ELOHI

Peuples indigènes et environnement

2 | 2012

Les peuples indigènes face au reste du monde

The “Whole Foods” Paradox

Food Sovereignty, Eco-Iconography, and Urban Indigenous Discourse

Lindsey Claire Smith

Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/elohi/288>

DOI: 10.4000/elohi.288

ISSN: 2268-5243

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Bordeaux

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 July 2012

Number of pages: 59-77

ISBN: 978-2-86781-865-3

ISSN: 2431-8175

Electronic reference

Lindsey Claire Smith, « The “Whole Foods” Paradox », *ELOHI* [Online], 2 | 2012, Online since 01 July 2013, connection on 22 April 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/elohi/288> ; DOI : 10.4000/elohi.288

The “Whole Foods” Paradox: Food Sovereignty, Eco-Iconography, and Urban Indigenous Discourse

LINDSEY CLAIRE SMITH
Oklahoma State University

Grocery store patrons are familiar with representations of Indigenous bodies on packaged commodities that crowd store shelves in the United States. From the Indian “maiden” printed on cartons of Land O’Lakes butter to the Inuit in a parka stamped on packages of Eskimo pies, to the young brave outlined on labels of Red Boy mustard, vague notions of Indianness have long been used to market food. Suggesting naturalness, purity, and ecological simplicity, these images are meant to signify food safety, quality, and locality, regardless of the ethics of the companies that adopt them. These associations have become even more prominent amid the explosion in popularity of “whole foods”: organic, natural, slow, local, non-genetically modified (GM) products that are found in upscale, urban markets (Whole Foods being the most visible in the U.S.) that are typically patronized by those with little other meaningful interaction with Native peoples. Though some companies have made great strides in transforming food processing and production by forging positive relationships with Indigenous growers, others have simply capitalized on the popularity of exotic, abstract associations of “natural” with Indigenous peoples in order to improve their profit margins. What is usually lost in this discourse is critical consideration of the disconnect between “natural” products, which celebrate distant Indigenous communities, and Indigenous populations within the communities in which such stores operate. These “natural” foods, marketed to non-Indians as beneficial to Indigenous peoples, remain inaccessible to most Indigenous peoples.

Unreliable access to healthy food for disadvantaged populations, including Native Americans, is of particular concern in the U.S. even amid remarkable growth in the grocery market. Marked by the expansion of companies such as Whole Foods that are specifically branded as being connected to local communities and ethical in their practices toward populations in developing countries, specialty food retailers are rising in popularity in the U.S. regardless of weak economic growth (Zweibach;

“Mission”). However, despite its wealth, the U.S. is unique among industrialized countries in its food access disparities, as the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention documents. In a review of studies on food access from 1966 to 2007, Julie Beaulac, Elizabeth Kristanjsen, and Steven Cummins find that “food deserts,” or “areas characterized by relatively poor access to healthy and affordable food”(1), exist in the United States to a degree that is not consistently measurable in other high-income countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand (4).¹ At the same time that demand for “natural” and organic products, including those branded as supportive of Indigenous peoples, rises, food security for those very peoples remains in question.

Though “food deserts” compromise Native Americans’ health in cities where (ironically) “natural” or “ethical” food products that celebrate a brand of “Indianness” are marketed more commonly, food sovereignty movements seek to counteract this problem. Indigenous food sovereignty movements in the U.S. draw upon a history of international measures to address concerns about Indigenous peoples’ access to healthy food amid the limits of industrial economies. As Joni Adamson explains, sovereign people’s “right to food” is articulated in several documents with international relevance, including the United Nations International Bill of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1976), the Declaration of Atitlán (2002), and most recently the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)² (“Medicine” 214-5). According to Adamson, the Declaration of Atitlán, a centerpiece articulation of food sovereignty as a collective right, “emerged from over thirty years of previous work, in the form of meetings and summits held throughout the Americas, and increasingly focused on the concepts of ‘nutritional sovereignty’ or ‘food sovereignty,’ which called attention to the ideologies and external forces that have been threatening indigenous food systems for hundreds of years” (“Seeking” 232-3). In this way, food sovereignty addresses not only immediate needs, but also it highlights the systems, rooted in colonization of Indigenous peoples, that have created those needs.

1. According to Beaulac, et al., the term “food deserts” was first used in Scotland in the 1990s to refer to “poor access to an affordable and healthy diet” (1). See also Cummins, Steven, and Sally Macintyre. “Food Deserts”—Evidence and Assumption in Health Policy Making.” *British Medical Journal* 325.7361(2002): 436-8. Web. 30 October 2012. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1123946>

2. See International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.html>. See also Declaration of Atitlán at http://treatycouncil.info/new_page_5241224.html. See also United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

Thus, both the persistent circulation of problematic associations between Indigenous peoples and “natural,” specialty food and the presence of food deserts in cities across the U.S. are connected to global realities of threatened Indigenous foodways. Likewise, global movements inform grassroots organizations that promote Native food sovereignty in the U.S., though these organizations are grounded in particular local contexts. Such food sovereignty movements are one means by which Native Americans assert their rights and their presence in U.S. cities, forming an urban activism in the spirit of broader Native American rights movements, which have important ties to urban environments. This activism undermines the marketing of Indigenous bodies on products in upscale markets such as Whole Foods that are distant from local Native Americans’ lived realities.

In this essay, I will provide a case study of sorts of problematic renderings of Indigenous iconography on specialty products at Whole Foods in Oklahoma, including in my analysis consideration of the geographical locations of such stores relative to socioeconomic advantage. Discussing the role of colonization in the production of urban environments as described by theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, I will argue that the experience of shopping is one way in which urban consumers in Oklahoma may fetishize indigeneity in order to simulate ethical behavior toward global Indigenous populations at the same time that many local Native Americans face hardships associated with food insecurity. I will then uncover Indigenous food sovereignty movements to be a response to the gap between a proliferation of foods branded as “Indigenous” and the lack of access to healthy foods that many Indigenous peoples in Oklahoma experience. Ultimately, I argue, urban food sovereignty emerges as an Indigenous environmentalism as well as a civil rights matter that refigures the “ecological Indian” stereotype.

The romantic association of Indigenous peoples with ideals concerning naturalness and ethical relationships to the environment that surface on food labels has its roots in the philosophical longings that have historically been used to justify colonization. Within the context of North America’s colonization, early expeditions to the so-called “New World” associated Indigenous Americans in wilderness settings with a “Golden Age.” According to Stelio Cro, the Italian humanist, Peter Martyr, the first historian of the “discovery,” fueled this association, articulating beliefs that this new world was unspoiled, its residents ripe for the civilizing influences of Europeans who could themselves become closer to perfection through mastery of peoples whom they perceived to be human embodiments of nature (396). This impulse to affiliate with Natives persists³, even in urban areas that on the surface seem far removed from the Edenic wilderness of colonial imagination.

3. For further reading about this enduring impulse to identify with Indigenous Americans in order to justify one’s presence as a colonizer, see Philip Deloria’s *Playing Indian* (1999) and Shari Huhndorf’s *Going Native* (2001).

In Whole Foods and stores like it, shoppers may believe that they are improving themselves, especially improving their relationships to nature, by purchasing and consuming products that, through images of Indigenous peoples, promise to reveal the secrets to long life, promote environmental sustainability, and guarantee fair labor practices, whether or not those claims can be verified.

In many cities in the U.S., one must go no further than a Whole Foods grocery store, purveyor of natural and organic foods, to view signs of Indigeneity that promise consumers better health as well as assurance that their behavior is environmentally ethical. Of course, food is an important part of all cultures, and so ethnic and racial signs of many kinds proliferate in stores such as this. However, I argue that grocery products carrying signs of Indigeneity are most strongly connected to a sense of ethics that shoppers may believe they are practicing through consumption. This connection between food and Indigenous identity is understandable since foodways are such an important part of Indigenous traditional cultures, but we often connect Indigenous food with special gatherings in ancestral home places outside of cities. I complicate this association by uncovering ways that foods branded as Indigenous may also be markers of an urban, cosmopolitan ideal.⁴ Further, though all manner of grocery stores across the U.S. have long carried brands that project images of Natives, such as Land o Lakes butter, I am interested in ways that specialty markets like Whole Foods are strong markers of urban culture because of their presence only in cities, in usually wealthy and/or gentrifying neighborhoods, and because of the sense of ethics regarding food quality and environmental impact that most Whole Foods shoppers believe that they are putting into practice through their patronage.⁵ Overall, I find that through stores such as this, a simulation of cosmopolitanism unites with consumerism through signs of Indigeneity.

4. My use of the word “cosmopolitanism” here derives from Kwame Anthony Appiah’s definition of the term as “universality plus difference” (92). See his “Education for Global Citizenship.” *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 107.1 (2008): 83-99.

5. Evidence of this celebration of shopping at Whole Foods as a “lifestyle brand” can be found in the more than two hundred Facebook Whole Foods Fan pages that feature the wall posts of enthusiastic shoppers, many of whom are not privileged to live within close vicinity of a store and thus use these fan pages to post their pleas for a Whole Foods in their communities. For many of these enthusiasts, Whole Foods is more than a place to buy food; it is a venue for consumption that honors patrons’ senses of ethics. Evidence of this idealization of the company appears on Facebook posts that praise the company for its stances on GMO foods, its adoption of “green” practices, its promotion of health, and its community work. For a window into the store’s presence on Facebook, including links to all fan pages for individual cities, see the hub located at <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/facebook/>

A visit to Whole Foods is not simply a chore one undertakes in order to keep his or her household well stocked, as anyone who has spent much time in such a store may certify. One of the most immediately noticeable realities about shopping at Whole Foods is the premium price one may pay for products, even those that are the same ones found at non-niche grocers. This actuality has earned the chain the nickname “Whole Paycheck”; indeed one wonders how exactly the brand has managed to experience recent exponential growth amid such a dismal global economy. Assessing the company in early 2011, Eliot Zwiebach reported in *Supermarket News* that the chain had achieved stronger growth in the quarter ending in April 2011 than it had seen in the past five years, leading it to establish a goal of increasing its number of locations from around three hundred to a thousand—three times the number of current stores. At least one explanation for the company’s success is the unique design and conceptualization of its store environments. Not only may one find a wide selection of groceries, but also one may accrue yoga supplies, Tom’s Shoes (a brand that is notable for its union of philanthropy with hipster fashion), and magazines about health and wellness, among other items. Additionally, one may dine in-store or even receive a massage! This creation of an environment that marries plentiful images of particular philosophical standards with social interaction among like-minded consumers allows customers an experience that is unmatched among other retailers, even other organic food stores. In Oklahoma, known for its low rankings on almost all surveys of the overall health of its population, Whole Foods is more than simply a grocery store—it’s a place to express an alternative lifestyle.⁶

A survey of food items quickly reveals the ways in which ethnicity in general is a means of marketing and enticing consumers, from “exotic” Chai teas to artisan Italian pasta sauces. A few patterns emerge. The area that most strongly features associations with European-American pioneers—the location of staples such as grains, flour, cornmeal, etc. —also carries signs of absent Indigeneity, such as arrowheads. This is curious not because it is inaccurate to link Europeans with these products—flour is an important product made all over the globe, of course—but because in the branding of products such as Arrowhead Mills, for example (see fig. 1), American pioneering images or signs of absent Indigeneity are linked even to products that are described as originating outside of the U.S. In these cases, words like “wholesome” and “pure” accompany European-American pioneering images, encapsulating an entire narrative of colonization within one small bag of flour.

6. Oklahoma was recently ranked 6th-worst in the U.S. for rates of obesity. See Muchmore, Shannon. “Oklahoma Ranked Sixth-Worst for Obesity Rates.” *Tulsa World* 14 August 2012. Web. 30 October 2012. http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=17&articleid=20120814_17_A1_Oklaho299643

Associations with present Indigeneity seem to be most prominent in food products that promise special health benefits. Some similar verbal cues, such as “pure,” and some different cues, such as “traditional,” or “warrior,” or “gods,” signify the benefits one can expect through consumption. The label for Planetary Herbals Old Indian Wild Cherry Bark Syrup (see fig. 2) explains that the product is “a combination of some of the finest botanicals in North America and China, traditionally used for supporting the respiratory system. North American classics such as elecampane, horehound, hyssop, and mullein are combined with loquat leaf, fritillaria, and platycodon from Chinese herbalism.” Likewise, Arisana Coconut Oil (see fig. 3) is described on the label as “Derived from the kernel of the coconut [...] known by many indigenous cultures as the tree of life.” The packaging of Yerba mate (see fig. 4) also has a promising definition printed upon it:

a small tree native to the subtropical Atlantic forests of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina. This evergreen member of the holly family was introduced to modern civilizations by the indigenous Guarani of Paraguay, Argentina and Brazil [...] Deemed “The Drink of the Gods” by many indigenous groups in South America and “the green gold of the Indios” by Europeans, yerba mate possesses a multitude of health benefits that have begun to attract the attention of American scientists and consumers.

There is hope even for the chocoholic in the form of Dagoba chocolate (see fig. 5), which has crafted not only a “xocolatl” bar in honor of the Aztecs, but also “New Moon” and “Eclipse” bars in honor of teen girls’ favorite British vampire v. Indigenous werewolf series, *Twilight*. According to the Dagoba web site, the company’s collection includes “17 bars made from sustainably grown, organic cacao, otherwise known as ‘food of the gods.’ Every product—from single varietals to flavor infusions that marry exotic ingredients such as pure essential oils, fruits and nuts—is manufactured in small batches with great care.” It seems that “the gods” surely ate and drank a lot!

Another brand, Sambazon, is worthy of closer examination, as its marketing of açai berries (see fig. 6) provides a striking strategy that weds signs of Indigeneity to a promise of health and eco-sensibility in the form of “guiltless euphoria.” The website for Sambazon offers users the opportunity to “join the tribe,” “warrior up,” and “design a headdress” to participate in the company’s efforts to support the harvesting of açai, a sustainable alternative to wood and other products of the rainforests of Brazil (“Warrior”). A closer look at this Indigenous-associated product reveals a connection between global, especially urban, consumption of it and the removal of its access to the very peoples who have cultivated it in the first place. According to John Colapinto, who profiled the Sambazon company in *The New Yorker* magazine, two brothers from Southern California, Ryan and Jeremy Black, along with their friend Edmund Nichols, became açai enthusiasts while

celebrating the millennium in Brazil. The fruit has historically been sold there in cities by “ribeirinhos,” river people of the Amazon, who ship it from the rainforest for sale at roadside stands (37-8). The three young American tourists noticed the popularity of the fruit at juice bars in Rio de Janeiro, which Ryan describes as follows: “I got this feeling that it was sort of like Brazilians were going to the açai bar the same way Americans were going to Starbucks. It was a social situation” (qtd. 38).

This social experience of açai was what inspired the company’s founders to market the product specifically to urban consumers, especially celebrities, in the United States, which naturally led them to pitch the product to Whole Foods. According to Colapinto, Michael Besançon, who heard the pitch, named “the mystique of the Amazon” as key to the product’s promise (41). Anthropologist Jane Fajans elaborates on this attraction: “There are all these claims [...] that it takes away the toxicity of living in the First World” (qtd. in 37). As sales increased, the founders built a processing plant that would allow them direct accessibility to growers, and they also donated to the local community. However, this acceleration of the açai market, while spurring economic growth among some local peoples, has also brought more non-Indigenous foods to the area and has made the product too expensive to remain within reach as a staple food for the urban poor (41). While economically advantaged American consumers have responded to Sambazon with enthusiasm because of its association with Native peoples and its (exaggerated) promise as a “superfood,” that very connection between açai and its origins has been compromised as a result.

These ironies of Indigenous branding, which demonstrate a connection between urban cultures and a desire, in Colapinto’s words, for a “balm for millennial anxieties”(37), make Whole Foods the perfect outlet for purchasing such products, since the chain is rife with its own paradoxes.⁷ Whole Foods’s founder and CEO, John Mackey, has come under scrutiny for his opposition to universal health care in the U.S. despite the generous benefits he offers employees, his anti-union stance despite the limits on compensation for executives within the company, his framing of certain items as organic that are nonetheless the products of large-scale corporate farming, and his affinity for figures such as Ronald Reagan, Ayn Rand, and Margaret Thatcher.⁸ Michael Serazio has studied the connection between Whole Foods’ success at selling “ethos groceries” that are “steeped in ideology”(159) and an overall trend toward ethical consumption that absolves shoppers of anxieties about luxurious excess. In his words, Whole

7. For more analysis of signs of globalization attached to groceries, see also Greg Dickinson’s and Casey M. Maugh’s “Placing Visual Rhetoric: Finding Material Comfort in Wild Oats Market” (2004).

8. See Nick Paumgarten’s profile of John Mackey, “Food Fighter” (2010), in *The New Yorker*.

Foods's "emergence coincides with powerful shifts and demographic trends in American popular culture that concern ethical consumption, the collective memory of the 1960s, and the shopper's relationship to globalization" (158-9), which is "aimed largely at the baby boomer bourgeois"(159). Whole Foods's intended demographic, Serazio explains, is steeped in the counterculture environmentalism of the 1960s spurred by the writings of Fairfield Osborn and Rachel Carson (161).

Serazio does not take the further step of linking this countercultural impulse to signs of Indigeneity that were also popular at the time, and I would like to make this connection clearer. While the accomplishments of Native American civil rights movements are certainly important to the historical narrative of the era, the proliferation of references to Natives in American popular culture at that time can largely be attributed to a broader countercultural impulse. These references are obvious, for example, in the leather and beads of hippie fashion as well as the crying Indian (ironically played by Italian actor Iron Eyes Cody) of the anti-litter television commercial sponsored by Keep America Beautiful. In this way, the consumerist co-opting of countercultural style that Serazio describes as "an emporium of [...] substitution: simulating politics, cribbing communalism" (162) via the "intersection of global transformations with localized objects"(167) likewise contains simulations of ethics concerning Indigenous peoples as part of its First World, urban yearnings.

In Oklahoma, Whole Foods has entered the grocery market much later than it has in other states, which is probably due to the area's low per capita income and low number of college graduates.⁹ The locations that have been chosen for Oklahoma's three stores, two in Tulsa and one in Oklahoma City, are affluent areas at a distance from neighborhoods where many Indigenous Oklahomans live. It is clear that despite the company's celebration of community responsibility and ethics associated with Indigeneity, such markets are not addressing the problem of food deserts among their community action initiatives, nor are they actively seeking to attract Native American shoppers. The site for the recently opened store in Oklahoma City, which was constructed according to green building standards, is particularly compelling, as it was the result of Chesapeake Energy Corporation's effort to bring a store to its campus in the northwest part of the city. Aubrey McClendon, CEO of the natural gas company, had the following to say about the arrival of the store:

9. Mackey says that new stores are put in locations where there are a high number of college graduates within a sixteen-minute drive (Paumgarten 36). State rankings for personal income and residents with bachelor's degrees or more are published by the U.S. census bureau and can be found at <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/ranks/rank29.html> and <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/ranks/rank19.html>, respectively.

The fact that we have attracted one of the most coveted retailers in the country to our community validates the revitalization we have experienced in Oklahoma City in the past ten years [...] The addition of a Whole Foods Market [...] contiguous to our corporate headquarters campus signifies a major step forward in our vision to create the most vibrant and dynamic urban environment for our employees and neighbors to live, work, and play in Oklahoma [...] We are taking the retail, entertainment and business environment to a new level in Oklahoma City while simultaneously furthering a mission of sustainability and healthy living with the addition of a Whole Foods Market (“Whole Foods Market Announces”)

McClendon’s comments emphasize sustainability and healthy living, yet at the same time, his company has been the target of concerns about the environmental impact of its practices.¹⁰ Further, McClendon emphasizes that Whole Foods’s arrival is linked to validation of the city as vibrant and dynamic. Thus, in this example, a simulation of environmental ethics and sophistication not only occurs within the grocery, but also it underwrites the urban location of the store and its relation to its neighbors.

These examples, visible both inside and outside of Whole Foods, reveal ways that product marketing and consumption, which promise health benefits and ecological absolution through ties to Indigeneity, obscure a very real disconnect between imaginings of Indigenous peoples from afar and the presence of local Indigenous residents of cities like Oklahoma City and Tulsa. Many of these Native American citizens experience hunger, poverty, and lack of access to healthy and affordable food in their own neighborhoods, making Oklahoma one of the hungriest states in the nation (“Hunger in Oklahoma”). This problem of food insecurity is due to a combination of factors; among these is a scarcity of grocery stores in low-income areas of town along with a lack of public transportation for those who do not own cars.¹¹ Thus, urban locales, perceived to be “vibrant and dynamic” enough for a Whole Foods and its “ethos groceries,” yet nonetheless

10. For more information about controversy surrounding Chesapeake Energy’s hydrofracking leases, as well as more information about its well blowout in Pennsylvania that polluted groundwater, resulting in the largest gas drilling fine on record, see *The New York Times*’s online archive of articles about the company: http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/business/companies/chesapeake_energy_corporation/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=chesapeake%20energy&st=cse

11. The Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has helpful tools for those who are interested in mapping food deserts and analyzing data about food environments in the U.S. These are the “Food Desert Locator” at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-desert-locator.aspx> and the “Food Environment Atlas” at <http://ers.usda.gov/foodatlas>

beset by food insecurity, require critical consideration of urban space itself as a scene of the paradoxes of global culture.

French scholar Henri Lefebvre and the succeeding urban geographical theorists he inspired, such as Edward Soja, have concentrated on these contradictions of the city as they signify a transition from agriculture to industry and ultimately to urbanization. Lefebvre describes the “urban fabric” as an ecosystem that is a way of life, an urban society (*Writings* 72). He makes a distinction between “the city, a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact, and the urban, a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought” (102). Further highlighting these social relations, he calls the capitalist city a “place of consumption and consumption of place. Businesses densify in the centre, and attract expensive shops, luxury foodstuff and products [...] In these privileged sites, the consumer comes to consume place; the collection of objects in the windows of boutiques becomes the reason and the pretext for the gathering of people” (169). According to Andy Merrifield, Lefebvre’s discussion of the transformation of traditional city into urban fabric is his rendering of a “global class practice, an urban strategy that peripheralizes millions and millions of people everywhere [...] The peripheralization of the world’s least well off is apace” (94). Thus, one may point toward Whole Foods, a social space as well as a marker of a more advanced urbanization, as an example of consumption of place as well as of “luxury foodstuff” that in some instances, such as those outlined above, counts Indigenous peoples among those it peripheralizes.

Lefebvre’s discussion of urbanization’s impact upon nature also has relevance for an analysis of relations between Indigeneity and the particular kind of consumption that Whole Foods offers. He explains that nature is fetishized as society transitions from agricultural to industrial to urban. This is visible in the design of parks and recreational areas, in which signs of nature multiply and supplant real nature. He explains,

Theoretically, nature is shrinking, but the signs of nature and the natural are multiplying, replacing and supplanting real ‘nature.’ These signs are mass-produced and sold [...] There is a continuous reference to nature in advertising, whether it be food or textile products, housing or vacations [...] What no longer has a meaning is given one through the mediation of a fetishistic world of nature. (Urban 27)

In a related vein within an Indigenous studies context, Shari Huhndorf, in her book *Mapping the Americas* (2009), names colonial visual and spatial practices as the explanation for the transformation of Indigenous territories into national parks and monuments. Likewise, Coll Thrush (2008), in his book *Native Seattle*, describes examples of deliberate, city planned monuments to Indigenous figures such as Seattle as well as Indigenous-named neighborhoods that are key to gentrification schemes that in fact supplant Indian neighborhoods. Though Lefebvre never

addresses the presence of Indigenous peoples in natural spaces that are colonized, one may understand this acceleration of Indigenous iconography, along with the explosion in popularity of Whole Foods, which is manifest in all manner of visual and spatial terms, as fetishizing. This fetishizing is yet more evidence of colonial longing for Indigeneity that nonetheless displaces Indigenous peoples.

Rather than suggesting an apocalyptic future, however, Lefebvre identifies a means of empowerment for residents of the urban oeuvre, which he calls “the right to the city.”

For Lefebvre, the right to the city involves the concrete over the abstract, or the conditions that surround everyday life, and ultimately, it is the working class that supports an “integrated theory of the city and urban society, [...] gather[ing] the interests [...] of the whole society and firstly of all those who *inhabit*” (*Writings* 158). While the marxist intonations of this model are not simply an overlay for individual tribes, who have their own ancestral, national, and economic contexts outside of the U.S. nation-state, the potential for resistance that it implies may yet converge in some ways with Indigenous peoples’ efforts to combat the detrimental effects of the global food systems emblemized by Whole Foods.

For Indigenous communities, relationships to food are one more manifestation of the importance of sovereignty, despite the signs of nature or natural food that supplant the real in urban areas of Oklahoma. In Tulsa, for example, where three tribal jurisdictions—Creek, Osage, and Cherokee—converge, Indigenous food sovereignty movements are gaining ground. For example, at the Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa, a 501c3 nonprofit health clinic governed by a board of trustees from the Tulsa Indian community, a “Food for Life” program seeks to resolve issues of food insecurity through education, cooking, and community gardening projects in Tulsa’s Indian neighborhoods (“Health Education”). Similarly, the Muskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative of the Creek Nation promotes sustainable agriculture and healthy food education but adds programs that preserve seeds, such as Soffkee corn, that are culturally significant; create partnerships with producers in the 5 counties of the Muscogee Creek Nation; and host Native American heritage dinners in partnership with the Okmulgee farmer’s market (“Mvskoke”). This program, headquartered in Okmulgee (Tulsa area), the capital of the Creek Nation, partners with the OSU-Institute of Technology and is presided over by a board of directors composed of participants in the organization Indigenous Activists of Tulsa.¹²

It is important to emphasize that these examples, arising out of the local context of tribal communities in Tulsa connect to broader, global movements that bring together diverse Indigenous communities. Technologically engaged, Oklahoma

12. For more information on this organization, visit its blog at <http://indigenousactivisttulsa.wordpress.com>

food sovereignty advocates employ the Web to promote education and foster research in the area about food sovereignty and are also involved in broader debates about the ethics of biotechnological practices in areas racked by famine.¹³ Actions to strengthen Indigenous peoples' historical agricultural practices are thereby not a desire to recreate a pre-colonial past, but are on the contrary connected, in a forum that incorporates difference, with tribal colleges and public universities, civil rights organizations, and nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations across nations. Therefore, despite the pervasiveness of fragmented simulations of ethics regarding Indigenous peoples in urban spaces, alternatives—*real* alternatives—exist.

These examples demonstrate that signs of urbanization, Whole Foods, for example, that are linked to Indigeneity in some sense may belie or displace the real, simulating ethics rather than truly engaging ethics in a local urban, geographical space. However, acts of Indigenous sovereignty, even in the everyday reality of food consumption, serve as a rejoinder to that displacement. In the urban spaces of contemporary Indigenous life, everyday encounters with signs of colonization are thus present, sometimes subtly, but as is evident in the work of food sovereignty advocates, those urban spaces are not being relinquished. After all, Tulsa means “Old Town” in the Mvskoke Language. And that it remains.

Works Cited

ADAMSON Joni, “Medicine Food: Critical Environmental Justice Studies, Native North American Literature, and the Movement for Food Sovereignty.” *Environmental Justice* 4.4 (2011): 213-19.

———, “Seeking the Corn Mother: Transnational Indigenous Organizing and Food Sovereignty in Native North American Literature.” *Indigenous Rights in the Age of the UN Declaration*. Ed. Elvira Pulitano. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012. 228-49.

APPIAH Kwame Anthony, “Education for Global Citizenship.” *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* 107.1 (2008): 83-99.

BEAULAC Julie, Elizabeth KRISTJANSSON and Steven CUMMINS. “A Systematic Review of Food Deserts, 1966-2007.” *Preventing Chronic Disease* 6.3 (2009): A105. Web. 30 October 2012. http://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2009/jul/08_0163.html.

“Chesapeake Energy Corporation News.” *Nytimes.com*, The New York Times, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/>

13. The Tulsa City-County Library houses an archive of resources about food sovereignty on local and global scales at the following site: <http://www.tulsalibrary.org/airc/food.php> and at <http://www.mvskokefood.org/>. See also the site for the Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism: <http://www.ipcb.org>

news/business/companies/chesapeake_energy_corporation/index.html?scp=1spot&sq=chesapeake%20energy&st=cse

COLAPINTO John, “Strange Fruit: The Rise and Fall of Açai.” *The New Yorker* 30 May 2011.

CRO Stelio, “Classical Antiquity, America, and the Myth of the Noble Savage.” *The Classical Tradition and the Americas*. Ed. Wolfgang Haase and Meyer Reinhold. Vol. I. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1993. 379-418. 2 vols.

“The Crying Indian Commercial.” *Youtube.com*. Youtube, 22 September 2006. Web. 4 December 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4ozVMxzNAA&feature=autoplay&list=PL41D1FDCBAC29B577&lf=results_video&playnext=2

CUMMINS Steven, and MACINTYRE Sally, “Food Deserts”—Evidence and Assumption in Health Policy Making.” *British Medical Journal* 325.7361(2002):436-8.

DICKINSON Greg and Casey M. MAUGH, “Placing Visual Rhetoric: Finding Material Comfort in Wild Oats Market.” *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. Ed. Charles A. Hill and Marguerite HELMERS Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. 259-76.

“Declaration of Atitlán, Guatemala.” *treatycouncil.info*. International Indian Treaty Council. n.d. Web. 30 October 2012. http://treatycouncil.info/new_page_5241224.html

DELORIA Philip, *Playing Indian*. New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1999.

“Food Desert Locator.” *USDA.gov*, Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/index.html>

“Food Environment Atlas.” *USDA.gov*, Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://ers.usda.gov/foodatlas>

HUHNDOERF Shari, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001.

_____, *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2009.

“Hunger in Oklahoma.” *Hungerinoklahoma.org*, Oklahoma Food Bank Network, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.hungerinoklahoma.org/index.html>

“Health Education.” *Ihcrc.org*, Indian Health Care Resource Center of Tulsa, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.ihcrc.org/healthEducation/foodforlife.html>

Indigenous Activists Oklahoma Blog. Indigenous Activists of Tulsa, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://indigenousactiviststulsa.wordpress.com>

Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism. Indigenous Peoples Council on Biocolonialism, n.d. Web 4 December 2011. <http://www.ipcb.org>

“International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Web. 30 October 2012. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.html>

LEFEBVRE Henri, *Writings on Cities*. Trans. and Ed. Eleonore KOFMORE and Elizabeth LEBAS. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.

LEFEBVRE Henri, (Trans. Robert BONONNO). *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: U. of MN P., 2003.

MERRIFIELD Andy, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge: New York, 2006.

“Mission and Values.” Whole Foods Market. n.d. Web. 30 December 2012. <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/mission-values>

MUCHMORE Shannon. “Oklahoma Ranked Sixth-Worst for Obesity Rates.” *Tulsa World* 14 August 2012. Web. 30 October 2012. http://www.tulsaworld.com/news/article.aspx?subjectid=17&articleid=20120814_17_A1_Oklaho299643

“Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative.” *Mvskokefood.org*. Mvskoke Food Sovereignty Initiative, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.mvskokefood.org>

“Our Products.” *dagobachocolate.com*. Dagoba, n.d. Web. 1 December 2011. <http://www.dagobachocolate.com/products.asp>

PAUMGARTEN Nick, “Food Fighter.” *The New Yorker* 4 January 2010.

SERAZIO Michael, “Ethos Groceries and Countercultural Appetites: Consuming Memory In Whole Foods’ Brand Utopia.” *Journal of Popular Culture* 44.1 (2011): 158-77.

SOJA Edward, *Postmodern Geographies: The Assertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. Verso: London, 1989.

“State Rankings—Statistical Abstract of the United States—Personal Income Per Capita, 2008.” *Census.gov*. U.S. Census Bureau, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/ranks/rank29.html>

“State Rankings—Statistical Abstract of the United States—Persons 25 Years Old and Over with a Bachelor’s Degree or More, 2008.” *Census.gov*. U.S. Census Bureau, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2012/ranks/rank19.html>

“Traditional Foods and Lifeways.” *Tulsalibrary.org*. American Indian Resource Center, Tulsa City-County Library, n.d. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://www.tulsalibrary.org/airc/food.php>

“United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.” *UN.org*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 30 December 2012. www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf

THRUSH, Coll. *Native Seattle: Histories of the Crossing-Over Place*. Seattle: U. of Washington P., 2008.

"Whole Foods Market on Facebook." *wholefoodsmarket.com*. Whole Foods, n.d. Web. 1 December 2011. <http://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/facebook>

"Whole Foods Market Announces Plans to Build Store in Oklahoma City Near Classen Curve Development and Chesapeake Energy Campus." *Whole Foods Market Press Room*. Whole Foods, 12 May 2010. Web. 4 December 2011. <http://wholefoodsmarket.com/pressroom/blog/2010/05/12/whole-foods-market%C2%AE-announces-plans-to-build-store-in-oklahoma-city-near-classen-curve-development-and-chesapeake-energy-campus>

"Warrior Up: Sambazon Warriors." *Sambazon.com*. Sambazon, n.d. 1 December 2011. <http://www.sambazon.com/warriors>

ZWEIBACH Eliot, "Whole Foods Sets Expansion Target: 1,000 Stores." *Supermarket News*. Supermarket News, 9 May 2011. Web. 1 December 2011. http://supermarketnews.com/retail_financial/whole_foods_expansion_0509

Lindsey Claire Smith is Associate Professor of English and Associate Director of American Indian Studies at Oklahoma State University. She teaches courses in Native American and Pacific Indigenous literatures. She has published a monograph, *Indians, Environment, and Identity on the Borders of American Literature*, and with her colleague Paul Lai, an edited essay collection, *Alternative Contact: Indigeneity, Globalism, and American Studies*. She is currently at work on two additional projects, one on Creek/Seminole filmmaker Sterlin Harjo and another on Indigeneity and urban space.

Summary: Grocery store patrons are familiar with representations of Indigenous bodies on packaged commodities that crowd store shelves. Suggesting naturalness, purity, and ecological simplicity, these images signify food safety, quality, and locality, regardless of the ethics of the companies that adopt them. These associations have become even more prominent amid the explosion in popularity of "whole foods": organic, natural, slow, local, non-GM products that are found in upscale, urban markets (Whole Foods being the most visible in the U.S.) that are typically patronized by those with little other meaningful interaction with Native peoples. Though some companies have made great strides in transforming food processing and production by forging positive relationships with Indigenous growers, others have simply capitalized on the popularity of exotic, abstract associations of "natural" with Indigenous peoples in order to improve their profit margins. What is usually lost in this discourse is critical consideration of the disconnect between "natural" products, which celebrate distant Indigenous communities, and Indigenous populations within the communities in which such upscale markets operate. These "Natural" foods, marketed as beneficial to Indigenous peoples, remain inaccessible to those very peoples. This paper investigates this rupture in the association of "whole foods" with Indigenous peoples, focusing on urban spaces.

Keywords: food, sovereignty, environment, globalism, food deserts, indigenous, native americans, foodways, urban, cosmopolitan.

Lindsey Claire Smith est maître de conférences en anglais et directrice adjointe du département d'études amérindiennes à Oklahoma State University. Elle enseigne les littératures amérindiennes et indigènes du Pacifique. Elle a publié une monographie intitulée *Indians, Environment, and Identity on the Borders of American Literature*, et a co-dirigé avec son collègue Paul Lai une collection d'essais, *Alternative Contact : Indigeneity, Globalism, and American Studies*. Actuellement, elle travaille sur deux projets, l'un sur le cinéaste creek/seminole Sterlin Harjo, l'autre sur l'indigénéité dans l'espace urbain.

Résumé : Les clients des supermarchés voient de plus en plus de représentations d'indigènes sur les emballages des produits qui emplissent les étagères. Suggérant le naturel, la pureté et la simplicité

écologique, ces images signifient la sécurité alimentaire, la qualité et l'authenticité, quelle que soit l'éthique des entreprises qui les adoptent. Ces évocations sont devenues encore plus prononcées avec l'explosion en popularité des « aliments complets ». On trouve ces produits organiques, naturels, locaux, non génétiquement modifiés dans les marchés urbains haut de gamme (Whole Foods étant l'exemple le plus représentatif aux États-Unis) qui sont généralement fréquentés par ceux qui n'ont pour ainsi dire aucun autre rapport substantiel avec les indigènes. Alors que certaines entreprises ont fait de grands progrès pour modifier la préparation des aliments et leur production en établissant de bonnes relations avec les producteurs indigènes, d'autres ont simplement profité de la popularité des représentations exotiques et abstraites du côté « naturel » des produits offerts par les populations indigènes afin d'améliorer leurs marges. Ce qui est généralement perdu dans ce discours est la considération critique de la séparation entre les produits « naturels » qui célèbrent des communautés indigènes lointaines et les populations indigènes à l'intérieur des communautés où ces magasins haut de gamme sont établis. Ces produits « naturels », dont les indigènes sont censés bénéficier, leur restent pourtant inaccessibles. Cette étude examine cette rupture entre l'association des « aliments complets » et les indigènes, en se concentrant sur les espaces urbains.

Mots-clés : nourriture, souveraineté, environnement, mondialisme, déserts alimentaires, amérindiens, habitudes alimentaires, urbain, cosmopolite.

Figure 1 – Arrowhead Mills

Figure 2 – Cherry Bark

Figure 3 – Coconut Oil

Figure 4 – Guayaki

Figure 5 – New Moon

Figure 6 – Açaí