

FOOD

LIFTING THE LID OF THE FOOD BASKET

'El pueblo tiene su valle'

by Isabel Parra

*What irony of life
what terrible task
dispersed throughout the world
loving our homeland so much.*

*Sing, sing compañero
do not be afraid of anyone.
In this great multitude
the people have their valley.*

most important expression of being Chilean, and points of contrast with the American lifestyle were emphasized. These had to be expressed in creative new ways. Other aspects of life which at home had been relatively unimportant became more visible in the new setting and also became symbols of being Chilean. Dress, hairstyle and ways of speaking Spanish for instance, became significant in order to distinguish themselves from the rest of the hispanic community and in particular Mexican immigrants. As Chilean identity has evolved through interactions with the host community, the form it takes in the US will be different in some respects than in other host countries. Members of the Chilean community in Sweden and in California visited each other and each were somewhat dismayed to note the changes in the others. Each group felt that the other had become more assimilated and retained less of their 'genuine Chileanness'.

Whilst change is inevitable, it can be problematic for some exiles. Forced out of their home country but with a strong commitment to return, life is 'on hold' in exile. Return home is portrayed by this community as a 'return to life', and assimilation, as a betrayal of a political struggle would be social death. There may be considerable social pressure in these communities, decisions and changes are closely evaluated by members and those who do live up to these ideals may find it best to withdraw. Sometimes uncomfortable changes are negotiated by the community as a whole and are justified in the way that they contribute to the political cause - so instead of being a sign of settling down, buying a house can be explained as an economic investment enabling return from exile one day.

There is a real tension between continuity and change, what life should be and what it is. Changing to the American environment may be betrayal, but holding on to the past may also be problematic as life in Chile is also changing in the meantime. It is a permanent struggle to create a life which resolves the contradiction between past and present. It is a difficult but important task for those who work with political exiles to understand these dilemmas and support refugees' own initiatives to solve them.

Marita Eastmond



*Fresh food bought by refugees to
supplement their diet*

Photo by Ken Wilson

In the following article, RPN raises some of the issues in the debate surrounding food for refugees and highlights some of the initiatives being taken to solve nutritional problems in settlements. This picks up on many of the themes raised by the Director of the World Food Programme, Mr James Ingram in his paper, 'Sustaining Human Dignity?', some responses to which were published in RPN 5.

What food should refugees be getting?

Recommendations for the food ration to be distributed to refugees were recently set out in 1988 at an International Conference 'Nutrition in Times of Disaster' and read as follows:

'The 1985 FAO/WHO/UNU energy and protein requirements should be used as the guide for calculating ration levels especially if the population is totally dependent on distributed foods. If it is not possible to meet these requirements, then a minimum of 1,900 kcal per person per day should be the target for sedentary populations. Additional allowances must be added for non-sedentary