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**Eating as a Cultural Performance in Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century New Zealand:  
An Exploration of the Relationships between Food and Place**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in Social Anthropology  
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## Abstract

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During New Zealand's comparatively short history as a nation, its cuisine has undergone great development. The culinary traditions brought by the early settlers, from both Eastern Polynesia and then Britain, offered a relatively limited variety, however, since the late 20<sup>th</sup> century New Zealand's foodways have undergone a revolution; today a smorgasbord of international cuisines awaits our selection. This gastronomic range is the result of a number of factors which include the influx of diverse immigrants, increased air travel by New Zealanders, the return of military personnel from overseas and globalisation.

To conduct this investigation of the relationships between people, identity, food and place I approach the topic from three perspectives. Firstly, I examine how exotic foods are used to link immigrants to New Zealand with loved ones in their homelands, and also how the same foods act as a bridge between those immigrants and other New Zealanders. Secondly, I look at how exotic foods serve to connect New Zealanders with, generally, far-away places, as through its evocative powers food has the ability to transport ordinary people to places where they may rather be. Lastly, I explore how some New Zealanders are making exotic foods 'ours' by combining them with the abundance of fresh local produce. Appropriating the exotic and combining it with the indigenous to make it ours is the story of New Zealand; our society has developed through the arrival of many people and cultures, and food is a lens through which to observe this process today.

This work differs from many ethnographic accounts in that it does not focus on a coherent group of people, but rather is based around the theme of food and eating in the New Zealand context. The thesis is the culmination of approximately twelve months of data gathering for which a multi-method approach was used. This process included: a review of both academic and popular literature; visits to food-related places such as cultural festivals, wine and food festivals, Agricultural and Pastoral Shows, Home Shows, community markets, farmers' markets, various Auckland supermarkets, ethnic food stores, specialty food shops; mainstream and ethnic cafés and restaurants, shopping centre food courts and various other miscellaneous places; attending different ethnic cooking courses and a series of semi-structured interviews. The interview process used different interviewee configurations: individuals, married couples and pairs, in an attempt to generate various perspectives and so enhance the data.

The thesis concludes that, firstly, exotic foods represent a means by which immigrants are able to connect with both loved ones remaining in the old home, and also to form new relationships with other New Zealanders in their new home. Secondly, exotic foods, through either their consumption or through people's memories of consumption, provide a bridge between New Zealanders and other places. Lastly, New Zealanders are increasingly taking exotic foods, combining them with the nation's abundant local and unique indigenous foodstuffs and making it ours.

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