



**UNIVERSITY OF
CANBERRA**

**A moveable feast:
Towards a better understanding of
pathways to food citizenship**

Gabrielle O’Kane

MPH, BSc, Dip Nutr & Diet, Dip Ed

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Education, Science, Technology and Mathematics

8th September 2014

When we feel that we have ownership in something, even if technically and legally we do not, or that our livelihood depends upon it, then we care. If we care, we watch, we appreciate, we are vigilant against threats. But when we know less, or have forgotten, we do not care. Then it is easier for the powerful to appropriate these common goods and so destroy them in pursuit of their own economic gain...The rapid modernization of landscapes in both developing and industrialized countries has broken many of our natural links with land and food, and so undermined a sense of ownership, an inclination to care and a desire to take action for the collective good (Pretty, 2002, p. 2).

Abstract

Although the globalised food system delivers unparalleled food variety and quantity to most in the developed world it also disconnects consumers from where, how and by whom food is grown, which discourages food citizenship. This thesis explored people's participation in their usual food procurement environment and their relationships to food, which revealed pathways to food citizenship.

This research used narrative inquiry methodology and purposive sampling to gather stories through focus group conversations. Fifty-two people voluntarily attended focus groups comprised of food procurers from one of five sources: community gardens, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, fresh food markets or supermarkets. A narrative was constructed for each of these groups of food procurers; their commonalities and particularities were illuminated through a final interpretive narrative.

The findings showed that people's meaning-making of food can be very complex and at times contradictory, both within and across the different food procurement environments. Food procurers, who actively participated in their chosen food system, enjoyed a 'contemporary relational food culture' and more consistently and enthusiastically enacted food citizenship. There is a continuum of engagement with food citizenship from the community garden food procurement environment at one end and the supermarket at the other. The community gardeners made meaning of food through their connections to the earth and to others. They rejected food available through supermarkets; instead, they grew, processed and prepared their own food, a pleasurable and meaningful use of their social time. The CSA and farmers' market groups similarly disconnected from mainstream assessments of food quality and re-connected in new ways. However, for the CSA members, these values were put aside when clock time imposed itself. Both the farmers' market and CSA facilitated food citizenship, as the farmers made organic, seasonal, local and ethically produced food available for their customers. The farmers' market shoppers became absorbed in their shopping experiences, where they developed relationships with farmers and a desire to support more sustainable food systems. Further along the continuum, the complexity and contradictions of food choice became more apparent in the fresh food market shopping environment. This food procurement environment did not enable meaning-making of food through intimate connections to the food producer or the place in which it was grown. Convictions about sustainable food practices

amongst this group were inconsistent and often contradictory, making the path to food citizenship unclear. The supermarket shoppers at the end of the continuum expressed that supermarket food was inferior to other food, but still used it. They did not tell stories of the importance of where or by whom food was grown, but described their meaning-making of food through cooking and sharing meals. Clock time overwhelmingly prevented these shoppers from spending social time on food-related activities. This group's disconnection from those who grew their food and where it was grown disempowered them from making sustainable food choices. This thesis provides preliminary qualitative evidence that local food systems can enable people to re-connect with their food and become food citizens.

Acknowledgements

As I reach the closing stages of my doctoral journey, I acknowledge publicly the contribution that many others have made in helping me achieve this milestone in my life. Firstly, I reflect on the people who encouraged me to reach my academic potential, in my formative years. My parents, Arthur and Ronda Boyd, and their parents before them, all valued education highly, so from a very early age they supported my learning not just financially, but practically and emotionally. Through their role-modelling, I also learnt the value of perseverance and hard work. I am very grateful for their continued dedication and support.

Another key person to figure in my academic development was Sr Jeanne Cover IBVM, who taught me modern history in my senior high school years, and later left for Canada to pursue her own doctoral research. Her constant encouragement and belief in my ability to write a cohesive argument has sustained me many times over the course of this thesis, when confidence waned. She too, taught me other life lessons about the power of one to lobby for changes to political decisions. To her, I offer my sincere thanks.

There are three people who have made very valuable additions to my thesis. Andrew Hore, the illustrator, has captured the essence of my findings chapters in a humorous and appealing way, which was just what I wanted. Sam Bartlett spent many hours developing the three-dimensional models that appear in this thesis, without ever showing his frustrations with me, as I changed my ideas. I am grateful to my editor, Miranda Bruce, for her attention to detail and teaching me more about the English language.

To my supervisors, Professor Barbara Pamphilon, Associate Professor Coralie McCormack and Associate Professor Katja Mikhailovich, who so graciously and gently extended my thinking without imposing their views, I owe so much. It was not just the lively discussions we had, the intense writing sessions or the feedback on my chapters that were so valuable; it was also the much needed guidance on managing my family and work commitments that helped me overcome some challenging times. Without their generosity and good humour, the path to completing this thesis would have been considerably harder and much less enjoyable. They have truly been the best supervisors I could have hoped for.

The participants who told me their stories gave me far more than they will ever imagine. At the time of the focus groups, I enjoyed their company and their thoughtful, reflective,

insightful and often entertaining stories and anecdotes. As I analysed the focus group material I was struck by their language in describing their relationships to food. They spoke in ways that I could never have contrived if I was alone in trying to construct a narrative on this topic. I am very grateful for their time and insights. I have learnt so much about others' very meaningful relationships to food.

Finally, it is nearly impossible to adequately express my gratitude to my husband, Ted, and my children, Lachlan, Bridget and Seamus, who have patiently put aside their own needs to allow me to achieve my personal goals. Throughout the course of the doctorate, Ted has offered sound advice and a listening ear on many occasions and tolerated my single-minded approach to completing this project. The two younger children, too, have allowed their mother the time and space to write when they really would have preferred me to go shopping, bowl a cricket ball or play a game of tennis. I cannot thank them enough for their enduring love and support.

Contents

- Abstract v
- Certificate of Authorship of Thesis vii
- Acknowledgements ix
- List of figures and tables xvii
- Chapter 1: Introducing the moveable feast 1**
- The global context of the study 2
- The need for this research 5
- The research question 5
- The location of this research project 6
- The five food procurement environments 8
 - Community Gardens 8
 - Community Supported Agriculture enterprise 9
 - The Farmers’ Market 11
 - The Belconnen and Fyshwick fresh food markets 12
 - The supermarkets 13
- The contents of this thesis 14
- Chapter 2: The challenges facing the dominant food system and the responses to them at the individual and community level 19**
- Explanatory frameworks 19
- Upstream influences on the current food system 20
 - Globalisation 20
 - Power and politics in the globalised food system 21
- Consequences of the current food system: Food as a commodity 22
- Intervening outcomes of the current food system 23
 - Environmental impact 23
 - Social and economic impact 24
 - Food and nutrition impact 25
- System outcomes of the current food system 25
 - Obesity and chronic disease 26
 - Food insecurity 26
 - An unsustainable food system 27
- Consumers’ experiences in the dominant food system 27
 - Complexity of food choice 28
 - The importance of time and demographics in assessing shopping behaviour 30

The place to shop depends on accessibility and convenience	32
Local food systems as an emerging response to the dominant food systems	34
Upstream influences on local food systems	35
Intervening outcomes of local food systems	36
Social, economic and environmental impact.....	36
Local food systems – idealism or realism?	39
Politics and power in local food systems	39
System outcomes of local food systems.....	41
Consumers’ experiences of local food systems.....	42
Community gardens and food sustainability.....	42
Community Supported Agriculture and food sustainability	44
Farmers’ markets and food sustainability	48
The meaning of food through cooking and sharing meals	51
Food citizenship	53
Concluding remarks	57
Chapter 3: Turning to narrative inquiry	59
Turn 1: From paradigmatic to narrative thinking.....	59
Turn 2: Valuing contextual knowledge	60
Turn 3: The functions of stories	61
Moving from process to product	62
Quality frameworks in narrative inquiry	62
Authenticity and trustworthiness.....	63
Researcher reflexivity	65
The unfolding of the narrative process.....	65
Analysis of narrative or narrative analysis	66
Collecting the stories	66
Choosing focus groups.....	67
Sampling and recruitment methods.....	68
Bringing people together for conversation.....	69
The analytical process	71
Phase 1: Draft stories begin to take shape.....	72
Phase 2: The refining processes for developing group narratives.....	76
Conclusion.....	77
Prologue to the narratives.....	78
Chapter 4: You can’t beat the taste of a home-grown tomato: The community gardeners.	81

Introduction	81
Gardening is ‘in their blood’: An ancestral history of gardening	81
I’ve got to have that! The importance of produce variety.....	82
These gardeners like to ‘see things being done’: Experiential learning.....	84
Community spirit ‘happens by osmosis’: Community, knowledge sharing and friendship in the garden	85
Food from the garden is astonishing: The intrinsic qualities of food are highly valued.....	87
I’ve always been very anti-spray: These gardeners like to avoid chemicals in food.....	89
Community gardeners’ perspectives of a moveable feast.....	91
Pleasure in gardening	91
Stories of the past	93
Social connections and community.....	94
Informal learning.....	95
The aesthetic and sensory aspects of food.....	98
Food processing and cooking.....	98
Conclusion.....	99
Chapter 5: This is a wonderful place to be: The Community Supported Agriculture members	103
Introduction	103
Community in Community Supported Agriculture.....	103
Pleasure and practicalities in growing some of your own food	106
Food from Briony – gee it tastes good	106
It’s hard to trust a food system that is designed purely around profits	107
CSA members’ perspectives of a moveable feast	109
Relationships, loyalty and contradictions.....	109
Good food.....	113
Cooking and conviviality	114
Sustainable food systems	116
Conclusion.....	117
Chapter 6: The soil brings people together	121
Introduction	121
The event, the social interactions and community in the food system.....	121
A return to traditional ways of growing and processing food.....	125
Good food is colourful, flavoursome and fresh.....	126
These shoppers vote with their feet and avoid the supermarket	129

Economic support for the region	130
Farmers’ market shoppers’ perspectives on a moveable feast	130
Community connections through food	131
Relationships with farmers makes the food taste better	131
Cooking and commensality	133
Connections to place	134
Unadulterated, seasonal food	137
Unpretentious, authentic markets	138
Resistance to the power of the supermarket duopoly.....	140
Conclusion.....	141
Chapter 7: The Belconnen and Fyshwick markets are theatre	145
Introduction	145
Markets offer choice, affordability and theatre	145
Social interactions and relationships are integral to these markets	147
Simple, yet exotic food is to be shared.....	149
The tensions embedded in food purchasing choices	151
Fresh food market shoppers’ perspective on a moveable feast	153
An inclusive, vibrant shopping environment that promotes community	153
Consumption patterns: Traditional versus ethical	155
The tension of ethics in practice.....	157
Cooking and identity	158
Family meal preferences	159
Conclusion.....	159
Chapter 8: Supermarket shopping is definitely business not entertainment	163
Introduction	163
Supermarkets for convenient, one-stop shopping	164
Supermarket shopping is not a social outing or an ‘experience’, but a means to an end.....	165
Supermarkets: A place of alienation or community?	167
Food: we like eating it; it satisfies hunger; but as far as enjoyment from cooking is concerned— well, that depends.	169
Dissatisfaction with the dominant food system, but whose fault is it?	172
Supermarket shoppers’ perspective on the moveable feast.....	177
Utilitarian approach to food purchasing—Food priorities amidst other household priorities	177
Large supermarkets are not places for community-building.....	179
Smaller stores for a sense of community	180

Food appreciation is mainly based on price and pragmatism, but sometimes it is about love	181
Meal preparation is catering through the week—cooking on weekends.....	182
Aware but passive consumers	184
Conclusion.....	186
Chapter 9: A moveable feast	191
Introduction	191
Relationships to food.....	193
Instrumental food culture	193
Contemporary relational food culture	195
Temporality—its impact on past, present and future relationships to food	195
Social time—investing time in pleasurable food-related activities.....	196
The aesthetic and sensory attributes of food	198
An emotional attachment to food	198
The philosophy of taste	201
The performance of taste.....	204
Relational aesthetic of food.....	204
Cooking, commensality and conviviality	207
Pathways to food citizenship.....	210
Active participation in the food system and commitment to food citizenship.....	210
Relational reflexivity	212
The continuum of engagement with food citizenship	214
Chapter 10: A moveable feast: Where to from here?	221
Strengths of this thesis.....	223
Limitations of this thesis	223
Implications for policy and practice	224
References	227
Appendices	249
Appendix I: Recruitment methods	249
Recruitment methods for alternative food system focus groups	249
Recruitment methods for supermarket focus groups.....	249
Recruitment methods for fresh food market focus groups	250
Appendix II: Methods for conducting focus groups	251
Appendix III: Focus group questions	253

List of figures and tables

Figure 1: Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).....	7
Figure 2: The Canberra region, as it is situated within NSW.	7
Figure 3: The Kaleen Community Garden, North Canberra, ACT	9
Figure 4: The Community Supported Agriculture enterprise in the Canberra region	10
Figure 5: The Capital Region Farmers’ market	12
Figure 6: The Belconnen and Fyshwick markets	13
Figure 7: Supermarkets in Canberra.....	14
Figure 8: An explanatory framework of the impact of the globalised food system.....	20
Figure 9: An explanatory framework of the impact of local food systems.....	35
Figure 10: A representation of the community gardeners’ food culture and their high degree of engagement with food citizenship.....	100
Figure 11: A representation of CSA members’ food culture and their inconsistent engagement with food citizenship	118
Figure 12: A representation of the farmers’ market shoppers’ food culture and their consistent engagement with food citizenship.....	142
Figure 13: A representation of the fresh food market shoppers’ food culture and their partial engagement with food citizenship.....	160
Figure 14: A representation of the supermarket shoppers’ food culture and their minimal engagement with food citizenship.....	189
Figure 15: The continuum of engagement with food citizenship across five food procurement environments	219
Table 1: Participants' demographics.....	79