

Mentions, papers and meals. An overview of the engagement of Symposiums of Australian Gastronomy with Australian multiculturalism

May 2025

Symposiums of Australian Gastronomy (SAGs from hereon) are biennial events begun in March 1984 that bring together food historians, food writers, academics, cooks and people interested in food and foodways to discuss all things culinary.¹

Each SAG has a theme. The theme of the 3rd SAG in 1987 was 'A multicultural society'. Anthony Corrones in the lead paper *Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Gastronomy* said:

Gastronomic thought in Australia has already gained a great deal from the influence of multiculturalism. The impact of the various ethnic cuisines here has been broad and complex, and although many have written about it I doubt that we have an adequate account yet.^{2 3}

This paper traces multiculturalism as expressed in SAGs 1 – 22 through brief mentions in papers, as the subject of papers, and in meals served at the SAGs.

Brief mentions

Brief mentions were made of the influence of multiculturalism on the Australian table.

For example:

It is impossible, I believe, to exaggerate the influence of the post-war migration. While the substantial British migration did little to change existing Australian cookery (which had, after all, largely derived from the same traditions), the successive waves of Baltic people, Italians, Greeks, Hungarians, Germans, Dutch and Poles changed Australian food traditions by introducing the 'multiculturalism' which has been discussed at previous Symposia. This produced both better standards of cooking of meat and vegetables and a greater variety in the resources themselves.⁴

By the time the White Australia policy⁵ was abandoned, the multicultural food fad was already taking off. The penetration of olive oil, sun-dried tomatoes, satay sauce and bok choy into Australian kitchens was more a commercial coup d'état than a people's revolution.⁶

¹ SAG 1 described itself as 'a balance of what we term "theoreticians", "practitioners" and "passionate amateurs"'. Proceedings of the First Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1984 p. iii

² Corrones, Anthony, *Multiculturalism and the Emergence of Gastronomy*, Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 pp. 17 - 27

³ Page numbering has sometimes been hazardous. I give the page number from the Proceedings of each SAG as published.

⁴ Dunstan, Don, *Tradition and Revival in Australian* Proceedings of 4th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 p.33

⁵ The White Australia policy was a set of Acts passed 1901 at the time of Federation of the colonies: the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, *Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901* and the *Post and Telegraph Act 1901*. The intent of the Acts was to prevent non-white migration to Australia. The policy ceased in 1973

⁶ Bannerman, Colin, *Federated food: the revolution we had to have?*, Proceedings of 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.47

Chef Gabriel Gaté personalised this.

We are all bringing something. I brought a bit of French cuisine. But since I have been in Australia the last eight years, my cooking has changed dramatically, completely. I have been influenced very much by Italian cuisine. I have been introduced to olive oil. In France I used olive oil but just very little because I was not from that region of France. It is a southern, an Italian influence. I have discovered about sweet and sour in Chinese cuisine. I have discovered about Indian spices. You can't help it. You have got to take some influence of all those countries and that brings Australian cuisine about.⁷

A comprehensive list is Appendix 1.

Papers on multiculinarism

Formal papers were presented on Australian multiculinarism.

Aspects of Australian multiculinarism.

For example:

- Jillian Stone presented to the 3rd SAG *The Influence of Chinese Growers on Attitudes to Vegetable Consumption in 19th Century Australia, 1870 - 1920.*⁷
- Tania Cammarano presented a paper on the *Italo-Australian sauce-making tradition* at the 14th Symposium.⁸
- Tammi Jonas presented *From Roasting Dish to Stock Pot: Practices of Frugality between Generations of Migrant Australians* at the 17th SAG.⁹
- At the 22nd SAG Karen Agutter & Rachel Ankeny presented *Migrant food needs in context: Reconsidering ideas of good nutrition*¹⁰; Karen Agutter presented *Producing food, producing new Australians: Catering for the Olympic Games.*¹¹; John Newton and Paul van Reyk presented *Food journeys on the way Down Under a discussion with refugee caterers Tinsae Mulegeta Yigletu and Zina Abdulghani*¹²; Leonard Janiszewski & Effy Alexakis presented *The food of fantasy: Greek cafés and milk bars*¹³; and Freda Moran presented *Curry in Australian history: In and out of place*¹⁴.

The complete list is Appendix 2.

⁷ Gate, Gabriel, *The Future Australian Cuisine*, Proceedings of 2nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988

⁸ Cammarano, Tania, *The Italo-Australian sauce-making tradition*, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005, p.53

⁹ Jonas, Tammi, *From Roasting Dish to Stock Pot: Practices of Frugality between Generations of Migrant Australians* Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005 Abstract only.

¹⁰ Agutter, Kerry and Ankeny, Rachael, *Migrant food needs in context: Reconsidering ideas of good nutrition*, 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.140

¹¹ Agutter, Kerry *Producing food, producing new Australians: Catering for the Olympic Games*, Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.141

¹² Newton John and van Reyk, Paul, *Food journeys on the way Down Under* Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.218

¹³ Janiszewski, Leonard and Alexakis Effy, *The food of fantasy: Greek cafés and milk bars* Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p. 148

¹⁴ Moran Freda, *Curry in Australian history: In and out of place* Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p. 180

Multiculinarism Meals

While the papers had a poor engagement with Australian multiculturalism SAGs often included meals from a diverse range of 'ethnic' cuisines, actively engaging SAG participants with Australian multiculturalism.

For example:

For the banquet at the 11th SAG Anne Ripper presented a Dinner From The Levant.

Baba Ghanouzh, Batinjan migli with Taratour, Batinjan migli with red pepper and garlic, Rolled eggplant sliced filled with goats cheese and walnut, Maguda bil badenjel (omelette with eggplant paste), Nourou sampug, Whole Nubian kid stuffed with burghul, and Thorpe Farm goat cheese with Maggie Beer's quince paste.¹⁵

At the 14th SAG George Qing of Bokchoy Tang presented a lunch of three Chinese healing soups at the 14th Symposium - . Winter Melon & Prawn Soup, Hot & Sour Fish Soup, and White Fungus Soup.¹⁶

Janet Jeff's Dinner at the 18th SAG was 'inspired by the *Deipnosophistae*, compiled in the 3rd Century, translates as 'The Gastronomers', or 'Philosophers at Dinner', a key source of classical Greek recipes and discourse on food.' The dishes were *mezedes*, *sitos* of barley bread with goatmilk cheese, *opson* – grilled eel with mulberry sauce, ancient garum with tuna, a salad of bitter herbs, and great pieces of roasted goat that had to be demolished with fingers, dessert was *glykea* of figs, honey, raisins, sesame and soft new cheese.¹⁷

Discussion

This paper has been a survey of occurrences of multiculturalism at Symposiums of Australian Gastronomy. It has been briefly noted in some papers presented, has been the subject of other papers, and has been the subject of meals. Arguably more could have been done. Of the two hundred plus papers given across SAGs from 1987 to 2022 just 15 dealt at length with instances of Australian multiculturalism. The Bonegilla dinner and discussion between Steve Manfredi and John Newton, and the discussion by John Newton and Paul van Reyk with Tinsae Mulegeta Yigletu and Zina Abdulghani were the only instances I found where SAG participants heard directly from individuals actively engaged in building Australian multiculturalism. The latter could be more integrated into a SAG programme catering meals and speaking of their experiences as exponents of Australian multiculturalism.

¹⁵ *Dinner From The Levant*, Proceedings of 11th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1999 p.91

¹⁶ 'Chinese Lunch, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005, pp. 53 - 54

¹⁷ Symposium dinner, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005 p.72

Appendix 1. Brief Mentions of Multiculturalism

The peasants who are most significant in the history of Australian food are those who arrived from the Mediterranean countries after the second World War.¹⁸

... suddenly we are confronted with real multiculinarism, or what I call world food. It comes under various guises, the most trendy being Nouvelle Chinese and Nouvelle Italian.¹⁹

The main enthusiasm was to 'experiment' with Asian styles. Of those advocating a particular cuisine, four-and-a-half votes went to those of Asia, as against two for French and one-and-a-half to Italian. Chinese was considered passe, with the preferences being for 'Asian generally', Malaysian and Thai.²⁰

It was felt that the most significant influence at the moment is the south-east Asian influence; changes which are taking place within the markets and in places like Victoria Street mean ingredients and styles derived largely from this region are accessible to a greater proportion of the population. The use of stir-frying techniques and of the (?) have progressed in Australia, and this change is beneficial, from the point of view of both health and economy.²¹

The food of the ordinary Australians has moved on from the roasts, grills, corned beef and meatloaf of that time. Australia's second nutritional awakening, following the acceptance of ethnic influences imported from Europe, Asia and the U.S.A., now includes a wonderful variety of high-quality fresh produce and talented cooks and teachers.²²

It is impossible, I believe, to exaggerate the influence of the post-war migration. While the substantial British migration did little to change existing Australian cookery (which had, after all, largely derived from the same traditions), the successive waves of Baltic people, Italians, Greeks, Hungarians, Germans, Dutch and Poles changed Australian food traditions by introducing the 'multiculinarism' which has been discussed at previous Symposia. This produced both better standards of cooking of meat and vegetables and a greater variety in the resources themselves.²³

On first examination, at least from the customer's perspective, a food court could seem to be the least likely place to find an Australian cuisine with shops advertising Chinese, Thai, Mexican, Italian and Lebanese cuisines.²⁴

¹⁸ Pont, Graham, *Upstart Gastronomy: A Cuisine Without Peasants*, Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 p.47

¹⁹ Halliday, James, *Multiculturalism: One-Night Stand or a Marriage Made to Last*, Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 p.61

²⁰ *Discussion* Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 p.144

²¹ *Discussion* Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 p.142

²² Marshal, Anne, *The Food of the Ordinary Australian*, Proceedings of 4th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988

²³ Dunstan, Don, *Tradition and Revival in Australian* Proceedings of 4th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988 p.33

²⁴ Sherringham, Colin, *Understanding the Food Court Dining Experience*, Proceedings of the 6th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1991p.19

By the time the White Australia policy²⁵ was abandoned, the multicultural food fad was already taking off. The penetration of olive oil, sun-dried tomatoes, satay sauce and bok choy into Australian kitchens was more a commercial coup d'état than a people's revolution.²⁶

Chef Gabriel Gaté personalised this.

We are all bringing something. I brought a bit of French cuisine. But since I have been in Australia the last eight years, my cooking has changed dramatically, completely. I have been influenced very much by Italian cuisine. I have been introduced to olive oil. In France I used olive oil but just very little because I was not from that region of France. It is a southern, an Italian influence. I have discovered about sweet and sour in Chinese cuisine. I have discovered about Indian spices. You can't help it. You have got to take some influence of all those countries and that brings Australian cuisine about.²⁷

I note here that in group discussions in the 4th SAG on the challenge and potential of the Australian cuisine, Lebanese food was the subject of one of the groups.²⁸

²⁵ The White Australia policy was a set of Acts passed 1901 at the time of Federation of the colonies: the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, *Pacific Island Labourers Act 1901* and the *Post and Telegraph Act 1901*. The intent of the Acts was to prevent non-white migration to Australia. The policy ceased in 1973

²⁶ Bannerman, Colin, *Federated food: the revolution we had to have?*, Proceedings of 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.47

²⁷ Gate, Gabriel, *The Future Australian Cuisine*, Proceedings of 2nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988

²⁸ Unpaginated, Proceedings of 4th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1988

Appendix 2 Papers on Australian multiculturalism

Jillian Stone presented to the 3rd SAG *The Influence of Chinese Growers on Attitudes to Vegetable Consumption in 19th Century Australia, 1870 - 1920*.²⁹

At the 6th SAG Rita Erlich spoke about a *Revival of Interest in Jewish Food*.³⁰

At the 11th SAG Paul van Reyk presented a paper on *Conquered Cuisines*, a look at what shapes non-Anglo food in the Australian culture.³¹

Tania Cammarano presented a paper on the *Italo-Australian sauce-making tradition* at the 14th Symposium.³²

At the Australian & New Zealand Symposia of Gastronomy & Food History November/December in Wellington Penny Porritt presented *Tempeh, Miso....and Tofu* and Jenny Yee Collinson presented *Romancing the evolution of Vietnamese street food in NZ*.³³

Tammi Jonas presented *From Roasting Dish to Stock Pot: Practices of Frugality between Generations of Migrant Australians* at the 17th SAG.³⁴

In the 18th SAG Tammi Jones presented *From Meat Pie to Pho in four decades: if you are what you eat, are Australians cosmopolitan?*³⁵; Dianna Noyce presented *From Slippery Bob to Baba Ghanoush: the influence of Australia's immigration policies on our culinary culture*.³⁶ and Josephine Gregoire presented *Feeding the immigrant child*.³⁷

Tania Cammarano presented *Eat like a "fascist": How Australia's first Italian cookbook imagined culinary utopia* at the 21st SAG.³⁸

²⁹ Stone, Jillian, *The Influence of Chinese Growers on Attitudes to Vegetable Consumption in 19th Century Australia, 1870 – 1920* Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 pp.169 – 174

³⁰ Erlich, Rita, *Revival of Interest in Jewish Food* Proceedings of 6th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1991 p.64

³¹ van Reyk, Paul, *Conquered Cuisines*, Proceedings of 11th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1999 pp. 57 - 67

³² Cammarano, Tania, *The Italo-Australian sauce-making tradition*, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005, p.53

³³ Proceedings of the Australian & New Zealand Symposia of Gastronomy and Food History. No abstracts or papers for these two were published

³⁴ Jonas, Tammi, *From Roasting Dish to Stock Pot: Practices of Frugality between Generations of Migrant Australians* Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005 Abstract only.

³⁵ Jones Tammi, *From Meat Pie to Pho in four decades: if you are what you eat, are Australians cosmopolitan?* Proceedings of the 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005 Abstract only.p.17

³⁶ Noyce, Dianna, *From Slippery Bob to Baba Ghanoush: the influence of Australia's immigration policies on our culinary culture* Proceedings of the 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2011 p.76

³⁷ Gregoire, Josephine Gregoire, *Feeding the immigrant child* Proceedings of the 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2011 p.95

³⁸ Cammarano, Tania, *Eat like a "fascist": How Australia's first Italian cookbook imagined culinary utopia*, Proceedings of 21st Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2016 p.15

At the 22nd SAG Karen Agutter & Rachel Ankeny presented *Migrant food needs in context: Reconsidering ideas of good nutrition*³⁹; Karen Agutter presented *Producing food, producing new Australians: Catering for the Olympic Games*.⁴⁰; John Newton and Paul van Reyk presented *Food journeys on the way Down Under a discussion with refugee caterers Tinsae Mulegeta Yigletu and Zina Abdulghani*⁴¹; Leonard Janiszewski & Effy Alexakis presented *The food of fantasy: Greek cafés and milk bars*⁴²; and Freda Moran presented *Curry in Australian history: In and out of place*⁴³.

³⁹ Agutter, Kerry and Ankeny, Rachael, *Migrant food needs in context: Reconsidering ideas of good nutrition*, 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.140

⁴⁰ Agutter, Kerry *Producing food, producing new Australians: Catering for the Olympic Games*, Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.141

⁴¹ Newton John and van Reyk, Paul, *Food journeys on the way Down Under* Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.218

⁴² Janiszewski, Leonard and Alexakis Effy, *The food of fantasy: Greek cafés and milk bars* Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p. 148

⁴³ Moran Freda, *Curry in Australian history: In and out of place* Proceedings of 22nd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p. 180

Appendix 3 Multicultural Meals

At the 3rd SAG:

Dinner on the first night was at each of six ethnic restaurants. Participants had been asked to choose within the categories of Chinese, Indian, French, Italian, Japanese and Thai. It was noted that 'the 'trendiest' preference (Australia, early 1987) was Thai. French was decidedly unfashionable. Experiences proved to be extraordinarily diverse and, with hindsight, we should have made an effort to collate reports, which would have exposed a truly 'multicultural' Melbourne dinner.⁴⁴

For the 3rd SAG also Dur-e Dara organised a multicultural lunch -

... a vast table of 'finger-food' and fruits (and not just fingers, various celebrities were seen eating their tiny pizzas with chopsticks). The bonzer smorgasbord of multicultural mezes included: Sushi, Tiropittas, Pizzas, Samosas, Dolmades, Chinese cold meats and noodles, Vietnamese cakes, Greek cakes.⁴⁵

Barbara Santich provided a 'Mediaeval' Lunch at the 5th Symposium.

'This is not an attempt to recreate an authentic mediaeval meal, least of all a monastic mediaeval meal, but simply a selection of dishes which take their inspiration from mediaeval recipes from Italy and Catalonia.

Fave
Platina 's green herb salad
Escabeche
Confetti di melle apia

For the banquet at the 11th SAG Anne Ripper presented a Dinner From The Levant.

Baba Ghanouzh, Batinjan migli with Taratour, Batinjan migli with red pepper and garlic, Rolled eggplant sliced filled with goats cheese and walnut, Maguda bil badenjel (omelette with eggplant paste), Nourou sampug, Whole Nubian kid stuffed with burghul, and Thorpe Farm goat cheese with Maggie Beer's quince paste.⁴⁶

Chef David Thompson prepared a Thai Picnic for lunch at the 9th Symposium.

At the 14th SAG in Beechworth Victoria, chef Stefano Manfredi cooked dinner for participants in the kitchen of Bonegilla Migrant Reception and Training Centre where Manfredi like thousands of migrants spent their early days in Australia. 'Conditions at Bonegilla were basic with accommodation being in fibro and corrugated iron huts. The food was also basic and, though unfamiliar to many migrants, it was typical of Australian food at the time.' Manfredi then was in conversation with food writer John Newton about the experiences of Bonegilla.⁴⁷

Paul van Reyk produced a Sri Lankan Breakfast at the 13th SAG.

⁴⁴ *Six Ethnic Dinners*, Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy

⁴⁵ *Multicultural lunch*, Proceedings of 3rd Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1987 p. 2 (?)

⁴⁶ *Dinner From The Levant*, Proceedings of 11th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 1999 p.91

⁴⁷ Bonegilla Dinner, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy p.19

Also, at the 14th SAG George Qing of Bokchoy Tang presented a lunch of three Chinese healing soups at the 14th Symposium - . Winter Melon & Prawn Soup, Hot & Sour Fish Soup, and White Fungus Soup.⁴⁸

Janet Jeff's Dinner at the 18th SAG was 'inspired by the *Deipnosophistae*, compiled in the 3rd Century, translates as 'The Gastronomers', or 'Philosophers at Dinner', a key source of classical Greek recipes and discourse on food.' The dishes were *mezedes*, *sitos* of barley bread with goatmilk cheese, *opson* – grilled eel with mulberry sauce, ancient *garum* with tuna, a salad of bitter herbs, and great pieces of roasted goat that had to be demolished with fingers, dessert was *glykea* of figs, honey, raisins, sesame and soft new cheese.⁴⁹

At the 22nd SAG lunch on the second day was provided by two women refugees, Tinsae Mulegeta Yigletu and Zina Abdulghani, both of whom do catering. On the second morning participants could sign up to a local food related tour. One of these was *A Taste Of Little India* in the restaurant precinct in nearby Harris Park. Morning tea on the third day of the 22nd SAG was provided by Al Afrah a Lebanese sweet maker. Lunch was provided by El Jannah a popular Lebanese charcoal chicken shop.

⁴⁸ 'Chinese Lunch, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005, pp. 53 - 54

⁴⁹ Symposium dinner, Proceedings of 14th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy 2005 p.72