

Chapter taken from:

**The Agency of Eating:
Food, Mediation and the Body**

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Chapter 2

Eating at Home:

Kinned, Shared and Acquired Bodies

Introduction

This chapter examines the ways in which bodies are socially and corporeally kinned through the sharing of the substances of food in the context of family relations. Drawing upon and re-reading classic ethnographic studies of kinship and commensality, such as those by Carsten (1995, 2004) and Weismantel (1988, 1995), I interrogate how eating draws bodies together into networks of relatedness. These intimacies and proximities, I argue, are fostered through the symbolic meaning and materiality of the food being shared, which is further entangled with emotion and affect. Individuals are thus made – both socially and corporeally – as kin, even though they may not share the other substance more commonly associated with kinship, blood. Drawing upon my reading of these texts, I then turn to analyse my experience of eating roast guinea pig (cuy) in an Ecuadorian household located in the village of Jima. Cuy is a dish laden with social efficacy and its role in making and deepening social relations has been widely acknowledged (Abbots 2011, Archetti 1997, Bourque 2001, Weismantel 1988). In this chapter, I move beyond this argument and attend to the material substance of cuy and how it is understood to act upon the body to make Jimeños. As such, I look to explore the ways in which matter and meaning interplay and highlight how a focus on eating can bring new understandings to this relationship. I hence consider how agency is distributed across an assemblage that includes the

nonhuman mediators of cuy meat and the substances which the animal had ingested before slaughter, the means and objects of preparation and cooking, cultural knowledge and, of course, the bodies of the cook and the eater. Consequently, I suggest that the cook can be seen as a bio-authority who permeates the boundaries of the eating body.

The embodied experience of eating cuy is central to my discussion in this chapter and I draw attention, in part through autoethnography, to the feelings and visceral responses to which the meat can give rise. This leads me to consider how taste is socially and corporeally acquired and how foods are evaluated through embodied encounters, a discussion thread that, in turn, leads to my suggestion that we can conceptualize food acquiring our bodies just as much as our bodies acquire food. Agency here, while present in the substance of food, is also situated in the body of the eater, and I assess the ways that an eater's desire, acceptance, or rejection of a food can be interpreted as an expression of their embodied agency. Eating can be as conflict-ridden and fuelled by tension as it can be cohesive and unifying, and the process of kinning may not be as smooth as suggested by classic texts on commensality, such as those by Carsten and Weismantel. Questions of bio-authority hence come to the fore once again, and I close the chapter by returning to the notion that cooking and eating are political practices through which, often gendered, authority can be enacted and contained.

Sharing Substance and the Social Production of Kinship

The argument that commensality produces and defines social relations and contributes to the creation of personhood has been long established (Holtzman 2009), and scholarship has drawn attention to the vital substance

of food and the ways it establishes links between bodies, especially in the context of kinship relations and family life. Carsten's (1995, 2004) discussions of eating and relatedness among Malays is one such example. Preferring to use the term relatedness, to allow for the fluid and processual nature of relation-making and to move beyond anthropological notions of kinship, she draws attention to how to food is a shared substance that establishes embodied, social and affective ties. Carsten explains that, for the Malays with whom she worked, food, particularly rice and milk, is mutable and understood as being transformed into blood once ingested and incorporated into the body. The boundaries between rice, milk and blood are hence blurred. These seemingly discrete categories of substance are located on a continuum in which each slides seamlessly into the other. As a consequence, those who continually eat together – or in Malay terms share food prepared on the same hearth – are regarded as having the same blood in common, as being related. Food, in this context, is therefore blood. As such, and resonating with Mol (2008), Carsten presents the boundaries of bodies as porous; they become united through the flow of shared substances of food and blood. As she notes, 'it seems hard to say where one person stops and another begins' (1995: 235).

Carsten's (1995, 2004) ethnography shows how, for Malays, one is not simply born with blood, but instead continually makes it by eating. It is these conceptualizations and the mutability of rice, milk and blood that enable fostered children to effectively become kin and be fully incorporated into the household, to the extent they are understood to physically resemble its other members. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that eating away from the house and hearth is strongly discouraged, as it disturbs the long process of becoming and 'implies a dispersal of intimate substance' (Carsten 1995: 234). It also

implies a dispersal of emotion, as Carsten further points to how the sharing of food's substance is not only entangled with affective relations, but also gives those relations a vitality and efficacy. A child's love for a mother, for example, stems from being fed breast milk. The bonds between children and mothers are seen to be particularly robust because it is the mothers who perform food labour within Malay households and are 'the source of shared substance' (ibid: 228). As food becomes gradually and continually transformed into blood within the body of an individual, emotional closeness is concomitantly forged.

Carsten's studies illuminate how eating makes persons, both biologically and socially, and situates them within a network of relatedness and kinship ties. In short, eating constitutes kinship, with food being one of the primary unifying substances. This argument is echoed in other ethnographic contexts, such as Weismantel's (1988, 1995) account of eating and feeding in Zumbagua, Ecuador. Focusing on the process of adoption, Weismantel explains how people become parents by eating with and feeding their adoptive children, instead of through a jural process. She (1995) elucidates this through the example of Iza, who wished to become a father to a young boy. Iza expressed his intention of fatherhood by feeding the boy soup from the same bowl from which he had eaten. This act, while seemingly symbolic and ritualized, is also, Weismantel argues, inherently material as, similar to Carsten's Malay participants, the sharing of substance creates a material connection between human bodies. She explains that adults 'by taking a child into their family and nurturing its physical needs through the same substance as those eaten by the rest of the social group can make of that child a son or a daughter who is physically as well a jurally their own' (1995: 695) and concludes that 'those who eat together in the same household share

the same flesh in a quite literal sense: they are made of the same stuff' (1995: 695).

Weismantel, like Carsten, further emphasizes that this is a gradual process, with bodies being made as kin through continuous layers of feeding and eating. They acquire substance through time: one shared meal does not make a kinship relation but, instead, kinned bodies are produced by an accumulation of many shared meals (see also Holtzman 2009). Weismantel is keen to stress, however, that while this process is material and corporeal it is not exclusively so – it is also social and symbolic. Kinship is not solely produced by eating. Rather, eating forms part of a wider series of social activities, such as sleeping in close proximity, providing clothing, linguistically articulating the relationship and generally sharing experiences. In drawing attention to these interplays, Weismantel implies an entwining between matter and meaning and the ways, albeit not in her terms, that food and eating are situated within a wider assemblage of practices, knowledges, affects and relations. It is this wider assemblage and the dynamic between matter and meaning that I now look to interrogate by turning to my own research in the Ecuadorian Andes on the eating of cuy.

Matter Made to Matter: Embodied Interactions with Cuy in the Ecuadorian Household

Cuy is a particular dish in the villages and towns of Southern Ecuadorian Highlands, as in other parts of the Andes (Archetti 1997, Bourque 2001, DeFrance 2006, Weismantel 1988). Eaten only on festive and ritual occasions, its preparation is carefully orchestrated and its shared consumption within a household context limited to those who have, or wish to

have, intense social connections. As such, it helps define and intensify a social network, as well as incorporating new members. As Weismantel concludes, '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' (1988: 131). The symbolic efficacy of cuy and its specific role in Andean social and ritual life, together with its class connotations and characteristics of being a 'traditional' food, has been discussed at length elsewhere (Abbotts 2011, Archetti 1997, Bourque 2001, Weismantel 1988), and I wish to move beyond these accounts here by interrogating embodied and affective interactions with the substance of cuy, the interplays between matter and meaning, and the ways agency is distributed across cuy's assemblage. In so doing, I bring eating into the analytical foreground.

The majority of cuy eaten within the Jimeño households with whom I conducted research had been raised within that household, with additional animals being acquired, in moments of shortage, from others within a household's primary social network. The circulation of cuyes thus forms a sphere of restricted exchange (cf Bohannan and Bohannan 1968) that reflects and helps maintain a defined set of social relations between households (see Abbotts 2011). To my knowledge, any additionally acquired animals were always obtained live and were slaughtered, butchered and prepared at home alongside those from the household; I give a possible explanation for this below. My research participants, who were primarily women, all consistently drew my attention to the importance of using local animals from known and socially connected households, and often framed this through the rubric of taste. I was told that it was crucial that the cuyes were fed on local grass as they would 'taste better' than those obtained from 'other' places and my

participants indicated that they could taste the localness of the meat upon eating it. This extends to a household's own cuyes, which are preferably fed on grass cut down from a household's own land, although when supply was limited grasses are purchased from members of a household's social network or cut from common land. The cutting of grasses, often by scythe, is laborious work, but deemed a worthwhile task due to the resulting enhancement of the flavour of the meat. The only acceptable exception to the grass is the leaves of locally grown corn, although this is not a common foodstuff and the cuy only receive the surplus leaves when the household is preparing corn-based snacks such as *humitas*.

In stressing the importance of the feed of cuyes and expressing how this is materially manifested in the eating of the final cooked dish, my participants point to the vitality, not just of the flesh of the cuy, but also of the substance that helped constitute it – local grass. In this context, what the cuy eats is a key component of its assemblage; that which gets incorporated into the cuy's body ultimately gets incorporated into the human eater's body. A thread of relatedness hence emerges between the human eating body, the animal's eating body and the matter of grass, with the boundaries between these, following Mol (2008), being stretched and rendered semi-permeable as each arguably gets incorporated into, and transformed by, the other. The grass is transformed into animal flesh, which is turned into raw meat upon slaughter and, in turn, cooked into an edible substance that is consequently ingested, digested and incorporated into the bodies of my research participants. The micro-matter of the meat, then, has to be considered a vital agentic substance that lodges itself into the eating bodies of both cuyes and humans. Taste here plays a critical role, as it is through the final tasting,

feeling and sensing of the meat in the mouth of the human eater that the vitalism of the grass is experienced.

But it is not just the grass, the cuy's body and the human eating body that are entangled and blended together through eating. So too are the bodies of those who have prepared the meat. Preparing cuy is an intricate, time consuming, labour intensive and embodied process, which is generally led by the senior woman of the household. First, the cuyes are killed in the intimate spaces behind a house or in the kitchen area. The common and preferred method is to take the creature's neck in one hand and smothering its nose and mouth with the other, while pushing downwards in a twisting motion until the neck bones crack. It is then immediately pulled downwards by its hind-legs to disjoin the spine and one eye is popped in order for the meat 'to bleed'. The carcass is then immersed briefly in hot water and dissolved ash before the fur is plucked off in handfuls. This process of immersing and plucking is repeated several times and the carcasses are inspected thoroughly to ensure no fur remains. Following the washing of the carcasses, the cuyes are manually disembowelled by a delicate and meticulous operation. First, the innards are located and a tiny vertical incision made along the length of the body with a sharp knife. The cook then gently tears open the stomach cavity with her hands and holds the carcass horizontally in the air, shaking it gently until the innards become visible. The intestinal tracts and stomach are then painstakingly removed by pulling each thread away from the membrane to which it is attached; the stomach and other lower organs are removed by a sharp twisting pull. It is at this stage that the acrid smell of blood and intestines becomes almost overpowering, and yet it is also at this time that the cook will be intimately engaged with the cuy's body, taking great care to

ensure that the bladder is not ruptured, for fear that urine will seep into the meat. This is a critical part of the process and caution is required, as the smallest of errors will make the final cooked meat 'taste bitter'.

Following the removal of the intestinal organs and the bladder, the cuy's body is turned inside out and the sexual organs gently pulled out and the anus pushed through with a forefinger and cut off. The carcass is then turned back and the heart and lungs removed by punching firmly through the ribcage, grabbing the organs in the hand and giving them a strong tug. Finally, the teeth and any remaining claws are pulled out by hand and the jaw cut open almost to the point where the head joins the neck. The body is then washed thoroughly both inside and out, with the cook massaging the cuy's skin until she is satisfied that all blood has been removed, before a marinade is rubbed over the inside and outside of the carcass. The meat is then left to rest before being inserted onto its own long pole and roasted slowly over a bonfire with the other cuyes. It is at this roasting stage that other members of the household become involved, as they each take an individual cuy and pole and sit around the bonfire slowly turning the meat until it is cooked and the skin burnished and crispy. This practice is deemed an essential component to the resulting flavour and overall eating experience, as well as being enjoyed for the inherent sociality that takes place. The flames do not just produce crackling skin, but also imbue the meat with the flavour of smoke, which is another material substance, like grass and blood, that eaters use as a marker of 'good cuy'.

The purpose of this rich description is to illustrate the extent that the cook's body becomes physically entangled in that of the cuyes she is slaughtering and preparing, and I wish to suggest that through this visceral

process of merging bodies, the essence of the cook is imbued into the substance of the meat. This accords with the arguments posited by Holtzman in reference to Samburu social relations, which he states are constituted 'through the stomach' (2009: 72). Stressing the materiality of shared substance, he explains that food is understood to create a 'supernatural tie' between individuals due to the manner it is an 'exchange of *vital* substances' (ibid: 73, my emphasis). In particular, the eater is understood to be consuming the bodily fluids of the producer and Holtzman suggests that it is this which gives, at least in part, food its efficacy. He concludes, '[i]n eating someone's food, you have partaken of and benefited from their sweat (*latakuny*), creating a tangible bond that is strengthened through repetition' (ibid: 73). Returning to Jima, waged domestic servants did not cook or eat *cuy* with their employers' families and, when viewed through the lens of Holtzman's argument, the reason for this prohibition comes into view: their bodily engagement with the meat would draw them too closely into the household and create intimacy in a context where distance is required and often struggled to be established (see Abbotts 2012b). Likewise, the cultural implausibility of purchasing ready-butchered *cuy* can be, at least in part, explained from this perspective.

Recognising the ways in which the cook's body is infused with that of the *cuy*, and in turn the eater of the *cuy*, extends Carsten's (1995, 2004) Malay conclusions about how shared substance creates connectedness. It is not just the hearth – the place of cooking – that is of symbolic and material import in Ecuador, but also the body of the cook that produces the food to be shared. Moreover, sharing takes a different form here. Carsten's argument, similar to other established discussions of commensality and connectedness, suggests

that it is the sharing of substance through eating, the mutual ingestion of the same matter that is broken up and incorporated into individual bodies, that produces relatedness. But I wish argue that my Ecuadorian ethnography shows this is not as mutual a process as initially appears. Instead, by extending the logic of how the cook becomes fused into the matter ingested, the notion that the eater is ingesting the cook can also be entertained. This suggestion builds on the framing of socialized eating laid out by myself and Anna Lavis in *Why We Eat, How We Eat* (2013). We posited that eating bodies are entangled across multiple scales as they 'become coterminous with other bodies over geographic, affective and social distances' (Abbots and Lavis *ibid*: 3). In the same volume, Coles (2013a) takes up this argument in his account of how the production and ingestion of coffee in London's Borough Market is mediated by multiple bodies – including that of producers, roasters, tasters and retailers – who all 'imprint' themselves into the final drink (see Chapter 5). Concluding that 'coffee is mediated by a constellation of bodies, to drink coffee is to drink a lot of bodies' (*ibid*: 268), Coles elucidates how multiple bodies bump up against and fold into each through their leaky, semi-permeable boundaries (cf Haraway 1990, Mol 2008).

Building from this literature brings to light a different power dynamic, in which the cook traverses the semi-permeable boundaries of the eater's body to effectively be *inside*, rather than just being externally connected to it. This efficacy of operating within the subjective depths of an eater's body indicates a dynamic of bio-authority. The cook is an influential and intentional mediator in the assemblage of *cuy*; she not only makes the eating of the meat possible, but also brings together the meat and the eater in a manner that shapes the flavour of the substance being eaten and, through the rituals of butchery and

cooking, informs its cultural and social significance. She also draws into the assemblage other mediating bodies, such as the local grass on which the cuyes are fed, the bonfire the cuy is roasted over, the poles on which they are cooked that shape the embodied experience of those participating, and the marinade that imparts a unique flavour. Following Latour (2005), then, the cook is a mediator in the sense that she makes other mediators do things. In essence she gives the matter of the meat vitality: she makes it matter by working to engineer affect in the eater. And in so doing, she plays a key role in bounding the vitalism of cuy's assemblage. She is not, of course, the only mediator in this process, as all the mediating bodies discussed thus far encounter one another and interact to create affect and effects in the eater's body. All therefore can be seen to have an agentic capacity (cf Bennett 2010). In this context, however, the agency of the cook differs somewhat in that it is arguably intentional as well as affective. As I wrote in the previous chapter, not all mediators are created equal and this has, in turn, as I discuss further below, consequences on the way we understand the bio-authorial influence of the cook.

The vitality of the meat then comes not just from its inherent substance but in the method this substance is *made* to matter through cultural practices and social relations, particularly those orchestrated by the cook. It is in the feeding of local grass to the cuyes – the restricted methods of exchange and distribution, and the slow, skilled and engaged method of slaughter and butchery that (in)fuses the cuy's body with that of its cook – that the matter of the meat becomes symbolically charged and affect created.

The Taste A/Effect

‘But it would taste horrible, bad. Urgh! The skin would be all flabby and soft. That’s not cuy’.

This quotation was exclaimed by Zoila during a group discussion, who was aghast at the revelation that her friend Sonia had once tried to cook cuy in the microwave. The experiment had not been a success and Sonia avowed never to attempt it again on the basis that the resulting dish was unpalatable and, echoing Zoila, produced something that ‘was not cuy’. These comments interest me because they point to how altering the substance of the meat through different cooking methods changes not just its meaning, but also its material essence. The two women imply that cuy is simply not cuy if cooked by any other means than those detailed above. Their observations also draw attention to the importance of taste and ‘mouthfeel’. Cuy can be slaughtered, butchered and prepared, it seems, following the usual rituals and practices, but if the final cooking stage is not completed correctly and the skin is flabby instead of crispy, and the meat tough instead of tender and juicy, it is just not cuy. Similarly, if the meat is not butchered correctly and blood seeps into the meat, taste is understood to be adversely affected. It is in the final eating, then, that the assemblage of cuy is culminated and the multiple mediators drawn together to produce a very specific eating experience.

This experience is, of course, embodied, with the substance of cuy being assessed and evaluated through the process of taking the meat into the mouth and chewing it, biting into the skin and sucking the fat from the flesh and bones. As the cuy is ingested, the extent that it can be deemed cuy becomes evident: it is in its disassembling by eating that the assemblage of cuy becomes evident. The eating body thus mediates and places value on the

experience, determining through taste and mouthfeel whether it is good or bad cuy, or even whether the meat *is* cuy. I was taught this process of evaluation through my initial and subsequent eating encounters with cuy.

My first taste of cuy was somewhat unpleasant. Contrary to the common misconception, the meat did not taste like chicken but was instead rather rich, gamey and fatty, with a slightly acrid aftertaste. I was unlike anything I had eaten before, despite having (what I like to think of as) an adventurous palate. Being the polite anthropologist, I tried to disguise my distaste by nodding enthusiastically and affirmatively to my participants' gentle probing assertions that I was eating 'good cuy' that was '*riquísimo* [very tasty and delicious]' and expressing delight every time they placed another piece on my plate. Yet my participants were clearly not deceived with Felicia reassuring 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 (Abbots 2011: 214, my emphasis).

Familiarity, then, would breed not contempt but pleasure. My participants commonly reiterated this point upon every subsequent cuy meal by enquiring whether I liked the meat more now I was becoming accustomed to its taste and texture. Following notions of shared substance, belonging and the sociality of cuy, clearly the only correct answer to this question was a firm yes: not partaking in eating the meat would have distanced me from the intimacies of the social group. But this affirmation was not without verity, as I was learning to acquire a taste for cuy. My personal notes in my field diary chart this trajectory from pain to pleasure. I noted that it was easier to digest

the meat and that eating it was making me less queasy than on previous occasions, and commented that I was looking forward to a cuy meal and had even enjoyed meat that was 'well cooked, fresh-tasting and *rica*'. Indeed, my enjoyment in cuy reached a point that I started to crave and dream about eating the meat – pangs that continued long after I left the field. In Jima, my palate also became more discerning as my participants guided me towards identifying good cuy from bad. This came to the fore particularly during a community event where cuy was distributed amongst all those gathered to celebrate two villages being united by a new road. While unusual to see cuy served so publicly, it made cultural sense in this context as it symbolically connected the two communities through shared substance. Yet, according to my participants, and my own palate, the cuy was 'not good', primarily because it tasted too acrid, too bitter and too gamey. Paraphrasing Sonia, the taste of the grass was absent and the meat didn't taste sufficiently fresh or clean – the cuy was just too strong and flavourful.

Assessing the extent that there are significant objective differences in the taste of Sonia's home-cooked cuy and that of the 'road-opening cuy' is not my concern here. What I wish to draw attention to instead is that both myself and my participants subjectively noticed a distinction and made a value judgement through our own embodied eating experience. As such, our bodies mediated our encounter with the road-opening cuy and compared it to the memories of previous, more intimate, encounters, evaluating and determining what cuy should taste like, or more accurately what cuy is, in the process. But our taste buds are not the only factor here. The affective background or 'condition' (Anderson 2011) – cuy being shared across a number of strangers, being publically cooked, and the overall social environment of its eating – also

mediated the way we judged the flavour of the meat. Arguably, it could objectively taste exactly the same as Sonia's home-cooked cuy but it could never subjectively taste the same to us because of the context in which it was served. The substance of the meat, while potentially the same, was symbolically different. And this difference manifested in taste.

The affective background through which cuy is eaten and assessed extends beyond the immediate context in which it is prepared and served, as other mediators, for example knowledge of its social import, are drawn into its assemblage. This informs, and is co-produced by, the embodied experience of the eater. To elucidate, my visceral reactions to cuy, whether distaste or pleasure, stems in part – and only in part – from the material substance of the meat and my body's biological reaction to it. But that reaction, while not fully governable (Mol 2008), is also informed by the cultural knowledge that I was taught by my participants – that cuy is a socially and symbolically important dish and that sharing it with my social group would help incorporate and root me to place and kin. These lessons were taught through everyday conversation and the way the dish was presented to me, for example the valorization of grass as fodder, as well as the ritualized practices of slaughter, butchery and cookery that accompanied it. The cook, therefore, materially shaped the taste of the meat by her preparation methods but these preparation methods, coupled with the attendant oral discourses, also socially shaped the material taste of the meat. As such, they informed not only how the meat tasted, but also the eater's expectations – the affective background – of how they expected it to taste. In short, the eating body was socially primed to corporeally experience the meat in a particular way (see Chapter 4).

These observations and suggestions further draw attention to the ways in which the embodied experience of tasting food is both individually subjective and culturally informed, a point that has also been made by Probyn (2000) and Hayes-Conroy (2014), amongst others (see Chapters 3 and 5). What I wish to initially stress here is that it is not just the individual eating body that mediates the encounter between food and eater, but also the cook, as argued above, and society and its discourses more widely. This builds from Carolan's (2011) argument that tastes for particular 'Global Foods' are 'tuned' by the food industry (see Chapter 5), in the sense that literal and metaphorical tastes are shaped by influential bio-authorities. Carolan's focus is on the public sphere of the food industry and the ways consumers' palates and bellies are tuned towards processed food, but the ethnography from Jima suggests that this process of tuning can also be applied to the domestic realm and home cooks.

To surmise, the ethnography from Jima shows that the food practices and knowledge surrounding *cuy* imbued its substance with vitality. This is not to state, contra Bennett (2007, 2010), that the substance of the meat is inherently vital but rather to argue, following Jessica Hayes-Conroy (2014), that matter and meaning collide. Thus far I have looked to elucidate this argument by further interrogating the practices, people and processes of how matter is made to matter and drawn attention to the bio-authorial role of the cook in bounding the vitality of *cuy* within a certain assemblage. I unpack what this dynamic means in terms of (often gendered) power relations within the family below, but first I turn to the ways in which eating bodies potentially uphold and contest such bio-authorial lessons of the home and family through the lens of desire.

The Agency of the Eater?: Desire, Acceptance and Refusal

Felicia's comment to me above, that I would 'have to like' *cuy* to be 'more like' my participants, not only reiterates the importance of sharing substance in the making of relatedness, but also indicates the role of enjoyment, pleasure and desire. For Felicia, it was not sufficient that I just ate *cuy* with my adopted kin group, I had to 'learn to like' the meat and express my pleasure and enjoyment at eating it. It is in this pleasure, her comment suggests, that my incorporation into the social group was performed: I had to *want* to eat *cuy* just as much as I could and did eat *cuy*. And it is not too much of a stretch to argue that expressing this desire for the meat is tantamount to expressing a desire to be part of the social group, insofar that a refusal of the meat is a rejection of social relatedness (cf Abbots 2011, Bourque 2001, Weismantel 1988). This points to the import of the emotional and affective sensations that an eating body experiences, which have received little overt attention in accounts of commensality and kinship but are evidently salient here. In a similar vein, Sonia professed pride in her son's greedy passion for *cuy*:

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*! (Abbots 2011:214-5)

In stating that Pablito is a 'good Jimeño', Sonia is clearly extending the terms of her son's relatedness beyond her immediate kinship group to the

broader community, a theme of social proximity I develop in chapters 3 and 4. What interests me here, however, is not only the way that Pablito's belonging is inscribed and enacted by his eating and 'incorporation' (cf Fischler 1988) of *cuy*, but in the manner this belonging is expressed. Pablito is a 'good Jimeño' because he loves his *cuy*, not just because he eats it. Moreover, his desire appears to be naturally imbued, almost innate, as it has been in evidence since he was a small child. The implication being that his love of *cuy* stems from his community of birth and is as an inevitable part of Pablito's essential being, as well as a character trait that is to be noted and celebrated.

Desiring, seeking and taking pleasure from shared substance thus emerge as core principles in this context, and this further draws attention to the agency of the individual eater. Pablito's passion for *cuy* reflects and actively works to construct his being and belongingness, and his greed can be interpreted as an eater's desire to be socially made in a certain mould. His desire for *cuy* is a desire to be continually (re)made Jimeño much in the same way that my learning to like *cuy* expressed my desire to be incorporated into my kin group and be 'like us'. The slight distinction here is that, unlike Pablito, I was not born in Jima and my liking for *cuy* was therefore not constructed as innate, but instead had to be nurtured through repeated eating. This raises a subtle distinction in mine and Pablito's agentic capacities. Pablito's hunger is constructed as inherently vital, as naturalized, thereby implying that he has had little choice about his passionate greed, whereas mine is understood as having to be cultured¹. Notwithstanding this difference,

¹ I am not looking to create a false dichotomy here between nature and culture, but am merely representing how my participants construct the difference between mine and Pablito's hunger for *cuy*.

our desire, or more accurately our eating bodies' desire, for the meat can be regarded as an expression of our own agency.

Or can it? For when the vitality of food's matter is taken into account, a question emerges regarding the extent that requesting, enjoying, hungering for, or even craving a food can be seen as an expression of individual agency. As I have previously explained, it is not my intent to measure the agency of each mediating body or assess which actors have the most bio-authorial influence. Instead I draw attention to the who, how and why particular mediators have arguably more influence in particular assemblages and eating encounters, as well as raising the possibility that other, oft overlooked, human and non-human mediating bodies have the agentic capacity to create affect in the eating body.

To explain this further I return to Felicia's statement that 'the more you eat it [cuy], the more you will like it'. Felicia seems to be suggesting here, in line with Bennett (2007, 2010), that the substance of cuy has an inherent vitalism that has the agency to create changes in the eating body. Resonating with Carolan's (2011) notion of tuning tastes to create increasing wants through repeated eating, the implication is that the more substance of cuy I ingest, the more my body will want to ingest – and I will take pleasure in doing so. These continued engagements with foods over time further echo how personhood and relatedness is made through repetitive eating (cf Carsten 1995, 2004; Holtzman 2009; Weismantel 1988, 1995). As such, I am, or more specifically my body is, acquiring the taste for cuy through every eating encounter. Yet it is not just the cells of my body that are acting here upon the cuy, but also the cells of cuy acting upon my body. A vital encounter thus takes place between food and the eating body in which both are mediators

combining to create an affect – my increasing desire for cuy. Cuy, then, is acquiring my body as much as my body is acquiring cuy.

Desire can therefore be understood as a product created by the encounter between body and food. Whereas Bennett (2010) stops at this point, I argue, and hope to have demonstrated, that each eating encounter is, in itself, framed by the background of affect that is co-produced from bio-authorial practices and the interplays between multiple mediators that form a food's assemblage. Queries thus emerge as to who is performing the labour of encouraging desire in bodies for certain foods, even when those bodies are corporeally absent – or, in other words, who is performing the primary bio-authorial role? Carsten (1995, 2004) and Weismental (1988) stress the gendered dimensions of this process and my ethnography too shows women are central figures. I discuss the implications of this vis-à-vis gendered power dynamics below, but first I want to draw attention to the agentic capacity of the body being fed. Thus far, I have represented eating bodies as somewhat acquiescent of the bio-authorial lessons they are receiving through food, as they seem to be absorbing, upholding and even encouraging such knowledges and lessons by desiring the food towards which their bodies are being tuned (cf Carolan 2011). But eating bodies can also reject or refuse that which is being offered, and questions arise as to whether this refusal is tantamount to the rejection of the dominant cultural discourses and those who propound them.

DuPuis' (2000) account of the 'Not-in-my-Body' tactics used in relation to the organic milk industry provides a springboard for thinking through these questions, as she indicates ways in which the embodied politics of refusing to eat particular foods co-produce networks of relatedness in which eating bodies

are embedded. DuPuis locates political action in consumption by showing how eaters evaluate claims by the food industry, scientists and government 'every time they reach for a milk carton or bottle at the store' (ibid: 293), as they negotiate the potential risks to their body of ingesting the substance contained within. Drawing on Actor Network Theory (ANT), she further demonstrates how such everyday actions co-produce the very networks in which consumers, milk and farmers etcetera are embedded. Political activity does not, therefore, have to take the form of social activism or even be politically conscious but can, instead, be identified in eaters' participation in 'reflexive consumption'. This account, then, provides a way of conceptualising how refusing to eat a substance is not only a political act, but also a productive one that can create and shape new social networks and knowledges and make the bio-authorities contained within them. Thus the eating body acts as a mechanism through which power dynamics are contested and reformed.

In concert, Bell and Valentine (1997) highlight the aversion that some individuals have to being fed by others, and Giard (1998 in Probyn 2000) argues that children's refusal to eat is a 'trump card' through which they can 'resist' their mothers and hold them in their power. Similarly, Wilk (2010) demonstrates that family meals can be fraught with tensions and difficult memories, and Probyn (2000) calls for a deeper consideration of what lies beneath the veneer of commensal relations, writing that:

[t]he claustrophobia of being cooked for and being fed in an important undertow beneath the bucolic images of eating together. As a flip-side to comfort food, the power-plays that structure familial eating and the ideology that the family-that-eats-together have been largely under-theorized (ibid: 38).

Moreover, as Holtzman (2013) explains in his commentary of how comfort foods can become 'dis-comfort foods', a meatloaf may invoke either a mother who lovingly prepared it or one who forced their family to eat it (see also Batsell et al. 2002). He concludes, 'food can construct and conjure a fantastic range of intimacies, yet closeness is not always good' (ibid: 145). In their different ways, all these authors thus indicate the power struggles that come with intimate food relations and the attendant attempts to mould bodies in certain ways: a political dynamic that is oft disguised through softer notions of 'care' and 'commensality' (see Abbotts et al 2015).

But an eating body does not have to refuse food so explicitly to reject the bio-authority of the cook or feeder. As I have argued thus far, eating takes place against a 'background of affect', which a bio-authority works to effect and arguably manipulate alongside other mediators. Yet the recognition that there are multiple mediating bodies in the assemblage of each eating encounter and these all dynamically interact to continuously co-produce affect, also suggests that not all elements are within the control of the cook. In essence, there are too many bodies at play here – the embodied experience of eating cannot be fully controlled by one, however influential. Relating this back to *cuy* we can recall that the cook as bio-authority may attempt to encourage my consumption of the meat and my desire to do so through both material and discursive measures. And the meat itself, as well as what the meat has eaten, may also act upon my body and tune its tastes. But, following Mol (2008), my body is itself an agent that cannot be fully governed and which brings its own memories, emotions, sensual feelings and workings to every eating encounter. Agency does not act as mechanical causality but is emergent, creating different effects and affects in different bodies at different

times (cf Bennett 2010: 41-2). My body could therefore just as readily rejected cuy as much as it accepted and desired it, albeit not so easily considering the measures taken to sway the outcome towards acceptance. It is this swaying of the outcome, I argue, that bounds the vitalism of food. Thus, while the cook may work to discipline my body towards cuy, the outcome – the extent of her authority – cannot be fully predicted. The odds, however, can be stacked through bio-authorial practices that imbue the matter of food with meaning and vice versa.

Gendered Food Labour and the Bio-authority of the Cook

Throughout my discussion thus far, I have situated the cook in a position of relative power within the domestic household, as she, notwithstanding the agency of the eater, materially and socially sculpts the bodies of her eating family and inscribes cultural knowledge into those bodies. My use of 'she' here is intentional, not least because my own ethnographic findings show that food labour is feminized, but also because this observation accords with those of other commentators in varied cultural settings (see, for example, Cairns and Johnston 2015, DeVault 1991, Counihan 1988, Murcott 1983, Weismantel 1988). I therefore close this chapter with a brief reflection on the political dynamics within the household through the lens of gender.

While cooking and preparing food in Jima is not the exclusive domain of women and my few male participants informed me they too could cook cuy, in practice, it is the women of the household who dominate both everyday and exceptional cooking activities. The kitchen is generally a female preserve, as is the case in other Andean households (cf Bourque 2001, Harris 2000, Weismantel 1988). Moreover, women are not regarded as 'proper women'

unless they can cook to the acceptable standard of '*rico*', (tasty, delicious) and men in the kitchen are seen as a humorous anomaly. These attitudes were evident during my fieldwork when I was constantly referred to as a novice housewife when I demonstrated my lack of ability to peel and chop an apple in the correct manner, made untidy misshaped *humitas* and could not crimp the edges of *empanadas* quickly. In contrast, my then-husband, who accompanied me for a time and quickly learnt the *truco* (knack) of cooking *empanadas* and *humitas*, was a constant source of amusement for local men and women who all tried to reason with him that the kitchen was not his proper place, and made jokes about his perceived lack of masculinity. As Carlo, another 'anomaly' surmised:

Men don't cook in Ecuador. It is a woman's job. I cook, but I'm different.

I like it, and all the great chefs are men. But cooking is a job for women; in most houses it is the women who cook. It is their job, since they were girls. They learn to cook because they have to feed their families.

My female participants held a similar view, and our conversations frequently referred to a woman's correct role, learnt from childhood, as the feeder of the family and the centrality of cooking prowess to their own sense of womanhood. Through this frame, food work was valued as being a crucial aspect of becoming and being Jimeña.

As Carlos's commentary indicates, this does not mean that boys and men are excluded from the kitchen, as they do occasionally participate in cooking 'traditional' foods, such as *cuy*, *humitas* and *empanadas* as part of a larger cooking collective². On such occasions, which are treated as exceptional

² Such collectives, known colloquially as *mingas*, were leisurely occasions when members of the, sometimes extended, household would come together

leisure activities in contrast to the 'work' of cooking for the family on a quotidian basis, male participation is not taken seriously. Many of my female participants told me that men did not have the skills or attention required to make, for instance, good *empanadas* or *humitas* and my experience in a number of mixed-gender cooking collectives partially bore out this assertion. The men involved appeared not to want to learn the skills required and had a tendency to deviate from the prescribed, often time-consuming and careful, methods that my female participants laboured to teach me as part of my journey towards Jimeña womanhood. Such 'short-cuts' included using a fork rather than manually crimping and the edges of *empanadas*, making the pastries larger or misshapen, or experimenting with different fillings. These were firmly censured by the women around the table and the men were not infrequently reprimanded, albeit in a joking yet firm manner.

So what can this tell us about gendered bio-authority? And the extent that the kitchen is a site of (female) bio-authority? There has been much discussion regarding the extent that food work can be a source of female empowerment, and scholarship has highlighted myriad nuances between responsibility and control (cf McIntosh and Zey 1998), the division of labour (cf Strathern 1988, Ray 2004), gifting and reciprocal relations (cf Counihan 1988), the ways food preferences are taken into account (cf Murcott 1983), and how food served by women is valued and by whom (cf Weismantel 1988) – to name but a few factors that can enable and limit the agentic capacity of

to make large quantities of labour-intensive foods, such as *empanadas*, *humitas* and *cuy*. Such events in Jima took place for fun and leisure. The term *minga* has historically been used in the region to define a collective work party borne out of necessity, such as agricultural and construction work, but has been adapted in circumstances of waged labour and increased wealth to refer to any collective activity that involves manual labour, however enjoyable or not it may be.

women. It is not my intention to discuss all of these variants here or to assess the value and limitations of each perspective and argument. Instead, I merely wish to signal the subtle ways that food *can* provide a mechanism through which agency can be enacted – and curtailed – by both feeder and eater and the ways this interplays with gender dynamics.

It is clear that the provisioning and withholding of food is a considerable source of power, although it has to be remembered that if one is the primary preparer of food, it does not automatically follow that one has economic control over food provisioning. That being said, there are examples where women have contested inequitable gender relations through their food work: Weismantel (1988) observes how women can punish husbands who drink too much by feeding them large quantities of rich food that entrenched values of reciprocity compel them to eat (often to a detrimental effect on their short-term bodily health), while Holtzman (2009) more radically writes of young Samburu women starving their older husbands. He explains that men's lack of knowledge and practical access to food makes them vulnerable to the wants of their wives, and writes that 'food is both beyond the view and purview of men' (ibid: 87). He surmises:

In contrast to women – whose status appears low but whose agency is high in regard to food – men are regarded as deserving a privileged position in regard to food distribution, but are highly limited in their means of exercising this privilege both for practical reasons and for reasons related to contradictions in the construction of Samburu masculinity (ibid: 88).

Holtzman thereby draws attention to the distinction between discursive values and lived reality, and highlights how such values paradoxically legitimize female agency.

Women, then, are sometimes able to exert considerable influence through their food work but, as Counihan (1988) notes, this only reaches as far as the boundaries of the household, an argument partially disputed by Harbottle (2000) who comments that, in being responsible for the caring of guests and for hospitality, women play a critical role in maintaining the reputation of their husbands and families. What the family eat, however, can be shaped by men, as women put their husbands preferences and needs above their own (Murcott 1983). In short:

Men can exert power over women by refusing to provide food or by refusing to eat or disparaging the food they have cooked. Women can also exert power over men by refusing to cook, controlling their food, or manipulating the status and meaning systems embodied in foods (Counihan 1998: 7).

Through my frame of reference, this argument suggests that food can enable women to reach into the bodies of others and is a potential source of female authority. Yet, the extent of this reach is dependent on cultural context and is by no means clear-cut. Highlighting such cross-cultural complexities maybe a somewhat typical anthropological motif, but this does not diminish the veracity of such a statement and it is in teasing out these nuances that the bi-directional flows of power between eater and feeder, with each informing the other, can be better understood. Such is the value of an ethnographic approach. Taken together, these studies also show how agency is dispersed and variably performed across a household, as well as indicating how bio-

authority may coalesce around one particular social actor. The extent of this coalescence and the forms it takes, in short how the scales of power are weighted, is further dependent on social norms and how expected gender roles relate to individual household dynamics and personal aspirations and circumstances. Another factor to consider is the ways in which personal affective relations and intimacies interlace with wider cultural values about the gendered division of labour, in addition to how such intimacies can 'disguise' and enable social asymmetry (Abbots 2012b).

It is also evident that bodies remain somewhat in the background in many accounts on the gendered division of food labour. Bodies are implied but rarely overtly considered as an analytical frame through which to consider gendered power dynamics, which is perhaps surprising given the presence of the body in discussions of the social construction of sex and gender (cf Butler 1993). Thinking through these questions through the lens of bio-authority can, perhaps, bring another layer of comprehension and shed light on a power dynamic that is oft-obsured. The extent that expressions of gendered agency performed through food, whatever form they may take, translate to shifts in gender relations in society at large is, of course, another question which takes us back to Goodman's (2016) distinction between ontological and political agency. I do not wish to make any sweeping claims here by arguing that, by feeding families and possibly guests, women have political and economic parity or that agency in the domestic realm equates to political power in the public domain (or vice versa). I am, however, suggesting that unearthing the bio-political dynamics that take place at the level of the household can deepen our insights and add another dimension to the study of gender relations.

It is important to note that, while I have focused on gender, it is not solely gender relations that matter here; class relations are also salient. And, just as there is a distinction between provisioning and preparing food, so is there a difference between managing and doing food work, as studies into waged domestic labour portray (Abbotts 2012b, Frøystad 2003, Gill 1990). Indeed, the extent that petty battles are waged between mistress and servant over the food that is served to a household and the wrestling that takes place about who ultimately has control of the kitchen, as I have expounded elsewhere in relation to Jima (Abbotts 2012b), indicates the efficacy of food as a site of empowerment and authority. Moreover, as I indicate in Chapter 4, a further distinction needs to be made between those who do the work of upholding culture through feeding and the bio-authorities who politically shape which food practices are valued as 'our culture'. In the next chapter, I return to this discussion thread by considering the ways in which women, through their food labour, can act as gate-keepers and upholders of culture in a migratory context.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have explored, initially through a re-reading of classic ethnographic texts on kinship and relatedness, how bodies are socially and corporeally kinned through the sharing of food in the domestic realm and worked to demonstrate the value an analytical focus on eating can bring to such discussions. Applying this approach to my experience of eating *cuy*, I have interrogated the meat's vital essence to make individuals as *Jimeño*, showing how its matter is understood to act in a certain way once ingested into the body, shaping, in turn, that body into a particular local form. Eating

cuy draws multiple human and nonhuman bodies into a bounded assemblage, which includes cultural knowledges about the dish. Matter and meaning are consequently enmeshed. Knowledge about cuy – that it is ‘traditional’ and ‘special’, and that eating it (and desiring it) makes you Jimeño and defines your place within a household – is critical, I have argued, in shaping the meat’s affect and effect. Without this knowledge, the meat’s vitalism is diminished. In short, the matter of cuy is charged through its cultural meaning and this cultural meaning is made manifest and viscerally experienced through its matter, which is realized through eating. The vitalism of cuy is thus bounded by the form of its assemblage; an assemblage that is shaped by its symbolic efficacy and its material form and the ways these two elements are entangled. While agency is distributed across *cuy*’s assemblage – and I have indicated a number of mediators including the substances the animal had ingested and the objects of its preparation – as a source of cultural knowledge and as a key actor is drawing cuy’s assemblage together, the cook who can be seen as a bio-authority that permeates the boundaries of the eating body. Agency thus coalesces around her.

The visceral experience of eating has been a key theme in this chapter and I have considered how taste is socially and corporeally sculpted, and food evaluated through embodied encounters. I have thereby suggested that we can conceptualize food as acquiring our bodies just as much as we can see that our bodies acquire food. This does not mean, however, that agency is solely situated in food. It also resides and is expressed in the eating human body and I have explored how desire and rejection can be understood as an enactment of eater’s agency. Showing that eating can be as conflict-ridden as it can be cohesive and unifying, I have further raised questions of how the bio-authority

of the cook is contested and upheld through the politics of embodied rejection, and briefly reflected upon how these household dynamics interplay with gender relations. Gender roles emerge also in the next chapter as I turn to the ways in which bodies are kinned through the sharing of substances in a migratory context; a discussion that develops the theme of the interplay between place, food and bodies implied thus far, and further examines how sameness and otherness are produced through food's matter and meaning becoming entangled in a migrant's eating body.

