

THE  
Federation\*  
of Taste

PROCEEDINGS OF  
THE 18TH SYMPOSIUM OF  
AUSTRALIAN GASTRONOMY



OLD PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA  
13 – 16 MAY 2011

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*Dedicated to the late Alan Saunders,  
food broadcaster, writer and  
philosopher, with delight*



## WELCOME

A warm welcome on a chilly autumn evening with champagne and classic canapés including Comte gougères; tempting croutons with tapenade; smoked salmon with sour cream and dill; salt cod brandade; and irresistible South Coast oysters with a mignonette dressing.



A reverential touch in the Ginger Room kitchens for the Batemans Bay oysters that delighted guests at the reception



The organising committee's Ian Ryall and Carolyn Ho welcome Jane Dixon of ANU



Alexandra Gregori from the Philippines and Adelaidean Nola Kenny arrive for the opening reception at Canberra's Old Parliament House



Margaret Emery (R) with Anne Crossley of Brisbane and Arthur Crutchfield and Staci Crutchfield from Sydney – former prime ministers Bob Hawke and Paul Keating look on



Canberra organisers Lenore Coltheart and Janet Jeffs greet Robyn Archer as guests gather in Kings Hall

## CONTENTS

<b>WELCOME .....</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>MORNING TEA.....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>ODE TO GASTRONOMY .....</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>SESSION 2 .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Robyn Archer AO</b>		<b>Revolutionaries</b>	
<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>6</b>	Is there a role for revolutionary ideas or is zeal dangerous to the sound and strong gastronomic body politic? Do we need real revolutionaries to lead us to a republic of taste instead of food critics dispensing toques and crosses?	
<b>DEBATE .....</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>SESSION 2.1 .....</b>	<b>39</b>
Liberty, Equality and Food		Convivial nation: towards a political gastronomy	
<b>DEGUSTATION DINNER .....</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>Marion Maddox</b>	
La Pétroleuse			
<b>SESSION 1 .....</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>SESSION 2.2 .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>A Good Constitution</b>		The Bitter Taste of Gastronomy	
Australia has a Constitution that is silent about food but sets down the framework for state and federal governance of food production, distribution, importation and of food industries. Is it time to de- mocratise the government of food with a Constitution that is clear about how it legislates taste and regulation that aims for more than the mediocrity of minimising harm. Is it time to appoint a Minister of Gastronomy?		<b>Staci Crutchfield</b>	
<b>SESSION 1.1 .....</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>SESSION 2.3 .....</b>	<b>46</b>
'Warning may contain traces of nuts'		Federated food: the revolution we had to have?	
<b>Jeanette Fry</b>		<b>Colin Bannerman</b>	
<b>SESSION 1.2 .....</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>CHESTNUT ROAST LUNCH.....</b>	<b>51</b>
The temporal dimension to Australia's culinary culture: implications for national food and labour market policies		<b>SESSION 3 .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Jane Dixon et al</b>		<b>Heritage of Absence</b>	
<b>SESSION 1.3 .....</b>	<b>26</b>	One of the first consequences of Euro- pean settlement was the displacement of indigenous foodways. Incomers ate their oysters, netted their fish and gave back boiled beef, bread and spirits. Can there ever be an 'Australian cuisine' which excludes indigenous food? What can be done to reconnect Australia's cui- sine with its heritage?	
Regulate or Educate: addressing obesity through food choices on New Zealand school premises		<b>SESSION 3:1 .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Nancy J. Pollock</b>		A load of rubbish? The state of municipal food waste in Australia	
		<b>Christian Reynolds</b>	
<b>SESSION 3.2 .....</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>SESSION 3.2 .....</b>	<b>60</b>
		Sweet tea: a 'universal' comfort	
		<b>Jacqueline Newling</b>	

<b>SESSION 3.3 .....</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>SESSION 5.2 .....</b>	<b>101</b>
Lost flavour and tea regulation		Our households: towards an alternative	
<b>Ian Bersten</b>		gastronomics	
<b>CHOCOLATIERS' TEA PARTY .....</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>Michael Symons</b>	
<b>SYMPOSIUM DINNER .....</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>SENATORS' PICNIC .....</b>	<b>111</b>
Deipnosophistae: Symposium dinner		<b>CITY AND COUNTRY</b>	
		<b>FOOD EXPEDITION .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>SESSION 4 .....</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>BUSH TUCKER AT THE NATIONAL</b>	
<b>Federated by Food</b>		<b>BOTANIC GARDENS.....</b>	<b>112</b>
Fusion means more than linking elements		<b>ON THE BUSES .....</b>	<b>113</b>
of different cuisines – it also refers to the		<b>ON THE BUSES TALK.....</b>	<b>114</b>
way food forms nations through social		Kitchen gardens	
fusion. Food can be the hidden ingredient		– back door to better health	
in turning both colonisation and immi-		<b>Rosemary Stanton</b>	
gration into forms of the federation of			
peoples.			
<b>SESSION 4.1 .....</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>ON THE BUSES TALK.....</b>	<b>116</b>
From Meat Pie to Pho in four decades:		Crown Lamb	
if you are what you eat, are Australians		<b>Jacqueline Newling</b>	
cosmopolitan?	75		
<b>Tammi Jonas</b>		<b>DINNER WITH THE STARS .....</b>	<b>118</b>
<b>SESSION 4.2 .....</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>BREAKFAST FAREWELL .....</b>	<b>120</b>
From Slippery Bob to Baba Ghanoush: the		<b>REPORT ON THE</b>	
influence of Australia's immigration poli-		<b>18<sup>TH</sup> SYMPOSIUM .....</b>	<b>121</b>
cies on our culinary culture		Canberra house party	
<b>Diana Noyce</b>		<b>Michael Symons</b>	
<b>SESSION 4.3 .....</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>PRESENTERS .....</b>	<b>128</b>
Filipino culinary heritage			
and colonisation			
<b>Alexandra Gregori</b>			
<b>FEDERATION MORNING TEA .....</b>	<b>93</b>		
<b>SESSION 5 .....</b>	<b>94</b>		
<b>Taste and place</b>			
How are places and tastes connected and			
how powerful might this make 'home			
cooking' – and where is our taste leading			
us?			
<b>SESSION 5.1 .....</b>	<b>95</b>		
Feeding the immigrant child			
<b>Josephine Gregoire</b>			

## ODE TO GASTRONOMY

On the occasion of the opening of the 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium of Australian Gastronomy  
in Kings Hall, Old Parliament House Canberra



**Robyn Archer AO**

*Good evening all and now I pay respects  
To all traditional owners present and past  
Gathering here tonight on Ngunnawal land  
To speak, to quaff and gorge on our repast.*

*We also sit tonight in hallowed halls  
What stories might these mighty walls impart?  
What morsels did immortals here consume?  
And when they rose to speak did any f...(forget  
their lines).*

*Outside these walls, upon these well-trod steps  
Full many a noble speech has been intoned,  
Who could forget the mighty Whitlam wit  
When he curs-ed Kerr's Cur and we all moaned.*

*We gaze upon the noble portraits here  
Prime Ministers, oft-times with wives enlaced  
We speculate upon their public lives  
But did one ever stop to pause and taste?*

*What stodgy muck from pots below arose  
To stink dumbwaiters full of English whiff  
Did meat and three veg plus some Yorkshire pud  
Command the fare of public servant stiffs?*

*Or did they love a quail in aspic fine  
Paté with Muscat de Beaumes de Venise  
Could their big bouches ever be amused  
Or only stuffed and sated, never teased.*

*Alas I'm but the singer, I do not know  
You must ask th'historian of this place  
To reveal what they drank and what they ate  
And whether a diner e'er fell into disgrace.*

*Tonight our quality is guaranteed  
We host the very finest in the land  
We want you to your various counties go  
And preach the finest words from our fair hand.*

*In 2013 we one hundred be  
One hundred years since this name was pronounced  
When Lady Denman stood in yonder paddock  
"This place shall be called Canberra"  
she announced.*

*One hundred years now on our capital  
Still celebrates the beauty of her spine  
The plan the Griffins splendidly spelt out  
Tonight we sit on that historic line.*

*The axis cut through rich pastoral land  
But proof is in the growing and sure, still  
McArdle's growing truffles near the airport  
And the hundred miles around, our plates can fill*

*The best of coast and country we embrace  
The high plains and the mountains nurture us  
Our national capital's, as planned, paradise  
When others whinge we wonder what's the fuss?*

*Innovation defined us from the start  
The contest for a global city ideal  
Invention, incubation, followed on  
And the nurture of democracy was real.*

*In 2013 it's what we celebrate  
We invite you all to join us in the song  
This repository of our national cultural wealth  
A place to serve us loyally and long.*

*And you are all now part of this great tale  
Please seek our website called Diaspora  
Upload your Canberra story for all to see  
And keep on wondering how on earth I'm going  
to find a rhyme for a diaspora – well I'm not !*

*For you particularly love a jape  
Full of fun and soon t'be full of taste  
You love to push the boat out, love to dare,  
Not stagnate in a gastronomic wasteland*

*The tales of your symposia have spread wide  
From rubbish to wisdom worthy of King Tut  
From patina-ed Persian Fairy Floss so light  
To Bilson's surrealistic blood and gut.*

*Ce soir nous mangerons comme les françaises  
Madame le chef La Jeffs est une gourmande  
Elle aime beaucoup en champs sons petits cochons  
Mais pas problème les presents a table grand.*

*And so we come to celebrate the food  
Let us eat up! And be both French and gay!  
For though we chatter, laugh and  
treat our tongues  
Who knows what diet strikes after today?*

*Can it be true one always pays for sin?  
For every oyster, every bubbly glass  
Someone high or below is taking count  
And reckoning in inches on our arse?*

*I think not friends, e'en though thy bum be big  
It's not because you took such pleasure in food  
It's more a payment p'haps for sitting down  
Or just cos your metabolism weren't so good.*

*So let us eat and drink, be free of guilt  
Let's raise a toast to camaraderie  
To wit and wisdom in the Capital  
And all in praise of this Gastronomy!*

*To Gastronomy !*

## PREFACE

Old Parliament House  
Canberra was the  
splendid venue for  
the 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium  
of Australian  
Gastronomy from  
13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011.  
The resonance of this  
heritage building set  
in Canberra's national  
precinct prompted  
the 2011 theme *The  
Federation of Taste*,  
in turn producing an  
intriguing range of  
papers.

The opening of Parliament House in Canberra in May 1927 completed the work of federating six Australian colonies into one nation and the national capital became the seat of government. After the new Parliament House was completed in 1988, the graceful Old Parliament House became a heritage site and now houses the Museum of Australian Democracy.

The opening reception for the Symposium was held in elegant Kings Hall, where French champagne and canapés complemented the welcoming ode from Symposium bard Robyn Archer. The scene then shifted to the adjoining House of Representatives chamber to debate 'Liberty, Equality and Food: Making the Revolution'. On the Government benches Marion Halligan and Christian Reynolds put a vigorous case for the proposition 'That it is the duty of this government to legislate good food for all its citizens', while on the other side of the Chamber Lenore Coltheart and Robyn Archer were a formidable Opposition. Most memorable though was moderator Alan Saunders, occupying the historic Speaker's chair to guide the House to the right decision with the most perfect authority.

*La Petroleuse* Dégustation Dinner in the Ginger Room restaurant, with its view to Federation Mall and the new Parliament House, completed the opening evening of the Symposium with dishes inspired by Babette's Feast.

On Saturday papers were presented in 'Gastronomers' Hall', former parliamentary committee rooms renamed for the occasion. The traditional 'bring something' morning tea was a delicious repast in the wintry courtyard of the Senate, while lunch was launched with a chestnut roast

in the House of Representatives courtyard and continued in the adjoining café, the former Press Bar. A chocolatiers afternoon tea in the Senate courtyard followed the Session 3 of the Symposium.

We reconvened in Kings Hall for pre-dinner drinks before the Symposium Banquet, when the former Members' Dining Rooms became the Deipnosophists' banqueting hall.

On Sunday the banqueting scene was miraculously transformed for Sessions 4 & 5. Between the sessions came a surprise as doors suddenly opened onto a gracious Federation morning tea in the adjoining Members Bar. After Session 5 came a similar enchantment as we entered the gates of the adjacent Senate Rose Gardens to find laid out for us a Senators' Picnic Lunch.

The afternoon venues were the National Botanic Gardens native food trail and a bus tour of some of the city's community food gardens and urban orchards, with talks on the buses as we wended our way some 40 kilometres to the Mulloon Creek Natural Farms. This was the intriguing venue for a southern hemisphere dinner, complete with the starry sky and rising moon.

The farewell breakfast on Monday morning made the original parliamentary kitchens a lively and busy place as dishes of congee and kedgeree were collected. The 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium offered a unique opportunity to see behind the scenes of the former Parliament House as well as to consider the connections between food and Federation in this resonant setting.

### *The Federation of Taste*

When the founders of federation drafted the Australian Constitution they left no trace of a concern for gastronomy - though many of them, like Edmund Barton and George Reid for instance, certainly rated gastronomy highly. Their law-making nonetheless had a profound influence on the new nation's cuisine – and still influences our tastes 110 years later.

Food regulation underpins nation-building. Australian history from convict colony to multicultural nation is intimately linked with food law as well as food lore. A century after the decision to bring the colonies together to form one nation, are we finally creating a 'federated cuisine'? And is it a republican cuisine of liberty and equality, or just for an aristocracy of privileged enthusiasts?

These ideas were basic ingredients for the six sessions of the Symposium, turned into a surprising range of papers to savour. There were the sour – as in Christian Reynolds 'waste paper'; the sweet – the aching nostalgia of Josephine Gregoire's presentation, the savoury, even the bitter in Staci Crutchfield's compelling critique of an inhospitable industry.

## DEBATE

### Liberty, Equality and Food



Rosemary Stanton and Ian Hemphill behind Carolyn Ho and Mary Brander, and at front Jill Stone, were among those assembled in the House of Representatives chamber for the debate



Lenore Coltheart and Robyn Archer formed the opposition, arguing against the case for good food legislation



Marion Halligan opens the case for the government  
‘That it is the duty of this government to legislate good food for all its citizens’



A convincing figure in the Speaker’s Chair, Alan Saunders was a compelling moderator for the debate



Christian Reynolds’ arguments on the government side captivated the audience



The ayes have it – the opposition case wins the day – but not all the votes

## DEGUSTATION DINNER

### Making the Revolution: La Pétroleuse



Staci Crutchfield (L) with her parents Arthur and Ann Crutchfield and Ian and Liz Hemphill in the Ginger Room



Testing the dishes in the Ginger Room in Old Parliament House



Caille en sarcophage, as featured in the feast created by Babette, the character based on chef and revolutionary Louise Michel



Ginger Room Executive Chef Janet Jeffs and Sommelier Frederic Rivard finalise preparations for the dégustation dinner



Savarin au Rhum completed the La Pétroleuse degustation, a delicious opening evening for the 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy

## **SESSION 1**

### **A Good Constitution**

Australia has a Constitution that is silent about food but sets down the framework for state and federal governance of food production, distribution, importation and of food industries. Is it time to democratise the government of food with a Constitution that is clear about how it legislates taste and regulation that aims for more than the mediocrity of minimising harm. Is it time to appoint a Minister of Gastronomy?

Papers for this Session were presented by **Jeanette Fry, Jane Dixon and Nancy Pollock** and the Session was chaired by Karen Goldspink.



## SESSION 1.1

### ‘Warning may contain traces of nuts’

Jeanette Fry

n May the 9<sup>th</sup> 1951 every schoolchild in Australia received a medal to celebrate the Jubilee of Federation. The medal was made of copper alloy and showed on one side a farmer hand-sowing a field of grain and on the other, seven ripe stalks of wheat indicating the maturing of that grain into the states and territories of the Commonwealth. There was also a seven-pointed star for good luck. Those ears of wheat, ready to be made into our daily bread and packets of Weeties, were a clear reminder that we were still an agrarian economy. Likewise, the shilling coin tied into the corner of a hanky for our lunch money, carried the head of a noble Merino Ram. Reminding us that Australia rode on the sheep’s back. We might have been lucky enough to get change, a three-penny bit, with another three ears of wheat as its symbol; we were big on wheat in the 1950s.

These memories were prompted by thoughts for a topic to fit the theme of this symposium. Since that medal so generously given sixty years ago there has been another celebration marking 100 years of Federation. The Howard Government struck two million medals to present to schoolchildren. I believe medals were awarded to grownups as well, but for merit rather than just turning up.

My research began with a 1994 publication entitled ‘2001, A report from Australia’ compiled by a committee headed by Joan

Kirner at the request of the then Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Its purpose was to discover how best to celebrate the Centenary of Federation.

They also wanted to avoid some of the mistakes and white elephants resulting from the Bicentennial celebrations of 1988.

The consultative process took the form of open meetings in all States and Territories. Over 500 people spoke at public forums and more than 400 wrote submissions.

Much of the report was given over to the form and purpose of celebrating the Centenary of Federation and certainly a discussion of food was not seen as a priority. It wasn’t until chapter 6 that I came across some interesting comments made by former Sydney Lord Mayor Jeremy Bingham, then representing the NSW Chamber of Commerce. He stated; “*we still have differences in packaging laws and differences in food laws affecting national products. So you cannot necessarily have the same things in the corn flakes in each state. To have the best Federation, doing all the things it ought to do, these things that remain ought to be fixed up.*” Maybe it was pushing the point a bit to suggest that our Federation was lacking because of that vital unifying component, but it did raise questions about an area many of us don’t give much attention.

On a visit to Canberra in January of this year I tried to access Mr Bingham’s submission. I was told that the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet now owned it and, due to the 30-year embargo rule, it was unavailable. My only way of sighting it would be by making a Freedom of Information request. This seemed a rather extreme way of conducting research, but I persevered. I am glad to report that I was treated with the utmost courtesy by the Staff of PM & C, who offered to investigate the matter informally and get back to me. I received a phone call from them some weeks later and was told that there

was no trace of a written submission and that Mr Bingham was probably speaking off the cuff at one of the public hearings (probably after a good lunch).

This paper takes its inspiration from Jeremy Bingham's informal remarks, using his example of corn flakes to reflect the lack of uniformity in regulation at a State and Federal level. He emphasised the need to fulfil the promise of Federation by bringing these things together by the Centenary. This paper is also a general reflection on food, our Federation and the search for a better life embodied in its conception. On the way I discovered some fascinating parallels between the origins of the breakfast cereal and the development of the National Capital.

Since Australia's earliest beginnings as a colony, food regulation has been part of our lives. On the voyage from England to Australia Governor Phillip insisted that all convicts receive the same rations as sailors. He wanted to arrive in the colony with a workforce fit to begin new lives in a hostile land. On arrival everyone was allocated weekly rations of bread, salted meat, flour, dried peas and butter.

As the colony grew, it was difficult to keep up supplies and quantity, not quality, was the imperative. Food shortages were common and the rations were often reduced. Some native foods augmented the supplies but the familiar was always desired above all else.

As a result fillers such as clay and ash were routinely used to extend baking flour, leading in 1801 to Governor King passing the first regulation to control milling and baking in the colony. Eventually the supplies of meat and grain were sufficient to meet local demand and provide excess for trade between the colonies and with England.

The 1800s saw the growth and independence of the Colonies, each with their

own parliaments and regulatory bodies to oversee everything from food production to railway gauges. The gold rush and flourishing primary industries brought settlers from countries other than England and with them came new cultures and ideas. With increased prosperity came the opportunity for people to reflect on matters other than survival and the yearning for greater autonomy and democracy took hold.

Henry Parkes promoted the idea of Federation in his newspaper *The Empire*, and in 1889 delivered a stirring speech in Tenterfield calling for 'a great National Government for all Australia'. By the 1890s the movement towards Federation was growing and a series of 'people's conventions' agreed to a draft constitution and the name 'Commonwealth of Australia.'

Let's leave the Federation story there for a while and pick up the other thread of this tale. Let's travel to another great Federation not much older than our own, to the United States of America and the town of Battle Creek, Michigan, home to the Western Health Reform Institute. Established by the Seventh Day Adventists in 1890 it was the brainchild of Ellen G White, an elder of the church. Ellen White wrote and preached extensively of her belief that the spirit could only truly flourish in a healthy body. She also advocated the benefits of Nature's remedies; clean air, sunshine, exercise and pure water.

Dr John Harvey Kellogg was the first superintendent of the Institute, which quickly became known as 'The Sanatorium' or 'San'. His brother Will Keith Kellogg was the business manager. Following Ellen's guidelines of abstinence and clean living they created an environment that would restore both body and soul. Alcohol, caffeine, meat and tobacco were not allowed. They were also encouraged to restrict their intake of spicy, savoury and sweet foods. It was considered that

these foods would heat the blood, inflame the passions and lead to dancing, another forbidden activity.

Their Sabbath was celebrated on a Saturday and passed in religious observance and quiet reflection with work of any kind forbidden. It's been said that the life span of Adventists is extended by at least five years by these practices.

The brothers worked hard at creating a range of foodstuffs, which would fit the SDA principles. The day began with grain or grits, which had been soaked and cooked overnight to soften and swell into an edible form. Now, I've eaten grits in the States accompanied by pan-fried country ham with red eye gravy: made by pouring a cup of strong sweet black coffee on to the ham fat left in the pan, letting it reduce then finishing with a knob of butter for good luck. That was obviously not one of their recipes.

The corn flake story begins with the brothers soaking the grain in the evening as usual, but being called away on urgent business. On returning many hours later, they found the grain dried out and inedible. Undeterred by this, they forced it through rollers, toasted the resultant flakes and served them to their hungry guests. I think they may have been tasty enough to lead to dancing.

They experimented with different grains and found that corn had many advantages: there was no waste, the colour was pleasing, it had texture, natural sweetness and a good shelf life; the Corn Flake was born. In later years as consumers demanded their food be more nutritious, additives such as folate and other vitamins were sprayed onto the flakes. This led directly to the concern expressed by Jeremy Bingham that there were no uniform labelling laws across the states.

The brothers were granted a patent for the flaking process in 1896.

Later they would fall out over the addition of sugar to the flakes, leading to Will Kellogg forming the Cereal Company that would become one of the greatest American success stories.

At the same time, back in Australia the Federation movement was approaching its Grand Final with the 1899 referendum vote of 'Yes' in all States except Western Australia, which hung out until July 31<sup>st</sup> 1900. The first Parliament met in the Royal Exhibition Buildings in Melbourne on May 9<sup>th</sup> 1901. A search for a site for the national capital would be one of the next things to preoccupy decision makers.

Meanwhile, back in Battle Creek, the Seventh Day Adventists were rejoicing in their success with the sanatorium and their breakfast cereal.... and doing what religions usually do when they are on the rise ... sending missionaries to spread their gospel to the world and in particular to their Pacific neighbours.

Melbourne was fortunate to have a visit from Ellen White, the woman responsible for the establishment of 'The San' at Battle Creek. She had fallen out of favour with the other Elders for introducing radical new ideas gleaned from her travels in Europe and it was felt that a tour overseas would be good for all concerned. At a tented meeting in Brighton Victoria, the subject of establishing a sanatorium similar to the one at Battle Creek was raised.

Ellen White put forward her views (I'm paraphrasing here): If you want the best situation for health both spiritual and physical, get out of town, find a place well above sea level with a good pure water supply and put buildings on that land which will nourish, protect and inspire your people.

By 1910 the Adventists had set up a sanatorium in the beautiful mountain town of Warburton. High in the Yarra Ranges outside Melbourne, with the fast flowing

Yarra River running through it and a train line connecting it to Melbourne. Warburton became home to a group of enterprises, which would ensure that the Seventh Day Adventist Church flourished for the next 90 years. There would be a sanatorium, later expanded to a full health and treatment centre and hospital. The Signs printing company was relocated from the inner Melbourne suburb of Fitzroy. There was also a food production business to cater for the needs of the faithful and to boost the cash flow of the whole enterprise. The canny Ellen White knew that linking a new food product with an institution for sufferers of tuberculosis and other unpleasant diseases was not a bright marketing ploy. So with the simple change of one letter she coined a new word for a ‘place of health and vitality’ and the *Sanitarium* Health Foods Company was born.

One of the most farsighted innovations was the building of a hydro-electricity plant to supply power to the Signs printing works and the Sanitarium Health Foods factory. During and after the First World War, the Seventh Day Adventists continued to prosper. Their breakfast cereal business was doing particularly well with Granose, their version of the Weet Bix that my family favoured and the parochially branded Skippy Corn Flakes.

Contrast their unity of purpose with the contentious struggle to find a home for the Federal Capital that would suit all parties to the 1901 Proclamation.

The specifics of the site were quite complex: it had to be in New South Wales but more than 200 miles from Sydney, at least 2000 feet above sea level and beyond reach of the then largest gun boats held by enemy powers – something therefore more than 25 miles from the coast. The region south east of Goulburn was chosen for its altitude, bracing dry climate and the availability of large tracts of open land. Only

later would cynics describe Canberra as ‘a waste of a perfectly good sheep run’. Gun-boats aside, the planning criteria of Ellen White were remarkably similar to those put forward for the national capital. It is worth remembering that in the early years of Federation Sydney had experienced a major outbreak of bubonic plague, a clear message that cities as then constituted were not particularly healthy places to be.

A competition to design the city was announced and more than 130 entries were received from around the world. The formidable team of Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahoney were awarded the contract. Their proposal was chosen for the boldness of its vision and in particular for the way it applied a clear plan incorporating the main geographical features of the site.

Both Walter and Marion were theosophists and their beliefs informed many of the decisions around the design for Canberra. The Griffins’ beliefs were strongly parallel to the thought and teachings of Rudolph Steiner, who proposed that every aspect of life should act in harmony; the cities and towns we live in, the houses we occupy and the design of the schools children study in. You only have to visit a Steiner school to see this thought in action.

The layout took into account the topography of the area; instead of imposing a city on the landscape they allowed the landscape to dictate the form. However, when the detailed planning phase began Walter found he was to be just one of a team, which would act under orders from the Government. It was a situation that quickly became untenable. The dramas suffered by the Griffins parallel those experienced by Jøern Utzon in the creation of the Sydney Opera House. We have a great way of compromising vision with oppressive bureaucracy.

But let’s get back to our corn flakes and

those healthy minds and bodies at Warburton and see how they're travelling.

In 1934 floods struck Warburton and swept away the Sanitarium Health Foods Factory and Signs printing works. As both were thriving enterprises a decision was quickly made to rebuild.

It was decided to amalgamate the two businesses, sharing functions such as administration and the making and printing of the cereal boxes.

They employed Edward Billson as their architect. After receiving his diploma from Melbourne University he had been employed to run Walter Griffin's Melbourne office. Billson also won a competition with Walter Burley Griffin's brother in law, Roy Lippincott to design Auckland University. After that partnership ended he worked successfully in domestic and municipal architecture. However it was The Sanitarium Health Foods factory that would prove the high point of his career. The ideals of the Seventh Day Adventists were a perfect fit for Billson who was a follower of the Dutch Modernist Architect Willem Dudok. The similarity of Billson's factory to Dudok's beautiful Hilversum Town Hall is unmistakable.

Built at a cost of £39,000 the factory was constructed of cream brick and featured a clock tower rising above the third storey. It was filled with natural light and all that was new in technology. Billson's plans included gardens which would provide employees with outdoor eating areas, detached buildings screened with plantings and a genuine concern for townscape amenity. It received the Street Architecture Award from The Victorian Institute of Architects – the first time it had been awarded outside the metropolitan area.

Canberra also was being designed as a unified whole, a place where people could live similarly clean, comfortable, worthy lives, working in pleasant surroundings

and ennobled by the national edifices around them. In just the same way, the Seventh Day Adventists designed their model factories, their workers' housing and their communities to produce a sense of order, peace, calm and mutual prosperity. By controlling every aspect of life, literally from the cradle to the grave and all the meals eaten in between, it was hoped that they could set a model for a form of utopian society, in much the same way that Canberra would be seen as a model to which all Australian cities could aspire. But of course excessive perfection palls all too quickly and the Australian Federation was as much a gang of warring tribes as it was the model for a nation. States' rights and petty jealousies often get in the way of good planning, with the most obvious case being a recent Prime Minister who refused to live at the Official Canberra Residence, preferring to stay on in Sydney at the modest cottage known as Kirribilli House.

And just as the states went their own way with their railway lines, their health and education systems and, apparently, their food laws, we have continued our love-hate relationship with central control and 'Canberra Bureaucracy', the name defining a system and an attitude rather than a city and a community.

A century after the states came together to create the Commonwealth of Australia the collective parties, in the form of the Council of Australian Governments, have actually got their act together. They heeded the advice of Mr Bingham when they created our national food standards legislation, which, for good measure, also includes our cousins across the Tasman in New Zealand, who were in fact offered a place in the original Federation, but maybe wisely, they declined. The seven ears of wheat on that Jubilee medal were sown in fertile ground and, while some were diverted as bribes to middle eastern dictators, most went on to provide

the breakfast cereals, bread and biscuits for all our citizens, from Warburton, to Weston, Winton and Wannaroo and the all the places in between within this great Federation.

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## SESSION 1.2

# The temporal dimension to Australia's culinary culture: implications for national food and labour market policies

**Jane Dixon, Cathy Banwell,  
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Dan Woodman, Anna Davies**

Over the last half a century, government policies have influenced significant aspects of the culinary culture. The best explored is the impact of migration policies on what and how we eat. Ethnic community foodways are viewed favourably for the way they have diversified Anglo-Australian diets, and have contributed to an envied multi-cultural society. A less debated but equally powerful influence over our diets concerns government labour market policies, and in particular incremental supports for a flexible labour market.

Take the Australian government Budget that was handed down on Tuesday night: it contains many new initiatives which would be generally considered to lie in the labour market realm. Here is a random sample of headlines from *The Australian* 11 May 2011.

SWAN CUTS MIDDLE-CLASS WELFARE BUT DELIVERS ON JOBS AND PARTICIPATION  
PRIORITY TO CUT TRAVEL TIME FOR CITY WORKERS

"INCENTIVES' TO CUT WELFARE DEPENDENCY

WORK PUSH FOR JOBLESS PARENTS IN DOLE NODES

SEEKING RELIEF FROM LABOUR DROUGHT

We explain in this paper why they equally could be considered culinary culture initiatives.

The paper focuses on the influence of labour market reforms on Australia's gastronomy. We argue that culinary deregulation, which is an amalgam of continuous dietary novelty and the de-ritualisation of eating, is a major consequence of economic deregulation. It describes how labour force induced 'busyness' and variability, which the baby boomer generation and generations Y and X are experiencing, is shaping national dietary practices. We base our argument on integrating four studies which the authors have been conducting out of the Australian National University and University of Melbourne over the last 8 years<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Time scarcity, labour markets and the deregulated economy***

Feeling rushed, busy, pressured or that there is not enough time in the day to do all that one is required or desires to do, are forms of time scarcity<sup>2</sup>. Whether

<sup>1</sup> ARC Linkage: Time scarcity in Australian families: another inequity?; ARC Discovery: Weight of Modernity; Woodman, D. (2010) The Post-Secondary School Transition and the Desynchronisation of Everyday Life. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Melbourne, University of Melbourne'; University Melbourne Life Patterns Project

<sup>2</sup> Strazdins et al., 2011

these feelings arise because people try to fit more into their day as Shove<sup>3</sup> proposes, or because of increasing work and caring demands over which people feel they have little choice or a combination of two is a matter for debate.

What is clear is that the amount of time Australian households spend on labour time activities is expanding. For this paper, we emphasise the changing temporal schedules of individuals as members of households, viewing the latter as the basic unit of Australia's culinary culture.

Firstly, the hours spent in the paid employment have increased for women, who have been the culinary custodians in this country. The proportion of women who are employed increased from 48% in 1992 to 55% in 2006; rising further to 60% once children are in primary school<sup>4</sup>. In the space of 15 years, women increased their paid working time on average by an hour and 45 minutes<sup>5</sup>. Men's working hours remained similar at 31 hours and 50 minutes a week but their household work increased by an hour and 25 minutes<sup>6</sup>. In terms of total workload, both men and women spent an average of 50 hours and 10 minutes a week in a combination of paid and household work. This represents an increase since 1992 of around two hours a week for both men and women (or around four days over the course of a year)<sup>7</sup>.

In a context of an assumed 16 'awake' hours per day, these gains may seem modest; but they ignore the essential job of child and other care duties that must be performed. Basically there has been a transformation in the valuing of house-

hold time with the shift to so many dual earner couples with children: 43% of families in 2000<sup>8</sup>. Forty-one percent of men and 51% of women with a dependent child in the family report feeling time pressure<sup>9</sup>; the main reason given is balancing work and family<sup>10</sup>.

These figures do not take account of the increase in numbers of households which have a member who works extremely long hours, or all of those jobs which have ramped up in intensity – leaving workers exhausted by the paid work positions<sup>11</sup>.

In the 2011 Budget, the Government acknowledged that time spent commuting is an additional and growing demand on family time. It declared that its Sustainable Population Strategy would create regional hubs co-locating housing with jobs and services: "We want hard working Australians to spend less time and money travelling to and from work", said Minister Burke. In Australia the mean commuting time to work each week is three hours and 37 minutes and it increases for those working full-time. In large urban centres such as Sydney and Melbourne 4.72 and 4.36 hours per week on average is spent commuting. An analysis of the longitudinal Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, shows that those who work longer hours tend to have longer commuting hours as well<sup>12</sup> thus compounding time pressure.

While the data all point to an increase in the number of household hours worked each week, we do not believe that it is the amount of time in paid work or commuting that is as critical to household culinary dynamics as the way these periods of time

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3 Shove, 2009

4 Maher et al. 2008

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009

7 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009

8 ABS 2003

9 Hayes et al., 2011

10 ABS 2008, reported in NATSEM 2009

11 ABS 2011

12 Flood and Barbato, 2005

are structured or allocated. Emerging over the last 30 years, Australia has what can be described as a flexible labour market characterised by: the intensification of labour routines with fewer breaks and multi-tasking; working schedules increasingly organised 24/7; and greater variability in work schedules with the emergence of a more casualised and shift-based employment regime.

The following data indicates who works and when in the 24 hour economy. Need to put in a box

- 18% Australian employees work 6 or 7 days/week
- 36% work between 7pm and 7am
- 36% usually work on weekends
- 22% have variable work hours
- 30 % have no paid leave (are casually employed), of these
  - 47% earnings varied week to week
  - 35% hours varied week to week<sup>13</sup>.

The so-called ‘flexible’ arrangements have contributed to an increase in waged labour force participation by women and young people; and while appearing to give employees greater choice they actually offer employers greater scope to offer women and young people shifts comprising short part-time hours, which may not be their preference. A higher proportion of women than men work two jobs – 7.7% and 5.3% - with NATSEM (2009) suggesting that women aged 35 to 44 this reflects a view that they can better balance work and family than if they have full-time work.

Thus labour force variability is not simply a matter that has implications for individual households, but it affects the way household networks operate. In the face of broad scale variable working hours across the whole labour force, parents who want to get their independently living offspring

together are up for a logistical nightmare<sup>14</sup>.

The emergence of 24-hour, seven-day-a-week global markets, both in production and consumption, more complex and more rapidly changing labour markets, and technological change have led to changes in the structuring of people’s daily timetables<sup>15</sup>. People’s labour and consumption patterns, including their meal patterns, can be spread over a greater part of the day and more significantly change from day to day. With flexi-time, “all time was theoretically of equal value [and] it was possible to move it around and exchange it at will”<sup>16</sup>. And this applies to the time devoted to culinary culture matters.

The temporal dimension to the flexible labour market then takes two forms: re-signing hours away from household, social and leisure activities to employment, and the need for complex scheduling to accommodate home, working life and personal development. Both aspects can contribute to a pervasive sense of being time-pressured, with a resulting need for greater ease in other aspects of everyday life at individual and household levels.

These time pressures are not confined to working parents. ‘Youth’ is a period of life that is associated by many with relatively more free time to spend to spend with friends than at any other point in the life course. Yet some dimensions of the desynchronisation of temporal schedules are felt most acutely by people in their late teens and twenties<sup>17</sup>. Legislative change has deregulated work hours and the once standard structuring of the work week has faded, particularly for young people, who are most likely to take jobs in the retail and hospitality sectors which increas-

<sup>14</sup> Banwell et al forthcoming

<sup>15</sup> Shove 2009, Symes 1999

<sup>16</sup> Davidson 1993, p. 150

<sup>17</sup> Woodman 2010

ingly operate 24 hours a day and 7 days a week, and in part-time and insecure work. Australia has the second highest casual employment labour force in the OECD.

There is an emerging cultural norm that “it has to be worth it” to come together socially because people are increasingly aware of the temporal and financial costs to committing to activities where they forego income generating possibilities. For young people who work as shelf-stackers in one of the two big supermarket chains, the choices are stark. Recently they were advised that rosters were to be discontinued, and as casual staff they are on daily call, via an SMS telling when to report for duty. Anecdotally we know of middle class parents who have asked their children to stop working under these conditions because they are willing and able to provide extra financial support to ensure that family times are somewhat protected from becoming ever more fractured and chaotic. Where very household dollar counts however, flexibilised working life conditions erode the capacity to organise social occasions including family meal times. This is a matter of gross social inequity.

These changes in the youth labour market have occurred concurrently with a large increase in participation in post-compulsory education<sup>18</sup>. Many young Australians need to coordinate ‘non-standard’ work hours (over which they often have little control) with the timetables set by educational institutions. Nearly seven per cent of women aged 15-24 work two part-time jobs, probably so that they can combine study and work that provides enough income to live on<sup>19</sup>. The increasingly fragmented and variable timetables that emerge from this are unlikely to align with those of their friends, and significant others more broadly, without active effort

from a number of parties to synchronise schedules. Shared time with significant others – for going out to a bar or restaurant, or preparing and eating meals, or for anything else, has shifted from being a taken for granted social convention to something that must be actively organised. As such relative control over time becomes a more important resource as well as a source of inequality. Some young people have greater resources to do so than others<sup>20</sup>.

In summary, the de-regulated economy fosters a greater spread in work-family life patterns than has ever existed. There are significant temporal extremes and a lot of variation in-between: low skilled, inflexible work (ie no time sovereignty: have to accept the most anti-social and variable rosters) sub-populations co-exist alongside over-worked, but with varying degrees of flexibility, sub-populations. There is too, as we have pointed out, greater unpredictability in work schedules<sup>21</sup>. Households can be considered to be moving at different temporal speeds, and may only come alongside one another as a nation for the ever diminishing list of national holiday festivals: Christmas, Easter, Anzac Day.

Endorsement of the transformation in temporal schedules by successive governments shows no recognition that people’s time matters.

### *Generational shifts in the culinary culture*

Greater variability in temporal structures shifts the synchronisation of timetables around meals from an institutional given towards a challenge demanding active efforts of coordination. While a degree of temporal co-ordination between individuals continues to emerge due to a shared socio-temporal order beyond how each

18 Furlong et al 2011

19 NATSEM 2009, p.14

20 Woodman 2010

21 Maher et al. 2008

person organises their life, co-presence now requires more deliberate planning and intervention by individuals to coordinate their lives with others<sup>22</sup>. This is well illustrated by the Weight of Modernity intergenerational study (Banwell et al. forthcoming).

A major feature of family dining for those who were children during the Depression and World War II was the predictability of meals. The evening meal was usually determined by the time at which the (male) breadwinner came home from work. Many men of this generation worked in blue collar, clerical and non-professional capacities and often finished quite early by current standards. The family meal consequently usually occurred at some time between 5 to 6.30 pm. There was usually only 1 breadwinner in the household at this time and even if there were others, there was not a lot of variation in the hours that people worked. One woman who was part of the Lucky Generation interviewed for the Weight of Modernity study remembered that the family meal was served exactly at 5 pm because that was when her father arrived home and he expected his meal to be ready.

*He'd been out working and he used to walk 5 mile to work, 5 mile back. And when he got home, he'd be hungry, but 5 o'clock was dinner.*

Because family meals occurred before 6.30 children, even when they were young, usually dined with the family and ate the same food as their parents and other attendant adults. One participant, who ate at 5 pm, commented that they often had a snack before bed because they were hungry again by then. Irrespective of the time of dinner it was set and children were expected to be ready for it. During this period children rarely had sporting or other activities that impinged on the timing of the family meal while women were

usually not employed in the paid workforce and were therefore free to prepare the meal at the allotted time. The predictability of meal times was mirrored in the predictability of what was consumed; meat and three veg followed by a pudding. On Sundays

*We'd have a weekly roast with three vegetables and a sweet...And that would usually be Sunday lunch. Sunday night it would be cold meat and salads and home-made scones just straight out of the oven.*

Davidson (1993) observes that "the inter-war years were the heyday of domestic punctuality" (p.138), in part as a way of restoring order after the WW2. 1948 saw the introduction of the 40 hour week, and efficiency was back on the agenda courtesy of WW 2 and numerous technologies with built-in clocks. Time wastage began to matter, and food waste continued to matter.

Australian meals in the pre- 1960s were plain, simple and limited in the range of foods on offer. Meals were highly ritualised, in the number of courses, the style of food, the behaviour of the diners with fathers sometimes dictating who could talk and what could be talked about. Furthermore, there were few alternatives on offer. Restaurants and cafes were uncommon in Australian cities and towns and people felt little need to eat outside the home unless they were travelling.

The post-war prosperity of the 1950s to 1980s heralded a proliferation of new food products supported by technological innovation, like canning, fridges and cars. However, according to our participants these changes had little immediate effect on family dining.

Jill, a 69 year old woman, recalled preparing meals at this time that were;

*Pretty much the same [as when she was growing up]. Grilled chops and veggies and then I would probably have a sweet*

*because it's like - the kids like and still like apple pie, apple sponge, stewed apples.*

As a teenager, Baby Boomer Julie reflects on new culinary influences and notes that her mother had joined the labour market.

*All these tastes were opened up to us. The butchers were ethnic and green grocers were from various ethnic cultures. .... My father and I really like very spicy foods so the butcher, who used to make his own small goods and stuff, he couldn't believe we were Australians because ... his sausages and things weren't hot enough. And my mum as one of her part-time jobs when I was at secondary school, she worked at the green grocers on Friday and Saturday. [The green grocer] was of Italian descent, and a neighbour. So, you know, there were different influences I guess on our life. It was no longer just, you know, good old Skips around you, Australians around ... I guess it still was fairly dominated by the meat and three veg, but my mother certainly got into ... more adventurous stuff.*

Some families began to stir-fry their vegetables, or cook them with Chinese style sauces, rather than boiling them. Around this period and continuing over the next few decades, more diverse vegetables (eg avocados, broccoli, eggplant, Asian greens) were incorporated into some families' diet and some families introduced wine with the family meal.

The 1970s influx of women into the paid work force had an impact on what the family ate and when they ate it. For example, the first thing that women did once they started working was to stop or reduce their production of home made puddings and desserts. Women now had less time overall and in addition they needed to schedule the time they committed to work to fit in with the rest of the family's activities. Mary from the Lucky Generation recalled

*Families either did without puddings or*

*women substituted commercially produced products for home made ones. Thus, commercial icecream, biscuits and cakes have grown in sales over the last 30 years of even though many families now say that they do not eat dessert. In other words, the formal final course of the family meal is no longer often eaten. Instead, families eat icecream or other sweets when they wish. Sweet snacks of all kinds are very widely available at supermarkets and elsewhere.*

By the 1980s, the labour market and the economy in general were de-regulated through a combination of government and industry actions. Flexi-time, longer shopping hours and daylight saving had all been introduced; and they ushered in 'personalised timetables', or a greater diversity of temporal scales and valuations: which as was noted "were no less exacting" than the more ritualised schedules<sup>23</sup>.

Men's working times were also changing with effects on the family meal. In this family, the father's shift work meant that the family no longer always ate together but in this case the result seems to have been positive. Michelle a baby boomer observed.

*My Dad was a shift-worker and when he was on afternoon shift, when my mother didn't have to please him, we would sometimes have things like chop suey or chilli con carne on the odd occasion, a very Australian version. It might have had a bit of garlic in it.*

Indeed, much of the predictability in family dining for the Lucky Generation appeared to derive from the patriarchal nature of family meals. As Lucky Generation Peggy (75) said

*My daughters are frightfully busy because they all work full time as well as raising families.*

Other Lucky Gen parents commented that the work that mothers used to do during

<sup>23</sup> Davidson 1993, p. 141

the week is now confined to weekends. Around this time, and probably associated with a growth in income due to Australia's increasing wealth and the benefits of a dual family incomes, people began to express pleasure in food, and take an interest in broadening their family cuisine. The number of places to dine out, including restaurants, cafes and fast food venues increased around this time.

Another noticeable difference was the loss of the predictable weekly food pattern. Talking about recent times, Leanne (aged 47) stated

*"You don't have potatoes with every meal!"*

The idea of a 'typical' meal was no longer considered relevant by Lynette (aged 51) who commented that

*"We don't have a typical night".*

Lynette again reflected:

*Eating out has become a solution to the difficulties of two people working ...*

As they grew up, the Gen Ys in particular found it increasingly difficult to join the evening family meal as other activities, such as sporting, social and work arrangements impinged upon their time. Work schedules for this generation in particular are very different from those of their parents when young. They have experienced an increase in non-standard work hours and they are more likely to be working while studying (Wyn and Woodman, 2007). Their parents too had to cope with increased *busyness*. Thus, family meals or 'sitting down to eat' according to Christopher, sometimes became expendable.

*Yeah. If I'm at work or if I'm organising stuff like the car or anything I usually just grab whatever I can eat while I'm driving or whatever yeah.*

Another fracturing force that undermined the predictability of family meals was that people's food tastes and preferences have

become more individualized. For example, several participants mentioned that they or family members had become vegetarian and so the notion that everyone in the family ate the same food began to change. Stephen, a Gen Y, explained how his mother coped with individual schedules and preferences.

*And depending on the day mum will usually ring me or [brother], my brother's a vegetarian so we just, he has to do his own. Usually mum will ring me and find out if I'm just home or if [other family members] come over I'll just cook and my mum usually just does her own thing. But if it's just us she'll usually just come home and cook something. Usually a phone call and its pre-organised whose going to be home and who is doing what.*

Due to business and conflicting timetables meal times have become "chaotic" in some households.

*Well we still try to achieve (sitting together). We try to know who's coming and whether partners are coming. And we try to time the meals so we can sit down together. But we don't get bent out of shape over that if that doesn't happen... But it doesn't matter if you are wanting to eat around 6.30 and one isn't here. We will keep some aside for him. That's the thing there can be anything from 3 of us to 6 or 7 of us. And thank god for SMS. About 5 pm [we'll ask] are you home for tea. Yes I'm bringing [friend] Ok we need enough for 5.*

As many Gen Y mothers were employed, men (fathers of Gen Y) took over some of the cooking, although they were often considered to be less skilful and more inclined to purchase pre-prepared food.

*He would do a couple of meals here and there, it was always really gross. [This was when your mum was working full-time?] Yeah, yeah. So probably we'd be more likely to buy the chicken from the supermarket or whatever and make up some-*

*thing, some sort of accompaniment with it, your coleslaw or whatever, and spag bol and that kind of stuff. So more stuff that could be frozen and brought out because of less time to do stuff. (Emma, aged 29)*

### ***From labour market-induced household dynamics to the societal culinary culture***

Maher et al. (2008) note that Australia “has no specified maximum working hours, with recent industrial changes focusing on temporal flexibility as the best framework for enabling family friendly workplaces” (p. 553). However, recent sociological work exploring time and everyday life highlights a potential impact of the institutional changes in the timetables and rhythms of people’s lives described above on their interactions with significant others<sup>24</sup>. Flexible working lives require flexible cultural lives, where households are freed from the discipline of previous routines and rituals: whether culinary, familial or friendship. One notable indicator of the relaxation in routines is the way in which 29 per cent of children reported not eating a main meal of the day with parents: making Australia rank 21<sup>st</sup> out of 27 OECD countries on this measure of family relationships<sup>25</sup>.

Whether the move to a less-family centred culinary culture is a health hazard is not known, and but it is possibly injurious to the capacity for a convivial society. For low and moderate income urban households in the US, working life pressures were found to influence food choices and family food roles in two directions. For some, work ‘spilled over’ into food choice strategies resulting in guilt and dissatisfaction while for others the strategies became a source of pride and satisfaction. What was shared though is the way ideals and values around food and health were traded

off against other values regarding family closeness and nurturing and personal achievement<sup>26</sup>. This is where the market of pre-prepared meals and convenience foods enters: healthy convenience for the family is a hallmark of so much fast food chain advertising<sup>27</sup>. These out-of-home prepared foods are where the health risks may be felt, as noted by the WHO (2003). However, as Schubert (2010) has noted these foods make enormous sense on so many other criteria: “In a period where time scarcity has become a symbol of modernity, the type of food that fits in with this lifestyle must be suitably ‘labour-lite’, high-tech, minimalistic and streamlined ... To not see population level changes in food habits at a time when food processing, family organisation and gender roles have all undergone profound change would be a curious outcome indeed”<sup>28</sup>. And we would add labour markets.

### ***Conclusion***

It is regularly said that governments should not intervene in culture because matters of taste, religion, everyday values are private matters. In contrast, Australians are generally content for governments to intercede in the economy. However, the extent to which the economy and culture are intertwined is often overlooked; and governments cannot avoid intervening in culture when they introduce labour market, urban planning and social policies.

Time pressure is a major reason for being unable to exercise enough or prepare healthy food<sup>29</sup>. As in other countries, the family valuing of convenient solutions whether involving car use or industrially prepared meals, is a cultural solution

26 Devine et al. 2003

27 Dixon 2002

28 pp.35-37

29 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006

24 Southerton 2009, Woodman 2010

25 The Allen Consulting Group 2008

to the problem of ‘earning a livelihood’, or income. Using these commodities to re-order time allocations is a rational response to high levels of variation and uncertainty endemic to contemporary labour markets. New forms of daily life are best understood as an adaptation to economic deregulation. They help to resolve tensions in managing working-family life dynamics and being a modern parent, consumer and citizen. Constructing a healthy and convivial society competes for temporal resources with the configuration of Australia’s labour market. To the newly constituted National Food Policy Working Group – one that is charged by government with adopting a paddock to plate approach - we urge consideration of the interconnections between the plate, labour market and urban planning policies.

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## SESSION 1.3

# Regulate or Educate: addressing obesity through food choices on New Zealand school premises

Nancy J. Pollock

**C**astronomy in present times presents consumers with many choices. For young people, students in schools, that diversity of foods, cooking styles and means of access presents dilemmas. Where should they draw guidance – from family, from peers, from the school, or from the media? Many of their choices are culturally embedded, as for religious abstentions, or vegetarians who may wish to avoid dairy as well as meat. New Zealand governments (and others, i.e. Canada) have expressed concern at what they consider excessive indulgence<sup>1</sup>. They take measures of obesity as indicators of health risks. This paper examines how those concerns are being addressed, and their likely success.

A war on obesity in school age young people is being fought as part of a world-wide ‘epidemic of obesity’<sup>2</sup>. School canteen food has become a target for politicians, on the grounds that such a health issue for future generations needs to be addressed. NZ Ministries of Education and of Health have compiled a joint policy to combat obesity by underlining ‘healthy eating’<sup>3</sup>. But teachers object to taking on the ad-

ditional task of Food Police, and parents object to the reduced food choices available to young people in school canteens. Young people want to be able to choose. Regulate or Educate; if the latter, who is best able to deliver the message?

Food intake and obesity have become prominently linked in current times for their effects on health being experienced world wide and on the economy. Egger and Swinburn (2010) urge nation states to curb indulgence in food as the world has surpassed its ability to feed everyone, so the gap between those who can access food readily, and those who cannot is widening rapidly (see also Sachs 2007). These authors suggest that some intervention is necessary, and urgent.

Educating young people about the ‘best’ food choices is one approach to addressing concerns about obesity, as supported by liberal economists. Alternatively, regulating food consumption by central laws and guidelines is supported by structuralists. The law can be used as a tool for preventing chronic diseases, as reviewed in an article Law and the Prevention and control of obesity. Whether parents or schools are the best educators, or need to be guided by laws and guidelines is also debated. As 30 per cent of total energy intake is consumed at school, improved nutrition in schools is needed<sup>4</sup> Many questions have been posed, but few answers, as yet.

Young people, students, have become the focal point of these discussions. Diversity of foodstuffs as well as diverse ways of presenting those foods challenges consumers young and old to make the best choices. The ‘best’ choices have become dominated by the ‘healthy option’, that is guidelines to reduce overweight and obesity. Students, schools and parents have been target audiences.

In New Zealand the debate came to promi-

<sup>1</sup> Ryall 2009

<sup>2</sup> Utter and Scragg 2009)

<sup>3</sup> NZ Dept. of Health 2003

<sup>4</sup> Utter et al. 2007

nence a decade ago. Initiatives such as the 1996 Food and Nutrition guidelines for healthy children, aged 2-12 years, and the 1998 Food and Nutrition guidelines for healthy adolescents did not appear to be achieving the expected goals. The 2003 key results of the Ministry of Health survey of child nutrition, NZ Food, NZ Children, revealed that 10 per cent of young people were recorded as obese, and a further 14 per cent were considered overweight<sup>5</sup>. A follow up survey (2006-7) reported that 8 per cent of children were obese, and 21 per cent overweight. The health concerns were not being addressed. Thus a School Food and Beverage Policy was introduced, with a special classification system for years 1-13. Martin Johnston (2009) summarized the political argument as The Price of Free Choice in which the new Minister of Health took 10 per cent off anti-obesity funding, recommending that the state should "take its nose out of school lunches."

Since around 62 per cent of young people buy food at school, and that may make up half or more of their daily food intake, schools were considered the appropriate target for Healthy eating for obesity prevention<sup>6</sup>.

Health concerns, particularly obesity, have thus dominated the debate about the role of schools or parents, or students themselves to determine appropriate foods to be consumed in schools (primary and secondary). If they are to be regulated, then what foods are approved, and which ones are 'banned'? The criteria used place heavy emphasis on nutritional content. They overlook the wider social aspects of obesity<sup>7</sup>. Food selection is based upon multiple issues, of which 'health' is only one.

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5 Taylor 2007

6 Walton et al. 2010

7 Pollock 1995

In our study of household decision making in the Wellington region in 1996 (as part of a Social Welfare Poverty Study) we sought the reasoning behind the items our interviewees had put in their trolleys at the supermarket when they had only \$100 per week to spend on food. Their households consisted of one or two adults with two or more young people. We found that the shoppers based their decisions on a combination of four factors:

- time it would take to prepare that food when young people came home from school hungry, and adults were headed off to a second job;
- taste of each food, according to family experience; foods families do not like are a waste of money, even though they may be good foods, and they may be cheap that week.
- 'healthy' foods such as vegetables, fruits and meats other than mince are expensive; so kept to a minimum if doubtful whether they will be eaten;
- Cost was an overall limitation. \$100 for a week, with nothing left over in the frig and cupboard from the week before<sup>8</sup>.

Filling foods, such as bread and potatoes were paramount especially for households with teenage boys. Healthy foods referred mainly to fruit and vegetables, but these were too expensive; meat, mainly mince became boring, cheese is expensive, and fish out of sight!. More expensive again was putting the 'right' foods in a student's school lunch box, where that was a choice – again the student was likely to 'waste' unacceptable foods. Decisions about how to make the best use of a limited purse to feed their families were extremely difficult for these shoppers each week of the year.

How can these households educate young people when they have so few options. School tuck shops may offer variety, but at

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8 Pollock and Dixon 1996

a price; \$10 per day for each school child is not feasible for families with several children and low income. Low decile schools are attempting to address this problem by offering subsidised breakfasts and school lunches, but the Ministry of Education has withdrawn support for such subsidies, so school boards have to find their own funding<sup>9</sup>.

Buying food for the household must somehow accommodate all taste preferences. Young people develop their own preferences, based on taste, what is ‘cool’ with mates, and other factors, including the media. A taste for foods containing fat, salt and sugar has become prevalent worldwide<sup>10</sup>. In New Zealand pies, sausage rolls, chips, donuts, lollies and soft drinks are the favourites<sup>11</sup>.

Obesity is not a major concern for the lay person, though ‘healthy’ may be. Yet the nutritional value of foods has become the focus of this debate about school canteen foods and obesity. It is the sole criterion on which the messages to schools and parents are being promulgated. It ignores the other concerns that parents use as their guidelines for household food decisions. For those with only \$100 per week to spend on food, their main concern is that their purchases address hunger, quickly, tastily, and as healthily as possible.

### ***Educate***

Young people learn food preferences in the home, as well as from TV and advertisements, and also from their mates. They tend not to read the nutrition literature. Thus learning to like certain tastes and dislike others is dependent on early exposure

to foods offered at home<sup>12</sup>.

Household shopping decisions are thus an influential factor on foods young people experience at home. They determine what a household may share from the frig, the pantry, or takeaways,. They influence tastes, and later serve as an indication of what money will buy. What young people eat at home as a result of those purchasing decisions contributes to their education about “Healthy eating”. Young people learn pragmatically from their families about the careful decisions juggled to put food on the table. Broccoli may be healthy, but if it takes too long to prepare, is not to everyone’s taste, and takes too much from the weekly budget, then it is not a good purchase. “Why can’t we just have chips” has to be answered in all its complexity. Healthy eating is not often the priority. Taste is.

Taste is a significant factor in food choices throughout life, and learned at an early age. Family settings are one strong guide to establishing ‘good’ tastes and food habits. Taste is a key element in the eating habits of those appearing on TV programmes on obesity (such as eating multiple McDonalds); these are shared family traits; these become shared family tastes. The family setting has a strong influence on how fatty, sweet and salty foods have become foods of choice. They are considered quick to prepare, fill hungry young people, and above all are tasty. They are rarely linked to body image, i.e. seen as ‘fattening foods’<sup>13</sup>.

Those tastes are carried into the school environment, where, in NZ, pies, donuts, together with sodas have become the best selling foods in school canteens. They could be places where new tastes are learned, as Jamie Oliver’s projects in British and American schools have attempted

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9 Dom Post June 13, 2011

10 Swinburn Radio New Zealand interview, February 2011

11 Utter et al. 2007

12 Johnston, NZ Herald 2009

13 Taylor 2007

to introduce. But those projects have struggled to change taste habits, food is wasted, and parents complain that their children are not being allowed to eat what they like, and are hungry.

Schools involvement in 'healthy eating' has emerged in the new millennium as the way to address the obesity concern (Walton et al.2010). Healthy choices are billed as the major guideline – Pick the Tick indicates foods considered healthy by the National Heart Foundation; they recommend five 'best foods': fruit and vegetables, lean meat, low fat milk, use only margarine and healthy oils, and reduce salt. They direct their Healthy eating message toward: lower levels of intake of energy, fat, saturated and transsaturated fat, sugar and salt, with more healthy foods higher in calcium and fibre. But those are not criteria high on the list for young people choosing something to buy at the school canteen. The language does not get the message of 'healthy eating' across (even with food labeling, and Red Ticks). The message fails to consider factors of taste and cost, which are the 'real' decision makers.

Education about such nutrition terms is missing in schools. Former domestic science classes taught young women (initially) how to prepare, cook and present 'nice' food. Today's emphasis on health and obesity needs to be more appealing, and in language that is readily understood. Whether scones etc. would be judged healthy by today's criteria is doubtful. Young people learn their food habits from their peers, from the media, as well as in the household. Matching those sources with school learning could be more productive in meeting formal education guidelines, ie the NAGs.

Beyond the home as a site of Educating choices, TV is the site of much learning about the world, including food. Its influences on food choices have not been fully and overtly recognized in this debate

on healthy foods to reduce obesity. Suggestions such as that by the Australian Government to banish Vegemite from the supermarket shelves because of its high salt content overlooks the factor of taste<sup>14</sup>. Banning foods, and outlawing advertisements of unhealthy foods only draws the ire of the food industry, and does nothing to educate young people about healthy food.

Food as entertainment has become the new medium to tempt those watching with new food combinations, new tastes, and new ways of presenting food. It is taking up ever increasing space in TV watching time. Australia has taken Master Chef to young people with its competitive weekly show, Junior Master Chef. While the introduction of new foods via advertising on TV may make them appear mouth watering, and thus desirable and buyable, TV is also 'educating' peoples' tastes through all the food programmes. The media world is playing an active role in educating consumers' tastes. Such media exposure is more likely to penetrate, and be influential than nutrition courses in which food is couched in obscure scientific terms<sup>15</sup>. A nicely presented platter of fish on couscous with salad and herb dressing might be easier to make at home than many young people had considered before. And if those young people can do it, then others can too. Cost of ingredients, and barriers such as the taste of fish or greens, and the time available have to be overcome.

Thus I welcome the Junior Master Chef programmes (though they have their detractors) for highlighting the skills young people can bring to new food combinations, while also arousing the "I could do that too" response. When young people engage actively in understanding food and

14 NZ Herald Feb 2009

15 Pollock 2011

make it appealing to their peers, then new advances will ensue.

Changing tastes, and linking foods to obesity is a major social concern, particularly where the costs of obesity later in life are calculated (Egger & Swinburn 2010). Health complications such as diabetes and the waste of food resources have to be addressed urgently. Unhealthy food choices are considered costly by government officials, while households struggle to make enough food available to assuage the hunger of teenagers, and keep kids satisfied.

What are the best media to *educate* to turn the tide on obesity, or must we rely on *regulations* from the administration?

### **Regulate**

Government intervention in a health concern, such as obesity, has precedence with successful regulation in other ‘personal health behaviours’, such as drugs, smoking, family planning, and drink driving. But as Egger and Swinburn point out these regulations intervened between commercial and personal interests. They cite a member of the Australian ‘Weighing it Up Committee’ as observing that while the ‘obesogenic’ environment argument had merit, this could not be seriously considered by government because it would be against the interests of parliamentary committee members with farmers among their constituents”. Intruding in personal eating habits, or ‘government’s involvement in the kitchen’ is considered a no-go area for those with self-interests<sup>16</sup>. These authors argue there is a need for an economic system that considers human health more seriously, as well as climate change<sup>17</sup>. Policy guidelines for reducing levels of obesity in students can provide one such step towards better health, and reduced health costs.

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16 Egger and Swinburn 2010:97

17 p.106

Government policies, guidelines and regulations have been introduced around the world to address concerns about obesity in school age students. Banning unhealthy foods from school vending machines, as proposed by the Rudd government<sup>18</sup>, or banning homemade lunches in Chicago schools because parents are ‘nutritionally challenged’ are two tools. In Fiji concern over obesity in children forms the basis of a new public health initiative<sup>19</sup>. In an unusual move Malaysia education authorities proposed to introduce an overweight/obesity factor to each child’s report card. In Ontario, Canada, a school food and beverage policy has been developed on the basis of research in collaboration between the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the food industry. In New Zealand the National Heart Foundation has introduced a ‘Healthy Heart Award’ to schools in addition to their ongoing ‘Pick the Tick’ for a healthy heart campaign – a guideline, but not a regulation.

Some of these programmes around the world are more stringent than others. Regulation is being introduced either in the form of guidelines, or recommended policies to School Boards, taxation, or media advertising re healthy options. In New Zealand the Healthy Eating, Healthy Action programme (2003), known widely as HeHa, supported by Health authorities has had considerable influence on communities across New Zealand. Local HeHa events run annually to promote health products and programmes have been very well attended, and popular; health products are on sale as are disability aids, and blood pressure checks are free<sup>20</sup>. I have not yet seen any evaluations of the effectiveness of such community outreach programmes. In 2009 the new

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18 NZ Herald 2011

19 Snowdon on RNZI 20/6/11)

20 e.g. Kapiti Coast March 2011

government reduced funding for anti-obesity programmes, with no grounds cited except cost saving, and “to rid New Zealand of “nanny state”<sup>21</sup>. Public health officials were aghast at National dismantling anti-obesity policies<sup>22</sup>. Communities have continued with this highly valued programmes, funding them from local sources.

The New Zealand Healthy Eating, Healthy Activity (2003), also supported a range of school activities, including free fruit in low-decile primary schools, school food gardens; schools such as one in Manukau, and another in Raumati South integrated such food gardens into their total curriculum, with essays about foods, mathematical and economics classes assessing the value of produce etc. The principal of a Manukau primary school proudly presented a video of his school’s HeHa programme to an Obesity symposium in Wellington<sup>23</sup>. But they now must struggle to find funding to keep such initiatives going.

If regulations are to become acceptable to guide public awareness of obesity issues, they must not become subject to political whims. The public is eager for information and HeHa has been a source of dissemination to wide audiences across communities. As entertainment, participation and information sharing such programmes are more effective than written material. Parents and children experience and share messages that lead to discussion of ways to activate them in their particular household. There must be consistency if the public is to learn and act on the messages that assist with improving knowledge about how to achieve health standards.

A similar political turn around affected the message to school boards about

healthy foods offered in canteens and tuck-shops. As a result of the Children’s Nutrition survey in 2003 that revealed increasing levels of obesity and overweight in school students, the Labour government introduced a Healthy schools programme . Following widespread discussion in the media and in private about ways to reduce obesity in young people, as highlighted in the 2002 Nutrition Survey, the Education Department advised all school boards, which are autonomous, of a new Guideline. Clause 5 was added to the National (Schools) Administration Guidelines (NAGs) in order to assist schools to implement new school canteen policies :

*A Board of [school] Trustees is required to provide a safe physical and emotional environment to promote healthy food and nutrition for all students. They are required to sell ONLY healthy food and beverages on school premises.*

‘Healthy food and beverages’ were not spelled out, but it was generally accepted that pies, donuts and soft drinks were to be excluded, to be replaced with apples, carrot sticks and bottles of water. Even though the ‘required’ feature was not a regulation it provided a guideline for those who negotiated with the providers of school canteens. There was vocal opposition from some suppliers, while many parents expressed their approval of the new ‘requirement’.

But this new clause in the NAGs was overturned just two years later by the incoming National government. In 2009 the clause was altered very slightly – the word ONLY was taken out, so that ‘healthy food’ was left to the discretion of those running the school canteen. Market forces and free choice were to prevail. And teachers felt that they were being given an additional task to monitor their classes lunch time activities, that is to become ‘food police’.

The new clause 5 of the National Adminis-

<sup>21</sup> Kate Wilkinson, Food Safety minister 2009

<sup>22</sup> Johnston 2009

<sup>23</sup> 2010 NJP fieldnotes

tration Guidelines (2009) read:

*A Board of School Trustees is also required to: a) provide a safe physical and emotional environment for students; b) to promote healthy food and nutrition for all students. c) comply in full with any legislation currently in force or that may be developed to ensure the safety of students and employees.*

(Ministry of Education Circular 2009/12).

A web response to this slight change in the wording of the NAGs headlined “Pies are back” reflecting the concern about such a turn around, and alerted authorities to school canteen/tuck shop food as a political issue. Taken together with reduced funding for anti-obesity activities this was considered a backward step in reducing increases in obesity and overweight in school students.

New Zealand has been both following and leading the rest of the world in attempts to control obesity by policies for and against regulating access to food in schools. New Zealand was considered to be leading the way “by providing clear rules on what foods were acceptable and appropriate for young people to eat at school” (Utter and Scragg 2009:123). These authors argue that regulation is necessary because ‘children do not always have maturity to make the healthiest food choices’. So by including guidelines in the National Administration Guidelines, parents are assured their children have healthy food choices at school. These authors concluded that having such guidelines in schools encouraged healthy eating that improved children’s and adolescent’s nutrition in New Zealand.

Similarly in Australia, the Rudd government proposed limiting the fat, sugar and salt content of food and drinks, and also outlawing advertisements of unhealthy foods, and banning them from school vending machines. (reported in NZ Herald April 27, 2011). Plans to ban such a popular product as ‘Vegemite’ met with strident

criticisms.

Controlling obesity levels through such policies appears to address the issue of ‘good nutrition’. But the language of nutrition is too obscure, and thus messages linking pies with the dangers of fatty foods (whether saturated or unsaturated) as precursors to obesity are not readily acceptable (Pollock, *The Language of Food* (in press)). The esoteric terms fail to strike the right chord that will change attitudes to such foods. Tastes are more appealing than carbohydrates and fats. ‘Healthy foods’ is a better message, but what is deemed healthy needs further clarification in social as well as medical/chemical terms.

Policies from government must be consistent; changes in such a crucial area as a population’s health should be apolitical, so that messages can be built on, not flip-flopped every time the government changes.

But they fail to address other issues that underlie acceptance of the concerns about obesity. Our food resources are being stretched as our food habits become more diverse, and nations are urged to use their skills and land to develop new foods<sup>24</sup>. As Orbach (2009) has indicated in her considerations about ‘the Perfectible Body’ the body is a canvas to be fixed, remade and enhanced in the process of ‘looking good, feeling good’. Food appeal contributes to that process. Tastes are challenged along a continuum, both tastes for foods, and tastes for body images. Many influences include social and cultural designations. Biology is no longer destiny, and is subject to ‘shaping’ by societal norms and personal preferences. Food choices contribute, but regulating bodies intrude on personal freedoms.

Regulations create dilemmas when seen as impositions on those personal choices. Examples from around the world are

<sup>24</sup> Egger and Swinburn 2011

available. In Hamilton, West Virginia, the least healthy state in the US, Jamie Oliver's attempt to introduce a Food Revolution, that would educate people about the virtues of fresh food and vegetables was soundly rebuffed by the local radio station telling him to take his 'busybody act' elsewhere. In Chicago it was proposed to ban homemade lunches for children, while in Malaysia government proposed that each student's weight and BMI was to appear on their report card. All these pronouncements met with strong community reactions.

The need to address obesity as a worldwide phenomenon is seen as an excessive use of natural resources that is resulting in harmful health concerns, i.e. Planet Obesity. We have exceeded the point of benefit, the sweet spot as they call it, and must address obesity within a total framework of economics, ecological resources, and health parameters. Some form of restraint is necessary if we are to reduce the levels of obesity<sup>25</sup>. School children are currently on a dangerous path to ill health in later life.

Foods being targeted in New Zealand and Australia as obesogenic include pies, chips, cakes, donuts and soft drinks, since they are considered to be high in fat, sugar and salt, and thus precursors to heart disease, diabetes etc. in later life. That is they are deemed unhealthy. The aim is to make healthy food choices accessible and thus to assist learning processes and improve child and adolescent nutrition in New Zealand. So health and agencies advise that regulation of food sold in schools is necessary.

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25 Egger and Swinburn 2011

## **Conclusions**

Managing food sold in schools in order to try to stem the tide of obesity as it sweeps the world is currently being addressed by both legislation and education. In New Zealand the Ministry of Education has provided a joint guideline with the Ministry of Health to stress that food sold in school canteens should be 'healthy'. That leaves the determination of healthy food to be addressed as part of any education system, whether the home, the media, or schools.

Already school food supplies have become a political football in New Zealand as the Ministry of Education guidelines have deleted the small but significant word 'only'. In 2011 school boards are advised that they are "required to sell healthy food and beverages" leaving open the determination of what is deemed 'healthy food' and the possibility that other foods can also be sold., ie chips.

This issue of healthy food being sold in schools places four groups in contest for determination of what they consider healthy foods. The Ministries, Boards of Trustees of schools(as independent authorities), student customers, and parents all have their concerns about how much control, and by whom, should be exerted over what students eat for lunch, and the expected obesity outcomes. In addition commercial providers of foods sold in schools are caught up in this complex issue. And teachers do not want to add 'food police' to their responsibilities.

If obesity is to be addressed in young people, then a combination of both education and regulation is necessary. 'Education' must clarify healthy foods in both social and nutritional terms. Affordability is a key means of access, especially when fruit and vegetables are expensive – what is good value for money? Taste is a key factor, thus learning about healthy foods must address the attraction of the taste of

foods such as pies, chips, donuts and soft drinks; fat, salt and sugar are all hidden in the processed foods that students can buy for their lunch. Today's foods are complex, i.e. The pie, so the main appeal is its taste, not necessarily its components, such as meat, pastry etc.; and it is often cheap.

Learning how to choose foods can begin in school. When those choices are considered in programmes such as New Zealand's Healthy Eating, Healthy Action awareness and support extends beyond the school, out into the community. Thus if we are to address obesity across the community, a wide approach that is non-political, stable, consistent and appealing must begin in schools.

Educating tastes, and thus food choices necessitates some guidelines. Selecting foods is a daily activity, established early in life, so if the obesity concern is to be addressed it is a long-term task which must draw the attention of all sectors of the community/nation. The media, in all its diversity, is a powerful modern channel for sharing information that can clarify what is healthy food across the generations. But there needs to be one message in clear language. Constraints and restraints on body size involve the mind, as well as the mouth. Learning healthy choices starts very early in life.

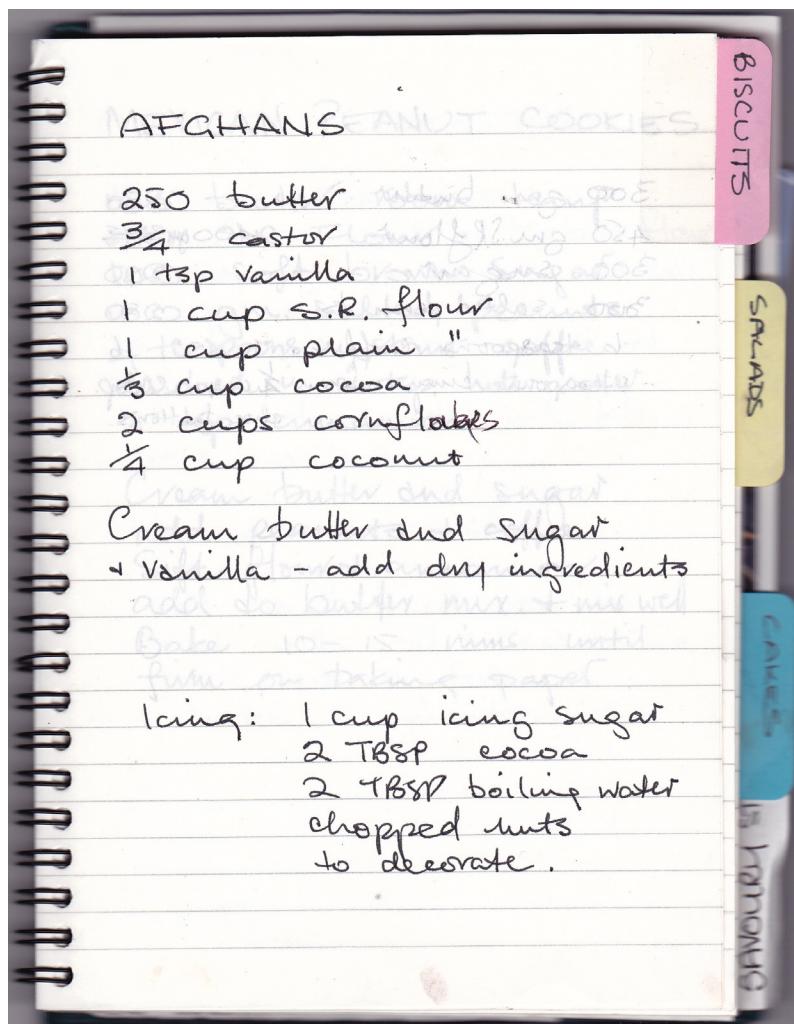
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## MORNING TEA

The traditional Symposium morning tea provided a tempting array of delicacies baked by symposiasts.

Sadly we collected only one recipe – Jeanette Fry's great afghans.



## MORNING TEA



Ian Bersten's showbags intrigued food writers Sophie Zalokar and Carla Ratcliff (R) as Paul and Beverley Sprague look on



Alex Gregori, Marion Grasby and Adam Liaw investigate their surprise 'teabags'



Morning tea with a little winter sunshine and a lot of warming treats to share



Ian Hemphill, Helen Hughes and Elizabeth Love among those enjoying morning tea in the winter sunshine



Bernadette Hince talks tea with Ian Bersten and Jeanette Fry (L)



Marion Maddox with Christian Reynolds and Anne Crossley



Symposiasts relaxing in the Senate courtyard include Colin Bannerman, Diana Noyce and Lilian Alden (L) and standing behind, Jeanette Fry with Ross and Maria Kelly



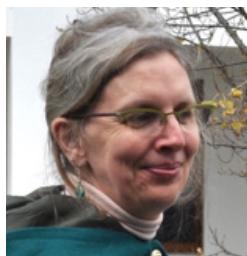
Ian Bersten making tea for the crowd, explains his unique teamaker to Margaret Emery

## SESSION 2

### Revolutionaries

Is there a role for revolutionary ideas or is zeal dangerous to the sound and strong gastronomic body politic? Do we need real revolutionaries to lead us to a republic of taste instead of food critics dispensing toques and crosses?

Papers around this theme were given by **Marion Maddox, Staci Crutchfield and Colin Bannerman** and in the chair for this Session was Marion Halligan.



## SESSION 2.1

# Convivial nation: towards a political gastronomy

**Marion Maddox**

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Only the Abstract was available for inclusion in these Proceedings.*

### *Abstract*

Australia proudly adopted multiculturalism as official policy in 1973. It was an unapologetic Australian response to diversity. Those seeking a shorthand for Australia's rich cultural variety often resorted to the riot of flavours to be found at any school fete, council street fair or community bring-a-plate. The Third symposium of Australian Gastronomy in Melbourne in 1987 was titled, 'A multiculinary society'.

Multicultural policy was initiated by the flamboyant Immigration Minister, Al Grassby 1975, Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser added the title 'Ethnic Affairs' to the Immigration portfolio. In 1990, the fourth Hawke ministry for the first time gave 'Multicultural Affairs' its own job title, with responsibilities allocated within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Since then, only two ministries have overlooked Multicultural Affairs as a portfolio responsibility. The exceptions were the last Howard front bench, and—after Rudd restored the portfolio under Laurie Ferguson, albeit only at Parliamentary Secretary level—the Gillard government, until she restored the Parliamentary Secretary position in February 2011.

The shaky stocks of multiculturalism in Australian domestic policy paralleled a loss of confidence in how we live together, revealed through such cracks as the Hanson

phenomenon ('I believe we are in danger of being swamped by Asians'), the Tampa affair ('We decide who comes here, and the circumstances in which they come') and the Cronulla riots.

Can a gastronomic understanding help us regain a durable and robust vision of national togetherness?

## SESSION 2.2

### The Bitter Taste of Gastronomy

**Staci Crutchfield**

**C**ood Morning, I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to speak to you today. It is a great honour for me to return to Canberra, the city in which I had my first contact with the Symposium of Gastronomy back in the mid -1990s and the city where my professional culinary career began.

At that time I had been working fulltime in the hospitality industry for about five years and had just made my first attempt at the recently introduced skills recognition program, having moved here to study a Bachelor of Arts Asian Studies at the Australian National University. I was told of a conference where people like Marion Halligan, Gay Bilson and Yanni Kyritsis would be gathering to discuss and partake in all things gastronomic. I toyed with the idea of attending; however the cost, a busy work schedule, saving to travel to Europe and active social life saw me deciding against it. Returning from overseas to work in Wollongong, Sydney, the Northern Territory and Queensland I heard murmurings over the years that these great occasions of feasting and conversation continued and was very pleased to be able to attend the 16<sup>th</sup> Symposium in the Hunter Valley.

At that time I was working as a chef in the mining industry having gone back onto the tools after a number of years in combined management/chef roles and had hopes this would allow me the economic freedom to explore options such as further study and alternate career prospects.

As a casual worker, having resigned my permanent position in October 2008, in an industry feeling the brunt of the financial crisis, tertiary fees were not an option and I decided to take up the offer of an assignment as an Australian Business Volunteer in Port Moresby Papua New Guinea with a privately owned restaurant and catering company. Returning to Australia in June 2009 I was pleased to find work in the mines was back on and I was earning again, casual stints, supplemented by occasional event and festival work.

In March 2010, through circumstances I have yet to comprehend I became unemployed. Stranded in a financial wasteland and estranged from the vocational and recreational pursuits which had sustained me through years of hard yakka labours of love, I was confronted with the loss of autonomy brought about by my own diminished food supply and increasing frustrations with systems of governance. Somehow the traditional support agencies were suddenly incommunicado and those I had access to, advised me to dumb down my work history, skill base and aspirations while exaggerating any possible grounds for eligibility for special needs as the best way to proceed.

I imposed a culinary work ban on myself. As the aromatic wafts of hope dissipated, the rose coloured glasses shattered and the hands once supple from gloves of salads dressed in oil became cramped with rage I was left with an abundance of time..... time in which to reflect on the bitter taste of gastronomy.

These are some of the concerns I have for the industry.

#### ***'Waitresses aren't paid to think!'***

This was the response from a 16 year old apprentice in the fine dining restaurant of University House where I worked part time as a 19 year old student, when I gave

an opinion regarding how customers might respond to a particular dish about to be served.

### *So -what is the relationship between financial and artisanal suffrage?*

The relationship between financial and artisanal suffrage is one which is often played out in the hospitality world with little positive return for the practitioners of the culinary arts. The notion that a skill which comes naturally to a person should be of a lesser value and given more freely is one which is often used to reinforce a lower price point of exchange. Even in a time of increased willingness to pay for premium ingredients in expensively decked out restaurants, little consideration is given to whether the remuneration of the workers is commensurate with the working conditions or level of skill expected and hopefully being developed. As many in the fine arts community have long been aware, regardless of the years spent crafting inspiration and technique into an individual style or seminal body of work there is no price point differentiator quite like a juicy tale of suffering, intrigue, physical frailty, mental anguish, scandal or grief<sup>1</sup>.

While we are yet to see the impact molecular gastronomy may have on the consumer's access to the signature dishes of revered chefs post mortem, cryogenic restaurants may have the means by which a brand name chef can value add in perpetuity. Unfortunately with the current environment in which our future culinary leaders are expected to develop, the emphasis is heavy on suffering and light on financial or artistic fulfilment. The workforce is still perceived to have a low skill base comprised of uneducated, unmotivated, untrained, & unproductive employees – hardly surprising given the reality of the low pay, low prestige, and

low dignity, no benefit no future nature of the industry<sup>2</sup>. Occupational Health and Safety studies characterise the internal workplace dynamic as being one with a high risk of under staffing human resource issues such as bullying, intimidation, social isolation, attacks on credibility, discrimination against gender and cultural or socio-minority groups, and overzealous micromanagement of duties<sup>3</sup>.

These standard operating procedures are accepted as part of the nature of the business and are further exacerbated by the extreme working conditions with combative, aggressive behaviour as the established model for workplace conduct.

### *Then we have our clientele.*

Occasionally motivated to leave the comfort of the wide screen gastro-educational virtual kitchen, Norm has been seen foraging for blue sebagos at growers markets around the country to turn into New York chips with sweet chilli aioli - the couch snack of choice for those watching *Come Bitch with Me*. I'm not sure how many of you are familiar with this show; it's the one that teaches how to be the least gracious host and most obnoxious guest at the same time. I have yet to see the Australian incantation of this program but I am sure it's a corker.

Yes, all it took was access to a lifestyle channel and a series of weekend intensives for the Australian dining public to be overrun by merry bands of critics armed with culinary jargon and superficial technical knowledge to barter down the patience of even the most seasoned service industry professional. This is the hummus in which Australia's fifth largest growth industry is expected to nourish 7.2% of the workforce earning an average weekly wage of \$475.60. This wage is a quarter of that

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1 Oughton, 2007

2 Baum, 2007

3 Bentley, 2009

being earned by those in the fourth largest growth industry – mining and construction<sup>4</sup>. This is a workforce whose primary descriptive is precarious by virtue of the expected tenure and terms of employment<sup>5</sup>.

The toxic reality of the social distance between server and recipient needs to be redressed.

Sacrifice, blood, sweat, tears and toil should not continue to be used as a flavour enhancer.

### *'Why don't you get a real job?'*

This has been asked of me many times by friends, co-workers and employers alike.

### *So - when will there be greater recognition of the culinary arts in the workplace, than in the theatre of taste?*

The recent explosion of interest in the culinary arts albeit through the glare of a camera and a gush of self-promoting product placement has caused me to wonder when there will be greater recognition of the culinary arts in the workplace than in the theatre of taste. I am concerned feel-good food fetishism is usurping the need for attention to be paid to the long standing industry shortfalls in terms of worker's rights and that equity and equality are becoming truly rare ingredients in the workplace.

I would suggest for the wider public, our perceived culinary sophistication is illusionary. Australia is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> out of the 27 OECD countries for time spent at a shared dining table<sup>6</sup>. In a short space of time many of the ground breaking innovative ideas behind such programs as the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden

Project and Alice Waters Chez Panisse restaurant in the United States, have been misappropriated.

We are now faced with prepubescent foodie prima-donnas à la Jean Benet, competing in a kitchen stadium before they are tall enough to wash dishes at a standard kitchen sink, with new age ma and pa kettles barking orders from the sidelines while they make passes at their non-significant others.

There is little reference to the hospitality industry workforce as one which requires staff to be loyal, flexible, tolerant, amiable and responsible with high levels of emotional intelligence. Staff have traditionally been required to have the ability to work in high pressure situations, be quick thinking problem solvers with advanced communication skills and a certain degree of cultural cachet<sup>7</sup>. Emotional and aesthetic knowledge are expected to be displayed by being able to hold informed conversations regarding politics, music, and sport often with an international perspective, which presupposes a certain degree of cultural exposure and a commitment to continued self-education.

In a recent study the cognitive interactive and motor skills required to work in the accommodation, café and restaurant services sectors were ranked highest amongst the five greatest growth industries and only slightly below those required by the top professional industries sector<sup>8</sup>. More than seven million of Australia's population are functionally illiterate<sup>9</sup>. This is of even greater concern when we consider that 73% of those employed, have levels of literacy and numeracy which prevent them from completing TAFE courses in areas where vocational education and training would traditionally be the means

4 ABS, 2010

5 Mayhew, 2005

6 SMH, 2011

7 Raybould, 2006

8 Lowry, 2008

9 ABS, Numeracy & Literacy Survey, 2006

to develop skills for workplace and career advancement<sup>10</sup>.

How is a growth industry expected to allow for these skill needs with low levels of workplace investment in training? A non-ascending pay scale, the failure to adopt formalised good practices in human resource management and business development and the lack of significant trade union presence will continue to drain the enthusiasm of even the most committed workers.

The demise of labour laws which no longer have employee protection at their core, deregulation of Australian workplace in 1980's followed by the shift in emphasis of regulatory bodies to corporate and employers interest from the mid 1990's to 2000's has seen further alienation of worker's rights<sup>11</sup>. This is particularly so in what have proven to be the expanding industries, the ones which had the potential to benefit the domestic market socially and economically. Instead with the added impact of American competitive market management style we have seen the situation worsened through the overall loss in national productivity and heightened financial squeeze as the corporate and financial sector protect their vested interests and profit margins<sup>12</sup>. The public have been distracted by the veneer of optimism presented by the ephemeral resources boom and encouraged by token increases in wage packets unfettered by petty concerns such as Consumer Price Index or Gross Domestic Product.

Australian consumers now able to travel, shop, and info surf off shore seem surprised when they surface in the real Australian economy perhaps by dining out to find vacuous even surly staff languishing in a peat bog of decomposing labour laws,

workplace relations and conditions the most intrepid Kokoda re-enactor would refuse to trek through. Old guard technicians ward off Dickensian flashbacks by humming a few bars of the *Internationale*, while generation YO (that's Y with a care factor of zer-o), refuse to forego their entitled snakes and ladders ascent to upper middle management bypassing any need to partake in the Orwellian service industry. How can we not see who the true beneficiaries of the resource boom are when the mining companies are reaping 1 million dollars in revenue for every worker they employ<sup>13</sup>?

We can only imagine the spread Antoine Car me would have laid out at the company Christmas party were the investment returns remotely comparable for the restaurant and catering industry.

### **'People will eat shit on a stick!'**

These were words of consolation from a restaurant owner as I agonised over the shortcomings of a bill of fare to be presented in a restaurant in Tokyo. The owner was not Japanese.

### ***What are the hazards presented by the gastronomic and cultural diet of the idle disenfranchised?***

In our society the disenfranchised classes are enabled to be physically idle and a poor quality diet has become a wise economic decision. There has been research and discussion of the implications of this on the overall physical and social costs of an un-motivated, under resourced and ageing community and we are aware of the damaging impact poor quality diet can have on the intellectual and social development of the youth. The time management, culinary and budgeting skills required to gather an array of ingredients, transform them into a balanced weekly menu while juggling mul-

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10 Volkoff, 2009, Hanson, 2002

11 Vranken, 2010

12 Richardson, 2009

13 Bearup, 2011

tripple piecemeal jobs or the hostile social calendar that is the welfare non-assistance circuit leaves little doubt as to why middle to low income diners are resorting to all you can eat food fests and haute cuisine meals on wheels. Tastes like cardboard but looks just like the picture, so it must be good.

Of greater concern though is the broader social implication these burgeoning food class distinctions represent in a nation that once looked like developing a proud egalitarian and pluralist palate. Instead the notion of keeping people in their place is evident throughout the sweatshops of the food industry. The cost of goods for this illusion of elevated social standing by virtue of the ostentatious appreciation culinary arts is our own moral fibre when it is sustained by the commercialisation of poverty.

As the cycle of worst practices hospitality candid camera continues to focus on random rodent outbreaks, errant personal hygiene and ingredient health exposés with racist undertones, a large number of the population are in fact further distanced from a democratic diet. For many, advanced information technology is being used to gain free membership in the elite food appreciationist society. The issues and outcry around hormones in food are soon forgotten when hordes of ladies who once lunched merely to vent frustration regarding their less than amorous even amoretentive hubbys (often also at lunch slapping down a few rumps) are joined by yummy mummies, to descend en masse for a prix fix, having now become groupies to the bad boy toy boys of the culinary scene. The description of a male chef as handy has little to do with palette knife technique and a lot to do with where the patron would like the chefs hands placed.

Similarly the revival of the dessert, rather than reflecting a celebration of women's empowerment regarding their caloric

intake, is a binge of chef, front of house staff and delivery driver eye candy ogling to satisfy those with the sweetest of tooth. I would like to suggest every one getting pinched is not progress. After a spot of shopping for a few essentials to add to the expanding range of kitchen aids rendering their home complete should they win the in-house dégustation they have always craved, the enfants terrible are be ready to be picked up from school armed with a tutti-frutti, self-expression extravaganza to prepare for dinner.

Representatives of fourteen out of thirty five predominantly white collar occupations have indicated they expect to retire early. A large proportion of these are self-employed with limited superannuation holdings to provide for their desired level of retirement income. Blue collar workers have a higher weekly expenditure of a proportionally smaller income, prolonging their expected working life and compounding costs on society with the subsequent risks to health and precarious nature of the workforce (Jackson, 2010). 64% of the workforce filled by youth and students is in small to medium business with 33% unaware of their terms of employment and have rapidly declining access to training and skill development resources<sup>14</sup>.

Australia is in a period of social flux, with whinezenilla desperate housewives life stylists presented as ones to be emulated and the gentility of the delicately dusted sponge with cream and jam in rapid decline.

Nothing quite irks Australians like the idea that they are missing out on something, being hard done by or excluded from a particular group, whether they would have any real interest in it or not. Disappointingly this has not fuelled the struggle for equity in the face of oppres-

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14 Robbins, 2010

sion as might have been expected, given the historical context and in a land with such opportunity and scope for prosperity.

The consumers of Australia's fare will have to display greater will power and collective empathy for there to be a true diversity of taste and equality in consumption.

*The soufflé has fallen  
– long live the soufflé.*

*Vive la revolution culinaire  
– Bring it on!*

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## SESSION 2.3

# Federated food: the revolution we had to have?

**Colin Bannerman**

*Acknowledgment of place: In the 61 years this building—Canberra's Old Parliament House—housed the Parliament of Australia, it never achieved much fame as a locus of rigorous research or critical thinking; so it would not be appropriate to take anything presented to this symposium too seriously. In the paper that follows I try to remain true to the traditions of this place—making no particular claims in terms of fact, logic or originality.*

 f the many narrative streams that constitute Australian history-making, two seem to govern the popular imagination (as evidenced by the histories commonly dished up for popular consumption through screen, print or the internet).

### **Taking the land**

The first narrative concerns ownership and sovereignty. It deals with discovery, exploration, colonisation, conquest, settlement and displacement. Its subtitle is either of a people displaced and way of life destroyed or of the foundation and construction of a nation—depending on whether your arm-band is black or royal blue. Either way, the story line connects the European idea of *Terra Australis Incognita* with the local reality of a land that was anything but ‘incognita’ to its inhabitants. From thence, it connects with whatever it is you think the word ‘Australia’ now stands for.

The issue of ownership has both legal

and cultural dimensions. Did the ancient peoples own the land or were they owned by it? Did those who ‘took possession’ become its owners or were they acquired by it? Such questions may help us decide whether we can ever govern ourselves with good taste or evolve anything worthy of acclaim as ‘Australian cuisine’. If there is to be a national cuisine, it must belong to the land and its people.

One of the many privileges of sovereignty, whether it be inherited, conferred or usurped, is to appoint gate-keepers. The first task of those so appointed was to keep out the French. The second was Project Little England—a task undertaken so successfully that, according to David Day, a visitor to Sydney in 1827 claimed ‘scarcely to be sensible that I was out of England’.<sup>1</sup> This determination to construct an antipodean society as faithful as practicable to the remembered English model reached its apogee in the notorious White Australia policy. Eventually—after decades of reformist agitation, external criticism and a brief bout of unusually clear thinking—our law-givers re-made Little England into something they called ‘multicultural’.

Despite the Tasmanian Clearance project of 1830—the infamous ‘Black Line’—and a series of State and Federal policies which created what is now known as ‘the stolen generation’, the original inhabitants of the land managed to survive. So some distance along the path of its stately progress their re-created country was pleased to offer them a budget of what it called ‘reconciliation’. This comprised a patchwork of welfare schemes, some parcels of sub-prime land and, eventually, an apology.

There were, of course, culinary parallels to this sovereignty narrative. The themes of exploration and discovery can be seen in the early letters and journals—and also in wide-eyed accounts of what the so-called ‘natives’ were accustomed to eat. Edward

Abbott, in Australia's first attempt at a gastronomic manual, offered a catalogue of edible native birds, fish and animals. (He was unsure about wombat, though the question has since been settled.)<sup>2</sup> As late as 1895 Queensland pioneer and writer, Mina Rawson was encouraging women in the bush to learn from the food-ways of indigenous people. She assured them that 'whatever the blacks eat the whites may safely try'.<sup>3</sup>

The concept of *terra nullius* was a convenient fiction; in reality Australia was taken by conquest. The process of conquest was nowhere better illustrated than in the oyster beds of Sydney Harbour. Shell middens around the coastline testify to the pleasure local indigenous people once derived from the wonderful Sydney rock oysters. But soon the oyster beds became favourite pleasure-grounds for colonial picnickers. Godfrey Mundy gave an account of it in his journal of 1846 and confessed that he had 'enrolled' himself more than once in such an expedition, regretting that he had 'had stomach' for only one-half the luscious victims demolished by his companions.<sup>4</sup> The rest—as far as the unhappy molluscs were concerned—is history. What little the picnickers left soon succumbed to pollution and the invading Pacific oyster. Gastronomically, it was a conquest without winners.

The colonisation of Australian food-ways is an accepted theme of popular history. But it's much too simple to say that it was done with British food and British recipes. The incomers had an understandable preference for what was familiar. They were not afraid of novelty when they could understand it. It made sense for settlers to learn from pioneering experience in the New World of America—what worked at one frontier was worth trying at another. There was no objection to foreign foods such as macaroni and curry once they were decently Anglicised to make them accessible. Even the kickshaws of France,<sup>5</sup>

though generally incomprehensible to the masses, were welcome at the tables of colonials with epicurean pretensions. (We never quite succeeded in keeping out the French.)

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>6</sup> the dominant influence on the emerging colonial food culture was not British tradition, or chauvinism, but English language. Culture is a product of shared knowledge, and knowledge is mostly transmitted through language. Essentially, Australians constructed their cuisine from the recipes available in their language.

It is also too simple to say that, since the colony's starter culture was scraped from the bottom of Britain's judicial sewers, early Australian cookery was universally wretched. As Penny Russell pointed out in her recent book, in the larger colonisation project—that is, looking beyond the particular ugliness of the convict regime—wide-spread brutishness was inevitable.<sup>7</sup> Some of that brutishness lingers to this day, especially in our veneration of fast-food, barbecues and breakfasting on the footpath. But the 'aspirational' goal of our nation-builders was always refinement. In 1864, at the bum end of civilisation, Abbott styled himself a student of the art of dining. In Sydney, Zara Aronson hailed the new century with a book aimed at women of refinement. Her twentieth century cookery book was essentially a plan for gracious living.<sup>8</sup> She offered her readers a selection of interesting, dainty and novel recipes, and encouraged cooks to study the art of garnishing. For her the new century was an opportunity to leave behind the brutishness of the convict and colonial eras.

Finally, the theme of displacement is paralleled in Australia's culinary history. The colonists appropriated the indigenous people's oyster beds and gave in exchange a diet of flour, sugar, tea and alcohol.

## *Federating it*

The second governing narrative in popular history is the story of Federation. Arguably it begins thousands of years before 1901 in the various customs that evolved among nomadic indigenous peoples for asserting their claims to place and for recognising the claims of others. It continues to the present day in unresolved squabbles about the requirements of efficient government on the one hand and the claims of states' rights on the other. It is helped along with the rhetoric of identity and nation-building.

Federation left its mark on Australian cuisine in two ways. First, thinking colonists—of whom there were several—were seized with the importance of federation as the beginning of a new phase in Australia's social and cultural development. Zara Aronson was hardly in the intellectual vanguard, but she saw a strong link between housekeeping and federation. She wrote:

*'...when people grow refined, first in their food fancies and their homes, the other characteristics of culture follow in due time. To ensure this we must cultivate the home and its management, and regard housekeeping as a desirable addition to our daily lives, and an interest that will assist in the success of a growing federated continent.'*<sup>9</sup>

Second, federation is a process of bringing together and connecting—or fusing—distant or disparate entities. It should have resulted, a century ago, in the emergence of a vibrant and distinctive Australian cuisine founded on three main ingredients. First there should have been as much as could be sustained of indigenous foodways. Second, the brutishness—or frank practicality if you prefer—of the pioneer's outdoor kitchen, a sort of culinary echo of Russell Ward's 'legend' of the Australian bushman.<sup>10</sup> Third, this rude mix should have been softened with a generous addi-

tion of urban convenience and garnished with a sprig of Mrs Aronson's refinement.

But it didn't happen. Mina Rawson's sound advice about indigenous food was outvoted by advertisements for Hutton's 'Pine Apple Brand' hams (1905), Dr Waugh's 'unequalled baking Powder' (1911) and Breakfast D-Light (1915).<sup>11</sup> Country housewives were understandably keen to exchange their rustic colonial ovens for shiny electric ranges. So industrialised urban food won a landslide victory. There is, of course, a niche market for indigenous foods, thanks to enthusiastic promoters like Vic Cherikoff. The art of outdoor cookery is kept alive among enthusiasts and celebrated by events such as the annual Bush Tucker Day at Trundle, NSW.<sup>12</sup> But Zara's plea for daintiness is largely forgotten—except perhaps by McDonald's, whose newest creations are said to be 'just a little bit fancy'.<sup>13</sup>

## *Revolting*

Federation returned to the Australian gastronomic agenda in the mid-nineteenth century—though few people noticed and fewer still cared. Journalists and popular historians now like to style it as a late-century multicultural revolution rather than a longer, less dramatic process of global federation. True to form, they offer three main causes for their revolution. First, soldiers from the battlefields brought home tales of strange and interesting foods. This was the beginning of enlarged awareness. Second, migrants flooded into the country and set up restaurants and food shops specialising in the exotic 'other'. This made ethnic food available to ordinary Australians. Third, baby boomers, flushed with post-war affluence, returned from their obligatory overseas trips determined to eat at home as they had eaten on holiday. This provided impetus.

Undoubtedly, each of these 'causes' was an influence. However, I seriously question

what gastronomic insights soldiers discovered in battle. And if homecoming tourists fomented any kind of gastronomic revolution, it was a quiet one.

I would also argue that the link between migration and the multicultural food phenomenon is more a matter of faith than of historically demonstrated causality. The post-war Displaced Persons Scheme began in late 1947 with a shipment of 844 Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians. Migration agreements with Italy and Greece were not finalised until 1951 and 1952 respectively.<sup>14</sup> But Edward Abbott had a chapter on 'Hebrew Cookery' in 1864. The *First Australian Continental Cookery Book* was published about 1936.<sup>15</sup> Irwin wrote his Frenchified *Garrulous Gourmet* in 1947. In 1951 the *New Australian Jubilee Cookery Book* included Continental, Dutch, Indonesian and Italian sections.<sup>16</sup>

Those 'New Australians', struggling to survive in a foreign culture, were less influential than the writers, publishers and food companies ready to exploit popular interest in the exotic other.<sup>17</sup> By the time the White Australia policy was abandoned, the multicultural food fad was already taking off. The penetration of olive oil, sun-dried tomatoes, satay sauce and bok choy into Australian kitchens was more a commercial *coup d'état* than a people's revolution.

The federation of food crept up on us. By mid-century the world was approaching the brink of what we now call globalism. The movement was not new; it can be traced back centuries. But now technology—especially communications and transport—was advancing at such a pace that the prospect of Marshall McLuhan's global village was in our faces.<sup>18</sup> There can be few cultures closely linked into the 'global village' whose cuisine has *not* developed distinct overtones of multiculturalism. To understand developing food culture in Australia, one must look at the information media, the entertainment

media and the persuasive media of the supermarket shelf.

In summary, my proposition is that our recently federated—or multicultural—cuisine is a product not of democratic revolution, but of sustained, excessive regulation. The policy makers are not elected representatives or gastronomic authorities, but level C executives in multinational companies. Their policies are not implemented through legislation but through commercial coercion. You can observe their power any day in the supermarkets as popular fascination with novelty is exploited and, in the process, the exotic other is converted into the ordinary.

### ***Our hope for the future***

Unfortunately for gastronomers, the task of federation is not about legislating our conception of good taste upon all Australians—any more than good government is about enforcing the ideals of zealots. It is about constructing a shared understanding that can embrace both Mosman and Redfern, lobsters and crabsticks. Both are realities of the Australian gastronomic polity.

The constituency of food consumers ranges widely: from gastronomically privileged to gastronomically marginalised, from wannabe gourmet to wannabe fed. 'People like us'—who have the will, the knowledge, and perhaps the means to indulge in excellence—are niche-dwellers. The vast middle ground—'common' in both that word's usual senses—is not, as a former Prime Minister's wife unwisely remarked, merely 'the dumb electorate';<sup>19</sup> in the politics of taste the middle ground is where ultimate power lies. Thus it is the ground most strongly contested: where food manufacturers see the largest sales for their product, nutritionists see the greatest need for their reforms and environmentalists see their best chance of saving the planet. Our hope for the future

is to feed a rapidly growing population without harm and to a level of taste that keeps the people happy.

Idealists, reformers, and attention-seeking chefs may think there should be no McDonalds, but the grim reality is that common does as common is. People eat the food that is available to them—meaning what is affordable, accessible and convenient. In their aspirational moments they may indeed look for something ‘a little bit fancy’—but only providing it is still affordable, accessible and convenient.

*Return to place: The business of this house for 61 years was the discernment and enactment of what was possible. To a few that meant the single-minded pursuit of idealistic goals (aided by slogans such as ‘crash through or crash’). To some it meant seeking a creative balance between inevitably competing interests (and presenting it with sufficient spin that although no-one won, everyone was strangely satisfied). To others it meant calculating the lowest common denominator (or, put another way, listening to constituents). One of the lessons of my own decades of public service was that management is the art of achieving good outcomes from ordinary inputs. Perhaps McDonalds have been listening—and the people really do want food that is affordable, not too harmful and sometimes just a little bit fancy.*

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Day, David, *Claiming a Continent*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1996, p. 84.
- 2 [Abbot, Edward], An Australian Aristologist, *The English and Australian Cookery Book*, London, 1864. See, for example, chapters on Game (p. 81), Fish (p. 92). Roast Wombat (Tasmania) p. 85: ‘some persons like its flavour, others, again, decry it’.
- 3 [Mina] Mrs Lance Rawson, *The Antipodean Cookery Book and Kitchen Companion*, George Robertson and Company, Melbourne, 1907 [first published 1895] p 54.
- 4 Mundy, Godfrey Charles, *Our Antipodes: or, Residence and Rambles in the Australasian Colonies. With a Glimpse of the Gold Fields.* (Three volumes) London: Richard Bentley, 1854 (3<sup>rd</sup> ed, revised.)
- 5 A corruption of the French *quelque chose* (something); by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> C. it was often used as a term of derision for small made dishes, implying that they were showy but without value.
- 6 Colin Bannerman, ‘Recipes come from kitchens, Food cultures come from printing presses’, Lynn A Martin & Barbara Santich (eds), *Culinary History*, Adelaide, 2004. The theme is explored further in a forthcoming article in *Australian Humanities Review*.
- 7 Russell, Penny *Savage or Civilised? Manners in Colonial Australia*. Sydney, University of New South Wales Press, 2010.
- 8 Aronson, Zara *XX<sup>th</sup> Century Cooking and Home Decoration*. Sydney: William Brooks & Co, 1900.
- 9 *ibid*, p.17.
- 10 Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, ‘new illustrated edition’ Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1978 (original edition 1958)
- 11 Examples of advertisements from early Australian newspapers.
- 12 See [www.trundle.sandyfeet.com.au/](http://www.trundle.sandyfeet.com.au/).
- 13 Television advertisements screened early 2011.
- 14 <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/belongings/about-belongings/australias-migration-history> accessed 18 April 2011.
- 15 *The First Australian Continental Cookery Book*, Melbourne, Cosmopolitan Publishing Co, n.d. [c. 1936]
- 16 Elsie Gill, *New Australian Jubilee Cookery Book*, Murwillumbah, 1951. The book celebrated the jubilee of Federation in Australia.
- 17 For example, *The Woman’s Mirror Cookery Book* of 1937 featured a section on international cookery.
- 18 Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*, Routledge and Keegan Paul, London, 1964 (republished London: Sphere Books, 1967).
- 19 Attributed to Tammie Fraser, wife of Australia’s 22<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister.

## CHESTNUT ROAST LUNCH

Symposiasts joined members of Canberra's Kitchen Cabinet for their annual celebration of the region's autumn harvest.

A chestnut roast in the historic setting of the House of Representatives courtyard at Old Parliament House, hosted by Sassafras orchardists Richard Moxham and Alison Saunders, made a warm and welcome opener.

Then, at café tables bedecked with persimmon and lemon branches, chestnut soup was served, before a superb dish of roasted Thirlmere duckling galantine, filled with Sassafras chestnuts, Pialligo apples and Ingelara pork, with Sassafras walnut and pomegranate jus.

Chestnut and walnut chocolate tart with chestnut parfait made everyone decide they could at least sample this delicious dessert, in celebration of Canberra's seasonal produce.



Sophie Zolokar (L) lunches with Mary Brander and Elizabeth Love



Janet Jeffs, hands-on head chef for the 18th Symposium and also Executive Chef at Old Parliament House Canberra



Bernadette Hince with Colin Sherington and Ben Standen at the Chestnut Lunch



Listeners learning the finer points of growing chestnuts from Alison Saunders and Richard Moxham (L) include Jill Stone, Max Dingle, Paul Sprague, Matthias Doern (front) and Jacqui Newling (back)

## **SESSION 3**

### **Heritage of Absence**

One of the first consequences of European settlement was the displacement of indigenous foodways. Incomers ate their oysters, netted their fish and gave back boiled beef, bread and spirits.

Can there ever be an ‘Australian cuisine’ which excludes indigenous food? What can be done to reconnect Australia’s cuisine with its heritage?

**This section was chaired by Lenore Coltheart  
and the papers for this Session were presented by  
Christian Reynolds, Jacqui Newling and Ian Bersten.**



## SESSION 3:1

# A load of rubbish? The state of municipal food waste in Australia

Christian Reynolds<sup>1</sup>

**A**ustralian households are throwing out more than \$5 billion worth of food each year, with over 40% of household food wasted. This non-consumed food constitutes a needless waste of resources and energy. To further complicate matters, the management, transport and disposal of this non-consumed food is a problem that does not have a full, federally legislated and governed solution. Instead the collection and processing of municipal food waste is organised by local area councils with support and additional funding from state and federal governments. This has resulted in conflicting waste practices across Australia.

In evaluating the municipal food waste disposal options that are available within Australia (home and centralised composting of organic waste, sewer disposal, animal disposal, and co-disposal of food waste via landfill etc), this paper will examine which of these options are the most economically and environmentally efficient for Australia.

The paper concludes with a discussion on the development of Australia's contemporary municipal waste system, highlighting how municipal food waste has been

managed and what improvements can be made to minimise environmental damage, economic loss and reduce the unnecessary waste of 936 kilograms of food per household per year.

### ***Introduction***

Food has a special relationship with humanity. It is both a requisite for life and an expressive, symbolic and communicative medium that defines local and global identities. However, over the last century in developed nations something has gone awry, with up to 50% of food produced wasted<sup>2</sup>. This level of wastage has not only altered the unique psychological and physical relationship that humanity has with food<sup>3</sup>, but is also an unwarranted economic and environmental burden on the planet. Consuming food is a necessity that enables the human body to function<sup>4</sup>, a commonsense even Brillat-Savarin<sup>5</sup> expressed as to survive one must eat. Yet, society's connection to food and food consumption norms<sup>6</sup> have changed over the last century. The combination of the advent of a stable food supply and the emergence of a 'throwaway society'<sup>7</sup>, has created a new paradigm of food consumption where food is ever present, and thus undervalued and disposable<sup>8</sup>.

Food waste is itself a very organic concept, with varied conceptualizations occurring in academic and professional literature. The most utilised terms are "solid waste"<sup>9</sup>, "biodegradable waste"<sup>10</sup>, and "organic

<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Ian Harvey, Manager Strategy and Programs, Zero Waste SA and the team at KESAB for advice and access to their archives. Thanks also to the ARC Linkage Project: "Zeroing in on Food Waste" research team for all their support.

<sup>2</sup> Blenckner 2008

<sup>3</sup> Barton and Atwater 2002

<sup>4</sup> Campbell 1995 110; Miller 2009 6

<sup>5</sup> Brillat-Savarin 1970 55

<sup>6</sup> Wilk 2004 17

<sup>7</sup> Lucas 2002 5

<sup>8</sup> Jones 2006

<sup>9</sup> Rathje 1992 46

<sup>10</sup> Chandon 2002

waste”<sup>11</sup>, expressions that conceal the scale of wastage via their homogenization of food with other types of waste. To clarify the nature of food waste here it is defined as the primary waste type produced by the private household on a daily basis, containing organic matter in the form of uneaten food as well as food lost via preparation. The size of this wastage is immense, with Australia producing over 874 million tonnes of this waste type in 2002-3<sup>12</sup>.

Though food waste is produced daily by most people, within modern western society the scale of waste production is now ‘hidden’ from society at large<sup>1314</sup>. The problem of waste disposal has now become a burden and responsibility of government - particularly at the local council level - due to the shift towards a “publicly controlled collection, incineration and landfill of waste” in first world nations<sup>15</sup>.

Traditionally, waste creators disposed directly of food waste through consumption by animals or composting, resulting in a low ecological and economical footprint<sup>16</sup>. The introduction of ‘modern’ disposal methods and sensibilities have led to a greater economic cost and adverse environmental impacts<sup>17</sup>. The most utilised

modern disposal method in Australia is sanitary landfill which - though economically efficient - allows food to biodegrade and release greenhouse gases that exacerbate global warming. In Australia, it is estimated that for every tonne of municipal waste stored in a landfill, 074 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> gases are released - with 55% of this gas pure methane and at least 21 times more damaging to the environment than carbon dioxide<sup>18</sup>.

Food waste also represents wasted resource, two of the most important in Australia being water<sup>19</sup> and energy<sup>20</sup>. Water is a critical component in all food production, with every kilo of food wasted representing thousands of litres of water not efficiently used. For example, producing a kilogram of beef requires 43,000 litres of water from cattle yard to plate<sup>21</sup>. Energy (and intrinsically oil) is also embedded within the creation, transport and disposal of food with Cuellar and Webber’s 2010 study finding that the energy embedded in food waste “represents approximately 2% of annual energy consumption in the United States”<sup>22</sup>. Thus, if food waste can be reduced, water, energy and other resources can also be saved.

Food waste is also an economic burden with a 2009 survey by the Australia Institute<sup>23</sup> quantifying Australia’s food wastage at approximately \$52 billion dollars a year - more money than the yearly government expenditure on the Australian Army (\$48

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11 McDonough 2002 102

12 Productivity Commission 2006 xxvii

13 Hawkins 2006 1-2

14 In the late 19th Century waste was a problem for the individual creating it and was disposed of either in-house or sold to waste dealers who on-sold it as various products. Educational, technological, transport, and scientific developments in the early 20th Century altered this balance and waste became a socialised problem. (Raven, R. 2007; ‘Co-evolution of waste and electricity regimes: Multi-regime dynamics in the Netherlands (1969-2003) *Energy Policy* 35(4): 2197-208).

15 Raven 2007 2200

16 Strasser 2000

17 With centralised waste collection and a number

of waste disposal laws now in place, both home composting and animal feed are far less frequent disposal methods

18 Barton and Atwater 2002; Productivity Commission 2006 428

19 Duchin 2005; Blenckner 2008

20 Cuellar 2010 6464

21 Pimentel 2004

22 Cuellar 2010 6464

23 Baker 2009 5

billion) and more than the Australian population spent in 2007 on digital equipment (\$5 billion) that year. In South Australia, the same study found that individuals and households wasted \$226 and \$513 per year respectively, the dollar values of the quantities of food wasted, not the costs nor environmental impacts associated with the production, storage and disposal of this wasted food. Therefore these values can only be seen as basic estimates of the costs of food waste to Australia as a whole.

To understand the state of municipal food waste in Australia now we must first understand the cultural, societal and political development of Australia's waste system from its colonial roots. As each colony developed separate governing mechanisms around common British sensibilities, the municipal waste history of the states is complicated. Here the focus is my home state of South Australia, for reasons of patriotism as well as ease of data collection.

### *A history of municipal waste policy*

In South Australia the foundations of 'modern' waste management lie in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the public control of communicable and preventable disease, and the public management of urbanisation, motivating factors<sup>24</sup>. Colonial policy was formed on the bedrock of the British administration systems and policies under the UK's *Public Health Act 1848* and the *Local Government Act 1858*<sup>25</sup>. Both the colonial governments and their municipal authorities developed waste management procedures to combat this menace to sanitary living. Though intentions were good, it was not until 1907 that controlled, licensed (and fee charging) waste disposal was commonplace (and somewhat affordable) in South Australia. This did not provide the solution of what

to do with the waste once collected as 'sanitary' landfill<sup>26</sup>, with collection and incineration, common to us, both still new then. Prior to the mass adoption of organised garbage collection and disposal, it was common for newspapers in 1889 for instance to decry that local creeks were polluted with garbage, in 1878 that Adelaide's 7,000 cesspits were overflowing, and in 1905 that it was common for 'city parks [to be] used as refuse stores'.

Driving the establishment of this early waste policy was not a moral concern for the protection of environment, an efficient economy or sustainable urbanisation, instead improving public health was the main agenda<sup>27</sup>, with experts agreed that reducing public exposure to waste would lower death rates and achieve better public health standards<sup>28</sup>. By the mid-1930s, public health and amenity were still the prime motivators for proper waste disposal as demonstrated in South Australian legislation like the *Health Act 1935-76* and the *Local Government Act 1934-77*<sup>29</sup>. This resulted in local government taking control of waste collection with publicly tendered contracts for municipalities, instead of each household making their own arrangements.

Municipally-authorised garbage collection began to phase out the old systems, though still in 1941 there were reports of rag-and-bone men collecting household rubbish independently. The official approach addressed the problem of what to do with the collected waste and 'sanitary' landfill and incineration became commonplace over the next forty years<sup>30</sup>.

In the 1970s though, concerns about the

<sup>24</sup> Coward 1988 51

<sup>25</sup> Coward 1988 1-2

<sup>26</sup> 1905; Rathje 1992 85-7

<sup>27</sup> Coward 1988 1-2

<sup>28</sup> 1905; Coward 1988 1-2

<sup>29</sup> Waste Disposal Committee 1977 Section 24

<sup>30</sup> Productivity Commission 2006 11

wider impacts of both methods led to the enactment of environmental protection legislation<sup>31</sup>. Most importantly, South Australia's *Clean Air Act 1984* - which became the *Environment Protection Act 1993* - greatly tightened the operation of incinerators and landfill. The pressures of urban growth also limited developing new landfills and other waste management facilities in many parts of the State. With many of the old landfills reaching capacity, where to put waste had become an issue Australia-wide. The problem was exacerbated by the greater amounts of non-recyclable plastics entering the waste stream, as well as the introduction of large standardised and durable plastic bins to domestic homes in the mid-1980s. Though easier for the waste contractors to collect, their larger capacity was an invitation to greater disposability for households and encouraged indifference rather than interest towards recycling and composting<sup>32</sup>.

Waste policy necessarily shifted in response to the increasing volume of domestic waste and decreasing storage, turning to wider goals of sustainability and conservation. Rather than just focusing on end-of-pipe downstream waste disposal, avoidance, reuse, recycling, and energy recovery became priorities and South Australia enacted the *Zero Waste Act 2004*<sup>33</sup>. This set in place Zero Waste SA (ZWSA), an organisation with the aim of reducing waste in all forms to landfill by 25% by 2014<sup>34</sup>. Subsequent moves include the banning of plastic shopping bags<sup>35</sup>, and a pilot to investigate food waste disposal in the organics bin<sup>36</sup>.

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31 Productivity Commission 2006

32 Metropolitan Waste Disposal Authority 1987

33 Productivity Commission 2006 11

34 Moore 2009

35 Sharpe 2009; Sharp, Høj et al 2010

36 Zero Waste SA 2010

After 150 years South Australia now demonstrates a high level of political and environmental commitment and willingness to 'stick its neck out' and implement policies and legislation where other governments are more conservative<sup>37</sup>. In 2011 South Australians deal with food waste either through: residual waste/rubbish bin (landfill), or garden organics bin (centralised composting), unless households have their own at-home composting or animal disposal.

Specific histories of waste in Australia like this South Australian example are essential context in considering future food waste disposal options. Presently the municipal and home food waste disposal solutions available to Australians fall into four types: home and centralised composting of organic waste, sewer disposal, animal disposal, and the co-disposal of food waste with garbage via landfill.

### ***Home and centralised composting***

Composting (from the Latin *compositum*, mixture) is a microbial biodegradation process reducing organic matter to 'carbon dioxide, water, minerals, and stabilized organic matter (compost)' that is beneficial to plant growth<sup>38</sup>. Composting has been practised for many centuries<sup>39</sup>, only falling from favour as society modernised, yet it remains a common waste disposal option for food waste throughout Australia with 458% of households utilising it in 2009<sup>40</sup>.

There are few municipal centralised composting facilities operating in Australia, though there is now a trend for more councils and waste management companies to allow food waste in green and organic waste collections, for instance

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37 2010 46-7

38 Insam, de Bertoldi et al 2007

39 McDonough 2002

40 Pink 2009

South Australia's food waste pilot program in 2009<sup>41</sup>.

This uptake of centralised composting also allows for a higher standard of product. Though the composting process is fundamentally the same<sup>42</sup>, there are reports of home compost heaps not being maintained, not chemically balanced nor mixed correctly to ensure optimal temperature and effective composting. Other positives of centralised composting are that people with no garden space can participate, with 10% of the sample State population giving this as a reason for not composting in 2007, and the final product can be sold back to consumers for farming or gardening.

Most available forms of composting produce carbon dioxide and utilise a great deal of land. Centralised composting also entails waste transport costs, a large factor in the environmental impact of waste<sup>43</sup>. As Lundie (2005) and Björklund (1999) suggest, these negatives make composting useful as a method to educate the population into source separation, but less viable as a long term method for waste disposal.

### *Sewer disposal*

Because of Australia's split sewer and storm water system, as well as the availability of landfill sites<sup>44</sup> over the last century there was no investment in 'In-Sink-Erator' style residential sewer-based food waste processing units (FWP), with many Australian councils banning their installation due to perceived potential damage to the sewer system<sup>45</sup>. FWPs are becoming more commonplace since Lundie (2005) investigated the positive environmental

impact that FWPs are capable of achieving – if given market penetration. For the moment they account for a small amount of the waste stream.

### *Animal disposal*

Feeding food waste to animals is an acceptable practice in many cultures, yet few Australians do this. The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute's 2009 survey of two South Australian suburbs found that only 5% of households disposed of more than half their food scraps to animals or pets while, even with the spatial pressures of urbanisation pet ownership is rising<sup>46</sup>, increasing this opportunity for this form of food waste disposal.

The main pets fed food waste are dogs and chickens, with chickens giving the additional benefit of eggs. The faeces of each can also be composted to further increase the environmental benefit of this waste disposal option. Dog faeces – due to the wetness – produce methane and CO<sub>2</sub> but chicken droppings being dry make them the more ecologically friendly option. To this author's knowledge (despite much anecdotal evidence) there has not been an investigation into the gas emissions (flatulent or otherwise) of dogs or chickens.

### *Landfill*

Landfill is the most common form of waste disposal in Australia with over 60% of its waste becoming landfill<sup>47</sup>. The landfill process involves a structured layering of waste upon sealed ground; if incorrectly managed it can produce uncontrolled amounts methane and CO<sub>2</sub>. And modern landfills specialise in capturing these biogases and transforming them into 'green' energy.

As Manfredi et al (2009) maintain, it is difficult to account for the total environmen-

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41 Zero Waste SA 2010

42 Dalemo, Sonesson et al 1997 34

43 Sonesson et al 2000; 2005

44 Coward 1988

45 Lundie and Peters 2005

46 Chaseling 2001

47 Productivity Commission 2006

tal impacts and costs of landfill, due to the numerous factors involved in their composition and upkeep, many not apparent for decades. The lack of viable land close to urban areas is now becoming a problem for landfill because transport factors again increase the environmental impact. For the moment, landfill will continue to be the dominant form of waste disposal.

### **Where to from here?**

Food waste is a complex and long term issue, ever present with societies ‘wasting’ food through the consumption process. However food does not have to be a ‘waste’. As illustrated by composting and animal disposal, ‘left over’ food can produce value with the correct treatment<sup>48</sup>. What matters is changing the assumption that food is automatically ‘wasted’ when thrown out, instead as Thompson says, seeing the disposal process as a way of adding another value to food. As well, modern awareness requires that any re-valuation of food scraps complement sustainable protection of the environment, complicating operational solutions.

One consideration particularly relevant to Australia is the distance waste matter is transported, with the demand on resources presenting environmental impacts as adverse as waste treatment<sup>49</sup>. Thus waste policy must become locally based, not just at the present council level, but down to every household taking some responsibility for food wastage. This will reveal the ‘hidden’ nature of food waste and promote change, or at least awareness of the cost, amount and effects of wasted food<sup>50</sup>.

This joint household and municipal approach must be driven by both economic incentives (taxes and levies) and education

about our whole engagement with food including growing, marketing, and cooking, to nurture a reduction of food waste in the household. Finally, composting and animal disposal must be engaged either at a household level for those with space, or at a centralised level for urbanised communities.

If the above objectives are fulfilled, Australia will secure a sound environmental footing through curtailed food wastage achieving less environmental damage and economic loss. Turning today’s landfill food waste into tomorrow’s environmentally friendly compost, eggs and green energy will transform it into much more than just a load of old rubbish.

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48 Thompson 1979; McDonough 2002; Wolfe and Liu 2003

49 Sonesson et al 2000; 2005

50 Hawkins 2006 1-2

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## SESSION 3.2

### Sweet tea: a ‘universal’ comfort<sup>1</sup>

Jacqueline Newling

The First Fleet to New South Wales arrived with a two years supply of salt provisions, but tea and sugar were not included in the government rations. Testament to their resourcefulness and willingness to experiment with native produce, First Fleeters found an adequate substitute to this domestic necessity in *smilax glyciphylla* leaves, a species of native sarsparilla. It earned the name ‘sweet tea’, was lauded for its health benefits, and, according to Watkin Tench, this indigenous China tea alternative ‘was drank universally’.<sup>2</sup> Many extant letters, diaries and journal entries make mention of the new beverage; an analysis of these primary references gives us an insight into the Europeans engagement with native produce across the social tiers, demonstrating the social differentiation in this micro-society. Further, the consumption of sweet tea provides evidence of the need to maintain ‘civilised’ cultural practices, which offered necessary ‘comfort’ for displaced individuals who found themselves in an unknown place in uncertain times.

Though it disappeared from use very early in the history of the colony, *Smilax glyc-*

*phylla* can be found growing in bushland along Sydney’s foreshores today, largely due to native plant regeneration projects.

By 1788, when the First Fleet reached Australia’s shores, tea drinking was an established British pastime. Tea had transcended its elite and exotic status to being a household staple throughout all classes thanks to the British East India’s energetic trade with China and a significant drop in government taxes and therefore market prices. As early as 1744 it was noted that “Trade with East-Indies...brought the Price of Tea... so low, that the *meanest* labouring Man could compass the Purchase of it....”<sup>3</sup> A Frenchman visiting England in 1784 observed, ‘even the humblest peasant will take his tea twice a day’.<sup>4</sup> Employers in tea drinking households were quickly learning that servants needed to be given tea as part of their domestic entitlement (albeit a lesser grade) or could expect to have it stolen from them.<sup>5</sup>

The majority of convicts and soldiers on the First Fleet were from England’s poorer classes, and many would have developed a taste for tea, however it would be another thirty years before tea was regarded enough of a necessity to be included in official convicts’ rations. Faced with the prospect of two years without contact with the known world, those who journeyed on the First Fleet that had the forethought and the means brought their own supply of tea, together with other luxuries such as coffee, chocolate, pepper, writing paper and soap. Such necessities were regarded by many as many as luxuries at

1 The author thanks the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales for financial support to participate in the Symposium

2 Watkin Tench (1793) *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson*. Online via SETIS (prepared from the print edition published by G.Nicol and J. Sewell. London 1793, footnote p18

3 S Mintz (1986) *Sweetness and Power*. Penguin, New York. citing D Forbes, p114

4 H Young (2003) ‘Western Europe’ in Faulkner, R (ed) *Tea East and West* V&A Publications, London, p105

5 Young, p105; Anne C Wilson (1991) *Food and Drink in Britain, From the Stone Age to the 19th Century* Chicago: Academy Chicago, pp.416 – 17



*Smilax glyciphylla* in bushland on the Sydney Harbour foreshore, 2010. Jacqueline Newling

the time; convicts and lower order marines would not have enjoyed items of such privilege, although some female convicts were ‘favoured’ with them from officers aboard ship, for ‘services rendered’ on the voyage.

While official documents and Australian historiography focus on rations and dire food shortages, the limited but rich collection of letters, diaries and journals held at Sydney’s Mitchell Library provide a more personal perspective on colonial foodways. Many of these earliest manuscripts make particular mention of one particular native plant species over any other - *smilax glyciphylla*, a native sarsparilla commonly referred to as sweet tea. According to Captain Watkin Tench, ‘It was drank universally’.<sup>6</sup>

6 Watkin Tench (1793) *A Complete Account of the Settlement at Port Jackson online* via SETIS (prepared from the print edition published

But how universally was it ‘drank’?

The important role that indigenous foods played in supplementing the narrow range of government-issued salt provisions - flour, rice, dried peas and salted meat, is often overlooked. Despite the fact that the majority of the population were serving penal sentences there was great freedom of movement throughout the settlement, which was effectively, a gaol without walls. Until European-style produce gardens were established, colonists were encouraged to forage in surrounding bushland for the fresh fruit and greens that were necessary to prevent scurvy and other health problems. (Convicts were forbidden fresh meat or fish – protein foods were strictly government property). Careful analysis of the various contemporaneous descriptions and references to sweet

by G.Nicol and J. Sewell. London 1793,  
footnote p18

tea revealed more than just an understanding of the beverage itself: it provided a valuable insight into the different levels of engagement with native produce across the social stratum of first fleet colonists.

Senior officers & civil servants like Surgeon White, First Lieutenant Bradley, Captains Hunter and Tench, and Judge-advocate Collins all made authoritative observations about sweet tea plant and its attributes.<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that much of our understanding of conditions in the settlement is drawn from this league of gentlemen, whose journals and papers were published and therefore preserved in history. But on close examination, many of these authoritative referrals are inconsistent, incorrect, and clearly, second or third hand. It is clear that many of the officers were reporting on hearsay and had not actually tasted the beverage itself.

We have far fewer primary sources from convicts, mainly because the convicts were less likely to have been literate (interestingly, the majority of our few sources are from women) and their references ephemeral; extant letters are often unsigned and therefore nameless, and so many of this class of people remain faceless.<sup>8</sup>

We gain further information about sweet tea from two ‘middling sorts’ – young Lieutenant Ralph Clarke who was attached to the marine corps, and seafarer

John Nichol who spent a short time in the colony in 1790 delivering second fleet convicts on the *Lady Juliana*.

Grace Karskens’ view is that for early colonists, “*Smilax glyciphylla* must have been delicious; a pick-me-up, an anti-scorbutic, a great comfort, perhaps addictive”.<sup>9</sup> The native ‘sweet tea’ was a welcome substitute for Chinese teas of the day, and became a ‘universal’ comfort, enjoyed by convicts and others in the colony. Its flavour was “tolerably pleasant” (White) having “much the taste of Liquorish & serves both for Tea & Sugar” (Bradley).

We know that convicts and marines went to great lengths to procure sweet tea. Our sources remark that people had to venture further and further afield to find any quantity of the plant, which reinforces the knowledge that the European settlers took an exhaustive heterogeneous approach to harvesting useful native plants. Being transferred to Norfolk Island early in 1790, Ralph Clarke spent several days hunting for sweet tea –heading ‘further up the Cove’ (probably into the area we now refer to as Lane Cove) one fine sunny day, and sending out his convict servants and a subordinate marine a few days later to find more.

Some colonists lost their lives over such expeditions into the bushland and forests that surrounded the Sydney settlement, being attacked by Aborigines who were either defending their territory or protecting their supply of a useful nutrient or medicinal resource. It is unknown if the Cadigal used *warraburra*, the Eora name for the smilax plant, as a ‘tea’ type infusion to drink, however it is known that Aborigines from the Jervis Bay area of New South Wales are believed to have sucked on smilax leaves, either for pleasure or

7 William Bradley *William Bradley Journal : A Voyage to New South Wales, December 1786 - May 1792*; David Collins (1798) *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales* [Volume 1]; John Hunter (1793) *An Historical Journal of the Transactions at Port Jackson and Norfolk Island*; J White (1790) *Journal of a Voyage to New South Wales*

8 Helen Heney (1985) *Dear Fanny*: Pergamon Press (Australia) p1; Letter dated 14 November, 1788, author unknown, *HRNSW* vol 2. Appendix E: British Museum Papers, pp746-747

9 G Karskens (2009) *The Colony* Allen & Unwin. Sydney. p366



'Leaves from Botany Bay', attributed to Mary Bryant's 1791 journey from NSW to England. SLNSW

medicinal purposes.<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the Europeans, Aboriginal people were more conservative in their use of local resources, ensuring adequate supplies remained as necessary. *Smilax glyciphylla* is slow-growing and difficult to propagate. Smilax therefore, is likely to have been a medicinal plant for coastal Aboriginal people, appropriated by Europeans in a familiar application as a herbal infusion, just like tea. The plant's perceived health attributes almost certainly added to its popularity, held in 'great estimation' and acclaimed as a 'powerful tonic' (Collins 1798).

*On infusion in hot water, [it yields] a sweet astringent taste, whence it derives its name: to its virtues the healthy state of the soldiery and convicts must be greatly attributed.*<sup>11</sup> (Tench 1793)

Knowledge possibly gained from local Aborigines or from the contemporary connection between its bitter-sweet flavour profile with herb extracts such as those

used to make aspirin or quinine might be beneficial to health, especially as a remedy for scurvy which up to two hundred convicts and marines were afflicted with in the early months of settlement – perhaps wishful thinking. Surgeon White used smilax leaves for medical purposes – finding it to be 'a good pectoral' (to allay chest complaints). Modern testing has shown that sweet tea leaves are high in antioxidants.

Sweet tea was also attributed with the baby boom experienced in the first years of settlement John Nichol recorded that he and many others had witnessed

*An old female convict, her hair quite grey with age, her face shrivelled...suckling a child she had borne in the colony. It was a strange sight. Her hair was quite white. Her fecundity was ascribed to the sweet tea.*<sup>12</sup>

Far from finding their new environs 'a hostile land', the First Fleet settlers were evidently willing to find positives in their

<sup>10</sup> Karskens p365; L Robinson, 'Aboriginal Uses of Plants Around Sydney' 199. <http://asgap.org.au/APOL10/jun98-6.html> accessed August 20, 2010

<sup>11</sup> Tench (1793) p18

<sup>12</sup> John Nichol in T Flannery (ed.), *Two Classic Tales of Australian Exploration: '1788' by Watkin Tench and 'Life and Adventures' by John Nichol*, Canberra, 2000, pp. 130-1

new locale. Nichol took a quantity of sweet tea away with him, trading it with the Chinese who took great interest in its qualities and administering it to shipmates that suffered with scurvy ‘which soon cured them’.<sup>13</sup>

Lieutenant Bradley reported that sweet tea was ‘recommended as a very wholesome drink and a good thing to take to sea’<sup>14</sup> implying that it acted as a suitable tonic for seafarers’ ailments – especially scurvy. Mary Bryant and her party took a quantity with them on her escape from the colony in 1791 – possibly as a scurvy preventative or cure. Two leaves taken by Mary on her journey from Sydney to Timor and thence on to England as the only survivor of her infamous escape, survive today as part of the Mitchell Library’s collection.

Ralph Clarke’s journey to Norfolk Island was equally hazardous. Deeming himself ‘a child of bad luck’ he, and many others, lost all his worldly goods – presumably including his precious cache of sweet tea, when the *Sirius* was wrecked in treacherous seas trying to land at the island. With no replenishment stores or contact with the outside world for several months, Clarke aggrievedly lamented his plight.

*I have not nor has Majr. Ross drunk a dish of tea or drunk a Glass of wine these Six months... our Breakfast is dry bread and Coffy made from burnt wheat and we are glad even to be able to get that — God help us I hope we will Soon See better days Soon for the[y] cannot well be Worse...<sup>15</sup>*

Aside from their health-giving attributes, simple comforts such as tea provide feel-

ings of security and dignity not afforded in other ways when enduring times of displacement and uncertainty.

Let us return now to Tench’s claim that sweet tea was ‘drank universally’. From the officers’ journals it is clear that only a few had actually tasted this ‘powerful tonic’ and almost none had actually seen it growing in the wild. Invariably the officers (Tench, White, Collins and others) commented on its importance and prevalence among ‘the soldiers and convicts’.

Indeed, some diarists distance themselves from the ‘commoners’ by using *they* rather than *we* – ‘[once] boiled, they obtained a beverage...’ (Collins). Bradley seemed quite *au fait* with the tea plant, saying ‘We also found a plant which grew about the rocks & amongst the underwood entwined, the leaves, of which boiled made a pleasant drink ...’ He even mentions the flavour gained by blending the sweet tea with leaves from the ‘Tea Tree’ (a species of *Leptospermum*): ‘The Tea Tree, so called because a little of the leaves being put into the Native Tea gives it a pleasant spicey taste’.<sup>16</sup> But Bradley separates himself from his subordinates by stating’ [*smilax glyciphylla*] was used as Tea by our Ships Company’. White regarded it as ‘very beneficial to those poor creatures whose constant diet is salt provisions’, indicating that his menu was more varied. Despite parity across all classes in official rations, this demonstrates the significant divide between the tiers of social organisation, with access to a broader range of foods for some.

Given sweet tea’s perceived health attributes, we can surmise that the officers did not suffer or fear ailments such as scurvy or chest complaints, or they’d have taken this ‘powerful tonic’ for medicinal purposes. Possibly they had more confidence

<sup>13</sup> Nichol (2000)pp. 130-1

<sup>14</sup> Bradley, in October (1788) p136

<sup>15</sup> Clark, Ralph *The Journal and Letters of Lt. Ralph Clark 1787-1792* 15 October 1787 & January 1791, accessed via SETIS <http://purl.library.usyd.edu.au/setis/id/clajour> accessed August 12, 2010

<sup>16</sup> Bradley, inserted into journal between pp 232-233.

in, and better access to, the conventional medical treatments than the convicts and lower order marines.

Further, the gentlemen officers obviously had no need for a tea substitute - other extant journal entries indicate that they still had personal supplies of 'real' tea, which lasted them well into 1790. Taking tea was a favoured social pastime. In times when food staples were in such short supply that you had to take your own bread even when dining at the Governor's residence, gathering to take tea was a cultural ritual that was actively preserved, and symbolised British civility in this remote and challenging location. Occasions such as these were brief re-enactments of the life they had left behind.<sup>17</sup>

So it appears that while there was curiosity, experimentation and writing about native fauna and flora, it was a "hands off" experience for many officers. It was those on the ground who were the willing venturers - actively exploring, discovering and embracing their new environs. Is this because the officers regarded their posting in NSW as a temporary duty? With their immediate needs taken care of, backed up with supplies they brought with them, any new and unusual things were seen as curiosities rather than opportunities to improve and add comfort to their new lives, as many convicts must have done. How many varieties of wild leaves were brewed as experimental tea substitutes? Or were such discoveries the result of a serendipitous mistake, as indeed legend tells us was the origin of tea in China many thousands of years ago?

*Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella* observed of the English in 1808

There are two words in their language on which these people pride themselves, and which they say cannot be translated.

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17 Currey, J. (2000) *David Collins: A Colonial Life*: Melbourne University Press, Melbourne. p85

Home is the one, by which an Englishman means his house... The other word is comfort; it means all the enjoyments and privileges of home ...<sup>18</sup>

Tea, whether 'real' imported, or native bitter-sweet, provided a necessary comfort from home for all levels of population in this extraordinary micro-society of Britons, seemingly stranded in a remote and foreign island.

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18 Robert Southey *Letters from England: by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella* translated from the Spanish 1808, cited in John Crowley, John (1999) 'The Sensibility of Comfort,' *American Historical Review* June 1999, p3

## SESSION 3.3

### Lost flavour and tea regulation

Ian Bersten

#### *Regulation of tea and tea quality in the marketplace*

**T**ea legislation is mainly about health and harm, that there should be no chemicals or dangerous residues in tea. Tea with other ingredients such as flowers must make sure that the additions comply with quarantine regulations.

There are also regulations to control the claims about the health benefits of specific teas. There is a requirement that the tea industry must set up its own standards - manufacturers must supply nutrition data on each packet and a use by date for retail consumers.

Apparently, wholesale suppliers of tea in bulk packs to cafes and institutions do not have to comply with date stamping of any type. The consumer one remove away has no protection and a cup of tea can be made with tea of any age at all.

Tea has slipped under the radar because there are in practical terms, no deleterious health issues involved with normal tea. I think the last court case involved a large national packer, accused of adding colouring to tea, was during the second world war.

#### *Tea sales of a century*

One hundred years ago boats came from Colombo with tea still fresh from the garden, imported in chests by large packers and small chains of retail grocers. The tea leaves reached the consumer in a

couple of weeks, to be used and abused in teapots by those who would make a second pot by pouring more boiling water on top of the exhausted tea leaves. The satisfaction can have only come from the extras – the milk added, the sugar to sweeten the tea and a sweet biscuit to dunk in it.

A hundred years later, retail tea sales in Australia amount to around \$250,000,000, with an astonishing 94% of this teabags that are individually filled then packeted, then boxed and loaded into shipping containers. The supply chain is now much longer, with many more links – from the tea garden to the auction, to the packer, into the carton, into the container, delivery to a large distribution warehouse and thence to a supermarket. The brewing time in England is, I am told, now a staggering 11 seconds, hardly enough to colour the water. With such a short brewing time, you can be sure to avoid flavour and allow the milk and sugar to operate unhindered. You can then dunk McVities biscuits, England's favourite dunkers, with 72 million packets consumed each year - or 51 biscuits every second.

#### *The fresh problem*

A 'best-before' date does not imply that a food is fresh until then and descriptions like fresh, natural or richly-flavoured fall outside Australian consumer legislation's limits on false, misleading or deceptive claims. Advice to consumers and food manufacturers is readily available at [www.accc.gov.au](http://www.accc.gov.au).

Simple smell tests show whether tea is fresh or not – not the leaf alone, but when boiling water is poured over it the cup will tell. I have asked Sri Lankan and Indian tea tasters in Colombo and Kolkata where I can find fresh tea outside the tasting room and they laugh at me. The freshness of tea is vital to taste as oxidation causes tea to lose both flavour and aroma. Research by the Indian tea industry shows that tea

stales rather quickly, detectable six weeks after manufacture, despite tea packets typically displaying a 2-year 'use by' date stamp. Staling can be arrested by vacuum packing, with flavour actually increased by 15% when tea is vacuum-packed directly after processing. Vacuum-packed tea is freely available on supermarket shelves in China and Japan, but the percentage of vacuum-packed tea in Australian supermarkets is minimal.

Specialty tea shops provide no guarantee either, particularly if the tea is sold from airtight tins, with no indication of the date of manufacture in the country of origin. The array of tins around the walls is supposed to convince the customer that the widest range of exotic teas from exotic gardens with fancy grade names warrants the high prices. The tea in these popular speciality boutiques costs around 7-8 times as much as teas on supermarket shelves – but the customer has no idea if it is fresh, or stale, only the plantation name and the size of leaf, which tells nothing of taste.

There is an unspoken arrangement between the buyers of tea for retail that the important thing is whether the packaging is good enough to move the tea off the shelves and the pricing is right with good margins. The suppliers know that the buyers have no expertise at tasting tea, so little or no consideration is given to assessing the taste of the tea. Those who believe that you get what you pay for consider the high price is justified by a quality tea and might even assume that a company packing tea for many years – or better yet, decades or centuries – is a guarantee of great tea. If tea is stale, it is not worth anything, and certainly not its asking price in specialist shops. I fail to understand how tea which is not out-of-date according to its packet but proves so stale it is useless, can be sold at the full price, while an out-of-date product in a supermarket sold at a greatly reduced price is more enjoyable. Our 'best-before' law makes asses of us and needs review.

The problem for the tea industry and the consuming public is that nowhere is a perfect cup of tea defined. Try Googling 'perfect cup of tea' and there are nearly 2 million hits, starting with ones like:

*How to Fix a Perfect Cup of Tea:  
Drinking tea is as much a ritual of contemplation and conversation as it is a delicious way to warm the body and refresh ....*

The focus on how to make the perfect cup of tea misses out on the first step, how to find the key fresh ingredient. And if Google distracts you with the ten best places to have afternoon tea in England, or Australia, the focus is on how the sandwiches are presented and the quality of the cakes. The tea is not even mentioned – because it is probably unspeakable.

The cause of the problem is that the tea industry and the writers who support it with beautifully produced books do not understand the simple science of making a cup of tea. Their prescription is to preheat the pot to an indeterminate temperature, pour boiling water over leaves measured in teaspoons of indeterminate size, with 'one for the pot', then brew for 3-5 minutes to avoid tannin bitterness. Science shows us that the extraction of tea flavour is reduced by 50% for every 10°C drop in the brew temperature and deduction tells us that, as the actual brewing temperature in many teapots is about 84°C, the extraction process leaves about 65% of the flavour in the tea leaves, to be thrown out with them.

Science tells us that the cells on the surface of the leaf release their flavour and that the extraction process does NOT penetrate to the centre of a large leaf. Experiments easily done at home will show that large leaf tea releases less than half its flavour, compared to the same tea in fannings or dust size. The claim that small leaf tea is floor-sweepings is unjustified – it has value and can be sold. In a tea factory there is hardly any dust on the floor and most tea sold in India and Sri Lanka is dust and fan-

nings grades.

Demonstration also proves to us that the astringency which makes the tongue dry occurs only after tea has been brewed for more than thirty seconds.

Our own taste tests enable us to define a perfect cup of tea as being full of tea flavour and aroma and having neither astringency, nor bitterness, and guide us to achieving that perfect cup.

If Australia's food laws acknowledged this evidence, we could go into any café and enjoy a good cup of tea, but at present, I do not think this is possible. What is bought instead is the illusion of a good cup of tea – one that has been prepared in a pot with tea leaves or using an expensive but useless brewer of some kind.

Tea filters where the boiling water can pass through vertical holes above the tea without actually touching the tea are common. It is possible to buy tea brewed from expensive pyramid nylon filters where large leaf tea is brewed in a cup – the high cost conveying the illusion that it makes a better cup of tea. We should trust our taste.

### *Good for you*

The tea industry makes broad claims that tea is a healthy beverage, without specifying the quantities of antioxidants per cup because the tea is prepared in so many different ways and drunk at so many different levels of strength. Tests done in China indicate that very small leaf tea brewed at boiling point for thirty seconds will produce 160% more antioxidants than large leaf tea brewed for five minutes in a pot. Most tea drinkers will miss this benefit unless their brewing method provides it. We need to remember that antioxidants from tea have a life similar to that of Vitamin C from a squeezed orange – around thirty minutes.

That polyphenols potentially available in a cup of tea also depend on the brewing process can also be missed, even by sci-

entists. Research presented to the American Chemical Society's 2008 conference showed that although antioxidants were the main marketing focus of bottled teas, a US\$1 billion industry, twenty bottles were needed to provide the same as 'a single cup of home-brewed green or black tea'. If that cup of tea was brewed for or by the average US tea-drinker, the bottled tea equivalent would be even more startling! (Shimin Li, Chi-Tang Ho and colleagues, reported by American Chemical Society 22 August 2010 [www.acs.org](http://www.acs.org))

Tea consumers gets a fraction of what they pay for in terms of taste and flavour – they should be getting a tea with the same flavour characteristics as at the point of manufacture. The importer makes sure the tea is fresh when it is bought, but from then has no interest in what is in the customer's cup.

This attitude within the tea industry is illustrated in an encounter with Basudeb Banerjee, Chairman of the Indian Tea Board, in his Calcutta office in 2008. After a demonstration making a fine cup of tea with a filter, using tea dust and fannings, in thirty seconds, he said

You are a problem. You are making better tea from the lowest grade of tea, better than we can make from the better grades of tea and we want to sell better grades of tea.

He was unconvinced that his assumption that better grades of tea are larger grades was demonstrably false.

Australian consumer legislation relies on consumers complaining if they feel they have been duped, but with tea shopping it is impossible for the average consumer to know just how false, misleading and deceptive are the claims on packets and in cafés. And the situation worsens, with most tea drinkers under the age of forty probably never having tasted real tea in a pot, to compare with a teabag that releases little

flavour in the cup. Being bound to fail every day in the everyday task of making a good cup of tea is sad. So is the search for flavour by spending on exotic names and fancy descriptions of leaf size that do nothing for flavour. How many people know for instance that Broken Orange Pekoe is a leaf size, not a flavour description?

Australian food laws specify the amount of meat in a meat pie, require fish to be labelled correctly, fruit drinks to list their ingredients, and processed foods to show nutritional values. None of this is applied to tea, which surely could carry a simple guideline to achieve optimum flavour and health benefits. If the product at purchase has deteriorated from its original condition and quality, marketing the original and not actual condition is deceptive.

That over time wine improves or deteriorates under various conditions is well known, but the average tea drinker goes by faith alone in keeping tea leaves in an airtight container, out of light and in a cool place. That works only if the tea leaves were fresh when first put into their container. I fear that an Australia-wide study, or a study anywhere in Australia, would show that at the moment of sale most tea has deteriorated. Only vacuum-packing soon after manufacture would make a difference. So why doesn't it? The technology dates back to 1903 and it is puzzling that it has become standard in the coffee industry and rare for tea. Vacuum packs of fresh tea could well transform us into a nation of happy tea-drinkers.

Is there a simple way to determine if tea is stale? My own experiments show that the cells on the surface of tea leaf oxidise first and act as a barrier to further oxidation. Any tea leaf ground to smaller particle size will reveal the fresh tea cells in the interior; if the aroma of the broken leaf tea is different then the large leaf was stale. In a laboratory this is tested on an electronic nose machine; good tea sellers might like to

install small portable machines to guarantee the freshness of their tea.

### *In the bag*

How long can tea remain a \$250 million industry in Australia once people recover their taste? The first sign of that will be an increase in the pathetic 6% who buy loose leaf tea. At every step of the supply chain the teabag loses out, from the first filling and packeting of the bags where oxygenation starts the staling process. Then the length of time before you put that teabag in your cup has its deleterious effect. And a lot depends on the actual teabag; how much tea it contains this can range from 1 gram to 2.5 grams, and its composition is important too. And not only to the taste of your tea.

The rapid increase in production of teabags has an accelerating disposal problem, with Nigel Melican's UK study showing that the carbon footprint for teabag tea is ten times greater than loose tea, while definitions of 'biodegradability' exacerbate the problem ([www.teaspot.com](http://www.teaspot.com)). The amount of filter paper Australia's teabag users discard each year is around an astonishing 1.5 million tons – surely enough to alert municipal councils, if not state governments.

Is change to governance likely? Not unless legislators find there are votes in tea.

My sad guess is that tea drinkers will continue to accept something that is brown, wet and maybe sweet to make up for the missing flavour. Only food historians will see a possible connection between rising coffee consumption and falling tea consumption, and consider the effective packaging now standard in the coffee industry a factor. In time anyone might wonder why the tea industry took so little interest in its own survival and ignored its responsibility for conserving the flavour essential to a first class cup of tea.



## CHOCOLATIERS' TEA PARTY



Canberra's 'Three Chocolatiers', Peter Edmunds (Lindsay & Edmunds), Robyn & Denis Rowe (Robyn Rowe Chocolates), and Heidi Ross (The Curious Chocolatier) provided a generous afternoon tea in the Senate courtyard at Old Parliament House

## SYMPORIUM DINNER

### Deipnosophistae: Symposium dinner

The *Deipnosophistae*, compiled in the 3rd Century, translates as ‘The Gastronomers’, or ‘Philosophers at Dinner’. A key source of classical Greek recipes and discourse on food, this was the inspiration for Janet Jeffs’ 18th Symposium Dancers from Canberra’s vibrant Greek society welcomed guests in the Kings Hall, where everyone was crowned with bayleaf wreaths, crafted from bay branches gathered from the 1927 gardens of Old Parliament House.

Some of the assembly were striking under these abundant garlands; all were transformed into some more heroic and handsome age. So were the Members Dining Rooms, as the procession of diners found all the dividing doors thrown open and two long tables running the entire length, so that all seats faced the whole table of diners, philosophers’ style.

Disconcertingly, at each place there was only spoon, plate, and glass. But as waiters began serving large platters from the dividing aisle, the chef’s creation came alive. Conversing and eating in timeless style, the gastronomers moved from *mezedes* of ancient foods like vine leaves and octopus, through *sitos* of barley bread with goatmilk cheese, to the masterpiece of *opson* – grilled eel with mulberry sauce, ancient garum with tuna, a salad of bitter herbs, and great pieces of roasted goat that had to be demolished with fingers.

With the final sweet notes, *glykeia* of figs, honey, raisins, sesame and soft new cheese, this was a feast of culinary art and gastronomic art, both on the plate and in the discourse along the length of the two great tables.



Greek dancers welcome guests to Kings Hall



Janet Jeffs, Jacqueline Newling, and Liz and Ian Hemphill, resplendent in bayleaf garlands.



The high tables for a democracy of deipnosophists



Carolyn Ho, John Stokes, Marion Halligan, Ian Hemphill and Marilyn Shady enjoy barley bread and dishes of chickpea, celery, almonds and pomegranate



Alison Saunders and Richard Moxham, accomplished at both dining and discourse



Tasmania's Apprentice Chef of the Year Ben Standen with leading Australian nutritionist Rosemary Stanton



Bernadette Hince, Lilian Alden, Lenore Coltheart, Janet Jeffs, Ian Ryall, and Sophie Zalokar, all garlanded



George Biron and Ian Bersten



Wine-roasted katsikai (baby goat)  
– eaten with the fingers



Suzie Langlois and Nola Kenny among diners delighted with their dish of honeyed figs and sesame



Alan Saunders and Colin Sherrington, a thoughtful moment between tuna, and grilled eel



Discourse and dining – this garlanded group of gastronomers in tribute to the chef, and the company

## SESSION 4

### Federated by Food

Fusion means more than linking elements of different cuisines – it also refers to the way food forms nations through social fusion.

Food can be the hidden ingredient in turning both colonisation and immigration into forms of the federation of peoples.

The atmosphere set – and a surprise in store for morning tea – Session 4, chaired by Ian Ryall, comprised papers presented by Tammi Jonas, Diana Noyce and Alexandra Gregori.



For the Sunday morning sessions of the Symposium, we moved from the first venues at the front of Old Parliament House to the elegant Members' Dining Rooms opening out onto Queen Victoria Terrace and Federation Mall.

Among those ready for Sunday at the Symposium are Rosemary Stanton, Alan Saunders, Lizzie Crosby, Margaret Emery and at back, Diana Noyce

## SESSION 4.1

# From Meat Pie to Pho in four decades: if you are what you eat, are Australians cosmopolitan?

Tammi Jonas

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Only the Abstract was available for inclusion in these Proceedings; a subsequent version of the paper was published as 'Eating the vernacular, being cosmopolitan' in CULTURAL STUDIES REVIEW 19, 1, MARCH 2013*

### *Abstract*

An Australian immigration official in the 1950s was reported to be indignant at the suggestion that New Australians might be introducing their food habits into Australia: 'That's not the idea at all', he said. 'What we want is for these migrants to become absorbed into the Australian community, not to bring their own habits with them'. Thirty years later, historian Geoffrey Blainey wrote that Asian immigration was too high for 'public sensibilities'. John Howard, then Opposition leader, soon echoed Blainey when he spoke of high rates of Asian immigration as a threat to 'social cohesion'. Pauline Hanson's racist discourse of the late 1990s (in which her most famous contribution to Parliament was 'We are in danger of being swamped by Asians') not only revived Blainey and Howard's rhetoric of a decade earlier, it curried favour with disenfranchised rural and urban fringe regions seeking greater economic protectionism.

Given the swift diversification of the population in the past forty years, it seems both anachronistic and counterproductive to push 'the Australian way of life' as a

homogeneous possibility, yet this is what politicians and the media continue to do, including in discussions of a 'national dish' (especially around Australia Day). This paper traces shifts and stagnations in national conversations about multiculturalism alongside an analysis of the increase in multicultural restaurants and cookbooks in Australia. It also draws on interview data with three generations of Australians of diverse ethnicities to better understand the role food plays in developing the everyday cosmopolitan attitudes of Melburnians.

## SESSION 4.2

# From Slippery Bob to Baba Ghanoush: the influence of Australia's immigration policies on our culinary culture

Diana Noyce

*The destiny of nations depends on how they nourish themselves. Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are.*<sup>1</sup>

**M**ore than 1,000 guests who dined in Sydney's Town Hall at the State banquet to commemorate the inauguration of the Commonwealth on New Year's Day 1901 were treated to a sumptuous repast that was, with the exception of the Sydney rock oysters that began the meal and a snapper dish, almost entirely lacking in food that was in any way Australian. The menu printed in the arbitrary mixture of French and English—a transported English custom for presenting meals of consequence—could have been lifted almost unchanged from that bible of English gastronomy, *Beeton's Book of Household Management*. It featured such delicacies as clear turtle soup, the quintessential Victorian dish, Scottish salmon with cucumber, beef fillet à la Renaissance, braised turkey and truffles, roast pheasant and the usual array of flamboyant sweets, including Charlotte Russe, invented by 19<sup>th</sup> Century French chef Marie-Antoine Carême and mixed fruit jellies.<sup>2</sup> No Australian wines

1 Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin *The Physiology of the Taste*, 1825

2 New South Wales Parliament, State banquet

are mentioned on the menu.

Like many commemorative menus, this is a mirror of attitudes and aspirations; reflecting here the new nation's faith in English foodstuffs, prepared in the English manner. Everyday cooking styles were as essentially English as grand banquets, with the Australian section added to the 1888 edition of *Beeton's Book of Household Management*, pronouncing that:

*Cookery in Australia is to all intents and purposes English. The dishes are the same, the mode is the same, and the order of serving meals precisely what it is in England... Provisions in Australia are the same as in England only that the supply is more abundant, in fact there is scarcely anything that we consume here that cannot be found there cheaper and more plentiful; while many of the luxuries of English life are within the reach of the poorest of the Colonists.<sup>3</sup>*

Although Australia has always been multiracial, British foodways prevailed for at least a century and a half after European settlement. In 1901, 98% of the population was white and our immigration policies aimed not only to keep Australia predominately 'white' but also British. Racial intolerance, prejudice and fear goaded these policies. Added to this was Dr Phillip Muskett's assertion, published in an 1893 discourse titled *The Art of Living in Australia* that the Anglo-Saxons lacked the ability to come to terms with different climatic conditions in British colonies.<sup>4</sup> The transplanted ingrained dietary habits were inherited unchanged by their children. Consequently, Australia failed to develop

[menu and programme]: to commemorate the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia, Town Hall, January 1901, NLA

3 Isabella Beeton, *Book of Household Management*. London, Ward, Lock & Bowden, 1893

4 PE Muskett, *The Art of Living in Australia*. Sydney, Kangaroo Press, 1987

a distinctive cuisine, regional cooking styles, and any great national dishes. Even the claim to the pavlova, long regarded as a national dish, is contentious.<sup>5</sup>

Australia's gastronomic wilderness was an empty space waiting to be colonised, and it would take changes to our immigration policy to do it. Following World War II, Australia launched a program of social engineering on a massive scale. As a result, the nation today is composed not only of its own indigenous peoples, but a wide variety of ethnic and cultural groups. Immigration has played a central role in the development of Australia as a nation, and food has been a significant element in its construction. One of the distinguishing features of modern Australia is that we are now tolerant, adventurous and daring enough to accept and absorb the foods of other countries, as well as our own indigenous ingredients, creating a rich and diverse culinary culture.

Australia's immigration policies have played an important part in determining what we eat. Food is not only *what* we eat, but *who* we are, and *where* we come from. Perhaps no other nation has had such a changing culinary culture as a consequence of immigration policies.

### Federation

On 1 January 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed and the six separate British self-governing colonies of New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia formed one nation. It was celebrated with a grand ceremony in Sydney's Centennial Park Sydney with Lord Hopetoun, the first Governor-General

proclaiming Australia as the newest self-governing member of the British Empire. A Federal Parliament was formed according to the Constitution and Edmund Barton became the first Prime Minister of Australia.

The Fathers of Federation, Alfred Deakin, Henry Parkes and Edmund Barton, waged a long campaign to turn the six sovereign colonies of 3.7 million people into one nation. In 1890, speaking at the Australasian Federation Conference, Alfred Deakin proclaimed that, "in this country, we are separated only by imaginary lines . . . we are a people one in blood, race, religion and aspiration". 'Race' was a key factor in the ambition for Federation, with the dream of a 'white nation' uppermost in the minds of the federalists. Despite 30,000 Chinese turning out for the Federation celebrations, on Federation, indigenous people were excluded from voting, as were most women, the poor and people of Chinese or Indian descent.

Australia has never been a nation of one blood, race or religion. Immigration has been a vital feature of Australia's history and identity for more than 50,000 years, with the initial human migration to the continent beginning when Aboriginal ancestors first set foot on the northern fringes of the continent. Food from the bush and waterways sustained Aboriginal people for thousands of years, with 'a rich, exciting and balanced diet of seasonal fruits, nuts, roots, vegetables, meats and fish'.<sup>6</sup> However, it was not the millennia of indigenous flora and fauna and culinary traditions that shaped Australian cuisine, but introduced plants, animals and tastes.

The 1,300 officers and crew, passengers and convicts who arrived with the First Fleet at Sydney Cove on 26 January were near to starvation in the first months at

5 Helen M Leach, 'The pavlova cake: the evolution of a national dish', in Harlan Walker. *Food on the Move: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery* London, : Prospect Books, 1996, pp.219–223

6 Jennifer Isaacs *Bush Food: Aboriginal Food and Herbal Medicine* Sydney, Weldon, 1987, p.11

Sydney Cove, yet they appear to have shunned local foods and shuddered at the indigenous diet of blue-tongue lizard, goanna and kangaroo. Instead, apart from fishing, they lived on subsistence rations until the crops they had planted were ready for harvesting and domestic animals arrived in sufficient numbers to be used as food. Included on board the eleven fragile wooden ships were not only the convicts, but a microcosm of the agriculture of Britain and its empire. The British brought with their culinary traditions an ecological revolution. It was to change the character of the continent as British foodways founded colonial cuisine.

While Mrs Beeton's assessment of Australia's culinary culture is probably accurate, choices of foodstuffs in Australia were different from those in England. Preeminent among the animals brought to the continent was the merino sheep so successfully and profitability grazed that flocks in New South Wales increased almost five-fold between 1803 and 1813. Mutton and even lamb was thus available and even inexpensive.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence, almost three times as much meat per capita was consumed in the Australian colonies, where it was the custom to have meat at every meal. After transportation of convicts to the eastern colonies ended in 1840, the colonies attracted British immigrants with the rallying call of 'Meat Three Times a Day' was a rallying call in the 1840s. The colonies competed for free settlers under immigration schemes encouraging British and Irish tradesmen and agricultural workers.<sup>8</sup> Unleavened damper and later white bread from wheat flour, also introduced (but imported for most of the period)

7 Barbara Santich, "Australia and New Zealand," *Encyclopedia of Food & Culture*. Solomon H Katz (ed) Vol. 1, Gale Cengage, 2003

8 Barbara Santich, *What the Doctor Ordered: 150 Years of Dietary Advice in Australia* Melbourne, Hyland House, 1995, p.12

became a staple. These staples were usually washed down with copious amounts of tea sweetened with sugar.

Despite a potential abundance of fruit and vegetables, market gardening was 'deplorably neglected', with potato planting prominent, along with the British method of cooking them by boiling in a cauldron.<sup>9</sup> Non-indigenous foods were the desired and dominant part of the diet. In spite of proximity to some of the richest fishing grounds in the world, there was no major fishing industry in the first fifty years. Wealthy Sydneysiders preferred expensive imported fish (except for Sydney rock oysters), such as cured cod and salmon from Scotland over the local product.<sup>10</sup>

### *Slippery Bob*

Some of the new Australians ate indigenous foods such as galahs, kangaroo and wombat, mainly drovers, shepherds and families on remote stations, if scarcity of preferred foods drove them to it. And notably, Edward Abbott's 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book* gave directions for cooking native ingredients, specifically to establish a distinctive Australian cuisine.<sup>11</sup> Abbott drew on indigenous and exotic ingredients to produce dishes using English methods and principles for dishes like Slippery Bob, a popular bush recipe for kangaroo brains, made into a batter with flour and water and then cooked in emu fat.<sup>12</sup> Another favourite, 'the finest dish of Australian colonial cookery', was 'kangaroo steamer', cooked in a similar way to jugged hare ('jugging' was the Brit-

9 Muskett, p.v

10 Laurel Evelyn Dyson, *How to Cook A Galah*, Sydney, Thomas Lothian , 2002),p.18

11 Edward Abbott, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many, as well as for the Upper Ten Thousand*. By An Australian Aristologist, London:, Sampson Low, 1864

12 Abbott, p.86

ish method of cooking in a closed earthenware jug). Made by mincing kangaroo flesh, the steamer incorporated pork or bacon (to provide the fat) and was left to steam in a closed saucepan.<sup>13</sup>

While cookery books can be seen as windows into the soul of a cuisine, they can also intervene in rather than reflect a country's diet, by popularising new foods, new methods, and fresh attitudes. They tell us more about the fantasies and fears associated with foods than what people actually ate for dinner.<sup>14</sup> Cookbooks are powerful, and in this case the early dishes and their recipes just vanished as British publications were more readily available. And as Australia became more urbanised, few non-Indigenous people had access to native ingredients, so local styles never entered into the serious or long-term eating habits of Britain's Australian colonies.

Sydney doctor Philip Muskett had a vision for a complete reform of these eating habits, challenging an Australian cuisine that 'implied good plain fare based on large quantities of meat', accompanied by the 'endless recurrence of boiled potatoes, boiled cabbage, boiled this and boiled that'. He deplored such excesses, including the unending consumption of tea.<sup>15</sup> Despite the assisted migration of German wine makers in the 1840s to the colonies of South Australia and Victoria, Australian wine, which Muskett said, 'should be the national beverage of every-day life', remained almost a curiosity.<sup>16</sup>

Muskett advocated a Mediterranean diet with more fruit and vegetables, especially salads, together with more fish and seafood and far less meat. But his words went

largely unheeded. Tomatoes, for example, tended to be cooked, made into sauces, chutneys or relishes, or added to stews, rather than eaten raw.<sup>17</sup> Over a century of European settlement had not resulted in the development of dietary patterns based on availability of food and its suitability to climatic conditions. Amidst the rising fervour for Federation, in 1893 Muskett, the visionary, boldly stated, 'The life of a nation is moulded in no small degree by its daily fare' and that 'the development of Australia as a nation will never actually begin unless it changed its culinary habits'.<sup>18</sup> It would take dramatic events, including two world wars and a revolution in immigration policies, as greater openness to gastronomic alternatives, to bring about the culinary changes more than sixty years after Muskett's advocacy.

In the meantime, culinary matters became worse, much worse.

### *White aliens*

One of the strongest motives for a federated Australia was achieving a common immigration policy. Racial diversity defined Australia before Federation, but resistance to Chinese migration that began with the 1850s gold rushes had become a common theme by the 1890s. The importation of indentured Melanesian labourers, known as Kanakas, to work in the Queensland sugar industry prompted anxiety not at their conditions as the jobs lost to non-Australians, while factory workers everywhere were vehemently opposed to importing cheap labour that would erode hard-won wages and conditions.

Western Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania even introduced a dictation test that became a national requirement after Federation under one of the first

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13 Abbott, p.82

14 Nicola Humble (ed), *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* Oxford University Press, 2000, p. xvi

15 Muskett, p.124.

16 Muskett, p.v.

17 Warren Fahey, *Tucker Track: the curious history of food in Australia* Sydney, ABC Books, 2005, p.187

18 Muskett, pp.114, vi.

laws passed by the new national Parliament, the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* aimed at ensuring there would be no place for ‘Asiatics’ or ‘coloureds’ in Australia. Next came the *Pacific Islands Labourers Act*, prohibiting non-white immigration and providing for the removal of 9,000 Kanakas from Australia. These restrictive laws implemented an undeclared but effective ‘White Australia Policy’ directed to preserving the British dominance of both population and culture.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1850s gold rushes people of all nationalities had contributed to the doubling within a decade of the colonial population, from 437,655 to just over one million. The economy too expanded as gold bullion was shipped to London and huge amounts of imports flowed back to the colonies. By the 1870s the capital cities could boast sophisticated restaurants and a wide range of imported luxury foods, from caviar to Gorgonzola cheese.<sup>20</sup> Fine dining though reached its peak during the *belle époque* between 1890 and World War I, when gourmet restaurants in all the major cities served a wide range of continental cuisines. Possibly as an effect of the new nationwide restrictive immigration laws, by 1920 the lament that Australia had only one diet: steaks, chops, beef, mutton, potatoes and gravy, with suet pudding and slabs of cheese was heard again. The fine dining rooms of hotels and exclusive private clubs served a standard antipodean cuisine: steak and chips, roast meats and vegetables, bread and butter, tea, and ice cream with passionfruit.<sup>21</sup>



A typical *Bulletin* cartoon, published 28 September 1901 depicts the loading of a cargo of unwanted immigrants

From 1901–1939 the ‘preferred’ immigrants were British farmers, young rural labourers and domestic servants to fill Australia’s ‘empty spaces’, but advertising to encourage British workers to Australia also encouraged others. In the 1920s non-British Europeans were arriving unassisted in increasing numbers, especially between 1925 and 1928.<sup>22</sup> Greek immigrants in particular settled in country towns where they became the purveyors not of Greek food, but plentiful and Australian meals. At cafes always known locally as ‘The Greeks’, they served sizzling steaks with fried onions, chips, tomatoes and topped with fried eggs.<sup>23</sup> This missed opportunity suggests the entrenched unwillingness to absorb new ideas and make unfamiliar culinary choices that for so long made Australia a gastronomic wilderness – and created a wide open space waiting to be filled.

### *Baba Ghanoush*

After World War 2 Australia launched a massive immigration program, believing that having narrowly avoided Japanese invasion, Australia must ‘populate or perish’.

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- 19 Michele Langfield, *More People Imperative, Immigration to Australia, 1901–1939*, Research Guide Number 7, National Archives of Australia, 1999; [foundingdocs.gov.au](http://foundingdocs.gov.au) accessed February 2011
- 20 Santich, 2006
- 21 Michael Symons. *One Continuous Picnic: A Gastronomic History of Australia*. (Australia: Melbourne University Press, 2007, p. 141)

22 Langfield

23 Symons,, p.157



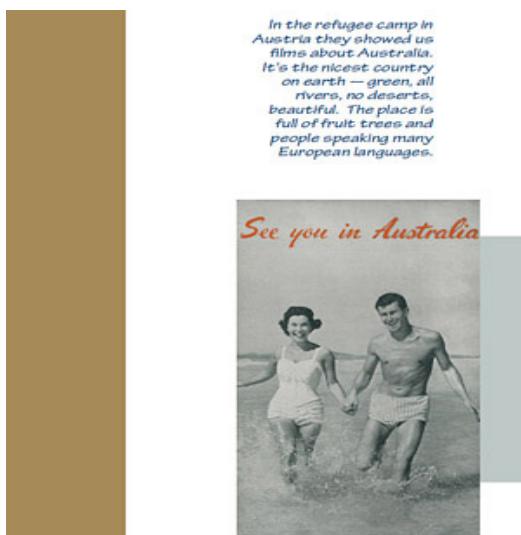
Dusan Malinovic recollection, *Migration Memories*, National Archives of Australia

Australia signed immigration agreements with more than twenty war-torn European countries, establishing immigration assistance and reunion schemes for displaced persons. Greece, Italy, Germany, Yugoslavia, the Netherlands and the Baltic States became major contributors. More than two million people immigrated to Australia during the twenty years following the end of the war. Political refugees fleeing dictatorships in Spain and Portugal, and communism in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and the former Soviet Union were also included in the figures.<sup>24</sup>

The new Australians were expected to assimilate into the Australian way of life, and become indistinguishable from the Australian-born population as much as possible. However, as the Mediterranean immigrants poured in, so too did spaghetti, youvetsi and baba ghanoush. Unlike the restrictive policies of the previous 60 years, Australia actively sought these non-British immigrants. They found work in an expanding postwar economy, with major infrastructure projects such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme. The echo of Italian settlers in the Riverina is in the

24 Immigration: Federation to Century's End (1901–2000), pp. 3–6

*In the refugee camp in Austria they showed us films about Australia. It's the nicest country on earth – green, all trees, no deserts, beautiful. The place is full of fruit trees and people speaking many European languages.*



names of wineries such as DeBortolo, Miranda, Rossetto and Calabria.

In Western Australia's Swan Valley, Yugoslavs settled in large numbers, bringing their strong wine culture with its subtle differences, their descendants producing wines under names such as Talijancich, Kosovich and Yurisich.<sup>25</sup>

Old prejudices die hard and the continuing role of xenophobic attitudes in expressions of national feeling still favoured British immigration. This was promoted through community schemes such as 'Bring Out a Briton'. The immigrants who availed themselves of this assisted passage scheme became known as 'ten pound poms'.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the wave of immigration from Europe was greatly changing the character of Australian society. Immigration was still restricted to Europeans in most circumstances, but Australia's restrictive immigration policies were gradually easing.

25 Australia: Early Wine Influences Available at: [www.globalgourmet.com/destinations/australia/wineinfl.html#ixzz1FqwydEcP](http://www.globalgourmet.com/destinations/australia/wineinfl.html#ixzz1FqwydEcP), (accessed February, 2011).

26 Immigration: Federation to Century's End (1901–2000), p. 6



Minister for Immigration Al Grassby announces the new immigration selection procedures, 1973.  
National Archives of Australia

### Injera

Following the election of a coalition of the Liberal and Country parties in 1949, Immigration Minister Harold Holt allowed 800 non-European refugees to remain in Australia and Japanese war brides to enter Australia. Over subsequent years, Australian governments gradually dismantled the 'White Australia Policy', with the final vestiges being removed in 1973 by the new Labor government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam. The end of the war in Vietnam in 1975 brought refugees and migrants from Indo-China to many countries, with Australia accepting some 70,000 people. East Timorese after 1975 and political dissidents from South America also sought asylum in Australia; with Australia moving to a policy Minister of Immigration Al Grassby termed 'multiculturalism'. The earlier policy of assimilation was now seen as stripping away cultural characteristics as the price of immigration. Australia changed from 'melting pot' to 'salad bowl'.

In the 1980s significant numbers of African refugees began to arrive, most from Ethiopia. With them came injera, the sourdough pancake-like bread, and thick spicy vegetable and meat dishes now favourites for takeaways, market lunches, or dining out in speciality restaurants cafes.

In the 1990s the 'salad bowl' had more new ingredients, after the Yugoslav wars in the Balkans brought Albanians Bosnian Muslim, Croat and Serb refugees to settle in Australia.<sup>27</sup>

This was not just a time of political and demographic changes for Australians, but also a cultural shift, with new popular pursuits including the arts, film and, of course, food and drink, while increasing access to overseas travel prompted interest in an Australian 'identifiable national culture'.<sup>28</sup> The baby boomers' parents had striven to 'make do' through depression and war, but now cooking for family and friends, and visiting restaurants, were avidly discussed, a new 'social currency'.<sup>29</sup>

The explosive growth of all types of restaurants reflects the impact of multiculturalism in the demand for diversity in restaurant cuisines. In 1980 the first edition of Melbourne's *Good Food Guide* included just one Thai and one Vietnamese restaurant among 47 French restaurants, five English and even three listed as Dutch. The 2002 *Good Food Guide* had eight Thai, eight Vietnamese, 11 in the modern-Asian category and at least one from a wide range of countries including Korea, Sri Lanka and even Straits Chinese. And that's not counting the dozens and dozens in the modern-Australian section, most of which were heavily influenced by Asian and Middle Eastern techniques and fla-

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- 27 Immigration: Federation to Century's End (1901–2000), 13
- 28 Stephen Downes *Advanced Australian Fare: How Australian Cooking Became the World's Best*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2002, p.50
- 29 Cher Holt-Fortin, 'A loaf of bread, a Jug of wine, and thou beside me in the kitchen.' *Americana: The Journal of American Popular Culture*, Fall 2002, Volume 1, Issue 2 [www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall\\_2002/holt-fortin.htm](http://www.americanpopularculture.com/journal/articles/fall_2002/holt-fortin.htm), (accessed February, 2011).

vours.<sup>30</sup> And of course in the same period, fast foods like gyros and kebabs joined East Asian and Indian takeaways, vastly extending the possibilities from pizzas and pies, in the diversification of foodways in Australia. Australia has transformed from the least multicultural country in the world to perhaps the most diverse, with 199 nationalities living here. Cuisines from around the world also influenced the food on offer in pubs and clubs around the country, where eclectic menus include for instance pasta, laksa, bangers and mash and crème caramel.

Australian palates offered a whole world of international dining developed an interest in their own local produce, with a growing interest from world-class chefs who are seeking 'new' tastes and combinations. Alongside the many restaurants with cuisines from Vietnam to Morocco are restaurants specialising in native ingredients. Barramundi, crocodile and kangaroo meat, as well as Bunya nut, lemon myrtle and bush tomatoes, are among the items that have found their way onto menus in leading restaurants in every city.

A study published in 2000 noted that improvements in Australians' nutrition were more by accident than intention, and had come about through the more diverse diet gradually adopted from the stimulus of immigration. In an echo of Philip Muskett a century ago, the study concluded

*Australia has a great food culture ... thanks to the Mediterranean and Asian influence, we have been introduced to a wide variety of foods ... there are obvious advantages in fusing cultures.<sup>31</sup>*

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- 30 Melinda Houston, Hot Chefs Sun Herald 15 June 2003, [www.changingtables.com.au/changing-tables-articles/2003/6/15/hot-chefs](http://www.changingtables.com.au/changing-tables-articles/2003/6/15/hot-chefs), accessed February, 2011
- 31 Mark Wahlqvist, 'Immigration the key to Australia's nutrition success', *Food Integrity*, 3 November 2000, [www.mydr.com.au/nutrition-weight/immigration-the-key-to-australias-nutrition-success](http://www.mydr.com.au/nutrition-weight/immigration-the-key-to-australias-nutrition-success)

Seventeen years before, at our 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium of Australian Gastronomy in Melbourne, the author of this study, Mark Wahlqvist, had strikingly expressed the connection between diverse diet and social openness implied by Muskett.<sup>32</sup>

As we began with a menu from 1901, we shall end with one from top Sydney restaurateur and chef Tetsuya Wakuda.<sup>33</sup> His is the quintessential immigrant success story, and his restaurant menu epitomises the diversity of modern Australian cuisine. Tetsuya was 22 when he arrived in Australia from Japan in 1982, bringing only a small suitcase and his love of food.

His eleven-course dégustation menu is a unique fusion of Japanese flair and flavour and French technique, using fresh seasonal Australian ingredients. The dégustation might start with a chilled cucumber soup with sheep yoghurt ice cream, followed by sashimi of kingfish, and marinated New Zealand scampi with Avruga. Tetsuya's signature dish, a confit of Petuna ocean trout served with konbu, celery and apple, always features on the menu, and may be followed by a fillet of mulloway with asparagus and pil pil, then braised ox tail with sea cucumber and yuzu. Slow-roasted breast of duck with sansho, and a de-boned rack of lamb with heirloom carrots, might complete the savoury courses. For dessert, perhaps a sorbet of Pione grapes with summer pudding, then a white peach with peach granita? Or a chocolate pavé and chocolate fondant, with chai mochi to finish?

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#### [gration-the-key-to-australias-nutrition-success](#)

accessed February 2011

- 32 Barbara Santich and Michael Symons (eds), *A Multicultural society: Proceedings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Symposium of Australian Gastronomy*, Melbourne, 8-10 March 1987

- 33 [www.tetsuyas.com/page/the\\_restaurant.html](http://www.tetsuyas.com/page/the_restaurant.html), accessed April, 2011

## SESSION 4.3

### Filipino culinary heritage and colonisation

Alexandra Gregori

This Symposium's questioning of the implications of colonial governance on indigenous foodways (the eating habits and culinary practices of a people, region, or historical period) is intriguing. Having recently moved to Manila, I was interested to investigate this issue in regards to Filipino foodways.

After more than four hundred years of colonisation, some have painted the Philippines as a culinary desert, any unique features blurred by the impact of colonial dominance; others suggest a muddying of the culinary waters has irreversibly polluted the indigenous food so that it now 'tastes like motor oil'.<sup>1</sup>

Others say its cuisine is 'dynamic, syncretic and emergent' or 'a frontier cuisine which demonstrates real harmony between indigenous and metropolitan ingredients'.<sup>2</sup>

Los Angeles based Filipino chef Rodelio Aglibot says it is arguably one of the least understood and appreciated cuisines in the world.<sup>3</sup>

So what is Filipino cuisine? And has it

been enriched or degraded by centuries of colonial governance?

When food writer Raymond Sokolov decided to visit the Philippines, friends were quick to warn him it was 'the worst food in Asia' and as we made plans to move to Manila last year, I received a similar response. Many expatriates I met mocked the idea of a Filipino cuisine and advised us to avoid the local food at all costs. When I suggested I might reserve judgment until I had tasted it myself, the inevitable response was 'Good luck with that!'

Our first foray into a Filipino restaurant unfortunately lived up to, or rather down to, its reputation. My bowl of *kare kare* was a greasy stew full of unidentifiable vegetables and off-cuts of meat that were largely fat and gristle. My husband fared no better. We re-grouped and decided to wait a little before we braved another such culinary adventure.

In the meantime I began to research the history and culinary traditions of my host country, keen to test the theory that cultural understanding through taste is one of the best ways we can learn to understand each other.<sup>4</sup>

#### *The Philippines*

For centuries the original inhabitants of the Philippines were scattered across an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands. Hunter-gatherers of Malayo-Polynesian descent, they lived in disparate communities, isolated from one another both geographically by sea, jungles and volcanic mountain ranges, and culturally by a wide variety of dialects and languages. Blessed with an abundant food supply of fresh fruit and vegetables, rice and fish, the indigenous Filipino had a simple but healthy

1 Raymond Sokolov, *Why We Eat What We Eat* New York, Simon & Schuster, 1991, p.51

2 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett & Doreen Fernandez, 'Culture ingested: on the indigenisation of Philippine food', in Darra Goldstein (ed), *Gastronomica: the journal of food and culture*, 3, 1, p.60; Fernandez-Armesto, p.161

3 Amy Scattergood, 'Filipino food: off the menu', *Los Angeles Times*, 25 February 2010, p.2

4 Fritz Allhoff & Dave Monroe (eds) *Food & Philosophy: eat, think and be merry*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p.264

diet. Indigenous cooking methods were simple too: steaming, boiling, grilling or roasting over hot coals.<sup>5</sup>

With no aristocracy to upgrade and refine it, Filipino cuisine would remain for centuries as unsophisticated peasant cooking that brought families and communities together. ‘Eating is the time when the family gathers, when the community is one... [it] is something of a sacred time’. Hospitality and conviviality are still deeply ingrained in the Filipino psyche and it would be considered shameful to send a guest or child away hungry.

Despite their isolation from one another, the Philippine islands were also strategically placed to link east and west trade routes, an advantage that proved irresistible to western colonial powers. In the fifteenth century, Portugal and Spain raced to claim the world’s spice routes, and effectively divided the globe between them. Spain took the West Indies, while Portugal seized control of the east – apart from the Philippines.<sup>6</sup> The Filipinos lived under Spanish supremacy for over four hundred years, as well as hosting a broad range of pirates, traders and migrants. And each new arrival brought new ingredients, new cooking methods, and new utensils, all influencing, through the centuries, the simple island cuisine.

### *‘The foods that we can truly call our own’*

It would be impossible to cover here the entire spectrum of indigenous Filipino food, with all its regional and individual

variation. So I will simply provide my beginner’s introduction.

**Rice** – all Filipino meals lead to rice. Just as the Eskimos have many words for snow, so ‘a seventeenth century Tagalog/Spanish dictionary listed more than 200 words relating to rice’. Rice has been cultivated in the Philippines since 3,200 BC, and it is now the country’s principal crop. There are over twenty varieties of rice available, but many are imported from neighbouring countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. Rice is quintessentially Filipino, the national staple, ‘the centre point of every meal’<sup>7</sup>:

*If we didn’t have rice, our deepest comfort food, we would probably feel less Filipino.<sup>8</sup>*

Rice is served with every main meal. It is steamed in banana or coconut leaves to become a portable snack called *suman*. Glutinous rice is used for making *Kakanin*, a generic term for desserts, like *puto* and *bibingka*, which are then sprinkled with freshly grated coconut or *pinipig* – rice pounded and toasted like cornflakes. Rice is also fermented into wine, made into rice porridge for the sick, and stewed into tea for stomach aches.<sup>9</sup>

**Coconut** provides good eating at every stage in its life: the young green nut is eaten or drunk fresh; made into sweets and syrups; or cooked with noodles. Its mature flesh is pressed for the milk and cream or grated over rice cakes. Its sap can be soured into vinegar or distilled into a potent spirit called *lambanog*. Heart of

5 Frances Dorai, *Insight Guides: Philippines*, Singapore, Apa Publications, 2008, p.51; Sokolov, p.52; Doreen Fernandez, *Tikim: essays on Philippine food and culture*, Pasig City, Anvil Publishing, 1994, p.223

6 Lloyd Grossman, *The World on a Plate: the history and mystery of the food we eat*, London, BBC Books, 1996, p.112

7 Doreen Fernandez, *Palayok: Philippine food through time, on site, in the pot*, Makati City, The Bookmark, 2000, p.16; Hicks, p.57; Amy Besa & Romy Dorotan. *Memories of Philippine Kitchens: stories and recipes from far and near*, New York, Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2008, p.56

8 Fernandez, p.19

9 Besa, p.56

palm, taken from the dead tree, is popular for sautéeing with shrimps for *lumpia* or tossing in salads. ‘Rice and coconut may be ... the two land products with the most influence on Filipino food.<sup>10</sup>

**Kinilaw** is probably the oldest cooking technique used in the Philippines, with archaeological evidence dating back a thousand years.

Seafood is taken fresh from the sea and bathed – not marinated – in a sour dressing of vinegar or citrus juice, then seasoned with onions, garlic, chilies or coconut milk. The seasoning depends on the taste and texture of the particular fish. *Kinilaw* is served raw and should be eaten almost immediately.<sup>11</sup>

**Pork** – after fish, the favoured meat in the Philippines. Everything is eaten bar the squeak; in the wet markets, tongues and trotters, intestines and stomach lining, ears, snouts and an unexpectedly long tail hang beside more familiar, if rather fatty cuts of meat. Spit-roasted suckling pig – *lechon de leche* - is the meat of choice for entertaining and celebrating, and is ideally cooked to the point where it can be cut with a saucer. Guests are offered the first bite, and it helps to know that etiquette requires you to pluck a piece of flesh from behind the ears or tail with your fingers before the animal is carved up for everyone else.<sup>12</sup>

**Adobo** is probably the most well-known Filipino dish. Adobo is a stew of pork, goat, chicken or seafood laced with vinegar, which both flavours and tenderises the meat. It was long assumed that adobo was adapted from the Spanish or Mexican dish of the same name, but Sokolov suggests

that, as all the necessary ingredients were already available, it may actually have been a Filipino dish renamed by the Spanish for its resemblance to something similar from home. Despite myriad regional and familial variations, adobo is now distinctly Filipino, quite different from its Spanish or Mexican counterparts.<sup>13</sup>

**Sinigang:** ‘Sourness is at the heart of sinigang’, a light broth soured with anything from tamarind or tomatoes to green mango or *kalamansi*, (a tiny but juicy native lime) and containing almost any seasonal vegetables, and any meat except chicken.

Whenever I wander through a farmers market I frequently ask stall holders to identify unfamiliar fruit or vegetables, and how they are used. The answer is inevitably ‘*in sinigang*’.

With all sorts of variations across South East Asia, including Thai *tom yum*, it is apparently more representative of Filipino taste than the overworked *adobo*, ‘adaptable to all tastes... to all classes and budgets... to seasons and availability’.<sup>14</sup>

**Vegetables** for me, are still a largely unknown quantity and apparently to many modern Filipinos too, who failed to recognize many weed-like examples of native greens at a recent workshop! But I have recently tried a tasty modern version of *pinkabet*, a traditional vegetable dish flavoured with bagoong (fermented fish paste) and topped with pork crackling. And I have experimented at home with young fern fronds (*sayote*) by sautéeing them in olive oil with onions and garlic. I have also made a healthy pesto from *marrungay* or horseradish leaves.

**Sawsawan** (seasoning or dipping sauces): Described as the key to Filipino cuisine,

10 Dorai, 2008, p.99; Fernandez, 2000, p.15

11 Fernandez, 2000, p.7; Besa & Dorotan, p.48

12 Gilda Cordero-Fernando (ed) *The Culinary Culture of the Philippines*. Manila, Bancom Audiovision Corporation, 1976, p.12

13 Sokolov, pp.60-61

14 Besa & Dorotan, p.44; Doreen Fernandez & Edilberto Alegre, *Sarap: essays on Philippine food*. Manila, Mr. & Ms. Publishing Company, 1988, p.2

sawsawan provide the accents of sweet and sour and saltiness in the face of the ‘benign presence’ of rice. This final touch is added not by the chef but the diner, who is given the freedom to ‘fine-tune’ and personalise the dish with ‘a galaxy of flavour-adjusters’ including vinegars and tamarind, soy sauce and garlic, pickled papaya and green mango, native chillies, tomatoes and *kalamansi*. The most common and popular accompaniments are *patis* and *bagoong*, salty sauces or pastes made from fermented fish and shrimp.<sup>15</sup>

This participatory and communal approach to food preparation is an integral part of Filipino dining which may not sit comfortably with the western diner, who may even be discouraged from adding salt and pepper for fear of affronting the chef.

### **Migrants & traders**

For the islanders, not only was the sea a principle source of sustenance, it would also prove to be ‘a determining theme’ throughout Philippine history, bringing migrants, trading vessels and colonial powers to this vulnerable crossroads in the Pacific.<sup>16</sup>

From 3,000 BC migrants sailed from Indonesia and East India, China and Malaysia. As early as the tenth century, traders from China and Arabia began to find their way to the islands. Their influence helped the indigenous islanders leap-frog various stages of human evolution: from hunting and gathering to agriculture, from earthenware cooking pots (*palayoks*) to cast iron woks and porcelain.

Arab traders established independent Muslim strongholds in the south, defending them fiercely throughout the centuries. Their descendants now constitute the largest cultural minority in the country. They

introduced not only Islam, but ground spices and small red hot chilies, which have become popular in the south, though not in other regions. Largely isolated from the influences of Spain and America, their cooking remains ‘strongly ancestral’.<sup>17</sup>

In the north, the Chinese had the most profound influence on Filipino food. Similar tastes and the same basic staples meant fusion occurred naturally as many Chinese dishes were absorbed into Filipino society, to the point that a lot of these are now cheerfully – if erroneously – claimed as purely Filipino.<sup>18</sup>

With the arrival of the Spanish In the sixteenth century, heightened political unrest in Hokkien increased Chinese immigration to the Philippines. Alternately fearing their influence and needing their skills, the Spaniards awarded land to the Chinese community outside the walls of their capital, Intramuros. Many Chinese converted to Catholicism and intermarried with the Filipinos, creating a mixed race that became known as *Chinoy*. Binondo quickly became the commercial hub of the city. Now the area is a prime tourist attraction, a well-established Chinatown boasting a plethora of cafes and restaurants, *panciterias*, bakeries and the ubiquitous street stalls. During Chinese New Year, a food lover’s walking tour through Chinatown introduced me to some *Chinoy* food.<sup>19</sup>

**Lumpia** originated in Hokkien and these fresh spring rolls are quite different from the bite-sized fried spring rolls popular in Asian restaurants across the globe. Consisting of a thin, rice flour crepe, *lumpia* are filled with pork mince or prawns,

17 Santanina T Rasul, ‘What do they eat in the Muslim south?’ in Gilda Cordero-Fernando (ed), *The Culinary Culture of the Philippines* Manila, Bancom Audiovision Corporation, 1976, p.113; Dorai, p.55

18 Fernandez, 2000, 48; Dorai, 100

19 Ivan Man Dy, *The Big Binondo Food Wok Map*, Manila, Old Manila Walks, 2010, p.1

15 Fernandez, 2000, p.15; Cordero-Fernando, p.43; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, p.64

16 Besa & Dorotan, p.11

carrot, bean sprouts, dried seaweed and crushed peanuts. They are then dipped in soy sauce and vinegar, or a sweet sauce made from brown sugar and cornflour.

**Sia pao** is a typical and popular *Hokkien merienda* (snack). This hot doughy steamed dumpling looks a bit like a jam donut. It is filled, however, not with jam, but with finely diced pork.

**Pancit or Hokkien noodles** are the original convenience food, long since adopted by the Filipinos. Now every region has its own favourite noodle dish, with noodles made from egg or rice, mung beans or wheat.<sup>20</sup> One of the more popular noodle dishes is *Pancit Luglug* – an emotive and onomatopoeic word for dunking in water before adding sauce and toppings.

And then there are the myriad street stalls selling cheap and popular snacks with Chinese origins and extraordinary names like IUDs (grilled chicken intestines on a stick), Nikes (grilled chicken feet) and Walkman (grilled pork ears), not to mention the infamous *balout*, a boiled duck egg complete with three week old embryo.

### *Colonisation*

In the 16th Century the Europeans arrived in the Pacific; the Spanish laid claim to the Pacific islands in 1543, naming them collectively Las Islas Filipinas after Crown Prince Felipe. Pushing north from Cebu, the Spanish arrived at Manila Bay in 1571 and built the walled city of Intramuros. Here they established a thriving galleon trade that sailed between Manila and Acapulco and onto Madrid for the next 250 years, attracting traders from China and Japan, Brunei and India.

The Spanish conquistadors also turned inland, where they appropriated large tracts of land to create large estates. Using native labour, they planted tobacco and coffee,

sugar and indigo, none of which was indigenous to the Philippines.

Meanwhile Spanish friars converted the locals to Christianity and effectively created a theocracy.<sup>21</sup> Spanish was the language of the overlords and the educated elite, and all things Spanish were imitated and glorified.

The colonisers relied heavily on foods imported from home. Some were transplanted and grew prolifically in the lush landscape. Others became exotic commodities available only to the upper classes. These ingredients, from Spain and its Viceroyalty of Mexico, included olive oil and tomatoes, corn and avocados, lemons and pineapples, garlic & onions, chorizo and ham, and chocolate.

Stews, *paella* and *rellenos* were common Spanish and Mexican dishes that, as ‘foods of the conqueror’ assumed a dignity they did not possess in Spain. Many gradually seeped into everyday Filipino kitchens to be adapted into ‘fiesta fare’: food made only for special occasions such as Christmas and Easter, festivals that along with their culinary traditions were introduced by the Spanish. Spanish stews would become ‘a reckless combination of pork, chicken, beef, vegetables, chorizo, jamon China [and] *morcilla*’, paella was filled with ‘a luxurious mix of the local and foreign’, while *rellenos* became ‘anything that can conceivably be stuffed’. Rich elaborate desserts such as *tortas imperiales* (almond cake) and *brazo de Mercedes* (a meringue roll filled with butter cream) created ‘a repertoire of sweetness’. *Leche flan* is still number one on a top twenty list of favourite desserts compiled by Filipino food blogger Market Man.<sup>22</sup>

Spanish is firmly planted in the lexicon of Filipino cuisine: *Caldereta, adobo, lechon de*

21 Carlos Celadron, *Walk This Way!* January, 2011

22 Fernandez & Alegre, pp.8, 18, 148, 151; Besa & Dorotan, p.94

20 Fernandez & Alegre, p.17

*leche, tamales, and empinadas* for example. Many Chinese and Filipino names were also translated into Spanish for the Spanish clientele, glamourising the dishes in the same way we have used French to add sophistication. These included *arroz caldo* (rice and chicken soup) and *morisqueta tostada* (fried rice). *Comida China* (Chinese food) was served at *panciterias* (noodle eateries) and cooked in a *carajay* or wok.<sup>23</sup>

Several Spanish cooking methods, such as sautéing onions and tomatoes, stewing meat in wine, and frying, were adopted by the Filipinos. But on the whole, Spanish cuisine made little impact on the day-to-day culinary traditions of the indigenous majority, for whom it was too expensive to reproduce. Chinese cuisine, on the other hand, entered at 'street level' and was absorbed by all levels of Filipino society and branded deep into its culinary history.<sup>24</sup>

### American influence

The Spanish ruled over the Filipinos until 1898, when they lost the Spanish-American war and were forced to cede their colony to the United States. America was eager to join other western powers in colonising the Far East, and recognised the Philippines as a perfect key to the Pacific and a useful 'decompression chamber' between east and west.<sup>25</sup>

Within 50 years the Americans introduced nationalism, democracy and English to the Philippines. They also introduced their convenience foods: sandwiches and salads, fried chicken and hamburgers, canned food, instant foods and fast foods. Today,

every Christmas food hamper contains a tin of Spam, a can of fruit cocktail, Nestle cream, and a jar of Cheese Whizz (a processed cheese spread with anchovies). To an objective observer, these additions to the indigenous diet strike a discordant note, but rest assured, American marketing companies, with astonishing colonial presumption, dictated that dairy products, canned food and sugary cakes were dietary improvements on 'an inadequate island diet'. Nestle and Knorr sponsored cooking shows that invented recipes using powdered milk, tinned coffee, stock cubes and cans of Nestle whipping cream. I even came across a book titled *Dairy Delights: menu planning and easy cooking with Nestle*, published in 2007.<sup>26</sup>

Thanks to mass advertising, the American influence on the Filipino diet has not diminished since the Philippines gained their independence in 1945. American restaurant chains fill every mall. Bakeries and cake stalls are sprinkled all over the city. Carbonated sugary drinks fill grocery shelves, and even fresh juices are served with a generous helping of sugar syrup, so that I have quickly learned to ask for 'syrup on the side'. And avoid the pre-made iced tea.

Since World War II, the Philippines has shrugged off the shackles of colonial expansion and is today an independent nation. In peacetime, many international companies have set up business in Manila, which now boasts a truly cosmopolitan array of international restaurants. Welcomed with open arms by the ever-accommodating Filipinos, it remains to be seen whether these more recent additions to the Filipino food scene will have any long-term impact on local culinary traditions.

Finally, propping up the national economy is an ever-growing number of overseas workers. Several million Filipinos living

23 Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, *Food: a history*, London, Pan Books, 2001, p.162; Doreen Fernandez, 'What is Filipino Food?' in Reynaldo G. Alejandro (ed) *The Food of the Philippines: authentic recipes from the Pearl of the Orient* Singapore, Penplus Editions, 2005, p.8

24 Fernandez & Alegre, pp.149-510

25 Celdran, 2011

26 Besa & Dorotan, p.104

abroad grow nostalgic for home cooking and adapt traditional recipes using ingredients available in their host countries. In recent years, professional chefs like Brooklyn-based Amy Besa and her husband Romy Dorotan are also experimenting with Filipino cuisine, adapting it both to available ingredients and American tastes. And thus the evolution continues.

### ***So what is Filipino cuisine?***

Renowned food historian and champion of Filipino food culture Doreen Fernandez described traditional Filipino cuisine as home-cooked comfort food, and journalist Amy Scattergood is inclined to agree. Like Besa, she observes that it thrives in home kitchens, but stubbornly ‘resists assimilation into mainstream culture’. For many chefs of Filipino heritage there is a distinct line between private and professional cooking, and rarely do family recipes make it onto restaurant menus.<sup>27</sup>

Yet according to Besa, traditional Filipino cuisine is still alive and bubbling, particularly in the provinces. Despite centuries of external influences, integration and adaptation, most Filipinos continue to ‘eat the native, indigenous Malay food of their ancestors’. The divisive nature of communities scattered over 7,107 islands ‘has conjured a people with a stubborn sense of regional identity’.<sup>28</sup>

However, according to Bel Castro, preference is not the only reason that traditional Filipino cuisine continues to thrive. Traditional Filipino cuisine is peasant fare ‘born from a combination of the desperation and imagination of a people of meagre means. It is closely tied to the land and the

seasons, not by choice but by default’.<sup>29</sup> For many, it is not about finding the best quality ingredients, but making the best of what is available and affordable. Here, imported food is still an expensive luxury, and poverty ensures that it stays that way.

For the Philippines is undeniably still a developing country. A huge percentage of the population live below the poverty line and that is not about to change when the population is already over 90 million and estimated to double in the next 20 years.

So perhaps the question the Filipinos should be asking should not be ‘can we continue to maintain our traditional cuisine’ but ‘can we continue to feed our people?’

### ***Cosmopolitan Manila***

While traditional Filipino cuisine might still thrive in the provinces, there is another side to Filipino cuisine. In the melting pot that is Metro Manila, with its history of Asian traders and western colonising powers, and its modern landscape of wealthy, educated professionals and cosmopolitan cafes and restaurants, Filipino cuisine is a heterogeneous work-in-progress; a mélange of indigenous cuisine and colonial influences.

Thus, ‘it is not easy to pin down a dish which is wholly Filipino’ for ‘nowhere is the Philippines eclectic mix of influences more clearly illustrated than in its food’.<sup>30</sup> Monina Mercado, amongst others, believes Filipino cuisine is the sum of all its parts:

*Drawing origins from various cultures but displaying regional characteristics, Filipino food was prepared by Malay settlers, spiced by Chinese traders, stewed in 300 years of Spanish rule and hamburged by American influence in the Filipino way of life ... producing dishes of oriental and occidental extraction.*

27 Scattergood, p.1; Besa & Dorotan, p.15

28 Besa & Dorotan, p.13; Corazon Alvina, ‘Regional dishes’, in Reynaldo G. Alejandro(ed) *The Food of the Philippines: authentic recipes from the Pearl of the Orient* Singapore, Penplus Editions, 2005, p.10; Fernandez, 1994, p.227

29 Castro, p.8

30 Dorai, p.101; Hicks, p.62

This culinary fusion has occurred at every level, to every immigrant recipe or ingredient. It is a cuisine of ‘mixings and borrowings’ born, ‘like every culture, every tradition, every identity... of exchange, interaction and contamination’. Doreen Fernandez calls it ‘indigenisation’ or the process of adapting alien dishes to Filipino tastes.<sup>31</sup>

This ‘cross-pollination’ is epitomised by the ever-popular national dish *halo halo*. Is it a snack, a dessert, or an entire meal? However you classify it, the clue is in the name: *halo halo* means mix-mix in Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines. Evolving from an early Filipino thirst-quencher of *gulaman* or tapioca jelly, coconut milk and *pinipig*, the availability of Japanese, Chinese, Spanish and American ingredients has provided inspiration for even greater flights of fancy.<sup>32</sup>

To eat it, the foreigner must suspend disbelief. The contrast of tastes and textures can be a challenge to western taste buds but it is a vision that makes the most extravagant trifle look bland. Ingredients can include *garbanzos* (chick peas), and tapioca pearls (caviar-like balls of gelatin) cooked *saba* banana and cubed *camote* (sweet potato), red mung beans and jackfruit. It can be topped with any combination of shaved ice, purple yam ice cream, evaporated milk, custard and *pinipig*. My favourite Chinese fusion restaurant even adds cubes of cheese.

### A foreigner’s response

As I wander through the history of Filipino cuisine, with its myriad permutations and permeations, I am still adapting to some unfamiliar tastes and textures, and I find that those early detractors may have a point.

The ‘haphazard etiology’ of cultural influences and the fact that many imported ingredients have been ‘completely Filipinised’ does create some extraordinary dishes that are not always accessible to or appreciated by foreign palates. Personally, I cannot fathom the high levels of sweetness that the Filipinos enjoy. And fatty meat, for western diners used to lean cuisine, can be hard to digest. The abundance of offal can also be challenging, as can the predominant sourness. As Sokolov says ‘other people do not react with wild enthusiasm to such culinary minimalism ... and miss the softer music and the hundreds of nuances of sourness in the dishes of the Philippines’.<sup>33</sup>

One journalist wrote that there is ‘possibly too much variety’ and this lack of standardisation in recipes can make this cuisine hard to assess when even a simple adobo tastes different each time you eat it, and every *halo halo* is unique to its particular creator. And there can be a lack of visual appeal in a cuisine consisting largely of soups and stews.<sup>34</sup>

So how has colonisation impacted on Filipino foodways? Has the indigenous Filipino cuisine been enriched or degraded? As we have seen, some external influences have been positively absorbed into this simple island cuisine, others have had less positive effects, and much depends on individual taste to decide which is which. Regardless of subjective judgments of taste, however, the culinary diversity of Filipino cuisine is undeniable, the effects of colonisation unalterable.

It also seems to me that Filipino cuisine is still a work in progress, an evolving fusion cuisine. In the last thirty years, Fernandez and others like her have attempted to

31 Sokolov, p.53; Massimo Montanari, *Food is Culture*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2006, p. 139; Fernandez, 1988, p.38

32 Montarni, p.133

33 Scattergood, p.2; Sokolov, pp.56, 61

34 Esther Salcedo-Posadas, ‘Promoting Filipino cuisine as a top brand’, *Philippine Daily Inquirer* 13 January 2011, p.1

document and develop national pride in Filipino culinary heritage and champion the survival of its foodways. Their research has raised awareness of this oft-maligned cuisine, and in particular, brought it to the attention of professional chefs who are now beginning to work on upgrading its status by standardising cooking methods, using quality ingredients and adopting western methods of presentation. Or, like Besa and her husband in America, ‘applying the concepts and philosophies of the new American cuisine to Filipino traditional dishes’.<sup>35</sup>

Colin Bannerman has suggested that a national cuisine should belong to the land and its people. Whatever our thoughts as outsider observers, the Filipinos obviously have a deep sense of ownership of their cuisine. While they have indigenised a wide variety of interloping ingredients and dishes, the Filipinos have still managed to keep a firm hold of their own traditional flavours and cooking methods. Filipino cuisine still reflects Filipino tastes; their cuisine is still distinctly their own. Fernandez claims it is ‘a cuisine enriched rather than bastardised, its integrity kept’ with all the cultural influences ‘companionably co-existing’.<sup>36</sup>

Two years ago a group of Filipino chefs got together to created *Kulinarya*, a cook-book designed to define quality guidelines, not to ‘suppress variation in favour of a single strict interpretation’. This would, after all, destroy the very soul of Filipino cuisine, which is intrinsically diverse and individualistic. The presentation is appealing and the use of quality ingredients is

paramount. Thus we begin to see a further evolution in Filipino cuisine and the building of a broader audience that can learn to appreciate its subtleties.

If Filipino cooking is still at heart an unsophisticated peasant cuisine and if, to paraphrase Michael Symons, the great cuisines arise from peasant kitchens, then perhaps the best is yet to come.<sup>37</sup>

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35 Besa & Dorotan, p.219

36 Kirschenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, 61). Colin Bannerman, ‘Federated food: the revolution we had to have?’ Paper for the 18<sup>th</sup> Australian Gastronomic Symposium, Canberra, May 2011 , 2011; Sokolov,p.54; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett & Fernandez, p.66

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37 Michael Symons, *One Continuous Picnic: a gastronomic history of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, 2007, p.9

## FEDERATION MORNING TEA

As applause for the speakers subsided, attention was arrested by the unexpected opening of the dividing doors to reveal a stage set for 1901. White damask cloths and silver bowls of lemons and grapes showed to perfection a morning tea array of 1901 delights including cucumber and mint sandwiches and tiny pavlovas topped with cream and strawberries. The scene and its setting on Queen Victoria Terrace brought a special round of appreciative applause before the room filled and the tastes enthusiastically sampled.



Appreciative samplers at a teatable of tasty tradition, from petticoat tails at one end to delicate finger sandwiches of cucumber and mint, or smoked salmon, cream cheese and dill, at the other.



The surprise unveiled – the Members Bar foyer transformed into a 1901 tearoom for the Symposium of Australian Gastronomy



There was no going past the fine shortbread petticoat tails and little Eccles cakes adorning the tea table



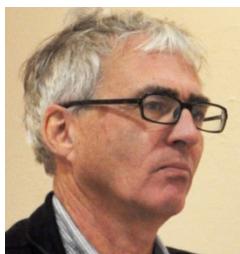
Princess of Wales cakes, Janet Jeffs' enticing retake on the 1893 recipe in Philip Muskett's *Art of Living in Australia*

## SESSION 5

### Taste and place

How are places and tastes connected and how powerful might this make ‘home cooking’ – and where is our taste leading us?

Concluding papers in the Symposium were two outstanding and very different takes on the theme of taste and place, presented by **Josephine Gregoire** and **Michael Symons**. Karen Goldspink chaired this Session.



## SESSION 5.1

### Feeding the immigrant child

**Josephine Gregoire**

I would respectfully like to acknowledge the past and present Elders, traditional owners and custodians of the Ngunnawal Country on which this Symposium is taking place.

Buongiorno e benvenuti a tutti. Welcome to my home. I have been expecting you. I embrace you and kiss you on both cheeks. I have prepared something for us to share; a platter of prosciutto, coppa, and mortadella. The home-made salami may be a little hot. Try the cheese, it is Provolone, it has a little bite, we say *picante*. You must try the olives; they are from last year's crop, the *Piccolino* variety. They are small but so tasty. I think that I have finally mastered my mother's recipe for preserving *melanzane*, marinated eggplant. They go well with this crusty Italian bread. This wine will go perfectly. We picked the merlot grapes from a local vineyard and this is the result of our winemaking three years ago. Salute!

I am the daughter of post war Italian migrants and this is the spirit of hospitality that I grew up with in the Canberra region. Today, my offerings are not unusual or unfamiliar and mainstream Australians have easy access to the taste of prosciutto, marinated olives and crusty Italian bread. But when my parents migrated from Italy nearly 50 years ago, that platter represented all things foreign and different.

I am not presenting a research paper, for I am not a scholar in the fields of gastronomy or the social sciences nor am I a

food scientist. I am a lifelong student. I run a small restaurant together with my husband, a French chef, and we go about our daily work preparing food and inviting people to the table.

Today I am going to take you to the intimate and personal realm of my home, from my childhood through to adulthood in a continuously shifting paradigm of biculturalism. I realise that in taking this personal and anecdotal approach I run the huge risk of contributing to the stereotyping of Italian migrants. But it is a risk I am prepared to take because my approach emphasises the importance of storytelling and oral history in the discourse about Australian cuisine. It is also the only way I know how to convey my extraordinary experience of growing up in Australia yet tasting Italy on a daily basis.

For most of us food is as ordinary as breathing, it can go unnoticed and yet it sustains life and is profoundly essential. Anthropologist Levi-Strauss states that, 'Food is good to think'.<sup>1</sup> When I think about growing up in the migrant context, food was a tangible and material thing, which openly communicated and symbolised my culture and defined my identity. A rich body of literary works examine food symbolism. For example, Bessiere stated that 'man feeds on nutrients but also on signs, symbols, dreams and on imagination'.<sup>2</sup> The cultural significance of food and ethnicity is not new; food for Italian migrants became a medium of

<sup>1</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologies*, vvol. I: The Raw and the Cooked, tr. John and Doreen Weightman, London, Jonathan Cape, 1969

<sup>2</sup> Jacinthe Bessiere, 'Local Development and Heritage: Traditional Food and Cuisine As Tourist Attractions in Rural Areas', *Sociologia Ruralis*, 38, 1, 1998, p.23; Joseph Hegarty, G Barry O'Mahony, 'Gastronomy: A Phenomenon of Cultural Expressionism and an Aesthetic For Living', *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 20, 2001, p.5

cultural expression and a consumable artefact produced by their culture.<sup>3</sup> Italian migrants brought with them their cultural artefacts and endeavoured to re-create the taste, smells and traditions of their homeland in a new place. Food is also the most common way in which we experience multiculturalism, as it is easy to use food to cross cultural and linguistic boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

My recollection of my Italian family and our food culture was not so intellectual; my family had no intention of changing the landscape of Australian cuisine. They did not imagine that one day the art of good coffee would be so important in our major cities. When my uncle opened the first delicatessen in Canberra in the 1960s his only concern was to make an honest living. He had no idea that the deli would one day be an important feature in all supermarkets across Australia.

Australia's postwar migration program, which was discussed, decided and ratified in this very place, the Parliament House, included a formal migration agreement with Italy.<sup>5</sup> This agreement changed the life of my parents and on 15 November in 1956, my father arrived by ship in Sydney. He was a bricklayer by trade and Canberra had the promise of much work.

Today, when we drive around Canberra my father points to some of the iconic buildings and in a humble and unassuming voice tells his grandchildren, 'I helped build that. It was such a cold morning when we lay the first bricks on the foundations, deep underground'. He is pointing to the National Library. He never elaborates; goes quiet as if in his mind's

eye is taken back to those early days of settling in a new and unfamiliar place, linguistically and culturally far from his homeland. Unless I ask, he does not talk about his experiences; he does not brag about his achievements and would be highly embarrassed at the idea that he is even mentioned today.

In the political and social environment of assimilation policies of the postwar period from 1947 and then the integration phase from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s<sup>6</sup>, my parents courageously changed and evolved, raising their children in a constantly negotiated place, somewhere between the two cultures. I have heard the comments that postwar Italian migrants are stuck in a time warp. In my experience, nothing could be further from the truth; as we were in constant change and moving in and out of two cultures, and finally creating our own unique place. At the beginning of the migrant experience they unconsciously re-created everything that was familiar to them, including their food practices. As I child I participated and was witness to the process. Unwittingly my parents transferred Italian culture through food.

The process occurred primarily in the intimacy of our home and some aspects extended out to my *Nonni's* place and at times even further out to the homes of my relatives. In an average size suburban block in Queanbeyan, my parents managed to cultivate a chestnut tree, two cherry trees, two different varieties of fig, two olive trees, a lemon tree, a persimmon tree, an apricot tree, and a *nespole* loquat tree, with grape vines lining the wooden backyard fence. But it was the vegetable garden which took up most of the backyard space. The garden was my playground.

3 Mary Douglas (ed), *Food in the Social Order: Studies of Food and Festivities in Three American Communities*, Russell Sage Foundation, 1984

4 Barbara Santich, "Looking for Flavour, Adelaide, Wakefield Press, 1996, p. 85

5 Australian Immigration Fact Sheet 4, *More than 60 years of Post War Migration*

6 Report of the Review of Settlement Services for Migrants and Humanitarian Entrants, [www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/\\_pdf/chap01web.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/settle/_pdf/chap01web.pdf)

There was a direct path from the kitchen door to the vegetable garden and the two distinct spaces where intrinsically linked. The garden gave me a good idea of what was going to be served for dinner that night and what would be served in a few months' time.

Weekends were about visiting, better known today as 'networking'. It involved turning up spontaneously at a relative's door with a bag full of seasonal vegetables or fruit. After a few hours of sitting and discussing political events, the visit ended with the important tour of the vegetable garden. The interaction between visitor and visited covered topics such as planting during the right phase of the moon, creative ways of eliminating insects and bugs, bean varieties which grew well in the climate and soil and there was always a funny story about neighbours complaining to Council about the noisy rooster. We always went back to the car with bags of vegetables and a dozen fresh eggs.

The Canberra climate offers four beautiful distinct seasons and our garden was a constant reminder of these seasons, each promising its own produce, preserving techniques and specific dishes. When it came to gardening my parents did not consult books or charts, they seemed to carry knowledge in their heads, as if it was second nature.

Autumn was about clearing the garden beds of all the summer plants, storing all of the seeds, mulching and composting, using the smelliest manure gathered from someone's horse stable and preparing a small patch for winter vegetables such as broccoli and rape – a kale like green vegetable. The *Festa della Castagna*– chestnut festival – was one of the highlights of the season and it was held at the local Italian club. In the company of relatives and *paesani* friends we ate lots of roasted chestnuts and bought kilos to take home for roasting or boiling.

Autumn was the time for winemaking. The handmade wine making equipment belonged to my *Nonno* and a verbal booking system was strictly adhered to by the extended family. When it was our turn, the garage was hosed down ready for the equipment to move in. I remember marvelling at the equipment, in particular, the hand ratchet basket press, *il torchio*.

Winemaking day invoked all of my senses; the rattle of the noisy hand crusher, the gushing grape juice down the filtering basin, the pouring of sweet freshly squeezed juice into vats and of course the unforgettable taste of the freshly squeezed juice. Everything was sticky to touch, my fingers stuck together and my shoes made a funny squishy sound when I walked. The pungent smell of fermentation remains the strongest memory. I like to describe the wine making process as melodramatic, for while the event was fun for a child, the adults seemed anxious, for things could go terribly wrong. Winemaking was so public and lot of pride was at stake.

In winter our frost-covered garden featured *raddichio*, the older outside leaves were tied up and around the young leaves in the centre using strips of cotton fabric. This protected the delicate inside leaves from frost bite, ensuring a perfectly formed red heart. The frost-covered, bunched-up red radicchio resembled a work of art.

The cold Canberra climate was perfect for sausage making. It was the season to convert the garage into an abattoir where the carcass off a full grown pig hung upside down. My fascination with anatomy began while observing my parents' skillful butchering techniques. I remember running my hands over the skin of the pig after my father had used his razor to shave the hairs. I have this wonderful memory of cleaning the intestines – playfully letting the running water wash over and into the hollow tubes, and as instructed by my

mother, used fresh lemon slices to sterilise and whiten the intestines. Everyone had a job making dry cured sausages, salt cured pancetta and brawn made from the pigs head. There was an unspoken understanding that the pig had given its life, it would be morally wrong to throw any part of the animal away.

Spring in Canberra was joyful. My *Nonno* prepared extra seedlings in his makeshift greenhouse. When it was time for planting, he delicately rolled up the seedlings in moist newspaper and offered them to his children. Time and energy was spent on planting the myriad of vegetables.

My *Nonna* was a skilful bread maker and the spring air was ideal for ensuring perfectly leavened bread. After kneading by hand kilos of dough, she would lovingly and respectfully carve out the Sign of the Cross on each loaf and once they were all neatly tucked in the wood fired oven she said the following prayer, 'Al nome di Dio, Santo Martino, pane buono e forno pieno'.

Bread making was a sacred activity for my *Nonna*. After a hard day of work, nothing seemed to make her happier than watching her many grandchildren eat the freshly baked bread, with a drizzle of olive oil and a sprinkle of oregano from her garden.

Summer was the most abundant of all the seasons, there were always extra vegetables to hand over to the neighbours and when we weren't busy preserving and putting away for winter, we ate them. Roasted capsicums, tomato and cucumber salad, crumbed zucchini slices and fried zucchini flowers. We enjoyed extended family picnics at Tidbinbilla National Park; we had enough food to feed everyone in the Park, including the wildlife.

The summer fruit that created the most powerful and lasting impression was the tomato. Stories have been written about the all-important Tomato Day. Zoe Boccabella in her memoir *Mezza Italiana* recalls:

*As a child I went with Nonno Anni in his ute to the fruit and vegetable markets out at Rocklea. I would beg to sit in the back of the ute (legal in those days) loving the wind in my face and 'holding tight' as I was told to, sometimes catching Nonno Anni's gaze as he kept an eye on me in the side mirror. We would both smile at each other. Since he had a fruit and vegetable shop for more than twenty years, Nonno Anni was familiar with many of the merchants at the markets. Often I stood and waited as he chatted to growers he knew. I wonder how we must have appeared: a big, burly, tanned Italian with his granddaughter skipping along by his side. We would head out early when the price was right and the Roma tomatoes ripe and buy anywhere up to eighty cases.<sup>7</sup>*

Yet Tomato Day had the power to cause shame and embarrassment, especially during adolescent years. Josie Allibrandi, the protagonist in Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi* shares her impression of the day:

Oh God, if anyone ever found out about it I'd die. There we sat, last Saturday, in my grandmother's backyard cutting the bad bits off over-ripe tomatoes and squeezing them. After doing ten crates of those, we boiled them, squashed them, then boiled them again. That in turn made spaghetti sauce. We bottled it in beer bottles and stored it in Nonna's cellar. I can't understand why we can't go to Franklin's and buy Leggo's or Paul Newman's special sauce. Nonna had heart failure at this suggestion and looked at Mama. 'Where is the culture?' she asked in dismay. 'She's going to grow up, marry an Australian and her children will eat fish and chips.' Robert and I call this annual event 'Wog Day' or 'National Wog Day'. We sat around wondering how many other poor unfor-

<sup>7</sup> Zoe Boccabella, *Mezza Italiana*, Sydney, Harper Collins, 2011, p.74

tunates our age were doing the same, but we were sure we'd never find out because nobody would admit to it.<sup>8</sup>

The easiest thing for me to do during this phase of my life would have been to deny and rebel against my Italian culture, quickly resolving my life long quest to 'fit in'. But when it came to food, I found this approach very difficult to swallow, mainly because the food was so good and most of my childhood experiences were so positive and joyful. So, just like Josie, I just didn't talk about it or admit to it. In between my tutorials, exams, aerobics classes and nightclubbing, my weekends were spent collecting mushrooms in paddocks and buying live chickens from a poultry farm in Pialligo which ended up on the table during the week.

In the late 1980s, my adult years were marked by a lack of interest and participation in my Italian food heritage. Labour-intensive food production such as making tomato sauce for a whole year's consumption involved the help of many hands. My lack of presence in the process meant that my parents stopped many of their activities. I convinced them that they were wasting their time growing vegetables and preserving food; after all, supermarkets provided everything they needed all year round, 24/7, at a fraction of the cost that it would take to grow or produce from scratch. I had a University degree, so I thought and behaved as if I knew better than my parents. Imported speciality products from Italy flowed in, *passata*, cheese and salami. It was also the era of weight watchers and the healthy diet pyramid. Obediently, I replaced my plate of pasta with low fat cottage cheese on a cracker.

In hindsight it was a period in my life when I felt that I 'fitted in'. Assimila-

tion and integration worked, Australia was beginning to feel like home. I had a good job, I was contributing to society and I was confident about my future. My community-based traditions were out of sync with the individualistic high achiever approach to my life. Perhaps my parents were also happy to relinquish some of the food practices because their children had grown up and their work in transmitting their culture was seemingly over. While I was a child they provided me with a safe place to grow up within a paradigm that they were sure would sustain and nurture me. Now that I was an adult there was no need to feed me; I was able to feed myself and the rest of the journey was of my own making. And yet my quest to find my place continued.

I am not qualified to speak about Indigenous Australians' understanding of the land, for they should be invited to speak for themselves. In the context of my search for place and identity, I would like to share a conversation that I had with Ruth Bell, the wife of Indigenous Elder of Ngunnawal Country, Don Bell. Ruth shared with me her knowledge of our area and stories of how her people used to live on the land in and around Lake George, close to where we were about to build our new house. I shared my story about my parents settling in Canberra and explained that for a while I kept going back to Italy to try and find my place. Ruth gently and knowingly explained that my search for a home and place was understandable, my ancestors were not of this land and it was normal to feel *out of place*. Ruth also explained how it was important for me to reconcile with the fact that I would always be linked to the place Italy. This gentle revelation helped me find peace with my identity and understand my unique experience of place. Moreover, the precious conversation gave me the kind permission to gently and lovingly place my feet firmly on Australian soil. As a custodian of Italian

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8 Minella Marchetta, *Looking for Alibrandi*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1992, 171

food knowledge, traditions and practices, I am now able to establish healthy and robust roots in Australia.

My *Nonno* used a fig leaf to protect his hands from the spines of the prickly pear fruit. Using a sharp knife he first cut off the two ends of the fruit, then with precision made a clean vertical cut. Using his knife he pushed and peeled away the skin to reveal the most amazing fruit. While conducting this delicate procedure – he would warn me against picking the fruit off a prickly pear tree with my bare hands. He gently handed me the fruit - as if it were a treasure. The prickly pear fruit may seem unattractive and bizarre, for some of you it may be a cause for concern as the plant is considered a weed, for others it may seem as too much trouble. For one Australian, for me, this is the most delicious fruit in the world. Delicious because it reminds me of my wonderful childhood growing up in Australia, a constant reminder of my *Nonno* who had the wisdom and foresight to come to Australia.

Today, when I see the faces of the new migrants on TV, I am not afraid, I smile and get excited about the new food knowledge and practices they will bring through the process of re-creating a familiar place and taste in their new home, tastes that my children will one day enjoy at a local cafe.

I am no longer interested in ethnicity, or looking for the differences; authenticity is what I strive for, the authenticity that I experience through the taste of my mother's spaghetti sauce; no short cuts, only quality ingredients, time and the pure intention to please. I am also scrambling to re-claim the food knowledge and skills that were once an important part of my life. The food practices which were once the cause of shame; the organic, gluten free sausages and sustainable living are now quite fashionable.

I would like to thank the organisers of

this Symposium for allowing the voice of an immigrant child. I thank my parents for the courage to quietly yet drastically change their lives and for always remaining open to new ways of being.

Our family parties and feasts always ended with song and dance. I am at the end of my story so let us all join Melbourne's beautiful Italian Women's choir *La Voce Della Luna*. This joyous song is called *L'Uva Fragolina*, from their 1997 album *Stepping Out*. The song is about grape picking and says 'O how beautiful the grapes (fragolini), o how beautiful to make love with my beloved in the fields.' The song is a celebratory song describing food and wine as the essential ingredients for a life filled with love and joy. As you leave my home, I embrace you and kiss you on both cheeks, wishing you a life filled with lovemaking and winemaking.

### ***L'Uva Fragolina***

*E quant'e bella l'uva fragolina*

*E quanto'e bello andare a vendemmiar*

*A far l'amore con la mia bella*

*A far l'amore in mezzo ai pra*

*Ritornello; diririndin, din, diririndin din,  
diririndin din din.....*

## SESSION 5.2

# Our households: towards an alternative gastronomics

Michael Symons

**D**o you know your PLUs? They're those Price Look Up codes stuck irritatingly on fruit and vegetables. If you peel '4149', that would be off 'Apples – Jonathan – Medium'. Run by a global body called GS1 under the slogan, 'The global language of business' ([www.gs1.org](http://www.gs1.org)), the system saves supermarkets from having to know their fruit and vegetables. The stickers might carry further information, perhaps barcode, brand or country of origin. Different numbers are used for imports/exports, so that imported Jonathans would be numbered '4148' (small) or '4150' (large). A fifth number, '8', can mean genetically modified and '9', organic.

Those codes aren't used at Frank's, where we buy many fruit and vegetables. Instead, he and his family know their produce. On the rare occasion they don't remember that day's price, the customer would have noticed or poked their head around the corner to check. Frank and his family discuss food quality and cooking; they know growers.

Those stickers epitomise the insufficiently analysed unsuitability of corporations for the marketplace. Many other illustrations cropped up at this Symposium. We heard, for example, that corporations benefit from labour market flexibility that leaves domestic households time-poor, harassed in the midst of abundance. We marvelled again how corporations advertise the worst foods most heavily to children. Sulo

bins aren't ecologically appropriate.

This paper gets behind corporate delinquency to explain why, for example, foodies love markets, and merely tolerate supermarkets. The approach is economic, although not economics as generally presented, but rather a meal-based 'gastro-nomics'. Illustrating the fuller intellectual framework that our discipline of gastronomy might yet gain, this paper considers households. Not merely domestic arrangements, but our immediate localities, our town/cities, our States and our Federation can all be viewed as households, and so, too, can nothing less than the market economy.

In exploring these households, that other name crops up, 'economy'. While having different connotations, the two words ultimately mean the same, *oikos* being ancient Greek for 'household'. Equally, they might be defined as social organisations through which human beings collaborate in support of basic needs. While 'economy' might sound more technical, objective, gainful and therefore important, 'household' suggests romance, companionship, intimacy and taste. These social organisations will be distinguished from others, to be called 'institutions'. While households/economies have complex functions, an institution works best with one, sharply-defined purpose. Corporations are the increasingly dominant style of non-household.

This distinction, once drawn, provides entry into an alternative economics, explaining the chasm we all recognise between local street stalls and Woolworths, between 'slow' and schlock, between authentic and twittery.

### *We eat food, not money*

The domestic household or home is the basic social unit, just as the organic cell is the basis of 'life itself', wrote early sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. He accepted that:

*The organisation of the house is primarily important from its economic aspect, ie as domestic economy and as community cooperating in work and consumption. The taking of food is repeated with the regularity of breathing; the production and preparing of food and beverages, therefore, is necessary and regular work.<sup>1</sup>*

Tönnies saw the home being symbolised in different ways by the hearth fire and the table. With the fire kept burning (and many societies have ritually carried the living flame to the newly-weds' hearth), it is 'the vital force of the house ever-lasting through the generations'. Whereas, for Tönnies, the table is

*the factor uniting the present members for the support and restoration of body and soul. The table is the house itself insofar as everyone has his place there and is given his proper share.*

For him, the home epitomised what he called *gemeinshaft* relationships typical of village society, as opposed to modern, impersonal *gesellschaft* interactions.<sup>2</sup>

The domestic household has been viewed in other ways, sociologically. Of particular relevance to the present argument, it has proved the most workable site of so-called 'reciprocal' exchange. We might think of reciprocity in terms of the principle, 'to each according to needs, from each according to abilities'. Putting that another way, Max Weber said that, in its pure form, an *oikos* 'implies solidarity in dealing with the outside and communism of property and consumption of everyday goods within'.<sup>3</sup>

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1 Ferdinand Tönnies, *Community and Association (Gemeinschaft und gesellschaft)*, trans. Charles P. Loomis, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974, pp.60-62

2 Tönnies, p.67

3 Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An outline of interpretive sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, Berkeley, University of California Press,

Domestic households have taken diverse forms through history – from solitary persons to temple and royal households that incorporate servants and rule entire kingdoms. Nonetheless, seen from a gastronomic viewpoint, each example shares the essence of *mutually* supporting a *full range* of basic needs. Food and drink are produced for the table, where they are distributed, along with the provision of shelter, comfortable clothing, conversation, news and teaching.

That definition of a household in terms of collaboration across basic needs encompasses other social organisations. These are often termed 'economies', but *eco*-words derive from *oikos* = household. Words have histories and Jonathan Swift made this instructive use in the early eighteenth-century:

*I knew three great Ministers, who could exactly compute and settle the accounts of a kingdom, but were wholly ignorant of their own economy.<sup>4</sup>*

By 'economy', he meant the management of their domestic households. Soon after, 'political economy' was borrowed to refer to the greater household, by way of parallel, and then the newcomers dropped the 'political', becoming just 'economists', so that the original economists were left practising, tautologically, 'home economics'. Gastronomics reverses that trend and, calling those wannabe economists' bluff, promotes the connotations of 'household' as preferable, being more redolent of hearth and table.

The second type of household being picked out here might generically be termed the political household/economy. The members – often termed citizens – combine in meeting basic needs in a *polis*

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1968, p.359

4 Jonathan Swift, 'Thoughts on Various Subjects', *The Battle of the Books: And other short pieces*, London, Cassell, 1886, p.95

or self-governing town or something larger, the nation being a familiar example. What makes a household political is its reliance on a second type of exchange, redistribution. The idea of redistribution is that people contribute to a central pool, which is then redirected to the common good in terms of infrastructure and services. The advantage here, of course, is that the state can organise large-scale enterprises and ensure welfare for a much wider community. In the ancient Mesopotamian temple-states, grain was gathered to a central store to feed the priests, army, labourers and needy.<sup>5</sup>

More commonly in recent eras, citizens are also tax payers, contributing to mutual betterment across a wide range of supports. So, everyone collaborates on security, health, education, and so forth. Summarising the political economy's scope, the Preamble to the United States Constitution opens:

*We the People ... establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.*

Some needs are well met by domestic households (the government keeping 'out of the bedrooms of the nation'), but, through redistribution, the political economy could bring in many more people, and so carry a greater division of labour. Communism might sound attractive, but government is needed with large communities, and some form of democracy seems to work best.

### **Market households**

The economic sociologist Karl Polanyi

paid attention to the reciprocal and redistributive modes of exchange, while being particularly interested in a third. This is market exchange, using barter or, more effectively, money. Given money's virtuality, the market circulation of goods and services can be intricate, dynamic and extensive. The division of labour can be much more complex. The result is a third basic category of household, the market household. Polanyi was in awe of the expansion of the self-regulating or 'free' market through the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

As with so many commentators, Polanyi did not distinguish sufficiently between that market economy and its distortion, and the concern of this paper. He lost sight of the household character of the market, because we essentially help one another, and leave price and capital as secondary. The household quality of the market economy was recognised by the early economists (in the dominant sense), the eighteenth-century French physiocrats, who borrowed William Harvey's concept of the circulation of blood to understand the circulation of particularly grain within the social body, so advocating 'natural' circulation beyond the reach of central authority, that is, the benefits of the market over the monarchy.

Living in France in 1764-1766, and learning from the physiocrats, Adam Smith also appreciated the market as collaborative provision, observing that 'man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren'. He saw these mutual benefits as deriving, paradoxically, out of self-interest. He argued:

*It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we*

5 Michael Symons, *The Pudding that Took a Thousand Cooks: the story of cooking in civilisation and daily life*, Melbourne, Viking, 1998, pp.252-54, republished as *A History of Cooks and Cooking*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2000

6 Karl Polanyi, 'The economy as instituted process', in Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg & Harry W Pearson, *Trade and Market in the Early Empires: economies in history and theory*, Glencoe Illinois, The Free Press, 1957, pp. 243-270

*expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.*

That is, the market economy grew out of each person's interest in the other's meat, beer, bread or whatever.

The tendency has been to see the market economy not gastronomically, that is, not as material distribution with sensory, nutritional and hedonic attributes, but back-to-front, so that the market becomes as a virtual meal with money substituting for food. The economy is idealised as a price-setting mechanism. Money starts out as a tool, but is lifted into an abstraction of unsurpassed authority. As Georg Simmel wrote, money as the 'absolute means' becomes, psychologically, the 'absolute purpose'.<sup>7</sup>

This tendency to see the market in terms of money rather than food is not helped by the market having been captured for money-making. Each household mode has its drawbacks, and the market's flexibility facilitates an exclusive wealth club. In turn, capital accumulation provides for the growth of corporations that then spin the over-riding principle of the market as 'gain'.<sup>8</sup>

To summarise so far, three basic types of household have been picked out. They are the domestic, political, and market households. These three types are based on three types of exchange - reciprocal, redistributive, and market, the principal categories used by Karl Polanyi. There are further households, notably the natural household. Charles Darwin referred in the *Origin of Species* in 1859 to the 'economy of nature', again drawing parallels with the domestic household. One of his German

exponents, Ernst von Haeckel, then coined 'ecology', which the *Oxford English Dictionary* finds in use in 1873.

### **Institutions**

So much for households; attention now turns to other social organisations. As opposed to households, which are supportive across the range of basic needs, other organisations pursue narrow goals; their essence is specificity of purpose. Together, institutions might provide support across the entire range of needs; but, working within a household/economy, each organisation is targeted. They include schools and trade unions. The paradigmatic forms are government bureaucracies within political households and corporations with the market economy. The general term to be used for these purposive organisations is *institutions*. Institutions exhibit Tönnies' impersonal *gesellschaft* characteristics; they comprise positions, requiring performances rather than people, and so forth.

The departments of state within the political economy have definite missions, bounded by rules or, as Weber put it, 'an administrative and legal order subject to change by legislation'.<sup>9</sup> Within the market economy, the leading institutions, corporations, provide goods and services within a narrow range, and, within that, they are focussed even more sharply on profit. In a fine-sounding (household-like) mission statement, McDonald's aims to 'be our customers' favorite place and way to eat'. More narrowly, worldwide operations are aligned around a 'Plan to Win', although still centred on 'an exceptional customer experience'. The annual report is more revealing: '2009 Highlights: Comparable Sales Growth 3.8%; Earnings Per Share Growth 9%; Total Cash Returned to Shareholders 2007-2009: \$16.6 Billion'. Behind the provision of food and fun, McDonald's is highly profit-directed.

7 Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, ed. David Frisby, trans. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, London, Routledge, 2004, p.232

8 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The political and economic origins our time*, Boston, Beacon [originally 1944], 2004, p.31

9 Weber, 1968, p.56

The distinction between households and institutions bears some resemblance to James S. Coleman's two parallel organisational structures of modern industrial society, the 'primordial' and the 'purposive'; that is, the 'primordial structure based on, and derivative from, the family' and the 'newer structure composed of purposive corporate actors wholly independent of the family'. Echoing some points made by Weber, Coleman notes that 'the corporate form, giving rise to the modern corporation from about 1850 on, proved extraordinarily hospitable to technological change', and so 'removed a large portion of production from the household to some locus outside it: the factory or the office'.<sup>10</sup> As a demonstration of his distinction, Coleman decides:

*The explosive proliferation of fast-food restaurants ... indicates the rapidity with which the activity of eating meals is moving out of the primordial structure of the household and into the purposive structure of modern corporate actors. In some cases families still eat the restaurant meals together, but in others eating together has also ended.<sup>11</sup>*

Coleman is right, so far as he goes. Like many observers, he does not stress the effect the corporations have had on the market economy *qua* household. Not only have corporations usurped domestic functions, but they have reshaped the market economy. Institutions are often highly useful, but traps include impersonality, secrecy, arbitrariness, abuse of power and self-perpetuation. The emphasis here is on market damage and distortion, promoting the horrors of PLUs, time-poverty, childhood obesity and Sulo bins.

Such harshness would not surprise Weber,

who deplored the market as 'not bound by ethical norms' and so 'an abomination to every system of fraternal ethics'.<sup>12</sup> But foodies like a market! The only problem is that Weber did not sufficiently distinguish the market as household and its distortion by institutions. But he understood the changes well. With considerable power, Weber depicted humanity's entrapment in an 'iron cage' of rationalisation, by which he meant the steady incursion of rational calculation in pursuit of explicit goals, which is the strength of institutions. They are really good at maximising the effectiveness of goal-oriented activity, especially when the goal is as narrow as profit.

More recently, George Ritzer reinterpreted Weberian rationalisation as 'McDonaldization' to evoke the whole social world run like a fast-food operation, with the corporate emphasis on efficiency, calculability, predictability and control.<sup>13</sup> Strict, money-making formulas govern dish designs ('Fries with that?') and social interactions ('Have a nice day').

The distinction between households and institutions, which is so horribly obvious from a gastronomic viewpoint, helps clarify what's going wrong. The point is that households, not being purposive (in Coleman's language), are not amenable to rationalisation. Meeting a comprehensive range of needs necessarily requires complex activities, so that a requirement for quick, cheap food might conflict with the need for pleasure, to take a simple example. Working long hours to earn 'a crust' might obstruct family life. The attempted adoption of 'modern' (rationalised) methods created the early twentieth-century absurdities of both domestic science and nutrition.

<sup>10</sup> James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, Cambridge (Massachusetts), Harvard University Press, 1990, pp.580, 584

<sup>11</sup> Coleman, p.587

<sup>12</sup> Weber, 1978, p.637

<sup>13</sup> George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* 6, sixth edition, Thousand Oaks California, Pine Forge [originally 1993], 2011

Instead, rationalisation belongs to institutions. We expect them to operate efficiently in pursuit of clear goals, and exploit scientific management techniques. This resort to rationalisation is all the keener when those organisations are corporations with the clearest of all possible objectives, profit. All other considerations can be aligned with that, so that Weber became trapped in an iron cage, Polanyi chronicled the new self-regulating market's conflagration (he published *The Great Transformation* in 1944), and Ritzer promoted all this in the popular notion of 'McDonaldization'.

Corporations are paragons of rationalisation. They are not set up, like a household, to serve needs either mutually or comprehensively, but to pursue simple, defined goals, and no goal is more defined than profit. As Tönnies put it, the corporation 'represents, in its exclusive concentration on profit making, the perfect type of all legal forms for an association based on rational will'.<sup>14</sup>

So far, I have outlined the main types of households/economies and then drawn a distinction between those and institutions. These are social organisations with narrow purposes. In institutions, people work together but not necessarily mutually, and not across the range of needs. The most successful institutions are business corporations, gaining power steadily for around 150 years. This is because nothing is as conducive to rationalisation as the simple goal of money-making. Corporations have grown up within the market economy, reshaping it and the domestic, political and natural households. Despite their increasing power over these households, they still attract political opposition. This raises the question of the legal, moral – and gastronomic grounds – on which they participate in households.

14 Tönnies, p.227

### **Legal personhood**

Before the nineteenth century, the market-place generally represented domestically-based farms, merchants and artisans. That is, business was an extension of households; it belonged intrinsically to a holistic approach to needs, and so the world. This changed with the advent of the corporation, which arose most emphatically during the nineteenth century. Initially, the joint-stock, limited liability company was a 'disputed, legally suspect and morally dubious organisational form'.<sup>15</sup> Yet, in Britain's case, a series of acts during Victoria's reign – the 1844 Companies Registration Act, the 1855 Limited Liability Act, the 1856 Joint Stock Companies Act, and the 1862 Companies Act – created the legal framework for incorporation and share ownership.

Legal and political arrangements adjusted. However, corporations presented a crucial conceptual issue, not always fully thought through. People belonged to households, including the market economy, to cater to one another's needs; but how did these institutions fit in? With the increasing rationalisation of the political economy, individuals increasingly sought human rights. But by what authority should corporations participate in the market household, let alone the political? They are not households. They are not individuals, or are they?

Corporations do not vote or end up in gaol. But they can own property, pay taxes, break the law and go broke. They are even granted privileges not available to most citizens, including limited financial liability and the ability to live forever. The very word 'corporation' suggests that they are discrete 'bodies'. They can also be viewed as acting 'morally', making plans, protect-

15 Paul Johnson, *Making the Market: Victorian origins of corporate capitalism*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p.2

ing interests and engaging in political lobbying.<sup>16</sup> The result throughout the Western world was to treat these legal entities as so-called ‘real persons’.<sup>17</sup> Johnson goes so far as to declare that the ‘*defining characteristic* of a commercial corporation is that it is conceived of in law as an artificial person which can sue and be sued in its own right’.<sup>18</sup>

Broadly speaking, Australians have scarcely debated the ontological status of corporations, with some research students among the exceptions.<sup>19</sup> Our assumptions deserve wider discussion, politically, legally and, especially, gastronomically. We are expected to take it on trust that corporations are ‘good citizens’. We are meant to accept that corporations can engage in political campaigns, as if legitimate members of our democracy, spending millions on lobbying and advertising to defeat the intentions of elected governments. We certainly welcome them into the market economy, perhaps regulating them a bit (although they prefer ‘self-regulation’, along with market ‘discipline’), despite vast disparities in power from other market members, their wealth measured in billions. We scarcely question how, relatively to actual persons, they cross national

boundaries at ease; indeed, we fear their departure offshore.

Viewed as persons, corporations can seem delinquent. Take the advertising of junk foods to children. That can scarcely be said to help those children. Instead, corporations appeal to some ‘right’ to ‘free enterprise’. Then they claim to provide jobs (but workers are already time-poor!). No, media and convenience food corporations are home invaders on several levels. Corporations get their way with infrastructures, research agendas, laws, opinions and elections.

For Coleman, these actors are not so-socialised to induce ‘responsibility toward others’. Secondly, they are ‘extraordinarily large and powerful’, which makes a transaction between a large corporate actor and a person ‘extremely asymmetric’. The third issue is that a corporate actor is, by definition, not a natural person. ‘It *must* serve the interests of some natural persons in society if it is to have a *raison d'être*’, Coleman determines.<sup>20</sup> Coleman is suggesting that corporations are highly useful instruments, tools, machines and, as such, they must remain under the control of natural persons. I don’t mean under their CEOs, who are effectively bribed huge sums to maximise the ‘bottom line’. I mean the rest of us. The people.

The status of corporations was debated in Germany in the late nineteenth century and America in the early twentieth and even now (for instance Hartmann makes a vigorous case against their *personhood*).<sup>21</sup> Whether corporations can exercise the First Amendment right to free speech remains a live issue in the United States, being recently reconsidered by the Su-

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16 Peter French, ‘The corporation as a moral person’, *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16, 3, 1979, pp. 207–15

17 For example, Reuven Avi-Yonah, ‘Corporations, society and the state: A defense of the corporate tax’, John M. Olin Center for Law & Economics Paper 04-006, 2004 [[www.law.umich.edu/center-and-programs/olin/papers](http://www.law.umich.edu/center-and-programs/olin/papers)]

18 Johnson, p.110 (italics added)

19 Jeremy Malcolm, ‘Do corporations have rights?’, Bachelor of Laws (Honours) thesis, Murdoch University, 1994 [[www.malcolm.id.au/honours](http://www.malcolm.id.au/honours)]; Christina Jarron, ‘Corporations as social institutions: a sociological perspective on the legal regulation of corporations’, PhD thesis, Macquarie University, 2008

20 Coleman, p.553

21 Thom Hartmann, *Unequal Protection: how corporations became ‘people’ and how you can fight back*, second edition, San Francisco, Berrett-Koehler, 2010

preme Court.<sup>22</sup> The rightwing majority of five judges overthrew existing restrictions on corporations to allow them to directly fund political campaigns.

Setting out the contrary case for the liberal minority of four, Justice Stevens challenged ‘the conceit that corporations must be treated identically to natural persons in the political sphere’. He declared that, in the case of corporations, ‘the ‘speakers’ are not natural persons, much less members of our political community, and the governmental interests are of the highest order’. With the rightwing ‘activist’ judges demanding freedom of speech for corporations, next they will assert the right of corporations to vote, he scoffed.<sup>23</sup>

Stevens saw no reason to overturn earlier court findings that corporate wealth can unfairly influence elections, for instance in *Austin v Michigan Chamber of Commerce* in 1990.<sup>24</sup> He argued that corporations are sufficiently different from natural persons to have ‘limited liability’, ‘perpetual life’, separation of ownership and control, and so forth. He continued:

*corporations have no consciences, no beliefs, no feelings, no thoughts, no desires. Corporations help structure and facilitate the activities of human beings, to be sure, and their ‘personhood’ often serves as a useful legal fiction. But they are not themselves members of ‘We the People’ by whom and for whom our Constitution was established.*<sup>25</sup>

Among other objections was one recognised by the court for more than a century: corporations are not necessarily domiciled in the United States of America. Accepting that corporate earnings were no ‘indication of popular support for the corporation’s political ideas’, Stevens found that:

*The legal structure of corporations allows them to amass and deploy financial resources on a scale few natural persons can match. ... Consequently, when corporations grab up the prime broadcasting slots on the eve of an election, they can flood the market with advocacy that bears ‘little or no correlation’ to the ideas of natural persons or to any broader notion of the public good. The opinions of real people may be marginalized. The expenditure restrictions [on corporations] are thus meant to ensure that competition among actors in the political arena is truly competition among ideas.*<sup>26</sup>

Stevens concluded that the majority opinion of the Court was:

*a rejection of the common sense of the American people, who have recognized a need to prevent corporations from undermining self-government since the founding, and who have fought against the distinctive corrupting potential of corporate electioneering since the days of Theodore Roosevelt. ... While American democracy is imperfect, few outside the majority of this Court would have thought its flaws included a dearth of corporate money in politics.*<sup>27</sup>

That is a legal qualification of corporate ‘rights’ within the political household. A similar line of argument can be taken with respect to corporate participation in the market economy.

### **Economic personhood**

Australian corporations have adopted

22 *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission*, 2010, 558 US 08-205

23 pp.2, 32-34

24 *Austin v Michigan Chamber of Commerce*, 1990, 494 US 652

25 Opinion of Stevens J, Supreme Court of the United States, *Citizens United, Appellant v Federal Election Commission*, 21 January 2010, pp.75-76 [[www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-205.pdf](http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/09pdf/08-205.pdf)]

26 Opinion of Stevens J, pp.80-81

27 Opinion of Stevens J, p.90

*economic personhood* with scarcely any public discussion. In praise of ‘freedom of enterprise’, think-tank apologists are paid to remind the populace of the value of ‘minimal government’, ‘free markets’ and ‘liberty’ – for corporations. Corporations as members of the market household are again a useful fiction on many occasions, and they are regulated with sometimes more stringent requirements than small business. It could be argued (differently from the legal case) that corporate wealth is indeed some measure of popular support. Against that, however, and warranting our urgent attention, corporations presently enter our homes ‘without consciences’, with ‘no feelings’ and with ‘financial resources on a scale few natural persons can match’. That very wealth ensures inordinate manipulative influence.

Corporations are distinct, purposive ‘actors’, as Coleman and others say. Like people, they can own property, pay taxes, break the law and go broke. While they should be regarded as entities with which people have to trade, negotiate and control, they should not be confused with actual people for all the reasons that Justice Stevens and others have explained. And more can be added from a meal perspective, which foregrounds collaboration within households across basic needs. They are basic *human* needs.

At the market ‘table’, we deal no longer with just the butcher and baker, as in Adam Smith’s day, but with massive institutions. Whereas the butcher, baker and brewer self-interestedly served one another in an effort to meet shared basic needs, corporations act entirely differently. They are narrowly purposive, as Coleman noted, pursuing profit, and we know what happened to Midas.

Corporations are not natural members of any household. They are worse than ascetic, as Weber stressed, because these incorporated economic ‘persons’ lack

stomachs. These body-less ‘bodies’ participate in the market economy entirely without appetites. Their ‘hunger’ and their ‘greed’ are virtual and, unlike actual hungers, the pursuit of profit is limitless. To these ‘bodies’, growth appears boundless. For these non-corporeal entities, money is not the ‘absolute means’ to a meal but, instead, the ‘absolute purpose’. And that purpose is pursued relentlessly in increasingly single-minded and scientific ways. In their service, we are run ragged.

Gastronomically, corporations are quite different from persons. Legally and financially, they might warrant some fictional ‘personhood’. From the viewpoint of meals, they are non-persons, lacking metabolisms. Without bellies, they come to the table anorexically. They take no hedonic pleasure, and do not know companionship, let alone how to love. *In vino veritas* could make no sense (other than as another profit line). So, what are corporations? As non-persons, they might be considered, at best, equivalent to slaves. More accurately, they are machines, and largely out of control. Corporations act like Mickey Mouse brooms taking over our homes – our bodies, domestic lives, marketplaces, commonwealth and environment.

Gastronomic discourse provides important insights into the rationalisation, if not transfiguration and obliteration, of households. The market economy is our home, not a corporate playground and, sadly, corporate activity is extending from the market into our domestic, political and natural lives. These giant social machines press us to work harder and harder, and more ‘flexibly’. They push worse and worse food, their cheap milk ‘restructuring’ farming households. Corporations value fresh and local merely in terms of margins. Tradition is only ever a marketing ploy. Sustainability is nothing to them. We urgently need to reassert control, although, as I said at the Hunter Valley Symposium:

*Global warming, loss of biodiversity, shrinking resources, commodified water, overpopulation and worsening inequalities are among the immediate hazards. The problems seem near-insurmountable, with capitalist [read corporate] ‘rationality’ still driving all before it.<sup>28</sup>*

Corporate identity needs closer analysis, and appropriate safeguards taken. To that end, foodies can celebrate our homes at all levels, not least the market. Foodies love the market – the meeting-place of actual appetites, not virtual hungers. We find our way preferentially to Frank's, rather than Westfield. In our original intentions, and Brillat-Savarin's to at least some demonstrable degree, gastronomy was the ‘view from the table’. It's the perspective and program from the grower-cook-eater's perspective. It's proudly in the interest of the stomach, the appetite, gourmandise. It remains distinctively directed at people's and so their households' needs. So much else is run by ‘the industry’.

While the machines are programmed to expand, they have not yet entirely rationalised the market economy. Individuals (with appetites) can still join Get-Up, chain themselves to a coal loader, write nice books, or develop Candide's answer. We also can act and argue, gastronomically, against corporate ‘personhood’. Gastronomy seems more radical and more necessary than ever.

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28 Michael Symons, ‘A jug of wine, a loaf of bread... how wise?’, paper delivered at the 16<sup>th</sup> Symposium of Australian Gastronomy: ‘Cry the Beloved River’, Hunter Valley, 26-29 October, 2008

## SENATORS' PICNIC

The Rose Gardens at Old Parliament House, established eighty years ago for the enjoyment of senators and their guests, made the perfect setting for a sunny Sunday Symposium picnic lunch. Bedecked with red checked cloths and laden baskets of crusty bread, a long trestle table was set in the sunniest spot, in front of arbours and trellises of roses.

Late autumn sunshine and the last roses of the season were two of the ingredients guaranteeing the picnickers' enjoyment. But of course the key to a perfect picnic is the selection of uncomplicated but tasty foods, like the baguettes, filled either with tiger prawn rocket salad with a garlic mayo, or chicken Caesar salad with an avocado anchovy mayo; or the pie of chicken leek, and mushroom, all so popular here.

The picnic table was spread with the delicious evidence of one much-discussed Symposium subject, Australia's multicultural tastes. There was terrine; a quiche of tomato and onion; frittata with beans, tomato, mushroom, sage and cheese; corn fritters with chilli mojo; spring rolls with papaya salad; and Janni Kyritsis wild weed pie.



The tempting picnic array, sampled here by a key figure of symposia past, the late Mary Brander



Spread in the sunshine - wild weed pie, tomato and onion quiche, frittata, corn fritters, and at the top of the table, rounds of local Thistledown tomme and Small Cow brie



Lizzie Crosby chats with George Biron, with picnickers seated on the grass including Max Dingle (L), Jeannette Fry (R), and at the back Jacqui Newling



Lunch on the grass,, Colin Bannerman holding the souvenir 18<sup>th</sup> Symposium 'bottomless glass', the ticket to sampling the many Canberra wines provided

## CITY AND COUNTRY FOOD EXPEDITION

Though most felt they could easily wile away the afternoon amongst the wine and roses, an expedition awaited and promptly at 2 o'clock, buses were boarded for the journey across the city to the Australian National Botanic Gardens.

There, under the expert direction of our waiting guides, we formed two groups to explore bush tucker trails through the Gardens.



Among those food plants we had heard of as Aboriginal food were **grass trees** (*Xanthorrhaea spp.*) and also **Nardoo** (*Marsilea drummondii*).

But few had tasted many of the 21 plants we encountered along the trails, with only **Davidson's plum** (*Davidsonia pruriens*); **Bunya** (*Araucaria bidwillii*); **Lilli Pilli** (*Acmena smithii*); Finger Lime (*Citrus australasica*); and perhaps one or other of the **Pepper Trees** (*Tasmannia insipida* & *Tasmannia purpurascens*) known to most of us.

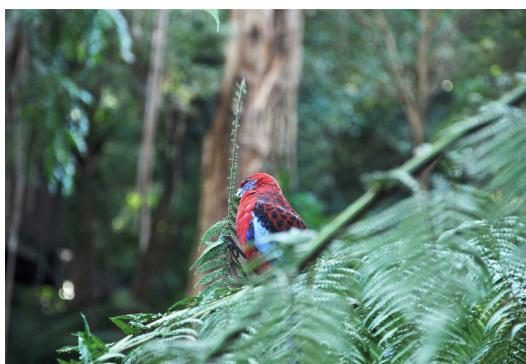
## BUSH TUCKER AT THE NATIONAL BOTANIC GARDENS

We were treated to an intriguing close-up of edible indigenous plants – though warned some knowledge was first necessary before testing tastes in this homegrown pantry.



For the rest we were intrigued as our guides explained food uses while showing us **Coast Wattle** (*A.longifolia*) (above, bottom right); **Brittle Gum** (*Eucalyptus mannifera*); **Burrawang** (*Macroramias spp.*); **mulga** (*Acacia aneura*); and the **aniseed myrtle** (*Syzygium anisatum*). There were also **Brush cherry** (*Syzygium austral*); **Cape Barren Tea** (*Correa alba*); Paroo lily (*Dianella caerulea*); and another **Finger Lime** (*Microcitrus garrawayi*).

## ON THE BUSES



There is a native thyme (*Prostanthera rotundifolia*); and there is food to be had in two tree ferns, the soft (*Dicksonia Antarctica*) and the rough *Cyathea australis*), and even in Bulrushes (*Typha spp.*).

With the same precision timing, we wound our way out of the Gardens and onto our buses for more food gardens, this time the more familiar urban community gardens, plant nurseries at Pialligo, and any backyards we could see – no stopping, for this was a journey with a destination. Dinner.

Karen Goldspink and Lenore Coltheart were bus guides, pointing out the organic community gardens on an old tennis court, amidst the harvest of multistorey apartment buildings in the inner south suburb of Kingston. Then on to Pialligo via Dairy Flat Road, where soon only the names will tell the story of these fertile foodlands, as market gardens, orchards and plant nurseries are ‘rationalised’ and developers drive the high prices that now equal ‘value’.

As we took the Kings Highway out of the city towards the rural town of Bungendore, bus talks were given by Rosemary Stanton and Jacqui Newling – so everyone could hear both these entertaining talks, the buses pulled over halfway so the obliging speakers could be exchanged.

*Their talks follow.*

## ON THE BUSES TALK

# Kitchen gardens – back door to better health

Rosemary Stanton

**F**ood plays many roles in our lives – it provides nourishment, enjoyment and the opportunity to share the day's joys and sorrows over the family dinner table. Sadly, the disappearance of the family table in many homes has resulted in a decline in vegetable consumption. Peas, spinach, carrots and even potatoes (other than French fries) have become a casualty of the modern trend to eat on the run.

Some families also report that a major reason for avoiding the dinner table is because they tire of the effort involved in trying to get children to eat their vegetables. National studies back these reports with almost 80% of 4-8 year-olds and 95% of 14-16 year-olds failing to consume even the minimum recommended two servings of vegetables a day.

From a nutritionist's perspective, it's almost impossible to devise a healthy diet without including vegetables. And children who don't establish the habit of eating vegetables (and other 'real' foods) tend to retain such habits into adult life. Our task is therefore to find a way to make vegetables more attractive – to children and adults.

### *The garden solution*

Preaching about the virtues of vegetables is useless. Most people already know that vegetables are good for them and we need a more positive approach to generate some enthusiasm for the wonderful array

of vegetables. One of the few approaches that works is the garden. School kitchen gardens where kids grow vegies and herbs, learn how to prepare them and enjoy them in a communal setting has led to both children and their parents eating and enjoying vegetables.

An increasing number of studies in the United States have reported changes in children's diets when they have access to a garden either at home or at school. Encouraging children to eat more fruits and vegetables has also been more effective in helping control excess weight than advice to reduce junk food.

Teachers are also aware of the value of school gardens. A survey in California found that students in schools with vegie gardens had better academic performance, physical activity, language, arts, and healthful eating habits.

In Australia, the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden program is enthusing children to grow, prepare and eat vegetables. There are also reports that the child's influence can also spread to improve the foods selected by the whole family. Wolongong University has done a formal evaluation of this program.

As a nutritionist, I have long advocated looking at three aspects associated with food

- Health and nutrition
- Taste and food literacy
- Environmental sustainability

Kitchen garden programs don't openly push the nutrition angle, yet by emphasising the other two aspects they assist health and nutrition without ever having to preach about such matters.

A report from the University of Melbourne has found that almost all children love the kitchen garden program. They like cooking, measuring, cutting, eating, trying new things, learning new skills, working in teams, meeting new people, be-

ing and playing in the garden and enjoying the “chooks”.

Some children also have a great sense of achievement from their work in the garden. Others find the garden a special place – and at times, a refuge. Children from schools with a kitchen garden say they are enjoying trying new foods, are more confident in trying new foods and now eat a wider range of food than they did before, including trying new foods from different cultures.

I have always believed that the best way to form friendships is to share food. That may be in the garden or at table, but understanding and sharing food breaks down barriers and increases social harmony.

### ***Community gardens***

In major cities, community gardens are flourishing. Many have long waiting lists. Kerbside gardens of edible vegies and fruits have become a feature of some inner Sydney suburbs. This has led to a more attractive landscape but has also brought communities together. People stop to talk about the garden and they soon discover that anyone who grows more than one or two cucumber or zucchini plants needs to find some friends! In some neighbourhoods, people are growing and sharing produce with amazing increases in community harmony as a result.

On the NSW South Coast, several community gardens have extended this concept by involving migrants and students from various countries. Some have grown produce familiar to them in various African, Middle-eastern or Asian countries and have shared the product and their knowledge with older Australians. This has increased feelings of self-worth among many people who have fled horrific situations. In the garden, there is peace – and products to share and cook.

Not everyone likes gardening, but even

onlookers love freshly picked produce. Interacting with those who are growing products on a small local scale breeds appreciation – for the growers as well as their products.

### ***Cuba***

It would be tragic if we had to endure many of the circumstances that engulfed Cuba in the 1990s. But amid its battles, Cuba offers us some valuable insights. With no supplies of fuel, and all resources cut, the people had little option but to use any possible space to grow food.

Twenty or so years later, the results of this urban agriculture revolution are being published. Unlike any other country, Cuba has had a decrease in obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease high blood pressure and strokes. In parallel with the development of urban community gardens, there has also been a decrease in mental health problems. Was it having a reason to get up, or the effect of sunlight, or the increased consumption of vegetables, or the social contacts that are inevitably forged or an increase in independence, or the need to plan that goes with gardening, or the competence and skills acquired that led to these benefits? We don't know, but we do know that vegetable gardens led to amazing results. Perhaps it was in accordance with William Affleck's famous line: “when the world wearies and society ceases to satisfy there's always the garden”.

## ON THE BUSES TALK

### Crown Lamb

Jacqueline Newling

**This talk responds to the question posed for the Symposium 'If our future is to move on from royalist to republican, what are the gastronomic implications?'**

Stephanie Alexander states in her culinary bible, *The Cook's Companion*, that "one cannot imagine anything more Australian than Kangaroo" (1996, p357). But for several years now, Sam Kekovich (in his role as hired help for the Meat and Livestock Association) has told us that not serving lamb on Australia Day is downright un-Australian! But shouldn't we, as Australians, be serving downright Australian meat on the day that celebrates our nation?

If we are to move towards being a republic, it is time we put aside the strictures of monarchy, empire and mother England. It is time we celebrated our independence, embraced our modern multi-ethnic society on Australian terms, by having kangaroo on our tables on Australia Day.

Australians have sought to stand alone since the early nineteenth century - fighting for independent government, a fair go for convicts, emancipists and the self-made man. Australians created a society based on renewal, one that offered an opportunity for a fresh start, a new identity; a society where you were not judged on your past but for who you are, here and now - valued for what you were willing to contribute to the nation.

I argue that lamb symbolises politics and power, in the most English of styles: Aus-

tralia may have been built on the sheep's back, but it was the gentlemen pastoralists who stood to benefit - including those who made up the first Legislative Council - the landowning gentry.

Lamb may have claim, to some supporters, as our "national" meat. But it got off to a tricky start and came at a price: Lamb, or mutton at least, was the first celebratory meat - served by Governor Phillip to his officers to mark British settlement on Sydney's shores - but it was February! Killed the day before, the meat was already maggoty and all attention turned to bumper rounds of spirits and porter (establishing another great Australian pastime).

Then there is the lovely irony that the nation's future was established when John Macarthur, father of the wool industry, conned the monarchy into granting him a royal flock and pastureland. Releasing the flock onto this land changed the landscape forever. Australia's 'squattocracy' duly spread across the country, pretty much on their own terms, to the detriment of the indigenous landowners and smaller settlers.

Despite having a flock of 1,000 sheep in 1798, even Macarthur didn't have lamb on his table - kangaroo was served in its favour!

William Charles Wentworth (Esquire) made a fortune from lamb in the 1840s - not from farming it, but boiling down 1000 sheep a day for tallow - the extensive drought proved that sheep were simply un-Australian.

And look where lamb got our Jolly Swagman – if it was roo meat in his tucker-bag those troopers wouldn't have had a case against him!

Today, according to Sam Kekovich, we should express our patriotism with lamb on the BBQ – how refreshingly Australian! We've broken the shackles by getting ourselves out of the kitchen to gather round the barbie. But surely we can do better than this!

As Colin Bannerman argued at the Symposium, a cuisine should belong to the land and its people . Do we really want our Australian-ness symbolised with a herd animal, rounded up and shepherded – a mindless flock, a homogenous woolly mass, following each other without vision? Or a unique, spirited individual, environmentally suited and deeply connected with its country, enjoying the freedoms of living in its land (at least until we shoot it).

We know kangaroo is healthier for us as nutrition, and for a sustainable environment, (which touches on another theme from this year's Symposium - *A Good Constitution – should eating for future health become a national goal?*). And let's face it – how many of us can really afford lamb at today's prices? While we may have made our fortunes off the sheep's back, dining out on cutlets at \$55 kilo will surely send us broke!

As we entertain the idea of making a fresh claim on political territory, it is time we identify lamb with the British notion of pastoral and social control. If Australia Day is set aside to celebrate European settlement of this country, let lamb reign supreme – but if it is to celebrate Australia as the country we're proud to be a part of, let's bring on the "wild colonial boy's" untamed alternative, downright Australian kangaroo, even if just once a year, to serve on Australia Day.

## DINNER WITH THE STARS

The timing was perfect – as each speaker finished, the buses were drawing near to our destination, and dinner. Up a steep hill, part of the Great Dividing Range, the buses turned right onto the side road leading to Mulloon Creek Natural Farms, our hosts for dinner with the stars. Set in a valley on the edge of the Great Dividing Range, this is a beautiful landscape. Alighting from the buses, our approach was along a path past ducks and geese, over a dam and up steps lighted with tiny candles.

Run by Tony Coote, Mulloon Creek is a substantial enterprise where contemporary good farming practices can be trialled, including organic and biodynamic growing, and the water retention techniques of Peter Andrews. While dinner cooked, Tony Coote explained a little of the success of his farm group and its environmental approach.

When it was time to gather at the long tables we were served with a sumptuous set of dishes, Asado De Tira Adobo spiced pork – from local Wessex Saddlebacks; with Patatas Bravas and great whorls of pinwheel sausages. There was Chimichurri sauce, Salsa Verde, Salsa Piquillo, Coca de recapte, Guacamole, and great bowls of tomato, onion, cucumber, pepper salad with a sherry vinegar dressing. Lunch seemed in another life somewhere, and even the afternoon-tea-in-a-bag served on the buses was a distant memory.

Or else it was the wonderful aroma of all that food cooking on a great, customised covered barbecue as we arrived, but there was no holding back. Janet Jeff's menu was a smash hit in that great outdoors. When it

came time for co-chef Peter Young's carefully torched Crema Catalana, the delectable dessert disappeared and eighty happy diners prepared to make their starry way back to the buses for a memorable moonlit ride back to Canberra.





## **BREAKFAST FAREWELL**

The closing event of the 18th Symposium of Australian Gastronomy was Monday morning's breakfast. Coffee and croissants and jams were set out in the Café at Old Parliament House, but the action was beyond, in the original kitchens.

There we could choose from chafing dishes of kedgeree, Eggs Benedict on smoked salmon and spinach, make-your-own sourdough toast, help-yourself Dundee marmalade, and made-to-order congee.

It felt like a prime ministerial privilege.

## REPORT ON THE 18<sup>TH</sup> SYMPOSIUM

The 2011 organising committee invited Michael Symons, a founder of the *Symposia of Australian Gastronomy* 28 years ago, to report on the Canberra Symposium.

### Canberra house party

**Michael Symons**

A useful conception of the gastronomic symposiums has been the “dinner party model”. Thinking of them neither as an institute, conference nor movement, but as a series of private dinners – or even as weekend house parties of the old, genteel type – helps decide policy. Rather than elected officials of some formal organisation, for example, self-appointed “hosts” organise a suitable venue, plan good food and conversation, ensure people mingle, and so on. Where some symposiasts have felt we should seek more publicity, a dinner party caters to the participants first, so that, as on the oxygen mask principle, we can then assist others. Likewise, we have tried to avoid formal votes.

The parallels are not complete: despite early rumours, the symposia were never “by invitation only”, the “guests” have always paid their share, and a research agenda is promoted. But I reflect on each symposium as I might a dinner party. How memorable was the eating? Did I meet someone interesting? Did we seem to enjoy ourselves? In response to Lenore’s Coltheart’s invitation to report, my quick answers are all “yes”, but let me respond more fully, and add a couple of policy reflections.

### Punctuality

In the lead-up, the Canberra hosts were modest to the point of anonymity. But the evident professionalism of unsigned internet announcements gave confidence. And, in the event, guests have good reason to thank the committee, which comprised ... some Canberra foodies ... the names must be here somewhere.<sup>1</sup>

One obvious strength was the event’s punctuality. At an early symposium, we sat around for what might have been 90 minutes waiting for a session to start. At another, using an unfamiliar kitchen, a banquet was still being served around midnight. By contrast, nothing in Canberra ran even five minutes late.

A large part of the explanation must be Janet Jeffs, whose career I’ve followed for more than three decades. After setting out as the chef at Possum’s in Adelaide even before Barry Ross had met long-term partner Phillip Searle, she opened her first restaurant at Killikanoon in the Clare Valley, before arguably reaching her creative apogee at Juniperberry at Red Hill in Canberra. Running the kitchens at Old Parliament House is more of a catering exercise, at which her team proved extraordinarily efficient, handling one breakfast, three coffee breaks, two lunches and three dinners (if we include the optional Friday “La Pétroleuse”).

Perhaps not as much as other committee members, Janet nonetheless stayed relatively in the background, leaving as the real star of the show the venue, Old Parliament House. We moved down those powerful corridors to debate in the same chamber as Robert Menzies and Gough Whitlam, and to sip champagne in the

<sup>1</sup> Some fine print at the bottom of the program revealed: Colin Bannerman, Mary Brander, Lenore Coltheart, Karen Goldspink, Josephine Gregoire, Marion Halligan, Bernadette Hince, Carolyn Ho, Janet Jeffs, Ian Ryall and Peter Young.

quaintly-named Kings Hall and to dine variously in the House of Reps courtyard, Senate garden, Members' Dining Room and present café.

### Meals

The (optional extra) opening meal in Janet's Ginger Room restaurant saluted revolutionary women with hints that Isaak Dinesen had modelled Babette on the Communard, Louise Michel (1830-1905). Trying to confirm that, I discovered both Dinesen and Michel among the thousand women recognised by Judy Chicago's installation, *The Dinner Party*. The reproduction of Babette's Blinis Demidoff, etc, was a highlight of the weekend, especially the *Caille en sarcophage*. So, too, was Saturday's lunch, based on chestnuts from Sassafras, starting with those roasted by their growers in the courtyard.

Does it sound as if I am then casting about too desperately for other food high points to hail everyone wearing laurel garlands in the Kings Hall before Saturday's "Deipnosophsists" dinner? But we proved surprisingly beautiful; rarely could that lobby have felt so elegant; and to think the committee used bay leaves from the nearby hedges. Another power walk took us to the former Members' Dining Room, set in two long rows, with the "philosophers at dinner" gesticulating across the divide, down which processions of waiters carried out trays of mezedes, then meats and garnishes. Provided with only plate and spoon, which apparently upset some in frocks, we used fingers even to pull apart joints of goat to share.

In such a full weekend, it is impossible to notice everything, which makes the tradition of local post-mortems valuable not only for well-wishers who couldn't attend. Just as I didn't pick up until too late that Ian Bersten was demonstrating the "correct" way of making tea, others might have missed the Greek duo doing songs of the

politically-charged Theodorakis in their "background" music.

Nothing failed at this symposium, but the closest to disappointment was the dinner at Mulloon Creek Natural Farms, which showcase biodynamic, permaculture, keyline, rehydration and other ecologically sensitive techniques, out Bungendore way. Interesting as far as he went, the owner of the glorious valley, Tony Coote, could have talked more, only beginning to open up on the protection against foxes, and never asked to explain the environmental suitability of willows. And we didn't seem to get much chance to enjoy (neither eat nor see) the livestock, nor one of the thousands of free-range chickens that bestow more than one million eggs annually. Overall, a pleasant enough night "with the stars", and not as chilly as feared.

### Papers

As to the spoken side, Robyn Archer opened with a rambunctious ode to the symposium, and with Lenore Coltheart was a winning debater in the old House of Reps chamber, along with Marion Halligan, Christian Reynolds and we backbenchers, under the eye of seasoned performer Alan Saunders. The extent to which governments should moderate corporate excess was hashed over with passion and wit and not for the last time. We also started the anti-politician "jokes", which align with media spruiking that relegates serious issues to a "sideshow" (Tanner, 2011).

More than one paper ran over old ground, but there were many highlights. Sociologist **Jane Dixon** spoke for five authors about their overlapping research projects on time pressures. In the face of the increasing "weight of modernity", the team renamed the "depression generation" the "lucky generation". With everyone now on the run, texting is used to organise household meal times. Fastfood employers

replace rosters with the SMS, too, so that the kids have to jump even faster. The researchers attributed novel diets and informalised meals to this much-vaunted labour market flexibility. That is, with increasing work hours, incompatible work schedules and casualised youth, economic deregulation has led to “culinary deregulation”.

A self-described “bitter” chef, presently without work, **Staci Crutchfield** reported personally, and brilliantly, on the culinary labour market, whose destructive effects are hidden by a “veeर of optimism”. Behind the revered maestros and dazzling dishes lies much abuse of minimally-paid employees. Not surprisingly, several of us urged Staci to turn her anger into a book, going on the shelves somewhere near Upton Sinclair, George Orwell and Anthony Bourdain.

Anthropologist **Nancy Pollock** described the difficulties faced by school canteens in New Zealand. Schools are run by individual boards, subject to “NAGs” (National Administration Guidelines), which were used by the Labour government to require canteens to serve “only healthy foods”; their National successors have simply dropped the “only”. From the discussion, we are mostly opposed to junk food advertising to children, although someone objected that healthy eating was a parental responsibility, a frequent corporate defence. But if healthy eating really were a matter for families, then the advertisers would have to butt right out. My own paper argued that food corporations, which have legal “personhood”, are actually problematic marketplace participants, because they completely lack appetites.

Revealing detailed knowledge of colonial fare, **Jacqui Newling** told of the early use of the plant *Smilax glyciphilla* as “sweet tea”. Italian immigrant **Josephine Gre-goire** contributed a finely observed personal history (another book?). Noting the absence these days of a shared discourse

of togetherness, **Marion Maddox** spoke about meal-based hospitality as model for academic research on social inclusion. (She later put up her hand to volunteer Sydney for the next symposium, exploring such themes.)

Introducing municipal food waste, PhD student **Christian Reynolds** said that Australian households throw out more than \$5 billion of food annually, a contribution to global warming that could be reduced by feeding scraps to chooks. **Jeanette Fry’s** architectural parallels between the Sanitarium factory outside Melbourne and Parliament House illustrated the move to uniform food legislation (a seeming nationalism that quickly betrays aggressive globalisation).

That summary of papers is too compressed, but given the committee’s efficiency, the prompt Proceedings now provide the written versions. [*Editor’s 2016 note: Oh dear!*]

### ***Excitement***

Australia’s first regional wine and food festival, the Clare Gourmet Weekend, was launched in 1985. Slow Food was founded in 1989, and took a while taking off in Australia. The modern farmers’ markets movement only really got going this century.

The tiny but animated and highly influential minority that had attended the first symposium in 1984 played a part in these are other changes, pushing the ideals of freshness and sustainability (from the start), food markets (1985), “multicultural” awareness (1987), food in the arts (1990), etc.

The excitement of being in the vanguard might no longer so thoroughly infect symposia. Along with everything having to be so faultlessly biogenic these days, the symposiums themselves have also become consistently more professional. We have

competition from ubiquitous food festivals, Slow meetings, smart publishers, and academics finally catching on. Just to mention other scholarly food conferences, they now include those of the new Regional Food Research Network Australasia (RFRNA) and a stream within the Popular Culture Association of Australia and New Zealand (POPCAANZ).

The gastronomic symposia are meant to be reflexive – if we cannot organise a worthwhile dinner party, who could? We have a self-appointed duty to experiment with both theory and practice. We need to keep rethinking ourselves. The eighteenth symposium stimulated many questions for me, but two in particular: one more practical - What are the most successful numbers for our type of event? – and the other more theoretical - What can we do about the uncertain state of gastronomy, as originally understood?

### **Numbers**

Canberra attracted around 90 participants, which made it among the bigger symposiums, and perhaps a few too many. Good restaurant kitchens usually cope with fewer mouths (some of my best meals at been at smaller places: Spring seated 16; Ritual 16; Noma 40; Vulcan's 40; Claude's 45), and a lecture hall with microphone is needed around that number. Just as the happy dinner party for “general conversation” comprises somewhere between 5 and 8, the most productive symposiums, in my experience, have had around 40 or 50.

Once the numbers grow, the event becomes like a standard conference with a passive audience, along with PowerPoint presentations and name-tags. We dilute the original DIY desire that everyone contributes a paper, meal, wines, morning biscuits or whatever (leading to the first BYO brown bread lunch, and some erratic papers – we were mainly novices). There is also value in the corollary, to which we

originally stuck perhaps too ruthlessly, of not inviting fleeting members of the press, guest lecturers or ticketholders for single sessions or meals. Numbers can be kept down by an unappealing theme, remote location or setting limits, which might be advisable next time, given Sydney’s large immediate catchment.

An associated challenge is democratic seating arrangements. Canberra organisers provided a mix – from named places (at the “Babette” and “Deipnosophists” dinners) through stand-up mingling (pre-dinner drinks and Senate gardens picnic) to the literal bagsing of places (Mulloon Creek). Opting for strict randomisation in Wellington (“In holiday mood”), we redistributed names on pebbles out of a hat each meal. It’s wonderful what interesting people you meet.

### **Gastronomy**

Food was studied academically throughout the past century, examined in ag. science, nutrition, economics, anthropology, etc. But that was not our own meals. The Oxford Symposia put culinary history on an academic footing in 1981. Taking a bigger picture, foodie academics developed what came to be known as “food studies”, especially in America, since the late 1990s. However, that’s still not gastronomy, in which Australian symposia led the world for a while, and which remains an alternative, more ambitious, but almost untried discipline.

With hindsight, the Canberra symposium might usefully have discussed the present state of academic gastronomy, given that Adelaide University now longer offers its Masters. That degree is being replaced in 2012 with Food Studies; but gastronomy promised something different, and something, at least in its more philosophical dimension, we seem to have left behind. So, let me attempt to re-justify “Australian gastronomy” not merely as a distinctive,

conversational “dinner party”, but also having theoretical foundations.

Trying to put my finger on what we might be pursuing, it’s not culinary history, which developed around the Oxford, Leeds and other symposia with much narrower ambitions. Food studies has greater scope, with its exponents studying gender roles, development studies and whatever. The difference between food studies and gastronomy lies in the basic approaches. I see food studies as the meeting-point of existing disciplines – the anthropology of food meeting the cultural studies of food, meeting nutrition, ecology, oenology, etc. Gastronomy wants to be its own discipline, and Brillat-Savarin expected a major discipline with distinctive things to say. Quite the opposite to many-eyed food studies, gastronomy has one distinctive standpoint, the view from the table. More picturesquely, gastronomy is the belly’s sense of the world. It’s the meal-time conversation.

“Food studies” is scientific-sounding, but is susceptible to corporate rather than to human values. Sheep and cattle require food, and industry turns them into it, too. By contrast, gastronomy studies *meals*, which might be woollier, but tastier and singularly important (and always being relegated to a merely trivial, privileged or indulgent interest).

At the risk of further caricature, food studies relies on existing disciplines, accepting their ways of looking at the world. Gastronomy starts afresh, contemplating what meals might mean. We see, and taste and enjoy, what’s on the table first, and then we see the communities, gardens, markets, cities, governments, lands and oceans and the stars beyond. The table provides an entry to the arts and religions. As Epicurus demonstrated, we experience the entire world from the table; we work out all our sciences and moralities (Symons, 2007).

Another major distinction is that gas-

tronomy comes from a grounded, material viewpoint. It is closely involved with that praxis which Brillat-Savarin describes in his important “Transition” section as *gourmandise*. It has an immediate, practical content. It has, as I say, immediate relevance to our daily lives, advising on meal activities, which are enmeshed, in turn, in the wider politics, etc. Brillat-Savarin urged that theoreticians and practitioners get together, and generally that has been a huge plus for the symposia.

As gastronomy has actually developed, especially in Europe, it has centrally celebrated individual foods and artisanal and regional production. It has fitted in with promotion by producers, processors, gastro-tourism operators and their consortia. Slow Food has this more marketing orientation in both its interests and methods. It has thus, to some degree, served industry rather than immediately personal purposes. In its defence, that’s tended to be non-corporate business. While gastronomy has generally been sympathetic to soft industry, Brillat-Savarin envisaged something much grander, rivalling any other study, both in scope and contribution.

Gastronomy has disciplinary integrity. It is not the meeting-point of existing disciplines, but its own thing, borrowing only when it wants. It also informs individuals and their communities, unlike food studies that can be more readily serve corporate interests, which aren’t those of the table (as I tried to argue in my paper to this symposium).

### *Original intentions*

Graham Pont declared himself at our first event to be Brillat-Savarin’s “devoted student and admirer”, having set the *Physiology of Taste* as a textbook for a “Food in history” course, which he started at the University of NSW in 1979, and then as the only text for “Gastronomy – A philosophical introduction to food in society”

in 1983 (Pont, 1984).

Pont's ambitions were taken up by his PhD student, Anthony Corones, who was surprised to learn from English writer Alan Davidson at the first symposium that Brillat-Savarin had never been mentioned at the Oxford symposium. Moreover, according to Davidson, no-one took *The Physiology of Taste* seriously. Corones decided that they must have read it as a somewhat eccentric cookbook, missing its theoretical intentions (1986: 6). So, in his paper to the second symposium, Corones drew attention to Brillat-Savarin's subtitle, *Meditations on transcendental gastronomy*, finding that gastronomy covers all other approaches to food.

Corones contrasted gastronomy with "foodism", as exemplified by *The Official Foodie Handbook*, which had just appeared (Levy and Barr, 1985). Foodism is "not in a theoretical position which can account for, and provide the necessary tools for studying, the entire agonistic field. But Brillat-Savarin's theoretical gastronomy, in its transcendence of foodie consciousness, is" (Corones, 1986: 7).

By that time, I was convinced that we were "food philosophers", who practised a definite school of "Australian gastronomy":

*Inhabiting an "upstart culinary country", lacking the security of tradition and dominated by global food corporations, we need to intellectualise. How else can we decide our next meal! This "gastronomy" takes from ecology, sociology and cultural studies, as much as from Athenaeus and Brillat-Savarin and the entire store of gardening, culinary and aristological wisdom (Symons, 1986a)*

Corones was much smarter, and, according to him at the third symposium in 1987, and that's a long time ago:

*... gastronomy, as defined by Brillat-Savarin, has the virtue of being a holistic*

*enterprise. It thus allows us to escape from the limitations of conventional academic disciplines, which for the sake of analysis and specialization are narrowly conceived, and simultaneously it also allows us to draw freely from them all. Gastronomy obliges us to pursue all aspects of food. ... As a critical enterprise, gastronomy has the potential to restore us to the roots of food. It is not a passive or "objective" study which simply leaves things as they are, for the understanding it imparts is practical in its implications (1988: 23).*

Perhaps Australian gastronomy's most distinctive feature (in accord with Brillat-Savarin's recommendation) is to have to successfully combined theory and practice. At symposia, we have both dined and thought with equal enthusiasm, demonstrating an Epicureanism that is world-embracing, empirical and hedonistic (Symons, 1986b and 2007).

Assuming that the symposia of Australian gastronomy continue to make a distinct contribution, and so maintain a valuable place alongside the proliferation of festivals, convivia, markets, tv shows and the various scholarly forays, then it remains the understanding of our meals, developed in conducive gatherings somewhat in the manner of a house party. As to the nature of gastronomy, here are five statements assembled from those early discussions:

1. The canonical text is Brillat-Savarin's.
2. The philosophical standpoint is Epicurean.
3. In other words, it is the view from the table
4. Gastronomy is holistic, including other studies, but not included.
5. It is critical.
6. It is reflexive.

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## PRESENTERS

**COLIN BANNERMAN** grew up in a country household in which chokos were plentiful, pumpkins home-grown, and opinions on rhubarb sharply divided. It was a shaky start, but enough. A growing passion for food, wine, cooking and old Australian cookery books kept him more or less sane through three decades in the Canberra bureaucracy. He finally escaped to take up a post as Senior Research Fellow at the University of Canberra in the field of educational communication. Finding that research rather suited his disposition, he turned to independent scholarship and discovered true happiness. He has published several books, as well as journal articles and magazine essays. His doctoral thesis was on cookery literature and its role in the development of food culture.

**IAN BERSTEN** holds a B.Com.(Economics) degree from the University of New South Wales and has been in the tea industry for over forty years, since starting the coffee company Belaroma Coffee in 1968. Ian is the author of three books, *Coffee Floats Tea Sinks*, *Coffee, Sex and Health* and *How tradition stood in the way of the perfect cup*. He spoke at the Guangzhou Tea Expo in 2009. His fourth book is in publication, for details see his website [www.tea-cha.com.au](http://www.tea-cha.com.au).

**STACI CRUTCHFIELD IS** of Greek-American heritage, having been born in Houston, Texas in 1966 and migrating to Sydney in 1971. She has worked in the hospitality industry for 25 years and attended her first Symposium in the Hunter Valley while working as a chef in the mining industry in 2008.

**JANE DIXON** is Senior Fellow at the ANU's National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health. Her research takes place at the intersection of sociology and public health, and focuses on transformations within national food systems. One of her books is *The Changing Chicken: chooks, cooks and culinary culture*. The research for this paper draws on

3 ARC grants – 'The Weight of Modernity', 'From Seedling to Supermarket', and 'Time scarcity in Australian families: Another inequality?' She regularly works with the colleagues who are co-authors of this paper, to which Dan Woodman from the ANU's Sociology School provided expertise on youth labour markets and social life.

**JEANETTE FRY** trained as a teacher in the early 1960s. She taught in Special Education for some years and ran a Catering Program involving youth in a Detention Centre. After several years she decided it was probably easier to go it alone and resigned in order to set up a catering business. Known as "The Excellent Moveable Feast" it provided her with extraordinary challenges, many sleepless nights, great opportunities to meet people and a small but adequate income.

In retirement she volunteers at Heide Museum of Modern Art, bakes biscuits and participates in a wide range of food-related events and activities. She has participated in every symposium since 1992.

**JOSEPHINE GREGOIRE-GAGLIARDI** was born and raised in Queanbeyan NSW. She is the daughter of Italian immigrants who settled near Canberra to help build the national capital. Josephine has a Bachelor of Applied Science in Health Education from the University of Canberra and recently completed Le Cordon Bleu's Graduate Certificate in Gastronomy through the University of Adelaide.

Josephine's work in health promotion focused on designing and implementing strategies to promote health in migrant communities in Australia. She also worked overseas with diverse cultural groups, putting into action her passion for community development and cross cultural communication. Her *restaurant life* commenced in 1999 when in partnership with her husband French chef Christophe Gregoire opened their first French restaurant in Canberra. Today, they live and work in the country town Bungendore, NSW. Their restaurant *Le Très Bon* is also the venue for French cooking classes and food & wine tours to France.

While the demands of owning a restaurant can be overwhelming, Josephine's priority remains the care of their three children. Motherhood has motivated her to take pride in her Italian background and heritage. She is happiest among people of different cultures and the sound of different languages is music to her ears – Italian is the language of her heart, French the language of her soul mate and English is the bridge which links her heart and head.

**ALEXANDRA GREGORI** graduated from Adelaide University in 2010 with a Master of Arts in Gastronomy. She has also studied hotel management at Regency Park and completed a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at Adelaide University. Alexandra has worked in hospitality, bookshops, children's book publishing and for the National Trust in the UK. She has written for and edited expatriate magazines in Malaysia, the Czech Republic and the United Kingdom. She is currently writing for the ANZA Magazine in the Philippines, where she moved with her family last year. Over the past twenty years Alexandra and her husband have lived and worked in seven different countries, travelled through many more and enjoyed eating in all of them!

**TAMMI JONAS** is a PhD Candidate at the University of Melbourne whose thesis is provisionally titled *From Gastronomic Multiculturalism to Cosmopolitanism: Exploring Melbourne's Foodways*. Her research interests include multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, national identity, everyday life studies, and food studies. Her article 'Essentially Cosmopolitan or Cosmopolitan Essentialism?' (2008) explores the implications of cosmopolitan identity grazing for both the 'feeders' and the 'eaters' in restaurant settings, and her forthcoming (2011) article in *Australian Humanities Review* 'Eating the Vernacular, Being Cosmopolitan' makes a case for maintaining distinctive cultural foodways to foster a more cosmopolitan society.

**MARION MADDOX** is Director of the Centre for Research on Social Inclusion at Macquarie University, Sydney. She holds PhDs in Theology (Flinders, 1992) and

Political Philosophy (UNSW, 2000) and has taught religious studies and political science in Australian and New Zealand universities. She writes widely on religion and politics, including *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin 2005). She also once published an English muffin recipe.

**JACQUELINE NEWLING** graduated from Adelaide University in 2007 with a Master of Arts in Gastronomy. Specialising in Australian colonial foodways, she now works with the Historic Houses Trust of New South Wales where she runs a series of Colonial Gastronomy public history programs. Jacqui guest lectures in Food across Cultures at Macquarie University (Anthropology) and holds regular Spice Appreciation Classes at Herbie's Spices in Rozelle.

**DIANA NOYCE** holds a BA and MA in Gastronomy from the University of Adelaide.

**NANCY POLLOCK** lectured in the Departments of Anthropology and Development Studies of Victoria University in Wellington, New Zealand.

**CHRISTIAN REYNOLDS** is a PhD Candidate in the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of South Australia

**ROSEMARY STANTON OAM** is Australia's leading nutritionist, and an ambassador for the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen garden program.

**MICHAEL SYMONS** is an independent scholar, after careers as a journalist (*Sydney Morning Herald*) and restaurateur (Uraidla Aristologist in the Adelaide Hills). He instigated the Symposiums of Australian Gastronomy in 1984 and gained a Ph.D. in the "sociology of cuisine" in 1991. He is the author of *One Continuous Picnic: A gastronomic history of Australia* (1982 & 2007), *The Shared Table: Ideas for Australian cuisine* (1993) and *A History of Cooks and Cooking* (2000, originally *The Pudding that Took a Thousand Cooks*, 1998), and publishes in high-ranking scholarly journals.

