Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers

Royal Geographical Society with IBG
Advancing geography and geographical learning

A visceral approach: cooking 'at home' with migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand

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People's visceral experiences of food – the tastes, textures and aromas – can tell us a great deal about their emotional and affective relations with place. Questions of bodies and embodiment are increasingly becoming a focus for geographers and migration scholars. In this article we extend some of this work by examining how the visceral can shape (and be shaped by) a range of socio-political relations. We concentrate on food and eating as a central political issue and illustrate how a visceral approach can push understandings of migrants' experiences. We focus on a group of 11 migrant women from South Africa, Singapore, Korea, Iraq, Thailand, Hong Kong, Somalia, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico and India in their 'new home' in Hamilton, New Zealand. Each of the women prepared and cooked for us a dish that was significant to them in some way. These migrant women are comfortable in their domestic spaces and largely experience cooking not as a burden but as an important way of staying viscerally connected with their 'old home'. Creating a domestic space where the body feels 'at home' can help resituate and reconstitute the diasporic subject. This kind of visceral approach is useful for informing the development of social policy.

key words New Zealand cooking home migration women senses

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revised manuscript received 9 March 2009

> 'Food is significant for its ability to evoke a multifaceted experience of place' (Law 2001, 267).

Introduction

People's visceral experiences of food – the tastes, textures and aromas – can tell us a great deal about their emotional and affective relations with place. This is, perhaps, especially the case for migrants (Ashley *et al*. 2004; Kershen 2002; Warde 1997; Watson and Caldwell 2005), because food can help people feel at home, it can prompt them to miss home, and it can be a bridge to a new home.[1] It is not just what we eat that makes us who we are, but it is also *where* we eat (Bell and Valentine 1997). Elspeth Probyn explains:

> Intensely social, boringly mundane, simple or complicated, at times eating seemingly connects to the very core of our selves, at others it is just a drudge activity necessary to keep body and soul together. (2000, 1)

Questions of bodies and embodiment have increasingly over the past decade become a concern for geographers and migration scholars. In this article, drawing on Elspeth Probyn's (2000) *Carnal appetites*, and Allison Hayes-Conroy and Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2008) 'Taking back taste', we add to this work by examining how the visceral can shape (and be shaped by) a range of socio-political relations. Like Probyn, and Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy, we focus on food and eating as a central political issue. We illustrate how a visceral approach can push understanding of migrants' experiences by focusing on a group of 11 women in Hamilton, New Zealand as they/we prepare, cook and eat food together 'at home'.

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New Zealand has a population of approximately 4.2 million. Over the past few years around 48 000 people per year have been granted permanent residence through the New Zealand Residence Programme (Bedford *et al.* 2005; for summarised information on migrants in New Zealand, also see Kirkpatrick 2007, 54–5).[2] Hamilton is New Zealand's fourth largest city and has a population of approximately 130 000. Over the past 10 years new residents from 'non-traditional' source countries such as countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have migrated to Hamilton. In 2006 Hamilton's population was made up of approximately Pākehā or European (65.3%), Māori (19.9%), Asian (10.6%), Pacific peoples (4.2%) and Middle Eastern, Latin American and African (1.5%).[3] Much has been written about migration and cultural difference in relation to public space (see Ho 2003; Spoonley and Bedford 2003; Spoonley *et al.* 2003; Collins 2004), but less is known about private space. One way to shift the focus from public to private space is to focus on women, food, eating, subjectivity and visceral politics within the home.

The article is divided into five sections. In the first section we explain what we mean by a visceral approach to migration. We engage with the work of Elspeth Probyn (2000), who uses the metaphor of the rhizome to think through a visceral politics of food, and the work of Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy (2008), who build on Probyn's contribution to make some arguments about different ways of 'doing' visceral politics. We also put forward a notion of home as porous, multi-scaled, sensory and a useful site for engaging with the visceral. Second, the methodological process used to carry out the research is explained. As we ate our way through this project we were compelled to think about what it means to be led by one's stomach in gathering information. The third section presents a case study of a visceral approach to studying migration. We explain that the migrant women in Hamilton experience food and cooking not as a burden but as an important way of staying connected with their old home through a very visceral geography. Fourth, we consider how a visceral approach might inform the development of social policy. The article concludes that the preparation and consumption of home-cooked food in the kitchens of migrant women in Hamilton, New Zealand is a salient example of how a visceral approach can be useful for understanding more about the experiences of migrants, but also for understanding subjectivity, difference and power more generally.

The visceral

Over the past decade critical approaches to studying migration have become more common. For example, feminist scholars have argued that the experiences of male migrants cannot be taken to represent the experiences of all migrants (e.g. see Huang and Yeoh 2005 on 'study mothers' from the People's Republic of China and Dyck 2006 on the health of South Asian migrant women living in British Columbia).[4] Others have begun to examine the body in relation to migration (e.g. see Gorman-Murray 2007 on 'rethinking queer migration through the body' and Francis Leo Collins 2004 on '(trans)national bodies, (trans)national languages and the transformation of local urban space'). Building on this critical work we think that a visceral approach has a great deal to offer migration studies and social policy. We use the word 'visceral' to refer to the sensations, moods and ways of being that emerge from our sensory engagement with the material and discursive environments in which we live. Paying attention to the visceral means paying attention to the senses – sight, sound, touch, smell and taste – which are a mechanism for visceral arousal.

Paul Rodaway explains that senses mediate our everyday experiences, writing: 'The sensuous – the experience of the senses – is the ground base on which a wider geographical understanding can be constructed' (1994, 3). Thinking about the body means thinking about the senses, and the ways in which the senses are embedded in social and spatial relations. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy note:

> Previous work on the senses in anthropology (Seremetakis 1994; Stoller 1989; Sutton 2001), geography (Rodaway 1994) and multi-disciplinary scholarship (Korsmeyer 2007), has detailed the role of food tastes and aromas in creating and triggering cultural memory. (2008, 463)

Probyn explains that eating 'brings our senses to life, it also forefronts the viscerality of life. . . . the question of how to live today can be best seen at a ''gut'' level' (2000, 7). Migrating involves developing an understanding of different social, cultural, economic and political systems, but it also involves coming to a sensual and visceral understanding of different micro-geographies of the body, such as

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different languages, gestures, textures, sounds, smells, tastes and culinary practices. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy argue that

> addressing the visceral realm – and hence the catalytic potential of bodily sensations – has the potential to increase political understanding of how people can be *moved* or *mobilized* either as individuals or as groups of social actors. (2008, 469; italics in original)

Over the past few years geographers have begun to rethink the materiality of bodies. There are numerous routes to doing this. One of us (Longhurst 2001) has focused on the ways in which bodies break their physical boundaries. Others, such as Alan Latham and Derek McCormack (2004) and Nigel Thrift (2004) have explored Non Representational Theory (NRT) in an attempt to envisage a realm outside of representation. Still others such as Ben Anderson (2005) and Edward Hall (2000) have deconstructed binary divisions between the mind and body. Rachel Colls (2007) has examined the fleshiness and folds of large or fat bodies. Using a visceral approach is another way of thinking through the body, not just as a surface that is etched with social messages but something that encompasses surface and depth, outside and inside, solids and fluids, materiality and spirituality and head and heart. Eating involves all this and more. Probyn suggests 'eating, of course, is intimately involved with bodies, and in fact can question what we think we know of the body' (2000, 3). Jack Goody argues that eating is 'a way of placing oneself in relation to others' (1982, 37).

The visceral, then, is about feeling, but it also about the relational and the random. Probyn (2000), drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), uses the notion of rhizomes (tap-roots, like on a potato, that spread laterally and horizontally) to think about relationships and connections between the body and mind, material and immaterial, biology and the social, the edible and inedible, the non-human and human. Rhizomes 'always have multiple entryways' (Deleuze 1993, 35). They move outwards, horizontally and vertically allowing for the possibility for multiple possibilities. Probyn provides an example of a mango. She says:

> Cutting into a mango ... is at once merely technical, slicing squares into flesh, but, as the mango is turned inside-out, its surface connects with experience near and far: here its flesh is dusted with cayenne, there are memories of a lover who fed you mango in a tropic bed, the thrill of the exotic rendered prosaic. You eat and feel parts of yourself moving at different speeds. (2000, 61)

It is for these reasons – being able to think across multiple axes, being able to place oneself in relation to others, and being able to see the politics in everyday acts such as eating – that we think studying migrant women's experiences of producing and consuming food at home using a visceral approach has the potential to inform geography and migration studies about the ways that bodily processes (internal and external) affect the formation of political subjectivities. As Probyn (2000) suggests, the visceral offers a place from which we can begin to unravel ideas about subjectivity, bodies, power and difference. Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy explain:

> Memory, perception, cognitive thinking, historical experience, and other material relations and immaterial forces all intersect with individuals' sensory grasp of the world, complicating one's visceral experience. (2008, 465)

The bodily phenomenon of eating disciplines bodies in particular ways (in a similar way to how sexuality regulates bodies – see Foucault 1978). When migrants arrive at a new place there are new ways in which their bodies are disciplined, including through food and eating. Eating is not just metaphorical. It involves mouths, chewing, throats, smells, tastes, textures, stomachs, feeling hungry and feeling full. We wanted, therefore, not just to think about how the visceral might inform a particular group's experience of a place but to eat with these individuals at home (see Valentine 1999; Pratt with the Philippine Women Centre 1998).

There are numerous ways in which home is understood, lived and contested. According to Blunt and Dowling, 'Home as a place is a porous, open intersection of social relations and emotions' (2006, 27). It is a place where senses of belonging and alienation are constructed across diverse scales ranging from the body and the household to the city, nation and globe. The recognition of scales as multiple and overlapping in two directions is crucial in this research because our participants tended to have varying and complex ideas about what constituted home. Blunt and Dowling (2006) point to the effects of transnational mobility on feelings of being at home or not at home. Home can exist in more than one place: 'diasporic, transnational and global imaginaries influence, and are themselves influenced by, everyday, domestic

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experiences and practices' (Blunt and Dowling 2006, 197).

Bronwen Walter notes 'diaspora involves feeling ''at home'' in the area of settlement while retaining significant identification outside it' (2001, 206). Her research on women living in Irish diaspora in Britain and the United States shows the ways in which identities are mapped onto different gendered geographies of home. Diasporic homes can be places of both containment and potential empowerment for women. They are not static sites of tradition and culture, rather they are transformative spaces shaped by the mixing and remixing of traditions and cultures (Blunt and Dowling 2006; also see Tolia-Kelly 2004). Home, then, was an important site for this research. As Blunt and Dowling argue 'food's relationship to transnational forms of home is multiple' (2006, 217). Home is a useful site for thinking about what we eat, the ways in which we eat, who we eat with and our visceral responses to eating.

Research led by our stomachs

Like Probyn, we had a desire to 'investigate how as individuals we inhabit the present: how we eat into culture, eat into identities, indeed eat into ourselves' (2000, 2). It seemed fitting, therefore, to design a project that involved eating – that involved thinking about food, ingesting food, digesting food and talking about food. To put it crudely, this research was, at least in part, led by our stomachs.

Two of us are Pākehā, that is, New Zealand European. One of us is Chinese, from Hong Kong and migrated to New Zealand in 1990. We were assisted in some of the interviews/cooking sessions by a (white) graduate student from Germany. In September and October 2007, we visited 11 women in their homes in Hamilton, New Zealand, where they prepared and cooked a meal that is significant to them in some way. On most occasions just two of us, rather than all three or four, visited. This was partly because it was difficult to find times when we were all available, but mainly because we felt that three or four of us turning up to eat might be rather daunting and costly for our research participants. One of us, however, attended 10 out of the 11 sessions.

We found that visiting women at home tended to create a positive rapport (on how home can affect the relationship between researcher and researched, see Avis 2002; Falconer Al-Hindi 1997; Oberhauser 1997). Participants in this study showed a great deal of trust in us as researchers, allowing us to enter their homes, their kitchens, and sharing with us their stories about home, and their food. As with most research situations, there was a quite a bit of preliminary talk that needed to happen when the interviewers met the interviewees (even if known to each other prior to a 'formal' meeting). In all cases we were met at the door of women's homes, offered to take our shoes off, sat in the lounge together and explained the research in more detail. Participants asked questions, signed ethics consent forms, and received copies of our research information sheets. We asked if we could record proceedings on an audio-digital recorder (all of the participants agreed to this). We also asked the participants a few contextual questions, such as: when did you come to New Zealand; when did you come to Hamilton; why did you come; who do you live with; where are your family, and what did you bring with you when you came? After having got to know each other a little we then moved to the kitchen. At this point participants usually appeared to relax and seemed more 'in control' of the research encounter.

As researchers, we attempted to be respectful and were indeed very grateful to participants for committing time and energy to the project. We are acutely aware of the difficulties faced by migrants in Hamilton as our everyday lived realities are informed by discourses of migration and notions of belonging, home and food. Robyn has a close connection with migrants through her partner's previous employment in the Waikato Migrant Resource Centre. Elsie immigrated to New Zealand from Hong Kong and has been a Board Member of the Hamilton Multicultural Services Trust. Lynda's partner's family immigrated to New Zealand from India and it is in the kitchen where she and her 'mother-in-law' connect. As researchers we all share a commitment to social justice and to ending the racism endured by some individuals and groups.

Research participants were recruited mainly through contacts at the Waikato Migrant Resource Centre. This is a Centre where newcomers can find information and resources to assist with the settlement process in the Waikato Region. It operates in a partnership between the Hamilton Multicultural Services Trust and the Waikato Ethnic Council. Various community and migrant organisations base

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their settlement services at the Centre (Waikato Migrant Resource Centre 2008).

We explained to potential participants that the aim of the research was to use the subject of food to understand further the relationship between identity, place and power for migrant women in New Zealand. We invited participants to prepare a dish or meal for us that felt significant to them in some way. After a few potential participants deferred our request, saying 'you need to talk to X because she's a better cook than I am', we realised that we needed to stress the point that this was *not* a demonstration of cooking skills but research that used food and cooking as a route to finding out more about migrant women's lives. We didn't just want to talk to women who were 'good cooks'. After explaining this more clearly, we found that more women were receptive to the idea.

The participants were a diverse group. They ranged in age from mid-20s to mid-60s. They varied in their religious beliefs, socio-economic status and education. The most recent migrant had been in New Zealand 3 years, the longest 10 years. All were first-generation migrants. The participants lived in a variety of different household configurations. Two lived with their husbands only, one lived with her 'boyfriend', five lived in nuclear families, two lived with children and a largely absent husband who resides overseas, and one lived in a family with her mother, stepfather and ten siblings (see Table I). Three of the women worked full-time outside the home, four worked part-time. The other four were full-time mothers. Five were in paid roles, two were in volunteer roles and each participant was from a different country. The 11 countries represented were South Africa, Singapore, Korea, Iraq, Thailand, Hong Kong, Somalia, Japan, Indonesia, Mexico and India. Two of the women had come to New Zealand as refugees; the others had come as migrants via a range of different visas. Several of our participants had been granted permanent residency in New Zealand. Despite this incredible diversity, however, there were also commonalities amongst this group of migrant women when it came to their identities and their relationship to food. This is discussed further in the section that follows.

The cooking sessions lasted between one and a half and three and a half hours. This seemed to depend on the preparation time of the dish, also the time taken over the eating of the meal and who was present. Not only did we eat different styles of food at different homes, but we also ate with a variety of different utensils and shared food in a variety of different ways. For example, at Kelly's we ate squid using metal Korean-style chopsticks

Table I List of participants

Name	*Country of origin*	*Dish prepared*	*Time living in New Zealand*	*Living arrangements*	*Work*
Sarah	South Africa (Coloured)	Bobotie, brandy pudding	9 years	Husband	Tertiary teacher
Catherine	Singapore	Soup, noodles, durian	4 years	Husband, two children	Mother, volunteer for church
Kelly	Korea	Spicy calamari, kimch'i	3 years	Husband, two children	Mother
Sadiya	Iraq	Roast chicken stuffed with rice, sultanas, vermicelli, potato, peas	4 years	Husband, adult son	Volunteer worker
Phan	Thailand	Thai green chicken curry	5 years	Husband, two children	Mother
Man Yee	Hong Kong (Chinese)	Roasted chicken pieces, broccoli and prawn	3 years	Boyfriend (New Zealander)	Works in government department
Hani	Somalia	Lamb prepared with onion, garlic, tomato, cloves, green herbs	10 years	10 brothers & sisters, mum & step-dad	Tertiary student
Yoko	Japan	Sushi, miso soup, radish, cooked spinach	6 years	Husband, two children	Mother
Heri	Indonesia (Malay)	Beef rendang, nasi goreng, vegetables, 'chips'	7 years	Husband	Retired
Frida	Mexico	Tortillas, chicken with mole, salsa	8 years	Three children	Works part-time in not-for-profit sector
Naaz	India	Naan, samosa, coconut chutney, potato dish	3 years	Two children (husband still in India)	Secondary school teacher and sports coach

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and drank miso soup from porcelain Chinese-style soup spoons. Individual portions were served on plates at the bench. At Man Yee's, large plates of food were put in the centre of a coffee table and we used plastic chopsticks to take food from the shared plates to put on our own individual plates. Nittaya served food on to individual plates and then we all sat around the dining room table. We were invited to two homes in the evening and we ate with the women and their husbands. When invited to cooking sessions in the afternoon, some participants invited women friends and acquaintances (other migrant women) to join in and on one occasion a husband left to provide the women with some space. Sometimes children, young and older, would enter the kitchen to talk with their mother or to get something to eat.

In short, on all but two occasions there were more people (usually women) present at the cooking session than just the researchers and the participant. This meant that the cooking sessions were more like focus groups than interviews, involving approximately 30 people in total. At the smallest gathering there were just four people (one participant, one friend and two researchers), at the largest there were eight people (one participant, two friends – one from the same country as the participant, the other from a different country – a daughter of one of the friends and her baby, the participant's husband who moved in and out of the activities and two researchers). Ethically we felt obliged to use material only from the initial participant whom we contacted. There was a fluidity to both the conversations and the unfolding of events. A few participants involved us directly in the food preparation and cooking (e.g. getting us to stir pots, press tortillas, grind spice and lay plates on the table ready for serving), others were more comfortable with us simply watching from a safe distance on the other side of the kitchen bench. At the end of sessions none of the participants took up our offer to help with washing dishes, but they did accept a supermarket grocery voucher for NZ$40.00 (£15), which in most cases would have offset the cost of preparing the meal.

Some of the women carried out initial preparation of their dishes before we arrived. All 'interviews' were conducted in English, although through the course of the morning, afternoon or evening inevitably a variety of other languages were spoken to friends and family members. Translations in English were sometimes offered to the researchers. All of the participants could communicate effectively in English.

The 'interviews' and discussions while cooking and eating were recorded and transcribed (as best we could – there was often lots of overlap in the talking, laughter and 'kitchen noises' such as bubbling, pot lids banging, stirring and blending). The transcripts were analysed using a discourse approach. Key themes began to emerge, such as embodied knowing, agency and links with 'community'. We searched through more than 200 pages of transcripts using key words such as home, food, family, friends, aromas, belonging, love, hate and feeling.

Gut feelings and tastes of home

The migrant women with whom we cooked and shared food were very comfortable, relaxed and in control in their domestic space, and in particular 'their kitchen' (for an introduction to a two-part themed issue on kitchens in *Gender, Place and Culture*, see Johnson 2006a 2006b). These kitchens appeared to be both the heart and hearth of the home. Some feminist scholars (e.g. Ahrentzen 1997) have argued that the home, and especially the kitchen, is a major site of women's oppression. Maria Elisa Christie explains that in some feminist work '[t]he kitchen figures as a domestic jail of sorts that keeps women outside the realm of public space, performing unpaid and undervalued work' (2006, 654), but this was not the case for our participants. Cooking was not experienced as a burden but an important way of staying connected with home through a very sensory and visceral geography.

The term 'home' was continually 'troubled' both by the researchers and participants during the discussions and cooking sessions. We did not want to take for granted that the participants would necessarily understand their country of origin to be home, but for the majority of them this was the case, although to varying degrees (see Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Ahmed *et al*. 2003; Salih 2003). For example, when we asked Frida, who had lived in New Zealand for eight years, 'Where is home for you?' she replied 'That is a good question', and laughed. She then said 'I want to figure that out myself. Yeah, Mexico, yeah, definitely.' Aya also considered her country of origin to be her home. She commented that fried rice 'is just so yummy at home', meaning in Japan. Catherine told us that

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last time she went 'back home', meaning Singapore, she heard some interesting theories about eating durian enhancing men's sexual performance. The phrase 'back home' was used frequently during the interviews to refer to participants' countries of origin. Sarah, however, unlike most of the other participants, considered New Zealand to be her home. She moved from South Africa to New Zealand 9 years ago. Sarah explains:

> If someone asked me 'where is home?' I would say 'New Zealand' because I think that this is where I'm working, where my house is, you know, where I'm living … but there's an element of me that can look at some things Kiwi … and it's just something distant for me. I can't describe it right now. I'd say that New Zealand is my home, but there are things South African that you'll always miss.

The women we visited actively created a 'sense' of home, in this instance meaning their country of origin, in their domestic spaces (on 'the sensory home', see Pink 2004). There were visual displays of photos of family members (often on the fridge), paintings, artwork, kitchenware and crockery brought from home. Also, the sounds of home were sometimes recreated. Several of the women had music from home playing on the stereo when we arrived, including Sarah from South Africa and Heri from Indonesia. Heri was keen to know if we liked the music. But most importantly for the purposes of this project the women created the tastes and aromas of home every day in their kitchens (on 'the taste of home', see Petridou 2001).

Frida migrated to New Zealand from Mexico when she married 'a Kiwi'.[5] She says when she came she found it very hard because she didn't like 'Kiwi food'. 'I went to the supermarket and I couldn't see any variety in the food in the supermarket and I thought that will be one of my challenges'. In order to make food that tasted and smelt familiar, Frida immediately set out to grow her own chillies.

> We went to the garden centre and to my surprise I saw chilli plants – all sorts of chilli plants so I made my own chilli garden. I had like 30 types of chillies and everything, like coriander, and all sorts of spices that we are used to.

When her plants grew she said that she was so proud she took photos. Frida 'loves' (her word) cooking and often prepares Mexican dishes for her children. For her, food and aromas are about identity, they are about becoming settled in a new place, and they are about memories of place. Frida explains:

> For me there are certain aromas that just bring me to those days [of watching and sometimes helping her grandmother cook]. When I smell some things it's like 'oh I remember the days cooking with my grandmother'. It just reminds me of home … It takes me back … even when I cook here [in New Zealand] with some ingredients from Mexico it reminds me [of home] but it's not the same.

Sarah, a tertiary teacher from Cape Town in South Africa who identifies as 'Coloured', lives with her husband on the outskirts of Hamilton. Like Frida, she is not keen on 'Kiwi cuisine' and enjoys recreating the tastes and smells of her place of origin. Sarah says, however, that although in some ways she identifies as a 'Kiwi'

> I'd never be a Kiwi with food stuff because I come from a culture that is rich in spices. But that again is not typical for South Africa. It's the area that we grew up in. Because of the apartheid system we grew up in an area with Indians, Muslims, Christians, all sorts of mixed people. So I grew up knowing all about the Indian religion, knowing all about the Muslim religion … and all of our food is very strongly influenced by that. So we eat Indian food every week because that's what we cooked, and a lot of Malaysian food that came from the Cape Malay. So with those tastes I can never be excited about a roast [like] the Kiwis would be … it's too bland for me.

Instead Sarah cooks hot and spicy food at home. She also cooks traditional South African food such as bobotie (spiced mince meat), boerewors (spicy sausage) and biltong (dried meat).

Nittaya, who migrated with her husband from Thailand in 2002, says that although they often eat Thai food at home for dinner, her children prefer to take a 'Kiwi lunch' to school.

> Bread, sandwiches, pizza, 'cause … you know it's really hard to cook Thai food and then bring it to school and they don't want to be different, but my daughter, she wouldn't mind having, like, noodle. Yeah, they like noodle. Sometimes they bring noodle in the cup.

Several other participants also reported that their children often take a 'Kiwi lunch' to school (but not all: Frida's children like to take tortillas). Some of the children and their mothers select food that looks and smells like the lunches of Pākehā and Māori New Zealand born students, mainly sandwiches. Smells or aromas of food can function to mark students as negatively 'different'.

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Sarah Pink (2004, 67) suggests that olfactory conventions are deeply embedded in cultures. Different smells around the home including cooking smells, body odours, mouldy smells, dusty smells, scented candles, pet smells and aerosol air-fresheners can prompt strong reactions in people. This reaction is not always one that makes people feel distanced from home. Aromas, emanating from a range of things, can also make people feel connected to home. Sadiya, a refugee from Iraq explains: 'We look for things Arabic'. She is referring to ingredients and foodstuffs, but also to non-food items. Sadiya says 'We use soap, olive oil soap … they bring it from Syria, Damascus. We have it in Iraq, but we can't go to Iraq'. As she says this she holds out the soap for us to smell. Sadiya had many painful memories of her home in Iraq. Relatives, including her brother and nephew, had been killed during Saddam's reign, but this did not make it any less important for her (maybe it made it even more important) to connect viscerally with the tastes and aromas of home. Sarah, Frida, Nittaya and Sadiya are just four examples of migrant women who enjoy many aspects of their new lives in Hamilton, New Zealand, but miss the tastes and aromas of home and so attempt to recreate them – at a gut level – in their 'new home'.

Different cultural practices, different cuisines and different aromas do not always travel easily across cultural boundaries. For example, a visitor at one of the cooking sessions explained that she was unfamiliar with the smell emitted by some women from a newer migrant group in Hamilton. She says:

> They say they use perfume, but maybe it is from their food but they say because they're so many come from lower class, so they use some cheap perfume but all the women use one type of it. They smell the same. I cannot stand it but I ask [name of her friend], I said 'why have they got that smell?' 'They just use cheap perfume.' It's not from skin, it's perfume.

This comment was not said with any malice, in fact the speaker is an avid supporter of 'cultural difference', but it does indicate that cross-cultural interactions are at some level deeply visceral and it is important to understand them as such. There is often a great deal of discussion about political and religious divides but sometimes it might just be about the smell of a body that seems 'Other'. Embodied experiences, including smell, cannot be ignored when attempting to understand relationships between people and places (Longhurst *et al.* 2008). People have 'bodily ways-of-judging' (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008, 469) each other. It is important to cast light on these ways that power works through bodily sensations, through the gut.

Cultural difference is an embodied encounter and creating a domestic space where the body feels 'at home' can help resituate and reconstitute the diasporic subject. Mathee explains:

> Understanding eating rituals as meaningful and meaning-making prompts consideration of how women who prepare food come to know and experience themselves as knowers through their participation in these rituals. Acts of making food, performed in the spaces of kitchens, reveal a sense of owning and embodying knowledge attained through hands-on experience. (2004, 438)

The participants reported that at home they tend to cast off the cultural conventions of their 'Kiwi friends', acquaintances, co-workers and employers, and eat their own food, listen to their own music, perform bodily acts in their own way. Homes can be places of remembering and forgetting, of being lively and quiet, of laughter and tears as people attempt to take on the challenges of a new life in a new place. When we asked Hani from Somalia if the women ever get together to cook, she replied:

> Oh yeah, even like the elderly people, 'cause to be honest there's not much for the elderly people. There are not many things to do, places to go … so all of them, they come together and they talk about Somalia, they cook food together. So every fortnight they'll come together, someone will come to their house and do cooked food, read the Koran together, try to learn different things and talk about … what's happening in Somalia.

The senses sometimes are assumed to be a 'natural' or intrinsic part of bodily experiences and yet they are highly acculturated. Outside the home migrant women must become accustomed to new sights, sounds and smells of Hamilton. Some spoke of how small, quiet and empty Hamilton feels. For some this is a positive thing, but for others shifting to Hamilton has meant a kind of sensory deprivation. These women have had to find new ways of engaging with life in a small city. Frida says that she 'loves' New Zealand because 'anything is possible here', but coming from a Mexican city with about 12 million people meant 'it was a big, big change'. Sadiya, from Iraq, explains that as a Mus-

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lim she is part of a minority culture in New Zealand and misses some of the cultural and religious rituals and celebrations of home. She says:

> We feast after Ramadan, when we break the fast after one month there is a feast, big like Christmas, three days official holiday and people visit each other so the whole night they are awake even the university closes for 30 days so we didn't work. We'd just go for visiting at night until early morning.

Aya, who migrated from Japan, misses the sights and smells of fish markets at home. She also misses the cakes available in Japan.

> Cake is almost an art, you know? It's just so delicious, so many varieties of cakes. When you go shop and then stand at the window it's 'ahhh' ... So many fruit cake and also green tea flavoured cake or chestnut flavoured or potato, you know, just so many variety of cakes. I really miss that. You can't buy it in New Zealand.

There are some things that the migrant women miss about their 'homes' that they cannot recreate. They are, however, resilient, resourceful and adaptable, finding new ways of leading meaningful lives – often at quite a visceral level – in their new home. For all of the migrant women we interviewed food and eating were important in this process.

Developing social policy

We think that a visceral approach to research is useful for deepening understanding of society and informing the development of social policy. The experiences of migrant women (and children and young people) are often overlooked in examinations that focus on public space. Economic indicators drawn from census data do not always reveal a full picture. Migrant women often have the greatest need for health, education and social services (Ho *et al.* 2005) and yet it is their experiences that often remain hidden. More research that finds ways to engage viscerally with people's lived experiences in increasingly culturally diverse yet still often racist societies is required.

Developing new support networks, learning new skills of where to purchase ingredients, housekeeping and child-rearing in a new country can be demanding tasks for migrant women. Several women in this study told us how intensely isolated they felt when they first arrived in New Zealand because migrating had stripped them of their former sources of support. Their lack of driving skills and English language ability further increased their sense of social isolation and loneliness. These are very deep felt responses that social policy on migration needs to be able to address. For some women who did not have paid work, their daily routines had been confined to preparing food for families, child-care and other domestic chores. New spaces have to be created for these women to forge new connections and to learn new skills for dealing with their everyday living.

The Waikato Migrant Resource Centre is one of these spaces for most of the participants in this study. In 2004 a Settlement Support New Zealand project was launched by the New Zealand Government and 19 migrant centres were established throughout the country. These centres are designed to be the first point of contact for new migrants to access information and resources which are available in the city they live in. These centres also provide a platform for the creation of a new settlement support system for new migrants, and for them to connect with other migrants groups and with the wider community. However, although most of these centres regularly run orientation sessions and workshops for new migrants on topics such as taxation, employment and curriculum vitae writing, there have been limited workshops or activities designed to cater for the needs of migrant women, to give them an opportunity to share experiences and information on topics that are important to them, such as housekeeping, budgeting, cooking, shopping, child care, home safety and so on. There is also the need to reach out to peripheral migrant women who are not connected to migrant centres, and address transport and language barriers to participation.

Cooking is one way that women can share stories and build relationships at a visceral level. The migrant women in Hamilton often use food to create new networks across a range of spaces — in workplaces, at children's school functions and special community events such as the Indigo Festival and Dewali celebrations. Through the tasting and sharing of food prepared by women from different countries, these events offer an opportunity to learn about the different culinary traditions and practices across cultures. In this project, for example, one of the Muslim participants, Hani, explained the challenges her family faced when they first arrived in Hamilton a decade ago and there was no halal food available. Muslim women still seem to face challenges nowadays when their neighbours, colleagues and the wider community

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show a lack of understanding towards the food they eat, the way they dress, their need to pray and their observance of religious occasions such as Ramadan (see for example, Ho *et al*. in press). Findings such as these call for the development of social policy on the promotion of inclusive societies that value diversity and the acceptance of differences.

Concentrating on the visceral – people's gut feelings, in this instance about eating, home, belonging, longing, food, hunger, identity and place – is one approach that has the potential to 'feed into' social policy and practice to create stronger programmes that might help improve migrants' experiences of integrating into a new home. Addressing the visceral realm – bodily sensations – has the potential to improve political understandings of and decisionmaking about migration issues. The visceral is of course not just confined to food. Sounds, music, reverberations and noise, for example, are also capable of prompting highly visceral responses. Neither are migrants the only groups affected by the visceral. All bodies are inhabited by a 'visceral politics' (Hayes-Conroy and Hayes-Conroy 2008) of sorts. It is possible to think about bodies individually and collectively – to think about emotion and affect – the local and the global. The visceral can help us understand subjectivity, difference and power and the ways in which they can be folded into social policy.

Conclusion

This research to date has taught us as much about our own embodied selves as it has about the participants. Perhaps the same can be said for all research, but in this case we had to confront our own feelings about what it means to eat particular foods, and food combinations, that were not part of our usual dietary regimes. We also engaged in culinary practices, such as sharing from one plate, which felt unfamiliar. If any of the researchers had had food allergies or hypersensitivity to particular ingredients or spices this would likely have presented yet another set of challenges to not just figuratively but also literally ingesting Otherness (Longhurst *et al*. 2008). As it was, each of us was able to be very open to a variety of foods and experiences and in the process we experienced both satisfying and gut wrenching moments. Visiting migrant women in their homes to share food and stories was an intense and visceral way of finding out more about the lives of 11 migrant women in Hamilton. It was a methodological process that was inflected with a huge range of emotions including, sometimes, delight and sometimes uneasiness. These are the everyday realities of cross-cultural interpersonal relationships that need to be acknowledged.

It soon became apparent to us during the 'interviews' that the participants were comfortable in their domestic space and that cooking was not usually experienced as a burden but as an important way of staying connected with home through a very sensory geography – visual, auditory, tactile but also smell and taste. The participants had not abandoned their former food practices, although they had made some adaptations to their new space in New Zealand. They had not simply replaced their 'traditional' diets with a new one. Instead food and eating were being used as a bridge to a new home. Food can evoke a familiar sense of taste, texture and smell as well as create a new sense of taste, texture and smell helping people to create new visceral associations between their country of origin and their new country.

Lisa Law comments that 'food acquires its meaning through the place it is assembled and eaten' (2001, 275). Women's 'old homes', through food, are recreated in their 'new homes'. The taste, texture, touch, look and smell of food may not be exactly the same when it is created in a 'new home', but it does, in a visceral way, connect Iraq, or Hong Kong, or South Africa, or Somalia, or wherever home might be to a woman's 'new home' in Hamilton, New Zealand. Sneja Gunew (2000) argues that culinary practices take on particular significance for people in disaporas. By reproducing recipes from home the participants in this study were guarding against assimilation, asserting a grounded and embodied sense of themselves and their cultural specificity by maintaining particular dimensions of their subjectivities (see Goldman 1992).

The preparation and consumption of food in the homes of migrant women is a salient example of how seemingly mundane experience can in fact be a performative politics of one's subjectivity. Kitchens are important spaces for many migrant women and yet it is not a space that geographers and migration scholars have paid much attention to. bell hooks comments:

> At times home is nowhere. At times one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no

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longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. (1991, 148)

Understanding more about how women 'make' home, in this instance through their relationship with their kitchen, through food, through changing culinary practices, and through the visceral is an important dimension of geography and migration studies.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to thank the migrant women who generously gave their time. Without them, this research would not have been possible. We would also like to thank Vanny Ng from the Waikato Migrant Resource Centre, who kindly assisted by setting up a number of the interviews. Others from the Waikato Migrant Resource Centre listened to our ideas and shared their knowledge. We are also grateful to our research assistants, Annika Phillips, Cherie Todd and Carey-Anne Morrison. Natalie Oswin was a discussant on an earlier version of this paper at the AAG Meeting in Boston 2008. We very much appreciate Natalie's helpful comments. We would like to thank BRCSS (Building Research Capability in the Social Sciences) for their financial support. Finally, detailed comments from Alison Blunt and four anonymous referees helped us to reshape this paper. We are most appreciative.

Notes

1 This is a point made by Shuchi Kothari, an Indian-born lecturer in film studies at the University of Auckland, in her excellent documentary 'A Taste of Place' (screened in 2002 by TVNZ).

2 These people are from a wide range of countries, and have entered New Zealand either under a points-based system, which awards prospective migrants points for qualifications, work experience or job offers, or through family reunification, or as refugees.

3 The percentages for all ethnic groups added together can exceed 100 per cent, as individuals have been able to self-identify with more than one ethnic group in New Zealand's censuses since 1981.

4 For example, see Tolia-Kelly (2008a 2008b), who refigures diasporic identity, being and belonging in various material, sensual and affective contexts within the United Kingdom. For further examples see Dunn (2004); Kofman *et al*. (2000); Mohammad (2005); Lam and Yeoh (2004); Teather (2002); Waters (2005); Yeoh *et al*. (2005) and the special issue of *Women's Studies International Forum* (2000).

5 A 'kiwi' is a nocturnal flightless bird, which has been adopted as New Zealand's national symbol (e.g. it appears on stamps and two NZ coins). However, the term 'Kiwi' is also used to refer to NZ national identity. New Zealanders of all ethnicities and social classes, both NZ born and immigrants, often refer to themselves and others as 'Kiwis'.

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