

TASTING TERRITORY

Imagining place in Australian native food packaging

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Abstract

One aspect of the contemporary interest in ‘local’ foods has been the appearance of products based on Australian native plants. In this article, I explore the place identities presented in the packaging of these products. How are the intimate connections between land and ingredients implicit in the idea of native foods represented in contemporary commodity culture? And how are these relationships between food and place situated within larger discourses of national identity and territory? While native foods present a unique and potent way of engaging with local foods, I argue that the consumer culture of native foods reinforces a naturalised conception of place that un-reflexively conflates the local with the national. Place is conceived of in largely natural terms, ignoring historical and social factors, including, crucially, the Indigenous Australian traditional knowledge on which native food production rests.

Keywords

Food, place, local, nationalism, native Australian, *terroir*

Introduction

The identification of food products with particular places is a common aspect of commodity culture. Legislation in many countries requires that product packaging declare the country of origin (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000), but product branding often goes well beyond regulations to flesh out the association of ingredients with their perceived place of origin (Thakor and Kholi, 1996). At the same time, the present agro-industrial system often obscures the location and methods of food production, leading many producers and consumers to be concerned with re-embedding food by reasserting the links between product and place (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005; Morris and Kirwan, 2011). A localised origin is associated with a guarantee of quality (O'Neill and Whatmore, 2000; Winter, 2003), and a shift from a heavily industrialised food supply to renewed artisanal production (Parrott et al., 2002; Pollan, 2006). In this article, I examine one intriguing example of this association of products with places: food products with ingredients derived from native Australian species.

An increasing number of such products have been made available over the past three decades (Cunningham et al., 2009; Foster et al., 2005; Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, 2008). The revival of interest in native foods began in the 1980s, and gained momentum with the build-up to the Sydney Olympics in 2000 (Bannerman, 2006; Probyn, 2000). Over the last decade, growth in native food production has been slow, but this period has seen some popularisation of native foods, with the appearance of products such as the widely-available Dick Smith Bush Foods Breakfast (discussed below). This period has also been one of industry consolidation, with the formation of a peak national body, Australian Native Foods Industry Limited (ANFIL), in 2006. Recent estimates value the industry at AUD 30 million a year, excluding animal products and macadamia nuts (Spencer and Hardie, 2011: 42). A comparable interest in foods sourced from indigenous plants is occurring in other countries, such as the United States and New Zealand (Nabhan, 2008; Royal, 2010).

Internationally, interest in local food has emphasised particular food traditions, for instance, the preservation occurring under the auspices of the Slow Food movement (Parkins and Craig, 2006). Native foods sometimes form part of these traditions, as in the Caribbean, where indigenous ingredients have been an ongoing part of home cooking (Wilk, 2006). In Australia, however, dietary habits have focused to a large extent on imported and industrial food products (Symons, 1982). Though historically non-Indigenous Australians have consumed some native foods, use of these ingredients has been limited, particularly in the 20th century (Bannerman, 2006; Santich, 2011). Most of the species in contemporary commercial production are used as flavourings, rather than providing staples (Woodall et al., 2010). “Bush tucker” continues to play an important part in the culinary practice of some Indigenous Australians (Bannerman, 2006: 26–29; Dyson, 2006; Foley, 2005), but for many people native foods are unknown and unfamiliar ingredients far from everyday fare.

Most Australian native foods, therefore, do not have a readymade audience, but must instead be introduced and explained to potential consumers. Unsurprisingly, the consumer culture of these products emphasises place as a mode of product explanation and differentiation. Given the inextricable connection to place implied by indigeneity, such native food products form a particularly potent site for the investigation of the political ecological imaginary of the local. In this article, I examine the presentation of place identities in selected examples of Australian native food packaging. How are the intimate connections between land and ingredients implicit in the idea of native foods represented? And how are these relationships between food and place situated within larger discourses of national identity and territory? As I demonstrate, the commodity culture of native food products contributes to, and is situated within, the range of available discourses on place, belonging and indigeneity. I discuss how the idea that food offers an experience of place, encapsulated in the French term *terroir* (Gade, 2004; Tomasik, 2001), is taken up in the consumer culture of Australian native food products. In doing so, I raise a series of concerns that have wider resonance for understandings of local and national food cultures.

Approaching Australian native foods

Native foods are by definition foods with a special relationship to place. However, this indigenous status and the understanding of place which accompany it are not as straightforward as they might at first seem. Rather than a self-evident category, “native” foods are defined differently at different stages of their production and consumption. At an industry level, government publications and ANFIL membership focus on native plant foods (e.g. Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, 2008). Meat and fish, as well as the macadamia with its long history of commercial cultivation, are excluded from this focus. At the other end of the supply chain, the definition is much broader, with cookbooks and restaurant menus often featuring both plant and animal ingredients (e.g. Bruneteau, 1996; Deere et al., c2006). However, retail products, such as those I analyse here, tend to follow the industry definition, with few animal products being sold under the label “native”.

The particular examples of native food products that I discuss in this article have been chosen from a much larger collection of material compiled from 2005 to 2008. I surveyed a representative selection of retail outlets in Melbourne for the availability and range of native food products. Further products were also found in Hobart, Brisbane and Adelaide, and online. The supply chains for native foods are relatively short but very fragmented (Spencer and Hardie, 2011: 42) and consequently, as I found in my survey, the retail contexts are immensely varied. Rather than attempt an overview of this disparate commodity culture, in this article I focus on four specific examples of native food product branding. These examples serve as insights into the more general discourses of place in the presentation of native food products.

One limitation of this methodology is that the focus on packaged products already excludes those products consumed within a short distance of their production—the finger limes available seasonally at the Canberra Farmers’ Market, for instance. Products that have been packaged, such as those discussed here, are often those destined to travel far beyond their place of production. Such products are already caught up in a move away from the “local”. While native foods seem to offer, then, a

potent way of re-embedding and reconnecting eating to place, this potential is limited with the transformation of these foodstuffs through the supply chain.

An example I discuss in an earlier article (Craw, 2008) succinctly demonstrates the issues that I am exploring here. Casalare Specialty Pasta produce a Native Bush Pasta range, available in varieties such as Rivermint Gnocchi. The product is described as showcasing the “uniquely exciting flavours of local native plants”. The “native” here is at once akin to the “local”, and yet distinct; it reiterates the “localness” of the product, but also adds its own special difference. Moreover, the packaging poses a mystery: where, specifically, is the “local” from which these plants are sourced? The only information given by the label is that the native ingredients—such as rivermint—are “Australian-grown”. In such cases, as I explore below, notions of “local” food are entangled with the larger place identities of state and nation: *terroir* becomes conflated with territory; the native with the national.

Making products, making places

Efforts to market Australian native foods participate in the broader consumer culture. Food products are commonly marketed with what food journalist Michael Pollan terms “supermarket narratives”, images and text that present the often idealised provenance of the ingredients (Pollan, 2001: 11; see also Hollander, 2003). Stories of origin serve to “re-enchant” food commodities and “to differentiate them from the devalued functionality and homogeneity of standardized products, tastes and places” (Cook and Crang, 1996: 132). Raymond Bryant and Michael Goodman suggest that, besides the specific agro-ecological manufacture of food commodities, such narratives constitute a second production “moment” in which the products are remade (Bryant and Goodman, 2004: 355). I discuss examples of native food packaging that similarly offer consumers stories about the imagined context of their ingredients’ production. Elaborating on the connection between these products and the Australian landscape, these stories remake Australian native foods.

Such marketing also impacts on place identities. Supermarket narratives form a “political ecological imaginary” (Goodman, 2004) that shapes consumers’

“geographical knowledges” of products (Cook and Crang, 1996). Cook and Crang influentially argue that “foods do not simply come from places, organically growing out of them, but also make places as symbolic constructs, being deployed in the discursive construction of various imaginative geographies” (Cook and Crang, 1996: 140). Analysing representations of the Caribbean, Mimi Sheller applies a similar approach to a broader range of products and discourses, arguing that the imagining of the region both informs and is embedded in material relations (Sheller, 2003: 4–5). This article draws on this work as a productive way of enquiring into the construction of place in the presentation of Australian native food products. This presentation, as Cook and Crang suggest, is a process that makes places as much as it brands products. As I argue, the place identities presented in native food marketing participate in wider discourses of Australian identity.

The construction of place is not in itself a problem. Discussing the recent interest in place, Wendy Parkins and Geoffrey Craig note that all place identities rest on the construction and communication of a place’s difference (Parkins and Craig, 2006: 77). The stories about place that accompany Australian native food products are not to be critiqued simply because these supermarket narratives contortedly depict underlying entities and localities. British geographer Noel Castree suggests that “rather than asking whose geographical imaginations are “correct”, we need instead to ask: who has the power to construct what geographical imaginations and with what effects?” (Castree, 2004: 139). The issue with the place identities that I analyse in this article is the way in which they reinforce particular understandings of place and marginalise other conceptions. Given their relatively novel status and strong connections with Indigenous Australian cultures, native foods offer an opportunity to introduce a different experience of place into Australian eating. However, as I discuss below, Indigenous Australians have little influence over the kinds of place narratives put forward about native food. Native foods are presented as natural and national, eliding Indigenous Australian conceptions of place.

Landscapes of taste

One way for native food marketing to explain the unfamiliar tastes of Australian native ingredients is by proposing that these foods offer an experience of place. For instance, Screaming Seeds' packaging characterises its native spice mixes as

captur[ing] the magnificence of Australia... The essence of this unique landscape is distilled into three blends – Desert, Rainforest & Outback... The colours and distinct flavours of each blend reflect the extreme isolation & climatic conditions found right across this great southern land.

The claim here is that there is a discernible “essence” embodied in the spice mixes, which are “distillations” that capture “the magnificence of Australia”. This connection between place and product is even more explicit in the blurb for Australis Native Tea:

The flavour of each native plant is as individual as the landscape it is nurtured by. This unique representation of warm spicy Queensland tropics, cool earthy Tasmanian rainforests, zesty coastlines and mystical red centre deserts is embodied in Australis carefully blended herbal teas.

Each of these descriptions posits that places have distinctive characteristics, represented in the flavours of ingredients sourced from them. These products promise an experience of place as well as of taste. Customers are invited to imagine particular landscapes as representative of particular flavours – and thus to imagine the new flavours of these ingredients themselves.

The promise that these products encapsulate the places of their provenance is an example of what in French is termed *terroir*. There is no English word that adequately and succinctly captures the precise meaning of *terroir*. Historically used in discussions of wine, *terroir* locates taste in the specific qualities of a region that are purported to lend distinctive flavour to its produce. The term is primarily concerned with geographical features such as soil, landforms and climate, though it is also used more expansively to include human factors such as production practices (Barham,

2003: 133; Gade, 2004: 848–849; Parkins and Craig, 2006: 76; Tomasik, 2001: 523). In examples such as those cited above, the geographical features are what is emphasised: both relate taste to the biomes from which the products are said to be sourced. The *terroir* of their native food ingredients is taken up in ways which connect these ingredients to natural locales.

However, exactly what tastes “extreme isolation” or “mystical red centre deserts” might produce is left to the consumer’s imagination. These products are presented as embodying the taste of particular landscapes, but this connection is nebulous and ill-defined. Australis Native’s “cool, earthy” rainforests hardly align with the taste of Tasmanian mountain pepper, described on the company’s website as having a “hot peppery zing” (‘Australis Native’, nd.). These ambiguities enforce the need, identified by ANFIL, for a clear set of flavour identifiers for Australian native foods (Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, 2008). Moreover, while these products proclaim associations with particular environs, the ingredients themselves are not necessarily sourced from these locales. One might expect, for instance, that Screaming Seeds’ “Desert” spice mix would contain at least some desert-sourced ingredients, but the Australian natives used in the mix—lemon myrtle and Dorrigo pepper—both grow in rainforest areas. One is left wondering quite what, besides the general associations of dry heat, the “desert” element of this spice mix is meant to refer to, especially in the context of bayou-bred Cajun food.

Alongside these natural tropes, the Screaming Seeds packaging also draws on global culture. Mimi Sheller remarks that Caribbean tourist culture is marked by a global exoticism, in which, for instance, boats and villas are named and styled according to Orientalist fantasies (Sheller and Urry, 2004: 18). This application of motifs and words from other places, Sheller argues, construes the Caribbean as “mostly cultureless”. Screaming Seeds similarly constructs Australia as a “natural” space overlaid by a pastiche of cultural borrowings: the Cajun food of the product’s name and the company’s “spice queen” logo (other product offerings from the company include Indian and Middle Eastern style spice mixes).

There is little room for Australian Indigenous culture in this presentation. Screaming Seeds packaging incorporates the image of a boomerang, but, as Felicity Errington comments in her historical overview of the use of boomerang motifs, these have often been used to emphasise the naturalness of products (Errington, 2010: 80). A blurb on the package alludes to Indigenous Australian food preparation methods as “an indigenous tradition that has been nurtured over thousands of years” that provides “ancient food sources” for an “ever evolving modern cuisine”. Indigenous knowledge provides the raw material for an exotically-charged “evolving modern cuisine”, the ingredients rather than the recipe. As with the boomerang, this kind of allusion to Indigenous Australian culture serves to position the product, and Indigenous people, as natural. While they might be swathed in the imagery of global exoticism, the ingredients inside these packages are authenticated through their ties to particular lands and the naturalised, albeit vague references to Indigenous food traditions.

Terroir and territory

Both of these examples connect the taste of their products to particular kinds of places within Australia, even if their location is imprecise. *Terroir*, however, can also function to shore up nationalist conceptions of space. Etymologically, the term shares the Latin roots of the English word “territory” (Tomasik, 2001: 523). Timothy Tomasik argues that the differentiation of places by reference to their ostensibly unique characteristics lays the ground for national identities predicated on narratives of stable and identifiable origins:

these territorial variations... are also the prima materia of ideology and commodity nationalism. Terroir thus also becomes imbued with the idealism of a cult of authenticity in which only things with clear origins have value.
(Tomasik, 2001: 526)

In France, for instance, interest in *terroir* functions as a symbol of national heritage and a revitalised rural future (Barham, 2003: 132). Rather than reinforce specific place

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identities, the recognition of *terroir* can also serve to tie food practices to national timespace.

The *terroir* of Australian native food products is similarly presented as a basis for an authentic national identity. The effusive attachment of these products to particular environments does not override their designation as “Australian”. On the contrary, the connection of foods to particular, iconic environments works to reinforce their status as offering a taste of Australia. Screaming Seeds’ portrayal asserts that Australia has an essence, naming it as a singular “unique landscape” with distinguishing features (isolation, climate). More specific references are to stereotyped depictions of particular biomes—the generic idea of desert—that are understood to encompass whole swathes of the continent. Similarly, the ingredients in Australis Native Teas may come from various locations around the continent, but the product gathers them together in an authentically national expression. These examples of native food packaging draw upon the trope of *terroir* but conflate it with its cognate, territory.

Elsewhere I argue that nationalism is a key theme in the marketing of Australian native foods (Craw, 2008). Australis Native Teas and Screaming Seeds spices offer further instances of this. The national affiliation that they proclaim is a form of what Michael Billig terms “banal nationalism”: the ideological habits by which national identities are maintained on a daily basis (Billig, 1995). The habits and symbols of such nationalism are not overtly nationalist, but rather form a nearly invisible background to everyday life, such as the division of news into “national” and “world” sections. In these examples of native food packaging, banal nationalism takes the form of the well-worn tropes of iconic Australian landscapes used in both of these product’s blurbs and the company name “Australis”. These symbols serve to gently reinforce the nation as the frame of reference for these products.

Another native food product goes well beyond the banal in its nationalism. Dick Smith’s Bush Foods Breakfast is one of the few native food products currently available in Australian supermarkets. The company’s marketing is particularly

emphatic in its nationalism: proclaiming itself a purveyor of “Genuine Australian Foods”, the company packages its goods with a large Australian flag and a portrait of founder Dick Smith wearing an Akubra, a distinctive hat commonly associated with Australian farming. The box of Bush Foods Breakfast issues an invitation to “Discover the Flavours of Australia”, to enjoy, in other words, the *terroir* of the continent. In a clear example of the heavy-handed nationalism of the company’s branding, the cereal’s ingredients are listed as “Australian cereal grains, authentic Australian rainforest fruit flavours, [and] Aussie wattle seeds”. While all the ingredients are described as Australian, however, native foods are signalled out as emphatically so—they are “authentic” and “Aussie”, a colloquial term for “Australian” (for further discussion of the presentation of this product’s origins see Craw, 2008). Like the pasta package quoted above, the connection to place of native foods is articulated as more than “local”. Nativeness is used to signify a connection to place that is authentic and authenticating: other foods may be Australian, but it is the native ones that are authentically so.

Bush Foods Breakfast repeats the natural positioning of the native food products discussed above. Distributed through Australia’s two largest supermarket chains, Coles and Woolworths, the cereal’s marketing is directly addressed to an urban Australian audience. The box asserts that “Bush Foods Breakfast brings the flavour of the Australian bush into your morning”. The product is positioned as the mediator of this relationship, a way, as a blurb from “Dick” claims, “to share [bush foods] with all Australians”. This promise relies on a perceived rift between the customer and Australian nature, to be remedied by the product’s purchase and consumption. Such positioning of products as means of connecting with an apparently distant, if not lost, nature is a common branding strategy (Goss, 1999: 60–63; Hansen, 2002).

This language and imagery also plays into the legend of the bush and the parallel romanticisation of pastoral life that have been longstanding tropes in Australia (Hoorn, 2007; Waterhouse, 1999). In the Australian context, the perceived alienation of settler culture from the landscape is also the basis for discourses of unitary nationalism. As Andrew Lattas observes, this discourse promises that alienation

from the land can be overcome through participation in the trappings of national unity (Lattas, 1997; see also Rose, 1996b; Rose, 2004). The branding of Dick Smith Bush Foods Breakfast draws on both of these discourses, re-naturalising and nationalising the commodity as a means for consumer-citizens to connect to a nature conceived of in national terms. The packaging of Bush Foods Breakfast sutures ecology and geopolitics: the blue sky behind the breakfast spread blends seamlessly into the blue background of the Australian flag. The different times and space of the production, distribution and consumption of the product—the gap between urban consumers and rural places—can be overcome by the magic of the commodity that encapsulates national timespace. As Lesley Instone (2001) has previously argued of native food more generally, presenting native foods in this way might provide a sense of belonging for settler Australians, but in doing so more difficult issues of environmental exploitation and social injustice for Indigenous peoples are sidelined. The idea of bringing the bush to breakfast tables, as innocuous as it may seem, offers a kind of re-embedding that participates in a banal, but hardly benign nationalism.

Packaging the nation

Tomasik suggests that *terroir* acts as a kind of “identity buffer” for national and regional cultures against the perceived threats of globalisation and European unification (2001: 526). Native foods work in a similar way for Dick Smith. Dick Smith’s marketing positions the production and purchase of its products as nationalist activism, trumpeting its Australian ownership and the domestic manufacture of its products (Prideaux, 2009: 629–632). The presence of native ingredients in Bush Food Breakfast guarantees an “authentic” Australian product and in doing so reinforces the moral legitimacy of the company’s claim to represent Australian interests.

The idea that native foods are involved in a tussle between “local” and “foreign” interests also resonates more widely in discussions of native food products. In the closing paragraphs of his landmark study of the history of Australian eating *One Continuous Picnic* (1982), Michael Symons eagerly anticipates the day when Australians establish a national cuisine based on “a healthy diet of fresh, local

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produce treated with proper respect” and the rejection of foreign food imports and ownership. In colourful terms, he imagines that:

food chauvinists will blacklist foreign names like Birds Eye, Heinz and Tip Top; Kraft workers will seize back the Vegemite factory; a youth wearing a “cabbage-tree” hat will gallop up to a McDonald’s barn and set fire to it;... and a Prime Minister will be seen dining on wallaby stew, quandongs, macadamias, and Anzac biscuits. (Symons, 1982: 262)

In this imaginative jumble of events, native foods are not simply a key marker of Australian eating, but part of a parochial return to a clearly bordered locale articulated expressly in economic terms. Symons’s idiosyncratic vision juxtaposes culinary nationalism with an assault on foreign ownership. In doing so, it aligns the symbolic enactment of national identity through eating Indigenous ingredients with an assertion of economic sovereignty through the expulsion of foreign-owned, particularly American, companies.

Part of the lament of commentators such as Symons is that Australia has been ‘beaten to the punch’ by overseas interests (Symons, 1982: 253). A more extensive articulation of this theme occurs in Michael Archer and Bob Beale’s book *Going Native*, with a list of the multiple Australian plant species that have been enthusiastically planted and cropped overseas (Archer and Beale, 2004: 12–13). Such a list works both to validate the claim that the authors are making for the potential of native species and as a wake-up call to their Australian readership to recognise this potential before, as happened with the macadamia, production is initiated offshore. Considered in this light, the injunction to consume “local” Australian species is not just a matter of national identity, it is also a means of claiming and practising ownership. Bush Foods Breakfast’s invitation “to share” “the abundance of our country” is underwritten by this need to secure Australia’s territorial interests.

Placing the consumer

The political ecological imaginary of the products I discuss above reinforces not just a particular understanding of the native ingredients and their provenance, but also of consumers' relationships to place. The spatial narrative invoked by products positions the consumer as a traveller. The promise of these is a sort of "culinary tourism" (Long, 2004): within the narrative in which native food products embody the Australian continent, their consumption can be a form of armchair travel.

Australis Native Tea makes a similar suggestion for consumption on its packaging: "[s]hut your eyes, sip an Australis Native Tea, take a trip to Australia's pristine, diverse wilderness". A further example, Tribal Rock Marandoo Lemon Bush Fruit Confectionary invites prospective purchasers to "[e]nter into the rhythm of this taste sensation, as you enjoy the ultimate rainforest experience from Australia". These promises inscribe the same distance between consumer and the Australian wilderness as Dick Smith's products, but they offer a different means of overcoming this gap. Rather than the product inserting a missing nature into the consumer's everyday existence, the eco-tourist pitch constructs these products as transformative experiences in which it is the consumer who is, if only in their imagination, transported.

A pragmatic explanation for this can be found in the distributions of these products: Dick Smith products are sold primarily to the Australian market, addressed as "all Australians" living within the continent from which the cereal's ingredients are sourced; Australis Native and Australian Outback Treats, on the other hand, are sold to both domestic and export markets (Australis Native, for instance, print the name of their North American distributor on the box). The differing narratives are appropriate for these different audiences; one for whom Australia is readily understood as "here", the other which must be transported from "there".

Such differentiated addresses also map onto different constructions of national identity. This is reflected in the packaging design: the Bush Foods Breakfast box repeats the red, white and blue of most Dick Smith products, whereas the Australis

Native colour scheme is ochre and red, with elements of Aboriginal-style artwork incorporated into the design. Dick Smith's appeal incorporates Australian natives into an existing patriotic schema; whereas *Australis Native* invokes the native as a separate space, whose pristine, "wild" condition is preserved, and which can thus function as a space of transformation for the consumer.

In these ways, native food marketing informs consumers' imaginative geographies of both the ecology of native food production and their own position. At the same time, place narratives serve as a way of instructing consumers on how to imagine the products themselves. Unfamiliar tastes are explained through familiar discourses, tales of exotic landscapes and banal tropes of national identity. These senses of place are also found in other presentations of native foods, such as the cookbooks that Colin Bannerman analyses (Bannerman, 2006).

Indigenous plants, Indigenous peoples?

Missing from the sense of place in native food marketing is the other kind of engagement that Bannerman recounts, that of Indigenous communities rediscovering and reinventing their food culture (26–29). Indigenous philosophies, techniques and histories of eating, as well as embodied knowledges, are largely absent from the presentation of native foods in the marketplace. Though native food products are the results of Indigenous knowledge and sometimes labour, this is often little reflected in products packaged, distributed and sold largely by non-Indigenous Australians. Extensive numbers of Aboriginal people are involved in the collection of raw produce in central Australia, but the industry as a whole is dominated by non-Aboriginal horticultural enterprises (Cunningham et al., 2009; Davies et al., 2008: 60), and there is no protection for Indigenous traditional knowledge under current intellectual property law (Morse, 2005: 13). In 2011, the Australian Native Food Industry Limited had no indigenous representation (Spencer and Hardie, 2011: 42). Moreover, the contemporary interest in Australian native foodstuffs is occurring against a backdrop of the devastation of Indigenous Australian food practices during the colonial period (Probyn, 2000: 110–116). Indigenous Australians, to recall

Castree's question, have little power over the geographical imagination of native food products, at least in the commodity context.

Indeed, the majority of native food products pay little more than lip-service to Indigenous Australians' contribution to their production. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, recognition of Indigenous Australians in the commodity culture of native food products commonly takes the form of vague allusions that bolster a primitivist, ahistorical conception of Indigenous cultures (Craw, 2008). Often, these allusions, such as the boomerang on the Screaming Seeds package, serve to reinforce a product's "natural" qualities rather than actually acknowledging contemporary Indigenous people. Other presentations, such as Dick Smith's, elide Indigenous Australians completely. The emphasis on the natural, as opposed to the social and historical elements that contribute to place identities, is part of the paucity of the contemporary commodity culture of native foods.

Re-embedding native foods

As Lesley Instone (2001) argues, new stories need to be told about native foods. There is still room for native food products to fulfil their potential in introducing other conceptions of place. Scholars writing on *terroir* defend the possibilities that it opens for re-embedding food production and consumption in resistive, progressive ways. Parkins and Craig (2006) observe that an emphasis on locale need not institute a static, inherent conception of place. Rather, re-embedding products in places can stress connectedness as the basis of local authenticity, opening up questions of identity and history (Parkins and Craig, 2006: 77-78, 99-101; cf. Barham, 2003: 129-130; Gade, 2004: 865; O'Neill and Whatmore, 2000: 134). More poetically, Tomasik proposes an understanding of *terroir* as

a sort of moveable mental and physical feast... Terroirs, plural and polyglot, are not sites of native origin [...] But they are [...] sites where words and things acquire uncommon aroma, taste, and gustatory savor. (Tomasik, 2001: 520-521)

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It is precisely this sort of contested and lively process of de- and re-locating that the uncommon flavours of Australian native ingredients could potentially offer.

This re-embedding of food in place could include an engagement with Indigenous Australian perspectives of country as a “nourishing terrain” (Rose, 1996a), and with it the affective, dislocating charge of engaging with Indigenous food culture. A common element in the multiplicity of Indigenous Australian worldviews is that they revolve around place (Memmott and Long, 2002; Rose, 2005). This understanding of being as profoundly and intimately connected to place extends to food. Margaret Somerville and Tony Perkins’ evocative account of “eating place” (2010; cf. Cunningham, 2005; Somerville and Hartley, 2000) begins with listening to the Gumbayangirr people whose country they are on, taking advice on where to find particular foods and how to prepare them. In this way, eating place is grounded in an awareness of the “intimate embodied knowledge of local places” (2010: 120) – and of the gap between this rich experience of locality and their own, limited knowledge.

Somerville and Perkins characterise the Gumbayangirr perspective in the following way:

All of the places where food is collected and eaten have their own pulse or rhythm that produces the bodies of the creatures that live in that place. These bodies have their own particular characteristics that are learned in finding, collecting, preparing and eating these foods. In this way Yarrowarra people take part of the place into their bodies, giving them an intimate connection to the place by incorporating it into their own being. In the intense engagement required to collect and eat food people learn the intimate embodied knowledge of their local places. (Somerville and Perkins, 2010: 119–120)

This is a profound and potentially transformative connection between body, food and land. Viewing the intimate interactions between bodies and local places in this way also opens up a way of understanding these connections and interactions outside of the static assertions critiqued above. Here, tasting place is an ongoing and open process of actively producing and maintaining one’s body in place.

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One site for this broader engagement might be the bush tucker walks offered by several Aboriginal communities, including the Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation that Somerville visits. These tourist activities do not escape the issues inherent in consuming across cultures (Hage, 1997; Heldke, 2003), but such gastronomic encounters do allow opportunities for the bodily experiences and challenges such as those related by Somerville. The sense of place enacted through “ecoethnotourism” may be an imagined geography, but it is a richer and more multi-faceted imagination than the naturalised, nationalised “local” put forward in most native food packaging.

There is a need, however, to go beyond the stories on food packets and to address more directly the politics of growing and eating local, native foods. This might entail an engagement with the “reflexive politics of localism” that Melanie DuPuis and David Goodman propose, involving a “conversation about how to make local food systems more just” (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005: 364). Key to this conversation, in terms of native food products, is a need for a more concerted effort to engage with Indigenous Australian perspectives on food preparation and consumption. This engagement would include recognition of the social justice issues involved in the commercialisation of native plants, in particular the need to maintain production systems that comply with and support Indigenous Australian law (Walsh and Douglas, 2011). This need not be on the cramped space of a product’s package. For instance, two companies, Robins Native Foods and Outback Pride, both make available information on the Aboriginal community enterprises that have grown and wild-harvested the native ingredients in their products, through websites and cookbooks (Deere et al., c2006; Robins Foods, 2012).

A further possibility comes from a recently released report on suggested ethical guidelines for bushfood enterprises in Aboriginal communities (Merne Altyerripenhe [Food from the Creation time] Reference Group et al., 2011). Based on work with these communities, the report suggests that native food items be identified with specific geographical indicators giving the Indigenous Australian names of the places in which foods have been cultivated or harvested (parallel to the French system of *appellation d’origine contrôlée*) (41–42). A Fair Trade mark for goods produced by Indigenous Australians is also in development (Spencer and Hardie,

2011; see also Cunningham et al., 2009: 436). Both of these suggestions stem from the desire of Indigenous producers to have their knowledge represented, on the one hand, and from their observation of consumer interest in where foods have originated, on the other. Clearly, there is a will, at least amongst some producers and consumers, to engage with native foods as more than just symbols of nature and Australian identity.

Such labels are not an easy fix. Localised information about a product continues to be filtered through consumers' pre-existing geographical knowledges (Morris and Kirwan, 2010), such as the tropes of nature and nation discussed above. The small size of the native food industry makes it difficult for producers to impact on these wider discourses. In addition, labelling schemes may have unintended negative consequences, such as the marginalising of groups by exclusive licensing agreements (Cunningham et al., 2009: 437) or through the costs of compliance (Morris and Kirwan, 2010: 142-143). In the long run, however, these developments might institute forms of place narrative that evade and challenge the 'banal nationalism' of the examples that I have discussed above. These different stories of place might provide the basis for a more nuanced discussion about the role of native foods in contemporary Australian cuisine. Most importantly, the development of labelling and Fair Trade schemes puts some of the power to construct place identities back in the hands of Indigenous producers.

Conclusion

Within the wider discourses of place and being that inform food marketing, claims to present the ostensible origins of native foods are supermarket narratives that tell tales about where food products have come from. By making available an experience of conveniently packaged "local" food, native food products enable a particular experience of connection to place, conceived of as a conflation of national and natural. Unfamiliar foods are rendered more palatable through nationalist narratives and the romance of the outback.

That these are the dominant narratives of the consumer culture of native foods is more disappointing than surprising. Native foods offer an opportunity for a rich and active engagement with *terroir* and with Indigenous Australian worldviews. Achieving this within the context of commodity culture, however, is difficult. Presentations of place in native food packaging succumb to a banal, or, as in the case of Dick Smith, explicitly activist, nationalism that sidelines alternative conceptions of place. This is less the fault of native food packagers, and more testimony to the strength of these dominant narratives of Australian place identities. Despite this, some native food companies, along with community-based tourism ventures and Indigenous Australian bushfood growers and harvesters, have recognised the need for, and the market for, products that convey a different sense of place. It is up to consumers to search out and support these alternatives, and to engage with a richer sense of where and what they are eating.

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