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# Rice & Coriander

## Sensorial re-creations of home through food: Ecuadorians in a northern Spanish city

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## Abstract

Food is an important and specific kind of material culture. It is literally embodied and present in an everyday basis. Familiar food can play an important role in the migratory context; both at a public visible level and also, and overall, in the intimate domain of the domestic sphere and the mundane everyday. As migration involves discontinuity with the known human, cultural and material environment, food practices and preferences can be used as a strategy to, in a sensorial way, fight off the sense of fragmentation triggered by migration. This paper explores these issues in the specific context of Ecuadorian migrants in the northern Spanish city of Santander, based on interviews with 38 such migrants.

## Introduction: researching food in the migrant experience

Several studies have shown the persistence of eating practices between migrant communities all over the world (for America see for instance Brown and Mussell, 1984; Diner, 2001 or Gabaccia, 1998; for the UK see Valentine, 1999; for Spain see Abu-Shams, 2006; Durán Monfort, 2004; Kaplan and Carrasco, 2002). According to Gabaccia

[...] food and language are the cultural traits humans learn first, and the ones that they change with the greatest reluctance. Humans cannot easily lose their accents when they learn new languages after the age of about twelve; similarly, the food they ate as children forever defines familiarity and comfort (1998: 6).

Eating patterns have been maintained in some cases even long after language acculturation has taken place (Valentine, 1999: 519). This is so, because 'in Homo sapiens food not only nourishes but also signifies' (Fischler, 1988: 276).

The study of food practices, meanings and preferences of non-transnational migrants can help us to raise – and hopefully answer – very interesting questions. What can we learn about processes of home formation or home re-creation through the food migrants choose to eat, or the foodstuffs they miss most, or the dishes whose smells and flavours most remind them of 'home'? And as a result, what can we learn about the notion itself of 'being-at-home'? And finally,

how is that all linked with issues of carnality and embodiment?

*Why food?*

Reason 1: Food is not only about health, it is also about meanings

Food has been studied from a variety of disciplines<sup>1</sup>. Anthropologists such as Levy-Strauss or Douglas can be considered pioneers in their structuralist analysis of food consumption (Levy-Strauss, 1997; Douglas, 1997). There is a preference for researching food in relation with health concerns (Brown and Mussell, 1984; Hargreaves et al., 2002; Jonsson et al., 2002; Mellin-Olsen and Wandel, 2005). With the recent revival of interest (both academic and non-academic) in identity-related issues, food has been brought to the front due its power to perform and produce identity.

Food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps it assert its diversity, hierarchy and organization and [...] its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently (Fischler, 1988: 275).

Still, when linking food and migration, either the emphasis is placed on the actual physical movement of the foodstuffs themselves (Cook and Crang, 1996; Wu and Cheung, 2002) or in the health effects

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<sup>1</sup> For illustrative purposes, see the following non-exhaustive list: Gabaccia, 1998 or Scholliers, 2001, for historic approaches; Fischler, 1988 or Lupton, 1994 for sociological ones; Corr, 2002; Mintz and Dubois, 2002, or Sutton, 2001 for anthropological; Bledin, 2003 for a psychology approach.

that migration brings to migrants through rapid changes in their diets (Brussaard et al., 2001; Edmonds, 2005; Hargreaves et al., 2002; Jonsson et al., 2002; Mellin-Olsen and Wandel, 2005).

However, the joint study of migration and – or through – food is still under-researched. The research described in this paper places itself within what can be considered a rather recent new approach. This trend is interested in identity and home formation processes read through material culture<sup>2</sup>. Scholars within this approach, the joint study of migration and material culture, have clearly stated the close links between material culture and process of identity and home formation (Tolia-Kelly, 2004; Walsh, 2006).

### Reason 2: We are in contact with food every day and we spend most of our lives in the 'mundane everyday'

The everyday life is where anyone spends most of his/her time. Thus, looking at the fabric of the quotidian, the minutiae of everyday experience, can reveal processes, that because they are seen as mundane, have been disregarded as unimportant. On the contrary, they are at the very core of processes of identity and home formation. Food sharing practices, cooking and eating, can be imbued with powerful meanings that are most of the time taken for granted as eating is depicted as a mundane act. We eat every single day, we celebrate most of our relevant dates with food, we share food with our loved ones, we look for specific ingredients to cook recipes... Food takes up a central part in every human life. The creation of regional cuisines contradicts the idea that food is only about nourishment; why then do we spend so much energy and imagination on ways of transforming already edible raw materials?

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<sup>2</sup> Let us not forget that foodstuffs are actually a special kind of material culture, as food, differently from clothing or domestic objects, is literally embodied, incorporated into our bodies. This feature allows food to overcome traditional frontiers of analysis: the inside and the outside; the others and me; the subject and the object. More than any object of material culture, food is highly loaded with meanings.

### Reason 3: Smelling, tasting, touching food: the forgotten senses

We all inhabit worlds of ideas and thoughts, but not only. Smells, flavours, textures are also an important part of our lived experience<sup>3</sup>. When migrating, one not only leaves behind his/her loved ones, her/his material possessions. Migrating also involves abandoning a sensorial world that is at the same time the frame where our experience takes place and part of the experience itself. In Sara Ahmed's words, migration implies 'a spatial reconfiguration of an embodied self' (1999: 341). Migration is experienced through the body. The actual physical movement is a fully embodied experience. One migrates usually for very rational reasons, to get better future opportunities, to give one's children a better education, a better house, to help one's parents to live a comfortable retirement. But one cannot help but feel fear, anxiety, homesickness, expectations, hopes, nostalgia, desires ... It does not seem appropriate to set aside 'rational targets' and the whirlpool of emotions and feelings triggering and triggered by the fact of migrating. The division between body and mind, well established in Western academia, has been revealed as misleading by new scholarly trends, such as the anthropology of the senses (Classen, 1993; Seremetakis, 1994; Stoller and Cheryl, 1989).

Migration can imply a sharp change of food, smells, flavours and known people. Migration means leaving behind a familiar sensorial environment, 'the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells' (Ahmed, 1999: 341). Living somewhere else can imply that 'nothing tastes as it does at home' or that 'almost every smell here reminds me of home'<sup>4</sup>.

Keeping in mind the strong power of food to trigger sensorial reactions, can food play an

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<sup>3</sup> Nadia Seremetakis in her work, *The Memory of the Senses* (1994: 1-18), makes a powerful description of the ability of a peach to recall a 'tastier past'.

<sup>4</sup> Answers given by the same person (31 year-old Ecuadorian male) to the questions, 'could you tell me a flavour that reminds you of home?' 'And a smell?' (data from fieldwork).

important role in processes of home re-creation? Can eating 'food from home' while away trigger specific emotions? Does eating meaningful food allow the re-creation of home, at least temporarily?

#### Reason 4: Migrants cannot live by bread alone: re-creating home

A human being is by nature a social being, so their 'primary impetus is to belong' (Dalal, 1998: 40). Home is when one belongs. Home has usually been thought spatially<sup>5</sup>. To problematise that assumption, this research works on the idea that the decisive dimension of home (i.e. the sense of being at home) is time over space, and as such, food can have the ability to trigger that sense. We all need anchors in our lives, scaffoldings that help us to keep on building our lives. For non-migrants<sup>6</sup> those moorings usually have a spatial nature, but for people in migrancy, do those moorings own a temporal nature? Is not the question when is home, instead of where is home?

This paper aims to highlight the food panorama of a small group of Ecuadorian migrants living in the Spanish northern coastal city of Santander. The ultimate goal is to obtain some theoretical connections between their eating practices, on the one hand, and food preferences and their homing processes on the other.

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<sup>5</sup> Moreover, traditional conceptions of home had made the simplistic (and wrong) assumption that home was the familiar house; a safe haven, a shelter where one can build his/her own identity and where to fight off the inhospitable outside world. Feminist authors have long ago destroyed that bucolic image. The domestic house can be a very dangerous place, especially for children and women. Queer studies have also come to complicate the idea of home. Research about 'queer migration' has shown how actually home can be found 'after leaving home' (Fortier, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> Although, does such a thing exist nowadays? Who has not either moved her/himself or any constitutive part of her/his environment, i.e. a relative or a friend who has migrated and thus changed the human environment one lives in?

#### **Preparations: choosing the chefs, the saucepan, the technique and the kitchen**

##### *The chefs: Ecuadorian migrants*

The research presented in this paper is based on data collected through 38 in-depth questionnaires to Ecuadorian migrants, out of an estimated population of 1,600 Ecuadorians living in the city of Santander. A conscious attempt was made to work with a sample as diverse as possible. Nineteen women and 19 men between 18 and 51 years old, from six different provinces of Ecuador, were questioned. This age range broadly equates that of adult migrants in the city. Regarding the provinces of origin of the 38 migrants surveyed, 21 are from Imbabura (whose capital is Ibarra, but it is better known by the town of Otavalo); 6 are from the adjacent province of Pichincha (which contains the capital, Quito); and 8 are from Guayas (which contains Guayaquil, the main port-city of Ecuador, which many consider the economic capital of the country).

The average length of stay in Santander of the sample is 4 years. The sample contains a wide range of length of stays, from someone arriving just four months ago (although his family has been living in Santander for more than 5 years) and who was excited about tasting new cuisines, to someone who has been living in Santander for the past 11 years, and outside of Ecuador for 18 years (more than half of his life). This point leads us to the links between differentiated mobility patterns and ethnic background. As shown by other studies, those coming from the Imbabura province are more likely to have been previously living in different locations outside Ecuador (Kyle, 2000; Meisch, 2002). This Ecuadorian province is the land of the Kichwa-Otavalo people, known worldwide as successful traders<sup>7</sup>. Kichwa-

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<sup>7</sup> The average presence in the whole country of indigenous origin people is 6.83%. In the province of Imbabura 22.8% are self-reported to be indigenous (INEC, 2001). According to some authors an important part of the success of the Kichwa-Otavalo group rests on their ability to become transnational traders and musicians while keeping close links to their communities of origin in Ecuador, through

Otavalo migrants display a specific mobility pattern, and can be considered pioneers in Ecuadorian international migration. However, despite having lived outside Ecuador on average longer than those from other provinces, collected data do not show weaker levels of attachment to food from their region.

Finally, physical contact with their regions of origin is very weak, with almost half of those questioned never having gone back to Ecuador. Obviously there is a positive correlation between the fact of going back to Ecuador for holidays and the presence of close relatives – e.g. children and spouse – in Ecuador. Also, those who had only recently arrived in Spain would be less likely to have already made a return trip.

#### *The saucepan: in-depth questionnaire*

The main methodological tool of this research was a long questionnaire. This instrument was used in two different ways: as a standard questionnaire (filled in by participants with assistance from the researcher) and as a rough guide for three informal in-depth interviews, where more freedom was provided and notes were taken from the informal talking that developed (no audio record took place as a means of fully engaging in a lively conversation without the obvious presence of a record device).<sup>8</sup>

I also received the help of a 23 year-old Ecuadorian woman from Otavalo, who carried out around half of the questionnaires. That allowed me to gain access to a significant kichwa population in the city. I noticed the importance of this 'indigenous' population (as they self-denominate) that I was not able to reach. Without any representative of that group the research would have not been able to capture the diversity of Ecuadorians living in Santander. She also provided me with relevant clues for my research and shed

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holidays or commercial involvement in extended kinship or community networks (Kyle, 2000; Meisch, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> This data gathering took place in the *Locutorio Ecuador* whose owners kindly helped me one very hot Saturday evening.

light on the Ecuadorian gastronomy, initially too complex for me<sup>9</sup>.

#### *The technique: hybrid methodology*

Having both an Economics and Anthropology academic background I was well aware of the risks of relying just in one kind of methodology. I was determined to bypass the traditional methodological divisions in this research. Reality is too complex to limit us, as researchers, to try to apprehend it by means of one methodology. I was in search of the facts (Do Ecuadorian people living in Santander eat Ecuadorian food? How often do they eat it?), but also the meanings and reasons they have to act in that way (Why do you think you eat less Ecuadorian food than you would like to? Could you describe me a smell that reminds you of 'home'?). It also should be noted that auto-ethnography was at the origin of this research<sup>10</sup>.

I decided then that the research would be based on an extended questionnaire, to be

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<sup>9</sup> It is worth mentioning here the clear non-existence of such a thing as an Ecuadorian gastronomy. Ecuador is divided in three very different geographical areas: the coastal strip, the Andean highland and the Amazon region, that have a parallelism with the gastronomy. Nonetheless, that distinction is not relevant for the present research, as it focuses on what the questioned people subjectively and personally considered to be Ecuadorian food. So there is no such a thing as an Ecuadorian gastronomy (as one of the interviewed people aptly pointed) just as there is not an English unified cuisine. For some interesting discussions over the idea of 'national cuisines' see Appadurai, 1988 for India, and Cusack, 2000 for Africa.

<sup>10</sup> I needed to live abroad for a while, to eventually forbid myself from eating bread and tomato as they so physically and painfully remind me of home, of happy times; to value more than ever those small precious pots with my grandma's preserves that transport me to the long lazy mid-summer dinners in Castile; to bring tens of times 'something from my country' to pot-luck dinners; I needed all that to realise how special was the relationship I have forged with food while away from home. I realised that food took me temporarily back home. The amount of sensations triggered by the fact of eating familiar food was impressive. Two external references came to build on those findings, and clearly stated that there was indeed, a connection between food, home and memories in the migrant experience. In a report about migrants' integration in the Northern Spanish province of Cantabria, an astonishingly high number of migrants refer to food, even though they have not been asked about it. An equally valuable clue was the final section of the bulletin by the Ecuadorian organization in Catalonia, comprising recipes from Ecuador (Llactaracu, 2002-2005). That led me to hypothesise that food, in experiences of migrancy, is a highly charged kind of material culture. It is infused with deep meanings that needed to be explored.

handed out at different locations and different times in the city of Santander. Although the number of Ecuadorian migrants that I expected to reach with the questionnaire would not be high enough to extrapolate any conclusions, they would be high enough to illustrate the mundane and not-so-mundane everyday food panorama of this small and recent community<sup>11</sup>. Thus the questionnaire was designed to state facts and reveal meanings, a hybrid between the 'traditional' quantitative survey and the in-depth interviews. It was designed to be able to accommodate further information likely to turn up during its handing-out, as readings about reflexivity in qualitative and quantitative methodology have previously warned me about (Gill and Maclean, 2002; Martín Pérez, 2006; Ryan and Golden, 2006). This likeliness was mainly due, and also encouraged, by the kind of information the research was looking for; half of it quantitative data to contextualise and the other half 'pure' qualitative data. That drove the design of the questions in the questionnaire. Some of them were deliberately ambiguous, and there is a clear predominance of open questions. In this sense this questionnaire can be considered a hybrid between a questionnaire and a semi-structured, more-in-depth interview, a rare specimen of qualitative and quantitative technique.

#### *The kitchen: Santander*

Santander is a small city in the north of Spain (around 183,000 inhabitants), the capital of the agricultural province of Cantabria. This province has no immigration history<sup>12</sup> and in comparison with the rest of the country, few migrants have chosen to

<sup>11</sup> This decision can be criticised, as any extended ethnographic research would have revealed far more subtle and hidden details and meanings. However there was a high time constraint to the research that should be taken into consideration. It is important to realistically acknowledge one's means and constraints to get the best out of oneself *given* those constraints. Such are the limits of an MA dissertation, on which this paper is based as a reworked and somewhat shortened version.

<sup>12</sup> To illustrate the lack of immigration past it is interesting to note that ICANE (the Official Statistics Office of the Province of Cantabria) as recently as 2006 still counted as 'foreigners' in its *Statistics Yearbook* those born in a different Spanish province (ICANE, 2006: 30).

work and live there<sup>13</sup>. Table 1 shows the main numbers related to Ecuadorians in Spain and Cantabria<sup>14</sup>. The most accurate figure for Santander would be 1,603 Ecuadorians registered at the beginning of 2006 in the municipal register: 682 male Ecuadorians and 921 female (INE, online). Overall, this is a much lower absolute and relative presence of Ecuadorians than in most other Spanish provinces.

Table 1: Presence of Ecuadorians in Spain, the Northern province of Cantabria and the capital of the province of Cantabria, Santander

	Municipal registers	Residence permits
Spain	421,384 (1st January 2007)	394,040 (31st March 2007)
Cantabria	2,055 (1st January 2007)	1,912 (31st March 2007)
Santander	1,603 (1st January 2006)	Not available

Source: Municipal registers from the National Statistics Office (INE) and Residence permits from the Permanent Observatory for Immigration (OPI), 2007.

Some economic characteristics of the province explain this low presence. Its far more industrialised neighbour autonomous community, the Basque country, has always

<sup>13</sup> A study by the *Cantabria Chamber of Commerce* in 2006 stated that this province was migrants' last choice in Spain (El Diario Montañés, 2006: online).

<sup>14</sup> Migration figures are never easy to state. This is particularly true in the case of Spain (Arango, 2000: 259). There are two main sources of statistical information related to migrants: the number of residence permits, released by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs twice a year, and the municipal registers. The first one provides accurate information about the migrants legally living in Spain, but as in the rest of the Southern European countries, Spain has high rates of irregular immigration (Baldwin-Edwards, 1999: 5). Information provided by the municipal registers (where migrants have to register, irrespectively of their legal situation, in order to gain access to health care and education) can help to partially solve this situation. Luckily for this research, the last regularisation (the normalisation programme of 2005) has helped to narrow the usually broad statistical gap between regular and irregular migrants, and as a result between statistics and reality.

overshadowed the province of Cantabria, traditionally an agricultural and tourist one. While the numbers of (im)migrants in the latter have been growing (although still far from close to those in the capital, Madrid, and Barcelona, the second biggest city in Spain), its 'poor' contiguous province has not managed to attract a large number of migrants (OPI, 2007).

The presence of migrants in general, and Ecuadorians in particular, is quite small in Cantabria. In Santander there are very few so-called 'Latin' shops and restaurants, and a small but growing number of locutorios (places where to phone internationally cheaper, usually with internet access too and selling a few 'ethnic' products). No public gatherings in parks, as in other parts of Spain (the park of La Florida in L'Hospitalet, an adjacent working class town to Barcelona, or El Retiro park in Madrid, are two well known places where these gatherings periodically attract hundreds of Ecuadorian migrants living in those areas), no crowded multicultural festivals, no dance exhibitions, no fashionable ethnic restaurants or gastronomic fairs with stalls selling Ecuadorian typical products. Nothing.

In my interest to know how migrants cope with the loss, re-creation and/or encounter of home, and to do this through a focus on everyday food, the absence of a well-established transnational net, which can easily act as a 'already-present home from home', was an important pre-requirement. The Ecuadorian community in the capital of Cantabria, Santander, fulfils most of my research needs. This group provides a wonderful opportunity to research into the everyday practices of eating and homing of a migrant population in a non-transnational context. With the appearance of transnational migration into the academic agenda, a lot has been researched into this 'new' kind of migration (for the foundational study on the transnational paradigm see Basch et al., 1992); this has been to the detriment of studies about the lives of those unable to involve themselves in transnational livelihoods. Not everyone can

live transnationally, as in the case of Ecuadorian migrants in Santander.

### *Getting the ingredients*

I have named 'ingredients' the foodscape features of the Ecuadorians living in Santander, as revealed by the fieldwork. This section has mainly a descriptive purpose.

### *Current eating patterns: Ecuadorian and Spanish food*

All the informants (except for one, but later answers contradict this data) reported to have eaten food they considered to be Ecuadorian since living in Spain. The reported frequencies of eating Ecuadorian food indicate that one third of respondents eat it every day and another 20% once or twice a week. Thus, a surprisingly high percentage of Ecuadorians (54%) eat Ecuadorian food every day or every week, as an attempt to be kept sensorially connected with their past in Ecuador. Eating known food 'occasion[s] a habitual, corporeal experience of continuity. [Food] provide[s] a means by which "original" home place and "new" home place are linked: via the continuing life of the habitual body that has and continues to experience home objects' (Warin and Dennis, 2005: 168). A third of my respondents eat Ecuadorian food once or twice a month. As will be explained later, empirical data seem to establish a division between the unconsciousness of eating Ecuadorian food every day (what makes that kind of food standard, not special), and the attempt to consciously engage in practices of remembering Ecuador through cooking and consuming Ecuadorian food on 'special' occasions, against the standard rule of eating Spanish dishes in their 'mundane' everyday. The reasons, as it will be seen, for eating Ecuadorian and/or Spanish food are multiple and complex.

Predictably, 95% of the sample recounted having eaten food they considered Spanish or Cantabrian while living in Spain. What is far more surprising is the detailed knowledge of Spanish and Cantabrian gastronomy shown by some participants. Several of them (mainly women) reported to

be able to properly cook highly elaborated dishes of the Spanish gastronomy. This fact is easily explainable by some of the features of the Ecuadorian migration towards Santander. This migration was primarily led by women, who initially worked as live-in maids for the upper class families of the city and for the booming tourist sector of the province. As a requirement, they were expected to learn how to properly cook Spanish/ Cantabria food for the families they were working for, or the restaurants and hotels they were working in (García Santiago and Zubieta Irún, 2003: 127). In order to match supply and demand, several NGOs offer short training courses aimed to migrants, and 'Spanish cooking skills' is one of the most repeated ones<sup>15</sup>.

#### *Last meal: the importance of rice*

As a control question and in order to gather more information, the question 'what was your last lunch or dinner?' revealed the importance of rice<sup>16</sup>. Sixteen respondents (i.e. nearly half of the sample) mentioned a dish which had rice as one of its ingredients. Of course rice is a normal ingredient in the Spaniards' diet, but it can hardly be considered a staple, such as bread or some kinds of legumes. Part of the explanation for this prevalence of rice in the everyday diet of Ecuadorians living in Santander could rest on the fact that rice is easier to obtain and cheaper to buy in Spain than other staples of Ecuadorian cuisine, such as corn or plantain.

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance those provided by the NGO 'Cantabria Acoge' [Cantabria welcomes] – to whom I am grateful for helping me to get in contact with Ecuadorians living in Santander – (<http://www.cantabriaacoge.org/integracionlaboral.htm>) or those provided by the Catholic organisation, *Cáritas*. Those two organisations can be considered, if not the only ones, the most important ones working with migrants in Cantabria.

<sup>16</sup> I find very 'tasty' the parallelism between the migration of people and the migration of their cuisines and ingredients. The history of rice is revealing in this sense. It is believed that rice was domesticated in the South of Asia. Nowadays, rice is present worldwide and has become the main grain for an important share of the world population. Similarly, the migratory history of coriander, originally a Mediterranean herb, which funnily, is widely used in many Latin American cuisines (the Ecuadorian one included), shows that it is completely absent in Spanish cuisine.

The over-use of rice can be considered a simple mechanism of 'bricolage alimentaire' (Durán Monfort, 2004: 9). Its use makes up for the absence of more expensive or difficult-to-find ingredients, such as shellfish or exotic fruits. Nevertheless, it is not clear that this partial substitution in the everyday would confer rice the high status of a 'plat-totem'. A 'plat-totem' (a totem dish) in the definition of Manuel Calvo is:

[...] an ethnic dish – this is, from a cultural point of view very specific – which as a result of emigration undergoes a cultural revalorisation. It is the consequence of the confrontation between different alimentary styles, being even able to become the mediating object of an identity (as cited in Durán Monfort, 2004: 8, footnote 7).

The study of migrants' foodways has tended to focus on those groups with extended food taboos, mainly due to religious precepts, as the case of the Jewish diaspora (Diner, 2001) or the Muslims living in non-Muslim countries (Abu-Shams, 2006; Durán-Monfort, 2004; Warin and Dennis, 2005). For those practicing such religions, there are strong incentives to maintain the food precepts of their religion in the context of migration. Maybe in this context it makes more sense to talk about the development of 'totem plats', because the consumption of food is a central part of their collective identity. In the current case, that of Ecuadorians in a non-transnational environment, the relationship with food is more of a personal nature, unmediated by religious precepts. Equally, food does not play an outward role; there is no need to generate symbols to be shown. The aim is more that of fulfilling a primary personal need. Therefore, in this case I prefer to talk about 'totem substances' and relate them to their ability to convey, in a sensorial way, meanings of home. Some specific herbs – mainly coriander and camomile – seem more adequate in the context of this



research to perform that role of 'totem substances'<sup>17</sup>.

### *Eating out: restaurants*

As previously mentioned, Santander is a small city with rather few migrants, in relation to the rest of Spain. As a result (and this observation from my own work of city mapping is backed by the answers to the questionnaire and the interviews), there is a lack of restaurants where you can eat Ecuadorian food.

Other migrant communities with a similar background (i.e. considered by the native population as 'Latin' in general because of speaking Spanish and coming from Latin America) are far more visible in terms of shops, stores, bars and restaurants. It is not difficult to come across places where to buy or to eat Colombian and Peruvian products. Hence, can those premises, more available, where to eat 'Latin' dishes be a good enough substitute for those Ecuadorians who do not know premises where to eat Ecuadorian dishes? My data is clear in this point: no. Thus, even though they are perceived by the native population as a rather homogeneous group sharing a so-called Latin cuisine, for Ecuadorians living in Santander there is no substitution between Ecuadorian and Latin (mainly Peruvian and Colombian) food: Ecuadorians reported knowing Latin places but not visiting them.

### **Integration**

The question, 'Have you ever invited anyone to have lunch/dinner in your house since you have lived in Santander?' was intended as a proxy for integration, i.e. close contact with native or other migrant groups. Letting someone into the domestic space and sharing food with her/him implies the existence of an intimate, close relationship that can be regarded as a measurement of integration<sup>18</sup>. Answers revealed that this

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<sup>17</sup> This assertion is based on the section of the questionnaire dealing with the issue of smells and flavours that remind one of home. As will be seen later in this paper, those two herbs were considered by a significant number of Ecuadorians living in Santander as the substances that reminded them most of home.

<sup>18</sup> Ecuadorians in Santander are bound to have contact with the native population but in a more formal way (i.e. in

kind of close links were almost exclusively with other Ecuadorians. Specifically, the survey data revealed that 29 respondents had invited Ecuadorians to their place for a meal, 3 had invited other Latin Americans, and 2 had invited other combinations of guests (Ecuadorian, Latin American, Spanish). Only one respondent had hosted a Spanish person to a meal in their house.

A similar outcome had been found by the first report about migrants' integration in Cantabria (García Santiago and Zubietta Irún, 2003)<sup>19</sup>. That report stated that Latin migrants were less likely than migrants from Africa or Eastern Europe to develop close links with the native population, in spite of sharing the same language. That was due to their higher numbers.

Food shared in those intimate occasions was, naturally, Ecuadorian: 32 out of 34 respondents who answered the question prepared Ecuadorian food. Hence the panorama for the time being is that of Ecuadorians inviting other Ecuadorian fellows to share Ecuadorian food in their houses.

### *Gatherings: sense of community? An unanswered question*

The idea that people gathering together and sharing food in those gatherings is likely to develop a strong sense of community in the long term, guided the section of the questionnaire dealing with commensality<sup>20</sup>.

A majority of Ecuadorians answered 'yes' to the question of having regular gatherings with fellow Ecuadorians. Again, 'regular gatherings with fellow Ecuadorians' was

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the workplaces). To invite someone to share food in one's own house means a high degree of closeness and intimacy.

<sup>19</sup> Although it is fair to recognise the importance of that report as the first, and the only extended study about migrants in Cantabria, it suffered from somewhat limited theoretical assumptions. For instance, integration was considered to be just one-way, and although it collected a series of migrants' stories, it was mainly a compilation of statistical data.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance the definition of commensality given by Grignon: a 'gathering aimed to accomplish in a collective way some material tasks and symbolic obligations linked with the satisfaction of a biological individual need' (2001: 24).

intended as a proxy measurement for 'Ecuadorian community' in Santander. It could be worth introducing some kind of strength measurement of the variable 'community'. A woman reported to gather regularly with fellow Ecuadorian women but the gathering was not 'institutionalised'. It was triggered by the mere fact of running into other Ecuadorians in the streets. This can, of course, be considered some proxy for the presence of an Ecuadorian community (i.e. having the intimacy to gather after running into someone in the streets means some kind of mutual knowledge) but I would rather understand it in individual terms, as friendship, instead of considering it in collective terms. So, though being interested in knowing about the 'Ecuadorian community' in Santander, with the obtained data, I do not think I can conclude anything apart from stating that it is important to take into consideration strong personal differences to explain personal collective involvement. These differences refer to region of origin in Ecuador, family situation (if one is the only member of one family in Santander, or the house is shared with others from Ecuador, etc.), length of stay, knowledge of Ecuadorian organisations in the city, etc. As an exception, those coming from Imbabura with a Quechua background, seem to have more frequent and established gatherings (e.g. basketball matches every Saturday and Sunday).

Coming back to the broad picture, gatherings take place usually once or twice a month triggered by some kind of event. Based on the questionnaire responses, the events that most often trigger gatherings are, firstly, life-cycle events (birthdays, weddings, christenings, communions, etc.) – 42%; festivals commemorated from Ecuador (19%); sporting events (17%); weekend get-togethers (15%); plus much smaller frequencies allocated to political or other church events.

Often these events involve sharing food. The open qualitative question, Which kind of food do you usually share in those occasions? provided very rich descriptions of the kind of food shared in each event.

With no exception, all the described dishes can be considered Ecuadorian. As already mentioned, not all of those events involved food sharing. In the occasions that do involve it, the 'formality' or elaboration of the food consumed varies greatly. It ranges from the 'beer and toast corn' (tostado) usually consumed while watching sports matches, to far more elaborate dishes, such as 'guaguas de pan y colada morada', a kind of child-shaped bread and a thick violet drink, that is typically consumed in Ecuador, and reported to be eaten in Santander every 2nd November (All Souls' Day).

Now that all the shopping and chopping is already done, it is time to move on to the cooking stage: heating and stirring the ingredients listed in this section to try to come up with the reasons underlying the Ecuadorian migrant foodscape.

### *Cooking*

As described in the previous section, Ecuadorians living in Santander often eat food considered by them Ecuadorian. This section tries to disentangle the underlying reasons to eat both Ecuadorian and Spanish food.

First of all, it is convenient to make an obvious but nevertheless important remark. Food does not convey the same powerful meanings for everyone. As a result, not everyone has exactly the same reasons to eat one or another type of food. An example from the fieldwork illustrates this point. A young Ecuadorian woman reported being not interested in food, neither in Ecuador nor in Spain, and described herself as a fussy eater. At the same time she encouraged me to talk to her mother because 'she missed food from Ecuador and usually cooks it'. Individual differences must be taken into consideration, but it should not prevent us from trying to sketch a broad picture of the meanings of food in the migrant experience. Age and gender intertwined with past experience influence the individual importance given to food. It is understandable that those who have experienced hunger or food scarcity are more likely to hold food in higher esteem. In

the case of Ecuadorians in Santander, someone coming from a rural area in Ecuador and who has migrated to Santander, an urban area in Spain, is more likely to miss 'food eaten back at home' than someone coming from urban Quito, because s/he must face, along with cross-national cultural differences, the impact of urbanisation.

Secondly, throughout all the answers aimed to unravel the reasons to eat Ecuadorian (or Spanish/Cantabrian food), stronger reactions were noted by women than by men. Women were more likely to 'strongly agree' or 'disagree', while men tended to be milder in their answers. This pattern suggests the presence of closer links with food by women than by men<sup>21</sup>.

The next two sections highlight the main results of the questions targeted to unravel the reasons to eat or not to eat Ecuadorian and Spanish food respectively. These questions used a Likert scale: those questioned were asked about the level of agreement or disagreement in relation with several statements. They were also provided with the option 'I have not thought of it'.

#### **Disentangling reasons. 'I eat Ecuadorian food because ...**

*... I am proud of it'*

Almost everyone strongly agreed or agreed with this assertion<sup>22</sup>. It is by far the most strongly supported reason. Ecuadorian food was then regarded as something valuable. Only one person disagreed with this statement.

Intriguingly, in the migrant stories included in the already-mentioned 2003 Report about migrants in Cantabria, one 28 year-old Colombian woman made a comparison between the tidiness of the Spanish meal pattern (a first course, second course and

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<sup>21</sup> Other studies have also acknowledged this pattern (see for instance, Beoku-Betts, 1995; Edmonds, 2005; Hargreaves et al, 2002; Kneafsey and Cox, 2002; Law, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Twenty-four out of 35 people who answered this question strongly agreed with this statement, 8 people agreed and only 2 people reported not having thought about it.

dessert) and the untidiness of her homeland cuisines:

'[...] there we mix up everything, there we put together rice with lentils with potatoes, everything together' (García Santiago and Zubieta Irún, 2003: 218).

In my research I have not come across any of those kinds of reactions. Hopefully, this type of 'interiorised colonialism' concerning eating issues (i.e. disregard of the cuisine of the homeland, because of differences with the cuisine of the place of destination, implying the superiority of the latter) is currently receding.

*... I want it to become known'*

This was also another commonly-expressed reason (though less than the previous one): almost 86 % of the sample strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. This response points towards issues of longing for visibility and recognition. As already mentioned, Ecuadorians in Santander are generally viewed by the native population as diluted within the broader category of Latin migrants, where Colombians are the most numerous. Equally, the number of Ecuadorians in relation with the total population does not allow for public 'institutionalised' multicultural fairs. Moreover, the lack of visible Ecuadorian restaurants or shops (i.e. easily recognised for the general public, not only by word of mouth among Ecuadorians) makes Ecuadorian cuisine absolutely unknown among 'natives'<sup>23</sup>.

*... I consider it special food'*

In relation to this statement two differentiated patterns emerged. Statistical analysis of the answers revealed a subtle hidden positive correlation between age

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<sup>23</sup> As an illustrative example let me briefly relate something that happened to me during the fieldwork. Once in a grocery store in Torrelavega, the second biggest city of Cantabria, where plantain or 'green banana' and yucca were on display, I asked the shop assistant (a migrant himself) about the reaction by non-Latin migrants towards those products (which can be considered staples in the Ecuadorian cuisine), and he answered that usually they find them very strange and asked him what they were for.

and consideration of Ecuadorian food as special or standard. For people aged between 18 and 29 years old, Ecuadorian food was more likely to be considered 'special' than for people over 30. The latter were more prone to disagree with the statement that one of the reasons to eat Ecuadorian food was because it is 'special food'. Hence for the latter group of people, Ecuadorian food was the 'normal', standard one. This answer was also supported by information gathered in one of the interviews where it was clearly stated: 'it is not special, it is just our food' (51 year-old woman from Guayaquil).

The age-related correlation can also be understood as revealing different ways of handling the situation of change that migration involves: either unconsciously fighting off fragmentation through the sensorial continuity that means the maintenance of the previous foodway (of course as much as structural constraints allow it, i.e. availability, budget constraints, etc.), or acknowledging that discontinuity and consciously battling it through the consumption of Ecuadorian food on 'special' occasions. In the first case, Ecuadorian food is consumed on a daily basis, while in the second, only once or twice a week or a month. This conscious/unconscious battle against fragmentation has revealed itself as one of the main findings of the research into the foodways of Ecuadorians in Santander. The issue of fragmentation deserves further inquiry.

*... my friends like it'*

Nine out of ten of those questioned agreed with this statement. The importance of eating with equals (i.e. the social dimension of eating) has been researched in a variety of contexts: rituals (Corr, 2002), commensality (Grignon, 2001), etc. Food is highly relevant in the 'performance of group identity' (Brown and Mussell, 1984). The act of sharing food has an extraordinary capacity to 'bind individuals, define the limits of the group's outreach and identity, distinguish in-group communication, celebrate cultural cohesion, and provide a

context for performance of group rituals' (1984: 5). Moreover, as shown by Kalik, 'shared foodways have a unifying ability so powerful symbolically that they can unite members of the group who are separated geographically' (1984: 13). In other words, food has the capacity to make us re-member. This re-membering is bound to be performed with those 'identical' to us. The fact of coming from the same country or region, and thus considered to have gone (and still going, as the experience of being 'the other' in arrival places) through similar experiences, are reasons strong enough to attract and 'glue' individuals who are in migrancy together. Those considered friends, with whom we like to spend time and share food, are important in our choice of the kind of food we share with them. If we take into consideration the already described situation that Ecuadorians in Santander develop close links almost exclusively with other Ecuadorians living in the area, then this fact makes sense entirely.

*... it makes me feel as if I would be in Ecuador'*

One of the main targets of this research has been to highlight the sensorial re-creation that can be deployed through the eating of food in the migrant context, whether in an individual or collective way. How useful or unmediated is the consumption of 'food from home' to sensorily activate memories? In the context of migrancy, where the basic life anchors must rely on the time dimension over the spatial one (Rapport and Dawson, 1998: 3-4), keeping the ability to connect the present with the re-created (remembered) past is vital. Table 2 shows the levels of agreement with two statements related to the feelings and sensations triggered by the fact of eating Ecuadorian or Spanish food. Both statements become fully meaningful when they are read together. The statement about the ability of Ecuadorian food to make one feel as if in Ecuador only becomes complete in its meaning when compared with the patterns of responses of the 'mirrored' statement for Spanish food (one of the reasons to eat Spanish food is

because it makes me feel from here). A rather surprising 43.8% answered that ‘they have not thought about it’. It is without doubt, the highest percentage of ‘haven’t thought’ responses among all the questions asked. On the contrary, the statement about Ecuadorian food was backed by an important percentage (two-thirds) but also a not inconsiderable 29% disagreed with it. When doing a cross analysis that takes into consideration the influence of the variable gender, it is easily noticeable that women have stronger reactions (either strongly agreeing or disagreeing) than men. Women do care about this question, as not even one woman reported not having thought of it.

Table 2: Feelings of belonging and integration triggered by food consumption

Level of agreement with the statement	Eating Ecuadorian food makes me feel as if I am in Ecuador (remembrance)	Eating Spanish food makes me feel from here (integration)
Strongly agree	31.4%	15.6 %
Agree	34.3 %	28.1 %
Disagree	28.6 %	12.5 %
I have not thought of it	5.7 %	43.8 %

These two questions lead us to the very interesting issue of embodiment. Familiar food (with all its attributes, i.e. flavour, smell, texture) has a strong power to trigger already experienced feelings and sensations, as it can be the feeling of belonging. The notion of ‘body memories’ is very useful here to introduce the issue of embodiment and the senses:

[...] memory ‘manifests itself physically and within a gendered framework’, to create ‘body memories’, a term that denotes traces of the past embedded in the physical senses (Warin and Dennis, 2005: 165).

In other words, those ‘body memories’ (or the memory of the body) is the knowledge

stored in our bodies without us even being aware of this<sup>24</sup>. A Ecuadorian woman whom I interviewed woman put it in this way: ‘I know I am not in Ecuador when I eat Ecuadorian food, but it feels as if I am’

She was well aware she was in Santander when she ate Ecuadorian food, but simultaneously she somehow felt herself back in Ecuador while eating that food. This was one of the motivations for this research, to seek to highlight migration as an embodied experience, felt through and in the body. No one lives her/his life in the purest rationality; we all develop our rationality in a sensorial context. Memories are created and re-created in a sensorial milieu, and the senses have the ability to recall those original sensations, as with the sense of being at home. Familiar food plays the role of a powerful comfort food in the migrant experience because it provides (psychological and emotional) comfort when the self feels fragmented in the situation of change that migration implies (see Locher et al., 2005: 274 on the definition of comfort foods).

*... I do not like the flavour of Spanish food’*

When talking about flavours, several people remarked the fact that both flavours, Ecuadorian and Spanish, were equally good. Nobody showed a clear disgust for the flavour in general of the Spanish or Cantabrian food. Nonetheless, several people mentioned the issue of tastiness and freshness. According to one of my informants and his wife (51 year-old couple from Quito) ‘meat and fish in Santander were not as tasty as in Ecuador, because in Spain almost everything is frozen, all the flavours are like frozen’<sup>25</sup>. Several other people also mentioned the issue of

<sup>24</sup> Driving is a good example. After a long time without driving, once in the car, the feet seem to know the right pedal to step on seemingly without our minds paying attention to it.

<sup>25</sup> What is really surprising about this quote is on the one hand, the fact that Santander is a port city where fresh fish is easily available, and the whole province of Cantabria is full of green fields where cows graze quietly. On the other hand, that family come from Quito, which is in the Andean highlands, far away from the Ecuadorian coast.

tastiness as one of the reasons to eat Ecuadorian food.

Several studies have also mentioned the same contrasting opposition. Kneafsey and Cox (2002) acknowledge this point in their study of Irish people living in the British city of Coventry. For those coming from rural Ireland, the comparison between the freshness of usually homemade or home-produced stuff and the 'plastic' appearance and flavour of English food, was a clear indicator that 'food at home tasted better' (2002: 11, italics in the original). Petridou (2001) also finds the same contrast in her study of Greek students in London, who opposed the freshness and tastiness of Greek products with those found in English supermarkets. Smells were present back in the grocery stores of Greece, but they were lacking in the United Kingdom. Plastic does not allow smells to hover around. In comparison with the tastiness of home, living in migrancy is rather tasteless and odourless.

### **Reasons to eat Spanish food: a matter of practicalities**

There are three main reasons stated by the Ecuadorians to eat Spanish food. All of them have a clear sense of pragmatism: convenience, price and availability.

One of the most obvious reasons to switch to the diet of the arrival place is the lack of availability or the higher price of ingredients to cook their own familiar food. Although, my data support this assumption, the percentages are not as high as might be expected. Hence, I guess (but it is no more than guessing) that the budget constraint is the most important variable. If able to afford it, how much more important is Ecuadorian food for someone, in the sense that that person is willing to pay more for the ingredients needed to cook it? Although literature has tended to consider cooking and eating as the only meaningful acts, maybe also the time-consuming activities of looking for and trying substitutive ingredients (i.e. in street markets, ethnic shops, big supermarkets, etc.) can equally be imbued with meanings.

The issue of convenience is well illustrated by the statement made by a 51 year-old woman from Guayaquil who openly stated that if in a hurry she cooked Spanish food, because it is easier and quicker to cook, but that her food was without question the Ecuadorian one. Several other people reported usually eating in their workplaces or having to eat out during weekdays due to the nature and location of their jobs<sup>26</sup>. In all those cases, the food consumed was Spanish. In these cases therefore the reason to eat Spanish food is obviously its convenience, and probably also the lack of choice.

#### *Is our dish now cooked?*

'One of my reasons to eat Spanish meals is because Ecuadorian ingredients are expensive here' (43 year-old woman from Guayaquil)

'Ecuadorian meals here taste fine but it is not the same flavour as there [in Ecuador]; the flour, for example, is not the same' (51 year-old woman from Guayaquil)

'My wife who is the one who cooks - I am rather bad at cooking - says that fish and meat are not as tasty here as in Ecuador, there everything is fresh' (51 year-old man from Quito)

If it is not easy to find places to buy ingredients to cook Ecuadorian dishes, if they are generally more expensive than the Spanish ones and the taste of the resulting meal is not quite the same as it was remembered back in Ecuador, why do a significant number of Ecuadorian people living in Santander still cook and eat Ecuadorian dishes?. The answer lies in the fact that eating certain food, with certain people, in certain ways at certain times is a highly loaded activity, both sensorially and cognitively. Food feeds our bodies but also our identities, personal and collective. Who has never felt that 'a familiar meal in an unfamiliar setting helps fight off the panic

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<sup>26</sup> In Spain it is quite usual to eat out during weekdays a so-called 'menú': a cheap three-course meal usually eaten by workers.

of disorientation [?]' (Bell and Valentine, 1997: 9).

However, our dish from home is not completely cooked yet. It still needs that delicate final touch that only the subtlety of herbs and spices can add.

#### *Herbing: the delicate smell of home*

This section tries to add the final touches to the dish, the subtlety, the delicacy of aromas and flavours. It will present the last findings of the fieldwork and will deal with two topics that have been rambling around all the previous analysis: the issue of 'being-at-home' and the sense of fragmentation in relation with the sensorial effects of food.

#### *The sense of being-at-home*

While reviewing literature about 'home' I was struck by the number of times that the binary pair fragmentation-wholeness appeared, either explicitly or implicitly (Al-Ali and Koser, 2002: 7; Duruz, 2004: 57; Holtzman, 2006: 367; Jackson, 1995: 6; Sutton, 2000: 121; Warin and Dennis, 2005: 167). Living in migrancy or exile is living in between, fragmented in time and space. One is fragmented from well-known friends and relatives, and from an imagined past<sup>27</sup>. As stated by Law in her study of Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong 'the absence of familiar material culture, and its subtle evocations of home, is surely one of the most profound dislocations [fragmentations] of transnational migration' (2001: 277).

If living in migrancy involves living mosaic-like lives, being at home, on the other hand, can be described as a sense of wholeness, when the self can regard her/himself as forming part of the whole<sup>28</sup>. There is not

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<sup>27</sup> This is the paradox of the return. Migrants longing for return when they actually come back must face a second migrancy, as the past they remembered and longed for is not there anymore; in this sense, 'you can never go home again'.

<sup>28</sup> Note here the use of the adverb 'when', instead of 'where', to refer to notions of home. In the line of the most recent theoretical developments in this field, which opt for privileging the temporal and continually under-construction nature of 'home' – and that have solidified in the use of expressions such as *homing* or *sense-of-home* (Ahmed, 2003; Fortier, 2003; Walsh, 2006) – I have

fragmentation, the self experiences a sense of sameness or continuity across time and space (Rouse, 1995: 357). The fact of migrating introduces a fissure into that continuity and the migrant must learn to live with it. Nonetheless, this is not a pessimistic conceptualisation of migration, as something intrinsically bad that fragments the self and condemns migrants to live suspended lives, irremediably feeling a sense of in-betweenness. As shown by some transnational groups, this fragmentation can also become the raw material for the construction of rich, elaborated, complex lives, in a sort of coloured patchworked existence<sup>29</sup>.

#### **Fighting off fragmentation: remembering Ecuador and re-membering far away from Ecuador**

Human beings instinctively search for familiarity. Known human, cultural and material environments ease human lives and trigger physical and emotional comfort. When one migrates, those known milieus, with their easiness and comfort, are left behind and the migrant must learn to cope (in practical terms but also in emotional and sensorial ones) with new environments. Migration introduces fragmentation into migrants' lives and these use different strategies to fight off that sense<sup>30</sup>.

As seen in this research, two of the most obvious ways of fighting off the sense of fragmentation are through the consumption of food. The first strategy is based on the remembering of past experiences through the intimate act of cooking and eating food

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consciously chosen these more dynamic notions of home as one of the initial drivers of this research.

<sup>29</sup> In my own limited 'transnational' experience, to live transnationally means sometimes that in a celebratory way the multiplicity of homes makes me happy (I am from here *and* from there). Contrary, some other times, it makes me feel displaced (*neither* from here nor from there) with an unsettling feeling of in-betweenness, or suspended life. Due to the temporal succession of both, I do not consider as very realistic the theoretical separation usually made between celebratory and gloomier visions of transnationalism.

<sup>30</sup> That is not to state that the sense of fragmentation is exclusive to migrants or that all migrants encounter that sense. The case of queer migrations represents a good counter-example: the fragmentation of their lives is the push to migrate: migration is the first step to become at home (Fortier, 2003; Probyn, 1996).

from home. This kind of food can be considered a special type of comfort food due to being sensorily highly charged. This strategy also involves the (usually unconscious) resistance to acknowledge discontinuity by keeping on eating familiar food on a daily basis. The second strategy opts for re-remembering in destination. This re-remembering implies the gathering with other migrants to share food, in an attempt to feel again the sense of belonging to a whole, trying to become members again.

Nonetheless, those two options are not mutually exclusive. In fact, they can even be considered the same item with different intensities in their constitutive variables, e.g. more or less visibility, access, intimacy, performance, etc. Festivals and gatherings that involve the sharing of food can be considered the strongest cases in point of the second type of strategy. These visible and public acts of identity performance that involve the sharing of food have been quite extensively researched (Brown and Mussell, 1984; Charon Cardona, 2004; Law, 2001). The other type of counter-fragmentation strategy by means of food-related activities has been far less researched. Against the performativity of festivals and gatherings in public places, the intimate act of remembering 'home(s) in the past' usually takes place in the cosiness of the domestic sphere in a more individual or family scale, which makes it less easy to access. However, as for those in the present study, this is a highly relevant strategy for migrants who cannot live transnationally and take part in those festivals and public gatherings. Both strategies are similar in mechanism, though not in intensity. Both strategies vessel migrants' bodies to activate senses of easiness and comfort that can be considered proxies for 'the sense of being at home'.

#### *Smells that move back home*

Eating familiar food is an unmediated action that triggers intense corporeal sensations of home. The attribute of food to be literally embodied allows for that intensity. This research looked specifically into two of the attributes of food, its flavour

and its smell. It discovered that the smell of herbs and spices such as coriander (the most common answer to the question, *Could you tell me a smell that reminds you of home?*<sup>31</sup>), camomile or cumin was closely linked to memories of home for those Ecuadorians living in Santander. For a 20 year-old male, cumin was an odour that reminds him of home, because 'it was always in the house'. Other studies have also come up with a similar outcome, arriving even to comprise the essence of Greece, its Greekness, in a pot of basil (Sutton, 2000: 121). Those are the mundane symbols, the ones with the strongest ability for 'those away' to signify a nation, a homeland. Herbs and spices play this role perfectly because of their almost perennial subtle presence in the childhood kitchens, the clothes of loved ones, special-occasion meals, etc.; and the ability of these smells to evoke strong biographical events.

On the other hand, the ability of flavours to apprehend meanings of home, to recall the self in the past, in a time that, from the present moment, the self is remembered as 'being-at-home', is weaker. Maybe the more culturally solid structure of flavours makes them less able than smells to provoke sensations of sensorial *déjà vu*. An illustrative example of this stronger capacity of smells over flavours to act as a recall of home is the case of a 31 year-old male from Imbabura, for whom while 'no flavour in Santander was as back at home', 'almost every smell in Santander reminds me of home'.

In a poetic parallelism, it could be stated that the sense of home is like those herbs and spices we throw into the stew. They are neither the staples, nor the main ingredients of the dish. They only achieve their full value when lost; missed most when we have to cook without them. In that moment their subtle smell, their delicate flavour become important (here we see the status of coriander, camomile or cumin as

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<sup>31</sup> Both the questions, *Could you tell me a flavour that reminds you of home?* and *Could you tell me a smell that reminds you of home?* were deliberately ambiguous, with the intention of not pre-assuming any location of home.



'totem substances'). As Christopher Hampton states in his book *White Chameleon*

'[...] the person with roots takes them for granted, while the person with no roots whatsoever is vividly aware of them, like some phantom ache in an amputated limb' (1991: 23).

That statement is equally true for home. We miss most the delicate, small things, because paradoxically those seem the ones with more room to fill with personal meanings. Latent 'body memories' (Warin and Dennis, 2005: 165) of (past) home(s) are activated through the smells, flavours and textures of specific foodstuffs.

### **Final dish (in tapas size): enjoying the meal, and the company!**

The primary goal of this research has been to enquire into the sensorial re-creations of home through food. The previous sections have described and analysed the general features of the Ecuadorians living in Santander, their foodways, the underlying reasons for their food election, their food preferences and the foodstuffs most highly loaded with meanings of home.

It can be stated that for the Ecuadorians living in the small city of Santander, Ecuadorian food, irrespective of specific personal features, plays an important role. The whole questioned sample reported having eaten Ecuadorian food while living in the city and an important percentage eats Ecuadorian food on a daily basis. They know Spanish gastronomy quite well, but the practices that could be considered revolving around homing processes are not linked with this kind of food. Ecuadorian food shared with other Ecuadorians and relatives can be considered at the core of their homing experience and sensations.

The empirical research presented in this paper supports the fact, acknowledged by other studies, that familiar food has a strong ability to re-activate already experienced feelings and sensations. This research has also highlighted the fact that the capacity of food to make the individual engage with sensations that have not been

previously experienced is rather limited. In the current case, Ecuadorian food has the skill to cause Ecuadorians living in Santander to feel as 'if they were in Ecuador', while the capacity of Spanish food to make them feel integrated, 'from here' (Santander, Cantabria, Spain, i.e. the new context) is weaker.

Nonetheless, food has also the ability to act as a trigger for re-membering, to cause people to group and become significant to one another. Both two sensations (that of remembering as re-enacting past feelings of being at home and that of re-membering, to cause to bring together 'the most equal ones' and make them feel they belong) can be used to temporarily achieve a sense of wholeness, completion or continuity. They are indeed two strategies, which often appear in combination, to fight off the sense of fragmentation or discontinuity brought to people's lives by migration. The need to belong, to share a mundane micro-history and to feel humanly bonded (Lugones, 1992: 88), can be achieved through food-related activities in migratory contexts. This can be either by re-enacting 'body memories' of home sensations through the personal intimate consumption and cooking of 'food from home', and/or by re-producing the human bond in the new environment through the sharing of familiar food with those regarded as most equals.

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