

“It Doesn’t Taste as Good from the Pet Shop”:

Guinea Pig Consumption among Ecuadorian Migrants in New York City

Emma-Jayne Abbots,

Goldsmiths College, University of London

Abstract

This paper contends that migrants living in New York who originate from the Ecuadorian village of Jima are reconstituted as Jimeño and as the kin of those who remain in the exporting community through their consumption of cuy (guinea pig) on ritual and familial occasions. Cuy is rich in cultural capital and symbolises aspects of Jima’s social and cultural life which are locally conceived as contributing to its distinct character. Moreover, it is rarely produced as a commodity and hence its circulation and exchange plays a significant role in defining social networks. Migrants in New York acquire guinea pigs from two sources: they receive packages of the cooked meat from their female kin in Jima, and purchase the animals from local pet shops to slaughter and cook for themselves. I argue the gifting of cuy plays a critical role in maintaining relations between male migrants and their kin, and, by actively requesting the packages and making a return gift of remittances, migrants participate in an intimate cycle of exchange and demonstrate their commitment to ‘home’. Moreover, migrants consistently assert that the ‘food from home tastes better’ than that which they purchase and prepare themselves, and I assess the value judgments which are made through this discourse, contending not only that taste is culturally and socially influenced, but also demonstrating that, through the idiom of taste, migrants offer a critical commentary on the commoditisation and prevalence of exchange-values in their adopted country. Thus through their foodways migrants reassert, and demonstrate their commitment to, Jimeño cultural values and social relations.

Introduction

In this paper I examine the social and cultural values expressed through the dish of roast *cuy* (guinea pig), and contend that the transnational exchange of this foodstuff plays a critical role in maintaining kinship relations between the home community of Jima and migrants in New York by demonstrating the manner in which the sending and consumption of the dish on ritual occasions helps minimise the threat of disruption and loss by reconstituting migrants as Jimeño and as kin. My secondary argument is that migrants play an active role in this process through their consistent requests for the *cuy* 'of home', and I indicate the ways in which their valorisation of this dish, and the manner in which they contrast it to *cuy* procured in New York, facilitates the articulation, through the idiom of taste, of a critical commentary of their adopted city. Thus, in contrast to accounts which tend to stress rupture and the breakdown of kinship relations once migration occurs (Kyle 2000, Miles 2004), I contend that both migrants in New York and their kin 'at home' work hard to maintain their relations and reassert cultural and social continuities through their performances of customary foodways.

This paper is ethnographically located in the migrant-exporting village of Jima in the Southern Ecuadorian Highlands and hence, in distinction to much anthropological work on migration – particularly work originating in the el Austro region (Jokisch 2007; Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002; Kyle 2000; Miles 1997, 2004; Pribilsky 2007), of which Jima is part – my focus is upon the women who remain 'at home' and their relations with migrants, some of whom are now starting to return from New York. Consequently I explore the relationship between the two sites from the perspective of the exporting community, and use these conclusions to examine the ways in which migration is experienced by both migrants and their kin. In this paper I therefore initially discuss the exchange, production and consumption of *cuy* in Jima in order to reflect upon similar cultural practices in a transnational context. I suggest that this methodological approach, which seeks to more fully comprehend the social and cultural role that foodways play in migrants' lives through the lens of certain dishes' symbolic resonance 'at home', provides an additional dimension to accounts which primarily focus on migrant activity

in their adopted homeland, and indicates the complex ways in which transnational kin relations are maintained through customary foodways.

El Austro is:

the locus of massive, predominantly male migration to the United States and Spain and the inflow of remittances that serve to transform the livelihood of the poor (Whitten 2003: 10).

Although migration from the region to the United States was reported as early as the 1930s (US Department of Homeland Security 2006), national economic crises in the 1980s and late 1990s were keenly felt in the rural economy, and resulted in large numbers of residents, predominantly men, choosing to leave the area and enter the United States (Kyle 2000, Jokisch & Pribilsky 2002). The exact number of Ecuadorian migrants currently living in the United States is impossible to ascertain, not least because total figures for Ecuadorian migration fluctuate dramatically¹, and up to seventy percent of migration is illegal (Weismantel 2003: 331), with many relying on *coyotes*, the term employed colloquially for an individual who traffics individuals for a substantial fee, to get them across international borders. A recent conservative estimate suggested the figure to be 436,409, of which 62% live in the New York-New Jersey area, making Ecuadorians the third-largest immigrant group behind Mexicans and Dominicans in this metropole (US Census Bureau 2005). This figure is significantly lower than the 'one million' commonly cited, and revised accounts estimate the number being closer to six hundred thousand Ecuadorian migrants (Jokisch 2007), with ninety percent originating in el Austro (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002); statistics which make New York Ecuador's third largest city in terms of population behind Guayaquil and Quito, and suggest that the total number currently residing in the United States and originating from el Austro is the equivalent of approximately two thirds of the total population remaining in the region².

¹ The total number of migrants who have left Ecuador is estimated between 1.5 and 3 million (Jokisch 2007), and one of the most recent national studies states that one million Ecuadorians have left the country in the last ten years (FLACSO 2006).

² El Austro, has a total population of 806,527 (INEC 2001) and comprises the provinces of Azuay and Cañar.

These statistics resonate with my experience in Jima, with all of my informants having close kin – normally husbands, brothers and elder sons – in the United States, primarily New York. Migration from Jima is generally a long term activity with many Jimeño men having resided in the United States for over ten years. The self-evident demographic result is that the village can now be seen, in some contexts, to have effectively become a ‘village of women’. However, as will be shown, in many cases relations between migrants and their home community remain firm and there is a strong expectation migrants will return. The demonstration of the critical role *cuy* foodways plays in this process of managing transnational relations and in realising expectations and aspirations is the central aim of this paper.

Defining and Maintaining Social Networks: The Consumption and Exchange of *Cuy*

The consumption of *cuy*, which are native to the Andean region, has a long history, with archaeological records demonstrating the animals were possibly domesticated as early as 5000 B.C., and definitely by 2500 B.C. (Wing 1986: 260), and widely distributed before the Spanish Conquest (Archetti 1997: 30-31). The common animals were not owned by the Incan state, unlike alpacas and llamas, although *cuy* was not a quotidian dish during precolonial times, but was rather reserved for ritual consumption (Archetti *ibid*, Cobo 1990, Gade 1967, Poma de Ayala 1978, Sandweiss and Wing 1997). *Cuy* has thereby been treated as a specific object of enquiry by a number of ethnographers who have acknowledged both its commensal restrictions and capacity to create and maintain social bonds (Bourque 2001, Weismantel 1988), in addition to examining its ethnohistorical role in ritual and popular medicine (Archetti 1997, Morales 1995). In Jima, *cuy* no longer has a function in healing practices and its role in ritual activity is limited to its consumption at festive occasions, and subsequently in this paper I examine *cuy* solely in its context as a ‘traditional dish’, rather than explore its position within cosmological and religious performances and conceptions of health and wellbeing.

Cuy is an exceptional foodstuff which holds a special place in the heart of most Jimeños, who regard it as local delicacy and undertake its consumption with great enthusiasm and gusto. The serving of *cuy* is restricted to public and private festive occasions, although

these restrictions do not mean that *cuy* is eaten infrequently, with the average household consuming a full *cuy* meal at least once a month. *Cuy* is a great source of excitement for Jimeños. Households anticipate and relish a *cuy* meal, and its preparation and cooking is regarded as a pleasurable family activity as opposed to a household chore. Female heads of households generally make the most of any opportunities to prepare, consume and send *cuy*, including family celebrations, for example birthdays, and private celebrations of public events such as Easter and Carnival.

In contrast to the production of other Jimeño foods which are characterised by increasing reliance on new kitchen appliances and paid domestic labour, the preparation and cooking of *cuy* is a labour intensive non-mechanised process which involves various members of the family, and lasts most of the day. The individual responsible for killing and preparing the *cuy* for roasting is generally the senior woman within a household, and she undertakes this task in the intimate spaces behind the house and kitchen. Slaughtering and butchering *cuy* is a skilled and time-consuming practice, in which the lead cook is physically and closely engaged with the meat. Jimeños take a great deal of care in ensuring the animals' blood and other bodily fluids do not seep into its flesh, and the use of knives and violent methods to kill, pluck and disembowel *cuy* are morally censured and understood to impair the flavour. Consequently a *cuy* is killed through a deft manual movement which breaks the creature's neck and back, and disembowelment is a delicate and meticulous operation in which intestinal tracts and stomachs are painstakingly removed by pulling each thread away from the membrane to which it is attached.

The final stages of *cuy* preparation include the removal of the bladder, the sexual organs, the heart and lungs, and teeth and claws by hand, and a thorough wash and massage of the skin. By this stage, depending on the number of *cuy* slaughtered, the process has taken between two to three hours, with a skilled cook taking approximately thirty minutes to butcher each animal. After the final wash, the cook will then prepare the marinade to flavour the meat. Although I was informed that different marinades and flavours are available, all *cuy* in Jima, in my experience, are prepared with a similar recipe – handed down through the female line – which consists of onion, garlic, salt and oregano mixed together with oil to form a paste-like mixture which is spread liberally on the meat, both

inside and outside of the whole body. The carcasses are laid out on a tray and left in the kitchen to marinade for the rest of the day until it is time for roasting.

Cuy in Jima is always roasted on the end of a long wooden pole, normally over a bonfire. Other methods of cooking the meat for example, frying and casseroles, do exist within Ecuador (cf Archetti 1997, DeFrance 2006, Weismantel 1988) and this knowledge can be accessed by Jimeños through the various cookbooks available in Cuenca and via radio programmes and newspaper articles. However, in a domestic setting there appears to be no interest in cooking *cuy* by any other method. The bonfires for cooking *cuy* always occur at the back of the house away from the slaughter site, and it is preferred that the roasting process occurs in an enclosed and sheltered space where the smoke can be trapped, as this is regarded as adding to the flavour of the cooked meat. All the *cuyes* are cooked at the same time and, as the number prepared for a meal normally ranges between four and six *cuy*, the roasting stage of the preparation will find the comparative number of individuals sitting around the bonfire together. This is a rare communal time and those involved will gossip and chat about their everyday lives, in addition to frequently chastising each other about burning the skin of their *cuy*, as this is seen to ruin the taste of the meat. Roasting *cuy* is hot, smoky and physically hard work, and many complain of aching arms after the two to three hour roasting process. Yet, like the preparation of other customary foodstuffs which occur in communal workgroups (*minga*), cooking *cuy* is also seen as an enjoyable activity and, in contrast with the slaughter and disembowelling of the animals which is characterised by quietness, care and respect for the creature, the roasting is frequently light-hearted, and it is not unusual to observe a temporary lance fight with the children, and frequently the adults, hitting each other's *cuy* in an attempt to remove it from the pole. It is also an opportunity to steal a crispy cooked paw, one of the favourite parts of the meat and a treat which is reserved for the cooks.

The consumption and exchange of *cuy*, in both its live animal and cooked meat forms, is firmly entangled in sociality and helps define and maintain social relations. Initially this can be seen in Jimeños' capacity to procure the meat, as on the occasions they do not have a sufficient number of suitable *cuy* in their own household they rely on their personal networks to acquire additional animals for the table. Live *cuy* are not available

on the open market but only through intimate acquaintances, and hence, although they are often exchanged for cash, labour and other household goods, the introduction of money does not dissolve the exchange into an impersonal transaction nor sever the link between seller and purchaser. Rather the exchange of live *cuy* helps enmesh households through generalised reciprocal obligations (Sahlins 1965), and I suggest their sale reinforces social ties, with their circulation being restricted to a defined social network. Due to the manner *cuy* are removed from the general market and their distribution is contained to a network of actors, the circulation and consumption of *cuy* can further be understood as representing a distinct sphere of circulation. Yet, as will become evident in a transnational context, this sphere is not segregated from (cf Bohannan 1967, Bohannan and Bohannan 1968), but rather articulates with, other spheres, including remittances, labour and other material goods. In this respect, the mutual exchange of *cuy* can be regarded as more akin to the kula system of the Massim islands, with a number of writers demonstrating the capacity for the restricted circulation and exchange of prestige objects to define and maintain social networks³, and noting the way this process interplays with other economic and social transactions (cf Leach & Leach 1983; Malinowski 1984; Strathern 1988; A. Weiner 1976, 1992).

Malinowski first observed the manner in which the exchange of kula shells created a network of social actors by “binding them with definitive ties of reciprocal obligations” (1984: 510), although he initially failed to show the motivating factors behind reciprocity, a theme elaborated upon by Mauss (1990) who argued that, as it embodies the original possessor, a gift creates a force-field which draws the recipient back to symmetrically make a return gift⁴. This ‘spirit of the gift’ concept was later developed by Gouldner (1960) who defined reciprocity as a moral norm, and by Sahlins (1965) who posited a typology of exchange relations founded upon social distance. Of Sahlins’ three types, generalised reciprocity – in which social distance between parties is minimal, need is the central criteria for help, time between exchanges is undetermined, and there is no one-to-one direct exchange with a calculated equivalence of value – most adequately fits the

³ Similar arguments can also be found in accounts of hunter gatherer societies (cf Woodburn 1982).

⁴ Mauss’ explanation was challenged by Malinowski (1926) in a later work in which he contends that custom is the primary motivating factor for reciprocity.

exchange of *cuy* in Jima, and it enables the relations to be conceived as a palimpsest of ambiguous moral obligations in which help is given when required⁵. Thus, the distribution and consumption of *cuy* is not only a socially embedded practice, but one which facilitates a general social indebtedness in which all members of a network are obliged to each other.

The argument that the exchange of foodstuffs, among other objects, enmeshes social groups, households and individuals into a web of relations founded upon obligations and reciprocity, is a common theme in the Andean literature and beyond (cf Sahlins 1972, Searles 2002). Reciprocity is acknowledged as being one of the most important social mechanisms in the Andes (Bourque 2001: 90, Isbell 1978: 83), and in her ethnography of Sucre, Bourque (loc.cit.) explains that women send food to those with whom they wish to affirm kin ties, with the expectation the gift will be reciprocated. Failure to do so, she states, results in the tie being dissolved, with food not being sent the following year (ibid: 90). Likewise, Weismantel states that “to kill a *cuy* for someone...is an open declaration that you would like to deepen and formalize the relationship between your household and theirs.” (ibid: 131), and thereby she and Bourque follow Mauss (1990) in emphasising the obligation on the receiving party to both accept and reciprocate the gift of *cuy*.

Both authors centre this argument on cooked *cuy*, with Bourque developing Weismantel’s (1988: 27) observation, that cooking brings the result of external productive activities inside the household and thereby internalises the external, to contend that raw food does not invoke the same level of mutual obligation and is reserved for non-agricultural and non-traditional activities (2001: 91-92). However, my examination of the circulation of the live animals suggests this is not the case in Jima, with raw *cuy* also being restricted within a network and carrying similar social obligations as the cooked meat. Hence, the acceptance of *cuy*, whether it is in a live or cooked form, is an acceptance of the reciprocal arrangements and the social ties they reinforce, while a rejection confers a rejection of the relation and a removal of a household from a web of mutual obligations and reciprocal relations. This practice is not limited solely to the consumption and

⁵ The remaining two types are balanced reciprocity, a form of immediate and identical exchange, and negative reciprocity, in which the sole motive is material gain and social distance is greatest (Sahlins 1965).

exchange of *cuy*, and levels of over-consumption, assertive hospitality and elaborate measures taken to ensure food is not publicly rejected (see Abbots 2008), all suggest that the distribution of other foodstuffs invoke similar rules of engagement. However, as Bourque and Weismantel have demonstrated, and as I develop in my discussion below, the consumption of *cuy* has particular symbolic capital, both at home in the Ecuadorian Highlands and in New York City.

“The Food from Here”: *Cuy*, Place and Locality

In response to my questions regarding the categorisation of *cuy*, my informants consistently invoked locality in their classification of the dish as *comida típica*. *Comida típica* can be loosely defined as the customary foods and dishes of the region: “it’s the food from here”, I was told, and although ‘here’ is a rather elastic concept dependent on the food being discussed, the central tenet remains that food categorised in this manner is specific to a locality, however that locality may be defined. Jimeño assertions of specificity is commonly not, however, a reflection of reality, and many dishes classified as *comida típica* are not particular nor unique to the region. For example, *mote* (white corn) is found in most areas of highland and coastal areas of Ecuador, *cuy* is eaten across the pan-Andean region (DeFrance 2006, Morales 1995), and *empanadas* and *humitas*, otherwise known as *tamales*, in addition to other corn-based products, such as tortillas are common across Latin America (cf Gonzales 2001, Pilcher 1998). Yet the broader production and consumption of these products does not negate Jimeño perceptions of them as local, in part because many of my informants did not have this broader knowledge, but also because many focused on the particular elements of a dish or a sub-species of a crop when representing their *comida típica* as specifically local. Thus, a widely available food is constituted as local through a focus on detail and particularity.

This process can be seen in Teresa’s and Carmela’s comments in which they refer directly to the species of corn regarded as specific to Jima. Carmela explained;

The name Jima is from the corn, the white corn, not the yellow one, that is morocho and not from here, the white corn, zhima, that is from here. The

Spanish changed it to Xima, with an X, I don't know why, and now we are Jima with a J and sometimes with a G.

Teresa held a similar view, although she differed slightly in the details;

The Spanish named it Xima, with an X, because when they came here they saw how hard the workers were planting maize in the fields. So they named the village after the corn, zhima, they were planting.

In this context, the foodstuff is firmly related to place through the women's understanding of the meaning and origins of the name Jima, which they regard as an hispanicised form of the corn species *zhima*. Likewise, Jimeños relationship with *cuy* is expressed through *cuentos* (historical stories) about San Miguel de Cuyes, a neighbouring village which features prominently in the written account of Jima's history my informants valorise as being the definitive narrative of the village's past (Aguilar Vázquez 1944). Consequently, a number of foods categorised as *comida típica* have an historical efficacy and are embedded in fragmented narratives, and it is partially through their understanding and creation of Jima's past that my informants create and maintain a strong relationship between specific foodstuffs and place. I argue it is through this process, coupled with the performance of their production, that particular foods become regarded as 'traditional' and their production, consumption and exchange becomes understood as timeless and unchanging.

However, while middle-class intellectuals emphasise the indigenous and precolonial origins of *cuy*, Jimeños rarely create direct associations between specific foods and temporal epochs in their own historical narratives. This is illustrated in the narratives above, which demonstrate that my informants understand that corn was planted before the Spanish conquest, but also show that do not apply this historical acknowledgement to any classification of corn and *cuy* as precolonial. Consequently, although the history of particular foods and dishes may emphasise associations with the precolonial or Spanish past, and these associations have led writers in the region to classify particular foodstuffs as either indigenous or *mestizo*/white (Archetti 1997, Morales 1995, Weismantel 1988),

Jimeños do not make these connections nor apply these temporal frameworks to their classification of *comida típica*. This may explain, to some extent, the often ambiguous responses I received when trying to determine whether my informants classified certain foods as either indigenous or white, as rather than using their historical understandings to underpin cultural classifications of food into distinct categories based on the colonial and precolonial pasts, they collapse the eras into the singular category of *comida típica*. Thus the category of *comida típica* is grounded both in space as ‘local’ and in time as ‘traditional’.

This practice of demarcating specific foodstuffs as *comida típica* not only valorises the culinary traditions of Jima and its environs, but also acts as a differential marker between the locality and other regions by making Jima unique. When Carmela is highlighting the differences between white *zhima* corn and other corn crops, such as *morocho*, she is valorising Jima and creating distance between the village and other regions which grow other species of corn. A similar pattern occurs in recipes for *cuy*, with the marinade used for preparing *cuy* being conceived and represented as uniquely local to the region and passed down through generations of Jimeñas.

The associations between locality and specific dishes continue in my informants’ understandings of other regions as Miguel’s comment demonstrates;

Each region has a food, a special type of food and they are famous for that food. My favourite is the food from the coast, from Manta. They have delicious fish, its very tasty, and coconut and peanuts. They make these little balls, with coconut leaves and shrimp, they’re very good. You can’t get them here, they only come from Manta.

Moreover, on informing Susana I was taking a trip to Loja, a small picturesque city approximately seventy miles south of Jima, she immediately exclaimed;

You must try the bocadillos (hard, sweet cake-like breads), they’re delicious. You can’t get them anywhere else; they only make them in Loja. I remember I went there, eight, ten years ago, with my husband – his family were from

there – and we had bocadillos, they're delicious. And horchata (a mixed-herb drink, often served as tea), you must try their horchata.

The views are not solely expressed by Jimeños, as individuals from other regions also use food to define the region, as Luis, a professional from Quito, demonstrates;

Every province has a distinct type of cookery, a comida típica. Cuy, mote sucio (mote deep fried in pork fat), mote pillo (mote cooked with scrambled egg and garlic, often served for breakfast); they're from el Austro, you get them in other places but they are not so good there, they are typical of el Austro.

Likewise, on hearing I lived in the *campo* (countryside) near the city of Cuenca, Marieya, a wealthy, educated teacher from Quito, asked;

Do you eat a lot of cuy and mote? The campesinos (peasants) in Cuenca always eat a lot of cuy and mote. I don't like cuy, it's horrible and bad for you. But the campesinos don't know much; they're always eating cuy and mote.

Therefore a locality, through a conflation of historical narratives, customary food practices, recipes and reputation, becomes synonymous with certain dishes and foodstuffs, and in Jima's case, when the foods are often generic and pan-regional they are made locally specific through a focus on particular ingredients and species of crop. These foods are included into the generic classification of *comida típica*, and although this is a more broadly used flexible concept with elastic geographical boundaries, with *cuy* being the *comida típica* of the el Austro region and *empanadas* a national *comida típica*, *cuy* roasted whole with a marinade of garlic and oregano is constructed by Jimeños as specific to Jima, as are *humitas* made with *zhima* corn. Thus, an often broader regional food tradition is made local through a focus on specificity.

The relationship between food and territorial identity has been widely acknowledged in a range of contexts (Bradby 1997, Corr 2002, Cusack 2000, Guy 2001, Harbottle 2000,

Klein 2007, Pilcher 1998, Wilk 2006), and is often conflated with ethnicity, with authors demonstrating that particular foods have a symbolic resonance located in place which, drawing on Douglas' (2002) notion of boundary markers, serve to distinguish regional and ethnic identities. Appadurai (1988) examines printed recipes in the context of India, and argues that regional dishes become codified as ethnic and representative of the region. These codifications are drawn into national cookbooks and while this facilitates inter-ethnic foodways and cosmopolitanism, it also, Appadurai contends, creates 'ethnoethnicity' and a culinary other (ibid: 14-18). The process can also create a culinary self; a point exemplified in Ayora-Diaz and Vargas-Cetina's (2005) account of Yucatan foodways which are defined and articulated in opposition to the Mexico core, and lead the authors to conclude that consumption of local dishes "is turned into a defining marker of local identity" (ibid: 172).

These practices raise clear questions regarding the politics of representation vis-à-vis national and regional cuisine, and, as Marieya's narrative above highlights, this process can facilitate negative stereotyping and regional othering. Yet Jimeños use the perceived locality and specialism of their dishes to root themselves to Jima, and in valorising *cuy* as the local customary food *par excellence*, they create a dish which is rich in cultural capital and symbolises aspects of the region's social and cultural life – its past, its customs and its unique recipes – which are locally conceived as contributing to its distinct character. Thus *cuy* is laboured over, painstakingly prepared and only exchanged within close social networks, and its preparation and consumption is the performance of a tradition locally understood as timeless and continual. *Cuy* can thereby be understood as a socially embedded object, and one which is imbued with the love and care of the cook. This practice, I contend, is not only central to the constitution of the self and kin as Jimeño, but is also a mode of maintaining intimate relations, and I now turn to develop this theme in the context of transnational migration, showing that the sending of food packages to migrants collapses both time and space and (re)constitutes migrants as Jimeño and as kin.

***Cuy* and Migrants: The Receipt of Food Packages**

One evening during the initial stages of my fieldwork I entered Maria's kitchen and was greeted by the sight of her sister, Teresa, standing at the kitchen sink rinsing blood from a freshly plucked and slaughtered guinea pig. "For the United States" she explained, "for Don Pepe; he asked", and nodded her head in the direction of the back garden where I found Don Pepe's wife, Maria, tending to the bonfire over which the carcasses would be roasted. She informed me her husband had telephoned from his apartment in Queens and requested a number of roast *cuy* to be sent as soon as possible, as he had woken that morning craving "the food of home".

I soon became accustomed to observing Jimeñas prepare, roast and package *cuy* for migrant consumption, as they send the meat to their migrant kin, not only on request, but also for public and private celebratory events. Birthdays, anniversaries, public holidays and ritual celebrations are all occasions for sending the meat, cooked whole and nestled among kernels of *mote*, with Jimeñas paying approximately forty dollars to a specialist courier service to transport the package across international borders. Each package, which generally contains two to three whole *cuy*, usually arrives safely at its final destination in the U.S.A. within five days. Jimeñas do not just send packages to their husbands for their own private consumption, but will mail enough meat for all members of their husband's North American household unit. As these units are often kin-based, a Jimeña is therefore not only supplying food to her husband, but is also often feeding her sons, nephews and cousins.

Cuy and *mote* consequently join videotapes, photographs, remittances, clothing and migrants in forming a continual flow of goods and people between a Jimeño household and its North American satellite. Generally, dollars and clothing for both women and children, often with US emblems and logos, are sent southwards to Jima, while food packages and video recordings of ritual events, household celebrations and personal messages, travel to the United States. Both parties send photographs, and during my fieldwork I was asked by my Jimeño friends to take a number of stills, primarily of their children during ritual and educational occasions, which were then sent to migrants, in

addition to being shown a number of photograph albums which they had received. The latter contain a mix of personal and generic images, including migrants eating at fast-food outlets, working at construction sites and enjoying fiestas in their apartments, in addition to pictures of New York landmarks, with the Twin Towers and the events of September 11th 2001 being particularly common⁶. Telephone calls and, in some cases emails, also circulate between the two household units and although it is not possible to quantify the frequency of calls accurately, weekly contact is not uncommon, and both migrants and Jimeños initiate telephone contact.

The application of exchange theory enables this cycle to be understood as a practice which enables both Jimeños and their migrant kin to minimise the threat of loss and maintain a presence in each others' household units despite the physical distance between them. However, a question remains regarding the reasons *cuy* is favoured over alternative customary foodstuffs, and this can be answered, in part, by critically unpacking the Jimeño concept of 'travelling well' and understanding the local cultural capital of the dish.

Cuy is good to send to the United States; chicken, it's not worth it, it doesn't travel well; pork is the same, it doesn't travel well. It's not worth it. It doesn't keep, when they get it, it's rotten, it's horrible. But cuy and mote, they're always fresh, they stay tasty (Doña Victoria)

The exchange of *cuy* and commensality creates and reaffirms intimate social networks and demonstrated that constitutes a social contract in which members of an intimate social network become generally indebted to the others. Accepting a gift of *cuy* thereby provokes a return gift. Applied to a transnational context, this practice can be regarded as having parallel social implications, with Jimeños incorporating the North American branch of their household into their cycle of exchange through their sending of *cuy* and receipt of return gifts. Due to their physical location, migrants are not, however, in a

⁶ Weismantel (2003: 330-331) observes that, although the attacks on the World Trade Centre is regarded as a US disaster, a number of those killed were Ecuadorian citizens. The events of September 11th 2001 continue to resonate in Jima, and a number of my informants would recount, unprompted, their own personal memories and the fear they felt for their loved ones on that day.

position to reciprocate their gift of *cuy* with other Jimeño or self-produced foodstuffs, although they are able to reciprocate with remittances and gifts from New York. These exogenous gifts and money are transformed and 'depolluted' through women's labour and we can conceive of this transnational circulation of goods and money as an exchange of labour; women send food manually produced and imbued with love and the essence of home and men reciprocate with the products of their waged labour, US dollars and American consumer items. Seen through this lens, the labour intensive process and exclusion of mechanical intervention is not incidental, but is rather central to the production of *cuy* and *mote* in this intimate context for, in order for the exchange to be morally viable, Jimeñas have to prepare and cook the *cuy* by their own hand, rather than rely on the numerous appliances and domestic labourers they have at their disposal.

Exchange in the Andes has often been interpreted in terms of labour, rather than objects (Harris 2007) and labour exchange systems are firmly established as a mode of maintaining relations founded upon generalised mutual obligation and reciprocity in Jima. Understanding the transnational cycle of exchange between migrants and their Jimeño kin in this manner enables us to conceive the system as somewhat open, as exogenous and new types of objects, for example money and clothing, are incorporated with apparent ease. This perspective differs from accounts of the closed exchange systems of prestige goods, for example the *kula* system (cf Malinowski 1984, Munn 1986, A. Weiner 1988), yet this latter literature, in highlighting the central role specific objects play in symbolising labour processes, suggests that, even in more open systems, the specificity of the objects exchanged are not inconsequential. Subsequently, viewing the exchange of goods as an exchange of labour does not mean the material objects exchanged should be regarded solely as signifiers of labour and any items produced by migrant and Jimeño labour can be incorporated into the cycle, and I contend the materiality, social role and cultural meaning of *cuy*, not just the labour it represents, is central to Jimeños' efforts in ensuring that migrants remain rooted to their Jimeño household.

By acknowledging the cultural significance of *cuy* in Jima, we can see that the contents of packages sent to migrants are not just any foodstuffs but are the two items most firmly

associated with Jima and being a Jimeño social actor, and consequently its exchange and consumption is laden with social meaning. From this perspective, Doña Victoria's comment above, that only *cuy* and *mote* 'travel well', have deeper significance than solely referring to the vagaries of meat decomposition, and the food she rejects, chicken and pork, do not have the same cultural and social resonance. I therefore suggest the dishes selected enable Jimeñas to remind their migrant kin of their true familial home, with the food acting as a reminder, not only of a migrant's kin group and his moral obligations to that group, but also of Jima as a place, and most importantly, the place of his true familial home and source of personhood.

As Proust's (1981) seminal discussion of *petites madeleines* highlights, food can play a significant role in provoking memories, effectively transporting the consumer across time and space. This argument has been developed ethnographically by both Sutton (2001) and Ben-Ze'ev (2004), with the latter explicitly addressing the role food plays among migrant communities in their constitution of their homeland⁷. Ben-Ze'ev discusses the practices of Palestinian refugees who were relocated from their home villages during the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and contends their consumption of specific herbs, greens, mushrooms and summer fruits enables a temporary recreation and recollection of their pre-1948 past and she thereby emphasises the significant role taste and smell play in the retrieval of memories. Moreover, she demonstrates tastes are abstracted and their origins, which in this context are specific plants, gradually become symbolic of a displaced person's homeland. Consequently, "taste or merely the discourse about taste is associated with a collective belonging" (ibid: 152), and thus act as identity markers for a diaspora.

In her account Ben-Ze'ev draws on a growing body of work which explores the relationship between bodily practice, the senses and memory, and her discussion implicitly echoes accounts of migrants who remember and reconstitute their homeland through other embodied practices, for example singing. This process has been detailed by Hoffman (2002) in her account of the Ishelin Berbers in Morocco, in which she utilises phenomenological perspectives to argue that urban migrants use song and language to

⁷ See also Ray (2004) for a similar discussion of food and nostalgia amongst migrants.

constitute the *tamazirt* (home countryside), and bring forward the collective past which is perceived to be encoded within it. Thus, she argues the embodied practice of singing, as with the tasting and smelling of specific foods, plays a crucial role in migrants' constitution of their homeland. Weismantel (2003) and Kyle (2000) have commented on a similar practice in an Ecuadorian context, and both authors further show that *cuy* figures in migrants' poetry, songs and on-line discussions of their el Austro homeland. Hence, in a process similar to that described by Ben-Ze'ev, *cuy*, alongside other images of el Austro, is abstracted through migrant discourse and has become a powerful symbol of home. Particular foodstuffs therefore become embedded within narratives, and this suggests it is not only the consumption of these foods which remind migrants of home, but also the discourse with which this consumption is entangled.

The process of reminding migrants of Jima and their Jimeño kin is reinforced by the practice of sending packages on ritual and festive occasions which contain food to which commensal restrictions are attached, as this can be seen to gently coerce migrants into acknowledging and participating in these geographically distant events. Migrants not only receive food packages for major events in Jima's ritual calendar, for instance Easter, Christmas and the Fiesta de la Virgen del Rosario, but also for family specific occasions, particularly those which are centred on their children including birthdays and life-cycle events, for example, First Holy Communion. Life-cycle events appear to present Jimeños with the greatest opportunity to exploit the moral ties embedded in exchange cycles, and I observed the largest packages being sent on these occasions. These packages included *cuy*, photographs of the event and the Jimeño house, and videotapes on which personal messages from every household member and images and commentary of house-building had been recorded, and their receipt would often result in a prompt return gift of remittances.

The sending of packages at these times thereby enables migrants to participate in family and household events, and consequently by eating the same food at a similar time, migrants and their Jimeño kin can be seen to share a celebratory meal and a festive occasion, despite their physical distance. The argument that commensality defines social networks in the context of kin relations is taken up by Carsten (1997), who explains that

kinship and personhood should be seen as a process in which individuals become kin through commensality⁸, and states that “eating together creates shared blood, that is, kinship” (ibid: 4). The context of Jima differs from that which Carsten describes as migrants are established consanguines and affines to their Jimeño households before their migratory journey, and thus they are not strangers who have to be incorporated into a household. Yet, a processual rather than structural perspective of kinship suggests that, due to their physical distance, migrants have to be consistently reincorporated and remade as kin, as there is a constant threat of loss, disruption and fragmentation. Thus I contend the practice of ‘eating together’ effectively collapses space between the two household branches and reaffirms migrants’ position as kin and members of a household’s intimate social network.

In receiving and consuming festive food packages on key dates, migrants’ time can also be seen, to some extent, to be governed by Jima’s ritual and their Jimeño kin’s calendar; a process which, following Bourdieu (1977), further remakes migrants as Jimeño. In his discussion of *habitus*, Bourdieu shows how the rhythms of life, including the times in which cooking, eating and ritual performance occur, constitute actors as cultural beings, as they conform to unquestioned social patterns. As he explains; “doing one’s duty as a man means conforming to the social order, and this is fundamentally a question of respecting rhythms, keeping pace, not falling out of line” (ibid: 161). Thus, it is through the temporal and spatial practices which comprise the unquestioned realm of *doxa* that solidarity is asserted and maintained, and I suggest this can be applied to a migratory, transnational context to understand the continual relations between Jimeños and their migrant kin. Moreover, Bourdieu demonstrates social actors are made through their bodily practices, a theme which is also apparent in discussions which stress the very particular role food plays in constituting personhood.

⁸ For similar perspectives in the Ecuadorian context, see also Bourque (2001) and Colloredo-Mansfield (2003). An analogous cross-cultural perspective can be found in Bear who notes; “people expressed their continuing relationships with relatives living abroad by sending them elaborate food parcels. Non-related individuals were incorporated into households through the medium of food (2007: 41).

As Fischler (1988) has forcefully argued through the principle of ‘incorporation’, food is a particularly powerful medium in the constitution of personhood due to the manner in which it is ingested (or incorporated). Thus, due to its physical attributes and its consumption, food can be theoretically conceived to literally produce individuals as cultural beings. This perspective can be discerned in my informants’ views of *cuy* which imply that consuming the dish, and taking pleasure in the process, are intrinsic aspects of ‘being Jimeño’. For example, during my first *cuy* dinner, Teresa told me:

Don’t worry if you don’t like it. It has a strange taste, but keep eating it. You will learn to like it; the more you eat it, the more you will like it. You have to like it, you will be more like us then – you will be Jimeña.

Susana continued;

*And you will learn the chola Cuencana and the national anthem, just like my husband in the United States – he has to learn the national anthem to be American, to be a citizen. It is the same, you will learn the songs and eat *cuy* and be a citizen of Jima!*

Moreover Maria took a great deal of pride in her son’s professed love of *cuy*, which was a frequent topic at the dinner table;

*Look at him eat, how many pieces is that, three, four? Pablito always eats so much *cuy*. When he was a little, you know, very young, one or two years old, he would always want *cuy*. “Mami” he would say, “when can we have *cuy*?”, “are we having *cuy* today Mami?” he would say. He loves it! It is because he is a son of Jima; he is a good Jimeño; that is why he loves his *cuy*!*

Susana’s statement has clear implications on the way citizenship and belonging in a transnational context is locally understood, although all the comments demonstrate that, rather than conceiving identity as fixed and static, Jimeños understand personhood as a process in which individuals are made in a certain guise through their embodied practices of eating customary dishes and singing local songs. This parallels Carsten’s (1997)

perspective that kinship is a process in which individuals become incorporated into a family unit, and it highlights the need to remake migrants as Jimeño by demonstrating their Jimeño identity as is not regarded as immutable, but rather is in danger, as Susana's comment illustrates, of being lost and replaced by another form. Moreover, my informants narratives also demonstrate the important role pleasure and desire play in the constitution of Jimeño personhood; it is not sufficient just to eat *cuy*, actors also have to articulate an enjoyment of the dish to be perceived as a 'good Jimeño'.

Similar arguments are found in a migratory context in the work of Strathern (1988) and Jolly (1994). Jolly demonstrates that foodways in Vanuatu are both gendered and related to social status, with yams being associated with masculinity and taro with femininity and newborn babies. For example, yams are excluded from birth but are central to male circumcision rituals, as adult men identify with long strong yams (Jolly, *ibid*: 168), and hence a direct equation between the food consumed and the bodily (and social) state is made. Subsequently, as Strathern's interpretation highlights, male migration weakens the body as men consume the exogenous foods of rice, tinned fish and corned beef. However the body, she notes, can be replenished during the yam harvest, and thus Strathern shows that symbolically resonant food from the homeland can counteract the potentially dangerous exogenous foods consumed by migrants, helping minimise their assimilation into their host country or region and aiding the process of maintaining their home personhood. Viewed through this lens, packages of *cuy* and *mote* therefore help neutralise the threat of North American food and remake a migrant Jimeño⁹.

The contradiction here is that Jimeños residing in Jima do not have any prohibitions or articulated discourse concerning exogenous foods, and consistently consume non-local produce in their efforts to represent their households as modern. Yet, while they consume these foods on an everyday basis, as do migrants – as the numerous photographs of them

⁹ In addition, Gonzales (2001) highlights that corn has a particular moral quality and is regarded as a plant-person in Talea, Oaxaca, and suggests the source of production, not just exchange and consumption are central to a food's role in the constitution of personhood. However, he does not expand upon this thesis, preferring instead to focus on dietary requirements, nutrition and the rationality of local agricultural practices. While it is preferential for *cuy* has to be reared locally, there is little evidence that Jimeños place any emphasis on the source of corn and this indicates the value they play on the transformative capacity of women's labour.

eating at fast food outlets testify – Jimeños take a number of measures, as I discussed above, to ensure customary foodways are followed on ritual and festive occasions. Hence there is a constant tension between embracing change and modernity and upholding custom which is managed through spatial and temporal practices. This tension is also apparent for migrants, as they are pulled in two opposing directions; towards their host country of the United States and disruption and loss, and towards their familial home in Jima and continuity. Food packages do not therefore solely remake migrants as Jimeño, but also help constitute them as a particular, ideal, type of Jimeño, one who upholds the moral values of reciprocity, acknowledges and valorises custom and acts responsibly to their kin¹⁰.

This indicates Jimeña women are not only central to the process of remaking migrants as Jimeño and as kin, but also play a critical role in the reproduction of custom both in Jima and transnationally. A similar point has been made by Strathern, who contends that ‘women are society’ (1988: 77) in her discussion of gender relations and the theory of the gift in the migratory context of Hagen (Melanesia). She explains that male migrants recreate an adolescent culture, seeing themselves as carefree and avoiding the political world and responsibilities of mature male Hageners, while perceiving women as representing adulthood, domestic responsibility, reciprocity and interdependence. For women, however, gifts and money are the central purpose for the migratory journey, and when migrants fail in their duties and do not send goods they are labelled ‘rubbish’. Thus, Strathern argues, it is through the actions and requests of women that migrants’ thoughts are drawn back to their home community and social obligations, and she concludes;

They [migrants] in turn might be able to ignore the politics and rhetoric of senior men, but find it much harder to denigrate the claims of women. It is easier for them to cast themselves sardonically into the role of rubbish men than it is to deny appeals to that interdependence with others which both constitutes and symbolizes sociality itself (1988: 91).

¹⁰ This image differs significantly to that promulgated by the Jimeño professional elite who represent migrants and their families as disruptive to continuity and as the source for a perceived breakdown in moral society.

Women therefore, by provoking reciprocal arrangements and reminding migrants of their moral duties through their gifting of food, enable the reproduction of society. However, in contradistinction to Strathern's depiction of migrants, those from Jima are not passive recipients of the actions of their female kin. It could be argued that migrants have the capacity to reject food packages, together with the cultural and social norms they exemplify, through a variety of means, including choosing not to consume or share the *cuy* and *mote* or make a return gift, and Strathern is not alone in observing that their geographical removal from the home community theoretically provides migrants with greater freedom to reject cultural values (cf Kyle 2000, Miles 2004). While I argue more generally that the view from the exporting community suggests this freedom has been over-stated and migrants remain obliged to their kin (Abbots 2008), in the context of accepting food and hospitality, I concede that spatial distance makes the rejection of food socially easier than in a face-to-face environment. However, the evidence from Jima indicates migrants are actively engaged in relocalising themselves to the village and to their kin.

“Cuy from the Pet Shop doesn't Taste as Good”

The focus of my research is not migrants in the United States but rather those Jimeños who remain and return, and therefore my primary data on migrant actions in New York is limited. However, the frequency in which my informants sent food parcels to their kin and received calls acknowledging their safe receipt is telling, and many, as Teresa's statement above exemplifies, sent packages in response to migrant requests. This perspective is supported by Don Pepe, who returned to Jima after eleven years, and informed me that he and his friends in New York often asked for *cuy* to be sent 'from home': offering the following explanation when I asked him which Ecuadorian foods are available in the United States;

Zhumir (sugar cane alcohol), you can always get zhumir; there are plenty of bars, and they serve zhumir. Cuy, you can't get cuy. Well, you can, but it's not the same. One day, my friends and I, we craved cuy. I remember we wanted it so badly. But, we couldn't get any; and we wanted it then,

immediately. So, we went to a pet shop, in the middle of New York and bought a cuy. They weren't so good for eating, too thin, the ones here, they're much fatter, there is more meat. In New York, they're pets, they're not meant for eating. Can you believe it? We were there, my friends and I in the middle of a pet shop in New York trying to find the fattest ones! Well, we bought two, took them home and killed them in the bathroom. But we didn't have much space for cooking, no garden, so we lit a fire in the room, with a gas burner, and cooked them that way. They were OK; it was cuy, but not as good as the ones from home. Now, I always get cuy sent from home, they taste better. The ones from the pet shop don't taste as good.

Don Pepe's comments can be interpreted as a desire for the food of home, yet his narrative also demonstrates Jimeña women are not lone actors engaged in pushing food packages onto their migrant kin. *Cuy* is requested by migrants, and as my informants gave me no reason to suggest migrants are not aware of the social and cultural values associated with their receipt and consumption of the dish, it appears they are encouraging the transnational cycle of exchange and their obligations to their Jimeño home and kin. In demonstrating their desire for *cuy* and articulating their pleasure in consuming the dish migrants can be seen to be expressing their Jimeño personhood. Hence, I suggest, a request for *cuy* can be interpreted as a request to be remade as Jimeño. Don Pepe's narrative also stresses the way in which *cuy* from home 'taste better' than those acquired locally in New York; a discourse which parallels Jimeño critiques of *cuy* which are procured and prepared in a non-traditional manner.

The discourse of *cuy* in Jima is dominated by the idiom of taste, and I suggest it is through this idiom that both migrants and those who remain 'at home' articulate a commentary on social change and potentially disruptive exogenous forces. My informants consistently told me that the taste of *cuy* could be adversely affected by three factors – the way the animals are reared, the method of slaughter and the way they are cooked – and during a meal a number of judgements are made against a set of criteria. The first concern is that a creature must have been fed on local grass and *zhima* corn, as Teresa explains;

We have delicious local cuy here, fed on local grass. Our cuy is the healthiest, most natural and tastiest. It's fed on local grass for a delicious flavour.

It was further explained that violently killing the *cuy*, for instance smashing the head with a hammer or stone or slitting the creature's throat, and butchering the creatures with knives, impairs the flavour, making it taste 'bad' or 'bitter', as opposed to "rico" (delicious), by encouraging the blood, urine and faeces to enter the meat. These slaughter methods were always met with disapproval and are regarded as unnecessarily violent and unskilled. I never observed any of my informants using them, and migrants appear to be the only actors who had tasted 'bitter' meat, but that did not inhibit all of my informants from expressing opinions regarding the right and wrong methods of preparation. Their views appear to be based less on actual sensuous experience and more on values which stress a continuity of practice that does not deviate from the established mode of preparation founded upon skill, care and physical engagement. Archetti (1997: 57) notes a similar discourse, and couches his analysis in the moral valuations underpinning notions of good and bad deaths. This is evident in Jima, with a clean, skilled despatch being regarded as a good slaughter in contrast to a violent bad death, although I suggest, when viewed alongside Jimeños' comments on cooking methods rather than in isolation, the discourse on slaughter is more indicative of concerns regarding continuity and change.

'Modern' cooking equipment such as ovens, microwaves and spit-roasting machines are also regarded as detrimental to the flavour, as Maria told me;

I tried cooking cuy in the oven once, it was horrible! It was soft, not crispy like it should be. And it didn't taste smoky; a good cuy should taste smoky. That's why you need a bonfire; you can't cook good cuy without a bonfire, it won't taste as good.

In making this statement I suggest that Maria is valorising the sociality of roasting *cuy* at home by contrasting the bitter *cuy* prepared by an individual in an oven to the tasty *cuy* prepared collectively over a bonfire. Consequently a hierarchy of taste can be discerned,

in which locally-reared *cuy* that is exchanged between members of an intimate social network, slaughtered and butchered in a skilled and careful manner, and cooked and consumed with love and sociality is placed above that which is acquired through alternative sources and produced rapidly, impersonally, and with the aid of new technology. Thus, *cuy* prepared in the manner locally understood as ‘timeless’ and ‘traditional’ are elevated above those prepared through ‘modern’ or exogenous methods.

As Don Pepe’s narrative demonstrates, this hierarchy is also evident in the discourse of migrants, with the *cuy* purchased from pet-shops being understood as not tasting as good as those from home. I thereby suggest these judgements are based less on the actual physical taste of the dish, but are rather founded upon cultural and social values which stress continuity, kinship, sociality and locality; in this context, the sensuous experience of eating good-tasting, *rico* food is shaped by social relations and cultural values. *Cuy* purchased and cooked in New York does not taste as good as those received from their kin in Jima, partly because they are sourced from exogenous sites, but also because they are purchased as a commodity. I suggest that for *cuy* to be *rico* to migrants the meat has to originate from home, be imbued with the personal labour of kin, and form part of an exchange cycle. Thus, the use-value of *cuy* is elevated above the exchange-value through the idiom of taste. Moreover, just as Jimeños at home use the idiom of taste to express their critical commentary vis-à-vis social change and reassert continuity and locality, migrants also appear to be utilising a similar discourse and can be seen to be implicitly criticising the commoditisation and prevalence of exchange-values in their adopted city in their comparison of *cuy* dishes. Consequently, in requesting and valorising *cuy* ‘from home’ over that from New York migrants appear to be reasserting, and demonstrating their commitment to, not only their kin relations in Jima, but also the cultural values they conceive as Jimeño, contrasting this moral integrity and sociality to the individualistic and commoditised world of New York in which they currently live.

Conclusion

Cuy is therefore a particularly powerful gift for Jimeñas to send to migrants. Rich in cultural and social capital, its customary production by manual labour imbues the meat

with love and a sense of home, and its exchange reaffirms and maintains social networks and provokes a return gift. The receipt and consumption of *cuy* on ritual and familial occasions remakes migrants as kin and as Jimeño, helping counter potentially disruptive exogenous forces and keeping the Jimeño household ever-present in migrant apartments. The consumption of *cuy* also enables both migrants and Jimeños to articulate, through the idiom of taste, a critical commentary of the rapidly changing social environments in which both groups are now living, and facilitates a reiteration and reassertion of cultural values which are locally understood as both timeless and uniquely Jimeño. Thus, the production, consumption and exchange of *cuy* becomes one of the core vehicles for constituting Jimeño personhood in an transnational context.

These conclusions become possible by taking a methodological approach which first seeks to understand the cultural and social significance of a foodway in its local context in order to reflect upon the relationship between food and migration, and understand the locally salient ways in which transnational kin relations are experienced by both migrants and those who remain in the exporting community. From the ethnographic position of an exporting community and by analysing the nature of the relations between home and migrant sites, a picture emerges that challenges accounts which stress rupture and the breakdown of kinship (Kyle 2000, Miles 2004) by demonstrating that migrants and their kin utilise customary foodways in their efforts to minimise the threat of loss and maintain their relations. Thus, local food practices and the symbolic capital of particular dishes, in this context *cuy*, are being adapted to a transnational and migratory context in order to ensure that migrants remain rooted and re-localised to their home community.

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