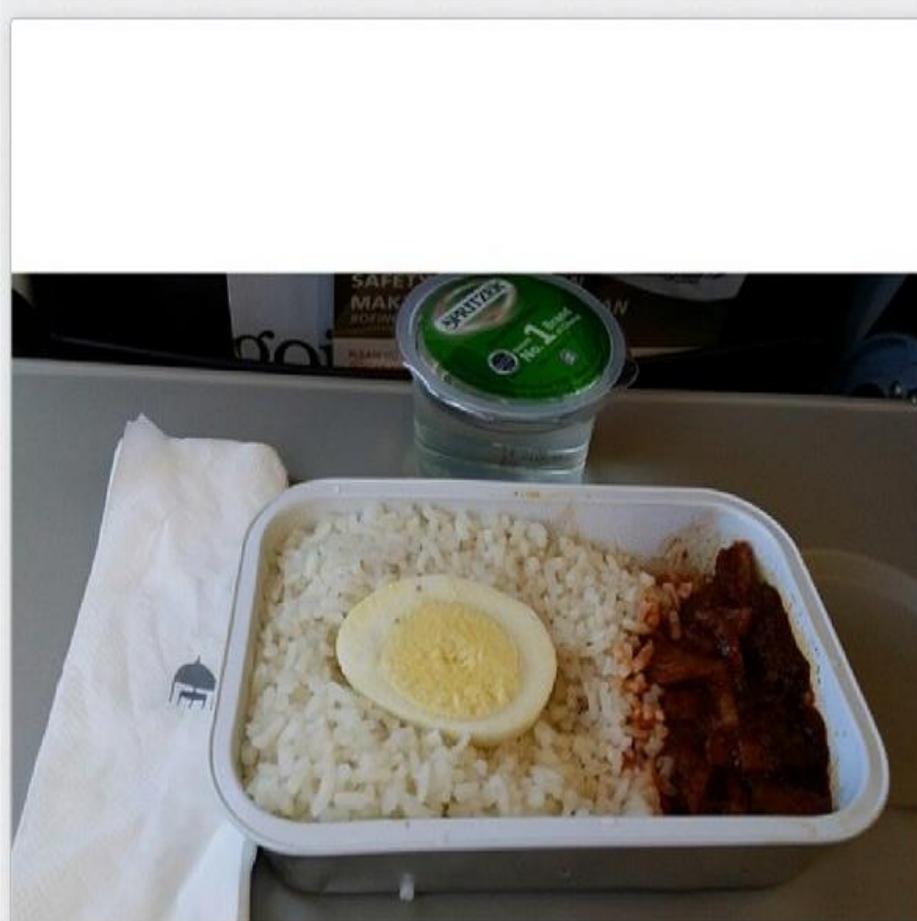


FOOD IN MALAYSIA : 'NASI LEMAK' STORIES 1



Miss Malaysia Universe 2017 and the *Nasi Lemak* dress

FOOD IN MALAYSIA : NASI LEMAK STORIES 2



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2 weeks ago

I flew on economy to Bangkok thinking its such a short trip and so early pulak tu pasti i will close my eye and have a short nap tak payah lah membazir duit naik business class. This Sad looking Nasi Lemak from Mas for sarapan sungguh memeranjat kan..The fact that its our national career and we dont take pride in providing our so call most famous Malaysian

Nasi Lemak kami LENGKAP!
Sejuklah di udara kalau telanjang!

Nasi Lemak Pak Nasser kami lengkap dengan sambal cili istimewa, rendang ayam, ikan bilis goreng, kacang goreng dan telur rebus.

A **RM12**

Kombo A
Nasi Lemak Pak Nasser
+ Kopi/Teh Tarik TBCO

Kombo B
Roti Canai + Kari Ayam
+ Kopi/Teh Tarik TBCO

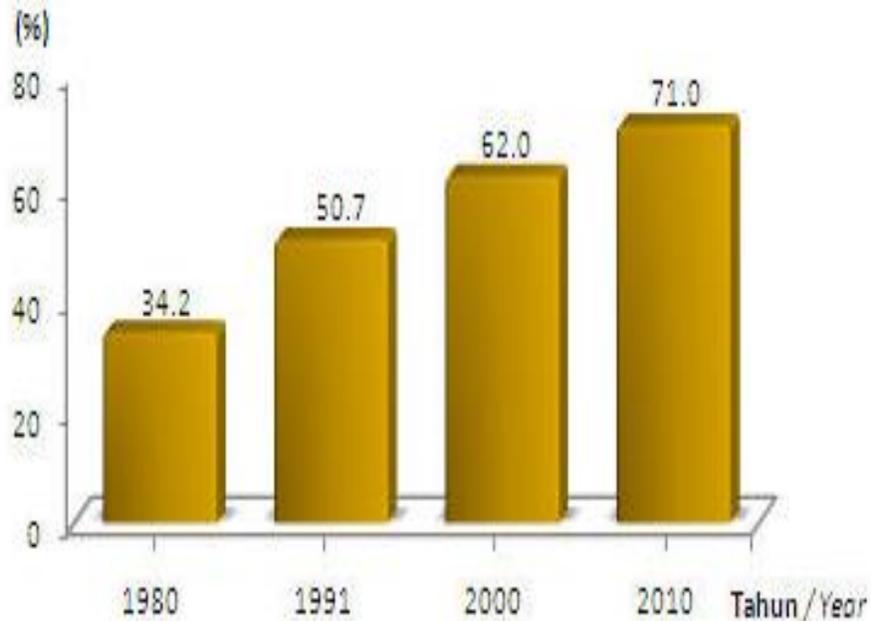
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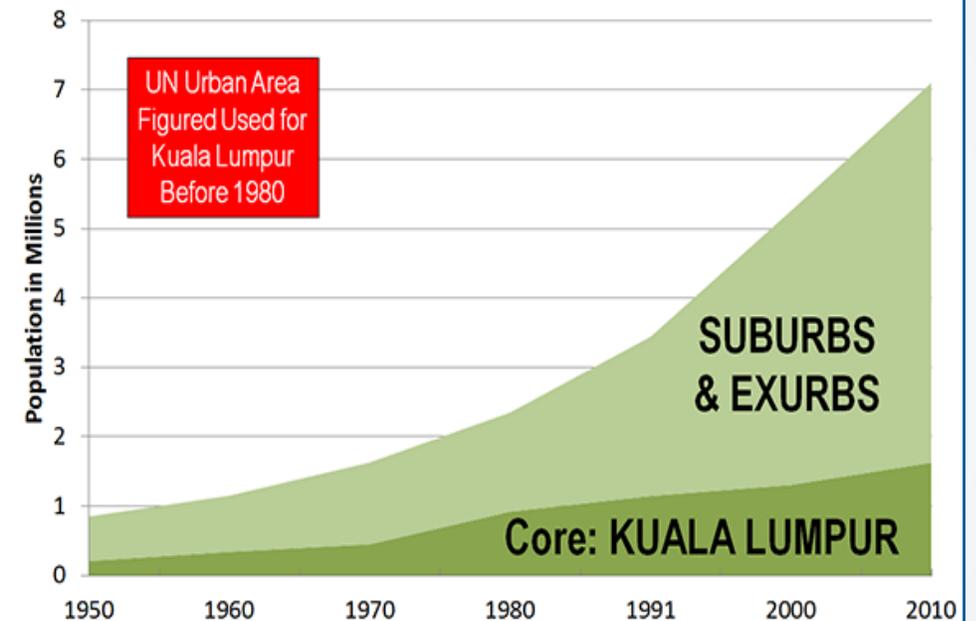
MALAYSIA : RAPID URBANIZATION SINCE 1980

Carta 5: Paras urbanisasi, Malaysia, 1980, 1991, 2000 dan 2010
Chart 5: Level of urbanisation, Malaysia, 1980, 1991, 2000 and 2010



Source: Department of Statistics, Government of Malaysia

Core & Suburban Population: 1980-2010
KUALA LUMPUR REGION



www.newgeography.com

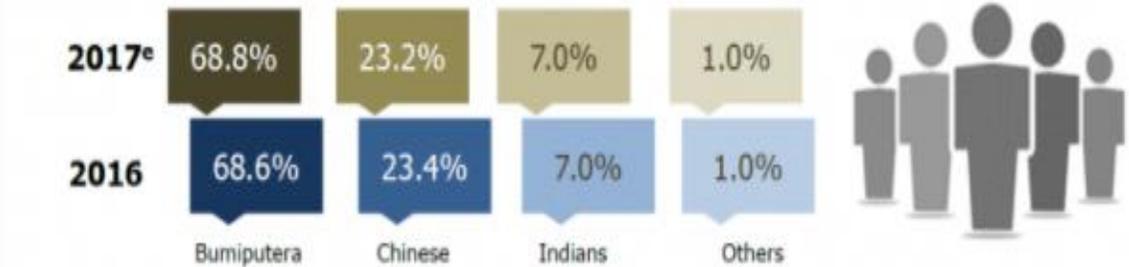
Malaysia is the second most highly urbanized nation in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) after Singapore

Kuala Lumpur, its capital and largest city, is projected to contribute almost one third to the country's population by 2030 (The Star, 2016).

MALAYSIA : A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY WITH RICH ASIAN TRADITIONS

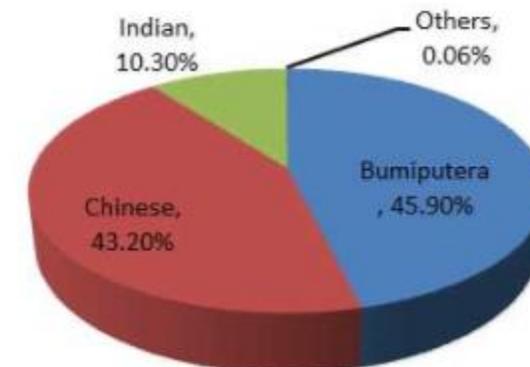


Malaysian citizen by major ethnic group



DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS, MALAYSIA

Kuala Lumpur



Recent research suggests that the shift toward urban living is changing people's relationships with food

What are the meanings of food, and food consumption patterns of urban residents from diverse cultural groups, tracing the dynamics of socio-historic experiences?

How is food consumption constituted and sustained by the varying institutional and social structures?

To what extent culture, history and place varyingly influence food consumption amongst the urban residents?



Approach and methodology

Informed by previous studies on eating in Malaysia



- 3 Malays
- 2 Chinese
- 1 Indian
- 1 Ceylonese (Others)

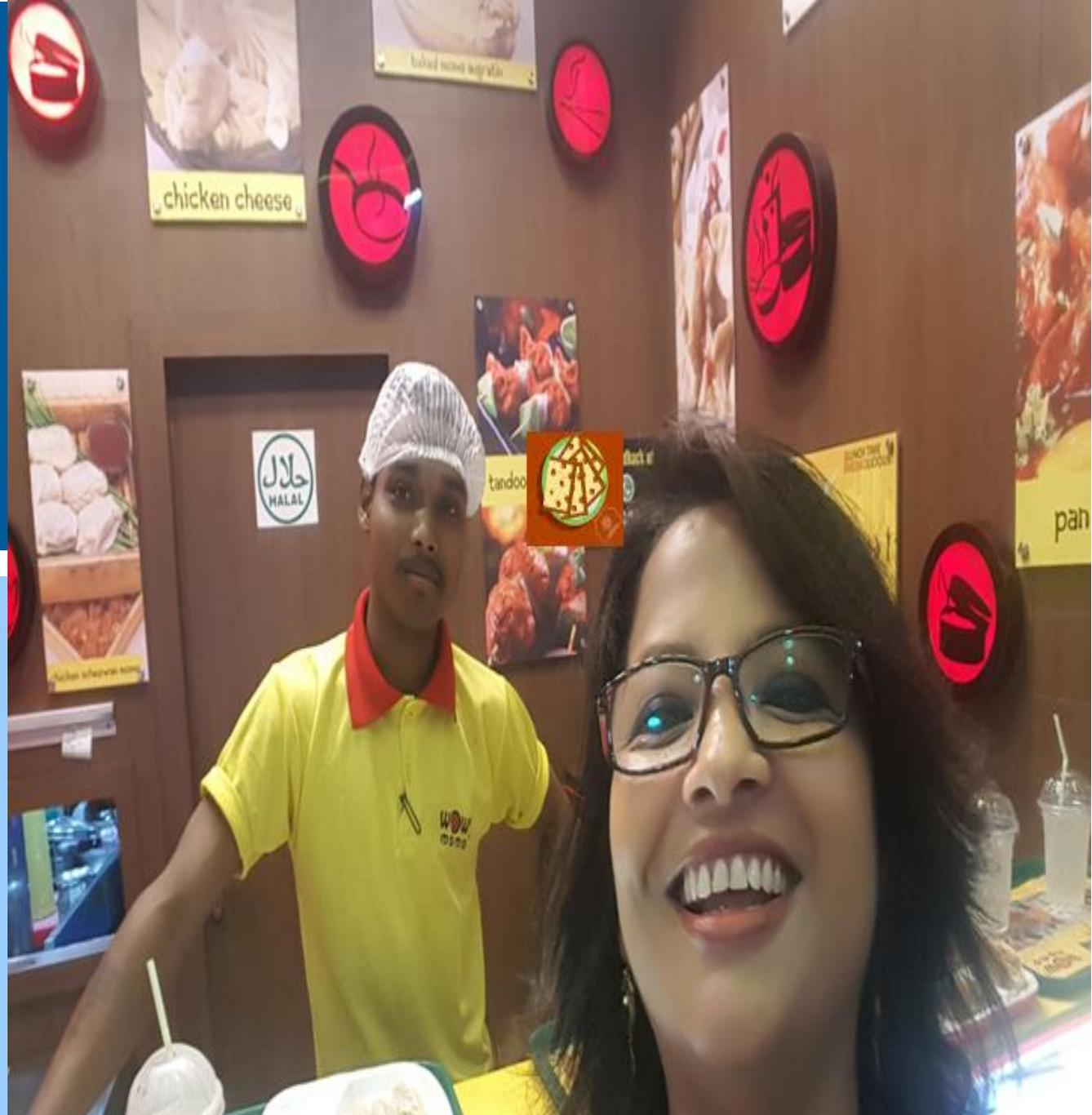
- 3 Malays
- 2 Chinese
- 1 Indian
- 1 Eurasian (Others)

3 Expatriates

Visits to restaurants, food courts

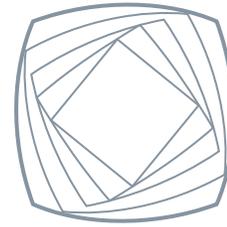
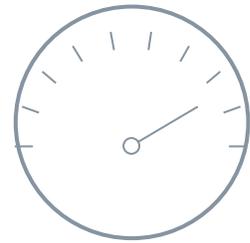
Visit to places of worship

Food blogs
Online recipes



Food Consumption : Meanings and Narratives

Emergent themes from qualitative study



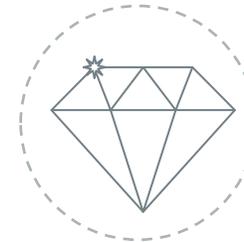
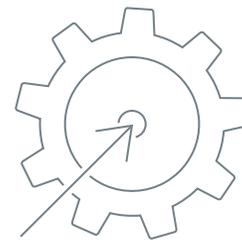
LONGING FOR HOME FOOD
Places of origin & ethno-tradition

THE IDEA OF THE 'AUTHENTIC'

**FOOD TRANSITION
& CATEGORIZATION**

AUTHENTIC FOOD SPACES

FRAGMENTATION
Intra-ethnic diversity
Inter-ethnic diversity



FOOD & POVERTY

COMMENSALITY

LONGING FOR HOME FOOD

Places of origin & ethno-tradition

RURAL

URBAN



LOCALIZED IDENTITY; PLACES OF ORIGIN; ETHNO-TRADITION

“I did not like eating Perak-style Malay food, but she did not know how to cook *assam-pedas*. My favorite dish was *assam-pedas ikan pari* (sour-spicy grilled Stingray) as always. Finally I sent her to my mother’s house to learn how to cook Melaka-style”.

“Eating for me became a balancing act between who I was at home, and who I was expected to be outside as a Malaysian”.

The idea of the ‘ Authentic’

Food as an ‘emotional book-mark’ of time and history

- authentic to ‘our past experiences”
- “the beginning of a food journey”
- “...shaped by what my grandmother’s interpretation of good food was”

- “It’s a tradition that I and my daughter eat *puttu* (steamed rice cake) in the way my grandmother used to make it. Quashed by hand, black sugar, *puttu* and banana. I keep telling my daughter that this is the Ceylonese way. But honestly, I don’t think it was the Ceylonese way, as I told you that my grandmother used to mix recipes up. But I was using food as an identity to capture my culture in an environment where it was hard to capture it anymore”



Food Transition and Categorization

The start of 'eating out'

"It was enjoyable. I liked to eat food of other races not because of the taste of the food itself, but because of the *experience*.

Chinese food meant going out- it was an event in our lives. Chinese food came with celebrations.

A holiday would be, say going to Penang, and eating Chinese food at the Hawkers Center.

My mother believed that eating Indian food at restaurants was a waste of money because that could be cooked anytime at home"

Eating in the city:

1. Staple, or 'everyday' food that one's mother would provide
2. Multicultural food that one's father would provide on special occasions
3. Western food that one would provide for oneself

New, hybrid space

multicultural foodscape was entering into the domestic space

Readymade preparation and ease of cooking methods

The cultural significance of fragmentation: Intra-diversity of cuisine (loss of intra-diversity) vs. inter diversity of cuisine (gain of inter-diversity) 1.

“Urbanization gives you a variety but it also it takes you away from your past”

Urbanization either denied the Malaysians this opportunity to go on an exciting journey of discovery of the richness of the food of the past, or did not bring them any closer to the food diversity of the past. Instead it introduced them to ‘new’ cuisines of different cultures,

Food as medicine, grown within its own ecosystem- example, banana tree, *rasam*

The interviews and group discussions revealed that a considerable amount of traditional food ingredients, cooking method, utensils, and knowledge have been lost in a single generational move to the city

	Generation 1 (Rural Malaysia)	Generation 2 (Malaysian cities)	Reasons for difference
Ingredients	“Curry and <i>pandan</i> (<i>screwpine</i>) leaves, coconut (coconut milk was used for curries), lemongrass, and many types of vegetables were easily available in our backyard”	Replaced by easy-to-find alternatives “We use regular or powder milk instead of coconut milk in our curries” Leave out some essential items from traditional dishes. “Especially garnishes like curry, coriander leaves, lemongrass and <i>pandan</i> may often be left out of our everyday cooking”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not easily available in the backyard or terrace gardens 2. Grocery shopping is done once a week 3. Replace coconut milk with alternatives due to health concerns 4. One adapts one’s taste and expectations 5. Lack of time 6. Reliance on foreign maids “We eat whatever they can cook”
	Use of different types of oil to cook different items- gingelly oil for <i>appam</i> and <i>thosai</i> , coconut oil for garnishing and cooking	Use of normal vegetable, soya or sunflower oil available in the market. Many brands are now available in the market.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Coconut oil has become expensive 2. Indian stores are few and far between, and often stock runs out 3. Not sure if the oils our parents used are healthy (due to bombardment of health related alerts on social media)
	Indian red shallots were used extensively in Malay <i>sambal</i> , Indian curries and <i>chutneys</i> for its unique sharp taste	French onions, regular onions have replaced shallots	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Erosion of traditional ways of cooking 2. Time consuming and labor intensive task

	Various types of spice-pastes were made by hand using grindstones	Powdered spices from the supermarket	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Easily available off the shelf 2. Pre-packed specialized spices are available for different types of curries (fish, chicken, meat) 3. No access to old fashioned grindstones 4. No time to make elaborate pastes which have short shelf life 5. Modern kitchens are not built to support use of grindstones 6. Heavy, difficult to lift or carry
Cooking methods and utensils	Use of clay-pots for cooking	Use of modern cooking ware, but the ‘ taste and flavor’ are lost	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Move toward modern lifestyle 2. Earthen pots break easily 3. Various types of modern pots and pans available (slow-cooker, crock-pot etc.)
	Use of mortal-pestle to produce spice-based wet pastes for gravies	Occasional use of miniature versions	Widespread use of dry, powdered spices from supermarkets
	Rice was cooked in pots, and starch thrown away unconsumed(sometimes used to starch cotton clothes) : <i>puttu</i> was steamed inside bamboo poles	Rice is cooked in rice-cookers with starch consumed; <i>puttu</i> cooked in aluminum ‘chimneys’	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Easy to cook(rice) 2. Difficult to find bamboo poles (<i>puttu</i>) 3. Easy to find metal <i>puttu</i> makers in supermarkets
	Fresh wheat grains would be taken to flour mills to be ground to become <i>Atta</i> flour in natural form	Pre-packed branded <i>Atta</i> flour is bought at supermarkets	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Very few flour mills still exist 2. Mills have been commercialized the sale of <i>atta</i> flour

	Cooking was done by charcoal fire in earthen stoves	Cooking done in gas or electric stove	1. Modern lifestyle
Know-how	This generation used to cook a large variety of traditional food that was nutritious, tied to the environment and self-produced	'As of today, I think none of my sisters or wife can even reproduce 20% of what my grandmother used to cook'	2. Distance from production process 3. Urban lifestyle 4. Changing notion of time and its uses 5. Changing position of women 6. Dependence on foreign domestic help 7. Eating out
Ways of eating	Joint families eating together Food was prepared before noon and usually left covered on the dining table all day to be eaten anytime	Nuclear families often eating in front of television or multi-tasking Instant noodles, frozen or semi-cooked packaged food Cooked food preserved in refrigerators to last a few days	1. Prevalence of nuclear families in cities 2. Pressures of modern life 3. Double income families
	Indians and Malays ate by hand; Chinese used chopsticks	Widespread use of western style cutlery; all races are generally familiar with use of chopsticks and deep Chinese spoons, though Indians and Malays may still eat using fingers;	1. Modern lifestyle; consumption of inter-cultural food 2. All restaurant have a place to wash hands after consuming food 3. "Too lazy to wash fingers after eating"

Inter-ethnic diversity 'common denominator' dishes?

“I know we are selling the storyline of “Malaysia truly Asia” but we are only offering a few popular dishes of Indian, Chinese and Malay culture. How many *Kadazan*, *Iban* or Eurasian dishes do you know of? So we are never truly trying to be authentically diverse and we don't truly celebrate diversity. Actually we had more diversity in the past-nobody can deny that”.



Food and Poverty

“... because you have this artificial desire for things you cannot afford. So the equation is not just supply and demand, but an additional keyword, *desire*, that is sold to us by the food companies. So poverty and food are instigated or made worse by advertisement. Otherwise we wouldn't be poor”.

“The truth is that you are in a different economic cycle that, is limited by resources and fixed prices”

“My grandmother had evolved into her own environment, she knew how to make use of that environment to provide for our family”

“ Marketing has put food outside of its context”

“Unless one is able to mediate this desire, affluent income will not address the sense of artificial poverty”



'Authentic' Food Spaces: Fluid, hybrid

1. Domestic space
2. First generation diasporic space
3. New gourmet ethnic space
4. The religious space



Offerings to the Gods in Indian temples in Kuala Lumpur consisted of both Indian and non-Indian dishes:

Time of the day	Food offerings served to the Gods that are shared with the devotees after the conclusion of prayers	Suppliers/Cooks
Night meals (non-Indian)	Mee hun (Chinese)	Produced in-house by temple cooks
	Mee Goreng (Indian Mamak) , Nasi lemak (Malay), Hokkien Mee (Chinese)	Catered from outside of temples as cooks from India are not familiar with non-Indian cuisine popular in Malaysia
	Kuih Seri Muka , Jelly, Curry puffs (Malay)	
Night meals (Indian)	Idli, daal, sweet rice, uppuma/ rava, sambar-satham, vegetarian fried rice	Produced in-house by temple cooks
	Thosai, Puri, String-hoppers, chapatti	Expensive and time consuming, therefore are catered from outside
Mid-day meals (Indian)	Rice, daal , vegetables like long beans, pumpkin, tapioca, cabbage etc.	Produced in-house by temple cooks
Morning meals (Indian & Chinese)	Rava/Uppuma or mee hun	Produced in-house by temple cooks

Spaces of Commensality

HALAL

1. Old fashioned Indian Muslim 'Mamak' restaurants
2. New and locally branded 'Malaysian' restaurants like Papparich, Old Town White Coffee
3. Western food chains like KFC and McDonald serving halal food
4. Chinese 'halal' seafood restaurants
5. No pork & 'no pork-no beef'



In conclusion

Rediscover past food traditions, Halal, Multiethnic innovations and accommodations, nutritious food for all budgets, vegetarian alternatives, fresh food delivery, address the current distances

- In Malaysia's emergent urbanscape, each ethnic foodway has 'converged' to produce a distinctive supra-ethnic cuisine- 'Malaysian'- commonly located in 'halal' spaces
- Poststructuralist theory helps to understand the relationship between the urban residents and their historical social contexts

Moving forward:

- Rediscover the food traditions, recipes and ingredients of the past that have scientifically proven nutritious value
- Create awareness about foods of the past, facilitated by use of Apps, online shopping and other new technologies to address the distance between the consumer and the production process.
- Provide easily available nutritious food for all budgets; nutritious food need not be expensive
- Study the complexities and differences between 'home food' (every day, special occasions, working mothers, foreign maids etc.) and 'outside food' (social, religious, office, tourism etc.)
- Studies of foodscape within different religious spaces
- Multidisciplinary approach in the study of future of food