

# 'Nobody Loves You as Much as Rice'

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**ABSTRACT:** Canada struggles to bolster immigration, especially in the Maritime Provinces that exist outside the current flow of migration to central or western Canada. Policy aimed at resolving this issue prioritizes practical and economic factors while ignoring the more subtle and personal facets of the decision to migrate. In this article, policy is coupled with human experience to inform new directions in research and implementation. The landscape of food and eating is the centre point of my analysis because shops and restaurants catering to Asian foods play important roles in constructing an environment favourable to immigration. Indeed, my research participants used food as a means of expressing notions of well-being and feelings of 'home' in a new setting. With a focus on the foodscapes in Halifax, Nova Scotia this article explores the role of food in how Vietnamese immigrants experience life in the Canadian Maritimes.

**KEYWORDS:** Canadian Maritimes, ethnographic humanism, foodscapes, immigration policy, Vietnamese immigrants

## Introduction

A great deal of media attention has focused on the need to attract immigrants to Canada's Maritime Provinces. Demographic studies indicate that birth rates have dropped and the Canadian population is on the decline, therefore immigration is necessary to offset the aging population. Meyer Burstein, the cofounder of Metropolis Canada (a policy-driven organisation dealing with migration and multicultural issues) referred to Canadian immigration policy as a 'remarkable experiment' in need of a makeover (Burstein 2005). By this he insinuates that current policy haphazardly accepts immigrants and alternatively suggests that policy should concentrate on attracting those who are highly skilled. He is also referring to the concentration of immigrants outside of the Maritimes. Of the few immigrants who do come to Atlantic Canada, far fewer actually remain in the region for long periods of time, with many relocating to larger city centres such

as Toronto, Montreal or Vancouver, where larger ethnic communities reside. Policy makers have redirected attention to creating more jobs, lowering the admission fee and advertising the Maritimes globally as an attractive place to migrate. This strategy simplifies the migration experience while ignoring a range of factors that extend beyond purely economic motives. It is true that the lack of good employment is an impediment to retaining immigrants, but this focus is too narrow; it ignores the everyday experiences. Beyond practical motivations, people are guided by more complex and intuitive reasons when deciding where to live. The question left unasked is, quite simply, how do immigrants feel about their life in a new setting? In this article, I employ the human-centred principles of ethnography to reveal these complexities. More specifically, I focus on food as a means to explore the immigration experience in Halifax, the largest of all Maritime cities, and bring attention to the voices of Vietnamese immigrants beyond the

imagination and speculation of policy makers.

'It is almost too obvious to dwell on' (Mintz 1986:3) but food preferences and practices, cross-culturally, are central to both self- and community definition. The *movement of people across borders into new arenas of food topography has the potential to threaten notions of identity and well-being. In this article, the landscape of food and eating in Halifax will be examined to capture both the symbolic and real spaces where consumption, identity and power merge for Vietnamese immigrants. A specific focus will be on accumulated knowledge, emphasizing the role of networks and communities to share this learning with special attention to the link between food choice and feelings of health and well-being. This research borrows from geography the notion of a mental map.* This includes the spaces that are conceptually meaningful for recent immigrants by outlining a familiarity with suitable or preferred spaces and places of food and eating, which grows as immigrants' knowledge of the city increases and social networks expand.

Building upon Bell and Valentines' (1997) focus on the geography of food consumption, this article also examines the role of food in creating identities based on place (Anderson 1983). Restaurants, grocery stores and other various places of food purchase and consumption are significant locations for identity formation both etically as Asian, or emically as distinctly Vietnamese. Based on these spatial dimensions, I incorporate a multisited approach to map the migration foodscape of Vietnamese immigrants in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Immigrants, like the example given by Bell and Valentine of Celiacs, are among those who have to carefully map out where they eat. For Celiacs the importance of space and place are heightened because of serious gluten allergies (Bell and Valentine 1997). I contend that this closely parallels the experience of a new immigrant seeking to eat in specific ways. Spaces of food

consumption and purchase have profound influence on the way Vietnamese immigrants experience life in the Canadian Maritimes and subsequently carry some weight in the decision to remain in the region or move to larger city centres.

## Migration Context

Up until the 1990s, a large portion of the Vietnamese immigrating to Canada came as refugees and settled in central Canada most often Toronto and Montreal, followed by cities in Southern Ontario including London, Kitchener, Ottawa, Hamilton and Windsor (Pfeifer 2000). Over the past decade, the stream of refugees has dwindled and the majority of Vietnamese immigrants to Canada are 'family-class immigrants', which means that they are sponsored by family members who immigrated previously. Not surprisingly, given the nature of recent immigration patterns, Canadian census statistics indicate that immigrants from Vietnam continue to concentrate in the same areas, leaving the Atlantic Canadian provinces in deficit (Arthur 1999; Pfeifer 2000). It should be noted, however, that secondary migration is not the only avenue used by Vietnamese people enter to Canada; the pull factors that attract Vietnamese people to live amongst family in Quebec and Southern Ontario are equally matched with factors that steer immigrants away from Atlantic Canada. The Maritime Provinces face a much larger immigration problem than policy makers are prepared to deal with. Historically, Canadian immigration had racist overtones discouraging those from Asia or Africa to move to Canada because it was believed that they could not be assimilated into Canadian society. While the rest of Canada moves towards embracing a larger and more multicultural sense of identity, it seems that in the Maritimes, people

are still separated into 'us' and 'others', 'mainstream citizens' and 'immigrants' or 'whites' and 'visible minorities' (Arthur 1999). In this framework, Asian immigrants become a homogenous group of 'others' and the life satisfaction and sense of belonging of immigrants from this region are accordingly low.

According to Canadian census, the population of Halifax Regional Municipality was 350,111 in 2001, and of these documented persons, 730 are Vietnamese. These numbers include periphery regions like Dartmouth, Bedford and Spryfield, therefore even fewer Vietnamese persons are visible in Halifax. This small population coupled with a climate heavily influenced by its location near the Atlantic coast keeps Halifax outside the path of immigration from Vietnam. Temperatures are consistently below five degrees Celsius in the winter and usually no higher than twenty-eight degrees in the summer months. Miedema and Tastsogolou (2000) note another factor influencing the retention of immigrants. She spoke to forty immigrant women in the Maritime region, all of whom emphasized the role of community involvement, both in 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' and in 'mainstream' community activities. Such involvement, with varied levels of success, helped to break isolation, promote a sense of activism or regional pride and build social capital in finding employment from connections made. Ultimately these women were searching for ways to create a 'home' for themselves in Canada; community involvement is just one key theme, alongside climate and size of ethnic community. Arguably the landscape of food is another factor, an enormously important factor that receives little attention.

In the struggle to bolster migration, perhaps something as essential to life as food goes unnoticed. The anthropological literature affirms a wide range of significance to food and eating beyond simply seeking nour-

ishment (Bourdieu 1984; Lupton 1996; Bell and Valentine 1997; Garbaccia 1998; Mintz 1999). Cultural constructions favor particular foods and reject others, despite an environment supporting a variety of possible choices. Societies create elaborate systems of acquiring food and notions of cuisine, lending themselves to complex conceptions of health and well-being, in addition to constructing and challenging identities based on ethnicity, social class and nationalism. Food solidifies social relationships, helps to celebrate special events, commemorates history and reveals relationships of power.

Immigrants, according to post-colonial literature, do not lose their cultural traditions and blindly assimilate but rather develop continually and mutually with their host culture (Ashcroft et al. 1995; Bhabha 1995; Braithwaite 1995). What happens when these ideas about food move across borders, resituating themselves in new settings? Recent literature suggests that migrants blend ideas and practices to create a sort of 'hybrid diet' based on a combination of new foods and those to which they are accustomed (Reid 1986; Ashcroft et al. 1995; Garbaccia 1998; Pilcher 2002). However, immigrants need to negotiate new identities based on these changes and this invariably influences their ideas of health and well-being.

For immigrants, the decision to invest their lives in eastern Canada depends on much more than policy makers envision and they have much more to offer to Atlantic Canada beyond augmenting the economy. Adjusting to a new environment of food depends on accumulating knowledge and upon making connections to exchange this learning. Devoid of these networks, immigrants are driven to larger city centres, like Toronto or Vancouver, where ethnic communities are well established and food is celebrated among people of assorted ethnic backgrounds. Such diversity has worked to reconstruct a plural sense of national identity that

expands beyond the 'us' and 'them' attitude that still lingers in the Atlantic Provinces. In one instance, the premier of Nova Scotia encapsulates this attitude in a seemingly innocent comment quoted in *The Coast* editorial. He referred to immigrants as 'people from away' and by this, he ignores the history of Canada based on immigration and falsely dichotomizes people as 'from here' or 'from away' (*The Coast*, 3 Feb. 2005). Steve Streach, the Mosquodoboit Valley councillor, made a similar blunder during a meeting at the Halifax Chamber of Commerce. He took issue with the recommendation to increase immigration and asks whether 'we run the risk of diluting our population?' Instead he offers that Atlantic Canadians bolster the population by encouraging couples to have more children, keeping their youth from moving out of province, and enticing those who have left to return (*Daily News*, 3 Dec. 2004). A comment such as this serves to separate people; and racism at its core is about separation. It also signifies which ethnic groups fit his idea of a Maritimer, notably those who are white and Christian. It seems a bit of a paradox for a province so desperate to attract immigrants to separate 'us' from 'others' who threaten the national identity. This attitude manifests itself in the landscape of food; Pillsbury observed that North American food is foreign 'but not too foreign', and items take on a distinct American flavour, such as Tex Mex (Pillsbury 1998).

### **Methodological Considerations—A Focus on Experience**

This research consists entirely of participant observation and informal yet purposeful conversations guided by my research questions (Burgess 1991). Inspired by the work of Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992), I proceeded with the intension of finding praxis between community and practice; I took a deliberately

engaged approach in which I became both a silent observer and an advocate or active participant in my participants' lives and their transition to life in the Canadian Maritimes throughout my research period. I began in 2004 when I moved from British Columbia to Nova Scotia in order to pursue my Master's degree at Dalhousie University, and continued to develop over the two years I lived there. I volunteered in a variety of settings with the intension of meeting and learning about immigrants and international students in Halifax and made a significant network of connections from these entry points.

The first point of access into the Asian community in Halifax was at St. Mary's University. This campus has a strong English-As-A Second Language program popular among East Asia students. I signed up to be a conversation partner and was paired with a Korean student of similar age. Later that year, I was matched with a Vietnamese student in my department at Dalhousie University who needed extra help with her studies. We met on a regular basis to study sociology and work on her class assignments. My relationship to both these students extended well beyond practicing English or studying sociology; we went out for coffee, shared meals and became good friends. Finally, I got involved with the Host Program at MISA (Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association). Through this organisation, I was matched with a new immigrant from China; we met weekly to cook for each other spend time with her family, go shopping for groceries and visit yard sales. All three women have become good friends of mine and I have spent a lot of time with each of them talking about the issues addressed in this article. Through these points I have made significant snowball networks among informants from various parts of Asia: I speak some Vietnamese; I habitually shop at Asian grocery stores, and attend local celebrations for various Asian holidays, including various events for

Asian-heritage month in May. As a result of this involvement in the lives of my participants, I hope to elucidate the human side of the economically driven issue of migration; using food and eating as a window to draw out themes of health, identity and feelings of 'home'.

This research is also part of a personal journey as I sought to eat in particular ways on a limited student budget in a new Canadian city. Halifax is very far away and quite different from the city I had carefully mapped for the best and cheapest places to buy healthy food, and the attitudes towards healthy eating are very different from those I had grown to know on Vancouver Island. Halifax also has a unique historical identity as a locale where freed slaves found solace, but where later they were forcibly removed from their community in Africville in the 1950s. It is, in short, a locale that seeks to retain immigrants, but has yet to deal adequately with black Nova Scotians. I found that in this new setting, the dichotomy between 'here' and 'there' as outlined by Clifford Geertz, became more apparent as people continue to question my ethnic background. 'Where are your parents from?' Or 'where are you "really" from?' Nova Scotians ask, a question I am unaccustomed to being asked. A strong regional identity or Maritime pride built upon homogeneity (common culture, race and language) (Robbins 2002) is prominent in Nova Scotia, as young Maritimers leave because of a poor economy or settle on underemployment. Outsiders are erroneously perceived as a threat to local employment rates. Political leaders in the Canadian Maritimes marveled at the new global strategies as 'the new frontier' and the hope for the future and prosperity in Atlantic Canada; however, such policies have driven down wages and exploded the number of working poor (Workman 2003). A Halifax-born university student articulated the general attitude to me when she asked me: 'Why would

we need immigrants when we cannot even take care of our own?' Her boyfriend, also a native-born Nova Scotian, has both a nursing and public relations degree, yet works for minimum wage as a security guard because he cannot imagine living anywhere else. Policies driven at attracting immigrants of European descent have reasoned that people who share a common race, cuisine and language will be less of a threat to this regional identity, and can assimilate more easily, however, this attitude has proven to be too simplistic (Oakley 2005). Most people who live but were not born in Halifax, including myself, report that they will always feel like an outsider regardless of these exterior commonalities.

This division between 'insiders and outsiders' revealed itself in many ways. One of the most striking sentiments was expressed to me at a barbeque where several recent immigrants were in attendance. I introduced myself to one man who told me he preferred to keep silent. He also said that he did not want to speak to me because I am 'white'. I told him that he was the first person in Halifax to label me 'white' since most Nova Scotians note my foreignness. Only then did he cautiously reveal some of his experiences of discrimination causing him to be careful with whom he speaks. I realize that this is a rather extreme reaction, but I asked people casually throughout the rest of the night 'are you happy living here in Halifax?' and to my surprise, given the mood of the event, most of them said very plainly that no they were not. It has become apparent that immigrants have very strong and sometimes varied opinions about their new lives in Halifax: How is it that policy is formed without asking very simply why immigrants choose to stay or leave? Maritime immigration lacks qualitative research, therefore ethnographic inquiry begs attention and policy needs a human side. Based on the principles of ethnographic humanism, which includes the experience

and agency of immigrants in Halifax, this research has been designed and carried out with a mindfulness of how it could be translated into a language that might appeal to the sensibilities of policy makers. I also hope that this approach might also inform other anthropologists working towards circulating these ideas outside scholastic circles, thus bridging the gap between academic and policy-driven research.

### *Ethnographic Foodscapes*

By conducting ethnographic research in grocery stores and restaurants, I am recognizing them as key social spaces or nodes in which to explore issues of transnationalism somewhat akin to Mankekar's research on Indian grocery stores in California (Mankekar 2005). Shops and restaurants play an important role in retaining immigrants for three reasons. First of all, they provide a place for making networks and exchanging knowledge. One of my research participants, the sociology student, has done most of her networking at the Asian grocery store. This is where she finds out about events such as the Chinese new year party (which corresponds with the Vietnamese new year) and found people to participate in interviews for her class assignments. Ethnic grocery stores 'invoke and produce powerful discourses of home, family and community' (Mankekar 2005: 210). Second, these stores provide food that fits immigrant ideas of health and well-being. Food is very intimately connected to health in Vietnam, from foods that you should eat or avoid when sick or the numerous dishes that I been told are 'good for your health'.

Lastly, it serves to dehomogenize or expand the perimeters of the Atlantic Canadian diet by teaching people about different foods and incorporating a much wider range of what it means to be a Maritimer. Similar to

the Indian grocery stores that Mankekar describes as social spaces that satisfy a 'curiosity about their new and not so new neighbors enabling them to purchase exotic "ethnic Indian" products', Asian grocery stores in Halifax also serve as a educational tool for Canadians of European descent (Mankekar 2005: 202). Non-Asian customers often frequent one store, for instance, located near the university campus. The storeowner was happy to answer my questions about the required ingredients for Tom Yum soup and made special note of the products most often purchased by non-Asian customers. There are some limitations to this argument, as Pierre Bourdieu would readily note that the desire for the exploration of world cuisine is very tightly enmeshed with social class and the process of acquiring cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Many people would never dream of giving up classic pub fare for Chinese food or sushi. However unbalanced throughout the social strata, it is part of the larger process of creating a landscape of greater tolerance and social understanding. This can be exemplified by an occasion when my I invited my volunteer match, along with her husband and child, over for lunch. I cooked a curry-and-rice dish and can recall how delighted they were to watch me cook. 'You cook like an Asian person,' they informed me, because I did not use any recipes or measuring cups as did most of the Canadians they had met, not even to make the rice. Such rigid cooking techniques were very foreign to them and they were so delighted to see me cook in a manner similar to what they were accustomed to. I never consciously modified the manner in which I cooked for them then or on any other occasion. Although seemingly inconsequential, this event is a powerful symbol of cultural borrowing and exchange rather than assimilation that has been the focus of determining who makes a 'successful' immigrant.

## Vietnamese Immigrants in Halifax

'What do you miss most about home?' I asked another Vietnamese student at Dalhousie University. 'The food', she answered instinctively and paused before adding 'and my boyfriend'. This straightforward, yet evocative initial statement clearly demonstrates the compelling relationship Vietnamese people have with food. Indeed, it is closely connected to every facet of their lives in Vietnam: it is featured in folk culture including songs, stories and holiday celebrations; is central to both regional and national identities; and is intimately connected to their feelings of health and well-being. The title of this article, 'nobody loves you as much as rice' is a folk expression taught to me by my friends during my internship in Vietnam in 2002 and heard again on my return visit in 2005, when I conducted research on the changing landscape of food and eating. This expression, in its simplicity, speaks to a lot of things about Vietnamese culture; rice is deeply connected to good health and well-being, as well as a symbol of national identity and a feeling of home. It connects all people, from the women in the rice fields in their conical hats, to the student who has traveled miles from home to study in the city. Ultimately, rice, a staple in their diet and fundamental to an entire cuisine, is a symbol of being Vietnamese, similar to the way *Qingzhen*, a very specific way of eating, is equated with being Muslim in China (Gillette 2005: 110). In the research of Thomas, Vietnamese immigrants expressed that Pho, the quintessential Vietnamese dish, is what 'makes them Vietnamese' while living in Australia (Thomas 2004).

Emblematic of this strong connection to food in Vietnam is *Bahn Tet*, a combination of sticky rice, beans and pork wrapped in banana leaves and tied carefully with strings

of bamboo. It is the traditional food associated with the Tet holiday in Vietnam. This food, in which rice is the main component, is a both symbol of national identity and linked to health and well-being. A well-known folk story informs us that prince Lang Lieu, in a competition to inherit the throne, was visited by a genie and given the recipe for these humble cakes, designed to replicate the earth and the sky. The reigning king, Hung the Sixth, had each of his twenty-two sons cook for him, and despite the fact that the others set out to the farthest corners of the earth to combine the most exotic flavours in a dish that would please him, he chose the simple dish created by Lang Lieu, made with locally grown ingredients and designed in shapes to represent harmony with the cosmic order (Mai Ly Quang 2002; Avieli 2005). This food and its associated folklore are reminders of Vietnamese humility and lack of desire for material things: It was the man who avoided frivolity who prospered. It was a sign from the heavens advocating regional pride and a guide to live in harmony with what the fertile land of Vietnam already provides or as Avieli wrote 'the legend defines the ideal Vietnamese king as one who nurtures the nation, and as one who feeds it with rice' (Avieli 2005: 175). 'When eating the humble rice cakes, the Vietnamese make a point about their preference for Vietnamese culture and artifacts over imported items, as luxurious as those may be' (Avieli 2005: 177).

Historically, these cakes are also connected to building strength and promoting health and well-being. Because they are preserved and more filling than the standard Vietnamese fare, these cakes were used as food rations for soldiers during the various periods of warfare. One cake provides an entire meal nutritionally in one small and compact item (containing a variety of vitamins, carbohydrates and proteins). It was rice that led Vietnam to victory over more powerful and

technologically advanced outsiders and enemies during periods of war (Avieli 2005).

Vietnamese food, smells, sounds and flavour create this sense of nostalgia, and well-being. During my time in Vietnam, people were genuinely upset that they could no longer eat chicken due to the threat of avian influenza—‘Vietnamese chicken is the best’, or so I was told. Not only did it perceptibly have more taste, it had added nutritional value because it was grown in a natural setting. These notions are transferred to a Western setting in the process of immigration. Sentiments described to me mirror those described by Australian immigrants meeting Vietnamese food in a new setting. The food in Vietnam is ‘not only more authentic, but qualitatively better’ (Thomas 2004: 58). Western food is grown with too many pesticides and becomes devoid of its smells and flavours through processing and packaging. The qualities that make Vietnamese food so healthy (‘good for your health’ was a description provided with all the Vietnamese food I was offered during my stay there) are seemingly absent from Western food.

I chose to focus specifically on Vietnamese immigrants and students initially because of my own experience and extensive travel in the region. The stories and experiences with food and the sense of pride and perceived superiority of Vietnamese tastes piqued my interest. How are these feelings made commensurable in new settings?

Statistics compiled on Asian immigrants in Canada by Jodey Derouin (2004) the research officer of the metropolis multicultural program, indicate that Vietnamese immigrants have the lowest level of life satisfaction in Canada, with only 73 percent stating they are satisfied with their lives compared to 86 percent of Filipinos or 83 percent of East Indians. The Vietnamese have the lowest sense of belonging to Canada at only 65 percent or an ethnic group in Canada at a very low

43 percent compared again to Filipinos who were 89 percent and 78 percent, respectively.

The Vietnamese community provides an ideal forum to explore the differences between the construction of their ethnicity ‘etically’ as Asian and ‘emically’ as distinctly Vietnamese. Using bubble tea as an example, it is impressive to note that it is served in a Vietnamese restaurant despite the fact that it is not a Vietnamese dish. With the exception of Hanoi, the most cosmopolitan city in Vietnam where bubble tea is marketed to tourists and young middle-class youth, bubble tea is absent from the food landscape in Vietnam. It seems as though this restaurant embraces a much broader ethnic identity. Not only are they ‘Vietnamese’, which in itself incorporates a wide range of tastes spanning from the salty taste in the North, to the much sweeter cuisine in the South, but also they are ‘Asian’ and serve foods that expand beyond Vietnamese borders. I discovered a similar example while dining at a Thai restaurant. The server was a Vietnamese woman. This conflated identity is striking because during my time living with a host family in Vietnam, I cooked Thai food and no one would eat it because the taste was too unfamiliar, but while living in Canada the difference between the two countries is seemingly blurred.

This binary sense of self or fusion of etic and emic identities became particularly significant at a small party I attended for the staff of the Japanese restaurant ‘Momoya’. Owned by a Chinese couple and staffed by a range of students and immigrants of Asian descent, the restaurant caters to an etic understanding of Asia as one large homogenous group. This phenomenon is not confined to this restaurant. Despite the plethora of Japanese restaurants in Halifax, most are in fact run or owned by Koreans or Chinese. This understanding has been confirmed in casual conversation throughout my stay in Halifax when people have said things to me like ‘the

Asian face looks the same, I cannot distinguish from which country.' This is a striking contrast to the particular identities revealed at the staff party where people identified themselves to each other very specifically as from Hong Kong or Beijing, Seoul or Bussan. Also notable is that not one staff member of Momoya is Japanese. It is interesting to have a landscape that accommodates Japanese cuisine but does not represent the Asian population, which is not overwhelmingly from Japan.

These new spaces and new styles of eating that expand beyond what is traditionally Vietnamese, create an 'intercultural space where tastes are reconstituted and re-imagined in relation to the wider society' (Thomas 2005). Vietnamese immigrants must adjust to how Maritime Canadians perceive them as part of this homogenous group from Asia, thus challenging the notions of being Vietnamese, a national identity that distinguishes itself very clearly from neighbouring countries.

In the Australian case study of first- and second-generation Vietnamese immigrants, Vietnamese food had transformed the landscape; Vietnamese people, people of Asian and European descent and Australians alike enjoyed Pho, rice noodle soup with beef, bean sprouts and mint leaves. 'Vietnamese food becomes "Australianized" and Australian food becomes "Vietnamized"' (Thomas 2004: 54). Similarly, in Ottawa, or in my hometown of Victoria, Pho restaurants are plentiful and well frequented. In these we have the borrowing and exchange, the mediation of power, rather than a one-way transfer or Westernization of material culture. Similar to what Watson (1997) and Thomas (2004) term 'localization', the entrance and acceptance of Vietnamese food on the Australian market creates a new culture, a common ground for greater social understanding. With only a handful of Vietnamese restaurants in the Halifax Regional Municipality,

with only one in the downtown centre, I wonder, is Halifax ready to embrace this larger sense of identity? Pho is only marginally featured here, a lunchtime special absent from the dinner menu. In Ottawa, store-window décor in Vietnamese restaurants attempts to entice customers with advertisements of Pho; some have chosen to serve only that dish. The Vietnamese restaurant in Halifax, on the other hand, has window designs and advertisements on the table featuring bubble tea. While Canadian immigration is under scrutiny, with a plethora of Canadian anthropologists devoting their energy to this issue, immigration in Halifax as seen in the landscape of food and eating, I would argue, is in crisis by comparison to other Canadian cities.

## Conclusion

I do not mean to suggest that the landscape of food is the only, or even the most prominent factor, in an immigrant's decision to stay in Halifax. Indeed the picture is far more complicated. The beauty of ethnographic enquiry is that it draws attention to the nuances and everyday experiences overlooked in policy-driven research. Food is at the very centre of Vietnamese life; in both ritual and in routine it is imbued with potent meaning. Symbolic meanings of food create a sense of self and community and diet is deeply connected to ways of creating and maintaining good health, all very integral to how a person experiences life in a new setting. By drawing attention to how identity is constructed and/or labeled in these spaces for the purchase and consumption of Asian foods, we can posit some theories to shed light on the aforementioned statistics compiled by Metropolis's ethnic diversity survey, which indicates that Vietnamese immigrants are generally dissatisfied or lack a sense of belonging in

Canada (Derouin 2005). Although this research is explicitly critical of policy, I hope that ethnographic research such as this can continue to develop with dexterity and be of use in practical settings.

Aside from the definite set of questions this research was designed to draw attention to, I hope that it also gives some voice to a particular set of people with different experiences. Asian-descendant citizens are typically forgotten in both academic and popular literature on 'race', because their 'otherness' is usually described as stemming from cultural or ethnic differences, in opposition to those of African descent, whose differences are usually recognized as 'racial'. Whether based on religion, culture, language or appearance, creating this distinction between 'us' and 'others' is at the very heart of immigration policy as well as Canadian misconceptions about immigrants; and racism at its very core is about separation.

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