

OUR GRAND DOMESTIC REVOLUTION

(Re-)making home from Jaffna, Sri Lanka to the Greater Toronto Area

by
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

Displacement is seemingly irreconcilable with the grounding quality of domestic space; however, the practice of housework and homemaking allows forcibly displaced people to reconstruct home elsewhere. Centring the context of migration, this thesis analyzes the makings of home upon displacement as experienced by my family, who were uprooted from a Tamil village in Jaffna, Sri Lanka to the suburban Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in Canada from the onset of the 26-year Sri Lankan Civil War in 1983. Using five family homes as case studies and drawing from oral history interviews and secondary social and spatial theories, the research explores how the built environment organizes oppressions in housework practices, and how my family continues to make home within the spatial constraints.

Historically, North American feminists have advocated for a radical socialization of housework in an effort to value domestic labour and extend its visibility to the public realm. This is evident in urban historian Dolores Hayden's *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981) which archives proposals by late 19th-century material feminists in America for transformed homes, neighbourhoods, and cities equipped with communal kitchens, laundries, dining halls, childcare centres, and other collectivizing strategies. Lacking in this approach to socialize housework, however, is the consideration of housework as necessary subaltern placemaking for racialized people living in a world 'made white,' or a world shaped by histories of colonialism (Ahmed 2007). This thesis, entitled '*Our Grand Domestic Revolution*,' turns to a personal family history in search of more inclusive models for housework's liberation.

By spatially analyzing my family's informal housework practices, I reveal how space can foster subjectivity for newcomers. This re-frames housework not solely as a source of oppression, as perceived in the Western feminist discourse, but simultaneously as an act of resistance through the making of an affirming domestic space for racialized refugees and their children. The findings reveal how the architecture and urban design of homes in the GTA, influenced by ideals of whiteness, become tools for negotiating insecure identities upon and after displacement. The application of these findings by designers (architects, urban planners, policy makers, etc.) can point towards alternative spatial frameworks that culturally re-value housework and allow liberation to be fostered at home.

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*To my Amma, Ammama, Appama, Athais,
Mamis, sisters, cousins, and aunties, who fled
a genocide to make homes all across the West.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

iii	Author's Declaration
v	Abstract
vi	Acknowledgments
ix	Dedication
xi	List of Figures
01	Preface
05	<u>00. Introduction</u>
09	The research trajectory
12	The organization
13	The methodology
25	A family's displacement
39	<u>01. A Home Remade</u>
41	A past and present family home
50	A comparative analysis
79	<u>02. The Journey</u>
82	Three 'in-between' family homes
98	The architectural
108	The furnishings, objects, and appliances
119	The urban
127	The ecological and bodily
135	<u>03. Conclusion</u>
141	Bibliography
147	Appendix

LIST OF FIGURES

00. Introduction

- Fig. 0.1* 'Village greens' imagined in Milton, Ontario
By author.
- Fig. 0.2* Transit and school hubs imagined in Milton, Ontario
By author.
- Fig. 0.3* Industrial 'factories for living' imagined in Milton, Ontario
By author.
- Fig. 0.4* Shared greens imagined in Milton, Ontario
By author.
- Fig. 0.5* Huda Tayob's drawing of the Bellstat Junction in Cape Town
Drawing by Huda Tayob.
- Fig. 0.6* T. Shanaathanan's artist book *The Incomplete Thombu* (2011)
Photograph by Nia Thandapani of Studio Carrom.
- Fig. 0.7* Appa's sketch of the Jaffna house location relative to the temple
Drawing by Appa.
- Fig. 0.8* Appa's sketch of the Jaffna floor plan
Drawing by Appa.
- Fig. 0.9* Irrigation system; transforming the courtyard into a verandah
By author.
- Fig. 0.10* Ecological relationships between cows, paddy, trees, etc.
By author.
- Fig. 0.11* The five family homes of study
1: Photograph by Kavivarman Suntharasivam; 2-3, 5: Google Earth; 4: Family photograph.
- Fig. 0.12* Aerial view locating the first home in the Jaffna village
Google Earth.
- Fig. 0.13* Map sketch locating the first home on the Jaffna peninsula
By author.

- Fig. 0.14* Map sketch locating the first home in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka
By author.
- Fig. 0.15* Map sketch illustrating Tamil Sri Lankan diasporas across the world
By author.
- Fig. 0.16* Map sketch locating homes 2 to 5 in the Greater Toronto Area
By author.

01. A Home Remade

- Fig. 1.1* Urban fabric of the Jaffna village
Google Earth.
- Fig. 1.2* Site plan of Appa's childhood house in Jaffna
By author.
- Fig. 1.3* My aunt and sibling approaching the Jaffna house
By author.
- Fig. 1.4* Appa in the backyard lot of his Jaffna home
By author.
- Fig. 1.5* Front view of my family's current Scarborough, Ontario home
By author.
- Fig. 1.6* Rear view of my family's current Scarborough, Ontario home
By author.
- Fig. 1.7* Site and ground floor plan of the Scarborough home
By author.
- Fig. 1.8* Basement floor plan of the Scarborough home
By author.
- Fig. 1.9* Appapa weaving a thatched roof for the cattle hut
Family photograph.
- Fig. 1.10* 'M' anna preparing raised rows of earth for planting crops
Photograph by Kavivarman Suntharasivam.

- Fig. 1.11* The *viyal* (farmland) near Appa's childhood home
By author.
- Fig. 1.12* Aerial view of Scarborough, organized on a colonial grid
Google Earth.
- Fig. 1.13* The Scarborough vegetable garden
By author.
- Fig. 1.14* Field sketch and photographs of the garden vegetables
By author.
- Fig. 1.15* Aerial view of village and central *amman koyil* (mother temple)
Google Earth.
- Fig. 1.16* The central *amman koyil* (mother temple)
By author.
- Fig. 1.17* Prayer room and portraits of deities in the Jaffna house
Photographs by Kavivarman Suntharasivam.
- Fig. 1.18* The *saamy* (prayer) room made in our Scarborough house
By author.
- Fig. 1.19* Scarborough park gatherings with my family in the 1990s
Family photographs.
- Fig. 1.20* Sleeping arrangements in Appa's Jaffna village home
By author.
- Fig. 1.21* Dining locations in Appa's Jaffna village home
By author.
- Fig. 1.22* Sitting room in Appa's Jaffna village home
By author.
- Fig. 1.23* The back door area in Appa's Jaffna village home
By author.
- Fig. 1.24* The verandah of Appa's Jaffna village home
By author.

Fig. 1.25 Allocations of bedrooms in the Scarborough home
By author.

02. The Journey

Fig. 2.1 Aerial view of the St. James Town neighbourhood
Google Earth.

Fig. 2.2 Floor plan of the St. James Town apartment unit
By author.

Fig. 2.3 Typical interior of a postwar apartment unit in Toronto
Photograph by Wellesley Parliament Square.

Fig. 2.4 Aerial view of the Huddleston house
Google Earth.

Fig. 2.5 Advertisement of a typical or ideal 1950s Scarborough interior;
four men eating in the basement of the Huddleston home
*Photograph by Gilbert Milne, July 150, City of Toronto Archives;
family photograph.*

Fig. 2.6 Site plan of the Huddleston house
By author.

Fig. 2.7 Basement floor plan of the Huddleston house
By author.

Fig. 2.8 Amma at her first job in Canada working in a mailroom
Family photograph.

Fig. 2.9 Zoning map of Milton, Ontario
*By author; adapted from a zoning map provided by Town of Milton
and Conservation Halton, July 2017*

Fig. 2.10 The Milton house under construction from 2000 to 2001
Family photographs.

Fig. 2.11 Illustration of the Milton house on the builder's pamphlet
By author.

- Fig. 2.12* Site plan of the Milton house
By author.
- Fig. 2.13* Basement plan of the Milton house
By author.
- Fig. 2.14* Upper floor plan of the Milton house
By author.
- Fig. 2.15* Diagram of rooms repeated in the Huddleston house
By author.
- Fig. 2.16* Living/dining rooms repeated in the Milton house
By author.
- Fig. 2.17* The formal living/dining room in the Milton house
Photograph by Siva Sivanesan.
- Fig. 2.18* The informal dinette and family room in the Milton house
Photographs by Siva Sivanesan.
- Fig. 2.19* Diagram of zones in the Milton house
By author.
- Fig. 2.20* Children and elderly occupying the front yard in Scarborough
Family photograph.
- Fig. 2.21* The outdoor cooking shed in ‘V’ mami’s Jaffna home
By author.
- Fig. 2.22* Wide side yards of the Huddleston and Newlands houses
By author.
- Fig. 2.23* Narrow side yard and asphalt driveway in the Milton front lot
Diagram by author; photography by Siva Sivanesan.
- Fig. 2.24* Repetitive, anonymous facades in St. James Town and the GTA
Google Earth; Martin Regg Cohn, May 2015, Toronto Star
- Fig. 2.25* Glass mosaic of a peacock on the front door of the Milton house
Google Earth.

- Fig. 2.26* Amma and Appa by the Huddleston side basement entrance
Family photograph; Google Earth.
- Fig. 2.27* Custom pink curtains chosen by Amma in the Newlands house
Family photograph.
- Fig. 2.28* Lillian Moller Gilbreth's kitchen triangle rule
By author.
- Fig. 2.29* The deep fryer set up on the back deck and under the gazebo
By author.
- Fig. 2.30* Amma's class at the Tamil Eelam Sangam community centre
Family photograph.
- Fig. 2.31* Women in the diaspora eating in the Newlands living room
Family photograph.
- Fig. 2.32* Exterior concrete washboard in Jaffna compared to the interior washing/drying machines in the current Scarborough home
By author.
- Fig. 2.33* Exterior abandoned outhouse in Jaffna compared to the interior washroom in the Milton house
By author.
- Fig. 2.34* A heap of coconuts in 'V' mami's front lot in Jaffna
By author.

PREFACE

A note on land

I began the Master of Architecture program at the University of Waterloo in 2020 with little knowledge regarding the history of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island, colonially known as Canada. Despite having been educated in architectural design for five years prior, and practicing as an intern for two years cumulatively, my relationship with 'site' was solely one of extraction. I entered the program during an uprising of actions led by Indigenous peoples to take the #LandBack in and around the Haldimand Tract where the University of Waterloo is situated, evident in the O:se Kenhionhata:tie occupation of Waterloo Park in October 2020, their previous occupation of Victoria Park in June 2020, and protests against the McKenzie Meadows housing development by the Six Nations of the Grand River at 1492 Land Back Lane. Alongside these calls to action, I began learning about my personal relationship to the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

As a child of refugees who were outspoken about their nostalgia for the Sri Lankan homeland, and indifferent towards the benefits brought on by Canadian life, I felt less complacent in the settler-colonial project of Indigenous land theft before I had educated myself on the history. I recall thinking about how my family never intended to occupy these lands, and how their fleeing here was less of a choice and more of a necessity. I thought about how external Western narratives would assume the diaspora is grateful for having escaped to a safer life, but how the reality of this displacement looks like unspoken and unresolved traumas, deep feelings of loss and resentment, a lingering disconnection with the host city, a lacking sense of belonging, and a depression that runs deep in the bloodlines of Tamil Sri Lankans making and re-making home. With the Sri Lankan Civil War ending in 2009, some of my family members speak of returning to Sri Lanka after retirement, with dreams of fixing up their old village homes or buying a vacation home along the island's edge. Others have assimilated into their diasporic Sri Lankan-Canadian identities, having lost hope for the politically corrupt island nation. In either case, the diaspora has temporarily or permanently planted roots in Canada, where my family has called the GTA home for over 30 years.

Throughout this book, I write about the homes my family has occupied across the GTA in detail. The critiques I make on Toronto's housing stock are rooted in long-term impacts of colonialism that have allowed for oppressive, isolating domestic frameworks to emerge in North American suburbs. These architectural and urban frameworks position domestic labour as secondary to the labour performed in the paid work economy, and delegates this work to those marginalized along race, gender, and class lines.

What I wish to achieve through this thesis, in addition to more inclusive models for domestic liberation, is a cultural re-valuing of domestic labour. This means re-valuing the home-making, community-sustaining, land-based practices once central to Indigenous ways-of-life on Turtle Island. As domestic work begins with planting food and having access to land, the struggle for domestic liberation must stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples defending land against privatization, against deforestation, against the poisoning of our lakes and waters, and against mining economies of extraction. Through my ongoing engagements with Indigenous scholarship, I better understand now how settler-refugees and settler-immigrants benefit from the same colonial violence that rid us of our ancestral homelands, and which now allow us to own, rent, share, decorate, and renovate homes in the GTA as described in this thesis. The devaluation of housework is therefore rooted in ridding Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island of their homes, land, land-based practices, and therefore housework practices, which are integral parts of culture and identity. Beyond acknowledging our complacency, I propose that the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA better supports Indigenous groups fighting for autonomy and reclaiming their land in the face of colonialism today. An opportunity for this to take place is in the current consultations for the construction of the first Tamil Community Centre in Canada, occupying four acres of Huron-Wendat land alongside the Rouge River in the Morningside Heights neighbourhood of Scarborough, Ontario. The development of this centre should uplift the voices of the Huron-Wendat people consulting on this project, respect the lands on which the centre will be built upon, communicate Huron-Wendat histories to the public, and foster solidarity between the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA and the Indigenous peoples to whom these lands were promised to.

Before introducing the research, I must acknowledge the three lands I am indebted to in the making of this thesis. The first is the land on which the institution sits and disrupts, where I have lived, learned, studied, worked, and sustained myself since 2014. The University of Waterloo School of Architecture is situated on the Haldimand Tract, land promised to the Haudenosaunee of the Six Nations of the Grand River in the Haldimand Treaty of 1784. This land stretches out to include ten kilometers on either side of the sweet waters of the Grand River. The Haldimand tract and its surrounding area is the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and previously the Chippewa and Wendat peoples. The second place I wish to acknowledge is where I spent half my time writing this thesis living in what is colonially known as Stamford, Connecticut. This is the land of Rippowam, meaning the 'Cliff of Rocks', belonging to the Siwanoy peoples who live along the 'fair fields' of what is now known as Fairfield County. This place, which I have been an immigrant, a non-resident, and an alien in myself since 2018, is a place I did not always feel rooted in but one that became a home over

time. I am indebted to the beautiful moments I was gifted by this land along the harbour and the Long Island Sound. Finally, this thesis was written in my natal hometown in Scarborough, where I was born, raised for five years, and returned to in my adulthood in 2019. For me, this is the place of \$5 Sri Lankan takeout meals, lively shopping malls, jerk chicken, and Chinese spas. For me, Scarborough is a glorious ethnoburb where so many of us impacted by the long-term effects of colonialism in lands abroad have come to make new homes, find solace, continue to live, and make do. This is the land that grows up bitter melon and spinach in my back yard, and where my family's humid kitchen supports the wrangling growth of a thin and tall neem tree, reminding us and our visitors of the Sri Lankan homeland left behind. To these lands: myself and this work are indebted to you.

00

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

What could domestic liberation look like? This question has concerned North American feminists since the Industrial Revolution when the separation of the home and factory left housework physically outside spaces of paid labour, devaluing women's household duties once necessary for their families' and communities' survival in agrarian economies. Since the late 19th-century, Western feminists have perceived the home as a site of oppression where women have performed housework in isolation.^[0.1] In response, material feminists in America concerned with social and economic equality put forth a radical proposal to socialize housework. This transpired as proposals for transformed homes, neighbourhoods, and cities equipped with communal kitchens, laundries, dining halls, child-care centres, and other collectivizing strategies. The proposals were archived by urban historian, Dolores Hayden, into a book entitled *The Grand Domestic Revolution* in 1981.^[0.2] Today, the attempt to socialize housework carries on in design approaches like Spanish architect Anna Puigjaner's kitchenless houses.^[0.3] Lacking in this approach to socialize housework, however, is the consideration of housework as subaltern placemaking for racialized people living in a world 'made white,' known as a world shaped by histories of colonialism.^[0.4] This is especially true for racialized refugees and their diasporas, who rely on practices of homemaking to (re-)construct their lives in the West. In Canada, the self-perception of the country as a diverse, inclusive nation of newcomers, with an increasing visible minority population since the early 1980s, illustrates the need to rethink housework's socialization from the perspective of racialized diasporas.^[0.5] This can extend 'The Grand Domestic Revolution' movement to learn more inclusive ideas of what domestic liberation could look like in the West today.

This thesis analyzes practices of homemaking upon displacement as experienced by my family-community, who were forcibly displaced when resettling from a conflict zone in Jaffna, Sri Lanka to the suburban Greater Toronto Area (GTA) in the mid-to-late 1980s. Their displacement occurred during the 26-year Sri Lankan Civil War between the majority Sinhala-dominant Sri Lankan government and the minority militant separatist group, Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE, also known as Tamil Tigers). Using feminist theorist bell hooks' concept of a 'homeplace,' the research approaches housework not solely as a labour of oppression for women but as the simultaneous making of an affirmative domestic sphere where racialized refugees and their diasporas can be subjects.^[0.6] The research therefore explores where oppression and liberation take place in my family's housework practices. It particularly asks: what could domestic liberation look like for the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA? Using five family homes as case studies, oral history interviews, and supporting social and spatial theory, the

[0.1] Shelley Mallett, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004): 62–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-954X.2004.00442.x>.

[0.2] Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981).

[0.3] Anna Puigjaner, "Bringing the Kitchen Out of the House," *e-flux*, February 2019, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/overgrowth/221624/bringing-the-kitchen-out-of-the-house/>.

[0.4] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>.

[0.5] The proportion of Canada's visible minority population has increased from 4.7% in 1981 to 22.3% in 2016. The country is known for a high degree of asylum acceptance in its immigration policies since 1976. In Toronto in particular, nearly half the population identify as racialized minorities and recent migrants, solidifying its reputation as an arrival city; StatCan, "Number and Proportion of Visible Minority Population in Canada, 1981 to 2036," Statistics Canada, October 25, 2017, <https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/dai/btd/othervisuals/other010>.

[0.6] bell hooks, "Homeplace (a Site of Resistance)" in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 41–50.

thesis tells my family's story of re-making home and subjectivity over time. This approach appropriates the universalizing 19th-century material feminist slogan, 'The Grand Domestic Revolution,' characterizing the proposal to radically socialize housework in North America, into the particular '*Our Grand Domestic Revolution*,' an intersectional feminist re-valuing of domestic labour in the context of migration.

This introduction serves as a preamble to the main event of the thesis, containing writings on the research trajectory, organization of the thesis, methodologies undertaken, and context on my family's displacement from Sri Lanka to Canada. In *Part One: A Home Remade*, I explore housework practices in the first and last home inhabited in chronological order. This section explores the core cultural values remade from Jaffna to the GTA. This sets the stage for *Part Two: The Journey*, which explores three GTA homes inhabited in-between the past Jaffna home and current Scarborough home. This analysis centres scale, moving from objects to the ecological, in exploration of how the built environment organizes oppression and liberation. The findings, synthesized in the conclusion, reveal how subjectivity is spatially re-made in my family's displacement. For architectural researchers and designers, this knowledge can point towards more inclusive ideas and models for housework's liberation and cultural re-valuing in the West.

The research trajectory

The central research question, asking 'what domestic liberation could look like,' has remained the throughline in the making of this thesis over the past two years. Two different approaches emerged from this question. The first explored the oppressive spatial organization of housework and speculated on a spatial model for liberation as evident in the final iteration of this thesis. The second approach more generally unpacked the devaluation of care work in both domestic and non-domestic spaces. In this second approach, I was especially interested in looking at the works of New York City-based artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles in the 1960s.^[0.7] Ukeles' positions herself as an artist-turned-mother, connecting the devaluation of domestic work to the devaluation of service and maintenance work. Her artwork explores how sanitation and custodial workers in cities and museums (specifically in New York City's Department of Sanitation and the Whitney Museum) are responsible for the reproductive labour that sustain these sites. An earlier iteration of this thesis was then titled, 'The Grand Domestic Revolution Goes On and On,' signifying the pervasion of housework's devaluation into non-domestic spaces. While I diverted away from this approach, I found value in drawing connections between different forms of socially reproductive work. These labours have historically been attributed to women, racialized

[0.7] Patricia C. Phillips, *Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art* (New York: Prestel, 2016).

men (in New York City's Department of Sanitation, for instance), lower-class people, etc. This approach therefore allowed me to extend 'The Grand Domestic Revolution' to consider subjects marginalized across gender, race, and class lines. These identifiers showed up intersectionally and introduced new limitations regarding domestic liberation when I later centred my family-community in the GTA as the subject of this research.

I began this research by conducting a transhistorical study of North American feminist movements that have fought for women's liberation in domestic and care work. This history can be summarized by three significant movements: 1) the proposal to socialize housework by late 19th-century material feminists in 'The Grand Domestic Revolution,' 2) the Marxist feminist *Wages for Housework* campaign arising in six Western countries in the 1970s, advocating for the compensation of unpaid domestic labour^[0.8], and 3) the post-COVID-19 contemporary world which revalued the labour of essential and frontline workers and drew attention to care theory across disciplines, including in feminism and architecture.^[0.9] The first of these movements is arguably the most spatial and formative in the making of this thesis. In my first term of study, I created visualizations re-imagining how proposals for socialized housework by early material feminists could translate to the present-day and in the town of Milton, Ontario, where I lived from 2001 to 2019. I rendered shared village greens in Milton's residential zones (*Fig. 0.1*), community hubs in schools and transit centres (*Fig. 0.2*), commercial factories for housework in industrial zones (*Fig. 0.3*), and shared green spaces with semi-public/private niches in existing courtyard homes (*Fig. 0.4*). These renderings envisioned Milton as a city of care for communal housework to take place, in contrast to the current model which fosters isolation in housework. However, these visualizations did not critique enough the universalizing nature of the proposal to socialize housework, which erases the unique cultural events, foods, rituals, and customs practiced by Milton's diverse population. When considering the cultural dimension of housework, evident in my own family's daily practices, I identified a gap in the Western feminist literature on housework's liberation.

I came to centre my family-community as the subject of this research while working as a Teaching Assistant in Anishinaabe scholar Dr. Andrew Judge's (Mko Mose, Bear Walker) Spring 2021 course at the University of Waterloo entitled *Pre-contact land sustainability in the Carolinian Zone: Practical knowledge for a changing climate*.^[0.10] Dr. Judge's course explores Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) to teach Architecture and Environmental Studies students about how TEK can be utilized in sustainable habitat design. In considering my own indigeneity and ancestry in relation to the course material, as encouraged by Dr. Judge, I began drawing connections between Indigenous land-based living in the Carolinian Zone

[0.8] Louise Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

[0.9] For an application of care theory in architecture during the COVID-19 pandemic, see: Elke Krasny, "Radicalizing Care," *The Site Magazine*, 2020, <https://www.thesitemagazine.com/elke-krasny>.

[0.10] Andrew Judge, "Indigenous land based sustainability practices: A Method for Thriving and Reconciliation" (unpublished manuscript, 2018), Microsoft Word file.



Fig. 0.1. 'Village greens' imagined in Milton, Ontario with shared backyards, accessory apartments, buildings for communal housework, and paved pedestrian paths connecting to existing sidewalks.



Fig. 0.2. Train station (left) imagined as a transit hub for laundry, meal preparation, and child care services. Existing schools (right) imagined as community hubs with evening programme.



Fig. 0.3. Industrial buildings imagined as 'factories for living' with commercial meal preparation and laundry on the ground floor and worker's apartments above.



Fig. 0.4. Existing courtyard housing re-imagining the central parking lot as a shared green space with niches allowing for degrees of privacy and publicity.

(Southern Ontario) and my parent's descriptions of agrarian life in their rural village home in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. While the former exists in the context of pre-colonial Turtle Island, and the latter exists within postcolonial ethnic conflict, both ways-of-life are similar in the sense that land-based practices become a part of one's home and identity. This reveals to me that housework is inherently ecological, spiritual, and cultural. With this in mind, I began to fill the gaps identified earlier in the Western feminist literature on housework, which further alienated land from the conversation on housework's liberation. I found that the mission of Dr. Judge's course was to return value to a way-of-life that is deeply embodied, rooted, ancestral, and remembered, in which housework—better termed as the labour of living—is the most crucial form of labour for sustaining and reproducing whole societies and economies. As activists and artists Binna Choi and Sakiko Sugawa have written, 'domestic work is fundamentally ecological. It repairs the destruction made by labour under capitalism. It repairs people and our environment. It sustains all forms of life.'^[0.11] Viewing domestic work in this way heals our alienation from housework's ecological roots in the West, established over the past two centuries through industrialization, technological acceleration, and the evolution of capitalism. Additionally, it promotes communal care over contemporary Western individualism, and non-hierarchical social organizations of domestic labour as evident in pre-colonial Turtle Island. In TEK, I therefore found the potential to address the central research question of 'what domestic liberation could look like' from a more personal positionality that centered my family-community as the subject of this research. This also allowed me to explore the ecological, spiritual, and cultural aspects of material, economic life that have long been left out of the Western feminist discourse on housework.

[0.11] Binna Choi et al., *Unlearning Exercises: Art as Sites for Unlearning* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018).

The organization

The five family homes of study in this thesis are not explored chronologically. Rather, the order prioritizes telling a story of how autonomy is found in homemaking upon displacement. ***Part One: A Home Remade*** compares the first and last home, specifically my father's childhood home in the Jaffna village, and my current multi-generational single-family home in Scarborough, Ontario. This chapter organizes its findings by cultural values, specifically addressing the agricultural activity, religious rituals, and social gatherings important to Jaffna village life and re-made in the Scarborough home. This section interrogates Western definitions of what counts as housework, moving beyond activities typically associated with housework like cooking, cleaning, laundry, etc. Organizing the findings by cultural values emphasizes how the social is interwoven with the spatial, where autonomy is found through my family's appropriations of space when re-creating these values. This sets the stage for a more detailed spatial analysis in Part Two.

Part Two: The Journey studies three homes inhabited in-between the first and last home, from the onset of my family's arrival in the GTA in the 1980s, to the present-day 30 years later. The homes include: 1) a postwar apartment unit in Toronto's St. James Town, 2) a multi-family semi-detached Scarborough bungalow, and 3) a two-storey builder's home in Milton. The findings are organized non-linearly by scale; instead of moving from a small-to-big or big-to-small scale, I continue to prioritize telling a story of how autonomy is found through homemaking upon displacement. I therefore follow a more intuitive organization for this chapter that moves from the architectural, to furnishings and objects, to the urban, to the ecological and bodily.^[0.12] Traversing scales identifies space as a main actor in my family's homemaking practices, where spatial conditions influence the value attributed to housework and my family's ability to foster subjectivity at home. This chapter ultimately reveals what space can do, represent, or foster for the diaspora in their search for subjectivity. The findings are synthesized in the conclusion, in which critical questions are posed regarding the role of architecture in the extension of 'The Grand Domestic Revolution' movement.

[0.12] The ordering principal of this spatial analysis is described in further detail in Part Two.

The methodology

On interviewing

The research findings are gathered interpretatively from oral history interviews conducted with six family members spanning three generations, audio-recorded, and taking place in-person and virtually over video calls. The interviews focus on housework in the five family homes of study across Jaffna and the GTA. The questions are designed around four areas of inquiry, including: 1) routines of housework, 2) the spatial qualities of the homes, 3) context on the sites of study, and 4) reflections on the experience of performing housework.^[0.13] First, I will introduce the six research participants. Next, I will describe the four areas of inquiry in the interview design. Then, I will outline two limitations in the research findings. Finally, I will address existing biases in the research and how they are countered through reflexivity.

[0.13] See the appendix for a copy of the interview guide with sample questions distributed to participants.

The six research participants include my parents, Appa and Amma, my maternal grandfather, Ammapa, my sibling, Ari, cousin 'C', and myself, implicated in the study as both a researcher and interviewee. Appa, Amma, and Ammapa identify as first-generation, having migrated from Jaffna to the GTA in 1988, 1993, and 1996 respectively. Appa entered Canada on refugee status, Amma arrived on a marriage visa, and Ammapa was later sponsored by the two to immigrate. Ari, cousin 'C', and I identify as second-generation Sri-Lankan-Canadian, having been born in Scarborough in the mid-to-late 1990s. Having family members of varying identities (refugees,

migrants, diasporas) and across three generations participate allows different perspectives to emerge in the findings.

The interview questions seek to understand the housework routines in each home of study. The first part of the interview asks participants to describe a typical day in each home. This uncovers the who/what/when/where/how of housework practices. Sample questions include: what housework tasks took place, who performed them, where were they done, how often, how long did they take, and did these tasks change on a daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, or annual basis? The second area of inquiry asks participants to describe in detail *where* housework took place, which may include areas of the home, property, street, neighbourhood, markets, or public spaces. These questions ask about the architectural construction, furnishings, objects, lighting, sounds, smells, and materials that constitute these places. The third part of the interview asks about the contexts in which homes are situated, which include their geographic location, and social, economic, and political factors influencing the participants daily lives. These questions ask about homemaking in the conflict, in the poverty brought on by war, within the caste system, in 20th-century American home designs for nuclear family structures, in St. James Town's tower-in-the-park urban morphology, and in varying socioeconomic conditions experienced upon arrival and over time in the GTA. Finally, the fourth part of the interview asks participants opinion-based questions regarding their lived experience performing housework in each home and context. I ask participants about their sense of inclusion, belonging, community, and privacy, what they miss from past routines of housework, what changes they appreciate, and what places feel most like home. Overall, the four areas of inquiry seek to better understand the participants' housework practices in each home, the spaces and contexts in which they take place, and what they foster in the interviewees' remakings of home.

My participation as an interviewee, a familial relative, and a second-generation Tamil Sri Lankan-Canadian positions me as an insider-outsider in this study. Ethnographer Diotima Chatteraj defines being an insider as 'someone who is fully accepted by the host society, and welcomed during cultural events, can access local resources and is able to blend in.'^[0.14] Chatteraj links being an insider to finding belonging in a society where an 'us' versus 'them' social dynamic exists. I position myself as both an insider and outsider in this research due to my diasporic second-generational identity. While I present as a Tamil Sri Lankan-Canadian, and am familiar with the language, cultural customs, and religious rituals for Tamil Hindus, my lived experiences also classify me as an outsider in Jaffna where I have only visited on occasion and am visually identifiable by locals as an outsider (due to my lighter skin, larger physical build, and other signifiers of holding global wealth). I therefore

[0.14] Diotima Chatteraj, "Sri Lankan Northern Tamils in Colombo: Broken Memories of Home," *South Asia Research* 42, no. 2 (2022): 246, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280221091796>.

operate as both an insider and outsider in this study.

My insider position inevitably comes with bias. To counteract this, I employ what social science scholars Schwartz-Shea and Yanow describe as reflexivity, referring to the process of being self-aware of my identity as the researcher while making methodological checks on the research findings through constant reflection.^[0.15] I record this reflexive process by footnoting the transcribed interviews, highlighting quotations, and interweaving relevant photographs^[0.16] into the text. The footnoting practice in particular allows me to uncover layers of the conversation that go beyond the spoken word, by recording details like where the interviews took place, who was present, what was shared, what findings were drawn, and how my position may have emphasized certain findings over others. Through reflexivity, I have also identified two limitations on the research conducted.

The first limitation is the degree of participant involvement early on in the research. In initial interviews conducted with Appa and Amma together, the two held a shared understanding that Appa's migration story took prominence over Amma's. This led to more active participation and follow-up interviews with Appa, painting a less nuanced portrait of the diasporic Tamil Sri Lankan woman in Part One. In informal conversations about the Sri Lankan Civil War with extended family, I similarly found that male voices overshadowed others. This is due to the patriarchal social structure of traditional Jaffna society and its diaspora. Furthermore, the conflict was perceived to have affected women less. The war, characterized by the desire for better educational and professional opportunities, was seen as a 'male' issue, as women already faced hurdles accessing secondary and post-secondary education due to pressures to take over domestic duties in their families.^[0.17] Additionally, violence faced by men during the war, apparent in cases of incarceration, disappearances, kidnappings, torture, and death, overshadowed other forms of violence experienced by women, children, and elderly, such as sexual violence, rape, theft, and the conscription of child soldiers and women suicide bombers in war attacks. The disposability of women, child, and elderly bodies under this patriarchal system further affirms the perception held by Sri Lankans and the diaspora that the Tamil genocide seen in the Sri Lankan Civil War most affected young men. While the male voice became more prominent in Part One of this research (and in the larger narrative of the Sri Lankan Civil War) as a result of these conditions, it is important to note that women's gendered experiences of life in Jaffna before, during, and after the conflict continues to exist in between the lines.^[0.18]

The second limitation on the research is generational difference.^[0.19] In interviews with second-generation participants, reflections on life in the Jaffna village are limited to temporary visits to Sri Lanka, passed down

[0.15] Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 95–104.

[0.16] Photographs annotated into the transcribed interviews include relevant found family photographs and/or stock images illustrating aspects of village life in Jaffna.

[0.17] In Jaffna, women are excluded from education and the paid work economy. In my family, my Appama (paternal grandmother) stopped her education in Grade 3 to assist with household duties; my Amma (mother), the only daughter in her family of eight, studied until Grade 12, despite being discouraged from attending her last two years of school. She, like many other women, did not attend university in Sri Lanka, both due to the interruption of the civil war and as a result of traditional gender roles in Jaffna society.

[0.18] Explorations of gender and class relations during the later years and after the war in Sri Lanka are beyond the scope of this research. For context, gendered experiences of life in Jaffna during the war can be characterized by the enlisting of women soldiers and the increased presence of women in the paid labour force as part of war efforts. After the war, the island saw an increased number of widows, and the abandonment of villages by largely middle and higher caste families.

[0.19] For more on generational divergences between those who lived in Jaffna during wartime, and their children growing up elsewhere, see: Sharika Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 98–99.

oral histories, and secondary sources. These perspectives are at risk of reading family histories through a more assimilated Western lens, which may fetishize certain aspects of Jaffna village life. Entangled in this is my own positionality as a second-generation researcher, which influences what is shared to me in the interviews, how it is told to me in a relatable way, and what findings are drawn from the interviews. These factors form an inherently diasporic representation of Sri Lanka that emphasizes differences between life in the Jaffna village and Western life in the suburban GTA. Additionally, the shared experiences between myself and other second-generation participants, specifically my sibling, Ari, and cousin 'C', creates bias in the research findings. Often, Ari and cousin 'C's perspectives reinforce my research findings, and do not introduce a new perspective. The three of us also identify as AFAB (assigned female at birth) and can relate to the experience of being socialized as women in our upbringing in the GTA. This makes for a rather specific second-generational voice. However, our shared experiences also provides a strong perspective on the intersectional experience of being raised in the GTA as racialized diasporic Tamil Sri Lankan-Canadian womxn and second-generational victims of the conflict's displacing impacts. ^[0.20] Therefore, both generational difference and the degree of participation between male and female interviewees are limitations important to consider in this representation of a diasporic ethnic community criminally silenced by the politics of the Sri Lankan Civil War. ^[0.21] While the findings will not reflect an identical experience for all Tamil Sri Lankan-Canadians in the GTA, they can reveal the broader negotiations made by the diaspora in their remakings of home.

[0.20] I use the term 'womxn' here in consideration of the participants' gender identities.

[0.21] The Tamil separatist LTTE group was listed as a terrorist organization by 33 countries from 1992 to 2014, including Canada, the US, India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Australia, and the European Union. In Canada, any support provided to the separatist movement has been criminalized since 2006. This resulted in an overall silencing of Tamil narratives in the diaspora during the war, recently after they had fled to countries across the West.

[0.22] WhatsApp is an internationally available instant messaging application where both my maternal and paternal family stay connected via group chats, connecting family members remaining in Sri Lanka with those displaced to Canada, Australia, Germany, and the UK.

On representing

My visual representation of Tamil Sri Lankans in this thesis required deep ethical considerations. In the end, I use many personal photographs to visualize my family's homemaking practices. These photographs were either directly taken, found in family photo albums, or shared over WhatsApp. ^[0.22] The photos were later edited to blur the faces of those pictured to maintain their anonymity while preserving their bodies, postures, faint expressions, colours of their dress and surroundings, and their emplacement in each setting. While using personal photographs for research can be voyeuristic, my aim is to represent myself and my family occupying homes originally designed for white nuclear families. Popular representations of North American suburban homes mainly depict this dominant demographic, from photographs of white families standing in front of their new Levittown homes, to advertisements for domestic appliances featuring white 1950s housewives. With these images dominating our cultural memory, I ask: are the presence of white bodies performing housework so normalized in North American society that seeing brown men occupy a cramped basement, or brown women eating rice with their hands in a living room, is considered voyeuristic, simply due to the

marginalization of these bodies and their cultural customs? Through my use of family photographs in the research, I aim to emplace my family's presence in the GTA since the 1980s through photographic representations of their lives at home, at day jobs, in school, and in community gatherings. Punjabi-Ontarian art and architectural historian Sajdeep Soomal similarly reflects on his anxieties about using personal family photographs in an ethnographic research article about his grandmother's Cambridge, Ontario garage where she had installed a second stove:

I considered how these photographs I had taken, presented without context, might confirm racial fears about the “dirty,” “cramped,” and “unkempt” living space of new migrants. In the end, though, architectural photographs themselves hold no clear-cut politics—it is only with context that they can be mobilized for varying political aims, from architectural reform to racial exclusion.^[0.23]

[0.23] Sajdeep Soomal, “Migrancy in the Garage,” *Avery Review*, April 2018, <https://www.averyreview.com/issues/31/migrancy-garage>.

Like Soomal, I grappled with the decision to represent my family through personal photographs while remaining aware of the social, economic, and racial connotations these images produce when viewing, for instance, impoverished bodies, overweight bodies, brown bodies, the ‘dirty’ conditions of the Jaffna homes, the ‘cramped’ Scarborough bungalows, and so on. However, the context in which I present these photos aims to tell a narrative of how autonomy is found in my family's remakings of homes in the GTA. I intentionally seek to visualize the joy fostered in homemaking as much as the oppression built into its spatial organization. Using personal photographs to represent my family then becomes a way of reclaiming the joy lost in the conflict in Sri Lanka and a forced displacement. These images also disrupt the typically victimizing representation of racialized refugees in the West, which rids these subjects of their subjectivity, autonomy, resiliency, and ability to foster joy in oppressive contexts.

These ethical considerations extend to representations of life in the Jaffna village. Vernacular Jaffna homes have been left out of the Western curricula on architecture, and therefore omitted from the Western cultural memory of what homes and homemaking looks like in an agrarian Sri Lankan village.^[0.24] Questions of representation must therefore consider the audience this work is being presented to. The whiteness of the architectural discipline in North America means that research presented on the global South in the global North is inherently extractive. As architectural historian Jay Cephas has written on historiography,

[0.24] An exception is Bonnie and Robert MacDougall's life-long ethnographic research on architecture and traditional domestic life in the Sinhala village of Mimure, Kandy, Sri Lanka, conducted between 1965 and 2012. However, little architectural research has been conducted on Tamil villages in Sri Lanka.

Racial capitalism is spatial. It stores racialized value in bodies and geographies. Extraction is necessary in order to

[0.25] Jay Cephas, "Racial Capitalism and the Social Violence of Extraction in Keeanga-Yamahatta Taylor's *Race for Profit*," *Avery Review*, no. 56 (April 2022): no. 56, <http://averyreview.com/issues/56/racial-capitalism>.

realize the racialized value stored in bodies and geographies. Extraction is necessarily violent. Historiography is complicit in the (violent) reproduction of racial capitalism. ^[0.25]

With extraction in mind, I would like to acknowledge that this research is indebted to the generosity of my family participants, who openly shared stories about their everyday lives in the homes of study. These participants navigated emotional, social, psychological, and community-related risks with the perceived benefit of putting Tamil Sri Lankans on the map in the architectural discipline, in the GTA, and in a world of whiteness that has violently erased Tamil subjectivity over four centuries of colonization, postcolonial conflict, and displacement. In considering my ownership to the images used and the viewpoints from which they are taken, I recognize the degree of distance that exists between myself as the researcher and the family participants I was photographing. In each home, the first-generation appeared as the experts of domestic work and those responsible for maintaining and reproducing home-space. When photographing their gardens, kitchens, and prayer rooms, my lacking knowledge of agriculture, Tamil cooking, and Hindu rituals distanced me from the subjects in the photographs. I remain unaware of all the stories behind the seeds planted in the garden or the religious objects for worship on the shrine. This emphasizes the 'outsider' aspect of my positionality and makes clear the extraction that comes with researching marginalized subjects to produce architectural histories. Within this extractive process, I take care to acknowledge the participants photographed as the experts of the domestic work documented. My family's presence in the research therefore becomes a gift to the architectural discipline rather than an opportunity.

On drawing

The participants' domestic expertise is also revealed in the methodologies undertaken, where their voices are preserved using long-form quotations, and their understandings of space are documented through collaborative drawings. Drawing with interviewees consisted of drafting a sketch floor plan of each home of study, as well as other homes not included in the thesis, to better understand residential typologies in Jaffna and the GTA. I later re-sketched these plans digitally for legibility and use in the body of the thesis. When re-drawing, I used an illustrative approach to interpret details shared in the interviews about routines of daily life and the typical occupation of space by family-community members in each home. These drawings were inspired by architectural historian Huda Tayob's drawings of markets in the Bellstat Junction Somalian mall run by refugee women in Cape Town, South Africa (*Fig. 0.5*). ^[0.26] Tayob's drawings appropriate orthographic architectural projections (plan, section) to illustrate the intimate details of these interiors, depicting the 'goods sold, furniture, and crockery—in other words, everyday

[0.26] Huda Tayob, "Architectures of Care," *Canadian Centre for Architecture*, August 30, 2021, <https://www.cca.qc.ca/en/articles/issues/30/of-migration/81159/architectures-of-care>.

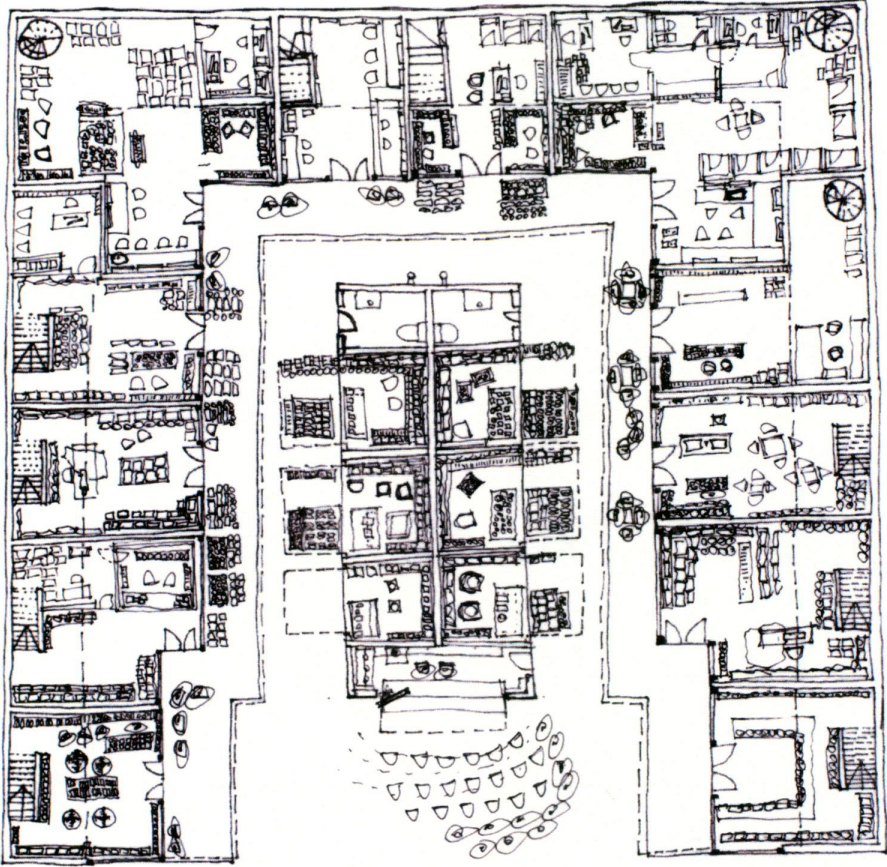


Fig. 0.5. Huda Tayob's drawing of the Bellstat Junction Somalian mall in Cape Town, South Africa (2014-2015).



Fig. 0.6. Artist Thamocharampillai Shanaathanan's architectural re-drawings of remembered Tamil homes in *The Incomplete Thombu* (2011).

objects not always included in architectural drawings.’^[0.27] By drawing the fragile, mobile, and temporal objects that form these subaltern spaces, Tayob illustrates the negotiations made between the refugee women owning and inhabiting these markets and the given architecture of the structures they inhabit. Tayob writes, ‘These drawings express in everyday details how forcibly displaced people assemble new spatial nodes as a way of overcoming formal exclusion.’^[0.28] My illustrative architectural drawings in the thesis similarly aim to depict the negotiations made between my family and the houses they inhabited, consisting of architectural frameworks influenced by capitalist-colonialist ideals in both Jaffna and the GTA. The drawings therefore depict both the formality of the given architecture and the informal appropriations of space by users remaking home in search for subjecthood.

[0.27] Tayob, “Architectures of Care.”

[0.28] Tayob, “Architectures of Care.”

The base floor plans are, at best, an estimate and assumption of the homes of study. With no access to floor plans for two of the five homes, and diagrammatic marketing plans for the other three homes, I use my research participants’ ability to render space by sketch to create the floor plans in this thesis. These drawings are ridden of formal rules, omitting a north arrow, scale, line weights, and accurately measured drawing. Instead, the sketches are presented in a consistent manner by orienting the entrance at the bottom of the page, hatching in the built walls and green spaces, and fading non-structural objects to distinguish between furnishings and architecture. A certain rigidity is maintained in the base drawings to depict the formality of the given architectural frameworks. This is inspired by artist Thamoatharampillai Shanaathanan’s book, *The Incomplete Thombu* (2011), which collects floor plans of past homes drawn by displaced Tamil Sri Lankan civilians from memory and overlays them with an orthographic architectural re-drawing of the home (*Fig. 0.6*).^[0.29] The publisher, Raking Leaves, has written: ‘a vellum overlay with an architect’s crisp drawing makes the lost home “real” in yet another way.’^[0.30] My re-drawings similarly seek to valorize personal family homes as legitimate places of study in the architectural discipline.

[0.29] Thamoatharampillai Shanaathanan, *The Incomplete Thombu* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Raking Leaves, 2011).

[0.30] Shanaathanan, *The Incomplete Thombu*.

I also created sketch drawings with first-generation participants so that I, as the researcher, could better understand their agrarian housework practices in Jaffna. These sketches were unplanned and created instinctively during our interviews to illustrate details, places, systems, and networks of housework. The sketches illustrate, for example: the location of Appa’s Jaffna home to the central temple mapped out by memory of streets (*Fig. 0.7*); the floor plan of the Jaffna home (*Fig. 0.8*); the irrigation system illustrating how water was pumped from underground wells to dug canals on the farm (*Fig. 0.9*); the transformation of the courtyard into a front-facing verandah in my aunt ‘V’ mami’s current Jaffna home (*Fig. 0.9*); and finally, a network of ecological connections made between cows, rice paddy, coconut and palmyra palm trees, architectural construction members, objects and furnishings, and food

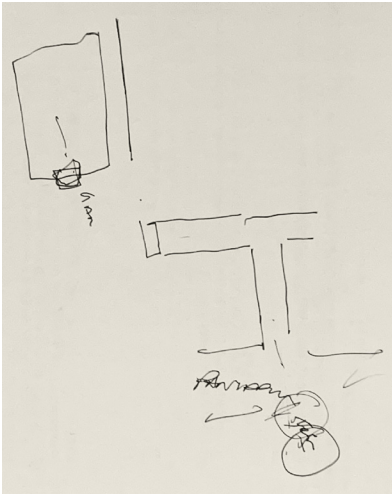


Fig. 0.7. Appa's sketch of the Jaffna house location relative to the temple.

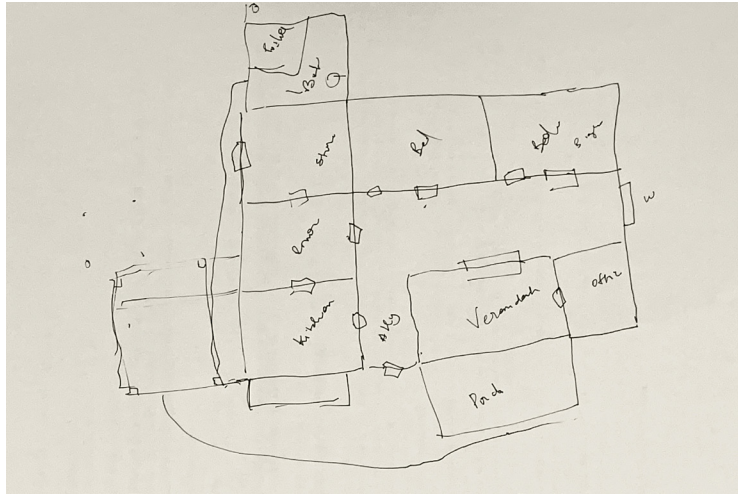


Fig. 0.8. Sketch of the Jaffna floor plan by Appa, outlining the arrangement and naming of interior rooms.

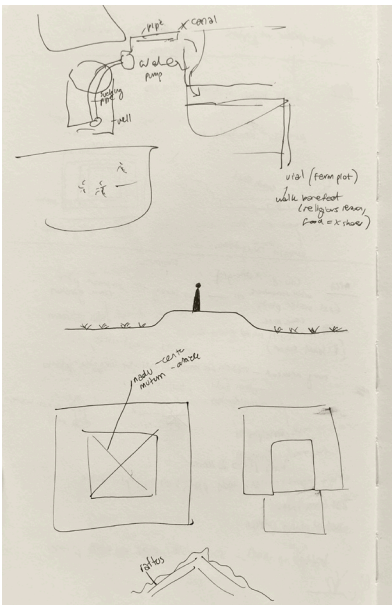


Fig. 0.9. Top to bottom: The farm's irrigation system; the conversion of the courtyard into a verandah.

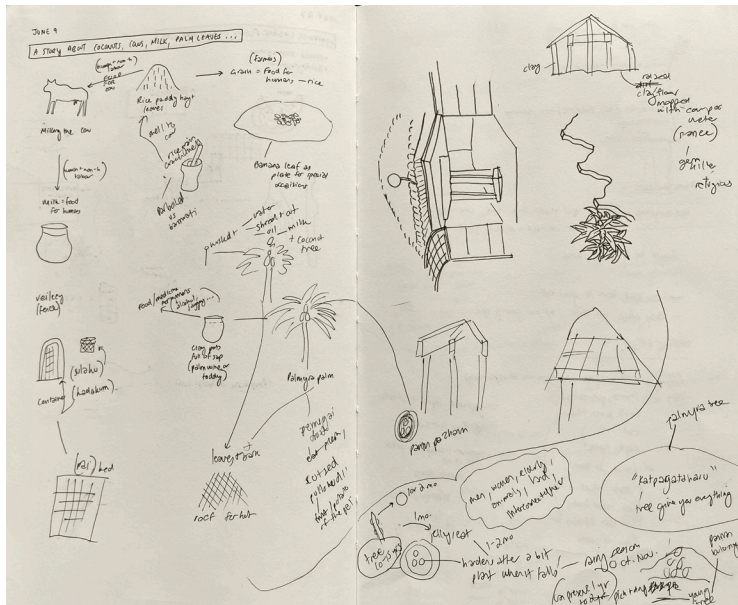


Fig. 0.10. The ecological relationships between cows, rice paddy, coconut and palmyra palm trees, architectural construction members, objects and furnishings, and food and drink.

and drink (*Fig. 0.10*). Initially, I was unsure about using these collaborative sketches in the final thesis as they were ‘messy,’ ‘all over the place,’ and perhaps conveyed my inability to be precise, clear-headed, structured, or prepared as an architectural researcher. I worried that my family-members’ strokes did not have a place in the architectural discipline and for the expert audience who would likely view this thesis, where perhaps I should have taken ‘leadership’ as the architectural ‘expert’ to render the participants’ words into images. In reflection, I realize that these concerns arise out of the aesthetic exclusion produced by the architectural discipline, where definitions of good drawings are often not communicative to, and exclude the visual languages of, those outside the field. ^[0.31] However, in embracing the non-hierarchical methods undertaken in this thesis, I pose collaborative drawings as a methodology that respects the participants ability to render space as architectural ‘non-experts.’ By putting the pen into their hands, and by preserving their voice in the text through long-form quotations as I do in the body of this thesis, I treat this research as a collaboration between myself and my family, between so-called experts and non-experts, in our equal abilities to understand and render space through drawing.

This method of drawing with participants is inspired by Dr. Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi’s proposal of ‘writing with’ in feminist architectural histories of migration. ^[0.32] Siddiqi describes writing with as ‘a way of taking differences and making them strengths: a radical form of collaboration that may sharpen the writing of architectural histories, making plain structural asymmetries, and bringing into view variegated ethical landscapes.’ ^[0.33] Siddiqi describes how an othering process typically occurs in the development of academic scholarship, where research findings are re-phrased or re-organized in ways that rid research participants of their autonomy. Instead, she suggests embracing differences and the consciousness brought forth by this to create processes of togetherness when writing with colleagues in collaboration. I use this approach to ‘draw with’ my research participants, embracing the ‘different’ architectural sketches they produce and the revelations these bring on ‘non-experts’ perceptions and ability to visualize space through drawing.

On writing

The final methodology I wish to reflect on is writing. Most of this thesis uses an academic tone to reveal ideas about space and its organization of housework. In many ways, I write history in the ways I was taught history, by making a point to counter bias, and by projecting the findings onto the larger Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA. I emphasize the impact of the research by referring to the ‘bigness’ of the diasporic community. This reflects imperial practices, where history has always been large and revolutionary. In reflection, I believe the tone could benefit from unlearning the harmful ways

[0.31] Mayuri Paranthahan and Arijit Sen, “Place-Making, Positionalities, and the Profession: A Conversation between Arijit Sen and Mayuri Paranthahan,” ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, June 6, 2022, 21.

[0.32] Anooradha Iyer Siddiqi, “Writing With: Togetherness, Difference, and Feminist Architectural Histories of Migration,” *e-flux*, July 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/structural-instability/208707/writing-with/>.

[0.33] Siddiqi, “Writing With: Togetherness, Difference, and Feminist Architectural Histories of Migration.”

[0.34] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 110–14.

[0.35] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love: Stories & Songs* (Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2013).

[0.36] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 169.

in which we have been taught to read, write, and value (architectural) histories. As feminist Audre Lorde has written, ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.’^[0.34] To truly decolonize architectural history, important when writing on architectures of the south, we must embrace particularity, smallness, and the relations that can be found in this way of writing.

The written style also raises questions regarding the intended audience of the research. The spatial focus positions designers, architects, planners, and educators as the primary audience. My practice of translating Tamil words into their phonetic English translation throughout further affirms this. In Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2013), Simpson does not italicize or define any dialects to determine her Nishnaabeg community as the audience of the work.^[0.35] In another case, Potawatomi writer Robin Wall Kimmerer describes in *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013) about how a graduate student of hers successfully described the traditional teachings of sweetgrass using the scientific, technical, mechanistic, and objective language of academia for her thesis; Kimmerer writes, ‘To be heard, you must speak the language of the one you want to listen.’^[0.36] This thesis employs the latter, written for an audience who study and/or can implement changes to our spatial models of housework in the built environment. However, as I extend this work in the future, I plan to also consider how Tamil Sri Lankan diasporas can more immediately and directly benefit from the findings in informal and bottom-up community approaches.

Outside of the academic essays evident in the thesis, I use reflective writing on the side as a tool for critical thinking and self-reflection. I wrote in various places: on my phone in the back of a van during road trips in Jaffna, in a journal, in community workshops with non-profit organizations in Scarborough and Toronto, in virtual classes at the University of Waterloo, over audio notes, and so on. In this process, I often hit roadblocks where, for periods of time, I could not write anything of substantial use in the thesis or for my own self-understanding of the research. I believe these fluctuating phases of writing rapidly, to putting the pen down for some time, reflected my own processing of trauma in the making of this thesis. In conducting the research, I uncovered stories involving trauma that my family was willing to share with me, and I have grieved these losses alongside them. In many ways, I view this work as ‘trauma-informed,’ a term circulated by health care workers that shifts the question from identifying trauma to assuming it is already in the room. This approach does not interrogate whether a research participant is traumatized, or if a situation or context was traumatizing, but rather assumes trauma is more likely present than not, and then analyzes conditions within this assumption. With this approach, writing became a tool of self-actualization, making legitimate some of the pains I felt myself growing up in the GTA suburbs as a racialized second-generation Tamil

Sri Lankan-Canadian woman. Writing also affirmed familial and ancestral experiences I held, and reflections on these experiences held by myself and research participants. In this way, writing became part of a healing process where I could sort out the emotions I was experiencing in the making of this thesis. Writing, like housework, became a way of making do in the larger context of an exclusionary world. As diarist Anaïs Nin has written,

Why one writes is a question I can answer easily, having so often asked it of myself. I believe one writes because one has to create a world in which one can live. I could not live in any of the worlds offered to me—the world of my parents, the world of war, the world of politics. I had to create a world of my own, like a climate, a country, an atmosphere in which I could breathe, reign, and recreate myself when destroyed by living...When you make a world tolerable for yourself, you make a world tolerable for others. ^[0.37]

[0.37] Anaïs Nin, *The Diary of Anaïs Nin, Vol. 5: 1947-1955* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 149.

Nin describes how the healing process of writing extends beyond the individual. When a reader finds relation with a text, a new world is constructed, and that too is spatial. I believe then, that emotional awareness and intellect has a place in academia. The emotional labour that I have put into this thesis, and the relations I have created in the dissemination of this work, has constructed for me a written world where I myself have found subjecthood, or a home. Amid the research phase, I recall asking myself what it was exactly that I was seeking through this work. Was it happiness? Was it finding belonging? I believe it was simply finding a way to exist. In the context of hurt and healing, of oppression and liberation, I make do with writing in the same ways my family has made homes over the last 30 to 40 years in the GTA.

A family's displacement

Before tackling the research question of what domestic liberation could look like for the diaspora in the GTA, I provide in this section context on my family's displacement from Sri Lanka to Canada. I will begin with a partial history of the Sri Lankan Civil War following the anti-Tamil pogroms in July of 1983. This is mainly told through the voice of my father using long-form quotations from our one-on-one interview. Appa's narrative describes the need for migration and the loss of home for many members of the diaspora dispersed across the West today. ^[0.38] After this, I will introduce bell hooks' concept of a 'homeplace,' used as a core theory throughout the thesis for understanding housework's ability to foster subjectivity. Finally, I present a series of maps at varying geographic scales to situate the five family homes of study in this thesis.

[0.38] Since the onset of the Sri Lankan Civil War in 1983, Tamils in Sri Lanka have fled to countries across the West, including Canada, the UK, the US, Australia, and in countries within Western Europe. Many have also been displaced to India, with few others resettling to other South Asian and Middle Eastern countries.

A partial history of the conflict

Below the southern tip of India, a staggering border separating sand and sea delimits the island of Ceylon. While my family continues to use its colonial name in Tamil, the nation was renamed as the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka in 1972 upon gaining independence in 1948. Many perceive the post-independence period as the beginning of Sri Lankan conflict, creating an ethnolinguistic divide between the Tamil-speaking minority and Sinhalese-speaking majority. A series of policies put forth by the new democracy were thought to have favoured a majoritarian Sinhala-Buddhist country. This includes the denying of citizenship and the disenfranchising of up-country Tamil plantation workers brought over from South India during the British occupation, reducing Tamil voting power in legislative elections. This also includes the Sinhala Only Language Act passed in 1956, in which Sinhalese became the sole national language, reserving better jobs for this majority. The limitation on educational and professional opportunities for Tamil youth led to the formation of Tamil militant groups pushing for greater autonomy. In May of 1976, the LTTE was founded by Velupillai Prabhakaran in succession of previous Tamil separatist groups formed since the early 1970s. By killing their leaders and absorbing their cadres, the LTTE emerged as the dominant militant group fighting for an independent state in the north and east known as Tamil *Eelam*, meaning homeland.^[0.39] Today, many understand the civil war as a conflict between the separatist LTTE group and the Sinhala-dominant Sri Lankan government. Asoka Bandarage, who studies this ‘ethnic dualism’ in Sri Lanka, claims that this perception leaves many groups in the margins: Tamil civilians opposing the LTTE agenda, Muslims, Sinhalese of the conflicted Eastern Province, and opposing Sinhalese parties.^[0.40] The intricacies of the conflict are replaced by a binary narrative further reinforced by international influences, including peacekeeping initiatives by India and Norway, who reduce the conflict to a terrorist problem, and activism by the Western diaspora, who depict the Sinhala majority as a sole aggressor and the Tamil minority as a ‘monolithic victim.’^[0.41]

[0.39] Asoka Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka* (London: Routledge, 2009), 53–76, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203886311>.

[0.40] Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 4.

[0.41] Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 3.

[0.42] For more detailed briefs of Black July, see: Diotima Chattoraj, “Ambivalent Attachments: Shifting Notions of Home among Displaced Sri Lankan Tamils” (Ruhr-Universität Bochum, 2017); Eva Gerharz, *The Politics of Reconstruction and Development in Sri Lanka: Transnational Commitments to Social Change* (London: Routledge, 2014); Thiranagama, *In My Mother’s House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*.

[0.43] This was not the first of such riots, as violence had erupted in 1958, 1977, and 1981 prior; Anoma Pieris, “Dwelling in Ruins: Affective Materialities of the Sri Lankan Civil War,” *The Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 6 (2017): 1002, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1363265>.

My family belongs to a diasporic community of Tamils who fled Sri Lanka for the West. Appa, my father, was 25 years old when he permanently left his Jaffna homeland in 1988. The outbreak of the war halted his education at a university in the city of Colombo, the commercial capital of Sri Lanka. On July 24th, 1983, a day now known as ‘Black July,’ the conflict broke out into a violent and gruesome civil war.^[0.42] The news of thirteen fallen Sinhalese soldiers in Jaffna and the arrival of their corpses in Colombo the day before had set off anti-Tamil riots that would last for several days on end.^[0.43] Hundreds of Tamil homes, shops, factories, vehicles, and properties were attacked, looted, and burned down, leaving many murdered, missing, fleeing, hiding, or forced into refugee camps. In our interviews,

Appa describes his whereabouts during the outbreak of the war in 1983:

You could hear the riots from inside the house, the wind and the burning. I was staying at my sister's house in a Tamil and Muslim enclave in Colombo at the time. My university was in a Sinhalese area, so I thought I'd be safer there when I heard anticipation of the riots. People expected a conflict, but no one knew how bad it would be. We were only a few steps away from the house when some Sinhalese gang members stopped us, took our belongings, and raided the house for valuables; they took everything. The Muslim residents in the area helped us get some of our things back. During this time, from late July to early August in 1983, we were hiding in Muslim families' houses and sleeping in their attics. It was such a horrible place to sleep; the attics were poorly constructed, but we didn't have much of a choice. My sister, her husband, and her kids eventually took a cargo ship back to Jaffna, and I took a passenger ship [to Jaffna] organized by the Indian Peace Keeping Force. It was too dangerous to get back to the village by land, so we had to go around the island, by sea. ^[0.44]

[0.44] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Appa*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 2.

In the following decade, the violence would move to Tamil areas in the north and east, escalating within the LTTE's aspirational borders of Tamil Eelam which carried the weight of socioeconomic, linguistic, religious, and casteist political tensions. ^[0.45] This area included my parents shared natal village in Jaffna, among others. Appa recalls:

I was eventually back in Colombo when my studies resumed. By December of 1983, tensions were rising again, and I thought I should better get back to Jaffna even though it was the middle of exam season. As soon as I boarded the train, the conductor informed me it was no longer running due to the conflict. That train would not run for another 20 to 30 years. I stayed put, and was lucky, because it was during that time that the army was in our village and things were really bad there. That's when they killed your Amma's brother and two young men we knew. When I eventually made it home later, the village had an air of sadness. There had been so many deaths, so much grief. ^[0.46]

[0.45] Pieris, "Dwelling in Ruins: Affective Materialities of the Sri Lankan Civil War," 1002.

[0.46] Paranthahan, *Interview with Appa*, 2–3.

The line drawn in the sand defined 'us' and 'them.' War crimes and human rights violations occurred on both sides of the conflict. In 2002, the United Nations claimed 100,000 people killed and 800,000 displaced, however, a countless number of casualties have gone unreported. ^[0.47] On May 18, 2009, the civil war was declared over after the killing of LTTE leader by the Sri

[0.47] Nicola Jens et al., "UNHCR's Programme for Internally Displaced Persons in Sri Lanka" (Geneva, Switzerland: UNHCR Evaluation and Policy Analysis Unit, 2002), v.

[0.48] Impacts after the war in Tamil areas of Sri Lanka are beyond the scope of this paper. For more on this, see: Chatteraj, "Ambivalent Attachments: Shifting Notions of Home among Displaced Sri Lankan Tamils"; Chatteraj, "Sri Lankan Northern Tamils in Colombo: Broken Memories of Home," 233–48; Gerharz, *The Politics of Reconstruction and Development in Sri Lanka: Transnational Commitments to Social Change*; Thiraganama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka*; Gordon Weiss, *The Cage: The Fight for Sri Lanka and the Last Days of the Tamil Tigers* (London: Random House, 2011).

[0.49] Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*.

[0.50] Toupin, *Wages for Housework: A History of an International Feminist Movement, 1972–77*.

[0.51] hooks, "Homeplace (a Site of Resistance)", 42.

Lankan government. However, the continuing military occupation of land and the sheer scale of human displacement over 26 years of violence left lasting wounds on the nation, its communities, and the meaning of a home or homeland to Sri Lankan civilians impacted on all sides of the conflict. ^[0.48]

Making 'homeplace'

The loss of home in the conflict influences my approach to housework in this research. Western feminism frames housework solely as a labour of exploitation for women, evident through historical calls to socialize ^[0.49] and compensate ^[0.50] this labour. However, for racialized diasporas, housework is simultaneously an act of resistance. bell hooks, a Black American intersectional feminist and social theorist, captures this in her concept of a 'homeplace.' She argues that for Black women living in patriarchal colonized white-supremacist societies, housework is the radical political placemaking of an affirmative domestic sphere where Black people can be subjects. hooks writes:

Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. ^[0.51]

In a world made white, homeplace becomes a place for racial and cultural affirmation. The domestic sphere can act as a site of refuge from the powerful legacies of colonialism and whiteness inherited in the outside world. For racialized diasporas oppressed in public life, the private nature of home provides a subaltern site where marginalized people can experience their humanity and find subjectivity. hooks' concept therefore subverts the Western feminist perception of housework as solely oppressive, and operates across race, gender, and class lines to uncover the radical possibility of joy that can be found in everyday household practices for those intersectionally marginalized in public space. I refer to hooks' concept of a homeplace throughout the thesis to address both the joys and oppressions involved in my own family's remakings of home from Sri Lanka to Canada.

While the explicit racial oppression experienced by Black people in slave economies that hooks addresses is incomparable to the diasporic Tamil Sri Lankan experience, racialized migrants forcibly displaced to the West are confronted with a similar legacy of whiteness in the outside world

that threatens their subjectivity and establishes pressures to assimilate. This rings true for the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA, who negotiate their brownness daily in homes and cities not designed for a diasporic Tamil Sri Lankan demographic. Whiteness is also confronted through the form of postcolonial conflict in Jaffna. After four centuries of colonization under the rule of the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796), and the British (1796-1948), the granting of political independence shifted power from the Tamil minority to the Sinhalese majority through the unequal distribution of wealth and power.^[0.52] This gave rise to Tamil grievances, and eventually, ethnic conflict, leading to an ongoing attack on Tamil space, seen in the 1983 pogroms and the ongoing military occupation of Tamil land. In the face of these lost homes and homelands, organized by colonial powers of whiteness, it is Sri Lankan civilians and diasporas who bear the burden of reconstructing an affirming homeplace where they can be subjects.

[0.52] Some Tamil Sri Lankan scholars, such as C.Y. Thangarajah, have argued that Tamil people's privilege during the colonial period only rose out of greater loyalty to the colonial master; Bandarage, *The Separatist Conflict in Sri Lanka*, 31.

Situating five family homes

The following drawings serve as a roadmap to the five family homes of study in this thesis, illustrating them at the scales of: the village, the peninsula, the world, the nation, and the metropolitan area. I include an accompanying family tree to situate the residents mentioned throughout the thesis in their familial relations to one another. While this knowledge of my family homes and family members may seem tangential to the overall purpose of this thesis, which is to point towards new spatial models for housework's liberation in the West, I turn to the words of Indian historian Partha Chatterjee to affirm the need for this information:

There is a price that has to be paid for this shift to the ethnographic, the practical, the everyday and the local...It is undoubtedly true that the weaving of a local historical narrative with detailed ethnographic description of local practices requires immersion in a seemingly bottomless pool of names, places and events that are unlikely to be familiar to readers outside the immediate geographical region...But then, we should remember that if history students all over the world could read about daily life in a single village in the French province of Languedoc in the 14th century or about the mental world of a solitary Italian miller in the 16th century, then in principle there is no reason why they should not do the same with a book about subaltern life in a village or small town in south Asia. ^[0.53]

[0.53] Partha Chatterjee, "After Subaltern Studies," *Economic and Political Weekly* 47, no. 35 (2012): 44–49, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41720086>.



1. The modern Jaffna village bungalow (1965-87)



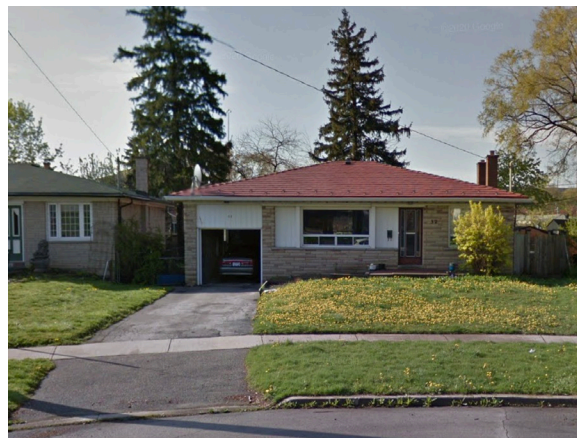
2. The postwar apartment in St. James Town (1987-89)



3. The multi-family Scarborough bungalow (1989-95)



4. The two-storey builder's home in Milton (2001-19)



5. The single-family Scarborough bungalow (2019-)

Fig. 0.11. The five family homes of study across Jaffna and the Greater Toronto Area, inhabited from 1965 to the present day.



Fig. 0.12. Aerial view locating the first home of study in the Jaffna village.

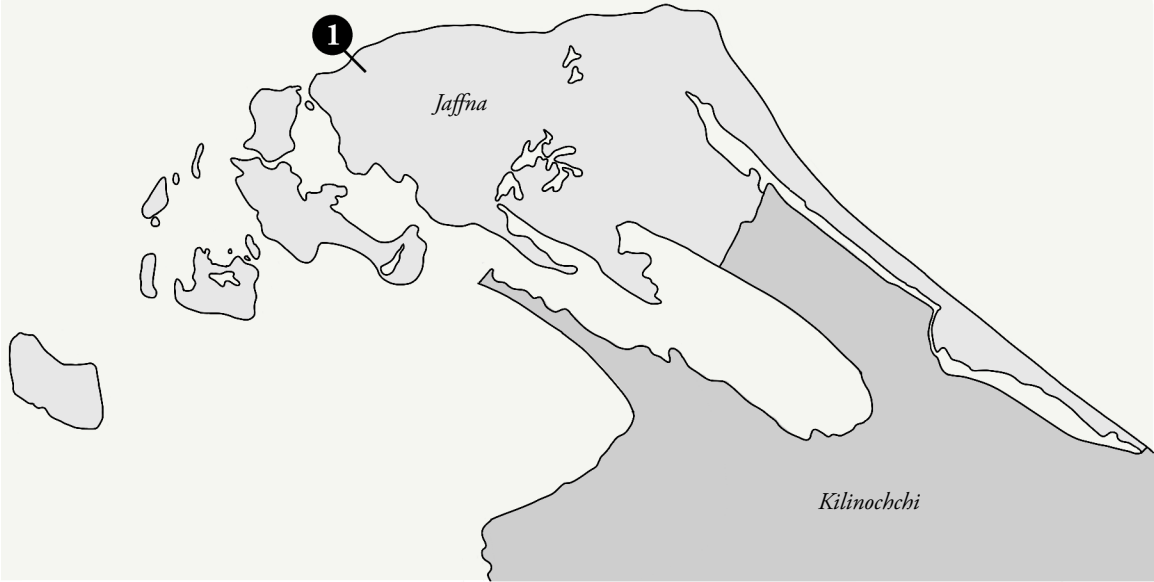


Fig. 0.13. Map sketch locating the first home on the Jaffna peninsula.

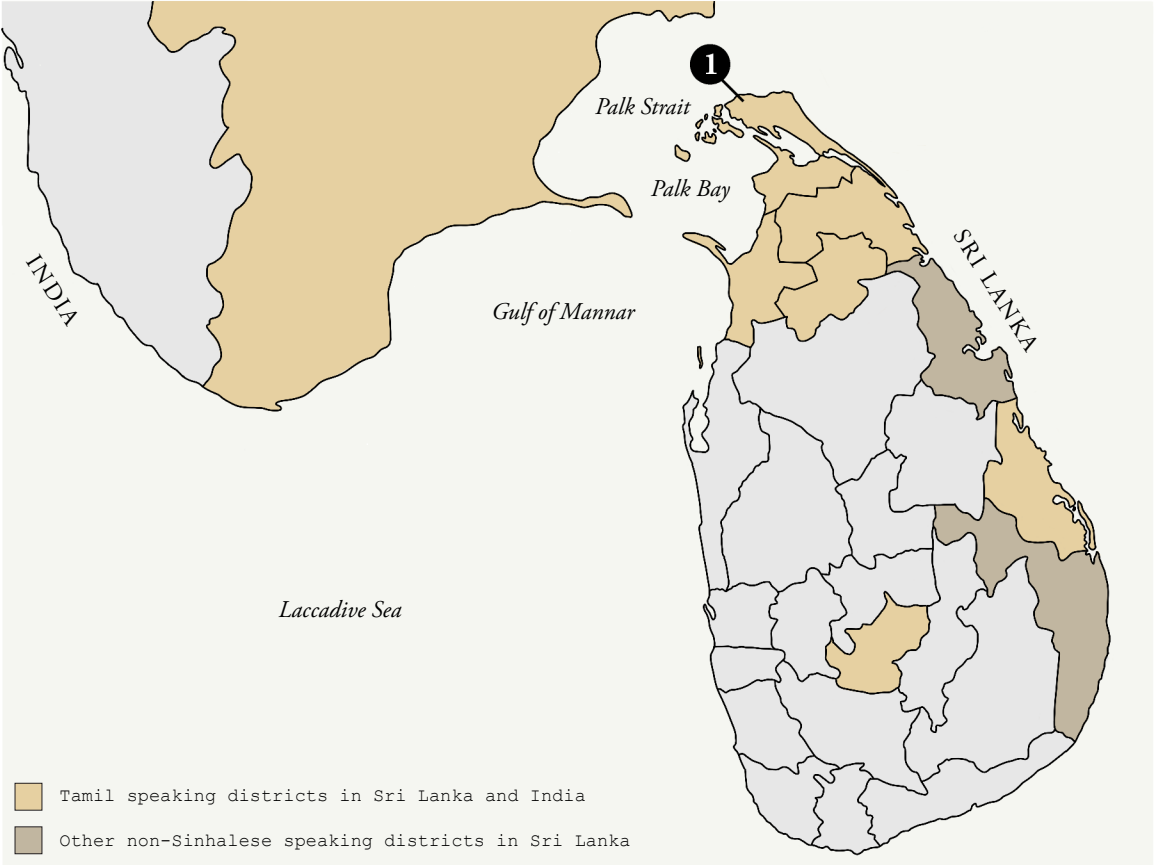


Fig. 0.14. Map sketch locating the first home in Sri Lanka, within the minority Tamil-speaking North and East.

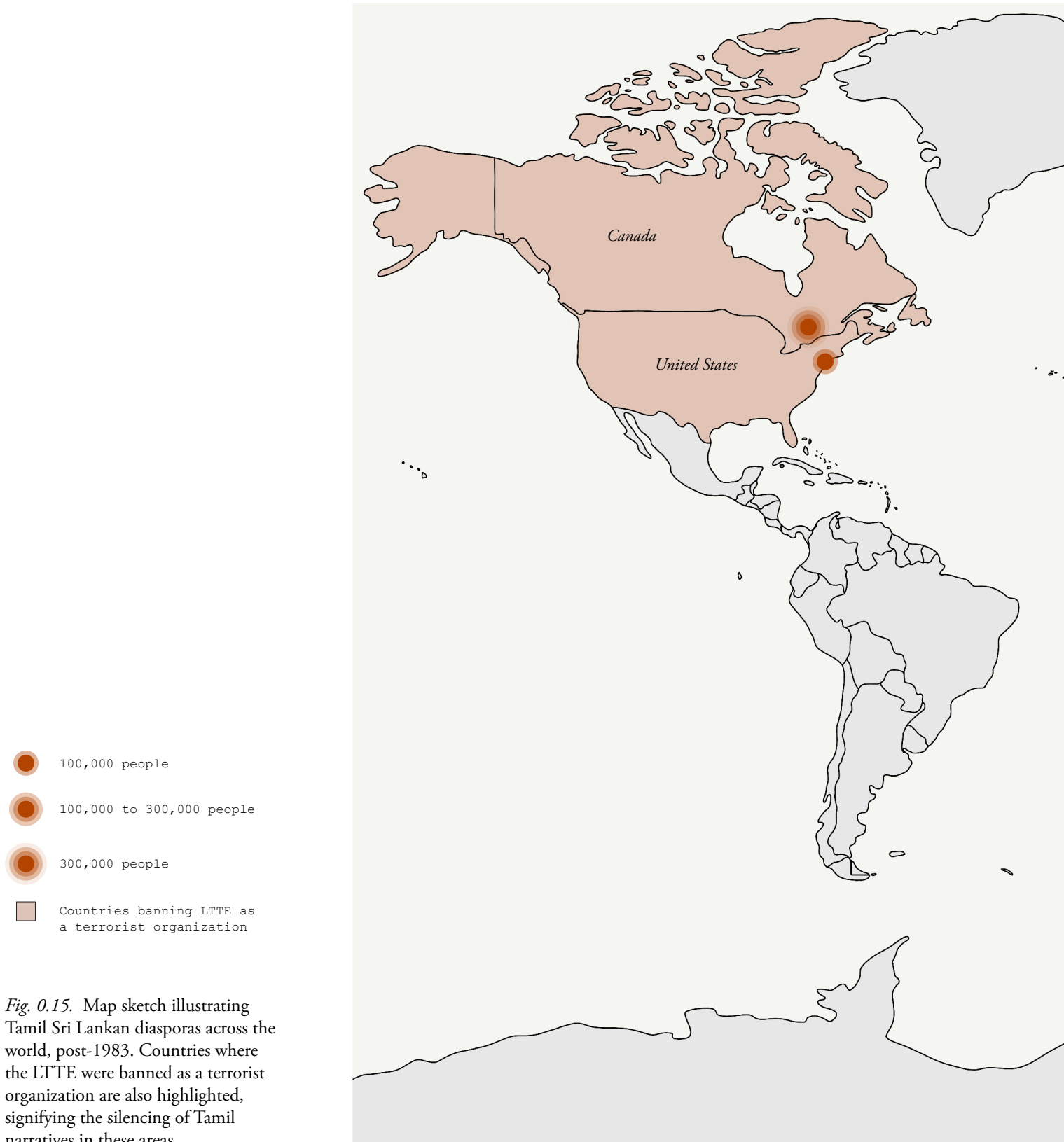


Fig. 0.15. Map sketch illustrating Tamil Sri Lankan diasporas across the world, post-1983. Countries where the LTTE were banned as a terrorist organization are also highlighted, signifying the silencing of Tamil narratives in these areas.

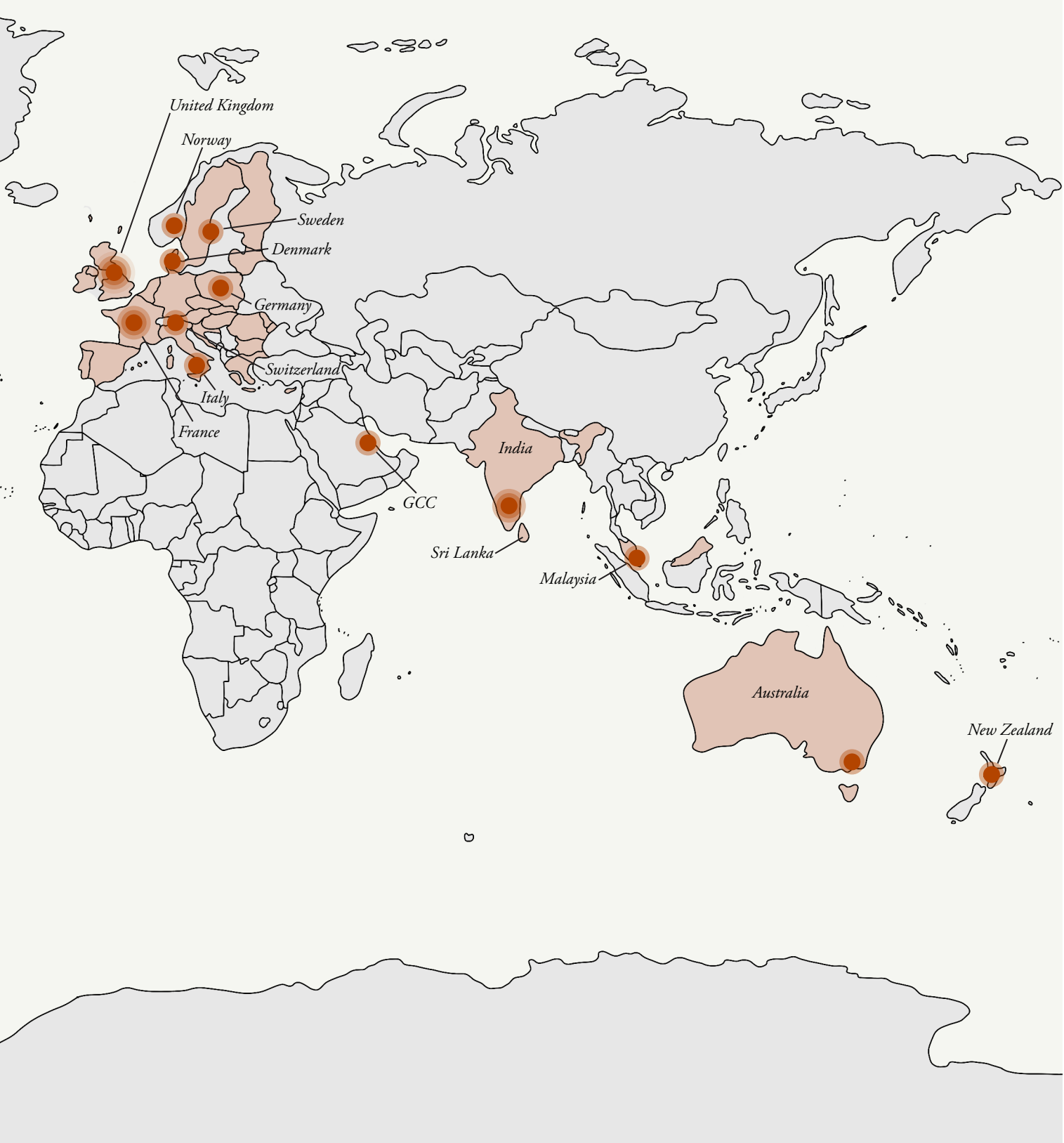
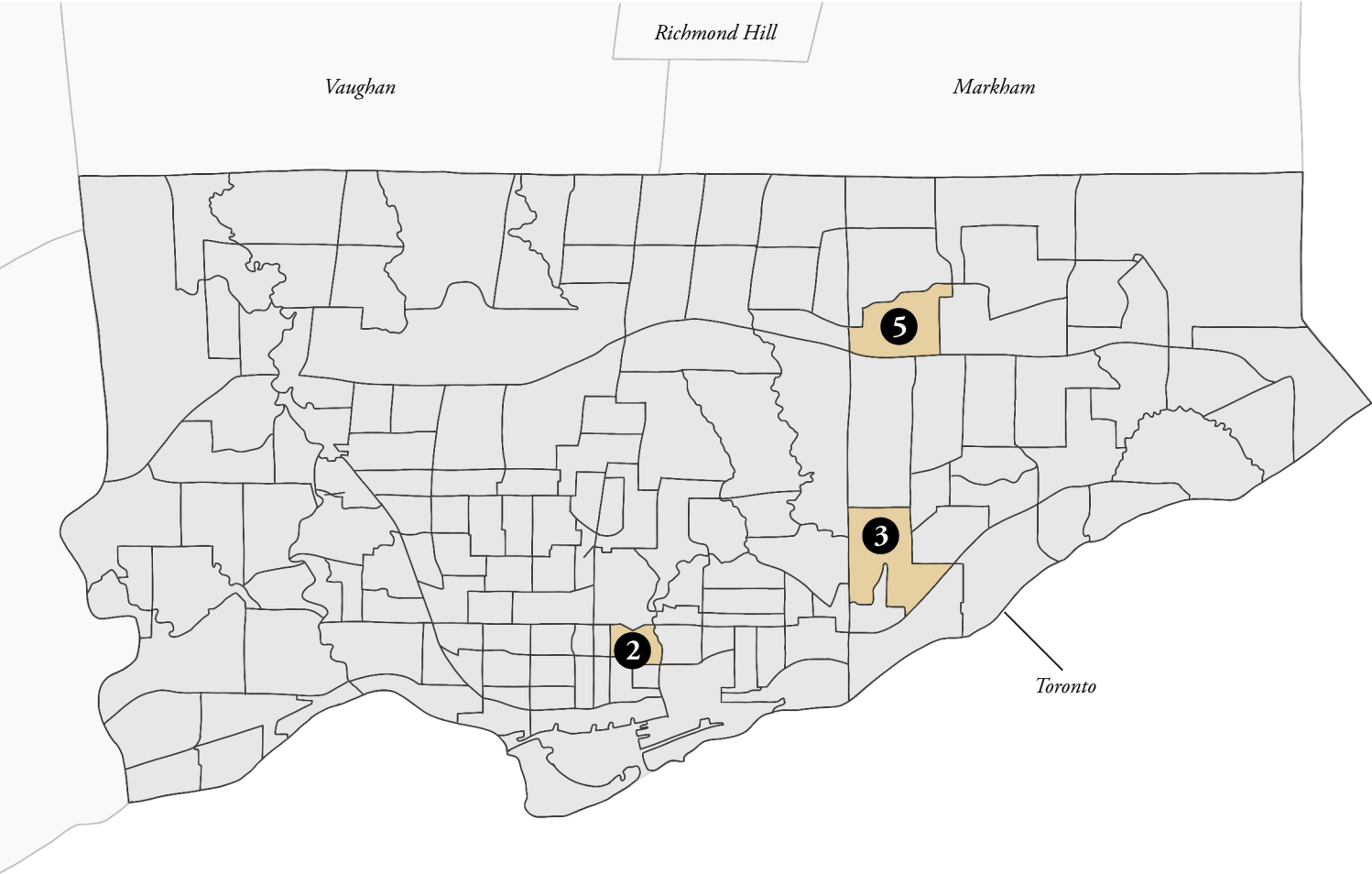




Fig. 0.16. Map sketch locating the second, third, fourth, and fifth home in the Greater Toronto Area; key map situating the Greater Toronto Area in Canada.



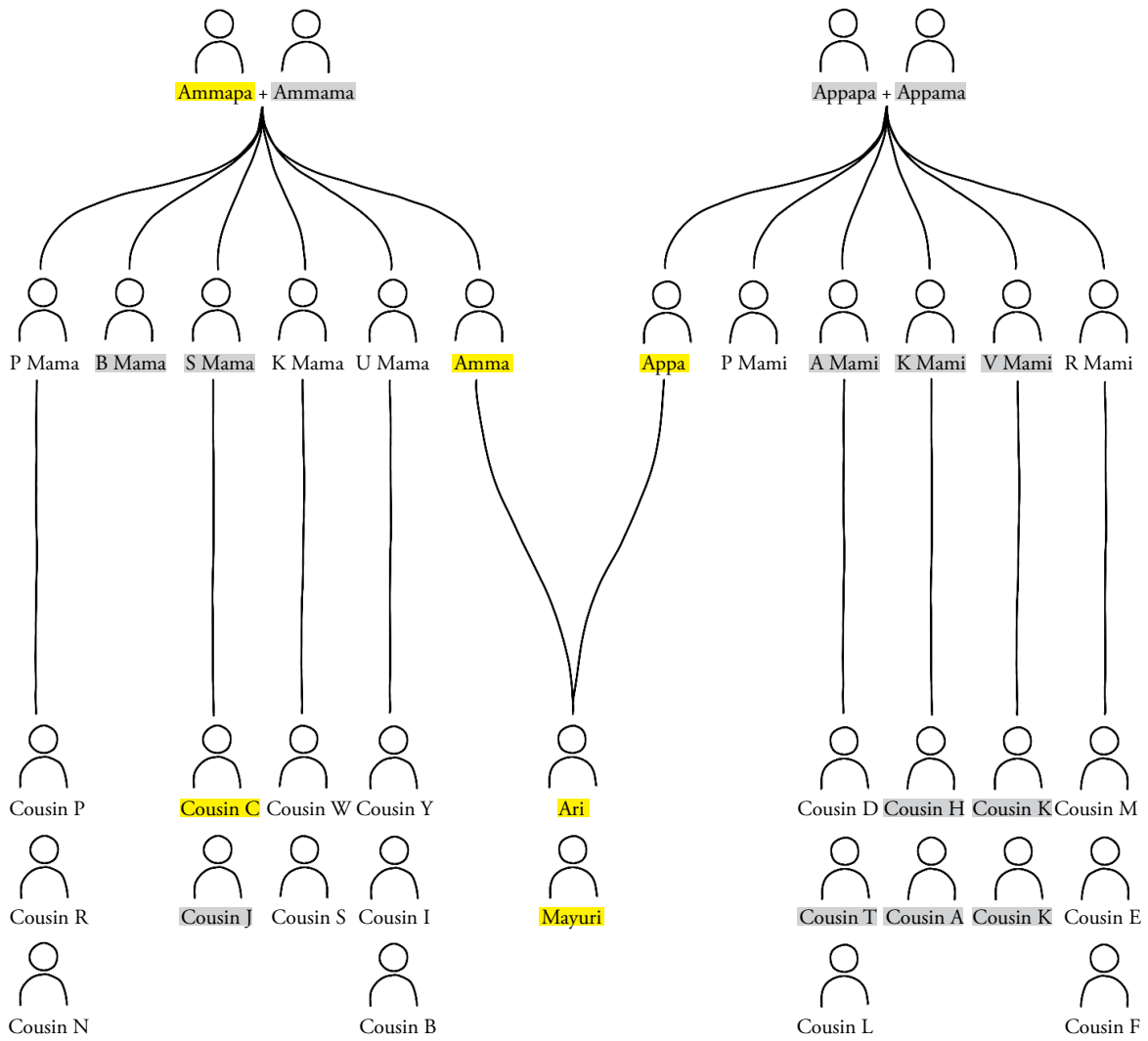


Fig. 0.17. A family tree situating participants and family members mentioned throughout the thesis in their relations to one another.

Participants
 Mentioned

01

A HOME REMADE

A HOME REMADE

What could domestic liberation look like for the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora forcibly displaced to the GTA? To answer this question, we must first determine what counts as domestic labour in this research. In a time-use report by Statistics Canada, housework is defined by the following six tasks: 1) indoor cleaning, 2) shopping, 3) outdoor maintenance, 4) meal preparation, 5) laundry, and 6) repair. ^[1.1] However, this definition does not account for the many responsibilities taken on by refugee and immigrant families after resettling to the West. In my interviews with research participants about homemaking in Jaffna, certain domestic activities appear as holding significant personal, social, cultural, religious, and indigenous values. ^[1.2] This chapter interrogates Western feminist definitions of housework by centring these housework practices and the cultural values they foster in Jaffna village life. I use the first and last home of study in chronology of my family's migration to spatially analyze how these values are remade from Jaffna to the GTA, and how my family has found subjecthood in the process.

In the part that follows, I will introduce the two homes of study. Then, I will uncover how my family's cultural values are spatially remade in their housework practices from Jaffna to Scarborough. This comparative analysis is ordered thematically by three housework tasks significant to Jaffna village life, particularly: 1) agricultural activity, 2) religious ritual, and 3) social gathering. The thematic organization, in contrast to a chronological or spatial exploration of the two homes of study, places importance on the values fostered in homemaking practices. This analysis seeks to learn from my family's appropriations of space when re-creating their cultural values to point towards more inclusive models for housework's liberation in the West.

A past and present family home

Appa's displacement from Sri Lanka to Canada is bookended by two family homes inhabited over thirty years apart, from a Jaffna village house inhabited from 1968 to 1988, to a suburban Scarborough, Ontario bungalow inhabited from 2019 onwards. The main thread between these homes is Appa's journey as the 'patriarch' of the family and the one responsible for economic security in the family as a result of traditional gender roles in Tamil society. ^[1.3] In between the lines, women in my family appear as the primary caretakers of domestic space, tasked with typical housework duties like cooking, cleaning, childcare, and additional social, cultural, and economic responsibilities. The following paragraphs describe the location, urban context, and architectural makeup of both homes of study before comparatively analyzing how cultural

[1.1] Melissa Moyser and Amanda Burlock, "Women in Canada: A Gender-Based Statistical Report," 89-503-X, Statistics Canada (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, July 30, 2018), <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/54931-eng.htm>.

[1.2] It is important to note that the (lowercase) 'indigenous' values practiced by my family in Jaffna are truly settler-agrarian practices originating from the land-based practices of the (uppercase) 'Indigenous' peoples of Sri Lanka.

[1.3] Gender roles in Tamil society are comparable to the Western nuclear family model in which men have authority over the home as the economic owner, but limited responsibility over domestic work; Shelley Mallett, "Understanding Home: A Critical Review of the Literature," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 1 (2004): 62–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fj.1467-954X.2004.00442.x>.

values are (re-)made in each home through housework practices.

A modern Jaffna village home

[1.4] For more on memories of home for Tamils displaced by the Sri Lankan Civil War, see: Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan, *The Incomplete Thombu* (Colombo, Sri Lanka: Raking Leaves, 2011); Thamotharampillai Shanaathanan, "Commemorating Home: Art as Place Making, an Artist's Narration," *Journal of Material Culture* 20, no. 4 (2015): 415–28, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183515605858>; Niro Kandasamy, Nirukshi Perera, and Charishma Ratnam, *A Sense of Viidu: The (Re) Creation of Home by the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Australia* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Diotima Chattoraj, "Sri Lankan Northern Tamils in Colombo: Broken Memories of Home," *South Asia Research* 42, no. 2 (2022): 233–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280221091796>.

[1.5] Caste relations are further explored in the comparative analysis, under the sub-heading 'Agricultural activity.' For more on caste relations in Jaffna leading up to and during the war years, see: Chelvadurai Manogaran and Bryan Pfaffenberger, *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

[1.6] Ratnavelupillai Mayoornathan, "Traditional Buildings of Jaffna," February 4, 2005, <https://www.oocities.org/rmayoornathan>.

[1.7] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Appa*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 3–4.

Appa was born in 1963 in a small village located in northern Jaffna, bordering the seashore, and situated in the driest region of the island. The urban fabric consists of farmland, forest, beaches, and built residential areas (*Fig. 1.1*) with dirt roads originally cleared by Indian Tamil slaves during the British colonial period. Appa's childhood home was abandoned during the early years of the civil war.^[1.4] It still stands today, unmaintained, with the concrete walls peeking through the faded exterior yellow paint and portraits of Hindu deities collecting dust on the interior shelves. The site (*Fig. 1.2*) consists of a 1960s bungalow house (*Fig. 1.3*), cattle shed, a dug area to store agricultural compost, a water well, and a detached bathroom. The property is delineated by ornate iron entrance gates, fences woven with dried palmyra palm leaves, and coconut, mango, and neem trees lining the rear and side (*Fig. 1.4*). The main house was constructed by a caste of carpenters from 1965 to 1968. It was built in replacement of the family's traditional village hut, which was made of thick adobe walls, earthen floors, a wooden construction using lumber from local trees, and a thatched palmyra roof. These huts still exist in Jaffna and are often inhabited by lower caste families; however, the middle-to-higher caste group to which my family belongs mostly live in concrete-block homes today.^[1.5] Upon independence, modern influences impacted the Jaffna vernacular. European-style loose furniture was introduced, Portuguese verandahs deepened, decorative screen windows appeared, and traditional fire stoves were elevated from the ground and equipped with chimneys to let out smoke.^[1.6] New floors were formed in red cement, exteriors were painted in vibrant colours, and red clay tile roofs replaced thatched leaf covers. It was in this modern village house that Appa spent the majority of his childhood years living with his family of eight, consisting of himself, two parents, and five sisters. He would later uproot the village home in 1988, after spending his last few years in Sri Lanka debating his departure:

By 1987, I had grown tired of the conflict. At the time, I was in a work-study program and had a job at the cement factory. On my commutes to and from work, the army would often stop the buses, check our IDs, pat us down, or reroute us. It felt like we didn't have basic human rights. In September, the Tigers began fighting with the Indian Peace Keeping Force, and that's when things got really bad; it felt like one of the worst periods of the war. During that time, I really felt like a refugee in my own homeland. Even though I never wanted to leave my village, that was when I seriously considered it.^[1.7]



Fig. 1.1. Annotated map of my family's village in northern Jaffna, consisting of farmland, forest, beaches, and residential areas. The image is oriented East in alignment with the Tamil Hindu temples in the area.

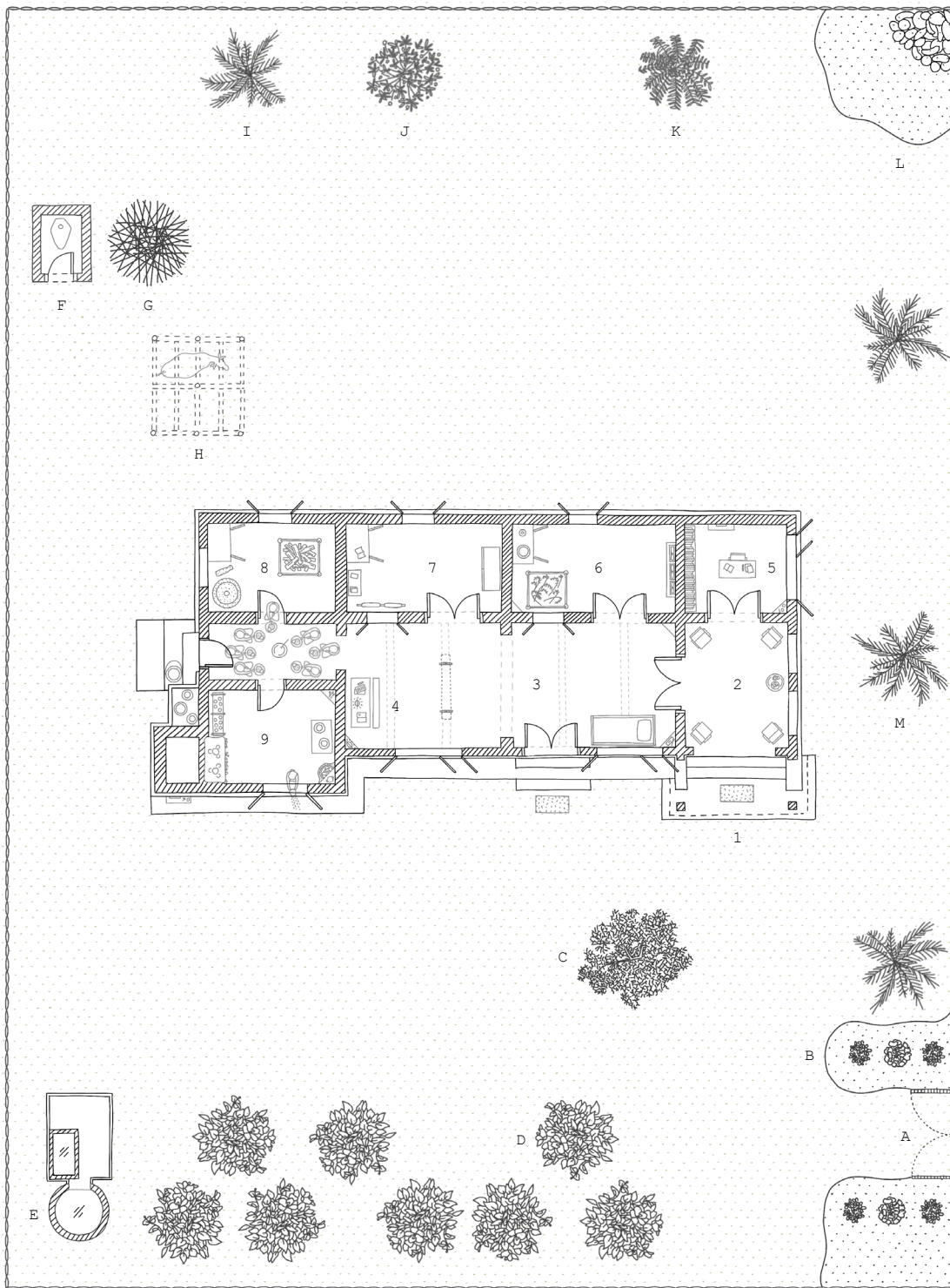


Fig. 1.2. Site plan sketch of Appa's childhood house in Jaffna.

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|---|--------------|
| A | Iron gates | 1 | Portico |
| B | Flowerbeds | 2 | Verandah |
| C | Eucalyptus tree | 3 | Sitting room |
| D | Hibiscus trees | 4 | Study area |
| E | Water well | 5 | Office |
| F | Outhouse | 6 | Prayer room |
| G | Cattle feed | 7 | Wardrobe |
| H | Cattle hut | 8 | Storage |
| I | Coconut tree | 9 | Kitchen |
| J | Mango tree | | |
| K | Neem tree | | |
| L | Composting area | | |
| M | Palmyra trees | | |



Fig. 1.3. My aunt and sibling approaching the house, constructed from 1965-68 with concrete-block walls, red cement floors, and a timber roof with clay shingles.



Fig. 1.4. Appa in the backyard lot of his Jaffna home where coconut, mango, and neem trees line the corrugated metal fence, replacing the previous thatched palmyra leaf fence. A young palmyra tree is also visible, sprouting in the foreground.

A suburban Scarborough bungalow

The year is now 2022 and Appa lives in our current family home, a suburban Scarborough bungalow located east of Toronto. The house marks Appa's fifth dwelling in the GTA—a place he still considers transitory even after over 30 years. The bungalow is remnant of his childhood Jaffna home, with its red metal roof, weather-resistant for Canadian winters, resembling the clay shingle tiles from Sri Lanka. The large picture window also provides a wide picturesque view to the front lot of the house, similar to the frequently occupied verandah in Jaffna homes. Both homes embody a bungalow typology first originating in the South Asian sub-continent in Bengal, India.^[1.8] Today, our home is inhabited by Appa, Amma, Ari, Ammapa, and me, making up a single-family, multi-generational household.

The Scarborough neighbourhood was planned after World War Two during Toronto's rapid population growth and suburban sprawl. During this time, the city saw the construction of defined arterial roads, internal streets, and commercial destinations.^[1.9] Today, Scarborough is known as a thriving ethnoburb, with 73% of its population identifying as a visible minority.^[1.10] As architects Safira Lakhani and Sneha Sumanth describe, 'Toronto, as Canada's "gateway city," receives the greatest concentration of people each year, the majority of whom are settling in suburbs in the Greater Toronto Area.'^[1.11] The pattern of newcomers moving into the metropolitan area establishes ethnoburbs and ethnic enclaves. The ethnoburb of Scarborough has been home to the largest diasporic concentration of Tamil Sri Lankans in the world, where Tamils were identified as the fastest-growing ethnic group in the 1991 census.^[1.12] Part of my family's desire to reside in Scarborough comes from living in proximity to this Tamil community, establishing a support network with our extended family, diasporic village community, and local Tamil temples, businesses, and services.^[1.13]

Our Scarborough house is low, wide, and square in plan. It is oriented north and situated on a trapezoidal lot. It was built with a timber construction covered by a stone and brick veneer with a one-car garage and a large picture window in the front (*Fig. 1.5*). The back lot consists of a small wooden deck, a storage shed, a gazebo, and a garden in the southwest corner (*Fig. 1.6*). The house was retrofitted in 2019 when Appa and Amma purchased it. The renovation split the interior into three apartments consisting of a main floor and a secondary and tertiary basement suite belonging to Ammapa and Ari respectively (*Fig. 1.7, 1.8*). This organization allows for rentable basement apartments and provides downstairs inhabitants with private space. Despite these perceived benefits, the house has also proven to be unfit for our family's needs over time. As Amma describes, the kitchen is 'too small for our Sri Lankan cooking,' and the inaccessibility of the steep flight of basement stairs

[1.8] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "bungalow." Encyclopaedia Britannica, November 2, 2011. <https://www.britannica.com/technology/bungalow>.

[1.9] City of Toronto, "PH 15.6 – Expanding Housing Options in Neighbourhoods," July 28, 2020, <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.PH15.6>.

[1.10] City of Toronto, "2016 Scarborough Census Profile," 2018, https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/8f7c-City_Planning_2016_Census_Profile_2018_CCA_Scarborough.pdf.

[1.11] Safira Lakhani and Sneha Sumanth, "City as Opportunity: Refugee Integration in Toronto, Canada," Architecture, Culture, and Spirituality Symposium (Coral Gables, FL, 2018), 1.

[1.12] Rudhramoorthy Cheran, "Changing Formations: Tamil Nationalism and National Liberation in Sri Lanka and the Diaspora" (York University, 2000).

[1.13] Choosing to reside in Tamil areas is common amongst the diaspora re-settling in various locations, as well as those internally displaced within Sri Lanka. This is especially evident in the Wellawatte area of Colombo, Sri Lanka, where Tamil families have moved into what they call *Punchi Yapanaya* or 'Little Jaffna'; Anoma Pieris, "Dwelling in Ruins: Affective Materialities of the Sri Lankan Civil War," *The Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 6 (2017): 1001–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1363265>; Chatteraj, "Sri Lankan Northern Tamils in Colombo: Broken Memories of Home," 233–48.



Fig. 1.5. Front view of my family's current Scarborough, Ontario home, depicting the red metal roof, large picture window, one-car garage, and stone veneer.



Fig. 1.6. Rear view of my family's current Scarborough, Ontario bungalow home, depicting the brick veneer, small wooden deck, and garden herbs in planters below.

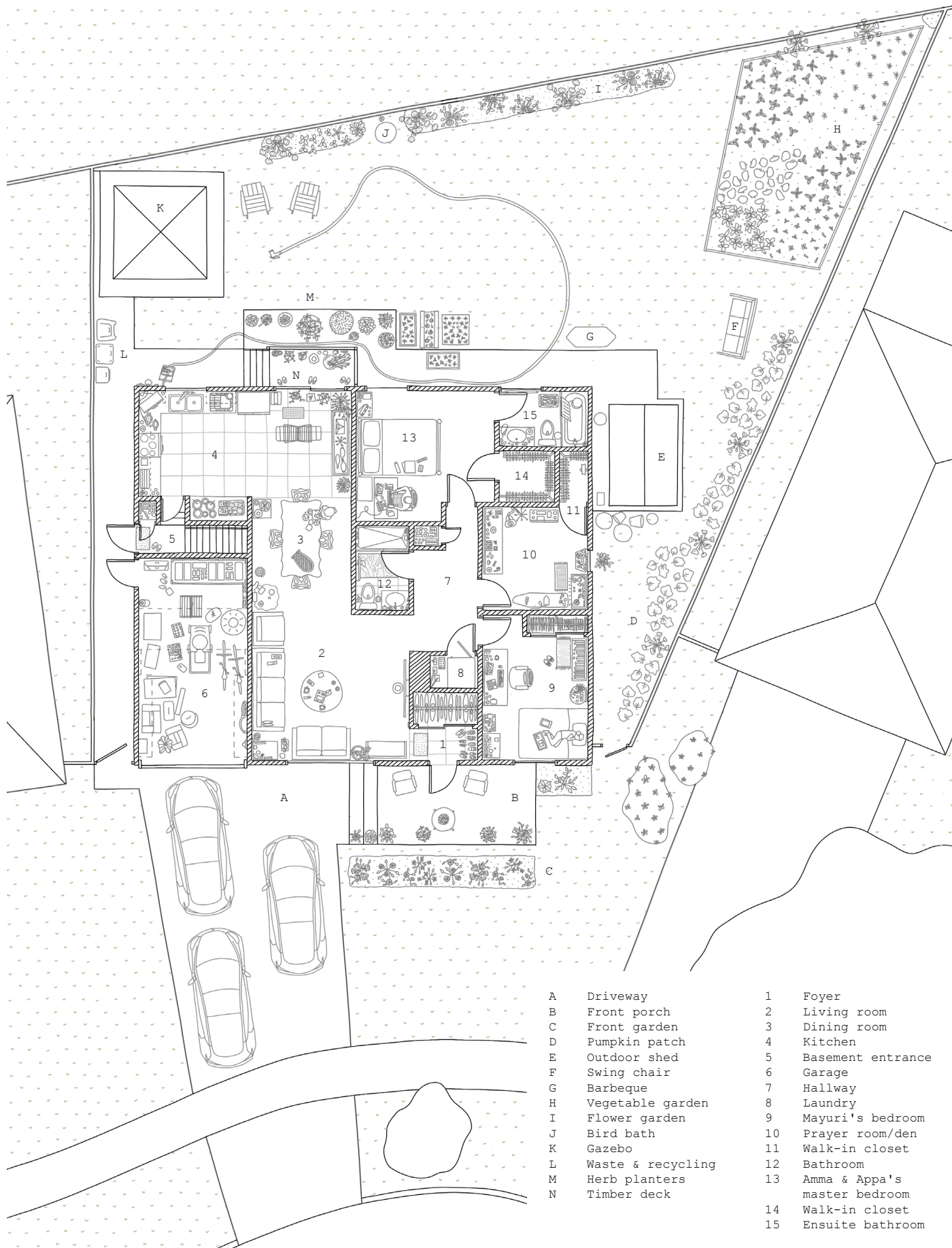


Fig. 1.7. Site plan drawing of the Scarborough home showing ground floor conditions.

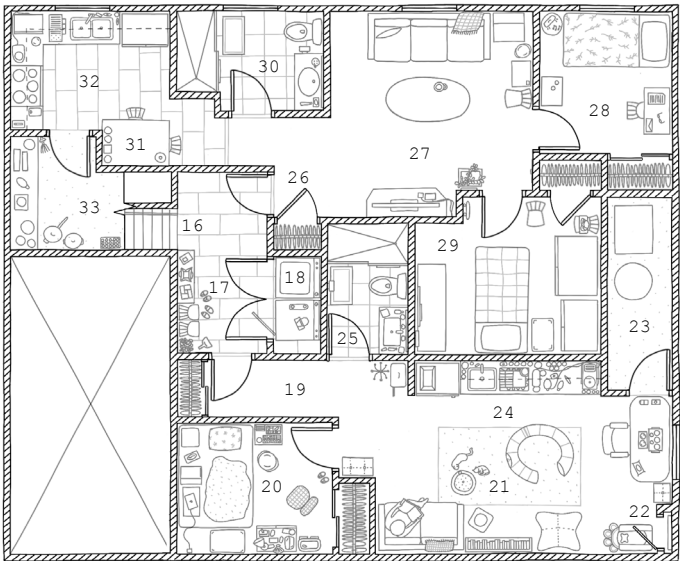


Fig. 1.8. The basement floor plan of the Scarborough home.

- 16 Basement stair
- 17 Hallway
- 18 Laundry
- 19 Foyer
- 20 Ari's bedroom
- 21 Living room
- 22 Electrical panel
- 23 Furnace room
- 24 Kitchen
- 25 Bathroom
- 26 Foyer
- 27 Living room
- 28 Ammapa's bedroom
- 29 Spare bedroom
- 30 Bathroom
- 31 Dining area
- 32 Kitchen
- 33 Pantry

[1.14] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022.

[1.15] Fatima Syed, "The Lessons of a Multi-Generational 905 Home" in *House Divided: How the Missing Middle Will Solve Toronto's Housing Crisis*, ed. Alex Bozickovic et al., (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2019), 178.

makes mobility difficult for Ammapa.^[1.14] As a result, plans are underway for a custom new-build in Scarborough that can accommodate our cultural needs and allow for aging-in-place. The house is planned to be built on land purchased with the intention of tearing down and rebuilding its original low-cost home, a common practice amongst multi-generational immigrant families as a way of reconstructing an accommodating homeplace in the GTA.^[1.15] For now, my family continues to make home within the architectural constraints.

A comparative analysis

Comparing housework practices in the two homes of study can reveal how my family remakes their cultural values fostered in Jaffna in the Scarborough home. The following analysis is structured around three housework tasks embodying my family's personal, social, cultural, religious, and indigenous values from Jaffna village life, including: 1) agricultural activity, 2) religious ritual, and 3) social gathering. Using an architectural lens, I seek to uncover the spatial negotiations made between my family's values from Jaffna and the built environment of the GTA. For my family, remaking home begins with the reproduction of land.

Agricultural activity

Agricultural activity is a housework task necessary in the agrarian economy of the Jaffna village. While caste hierarchies, land ownership, and the poverty brought on by war socially organizes this work in exploitative ways, agricultural labour also fosters relationships between the land, trees, plants, human, and more-than-human beings. Upon displacement, the Tamil diaspora is tasked with remaking their indigenous connections to land through housework practices. In my current Scarborough home, this is evident through my parents' creation and maintenance of our backyard vegetable garden, which produces a network of exchanges between friends, family, and neighbours in the warmer months. This section explores in detail the social realities surrounding agricultural labour in Jaffna and spatially explores my family's remakings of their indigenous connections to land through our Scarborough vegetable garden.

[1.16] Manogaran and Pfaffenberger, *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*.

My mother and father were raised as *vellalar*, referring to a caste of people who cultivate.^[1.16] The term roots from the Tamil words *vellam* (flood, water) and *anmai* (lordship, management), translating into 'those who manage water' or 'lords of the floods.' I learned the extent of their ecological knowledge in our interviews on housework, where they described the agricultural duties they performed daily in Jaffna to sustain their individual families and village

community. The rudimentary nature of agricultural technology in Jaffna establishes an economy where villagers rely on one another for domestic goods. This is evident in the housework practices taking place in Appa's childhood home. In our interviews, Appa recalls how every morning in his childhood home began with milking the family cow. She was kept in a cattle hut under a thatched roof that Appapa, my paternal grandfather, wove using dried palmyra leaves (*Fig. 1.9*). Appa and his five sisters would bottle the milk and deliver it to neighbours by foot or bike on their way to school. He describes it as a reliable income, as everyone needed milk for tea, cooking, or drinking on its own. ^[1.17] Today, villagers continue to provide domestic goods and services from their homes: Appa's cousin weaves handmade baskets out of dried palmyra leaves, a nearby neighbour tells *sathrams* (fortunes) from home, and an elder woman who lives down the street cooks homemade *appams* (thin rice crepes with sweet coconut milk centres) at the break of dawn to deliver to neighbours in time for breakfast. Nearly every family plays an economic role and exchange their goods and services with one another. The agrarian lifestyle establishes the extended family as a primary economic unit in Jaffna where everyone takes part in domestic and agricultural work regardless of gender, age, class, or caste. ^[1.18]

This community-scale organization of domestic care in Jaffna is not without its own hierarchies. This is made explicit through the caste system. Temple priests, patrons, farmers, and landholders are among the highest castes in Jaffna society; barbers, funeral drummers, toddy tappers, and agricultural labourers make up the 'untouchable' lower caste groups. ^[1.19] According to Sri Lankan sociologist, Paramsothy Thanges, the numerically dominant *vellalar* caste in Jaffna hold a hegemonic control over lower castes through 'economic domination, ritual superiority, and political power.' ^[1.20] Lower caste people are prohibited from wearing specific clothing items and jewellery, travelling on certain paths, entering high-caste temples, and performing religious rituals. In our interviews, Appa reflects on the caste hierarchies observed in his own village. He describes how when lower caste people were hired by the *vellalar* caste to help with household tasks, such as domestic or agricultural work, they were not allowed to sit just anywhere or enter specific areas of *vellalar* homes. ^[1.21] Today, homes of the wealthy elite in Jaffna continue to maintain slave quarters for live-in labourers. These spatial segregations reflect the ongoing exploitation in the social and spatial organization of housework in Jaffna village homes.

Exploitation in housework in Jaffna is also tied to the villagers' relationship with the land. In Jaffna, the caste name '*vellalar*' refers to both agricultural cultivators and landowners. These two roles are distinct in the sense that one reproduces land through agricultural work, while the other owns and controls land, yet both responsibilities are attributed to the same



Fig. 1.9. Appapa weaving a thatched roof for the cattle hut using dried palmyra palm leaves.

[1.17] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interviews with Appa and Amma*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2021, 3.

[1.18] Angela Davis, "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working-Class Perspective" in *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981).

[1.19] Paramsothy Thanges, "Caste and Social Exclusion of IDPs in Jaffna Society" (University of Peradeniya, 2011), 5–6.

[1.20] Thanges, "Caste and Social Exclusion of IDPs in Jaffna Society," 23.

[1.21] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Appa and Amma*, 5.

vellalar caste name. Agricultural workers and fieldhands also exist as a separate low-caste group in Jaffna. While both groups engage in fieldwork, the distinction of the *vellalar* as simultaneous landowners provides them with a privileged position in the caste system. Connections can be made between caste hierarchies in Jaffna and American slave economies in the West through the distinction between who owns land and who performs reproductive agricultural labour. In a lecture by urban scholar, Ananya Roy, she describes how American slave economies distinguished Black women, the reproducers of property in the plantation system, from white women, the controllers of property as landowners. ^[1.22] The difference between who owns and reproduces the land, between property and gendered reproductive labour, therefore consolidates caste-class domination around land and housework in both the global South and North.

[1.22] Ananya Roy, "Undoing Property: Feminist Struggle in the Time of Abolition" (Cambridge, MA: Harvard GSD, March 9, 2021).

Social exploitation in housework is also evident in the poverty brought on by war. Agricultural dependence, limited resources, unmaintained infrastructures, and poor socioeconomic conditions forces villagers from all caste groups to prioritize housework as necessary survival work. In an interview with my sibling, Ari, they reflect on this culture of lack from a second-generational lens:

During my two months in Jaffna in 2019, I found that doing housework is the lifestyle there; it's what you spend all day doing. If you're not at [your paid] work, you're at home maintaining the house and family, cooking, cleaning, prepping, supporting... There aren't really individual hobbies that people do for fun. Everyone is pitching in and doing this work for survival. I think in many ways, housework was fun for our family in Jaffna because it was their routine and what they grew up needing to do. ^[1.23]

[1.23] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interviews with Ari*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2021, 15.

In my interviews with first-generation participants displaced from Sri Lanka to Canada, they describe how the war enforced a mindset of living day-to-day without planning for the future. Without one's survival the next day assured, joy had to be fostered in everyday practices and routines. This builds on bell hooks' concept of a homeplace as a site of both pain and joy, where happiness is often found in the private realm in painful external conditions. For Tamils actively oppressed by the Sri Lankan state, through policies limiting their educational and professional opportunities and the conflict removing their rights to safety and life, joyfully participating in housework in Jaffna becomes an act of resistance against the poverty, oppression, pain, and traumas brought on by war. While the spatial organization of housework still presents its own oppressive conditions, a homeplace can provide Tamils with refuge from an oppressive outside world. ^[1.24]

[1.24] The 'outside world' in this thesis constitutes any non-domestic, non-familial, public, or state-owned space. Many feminist scholars have similarly defined public or urban space in this way, as described in: Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25 (1990): 71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

Relations to the land and non-human beings are also an important aspect of agricultural tasks in the Jaffna village. This is apparent in Appa's memories of the *viyal*, a plot of farmland where his family grew crops. Appa recalls,

Between grade 4 to 8, I would wake up at 6am and walk to the 'viyal' with my family to water the crops before school. It was a kilometre away in a shared field where we had our own plot, similar to a community garden. Every weekend, we'd return to the 'viyal' to watch for crows. When you weren't looking, the birds would eat all the plants and veggies. We made it fun, though. There were usually other kids around so we would play together there. We'd make tea outside, eat lunch, boil long beans over a fire, and eat it as a snack. We'd walk barefoot on raised rows of earth between the plants and bathe where the water fell from the pump to the canals (Fig. 1.10). Being outside in the natural weather was so nice; nothing felt better than the 'viyal' in the breeze (Fig. 1.11).^[1.25]



Fig. 1.10. 'M' anna preparing raised rows of earth for planting crops in 'V' mami's residential lot, similar to the agricultural land of the *viyal* (farmland).

[1.25] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Appa and Amma*, 13–14.

Appa's memories of the *viyal* recall the land as a place to eat, gather, bathe, and play. His memories reveal how the ontological connection to home is not only tied to the architecture of the dwelling, but also to the land it sits on, the plants, animals, trees, and neighbours. These relations reveal housework as an inherently ecological practice. This is affirmed in an etymological study of the Greek root term *oikos*, meaning home, and the following three words it comprises: 1) 'ecumene' as inhabited land, 2) 'economy' as the management of resources, and 3) 'ecology' as the relationship between organisms and their environments.^[1.26] By understanding housework as the intersection of these three words—as residing and settling, managing and planning, and providing and consuming—we can reconnect to and remember the ecological processes once crucial to Indigenous agrarian housework practices. Just as Indigenous scientist Robin Wall Kimmerer has described about sweetgrass, plants are 'both medicine and a relative, its value is both material and spiritual.'^[1.27] My family's agricultural practices that once helped sustain the human and non-human life around them provided them with material security and a deep personal connection to the Earth, rooting them in the Jaffna village and defining this place as their homeland through the reproduction of land.

[1.26] This etymological study is inspired by a unit in Dr. Anne Bordeleau's first-year undergraduate course, ARCH 142: Introduction to Cultural History, delivered at the University of Waterloo in Fall 2021.

[1.27] Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 5.

How, then, do Tamil Sri Lankan refugees and migrants like the *vellalar* in my family cope with the loss of agricultural land upon displacement? In the GTA, homes are spatially organized on a colonial grid (Fig. 1.12), which divides and parcellates land into ownable property. This diminishes suburban Toronto of any heterogeneity, collapsing cookie-cutter homes into a parallel formation and commodifying the land. The urban fabric also rids residents of access to shared agricultural land like the *viyal*. It then becomes the



Fig. 1.11. The *vijal* (farmland) near Appa's childhood home.

responsibility of the diaspora to creatively re-practice agricultural activities in the West. In my family's Scarborough home, this is evident in the quotidian labour put into maintaining our backyard vegetable garden.

Our Scarborough garden is located in the southwest corner of the lot, surrounded by a landscape of old trees and frequented by diverse wildlife (*Fig. 1.13*). Despite the parcellation of land in the GTA, ecological processes continue moving through their cycles. Supported by my parent's agricultural knowledge transplanted from the Jaffna homeland, this resulted in an especially abundant harvest in the summer of 2021. That year, Appa and Amma grew Romano tomatoes, collard greens, long beans, cherry tomatoes, red onions, and bitter melon (*Fig. 1.14*). At the time of my documentation in mid-August, the yellow beans, spinach, okra, and leeks had ended their growth cycle. Green chilis, cucumbers, white eggplants, and green pumpkins would later be harvested in the fall. The abundance of produce left our family with excess food throughout the warmer months, prompting exchanges with extended family, neighbours, and friends residing across the GTA. These exchanges produced what feminist economic geographers, J.K. Gibson-Graham, describe as a 'diverse economy.' This theory describes the many kinds of exchanges, markets, and labour practices existing beyond the boundaries of paid work under capitalism. Gibson-Graham argue that transactions happen everywhere: in schools, on the street, in neighbourhoods, within families, and in the case of my family's vegetable garden, in and around the Scarborough home. Throughout the summer, friends, family, and neighbours would visit the garden to pick produce for their immediate families. In the process, prepared meals, preserves, plants, flowers, yard tools, and domestic knowledge, such as recipes, cooking advice, and gardening tips, were also shared. These exchanges took place despite the highly individualized property lots that constitute the suburban GTA. Unlike the *viyal* in Jaffna, which serves as shared open farmland between neighbours, the Scarborough garden is tucked away within the boundaries of the residential lot, open only to invited guests. Despite this privatization, the sharing of the earth's fruits within our tight-knit community in Scarborough and the reclamation of residential property as fertile agricultural land becomes a small act of resistance against the capitalist-colonialist alienation of ecology in Western housework practices. Gardening becomes a way of exercising autonomy for my family where, through housework, their connection to land once fostered in the Jaffna homeland can be remembered and re-practiced in the suburban GTA.

By planting seeds, my family transforms the land of the GTA backyard into an ecosystem for plants, insects, animals, and humans. The exchanges prompted by the garden creates a small diverse economy between friends, family, and neighbours in the summer months. My family's use of

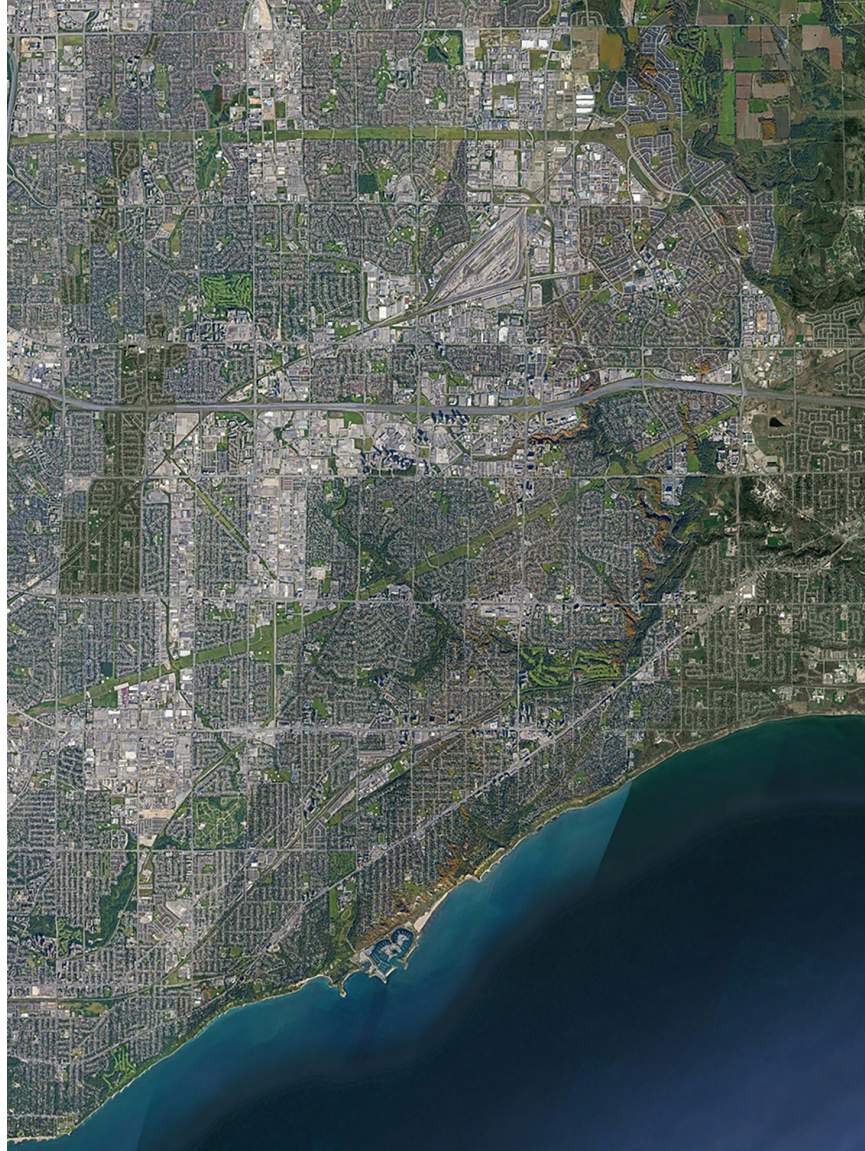


Fig. 1.12. Aerial view of Scarborough, Ontario, organized on a grid morphology.



Fig. 1.13. The Scarborough vegetable garden, located in the southwest corner of the residential lot.

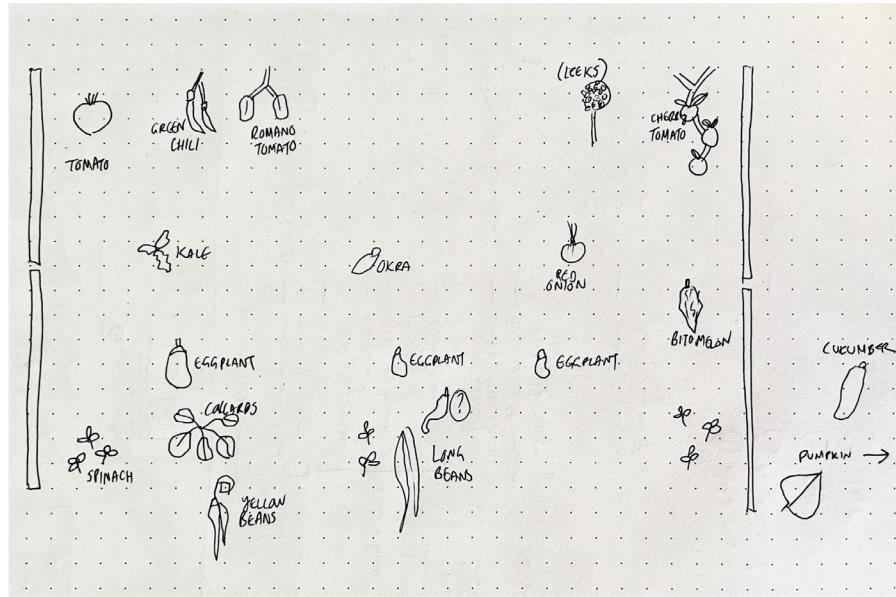


Fig. 1.14. Top to bottom, left to right: Sketch of plant locations; cherry tomatoes, Romano tomatoes, collard greens, long beans, bitter melon, and red onion in the Scarborough garden.

the backyard ultimately reveals how the oppressive urban framework of the GTA, consisting of a colonial grid parcellating lots into ownable property, can be contested through quotidian practices like gardening. This reveals how the social and spatial are at interplay, constantly forming and informing one another. My family's valuing of agricultural activity from Jaffna informs the spatial creation of a garden in the Scarborough home. Understanding the autonomy that users have in their appropriations of space and land can point towards better models for domestic liberation in the West. The backyard, serving as open 'freespace,'^[1.28] provides an adjustable framework for users to re-create their cultural values. hooks concept of a homeplace reappears, where both joy and oppression exist through the creation of a garden within a colonizing framework of land organization. Ultimately, relations are fostered in this oppressive context, and a connection to the Earth is restored, in my family's re-makings of their agricultural practices through the Scarborough backyard.

Religious ritual

In addition to the loss of the *viyal*, the grid morphology of the GTA deprives the diaspora of a place of worship, once socially and spatially central in the Jaffna village. In this section, I first explore the urban and architectural spaces of Jaffna that foster religion as an important cultural value in village life. I then explore how religious rituals are spatially re-made in my family's current Scarborough home, from the architectural scale of the house to the urban scale of the GTA. The findings seek to reveal ideas about space that can be mobilized to create more accommodating domestic frameworks for the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora remaking home in the GTA.

The urban organization of villages in northern Jaffna consist of houses branching off a central ring road enclosing an east-facing Hindu temple, known in my family's village as the *amman koyil* in Tamil, translating to 'mother temple' (Fig. 1.15). The *amman koyil* is celebrated through its physical placement at the centre of the village. It is an identifier of what I describe in this thesis as a 'family-community,' or which many scholars have written about using the Tamil word for home, *ur*.^[1.29] Ethnographer Valentine Daniel has written about *ur* and its influence on personhood for South Indian Tamils in particular. He writes:

One of the most important relationships to a Tamil is that which exists between a person and the soil of his *ur*... "Ur" is defined to approximate to a named territory that is 1) inhabited by human beings who are believed to share in the substance of the soil of that territory, and 2) a territory to which a Tamil cognitively orients himself at any given time.

[1.28] The term 'freospace' is taken from the theme of the 2018 Venice Architecture Biennale, defined by curators Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara as 'a word which describes a generosity of spirit and a sense of humanity at the core of architecture's agenda'; Yvonne Farrell and Shelley McNamara, *Freespace: Biennale Architettura 2018* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2018).

[1.29] For more on *ur*, see: E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 62; Sharika Thiranagama, *In My Mother's House: Civil War in Sri Lanka* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Chatteraj, "Sri Lankan Northern Tamils in Colombo: Broken Memories of Home," 233–48.

[1.30] Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, 62.

[1.30]

The temple one frequents in Jaffna can identify their *ur*, and therefore the relative location of their home, the village it belongs to, and the community of family and friends it is associated with. In this sense, a temple in Jaffna is a clear marker of identity.

Temple grounds serve as a central gathering space in the Jaffna *ur*, integral to forming community bonds through religious rituals and celebrations. In my interviews with Ari, they observe the prominence of the temple when reflecting on their two-month stay in Sri Lanka in 2019. Ari recalls:

Ammapa's sister who lives in Ceylon would sing for the village on the microphone at the 'koyil' (temple) every day. The 'koyil' was equipped with megaphones so that everyone could hear the programming from their homes: the songs, bells, music, and 'pujas' (rituals). The idea was that if you could feel the musical vibrations, that was god blessing your home. [1.31]

[1.31] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Ari*, 18–19.

I was able to witness the importance of the temple that Ari reflects on during my visit to Jaffna in April of 2022. I was staying at my aunt's house in the village at the time, located a short alleyway away from the village temple's ring road. Each morning, I would wake at 5am to the sound of bells ringing through the bedroom's open, barred windows. The bells would mark each following hour until evening, and the music and programming contributed to the soundscape of the village. The temple was also a place for informal encounter, where my family and I were often recognized by friends and family still residing in the village when crossing the grounds by foot. In the evenings, men and boys would also gather at the grounds to spend leisure time and play music into the night. The temple (*Fig. 1.16*), functioning as an active centre, reflected the faith-based quality of the village community. Its acoustic pervasion into the home causes the temple to serve as an extension of every villager's domestic space.

Religion is also practiced within the domestic sphere, collapsing the circular movement of people typical in Hindu temples into a rectangular, enclosed room with a shrine. In Appa's Jaffna home, there is a dedicated prayer room with built-in shelves in which an east-facing shrine is made. Portraits of deities are also placed on shelves in various rooms around the house (*Fig. 1.17*). The prayer room creates a temple inside the house, which South Asian sociologist Puja Sahney describes as the 'imparting [of] sacredness to the entire dwelling.' [1.32] Sahney notes that the Hindu religion has never been institutionalized in the sense that Hindus do not belong to a single temple, but rather, it is internalized, lived by, and observed through ritual. The shrine

[1.32] Puja Sahney, "Pavitra Hindu Homes: Producing Sacred Purity in Domestic Diasporic Settings," *South Asian History and Culture* 8, no. 4 (2017): 494, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2017.1371507>.



Fig. 1.15. Left to right: Central temples and their ring roads in Jaffna; aerial view of the central amman koyil (mother temple) in my family's village.



Fig. 1.16. The *amman koyil* (mother temple) at the centre of my family's village.

and portraits allow inhabitants to worship the divine through rituals in domestic space. These rituals are informed by a logic of purity, referring to the care taken to engage with deities in clean conditions, such as after having bathed. ^[1.33] This practice was evident in Appa's family home; Appa recalls:

The house originally had a raised earthen floor before they poured the red cement. Every Friday, we would use a towel to mop and soak the dirt floor with 'saani', a mixture of water and cow dung, as a sacred ritual to prepare and purify the ground for the week. It would give the floor a nice sheen and we would make beautiful patterns while mopping. It was seen as a germ killer as well as holy water. ^[1.34]

[1.33] The Hindu notion of purity also becomes a basis for discrimination when certain 'untouchable' lower caste groups are prohibited from entering *vellalar* homes and temples for the stigmatized fear of disrupting the purity of these spaces; Manogaran and Pfaffenberger, *The Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity*, 148–50.

[1.34] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Appa and Amma*, 8.

The maintenance of purity in the home is therefore tied to the weekly practice of cleaning as religious ritual. The divine is always present in domestic space in Jaffna through the shrine, portraits, domestic rituals, cleaning practices, and the proximity of the temple. The Hindu religion, deeply tied to the villagers' sense of identity, is embedded in the architectural and urban organization of the Jaffna home, from the organization of buildings (with the temple at the physical centre of the village) to the objects (east-facing shrine, portraits, etc.) materializing sacredness in the dwelling.

A spatial connection to the divine must be re-made in creative ways by the diaspora in the GTA. Often, it is Tamil Sri Lankan women that take on the additional responsibility of maintaining cultural and religious ties after migrating to the West. Religious preservation is apparent through meals, festivals, ceremonies, and holidays celebrated at home. Spatially, it is signified through dedicated home shrines. The locations of home shrines are dictated by their cardinal direction, as the shrine must face north or east. Ideally, the built-in linen closets in GTA homes will face in either of these directions. Alternatively, a shrine may be placed in a dedicated prayer room. Like the Jaffna home, GTA homes similarly collapse the cyclical circulation designed into Hindu temples into rectangular rooms. This poses difficulties when hosting religious ceremonies with many guests, where it is difficult to crowd around the shrine in the compact hallways or bedrooms of GTA homes.

In my family's Scarborough home, an east-facing wooden shrine sits in the corner of a guest bedroom that has been transformed into a multi-purpose space for praying, ironing, storing items, and dressing. Amma, my mother, puts in the labour to make the shrine. She painted auspicious symbols on the wooden panels, populated the shelves with dressed statues and portraits of deities, and filled it with tools for worship such as matchboxes, lighters, incense sticks, bells, oil lamps, religious texts, sacred ashes, and powders (*Fig. 1.18*). She places fresh flowers, fruits, and nuts as offerings to the gods and



Fig. 1.17. The prayer room (top) and portraits of Hindu deities remaining in Appa's childhood home today (bottom).



Fig. 1.18. The saamy (prayer) room made in our current Scarborough home.

uses a red mat below her knees to pray twice daily. In my interview with Cousin 'C', she reflects on her mother's similar religious rituals that took place every morning in her Milton, Ontario home. She recalls,

Every day starts with praying in the 'saamy' (prayer) room. In the summers, my mom starts her day by going to the garden to pick fresh flowers and emptying yesterday's incense ashes off the tray. She'll pray, put on religious music that plays throughout the day, and turn on a 'saamy' light. Waking up to the smell of incense always reminds me of home; that smell is my indicator that Amma is awake, signifying the start of a new day. [1.35]

[1.35] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Cousin "C,"* ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 11.

In both households, women are responsible for maintaining religious practices. The objects and furnishings they use to make the shrine are examples of what Sahney describes as the 'objectification of the sacred,' in which the cognitive practice of religion is made material. Materializing the sacred in home-space also aids in coping with the insecurities brought on by displacement. Sahney writes,

Within a diasporic context, this objectification of the sacred is a way of easing the pain of rootlessness, of not belonging, anxiety and alienation that immigrants experience regularly... many immigrant groups have turned to religion to ease the pain and stress of transition and transplantation. [1.36]

[1.36] Sahney, "Pavitra Hindu Homes: Producing Sacred Purity in Domestic Diasporic Settings," 493.

For the forcibly displaced navigated estranged contexts, the spatial creation of a shrine can foster a sense of belonging and rootedness within the alienating whiteness of the outside world. However, in an ethnographic study with South Asian women from Plainsboro, New Jersey, Sahney finds that these home shrines are often not made architecturally, and therefore not permanently. Rather, these are made more temporarily through the placement of furniture and objects. In the GTA housing stock, built-in prayer rooms are atypical, and domestic interiors continue to follow a logic of whiteness despite the large population of racialized diasporic residents that live here. This reveals the exclusivity embodied in the built environment of the GTA. The shrine is therefore made less permanently with furniture and objects, often by women, who carve out a sacred space in an otherwise secular home.

Finally, Tamil Hindu temples are integral for maintaining religious ties in the West. There are roughly four purpose-built temples and ten converted warehouse temples in the GTA, with the majority located in Scarborough. These temples were established in the last four decades when large numbers of Hindus began immigrating to Canada. Upon Appa's arrival in 1988, the Richmond Hill Hindu Temple, consecrated in 1983, was the only existing

Tamil Hindu temple in the area. Unlike purpose-built temples, warehouse temples are located outside of urban centres, in inactive industrial zones with little cultural programming and pedestrian foot traffic, and therefore less chances of encounter with the dominant public in the GTA. The facades of these warehouse temples allow for little personalization, anonymizing the programmed use of these spaces as converted Tamil Hindu temples. Having grown up further west of Toronto for most of my life, I can recall frequent drives to and from these Scarborough temples in my childhood. These visits became part of my family's household responsibilities to preserve religious ties at the scale of the suburban GTA. ^[1.37] This practice was also a way of resisting the isolation my family experienced in the sprawling suburbs further west of Toronto, where the visible minority population is significantly lower in comparison to Scarborough. ^[1.38] As Lakhani and Sumanth point out in their report on refugee integration in the City of Toronto, faith-oriented gathering spaces are especially important for people who are refugees, who have experienced trauma and require safe spaces for healing. They write, 'The further away these [gathering] spaces are, the more it strengthens an identity of isolation.' ^[1.39] Temples at the urban scale can therefore help the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA foster community and belonging upon displacement. The proximity of temples to our current Scarborough home provides our family with a faith-based social network remnant of the Jaffna village community.

[1.37] Lakhani and Sumanth, "City as Opportunity: Refugee Integration in Toronto, Canada," 3.

[1.38] In the 2001 census, 60.0% of the population in Scarborough identified as a visible minority. In contrast, in the town of Milton where my family lived from 2001 to 2019, only 3.3% of the population identified as a visible minority in 2001; StatCan, "2001 Community Profiles - Scarborough," Statistics Canada, February 7, 2019; StatCan, "2001 Community Profiles - Milton," Statistics Canada, accessed July 5, 2022.

[1.39] Lakhani and Sumanth, "City as Opportunity: Refugee Integration in Toronto, Canada," 3.

Overall, the findings reveal ideas about space that can be mobilized to create more accommodating spatial conditions for Tamils seeking to recreate their religious rituals in the West. Firstly, the presence of the temple as a celebrated urban centre and a marker of identity in Jaffna is lost in the urban organization of warehouse temples in the GTA. Instead, these warehouse temples are tucked into inactive industrial zones and located in the physical margins of the city. This can produce an 'othering' effect for Tamils seeking to practice religion outside of their homes. By excluding Tamil Hindu temples from dominant public areas, the urban organization affirms Tamils' social marginalization in GTA society. This forces the diaspora to carve out their own alternative urban centres through subaltern spaces like the warehouse temple. Additionally, the findings show that home shrines made in both Jaffna and the GTA re-create a Tamil Hindu temple in domestic space. This reveals how the objects and furnishings that make up a shrine hold great organizing power in programming the use of a space. In my Scarborough home, the shrine, made by Amma using a wooden shelf and religious objects, determines the use of a bedroom as a multipurpose prayer room. The hard and immovable edges of the enclosed GTA bedroom can therefore be contested and made into a prayer room using more mobile furnishings and objects. This allows the Tamil diaspora to re-practice religion in the GTA and find subjectivity in both self-made prayer rooms and Tamil Hindu temples located

in the outskirts of cities. Re-practicing the Hindu religion in Scarborough has also fostered for my family new faith-based social networks integral to their sense of belonging in the GTA.

Social gathering

Social networks like my family's faith-based community in Scarborough are crucial to their makings and re-makings of home. In this section, I first explore social gatherings at the urban scale in Jaffna and Scarborough. I particularly unpack the social role gossip plays in fostering community in these sites, and the simultaneous oppression that must be navigated when considering how gossip establishes strict social norms and gender roles within a community. Next, I explore social gatherings taking place at the domestic scale in housework activity. I compare the spatial arrangements of housework tasks in Jaffna and Scarborough and identify how space allows or limits the possibility for communal housework. I use these findings to uncover how space can encourage or discourage social gathering in housework activities, and how this knowledge can be used to create more inclusive models for domestic liberation in the West.

Social gatherings between family-community members occur in urban spaces for informal encounter in Jaffna and the GTA. In the Jaffna village, this is evident through the 'junction chats' that Amma describes, where stay-at-home women would gather at the intersections of dirt roads to gossip about village affairs. Similar occurrences took place every evening on the verandah of Amma's childhood home. Amma reflects:

Ammama and Ammapa would have guests come over to chat every evening on the verandah. As kids, we would always try to listen in on their conversations. They were usually gossiping about disagreements between families and castes at the 'koyil' (temple). [1.40]

[1.40] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Appa and Amma*, 33.

Negatively, gossip can be used as a tool for surveillance. A lack of privacy exists in the Jaffna village, where the close-knit nature of the community and emphasis on quotidian life triggers gossip. However, by approaching gossip not as lowly talk amongst women but as positive community-building communication, road junctions and verandahs can be understood as crucial 'urban' sites for fostering social ties. While Amma's verandah may typically be considered domestic and private, the frequent presence of guests from the community allows it to serve as an extension of public urban space, blurring with the street junctions where village women chat and gossip. Tamil-American educator, Mathangi Subramanian, argues that gossip is 'particularly useful for groups which are racial or ethnic minorities, and therefore may be

threatened by a larger, more dominant society.’^[1.41] This is the experience of the Jaffna Tamil minority in Sri Lanka, who use gossip to form a close-knit community in the face of ethnic conflict. This is further intensified in migration, where ‘in immigrant communities, gossip can be a tool for establishing mutually agreed upon group norms that build solidarity.’^[1.42] For the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora resettling in the GTA, the establishment of shared social norms with other South Asian, African, and Middle Eastern immigrant groups can reassure the insecurities brought on by displacement. In this context, gossip can help newcomers establish a social support network and foster belonging in a new country.

In the GTA, gossip also takes place at the urban scale in informal places of encounter such as temples, malls, parks, and sidewalks in ethnic enclaves. These spaces ‘can undo an “othering” that would otherwise be generated in isolation.’^[1.43] Throughout my childhood, I witnessed the importance of these spaces during Scarborough park gatherings that brought my family-community together annually (*Fig. 1.19*). The high density of Scarborough and its diverse population of immigrants allows outdoor spaces, like parks, to function as successful gathering spaces for many immigrant groups. In an interview conducted by Ari^[1.44], I recognize the importance of these park gatherings for first-generation Tamil Sri Lankans from my *ur*, who could be at home with the village community in spaces free from the ideals of whiteness embodied in the built environment of the GTA. However, I can also observe the explicit gender roles performed by men and women during these events. I found that women were typically in charge of domestic duties, like food preparation, cooking, cleaning, childcare, and maintaining kin. As a racialized second-generation Tamil Sri Lankan-Canadian woman, I also reflect on my own feelings of being under the surveillance of gossip during these events. In the interview conducted by Ari, I mention:

I didn't like going to the parties in the park because of this pressure to 'act like a lady.' I felt like we, as girls and women, were under closer supervision than our male counterparts. While navigating the different social norms between our family and Western society in the GTA, we were forced to socialize with people that judged us by this expectation of what a woman's role is in our village community—as communicators, carers, and maintainers of kin.^[1.45]

The social pressure to uphold gender norms and the comfort found in these park gatherings for the first-generation diaspora further reinforces and reflects bell hooks’ concept of how homemaking is the process of making joy within painful (social and spatial) structures. For my family-community, these Scarborough park gatherings were tied to our sense of subjectivity in

[1.41] Mathangi Subramanian, “Gossip, Drama, and Technology: How South Asian American Young Women Negotiate Gender on and Offline,” *Gender and Education* 25, (2013): 311, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2012.746647>.

[1.42] Subramanian, “Gossip, Drama, and Technology: How South Asian American Young Women Negotiate Gender on and Offline,” 311.

[1.43] Lakhani and Sumanth, “City as Opportunity: Refugee Integration in Toronto, Canada,” 4.

[1.44] This interview was conducted by my sibling, Ari Para, while they were working as a social researcher at the Department of Imaginary Affairs (DIA) non-profit community organization based in Toronto, for the “Tale of Two Parks” project exploring the importance of Scarborough parks for newcomer communities.

[1.45] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Ari*, 21.



Fig. 1.19. Scarborough park gatherings with my family and diasporic village community in the 1990s.

the GTA, while remaining a site ridden with gendered expectations for both men and women. Negotiating these tensions and upholding gender norms resulted in emotional work taking place at these leisurely family events, alongside the domestic and caretaking labour already taken on by women in the diaspora. Despite these additional labours, social gatherings in parks still serve as a necessary form of subaltern placemaking at the urban scale for the Tamil diaspora in Scarborough, domesticating the park through the annual reuniting of an extended family, past neighbours, and family friends. This reflects the domestic experience for women in the diaspora especially, who carve out culturally affirming homeplaces—even in public space—while negotiating their gendered oppression and delegation to domestic work.

Social gatherings in Jaffna and the GTA also take place in housework tasks. By analyzing domestic rooms, their uses, arrangements, hierarchies, names, building elements, and furnishings, we can uncover how the interior organization of housework can encourage or discourage communal housework from taking place. I explore this through the social and spatial organization of everyday household tasks in the Jaffna and Scarborough home. For instance, in Jaffna homes, sleeping arrangements consist of men and elders sleeping on the exterior verandah while women and children sleep together in the main sitting room (*Fig. 1.20*). The cool breeze on the verandah provides a break from the tropical heat and is deemed safer for men and elders. Dining arrangements also reveal the communal and flexible use of rooms in Jaffna. In our interviews, Appa describes how his large family of eight would typically eat together on the kitchen floor, which was admittedly cramped and small in size. Depending on the meals eaten, dining locations would vary (*Fig. 1.21*). On auspicious days, the family would eat a strictly vegetarian diet in the larger sitting room (*Fig. 1.22*). On days that the family cooked *odiyal kool*, a traditional stew made of their own harvested and dried palmyra sprouts, they would eat near the back door, which was shaded at lunch time and had natural ventilation coming through the doorway (*Fig. 1.23*). Food preparation would also spill out into larger communal areas, taking place in the sitting room or on the verandah, often performed communally with family members and occasionally with visitors and neighbours. In an interview with Ari, they describe the multipurpose use of rooms at our aunt, ‘V’ mami’s, current Jaffna house:

Every morning, we drank milk tea on the verandah and ate ‘kanji’ for breakfast, which was a mix of leftover rice and curries from the day before turned into soup. Right after breakfast, the cooking for lunch would commence. The kitchen was small and cramped, so people often prepped food outside on the verandah. An elder lady who lived down the street also came by to help with food prep and socialize. People spent most of their days on the verandah or in the

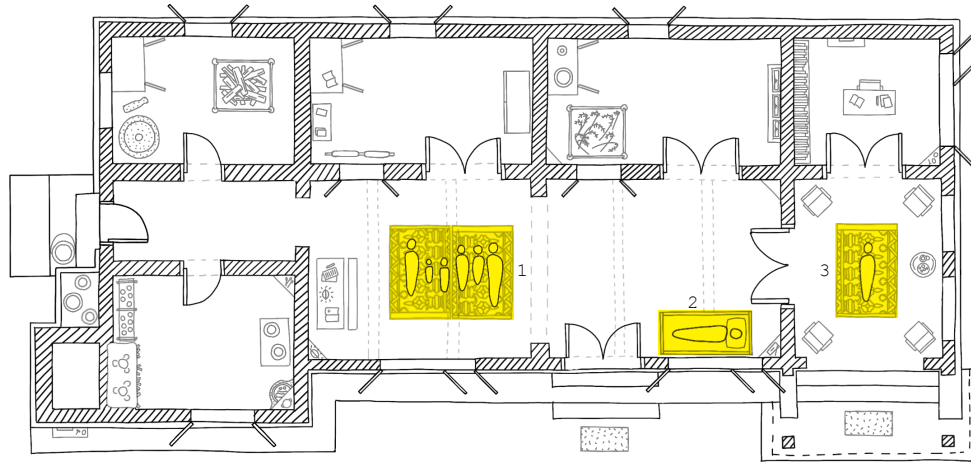


Fig. 1.20. Sleeping arrangements in Appa's Jaffna village home, where women and children slept in the sitting room, men slept on the verandah, and elders would sleep on a wooden bed.

- 1 Pais (woven mats) in sitting room
- 2 Wooden bed in sitting room
- 3 Pais on verandah

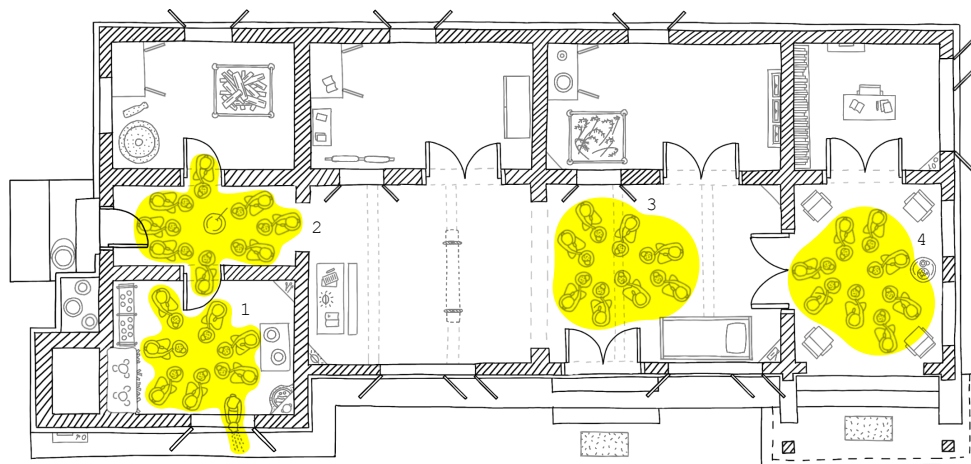


Fig. 1.21. Dining locations in Appa's Jaffna village home. The family typically ate in the kitchen or verandah, in the sitting room on auspicious days, or in the hall when eating *odiyal kool*, a stew made from harvested palmyra sprouts.

- 1 Kitchen
- 2 Back Door Hallway
- 3 Main Sitting Room
- 4 Verandah



Fig. 1.22. Sitting room in Appa's Jaffna village home, where the family would eat a vegetarian meal on auspicious days.



Fig. 1.23. The back door of Appa's Jaffna home, where the family would eat *odiyal kool*, a stew made from their harvested and dried palmyra sprouts.



Fig. 1.24. The verandah of Appa's childhood home, a flexible multi-purpose space for sleeping, eating, socializing, and preparing foods.

[1.46] Paranthahan, *Interviews with Ari*, 4–12.

sitting room, which were like makeshift living rooms. ^[1.46]

Ari's memories reveal the verandah and main sitting room as two key social spaces in the Jaffna house (*Fig. 1.24*). I speculate that the lack of attributed private space within Jaffna homes contributes to the collective use of these spaces. For example, while bedrooms are present in the Jaffna floor plan, they do not belong to individual family members, and instead function as shared spaces for storage. The lack of similar multipurpose rooms in the Scarborough home reveals how isolation between family members is designed into Toronto's housing typologies.

In GTA homes, interior rooms are designed for single function uses, preventing communal gathering in household routines. Unlike Jaffna, bedrooms belong to individual inhabitants. This is evident in my family's current Scarborough home, where each of the five residents have a designated private space (*Fig. 1.25*). While the privacy gained in displacement can provide refuge and allow for individual identity to emerge, it can simultaneously breed isolation. The single-function nature of rooms means that cooking and food preparation is designed to be isolated within the 'kitchen triangle' organization of appliances. ^[1.47] Likewise, social gatherings are intended to take place in the main floor living room. This design isolates inhabitants within the suburban home in everyday housework practices.

The given architectural framework of the house also imposes certain Western ideals. The presence of a larger master bedroom and smaller subsequent rooms informs the existence of a nuclear family household, with two parents and two-to-three children. This model, ridden with power and hierarchies in its naming and arrangement, does not account for living with elders as apparent in my family's current home, nor does it consider the many multi-family and multi-generational households apparent amongst racialized diasporas in the GTA. ^[1.48] In an essay entitled 'The Lessons of a Multi-Generational 905 Home,' journalist Fatima Syed describes how, despite the 1.1 million people living in multigenerational households in Ontario, there remains a lack of alternative housing typologies in the GTA. ^[1.49] Large immigrant families must negotiate their social, cultural, and economic needs with housing models designed for white nuclear family structures. Few solutions exist, including the retrofitting, renovating, or purchasing of larger homes, or the creation of innovative living solutions within smaller apartments and bungalows. However, these alternatives still fail to provide homes that are architecturally functional and accommodating. This is evident in my family's Scarborough house, where the basement apartment provides extra bedrooms for multigenerational living but is not accommodating for aging-in-place or fostering communal activity within the home. This lack of consideration for racialized diasporic households reveals the systemic racism

[1.47] The kitchen work triangle is a popular spatial organization often attributed to Lillian Moller Gilbreth's concept of "circular routing" introduced in 1929, in which the fridge, stove, and sink in any kitchen should be arranged in a triangular formation for maximum efficiency; Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*, 284–86.; Alexandra Lange, "The Woman Who Invented the Kitchen," *Slate*, October 25, 2012, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2012/10/lillian-gilbreth-kitchen-practical-how-it-reinvented-the-modern-kitchen.html>.

[1.48] Multi-generational and multi-family households may be common amongst racialized diasporas in the GTA to maintain cultural values and/or to economically afford a home in the GTA's expensive housing market. In my family's case, both cultural and economic factors applied. In the Jaffna village, extended family lived in proximity, and the agrarian lifestyle fostered a culture of interdependence that was then attempted to be remade in the GTA. Additionally, financial security had to be gained and maintained by the diaspora in the GTA, and co-housing with multiple generations and/or families helped lower the costs of living.

[1.49] Syed, "The Lessons of a Multi-Generational 905 Home," 177.



Fig. 1.25. Top to bottom:
Ground and basement floor
plans showing bedrooms
attributed to the five members
of the Scarborough house.

- 1 Appa and Amma's Master Bedroom
- 2 Mayuri's Bedroom
- 3 Ammapa's Bedroom
- 4 Spare Bedroom/Storage
- 5 Ari's Bedroom

embedded in the GTA's housing stock. However, the homemaking solutions undertaken within these architectural constraints reveals the resilience of newcomer families like mine. The given architecture and urban design of GTA homes are then creatively negotiated with in the making of an affirmative homeplace.

The findings in this section ultimately reveal how urban and architectural spaces can organize social gatherings in housework routines. The gossip taking place at junctions and on Jaffna verandahs are remade in places of informal encounter in the GTA and in my family-community's annual park gatherings. These gatherings are ridden with both joy and oppression. The importance of preserving the tight-knit village community is arguably heightened in the context of the GTA, where Jaffna villagers are no longer neighbours, and the outside world poses pressures to assimilate. The oppressive social norms and expected gender roles accompanying these social gatherings reveal how, even in the creation of subaltern urban centres like the Scarborough park during family gatherings, the diaspora must navigate social oppressions relating to their roles in domestic and care work. Additionally, the findings reveal how the architecture of our GTA homes follow isolating models that limit the potential for communal housework activity. By learning from the multipurpose, undefined rooms of the Jaffna house, GTA homes could more easily foster communal housework activity. This could better accommodate racialized families displaced to the GTA and establish a more inclusive model for housework's liberation.

Conclusion

Overall, my family's remakings of home from the Jaffna village bungalow to the suburban Scarborough bungalow provides a single narrative of how housework functions as subaltern placemaking for racialized refugees and their diasporas living in the West. At both the architectural and urban scale, my family re-makes their personal, social, cultural, religious, and indigenous values left behind in the Jaffna homeland. This is evident through their transformation of our Scarborough backyard into a vegetable garden to perform agricultural labour in. It is also seen through the self-made prayer room, shrine, and visits to the GTA's Tamil Hindu warehouse temples to re-practice religious rituals. Finally, it is evident in Scarborough parks which become subaltern spaces for social gathering. These spatial re-makings of home ultimately come with negotiations made between the diaspora and the built environment of the GTA. For instance, the garden must exist within a colonizing framework of land parcellation and privatization. The prayer room is compacted into an enclosed, isolating bedroom. Tamil Hindu temples are located in anonymizing warehouse facades in the outskirts of the city. Finally,

the architecture of our GTA homes discourage communal housework from taking place, as it once easily did in Jaffna sitting rooms and verandahs. These dualities reflect bell hooks concept of a homeplace where joy is found when making an affirming domestic environment within the oppressive spatial organization of housework in the GTA.

The need to negotiate with the given architecture and urban design of the Scarborough home to maintain these values prompts the question: who are our GTA homes designed for? How can local architects and urban designers pay closer attention to the existing social norms, values, and hierarchies built into our suburban GTA housing models and who they exclude? In my family home, joy is found within the architectural and urban constraints, in connections to the land, the divine, and one another—relationships formative to Tamils people's sense of *ur*.^[1.50] These connections are remade despite the limitations posed by the GTA's urban morphology (property lines, urban centres) and architectural typologies (anonymizing facades, defined single-function rooms). This creates oppressive conditions in the spatial organization of domestic labour, where shared agricultural practices and exchanges, faith-based support networks, and communal housework activity becomes difficult to foster.

[1.50] Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*, 62.

Dualities are found at home, where pain and joy, socialization and privacy, safety and the upholding of social norms, and oppression and liberation continue to be at odds and in interplay with one another. For the diaspora, these dualities are part of the many negotiations that come with being marginalized as a refugee, migrant, or a member of the diaspora in Western GTA society. By paying attention to the creative solutions undertaken by my family to maintain their values from Jaffna in the GTA, we can better understand the importance of housework as homemaking for refugees and diasporas experiencing insecurity in their identities in an unknown country. The resulting homeplace that emerges in the Scarborough house after 30 years of residing in the GTA is an example of my family's healing from the ontological loss of a home and homeland in Jaffna during the Sri Lankan Civil War. The Western feminist discourse must consider, then, how personal values embodied in housework practices can establish identity, belonging, security, and community for racialized refugees and their diasporas seeking home. The result can lead to a cultural re-valuing of housework that points towards more inclusive models for domestic liberation in the West.

02

THE JOURNEY

THE JOURNEY

The Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora's search for subjecthood in the GTA is influenced by unique social, economic, and spatial conditions of housework. This chapter outlines the journey of making and remaking home over the span of 30 years in the GTA, from Appa's arrival in Toronto in 1988 to my family's move to our current Scarborough house in 2019. Three family homes inhabited during this time frame, in between the past Jaffna home and the current Scarborough home, will be used as case studies to analyze various conditions of homemaking. The three family homes of study include 1) a postwar apartment unit in Toronto's St. James Town, 2) a semi-detached Scarborough bungalow, and 3) a two-storey builder's home in Milton, Ontario. Each home presents unique conditions of housework due to its distinct housing typology, location in the suburban GTA, and my family's varying socioeconomic conditions upon and after arrival to the GTA.

Oral history interviews are used to uncover these conditions. Individual interviews conducted with three participants in particular make up the stories shared in this chapter. The interviewees are: 1) Appa, who lived in all three homes of study, 2) Amma, who lived in the multi-family and Milton home, and 3) Cousin 'C', who is second-generation and lived in similar homes, including a Scarborough apartment, bungalow, a Milton semi-detached, and detached house. My own reflections from living in a two-family Scarborough bungalow and the two-storey Milton house are also drawn from to support ideas communicated by the interviewees. These reflections allow me to find spatial patterns between the interviewees' oral histories and my lived experience. My insider-outsider positionality therefore lends me an intimate knowledge of the homes of study through personal experience. However, it also instills biases which I continue to counteract through Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's reflexive approach for interpretive and analytical research as described in the Introduction.^[2.1]

[2.1] Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow, *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 95–104.

In the following section, I will describe the three 'in-between' homes in my family's migration. Then, I will comparatively analyze these homes on four spatial scales: 1) the architectural; 2) furnishings, objects, and appliances; 3) the urban; and 4) the ecological and bodily. The order of scale is non-linear, meaning I do not abstractly explore the home from a big-to-small or small-to-big scale. Rather, I follow an intuitive approach that jumps between scales. This allows me to centre a narrative of how autonomy is made, found, and negotiated in housework practices. I therefore begin with the given architectural framework of the home, which produces immovable organizations of space that create oppressive conditions for housework. This framework must be understood to realize the agency found in furnishings, objects, and appliances, which can reflect personal values and foster a sense

of belonging. I then expand out to non-domestic spaces, which I speculate may consist of alienating public and urban spaces for racialized diasporas. Finally, I end with the ecological and bodily scale, which acknowledges that architecture is inherently tied to land; ecological changes experienced in displacement are non-negotiable and directly affect the body, influencing what is eaten, grown, and felt in domestic space, on daily, weekly, monthly, seasonal, and annual cycles. These scales can uncover different kinds of spatial technologies influencing my family's housework practices. In exploring the centuries-old question of what domestic liberation might look like, the spatial analysis reveals where the built environment organizes oppression, and where liberation is sought in the constraints.

Three 'in-between' family homes

A postwar apartment unit in Toronto's St. James Town

Appa arrived in Toronto in November of 1988 when he was 25 years old. He moved in with his older sister, my aunt, 'K' mami, in a postwar apartment unit in Toronto's St. James Town. 'K' mami had immigrated two years earlier and was living with her husband, 'R' mama, who had immigrated four years earlier. 'R' mama's sister, 'J' aunty, also lived here, and the married couple would soon have a child, cousin 'H.' The five residents shared a two-bedroom apartment in the apartment tower for the next seven months. The unit was inhabited under the lease of a previous tenant, a Tamil Sri Lankan acquaintance, in effort to keep the rent costs down.

The St. James Town neighbourhood was a middle-class neighbourhood of Victorian houses in the 19th century. Following the post-WWII economic boom in the 1950s, the City of Toronto announced major zoning amendments for the area. By the 1960s, the Victorian housing stock was demolished and replaced with high-rise residential apartment towers to accommodate Toronto's rapidly expanding population (*Fig. 2.1*).^[2.2] These apartments followed a 'tower-in-the-park' urban morphology, a modernist, functionalist urban planning approach proposed by Swiss French architect and planner, Le Corbusier, in the 1920s.^[2.3] With an interest in efficient design, Le Corbusier sought to organize land use based on the functions of everyday life, separating spaces of dwelling, work, recreation, and transportation into distinct, compartmentalized areas. This morphology was used to attract a middle-class community of car-dependent workers into the St. James Town neighbourhood, with an array of tall dense towers, parking lots, green spaces, and high-traffic streets prioritizing the daily routines of this intended demographic. However, the declining maintenance of the towers resulted in the middle class abandoning the neighbourhood in the following decades.

[2.2] St. James Town Community Corner, "History of St. James Town," St. James Town, accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.stjamestown.org/the-neighbourhood/#history-SJT>.

[2.3] Alexi Ferster Marmot, "The Legacy of Le Corbusier and High-Rise Housing," *Built Environment* 7, no. 2 (1981): 82–83, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23288674>.



Fig. 2.1. Aerial view of the St. James Town neighbourhood, characterized by a 'tower-in-the-park' urban morphology.

[2.4] Corner, "History of St. James Town."

[2.5] St. James Town Community Corner, "About the Neighbourhood," St. James Town, accessed June 12, 2022, <https://www.stjamestown.org/the-neighbourhood/#history-SJT>.

[2.6] City of Toronto, "2016 Neighbourhood Profile: North St. James Town," City of Toronto, February 2018.

[2.7] A family-community member from the Jaffna village was also living in same building as Appa, in a different unit.

[2.8] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Appa*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 3.

Today, St. James Town is known for housing lower-income residents.^[2.4] Despite being the densest census tract in Canada,^[2.5] the compartmentalized urban planning approach has fostered isolation for the urban poor and waves of newcomers inhabiting these towers. Tamil Sri Lankans continue to make up a significant portion of the neighbourhood's population. In the 2016 census, Tamil was identified as the second most common mother tongue, and Sri Lanka was identified as one the top five places of birth for residents in the neighbourhood.^[2.6]

The apartment unit is located on the west side of the building, facing away from the main street and onto a rear parking lot. It has views to a closed outdoor pool and the façade of another tower where family-community members from Jaffna were also living.^[2.7] The unit consists of a foyer, kitchen, living/dining room, balcony, hall with closets, full bathroom, and two legal bedrooms (*Fig. 2.2*). The off-white walls and parquet flooring are characteristic of a typical postwar apartment interior in Toronto (*Fig. 2.3*). In our interview, Appa recalls occupying the TV/living room, while 'J' aunty occupied one bedroom, and the three others occupied the other bedroom as a single family. The building itself had few communal spaces to extend into, including the closed outdoor pool, gym, and basement laundry. The ground conditions consist of expansive blocks with lawns, playgrounds, courts, parking lots, long pedestrian pathways, discontinued sidewalks, and harsh fencing between private lots. Appa recalls infrequently using these already lacking communal, outdoor spaces:

We wouldn't really use those spaces. We would go on walks though, and sometimes visited our friends in the Wellesley building behind ours. Also, then, it was mostly only guys here. There were maybe ten of us from the village, so 'the boys' would all get together [laughs]. We'd go to Tamil movies sometimes. A few of us met at school since we all didn't have a work permit... Most people stopped studying after completing the high school requirements because they needed money. Plus, English was a barrier in school. Back then, life was working, working, working... We had no time to enjoy.^[2.8]

Appa describes how he was often worried about money while living in the apartment. He recalls seeing frequent notices about unpaid rent as he struggled to make do on the \$400 to \$500 he was receiving from welfare while having a lasting debt. For these reasons, he was set on completing school, obtaining a work permit, and finding a job upon arrival to Toronto. By the following year in 1989, he got his first job in the GTA as a cashier:

I was set on entering the workforce and earning money. Once I

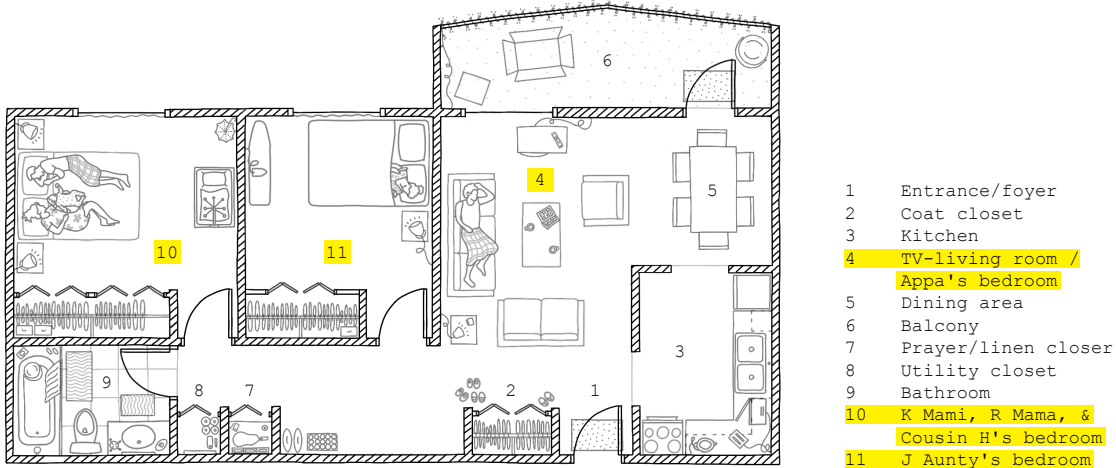


Fig. 2.2. Floor plan sketch highlighting how rooms were occupied from 1988-89 in the upper-storey, west-facing St. James Town apartment.



Fig. 2.3. Typical interior of a two-bedroom unit in the postwar apartment towers of St. James Town, with off-white walls and parquet flooring.

got my work permit, I was hired as a cashier at Kitchen Table, a small grocery chain in Toronto with just a few locations... Getting a cashier job felt pretty good at the time, and necessary given my financial situation, paying rent and sending money back home, and because of the high cost of living in Toronto. I was also giving money to 'A' mami and her family after her husband died... 'R' mama worked all the time and was rarely home. He had a morning job, an evening job, and a weekend job. I was also working two jobs [a few months later]. The same year, I got a pretty great job through an agency at the Bank of America counting money. It was unreal to see all that money. I finished the bank job around 4pm and would go straight to Kitchen Table to work from 5pm to midnight... 'K' mami stayed home to take care of the baby. Since she was home, she would do a lot of the cooking and cleaning. [2.9]

[2.9] Paranthahan, *Interview with Appa*, 5–6.

Appa's economic status upon arrival to Toronto and the influence of gender roles carried over from Jaffna resulted in a gendered division of labour in which men were responsible for financial security and women took care of domestic duties. This positioned men as the owners of home, despite the labour put in by women to maintain domestic space. This meant that it was 'R' mama, the highest-paid earner in the apartment, who made the decision to uproot the family in May of 1989. As more Jaffna villagers immigrated to Canada, 'R' mama realized they could accommodate more people in a house compared to an apartment, which could lower everyone's cost of living. Eventually, he settled on purchasing a semi-detached bungalow east of Toronto, in the suburb of Scarborough.

A multi-family, semi-detached Scarborough bungalow

The multi-family, semi-detached Scarborough bungalow is nicknamed in this chapter as the Huddleston house. Like the Scarborough home introduced in Part One, the Huddleston house is low, wide, and square in plan, but with a party wall dividing the detached structure into two narrow homes. The house is oriented west on a rectangular lot (*Fig. 2.4*). The Scarborough neighbourhood it is situated in was one of the first to be rapidly urbanized after WWII. The house is therefore characteristic of a typical 1940s/50s North American home, equipped with a master bedroom and two smaller bedrooms designed in mind of a nuclear family structure, [2.10] (*Fig. 2.5*) once dominant in the 20th-century and disappearing today. [2.11]

[2.10] This idea is further explored in Part One under the heading 'Social gathering.' In this section, I reveal how the bedrooms in my family's current Scarborough home is designed for a typical nuclear family unit, with a master bedroom for two parents and two-to-three smaller bedrooms for children.

[2.11] Fatima Syed, "The Lessons of a Multi-Generational 905 Home" in *House Divided: How the Missing Middle Will Solve Toronto's Housing Crisis*, ed. Alex Bozikovic et al., (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2019), 177.

In 1989, six family-community members moved into the first floor while the renovated basement was rented out to a Guyanese family; in 1990, four more would join to occupy the whole house, and they would all pitch



Fig. 2.4. Aerial view of the Huddleston neighbourhood consisting of semi-detached Scarborough bungalows.



Fig. 2.5. Top to bottom: Advertisement of a typical or ideal 1950s Scarborough interior for a manufacturer of radiant heating tubes, illustrating a man in spending leisure time alone in a spacious living room; four men from my family-community eating at a dining table in the cramped basement hallway of the Huddleston house.

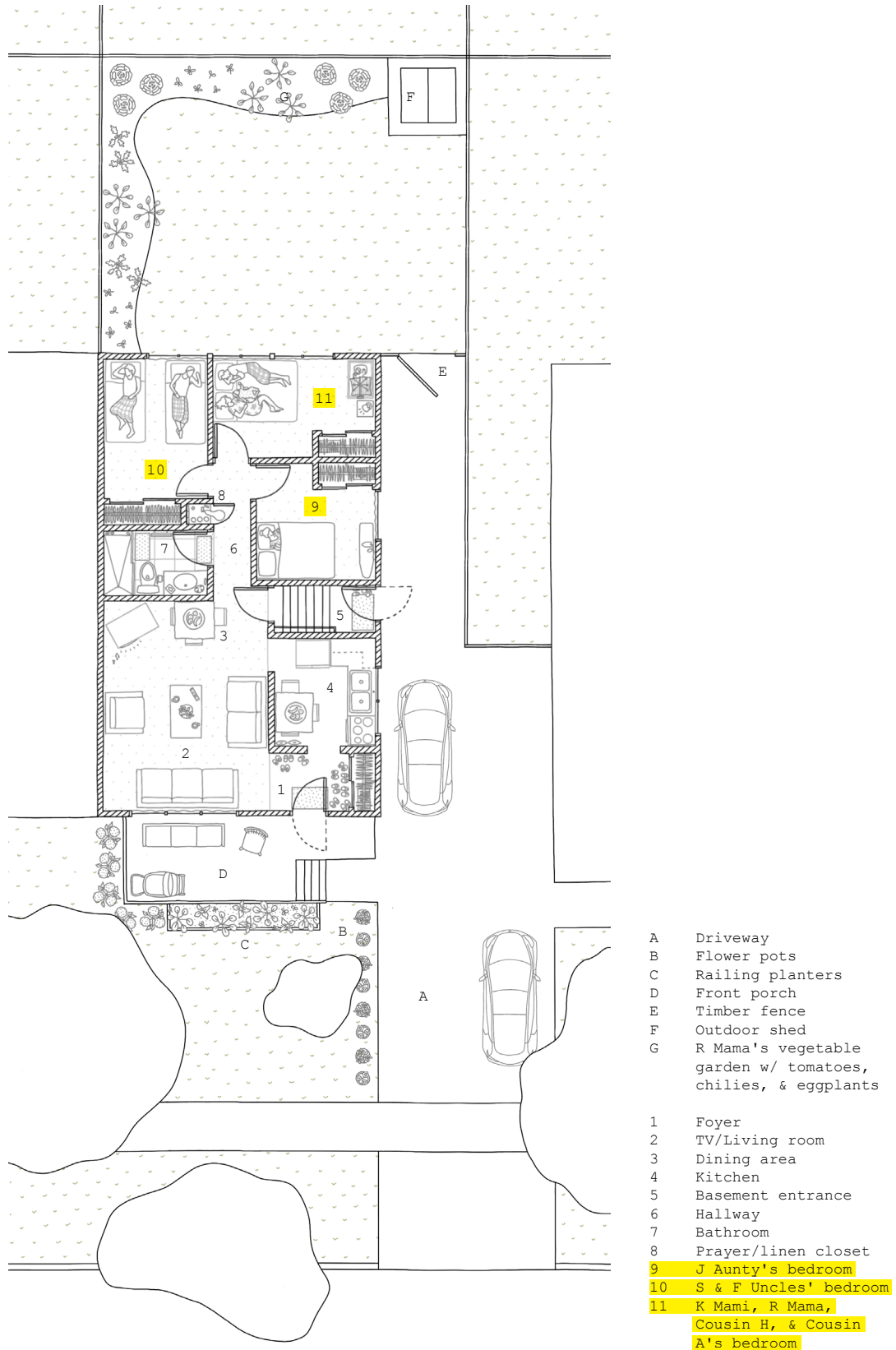


Fig. 2.6. Site plan sketch highlighting how bedrooms were occupied in 1993 in the Huddleston house.

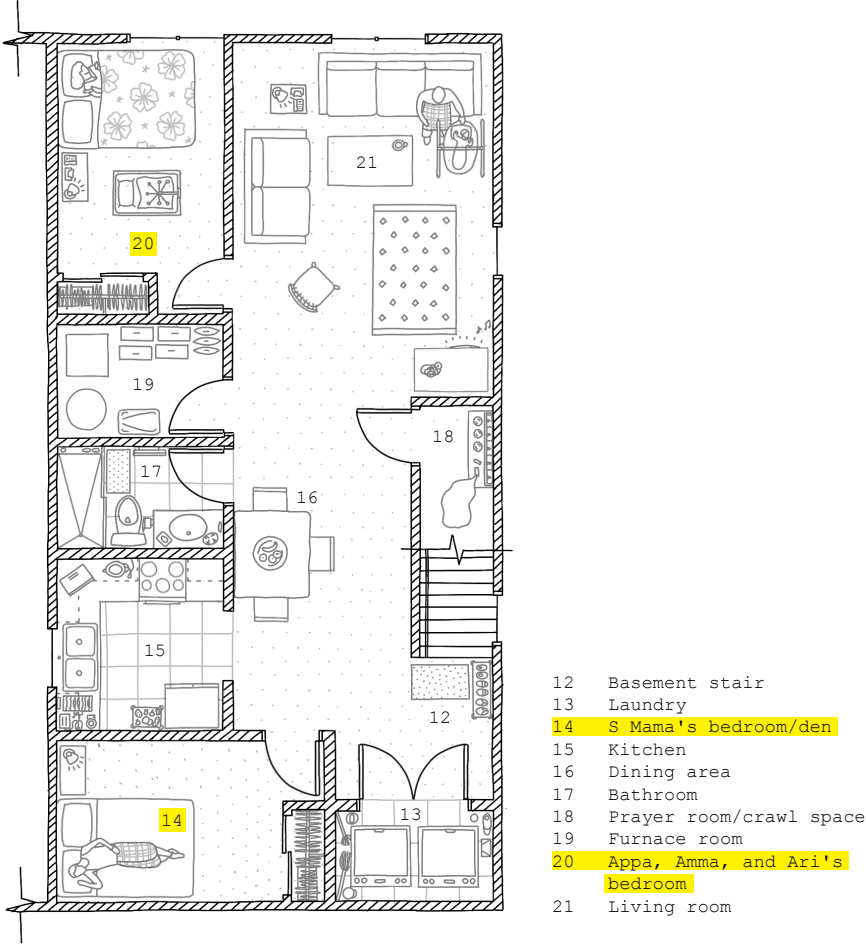


Fig. 2.7. Left to right: Basement plan sketch highlighting how bedrooms were occupied in 1993 in the Huddleston house.

in for a shared car. In 1993, Amma would arrive to live in the basement apartment alongside my father, uncle ('S' mama), and sister while seven others lived upstairs, including my aunt, her husband, sister-in-law, two children, and two bachelors who were family friends (Fig. 2.6, 2.7).

Like Appa, Amma did not have a work permit upon arrival to Canada as her educational credits from Sri Lanka did not translate. She spent her first two years in the GTA learning English and finishing up the high school requirements, and the next six months enrolled in a computer course. Appa and 'S' mama worked multiple jobs at the time, so Amma's afternoons and evenings were mostly spent alone in the Huddleston basement. When asked about a typical day in the Huddleston house, Amma says:

Let me think, what did I do every day? I guess normal things, like cooking, cleaning, watching TV. I would usually get home from school at around 3pm. I would shower, and sometimes play with 'K' mami's kids upstairs after. Most of the upstairs residents would just stay in their own rooms after work. I would cook rice and curries for Appa and 'S' mama in the basement in the afternoon. Appa would get home so late then since he also worked an evening shift. He would have dinner at around 11pm, so I usually ate beforehand. Sometimes 'K' mami would come downstairs and have dinner with me so I wasn't alone. We would have our afternoon tea together too, and just talk. But otherwise, I watched movies alone, and sometimes walked to the nearby stores. When your sister was born, I'd take her with me in a stroller to the strip mall near our house and to the park. [2.12]

[2.12] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 2.



Fig. 2.8. Amma at her first job in Canada, labelling envelopes in a mailroom.

Amma describes her delegation to domestic work and the isolation she felt in the Huddleston house, despite living with ten other family-community members. The individualized schedules of the residents, and the compartmentalized basement apartment, meant that communal domestic activity in the house was rather atypical.

By 1995, Amma had finished school and gotten her first job in Canada through an agency, labelling envelopes in a mailroom (Fig. 2.8). Domestic work became a second shift in addition to her paid labour. However, the extra income and the eligibility for a loan allowed Appa and Amma to purchase their own home one block away from the Huddleston house. They bought a similar semi-detached Scarborough bungalow for 150K, nicknamed as the Newlands house. [2.13] My uncle, 'S' mama, his friends, wife, my Ammama and Ammapa (maternal grandparents), and their two friends had all occupied the basement apartment of the Newlands house at different points in time,

[2.13] The architecture, geographic location, and social make-up of the Newlands house is comparable to the Huddleston house and therefore excluded from the five homes of study in this thesis.

making up a two-family household. With a second child on the way, Amma took a break from her paid work in 1996. Ammama and Ammapa would pitch in with domestic and childcare duties when possible. A network of care was established within the Newlands house.

The Newlands house pins the transition from a multi-family household to a multi-generational, single-family household. In search for more space, my family unit of six (now consisting of Appa, Amma, Ammama, Ammapa, Ari, and I) would move to Milton, a suburb located 40km west of Toronto, in 2001. In our interview, Amma recalls her anxieties about purchasing a more expensive home:

I remember Appa had an idea about moving there. I was really scared to move, though, since it was a lot of money, 285K. I didn't know if we'd be able to afford it and the mortgage. I started working again in 2001. 'K' mami and her family had also moved out there, and we were able to get a family and bank loan again, so we decided to move too. One day we were going to look at the model houses with [our family friend who is a realtor] and that's when Appa signed the lease. So, even though I was happy to move into a big new home, I was also scared for our finances. ^[2.14]

[2.14] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 7.

Amma's passivity in the decision reveals how it was Appa's decision to uproot the family. This, again, positions men as the owners of domestic space, despite their lack of engagement with domestic labour in comparison to women in the diaspora. However, the move was also made possible by the social support and financial help of the family-community, who provided personal loans and real estate support. In relocating, my family was confronted with new social, economic, and spatial conditions that would have to be re-negotiated with in our makings of home from Scarborough to Milton.

A two-storey builder's home in Milton

In the year 2000, the 'Big Pipe' project was introduced to pump water from Lake Ontario to Milton, enabling Milton's rapid growth and increase in population. ^[2.15] Milton was named the fastest growing city in Canada from 2001 to 2011, with its population multiplying 3.5 times in 15 years. ^[2.16] Milton's growth can be characterized as a greenfield development, in which previously undeveloped agricultural lands were transformed into mainly residential zones (*Fig. 2.9*). The lack of non-residential zones identifies the suburb as a bedroom city, in which residents often travel outside of the suburb to engage in paid work. This was the case for my family, where Appa and Amma made the drive each weekday to Brampton and Mississauga for

[2.15] Wayne Concessi, "Big Pipe Will Open up Phase 1 Lands in Milton, Ontario" (Aurora, ON: *Environmental Science & Engineering*, June 2000), 34–37, <https://esemag.com/archive/0600/Milton.html>.

[2.16] The town of Milton's population rose from 31,471 in 2001 to 110,128 in 2016; Nick Moreau, "Milton," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, last modified June 22, 2021, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/milton>.

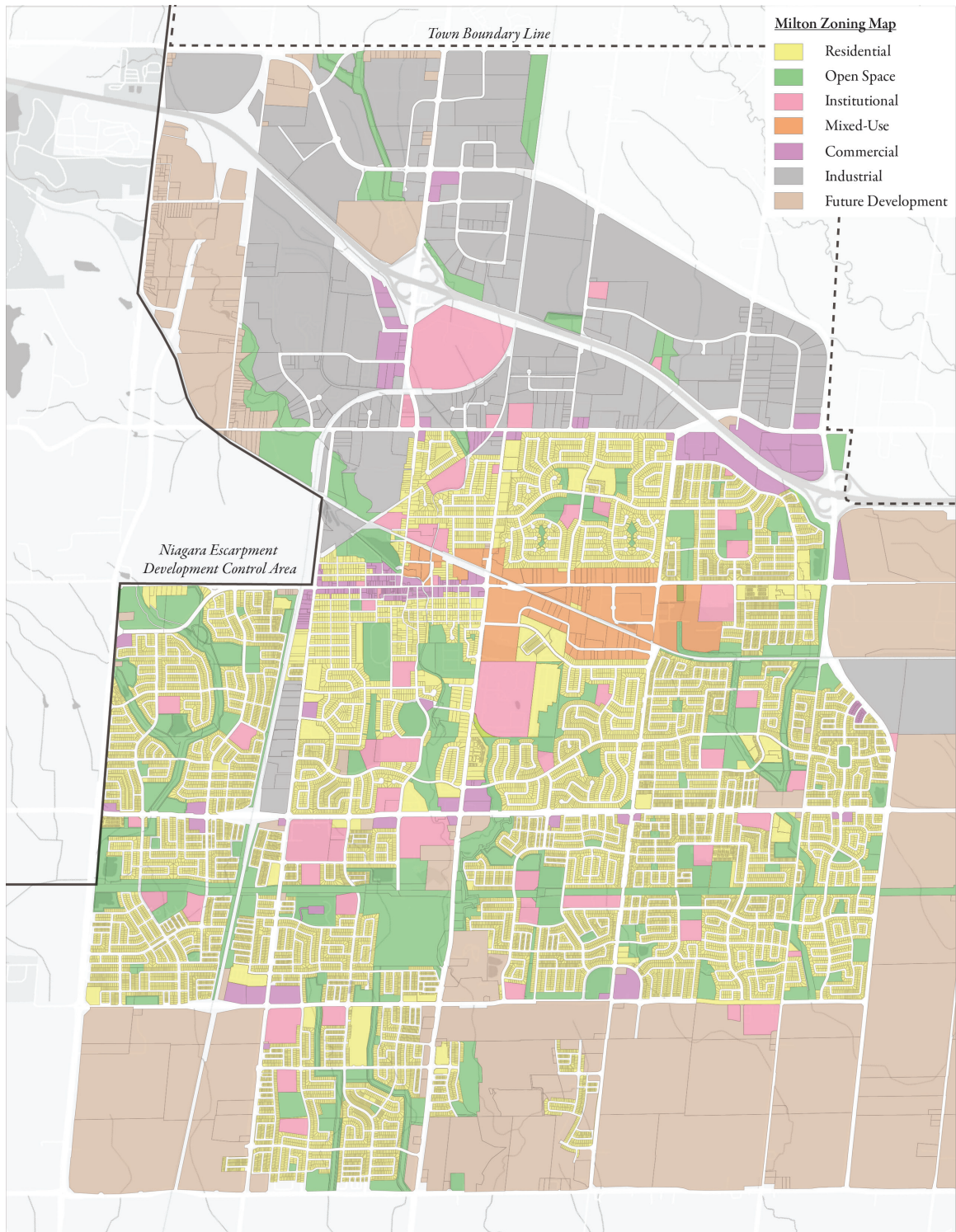


Fig. 2.9. Zoning map of Milton, Ontario, a developing commuter town consisting mainly of residential zones.

their day jobs, and Toronto for occasional night jobs. The lack of mixed zones, and the developing nature of the suburb, made Milton especially car-dependent, but a popular location to start a family due to the availability of new houses, neighbourhoods, and public schools.

The house was newly built, (*Fig. 2.10*) developed by the Greenpark Group, one of Canada's largest privately-owned home builders. Greenpark Group provides contemporary catalog houses (*Fig. 2.11*), popularized in North America since the early-20th century.^[2.17] These homes are designed to be mass produced quickly and cheaply. For new homeowners like Appa and Amma, these catalog houses were affordable, spacious, and attractive for raising a family in. Only a few families in our village diaspora moved out west into newer catalogue homes, while the majority stayed in suburbs near Toronto. At the time of our move, these western suburbs were far less diverse than those neighbouring Toronto. To illustrate, 60.0% of the population in Scarborough identified as a visible minority in the 2001 census, while only 3.3% did in Milton the same year.^[2.18] The urban environment of a developing suburb away from the diverse demographic of Toronto and its inner suburbs presented unique living conditions for immigrant families living in these western suburbs. In an interview with Cousin 'C', she describes these conditions when reflecting on her family's decision to move from Scarborough to Milton:

I think it was economically a good time to move. We weren't expecting to buy a house, but a new area was under construction and the houses were at a good price, so it happened kind of spontaneously. The house was newly built, and I think the appeal of a new area played a factor. This meant there'd be new and better schools, new parks, and it would be safer. There was also this idea that there would be more opportunities for us there...I do feel like this level of suburban 'propaganda' played a part. The new area seemed developed, safer, cleaner, and more prosperous, but in reality, it feels like there's nothing there. It wasn't walkable, and we were children, so we relied on our parents to drive us around. It felt pretty isolating. There were also very few parks to play in. It felt like a weird sense of control impressed on us.^[2.19]

It is important to note that Cousin 'C's perception of Milton is not held across all members of the diaspora. For instance, Amma mentions how our Milton house felt most like a home for her, since this was the first home in Canada where she did not need to permanently co-live with other families. In this sense, the Milton house represents a shift from a lower-class way-of-life to a higher-class one, embodying the pros and cons that come with having more

[2.17] The Sears Modern Homes Program popularized mail-order homes in America since 1908, however, DIY and catalogue homes have been available since the mid-19th century; Joe Rosenberg, "The House That Came in the Mail" (99% Invisible, October 5, 2021), <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/the-house-that-came-in-the-mail/>.

[2.18] StatCan, "2001 Community Profiles - Scarborough," Statistics Canada, February 7, 2019; StatCan, "2001 Community Profiles - Milton," Statistics Canada, accessed July 5, 2022.

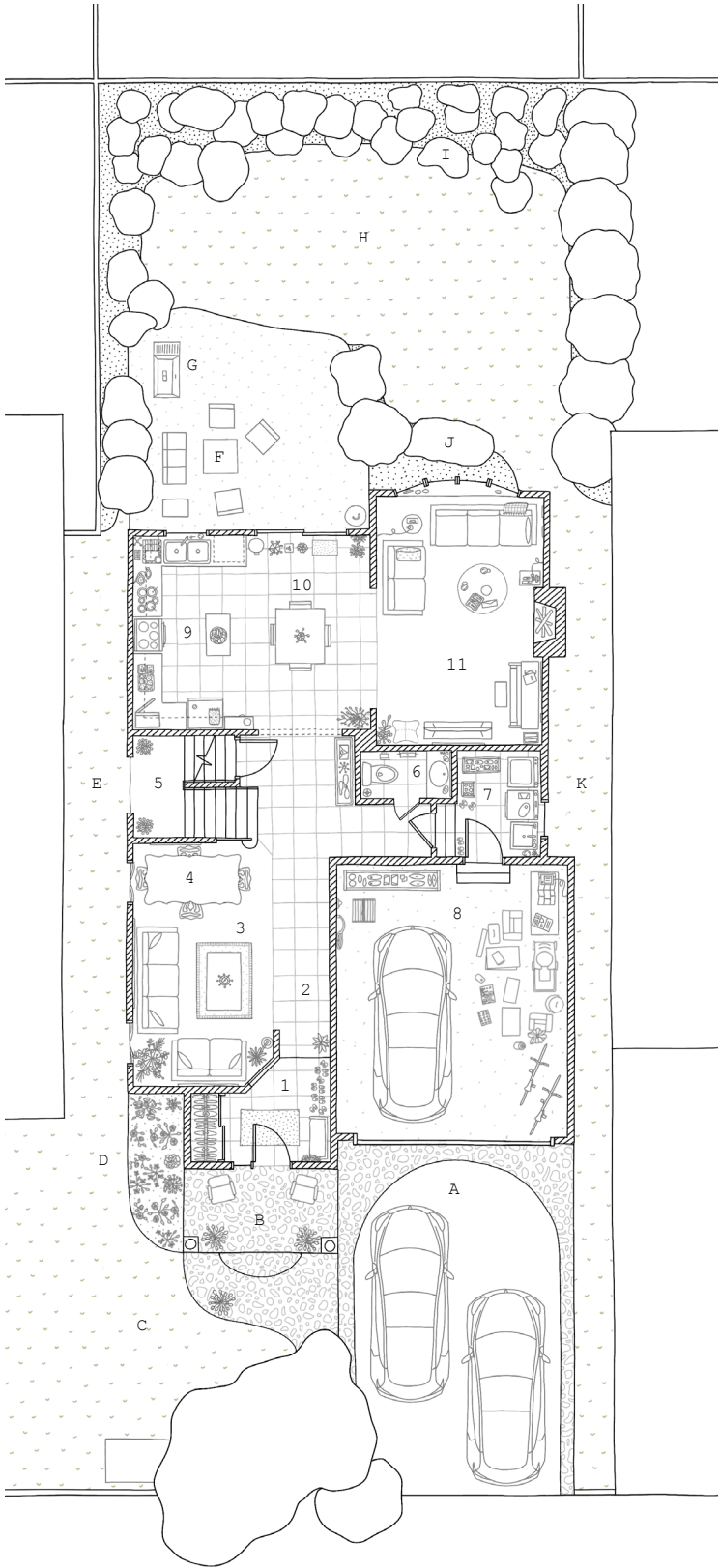
[2.19] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Cousin "C,"* ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 5–6.



Fig. 2.10. The Milton house under construction from 2000 to 2001.



Fig. 2.11. An illustration of the Milton house, a contemporary catalogue home, depicted on the front cover of the builder's pamphlet for marketing purposes.



- A Driveway
- B Front porch & steps
- C Front yard
- D Side garden
- E Left side yard
- F Back patio seating
- G Barbeque
- H Back yard
- I Back flower garden
- J Back vegetable garden
- K Right side yard

- 1 Foyer & coat closet
- 2 Hallway
- 3 Formal living room
- 4 Formal dining ara
- 5 Stair core
- 6 Bathroom
- 7 Laundry room
- 8 Garage
- 9 Kitchen
- 10 Dinette
- 11 Family/TV room

Fig. 2.12. Site plan sketch of the Milton house.

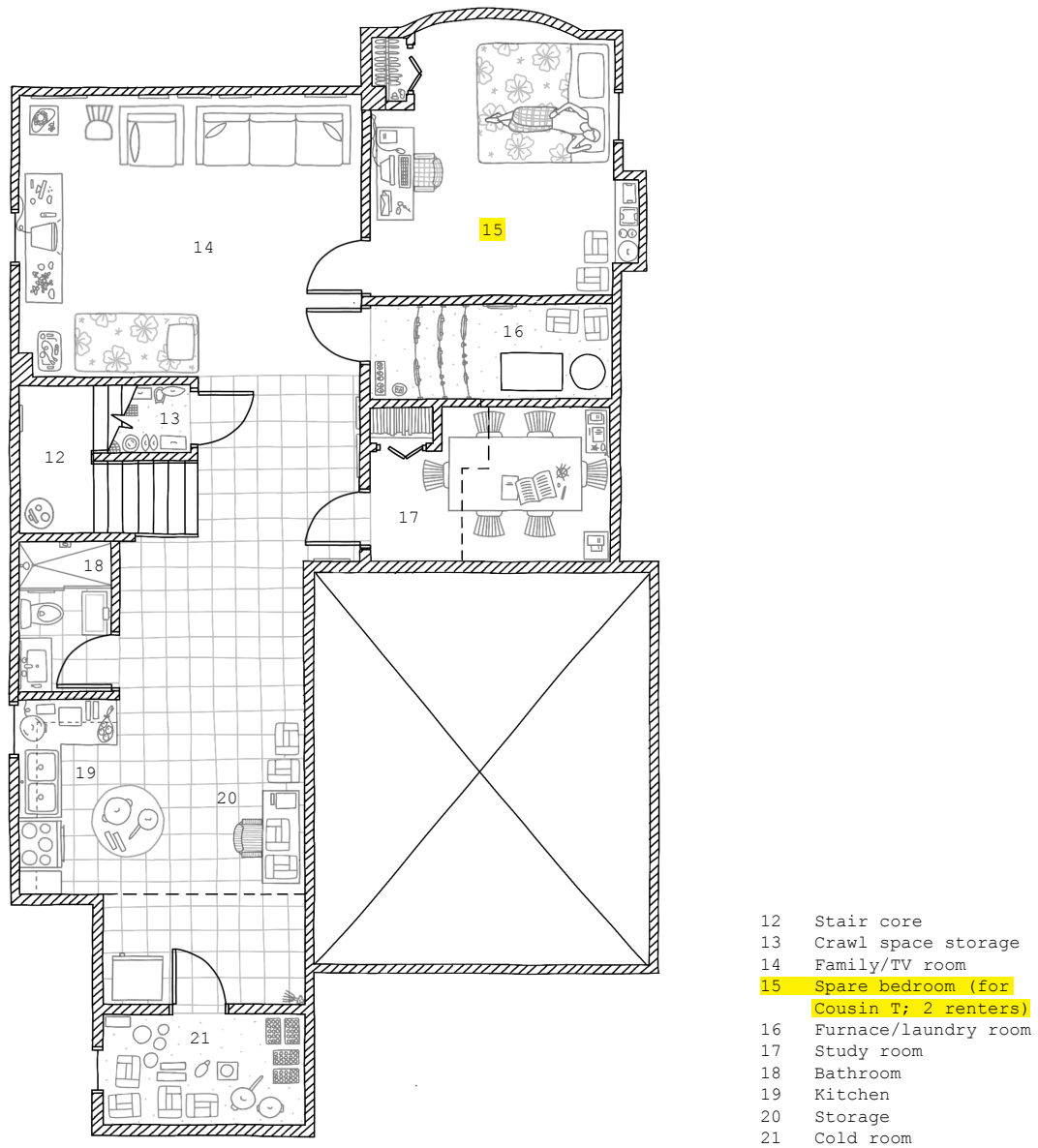


Fig. 2.13. Basement plan of the Milton house highlighting how bedrooms were occupied from 2001-2019.

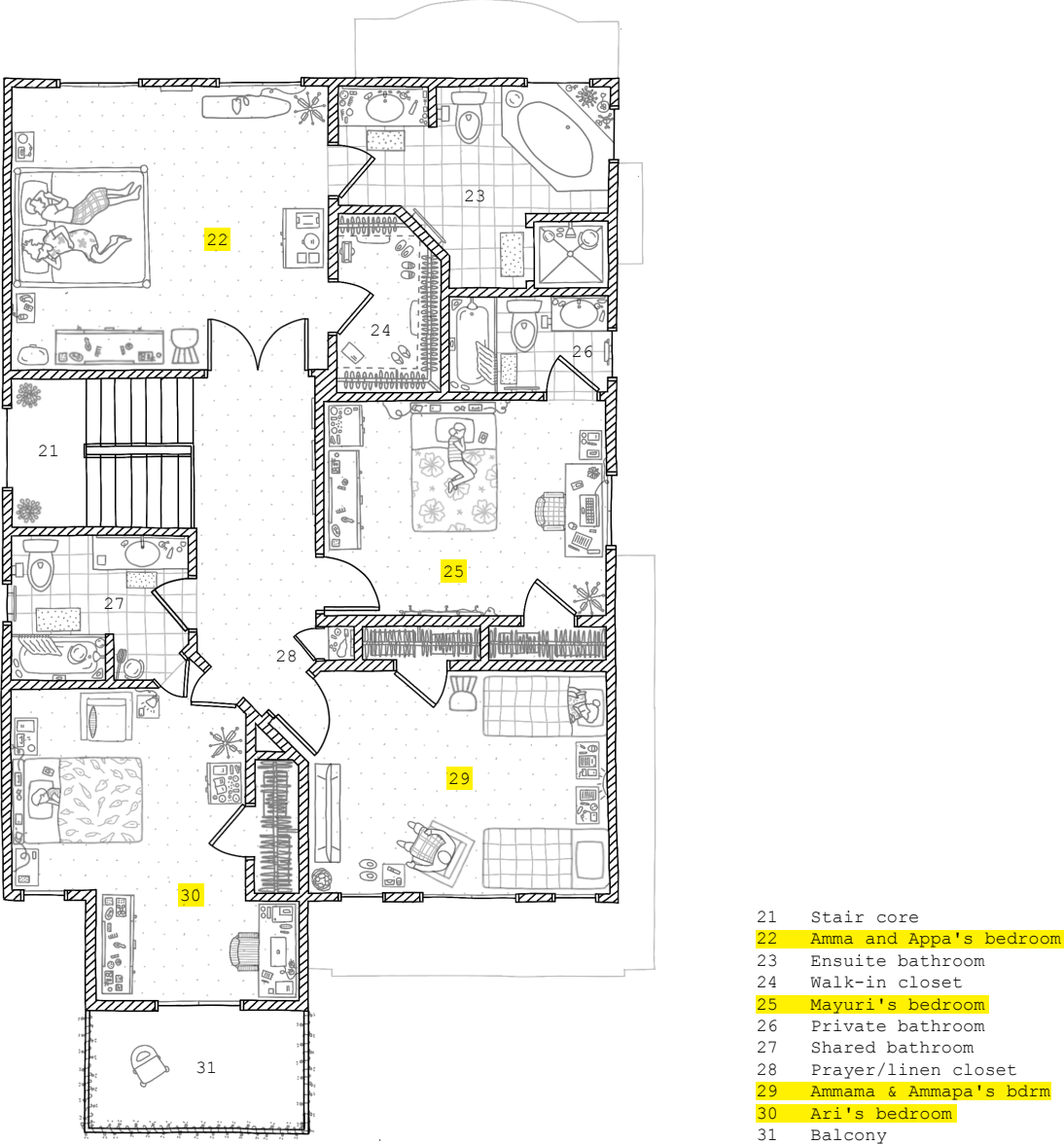


Fig. 2.14. Upper floor plan of the Milton house highlighting how bedrooms were occupied from 2001-2019.

individual private space for a single-family unit.

The main floor of the Milton house consists of a front porch, garage, foyer, formal living/dining room, powder room, laundry room, stairway, family room, dinette, and kitchen (*Fig. 2.12*). The second floor consists of three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a master bedroom with an ensuite and walk-in closet (*Fig. 2.13*). The basement floor came with a crawl space under the stairs, furnace, and cold room under the porch; it was later renovated to include an additional bedroom, living room, den, full bathroom, and kitchen (*Fig. 2.14*). Each family member or couple had an allocated private space. Appa and Amma occupied the master bedroom, Ari and I each occupied our own bedroom, and Ammama and Ammapa shared a bedroom on the second floor. My elder Cousin 'T' who immigrated in the early 2000s temporarily occupied the basement apartment; two other Tamil Sri Lankan acquaintances rented the basement apartment during our last year in the home in 2019. The floor plans reveal an excess amount of space in the Milton house in comparison to my family's previous homes. However, all three houses have a similar layout and organization characteristic of postwar North American homes. A spatial analysis can reveal these similarities and the oppressions they design into the organization of housework.

The architectural

Architecture, defined as the fixed construction of a building, produces immovable boundaries and separations. These boundaries appear as compartmentalized rooms, public and private zones, or a defined interior and exterior. This section will explore edges, zones, and facades in the three homes of study to unpack how oppression in domestic work is organized by the architecture. This begins with first identifying the fixed boundaries which dictate how and where housework is done.

Edges

Each GTA home has interior edges creating compartmentalized rooms, including: a contained living/dining room, kitchen, bathroom, outdoor space, and bedrooms. The single-function nature of these rooms informs the individual practice of housework, limiting opportunities for communal housework once common in the Jaffna village. These rooms are divided by interior walls and in some cases separated by floors. For example, in the Milton house, bedrooms are contained on the second floor while activities like gathering, dining, and cooking are designed to take place on the ground floor. Single-function rooms are even repeated within a household. For instance, in the Huddleston house, each floor has its own entrance,

kitchen, living/dining room, bathroom, and self-fashioned prayer room (*Fig. 2.15*). This means that the basement apartment of the Huddleston house can function autonomously from the ground floor. As a result, housework is performed separately between the upstairs and downstairs residents. A similar example is evident in the Milton house where living/dining rooms are repeated thrice (*Fig. 2.16*). The formal living/dining room in the front of the ground floor (*Fig. 2.17*) is used occasionally when special guests visit. The informal family room and dinette at the back of the ground floor (*Fig. 2.18*) are used on a daily basis by all family members. After the basement renovation, an additional living room was established downstairs, used when guests were visiting or when people occupied the basement apartment. The redundant living/dining rooms result in unused space and further isolation of these housework tasks.

Thinking of the domestic interior as its own urban plan can reveal segregations designed into the architecture of our homes; individual rooms, comparable to single-use zones in cities, can foster isolation in comparison to mixed-use zoning, or multi-purpose rooms. The architecture of interior walls and floors then become hard boundaries that produce a North American practice of performing housework individually. The compartmentalized, single-function, redundant rooms discourage communal undertakings of housework between family members, individualizing this labour as a result.

Zones

The arrangement of rooms can also establish public and private zones within a house, informing the visibility, accessibility, and communal practice of housework tasks. Each of the homes have a similar front, middle, and back zone. The front is the most public domain, the middle functions as a service core, and the back contains the most privatized areas of the house (*Fig. 2.19*). These zones create degrees of privacy and publicity at the scale of the unit, floor, or house. To illustrate, in the St. James Town apartment, the unit opens onto a public front zone consisting of a foyer, living/dining room, and door to the exterior balcony. The middle service core exists where the kitchen, coat closet, linen closet/prayer shelf, utility closet, and bathroom are located in the hallway. Finally, the two bedrooms are located at the very left side of the unit in a private back zone. Similar zones exist in the Huddleston house. The foyer, living, and dining room make up the public front zone. The middle service core consists of a kitchen, bathroom, hallway, basement entrance, and stair. Finally, three bedrooms are located in the private back zone. In this typology, the entire basement becomes a private zone, with no access or views to or from the street. The basement was also likely renovated after the home was constructed, and therefore may not follow the same front-middle-back logic of the given postwar bungalow. The same argument can be made about zones



Fig. 2.15. *Left to right:* Room types in the Huddleston house, with a repeated entrance, kitchen, living/dining room, bathroom, bedrooms, and self-fashioned prayer room across the ground and basement floor.

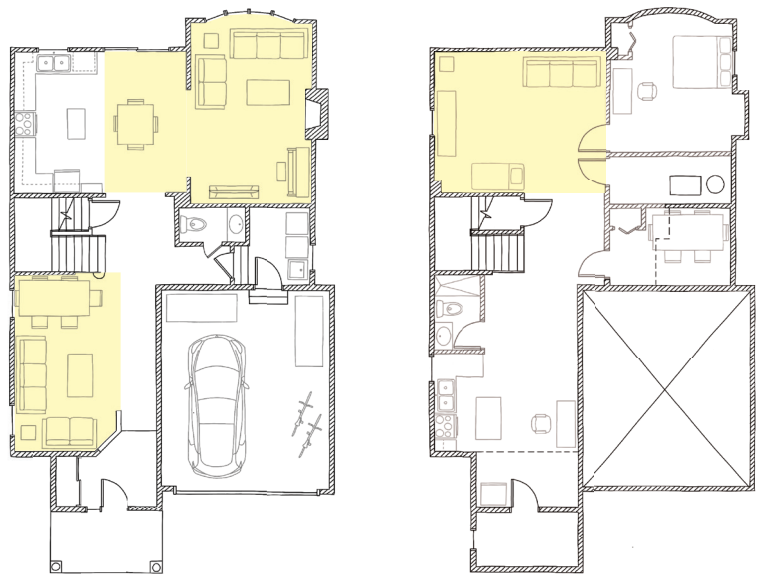


Fig. 2.16. *Left to right:* Living/dining rooms repeated across the ground & basement floors of the Milton house.



Fig. 2.17. The formal living and dining room located at the front of the Milton house, used occasionally when guests visit.



Fig. 2.18. Top to bottom: The informal dinette and family room located at the back of the Milton house, used on a daily basis by all family members.

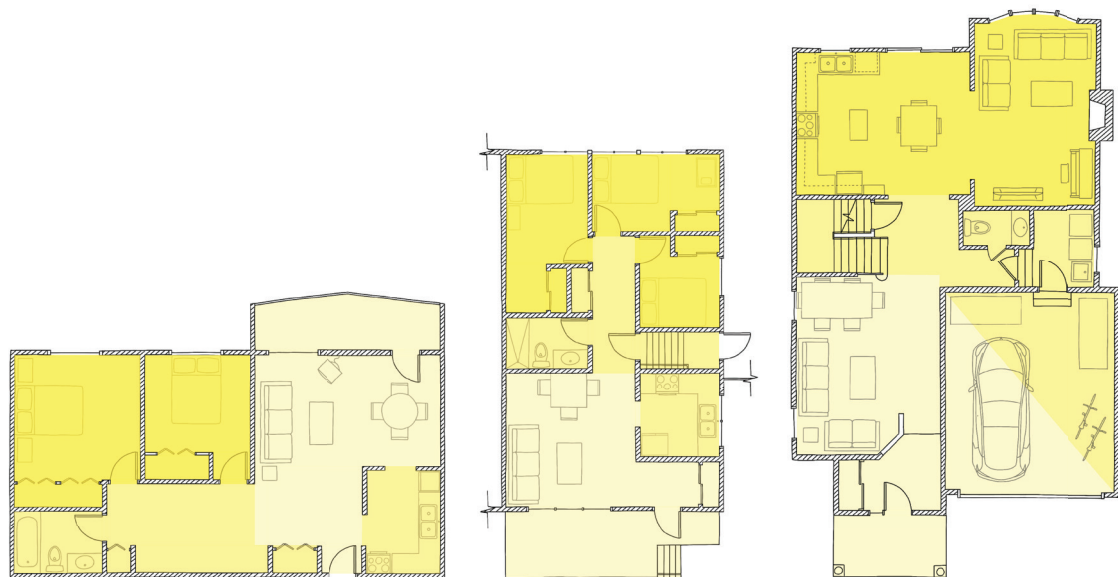


Fig. 2.19. Left to right: Public, private, and service zones located in the fronts, middles, and backs of the ground floors of the St. James Town apartment, Scarborough bungalow, and Milton house.

- Private
- Service
- Public

in the Milton house. On the ground floor, we can identify a highly unused public front zone with the formal living/dining. This room is the most visible from the street and neighbouring houses due to the side and front windows. Its unused nature results in it becoming a kind of showroom for Milton homes, usually containing a nicer set of interior furniture, and occasionally holiday decorations in its front windows. The middle service zone consists of access to the garage (an occasional public space when the door is propped open), a laundry room, powder room, and stairway. The back zone contains the kitchen, dinette where meals are eaten, family/TV room, and access to the backyard. This area has doors and windows opening onto the backyard only, limiting views into the private zone from neighbouring houses. The second floor of the Milton house, while more private in nature, on an upper storey, also has a hierarchy embedded in the arrangement of its bedrooms; the larger master bedroom, often reserved for the parents of an idealized nuclear family, is located in the most private back zone. The basement floor, like the Huddleston house, has no views or access to or from the street and is similarly privatized as a result. It was also renovated after the house was built and therefore features unconventional zones. However, the pre-renovation layout maintains ideas for a service core with the stair, bathroom, and furnace room located in the middle of the floor plan.

The middle service core, consistent in each floor plan, reveals what architectural historian Swati Chattopadhyay calls ‘the distinction between service space and served space.’^[2.20] These spaces arise out of segregated master and slave quarters established in colonial homes across the global South and North. Chattopadhyay references British architect Robin Evans’ writings on the mid-19th century British architecture of Robert Kerr to describe how routes and destinations between served and service spaces are defined within homes. She quotes Evans:

If anything is described in an architectural plan, it is in the nature of human relationships, since the elements whose trace it records—walls, doors, windows, and stairs—are employed first to divide and then selectively to re-unite inhabited space...Robert Kerr made diagrams that reduced house plans to...trajectory (route) and position (destination), proposing that their proper arrangement was the substratum upon which both architecture and domesticity were to be raised.^[2.21]

These front-middle-back zones, and the gradients of publicity and privacy they create, can be understood as segregations between spaces of labour and leisure, and thus between women, men, children, and elderly. In the same way the well, cattle hut, outhouse, composting area—and in my aunt, ‘V’

[2.20] Swati Chattopadhyay, “Architectural History or a Geography of Small Spaces?,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 81, no. 1 (March 1, 2022): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jsah.2022.81.1.5>.

[2.21] Robin Evans, *Translations from Drawing to Building, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 56; 77.

[2.22] In my interview with Ammapa, he similarly describes how the traditional Jaffna hut his family had lived in consisted only of two rooms: a bedroom and sitting/prayer room, no hallway, and a small L-shaped verandah wrapping around the house. The kitchen was in a detached structure located away from the main house, as was the outhouse and storage shed; Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interview with Ammapa*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2022, 1.

mami's current Jaffna home, the cooking shed (*Fig. 2.21*)—is detached from the main Jaffna house, GTA homes also internally divide the sounds and smells of labour from formal leisure areas.^[2.22] These zones therefore instill ideas about what life in GTA homes should look like, allowing formal spaces of leisure to be visible, communal, and accessible, while hiding away spaces of domestic labour necessary to maintain and reproduce a house and family. Each home also specifically maintains the individual privacy of bedrooms (especially the master bedroom, located in the back private zone), where rest, leisure, and individual hobbies take place. Similarly, each home maintains a communal public living/dining area in the front of the home, where the indulgent activities of socializing, gathering, eating, entertaining, and consuming take place. Alternatively, circulation spaces (stair cores, hallways) and 'dirtier' places of personal hygiene (bathrooms, laundry) and food preparation (kitchens) are arranged out-of-sight from the two leisure areas flanking this middle zone. Overall, each home prioritizes leisure over labour, or served space over service space. The result reveals how housework's devaluation is designed directly into the floor plan, enclosing spaces of domestic labour through compartmentalizing edges and the arrangement of rooms into public, private, and service zones.

Facades

[2.23] Having grown up in Scarborough, I can recall frequently playing in the front yard. This differs greatly from my family's experience in Milton, where outdoor leisure only took place in the backyard.



Fig. 2.20. Children and an elderly Chinese neighbour inhabiting the front yard of the Newlands house in Scarborough.

[2.24] StatCan, "2001 Community Profiles - Scarborough," Statistics Canada, February 7, 2019; StatCan, "2001 Community Profiles - Milton," Statistics Canada, accessed July 5, 2022.

Exterior fronts and facades also play a role in spatially reflecting identity, significant to domestic life for newcomers like those in my family. While both the Scarborough and Milton front lots are similar in their overall size, their ground surface materials influence how they are used. For example, in the Huddleston and Newlands houses, the driveway extends into a wide side yard that can fit the width of a single vehicle (*Fig. 2.22*). This allows for unobstructed green space in the front lot, making the front yard a popular place for children to play (*Fig. 2.20*).^[2.23] In contrast, side yards in the Milton house are much narrower and the front lot consists mostly of an asphalt driveway to park vehicles in (*Fig. 2.23*). This discourages leisure from taking place, further privatizing the already underused front zone of the Milton house. I speculate that social demographics also play a factor in the underuse of the Milton front lot by racialized families. As mentioned previously, Scarborough houses a much larger visible minority population than Milton (60.0% versus 3.3% in 2001),^[2.24] normalizing the presence of racialized families spending leisure time in front of their homes. This is less common in Milton, where racialized households are underrepresented in the population, and therefore may feel less comfortable spending time in the front lot. Despite having lived in the Huddleston house for six years, and the Milton house for 18 years, being able to comfortably inhabit the front lot made Scarborough feel more like a home for my family by affirming our racialized identity. Our presence extended the private domestic activities of gathering, play, leisure, and childcare into the



Fig. 2.21. The outdoor cooking shed, detached from the main house, in my aunt ‘V’ mami’s current Jaffna home. This structure is remnant of traditional Jaffna huts, which had cooking sheds, storage sheds, and outhouses detached from the main house.



Fig. 2.22. Left to right: Aerial of the Huddleston and Newlands houses showing the side yard driveway, wide enough (4.6m, 3.3m) to fit one or two cars and allowing for unobstructed green space in the front lot.



Fig. 2.23. The front lot of the Milton house, consisting of narrow side yards (2.0m) and mostly asphalt driveway, obstructing the green space and discouraging leisure and play from taking place.

semi-public and public areas of the front yard and street. This fostered for us a deeper sense of belonging in Scarborough in comparison to Milton.

Façades also play an important role in spatially reflecting identity. All three homes of study in this chapter are architecturally identical to their neighbouring residences. The cookie-cutter quality of apartment doors, balconies, detached suburban bungalows, and two-storey house façades fosters an anonymous existence for the families inhabiting these structures (Fig. 2.24). In a suburb with a low visible minority population like Milton, a degree of whiteness arises from the invisibility produced by the uniformity of façades.^[2.25] The façade of my family's Milton house cannot identify us as a Tamil Sri Lankan-Canadian household. Alternatively, in Scarborough, it is common for the visible minority population to decorate their front windows, lawns, and façades with cultural remnants from homelands left behind. My family's current Scarborough home has a garland of pinecones, seashells, and mango leaves hanging by the front door, first placed after a *puja* (ritual) blessing the new home when we moved in. Amma purchased these decorations at a local *puja* store and hung them over the front door on the day of our arrival to bring positive vibrations to the home and ward off evil spirits.^[2.26] On our street alone, we can identify three other Tamil Sri Lankan households through their exterior decorations: one house has a small statue of the Hindu god *Pillaiyar* (Ganesh) placed into a carved-out nook in a tree trunk, another house has two concrete lion statues flanking the driveway, and another similarly has mango leaves hanging above the front door. However, the Huddleston house in Scarborough, which my family occupied from 1989 to 1995, had less exterior décor that signified personal values. The lack of decoration was due to the lower economic status of residents, the lack of rootedness for family members renting the house, and the lack of time to decorate during a period of overworking upon arrival to Canada. In our interview, Amma mentions how, between work and school, there was little time for gardening in the Huddleston and Newlands houses.^[2.27] Socioeconomic status therefore influences one's ability to spend time and money on the personalization of their home. This, in turn, affects the ability to reflect identity and values within an otherwise anonymizing architectural façade.

In the Milton house, my family challenged the dominating, uniform aesthetic of whiteness with two architectural changes. The first was installing a front door with a glass mosaic of a peacock, a cultural and religious icon in the South Asian subcontinent (Fig. 2.25). My name, Mayuri, roots from the Tamil word *mayil* for peacock, resulting in my name itself, an indicator of identity, presented on the home's façade. The door was often complimented by South Asian neighbours, family, and friends. However, the second change made to the façade was received less positively. In our final years in the house, my



Fig. 2.24. Top to bottom: Repetitive and anonymous facades of the St. James Town apartment unit and detached suburban homes in the GTA.

[2.25] Mayuri Paranthahan and Arijit Sen, "Place-Making, Positionalities, and the Profession: A Conversation between Arijit Sen and Mayuri Paranthahan," ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, June 6, 2022, 18.

[2.26] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*.

[2.27] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 7.

family created a private secondary basement entrance on the side of the house for two Tamil Sri Lankan acquaintances living in the basement apartment, similar to those in the Scarborough homes my family had inhabited previously (Fig. 2.26). These secondary entrances were atypical in newly built Milton houses and carried racial and economic connotations of lower/middle-class, newcomer, brown families housing together in single-family homes. After receiving a permit to create an external doorway and concrete pathway to the side of the house, the change was met with frustration from nearby white neighbours. I speculate that this architecture change, uncommon in these neighborhoods, ensued a subtle degree of class-based racism in a time when Milton's visible minority population was growing rapidly from 3.3% in 2001 to 45.4% in 2016, with South Asians making up half of this increasing population.^[2.28] The geographical shift from Scarborough to Milton therefore reveals an organization of people along race and class lines. Architectural practices extremely common amongst immigrants in Scarborough threaten the social norms built into the western suburb of Milton. Architectural features on the façade can therefore reveal ideals built into GTA homes, even from the small scale of front doors.

[2.28] In under two decades, Milton had seen a rise in ethnic grocery stores, restaurants, salon services, and warehouse mosques, with recent plans for a purpose-built mosque to be constructed in the suburb. With few Tamil Hindu Sri Lankans residing in Milton, my family and I were often lumped in with, but also found comfort and solidarity in, a growing community of brown people in Milton of various ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds; Statistics Canada. 2017. Milton, T [Census subdivision], Ontario and Halton, RM [Census division], Ontario (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed June 13, 2022).

Overall, the compartmentalizing edges of rooms, the hierarchy of served and service zones, and the invisibility produced by uniform front façades creates oppressive spatial conditions for housework to take place in, undervaluing this labour by design. The relatively unchangeable nature of the architecture of all three homes (except through intensive renovation, not always accessible to those of lower economic status, especially upon arrival to a new country) reveals spatial constraints that must be negotiated with when homemaking in the GTA. Autonomy must therefore be sought by users through their everyday housework routines and more changeable spatial elements.

The furnishings, objects, and appliances

Non-structural, non-architectural objects play an important role in my family's remakings of home in the GTA. This is evident in my current Scarborough home explored in Part One, where the planting of seeds creates a garden in the backyard, and a wooden shrine creates a prayer room out of a spare bedroom. In both cases, my family's personal, cultural, and religious values are reflected through temporary objects. This section will explore other objects, furnishings, and appliances significant to my family's remakings of home. I return to Swati Chattopadhyay's research here by studying, what she calls, 'a geography of small spaces':

An aesthetics of big scale dominates our historical



Fig. 2.25. The front door of the Milton home, featuring a decorative glass mosaic of a peacock, a cultural and religious icon in the South Asian subcontinent.



Fig. 2.26. Left to right: Amma and Appa standing under the awning of the side basement entrance in the Huddlestone house, also visible from the street.

[2.29] Chattopadhyay, "Architectural History or a Geography of Small Spaces?" 5–20.

imagination...I wish to posit a way of thinking about architecture that interrogates the entanglement between bigness and imperialist thinking...I ask, is it possible to counter the aesthetics of bigness by taking small spaces as the primary focus of architectural history?... They are adjunct spaces that play supporting roles to the main architectural event in a building. Servants, the enslaved, children, and women, flit in and out of these spaces...Seen from their circumscribed positions, the world appears not as a panorama, but as fragmented scenes...The challenge is to write the history of that spatial fragment. [2.29]

Using Chattopadhyay's methodology of studying small spaces to tell subaltern narratives, I will focus particularly on the furnishings, objects, and appliances accompanying Amma's housework tasks to tell her story of homemaking in the GTA from her marginalized position as the primary domestic caretaker of the family. The findings in this section are mainly drawn from an individual interview I conducted with Amma about her time in the Huddleston and Milton homes. I will begin by first exploring her role in furnishing and decorating the two homes.

Furnishings and Objects

Amma recalls playing an active role in decorating and furnishing the Newlands, Milton, and current Scarborough home, in comparison to the Huddleston house. This was due to her late move to the Huddleston house (in 1993, while other residents moved in 1989), the shared multi-family nature of the home, her lack of ownership as a resident renting the basement apartment, and her lower economic status upon arrival to Canada. She describes how her lack of choice over the appearance of the Huddleston house resulted in it feeling less like a home for her:

Appa had bought the furniture for the basement [of the Huddleston house] before I came to Canada. I remember there was a used sofa and a TV he got for the living room... 'S' mama came to live with us later in the basement den. It was such a bad room, no windows, no light, or anything... The kitchen was so bad. It wasn't small, but it was an old-looking interior, you know? It was all wooden cabinets with wallpaper. The cooking smells always stayed in the room; it wasn't easy to ventilate it out... We didn't do any renovations since we were renting from 'K' mami... It was fun to live there altogether, but everyone also wanted to get their own house. The Newlands house wasn't tight like the basement of the Huddleston house. There was lots of

room, and it was our own house, you know? Lots of space, more rooms, and Appa and I had fun decorating and buying new furniture.^[2.30]

[2.30] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 3–5.

Amma's lack of choice over the appearance of the Huddleston house correlated with her lacking feelings of belonging. In contrast, the move to the Newlands house provided her with autonomy over the look of her home, which became a reflection of her interests, values, and ideas of beauty. Throughout our conversation, Amma joyfully recalls notable décor, furnishings, objects, and renovations that she helped implement in the Newlands home, including custom pink curtains draping over a kitchen doorway (*Fig. 2.27*), purple paint, a pink couch, a California king bed, a wall unit with statues of Hindu gods, and a finished basement with a separate entrance. Her emphasis on the colour of some of these memorable furnishings (pink curtains, purple paint, a pink couch) describes the creative choices she made while decorating and her emotional attachment to the homes she furnished.^[2.31] Decorating provided her with a sense of ownership over her domestic space, allowing her to transform a house into a 'home.'

[2.31] For an in-depth analysis on the influence of color and decoration for immigrant women (including Sri Lankan immigrants) re-making home in 1940s and 50s Australia, see: Sian Supski, "It Was Another Skin: The Kitchen as Home for Australian Post-War Immigrant Women," *Gender, Place & Culture* 13, no. 2 (2006): 133–41, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09663690600573635>.

The process of furnishing is also influenced by the economic status of residents and the size of homes. In my interview with Amma, she describes how she was able to use her dowry money to furnish the larger Milton home:

I was happy when we moved [to Milton]. It was such a big house, and brand new. I liked going up and down the stairs. It was so clean, and it even smelled new. There was a big kitchen. And we had lots of space for new furniture. Around that time, in 2001, we [had] sold my family home in Jaffna; I was sad to sell it, but we had no direct family left in Ceylon to maintain the house. It belonged to me through the dowry since I was my parent's only daughter, and we got 13K in Canadian dollars from [selling the house]. With that money we bought all the furniture [for the Milton house]. We got a nice dining table and chairs for the [formal] dining room, and three bedroom sets for you, Ari, and Ammama and Ammapa. We got the same bench that's still in the foyer today then too. Almost everything was bought from Tamil furniture stores in Scarborough.^[2.32]

[2.32] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 9.

Amma's financial circumstances of having dowry money to spend aided her in furnishing the large Milton home. However, this was not the case for all families in the village diaspora. In my interview with Cousin 'C', she describes how, in her family homes, furniture was either underused for its preservation or used to spatially invest in the program of a room. She says:



Fig. 2.27. Custom pink curtains draping the kitchen doorway, chosen by Amma when decorating the Newlands house.

I remember there was a guest bedroom in our Scarborough house with purple carpet where all the nice furniture was kept. I think we didn't use it much to preserve it. We were kind of saving the furniture for when we needed to actively use it and were saving money in that way...I was three or four years old when we moved into the semi-detached house in Milton... [my family of four] used to sleep together in my bedroom on a queen-size mattress. We later slept on two comforters laid down on the floor of the master bedroom. We eventually used our own bedrooms by the time I was around six years old. We bought furniture for each bedroom: I got a single bed, side table, and dresser. My brother got a double bed, and his room was also the computer room. Buying the furniture was kind of like investing in the room and establishing our own space. ^[2.33]

[2.33] Paranthahan, *Interview with Cousin "C,"* 3–4.

Cousin 'C' describes how her family underused and preserved furniture to save on costs long-term, a common practice amongst newcomers in the GTA. These families may keep the plastic wrapping on their nicer pieces of furniture, or use the same pieces for decades, as Amma mentions doing with the bench in the foyer of our current Scarborough home, purchased 21 years ago. These practices also signify how those on the lower end of a wide-ranging middle-class, or those with less generational wealth and economic security in a country, may live at home to cut costs, preserve goods, maintain wealth, and invest in their homes in unconventional, but common ways, amongst immigrant and diasporic groups.

Furnishings can also establish degrees of privacy when programming a room. In Cousin 'C's house, the purchasing of beds for herself, her brother, and her parents establishes individual bedrooms within the Milton house. This creates a degree of isolation between family members, as leisure time can now be spent alone in one's bedroom. The architecture encourages this, as the size and layout of rooms are already designed with intended purpose and degree of privacy. Contrastingly, in Jaffna homes, *pais* (mats woven with dried palmyra palm leaves) are located side-by-side in the main sitting room where family members typically sleep together. The *pais* are thin and rollable, laid out each night and stored every morning to make space for daily activities. In GTA homes, beds typically consist of a mattress and bed frame, heavier and less mobile than *pais*. The easy mobility of furniture can therefore unite inhabitants in routine household activities like sleeping.

Furnishings and objects therefore provide users with ownership over their domestic space, allowing them to decorate interiors to reflect their personal values, ideals, and aesthetics. This can establish an emotional connection to home, further rooting newcomers in the GTA. The purchasing

and placement of furnishings can also program a room, which can unite or divide people in housework tasks. Technology and appliances similarly have the power to program rooms and can inform the communal or individual practice of housework tasks.

Technologies and Appliances

The move from Jaffna to the GTA introduced the diaspora to domestic technologies and appliances uncommon in the village at the time of their displacement. This includes communicative technologies like the phone and TV that bring the outside world into private domestic space. It also includes domestic appliances used in housework routines, such as washing machines, dryers, fridges, stoves, and dishwashers. I will begin by first exploring the role of communicative technologies in combatting isolation in the domestic sphere.

Amma recalls using communicative technologies during her time spent alone in the basement of the Huddleston house. During her afternoons and evenings after school, before she had entered the paid work economy, she would pass time by talking on the phone and watching TV. Amma says,

I would watch TV and movies alone. There were Tamil movies that would play on satellite TV. We didn't have a radio then. Appa had bought the TV for the basement...I'd also call friends and family on the phone. My cousin 'R' and I would talk a lot. That was our entertainment then...sometimes I would be home at night alone when Appa was working. On those nights, our friend, 'S' uncle, would call me sometimes and scare me on the phone to tease me [laughs].^[2.34]

[2.34] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 2–3.

Amma describes how she would use the phone and TV to stay connected to her family, friends, and Tamil culture when alone in the Huddleston house. Tamil movies and television shows in particular allowed her to stay connected to Tamil culture even after being physically displaced from Sri Lanka. In an architectural research paper, author Hassina Benchelabi describes how Maghrebi women in Brussels similarly kept in touch with their home countries through the TV. She writes, 'All of the homes I visited had satellite dishes to pick up the Moroccan channel...Fatma and her daughter like to watch the Moroccan channel, for the music, singing, and dancing.'^[2.35] Tamil TV channels are similarly a staple in diasporic Tamil Sri Lankan households across the GTA; competitions, debates, concerts, soap operas, talent shows, and movies make up the soundscapes of these family/TV rooms. The cultural re-connections fostered by the TV helps Amma combat her isolation at home. A similar finding has been made by ethnographer Dorothy Hobson

[2.35] Hassina Benchelabi, "Cultural Displacement in Brussels with Maghrebi Women," *Journal of Architectural Education* 52, no. 1 (1998): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1531-314X.1998.tb00250.x>.

about the role of radio in the lives of stay-at-home wives in 1980s Britain. Hobson writes, ‘within the overall picture of isolation which has emerged in the lives of the women in this study, the disc jockey can be seen as having the function of providing the missing “company” of another person.’^[2.36] While technology provided Amma with connection and communication, it also became a method of coping with the architectural and urban design that separates what was once a close-knit extended family unit in Jaffna. The suburban isolation designed into the arrangement of GTA homes is therefore mediated with communicative devices, allowing the diaspora to remain connected to their family, friends, and culture from a multitude of distances.

[2.36] Dorothy Hobson, "Housewives and the Mass Media" in *Culture, Media, Language* (Routledge, 2003), 95.

The isolation experienced by women in the diaspora is also further inscribed by certain ‘labour-saving’ domestic appliances. Many domestic appliances were only introduced in Jaffna after the war ended in 2009. This includes electric and gas stoves, washing machines, fridges, and TVs, all of which are smaller and less efficient than the appliances normalized across GTA households today. This meant that the diaspora that migrated between 1983 and 2009 were unfamiliar with the domestic appliances present in GTA homes since the post-WWII period. In our interview, Amma describes how she became acquainted with this new world of domestic machinery upon arrival to Canada:

Appa taught me how to use all the kitchen appliances. We spent more time cooking in Ceylon. Here, we have all these appliances, so we spend less time. There, we had a fire stove which was different to cook on compared to electric or gas. The fire would blacken all the pots and the walls of the kitchen. Later, people started adding chimneys to their houses to vent out the smoke and ashes. Nowadays, gas stoves are becoming more popular there. Most technology is coming to the houses there now, like washing machines, TVs, fridges, things like that.^[2.37]

[2.37] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 7.

Amma mentions how the advanced technology of domestic appliances in GTA houses resulted in less time spent on housework activities like cooking. This ideology is rooted in historical Taylorist approaches to domestic liberation, which sought to use efficient design to optimize the time spent on housework and ease its labour. This is evident in the popular Frankfurt kitchen, a fitted interior kitchen designed by Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky for working-class apartment units in Frankfurt in 1926. This kitchen was influenced by the modern industrial workplace and was designed to optimize cooking labour for working-class residents.^[2.38] Schütte-Lihotzky’s design was rooted in 19th-century material feminist ideas for efficient housework that are archived in Dolores Hayden’s *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981). This includes the work of scientist Ellen Swallow Richards, who established lab-

[2.38] Marcel Bois, “A Communist Designed Your Kitchen,” trans. Julia Damphouse, *Jacobin Magazine*, January 18, 2020, <https://jacobinmag.com/2020/01/margarete-schutte-lihotzky-frankfurt-kitchen-communist-architect>.

[2.39] Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 150–62.

[2.40] Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods and Cities*, 284–86.; Alexandra Lange, “The Woman Who Invented the Kitchen,” *Slate*, October 25, 2012, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2012/10/lillian-gilbreths-kitchen-practical-how-it-reinvented-the-modern-kitchen.html>.

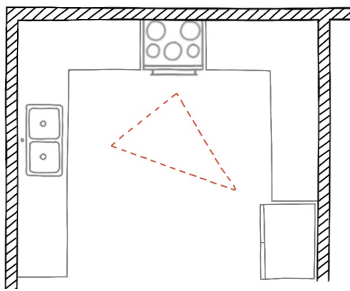


Fig. 2.28. Diagram illustrating psychologist and engineer Lillian Moller Gilbreth's kitchen triangle rule, which brings three kitchen appliances (the sink, stove, and fridge) into a triangular formation for maximum efficiency.

[2.41] Mayuri Paranthahan, *Interviews with Ari*, ed. Mayuri Paranthahan, 2021, 8.

like community kitchens and taught home economics.^[2.39] Lillian Gilbreth and Christine Frederick were two other key figures of this Taylorist approach; Frederick published books on the scientific management of housework, and Gilbreth is attributed for inventing the kitchen triangle rule, which brings kitchen appliances (the fridge, stove, and sink) into a triangular formation for maximum efficiency (Fig. 2.28).^[2.40] While these approaches make domestic labour more efficient, they fail to truly free housework from its invisible, isolated, and individualized constraints. For example, in Gilbreth's findings, the triangular formation of kitchen appliances positions the working body towards the walls of the kitchen. This isolating arrangement is evident across GTA homes, informed by built-in counters, cabinetry, and plumbing hook-ups dictating where these appliances should be placed. This reveals how the arrangement of kitchen appliances can hide, isolate, and individualize cooking labour, even at the bodily scale.

My family's cooking practices also make efforts to resist the isolation designed into GTA kitchens. Oftentimes, tasks that do not require the use of appliances will spill out onto the dining room table. The table sits between the 'served' living room and 'service' kitchen space, becoming a mediating, multi-purpose site for food preparation, conversation, gossip, gathering, and the transfer of domestic and cultural knowledge between generations. The dining table also repositions bodies towards one another around a central workstation, recreating the socialized food preparation that once took place on the Jaffna verandah. My sibling, Ari, reveals the importance of the dining table when asked to name a piece of furniture significant to our family's housework practices. Ari describes how the table acts as many different things during the day, 'as extra counter-space for the kitchen, as a desk where people do work, it's where we eat our meals, where we prep food.'^[2.41] The multiple uses of the dining table as a kitchen, office, and dining area can informally unite inhabitants in housework around the table. This reveals how furnishings can allow for communal practices of housework, even within an architectural framework of compartmentalized rooms for cooking, eating, and gathering.

Cooking also extends beyond the kitchen and dining room, into living rooms and bedrooms for taste tests; linen closets, garages, crawl spaces, and cold rooms for storage, or into the backyard vegetable garden where food is planted, maintained, and harvested. The movement of small kitchen appliances in particular can extend cooking labour outside of the house. In our current Scarborough home, the deep fryer is often used by Amma on the back deck or under the backyard gazebo so as not to contain the smells of oil frying inside the home (Fig. 2.29). In the Milton house, the deep fryer is similarly used by Amma or Ammama in the garage with the door propped open high enough to limit visibility but to allow smells to leak into the street. These cooking smells were often complimented by our neighbours in Milton

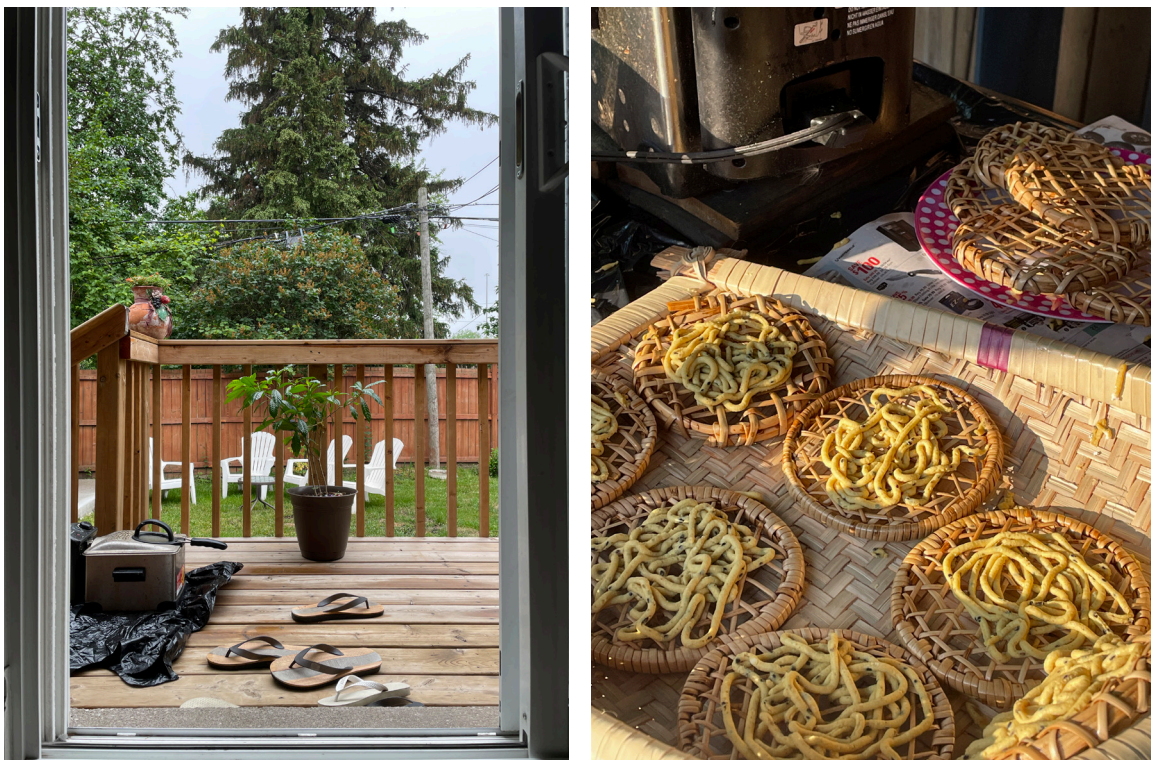


Fig. 2.29. Left to right: The deep fryer set up on the back deck and under the backyard gazebo of the current Scarborough house, where Amma makes *muruku* (a crunchy snack made with gram flour, rice flour, and sesame seeds), extending cooking labour outside of the kitchen and into semi-public spaces.

and met with a mix of pride and shame in interactions where my family's 'otherness' rose to the surface. In an article entitled 'Migrancy in the Garage', Punjabi-Ontarian art and architecture historian Sajdeep Soomal similarly writes about the semi-public cooking that took place in the garage of his grandma's Cambridge, Ontario home where she had installed a second stove:

The stove is helpful for when she cooks tadka (the tempered spices, ginger, garlic, and onions that form the base of most Punjabi cuisine), as well as jalebis, samosas, and other deep-fried snacks so that the smell of the frying oil doesn't enter into "the clothes, furniture, and carpet." When I asked about fire safety, she told me that the garage door was always propped open for ventilation when she cooks... Her "open-door policy" blurs the line between garage and neighborhood... Describing her childhood house in rural Punjab, my *dadi ji* recalled family life in the courtyard, where an open kitchen was installed for cooking in the summer, a few *manjaas* (traditional woven furniture) were laid out as seating for visitors, and a section was reserved for domestic and agricultural tools. Inspired by the Punjabi domestic courtyard, her garage reroutes the kitchen, workshop, and living room into a singular space. ^[2.42]

[2.42] Sajdeep Soomal, "Migrancy in the Garage," *Avery Review*, April 2018, 5–7, <https://www.averyreview.com/issues/31/migrancy-garage>.

Soomal reveals how the second stove recreates the Punjabi domestic courtyard in the North American suburban garage. Similarly, my family's cooking practices recreates the socialized food preparation that once took place on the Jaffna verandah at the family dining table in the GTA. The open-air cooking that also took place in Jaffna: on the verandah, in cooking sheds, and around the residential lot, is recreated in outdoor areas around the GTA home: on the back deck, under the gazebo, in the vegetable garden, or in the garage, using movable furnishings, appliances, and objects like a dining table, deep fryer, or seeds. This reveals how the arrangement of kitchen appliances in a standard North American home, influenced by built-in furnishings (counters, cabinetry), plumbing hookups (sink, dishwasher), and large kitchen appliances (fridge, stove), are designed to hide, isolate, individualize, and undervalue housework. My family's appropriations of space when extending cooking outside of the home becomes a small act of resistance against this isolating arrangement of kitchen appliances.

In summary, furnishings and appliances can inform whether housework is performed individually or communally. However, the guiding framework of the architecture can dictate the single-use programs of rooms and therefore the isolated practice of domestic labour. Using Chattopadhyay's 'geography of small spaces' as a method for analysis, we can see the organizing

power of small-scale furnishings and their use as tools for seeking liberation within the architectural constraints of North American suburban homes. For the marginalized and oppressed—in this case, women in the diaspora as the primary caretakers of domestic space—appropriations of space using furnishings, objects, and appliances are crucial to the vernacular makings of home inside architectural structures that were not originally designed to house a diasporic Tamil Sri Lankan demographic. My family's acts of resistance against the isolated design of housework through the placement of furnishings, objects, and small appliances helps carve out what bell hooks has defined as a 'homeplace' where racialized women turn homes into sites for racial and cultural affirmation, even within the oppressive spatial organization of housework. ^[2.43]

[2.43] bell hooks, "Homeplace (a Site of Resistance)," in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1990), 41–50.

The urban

Urban spaces used or underused by the Tamil diaspora can also reveal where oppression and liberation exists in my family's remakings of home. In this thesis, the 'public' or 'urban' sphere refers to any space outside the domestic, familial realm. ^[2.44] In Hayden's *The Grand Domestic Revolution* (1981), the urban realm is understood as an extension of domestic space, in which retail spaces, transit, recreational areas, and urban morphologies all contribute to housework's organization. The book archives proposals for a variety of new urban centres, such as dining halls, childcare centres, community kitchens, commercial laundries, and co-operative housekeeping centres, in attempt to liberate housework from its individualized constraints. However, these proposals are universalizing and alienating to households where varied cultural practices take place, such as the agricultural activity, religious ritual, and social gathering significant to my family's homemaking practices as explored in Part One. These proposals therefore erase the unique foods, events, and rituals that make a culturally affirming homeplace. This section will explore alternative urban centres important to my family's remakings of home, including retail spaces, locations of school and work, living rooms, and the transportation connecting these urban nodes. I will begin by first exploring the retail spaces frequented in Amma's weekly housework routines.

[2.44] This definition of public urban space as any non-domestic, non-familial space has been used by many feminist urban scholars; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25 (1990): 71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

Retail spaces

Retail spaces are sites of habitual practices that sustain domestic life through the regular purchasing of food, clothes, and home goods. Amma's domestic duties extend into retail spaces on a regular basis. Amma recalls visiting various groceries, discount and dollar stores, strip malls, and shopping complexes on the weekends or to pass the time during her weekday

afternoons and evenings spent alone in the Huddleston basement. She would take my sister in a stroller on walks to the dollar store at a strip mall near the Huddleston house and would browse for home goods in Toronto and Scarborough nearly every weekend with Appa. She mentions how no one would ever stay home in the Huddleston house all day long, including the women who did not attend school or work, as they were often leaving the house to shop or run errands. In our interview, she reflects on her experience shopping in public retail spaces during her early years in the GTA:

The stores were new for me when I first moved. Everything was so clean, and there were 10,000 things. Mami usually drove Appa and I to the grocery store and I would stand behind him and let him do all the talking. Now, I'm the one standing in front of him! [Laughs] On the weekends, Appa and I would go explore stores and malls in downtown Toronto. I remember going to the Eaton Centre and Honest Ed's; we got a really nice dinner set there.^[2.45]

[2.45] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 3–8.

I speculate that Amma's purchasing of home décor in retail spaces served as her gateway into the public urban sphere. As décor is less of a necessity for socially reproductive housework tasks, her participation in retail space is revealed as a choice. Shopping, like decorating, can provide a sense of ownership over domestic space through choices made about the appearance of one's home. For example, the dinner set from Honest Ed's that Amma remembers purchasing over 27 years ago may have provided her with a sense of autonomy during a time of economic precarity and within the constraints of renting the Huddleston basement. Media theorist Anne Friedberg has written about shopping:

To shop: as a verb, it implies choice, empowerment in the relation between looking and having, the act of buying as a willful choice...the female flâneur, the flâneuse, was not possible until she was free to roam the city on her own.^[2.46]

[2.46] Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 36–57.

Friedberg argues that the rise of consumer culture in 19th-century America provided women with a new mode of vision, allowing for a female gaze, the power of choice, and women's mobility through an urban landscape.^[2.47] While this perception of women as consumers is rooted in cultural constructions of gender, in the case of newcomers like Amma, the power of choice embodies something more meaningful than the pressure to consume in a capitalist society, as acknowledged by Friedberg.^[2.48] Shopping provided Amma with the ability to individually navigate public space, fostering for her a sense of confidence in the public realm, even in her lower socioeconomic conditions. When considering the whiteness of the public sphere in the West,

[2.47] Mayuri Paranthahan, "On Female Existence in the Home," *Ground Up* 8 (2019): 78.

[2.48] Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*, 36.

described by Sara Ahmed as a world shaped by histories of colonialism, ^[2.49] the autonomy found in shopping makes retail spaces crucial sites for refugee integration. Shopping fosters for Amma a sense of belonging by allowing her to socially and economically participate in GTA society through public retail spaces.

School and work

Amma's integration was predicated on her understanding of English, evident when she mentions how she used to 'stand behind Appa' in grocery stores upon arrival to Canada. Her improved English directly correlates with her easier mobility in public retail spaces today. She gained a better understanding of English through school and her entrance into the paid labour force. Her integration into GTA culture therefore required a degree of assimilation. English was not learned by all members of the village diaspora, especially elderly and those who never participated in the paid work economy. School and work therefore became important urban nodes for the Tamil diaspora attempting to integrate upon arrival. Both Appa and Amma recall making close Tamil friends at schools where they completed their high school requirements; for Appa, this was at Bloor Collegiate Institute in Toronto, and for Amma, this was at the Tamil Eelam Sangam community centre in Scarborough (*Fig. 2.30*). Their new knowledge of English assisted them in joining the paid work force, where they would eventually make friends and find solidarity with other white and racialized immigrants residing in the GTA.

In Amma's workplaces, alternative economies of domestic knowledge-sharing and the informal buying and selling of home goods takes place between co-workers from different immigrant backgrounds. I can observe this at her current warehouse job, where she often brings home goods from friends at work, including fresh dill from a co-worker's garden, homemade Polish sausages, cheap towels for sale, and so on. This extends into knowledge-sharing, evident through the exchange of cooking, shopping, and gardening tips. In my family's housework practices, this has translated into the making of a tomato preserve at the end of our garden harvest each summer using a recipe shared by Amma's Polish co-worker. It also appears as stopping by a Chinese shoe store in Scarborough to pick up well-priced ballet slippers for Amma's friend who recently took up dance classes. The result of these seemingly minor exchanges is a diverse economy found in Amma's workplace. The community found in sharing domestic knowledge and goods between immigrant groups reveals how the workplace is as an important public urban space for refugees and immigrants, influencing the communal practice of housework through the transfer of cultural domestic knowledge between coworkers. The workplace perhaps embodies the visions

[2.49] Sara Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–68, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139>.



Fig. 2.30. Amma's graduating class at the Tamil Eelam Sangam community centre in Scarborough, with many extended family members and family friends from the village diaspora present in the photograph.

19th-century material feminists had for communal housework centres where domestic goods and knowledge can be shared between homemakers. Rather, this takes place in the informal diverse economies between immigrants in locations of school and work.

Amma's entrance into the paid work force also provided her with a new degree of urban mobility. Education and work gave her new knowledge, skills, money, a social network, confidence, autonomy, and the ability to integrate into GTA culture. Her second stream of income was necessary to sustain our life in the GTA even though it was uncommon for women from the Jaffna village to work. In my family-community's village, women were discouraged from partaking in post-secondary education and professional work due to their delegation to domestic work. Amma, the only daughter in her family of eight, studied until Grade 12 despite being discouraged to attend her last two years of school. My Appama (paternal grandmother) similarly stopped her education in Grade 3 to assist her mother with household duties. Immigration therefore provided Amma with the opportunity to engage in paid work. However, this also meant that domestic work became a second shift in addition to her paid labour. The 1970s Wages for Housework activists believed that outside jobs provided a false sense of liberation from women's oppressions in the domestic sphere. Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, two Marxist feminists pioneering the Wages for Housework campaign, have argued that 'slavery to an assembly line is not liberation from the kitchen sink.'^[2.50] However, for newcomers like Amma, the sense of community, belonging, financial security, and identity that paid work force offers can combat the isolation experienced at home when delegated to domestic work. Amma mentions how school and work allowed for connections she would not have otherwise made in Jaffna, with non-Tamils, white, and racialized immigrants who she fostered friendships with in the GTA. When considering the newcomer experience, locations of school and work therefore appear as important urban nodes for economic exchanges and fostering belonging in a new country. These spaces of school and work, typically defined as institutional, industrial, commercial, or private spaces, can serve as more of a 'public urban' space for newcomers than municipally recognized public spaces.

[2.50] Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1973), 40.

Counterpublic living rooms

In the Western urban literature, public urban spaces are where people meet one another and understand themselves as a community.^[2.51] However, the notion of a universal public has been critiqued by feminist theorists for being inherently white and male, in reflection of existing sociopolitical hierarchies.^[2.52] Immigrants and refugees must therefore seek alternative spaces for familiarity and comfort. These appear in my interview

[2.51] Paranthahan and Sen, "Place-Making, Positionalities, and the Profession: A Conversation between Arijit Sen and Mayuri Paranthahan," 4.

[2.52] Joan B Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Cornell University Press, 1988).

with Amma as the GTA homes of other Tamil Sri Lankan family members, which Amma recalls frequently visiting. Upon arrival, many members of our village diaspora lived in the same building on St. Dennis Drive in North York; on the weekends, they would gather in the living rooms of one another's Toronto apartments and bungalows (*Fig. 2.31*). I argue that these living rooms, easily categorized as private domestic space, became a counterpublic space for my family-community to seek familiarity in outside of their own homes. I borrow from feminist theorist Nancy Fraser's concept of subaltern counterpublics. Social theorist Michael Warner quotes Fraser:

Nancy Fraser observed that when public discourse is understood only as "a single, comprehensive, overarching public," members of subordinated groups "have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies." In fact, Fraser writes, "members of subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics." She calls these "subaltern counterpublics," by which she means "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."^[2.53]

[2.53] Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 85; quoting: Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," 67.

Fraser positions subaltern counterpublics in opposition to dominant urban publics. In my family, living rooms appear as subaltern counterpublics for fostering subjectivity within an alienating outside world. Having grown-up in Milton, I can recall frequent drives to and from this counterpublic network of living rooms across the GTA, transporting my family to Scarborough, Markham, Brampton, and Mississauga nearly every other weekend. When considering the frequency of these visits to family member's homes, in comparison to visiting more dominant public and commercial areas like cinemas, restaurants, downtowns, fairgrounds, and community centres, I can observe an extreme underuse of planned public space by the first-generation diaspora. I speculate that these spaces, often located in the centres of neighbourhoods and cities, are socially alienating to those bodies who enter the country already marginalized in society, as newcomers, refugees, those of lower socioeconomic status, and brown people. This requires the diaspora to make their own counterpublic spaces in the social and physical margins of the city—in this case, in the privacy of one another's homes. I therefore recognize the underuse of planned public space as an act of resistance against pressures to assimilate in the outside world. This persists today, even after over 30 years of living in the GTA, in effort to preserve the order of an entire community from Jaffna lost and dispersed. A similar comment has been made by the



Fig. 2.31. Women in the village diaspora gathering together and eating in the counterpublic living room of the Newlands house.

main actor of Jacques Audiard's Palme d'Or-winning 2015 film, *Dheepan*, when commenting on his own displacement from Sri Lanka to Paris, France as a Tamil child soldier in the war. The actor, Antonythasan Jesuthasan, says: 'I'm not an immigrant. I'm a refugee, and I live with a refugee mindset. I live thinking of my motherland and when I can get back there, so I've engaged very little with French people and French culture.'^[2.54] This quote reveals how analyzing the use, or underuse, of dominant public spaces can reveal where oppression and exclusivity exists in the urban realm; simultaneously, it can uncover the subaltern counterpublic spaces where liberation is sought and made.

[2.54] Jacques Audiard, Antonythasan Jesuthasan on *Dheepan*, Video, 2017, <https://www.criterionchannel.com/videos/antonythasan-jesuthasan-on-dheepan>.

Transit and mobility

Transportation to and from these urban nodes is an important aspect of the diaspora's housework practices. This was recognized by early materialist feminists who proposed utopian ideas for trams of food delivery and soundless monorails with second-storey apartments and cooperative housekeeping centres. As mentioned about my personal experience, living further west in Milton often required making the drive to Scarborough every other weekend to visit family members' homes, Tamil Sri Lankan temples, grocers, banquet halls, parks, and backyards for celebratory events like weddings, annual summer and holiday gatherings, and traditional puberty ceremonies. The car provided me and my family with the flexibility to perform culture when making the drive from Milton to the ethnoburb of Scarborough.^[2.55] The dispersal of the diaspora across the GTA, and the need to drive to visit one another, radically changed the way-of-life the first-generation was accustomed to in Jaffna. When comparing the proximity of extended family in Jaffna to that in the GTA, Amma says,

[2.55] Paranthahan and Sen, "Place-Making, Positionalities, and the Profession: A Conversation between Arijit Sen and Mayuri Paranthahan," 18.

I miss being [near] family and friends like how I was in Ceylon. There, we would visit each other's houses while wearing our home clothes [referring to men's 'sarams' (sarongs) or women's 'nighties' (nightgowns)]. We just took a bike or walked, and everyone was nearby. Here, we have to call before we go over [to someone's house], change our clothes, drive the car. We see people less here for that reason too.^[2.56]

[2.56] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 8.

The frequent informal encounter in the Jaffna village established the community as an extended family. This is lost in the urban arrangement of homes in the GTA, which disperses the community from a radial organization around a central Hindu temple in Jaffna onto a colonial grid of compartmentalized single-family homes. A vehicle is then required to maintain these extended family relations. The transition from an extended family unit to more individualized (nuclear or multi-generational) single-family households also

[2.57] Norbert Schoenauer, *6,000 Years of Housing* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003).

marks the shift to a less agrarian, more industrialized economy, where family members are less dependent on one another for domestic labour. ^[2.57] The need for a car therefore signifies the industrialization and individualization of housework in displacement, organized by the urban morphology of the colonial grid in the GTA's suburban sprawl.

The three homes of study pose different conveniences and challenges in terms of urban mobility. In our interview, Appa mentions the convenient location of the St. James Town apartment for accessing transit in Toronto in comparison to the later Scarborough homes:

I took the TTC (Toronto Transit Commission) often, and from that building, I could catch a bus to both trains on both lines. One bus went to Castle Frank, and the other went to Wellesley station. I would need to take the bus often for school and work. I remember when I moved to Scarborough, it was difficult to get around and I was sad to move there. People that stayed in Toronto would say, 'you're living in a jungle' about Scarborough [laughs], because it was away from the city, there were trees and grass, and it was more rural. ^[2.58]

[2.58] Paranthahan, *Interview with Appa*, 4.

Amma did not share the same sentiments regarding the convenience of the TTC. She mentions her difficulties bussing home with a baby stroller after picking my sister up from daycare each weekday. They eventually purchased a car to support their housework duties while starting a family. This was especially necessary for life in Milton. In my interview with Cousin 'C', she mentions how Milton was disconnected at the urban scale during the suburb's development in the early 2000s. To this day, the suburb is not very walkable and has an underdeveloped, underused transit system. This meant that women in the diaspora who moved to suburbs away from the extents of the TTC would learn to drive and often purchased cars of their own. This is uncommon in Jaffna, where women ride bikes and motorcycles, but rarely drive or own cars. This again provides women in the diaspora with new knowledge, skills, and confidence. While Cousin 'C' describes how the vehicle-designed suburb was isolating for second-generation children like herself, Amma's experience provided her with a degree of urban mobility that would have otherwise not been accessible in Jaffna.

Overall, urban spaces can foster community and assist newcomers with their integration into GTA society. Participation in the retail sphere, school and workplaces, and vehicular driving by women reveals the empowerment and autonomy gained in displacement from Jaffna to the GTA. However, this autonomy is also predicated on negotiations made with the alienating whiteness of the outside world. The findings reveal that the

diaspora feel excluded from planned public spaces and, as a result, carve out affirming counterpublic spaces of their own. Additionally, the urban morphology of single-family homes, dispersed onto a colonial grid, isolates members of the diaspora from their extended family kin, once in close distance in the Jaffna village. Like the architecture and furnishings of GTA homes, the urban realm, intertwined in domestic work, becomes a site to negotiate oppressions built into the arrangement of our suburbs. Identifying public urban spaces significant to the diaspora's integration into the GTA can allow us to reconsider the definitions of public, institutional, industrial, commercial, and private space in Western urban literature. This can provide new vocabularies, and therefore new ways of thinking about, the experience of public urban space for those left in the margins.

The ecological and bodily

While the GTA provides the diaspora with new skills, confidence, and autonomy, it is important to note that this was a result of a necessary forced displacement. Despite the joy found in remaking home, the diaspora continues to cope with feelings of loss and trauma from being forcibly driven out of their natal homes during the Sri Lankan Civil War. Architectural historian, Anoma Pieris, has described the impact of this loss for Tamil Sri Lankan women in particular when she writes, 'the displacement of women from natal homes, atypical in a traditional Tamil society, causes extreme ontological insecurity...the destruction of the home violates a gendered cultural preserve of traditional place-associations shaped by natal and kinship networks.'^[2.59] I extend Pieris' claim to include the loss of land for Tamil Sri Lankans. In our interview, Amma recalls missing aspects of Jaffna life tied to the region's climate and ecology, a non-negotiable change in the diaspora's displacement from the tropics of northern Jaffna to the four seasons of the GTA. These ecological factors also inform the body, influencing what is grown, eaten, and felt on daily, weekly, monthly, annual, and seasonal cycles.

Climate can influence where housework takes place in Jaffna and GTA homes. In our interview, Amma comments on the climatic differences between both sites when describing how she misses her open-air Jaffna home:

I really didn't like the cold weather and all the snow [in Canada]. I missed some of my home food. Our food just tastes better in Ceylon. I guess I also missed my home. I like how, in Ceylon, all the homes are open and airy because of the warm weather, and it's not scary to have open homes. Here, all the homes are so closed up, tight, and private.^[2.60]

[2.59] Anoma Pieris, "Dwelling in Ruins: Affective Materialities of the Sri Lankan Civil War," *The Journal of Architecture* 22, no. 6 (2017): 1005, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602365.2017.1363265>.

[2.60] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 8.

The ‘closing up’ of the open-air homes from Jaffna to the GTA resulted in new cultures of publicity and privacy fostered, and as a result, new standards of hygiene and cleanliness. The move brought many domestic activities into the interior of the home. This includes ‘dirtier’ housework tasks like washing clothes (Fig. 2.32), cooking, preparing food, and cleaning bathrooms, which were typically outhouses in Jaffna (Fig. 2.33). In traditional Jaffna huts, sites of cooking and cleaning were detached from the main house, influenced by colonial homes maintaining a separate servant’s quarter. In our conversation, Amma reveals the different standards of hygiene and cleanliness arising out of these interiorized rooms in the GTA:

Cleaning the washroom was very different, since it’s an interior washroom [with a seated toilet] in Scarborough. . . In Jaffna, the washrooms are all exterior [with a squat toilet] so we would use a bucket and just throw water down on the ground to clean it out. Usually, water and a brush would do. Here, in Canada, we got used to the interior washroom and all the cleaning products. ^[2.61]

[2.61] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 7.

Interiorizing the washroom therefore introduced higher standards of cleanliness into GTA homes. I speculate that the interiorizing of similar ‘dirty’ housework tasks, like cooking and laundry, and the industrialization of this work through domestic machinery, alienates residents from this labour and contributes to the higher standard of cleanliness normalized in the West today. The interiorization of these rooms is also influenced by Canada’s colder climate. Most household activities are designed to take place indoors due to the long, cold, snowy Canadian winters. Homes are therefore designed to be fully enclosed in the GTA, whereas open-air housework can easily take place year-round in Jaffna’s tropical climate. Climate can therefore influence the spatial arrangement of housework practices which can in turn affect the privacy/publicity of tasks and standards of cleanliness in housework.

Climate and ecology also influence cooking practices in the GTA. Amma recalls missing the food cooked in Ceylon, which she claims, ‘just tastes better.’ She further explains how Sri Lankan *kulambu*—a tamarind broth used as the base of most meat/vegetable curries—tasted better in Sri Lanka as it would be made with fresh coconut milk:

The first thing you have to do when you’re cooking [in Jaffna] is grind the coconut [flesh] and get milk. Here, the coconuts are less fresh, so that’s why we start every curry with [blooming] four seeds: mustard, dill, fennel, and pepper, and then [simmering] tomatoes. In Ceylon, you normally don’t need all those seeds or even tomatoes. The curries taste much better there because of the



Fig. 2.32. Left to right: Concrete washboard for laundry, located outdoors in the back of ‘V’ mami’s Jaffna house; interior laundry with a stacked washing machine and dryer in my family’s current Scarborough house.



Fig. 2.33. Left to right: The abandoned outhouse, detached from the main house of Appa’s childhood home; an interior washroom in the Milton house.

[2.62] Paranthahan, *Interview with Amma*, 6.

milk. [2.62]

On my visit to Jaffna in April of 2022, I recall seeing heaps of coconuts and their husks piling up at the base of trees in my aunt ‘V’ mami’s lot (*Fig. 2.34*). The sight reminded me of the nickname my Appapa (paternal grandfather) gave to Appa’s childhood home in Jaffna, *palamuthirsolai*, translating to ‘the place where fruit falls’ in reference to a mythological tale about Lord Murugan. The tropical climate that allowed for fresh coconuts to grow made for a creamier, milkier broth that was lost in the taste of Tamil Sri Lankan food cooked in the GTA. The recipe Amma learned to make in the GTA without coconut milk was first shared to her by Appa, taught to him by my aunt ‘K’ mami who immigrated a couple years earlier, influenced by the advice of other immigrant friends, co-workers, and acquaintances in the GTA, and made by trial and error to form a distinctly diasporic taste of Sri Lankan *kulambu*. This taste of the diaspora, using four seeds and tomatoes in replacement of fresh coconut milk, established a new taste-memory of what Tamil Sri Lankan cooking is for the second-generation diaspora in the GTA. The recipe was passed down to me from Amma which I made on various occasions while living away from home. In our interviews, I was surprised to hear that what I had learned to cook and eat was not an ‘authentic’ Tamil Sri Lankan taste. At the bodily scale of taste-memory, and at the much larger ecological scale of the Jaffna village, food allows us to understand ancestral and diasporic places from a more intimate, bodily geography. Architectural historian Arijit Sen has employed this in his writing about Bangladeshi fish sold in South Asian grocery stores on Devon Avenue in Chicago. He writes,

Fish stories allow us to see that place is neither neutral nor discrete, that it is neither local nor fixed. Rather, multiple, often intertwined, and contested stories produced at multiple locations, times, and scales sustain many forms of geographies. We discover contingent forms of memory—from the ancestral and collective to personal and embodied, human to environmental, from written reminiscing and written recipes of culinary traditions to embodied remembering of names, tastes, smells, and events related to food. Food memories help us rediscover myriad forms of belonging and peoplehood and suggest a better way to understand place and geography as an interconnected system. [2.63]

[2.63] Arijit Sen, “Food, Place, and Memory: Bangladeshi Fish Stores on Devon Avenue, Chicago,” *Food and Foodways* 24, no. 1–2 (2016): 79, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2016.1145026>.

Sen studies the habitual practice of shopping for fish and the geographies it influences and is influenced by, all the way from the Ganges delta and the Bay of Bengal to Bangladeshi-owned grocery stores on Devon Avenue in Chicago. He shifts across historical periods, locations, and scales to tell



Fig. 2.34. A heap of coconuts piled up at the base of a tree in my aunt ‘V’ mami’s front lot in Jaffna.

[2.64] Tao Leigh Goffe, "Kitchen Marronage: A Genealogy of Jerk," *The Funambulist*, no. 31 (August 27, 2020): 18–23, <https://thefunambulist.net/magazine/politics-of-food/kitchen-marronage-a-genealogy-of-jerk-tao-leigh-goffe>.

a taste-memory of fish for the Bangladeshi-American diaspora in Chicago. Inspired by Sen's approach and drawing from Black feminist food scholar Tao Leigh Goffe's concept of gastropoetics, I use the recipe for Sri Lankan *kulambu* to illustrate how the diaspora cultivates, and is cultivated by, by their ecological environments in Jaffna and the GTA. [2.64] Gastropoetics allows us to locate migration stories 'in the power of making,' similarly to how this research centres the labour of housework and home-making. Both Goffe and Sen's work reveals how the altered recipe for Sri Lankan *kulambu* embodies a story about resiliency for my family-community in the GTA. The ecological scale also reveals how the role of design in this research is not to replicate Jaffna life in the GTA, impossible when considering land, climate, and ecology, but to better understand the role design plays in the diaspora's ability to remake home, culture, and subjectivity through housework practices. The relationship between the diaspora and the built environment of the GTA then becomes one of constant negotiation and resiliency, located in the power of making and remaking home.

Overall, the ecological and bodily scales reveal how weather and food influence housework, from the interiorization of certain 'dirty' domestic tasks to the ingredients used in recipes cooked, eaten, and passed down between generations. This scale of analysis also puts into question the role of architecture in the spatial organization of housework. If architecture's primary purpose is to provide a habitat for living in, often in harmony with unfavourable climatic conditions, then the ecological scale asks architects to consider the land upon which architecture is built. How our structures provide shelter, well-being, nourishment, social reproduction, and socially organize people in domestic labour, then becomes a crucial feminist and architectural question regarding how we might be free in domestic space.

Conclusion

This chapter ultimately reveals how domestic liberation and oppression is organized at various spatial scales and influenced by intersectional identifiers such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, immigrant/generational status, and language capabilities. The three homes of study pose unique social, economic, and spatial conditions that are navigated by my family in their remakings of home and search for subjectivity. Four scales are used to analyze the spatial organization of housework across the three homes: 1) architecture, 2) furnishings, 3) urban elements, and 4) the ecological and bodily. The architectural scale reveals how unmovable boundaries create compartmentalized areas, hierarchies, and invisibility in domestic work. Furnishings are found to hold power in their use as organizing tools to disrupt built-in oppressions within our isolating North American domestic

frameworks. The urban organization of homes is revealed to have separated the extended family unit while other public spaces, urban nodes, and methods of transportation emerge are crucial sites for the diaspora's integration. Finally, the ecological and bodily create new dynamics of privacy and publicity, and with that new living standards, non-negotiable changes, and answers regarding architecture's role in fostering domestic liberation. Overall, the findings reveal socio-spatial relationships between the organization of racialized refugees and their children in housework practices and the design of our GTA homes.

03

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The spatial analysis of housework in five homes tracking my family's displacement helps point towards what domestic liberation could look like for the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora in the GTA. From the research findings, I have found that domestic liberation appears as the informal and vernacular makings of space that have allowed my family to find subjecthood and autonomy in the West. Within an overall oppressive spatial framework of housework, these small instances of liberation appear in my family's unique uses, appropriations, and creations of space. For example, liberation is found in the ways my family have remade their values (through housework practices, renovation, or decoration), found mobility in non-domestic spaces, and in locations where they gather for leisure or to perform housework tasks communally. These glimpses of liberation appear as informal, temporal, small-scale, flexible, adhoc, decorative, strategic, communal, and creative ways of remaking home. By paying closer attention to alternative forms of place-making, we can understand how my family-community and the larger diaspora serve as informal architects, experts, creators, and makers of space.

Returning to bell hooks' concept of a 'homeplace,' used as a core theory throughout the thesis, we can understand how joy and oppression simultaneously exist at home for racialized diasporas. hooks describes the importance of homemaking for Black people residing in white supremacist societies in America, revealing how domestic liberation already is and has been taking place in informal ways in the West for centuries. The innovative and radical framing of domestic liberation by past and present Western feminists must therefore be interrogated. This raises the question: what does it take to culturally analyze domestic work and speculate on spatial ideas for domestic liberation?

The first step I took towards culturally analyzing domestic labour was centring my diasporic family-community as the subject of this research—an underrepresented marginalized group of racialized refugees and their children displaced from Sri Lanka to the GTA. In doing so, intersectional identifiers uninvestigated in previous studies on the spatial organization of housework in architecture and feminism were able to be addressed. These identifiers pose frictions and limitations that impact the inhabitants' abilities to successfully remake their homes, values, and needs. For example, in the multi-family Scarborough bungalow, a sense of belonging was difficult to foster for Amma when she was of lower socioeconomic status and unable to renovate or decorate her shared basement home. The varying conditions of the five family homes allows such limitations to emerge in the findings. Using an intersectional lens ultimately reveals complexities regarding the lived experience of housework for different communities.

While making the thesis, I became acutely aware of being one of few voices studying the Tamil Sri Lankan community within the architectural discipline. However, the shift in trajectory also introduced me to a necessary world of scholars (in architecture, art history, anthropology, sociology, and feminist and migration studies) whom I could find relation with between our communities of study. These scholars are concerned with uplifting ethnographic research and the vernacular makings of space by so-called architectural ‘non-experts’. I learned from analyses of small spaces (Benchelabi, Chattopadhyay, Sahney, Supski); food stories (Goffe, Sen); refugee and migrant experiences of the built environment in the GTA (Lakhani and Sumanth, Soomal, Syed); methods of drawing- and writing-with (Cephas, Siddiqi, Tayob); memories of home for Sri Lankans (Chattoraj, Pieris, Shanaathanan), and reflexive approaches in interpretive research design (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow). These authors supported what I have described in the Introduction as an inherently extractive unearthing of writings, images, and realities regarding the Tamil Sri Lankan diaspora’s intersectional experience performing housework in the West, underrepresented in our history books, research papers, and cultural knowledge. The project therefore became part of a larger pedagogical goal and form of academic resistance to challenge the narrow and exclusive canon which has historically dominated the architectural discipline. My emplacement in the research as a child in a (dispersed, displaced) community, and the intuition, grief, emotional awareness, and insider knowledge that comes with this positionality, proposes an alternative pedagogy and autoethnographic approach that disrupts inherited hierarchies of how to typically conduct ‘objective’ architectural research.

A process of unlearning Western thought is also required to culturally analyze housework. Throughout the thesis, I re-think Western definitions of housework tasks (to include agricultural activity, religious ritual, social gathering, as well as home-making and place-making practices); space (e.g., challenging the Western urban literature on what constitutes a public space), and the overall model of housework’s liberation (by paying attention to small spatial changes rather than seeking one pure radical and universalizing model, as conceived by 19th-century material feminists in *The Grand Domestic Revolution*). These processes of unlearning, re-learning, and re-defining housework, space, and liberation can raise questions that help us imagine more equitable spatial domestic frameworks.

For myself as a researcher, the findings teach me to pay attention to, uplift, and attribute value to ethnographic analyses of architecture. By uplifting makings of space implemented by ‘non-experts,’ architects can learn from users who hold lived experience and intuitive knowledge regarding the contexts they inhabit. This shift in value can help the architectural discipline uncover realities that have long been left in the shadows, and work towards a

more inclusive discipline that values all forms of place-making.

For myself as a designer, the research also makes me question the impact of my creative hand. The architectural profession has historically employed a god-like narrative that takes on design from above and imagines universalizing, large-scale transformations of space that can be harmful to marginalized communities and can threaten their subjectivity and autonomy. By listening to and learning from my family's informal homemaking practices, we can consider design moves that put autonomy back into the hands of users. For me, the thesis research raises the following questions: how can the architectural frameworks of GTA homes be adjusted to make it easier for my family to program their own space? How can these changes towards flexibility better support my family's personal values, transplanted in displacement? How can we allow for social gathering in domestic routines, as once practiced in the Jaffna village? Perhaps non-load-bearing walls that create hard, unmovable edges become flexible screens or curtains. Perhaps inside-outside distinctions blur, where the Scarborough garden can exist in an enclosed sunroom by the backyard deck during the cold winter months. Perhaps prayer rooms do not have to be limited to adjunct spaces like linen closets, basement crawl spaces, and small dens, but can exist in the centre of the home to allow for circular movement around statues of deities, and to mimic the movement and location of the *amman koyil* (mother temple) in the centre of the Jaffna village. At a larger scale, potential policy changes may become necessary. Future suburban catalogue homes may come equipped with culturally inclusive features, such as the option for a larger kitchen, living, or dining area to accommodate large multi-family and multi-generational living, or the option to implement flexible, undefined, unnamed, multi-purpose rooms to support communal housework tasks. Perhaps kitchens move to the front zones of homes to disrupt the current hierarchy of (visible, public) served and (invisible, private) service zones. These kitchens may come equipped with an enclosed porch to re-create the Jaffna verandah and extend cooking labour outside to the front of the house. At an urban scale, perhaps front yards become more inhabitable and communal, decorated with vegetable gardens, pedestrian-friendly pavers, and fruit trees to encourage the neighbourhood foraging that already takes place in secret on my Scarborough street. Perhaps we loosen the rigid colonial grid morphology that constitutes the GTA and find ways to make existing subaltern spaces like warehouse temples into micro-centres that are more accessible and active in their surroundings, with pedestrian-friendly features, transit connections, and mixed-use programme. Many of these proposals are not entirely innovative and instead borrow from existing architectural methods such as human-centered design, the arguments for mixed-use development, and elements of space in existing domestic typologies. This further proves how domestic liberation does not require a radical new model of space but can borrow from and re-think existing architectural approaches in relation to

achieving culturally-inclusive spatial models for domestic liberation.

These changes could support the informal remakings of home by racialized diasporas forcibly displaced to the West. I turn to the words of feminist economist Katherine Gibson, who describes architecture in lay terms as ‘a kind of framework for living...the infrastructure in which one lives.’^[3.1] When our architectural frameworks better support informal placemaking, we shift the power dynamics between people and place and give users autonomy over their own surroundings. Currently, oppressive North American home designs isolate and individualize people in housework practices through harsh walls, lines, and edges enclosing people and labour into rooms, homes, urban zones, neighbourhoods, and even cities across the GTA. By providing looser and more flexible architectural frameworks, users can re-gain autonomy over the spatial conditions of their homes. What becomes visible, communal, and valued then becomes the decision of the inhabitant, allowing for necessary degrees of publicity and privacy when racialized diasporas re-make home in a world made white. I believe then, that the cultural re-valuing of housework is key to achieving spatial liberation. Borrowing from the words of early suffragist and feminist Frances Willard, we must ‘bring the home into the world,’ and ‘make the whole world homelike.’^[3.2] As an architectural researcher and designer, I interpret Willard’s sentiment as the need to make flexible, adaptable, blurry, feminist frameworks of domestic space that empower people to live non-hierarchically and symbiotically in relation with their surrounding place. Potential applications of the findings and speculations in this thesis, which I encourage designers reading this work to further build on, can extend *The Grand Domestic Revolution* movement to consider marginalized communities, intersectional identifiers, and the complexities that exist when racialized refugees and their children remake home in the West.

[3.1] Kim Trogal, Doina Petrescu, and Katherine Gibson, "Diverse Economies, Space and Architecture: An Interview with Katherine Gibson," in *The Social (Re)Production of Architecture*, ed. Kim Trogal and Doina Petrescu (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2017), 147.

[3.2] Sheila Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 67.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW GUIDE



Our Grand Domestic Revolution
by **Mayuri Paranthahan**

Interview Guide

A guide of sample interview questions for potential research participants.

The focus of this interview is to understand your daily housework practices in both Jaffna, Sri Lanka and the Greater Toronto Area. This thesis aims to learn from these practices to uncover spatial strategies that re-value housework in the West while remaining inclusive of racial and cultural differences in how we live at home. There are various areas of research addressed in this interview: 1) routines, addressing the who/what/when/where/how of your housework practices in both sites, 2) places of housework, addressing the physical architectural and urban areas in which housework took place, 3) reflections, asking personal and opinion-based questions on your lived experience in these routines and within these places of housework, and 4) context, addressing the larger social, economic and political environment in which these experiences of housework took place.

All initial interviews will be **one-hour long** and will take place on **Microsoft Teams** through audio- or video-chat. Please see the [Letter of Information](#) for more details.

For the scope of this interview, “housework” can be defined as: cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, indoor maintenance (e.g. repairs to the house, furniture, etc.), outdoor maintenance (e.g. gardening, planting, etc.), and other tasks relating to our basic needs and sustained survival.

Areas of Research	Sample Questions*
Routines of Housework	In both sites: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who did each housework task? - Where was each housework task done? - How often was each housework task done? - How long did each housework task take? - Can you give me a schedule of you and/or your family’s daily housework routine? - Did your housework routines change daily? Weekly? Monthly? Seasonally? Annually?
Places of Housework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What were the places of housework like? (Places may include: houses, property, garden, streets, neighbourhoods, markets, community wells, agricultural plots, forests, etc.) - What did the rooms of the house look like? Can we draw a floor plan of it together? - What furniture was in these rooms? Was it static or rearranged? Did the furniture influence the use, or multiple uses, of this room? - What objects were in this room? Did these objects influence the use, or multiple uses, of this room?



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who made the furniture and objects? Where did you make/buy these? - What sounds do you remember hearing in these rooms/in these areas of the house/in the neighbourhood? - What smells do you remember smelling in these rooms/in these areas of the house/in the neighbourhood? - What was the lighting like in these rooms/in these areas of the house? - Did these places of housework feel open or closed? - What materials were the places of housework (e.g. homes, market) made of? - Do you know who built these places of housework (homes, neighbourhoods)? Do you know how long ago it was built? - Do you know who designed these places of housework? Do you know what the intended use was of each area in the home/neighbourhood (if there was any)? - Who were often in these places of housework, and when? Did it often consist of the household inhabitants only? Did guests also occupy these places? At what time of day were these places occupied?
<p>Reflections</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you use these places of housework (rooms, areas, buildings) based on their intended design? If yes or no, why do you think so? - Do you feel like these places of housework were designed for you/your family? If yes or no, why do you think so? - How have housework roles changed from your experience in Jaffna compared to your current life in Canada? What has stayed the same? - What are some differences you noticed in the places of housework in Jaffna compared to the Greater Toronto Area? Why do you think these differences exist? - Did you feel part of a community when doing housework in Jaffna? In Canada? In specific places of housework (rooms, homes, streets, etc.)? - Do you miss anything from your past routines of housework in Jaffna? - Did you have private (individual or family) space in Jaffna? In Canada? - Do you feel private space is necessary? Why? - Does private space in Jaffna feel different, or offer different things, compared to private space in Canada? - What does home mean to you?
<p>Social-Economic-Political Contexts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Suburban houses in the Greater Toronto Area are largely designed based on the “nuclear family” concept, popularized in 20th-century U.S. and Europe as the most common and dominant family



	<p>structure. The nuclear family structure consists of a married couple (mother and father) and children. Do you feel your family structure fits into this concept? If yes or no, how so? Does this definition exclude anyone that you consider part of your family?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the 1970s, many Western feminists argued for a wage for housework, requesting that the government/state provide a basic income to families to support the time and costs spent on daily housework. What are your initial thoughts on this idea? Do you think housework should be compensated with money? Do you think of housework as similar to paid work? How do you think receiving a wage for housework would affect your family? - In the late 19th century, American feminists designed spaces for collectivized housework where women would do laundry, cook, dine, and take care of children in larger neighbourhood spaces. Do you think this level of socialization would work in your Canadian neighbourhood today? Why or why not? Is this idea attractive to you? Why or why not? What would you lose from this model or housework? What would you gain? - What social factors (age, gender, class, etc.) defined your housework roles and duties in Jaffna? In Canada? - How did the caste system in Sri Lanka influence housework roles and duties? Do you think there is a similar system influencing housework responsibilities in Canada? - Did the civil war change the nature of housework practices in your village or household in Jaffna? Do you think things were different before, during, or after the war? - Do you feel that your time spent on housework practices is valued? How so? By whom? If not, why do you think so? Do you have thoughts on what would make people value housework more? - Do you think there was a difference in how people valued housework in Jaffna versus in Canada? If so, why do you think so?
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**Please note that this interview guide offers sample questions of what may be asked in your initial and subsequent interviews so that you can understand the topics of discussion when considering your participation in this study.*