The Fame of Chhoyela and Yomari: Reverberations of Newar Foodways in London and in a Transnational Context

Marilena Frisone

Abstract

Food and feasts play an important role in defining Newars' social practices both in Nepal and abroad. Although the religious and symbolic value of specific food items shared by Newars in Nepal has been studied in detail, the significance of Newar foodways as practised in a diasporic context and as circulated in media, has yet to be explored. Newar Londoners regularly engage in food practices of socialisation like festival celebrations and gatherings, which require an enormous organisational effort, from the search of specific ingredients to the arrangement of elaborate dishes served during the events. However, the "social life of Newar food" is not exhausted in the process of production and consumption in London, but rather it *reverberates* in the mediatic sphere of social media, publications, songs, and more recently online events on Newar food. Based on ethnographic fieldwork started in 2015 with the Newar community in London, the paper focuses on two iconic items of Newar food, namely *chhoyela* (roasted meat) and *yomari* (sweet, elongated dumplings), following their pathways from their production and consumption to their presence in songs, webinars, up to *MasterChef: The Professionals UK* programme. Drawing on Nancy Munn's idea of "fame of Gawa"—as generated by food exchanges and gifts that, carrying the names of those involved in the transactions, make the Gawans known to distant others—the paper argues that the circulation of food in events and media contributes to the spatiotemporal expansion of Newar self beyond the space and time of the diasporic community in London, enhancing the fame of Newars and Newar food in a transnational sphere.

Keywords: Newars, anthropology of food, heritage, Nepalese diaspora, identity, fame, media reverberation.

Marilena Frisone is a PhD Candidate in Social Anthropology at the University of Cambridge, and Teaching Fellow in Cultural Anthropology at the University of Padua. She has conducted fieldwork in Nepal, researching on Nepalese followers of Japanese New Religions and focusing on religious conversion, ritual, ethics, hope and conceptions of the future. More recently she has also conducted fieldwork among Newar communities in London, researching on language revitalisation, heritage, and food practices in the diaspora.

In memory of Laxmi Nath Shrestha (1948-2020),
whose passion for teaching I hope will reverberate in this paper.

Introduction

In a collection of essays on food as cultural heritage the editors Michael Di Giovine and Ronda Brulotte write at the very beginning, in their introduction:

> […] we all must eat to sustain ourselves. Yet how we eat, and what we eat, and when we eat, and with whom we eat, all uniquely vary from place to place, group to group, time to time […] And within these discrete social entities, food binds people together; it is individually consumed […] but often communally grown, processed, and prepared. […] as such, food is often a primary marker of individual and group identity. […] Already affective in nature, food therefore takes on even greater emotional weight when designated as "heritage". […] It is also able to contain and embody the memories of people and places across space and time – becoming, in the words of Barbara Kishenblatt-Gimblett, "edible chronotopes".[1]

In this passage Di Giovine and Brulotte effectively point out that eating is not only linked to human nutritional needs, but on the contrary, the choice of specific foods and the circumstances of their consumption are part of distinctive cultural practices. Stressing the socio-cultural, but also affective impact that discourses on food as heritage have for specific ethnic communities, they use the concept of "edible identities", in order to capture the collective dimension of food consumption and its intimate connection to the construction of group identities.[2]

In this article I intend to explore the foodways, or "edible identities", of a diasporic community of Newar Londoners who engage not only in the collective preparation and consumption of festive food, but also in food talks on various media, which enable them to extend their sense of self beyond the present time and space of their lives in the UK.[3] Interest in food and food practices is not new in anthropology and social sciences,[4] but it has received

[1] Michael Di Giovine and Ronda Brulotte, "Introduction: Food and Foodways as Cultural Heritage", in *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*, edited by Ronda Brulotte and Michael Di Giovine (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 1-2.
[2] Ibid., 21.
[3] I wish to thank Ojesh Singh, Sanyukta Shrestha, Sachetan Tuladhar, Sushil Prajapati, Rukmani Manandhar, Menka Shrestha, Sony Shrestha, Rita Devi Singh Dangol, Arjun Pradhan, Satya Prajapati, Bikram Vaidya, Subhash Ram Prajapati, Karna Shakya, and the whole PPGUK community for having offered their precious assistance and advice at various stages, during the preparation of this article. I also owe a special debt of gratitude to the late Laxmi Nath Shrestha, my Nepali and Newar language teacher who, with his tenacity and passion for life, taught me much more than language.
[4] See Marcel Mauss, "Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques". *L'Année sociologique, seconde série* 1 (1923-25): 30-186; Bronislaw Malinowski, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, vol. 2 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935); Edward E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940); Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Culinary Triangle". *Partisan Review* 33, no. 4 (1966): 586-95; C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969); C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1978); Jack Goody, *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); M. Douglas, "Deciphering a Meal", in *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, edited by C. Geertz (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 61-81; M. Douglas (ed.), *Food in the Social Order: Studies*

renewed attention in recent publications of edited volumes and readers,[5] up to one of the latest special issues of *Asian Anthropology*.[6] By following Gianfranco Marrone, who understands the sensory aspect of food consumption and the vast field of visual and verbal discourses on food as a *continuum*, rather than two separate entities,[7] I wish to explore the "language of food" in the double sense of "food talks" and "food that talks". I will thus consider, on the one hand, the mediatic discourses that Newars have been producing ("food talks") and, on the other hand, how specific food items can indeed "talk" about ritual and religious worldviews ("food that talks"), conveying shared understandings of what it means to be Newar. In so doing I will argue that it is precisely in the constant *re-bouncing* and *reverberation* from the realm of organised events to online webinars, newspaper publications, TV shows, and songs, across different media, that we can better grasp the complex meanings of Newar foodways, and their impact in defining Newar sense of identity in diaspora and in a transnational context.

The label 'Newars' refers to the original inhabitants of Kathmandu valley, and they constitute one of many ethnic groups present in Nepal, with distinctive linguistic and ritual traits.[8] Food and feasts play an important role in defining Newar social practices both in Nepal and abroad. In his ethnography of the Newar diaspora in Sikkim, Bal Gopal Shrestha states:

> In Nepal, the religious and ritual life of the Newars is highly guided by calendrical festivals. A great part of their lives is spent organizing and

of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984); Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985); Marvin Harris, *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1985); Arjun Appadurai, "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia". *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 3 (1981): 494-511; A. Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (1988): 3-24.

[5] Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (eds.), *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 3rd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2013); Jakob A. Klein and Anne Murcott (eds.), *Food Consumption in Global Perspective: Essays in the Anthropology of Food in Honour of Jack Goody* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Jakob A. Klein and James L. Watson (eds.), *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016); R. Brulotte and M. Di Giovine (eds.), *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Sidney C. H. Cheung and Tan Chee-Beng (eds.), *Food and Foodways in Asia: Resource, Tradition and Cooking* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

[6] Chan Yuk Wah and James Farrer (eds.), special issue on "Asian Food and Culinary Politics: Food Governance, Constructed Heritage and Contested Boundaries". *Asian Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2021).

[7] Gianfranco Marrone, *Semiotica del gusto. Linguaggi della cucina, del cibo, della tavola* (Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 2016).

[8] Newars speak a Tibeto-Burman language called Newar language or Nepal Bhasa, and they prevalently practice Hinduism, Tantric Buddhism, and a combination of the two. More recently they have also embraced other religious traditions like different forms of Buddhism (e.g. Theravada) and Neo-Hinduism, Christianity and Japanese New Religions. Newar language presents significant local variations both in terms of grammar and pronunciation. Also, there is no standardised transliteration for Newar terms shared by scholars. As the original alphabets used to write Newar language fell in disuse due to political persecution of the language, speakers transcribe it in Nepali Devanagari or Roman letters without using a consistent system. In this article I have adopted the transcription used by my informants for the most relevant terms of this paper (like *yomari*, *chhoyela*, *bhwoye*), as well as for transcribing Newar texts or interviews, although other styles of transcription are also available. For transcriptions of Nepali and Sanskrit instead, I have used the standard system unless when the terms appear within a Newar text. Unless otherwise indicated, where I provide a transcription of the original language in italics, the language used is Newar, whereas in other cased I have prefaced it with "Np." for Nepali, and "Skt." for Sanskrit.

> performing at feasts and festivals. Almost every month they observe a festival, feast, fast or procession of gods and goddesses.[9]

The complex symbolic value of Newar food has been studied in detail by many social anthropologists,[10] and there is a growing interest in the general field of Nepalese migration and diaspora,[11] although little research has yet been conducted specifically on the Newar diaspora.[12] Few of these recent studies on Nepalese migration and diaspora do address Nepalese foodways in relation to health and maternity,[13] and in relation to digital media,[14] but the significance of specific Newar (rather than Nepalese) food practices in diasporic communities and in the media has yet to be fully explored. An exception to this gap in the literature, is the ethnographic account by Bal Gopal Shrestha, already mentioned above, which presents a portrait of the creative ways in which Newar diaspora in Sikkim has transformed Newar traditions and rituals in order to keep them alive. Shrestha describes annual as well as life cycle rituals, and provides detailed ethnographic data on the different types of food consumed during festivals and feasts, or ritually offered on those occasions.[15]

My study of the Newar community in London began in 2015 when I first encountered members of Pasa Puchah Guthi UK, and started collaborating with them for the revitalisation of Newar language.[16] Pasa Puchah Guthi UK (lit. "group of friends' association", hereafter PPGUK) was founded in November 2000 "as a cultural community to fulfil the needs of the Newar community in the UK". It is now a registered charity which aims at introducing and promoting Newar culture among members, developing links with other Newar associations, and organising the celebration of "special dates in Newa year".[17] It counts about 1200 members

---

[9] Bal Gopal Shrestha, *The Newars of Sikkim: Reinventing Language, Culture, and Identity in the Diaspora* (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2015), 79.

[10] See Gérard Toffin, *Pyangaon. Une communauté de la vallée de Kathmandou. La vie matérielle* (Paris: CNRS, 1977); Per Löwdin, *Food, Ritual and Society among the Newars* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1985); Michael Allen, "Hierarchy and Complementarity in Newar Caste, Marriage and Labour Relations". *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (1987): 92-103; Robert I. Levy, *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); David N. Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992); Albert W. van den Hoek, *Caturmāsa: Celebrations of Death in Kathmandu, Nepal*, edited by Johannes C. Heesterman et al. (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2004).

[11] Ishii Hiroshi et al. (eds.), *Nepalis Inside and Outside Nepal* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2007); Tristan Bruslé (ed.), special double issue on "Nepalese Migrations". *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 35-36 (2009-10); Sienna R. Craig, *The Ends of Kinship: Connecting Himalayan Lives between Nepal and New York* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020); Krishna P. Adhikari (ed.), *Nepalis in the United Kingdom: An Overview* (Reading: Centre for Nepalese Studies UK, 2012); David N. Gellner and Sondra L. Hausner (eds.), *Global Nepalis: Religion, Culture and Community in a New and Old Diaspora* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 2018); D. N. Gellner and S. L. Hausner (eds.), *Vernacular Religion: Varieties of Religiosity in the Nepali Diaspora* (Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2019).

[12] Shrestha, *The Newars of Sikkim*, op. cit.

[13] Thea D. Vidnes, *Consuming Expectations: An Exploration of Foodways in Relation to Health and Maternity among Nepalis Living in Norway* (PhD Dissertation, Brunel University, 2017).

[14] Premila van Ommen, "Transmitting Traditions: Digital Food Haunts of Nepalis in the UK", in *Food, Senses and the City*, edited by Ferne Edwards et al. (London: Routledge, 2021), 155-166.

[15] Shrestha, *The Newars of Sikkim*, 75-108.

[16] In 2015 I helped some linguistics students at SOAS starting a Newar Language Society, a student society where I have since coordinated events and volunteered to run classes and workshops related to the promotion of Newar language and culture, together with members of the Newar community.

[17] See http://www.ppguk.org/about-us/ [last accessed 31/12/2021].

and consists of six branches (London, Southeast, Reading, Aldershot, Scotland, Wales)[18] that work in autonomous but coordinated way. Newar Londoners regularly engage in practices of socialisation in which food plays a central role. From annual Mha Puja ("worship of the self") celebrations, to Yomari Punhi ("full moon of *yomari*"), Mohani festival (Np. Dasaĩ, celebrating Durgā as the goddess who killed the demon Mahiśa), Kuchi Bhwoye (festive meal served on the 8th day of Mohani),[19] Yenyā Punhi (Np. Indra Jātrā, a festival celebrating the god Indra), Bṛhat Newāḥ Munā (biennial gathering of Newar communities living in the UK), and various Guthi Bhwoye (feasts periodically organised by Newar associations), these events require an enormous organisational effort for both the catering and the arrangement of additional entertaining performances. However, as I will try to demonstrate in this article, the "social life of Newar food", is not exhausted in the process of production and consumption in London, rather it "reverberates" in the sphere of social media, publications, and more recently in online events, and new gastronomic discourses.

For my argument I draw on Nancy Munn's classic anthropological study *The Fame of Gawa*, where she analyses the way in which positive value transformations are enacted through food gifts and shells' exchange in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) society.[20] In this society, food-giving to overseas visitors is conceptualised as an act operating a spatiotemporal expansion—spatially beyond Gawa and temporally future-oriented—because it triggers the possibility for the giver of later becoming, in his turn, a guest of that visitor outside Gawa. But food exchange is also considered the first step towards the possibility of finding partners for a larger Kula exchange based on the transaction of shells. When a shell is exchanged the transactor's name travels with it, and this is precisely what Gawans call the fame (*butu*) of the transactor, "a mobile dimension of the person" which "extends beyond the physical body" and constitutes a "reverberation" triggered by the person's generosity and capacity to convince others to trade. Because he is able to influence other people's minds, convincing them to get into a Kula exchange with him, and because people who come to know about his generosity speak his name, the transactor becomes a *guyaw* ("leading man"). In other words, his subjectivity is constructed through the reverberation of his name, and this also brings fame to the entire Gawan community.

In this article, I will argue that Newar Londoners, similarly to Gawans, engage in a process of positive value creation by participating in practices of socialisation involving food and requiring effort and dedication. The circulation and reverberation of food and food talk in events and media, further contribute to the spatiotemporal expansion of Newars' collective self beyond London. By organising webinars on Newar culinary heritage, and by circulating media information on Newar food, they connect with a broader community, thus enhancing the "fame", of Newar food and culture in a transnational sphere. This creates a meaningful, *expanded space* in which members of the community can construct their subjectivity as Newars. But it also generates an *expanded future-oriented temporality* by tracing a path that can be followed by future generations, to maintain their cultural identity. I will focus on two iconic items of Newar culinary tradition, namely *chhoyela* (roasted meat, especially the loin part of water buffalo) and *yomari* (sweet, elongated dumplings), following their pathways from their consumption in *guthi* (Newar associations) events, to their presence in various media. The analysis that follows emerges from fieldwork conducted in the form of participant observation

[18] Wales branch is currently inactive.
[19] The terms *bhwoye* in Newar, or the corresponding *bhoj* in Nepali, can be translated as "festive meal".
[20] Nancy D. Munn, *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1992 [1986]).

at those events in presence, but also digital ethnography, participating into online events, or entertaining WhatsApp/Messenger/Zoom conversations with members of the community both in diaspora and in Nepal.[21]

Chhoyela: Converting Food into Fame

On 29th September 2018, a joint Guthi Bhwoye was organised by all PPGUK branches with the help of many volunteers in the community. Traditional Newar feasts (*bhwoye*) display a huge variety of dishes served with many variations during the ceremonial and festive meals, and by focusing on this specific Guthi Bhwoye I will try to highlight the important role played by roasted meat (*chhoyela*) in ritual, cosmological, social, music, and media discourses, as a symbol of Newar identity. The event was held in Reading, UK, and more than 250 people attended.[22]

The *bhwoye* was announced on Facebook and community chats, as well as through Nepali media like for example the *Nepalipatra*, which on 30th August 2018 titled: "Belāyatmā 'paleṭī kasera laptemā khāne' paramparāgat newārī bhoj āyojanā hũdai" ("Preparations in England for a traditional Newar feast consisting in eating from leaf plate (*lapte*) while sitting in lotus posture (Np. *padmāsana*)".[23] The article defined the upcoming event as a "delightful opportunity" (Np. *sukhad avasar*), defined the different Newar types of food as people's favourite (Np. *phevreṭ*) and announced: "In this feast (Np. *bhoj*) there will be more than 30 varieties of Newar food […] *chhoyela*,[24] pulse cake, rice pancake, egg, chicken meat, bamboo-shoot and potato soup, sweet pancake, eggs, hog plum soup, there will be a chance to rejoice in the taste of truly original Newar varieties";[25] and this was indeed the experience of participants.

[21] Following what Sarah Pink et. al. (eds.), *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice* (London: Sage, 2016), 7, have recently called "a non-digital-centric approach to the digital", I have considered the digital as part of a wider context of social relations and co-production of ethnographic knowledge.

[22] This *bhwoye* was remarkable for two reasons: it was the first time that such an extensive variety of dishes was prepared in the UK; and it was also the first time that three elder women were included in the group of elder men, who traditionally sit at the beginning of the row in this kind of *bhwoye*. The decision to change tradition, on the basis of gender equality, was reached within the community after a series of negotiations.

[23] https://nepalipatra.com/news/uk-newari-bhoj/6835 [last accessed 31/12/2021].

[24] There are different kinds of *chhoyela*: *mana chhoyela* (boiled); *haku chhoyela* (roasted on flame); normal *chhoyela* (grilled, roasted or somehow a combination of boiled and then roasted etc.). *Mana chhoyela* is generally used for ritualistic purposes, *haku chhoyela* is instead typically used for *guthi bhwoye*.

[25] The Nepali text says: *so bhojmā newārī khānākā 30 bhandā bhaḍhi parikārharu rahanechan […] choilā* [*chhoyela*]*, bārā, catāmari, aṇḍā, kukhurākā māsu, ālu tāmā boḍī, mālpuwā, aṇḍā, lapsīko jhol, sahitakā maulik newārī parikārharuko swādmā ramāune avasar pāunechan*.

Figure 1. Screenshot from video of PPGUK Guthi Bhwoye 2018, Reading, 29th September 2018. Courtesy of Aashish Shrestha.

Sushil Prajapati, President of PPGUK Southeast branch at the time, planned the list of items to be served in this *bhwoye* and in the *samay-baji* (a Tantric meal, usually served at the beginning, after *samay* offering has been made to the gods).[26] The list was impressive, and for the first time it raised the number of items from the 35 cooked in 2017 to the 45 prepared for this occasion. Variations concerning the items served in *samay-baji* are common, and can depend on caste, place, or the host's choices, and in London, also on what volunteers are willing to prepare. The items served as *samay-baji* for this specific *bhwoye* included beaten rice (*baji*), black soybeans (*haku musya*), garlic and ginger (*laabhaa paalu*), fish (Bhaktapur Newar *nga*, Kathmandu Newar *nya*), boiled tossed egg (*mana khen*), moong green beans pancake (*muu wo*), black-eye beans (*bhuti*), potatoes (*aalu*), a sweet pastry (*maalpaa*), seasoned garlic (*laabhaa waalaa*), and roasted meat (*chhoyela*).[27]

Chhoyela is thus an important element which appears in both the festive meal (*bhwoye*) and the *samay-baji*, and it is a constant feature within a set of dishes which may vary. Variations can also concern religious and symbolic interpretations of the dishes which make up *samay-baji*. For Sanyukta Shrestha (former President of PPGUK London branch), there is a set of six main items which would correspond to the five elements (Skt. *pañcatattva*) of Tantric cosmology.[28] According to Robert Levy the ritual importance of meat in *samay* is of course justified by the fact that it is a Tantric offer, but it also symbolises the idea of feeding the

[26] According to Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, 302-303, the word *samay* "is the same word as *samaya*, Skt. vow or sacrament" and thus defined as Tantric sacramental food.

[27] One of the books consulted by members of PPGUK community when preparing for a *bhwoye* is usually: Tara Devi Tuladhar, *Thāybhu: Bhoy [bhwoye] Jvalaṃyā Vivaraṇ* ["*Thāybhu* (Brass Plate): A Description of Feast Materials"] (Kathmandu: Chhusingsyar, 2011). In the section on *samay-baji* (ibid., 48-50) it states that although other items may be included: "When putting *samay-baji*, the items that should absolutely be there are the following: 1) puffed rice; 2) beaten rice; 3) beans; 4) ginger; 5) roasted meat; 6) *thwon* or *ailaa* (typical Newar alcoholic drinks): one of the two" (*samaybaji tayeble madayeka magaagu ghaasaata thathe jula: 1) syaabaji; 2) baji; 3) musya; 4) paalu; 5) chhoyela; 6) thwon waa ailaa: madhyey chhataa*). The book also specifies a list of items that can be added to it and has a picture of how items should be placed within the plate.

[28] These are, according to Sanyukta: 1) *baji* and *syaabaji* (beaten rice and puffed rice) corresponding to *ākāś* (sky); 2) *haku musya* (black-eye beans) corresponding to *vāyu* (air); 3) *paalu* (ginger) corresponding to *jala* (water); 4) *chhoyela* (roasted meat) corresponding to *pṛthvī* (earth); 5) *ailaa* (alcoholic drink) corresponding to *tejas* (light). On the symbolic meanings of *samay-baji* see Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, 302-304. Concerning the possibility of different interpretations of these ritual food items, it is also worth noting that Shaka Shree Vajracharya, a priest from Kathmandu that I interviewed, mentions *laabhaa* (garlic) as fifth item of the list instead of *ailaa*.

Tantric Goddess residing in each participant, and it would be connected to the Hindu logic prescribing meat consumption in sacrificial context already stated in the classical Hindu text of *Manu-smṛti*.[29] As already noticed by David Gellner, the interpretations of this Tantric meal (*samay-baji*) may vary.[30] It can represent the five elements as we discussed above, or it can be associated to the six tastes (Skt. *ṣaḍrasa*) to be consumed by the Tantric practitioner as prescribed in the Buddhist text *Hevajra Tantra*, but also the nine-grain fire offerings (*nava caru*) of the Hindu tradition.[31] As Lévi-Strauss once remarked in his analysis of myth: "All available variants should be taken into account. […] There is no single 'true' version of which all the others are but copies or distortions. Every version belongs to the myth".[32] Similarly, I would like to suggest approaching the study of Newar food by looking at all its variations – including not only its cosmological interpretations, but also its transformations and reverberations in social life, music and media – as "variations on the theme".

Figure 2. *Samay-baji* Tantric meal containing *chhoyela* meat, from PPGUK Guthi Bhwoye, Reading, 29th September 2018. Photo by the author.

[29] Levy, *Mesocosm*, 303-6, 325.
[30] Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, 303.
[31] According to Gellner (ibid., 303-4, 378), the six items contained in *samay-baji* would correspond to the six tastes (*ṣaḍrasa*) mentioned in the *Hevajra Tantra*: 1) sweet (*chaaku*) (Skt. *madhu*); 2) bitter (*kaayu/khaayi*) (Skt. *tiktaka*); 3) sour (*paaun*) (Skt. *amla*); 4) salty (*chisawaah*) (Skt. *lavaṇa*); 5) spicy (*paalu*) (Skt. *kaṭuka*); 6) astringent (*phaaku*) (Skt. *kaṣāya*). Verses 46-47 of the *Hevajra Tantra* say: "He must eat the Five Nectars, drink liquor made from molasses, eat the poisonous Neem (a species of tree) and drink the placental fluids. He must eat foods which are sour, sweet, bitter, hot, salty, astringent (Skt. *amla-madhura-kaṣāyādi tikta-lavaṇa-kaṭukas tathā*), rotten, fragrant and bloody liquids along with semen. By means of awareness of non-dual knowledge there exists nothing inedible (Skt. *nābhaktaṃ vidyate kiñcid advayajñānacetasā*)", see David Snellgrove, *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study* (London: Oxford UP, 1959: 58); see also George W. Farrow and Indudharan Menon, *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001 [1992]). Also, as mentioned above, in Newar Hinduism *samay* can be associated with the 9 grains (Skt. *nava caru*) offered in a fire sacrifice: beaten rice, puffed rice, meat, fish, egg, lentil cake, ginger, black lentils, and one green vegetable.
[32] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), 218.

Chhoyela in fact also appears as a recurrent theme in traditional Newar songs related to festivals. A *Kathmandu Post* article in English (13th September 2019) for example, mentions a famous line sung during Indra Jātrā.[33] The song is widely popular among Newars, and it was also chanted in London during the first Indra Jātrā celebration organised by PPGUK London branch, on 14th September 2019. The song, which is recited when the white elephant Pulu Kisi[34] (representing the vehicle of Indra) arrives among a festive crowd, roughly says: "Make sure there is a piece of *chhoyela* in my *samay-baji*, Pulu Kisi is coming" (*Laa chhaku wayka samaybaji – wola wola wola wola Pulu Kisi*).[35] The significance of *chhoyela* in the context of Newar *bhwoye* and other ritual meals was also repeatedly stressed by my informants. As Sanyukta once put it, during an informal interview: "No *chhoyela* no *ailaa*, no *bhwoye*!". And *chhoyela* is also the dish served immediately after *baji* in the sequence of items consumed during a *bhwoye*. In a conversation, Sushil remembered that as a child in Bhaktapur he used to eat *mhu samay-baji*, that is a handful (*mhu*) of beaten rice (*baji*) with two pieces of roasted meat (*chhoyela*), cooked straight after the sacrifice. This meal was consumed as a sort of quick *prasād* (Skt. "blessed food"). Another member of the community, Sachetan Tuladhar, stressed the importance of *chhoyela* also in *chhoyelabhu*, a special meal consumed by the family on the day before any big event, like for example a wedding.

Such ethnographic accounts thus, once again, reveal how, alongside Hindu and Buddhist interpretations of Newar food items, we also need to follow the life of *chhoyela* and Newar foodways beyond the *bhwoye* event itself, in order to map its "reverberations". A few days after the 2018 Guthi Bhwoye in fact, a video was released capturing the most important scenes of that event. Ojesh Singh, current President of PPGUK Board of Trustees, acted as narrating voice over the video, describing the event, and listing the relevant food items required for *samay-baji* and *guthi bhwoye*. Ojesh also told me that he is particularly fond of *chhoyela* and considers it a distinctive dish of the community.[36] The video circulated on Facebook and was shared by many members of the local Newar diasporic community. On 4th October 2018 (18th Asoj 2075), a press release concerning that event was published in the online newspaper *Wenepali.com* entitled: "A Newar feast in the UK for the preservation of culture" (Np. *saṃskṛti saṃrakṣaṇa ko lāgi belāyatmā newā bhoj*).[37]

But the "fame" of Newar food culture did not stop there, it continued travelling through media. In another video realised by PPGUK to document the event, Kumar Shrestha, President of PPGUK Central Committee at the time, declared: "The main objective of this Newar *bhwoye* is to inform (Np. *jānkārī garāunu*) the new generations of Newars living in the UK about Newar *bhwoye*, show them what kind of food gets included in a *bhwoye*, what is important about this food (Np. *yo khānāko ke mahatva cha*) […], what kind of benefits it gives to the body, and how it can attract people (Np. *akārṣit hunu*, 'to be attractive')", including not only

[33] https://kathmandupost.com/food/2019/09/13/a-feast-fit-for-the-gods [last accessed 31/12/2021].
[34] Pulu Kisi – who corresponds to Airawat, the vehicle of Hindu god Indra – is said to come wandering around in the Kathmandu valley in search of his lord during Indra Jātrā. *Kisi* means elephant in Newar language, and *pulu* comes from the straw mat that covers the model representing the elephant and used in public celebrations, see Gérard Toffin, *La fête-spectacle: Théâtre et rite au Népal* (Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2010), 61. For other studies on Indra Jātrā see also Gérard Toffin, "The Indra Jātrā of Kathmandu as a Royal Festival: Past and Present". *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 19, no.1 (1992): 73-92.
[35] Only the first line of the song is traditional, the second part was instead added in the version sung by Madan Krishna Shrestha a few decades ago (Subhash Prajapati, personal communication, 24/01/2022).
[36] For that specific *bhwoye* lamb meat was used to make *chhoyela*, as buffalo meat is not easily available in the UK.
[37] https://www.wenepali.com/2018/10/57380.html [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Newars, but also non-Newar friends who could be invited to participate. According to Nancy Munn fame is:

> […] an enhancement that transcends material, bodily being, and extends beyond the physical body, but refers back to it. Fame is a mobile, circulating dimension of the person: the travels (*-taavin*) of a person's name (*yaga-ra*) apart from his physical presence. In fame, it is as if the name takes on its own internal motion traveling through the mind and speech of others.[38]

It is in this way that we could conceptualise the role of press releases, songs, news shared on Facebook, and webinars within the system of circulation of Newar food across media. Similar to what Munn describes, although within a very different cultural context, we could say that through these conversations about food, positive values are created and "food is converted into fame".[39]

Food, Heritage, and Gastronomy in Newar Transnational Community

An important role in the process of reverberation of the fame of Newar culinary practices is also played by webinar presentations, which will be the focus of this paragraph. These online events constitute *communicative acts*, which provide Newar food with additional values related to the importance of culinary tradition and its continuity among younger generations in the diaspora. But they also represent the possibility of a wider recognition of Newar culture and identity at an international level, within a gastronomic or heritage discourse. The role of Newar food within gastronomic and heritage discourses was addressed during a World Newah Organization (WNO) online conference organised on 30th–31st December 2020, which dealt with various aspects of Newar culture, including food. Newar chef Bikram Vaidya, who entitled his talk "Newa culinary heritage: Mystical cuisine of the world", discussed the role of meat in Newar diet, giving details about the cuts of water buffalo meat used to prepare different dishes and their nutritive values. In his introduction he stressed how Newar "knowledge, skills, and practices" (*gyaan, sheep, abhyaas*) have been transmitted from generation to generation (*chhagu pustaan megu pustaayaata*) for a very long time, and how this "provides communities with a sense of identity and continuity". He then stressed the importance of food in relation to Newar religious festivals and rituals, to the point that "without preparing food it would be impossible carrying them out" (*nayegu madayekaa chhun he chale jui makha*) and that "if food were not given, nobody would come [to the festivals]" (*nayegu madusaa, su he woyi makhu*). Being a chef himself and belonging to a Vaidya family, traditionally considered ayurvedic physicians, he is particularly concerned with the nutritive and health-related properties of Newar food. In an interview with me he later mentioned the six tastes included in Newar cuisine and he stressed that "food is medicine". However, Bikram is equally interested in both preserving traditional Newar food and innovating it, as well as promoting its inclusion in the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage.[40]

---

[38] Munn, *The Fame of Gawa*, 105.
[39] Ibid., 50.
[40] For a recent discussion on tangible and intangible heritage in Nepal see Michael Hutt et. al. (eds.), *Epicentre to the Aftermath: Rebuilding and Remembering in the Wake of Nepal's Earthquakes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021). For a recent discussion on Japanese food and its inclusion in the intangible heritage list of UNESCO as a

Although Newar food has not managed yet to make its way into the UNESCO list, the idea of traditional food as heritage is certainly already widespread in the Newar community. On 7th February 2021, Ojesh jointly organised an online seminar with the PPGUK Reading branch entitled "Newah Culinary Heritage". During this seminar a speaker from Nepal, Sugam Tamrakar, working in the hospitality sector, explained to young Newars living in the UK – and to an audience of Newars in diaspora and in Nepal attending the event via Zoom or Facebook – the system of courses and different dishes served during a *sukuu bhwoye*.[41] Ojesh introduced the event by saying: "The objective of today's seminar is to promote, preserve and educate on our Newar traditions, not only in a local area, but also, as much as possible, in the global diaspora" (*Newa tajilajiyaata local area jaka makhu gaeyaanaa Newaayaa 'global diaspora promotion, preservation and educate' yaagu dhaigu thauyaagu seminaryaa objective kha*). In other words, the online seminar on Newar culinary heritage, became an opportunity for the Newar diaspora to learn and share knowledge about Newar food with other Newars from Nepal and the UK.[42] The digital space transnationally connected people belonging to the Newar community, and contributed to the spatial expansion of the Newar self and to the sense of belonging of Newar Londoners. This created a mediatic "reverberation", that is a re-presentation of Newar food beyond the physical encounter of a *bhwoye*. But this event also contributed to the expansion in time of the Newar self. By sharing their knowledge with a younger generation of Newar diaspora, more culturally competent members of the community created in fact an opportunity for their traditions to be remembered and possibly practised by their descendants. In this way, the importance of certain foods and their link to specific festivals and ritual events in the life of Newars reverberates within the global Newar community, effectively reaching the younger diaspora in the UK.

The problem of how the diaspora community can preserve tradition was addressed during the Q&A session of the Newah Culinary Heritage online seminar when Tamrakar, who had previously stressed the importance of preparing dishes in a traditional way, seemed to move to a more flexible approach. He said:

> […] when we are abroad, we miss the food we had, and we try to replicate [it] but sometimes [it] doesn't feel right or proper […] we had a conversation with Ojesh about: "How about having peanut butter *yomari*?". Some people might not be happy with this, but it is about getting that creativity and the heritage on the move in a fusion way. If you have all the stuff, you need to do it properly, but if not, why not doing fusion and still keeping the heritage alive?

Similar discussions, on how and whether it is possible to change tradition without betraying it, are also going on in the diaspora community. Some members of the community for example, support the preparation of mushroom *chhoyela*, as a possibility for commercialising the dish or making it appealing to a Western vegetarian/vegan audience. Others instead, remain

possible comparative example, see also Nancy K. Stalker (ed.), *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity* (New York: Oxford UP, 2018).

[41] A feast during which the meal is served while guests are sitting in a row on a straw mattress (*sukuu*).

[42] As also remarked by Ojesh at the beginning of this webinar, the Covid-19 pandemic, during which such activities were taking place, unexpectedly created additional opportunities for Newars around the world to come together using online platforms, in order to promote and raise awareness about the importance of supporting Newar cultural practices.

adamant in saying that *chhoyela* can only be meat as suggested in fact by the word *-laa* in *chhoye-laa*.[43]

The "limits of interpretation", so to speak, in deciding to which extent a certain Newar dish can be changed before it becomes something else, and to what extent a certain dish can shift from a traditional culinary practice to a contemporary gastronomic discourse, are thus negotiated within the community according to its aesthetic, religious, moral, political, and social values.[44] In the same online event discussed above, for example, Sugam Tamrakar, who showed a picture of *yomari* during the online seminar, said: "Everybody knows this, this has been made popular recently in *MasterChef* and I presume this is not what it looked like, but this is what it's supposed to look like, to be very honest with you". Tamrakar's attitude is shared by other members of the Newar community and shows how, on the one hand, introducing Newar dishes into the international gastronomic discourse is considered as an opportunity to promote Newar cuisine and construct its uniqueness, but on the other hand, it also entails the risk of moving the dishes out of their cultural context into a different discourse, with other interlocutors in mind. For example, on the same occasion, Tamrakar suggested that we change the translation of *baji* from "beaten rice" to "rice flakes", because this second term would be more appropriate or elegant in a gastronomic context, and it would be better understood by an English-speaking audience. Sushil, who is also a restaurant owner, however, pointed out that the word "beaten" would be a closer translation from the Nepali word *piṭnu* used to describe the process of production of *baji*, and he expressed his perplexity in the use of the term "rice flakes", because this is also used as translation for an Indian type of flakes which are different from *baji*. Sushil then asked:

> How can we differentiate from others? If we want to differentiate ourselves from others, what can our "beaten rice" be? (Np. *aru bāṭa kasari alag hune bhandā kheri, hāmro beaten rice ke huna sakcha?*) How to differentiate from Indian rice flakes? How do we make ourselves more presentable to people?

The problem addressed by Sushil clearly shows the complex consequences generated by the introduction of Newar food into the gastronomic discourse. It also highlights the problems that the community of Newar restaurant owners are debating: How can Newar cuisine create a brand for itself that distinguishes it from the neighbouring and currently more famous Indian cuisine? How can it effectively present itself to an international audience of potential customers?[45]

---

[43] The word *-laa* is included in the term *chhoye-laa*, which I chose to transcribe as *chhoyela*, following one of the most common transcriptions used by Newar speakers.

[44] Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).

[45] Similar discussions on food as heritage have been going on also in the broader field of Nepalese cuisine. For example, Karna Shakya, an entrepreneur and philanthropist very active in Nepal, launched a campaign called "Globalization of Nepal Heritage Cuisine" in collaboration with representatives of the Hotel Association of Nepal, Chefs Association of Nepal, Restaurant and Bar Association of Nepal, and the Nepal Tourism Board. The initiative culminated in a series of events and the publication of a recipe-book: Karna Shakya et al., *Nepali Heritage Cook Book: Experience Nepal – Cuisine and Culture. Globalizing Nepal Heritage Cuisine* (Kathmandu: Nepal Tourism Board, 2018). The book, which collects recipes belonging to different ethnic groups, starts by celebrating the cultural and ethnic diversity of Nepal, but then it also tries to construct a national identity that might fit into discourses on heritage.

The Journey of *Yomari*: From Panauti to London and *MasterChef*

On 14th December 2019, PPGUK Southeast branch organised a Yomari Punhi celebration which also included a "*yomari* competition". According to the tradition, the practice of making *yomari* (sweet, elongated dumplings) is linked to a legend concerning the ancient village of Panauti located southeast of Kathmandu. According to one version of the story, Kuber, a god associated with wealth and richness, had appeared to a merchant of Panauti, disguised as a beggar. Having received great hospitality Kuber was so pleased that he revealed his true identity to the merchant and gave him a gift of figs, and in fact according to some the word *yo-mari* would mean fig-shaped bread (*yo*, figs).[46] In another version of the legend, it is narrated that Kuber appeared as a renouncer to the wife of a merchant who looked after him and offered him food. Pleased with her welcoming he offered a citron as a sign of gratitude, by also telling her that if she put it on the traditional container used for storing rice (Np. *bhakārī*) she will have abundance of rice throughout the year. When her husband came back, and heard the story, he asked her to cook a *yomari* in the shape of a citron and he put it on top of the *bhakārī*. Since that time on, *yomari*, which are associated with Kuber and symbolise prosperity, have been offered to Dhāneśvar Mahādeva in Panauti or to Annapurna (the goddess of rice-harvest) in Kathmandu, by placing them on top of the newly harvested rice in the storage room, on the full moon of the Newar month of Thinlaa (November/December). After four days, they are collected and consumed as *prasād*, and this offering is said to ensure that the storage will always be full and that there will never be shortage of food in that household.[47] On that day, more *yomari* are prepared to be shared with the family together with other delicacies of traditional Newar cuisine.

On 14th December 2019, a group of volunteers, which I also joined, gathered in the early afternoon in southeast London in order to prepare enough *yomari* for all guests who were going to celebrate this festival together. Unfortunately, the person who is usually considered the most knowledgeable member of the community when it comes to rituals, festivals, and celebrations could only join us later, because of a bad back pain. So, the group of ladies that gathered started the preparation of *yomari* through various attempts of trying to remember the best technique to be used to prepare the dough, and also to shape and fill them with the right amount of *chaku* (molasses). Later, when the *yomari*-making competition was announced, members of the community were invited to participate. A total of six people competed, five women and a man with his little daughter, and as soon as the starting signal was given, all participants began shaping *yomari* at an incredibly fast speed, with the aim of producing as many as possible, and shaping them as nicely as possible. When the voting started, a friend of Sushil, attending the event, was invited to have a look, while others explained to him what was going on. This person was Santosh Shah, the Nepali chef that we have come to know through his recent presence as finalist in *MasterChef: The Professionals UK 2020*.[48]

[46] See Löwdin, *Food, Ritual and Society among the Newars*, op. cit.; and Mary M. Anderson, *The Festivals of Nepal* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1971). Another popular etymology often shared by Newars is that *yo* comes from the Newar verb *yaye* which means "to like, to be fond of" and thus *yo-mari* could be translated as "the bread that we like".

[47] See Toffin, *Pyangaon*, 81-82.

[48] Luckily for me, Santosh does not remember that I took part into the competition, and that I received the last prize for the worst *yomari*–whose shape was so unrecognisable and so oversize that it was nicknamed *bomb-yomari*!

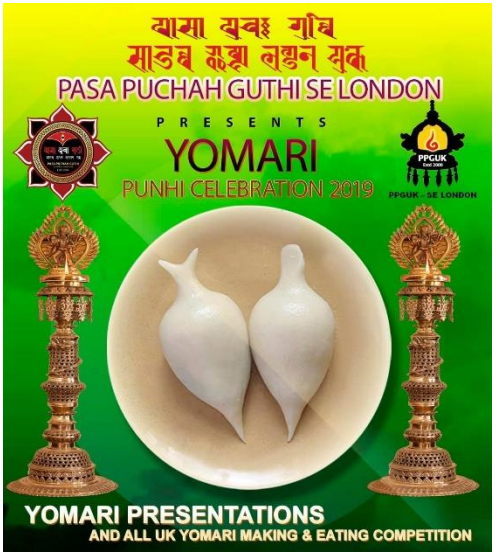

Figure 3. Poster of Yomari Punhi celebration, London, 14th December 2019.
Courtesy of PPGUK Southeast branch.

Later, while competing in *MasterChef,* Santosh decided to prepare his version of this sweet, and worked closely with Sushil to experiment with it. Bringing *yomari* to *MasterChef* opened the possibility for this Newar dish to enter a broader gastronomic discourse. By doing so, the "fame" of this traditional dish was expanded beyond the spatiotemporal dimension of the Newar ethnic community and its festival, to enter the field of *haute cuisine*. This "reverberation" further stirred an ongoing discussion within the Newar community, and among Nepali caterers in the UK and in Nepal, where a gastronomy competition was organised on 22nd March 2021. This competition was organised by the International Nepalese Chefs Society and the Global Nepalese Chefs Federation, and it was inaugurated by Karna Shakya who welcomed the two judges Santosh Shah and Vikram Singh. Karna Shakya, head of Karna Positive Trust, had also previously hosted Santosh Shah in an online event entitled "Globalization of Nepalese Heritage Cuisine with Chef Santosh Shah", held on 12th December 2020.[49]

One day after participating in the PPGUK Southeast branch Yomari Punhi event, on 15th December 2019, I also attended the Yomari Punhi celebration organised by PPGUK London branch. In this branch the event had been organised with an educational intent, in order to teach children about this tradition and its meaning. As one of the members told me during an interview: "Some kids would even ask what is *yomari*? You see! If we can show them, then they will understand" (*gumhagumha [mastapisan] yomari chhu? Dhakaa dhai, na taa kaa! […] aa jhhee kenaayenkiphusaa, eh yomari thwo kanisaa dhakaa buje jui phu*). During the celebration then children were asked to make their *yomari*, and they were taught to sing the old

[49] As I am writing Santosh Shah has won *MasterChef: The Professionals, Rematch* on 27th December 2021, presenting Nepalese dishes inspired to Dasaĩ festival, but this time completely vegan. This move further shows Nepalese chefs and restaurant owners' attention to recent contemporary trends in the gastronomic discourse. A similar discussion on the possibility of creating a mushroom *chhoyela* that could be appealing to vegan customers had been started, as we have seen, by another member of the Newar diaspora, and other concerns on "packaging" and "branding" Nepalese food specialties had been discussed by the Nepalese Caterers Association in the UK, at an online event in 2020.

song *Tya chin tya*, associated with the tradition of kids walking from household to household in Nepal, asking for *yomari*.[50]

At the same event a videogame called *Save Your Yomari* was also released by Sanyukta Shrestha, who was the President of PPGUK London branch at that time, and this was in continuation with a previous one called *Yomariman*.[51] *Save Your Yomari*, released on 15th December 2019, on the occasion of Yomari Punhi celebration in London, is a simple online game where some threats are launched against a *yomari*, and the player has to intercept them in order to save the sweet dumpling. The game is thought as an educational tool, and in fact each time a level is completed, the player is presented with some information on different aspects of Newar culture. After completing the first level, an explanation of what *yomari* is appears, while after the second one, there is a description of Khaasti or Bauddhanath, which is a World Heritage Site located in Kathmandu and appearing as the setting for this level of the videogame. Unlocking levels three, four, and five gives access to information on Kwopa Layekoo or Bhaktapur Durbar Square, Yela Layekoo or Patan Durbar Square, and Yen Layekoo or Kathmandu Durbar Square, which are again World Heritage Sites used as background setting for these sections of the game.

Yomariman, the other videogame mentioned above which also had an educational purpose, focused on the necessary steps for the preparation of *yomari* and on the importance of charity, and it was released on 22nd December 2018, once again at a Yomari Punhi celebration in London. Therefore, somehow, these strategies used in order to get children involved in cultural practices and learning activities, constitute attempts of creating a meaningful environment, where making *yomari* can make sense for Newar children growing up in London. Through these initiatives the subjectivity of the community is shaped and expanded temporally, hoping that the new generation will also care for its Newar heritage and will continue it, although perhaps in a different way. The importance of such a temporal

[50] The Newar text of the song says:
tya chhin tya, bakachhin tya laataapaataa kulichaan jusa/juchhin tya |
yamari chwaamu ukii dune haamu/haku, byusaa maaku, mabyusaa phaku ||
byumha lyaase mabyumha/mabyusaa buri kuti |
tya chhin tya, bakachhin tya laataapaataa kulichaan jusa/juchhin tya |
chhimi nan chiku, jimi nan chiku, yomari yaakanan bii haji ||
"If you give it in a four-*mana* pot it's good, but it's okay also if it's a two-*mana* pot or even smaller than this. *Yomari* is pointed, there is sesame inside/it is black inside, if you give it to me, it's sweet, but if you don't give it, it doesn't taste good. If you give it in a four-*mana* pot it's good, but it's okay if it's a two-*mana* pot or even smaller than this. You are cold too, I am cold too, please quickly give me *yomari*!". Other versions of the song can be found in Toffin, *Pyangaon*, 81, and Todd Lewis, *The Tuladhars of Kathmandu: A Study of Buddhist Tradition in a Newar Merchant Community* (PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1984), 409-10. Also, many articles in magazines or newspapers are published around the days in which Yomari Punhi is celebrated and describe or comment on this practice. For an interesting example of newspaper discussion on current commercialisations of the *yomari* dish, as opposed to the tradition of giving it out as a gift, see the following article in Nepali: "Kasarī āviskār bhayo yaḥmari? Vyāvasāyīkaraṇko mār thapĩdā 'krancī' pani?" ["How was *yomari* invented? On top of the negative impact caused by commercialisation, also 'crunchy'?"], *PahiloPost*, 19th December 2021, https://pahilopost.com/content/20211219114521.html [last accessed 31/12/2021]. The article also emphasises that the tradition of singing *Tya chhin tya* while "begging" (*phwane*, Np. *māgnu*) for *yomari* is not only a way to consolidate social relations with family and neighbours who donate *yomari*, but also a means to educate children on this festival, quite in tune with what Newars do in London. On the commodification of food in Kathmandu and the emergence of "restaurant culture", as part of the construction and performance of middle-class lifestyles, see Mark Liechty, "Carnal Economies: The Commodification of Food and Sex in Kathmandu". *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no.1 (2005): 1-38.

[51] For demonstrative videos of the two videogames see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afJIKBRB_cc [last accessed 31/12/2021]; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT4_gAV2TUM [last accessed 31/12/2021].

expansion was further revealed by an online event entitled "Let's cook *yomari* together", when PPGUK London branch members gathered during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, and cooked along, while also sharing information about the festival. This kind of activity was also developed individually by a very young member of the community, who realised and posted an open access and humorous video tutorial in English on how to make *yomari*.

Such activities also resonate with other contemporary practices in media, like transforming *yomari* in a cartoon character, which make of *yomari* an iconic symbol of Newar identity. This *yomari* character appeared in a series of comic strips published and shared on social media, where the story of Newar festivals, including the story of *yomari*, is narrated by a cute, anthropomorphised dumpling, in English and Newar language. Some versions of the stories are closer to tradition, others have been modified to fit the taste of contemporary children in the Newar community. The *Yomari Cartoon Series* was started in 2019 by Niroj Maharjan and Munu Shrestha, two Newars from Kathmandu, currently living in Sydney, Australia. Niroj creates the concept and the main idea for the stories, whereas Munu is the illustrator, but the team also includes two other members, Rahul Maharjan also based in Australia, and Subhash Ram Prajapati, based in the US, who translate and finalise the script in Newar language.[52]

It could be tempting for us to quickly conclude that these mediatic reverberations of Newar foodways are only a recent phenomenon, and that although in the context of the new media and the current digital era it might make sense studying them, this was not the case in the past. However, like scholars of visual culture have demonstrated, we have always used mixed languages and media (gestures, verbal language, images, music etc.) when communicating,[53] and the practices concerning Newar food were not an exception. This is widely demonstrated for example by the use of traditional songs linked to *yomari* or *chhoyela* mentioned above, a tradition which has continued up to including the more recent proliferation of Newar pop songs on food.[54] As I have tried to demonstrate in this paper, my suggestion would thus be that, in order to understand how the meaning of Newar food discourse is constructed, we need to go beyond the single *bhwoye* and its ritual significance—although this is certainly an important aspect of the practice—and also look at how Newar foodways have been reverberating in other more or less contemporary media. This shift would allow us to fully explore and expand the range of meanings encompassed by Newar foodways.

[52] The contents of this series can be seen at https://www.facebook.com/yomariCartoonSeries/ [last accessed 31/12/2021]. Subhash Ram Prajapati holds a PhD in ethnomusicology and is also a Newar language expert who is currently working on a project aimed at digitalising Newar language, through the realisation of an open access online dictionary which has been recently launched. He is the son of Ganesh Ram Lachhi, a Newar culture expert who played an important role in revitalising traditional Newar music and dance in Sikkim, see Shrestha, *The Newars of Sikkim*, 52-53, 86.

[53] See William J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: Chicago UP). For an overview of visual culture scholarship, and of the role of images in human history, see Michele Cometa, *Visual Culture. Una genealogia* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2020).

[54] This practice includes songs like *Wangu lapte tuyu baji* ("Green leaf plate, white beaten rice"), by Prem Dhoj Pradhan (1958) with lyrics by Durga Lal Shrestha, where the song itself includes a narration of the different items served during a *bhwoye*; to *Yomari chaku chatamari maku* ("*Yomari* is sweet, rice crepe is tasty") by Krishna Bhakta Maharjan (2016), which uses *yomari* as a pretext to talk about love; and more recently a Newar heavy metal song called *Chhoyla [chhoyela] Baji* ("Roasted meat, beaten rice") by Boo:Khyaa Band (2013), which narrates the story of a Newar farmer who gets indebted in order to buy *chhoyela* for the numerous feasts where this dish is required – the music video shows the traditional way of cooking *chhoyela* directly on the fire.

Conclusion

To conclude, by following the "reverberation" and "fame" of two iconic dishes of Newar culinary tradition like *chhoyela* and *yomari*, within and without the limits of religious festivals celebrated by Newars in the UK, the paper has argued that the Newar community engages in creative ways of practising and sharing its cultural heritage. This kind of commitment simultaneously expands Newars' subjectivity *in space* – by allowing them to connect with other Newars outside the UK, and by introducing Newar dishes in broader gastronomic heritage discourses. But it also expands Newars' subjectivity *in time*—by constructing a meaningful cultural environment for new generations, hoping that they will engage in new ways of being Newars in diaspora.[55] As Munn reminds us, referring to one of her earlier publications, "sociocultural practices do not simply go *in* or *through* time and space but [they also] constitute (create) the spacetime […] in which they 'go on'".[56]

Finally, from a *methodological point of view*, I would also like to emphasise that this paper itself was part of those reverberating discourses on food taking place within the Newar community, in that its conceptual framework and its content and translations were discussed various times with members of PPGUK who have been extremely generous in offering sources, feedback, and critiques at different stages of the writing.[57]

[55] The impact that these activities will have in the long term for the Newar diaspora, in the effort of keeping their cultural heritage, is not predictable at the moment, but we could say that the community is preparing the ground to set a path for the youth to follow. Also, although this article offers a picture of the steps that leaders and cultural activists are taking to support Newar traditions and heritage, it could not cover, for reasons of space, other relevant aspects of this process which I explored during my fieldwork. These include, for example, the decisional processes and the organisational structure of the local associations in London, or the aspirations and expectations of the broader community of members, which I intend to present and analyse in future publications.

[56] Munn, *The Fame of Gawa*, 11.

[57] Following the recent discussion on the use of pseudonyms in anthropology in Carole McGranahan and Erica Weiss (eds.), "Rethinking Pseudonyms in Ethnography". *American Ethnologist* website, 13 December (2021), and more specifically the two contributions of Mark Turin and Sara Shneiderman to this issue, I have decided to include the names of my Newar interlocutors, who have been previously asked permission. As many of them are members of the community, who have actively participated in or organised debates on Newar foodways as expression of Newar identity, I felt it would be appropriate to present their voices without concealing the authorship of their thoughts behind pseudonyms.

References

Adhikari, Krishna (ed.). *Nepalis in the United Kingdom: An Overview*. Reading: Centre for Nepal Studies UK, 2012.

"A Feast Fit for the Gods: Kathmandu Becomes a Theatre during Indra Jatra, and Food Plays a Huge Part During the Festival". *Kathmandu Post*, 13th September 2019. https://kathmandupost.com/food/2019/09/13/a-feast-fit-for-the-gods [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Allen, Michael. "Hierarchy and Complementarity in Newar Caste, Marriage and Labour Relations". *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 17, no. 2 (1987): 92-103.

Anderson, Mary M. *The Festivals of Nepal*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1971.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Gastro-Politics in Hindu South Asia". *American Ethnologist* 8, no. 3 (1981): 494-511.

——. "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (1988): 3-24.

"Belāyatmā 'paleṭī kasera laptemā khāne' paramparāgat newārī bhoj āyojanā hũdai" ["Preparations in England for a traditional Newar feast consisting in eating from leaf plate (*lapte*) while sitting in *padmāsana* posture"]. *Nepalipatra*, 30th August 2018. https://nepalipatra.com/news/uk-newari-bhoj/6835 [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Boo:Khyaa Band. *Chhoyla Baji* ["Chhoyela and beaten rice"]. Kathmandu: Opus Studio, 2013.

Brulotte, Ronda and Di Giovine, Michael (eds.). *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.

Bruslé, Tristan (ed.). Special double issue on "Nepalese migrations". *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 35-36 (2009-10).

Chan Yuk Wah and Farrer, James (eds.). Special issue on "Asian Food and Culinary Politics: Food Governance, Constructed Heritage and Contested Boundaries". *Asian Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2021).

Cheung, Sidney C. H. and Tan Chee-Beng (eds.). *Food and Foodways in Asia: Resource, Tradition and Cooking*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Cometa, Michele. *Visual Culture. Una genealogia*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2020.

Counihan, Carole and Van Esterik, Penny (eds.). *Food and Culture: A Reader*, 3rd edn. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Craig, Sienna R. *The Ends of Kinship: Connecting Himalayan Lives between Nepal and New York*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2020.

Di Giovine, Michael and Brulotte, Ronda. "Introduction: Food and Foodways as Cultural Heritage". In *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*, edited by Ronda Brulotte and Michael Di Giovine, 1-28. Farnham: Ashgate, 2014.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966.

_____. "Deciphering a Meal". In *Myth, Symbol and Culture*, edited by C. Geertz, 61-81. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971.

_____(ed.). *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984.

Eco, Umberto. *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

Evans-Pritchard, Edward. *The Nuer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940.

Farrow, George W. and Menon, Indudharan. *The Concealed Essence of the Hevajra Tantra*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2001 [1992].

Gellner, David N. *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992.

——and Hausner, Sondra L. (eds.). 2018. *Global Nepalis. Religion, Culture, and Community in a New and Old Diaspora*. Delhi: Oxford UP.

——and Hausner, Sondra L. (eds.). *Vernacular Religion: Varieties of Religiosity in the Nepali Diaspora*. Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2019.

Goody, Jack. *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: A Study in Comparative Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.

Harris, Marvin. *Good to Eat: Riddles of Food and Culture*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1985.

Hutt, Michael, Liechty, Mark and Lotter, Stefanie (eds.). *Epicentre to the Aftermath: Rebuilding and Remembering in the Wake of Nepal's Earthquakes*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2021.

Ishii Hiroshi, Gellner, David N. and Nawa Katsuo (eds.). *Nepalis Inside and Outside Nepal*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2007.

"Kasarī āviskār bhayo yaḥmari? Vyāvasāyīkaraṇko mār thapīdā 'krancī' pani?" ["How was *yomari* invented? On top of the negative impact caused by commercialisation, also 'crunchy'?"]. *PahiloPost*, 19th December 2021. https://pahilopost.com/content/20211219114521.html [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Klein, Jakob A. and Murcott, Anne (eds.). *Food Consumption in Global Perspective: Essays in the Anthropology of Food in Honour of Jack Goody*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

_____ and Watson, James L. (eds.). *The Handbook of Food and Anthropology*. London: Bloomsbury, 2016.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 1963.

_____. "The Culinary Triangle". *Partisan Review* 33, no. 4 (1966): 586-95.

_____. *The Raw and the Cooked*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1969.

_____. *The Origin of Table Manners*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1978.

Levy, Robert I. *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.

Lewis, Todd. *The Tuladhars of Kathmandu: A Study of Buddhist Tradition in a Newar Merchant Community*. PhD Dissertation, Columbia University, 1984.

Liechty, Mark. "Carnal Economies: The Commodification of Food and Sex in Kathmandu". *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no.1 (2005): 1-38.

Löwdin, Per. *Food, Ritual and Society among the Newars*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1985.

Maharjan, Krishna Bhakta. *Yomari chaku chatamari maku* ["*Yomari* is sweet, rice crepe is tasty"], music video directed by Surendra Maharjan, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J3XsxlxjGA [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Maharjan, Niroj and Shrestha, Munu. *Yomari Cartoon Series*. https://www.facebook.com/yomariCartoonSeries/ [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Malinowski, Bronislaw. *Coral Gardens and their Magic*, vol. 2. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935.

Marrone, Gianfranco. *Semiotica del gusto. Linguaggi della cucina, del cibo, della tavola*. Milano: Mimesis Edizioni, 2016.

Mauss, Marcel. "Essai sur le don: forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques". *L'Année sociologique, seconde série* 1 (1923-25): 30-186.

McGranahan, Carole and Weiss, Erica (eds.), "Rethinking Pseudonyms in Ethnography". *American Ethnologist* website, 13 December (2021). https://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/rethinking-pseudonyms-in-ethnography [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Mintz, Sidney W. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985.

Mitchell, William J. T. *What Do Pictures Want?*. Chicago: Chicago UP.

Munn, Nancy D. *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1992 [1986].

Pink, Sarah et. al. (eds.). *Digital Ethnography: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage, 2016.

Pradhan, Prem Dhoj. *Wangu lapte tuyu baji* ["Green leaf plate, white beaten rice], lyrics by Durga Lal Shrestha. Calcutta: Hindustan Recording Company, 1972 [1958].

"Saṃskṛti saṃrakṣaṇa ko lāgi belāyatmā newā bhoj" ["A Newar feast in the UK for the preservation of culture"]. *Wenepali.com*, 4th October 2018. https://www.wenepali.com/2018/10/57380.html [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Shakya, Karna et al. *Nepali Heritage Cook Book: Experience Nepal – Cuisine and Culture. Globalizing Nepal Heritage Cuisine*. Kathmandu: Nepal Tourism Board, 2018.

Shneiderman, Sara. "Collapsing Distance: Recognition, Relation, and the Power of Naming in Ethnographic Research". In "Rethinking Pseudonyms in Ethnography", edited by Carole McGranahan and Erica Weiss. *American Ethnologist* website, 13 December 2021. https://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/rethinking-pseudonyms-in-ethnography/collapsing-distance-recognition-relation-and-the-power-of-naming-in-ethnographic-research [last accessed 31/12/2021].

Shrestha, Bal Gopal. *The Newars of Sikkim: Reinventing Language, Culture, and Identity in the Diaspora*. Kathmandu: Vajra Books, 2015.

Snellgrove, David. *The Hevajra Tantra: A Critical Study*. London: Oxford UP, 1959.

Stalker, Nancy K. (ed.). *Devouring Japan: Global Perspectives on Japanese Culinary Identity*. New York: Oxford UP, 2018.

Toffin, Gérard. *Pyangaon. Une communauté de la vallée de Kathmandou. La vie matérielle*. Paris: CNRS, 1977.

_____. "The Indra Jātrā of Kathmandu as a Royal Festival: Past and Present". *Contributions to Nepalese Studies* 19, no.1 (1992): 73-92.

_____. *La fête-spectacle: Théâtre et rite au Népal*. Paris: Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2010.

Tuladhar, Tara Devi. *Thāybhu: Bhoy Jvalaṃyā Vivaraṇ* [*Thāybhu* (Brass Plate): A Description of Feast Materials]. Kathmandu: Chhusingsyar, 2011.

Turin, Mark. 2021. "Recognizing Authority and Respecting Expertise in Language Work". In "Rethinking Pseudonyms in Ethnography", edited by Carole McGranahan and Erica Weiss. *American Ethnologist* website, 13 December 2021. https://americanethnologist.org/features/collections/rethinking-pseudonyms-in-ethnography/recognizing-authority-and-respecting-expertise-in-language-work [last accessed 31/12/2021].

van den Hoek, Albert W. *Caturmāsa: Celebrations of Death in Kathmandu, Nepal*, edited by Johannes C. Heesterman et al. Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2004.

van Ommen, Premila. “Transmitting Traditions: Digital Food Haunts of Nepalis in the UK”. In *Food, Senses and the City*, edited by Ferne Edwards et al., 155-166. London: Routledge, 2021.

Vidnes, Thea D. *Consuming Expectations: An Exploration of Foodways in Relation to Health and Maternity among Nepalis Living in Norway*. PhD Dissertation, Brunel University, 2017.