

Recipes for Democracy?

Gender, Family, and Making

BY FRANCA IACOVETTA

Cet article conteste le concept néo-libéraliste qui affirme que le Canada est une terre d'opportunité. Cet article explore les idéologies du sexe dominant dans les démocraties libérales du début de la guerre froide qui ont influencé les foyers, les habitudes culinaires, les activités des services sociaux à la famille chez les immigrants et les réfugiés.

During the past several decades, feminist and left scholars of immigrant and refugee women and women of colour have exposed—both through empirical documentation and careful rethinking of conventional categories of nation, immigrant, and citizen—the material and ideological processes central to the “making” of nation-states and national identities. Many now acknowledge that nation-building is premised on the political and social organization of “difference,” and that it creates both citizens (or potential citizens) and non-citizens denied rights. That First World nations in the EU and NAFTA champion globalization and free trade zones while at the same time “police” their borders against “others” (especially Third World migrant workers) speaks volumes on the topic.

Studies of contemporary migration note the growing female presence among migrant workers around the world, while those focused on Canada show how racist, class-based, and heterosexist paradigms continue to define mainstream notions of Canada and Canadian. This situation prevails despite the long history and enduring impact of immigration to Canada, and its increasingly multi-

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racial profile—especially since the 1970s. Immigrant women of colour from the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and other “Third World” nations—who are exploited as temporary workers but discouraged from settling permanently and stereotyped as sexually promiscuous single mothers undeserving of citizenship—experience most directly the cruel hypocrisy of liberal capitalist countries that promise opportunity and freedom to all, while simultaneously creating pools of unfree labour and perpetuating damaging race and gender stereotypes. Immigration and citizenship policies are also sexualized and

shaped by bourgeois and heterosexual norms regarding reproduction and motherhood. Lesbian women face particular challenges in the face of hetero-normative discourses, and women of colour are eroticized in ways that affect adversely their claims to citizenship.

Specialists of migrant, immigrant, and refugee women workers in Canada have sought to disrupt the dominant liberal construction of Canada as “an immigrant nation” that has always opened its doors to the world’s peoples. As their work documents, liberal histories of Canada erroneously depict state-sanctioned racist policies, such as the infamous Chinese Head Taxes and other laws prohibiting the entry of wives and children of Chinese male workers, as blips in an otherwise smooth and linear development towards mature nationhood. Similarly, nationalist boosters, past and present, see the presence of “successful” white ethnic and “non-white” Canadians as proof of even greater national progress. We must remain aware of the critical distinctions between, on the one hand, an official liberal and highly flawed policy of multiculturalism, and, on the other, Canada’s historical and continuing transformation into a multi-racial society and the reality of many Canadians who in daily practice live multi-cultural, multi-racial lives.

As a historian of post-World War II Canada, I wish here to tackle the dominant liberal framework of Canada as a land of genuine opportunity, where all hardworking newcomers can prosper, contribute to the country’s rich cultural mosaic, and eventually join the Canadian “family.” Such portraits of Canada as a place where everyone can be both “different” and “equal” ignore the fact that, as Tania Das Gupta and I observed elsewhere, Canadian immigration and refugee policy have long been exclusionary and discriminatory with regard to so-called “undesirables.” But I want also to take the point further. The liberal “we are an immigrant nation” discourse (which perhaps only the U.S. has more aggressively promoted) also ignores or downplays the more invidious aspects of gatekeeping efforts to remake into something else even those newcomers ostensibly “welcomed” into the nation.

In addressing this theme, my article shifts the focus from the present to the recent past, and from the exclusionary practices described above to the immigrant and refugee reception and citizenship campaigns of the early post-war and Cold War decades before 1965. More specifically, it examines the gendered nature of reception

Female Citizens in Cold War Canada

activity, and nation-making after 1945. And rather than addressing forms of outright exclusion—such as screening for Communists or deporting newcomers deemed politically or morally suspect, or deemed potential burdens on the state—I adopt an analytical framework central to the emerging social and gender histories of Cold War capitalist societies—domestic containment. By focusing on women, nutrition, food, and gender and family ideals, I explore here how the dominant gender ideologies of liberal democracies in the early Cold War—including a bourgeois model of home-making and food customs and family life—informed reception work and social service activities among immigrant and refugee women. By domestic containment, I mean, of course both state-sanctioned and volunteer efforts within western countries to police not only the political but also social, personal, moral, and sexual lives of its citizens—a process that, ironically, involved the repression in liberal western democracies of individual rights and freedoms in the name of democratic rights and freedoms. The Cold War, as U.S. scholars such as Elaine Tyler May and Canadian historians such as Gary Kinsman have documented, witnessed the resurgence of a conservative and hegemonic family ideology that “normalized” an idealized bourgeois Anglo-Celtic nuclear family, and that in turn served as an (unrealistic and oppressive) standard against which “non-conformists” were harshly judged, harassed and punished.

I have documented elsewhere that even as Canada’s social welfare elite boldly declared the birth of the brave new world, they also debated at length the fragility of postwar democratic society and swore to attack all threats—from within and without—to democratic “decency.” The threat of the atomic bomb, the Soviet Empire, and homosexual spies were marked features of the Cold War, as were working mothers, juvenile delinquents, (especially but not exclusively gang girls), women deemed sexually promiscuous, and male “sex perverts,” and they legitimated a “corrupted democracy” in which the state, and its civilian accomplices, was obliged to censor its citizenry. Historian Geoffrey Smith has effectively used the metaphor of disease to describe how the U.S. state waged a dirty war against all those considered sources of contamination—godless communists, gay civil servants, marginal African-American welfare mothers, and others. Similar patterns obtained in Canada; indeed, recent research on the domestic side of the Cold War, made possible in part because

of recent access to security intelligence materials (such as RCMP case files), has begun to challenge the conventional wisdom that Canada’s Cold War was essentially, or comparatively, benign.

Mariana Valverde’s *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada 1885-1925* showed how Canadian nation-building in an earlier era required more than protective tariffs, backroom political deals, and a transcontinental railway. It also involved various moral campaigns aimed both to encourage middle-class white Canadian women to procreate (or face “race suicide”) and to ensure the moral “uplift” of working-class immigrants and racialized Canadians deemed inferior on both moral and mental health grounds. The desire for a healthy body politic, both literally and figuratively, also fueled nationalist boosters and social and psychological experts committed to national reconstruction after the Second World War. While hardly the sole cause of these post-1945 agendas, the arrival of the Cold War did impart a particular kind of political and moral urgency to campaigns meant to ensure the long-term physical, mental, and moral health of Canada’s current and future citizens. Both men and women were targeted by such campaigns, but women, as in the past, were more vulnerable to moral assessment and branding.

My research on immigrant and refugee women and families offers another lens through which we can explore some of these key issues. Here, I take one thematic slice—nutrition and food campaigns and what front-line health and welfare workers called “family life” projects intended to improve poor and immigrant children’s lives and remake their mothers. In tackling this topic, I have considered a wide range of players and activities. They include, on the one hand, a variety of gatekeepers, from front-line settlement house workers, citizenship activists, adult literacy workers, and women’s organizations to professional social workers, psychologists, and government bureaucrats; and, on the other, the more than two million women, men and child immigrants and refugees, especially but not exclusively,

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from Europe. Taken together, the activities under scrutiny were many and varied: from the more explicitly ideological work of the Citizenship Branch and the RCMP, both of whom engaged in the political surveillance of the left ethnic press and organizations, to the numerous English classes, social agency services, and neighbourhood “projects for newcomers” undertaken in these years, particularly those aimed at low-income immigrant mothers and children in inner-city neighbourhoods in Toronto.

“Selling” Canadian abundance and modernity to Europe’s “backward” women

As the Second World War ended, the media alerted Canadians to the widespread hunger, starvation, and health disasters affecting people from around the world. Canadian newspapers, for instance, contained graphic and heartbreaking images and tales of emaciated Holocaust survivors, flood and disaster victims in Europe and beyond, and malnourished mothers and children from towns ravished by war. Indeed, a central theme emerging in these early years stressed the great gap between Canada as a land of modest affluence and a devastated Europe.

With the coming of the Cold War, this theme also served ideological ends. Among the most popular texts of

the day were what I call “iron-curtain escape narratives”¹ published in newspapers and magazines. Highly dramatic, these stories featured the trials and tribulations of those who had escaped “Red” countries, risked health and death to trek across frontier border towns, and eventually reached the western zone in Europe, finally settling in countries like Canada. A *Toronto Star* front-page story (23 Sept 1950) that told about the escape of a “pretty little Czech girl” who “outwitted” Soviet Police,” and “waded mountain snows” to reach Canada is emblematic. A PhD student from Prague, 23-year-old Irene Konkova had been arrested “for not conforming to Communist dictates.” After escaping jail, she gave the Soviet police the slip at a remote inn and finally reached safety in west Germany. There, she worked in the U.S. zone as a physical education director with the YWCA-YMCA until taking a YWCA job in Winnipeg. Though worried about her parents, Konkova told reporters she was “looking forward to the Canadian way of life,” which she associated with western modernity and affluence. When asked what most impressed her about Canada, she noted the “smart clothes and immaculate appearance” of Canadian women and abundance of food. She loved it all: “hot dogs and potato chips impressed her as much as steaks, cakes and candy.”

Both U.S. and Canadian propaganda material contrasted the good fortunes of mothers in North America, where liberal capitalism permitted them to raise and nurture well-fed and moral children, with those mothers working far away from their children and in other ways struggling under the exploitation and scarcity prevailing in “Iron Curtain” countries. From stoves to one-stop grocery stores, boosters sang the praises of Canadian modernity. In the Displaced Persons and refugee camps, on ships sailing overseas, and in locales across Canada, women newcomers confronted these messages of Canadian affluence and modernity everywhere: in films, pamphlets and newspapers, in English and citizenship classes, and in settlement house mothers’ clubs and YWCA meetings. Cooking lessons, sermons, and health “interventions” sought to reform both Canadian and New Canadian women’s cooking regimes and food customs, household management, and child welfare. Indeed, health and welfare experts offered their version of the postwar, bourgeois homemaker ideal, with their middle class and sexist denunciations of married women and wives who worked for pay—among them, huge numbers of refugee and immigrant women.² Canadians were encouraged to embrace the newcomers but also teach them the superior values of democracy, “freedom,” and, not least of all, the well-balanced Canadian meal.

After 1945, Canadian nutritionists, food writers, and health and welfare “experts” focused much of their attention on the hundreds of thousands of Europeans who figured prominently among the more than two-and-one-half million newcomers who had entered the country by 1965. Food and health campaigns aimed at immigrant

women and their families were varied and numerous. They were part of larger campaigns intended to “improve” the homemaking skills of all women—resident or soon-to-be resident—in Canada. When, for example, British war brides were offered health lectures and cooking classes, both in England and Canada, they were not only taught to measure ingredients the Canadian way (i.e., the British measured liquids by weight, North Americans by volume), but were deliberately being “trained” for their new role as wives and mothers of Canadian husbands and children. Media coverage of the war brides’ resettlement in Canada, a major government undertaking in which the military and Canadian Red Cross played important roles, garnered enormous public attention, and was everywhere punctuated by the image of the fresh faces of young, white British women and their ruby-cheeked children. By contrast, the non-British war brides, including Dutch and Italian women, and their children never attracted as much attention.

Central to these health and welfare campaigns were certain over-riding concerns: preaching the value of a well-balanced diet, efficient shopping and household regimes, planned menus, and budget-conscious shopping. Much of the food advice prioritized middle class ideals regarding preparation and consumption—clean and uncluttered homes, formal dining rooms or kitchen “dinettes,” and a stay-at-home wife and mother. This was a far cry from the crowded and sub-standard flats, low and vulnerable incomes, and harried and tired working mothers that were the hallmarks of many newly arrived immigrants and refugees in Toronto and other urban locales.

Canadian Culinary Ways

As Valerie Korinek’s important new book, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine in the Fifties and Sixties* well illustrates, Canada’s top-selling woman’s magazine offers us an indirect but excellent source about postwar food and health campaigns. In saying this, I am not suggesting a direct causation between immigrant women, *Chatelaine* magazine, and changed habits. Rather, the magazine’s food features and recipes provide valuable glimpses into the images, assumptions, messages, recipes, professional advice, and other features of postwar health and homemaking campaigns. Korinek persuasively argues that the magazine, despite its image as a conventional woman’s magazine, was not composed exclusively of “happy homemaker” images. She also cautions against simple and reductionist theories that assume women readers are passively duped by bourgeois women’s magazines. Still, as she adds, the food advertisements and features did provide many conventional images of traditional middle class femininity—including images of mothers who showed their love in part by baking bread, shopping well, and producing a grand variety of cheap but well-balanced meals, nicely presented on table-clothed

tables. The ads that delivered such messages also reflected the interests of food corporations whose much-needed funds kept *Chatelaine* afloat. Central images emerged in these food features. For example, the “Canadian way” (as Korinek and I detail elsewhere) was usually portrayed by attractive, white, middle-class Canadian women pushing overflowing grocery carts down aisles with well-stocked shelves, or cooking meals in modern and well-appointed kitchens using canned, frozen, and other ingredients from their well-stocked pantry shelves, freezers, and refrigerators. Recipes featured affordable meals using cheap cuts of meat—hamburger, for example, in the ever ubiquitous casserole (though by the 1960s curry chicken casseroles actually hit the pages!) and on occasion, fancy hors d’oeuvres and brunches.

By the early 1960s, the magazine began to feature more “ethnic” recipes and even discuss the plight of working wives and mothers, but these were very modest concessions. A case in point is Italian food. U.S. food historians such as Harvey Levenstein and immigration historians such as Italian specialist Donna Gabaccia have documented both that Italians were among the most resistant of the immigrants in the U.S. when it came to pressures to change their food customs and that Italian foods, including pasta, were among the most successfully

School Days
are
Soup Days
by Anne Marshall

SCHOOLDAY LUNCH EATEN AT HOME
(serves 4-6 cups)

Tomato Soup
1 can Campbell's Tomato Soup
1 can Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup
1 can Campbell's Condensed Milk
1 can Campbell's Condensed Chicken
1 can Campbell's Condensed Beef
1 can Campbell's Condensed Pork
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fish
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fruit
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fruit
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fruit

SCHOOLDAY LUNCH CARRIED TO SCHOOL
(serves 4-6 cups)

Chicken Soup
1 can Campbell's Chicken Noodle Soup
1 can Campbell's Condensed Chicken
1 can Campbell's Condensed Beef
1 can Campbell's Condensed Pork
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fish
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fruit
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fruit
1 can Campbell's Condensed Fruit

CAMPBELL'S ARE CANADA'S FAVORITE SOUPS



“mainstreamed” ethnic foods in the U.S. diet. For the U.S., the conflicts and accommodations involving immigrant and particularly Italian foods occurred in particularly dramatic ways during the inter-war decades, following the mass migration of Southern and Eastern Europeans to the U.S. during the period from the 1880s to the 1920s. Levenstein and Gabaccia trace the promotion of Italian and other ethnic foods that were inexpensive, nutritious, and filling—in food magazines, food corporation ads, and also the military, where large numbers of young American men were first introduced to Italian foods. That process invariably involved modifying “foreign” or “exotic” foods for the more timid palates of North American consumers by removing pungent cheeses, or other offensive ingredients, and perhaps including more recognizable ones (cheddar cheese instead of parmesan, for instance). Similar developments occurred in Canada especially though not exclusively during the post-1945 era, when the country witnessed its mass migration of incoming newcomers. Yet, it’s also clear that Canadian women did experiment with ethnic recipes, particularly by the 1960s. By then, *Chatelaine* also began featuring (white) “ethnic” women, including working mothers, and their recipes, although this did not preclude a reliance on “cute” and patronizing racial-ethnic and sexual stereotypes.

Nursing inner-city kids, pathologizing immigrant mothers

In contrast to media depictions of ethnic foods, the

records of Canadian health and welfare experts from the 1950s and 1960s are less ambiguous with respect to the “problems” posed by the huge influx of immigrant and refugee mothers and their families. Indeed, they are replete with examples of the ways in which Canadian experts singled out immigrant women for special attention or blame, particularly those from more impoverished and “peripheral” rural regions of Southern Europe. Invariably the “experts” stereotyped these humble immigrants and low-income mothers (and fathers) as too ignorant, isolated, backwards, stubborn, and/or suspicious to access “modern” health care, secure their children’s health needs, and otherwise raise their children appropriately as future Canadians.

Such themes emerge in a popular postwar food guide, *Food Customs of New Canadians*, that was prepared by professional home economists and nutritionists for use by health and welfare personnel working with newcomers. Although presented as a scientific and objective assessment of the food customs of racial-ethnic groups, the guide sought to equip front-line activists with ways of encouraging immigrants to adapt their food patterns to Canadian foods, recipes, equipment, and eating regimes. Some recommendations—drink more milk, for instance—were intended for everyone. Overall, however, the guide reflected middle class, pro-capitalist, North American assumptions such as the wisdom of a three-meals-a-day pattern because it was well-suited to Canadian school and work hours. It also reflected the superiority of Canadian utensils, equipment, and modern appliances.

The guide isolated particular problems for each group under review and assigned teaching suggestions for eliminating them. No group received an entirely negative (or positive) evaluation. For example, while the Chinese scored poorly in hygiene on what the experts considered insufficient cleaning of pots and shared use of chopsticks, they scored well overall on their use of fresh foods, including vegetables. Overall, North-Western Europeans generally fared much better, though there was room for improvement here too. The guide referred to the propensity of “Czechs” to be overweight because of their love of dumplings, and Austrians were cited for consuming too many sweets, and so on.

More problematic were the Italians and Portuguese. Italian immigrant women emerged in the guide as uneducated and primitive peasants who were forced to cook on outdoor clay or brick ovens and whose homes lacked the necessary equipment of a modern household: a gas or electric stove, a refrigerator, and storage space. Although praised for their ability to “stretch” meats through use of pastas and other starches, Italian women in Toronto were chastised for spending too much of their modest family income on purchasing specialty foods from Italy such as fine-grade olive oil when cheaper Canadian substitutes were available! (Curiously, only the Italian entry refers explicitly to the possibility that the high rate of female

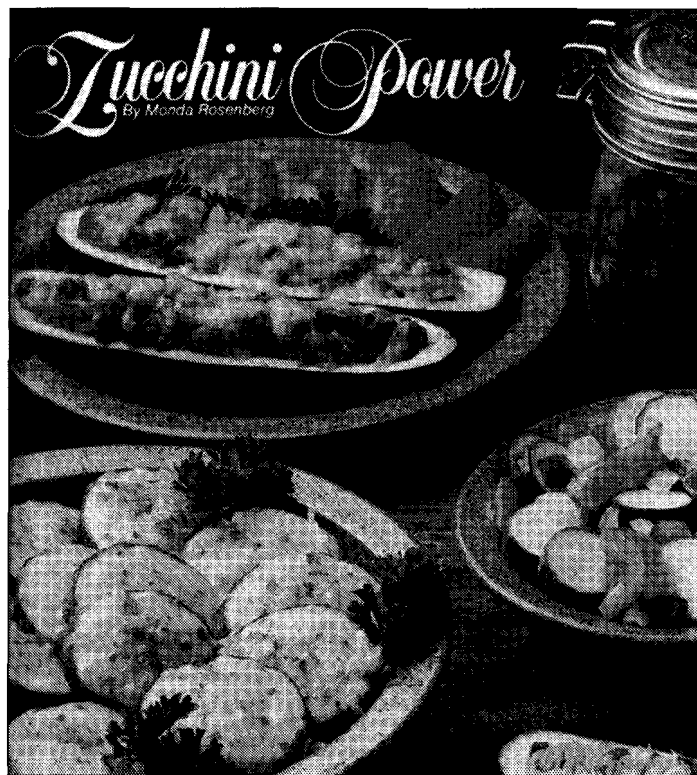
labour participation meant that, after migration, Italian women had less time to produce food.) Similarly, Portuguese women were criticized for buying fresh fish from the market because it was more expensive than the frozen variety. Professional nutritional experts appear to have prioritized their professional repertoire over the values and cultural preferences of their clients. Italian mothers, I should add, were also singled out for their “bad” habit of serving their children a bit of wine with dinner. Their advice, of course, ran counter to that of today when we are told to more closely emulate various features of the continental European diet.

Many of the recommendations contained in the guide reflected the concern of nutrition experts to determine the capacity of immigrant women in low-income families to produce well-balanced meals. Since family economic need pushed many of them into the paid force, these women had even less time for “improving” homemaking skills. Thus, even while public and professional campaigns intended to raise homemaking standards were aimed at the entire female population, class distinctions, which overlapped with racial-ethnic ones, accounted for some differing remedies. Regrettably, home economists have long assumed that poor people’s diets were more the result of their ignorance of nutrition and food preparation than material scarcity. Proposed solutions usually meant imposing austere diet and meal plans on the poor, while the approved diets and advertised meal plans for middle class families permitted various frills and luxuries. In postwar Toronto, experts serving immigrant neighbourhoods were routinely asked whether people in the area seemed aware of general health guidelines such as, The Canada Food Rules, cod liver oil for children, what constitutes adequate hours of sleep, and so on. School nurses and child welfare workers held differing expectations for the mother and children of bourgeois and poor families. On one level, this was a reasonable response: as Cynthia Comacchio observed for an earlier period, it was insulting to teach the finer points about child personality training, or food fussiness and toy fetishes, to poor immigrant mothers who could not even afford “decent” housing. Yet, rather than attack class inequities, the experts focused on teaching mothers the fundamentals of health—cleanliness, nutrition, fresh air—as though mothers alone could prevent ill health.

Toronto provides a valuable case study for considering how low-income immigrant and refugee women were both given some critical assistance by front-line social workers and health and welfare personnel keen to improve health care among struggling working-class immigrants—and also pathologized by the experts. Front-line social and welfare personnel identified several major problems. They worried about the ill effects of crowded and substandard housing on low-income immigrant families and the special burdens that inadequate wages imposed on women who, whether housewives or working mothers,

had to stretch inadequate pay checks to cover rent, food, drugs, clothing, furniture, and other necessities. If the family had purchased larger ticket items like furniture on credit (which became more accessible to low-income people in these years) there was the burden of additional bills and collection agencies that would demand payment. The lack of proper cooking facilities in many substandard rental flats encouraged unhealthy eating. Furthermore, the budget item that invariably appeared most flexible was food. To pay the bills, women, it was feared, turned to cheap, usually starch-heavy, foods while cutting out comparatively more expensive and healthy alternatives. The result, claimed nutrition experts, was malnutrition, which might not be detected for years but would nonetheless take its toll on the mental, emotional, and physical health of immigrant adults and children. An additional concern was that as more middle-class Canadians abandoned the urban core for the suburbs, cities like Toronto would become host to “decaying” inner-city neighbourhoods. In response, experts basically applied old remedies to the current context—home visits, family budgets, meal plans—and tried to attract particularly stay-at-home immigrant mothers into their cooking and nutrition programs. Some modest successes were scored, but the main response recorded is continuing frustration with absenteeism.

A related problem earmarked by health and welfare experts was that immigrants’ seeming ignorance of Canada’s social services, combined with their needless suspicion or distrust of outsiders, meant that many immigrant parents, especially mothers, were unwittingly neglecting their



children's health. When both parents worked, mothers were unavailable or too exhausted to tend to their children's needs. Social workers referred to the "tremendous job" required to educate the newcomers about the value of nursery school, summer camps, parent education, and other valuable services "new" and "strange" to them.

Once again, rural non-English-speaking immigrants transplanted to major urban centres were considered most pathetic. In the heavily Portuguese neighbourhood of Parkdale, the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto (IIMT), the city's largest immigrant aid society, opened up an extension office in 1961 to reach these women. The project supervisor, veteran social worker Edith Ferguson, collected field work notes and produced case histories meant to illustrate the value of social work interventions. One such case involved a mother who told the visiting caseworker that her daughter had infected tonsils but could not afford to have them removed. Although the family had been registered with the Ontario hospital plan, the mother, who had recently undergone an operation, erroneously assumed that time had to elapse before they could return to hospital. They could not afford a private surgeon's fee because they held a heavy mortgage on a recently purchased house and the husband was sidelined by a workplace injury. Their 17-year-old daughter was the family's only income earner.

In response, the IIMT caseworker contacted the girl's school nurse, who, wrote Ferguson, saw the child immediately, determined her tonsils were badly infected, and referred her to Toronto Hospital for Children. Having secured the parents' trust, they could assist with other things—completing the husband's workman's compensation application, enrolling him in a training course, and checking out job possibilities for a nephew wishing to come to Canada. They also found the daughter, who had been earning a dismal factory wage, a better-paying clerical job in a new local pharmacy interested in a Portuguese-speaking employee.

Efforts aimed at inner-city immigrant mothers included meal planning, food purchasing on limited funds, and child and adult eating habits.

Like the *Food Customs* manual, front-line workers also stressed the lack of pre-natal instruction for immigrant and refugee women. While the guide focussed on the absence or inadequate pre-natal education in the women's homelands, front-line caseworkers dwelt on a continuing widespread ignorance about modern childfeeding and childrearing methods among immigrant women. Immigrant women, they argued, suffered needless "complicated pregnancies" for lack of doctor appointments. Those convinced to go to out-patient clinics or pre-natal courses learned very little as the lectures and mimeo-

graphed diet and instruction hand-outs were in English. When "costly vitamins or medicines" were prescribed, women "seldom" took them "because of a lack of understanding of their worth." Too often, community social workers had had to convince parents to rush a sick child to hospital.

In response, experts searched for better ways to reach immigrant women, including translating information pamphlets and more systematic home visiting. Public health workers also began enrolling in Italian and Portuguese language classes, while others lobbied for more local prenatal and child nutrition clinics. However, the initiatives of professional nutrition and health experts determined to reshape immigrant behaviour were not always effective. For example, city settlement records in the early 1960s commented on the high rates of absenteeism to courses organized for recently arrived newcomers.

Health and welfare personnel also frowned on what they dubbed the inadequate, makeshift daycare arrangements of immigrant working mothers who reportedly left babies and toddlers in the care of grandparents, siblings, and others sitters incapable of providing proper supervision, nutritious meals, healthy recreation, or moral guidance. While all working mothers were vulnerable to such criticism, non-English-speaking immigrant and refugee women were considered particularly prone to bypassing modern daycare centres for informal, often kin-based arrangements. The result in downtown areas was a so-called "epidemic of inadequate child care arrangements." Home visitors reported on a range of inappropriate sitters: an old age pensioner who lived next-door, a six year old child in charge of a two year old, and harried mothers with their own children.

Determined to raise the standard of child care in the community, St Christopher House (SCH), along with the neighbouring Protestant Children's Home and the Victoria Day Nursery, began experimenting in 1962 with small day care programs "in specially selected family settings." Like other social welfare programs, including progressive ones intended to support low-income working mothers, a carrot-and-stick approach characterized this scheme: all participating mothers had to attend SCH sessions on child care and homemaking.

By the early 1960s, efforts aimed at inner-city immigrant mothers included downtown experiments intended to "strengthen family life" by addressing "part of a complex of problems of family living," namely, meal planning, food purchasing on limited funds, and child and adult eating habits. In 1961, SCH (whose neighbourhood was bounded by Queen St, Bathurst St., College St., and Spadina Avenue), participated in a hot lunch program with Toronto Board of Education and the Metro Toronto Social Planning Council at Ryerson Public School. An important program that deserves praise for addressing the needs of low-income children, the hot lunch project nevertheless came with conditions: a dozen "undernour-

ished” children from the neighbourhood were given money subsidies (donated by the Rotary Club) to purchase nutritious hot lunches at school provided that their mothers agreed to attend fortnightly classes at St Christopher House for “help in nutrition and meal planning.” The children were selected in consultation with school and St. Christopher House staff, who could supply “knowledge of family conditions,” while a family life worker hired by St Christopher House conducted follow-up visits. The hot meals were not described but likely consisted of conventional cafeteria fare of this era, such as hot roast beef sandwiches with peas and carrots or cooked ham with (canned) pineapple and (canned) vegetables, and, of course, milk.

According to St Christopher House staff, the hot school lunch produced positive results for both children and mothers. Within a year, they reported a general increase in the number of students buying hot lunches at Ryerson Public School. Meanwhile, the mothers of the subsidized children had shown much “enthusiasm” for their meetings and their “excellent” instructor, a nutritionist from the Visiting Homemakers Association who used a good mix of films, kitchen demonstrations, and lectures. Two years later, a report claimed that teachers had “observed improvement in the health of the children and in the quality of their work in school,” while their mothers had “gained practical knowledge through their contact with a nutritionist and a social worker.” Furthermore, the classes had provided the women with “their only social experience in an otherwise drab existence” and given them “the feeling that somebody cared.” On a more negative note, nutritionists expressed “some concern about finding methods to ensure that the families are taking full advantage of the subsidy to purchase the lunches at school”—suggesting that some immigrant mothers, by choice or circumstance, were spending the money on other items.

The Hot Lunch campaign quickly became incorporated into a more intrusive two-year Family Life project launched at SCH in 1962. With funds from the Laidlaw Foundation, this project too aimed to “reach” rural immigrant women now transplanted to an urban centre and provide them with “a very basic type of adult education eg., consumer buying, citizenship etc.” The primary target was the growing number of Portuguese newcomers in the Kensington market area, though Italian, Chinese, Caribbean and other newcomers were also contacted. A full-time Family Life worker and a Portuguese-speaking nutritionist with experience in Home Economics education in Angola were hired. The IMT also collaborated on the project.

Like other community experiments with inner city immigrants, the Family Life Project produced mixed results. Also, like other front-line work with newcomers, it reflected and perpetuated the marginal status of women from rural, impoverished, and formally uneducated Old World backgrounds.

Immigrant and refugee women’s recipes for “Canadian” living

Although anecdotal, the available evidence suggests that refugee and immigrant women also responded selectively to postwar health and homemaking campaigns, even if they could not control the terms of their encounter with social welfare personnel. Like surviving written sources, oral testimonies³ attest to the critical importance of food to immigrants and refugees and to women’s efforts to negotiate a complex culinary terrain. Immigrant and refugee women had their own versions of European scarcity and Canadian abundance: their recollections contain horrific tales of starvation in Nazi camps and heroic ones of gentiles and partisans who risked their lives to get food to hungry prisoners across Europe. Some testimonies offer us humorous recollections of the joys of eating Canadian bread and fruit upon arrival in Halifax, while others record the serious complaints and protests of refugees clearly disgusted by what they saw as over-indulgence and the (sinful) throwing out of leftovers. In addition, immigrant women’s cooking and their families’ food-eating patterns varied greatly during these years and thus defy easy categorization: some immigrant mothers steadfastly stuck to “traditional” meals in the home while others were keen to experiment with Canadian recipes or convenience foods. The example of Polish Jewish survivors who responded differently to Canadian food customs and the availability of many commercial products suggest too the importance of individual choice. One woman explained her insistence on cooking traditional “Jewish food” in part as a concrete way of continuing to defy Hitler’s Final Solution; the other embraced Betty Crocker and other U.S. as well as Canadian products because these newfangled things offered her one of several ways of putting behind the past and moving forward.

While these briefly summarized testimonies are highly suggestive, the gender and generational dynamics involved still require more research and closer scrutiny. Here again, my research sheds some light on various intriguing patterns. For example, some immigrant and refugee husbands pressured their wives to stick to familiar meals and insisted that their children eat their homeland foods at home. In some cases, this gender dynamic overlapped with political as well as ethnic or cultural tones. During the early Cold War years, for instance, left-wing Ukrainian Canadians who belonged to the Farm-labour Temple in Winnipeg evidently insisted on eating Ukrainian as a sign of their continuing resistance to a repressive Canadian

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state—but they also left it to women to do the time-consuming labours involved to prepare the food. By the same token, certain immigrant or ethnic Canadian men deliberately encouraged their wives to incorporate some Canadian foods because they wished to “embrace” Canada; other times, the opposite pattern emerged. Children also played a role, usually by pressuring their mother to “try” or “buy” Canadian goods—with hot dogs, hamburgers and pop being favourites. In short, the evidence, though fragmentary, points to a seemingly endless number of permutations of hybrid diets in the households of working-class and middle-class immigrants who increasingly combined familiar foods with Canadian foods and “ethnic” foods from other homeland origins.

Particularly for cities like Toronto, immigrant foods (and ethnic restaurants) have clearly changed the city’s culinary landscape even as the immigrants’ own food customs have themselves been modified. But we still need to trace more closely and to develop a sharper analysis of what some have called the “yuppification” of ethnic foods. I find it especially ironic that the foods that had caused me much embarrassment as a child—spicy and pungent salami, prosciutto, strong and smelly cheeses, dense and crusty bread—have become markers of middle-class taste. But they have also been embraced by people from diverse racial-ethnic and class backgrounds, many of whom, in my view, are not merely using food to affect a certain sophisticated, worldly, or snobbish big city style. Rather, they (we) clearly value the sensuality involved in eating a range of foods, of experimenting with new smells and tastes, of embracing food practices that see eating as a social and cultural practise, not merely a biological function, during which people talk, laugh, argue, debate, and in this and other ways spend hours making and re-making community.

Equally important, we cannot deny the power politics embedded in food wars and customs—to make only brief mention of the so-called “wok wars” that recently received media attention in Toronto, when a WASP Canadian couple complained bitterly and publicly against their Chinese neighbour’s cooking habits and “smells.” Nor can we omit the role that food corporations, saturation-advertising, and capitalist imperialism have played in shaping women’s cooking and shopping habits and family eating customs—how else can we explain what I have called the post-war Dole Pineapple conspiracy? As suggested by the New Left scholars of the late 1960s and the 1970s, who exposed the insidious links between U.S. imperialist ambitions in Latin America, the creation of so-called banana republics, and multi-national food corporations’ aggressive promotion of their various tinned and packaged citrus fruits to (North) Americans, the political economy of food must inform our analysis of the social and gender practises surrounding the purchase, production, and consumption of food.

So too do people matter; their curiosity, willingness to

experiment, in short their agency—should also figure in our efforts to discern key changes in food customs, including the recent rise of “multicultural” eating in Canada. Nevertheless, when we focus on the immigrant and refugee women and families who encountered Canadian nutrition and food experts on their door steps or in their children’s schools, health and welfare offices, hospitals or settlement houses during the early post-1945 decades, a particularly strong theme looms large: working-class immigrant women residing in inner-city neighbourhoods bore the brunt of professional discourses that attributed women’s failure to conquer the kitchen and ensure “quality” food and family life to ignorance and distrust of modern standards and distrust of social service interventions.

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¹See, for example *The Toronto Star* from 1945-65.

²Sources listed in order of appearance in the text: Toronto City Archives: Social Planning Council (sc) 40, Box 53 File 3 A-International Institute Parkdale Branch (IIPB) 1961-63, Report on School Principals at Grace, Alexander Muir, Old Orchard, Charles E. Fraser, and Lansdowne Public Schools; sc 24 D Box 1 University Settlement House, Executive Director’s Reports, 1939-1975, Head Resident’s House Report, 14 Feb 1952; Executive Director’s Monthly Report, 28 May 1956 on Housing and Suburbs: National Federation of Settlements Conference; St Christopher House, sc 484 IA1, Box 1, Folder 5, Minutes 1951-1952: Annual Report 8 Feb 1951; sc 484 IA1 Box 2 St Christopher House Folder 1 Minutes 1959, dated 23 April 1959; Box 1 Folder 7 Minutes 1955; Folder 8 Minutes 23 May 1956; SC 40, Box 53, File 3 A-IIPB 1961-63, Report from Parkdale Branch, International Institute (Edith Ferguson) to School Principals at Grace, Alexander Muir, Old Orchard, Charles E. Fraser, and Lansdowne Public Schools; SC 484 IB2 Box 1 Folder 6 “Briefs and Reports 1962-1970” St Christopher House to

the Select Committee on Youth. Oct 1964; Box 2 folder 4 Minutes 1962; Folder 6 "Briefs and Reports 1962-1970" Draft Presentation of the St. Christopher House to the Select Committee on Youth. Oct. 1964 (description of School Lunch Committee, Child and Family Section, Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, May 1964; Box 2 Folder 5 Minutes 1963, 24 Jan 1963; Report filed by Family Life worker Miss Spadafore regarding Visiting Homemakers Nutritionist.

³The oral testimonies were selected from a larger data base of more than 100 interviews with post-1945 immigrants culled from the Oral History Collection, Multicultural History Society of Ontario), my sample here is of 28 interviews, most of them conducted in the 1970s, with immigrant women and couples asked about food customs, with the following breakdown: European (18), including European Jewry (4), Asian (2), Caribbean (1), and South Asian (India) (3). I also drew on a few anecdotes collected from numerous colleagues and members of audiences who have heard me speak about this research. I thank them for sharing their stories with me.

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