

**Negotiating Foreign Bodies:
Migration, Trust and the Risky Business of Eating in Highland Ecuador**

Emma-Jayne Abbotts

Introduction

On returning to the city of Cuenca, situated in the Southern Ecuadorean Andes, after a two year absence, I was immediately struck by two notable changes. Firstly, the local restaurant scene had exploded, with the opening of a range of higher-end, self-styled 'fusion' and 'cosmopolitan' restaurants, a number of which promoted 'Gringo Nights'. The second change related to the 'gringos' who comprise the target audience for such nights, and for the first time I observed a conspicuous presence of, predominantly, retired North Americans living in the city. This recent inward migration has not gone unnoticed by the incumbent Cuencano population and many are ambivalent about their presence, highlighting that they keep to their own and do not integrate into broader society, while also acknowledging that they bring wealth, potential job opportunities, and open new markets and spaces of consumption. Integration, or lack thereof, in relation to food spaces is the subject of this chapter, and I explore the bodily encounters that privileged migrants, as I refer to this social group rather than using the politically and morally charged terms 'expatriate' (cf. Fechter 2007) or 'gringo', both create and deny in their everyday eating practices.

In particular, through the lens of risk, trust and control, I highlight the disjuncture between migrant dreams of consuming a diet of 'simple', 'clean' and

local' food and the reality of their practical eating experiences. A desire to minimize risk by reasserting control over their bodies, and ultimately their physical wellbeing, by escaping the industrial food chains of their home countries is one of the primary motivations privileged migrants cite for moving to Ecuador, and the valorization of short food chains, peasant producers and retailers, and the wide availability of 'healthy', 'fresh' and 'pesticide-free' foods at local markets and restaurants in Cuenca is a recurring motif. Yet, privileged migrants obtain the majority of their food in the 'clean' and 'safe' environment of the supermarket and 'modern' retail outlets, and eat primarily at home and in 'cosmopolitan' restaurants, a number of which are managed by members of their own community. My purpose in this chapter is thereby to explore this contradiction between discourse and practice, and I argue that migrant estrangements from Cuencano foods and food spaces are less founded on practical issues, and more related to migrants' broader fears over 'foreign' bodies, in the shape of both local people and pathogens, and their ambivalence over 'dirty' and 'risk-laden' spaces, including markets. Thus, I highlight how privileged migrants are hindered in the realization of their lifestyle aspirations by their need to assert their own cultural and bodily boundaries, and their concerns over intimate engagements with 'foreign' bodies. Moreover, privileged migrants in Cuenca are a distinct and self-identifying social group, due to their own 'foreign' status, but they are by no means homogenous, and economic, political and geographical divisions that existed pre-migration are being usurped by new, more locally salient and contextual boundaries. This chapter consequently illuminates the role that eating plays in creating these emerging boundaries, not only between migrants and Cuencanos, but also among

migrants; thereby elucidating how food and its spaces create new sites of ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu 1984).¹

“Live Healthier....Live Longer....”

By moving to Cuenca. So advised a recent article in *International Living* (IL), a magazine targeted towards those, primarily North American and retired, individuals looking to enhance their lifestyle by migrating to another country.² IL promotes Cuenca as the ideal destination for those who are searching for a ‘quality of life that just plain doesn't exist anymore in the States’ (IL website ‘Why Ecuador’), naming the city ‘The World’s Best Retirement Haven 2009’, and putting Ecuador at the top of its list of preferred retirement countries in 2010 (ibid). As perhaps can be anticipated, IL’s representation of everyday Cuencano life is romanticized, synchronic and essentializing, with the local population being portrayed as ‘fine craftsmen and attentive caretakers of their land’ who ‘adhere to the natural healing traditions their ancestors taught’ (unattrib. IL website ‘Why Ecuador’). Migrants are told they ‘can sit on a front patio each morning in the clear mountain air, sip coffee, and bask in the equatorial sun’, ‘discover the natural rhythms of the world’, and ‘feel younger, years younger, every day’ (op. cit.). Cuenca is thereby portrayed as the site in which the aspiration of living longer and living healthier can be realized, and it is represented as one of the ‘few small, protected pockets of the world’ where life can continue as

¹ In addition to food, new self-acknowledged distinctions are emerging between migrants who are investing in land and property and those who cautiously prefer to rent, and those who regard themselves as ‘pioneers’ in contrast to the more recent arrivals whose entries have been smoothed – and in part motivated – by the existing ‘expat’ community and the promotion of Cuenca by *International Living* (IL) Magazine.

² IL also helps facilitate privileged migration through a range of advisory activities, including tours that show potential migrants real estate, arranges meet and greet sessions with ‘successful’ migrants and ‘friendly locals’, and highlights migrant spaces, for example, a gringo-owned coffee shop. For many of my participants, an IL tour was their first experience of the city and many cited the magazine as being a significant factor in informing their decision to move to Cuenca. Consequently, the magazine has an unusually marked influence and presence among the privileged migrant community in Cuenca and for many it is the definitive text and source of authority, especially if they do not speak Spanish and have little knowledge and experience of Ecuador.

‘Mother Nature intended and natural remedies have not been supplanted in popularity and accessibility by synthetic medicines’ (ibid). Consequently, living in Cuenca is ‘like living in the 1950s in the USA’ (ibid).

Just as the backgrounds of privileged migrants are varied, the individual journeys that have led to their decision to leave their homes and move to Cuenca are multiple, complex and often deeply intimate, with a number recovering from chronic illnesses and/or becomingly increasingly aware of their ageing bodies. This often interplays with feelings of disempowerment and vulnerability vis-à-vis multinational corporations, Big Pharma and the state, that are further compounded and crystallized by personal tragedies and health concerns.

Steve is an Italian-American from Minnesota, and he and his wife had been permanently living in Cuenca for approximately six months when we first met in a popular ‘gringo’ café. The recent passing of Obama’s healthcare bill by Congress was our first topic of conversation, and Steve was feeling very emotional at the ‘bittersweet’ news. Two years previously, he had been diagnosed with an illness that had ‘financially wiped [him] out’, yet he downplayed his economic motivations for leaving the US, explaining that his primary reason was to live a ‘more simple way of life’. Asked to elucidate what he meant by this, Steve invoked a *New York Times* article that stated ‘a hamburger is more well travelled than most Americans’ and he said ‘I just want to get away from this complexity of the food-chain in the US, you know, with all its pathogens, salmonella and mad cow disease’. He continued ‘for me, well, simple means eating in a more simplified and less complex manner; you know, cutting out some of the links in the food chain, and eating clean food that hasn’t been produced on these great big industrial farms’.

His desire for simple food chains thus arose from a concern over bodily health, and Steve explained that he found it impossible to follow this philosophy back in the USA, primarily because of the intensity and complexity of industrialized food production in North America, and the number of links in, and lack of transparency of, the food chain. He had located 'alternatives' back in Minnesota in the form of farmers markets and organically certified produce, but had found the comparatively high retail prices of these foods prohibitive. In comparison, it was 'easy to be a locavore in Cuenca: the food just hasn't travelled so much so, well, it's cleaner'.

Kiki has not been through the same life-threatening health scares as Steve, but her reasons for migrating are similar, albeit more overtly politicized. A strict vegetarian who has a strong interest in yoga, alternative remedies and natural healing practices, she consistently referred to the disproportionate political and economic power of Big Pharma, and the ways in which 'alternative' health practices, and their practitioners, are consistently undermined and marginalized in the United States. A significant proportion of my conversations with Kiki, and her close circle of friends, were thereby given to the relative merits of alternative diets and eating practices, and the manner in which multinational pharmaceutical and food production companies, with the support of the state, attempted to limit these. Like Steve, Kiki is also searching for a 'simple life', and she explained that she was trying to forge a new way of living in which she would be able to control her food and water sources, and know the 'clean' provenance of the food she ingested, concluding 'in cases of political, economic and/or natural disasters, people in the cities go crazy, but in the country I'll be able to live quietly, away from this mess and the political and corporate powers that try to control our lives'.

Steve and Kiki are not alone in their ambitions to lead a ‘more simple life’. For, although the privileged migrants with whom I worked had different life-stories and personal catalysts for making the life-changing decision to migrate to Cuenca, all cited their aspirations of eating a diet free from pathogens and pesticides, and were looking to source food locally grown by smallholders rather than that which was industrially produced. The consistent valorization of organic foods is a recurring theme, and the range and forms in which this finds expression is testament to the value that pesticide free food has in everyday migrant lives. Organic, local and small-scale production are not, of course, synonymous and, far from being diametrically opposed to industrial agriculture, organic farming, in some contexts, has been appropriated by major players in the food industry and can replicate the agricultural relations of production it originally set out to challenge (cf. Belasco 1989, Buck et al 1997, Guthman 2004, Marsden & Arce 1995). Yet, as Coles (this volume) also notes, consumers often collapse these categories into each other, and the privileged migrant community in Cuenca are no different: organic = local = smallholder = simple.

I first came across the unquestioned value attached to organic food in an IL article in which a privileged migrant extolled the virtues of living in Cuenca by stressing that the city ‘is a place where you can reconnect with the Earth’ and ‘eat organic fruits and vegetables...[sic] because that’s what sold in the markets’ (unattrib. IL Website ‘Why Ecuador’). This perspective was further reflected in my interviews with migrants, as Ian explained;

I like the fact that fruits and vegetables here do not contain pesticides and insecticides because of the elevation. Also many restaurants serve grass-fed beef. Because they are raised freely and not fed with chemicals I would eat [meat] here, whereas I wouldn’t eat it back in the US.

Likewise, on meeting Zelda for the first time and being introduced as somebody ‘who knows about food in Cuenca’, I was immediately asked about grass-fed beef and the agricultural use of pesticides. Zelda understood that most, if not all, fruit and vegetable production was organic, while her partner Quentin was excited about the ‘abundance of pesticide-free, organic fruit and vegetables that you can find in markets and being sold by those peasant women in the street’. Yet it was not just in interviews that I found organic food being championed; on ordering a *mojito* cocktail during a ‘Gringo Night’ drinks evening, Jimmy’s biggest concern was to clarify ‘is the mint organic?’, and a favourite theme of discussion during social dinners was the difficulties of procuring certified and trustworthy organic produce. Consequently, during the course of my research I found myself being drawn into a social network in which tidbits of information about possible sources, and the trustfulness, of organic foods were exchanged. These networks of information exchange become critical for privileged migrants in their attempts to eat ‘simple’ produce as, contrary to IL’s assertions and migrants initial images of Cuenca, organic food, as migrants understand it and need it to be presented, is not as readily available as they wish.

The realization of the scarcity of organic food is often cited by privileged migrants as one of their greatest disappointments and one of their most pressing practical concerns. Consequently their definition of a ‘simple life’ is being constantly renegotiated, as they look to reconcile their expectations and desires with the reality of everyday eating experiences. This process of renegotiation requires, in the language of Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991), the management of risk that, in turn, involves the assessment of knowledge – and their sources – and the allocation of trust. As Caplan states, ‘eating has become a risky business’ (2000: 187). For privileged migrants, who have left their homes and established networks and are entering new,

often unknown, food spaces, the quotidian decisions of what to eat, where to eat it, and from whom to procure it are, I suggest, particularly risk-laden, and the question of who and what to trust are at the forefront of their everyday encounters with food.

Many migrants are unprepared for this negotiation of new risks, in part because they are unaware of the realities of living in Cuenca before arrival and have created an image of the city – and its foods – on idyllic representations in the media, but also because their initial move to Cuenca from the USA can be construed as attempt to better their social risk position (Beck 1992: 23). Both Kiki and Steve's commentaries suggest that privileged migrants comprehend their subject position in the United States as relatively weak in relation to the state and capitalist interests, and that these asymmetries are felt through their bodies. This is particularly acute, as Steve's experience indicates, during times of ill health. Thus the personal and political become entwined: Steve wants to avoid ingesting 'pathogens, salmonella and mad cow disease', but finds this difficult back in the US due to the levels of industrial food production, a lack of transparency and the economic cost. Similarly, Kiki feels subjected to the ambitions of Big Pharma and industry that, in conjunction with the state, restrict her 'alternative' wellbeing and 'clean' food choices. Both, therefore, like Ian, Zelda and Quentin, amongst others, are attempting to gain more control over what goes into their bodies in the form of food. Thus, their migration to Cuenca can be understood as an expression of agency in which they are attempting to alter the terms of their engagement with food, and its providers, by relocating to a place that, as they understand it, has an abundance of clean, simple produce.

In this respect, privileged migrants echo the reflexive consumption politics underpinning natural food (cf. Belasco 1989), and the 'Not In My Body' movements (cf. DuPuis 2000), as they seek to reassert control over, and minimize the risk to, their

own bodies, thereby improving their physical wellbeing. Concerns over others, in the form of long-term ecological sustainability and a desire to establish more equitable relations of production, as commonly located in fair trade, organic and community supported agriculture movements, may be less pronounced in migrant discourse, which appears predominantly concerned with the self, but it is no less political. As Goodman's (1999) actor-network approach to food studies suggests, eating is embedded in an everyday politics in which the claims and counter-claims of actors are evaluated and contested and, as DuPuis (2000) notes in reference to organic milk, consumers do not have to be social activists to shape the relations of food production. DuPuis charts how eating involves consumers negotiating what they will or will not put into their bodies (ibid: 289) and by refusing to consume non-organic milk, due to the concerns over rBGH (recombinant bovine growth hormone), shows how they contest notions of risk; a practice that subsequently draws them into the formation of the organic milk industry. These politics of refusal can also, I suggest, be identified in migrants' relocation to Cuenca. Some, for example Kiki, may formulate their move in more explicitly political terms than others, but all, in looking to minimize their risk position, participate in networks in which claims about foods and made, evaluated and enacted; a process that, in turn, constructs Cuencano food spaces and actors as either 'safe' or 'risky', and potentially leads to the formation of new markets.

Not Alongside My Body: The Antithesis of Commensality

At first glance, the city of Cuenca and its rural environs appear to be the perfect site in which to pursue aspirations for simple, clean food. Set at an elevation of 8200 feet, the city's climate is relatively temperate, the infrastructure is good, and an absence of biting insects helps ensure the region does not suffer from the outbreaks of seasonal disease which plague its lowland neighbours. The area further boasts a

thriving dairy sector and the surrounding countryside is fertile and productive. Low cost fresh produce, including corn, potatoes, cabbages, peas, beans, blackberries and apples, when in season, are widely available in local markets, as are a range of tropical fruits imported from the coastal regions and Amazonia lowlands. This is, however, only one half of the story.

Due in part to its historical position at the heart of the export-orientated Panama hat industry, the greater Cuencano region has been outwardly orientated since the 1930s, and the region has been the site of persistent outward migration and remittance-fuelled ‘development’ since the 1960s (Kyle 2000, Jokisch & Pribilsky 2002). Moreover, IMF/World Bank-led restructuring policies which encouraged the rolling-back of the state, together with national economic crises in the 1980s and late 1990s, were keenly felt in the rural economy, and the resulting proletarianization of the peasantry, consolidation of landholdings, and opening up of markets to international capital have inexorably altered patterns of food production and consumption in the region. Today small agricultural plots are making way for the semi-urban sprawl of new housing developments, new malls containing global fast-food chains and supermarkets are opening, and the state is looking to reverse the trend of diminishing agricultural yields by incentivizing the use of chemical fertilizers (el Tiempo 2010).

As I have argued elsewhere, Cuencanos are generally rather relaxed about these changes and are skilled in negotiating a path between reasserting their ‘traditional’ and ‘local’ food practices and embracing ‘modernity’ and the ‘exogenous’ in the form of a Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) bargain bucket (Abbots, 2012). Global fast food chains, and their local counterparts, are popular with a range of Cuencano social groups and across all generations, yet the one social group who

remain conspicuous by their absence are privileged migrants, who roundly condemn this perceived ‘McDonaldization’ (cf. Ritzer 2010). The presence and local popularity of KFC and Burger King (BK) are a particular source of consistent dismay for migrants, as Xenia explained, ‘the local people, well, they’re just not as far along as us in realising the dangers of these foods’ and Carol exclaimed ‘we’re creating monsters in these countries; people don’t realize what they’re eating, what harm they’re doing to themselves with all those fats and poisons’. Consequently, although they commonly frequent the malls in which the chains are located, privileged migrants never, to my knowledge, purchase or consume food from these restaurants.³

Although it is tempting to assume, based on scholarship on the role food plays in reaffirming migrant identities and sense of belonging (cf. Abbots 2011, Harbottle 2000, Kershen 2002, Ray 2004), that North Americans will gravitate to the food of their home country, the self-distancing of privileged migrants from global fast-food restaurants is not unsurprising when their views on complex, industrial foods are considered. The relations of food production within these chains may differ significantly from the image circulated in popular discourse (Striffler 2007) but, for privileged migrants – as expressed by Steve’s ‘well-travelled’ hamburger and Carol’s assertion that eating the foods of KFC and BK is tantamount to self-harm – they are the antithesis of ‘simple, clean’ food and symbolically epitomize the industrial chains, and its associated pathogens, from which they are trying to escape. The ‘dangers’ to which Xenia refers are not, however, limited to the foods and the bodies that ingest them, but are conceived as being multi-dimensional: they erode the sites of ‘simple’

³ The global fast food chain are one of the few areas in which privileged migrants discourse and their practices were consistent.

food production, displace the 'local', and supplant 'tradition'.⁴ Privileged migrants' rejection of the global fast-food chains thus appears consistent with their food politics and their aspirations to manage risk. Yet their self-removal from the shared eating spaces of these restaurants has broader social consequences, by creating bodily distance from the incumbent Cuencano population.

The role that the exchange of food and commensality plays in establishing social relatedness has been well documented (cf. Carsten 1997, Saleh this volume, Strathern 1988) and, although these discussions have commonly been concerned with the domestic sphere and kinship relations, and have centred on the active sharing of the same food, rather than the incidental sharing of the same food space, their suggestion that food constitutes coterminous bodies can be extended to a restaurant setting. For these works all demonstrate that eating forms persons and enacts social relations. Broadening this argument, I suggest that eating bodies which share the same food space, thus encounter each other and, in doing so, become related. These relations have different levels of engagement and may be fleeting; eaters within the restaurant space may never acknowledge their relatedness, or seek to develop it within or outside of the restaurant space. Yet the act of consuming and ingesting the same food in the same space establishes an incidental encounter between bodies, and by removing their bodies from this potentiality, privileged migrants are denying the possibility of relations with other consumers, much in the same way as refusing a gift of sharing food is to deny a social relation (cf. Mauss 1990). Thus, migrants' politics of refusal does not just pertain to the products of fast food chain, but extends to the consumers of these products.

⁴ See Abbots (2012 and forthcoming a) for a broader discussion of the perceived 'dangers' and the attractions of fast-food chains in the greater Cuenca region.

By consciously removing their bodies from the same sites of eating as many Cuencanos, privileged migrants are consequently the architects of their own social estrangement. This does not occur in all food spaces, and elsewhere I have discussed the emergence of ‘cosmopolitan’ eating spaces which are shared by middle- and upper-class Cuencanos and migrants (Abbots, forthcoming a), and later in this chapter I discuss the ‘clean’ coterminous bodies that move through the sterile environment of Supermaxi. But first I turn my attention to the ways that migrants further establish social distance through their rejection of foods from markets and local restaurants, and explore some possible motivations informing this process. For, the rejection of global chains and ‘industrial’ food does not automatically equate to privileged migrants seeking out ‘alternative’ food spaces situated at the other end of the spectrum – the restaurants and markets selling ‘local’ and ‘simple’ food. Migrants may commonly extol the virtues of Cuencano markets and ‘local’ produce, but a survey of their shopping habits demonstrates that they do not acquire their food, or eat, in these spaces. Rather, the majority of their everyday food purchases are made in Supermaxi, the national supermarket chain (whose outlets are located in the same malls as KFC and BK): a practice that appears to be somewhat contrary to their food aspirations and politics.

Who and Where to Trust?: Evaluating Risk through the Body

Caplan (2000) has argued, in the context of BSE scares in Wales and England, that consumers look to localize their eating practices. In other words, when faced with risks, in the form of toxic food that has the (unknown) potential to damage bodily health, social actors attempt to minimize the danger by purchasing and eating food of which they are confident that they know the source, either in the form of producer or retailer. She thereby notes that it is not just knowing where food comes from, but also

knowing whom one buys it from that is of import (ibid: 192), and thus draws attention to the centrality that established social relations play in evaluations of safe and dangerous foods, as well as indicating the critical role ‘trust’ plays in these evaluations. The issue, however, that privileged migrants in Cuenca face is that, unlike the members of Welsh farming communities discussed by Caplan, migrants do not have established social relations with local producers and retailers nor the wherewithal to develop them. The majority of my research participants, particularly those whose relocation to Cuenca has been orchestrated by an external agency, have very little knowledge and experience of the city, Ecuador, and even Latin America more generally. Consequently they are commonly lacking the language skills, social networks, and cultural knowledge required on which relations of trust can be built.

This lack of cultural knowledge further extends to understanding and recognizing the food for sale at markets, a point made by Abi who explained;

I wish they [International Living] offered tours around the markets: I don’t know what all these strange fruit and vegetables are; I’ve got no idea how to cook them or eat them, what I should pay for them – or even if they’re safe! We need someone to show us – we don’t know this food. I get all my food from Supermaxi; that way I know what it is and how much I’m paying for it. I recognize the food there.

Relations of trust with Cuencano food producers and retailers are therefore difficult, although not impossible, for privileged migrants to establish, and the issues they face are further compounded by a lack of transparency in market negotiations. Cuenca’s food markets appear distinctly confused; non-organic produce is, at times represented as organic (and vice-versa) and industrially produced foods are often marketed and sold as if they were the products of local and small-scale agriculture.

This confusion stems, in part, from the long resale chain that culminates in the produce of multinationals being sold by street and market vendors,⁵ as well as a less rigorous system of regulation than privileged migrants are accustomed.⁶ It is also exacerbated by vendors' own marketing techniques: until recently, the term 'organic' was rarely, if ever, in the lexicon of small retailers but now Luis the barman responds to Jimmy's concern over the mint in his *mojito* with smiling assurances and confirmation that 'yes, of course it's organic; I know how to look after my customers', and it is not uncommon to be stopped in the street by a fruit seller, be offered strawberries of extraordinary size, and be told 'they're organic, from here; the best quality with no chemicals'. Thus, while Quentin regards the women standing on the street corners dressed in the 'traditional' clothes of a Cuencana peasant selling fresh fruit from wheelbarrows and baskets as symbolic of an uncomplicated food chain,⁷ a closer look commonly reveals the branding of Del Monte and Dole lying beneath the façade. To add to the confusion, fruit and vegetables produced on smallholdings without the use of pesticides, that may well be organic in essence, are not constructed and represented as such in the 'formal' and certified manner that privileged migrants recognize and are also, at times, sold alongside imported, non-organic produce.

⁵ Ironically, this produce may also have originated from small farms and been purchased by multinationals through contract farming arrangements. See Hellin and Higman (2003), Lyon (2010) and Ormond (this volume) for further discussions of contract farming.

⁶ Systems of organic certification do exist in Ecuador, but the majority of producers who are engaged with certification are generally orientated towards the export market, for example Dole Organic. Hence, the availability of organic produce that is certified as such is not only extremely limited in Cuenca, but is also commonly the produce of agro-industry. See, for example, Belasco (1989), Buck et al (1997), Guthman (2004), Marsden & Arce (1995) and Lyon (2010) for further discussions on the politics of organic production.

⁷ I have discussed the image of the *Chola Cuencana* and the ways she embodies country – city relations in more detail elsewhere, (Abbots forthcoming b). See also Weismantel (2001 and 2003).

Deciding in whom to invest their trust is thereby a potential minefield for privileged migrants, with many feeling that sellers were taking advantage of their cultural and social incompetence. As Steve explained when discussing street sellers:

I feel, in my heart, that it's [their produce] probably not organic; I mean strawberries shouldn't be that size! But these local producers, they need to produce as much as possible, they need to make money, so you can't blame them for telling you what you want to hear.

Yet Steve was also one of the few participants in my research who occasionally ate fruits purchased from street vendors, telling me 'I want to believe it's organic, so I tell myself it is. My head won't quite let me at times, but I keep trying to believe 'em!' This Cartesian battle between head and body is not uncommon among privileged migrants, with Yvonne also explaining that she 'wanted to buy into this whole nature's basket and its all natural thing, but it's a struggle when you know its not', and it is, in many ways indicative of the disjuncture between migrants' aspirations and the reality in which they find themselves. Yet, as Steve indicates, a number of migrants, albeit a minority, persist because, 'we've made this life-choice now'; a point neatly surmised by Yvonne who concluded; 'I'm here, I've got to eat – and the alternative [back in the USA] is so much worse!'

Steve and Yvonne's eating practices are based on an evaluation of relative risks, but their comments also suggest that this process is informed by their current social position, both real and imagined. Both felt that, after investing so heavily (economically and emotionally) in their dreams of 'a simple life', they had little option but to follow the path they had 'chosen', even when it challenged their instincts and intellect. This battle with the self further indicates, however, that migrants, at times, are making conscious, reflexive decisions to establish relations of

trust with Cuencano food retailers, even when it potentially carries a risk of ingesting chemicals. This is further demonstrated by Bryan, one of the ‘pioneer’ privileged migrants who relocated to Cuenca over four years ago. While still being a keen supermarket shopper, he, along with his wife, Carol, were keen to stress the frequency of his market visits, with Carol proudly telling me that ‘the women know Bryan in there now’. Bryan himself continued;

I go to the same two or three stalls, and have been for some time. They even let me fill the bag now, you know you get four avocados for a dollar, but they fill the bag; well I like to select which ones I want – and that might mean me giving them a dollar for three – but they’re the ones I want. I choose each individual strawberry too.

Over time Bryan has developed relations of trust with two to three market vendors not only by repetition and familiarity, but also by changing the terms of engagement. He asserts control in the market; selecting the fruits he wants at the price he is willing to pay. The couple repeatedly told me how comfortable Bryan was in the market and emphasized his close personal connection to the vendors, using this as the means by which to demonstrate their integration into Cuencano society and openness to new cultural experiences which, in turn, from their subject position, distinguishes them from other ‘more recent – the International Living’ migrants. To borrow from Caldwell (2004), Bryan has thereby ‘domesticated’ the foreign space of the Cuenca market, transforming the unfamiliar and risky into the known and trustworthy. Yet he has not just done so by symbolically appropriating Cuencano food spaces and using them as a place for intimate celebrations, nor by bringing Cuencano foods into the private space of his home. Rather, he has physically domesticated Cuencano markets,

and their produce, through his embodied engagement with them; drawing the food of the market into his body and making it his own.

Establishing relations of trust with local food spaces and retailers may, in some contexts, be a case of ‘mind over matter’, but privileged migrants also discover that they cannot negate their bodies altogether in their evaluations of risk. For the body plays a significant role as a test-bed for the relative safety of foods: Bryan continued shopping in the market as he had suffered ‘no ill effects’ from the fruit purchased from his trusted vendors, whereas Josie’s story is somewhat different. She avoided all local foods, telling me that this avoidance was due to the manner in which her body had gone into ‘a tailspin’ since arriving in Cuenca. Josie and I first met during dinner at a higher-end Italian restaurant, and I was initially surprised when her order only comprised bottled water. She proceeded to remove from her bag, and eat from, a plastic container filled with a seaweed and cider vinegar mix, and explained she was following a restrictive ‘body ecology’ diet:

When I arrived, I ate loads of fruit – I mean I concentrated on the fruit you could peel, or I washed it – but my body just went into a tailspin; I guess it’s just that there are so many germs here and my body isn’t used to it. So now, the only way I can get by is by being on this diet. I need to sort out my intestines, y’know, the balance of them – they’ve been put completely out of whack here.

With the exception of quinoa, which is produced in the Andes but rarely consumed by Cuencanos, Josie is unable to source the food her diet requires her to eat, and consequently her husband made frequent trips back to the United States in order to fill empty suitcases with sea vegetables and supplements. This practice of

importing food, especially supplements, is not uncommon and forms part of migrants' exchange networks, but I first wish to address Josie's concerns over 'germs'.

The 'Dirty' Market: Avoiding Pathogens and Pollution

A dominant theme in the food discourse of privileged migrants is the manner in which they perceive Cuencano food markets – and often, by extension, the people contained within the market – as dirty and dangerous sites;⁸ a perspective typified by Toni, who stated that “‘we have been to a couple of the open-air markets but they are crowded, confusing, and really dirty. They are interesting but we do not buy anything’. She continued to explain that she had suffered severe food poisoning, which she attributed to the one occasion she had eaten food purchased from a local vendor, and, as a result, would ‘never eat anything sold in those places again – it’s just not safe’. Like Josie and Bryan, Toni judges the risks of certain foods through the effects on her body, but her evaluations are premised not only on *what* food she is eating, but also *where* it has been purchased. She consequently drew attention to the dirt of the market and, through this framework, renders the unseen intangible threat of germs visible and material. Food from markets is thus deemed unsafe because it is from the market; a place of dirt and chaos. However, not all food receives the same treatment, and some are understood to be less susceptible to the dirt of the market, or in other words potentially less risky, than others. This is seen in the eating practices of Bryan and Steve. Both will, through varying acts of trust, purchase fruits, which can be washed or peeled, from markets, but when asked if they would purchase meat from

⁸ Markets are often seen as dangerous sites that present a risk to personal safety (cf. Carrier 1997). This extends beyond food to the more immediate risks of robbery and violence, and there is some evidence to suggest that privileged migrants imagine Cuencano markets in this way. However, while this may influence the eating practices of some, as Valerie suggests, others visit the markets ‘out of interest’ while still continuing to refuse to eat any of the food sold there.

the same sellers, they responded with a resounding ‘no’. As Carol told me; ‘we’re fussy about meat’. Trust, it seems, can only extend so far.

Privileged migrants are not, however, avoiding Cuencano markets solely because they understand them to be dirty and the food potentially harmful to their bodily health. Rather, their estrangement from these spaces, I argue, indicates a deeper cultural aversion to the local population and a desire to create bodily, and consequently social, boundaries. This is indicated in the broader concerns that migrants have about the transmission of disease and germs, which results in their extensive use of hand washes and sprays, bleaches and cleaning products. As Kelly-Mary stated, ‘I always use one of those anti-bacterial hand washes after being in any public space because, well, you could pick up anything there’. Kiki agreed, explaining that she always carried a spray with her and used it while on public transport, after handling money and always before eating outside of the home. The implication is that local bodies, as well as local food and markets, are dirty and, hence, risky. The fear of foreign bodies thereby extends beyond pathogens to include the bodies of Cuencanos, with migrants erecting barriers – in the form of anti-bacterials – to protect their own bodies from ‘contamination’. As Douglas (2002) has eloquently argued, these fears of bodily pollution symbolize broader concerns regarding the social body, and the reassertion of bodily boundaries can be interpreted as a desire to affirm social boundaries and maintain purity. Thus, while the factors informing migrant estrangement from Cuencano bodies in markets follows a different, pathogen-laden path from their distancing from those same bodies in fast-food chains, their core aspiration – that of controlling the risks to their own bodily health – not only leads to the reproduction of bodily boundaries, but also, by reaffirming social boundaries, can be understood as producing their own social categorization.

Not all bodily reactions to Cuencano foods are as visceral and immediate an experience as Toni's and not all 'foreign bodies' can be rendered material through dirt. As Steve's quandary demonstrates, pesticides present privileged migrants with a more oblique risk than pathogens: they remain hard to discern and any potential ill effects on the body are felt over a longer time frame. Yet, they are not totally imperceptible. In making the statement 'strawberries shouldn't be that size', Steve draws on his experience of eating organic strawberries from his most trusted source in the USA – farmers' markets – and draws on this experience and knowledge to evaluate Cuencano 'organic' strawberries. A large part of this process is evidently visual, with the fruits being judged on size, but the embodied act of eating also continues to play a role. Steve told me he was disappointed with the sweetness of the strawberries, finding them 'tasteless' and 'watery', and to make these quality judgements he used his body, measuring the taste of the strawberries against known organic produce, and ultimately finding it lacking. Thus taste, in addition to the look of the fruit and his relation with the seller, becomes a mechanism for judging whether it is, in his view, organic or not, and consequently the practice of ingesting and tasting food is a mechanism through which risks, in conjunction with social relations, are evaluated, however invisible they may be.

Strawberries are not unique in this context, and food doesn't have to taste 'good' to be deemed organic by migrants. For the converse occurs with the local grass-fed beef, a common symbol, as indicated earlier, of a simple food. Yet migrants commonly find it 'tough' and 'unpleasant', a perspective illustrated by Bob who complained, 'it's so chewy, it can take you half an hour to get through a piece; it's because they don't feed the cows corn, and you need corn to put some fat on that meat and make it nice and tender'. In migrant discourse on beef, being chewy and tasteless

is thereby equated to being grass-fed which, in turn, is associated with simple food chains and the absence of pathogens and industrialization. Thus, while it may not be to the personal tastes of the privileged migrant population, being unpleasant and chewy bestows beef with a particular ‘simple’ quality that indicates lower risk. Thus, trust and an absence of risk become associated with particular material qualities and sensorial experiences.

As suggested in my discussion of markets, the risk that grass-fed beef poses increases significantly when purchased from a Cuencano market, and thus far I have attempted to tease out the multiple ways through which privileged migrants negotiate risk through their eating practices, tracing the interplays between foods, the sites in which they are purchased and consumed, social relations, and embodied reactions. It has become evident, I hope, that a tension exists between migrants’ aspirations and their eating practices, as they discover that eating ‘simple’ food involves the necessary engagement with, and often the introduction of, ‘foreign bodies’ (in all their forms). The resultant risks to their own (also foreign) bodies, both real and imagined, has to be managed – migrants do, after all, have to eat – and I now turn my attention to the foods and food spaces they consume, rather than those they avoid, as they seek to regain control over the substances they ingest.

Clean, Sterile and Safe: The Lure of Supermaxi

Privileged migrants are thus faced with a dilemma. They left the United States in search of simple food that would reduce their exposure to risk, but this relocation produces new, often unforeseen, risks that also potentially endanger the body. Consequently, they turn to familiar ‘safe’ territory and the food spaces that appear to present the relatively lesser risk: the supermarket. Whether it is Bryan buying selected foods from trusted women in the market, Steve trying to trust the words and produce

of a local vendor, or Josie following a restricted diet, the one food space that all my migrant research participants had in common was ‘Supermaxi’, the national Ecuadorean supermarket chain. Commonly situated in malls located on the inner fringes of the city, the stores would not be out of place in the USA, and they boast well-stocked shelves, wide aisles and checkouts, and a bright and spacious environment. All the self-serve foods available, with the exception of some fruits and breads, are prepackaged, all are clearly labelled, and their prices prominently displayed. It is therefore tempting to view Supermaxi’s attraction for migrants purely in terms of convenience which, as Reardon & Berdegú (2002) have identified, is one of the primary reasons, together with time pressures, urbanization and increased wealth that have resulted in the rise of supermarket culture. Yet, while not disregarding this self-evident convenience, as well as the transparency of pricing that is, for example, so important to Abi, I suggest there are other factors influencing Supermaxi’s popularity among privileged migrants.

Toni buys nearly all her food in Supermaxi although her other ‘favourite place is a very modern and clean Italian deli’ and in our conversations she contrasted these two food spaces to the market, creating a striking dichotomy between the sterile safe surroundings of the former to the dirty risky environment of the latter. The association between Supermaxi and sterility was further made by Mitch, who explained the attraction of the supermarket as having ‘something to do with the type of architecture: malls and supermarkets, well, they have that wonderfully sterile environment, don’t they?’ He continued to elucidate his patronage by challenging the ‘convenience’ thesis: ‘it’s crazy really, I have all the time in the world now, I can shop every day and have no pressures on my time, and yet I still go to Supermaxi – what can I say? I’m Western!’ The supermarket thereby appears to invoke a certain localized familiarity in

migrants, and this, following Caplan (2000), helps facilitate relations of trust. This is reinforced by the perceived cleanliness and modernity of the space, although I suggest the sterility to which Mitch refers is not solely premised on Supermaxi's scrubbed tiles, neat displays and tightly wrapped foods, but is also related to the lack of foreign bodies, and the chaos they are perceived to create. Cuencano bodies are not totally absent from supermarkets – they are evidently present in the form of customers and staff – yet they are more ordered and clean in this context; smartly uniformed check-out assistants replace the peasant, lower-class market vendor, and customers glide between the aisles behind their shopping trolleys and wait in line instead of jostling through narrow spaces and loudly bargaining. Hence the bodies that are present are more familiar, or in other words, less foreign, to privileged migrants. Familiarity, and the associated diminished risk, in this context does not just refer to the produce and space, but also the bodies who handle the produce and move through this space.

Relations of trust with Supermaxi are further enabled by migrants desire for organic produce, as the chain is one of the few sources of 'certified' organic produce, as Carrie highlights. Carrie is a big fan of the supermarket and has 'struggled' with the lack of certified food available in Cuenca, telling me that she didn't "trust the street-sellers" and didn't know "where else to go to get the food I want; I want to know it's organic and that's impossible here unless I go to Supermaxi". Carrie is therefore looking for guarantees and for her this takes the form of a recognizable brand that certifies the food's organic status through recourse to regulatory agencies and the state. Her position is therefore somewhat paradoxical: in order for her to trust her 'simple' food she needs it, and its producer, to be subjected to a complex system of governance and regulatory procedures. In evaluating her risk position, Carrie places more trust in 'formal' certification and Supermaxi than the word of a Cuencano

market-seller. Yet only a very limited range of produce is certified organic and visible regulations do not extend to all the foods on the supermarket shelves. Hence the fear of pathogens, and the need to control it, persists and Carrie, like other migrants, looks to minimize the risks associated with fresh fruit and vegetables through sterilization.

The best methods for sterilizing food are commonly shared between migrants, and many used the 'special wash sold in Supermaxi' and a 'peroxide solution' for this purpose. They thus look to depollute produce by similar methods as those used to ensure their bodies are not 'contaminated' by germs in public spaces, and revert to chemicals as the means of 'cleansing'. However, not all foods lend themselves to being cleaned in this manner, meat being especially problematic, and a number of migrants, like Josie above, rely heavily on multi-vitamins and diet supplements, often imported from the United States, to counter-balance the potentially harmful effects of ingesting 'risky' foods and pathogens.⁹ In addition, a small number advocate vitamin C injections, of which Penny is a fan. She explained she 'have never felt so good' after following a course of injections that were designed to counteract the pollutants in her body: she would not, however, eat a local Vitamin C-rich mango. When viewed through the lens of risk this preference is understandable; the mango can potentially increase the pollution levels inside Penny's body with pesticides and pathogens whereas the pure injections defend the body from such harm.

Penny's practices are reminiscent of Strathern's (1988) account of gift-giving in Melanesia, in which women feed yams to male migrants in order to strengthen and replenish their bodies, which have been weakened by the consumption of the exogenous foods of rice, tinned fish and corned beef. In this work, Strathern shows

⁹ The high rates of import duty that they have to pay on multi-vitamins and diet supplements are a consistently common complaint among the privileged migrant population. A number hire 'baggers' to carry vitamins across the border on their behalf.

that symbolically resonant foods can counteract the potentially dangerous foreign foods consumed by migrants, helping minimize the risk that they will assimilate into their host country. Her argument thus points to the social and cultural risks that consuming foreign foods can pose and, in indicating the ways these dangers can be neutralized by ingesting ‘home’ substances, she elucidates the interplay between the body and the social. In this chapter I have attempted to trace this relation between the individual and social body by exploring how the practice of eating is fraught with dangers for privileged migrants. Some of these dangers are visible, while others are not, but by examining the everyday encounters between foods and migrants’, and others’, bodies I have aimed to provide an insight into migrants’ broader concerns over intimacy with the foreign, as well as the ways in which their establishment of bodily boundaries indicates a process of social and cultural distancing and estrangement. It is perhaps not surprising that many migrants turn inwards, towards the non-foreign (from their subject position) bodies of other migrants, and the trends of restricted networks of food exchange, communally held land and food co-operatives (for self-consumption) are beginning to emerge. In addition, a number of migrants are opening up their own commercial food spaces in which to satisfy their ever-increasing demand for safe food from a trusted source.

Yet, to portray privileged migrants as inherently insular would be a misrepresentation. Many have made a significant, emotional as well as financial, investment to realize their aspirations of a ‘simple life’ and, as Bryan and Steve indicate, a number make considerable efforts, at times contesting their bodily instincts, to live that dream and engage with Cuencanos and their food spaces, even when it involves ‘risky’ eating. This engagement entails a process of ‘domestication’ of Cuencano food sites and the consequences of this are yet to be seen. There are

hints, in the exclusive ‘Gringo Night’ dinners and the emergence of ‘cosmopolitan’ restaurants, that migrant intimacy with Cuencano food spaces may be a case of appropriation rather than integration, but these new sites, while excluding some, commonly lower-class, Cuencano bodies also provide a space that migrants and, higher-class, Cuencanos intimately share.¹⁰

Conclusion: Who, what and where to trust?

Or, in other words, who, what and where presents the lesser risk?

As I indicated at the start of this chapter, privileged migrants, while appearing from the outside as a distinct, homogenous social group, are, to some extent, heterogeneous in their food practices. All may shop consistently in Supermaxi and avoid the multinational fast food chains, but in between these two poles of engagement and refusal, there are multiple relations of trust. Some, like Steve, consciously decide that, as they have invested so much into their new lives, they will make concerted efforts to trust Cuencano retailers and their produce, despite what their bodies, instincts and intellect tell them. Others, for example Bryan, domesticate unfamiliar spaces and foods, making them familiar and trustworthy by establishing social relations with vendors and ingesting their wares. Whereas some, as exemplified by Josie, turn inwards, towards restrictive diets, imported foods, supplements and migrant exchange networks. There are therefore varying degrees of engagement with Cuencano food spaces, and multiple relations are simultaneously created and denied through migrant eating practices and food preferences. Yet these relations are not mutually exclusive, and privileged migrants are in a constant process of renegotiating their notion of a ‘simple life’ with the realities of their everyday, embodied lived experience. Eating is a risky business, and the assessment of the relative risks are

¹⁰ See Abbots (forthcoming a) for further discussion.

informed by conceptions of people, places and foods: the decisions of who, what and where to trust are not only founded on experience, knowledge, and personal politics, but are also shaped by social relations. Evaluations of trust are further mediated through the body, either in its visceral reactions to ‘foreign’ food or through the less dramatic experience of taste, texture and smell. ‘Deciding’ what, where and how to eat is thus a complex practice in which the body and the social interplay. Food ‘decisions’, moreover, create intimacies and encounters between coterminous eating bodies, while also negating social relations, or their possibility, with others. In some contexts, as in the case of migrants refusing to consume in KFC and BK, these politics of refusal can be explicit, although the negation of a social relation with other consumers can be incidental. In other scenarios, for example distancing one’s body from a market because of fears over dirt and pathogens, or using a hand-spray, the politics of refusal and self-estrangement may not be as clearly articulated, but, I suggest, they are still very much present. As Goodman (1999) highlights, eating is a political act and, through their evaluations of ‘safe’ and ‘unsafe’ foods, vendors, and spaces, privileged migrants are not only creating new social boundaries and relations, but in doing so are also participating in, and helping shape, the changing foodscape of Cuenca.

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