

# A gastrogeography of mobility

## Urban reorientation through food

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*Some people may have roots and others may have routes . . .*  
*Talja Blokland (2017: 1)*

In planning food for a daily meal or a dinner party, time and space, roots and routes come undeniably together. This time-space relation has to do with how the meal is assembled (appetizers, first and second courses, dessert), the ingredients needed, and where to buy these, which implies not only a particular store, but also the location of it within the urban fabric and how long it takes to get there – which also connects to the time of preparation required for each of the meal components.

Underlying this quotidian mobility – simply going out to do the shopping – there are long term demographic trends and biographical narratives. The mass migrations of the twentieth century, from Europe to the Americas or Australia, have given way to the mass tourism of the twenty-first, across Europe and the world. The Italian coming from a rural area to work in an Australian factory may have been the typical migrant of two or three generations ago. Now, in addition to the waves of tourists flooding the historic centres of Europe, there is an international class of educated professionals, who make their home in Berlin or New York, but only until their next job opportunity takes them to another city (those whom Blokland describes as having ‘routes’ rather than roots). These great movements of people, together with immigration into Europe from a formerly imagined ‘periphery’, have well-known impacts on cities. These impacts are condensed into an array of neologisms – gentrification, ghettoization, touristification – that sound uglier than the reality.

Here we explore an aspect of that reality in the fine-grained experiences of intercultural travel and migration through the urban pathways we cover in search of food. We will see how these urban routes can speak to us about our cities and ourselves. Debord’s *dérives* in Paris, like Benjamin’s ‘marauding walks’ in Berlin, were focused inward, to an esoteric experience of self, through a contrived disorientation.

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance – nothing more.  
But to lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling.  
(Benjamin 1986: 8)

Our focus is strictly on the banal: how to buy food for dinner. The only schoolings required are hunger, ignorance and nostalgia for familiar food. Yet these pathways can tell us about the history of migration and cut purposefully across the well worn wanderings of tourists. When we step outside ourselves to question what propels us down this street, or onto that bus, we might find that our compulsive orientation is towards rediscovering roots, the familiar, the homely, in a strange city. We

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find it in a recipe. The recipe might be written down, on a sauce stained piece of paper, in a favourite recipe book, or on the Internet. Or it may be as ingrained in our upbringing and way of living as any other habitus, as an 'internalized disposition' or 'set of practices' (Bourdieu 2010: 166). Here we risk slipping from one to the other by transposing lived recipes to written ones.

By presenting two recipes – *Pasta col sugo finto alla Nonna Flora* and *(Portuguese) fried pork neck chops and carrot rice* – our account will deal with the issues of migration (of humans but also of ingredients, preparations, and taste) and translation (linguistic, practical and sensorial), food and the

psycho geography of urban place and displacement. From this exploration it will be seen that recipes for the preparation of a meal jostle with urban recipes, of community and place, and biographical recipes of identity.

*The immigrant's map of their new city is shaped by the shops that sell their food. In turn, they reshape the maps of those cities where mass migration has led to the establishment of whole communities from one country.*

## The recipes

### *Pasta col sugo finto alla Nonna Flora*

In a terra cotta pot sauté slowly in olive oil until softened: half a carrot; half a stick of celery; a handful of parsley; a clove of garlic (crushed with the side of a knife).

Add a can of good quality peeled tomatoes from Campania, and a quarter to half a jar of passata<sup>1</sup> (more of either depending on quantity of pasta) and salt to taste. Cook slowly for at least half an hour, or as long as possible.

In a large saucepan or pasta pot bring plenty of water to the boil. Add salt (sale marino grosso). Put in 100 grams or more per person of De Cecco or any good, preferably Abruzzese pasta (spaghetti or penne). Time according to taste, or the cooking time on the label, and then drain. Add sauce and fresh basil and serve with Parmigiano Reggiano.

### *(Portuguese) fried pork neck chops and carrot rice*

#### A. Fried chops

4 pork chops (1/per person); 2 garlic cloves; 1 bay leaf; olive oil, salt, pepper and the juice of half a lemon.

#### B. Carrot rice

1 and 1/2 cups of Carolino rice (or Arborio); 1 medium carrot chopped into small pieces; 1 small onion finely chopped; olive oil, salt and water (double the rice cups).

Start by preparing the carrot rice: put a drizzle of oil in the rice pot and sauté the onion and carrot in the olive oil. When the onion is translucent, add the rice and stir; add the water and stir, season with salt, cover and simmer for about 15/20 minutes.

Season the pork chops with salt, pepper and the lemon juice. Then put a drizzle of oil in the frying pan and the 2 whole (or chopped, if you prefer) garlic cloves and bay leaf. Then, place the chops in the frying pan and fry until golden brown on both sides. Remove from the heat and serve immediately. Accompany it with a green salad if you like.

## Migration and food: readjusting recipes and maps

In Australia since the 1980s, pasta with a tomato-based sauce and a mixed green salad has become the simple, crowd-pleasing meal for busy families and budget conscious share-households. It has come to be seen as a quintessentially Australian meal, as well as one of the most fundamental neces-

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<sup>1</sup> Already we've betrayed the spirit of the lived recipe, as cooked by Nonna Flora in Pescara or Rome. She would use fresh ripe sauce tomatoes in season; passata if someone had given her some they had made. The parsley, carrot etc. would depend on what the *fruttivendolo* at the market gave her, gratis, as a handful of *odori*.

sities.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, fried pork chops and carrot rice is one of those recipes one will cook on a day-to-day basis in any Portuguese household, because of the price (low), simplicity (undemanding cooking skills) and reduced time of preparation.

Yet when we start to conjugate these straightforward recipes, it quickly becomes more complicated. As they travel round the world from their origins, tastes vary and ingredients are altered, or hard to source. This leads to an exploration of the urban landscape in search of the perfect, or merely acceptable, ingredients. Today some semblance of a pasta col sugo can be made in Australia going no further than the shelves of the local supermarket:<sup>3</sup> an Australian pasta (or Barilla will probably be available), a jar of 'pasta sauce' (or maybe an imported passata), some grated 'parmesan': too easy! as they say in Australia.

But immigrants (and gourmards) have to be more resourceful if they want to enjoy their pasta. Or pork chops with rice. Matters of linguistic translation immediately are felt. Immigrants coming to Australia from Italy, or from Portugal (new/old world relation), quickly find the networks that connect them with the shops that sell their familiar fare, usually in their own language. The problems arise when Portugal meets Italy (old/old world relation): How does one ask for pork neck chops (*costeletas do cachaço*) in Italian? In the readjustment of recipes, maps and tastes we see the intimate, ongoing interplay between recipes and maps, tastes and identities, cities and cultures.

The immigrant's map of their new city is shaped by the shops that sell their food. In turn, they reshape the maps of those cities where mass migration has led to the establishment of whole communities from one country. People choosing to live among compatriots so they can source their own foods, in their own language, has led to food shaping the urban fabric to the extent that precincts come to be known as 'Little Italy' or 'Little Portugal!'<sup>4</sup>

This is a well-known phenomenon in the new world, as in Sydney, where immigrants can arrange to live near those places where their familiar ingredients are sold. This quickly re-establishes a workable mental shopping map. Further from these particular communities, or for immigrants from a small and under-represented group, the area of a large city like Sydney is so vast that the access map could become very complicated. And even in a smaller city, like Wollongong, NSW, or Victoria, BC, the shop selling *sale grosso* and Parmigiano Reggiano will be located where the Italians settled 50 or 60 years ago. That may well be in a nondescript suburb 20 minutes by bus from the CBD.

Cities change as the older migrants die, or their neighbourhoods gentrify. Many of the specialty shops survive a generation or two longer, as the next generation comes back for familiar foods, or as the gentrifiers take up the ethnic foods of the neighbourhood to which they have moved.<sup>5</sup> None of the old world habits can last forever as they are threatened by changing demographics and mass consumption supermarkets. Yet this is not simply a process of cultural destruction, but one of accommodation and adaptation at work on the city, the community and the cuisine.

These processes of map-making and map-shaping by mass migration to the new world can be

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<sup>2</sup> In the panic buying as the covid-19 pandemic led to restrictions on movement, pasta was the next item to be stripped from the shelves of Australian supermarkets, after toilet paper.

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.goodfood.com.au/eat-out/news/from-adobo-to-zaatar-australian-supermarkets-increase-international-food-offerings-20200207-h11nb7>

<sup>4</sup> The Inner West Council in Sydney resolved in August 2019 to refer to Petersham as 'Little Portugal', and in February 2020 to refer to central Leichhardt as Little Italy. This follows widespread community recognition of these precincts that were established by an earlier generation, who have in many cases moved on. See <https://www.innerwest.nsw.gov.au/about/news/media-releases/2020-media-releases/leichhardt-to-be-recognised-as-little-italy>

<sup>5</sup> Asian and other shops are less likely to survive than those devoted to Italian cuisine, which has been taken up by bourgeois 'foodies'. Italian culinary imperialism in the form of Barilla pasta or Lavazza coffee can be seen on the shelves of many mainstream supermarkets around the world.

contrasted with the position of a migrant from a small minority in an old world city. For a Portuguese immigrant to Naples it is even more difficult to find, in a regular supermarket, most of the familiar ingredients for the flavours of home. In Coimbra, the urban map was familiar, and ingredients were easily found, even at the average supermarket near home (2 minutes walking). In Naples a whole new map had to be learnt. Even if some familiarity with the city had already been acquired, in particular with some of its touristic routes, one had to attune to new routes, motivated by the need to find the ingredients required to cook one's recipes, those brought in our suitcase of memories and those created anew.

Wandering around the Neapolitan historical centre, the gaze was finally directed towards a butcher who could provide pork neck chops. Once matters of translation were overcome, he reflected on this request: 'this type of cut, we used to do it a long time ago. . . Now people prefer a different kind of chop.' Carolino rice proved even more elusive, disclosing its unfamiliar character in an unfamiliar place. With few Portuguese residents,<sup>6</sup> as well as the wide variety of Italian rices,<sup>7</sup> it proved impossible to source. Adaptation to new conditions was a necessary consequence. Research on food and migration has pointed out the concept of dietary acculturation as a form of examining immigrants' food-related experiences (Terragni and Roos, 2018). Arborio came in as an alternative to Carolino, transforming recipes and flavour, and profoundly impacting the relation between the self and the city.

### **The psychogeography of urban recipes: reorientations**

Nonna Flora's map covered the route from her home to the market, like the route to the local supermarket in Coimbra. For someone living in Sydney, or a visitor to some unfamiliar Australian city, maps and routes call for reorientation. Sourcing ingredients such as *sale grosso*, or even Parmigiano Reggiano can cause difficulties to new arrivals, the lost, and the unconnected. Orientation in Naples seems to reveal similar patterns, conferring an *agrodolce* flavour to the interdependence between roots and routes. Pork neck chops can be sourced, but they speak of different places, of a time gone by. The time has passed for some but not others. This extra layer of othering adds time as well as space to the displacement, further accentuating foreignness. Meanwhile, the stealthy processes of assimilation – and the associated risks of loss of culture – invade the taste buds and the alimentary tract, when Arborio replaces Carolino.

New arrivals must be resourceful to find the flavours of home, rapidly inscribing new urban maps into their lived city. Our routes, directed by quotidian needs for food, reveal our roots. Whereas Benjamin talked of losing oneself in a city, our recipes lead us towards reorienting oneself in the city. In such a process, the geography of menu planning intersects with cultural background, biography and identity, leading to the creation of new recipes – culinary, biographical and urban. Each builds on the others, so that we eat what we are, we are where we live, and we live what we eat, in an endless project of urban reorientation and identity re-formation through food.

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6 In January 2019 there were 92 Portuguese individuals living in Naples according to the Italian Statistics Institute (ISTAT).

7 The Riso Italiano website lists 182 Italian varieties of rice: <https://www.risoitaliano.eu/category/le-variete-italiane/>.

Compare the website of Portuguese rice producer and distributor, Novarroz, which lists the principle varieties as 'Carolino and its main varieties, Ariete and Euro, but also Agulha rice'. Twelve varieties listed include the Asian varieties Jasmin and Basmati, at <http://novarroz.pt/pt/variedades-de-arroz>

## References

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Celeriac, yolk, apple, dates, truffle - 15

Lobster bisque, Thai Basil - 10

Retired dairy tartare, sprouts, horseradish - 12

Mac & cheese - 15 (Add truffle - supplement 10)

Cornish cod, yellow curry, cucumber, kaffir lime - 20

Salt aged duck, cabbage, rhubarb, sichuan - 23

Beetroot, elderflower, bull's blood - 15

Tempura, romesco, calcot - 8

Crispy artichoke, sour cream, chive - 8

Bitter leaves salad - 7

Cheese, Beetroot, Szechuan - 10

Coffee, Artichoke, Mandarin - 10

Rhubarb, Gateau Basque, Yoghurt - 10 (allow 20 minutes)

Chefs' menu 60

Paired wine +60