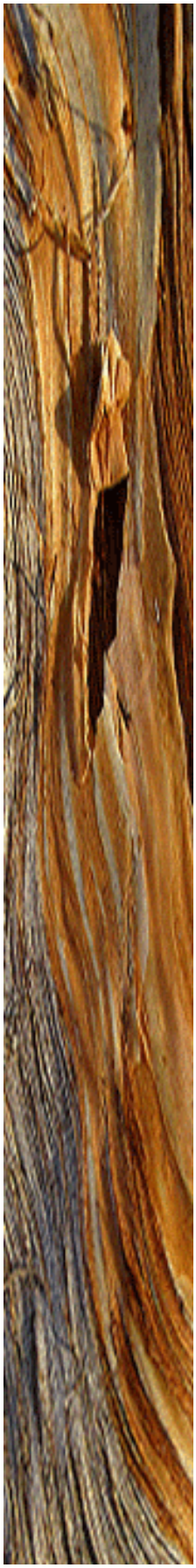

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# Gustatory Redemption? Colonial Appetites, Historical Tales and the Contemporary Consumption of Australian Native Foods

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**Abstract**

In this article, I critique the historical narratives surrounding the consumption of Australian native foods by European settlers. I argue that culinary historians and other commentators present the contemporary consumption of native foods as a means of rejecting the colonial attitudes of the past. In this narrative, early settlers lacked appreciation for Australian native foods and, by extension, Indigenous Australian culture and knowledge. Based on this depiction of colonial history, the current interest in native foods becomes symbolic of a wider revaluing of Australia's previously denigrated indigenous flora and fauna and Indigenous people. However, as I relate, some early European settlers and their descendants ate a wide variety of native Australian foods. These historical episodes challenge the conventional narrative of Australian culinary history and, in particular, the idea that contemporary consumption constitutes a novel break from past culinary practices. Moreover, as I demonstrate, settler interest in native foods was often consistent with the attitudes that justified and underwrote colonisation. By drawing attention to the role that native foods played in the colonial project, I complicate the idea that recognition of these foods is sufficient to address this history.

## Introduction

'After 200 Years, We're Eating Our Vegies' proclaimed the headline of a 1994 newspaper article by Australian food writer Alan Saunders. Saunders had some specific vegetables in mind: those which were native to Australia. After two centuries of seeming disinterest, he related, settler Australians were diversifying from their British-derived staple diet to embrace indigenous ingredients. Here, at last, might be a distinctively Australian cuisine, one that was healthier for people and for the continent than that based on introduced species. Saunders was not alone in this reading of Australian culinary history. As Barbara Santich (2011) and Jacqui Newling (2011) have recently noted, discussions about the settler diet commonly promulgate the idea that settler Australians had little interest in native foods. As I discuss, food writers accuse colonial-era eaters of failing to appreciate the rich potential of Australia's native produce, while lauding present-day consumption as a corrective to this colonial ignorance. Given Australia's contentious colonial history, what might be the implications of this tale of the dietary past? In this article, I argue that there was colonial interest in the culinary and commercial potential of indigenous species, and, furthermore, that this interest was implicated in the wider justification and enactment of colonisation. As I demonstrate, the story of native foods is a story about history, ecology and culture that extends well beyond the dining table.

In culinary terms, the colonisation of Australia is distinguished by its lopsidedness. The 'Columbian exchange' transplanted native flora from the New World—corn, potatoes, tomatoes, chillies—to become staples of Old World cuisine, while European species such as oranges, apples, wheat and cattle were introduced to the Americas (Crosby 1986). In Australia, by contrast, native plant and animal species were noticeably absent in the agricultural revolution—or ruination—of the continent. The overwhelming emphasis was on the introduction of species whose economic viability for world trade was already in place (Crosby 1986; Gascoigne and Curthoys 2002; Griffiths and Robin 1997).

As a consequence, foodstuffs derived from plants and animals indigenous to the Australian continent do not have a large presence in the contemporary Australian diet. Some Indigenous Australians, especially in rural areas, continue to consume 'bush tucker', but the vast bulk of Australian food is sourced from introduced species and imported goods. Over the last three decades, however, there has been growing interest in native foods, evidenced by the emergence of commercial production, albeit mostly small scale, of native ingredients (Clarke 2012). My usage of the term 'native foods' in this article reflects my interest in this recent surge of commercial activity and the accompanying commentary; my concern is with this broader culinary culture rather than the ongoing use of bush tucker by Indigenous communities (for discussion of the latter, see Morse 2005).

Despite their scant presence on dinner plates, native foods play a significant role in Australian culinary culture. The last three decades have seen a steady stream of guides and cookbooks introducing native foods to readers (Bannerman 2006, 24). In this article, I examine how these texts position native foods within wider debates about Australia's colonial history, especially debates over the relationships between settlers, Indigenous people and the land in Australia. The popularisation of native foods coincides with three distinct movements: articulations of the desire for reconciliation between settler and Indigenous Australians (Gunstone 2007; Short 2008); anxiety over the drastic environmental issues facing the continent, including the unsustainability of European farming methods (Archer and Beale 2004; Flannery 1994, 2005); and aspirations to cultivate a local sense of place whilst simultaneously, in an era of multiculturalism, consolidating a national identity (Gelder and Jacobs 1998; Hage 1998). As metonymic signifiers of the continent's ecologies and Indigenous cultures, native foods are intimately bound up in these concerns—although, as circulating commodities, they attract a host of other meanings as well (Craw 2008).

In contrast to narratives of the modern 'discovery' of native foods, I take up Barbara Santich's (2011, 66) recent contention that prior native food consumption has been ignored in Australian culinary histories. My concerns, however, are broader than Santich's, extending beyond her question of what settlers actually ate to how food is implicated in broader ethico-political issues. Elspeth Probyn (2000) and Lesley Instone (2006) both urge the need for scrutiny of the ethical presumptions about native food consumption. In particular, they critique the presentation of native foods as an opportunity for non-Indigenous Australians to assert a distinct, 'authentic' identity, arguing that this assertion reiterates colonial motifs of place and culture. I build on their work by focusing more specifically on the role that culinary history plays in this positioning, through an analysis of historical accounts in cookbooks and newspaper articles. There is more at stake here, I suggest, than a century-old dinner; these gastronomic tales invite readers to imagine their own gustatory practices against the historical backdrop of interactions between colonists, Indigenes and ecologies. Through partaking of native foods, diners take part in the ongoing reconfiguration of these interactions.

**Condescending convicts, starving settlers, and other culinary tales**

Many contemporary Australian food writers have commented on the lack of native food consumption by settlers. The common story is that the colonists arrived, flour, sugar and mutton in hand and, despite initial difficulties, quickly re-established their British consumption habits. For instance, Saunders (1994) comments that:

> what the convicts ate—and even more, what they didn't eat [i. e. native foods]—had a profound effect on the development of Australian food. They got it wrong, poor bastards … and they got it wrong in an interesting way …

In *One Continuous Picnic,* his landmark study of Australian eating, Michael Symons (1982, 257) complains that settler Australians 'have eaten prefabricated food, comparatively little tainted by local flavour'. In her ecological history of Australia, *How a Continent Created a Nation,* Libby Robin (2007, 186) echoes such despair at the disinterest in consuming native foods. In each of these historical overviews, native foods figure only marginally, if at all.

Australian culinary histories offer various explanations for why native foods have not played a larger role in the settler Australian diet. For some writers, this dietary avoidance is a clear matter of their unpalatability: in *Advanced Australian Fare: How Australian Cooking Became the World's Best,* Stephen Downes (2002, 272) dismisses native foods, complaining of their undesirable flavours such as the 'incredibly strong—even caustic' mountain pepper. Most commentators, however, present native foods as under-appreciated, providing variations on Saunders' assertion that the colonists 'got it wrong'. One common suggestion is that British culinary apathy, including disdain for the food of other places, has led

to the overlooking of indigenous ingredients. Cook and provedore Maggie Beer (quoted in Pryor 2002) blames this mindset for settlers' lack of an adventurous approach:

> We now have such a bounty taken with an open mind and without the historic cultural background of the Anglo-Saxons … If we [sic] had been colonised by the French they would have been immediately into the wonderful things available.

Beer's assertion repeats the popular cliché of British culinary ineptitude, upon which I expand further below. Ironically, her remark is quoted in a newspaper article reporting the enthusiastic reception of Australian native food products in Britain, but there is no comment on the more expansive British palate that this suggests. Other commentators attribute the ignoring of Australian native foods to historical fate: for Robin (2007, 186), Australia was the last continent whose produce was introduced to European tables; Australian ingredients could not sway established agro-food practices. Like Beer, but with a more maudlin tone, Robin speculates about the possibilities of an alternative colonial history:

> If wattleseed had been discovered before nutmeg and cardamom, perhaps European cuisine might have been different. The kangaroo might have fed the courts of Europe, if the cow and the sheep had not been entrenched for centuries. Instead kangaroo became poor man's food […] In terms of European taste and trade terms, Australia was indeed 'the last of lands', and the unique produce that it offered did not threaten established markets.

Both of these commentators indulge in speculative histories in which the imperial trade in foodstuffs is a celebration of the bounty of the colonies—if only Australia too could have been a spice island! In such wistful, nationalist calls for proper appreciation, there is a clear judgement: the condemnation of British settlers, those 'poor bastards', for lacking the good taste to recognise the continent's 'unique produce' and 'wonderful things'.

Moreover, food writers commonly interpret these culinary failings as evidence of settler-colonists' wider hostility to their adopted environment. Colonial settlers are depicted as focusing their energies on often ill-fated attempts to establish European crops on Australian soil, overlooking the continent's resources. Food writer Cherry Ripe (1996, 216) condemns the settlers' dietary decisions:

> The paucity of attention to, and pitiful use of, Australia's indigenous food sources has been at the forefront of our arrogance towards this unique land and its ecosystems since colonisation. … Ignorance of native foodstuffs, and again, arrogance towards the diet of the Aborigines saw the early colony come close to the brink of starvation in the 'Hungry Years', thanks to a complete disregard of the knowledge of the people already living here.

Folklorist Warren Fahey (2005, 82) similarly charges:

> Our early settlers never really understood the hunter-gatherer diet of the indigenous Australians. The fact that we built our townships on the riverbanks, the main food gathering areas of the native people, shows our insensitivity and ignorance, or, worse still, our colonial intolerance. … The first settlers looked on the Aboriginal diet as scant and uninteresting. In reality, the indigenous people enjoyed a wide range of foods.

The crime of native food avoidance, then, is not merely the resulting bland food. Such aversion contributes to both settler dissociation from the continent's biota and colonial failure to adequately and respectfully engage with Indigenous Australians. Fahey's condemnation, however, doesn't prevent him from concluding, immediately following the comment above, that '[t]he Australian bush is a bountiful kitchen but one best left for the experts' (82). Though he derides colonial attitudes, he swiftly discards the possibility of a more thorough engagement with Indigenous Australian culinary knowledge as too difficult.

I agree that reliance on imported crops, animals and agricultural techniques has been, and continues to be, devastating for both Australian ecological systems and for Indigenous systems of provision. My concern, however, is with the kind of historical consciousness that is put forward in these stories, and, particularly, the implication that present-day consumption of native foods suffices as recognition of Indigenous ecological knowledge. Scholars writing about settler-colonial societies have remarked on the effects that particular kinds of history-telling can have. Some settler colonies, such as Australia, lack a clear point at which decolonisation was achieved; instead, there is a long and slow process of decolonising that remains incomplete (Curthoys 2000, 32). Despite this, stories about Australian history often assert a form of closure to the colonial period, deflecting responsibility for the past injustices that have produced and continue to inform the present (Rose 2004, 15).

Such periodisation of the colonial project detaches the contemporary moment from its troubling past, and, in doing so, valorises contemporary actions as a turn away from past practices and attitudes now deemed repugnant (Rose 1996, 209; c.f. Sheller 2003, 7 on the Caribbean). Detaching the present from its colonial past in this way situates contemporary actors as part of a 'transcendent moral community' (Wolfe 1999, 166) who enjoy a surfeit of positive feeling stemming from their renunciation of a shameful past (Ahmed 2004). In environmentalist narratives, for instance, engagement with a hitherto denigrated nature redeems present-day Australians from complicity in the colonial destruction of the environment (Lattas 1997, 232; Morton and Smith 1999, 172). Such historical narratives inform present-day practices: for example, some settler Australian home gardeners consider their planting of indigenous species as a practice that marks them out from earlier generations, whom they perceive as having been alienated from the Australian land (Cerwonka 2004, 102).

The stories of Australian culinary history that I have quoted above similarly imagine the consumption of native ingredients as a step away from colonial practices now viewed with distaste. More than a simple change of taste, these stories imbue this eating with ethical as well as culinary value. Native food consumption serves metonymically as a signifier of the difference between settlers and their descendants, in a culinary tale that contrasts the starving colonists and their inadequate agriculture with today's gastronomically-diverse gourmands. The structure of this culinary history conforms to the pattern of renunciation and closure: colonial settlers erred by ignoring the culinary potential of native species, but their postcolonial descendants can now redeem themselves through enlightened gustation, throwing off the unappetisingly monocultural colonial past. Recognition of the limitations of the settler culinary (and ecological) imagination is positioned as tantamount to redress; the recitation and repudiation of 'colonial intolerance' and 'arrogance' casts these writers and their readers as possessing the 'open mind' necessary to recognise both the 'bounty' of Australia's 'unique produce' and the wisdom of Aboriginal ecological knowledge. Current native food consumption is thus valorised as a corrective rejection of colonialism's boring food and bad politics, a way of symbolically redressing colonial despoliation of the environment and mistreatment of Indigenous Australians. Such a narrative asserts colonisation as finished business, and, in doing so, closes down further examination of the ethics of contemporary interest in native foods. My aim in the rest of this article is to trouble this sense of closure, by drawing attention to the multiple ways in which the contemporary settler interest in native foods is prefigured by colonial ideologies and practices.

**An alternative story of colonial appetite**

The pat summary of colonial distaste is not the only possible history that could be told about native food. While not entirely misrepresentative, this story is overly simplistic in its characterisation of the colonial lack of relish for native foods. As Santich (2011) argues, settler consumption of native foods did occur, sometimes with great enthusiasm. To date, there is no definitive history of this consumption—the accounts that I provide here draw on a mix of archival sources and secondary work, the latter mostly by amateur historians. Early colonisers' interest in native foods is best characterised as mixed. The British settlement at Port Jackson was a hotpot of adventurous eating in 1788, as the starving newcomers tried desperately to supplement inadequate rations with local flora and fauna (Low 1987–8; Clarke 2008, 26). In the early years of the colony, a wide array of Australian animals were eaten, including kangaroo, echidna, seals, wombats, swans, lyrebirds, wild geese, snakes, fruit bats and possum (Flett 2007); various tree leaves were used to make tea and cider and gum sap was fermented into an alcoholic beverage (Clarke 2008, 34–7). As these examples illustrate, seeking out native foods was not always a matter of survival: native game and vegetables also provided a break from, and vital nutrients lacking in, monotonous rations of mutton and white flour (Bampton 1996, 20; Newling 2011, 47).

Native foods continued to be eaten throughout the nineteenth century. Explorers venturing away from established settlements often depended for their survival on native foods, taking advantage of Aboriginal knowledge (Clarke 2008, 32–4; Cooper and McLaren 1997). In more established settlements, kangaroo was a popular ingredient in recipes (Bannerman 2006, 19–20). Mina Rawson's 1895 *Antipodean Cookbook* (1992 [1895]) was particularly comprehensive in its advocacy for native victuals, detailing the preparation of parrots (63), wallaby (116), native pigweed (53) and rosellas (124–6). Such embrace of native ingredients was not limited by the squeamishness of present-day eaters (Hayes 2010): Rawson encouraged the consumption of grasshoppers and witjuti grubs (1992 [1895], 54–6). As the supply of European ingredients became more regular, reliance on native game and vegetables came to be perceived as a failure of individual settlers to contribute to the transformation of the continent into a productive landscape (Bampton 1996, 20). Native foods all but disappear from recipes by the 1950s, continuing to appear only in survival guides (Bannerman 2006, 2–23).

These examples do not rebut the idea that most Australian settlers have largely overlooked native produce, but they do trouble the claim that the contemporary interest is unprecedented. In doing so, they raise further questions of how this history might be assessed, and the extent to which it might inform contemporary practice. Santich (2011, 65) suggests that 'nineteenth-century experimentation with indigenous foods … offers a model for the incorporation of indigenous foods into contemporary Australian food culture', citing in particular the open-minded approach of settlers in introducing native foods into their domestic culinary repertoires. I agree that these past meals need to be acknowledged. Against the narrative that settlers were culinarily-impaired Anglophiles who ravaged the continent, these incidents of interest in native foods do seem laudatory. However, as I now turn to discuss, appreciating the food of other peoples, cultures and places is not a straightforwardly 'good' exercise. Acknowledging the past consumption of native foods also means asking to what extent this consumption was part of justifying and enacting the colonial enterprise. Interest in native foods may have been sporadic, but it was nevertheless part of the larger curiosity about Australian flora and fauna demonstrated by settler-colonial actors. This interest included the practical and economic potential of Australian species, their value as transportable artefacts of empire, and, later, their availability as symbolic fodder for Australia's nascent national identity (Bonyhady 2000; Horne 2005; Thomas 2001). To what extent did culinary usage of these species participate in these colonialist and nationalist preoccupations?

Stories about settler disdain for native foods rehash the cliché of British culinary ineptitude, overlooking the role that various foodstuffs played as palpable and palatable signs of British imperial reach. In her book *Exotic Appetites* (2003) Lisa Heldke critiques 'food adventuring'; the searching out of exotic cuisines by privileged gourmands. She argues that this form of 'cultural food colonialism' involves only superficial cross-cultural engagement. While Heldke's interest is in present-day practices, her analysis resonates with the British uptake of the exotic foods that became available through colonial expansion. Indian cuisine, for example, was enthusiastically adapted into the British concoction of 'curry', a dish that flattened India's rich culinary heritage into a single, versatile powder. This borrowing not only belies the idea of British disinterest in other cultures' foods, but also demonstrates the role that food has played in the imperial project. Dishes such as curry, several scholars argue, were 'digestible artefacts' (Bickham 2008, 100) of the British Empire that served as vehicles for incorporating and domesticating Indian culture (Narayan 1995; Spencer 2003; Zlotnick 1996).

Though not as popular as curry, Australian native foods were also the subject of imperial interest. Native foods were displayed and eaten in Europe as examples of colonial bounty: the 1855 Paris *Exposition Universelle* featured an array of native fruit jams and preserves (Santich 2011, 71); an 1862 dinner held in London by the United Kingdom Acclimatisation Society offered guests a plethora of international delicacies, including canned kangaroo and jelly made from Australian seaweed (Lever 1992, 45). On Australian soil, native foods served as ways of experiencing and occupying Britain's new territory: for instance, in 1846 a high-ranking member of the New South Wales colonial administration hosted a celebratory dinner featuring kangaroo, wonga-wonga pigeon, and wallaby-tail soup (Gollan 1978, 85). Like curry, native foods were a means of enacting and displaying the reach of the British Empire.

Whether settler interest in native foods actually encompassed cross-cultural exchange also gives cause for concern. As Santich and Newling comment, there is little evidence that colonial-era interest in native foods went beyond the most basic engagement with Indigenous Australian cooking methods, let alone a consideration of Indigenous Australian culinary values (Santich 2011, 72–3; Newling 2011, 41–2). As Angela Heuzenroeder (2006, 34) reports, many of the interactions that occurred are unrecorded, making it difficult to say whether these constituted 'a genuine transfer of food culture'. In the early years of British settlement, Aboriginal collectors sometimes sold fruit and other plant foods to settlers and provided some advice on edible plants (Clarke 2008, 26–31), but the colonists relied heavily on experimentation (Low 1987–8). A century later, Mrs Rawson (1992 [1895], 55) advocated consultation with Indigenous Australians on the 'Food Value of the Bush':

> I would advise every housewife in the Bush to experiment and try everything; the blacks [sic] or her own common sense will soon tell her what is edible and what is not. There is a great amount of pleasure to be gained in trying new dishes with primitive [sic] materials.

However, her own usage of these 'primitive materials' was based upon European culinary practices. In an unexpected detour in the imperial traffic of ideas and artefacts, she also recommended curry as an excellent way to prepare various native meats (Santich 2011, 71).

Furthermore, these 'primitive materials' were thoroughly embedded in the ideological justification of colonisation as a necessary development of uncultivated lands and peoples. Take, for instance, the example of warrigal greens. Introducing the cookbook *Australian Food,* Saunders (1999, 18) laments:

> Local plants are eaten only when they're all that's available, and they're seen as substitutes for something else ('a kind of beans, very bad, a kind of parsley and a plant something resembling spinage [sic]' noted an unenthusiastic explorer).

This story of a disappointing experience of Australian vegetables fits into the narrative of culinary history that I have outlined above. What Saunders fails to mention, however, is that this apathetic voyager was Joseph Banks, naturalist on the first of James Cook's voyages. Cook's mission included observing and collecting specimens of the flora and fauna of the great southern continent ('Secret instructions for Lieutenant James Cook' 1768), tasks in which Banks aided him. On 6 May 1770, as they sailed along Australia's eastern coast, Banks and Cook dined on the spinach-like *Tetragonia cornuta* (warrigal greens), together with the flesh and tripe of stingrays. Cook, certainly, was unmoved by his meal, writing later that the Australian continent 'naturly [sic] produces hardly any thing fit for man to eat and the Natives know nothing of Cultivation' (quoted in Clarke 2008, 11). Banks, on the other hand, seems to have been keener, recording in his daily journal that warrigal greens 'eat as well as spinage [sic] or very near it' (Banks 1770). Banks' enthusiasm for the vegetable is evident in his actions: specimens that he collected were propagated at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew (Bruneteau 1996, 118–19). The vegetable became popular in Europe; gardening manuals recommended planting it during summer months when English spinach would run to seed but *Tetragonia* would produce 'leaves of the greatest succulency' (Loudon 1835, 840–41). In Saunders' account, Banks' opinion serves as evidence of British distaste for native foods. However, Banks' legacy is not as someone who disparaged the foodstuffs of the continent, but rather as the first European gourmand to appreciate them.

Moreover, Banks' botanical curiosity is also linked directly to the colonisation of Australia. As an unofficial advisor to parliament, Banks advocated the settlement of Australia, playing a large role in convincing the British government to establish the colony (Gascoigne 1998). Before a House of Commons committee considering various proposed locations for a convict colony, Banks gave testimony that Australia possessed ample grass for livestock, an abundant fish supply, and 'eatable vegetables' such as *Tetragonia* (1779, 311). The decision to colonise Australia was not undertaken with the perception that the continent's food supplies were sparse and unpalatable. Rather, this decision was made with the belief, based on Banks' expert testimony, that Australia's game and vegetables were sufficient to support a settler population.

Banks' appetite for warrigal greens serves as an early precedent for the settler consumption of native foods, but also opens up questions about the role that such culinary experimentation played in the larger colonial project. Banks' advocating of Australian colonisation was part of a more general belief that nature in the colonies was abundantly fertile. This conviction of fecundity led to the argument that the extensive natural resources of these new lands were wasted by the lack of more intensive exploitation (Cronon 1983). European intervention in the form of settler colonialism was deemed necessary to prevent such spoilage. Even the most ostensibly scientifically-minded surveys participated in the legitimation of colonisation, for instance, through the production of visions of a resource-rich country empty of people and ripe for the taking (Pratt 1992). In Australia, colonial accounts narrated the continent in a manner that wrote out Aboriginal presence (Carter 1987; Moran 2002, 1021–3). Banks' investigations of native foods similarly served to present an image of Australia's untapped resources that justified its colonisation.

So too did many other accounts of Australia's food resources. Emigrant handbooks praised the diversity and plenitude of game animals as one of the attractions of the continent. For instance, migration agent Henry Watson (quoted in Bampton 1996, 19) promised hoards of toothsome prey:

> [t]he emu stalking along like an ostrich, the hopping kangaroo, the great turkey, black as well as white cockatoos, parrots of all sizes, and some exceedingly handsome, wild ducks, teal, quails in abundance; all these things are within the reach of a good shot, and a double barrelled gun. … a stewed cockatoo, a parrot-pudding, a steak off the leg of an emu, or a tureen of kangaroo-soup, is a dish that you would relish even in London.

Indeed, many native animals were hunted to such an extent that their populations rapidly decreased. The turn in the latter-nineteenth century to hunting introduced British species was driven by the depleted populations of native game (Franklin 1996). Some of this enthusiastic pursuit lacked culinary motivations,

but there were many colonists who, like Watson, praised the flavoursome meat of native animals (Flett 2007). Such descriptions assured migrants an ample food supply, as well as the opportunity to engage in a pursuit that was in Britain increasingly restricted to the landed gentry (Taylor 2004, 34–5).

Nineteenth-century settlers in Australia also conducted a lively investigation of the culinary, aesthetic and economic potential of the continent's biota that went beyond day-to-day provisions. In the infamous case of Burke and Wills, explorers who perished en route, interest was demonstrated in the agricultural potential of the nardoo plant that constituted their final meals—despite their ingestion of the raw plant having led to their deaths (Bonyhady 1991, 95–6, 177). This interest was further demonstrated by the movement of species around the globe. One important vector for such exchange was the network of Acclimatisation Societies, the most prominent of which was founded in Victoria in 1861 (Lever 1992). The work of such societies often emphasised the introduction of European species to the colonies (Dunlap 1997; Osborne 2000, 145–50; see also Lien 2005), but there was also attention paid to Australian natives. The foremost British acclimatiser, Frank Buckland (quoted in Lever 1992, 66), wrote:

> Australians tell us that the kangaroos are very good to eat, and should their acclimatisation be continued, it may be hoped that they may be found useful as food, or at least as a new kind of game.

Another acclimatisation advocate, Sir George Bowen, recommended kangaroo and various birds for introduction to Britain, commenting that they all 'afford delicious eating' (quoted in Lever 1992, 38). While the Acclimatisation Societies framed their goals in terms of the exchange of useful wildlife, the bulk of their activities resulted in little more than the provision of exotic pets for their elite members. Other ventures were more successful in establishing Australian native plants abroad, such as the warrigal greens discussed above. The macadamia is another example; the nut was first commercially cultivated in Hawai'i in 1905 (Stephenson 2005), and even today Australia produces only 38 per cent of the global crop (Foster 2009, 90). At a time when the active destruction of many native species was being prosecuted, then, there was nevertheless continuing interest in how these species might be gainfully exploited as food sources. This experimentation was not a challenge to prevailing ideologies, but rather further reiterated the notion that the Australian colony possessed underdeveloped natural resources that were in dire need of British intervention.

As these brief examples demonstrate, the attitudes that informed settler-colonial eating were more diverse than is often acknowledged. The fact that native foods were eaten, sometimes with relish, is a challenge to the depiction of settlers as ignorant and picky eaters, and upsets the idea that present-day consumption is without colonial era precedent. The conviction that British colonists were uniformly dismissive of Australian ingredients glosses over the complexities of colonial engagement with the Australian environment. However, settler appreciation of indigenous ingredients is not a simple matter. The nineteenth-century experimentation with native foods that Santich lauds was not always an innocuous enterprise, but was intimately implicated in the colonial project. Native foods were evidence for the choice of Australia as the site of the new colony, an enticement to new migrants, and a means of demonstrating and justifying British possession of the continent.

**Rejecting or regurgitating colonialism?**

Does current day engagement with native foods depart from these colonial precedents? The question needs to be raised whether native food consumption enables new relationships to place or simply reiterates colonial understandings of nature, territory and Indigenous culture. Instone (2006) has commented that settler discussions of native foods, such as the 1990s television series *Bush Tucker Man,* present native biota through the lens of European notions of unmanaged wilderness. Despite the adamant rejection of colonial attitudes in the examples I give above, these discussions continue to frame native foods as 'primitive materials', in need of proper development, often under the auspices of European-style agriculture. This framing reiterates the conception of the Australian landscape that justified colonisation.

Moreover, the concern of many of the commentators I quote above is in establishing a national culinary (or, in Robin's case, ecological) identity. The lack of consumption of native Australian foods by settlers is a problem for this project: without native foods, there is little to distinguish 'Australian' food from other similarly multicultural cuisines. Food commentators encourage the embrace of native foods as a means of renouncing colonial errors and simultaneously securing a distinctive national identity. This presentation resembles earlier settler interest in indigenous biota: for instance, modernist artists who expressed nationalist sentiments through the depiction of native flora (Thomas 2001). As I demonstrate elsewhere,

native food product packaging similarly promises a reconnection to place imagined in nationalist terms (Craw 2012). Instone (2006) argues that contemporary food culture promotes native food consumption as a means for non-Indigenous Australians to enact a sense of belonging, literally 'eating the country'. From colonial-era expressions of imperial possession, native foods have become digestible artefacts of what Moran (2002) terms an 'indigenizing settler nationalism'.

There is little acknowledgement of, or engagement with, Indigenous Australian perspectives within this framework. Zilkia Janer (2007, 402) argues that the development of fusion cuisine in the Caribbean has sidelined indigenous culinary epistemologies, 'relegat[ing] the Caribbean to a source of primary materials'. As I have demonstrated elsewhere (Craw 2008; 2012), the current marketing of native foods similarly brands them as a natural resource to be inserted into established culinary practices. Modern Australian culinary culture takes little inspiration from Indigenous Australian culinary techniques or understandings of food. The contemporary revaluation of native foods also occurs in the absence of any requirements for production to include Aboriginal people or perspectives. Guidelines have been recently proposed for the ethical involvement of Indigenous Australians in the native foods industry (Merne Altyerre-ipenhe (Food from the Creation Time) Reference Group et al. 2011; Spencer and Hardie 2011). These guidelines reflect the concerns of Indigenous producers including the need for culturally-appropriate production techniques and for the recognition of Indigenous intellectual property. These issues are notably very different to the preoccupations of non-Indigenous commentators concerned with establishing an eco-friendly national cuisine.

This incommensurability extends to historical narratives. The emphasis in discussions of native food on the apparent disinterest of settlers in native ingredients does not broach the question of how it was that many Indigenous people came to rely on introduced foods. Elspeth Probyn (2000, 110–16) notes that the contemporary interest in Australian native foods is set against the backdrop of the devastation wrought upon Indigenous Australian food practices during the colonial period. Indigenous systems of provision were undermined, leaving Indigenous communities dependent on white-controlled rations. This dietary shift had an immensely destructive impact on Indigenous family life and social structures (Brock 2008; Dyson 2006, 14–17; Rowse 1998). Furthermore, on numerous occasions in the nineteenth century, station owners deliberately laced flour with arsenic to poison Aboriginal populations (Elder 2003). The positive revaluation of native foods is not in and of itself sufficient to resolve the ongoing impact of this history. More attention needs to be paid to the social justice issues inherent in Australia's culinary past, and to ensuring that contemporary practices, such as the development of the commercial native food industry, work to redress this damage by providing positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Culinary exchanges between Indigenous Australians and non-British settlers and visitors might also be considered. Contrary to Santich's (2011, 72) assertion that native ingredients were used through the sole culinary model of English food, other migrant communities to Australia have had their own culinary practices around the use of native ingredients. For instance, German settlers in South Australia ate parrot pie as a celebratory wedding dish (Bampton 1996, 20). And what if we were to follow Regina Ganter's (2006) suggestion of 'turning the map upside down' and start the tale of Australian culinary multiculturalism with the cross-cultural interactions in Arnhem Land and the Torres Strait? Consider for example the Macassans who visited Arnhem Land to trade for trepang (sea cucumber) (Clarke 2008, 23), bringing with them tamarinds and rice (Dyson 2006, 13). The history of cross-cultural culinary exchange in Australia begins to look very different from the narrative of British discovery.

**Conclusion**

The cultivation and consumption of native foodstuffs does indeed offer an opportunity to rethink and rework the system of food production in Australia. At present, however, the symbolic weight vested in native food consumption affirms such consumption as a guilt-free, postcolonial eating practice. By eliding settler interest in native foods, historical narratives about Australian cuisine participate in this feel-good story. The presentation of native foods as a corrective to colonial ills that I discuss above might seem to be directly engaging with colonisation. However, the rhetorical force of these histories is to relieve the anxiety that present-day practices might also participate in colonial ideas and actions. Present-day consumption can be presented as unencumbered by colonial baggage.

The alternative history of native food consumption that I have related unsettles the current formulation of historical consciousness in discussions of native foods. If the Australian environment has been transformed by settler dietary practices, non-Aboriginal interest in native foods has also played a role in the colonisation of the country. There are indeed more resonances between past practice and current consumption than have been acknowledged. The mass cultivation of native foods has its own colonial

baggage as part of an effort to make the continent properly productive and to exploit the commercial and culinary potential of native species. Native food consumption is not an easy route to the ethical reframing of settler relationships with Indigenous Australians and the continent's ecologies. For those eaters and thinkers who wish to address the larger-scale impact of colonisation on Indigenous Australian cultures and on the Australian environment, mere culinary curiosity is not enough.

My argument here is not intended to dissuade settler Australians from consuming native foods. Rather, it is to encourage such consumption—and the stories that are told about it—to take place in ways that support full recognition of Indigenous Australian ecological and culinary knowledge. A truly postcolonial eating practice needs to go further than simply assuming that enthusiasm for native foods rectifies the colonists' mistake in overlooking them: it needs to address the ongoing, deeply-embedded colonial attitudes that have framed settler relationships to the environment and Indigenous peoples. Without a robust consideration of this colonial legacy, without scrutiny of the extent to which contemporary eating practices are embedded in colonial understandings of culture and nature, and without an acknowledgement of needs and desires of contemporary Indigenous Australians in relation to native foods, these ingredients become fetish objects that promise an easy salve for colonial guilt without requiring actual change on the part of settlers. Food commentators, scholars and concerned producers and consumers need to participate in a more critical conversation about how, what and why we eat, one that actively engages with Indigenous Australian perspectives. A different take on culinary history, such as the one that I offer here, is one part of the larger project of considering how the legacies of colonialism inform contemporary food culture, and of establishing new, anti-colonial culinary relations.

**Notes**

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