

Deborah Phillip

FROM BOLO D'AMOR TO BREUDHER: A CONVERSATION ON PORTUGUESE AND DUTCH BURGHER CUISINE IN SRI LANKA

Abstract:

In Sri Lanka, a dwindling minority community continues to refer to themselves as Burgher, with the descriptive Portuguese or Dutch evidence of their ancestral links to the former colonial powers of Sri Lanka. After independence and the rise of communal politics many Burghers migrated overseas in search of greener pastures. Even as their numbers decreased, those that remained continued to flavour and influence local cuisine with their inherited culinary delights, of which the most famous and symbolic of Burgher identity are undoubtedly the *breudher* and *lamprais*. These two dishes, symbolic of the continuous battle between the desire for authenticity and the need for adaptation, have tasted the power of commercial success. For the Burghers this has resulted in a longing for the return to the 'original' version, which is generally, associated with home, family and a way of life that is no more. In previous decades a commitment to family culinary tradition and hours spent in the kitchen meant that the skills necessary to labour over *bolo d'amor* (Love Cake), *bolo fiado* and *fuggetti* were developed under the watchful eyes of mothers and aunts, grandmothers and grandaunts. Today the *pofoertje* pan is hard to come by; the *bolo de co-co* hardly heard of and the *ijzer koekjes* easily replicated. The younger generation struggles to pronounce the names, the older generation remembers with fondness and nostalgia a lost 'golden age'. This panel discussion will focus on the history and heritage of Portuguese and Dutch Burgher cuisine by delving into family cookbooks and stories, recipes and memories to understand the impact that food has on identity, culture and the continuation of tradition.

Biography:

Deborah Philip is an Asst. Lecturer in History at the University of Colombo. Her most recent work includes her research and talks on the modernist art movement of Sri Lanka and the short documentary film, *It Could Happen to You* (2015), which dealt with the attack on the Rio Cinema in Slave Island during the '83 Riots. Her undergraduate dissertation was on the Burghers of Sri Lanka after 1956 and their response to Sinhala Nationalism (2013). *Cooking up a Nation* (2016) was a newspaper feature article

Deborah wrote narrating the story of Hilda Deutrom, editor and compiler of the Ceylon Daily News Cookery Book. Writing this article contributed to her interest in the gendered nature of the Colonial cookbook and the role that food plays in the construction of identity and the nation.

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