



Food insecurity in urban New Zealand. The case of the Kopa family

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3 Title: Food insecurity in urban New Zealand. The case of the Kopa family
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8
9 Abstract

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11 Poverty brings insecurity and chaos into the home, forcing families to develop strategies for
12 navigating the difficulties of food insecurity. We document how one household, the Kopa family,
13 responds to poverty in ad-hoc and agentive ways that assist and hinder their attempts to keep
14 themselves fed. This study is based on a series of eight qualitative interviews with family members,
15 including photo-elicitation and go-along techniques, as well as extensive field notes from more
16 casual research interactions such as shared meals. Our analysis demonstrates how food insecurity
17 shapes this family's culturally-patterned social practices surrounding the procurement,
18 consumption, and sharing of food.
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32 Key words

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34 Families in poverty, Everyday Life, Food insecurity, Mimesis, Food traditions
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40 Introduction

41
42 Poverty brings chaos, instability, and food insecurity to people's lives (Evans, Eckenrode, &
43 Marcynyszyn, 2010; Scott, Edin, London, & Kissane, 2004). Food insecurity means having insufficient
44 food to live, difficulties in acquiring sufficient food, and can increase social marginalization (Parnell &
45 Gray, 2014; Boon & Farnsworth, 2011), manifesting in hardship, tensions, and distress (Weaver &
46 Hadley, 2009; Whiting & Ward, 2010). The absence of sufficient food forces people to seek
47 assistance from various sources, including food charities and welfare agencies. Households
48 experiencing food insecurity characteristically utilize a wide variety of creative food-provisioning
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3 tactics to keep their families fed (Buck-McFadyen, 2015; Gazso, McDaniel, & Waldron, 2016;
4
5 Kempson, Keenan, Sadani, & Adler, 2003). Families respond in agentic ways (Buck-McFadyen,
6
7 2015), such as drawing on a mixture of relational supports (Gazso et al., 2016), charitable aid
8
9 (Whiting & Ward, 2010), supplementary finance (Kempson et al., 2003), and functioning to 'stretch'
10
11 available food resources (Connell, Lofton, Yadrick & Rehner, 2005; Fram et al., 2011).
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17 Families respond to poverty and the distress of food insecurity within the restraints of the resources
18
19 available to them. Their responses are often imperfect and flawed. Whilst enabling survival, food-
20
21 provisioning tactics are no panacea; such tactics do not resolve poverty as the underlying driver of
22
23 food insecurity (Poppendieck, 1998). Further, efforts to access food is often time-consuming, can
24
25 produce uncertain results, and requires considerable tenacity (Gazso et al., 2016). Tactics associated
26
27 with food insecurity are about more than the provision of food and material survival. These tactics
28
29 are intricately connected with a sense of being, since food preparation and consumption are key
30
31 ways that people maintain and transmit socio-cultural identities (Graham, Hodgetts & Stolte, 2016).
32
33 In acquiring and preparing food for consumption, our research participants enact what it means to
34
35 be human, connecting with wider food traditions and cultural practices. What they acquire and eat,
36
37 how they eat it, and who they eat it with are crucial in sustaining a sense of self and in connecting
38
39 them with broader social structures (Graham, Hodgetts, & Stolte, 2016).
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46
47 Social practice theory (Halkier & Jensen, 2011; Hodgetts, Groot, Garden & Chamberlain, 2017;
48
49 Reckwitz, 2002) informs our exploration of how food insecurity manifests in the everyday life of a
50
51 particular household. Halkier and Jensen (2011, p. 104) note that, "The most basic theoretical
52
53 assumption is that activities of social life continuously have to be carried out and carried through,
54
55 and that this mundane performativity is organized through a multiplicity of collectively shared
56
57 practices". A dynamic nexus of social practices comprises an activity structure that reproduces
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3 societal structures and relationships (Reckwitz, 2002), shaping experiences of hardship and food
4
5 insecurity (Hodgetts et al., 2017). In responding to poverty and food insecurity people develop
6
7 particular purposeful and routinized social practices (tactics) that are aimed at achieving particular
8
9 ends (de Certeau, 1984). In doing so, they work to assert some control and routine over their
10
11 everyday lives and to enable them to make the most of meagre resources (Hodgetts, Chamberlain,
12
13 Groot & Tankel, 2014). Here, tactics constitute small everyday practices of adaptation to
14
15 circumstance for people with limited control over their circumstances (Stolte & Hodgetts, 2015). In
16
17 other words, tactics are central to families 'making do' despite the constraints of poverty and food
18
19 insecurity (de Certeau, 1984).
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26 By exploring the tactics of one family we can begin to develop a bigger picture of how inequitable
27
28 social structures driving poverty require the development of deliberate responses in everyday life.
29
30 This article foregrounds experiences of food insecurity as a key dimension of poverty through an
31
32 examination of how a particular family responds agentively and tactically to their situation. Through
33
34 focusing on responses to food insecurity, we emphasize that responses to poverty are personal and
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36 relational, planned and ad hoc.
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42 The present study

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45 The Kopa¹ household comprises an extended Māori² family experiencing poverty and food
46
47 insecurity. The four-bedroom dwelling they rent contains a much larger number of people than the
48
49 house is designed for. There are three generations living in the house. Sissy and Don live with their
50
51 five of their seven children (Janine (21), Roseanne (19), Taine (18), Izayah (16), and Mere (14)), as
52
53 well as Janine's partner and their two children, and Taine's girlfriend. In addition, Sissy's sister
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56
57 ¹ A pseudonym. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

58 ² Indigenous people of New Zealand
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3 Andrea, along with her partner, their daughter and her young son (Andrea's grandson) share the
4
5 house. Having so many people in the home is a tactic for cutting costs and pooling resources. Such
6
7 pragmatic responses to the high cost of living bring additional complications and increases tensions
8
9 (Evans et al., 2010).
10

11
12
13 The first author (Rebekah) initially met members of the Kopa household at a local (free) community
14
15 meal, which was the site for a larger research project (AUTHORS1). This article draws on multiple
16
17 interactions spanning the subsequent twelve months between Rebekah and members of the Kopa
18
19 family across various locations. These engagements involved multiple family members and included
20
21 weekly interactions while eating and talking together at the community meal, participant
22
23 observations, casual conversations, extensive field notes, shop-along and photo-elicitation exercises,
24
25 and eight interviews with family members. Aspects of the banality of food insecurity and the family's
26
27 tactical responses were evident from the structured research engagements, but also emerged across
28
29 snippets of unrecorded conversations as Rebekah transported family members to appointments
30
31 after interviews, had casual conversations as she queued in line for dessert at the community meal,
32
33 or during brief chats when rescheduling interviews. All of these interactions contribute to a sense of
34
35 the household's everyday life, yet are not reducible to tidy quotes or specific images. The range of
36
37 engagements was important for generating insights into the household situation, tactics for
38
39 responding to food insecurity and the relationships in play.
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48 The multiple research engagements made up an immersive approach whereby scholars immerse
49
50 themselves in the lives faced by people with whom they conduct research to reveal the broader
51
52 social structures embedded within and reproduced through everyday practices (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld,
53
54 & Zeisel, 1933/1972). As proponents of this approach in poverty research, Jahoda and colleagues
55
56 emphasize the importance of the use of case studies for understanding human experience in
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3 situations of adversity, and how broader political, economic and social structures manifest in the
4
5 lives of actual human beings. Correspondingly, Rebekah's engagements are drawn on in the
6
7 construction of the case study for this article. The power of such cases is to generate theoretically
8
9 informed, grounded, and context-dependent knowledge that sheds light on the reproduction of
10
11 social practices. As a case, the Kopa household offers insights into familial responses to food
12
13 insecurity associated with poverty that are of significance beyond their personal lifeworlds
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15 (Flyvbjerg, 2006).
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21 Evident across the research engagements was the difficulty participants had in trying to
22
23 communicate their experiences of food insecurity. Our research generated materials that never fully
24
25 conveyed the totality of participants' experiences. Rather, they provided snippets lifted from their
26
27 lives, hinting at tensions between what they can convey about food insecurity and what remains
28
29 unarticulatable. The hurt and embarrassment that comes with food insecurity is deeply felt, yet
30
31 words alone cannot always fully convey their experiences. The realities of such lives are challenging
32
33 to articulate to outsiders, in part because they are experienced as unremarkable by inhabitants who
34
35 'just do what you do'.
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42 Here we are raising a tension in poverty research whereby people from more modest backgrounds
43
44 try to communicate their experiences to researchers from more affluent backgrounds with no direct
45
46 experience of issues of poverty. Commenting on homelessness on the Parisian streets, for example,
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48 Benjamin (1940/2002) writes:
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50
51 What do we know of street corners, curbstones, the architecture of the pavement, we who
52
53 have never felt heat, dirt and edges of the stones under our naked soles, never inspected
54
55 the unevenness of paving stones for their suitability to bed on them (p.517)
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3 In theorizing participant accounts and orientating our analytic activities, we utilize the concept of
4
5 mimesis, which provides a way of invoking the 'unsayable' of participant experiences (Benjamin,
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7 (1940/2002). Mimesis is at once the imperfect act of mimicry, representation, re-assemblage, and
8
9 the expression and construction of experience. In engaging mimetically with their lives and with
10
11 everyday challenges such as food insecurity, our participants worked to contextualize everyday
12
13 events and occurrences, giving these some continuity and an overarching narrative that mimics their
14
15 everyday lives (Ricœur, 1990). Their efforts reflect Benjamin's (1940/2002) conceptualization of the
16
17 'mimetic faculty' as a type of knowing related to often overlooked experiences of survival.
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19
20 Participants in this research attempted to make sense of and coalesce disjointed experiences into
21
22 personal stories of agency and hardship. Correspondingly, the empirical materials generated were
23
24 approached as incomplete and lumpy, providing mimetic approximations of what food insecurity
25
26 feels like for household members. This requires us to work with participants to look beyond the
27
28 images and quotes they offer to the broader experiences and practices at play.
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34 Our analysis draws together the complex array of materials generated during the research into a
35
36 cohesive interpretation of the family's response to food insecurity. The analytical process involved
37
38 listening to participant accounts and looking at and behind what they told and showed us. Through
39
40 re-immersing ourselves within these materials from the Kopa household we see them anew. The
41
42 analysis documents how the Kopa household agentially navigates a precarious foodscape by
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44 utilizing specific tactics. We begin our analysis with a discussion of the family's combined food-
45
46 sourcing practices with particular emphasis on food sourcing as a familial-regulated social practice
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48 that is complex, negotiated and emotionally-laden. We then consider communal and personal
49
50 responses to food insecurity, which includes the community meal, Nan's house, busking, and
51
52 hoarding food. Lastly we cover everyday food-related practices as a survival tactic in the midst of
53
54 difficulty. Taken together, these tactics make up a strategy for survival. Nevertheless, underlying
55
56 issues of poverty remain unresolved and the ongoing nature of food insecurity makes life difficult.
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3 Along with interview accounts and photographs, we also draw on 'urban pen pictures' (Rodriguez-
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5 Hernandez, 2010; Benjamin, 1940/2002), a form of mimetic writing that captures and describes
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emplaced interactions such as the shopping expedition.

Sourcing and sharing food

People facing food insecurity often obtain their food from a patchwork of sources, including shops, charitable meals, foodbanks, and extended family networks. There are multiple expeditions by the Kopa household members to obtain food throughout the week. Their shopping excursions coincide with the different days that household members receive their weekly welfare payments. As for most families, the supermarket is the primary source of food for the Kopa household. However, while shopping, they need to be especially conscious and disciplined about how they utilize their meagre resources while navigating the budget supermarket.

Janine (Sissy's daughter) and her partner Ezra do the bulk of the supermarket shopping. On one weekly supermarket expedition, I (Rebekah) went along with Janine, Ezra, and their youngest daughter. During this particular outing, their tactics for shopping on a restrained budget came to the fore. As we will show, these tactics enable the family to normalize and routinize the shop and staying within budget, while minimizing conflict with other household members and avoiding the stigma of being identified as poor. For example a particular tactic for parents facing food insecurity is to have children ride in the trolley as it reduces opportunities for children to place unsanctioned items in the trolley which the family cannot afford and could be embarrassed by at the checkout. When we arrived at the supermarket, Janine engaged in her usual negotiations with her daughter about whether she will ride in the trolley, walk or a combination of both. Janine gives her daughter in the trolley "Something to hold and stuff...she wants to feed herself". This also means that wandering hands are occupied. The supermarket shop also doubles as a family outing that is planned and

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3 executed to be fun despite restraints on what can be purchased. Janine explains "...my babies love it,
4
5 especially Aaliyah, she's 'I want to come' ... and then yeah, we'll end up bringing her." As we
6
7 progress through the store Ezra and Janine discuss which vegetables and meats are needed.
8
9 Compromises are thick in the air as are desires for items that cannot be purchased within their strict
10
11 budget. These issues are never fully reconciled.
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17 Well-rehearsed exchanges between Janine and Ezra include discussions about various options and
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19 brands are prompted by moving through particular sections of the supermarket. Cost considerations
20
21 are ever present, but not always discussed directly. Janine asks Ezra, holding up an item, "This one?"
22
23 Ezra replies "How much is that one?" Janine replies "Oh I dunno." which indirectly communicates
24
25 "Can't we just get it?" In the vegetable section, Janine directs Ezra to less expensive items: "Oh,
26
27 those veggie ones are only two dollars thirty, hun. Cheaper than all of them. They're right there."
28
29 The implicit meaning is that, with their budget, if they get these vegetables they can afford other
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31 items. This leads to the selection of specialist items such as "They usually have pig heads. They're
32
33 cheap."
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40 Tasks are split and specialisms come to the fore, allowing them to maximize limited resources by
41
42 utilizing their specialist knowledge of the cheapest and most satisfying foods. Ezra takes charge of
43
44 selecting the meat. Janine notes "Yeah, he does all the meat shopping. I do all the cupboards. Only
45
46 cos he knows which meat to grab. So he does, he gets all our meat for us and then I do all the junk
47
48 food and the junk shopping." Junk food in this context refers to cheap pantry staples such as two-
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50 minute noodles, white bread, plain biscuits, and budget items for the children's lunches. In
51
52 negotiating the supermarket aisles and checkouts, Janine and Ezra are conscious that they must
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54 respond in restrained and disciplined ways to the abundance and variety of food that surrounds
55
56 them.
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6 Absent others also have a voice in the shopping expedition; their preferences are considered to
7
8 avoid complaints if the 'wrong' choices are made and unfavorable items brought home. While Janine
9
10 and Ezra do their best in considering wider family members, providing for everyone means that they
11
12 must make difficult choices regarding individual food preferences. In this way, managing the
13
14 shopping expedition is also about managing householder expectations and desires through
15
16 particular tactics. These are necessary because conflicts around food preferences are challenging to
17
18 resolve in a large household with limited funds. In an earlier interview, Janine had stated "Well, I just
19
20 get whatever and if they don't like it, tough shit." Andrea chipped in "They make their own." Janine
21
22 confirmed "They cook for themselves. But nah, I just get whatever. Mostly tinned food because
23
24 tinned food goes a long way. Veggies. And meat. Just as long, we make sure that there's meat in the
25
26 freezer yeah." Janine's implication is that it is too expensive to buy food that all family members will
27
28 enjoy and that difficult decisions must be made regarding foodstuffs purchased. The 'I just get
29
30 whatever' clause gives voice to frustration and tensions, but also obscures how choices are often
31
32 agonized over in the supermarket and the preferences of other householders are met where the
33
34 budget can accommodate these.
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41 We see similar tensions arising when Sissy outlines the food preferences of her sons:

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43
44 I got different types of kids for different types of foods. My son...he don't like the meat that
45
46 we cook up...he'll just eat noodles. He'll live on that or Weetbix [a budget cereal]. Oh, my
47
48 other son, didn't like boil-ups [a type of stew] and he'll only eat the potatoes from out of the
49
50 boil-up and the juice. Yeah. That's where a lot of iron comes from, boil-up as well.
51
52

53 This quote reveals Sissy's tactics in responding to the difficulties and conflicts of living in a food
54
55 insecure household. Sissy indirectly constructs herself as a caring mother who has a detailed
56
57 knowledge of her children's food preferences and an understanding of nutritional values. The
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1
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3 noodles mentioned refer to a particular type of inexpensive, nutritionally-poor 'two-minute noodle'
4
5 that require minimal cooking and are easily prepared using the provided flavor sachet and boiling
6
7 water. These, along with inexpensive cereals such as Weetbix, 'fill the gap' on a regular basis for
8
9 household members. A staple breakfast item in many New Zealand households, for the Kopa family,
10
11 Weetbix is also consumed when there is an absence of food and available funds for purchasing
12
13 other, more interesting menu items. As mentioned by Janine, if she's not home "no one cooks. They
14
15 just all end up having Weetbix or something." In responding to food insecurity, household members
16
17 pragmatically prioritize staple items when sourcing food, yet these pragmatic responses mean that
18
19 they risk being constructed as nutritionally inadequate (AUTHORS 2). The impact of poverty on the
20
21 food practices of such families is typically overlooked in nutritional advice, which individualizes food
22
23 choices (Dodds & Chamberlain, 2017; Signal et al., 2013).
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30 The regular sources of income for the Kopa household are insufficient to ensure food security.
31
32 Consequently, householders have developed a range of collective responses for dealing with food
33
34 insecurity. Below Janine outlines some of these tactics:
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36

37 Mum went for a budgeting appointment and they gave her a food grant. So that's one way.
38
39 And then it's Mum, Dad busks [he] can make up to like 30 bucks ... Our Nan came in and
40
41 brought some shopping yeah. They were like goodies, like cake slices and stuff. Yeah, it was
42
43 nice ... that's another way that food comes in too, is the church ... helps us out too, when we
44
45 need it ... Really thankful there. We'll go and help and just vacuum around and wash the
46
47 fount out and stuff. Yeah.
48
49

50 Food flows into the household through a patchwork of sources that necessitate particular social
51
52 practices in exchange for food. These are relational exchanges that involve a range of social actors
53
54 and extend beyond the purchasing of food through the formal economy. The reference to a food
55
56 grant above shows how the householder must undergo budget scrutiny, creating a conditional
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1
2
3 relationship for obtaining food. Evident here is the conditionality of contemporary welfare provision,
4
5 where welfare is no longer simply a right but is subject to conditional behavioral expectations
6
7 (Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Groot & Tankel, 2014). Also at play are practices around reciprocal giving.
8
9 One household member busks in return for monetary donations that are used to purchase food. A
10
11 grandmother drops by to gift food to the family, which is reciprocated in the support they offer her
12
13 in her own dwelling. In return for food from the church, the family vacuum and clean it. Here,
14
15 familial and congregational relationships offer a more humane form of food relief embedded within
16
17 ongoing processes of reciprocity (Mauss, 1950). These examples invoke the complexity of
18
19 relationships around acquiring food.
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26 For the Kopa household food insecurity is punctuated by occasional episodes of abundance that
27
28 stem from extended familial relationships. For example:
29

30 Sissy: Sometimes I tell my son-in-law to bring us down some fruit and veggies, cos he um, he
31
32 works at [workplace]...so everything that they get, he can bring it all home.
33

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35
36 Janine: All the veggies and stuff for free
37

38 Sissy: Yeah like sixteen punnets of strawberries, like two big bags full of bananas, I was like,
39
40 aye? A whole big bucket full of apples, I was like, far out.
41
42

43 In another example, Sissy sourced multiple meat items from a charitable organization which was
44
45 then shared with extended family in an act of reciprocity:
46
47

48 I gave meat to my niece. I was like, oh my gosh, I can't even fit these in my freezer. And she
49
50 was like, 'Mean [slang for thanks] Aunty' and because my daughter did a shopping as
51
52 well...so she had all her meat, so she goes and gives it to my goddaughter.
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55 In these examples, the household are not only recipients of food, but are also embedded within
56
57 reciprocal relationships in which they gift food to others. These practices of reciprocal sharing work
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3 to reproduce networks of support. Being part of an active familial network buffers adversity. As a
4
5 New Zealand Māori family, food is particularly crucial for sustaining a relational sense of self, both as
6
7 individuals and as part of a collective, (re)connecting the Kopa family to wider cultural milieu (King,
8
9 Hodgetts, Rua, & Whetu, 2015).
10

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15 Broader familial networks provide support through mundane acts that reinforce care for the
16
17 household. Wider family members such as “Nan” and “Uncle” are important anchor points for the
18
19 Kopa household in alleviating hardship:
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21
22 When we used to run out of food quite a lot of times, [Nan] always used to come over and
23
24 save the day. Cos she knew how to make anything out of nothing. She’d mainly make us like
25
26 fried bread. She always had flour. She’d bring her flour over, and she’d probably bring meat
27
28 over, and just make a big pot of stew, soup when we came back from school. Uncle knew
29
30 how to make anything out of nothing too. When we had nothing he always seemed to make
31
32 something that was yum. (Janine)
33
34

35
36 Having Nan and uncle ‘come over’ and create a meal ‘from nothing’ buffers adversity and mediates
37
38 the impact of dislocation and poverty in the modern world. In this case, extended family members
39
40 flow in and out of each other’s households. Janine recalls ‘going to Nan’s’ in the past: “Yeah, there
41
42 was so many of us she [Nan] used to do big pots. Even if it was just her and my cousin ... [we’d] go
43
44 over there for breakfast.” Andrea chips in “Say hello and then go straight for the cupboards or the
45
46 fridge or whatever it was.” Going to Nan’s to eat breakfast is a culturally-patterned taken-for-
47
48 granted social practice that reflects the flow of food and people within the extended family (Metge,
49
50 1995). Nan’s house provided an enclave of care or space of respite from the grind of poverty
51
52 (AUTHORS 1). This is also a space of reciprocity. In response to Nan’s current ill-health, Sissy and
53
54 Andrea provide care for their sick mother. As Andrea states “now we cook for her”.
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3 The dynamics of reciprocity in addressing food insecurity are not always harmonious and require
4
5 compromises. As mentioned earlier, busking enables Don to earn money to purchase bread and milk
6
7 for the family. While Don enjoys performing on the street and contributing to city and family life,
8
9 Sissy feels embarrassed that her husband's activities advertise her family's impoverishment. Janine
10
11 comments "Mum doesn't like Dad busking much, but I don't mind...It's how we get our bread and
12
13 milk money". In contrast, Sissy asserts that Don "...does nothing but sits on the street and be a
14
15 humu³." This reveals Sissy's sense of frustration and shame at the absence of more socially
16
17 acceptable forms of employment. Sissy's position contrasts with Don's perspective and with Janine's
18
19 pragmatic acceptance of a source of bread and milk. These participants are all too aware of public
20
21 expectations regarding poverty and food insecurity that shape the subjectivities and social practices
22
23 of people in need.
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30 Like many children growing up in food-insecure households (Connell et al., 2005; Fram et al., 2011),
31
32 Janine is well aware of the stigma associated with an absence of food. Reflecting on her childhood,
33
34 Janine attempts to convey her sense of shame and social exclusion:
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36

37 We couldn't even like, we never even had friends over because we couldn't, we didn't have
38
39 enough food to feed them or, yeah. It was rat shit. We couldn't do most of the stuff. We
40
41 didn't even have like oranges... We had no shoes and lunch and it was really cold, and then
42
43 my teacher asked me why... I didn't want to say the truth... Like I was actually embarrassed...
44
45 And yeah, I started hiding, like trying to hide the poverty and make out like I was rich and I
46
47 wasn't... Cos back then we were like pretty much starving. We were only having like, one
48
49 meal a day, which was dinner.
50
51

52 Uncertainties entangled within going hungry are invoked in this quote through specific experiences
53
54 such as not having access to material items like oranges and shoes. Janine's fear of replicating such
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57
58 ³ Humu is a New Zealand slang term meaning to beg or scavenge
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3 experiences invokes the dread of not being able to adequately feed her children. Past memories
4
5 bring into collision her role as a mother and as a family member. Sharply contrasting with the food-
6
7 sharing practices outlined earlier, Janine's response to a precarious childhood is to hoard food:
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9

10 But then that's why I make sure, like, oh cos I have my own cupboard with their stuff in it,
11
12 just so if food runs out we've got backup. I think I'm just too scared to run out of food again
13
14 and let that happen to my babies. Yeah ... That's what I'm scared for, is having no food.
15
16 Especially when I have kids now. I don't want them to starve like we did.
17
18

19 Janine draws a verbal picture of her cupboard tucked away in a corner of her room, containing
20
21 enough Weetbix and canned goods to keep her two daughters from experiencing a shortage of food.
22
23 In hoarding food in her own cupboard, Janine prioritizes the wellbeing of her daughters' at the
24
25 expense of the very relational networks that enable her survival, adding an additional layer of
26
27 distress to the hardships of poverty. This distress is difficult to articulate, invoked instead through
28
29 practices such as hoarding and references to foods such as oranges (Regier, 2010). Janine's
30
31 overarching narrative as a caregiver for her family, first to her siblings, and later, to her own
32
33 children, is constantly under threat from ongoing food insecurity.
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40 Food practices and traditions

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42 In the face of food insecurity, the Kopa family works to keep their food traditions and extended
43
44 familial relationships alive. In doing so, they also work to preserve their way of being Māori. Their
45
46 cooking practices are both about making food 'stretch' and the reproduction of cultural traditions.
47
48 As noted by de Certeau, Giard & Mayol (1998), everyday meals in particular bear a social writing of
49
50 the experience of poverty. Members of the Kopa household presented annotated images as mimetic
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52 objects of mundane meals featuring culturally-patterned foods associated with hardship. In
53
54 considering these images and associated cultural practices, we are reminded that addressing food
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3 insecurity is not simply about survival, but is also connected to the broader issues of identity,
4
5 relationships and care for others in culturally-patterned ways.
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11 Figure 1 depicts the preparation of five separate everyday meals which encompass tactics such as
12 including cheap filler foods. The dollar loaves of bread depicted on the dinner table are associated
13 with the diet of people experiencing food insecurity. As de Certeau, Giard and Mayol (1998 p.86)
14 note, bread “remains the indelible witness of a ‘gastronomy of poverty’...a monument constantly
15 restored in order to avert suffering and hunger”. The images in Figure 1 foreground the inexpensive
16 nature of family meals, with low-cost items being incorporated throughout. For example, the ‘cream’
17 in the creamed mushrooms is made from cornflour and milk. The battered nature of the cooking
18 paraphernalia with missing handles and chipped enamel is indicative of both their constant use and
19 the absence of available funds to replace much-needed items. Taken together, these images
20 communicate the reality of feeding a family on a low-income and speak to the nature of ‘making do’
21 by the household.
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37 **INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

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40 Figure 1: Left to right by Row; Row 1: Breakfast meal items, noodles, bacon and egg pie; Row 2: creamed
41 mushrooms, peeling potatoes, potatoes ready for boiling; Row 3: mince stew and mashed potato, preparing
42 mince stew, brisket boil-up.
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50 In discussing photographs taken over the course of a week, including those in Figure 1, Janine
51 reveals favored foods, cultural practices, and aspects of providing food for many people. Talking to
52 the top left image, Janine states: “This was our breakfast. You have fish cakes, eggs, spaghetti and a
53 bun that we got from the bakery. You heat it [the buns] up, and it had herbs, cheese and bacon in
54 it.” In photographing a plentiful family breakfast, provided and cooked by herself and her partner,
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3 Janine contributes to her self-presentation as a caregiver and embeds herself within familial
4 traditions of sharing food. The preparation of two-minute noodles on the stove (middle top image) is
5 quickly skimmed past as unremarkable: "This is our lunch one day, it's just some noodles. Yeah." The
6
7 two individual serves depicted will provide lunch for two adults and a young child. Like dollar loaves
8
9 of bread, cheap noodles invoke a modern-day 'gastronomy of poverty', whereby such low-cost fillers
10
11 are utilized to keep hunger at bay.
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19 Although Janine took a photo of the cheap two-minute noodles, she was not particularly interested
20
21 in talking about this image preferring instead to proudly focus on the images of her handmade pie
22
23 (Figure 1, top right): "This is the bacon and egg pie I made. It had bacon, egg, creamed corn, onions
24
25 and cheese, yeah. [I was] taught by mum. This is the creamed mushrooms we had with it. This was
26
27 me making it." The creamed mushrooms are depicted in Figure 1 (middle left), and, together with
28
29 mashed potatoes (also middle left, in a pot behind the creamed mushrooms) will provide a dinner
30
31 meal for the entire household. Despite a foodscape textured by insecurity, Janine finds ways to
32
33 participate in the visceral enjoyment of cooking favored meals. Cooking a bacon-and-egg pie 'from
34
35 scratch', the way she learnt from her mother, embeds Janine within familial food traditions and
36
37 contributes to a sense of belonging within the family (King et al., 2015). As well as being an
38
39 inexpensive way of feeding many people, the creation of this dinner meal reproduces important
40
41 cooking skills necessary to managing food insecurity (Buck-McFadyen, 2015). There is a substantial
42
43 degree of skill in being able to organize ingredients, calculate amounts required, execute, and adapt
44
45 meals (Giard, 1998). Even more skill is required to do so with meagre resources (Buck-McFadyen,
46
47 2015). These skills, evident in everyday meals of creamed mushrooms, bacon-and-egg pie and
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49 mashed potatoes, assist Janine with navigating the instabilities associated with food insecurity.
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3 A New Zealand 'gastronomy of poverty' also includes ground beef (colloquially known in New
4 Zealand as mince), an inexpensive and readily available cut of meat that can be carefully prepared to
5 feed many people. Janine describes one such meal (Figure 1, bottom right and middle) that Ezra
6 prepared: "Oh this was yum, this is, ah, mashed potato and mince stew. That's just preparing that
7 mince stew." The carrots, onions and garlic (Figure 1, bottom middle) depicted are all inexpensive,
8 readily available vegetables that flavor and 'pad out' the mince. Along with the ubiquitous mashed
9 potatoes, Ezra creates a tasty and inexpensive evening meal for the household. In doing so, the
10 family are able to enjoy eating together and bond despite ongoing precarity. In cooking mundane
11 home-cooked meals such as mince stew, Janine and Ezra are able to enact key cultural and personal
12 values regarding care for others, the provision of food, and of eating together.
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28 Janine also photographed two pots of 'boil-up' made with brisket, an inexpensive cut of beef (Figure
29 1, bottom right). As a dish of 'ordinary cuisine' (de Certeau, Giard & Mayol, 1998), boil-up is a staple
30 stew common to Māori households. Made with inexpensive meats and specific leafy greens⁴, boil-up
31 transforms cast-off food items into delicious traditional fare. In an earlier interview Sissy describes
32 the family's favored boil-up ingredients: "we usually have bacon bones, pork bones, or brisket,
33 watercress, dough-boys⁵ and potatoes." The potatoes that Janine is preparing (Figure 1, middle
34 center) will be boiled and served, along with the depicted white bread, margarine, and tomato
35 sauce. There are shared assumptions regarding the serving and eating of boil-up. It goes without
36 saying that it will be eaten as a communal dish by family members. The specific method and
37 sequencing of cooking ingredients, the particular type of pot used, and the condiments and side
38 dishes presented alongside the boil-up meal all contain a social writing that speak to the cultural
39 nature of this dish. Deceptively simple, boil-up contains embedded knowledge regarding ingredients,
40 preparation, and personal preferences for particular tastes and flavors. Cooking a boil-up meal rests
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57 ⁴ Both are sharply flavoured leafy green plants indigenous to New Zealand

58 ⁵ A form of dumpling made from flour and water.
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3 atop a complex montage of cultural knowledge and familial data that must be interpreted, adapted
4
5 and modified depending on who is eating the meal and what ingredients are available and
6
7 affordable (de Certeau, Giard & Mayol, 1998). In addition, through cooking, serving, and eating boil-
8
9 up, Janine and Ezra enact a mimetic process that coherently organizes memories of previous boil-ups
10
11 with present experiences (Garff, 2015), invoking a sense of being Māori and of connectedness to
12
13 people and groups beyond the here and now (Pickering & Keightley, 2013). In this manner, boil-up is
14
15 able to transcend a gastronomy of poverty and becomes a signifier of cultural practice and
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17 belonging.
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23 In contrast to the everyday cuisine depicted in Figure 1, hangi⁶ meals are valorized as an elevated
24
25 form of Māori gastronomy (De Marco, 2016). When mentioning hangi meals associated with cultural
26
27 events such as funerals and unveilings⁷, Janine embeds herself within Māori food traditions and
28
29 ways to be in the world as Māori: “Oh, we’re getting a hangi this week, on Thursday for the brother-
30
31 in-law’s, Nan’s unveiling. Oh man I can’t wait. Steamed pudding, and chowder, raw fish, oh yeah! Fry
32
33 bread, oh yum.” In a subsequent interview, Janine talks to the image (Figure 2) she took of a hangi
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35 meal she purchased from a relative. This relative was selling hangi meals as a fundraising effort to
36
37 provide for an upcoming unveiling:
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41 **INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE**
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43
44 Figure 2: Hangi fundraiser meal.
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46 Oh, my brother-in-law is fundraising for his nana’s unveiling, yeah...hangi’s nice aye... It was
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48 just this big steamer yeah. And they just like to get that taste they just put like dirt, I think it
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50 was on the bottom or on the top but yeah it was so nice.
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57 ⁶ Traditional Maori cooking practice that involves wrapping food in woven flax baskets, placing on top of
58 heated rocks, and covering in earth to steam for several hours

59 ⁷ A ceremonial event held to commemorate a year’s mourning and to unveil the associated headstone
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3 Depicted in Figure 2 is Janine's individually packaged hangi meal, replete with chicken, pork, stuffing,
4
5 kumara⁸, pumpkin and potato. Such items are considered typical hangi fare. Also depicted are
6
7 'extras': a small soft-drink, seafood, and a slice of rewāna⁹ bread. As with boil-up, there is an
8
9 assumption of shared cultural knowledge in conversations regarding hangi. Dishes such as fry bread,
10
11 steamed pudding, rewāna, and raw fish are all part of Māori cuisine, with regional variations
12
13 regarding tastes and flavors. It goes without saying that, as a New Zealanders, we are familiar with
14
15 the cooking and eating of such items. Janine invokes the taste of a traditional 'in-the-ground' hangi
16
17 meal in outlining attempts to replicate the flavor utilizing more contemporary methods¹⁰. In doing
18
19 so, cultural memories are evoked and ways of being Māori in the modern world enacted. Like boil-
20
21 up, hangi is traditionally eaten communally, with wider family members (Moon, 2003). The purchase
22
23 of a hangi meal for a fundraiser weaves traditional practice with contemporary everyday life. It is not
24
25 just the steamed kumara and chicken present in Figure that Janine enjoys, but a sense of connection
26
27 to broader cultural narratives beyond the here and now (Pickering & Keightley, 2013).
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34 The eating of boil-up and hangi offers a form of respite from the mundane tedium of food insecurity.
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36 On offer is a sense of security in the reproduction of cultural food traditions that transcend
37
38 individual circumstances. For the Kopa family, Māori culture offers a cuisine and set of communal
39
40 practices that provide helpful tactics for enduring food insecurity. More than mere survival, these
41
42 collective practices buffer the eroding effects of poverty (Jahoda, 1992). Through the process of
43
44 revitalizing their shared archives of experience, the Kopa family construct a sense of belonging and
45
46 being as Māori in the world (King et al., 2015). These processes are mimetic in the sense that they
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48 are predominantly unspoken and woven into everyday acts such as cooking boil-up for the family
49
50 and purchasing hangi fundraiser meals (Regier, 2010). Through evoking images and producing
51
52 connections that have broader socio-cultural meanings, the eating of boil-up and hangi blends doing
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56 ⁸ Type of sweet potato

57 ⁹ Traditional Māori sourdough potato bread

58 ¹⁰ Modern steamer, often hand-made and which cooks food in a similar manner to a traditional hangi pit.
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3 with knowing, fusing the human spheres of experience, action, and symbolic production (Gebauer &
4
5 Wulf, 1992). Through preparing and consuming such dishes, the Kopa family are able to enact what
6
7 it means to be Māori in the modern world, temporarily transmuting the difficulties and insecurities
8
9 associated with poverty.
10

11 12 13 14 15 Conclusions

16
17 Our participants' responses to the insecurities and chaos of poverty are personal, cultural, and
18
19 relational. The Kopa household has developed particular tactics that allow them to assert some form
20
21 of control and routine over their everyday lives. These small everyday practices of adaptation central
22
23 to 'making do' speak to the compromises, tactics and relationships central to navigating food
24
25 insecurity. Through social practices such as tactical supermarket shopping, accessing charitable food
26
27 grants, sharing surplus food items and distributing food-provisioning tasks, the Kopa family is able to
28
29 provide a variety of dishes to eat despite limited resources. In conveying these practices,
30
31 householders foreground the care, compassion and cooperation that is central to pragmatic,
32
33 precarious and collective tactics for addressing food insecurity. Experiences of food insecurity are
34
35 emotionally laden and not always easy to adequately articulate verbally or visually. These are
36
37 instead invoked mimetically through reference to particular objects and specific social practices. This
38
39 case study reveals the complexities of one family's situation, allowing us to avoid dehumanizing
40
41 tropes common to public deliberations regarding poverty and food insecurity. Through immersing
42
43 ourselves within the lifeworld of the Kopa family, we were able to explore the nuanced, particular
44
45 and practical-orientated knowledge this case produces regarding surviving during times of insecurity
46
47 (Jahoda, 1992). Detailing this family's strategy for survival facilitates a deeper understanding of the
48
49 complexities, ambiguities, and contradictions of hardship (Flyvbjerg, 2006).
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3 The Kopa case speaks to more than just this particular household. In the tactics and everyday food
4
5 practices of the Kopa family we find insights into broader agentic responses to food insecurity. This
6
7 case exemplifies a social milieu in action and how people navigate hardship and food insecurity in
8
9 everyday life. This family is operating in an epoch shaped by neoliberalism and increasing hardship
10
11 and food insecurity. Their pragmatic tactics are a reflection of familial circumstance within a
12
13 particular societal context. Yet, the stress associated with navigating survival in constrained
14
15 circumstances has little place in neoliberal narratives of self-sufficiency and the pursuit of economic
16
17 materialism (Lucio, Jefferson, & Peck, 2016). In addition, dominant societal narratives see poverty
18
19 constructed as the product of individual deficits, failing, and a lack of agency (Hodgetts et al., 2017).
20
21 Such narratives are designed to shape compliance with neoliberal ideals and unfairly target the poor
22
23 (Morgan & Gonzales, 2008), making it even more difficult for those affected to describe their
24
25 situations and experiences beyond the position of failed citizens. This reduction in the language
26
27 available to communicate experience of hardship is painful, compounding the exclusion and
28
29 alienation already felt by people affected by poverty. The subsequent shame and the stigma
30
31 associated with a lack of food means that much of the reality of life with poverty remains obscured,
32
33 or worse, misinterpreted.
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41 The case explored in this article exemplifies how, in the face of adversity and the dominance of
42
43 stigmatizing neoliberal narratives, people facing poverty and food insecurity often act agentively and
44
45 offer evidence to support self-narratives that facilitate a more positive sense of self as thoughtful,
46
47 skilled and caring family members. Such self-presentations also counter dominant public narratives
48
49 that position such families as lazy and lacking life skills (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Through
50
51 connections to specific foods, culture and people, the Kopa household are able to construct a shared
52
53 narrative that gives meaning and value to otherwise stressful and difficult circumstances (Rappaport,
54
55 2000). Such narratives are deeply felt, and are often only invoked through snippets of conversation
56
57 about 'Nan's house' and memories of shared meals, rather than being articulated directly. This
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3 highlights the need for research methods that are sensitive to the mimetic nature of accounts of
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5 poverty and food insecurity.
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Figure 1: Left to right by Row; Row 1: Breakfast meal items, noodles, bacon and egg pie; Row 2: creamed mushrooms, peeling potatoes, potatoes ready for boiling; Row 3: mince stew and mashed potato, preparing mince stew, brisket boil-up.

442x299mm (150 x 150 DPI)

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Figure 2: Hangi fundraiser meal.

184x103mm (68 x 68 DPI)

Review Only

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3 Title: Food insecurity in urban New Zealand. The case of the Kopa family
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5 Figure captions:

6
7 Figure 1: Left to right by Row; Row1: Breakfast meal items, noodles, bacon and egg pie; Row 2:
8 creamed mushrooms, peeling potatoes, potatoes ready for boiling; Row 3: mince stew and mashed
9 potato, preparing mince stew, brisket boil-up.
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11 Figure 2: Hangi fundraiser meal.
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