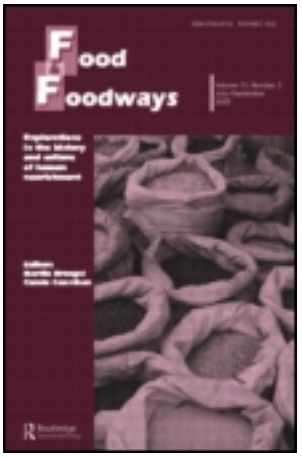

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Introduction: Consuming Memories of Home in Constructing the Present and Imagining the Future

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Introduction: Consuming Memories of Home in Constructing the Present and Imagining the Future

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FOOD AND MIGRATION

It is now widely recognised within anthropology that the study of 'foodways' is important in understanding the ways in which people construct their ideas of who and what they are.[1] The ways in which the role of food plays itself out in the context of migration have not received as much attention thus far (although see Kershen 2002). However, there are good grounds for suggesting that our understanding of the processes of migration itself can benefit from examining them through the lens of food and drink, which arguably play a central role in identity construction in the context of migration at both individual and group level. For migrants, food and drink play a key part in maintaining kin, social and cultural ties; in building new groupings; and in creating divisions, both between immigrants and 'host' groups and within a migrant group. It was a conviction that this is the case that led Parvathi Raman and me to organize a workshop on 'Food and Migration' at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in January 2009. That workshop has led to two collections of articles: this collection and another which formed a special issue of the journal *Food, Culture and Society* published in June 2011.[2]

The papers presented at that workshop underlined the fact that food not only reflects change and continuity; it is used deliberately by migrants to make statements of continuity or change. In making such statements, individuals and groups draw not only on notions which they have brought with them about appropriate feeding, offering and sharing relationships, and about the appropriate elements and structure of eating and drinking events; they also draw on those which they encounter in the new environment in which they live, to alter relationships within the immigrant group as well

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as to generate new relations outside the group. They may cling to existing foodways and the relationships which go with them to resist change. They may draw on foodways to make religious or political statements about identity, e.g. through the consumption of *halal* or *kosher* meat, or to generate an identity founded in economic activity, such as through setting up restaurants.

Foodways themselves are not normally—perhaps are never—static. However, with migration, the 'idea' of a foodway may become 'fossilized' and become an important marker of identity. A foodway can take on a symbolic role—not only for immigrants but also, to some extent, for host groups and members of other immigrant groups. For an immigrant group, this may lead to the consumption of ritual meals representing cultural, religious or group identity on certain occasions. For host groups and other immigrants, too, 'marker' foods and meals deriving from an immigrant group's repertoire may, in their consumption at home or elsewhere, play a role in the construction of their own syncretic identity. Ritual meals and 'marker' food and drink consumed by migrants are seen as being brought from the 'homeland'; but they may, in fact, be significantly different from the ways in which food and drink are consumed 'back home'. Change occurs very differently 'back home' and among migrants: 'back home', changes in food habits—even changes in ritual foods and meals—are more likely to occur without this being visible or being seen as an issue; among migrants, on the other hand, much more deep-seated changes are likely to occur in the patterns of daily consumption. At the same time there is often more concern about maintaining continuity in foodways, particularly in relation to ritual meals and 'marker' foods, because of concern about maintaining continuity of identity—in a context where change cannot, in fact, be avoided but can be mitigated, with food used as a means of attempting to achieve this.

MIGRATING, EATING AND REMEMBERING

This collection focuses particularly on the role of memory. Whether people remain in one place or move to a new one, food, due to its sensuous nature and its potential to act as a powerful mnemonic, has huge potential as a means of remembering the past, whether deliberately or otherwise (Sutton 2001). This is evidenced through the popularity of food-based memoirs, such as that published as early as 1943 by M.F.K. Fisher (Fisher 1943). These have a wide appeal, probably because they evoke—and/or contrast with—the reader's own food memories. Food has a role as part of individual histories, with memories of childhood and key events often strongly associated with certain foods and methods of preparation; and on a group level, since food is not uncommonly associated with memories of being part of a group which produces, processes, cooks and/or consumes food together. Food, then, has the capacity to 'encode' memory. It can also be used to 'decode' memories (Mintz 1997: 96); it is a means of re-accessing what is remembered

as happening in the past—whether this is an accurate representation of the past, a desired projection of the past, or one coloured by negative memories.

However, as with other kinds of memories, food memories should not be seen as straightforward accounts of what really happened. Stories told about the past, to oneself or publicly, are tinged with complex emotion. It must be remembered that ambivalence and dissonance are fundamental to memory, although this is not often explored in anthropological discussion (although see Smith 2004). The concept of 'memory' itself is a complex one, reflecting as it does the memories of individuals, groups and wider societies and incorporating the wide range of meaning which it can denote, even in relation to one person. Despite this, as Holtzman has pointed out (Holtzman 2006), studies of the role of food, even within anthropology, have tended to concentrate on the ways in which processes unfold over time, rather than on the complexities of the ways in which people remember the past (Mintz 1985; Cwiertka 2000). This tends to imply that memory is a device for (more or less) accurately remembering what 'really' happened, rather than something which is profoundly manipulated by feelings about the present.

The inherent potential for complexity and ambivalence attached to food is particularly likely to surface in the context of change, particularly where change is traumatic. Migration is in some sense always traumatic, and we must therefore expect a particularly intense creative 'work' of 'remembering' to occur with migration. An important point to bear in mind is that while 'memories' of the past reflect feelings about the present, they are also used to create the future. Food is important grist to the mill of future-creating. It provides the potential for being used in creative ways, drawing on memories of the past to construct not only the present but also the future.

Certain foods in particular hold this potential, carrying special, indexical status, with particular resonance for cultural, social, religious and/or cosmological reasons. This may be due to a food's central cosmological and symbolic role, for example within an agricultural society organized around its production; or it may be because it has been associated with dominant groups or 'exotic' foreign places (Douglas 1975; Smith 1984; Mintz 1985; Camporesi 1989; Turino 1999; Stewart 2003; Janowski 2007). In the context of diaspora and migration, the potential held by such central foods becomes particularly poignant and important. Where people move to a new place, these foods tend to take on a particularly powerful position in restructuring life there. They are central to the telling of stories about identity and belonging, based on what is believed to be shared or not shared from the 'homeland'. Such stories are founded in memories, real or imagined, from lives led in that homeland. The identity and belonging elicited through such stories is lived out through the preparation and consumption of 'marker' foods and ritual among migrants in a new home.

All of the contributions to this collection show how 'memories' of food are used creatively to construct a sense of identity in the present which is dependant on conscious efforts to reach into the past, which are at the same

time inextricably involved in a construction of identity in the present and into the future. Walker looks at migrants from one of the Comorian islands, Ngazidja, in France and in Zanzibar, and at the different ways in which food is used in those two contexts to make statements about being 'Comorian'. In Zanzibar, this includes a public statement about being distinctive from other Zanzibaris and also, within the Comorian community, about being truly Comorian; in France, it includes a public statement about being distinctive but is also about reaching out to and welcoming the broader French world. Rowe explores the multiple layers of identity generated through food by Lebanese migrants to the US, who use foodways to maintain and project both a Lebanese identity and a 'white American' identity. Rosales examines the ways in which food is used by people of Goan origin who migrated from Goa to Mozambique many years ago and then on to Portugal, to project certain kinds of relationships between and among themselves and between themselves and the Portuguese in Mozambique, in ways which continue to have significance in Portugal. Gasparetti examines the complex interplay between the ways in which food is used among Senegalese migrants to Turin to generate difference among them—and between them and other African migrants—but at the same time a common identity vis-à-vis the Italian world. It both maintains boundaries and allows those boundaries to be crossed. Marte shows how food is used by women from the Dominican Republic living in New York City to underline their own sense of self-worth, their social networks and their own sense of identity as women and as Dominicans living in New York. Coakley shows how in Cork food evokes profound emotions among Polish migrants, both maintaining a sense of what they come from but also serving to 'move them on' into a new identity in their new homes. In my own contribution about the experiences of women deported from what was then eastern Poland to Kazakhstan and Siberia at the outbreak of the Second World War, I show how food has been central both to maintaining and to remodelling a sense of 'Polishness', through their long 'odyssey' through Central Asia, the Middle East, Africa and on to the UK.

CREATIVE ACTS OF REMEMBERING

The process of creating such stories and living them out through the preparation and consumption of certain foods and meals in certain ways and with certain people involves highly creative acts, which reconstruct the past in order to create the present and the future. Food is the basis for creative interpretations of the past and projections into the future based on these interpretations. This echoes Anderson's concept of the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991); migrants see themselves as coming from such a community and as recreating it or as creating a new community which has continuity with the community in the homeland. It also echoes Hobsbawn's notion of invented tradition (Hobsbawm 1983).

There is no doubt that nostalgia is an emotion and attitude central to foodways among migrants, with food used to evoke a past homeland, as Ray, for example, shows among Bengali Americans (Ray 2004). However, the longing which is experienced by migrants, and especially by their descendants, may often be what Appadurai has described as 'armchair' nostalgia (Appadurai 1996): they may remember events which did not happen to them personally, and which may never have happened at all. Migrants may cherish personal or group memories of foodways which are the subject of iconic narratives symbolising history and identity, but which may not reflect reality. This is illustrated in my contribution to this collection; some of the women who were deported were so young that they could not have memories of the place where they were born, or even of much of the 'odyssey' they went through, but they build on memories of others to construct a 'memory' of their own. It is also illustrated in Rosales' contribution; the Goans she discusses do not remember Goa, from which their ancestors came generations ago, but carry with them stories about Goa, bolstered by the consumption of Goan food, which are undoubtedly to a large degree mythical. The stories which migrants tell about the past, fed by food, may, indeed, be used to generate a sense of identity which hardly exists beyond the table, as Buckser has pointed to among Jewish people in Denmark (Buckser 1999). The table can be the last bastion of a vanishing, though emotionally charged, identity.

Shared 'memories' of iconic foodways may be the subject of creative construction of social groups in a new home. They may serve to help to unite or separate people, grouping people as being from a shared 'homeland' who would not, in that 'homeland', have seen themselves as being from the same group. They may unite people from different class, caste or clan backgrounds, or people from widely flung places. They may also, of course, serve to separate people who would have been closer if they had remained in the 'homeland'. Thus, people from Ngazidja see themselves as Comorian, as Walker shows in his contribution to this collection, and express this through food which is tagged as such; as Rosales shows in her contribution, people from different castes and classes see themselves as sharing a common 'Goan' identity far from Goa (although they also maintain distinct caste identities), and express this through certain foods which are considered 'Goan' although they are very different from anything eaten in Goa; and, as Gasparetti shows in her contribution, Senegalese from different parts of the country share a common identity through eating foods tagged as 'Senegalese', which are, at another level, tagged as 'African' when shared with Moroccans, and confer common identity vis-à-vis the Italian world.

Indexical or 'marker' foods are used to evoke a homeland, and accessing them, preparing them and consuming them is perceived to be central to maintaining an identity rooted in that homeland. Sometimes these foods may be ones used in the context of the homeland itself to underline and to project national identity (e.g. see Ohnuki-Tierney 1993; Murcott 1996; Bellasco and

Scranton 2002), and this is drawn upon by migrants in constructing their own sense of shared identity founded on nostalgia for the past. However, indexical foods in the context of migration may be different in significant or subtle ways from those in the homeland. They may be foods which are highly prized back home, and are therefore adopted as part of a display of affluence in migration, as we see in Walker's paper focuses on the indexical food *ntsambu*, the fermented seed of a cycad, which is seen as a marker of being Comorian among people from Ngazidja living in Zanzibar. However, it has a strong smell which is liked in Ngazidja but not by migrants to Zanzibar, and is made more palatable through being sold in varieties which have no smell. Indexical foods may also be everyday foods back home, as I show in my contribution. In this case, these are made using different ingredients from the same foods as presently consumed in Poland as eaten by first generation migrants before they left their homeland.

GENDERED REMEMBERING

Most studies of foodways in the context of migration deal with women's memories e.g. (Innes 2001; Meyers 2001; Counihan 2002; Counihan 2004). This is sometimes linked to an analysis of foodways as a valorization of women's contribution to constructing a new society (Counihan 2002), something which Marte brings out in her contribution. Men's role in foodways, including in the context of migration, has received less attention, although there have been some studies of male roles in the construction of memory in relation to food (Eves 1996). Women usually deal with the final process in the chain of food production: cooking. However, it is important to note that men do play an important role in foodways; not only are they responsible for procuring and producing many foods, but in ritual contexts, they often prepare food, particularly meat, as Walker brings out in his contribution to this collection (and see Kahn 1988 and Janowski 1995).

While women's role as everyday cook may be viewed in some senses as drudgery, it also gives them a good deal of power. Who has prepared the food which a person eats and with whom one eats food is always profoundly important (Carsten 1997; Janowski 2007), and this has a particular resonance in the context of migration because of the very rapid changes which have usually occurred in social structure and the importance of feeding relationships in constructing new relationships between people and/or maintaining relationships from the homeland. In the context of migration, the way in which control over food confers power can become particularly evident. All migrants are likely to feel that they are relatively powerless; but men, because they are not normally responsible for cooking, are often particularly powerless in that arena. They cannot provision themselves with the food which they want to eat, but rely on women to do this. Because food is

central to maintaining identity, this is a matter of explicit concern, and makes visible what is less visible in the homeland: the reliance of men on women for cultural and social identity. Gasparetti, in her contribution, shows how Senegalese women derive a definite sense of social and political power from provisioning others as well as themselves with Senegalese food. They are not only able to make money from doing this, but they are able to discipline Senegalese youngsters by refusing them food if they misbehave. Marte, in her contribution, shows how Dominican women in New York City derive a sense of political and social worth, and hence a sense of power over their own destiny and that of others, from cooking for themselves and their families.

'LIMBO MIGRANTS', MEMORY AND FOOD

Memory can become a particularly creative act among those who left their homeland as small children or who are descended from migrants. Such individuals are likely to be brought up with stories about the 'old country', the homeland, and are asked to follow cultural and social patterns, including foodways, which they are told derive from that homeland. However, they have no memory of their own of that place in which they see themselves as rooted. They are caught in a kind of limbo, occupying a space between one identity and another. Even if they were born in the country in which they are living they may feel to some extent as though they were themselves migrants, as though part of them is trapped somewhere else—in a place of which they have no memory of their own. They are what may be described as 'limbo migrants'.

All migrants find themselves in a situation where there are almost always many possible routes into the future available to them, many different identities and combinations of identities to which they can aspire and which they can work to construct. Paradoxically, given their in-between identity, this is particularly true of 'limbo migrants', who, because they moved at a young age or were born in the new country, can adopt and adapt new ways more easily. In relation to food, their palates are less formed by distinctive foodways and are more open to new tastes and combinations of foods. However, some are, for social reasons, more constrained than others; and individuals vary individually in their desire and ability to take up the opportunity to use food, among other means, to construct a distinctive future for themselves. Some rely much more heavily on an identity dependent on 'memories' inherited from their elders in constructing a future; others reject these 'memories' and reach out into the new country in search of material from which to construct a new identity. Foodways are a central part of the choices available to them.

Rosales shows in her contribution how some 'limbo migrants'—the Goans now resident in Portugal—rely heavily on certain 'inherited memories'

rooted in food for their identity. Because of the profound sensuousness of food and the fact that it therefore evokes personal memories from childhood, food arguably has the ability to make limbo migrants feel as though they were evoking memories of equivalent eating events in the past homeland, lived out by their parents, grandparents or great-grandparents. The memories of others may, as I describe among 'limbo migrant' Poles born in the UK, be treated as though they were personal memories; the boundary between what is actually remembered and what has been transplanted from another person becomes fuzzy, and memories transplanted from the minds of others may be treated as own memories. An awareness that this is going on, conscious or subconscious, may cause anxiety and underlines the desire to re-state and re-tell what are invented or transplanted memories.

Such re-told and re-enacted memories borrowed from others are not always welcome by all 'limbo migrants', however; some young first generation, second and third generation migrants reject foodways associated with the homeland from which their parents and grandparents came. The desire to eat the foods of the new homeland is at least partly based on a change in gustatory inclination; with exposure to the foodways of a host society in the context of school and wider socialisation, those who grow up in that host society become attached to new foods they encounter. However, the rejection of the foodways of one's migrant parents and grandparents may also be linked to a desire to reject some or all of the identity rooted in the 'old country'. Marte's and Gasparetti's contributions, as well as my own, show the process of becoming attached to a new identity and to local foodways among second generation migrants. Among Senegalese, Poles and Dominicans, we see how the children of female cooks can be reluctant to eat food from the homeland cooked by their mothers. Gasparetti points out that for Senegalese youngsters this is framed as an explicit refusal of Senegalese identity.

CONCLUSION: FOOD FROM THE PAST AS FUEL FOR THE FUTURE

The contributions to this collection demonstrate different ways in which, through food, the tightrope into the future may be walked by migrants, using materials from the past as well as the present. Food is an important material of this kind. Because of its sensuous and emotional strength, it has a particularly powerful ability to recall the past; and when introduced into the construction of the future it has a potent ability to manipulate feelings and behaviour. Because of its complex meaning and complex sensory status, food has great potential for reflecting—and generating—change. It can be used in highly creative ways to manipulate memories. We have looked at examples of ways in which it can be used to imagine the past, to project this into the present, and to create the future. Certain indexical foods in particular may be used in these creative ways, as we have seen.

Gender, of course, comes through in all of the papers in this collection, showing how important food is in constructing relations between men and women as well as in building and projecting the role of women in particular. In the context of migration, we have seen how the dependant relationship which men have on women for food becomes particularly striking.

All migrants are in the process of constructing a new identity for themselves as individuals. In this process their membership of groups deriving from their homeland play a major part, and this is expressed through food choices which they make. However, the younger they are when they move the more choices they have of new identities and new foodways associated with these; and at the same time, the less of a memory they have of the homeland from which they came. With the second generation of migrants, born in the new country, this becomes particularly true. I have therefore described these younger first generation, and second and subsequent generation migrants who identify themselves as deriving from the homeland of their parents, as 'limbo migrants': neither one thing nor yet another.

It can probably be reasonably asserted that second and subsequent generations never either attempt to fully relive an imagined past nor do they completely reject that past. They are in the business of constructing new, hybrid identities. Even if they describe themselves as 'Polish' or 'Goan', what this means is not the same to them as it is to Polish people who live in Poland or Goans who live in Goa. They see their own identity as having changed, become hybridized with host cultures. A new, 'British Polish' or 'Portuguese Goan' identity is generated, which they see as something distinct while desiring also to ground it in the 'old country'.

Food is fuel: not only for our biological selves, but for our social selves, as humans living in groups which eat together in ways which explicitly and implicitly make statements about identity and belonging. As social fuel, it allows individuals and groups to move into the future. In the context of migration, this becomes a particularly active and necessary process. Memories about food are mobilized and manipulated, drawn on and themselves fed, in an active process which does not just make a statement about affiliation to individual people and groups but is part of an active and sometimes highly aspirational process of moving into new social, class and ethnic spaces. Food provides a sensuous and a social space for drawing on the past to construct the present and imagine the future.

NOTES

1. Authors who have written on this include Lévi-Strauss 1970 [1964]; Douglas 1971; Murcott 1983; Douglas 1984; Harris 1985; Manderson 1986; Bourdieu 1986 [1979]; Harris and Ross 1987; Kerr and Charles 1988; Fiddes 1991; Camporesi 1993; Caplan 1994; Lupton 1996; Mintz 1996; Bell and Valentine 1997; Caplan 1997; Carsten 1997; Counihan and van Esterik 1997; van Esterik and Coynihan 1997; Gabaccia 1998; Murcott 1998; Pillsbury 1998; Atkins and Bowler 2001; Dietler and Hayden 2001; Mintz and Du Bois 2002; Bryant, DeWalt et al. 2003; Mason 2004; Conquhoun 2007; Janowski and Kerlogue 2007.

2. *Food, Culture and Society* Vol 14, No. 2, June 2011. The collection is introduced by Harry West (West 2011) and includes papers by Emma-Jayne Abbots (Abbots 2011), Nicola Frost (Frost 2011), Ray Krishnendu (Krishnendu 2011), Anne Meneley (Meneley 2011), Parvathi Raman (Raman 2011) and Lidia Marte (Marte 2011); Lidia Marte also contributes to this collection.

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