

**Curtin University of Technology**

**Michelle Burns**

**Love Cake: Authenticity and the Boundaries of ‘Eurasian’ in the Hybrid Kitchen.**

**Introduction**

This paper draws on my doctoral thesis research, which focuses on the lived experience of people in Australia who self-identify as ‘Eurasian’. Within this contested, ambiguous and shifting term, I focus specifically on the Burghers of Sri Lanka and the Eurasians of Malaysia and Singapore. Both groups constitute the ‘mixed’ descendants of the European colonial encounter in South and South East Asia where the European colonists intermarried with the local populations in these locales. These often merging post-colonial identities share a common history of successive waves of Portuguese, Dutch and British intrusions, and this has resulted in considerable cultural cross-over between the two groups. For this reason, I include them both under the broad category of ‘Eurasian’. I situate my research within the domestic space of the home, where identities are created and negotiated, to determine how Eurasianness is understood and experienced by people of ‘mixed’ heritage. My findings revealed that self-identification and representation of Eurasianness is contingent on the situational and political context within which my participants live and their country of origin. It is these factors that shape how they understand and articulate being Eurasian in everyday life. While some of my participants have a broad conception of Eurasian and readily interchange the terms Burgher and Eurasian, others reject using the term Eurasian as a broad umbrella term and instead construct boundaries around what they see as separate and distinct ethnic groups who are of mixed European and Asian origin.

**Background**

In this paper I look at how discussions of food provide a platform for the discussion of cultural identity. My findings are the result of my in-depth, semi-structured interviews with women of various ages in Perth, Western Australia who identify broadly as being Eurasian or as having ‘mixed’ European and Asian ancestry. Throughout my research I use concepts such as hybridity to explore ethnic or cultural identity constructions in everyday life. The study of food-ways has become an important path to understanding

human life and Rick Dolphijn's text *Foodscapes* (2004) reveals a concern with 'how we live our lives with food, according to food, and through food' (p. 8). He argues that food and everyday events are so entwined that the study of foodways and foodscapes can teach us much about life and how we live our lives (Dolphijn 2004, p. 9). The significance of culinary practices and their link with cultural identity can give us important insight in to how humans see themselves, express themselves and understand the world around them - and also how they form ethnocultural groups and draw distinctions between themselves and others. Through my fieldwork I have found that talking about food and culinary practices has revealed some of the most interesting beliefs and thoughts about identity and ethnicity amongst my interview participants. In particular, it was whilst I was talking to one of my participants that I first started to think about cultural boundaries and the notion of authenticity.

### **Cultural Boundaries and Authenticity**

It was while we were talking about food with one of my interview participants that she expressed her definition of 'Eurasian'. She used cakes to draw boundaries between who could identify as Eurasian and who should not. She told me that the 'real' Eurasians were those who were the Portuguese descendants in Malacca, Malaysia and they made the *Sugee* Cake. 'You shouldn't really be calling yourself Eurasian', she told me. 'Your family were the Burghers. You make the Love Cake. The Love Cake is Burgher, the *Sugee* Cake is Eurasian'. This was not the last time that I would hear this drawing of boundaries from my participants. The cultural boundaries between Eurasians and Burghers and within each category were defined and described to me repeatedly during my fieldwork. However, I found her statement interesting as it involved food and was therefore an indirect way for her to talk to me about ethnic identity. I believe she had wanted to tell me that I should not be identifying as Eurasian from the start of our interview, but it was through the discussion of food – a 'safe' topic – that she felt she could express this to me.

Food is used in identity processes because it can act as a boundary marker, and claims of 'authentic' ethnic cuisines are made to distinguish one group from another. Therefore this paper is not about a cake, rather it is about the thinking and the ideas surrounding a cake and how these ideas, often framed within debates surrounding authenticity, can tell us much about the construction of 'Eurasian' identities, and how

Eurasians create boundaries within and around these identities. Despite its variations, the perceived authenticity of the Love Cake's recipe is part of the identity-formation and boundary-making processes that are used to distinguish between those of Burgher background and those of Eurasian heritage. In short, those who make and consume the Love Cake are defined against those that make and consume *Sugee* Cake regardless of whether there is any actual cross-over of these cakes between the two groups. I draw on the voices of my participants, as well as my family's experience throughout this paper to illustrate the complexities of self-identification when notions of hybridity and authenticity are involved and I use the cakes as objects of cultural comparison.

### **'Eurasian'**

I will begin with a definition of 'Eurasian'. As a term it is hard to define and its ambiguity leads to a variety of meanings for different people in different contexts (Choo *et al* 1995, p. 71). Eurasians have varied backgrounds, experiences, and histories and there is no singular identity. One common factor identified by Caplan (1995) is that a Eurasian identity marks a historical meeting of separate streams along the line of a perceived East/West divide (p. 745). All of my participants have broadly defined 'Eurasian' as being of mixed European and Asian ancestry. However within this popular definition, internal distinctions are made between the Burghers of Sri Lanka and the Eurasians of Malaysia and Singapore, with further distinction being made amongst Malaysian Eurasians based on specific geographic location. Within the broader category of 'Eurasian', my thesis research initially focused on the Burghers as they constitute my family on my mother's side. However, I came to realise that the register of who identifies as Eurasian and who as Burgher, is very fluid and subject to the complexities of identity-formation. For example, many of my interview participants are similar to my family in that they are of Burgher ancestry but were born in Malaysia and grew up calling themselves Eurasian. Some other Burghers – those who had migrated to Australia from Sri Lanka - objected to being called Eurasian as the term was perceived to have had a negative history in Sri Lanka. Despite this, they still used the same definition of 'mixed European and Asian descent' to describe themselves. Some of my Eurasian and Burgher participants have enquired about the inclusion of Burghers in my study of Eurasianness, and others have expressed a belief that the only 'true' Eurasian community left in the world are

the Malaccan Eurasians and those falling outside this group should not be using the term.

Throughout my fieldwork it has become evident that the term Eurasian can convey fluid understandings or rigid demarcations, and at times it is rejected altogether as an irrelevant label. This was particularly the case for those Burghers who migrated to Perth directly from Sri Lanka and therefore have experienced less ambiguity when it comes to self-identification (Harrison 1999, p. 11). Adding further to these complexities and contestations, all my participants described either themselves or their ancestry in terms of hybridity, with many simultaneously asserting that they are part of a single bounded ethnic identity. Arguably, the only common thread that holds my participants together is that they are people whose heritage is the legacy of the European colonial expansion throughout South and South East Asia (De Witt 2006).

A simple definition constitutes the Eurasians of Malaysia and Singapore as the descendants of the Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial rulers who intermarried with the various existing ethnic groups of the Malay Archipelago (De Witt 2006). Within Malaysia, the Eurasians of the state of Malacca and more specifically Malacca Town, constitute a separate and distinct ethnic group that can trace its roots back to the Portuguese colonial encounter in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Malaccan Eurasians now have *bumiputera* status in Malaysia. This literally translates to ‘son of the soil’ meaning that they are recognised to be an indigenous ethnic group. Similarly, the people known as the Burghers are also a legacy of Empire resulting from over 400 years of European rule in colonial Ceylon (present day Sri Lanka). They are the descendants of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British colonial rulers who initially intermarried with the local Sinhalese and Tamil populations of Sri Lanka (De Witt 2006). Both the Eurasians and the Burghers see themselves as distinct groups, however they share many cultural cross-overs, particularly when it comes to food: both have culinary traditions with roots in Portuguese and Dutch cuisine. The Burghers took the Sri Lankan Love Cake across the Andaman Sea in the 19<sup>th</sup> century at the beginning of the Burgher migration to British Malaya (present day Malaysia) where a large labour force was needed to aid in the extension of Empire. The Burghers were well suited and easily absorbed into the colonial structure in Malaya as they were English speaking British citizens with backgrounds in administration and

Christians (De Witt 2006). Many Burghers and their culinary traditions were absorbed into the existing Eurasian communities in Malaysia, and this was my family's story. My great grandparents migrated to Malaysia in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, arguably for socio-economic reasons. My great grandfather anglicised the family name, removing a letter and thereby transforming it from being of recognisably Dutch origin to become a common British surname. Both my grandparents were then born in Malaysia and grew up identifying as Eurasian. This was also where my grandmother was taught to make the Love Cake by her Sri Lankan-born mother.

### **The Love Cake**

The Love Cake, in its current form, originated in colonial Ceylon but takes its influences from around the globe. Like the concept of 'Eurasian', the recipe is a product of the vibrant cultural exchanges that occurred at the intersection of East and West. Although no one knows its exact origin (some say Dutch, most say Portuguese) similar cake recipes can be found in both European and Asian culinary traditions. The cake incorporates a mix of ingredients from other Portuguese cakes such as semolina, with local Sri Lankan spices such as nutmeg, cinnamon and cardamom. Added to this is the Arabic influence of rosewater that is found in many cakes from Portugal and Spain dating from the Moorish occupation of the Iberian Peninsula. It is highly likely that the Love Cake and the similar Eurasian *Sugee* Cake are closely related (the former uses cashew nuts and the later uses almonds), one being adapted from the other, using more readily available ingredients depending on location. For example the Love Cake uses the cashew nut, a crop that is specific to the tropics, is easily grown and therefore widely available in Sri Lanka.

Recipes are repeatedly drawn into cultural debates surrounding authenticity and identity, according to Floyd and Forster (2003, p. 1). It is through arguments over the authenticity of a cultural group's food, that clear lines of demarcation are drawn and boundaries are constructed on the premise of an essential authenticity. One of my participants recounted to me how she grew up in Malaysian kitchens surrounded by fights over the authenticity of curry recipes. Curries were designated as being authentically Burgher or authentically Eurasian and arguments would erupt if either crossed the boundary. Despite the reality that all recipes are and always have been fusions of other recipes, ideas of authentic and bounded cuisines still prevail, along

with seemingly contradictory acknowledgement of the hybrid nature of Eurasian cuisine (Kraal 2003). Similarly, despite acknowledging the cultural fusion of both the Love Cake and *Sugee* Cake recipes, ideas of bounded authentic recipes still seem to apply for my participants. As I revealed in the story in the introduction of my article, Love Cake is often designated to the Burghers and *Sugee* Cake to the Eurasians, despite both cakes being similar and eaten by people on both sides of the constructed Burgher/Eurasian border. I have found however that my Eurasian participants from Malaysia and Singapore will generally only bake the *Sugee* Cake and my Burgher participants from Sri Lanka will only bake the Love Cake. So the question then is what of the Burghers who grew up in Malaysia and called themselves Eurasian? Interestingly enough, despite knowing and eating both cakes, all of my participants who fall into this category, only bake the Love Cake. In this case it seems that it is ancestral origin that dictates which cake is chosen to represent identity.

Certainly, despite identifying as Eurasian in Malaysia, my family on my mother's side have retained the baking of the Love Cake as a family tradition. My mother remembers her mother telling her and her siblings to always remember that they were the Dutch Ceylonese Burghers. It seems that it was extremely important to my grandmother to make this distinction, essentially to assert the 'type' or category of Eurasian that her family fell within. Arguably my grandmother made this distinction to denote a higher social status than Eurasians in Malaysia, and within the Sri Lankan context using the word Dutch to denote a higher status than the Portuguese Burghers (McGilvray 1982). In colonial Ceylon, the Dutch-origin Burghers sought to distinguish themselves from those of Portuguese origin who they considered to be of a lower status, and this thinking has to an extent survived to the present day.

My grandmother was not a big baker or cake maker, yet she chose to make the Love Cake every year as part of her family's Christmas tradition. Both the Love Cake and the *Sugee* Cake are used variously as Christmas cakes, birthday cakes and wedding cakes (Kraal 2003) - depending on who you ask. Amongst my participants, there has been limited consensus about the use of these cakes in family and social rituals pointing to the constructed and contingent nature of the link between these cakes and identity. For my grandmother, it was the 'authenticity' of what she believed to be the traditional Sri Lankan recipe that she used as a marker for her family's identity.

Choosing to bake the Love Cake each year for Christmas, an important date on the Christian calendar, served as a way for her to assert her family's Burgher origins. Boyle sees authenticity in relation to the 'rootedness in a tradition or in a place of origin' (quoted in Heynen 2006, p. 288). Following from this, my grandmother's idea of authenticity related to her ancestral ties to Sri Lanka. By asserting the culinary authenticity of her Love Cake, she was attempting to maintain the idea of ethnocultural authenticity by asserting her 'Burgherness'.

### **Authenticity**

Hilde Heynen (2006) sees the desire for authenticity as a legacy of the European Enlightenment - the concept emerging alongside, and as a reaction to modernity. She cites Rousseau's call for authenticity as a counter reaction to the dominant culture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century which Rousseau described as 'artificial, false and presumptuous' (p. 287). Authenticity in this sense refers to the idea of something being 'real' or 'true'. In 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century culture the longing for authenticity has had its ups and downs as global movements, capitalism and continued cultural flows have challenged notions of the truth and what is 'real'. Heynen argues that despite seeming ubiquitous, authenticity is a concept with no clearly fixed meaning, rather it exists as 'a vague, underlying quality that is recognisable, but not easily pinned down' (2006, p. 289). As a notion, it exists within many cultures but its judgement is relative and its nature is contingent (Heynen 2006, p. 289). Cultural analysts have criticised the idea of an essential authenticity, instead seeing it as a subjective, constructed notion - a perception of authenticity. This perception of authenticity has led it to become an important category in cultural debates involving objects and practices, ranging from music, dress, traditions, food, and so on. As Spooner (1986) asserts, 'authenticity is our cultural choice' (p. 223).

Furthermore, as cultures are not fixed, static systems, cuisines too are never entirely closed systems (Lu and Fine 1995, p. 538). When it comes to food, a presenter at the 2005 *Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery* rightly argued that the idea of a so-called authentic regional dish is a myth. In reality all dishes are hybrids 'born of historical patterns of travel, immigration and agricultural development' (quoted in Levy 2005, p. 1). The choice of ingredients is also subject to arguments about authenticity in ethnic cuisines as ingredients were substituted by more readily

available ones when recipes spread to different kitchens around the globe, and those then became the ‘essential’ ingredients in ‘authentic’ dishes. The symposium presenter cited the example of the chilli, which is a New World crop that has become one of the hallmarks of Sichuan cooking, and has certainly prevailed throughout Asian cuisine. He stated that ‘ancient and modern have always existed. Purity is an illusion’ (quoted in Levy 2005, p. 1). Authenticity is an illusion as there are never two identical versions of a canonical dish or recipe (Levy 2005, p. 1). This may be true, however ideas of an essential authenticity still prevail. In terms of the Love Cake, as Charmaine Solomon (1998) proclaims, there are as many recipes for the cake as there are cooks or as one of my participants told me, there are as many variations as there are families. I was told by most of my participants that they grew up knowing that bakers of the cake would argue with each other over the ‘real’ or authentic Love Cake recipe. The debates over the cake seem to be more of an enjoyed tradition; however they were still involved in the process of boundary work as they allowed my participants and others to decide which cakes belonged to Eurasian or Burgher cuisines based on perceptions of authenticity, and this in turn asserted the boundaries between the two ‘Eurasian’ groups.

The cake is known to be fiddly to make and bakers take great pride in mastering the perfect texture. The authentic Love Cake is supposed to be moist on the inside, but not too moist, with a crust on the top, but not too hard. I was told of numerous ways to achieve this and how others were making mistakes when it came to make the perfect cake. Some recipes include honey, some do not. Some include preserved fruit, while others do not. All seem to cut their cake into little squares, although some will do this in advance, while others do it at the time of serving. When giving the Love Cake to guests at Christmas, some wrap the pre-cut squares in Christmas paper, some in cellophane, others in grease proof paper. My family is unique in using aluminium foil. My participants expressed that their way was the correct way, while others’ ways were wrong, or inauthentic. My family’s aluminium foil wrapping method was declared wrong by everyone outside my family. I was told that, yes there are many recipes for Love Cake, however only a true Burgher will be able to tell if it tastes correct. I was also told the same about the *Sugee* Cake - only a true Eurasian will be able to tell if a cake is the real *Sugee* Cake. In this way, recipes, and in this instance, cakes, were being used to mark out boundaries around what were perceived to be

different and essential authentic Eurasian groupings. During my fieldwork, I have to say that I found myself doing the same.

One of my participants who identifies strongly as a Malaccan Eurasian, has a Burgher husband so she also bakes the Love Cake. She has ties to my family and learnt the recipe from my great grandmother Charlotte on my grandfather's side. Charlotte was also a Malaccan Eurasian and was married to my Burgher great grandfather. I am not certain where Charlotte got her Love Cake recipe, however it is significantly different from my grandmother's side of the family. My grandmother's recipe was handed down to her from her mother Dulcie and her grandmother Emily, both of whom were born in Sri Lanka. This is the recipe that my aunty now uses as she inherited the task of baking the cakes for Christmas after my grandmother passed away. My participant described the cake that she makes using Charlotte's recipe as being sticky and more like a sweet. When she first attempted the cake she questioned Charlotte about whether she had done it right - it had two layers, the one on the bottom was chewy like toffee and the one on top was like fluffy marshmallow. She told me, 'I thought when I first made it, that it was wrong. Then Grandma Charlotte said "That's the way it is"'. When she told me this, I found myself thinking that she had made the cake incorrectly or the recipe was not authentic considering that my great grandmother Charlotte was not actually Burgher and perhaps had a Malaccan Eurasian adaptation of the recipe. I had bought into the debates. At other times participants gave me pieces of Love Cake to eat if they still had some left over after Christmas. In one Burgher household I was given a piece that was overly moist and I found myself again thinking it was not 'real' or authentic.

I argue, however, that it does not matter what the cake looks like, or its texture. What matters is that there is a continuity of the history of the recipe. This represents a belief in the Love Cake as an 'idea' that goes beyond the actual recipe. This Love Cake 'idea' is impervious to the external changes and fluidities of culinary systems from generation to generation though the actual recipe is not. For example, my aunty has adapted my great grandmother Dulcie's recipe by reducing the amount of sugar, butter and eggs. She did this for health reasons and therefore believes that she has not altered or affected the authenticity of the recipe in any way. Some of the Love Cake's ingredients will change, but the idea of the Love Cake and its history will remain,

regardless of minor alterations, as its perceived authenticity is part of the identity work involved in the construction of bounded Eurasian identities. Food and culinary practice are linked to ideas of 'real' or 'pure' cultural identities and these are articulated through the category of authenticity. In this sense, authenticity is closely linked to the notion of hybridity with its associated (and contradictory) assumptions of purity and boundaries. As I discuss below, hybrid forms often form new boundaries and coalesce into new entities which are conceived of as 'pure'.

## **Hybridity**

The concept of hybridity has traditionally been conceived of by post-colonial scholars as an in-between space. In his key text *The Location of Culture* (2004) Homi Bhabha is concerned with the 'third space' that opened up between cultures during colonial contact and created an ambivalence that he argued could subvert colonial authority (p. 38). Bhabha's notion of hybridity has been used widely in different disciplines to denote the liminal space that exists in between fixed identities and binary oppositions. Particularly within ethnicity and migration studies, hybridity has become useful for describing cultural mixing at 'the edge' or contact point of diaspora (Hutnyk 2005, p. 79). Cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Paul Gilroy have tended to focus on the effects of hybridity on identity and culture in response to a climate of increasing multicultural awareness around the globe. Hybridity's usefulness as a way to articulate the negotiation of diasporic identities in the host culture, has offered theorists a term that encapsulates mixing, combination, and the blurring of boundaries (Hutnyk 2005, p. 81).

Certainly hybridity theorists have focussed on cultural exchange and mixture as a way to counter the perceived negative aspects of assimilation and integration in a globalising world. As Ien Ang (2006) argues, claiming a hybrid diasporic identity can be a symbolic liberation from oppression and ethnic marginalisation (p. 141). Within critical race studies the concept of hybridity allows for an understanding of the ambiguous in-betweenness of mixed race individuals, and as a result has entered popular academic usage as a celebrated term that embraces cultural pluralism and negates essentialism, and by extension negates ideas of the authentic or pure. As a theoretical approach, hybridity challenges the notion of a stable and unified subject as it celebrates multiplicity, ambiguity and fluidity. For this reason, hybridity is an often

used concept within race and ethnicity studies as a way to understand the ambiguous in-betweenness of people who identify as ‘mixed race’, or in this case as Eurasian.

There are many limits to the theory, however an aspect of hybridity that I find interesting for this paper, is that while it challenges the idea of a stable and pure identity, hybridity often ends up creating new identities that are seen to be stable and pure themselves. Christina Beltran (2004) argues that hybrid or bordered identities are not inherently transgressive, rather they are often essentialist in themselves. She states that hybridity often becomes a new ‘kind of foundational or ‘fixed’ identity’ (p. 596). Yuko Kikuchi’s (1997) work on *Mingei* theory in Japan also concludes that hybridity does not remain ‘open’, rather hybridity closes and creates another ‘other’. In other words, what often emerges as a hybrid identity - an ambiguous ‘in-between’, often ends up transforming or being reconstructed into a new purity with new borders. It is precisely hybridity’s anti-essentialist stance that itself presupposes essentialism during the process of creating a ‘hybrid’. Engaging with hybridity from a critical viewpoint, Cultural Studies Professor John Hutnyk (2005) asks: ‘to what degree does the assertion of hybridity rely on the positing of an anterior ‘pure’ that precedes mixture?’ (p. 81). The problem of purity within hybridity theory prevents the adequate theorising of intermixture without also suggesting the existence of separate, distinct and uncontaminated entities before mixture. The notions of hybridity and purity rely on each other and therefore hybridity informs and is informed by the category of authenticity. What were once hybrid identities born in the ‘third space’ of the colonial encounter, Eurasian identities have often come to be regarded by my participants as essential and bounded identities each with its own claims to purity and authenticity and each deploying boundaries to distinguish one from the other.

### **Boundary Work**

The boundary making approach to studies on ethnicity posits that rather than being conceived primarily in terms of relations between pre-defined and fixed groups, ethnicity is ‘a process of *constituting* and *re-configuring* groups by defining the boundaries between them’ (Wimmer 2008, p. 1027). As Wimmer points out, previous research on ethnicities tended to focus on the boundaries themselves, while more recent research has shifted to the process of boundary making, also conceived of as ‘boundary work’ (2008, p. 1027). The boundaries between ethnic groups do not

simply emerge through interaction, they are constructed, maintained and reinforced, displaying evidence of agency – in short, ethnic groups are constructed. In the process of construction, and as with the notion of hybridity, these identities are often ‘fixed’ into what is perceived to be pure groupings (Harrison 1999, p. 10). All my participants acknowledge a hybrid identity, often proudly, however many of them have reconfigured this ‘mixed’ identity as being pure. Aside from my participants who have one Asian and one European parent (who I refer to as ‘first generation’ Eurasians), the rest place ‘mixture’ in the distant colonial past, assigning their hybrid identity to history. The identities they have today are no longer perceived as hybrid. During interviews I was told by various participants that they defined ‘Burgher’ or ‘Eurasian’ as being separate, distinct and whole groups.

Simon Harrison (1999) defines ‘cultural boundaries’ as the differences that are perceived and asserted by groups using practices and symbols that include language, dress, music, religion, ritual and food to distinguish themselves from other groups (p. 10). In other words, groups will seek out ways to define themselves against any available ‘Others’. Harrison goes on to point out that movements of cultural practices and meanings accompany the movements and interactions of people around the globe, which give life to hybrid forms that challenge essentialism. However, this challenge acts as a perceived threat to the belief in essential qualities and distinctive ways of a group, resulting in the representation of endangered cultural boundaries (p. 10). These are then reinforced and constructed to create a distinction between insiders and outsiders. This sheds light on some of my participants’ insinuations that I and my family are not really Eurasian and should instead be calling ourselves Burghers. The Love Cake is my family’s culinary tradition and this means that we are positioned outside the ‘real’ Eurasian group for many of my participants.

The distinction between Burghers and Eurasians is further asserted by the use of iconic cookbooks respective to each group. Along with the cakes each group had a prized and representative cookbook which was spoken about in terms of its value to either Burgher or Eurasian identity, and in terms of the importance of owning a copy and the need to pass it down through the family as a collection of heirloom recipes. By my Burgher participants I was shown recipes from Hilda Deutrom’s *Ceylon Daily News Cookery Book*, while my Eurasian participants talked about their old copies of

Ellice Handy's *My Favourite Recipes*. The boundaries are again drawn, this time using cook books in what Harrison calls a 'reification... of cultural heritage as property' (1999, p. 11). Despite the similarity of many of the recipes within both cookbooks, and despite the similarities between the Love and *Sugee* Cakes, they have been assigned as cultural property to each respective group, thus strengthening the imagined boundary between them.

## **Conclusion**

The cultural adaptations that occurred during Burgher migrations to Malaysia and then later to Australia, have confused the definitions and boundaries of 'Eurasian'. Ideas of purity/authenticity and the threat of hybridity with its ability to affirm and blur boundaries at the same time, play an important role in the construction and continued negotiation of cultural identities. These same notions also play a role in the fears over losing cultural practices through appropriation or dilution. It was evident that many of my participants believed themselves to be a part of a dying 'race' as some described it, due to their children marrying outside Burgher and Eurasian groups. This was not said with any pain or regret, rather it was stated as a matter of fact and an inevitable part of today's world. Despite this, many of my participants actively engaged in constructing and reinforcing boundaries around and between 'Eurasian' identities. This happened particularly when talking about food and the boundaries were most noticeable to me when talking about the Love and *Sugee* Cakes.

My female participant from the start of this article chose to use food and specifically the two cakes, to draw her boundaries around who she saw as being 'real' Eurasians. By separating the Love and *Sugee* cakes and assigning them into Burgher and Eurasian cuisines respectively, she was excluding the Burghers from the broad category of 'Eurasian' and reasserting what she perceived to be her own authentic Eurasian identity. I came across this boundary work repeatedly while talking about food and specifically the cakes that my participants either made or grew up with. Arguably, my participants in each group sought to define themselves against the other: those who mostly make and eat Love Cake as opposed to those who mostly make and eat *Sugee* Cake.

In the case of the ambiguous concept of 'Eurasian' what often happens is that fluidity

and ambiguity are actively reduced through the creation of fixed boundaries with assertions of essential authenticity within these boundaries – regardless of the possible cultural flows that occur over these boundaries (Harrison 1999, p. 11). In reality, both the Love Cake and the *Sugee* Cake are hybrid recipes, and are known and eaten by both Burghers and Eurasians, however, when it comes down to defining and constructing these groups as separate identities, each group claims their respective cakes as belonging to them – the *Sugee* Cake as an authentic Eurasian recipe and the Love Cake as an authentic Burgher recipe. The two cakes therefore act as cultural objects that are involved in the debates surrounding the contested and ambiguous broader ‘Eurasian’ identity, and they play an important role in the boundary work that occurs within this identity.

## **Sri Lankan Love Cake Recipe**

### Ingredients

6 large eggs  
500 g/1 lb/2 cups caster sugar  
150 g/5 oz unsalted butter  
3 tablespoons honey  
2 tablespoons rose water or 1/4 teaspoon rose essence  
finely chopped zest of 1 lime or lemon  
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg  
1 teaspoon ground cardamom  
250 g/8 oz raw cashews  
250 g/8 oz coarse semolina  
125 g/4 oz crystallised winter melon or pineapple (optional)

### Method

Line a 25 x 30 cm (10 x 12 in) cake tin with baking paper. Preheat oven to 150 degrees C (300 degrees F).

Beat eggs and sugar until thick and light. Add softened butter and honey, rose water, lime zest, nutmeg and cardamom. Beat well. Chop cashews coarsely and stir in together with the semolina and crystallised fruit. Turn into prepared tin and bake in a slow oven for 1 hour or until pale golden on top. If the cake starts to brown too quickly, cover loosely with foil. Do not use the skewer test, because if a skewer comes out clean it means the cake is overcooked by Sri Lankan standards. It will taste good, but there won't be the moist centre which is typical of this confection. Leave cake in tin to cool. Cut into small squares to serve.

From Charmaine Solomon's *Encyclopaedia of Asian Food*, (1998),

Available: <http://www.asiasociety.org/style-living/food-recipes/recipe/desserts/sri-lankan-love-cake>

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