

**L. Sasha Gora**

## **Going Native? The Influence of the New Nordic Food Movement on Canadian Cuisine and its (Re)imaginings of First Nations Food Cultures**

Food cultures change and yet we associate certain foods with particular places and peoples. However, because of an extensive history of globalized food, even ingredients that are deeply entrenched in a specific regional or national kitchen are products of international trade and conquest. This makes cuisine a cultural and historical product.

According to John Ralston Saul, nations and national identities are built around conversations, conversations about what to remember and what to forget.<sup>i</sup> Concerning Canada, the common narrative is that this conversation took place between the British and the French. Saul, however, argues that it is misleading to see Canada only through a European lens and that Canada is, in fact, an aboriginal-minded society, a “Métis nation.”

If food acts as an expression of identity, how does this translate into cuisine? What foods are associated with First Nations communities across Canada and how have they and their role in the Canadian conversation changed over time?

The past decade has seen the development of the New Nordic food movement, which I argue, because of its focus on wild foods and ingredients indigenous to Northern climates, has been influential on recent interpretations of Canadian food.

In 2003 René Redzepi opened the restaurant Noma in Copenhagen, Denmark. A portmanteau of the Danish words *nordisk* (Nordic) and *mad* (food), it won first place in *Restaurant* magazine's Best Restaurant in the World competition in 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2014. Considered to be the protagonist of the reinvention of Nordic food, staple restaurant ingredients such as tomatoes are banned. Instead, the restaurant only cooks and serves ingredients that are “native” to the region.

Noma makes it clear that what it serves is an interpretation rather than classical Nordic food. However, since cuisine is often in flux, what are the differences between “invention” and “reinvention”, or “interpretation” and “reinterpretation”? What is considered to be Nordic or Scandinavian restaurant cuisine may not always overlap significantly with historic diets in the region, yet it provides great insight into how Nordic food—and its landscape—is conceptualized today and which ingredients are allowed to take part.

My dissertation project aims to study perceptions of First Nations food cultures in Canada and how this fits into a larger understanding (and construction) of Canadian food. Instead of focusing on what First Nations food is per se, I am interested in how contemporary renditions of Canadian cuisine imagine the history of First Nations food cultures and thus, the country's culinary heritage, especially now that “native” ingredients are receiving increased attention and positive interest.

Subtopics in my research include food's potential for both assimilation and resistance, cuisine and nationalism and the pedigree of “Canadian” ingredients.

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<sup>i</sup> John Ralston Saul, “The Aboriginal Peoples and New Canadians: The Missing Conversation,” Lecture at Chan Shun Concert Hall, University of British Columbia (April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2009). Broadcasted on CBC Radio's Ideas (June 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009).