Wild Cuisine and Canadianness: Creeping Rootstalks and Subterranean Struggle

Abstract: Canada is commonly depicted as a rugged wilderness. Defining the characteristics of its food as wild is a contributing factor in this narrative. While there may be some truth to this image, there are also overlooked implications in perpetuating links between the notion of Canada as a nation, and the trope of wilderness as its defining feature.

In this article, I draw on visual analysis as well as theory from sensory studies to complicate the concept of “wild” food at the root of discourse on Canadian cuisine. The focus of this analysis is a case study of wild berries on the northeastern coast of Québec, Canada. Throughout the article I quote from interviews that I conducted with Anglophone, Francophone, and Innu locals of Québec’s Lower North Shore. The intimate experiences of residents with the foods that grow in their home do not connect smoothly with representations of wilderness in promotional materials for wild berry products and tourism in the region. In fact, personal accounts of picking, preparing, and eating wild berries complicate master narratives of wild Canadian cuisine, thus enriching this country’s national food culture through complexity. These stories show that wilderness is not a state of purity but a fiction that obscures the multifaceted natural-cultural negotiations among humans, plants, animals, climate, and more in the making of what we call “wild.”

Keywords: Canadian cuisine, wilderness, wild foods, emplacement, place-branding, sensory ethnography

Food is widely recognized as being integral to processes of identity formation and the mediation of boundaries between self and other (Meigs 1987, 1997; Naccarato and Lebesco 2012). In Québec, Canada, the effort to brand a place based on wild, local, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) harvested on contested territory brings into relief deep-rooted issues that are at stake in the notion of Canadianness. For most Canadians, who are settlers and city dwellers, relationships to Indigenous people, land, and “resources” are rarely confronted. On the Lower North Shore (LNS), however, European descendants live alongside Innu communities, so that the cultural, linguistic, and geographical divides between them are pronounced. The recent work of non-Indigenous communities there to generate economic opportunities through artisanal food exports and tourism presents both challenges and openings for confronting settler-Indigenous relations and Canadian identity.

Canada is commonly depicted as a rugged wilderness.1 Defining the characteristics of its food as wild is a contributing factor in this narrative.2 While there may be some truth to this image, there are also overlooked implications in perpetuating links between the notion of Canada as a nation, and the trope of wilderness as its defining feature.3 Picturing Canada as a pristine landscape waiting to be discovered was a colonial strategy employed to encourage settlement by Western Europeans.4 Settlers meanwhile described that same land as fallow, to support their claims to it and to prove that its Indigenous populations were by extension in need of civilization.5 Binding together notions of Canada as a nation and of wilderness, depicted as empty land, has thus historically been used as a pretext for settlement.6 Canadian culinary tourism that is founded on a celebration of wild foods cannot be disentangled from this fraught history.

Geographer of food and tourism Hersch Jacobs (2009) has provided a thorough overview of the country’s claim to a national cuisine through its myriad public and private institutions, despite what he calls the absence of a “coherent hegemony.” While surveys of food across the country (Hluchy 2003; Newman 2017; Stewart 2000) provide rich impressions of the specialty dishes around which different regions promote narratives about their place at the nation’s table, what is missing in these accounts is a sense of “wilderness” as a nation-building trope that points to the contested nature of Canadianness. The stories that people tell about the foods that represent home reveal much about the entanglements between humans and their environments, and these accounts are by no means straightforward. On the contrary, what makes a
given food significant in a particular place is often a matter of debate and even deep-rooted conflict. In this article, I draw on visual analysis as well as theory from sensory studies to complicate the concept of “wild” food at the root of discourse on Canadian cuisine.

In the summers of 2013 and 2014, I traveled along the LNS, a region that consists of sixteen small communities that are unconnected by road, spread along 400 km of northeastern Quebec coastline. My goal was to learn about cloudberry harvesting and cooking practices there. Also known as Rubus chamaemorus, bakeapple, chicoutai, and bjorron, these wild berries grow in alpine and arctic tundra or boreal forest regions. Cloudberry is tart in taste and are used in a number of recipes for pies, cakes, teas, jams, and jellies. This fruit has been an important staple in local diets for at least several centuries. Rich in vitamin C, cloudberry served historically as protection against scurvy. They have also been useful to humans because their benzoic acid content acts as a natural preservative, facilitating their storage in places where food is scarce throughout winter months.

Today, the composition of this region is unusual compared with the rest of the province, due to its predominantly Anglophone population. Two of its communities, Tête-à-la-Baleine and La Romaine, are French-speaking. The first language spoken in Unamen Shipu and in Pakua Shipi is Innu, with French and English as second languages. The recent decline of English-speaking communities on the LNS has been identified as a problem that needs to be addressed through economic opportunities.

Since the collapse of its cod-fishing industry in the 1990s, the region has been developing place-branding strategies to encourage wilderness tourism and artisanal foods as forms of economic renewal. Cloudberry is central to these strategies, and a local co-op has begun marketing a series of wild berry products, including jams and jellies, with labels that intend to promote the place as “pure,” “natural,” and “wild.” Cloudberry have been targeted for some time as a potential market for the LNS (see Hull 1998: 156). Crèmerie la Chicoutai in Natashquan is now part of the Circuits des Gourmands, a series of stops in coastal towns of Quebec featuring local culinary items. Other restaurants throughout the region feature cloudberry dishes on their menus and are also being promoted through tourism channels. Wild berries are key to branding the LNS as a culinary destination, with the hope of generating revenue for locals from the production of artisanal products. Thus, cloudberry serve to link notions of wilderness to the identity of this place.

During my travels I met with LNS locals from its diverse Anglophone, Francophone, and Innu communities. Through my conversations and outings with them, I found

![Figure 1: Slightly unripe cloudberry (bakeapple), Blanc Sablon, Lower North Shore.](http://online.ucpress.edu/gastronomica/article-pdf/18/3/14/143335/gfc_2018_18_3_14.pdf)

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that the intimate experiences of residents with the foods that grow in their home do not connect smoothly with representations of wilderness in promotional materials for wild berry products and tourism in the region. In fact, personal accounts of picking, preparing, and eating wild berries complicate master narratives of wild Canadian cuisine, thus enriching this country’s national food culture through complexity. These stories show that wilderness is not a state of purity but a fiction that obscures the multifaceted natural-cultural negotiations among humans, plants, animals, climate, and more in the making of what we call “wild.”

Cloudberries are connected to harvesting and culinary activities that belong to a particular place and time. On the LNS they are integral to locals’ sense of emplacement. Sensory ethnographer Sarah Pink (2009: 24) explains that “the idea of embodiment” is “a process that is integral to the relationship between humans and their environments.” David Howes, a pioneer in the field of sensory studies, deploys the notion of “emplacement” as a way of emphasizing the importance of “environment” in this equation. Howes (2005: 7) writes: “While the paradigm of embodiment implies an integration of mind and body, the emergent paradigm of emplacement suggests the sensuous inter-relationship of body-mind-environment,” explaining that “[t]his environment is both physical and social.” The concept of emplacement is useful for situating regional wild berry activities within the current sociopolitical climate on the LNS and thus challenging the myth of wilderness as a space of timeless purity.

Significance of Wild Food on the LNS

Wild food is a natural-cultural production, as can be attested through debates about how it should be managed. During the time of my interviews, conflicts surfaced in relation to locals’ sense of freedom to roam, hunt, and forage on unregulated tracts of land, and the contradictory need to manage resources in order to maintain the so-called purity of nature. There are many parallels with anthropologist Anna Tsing’s ethnographic account of matsutake foraging, in which she finds that “Oregon mushrooms are contaminated with the cultural practices of ‘freedom’” (2015: 68). She explains: “This is not the freedom imagined by economists … freedom emerges from open-ended cultural interplay, full of potential conflict and misunderstanding” (76). Likewise, it becomes clear through descriptions of using cloudberries for medicinal, social, and cultural purposes on the LNS that the management of these berries through picking permits, quotas, and domestica- tion would constrain these social activities. Notably, such constraints will likely be experienced differently for people in Innu and in non-Indigenous communities.

Wild food sources have been the driving force of human migration across this land for thousands of years. For Innu people and their ancestors, home was all of Nitassinan, or “our land,” a territory that has been reinscribed by Québec and Labrador. Until the 1960s the Innu were nomadic peoples whose seasonal movements followed the paths of birds, mammals, fish, and plants. For Basque fishermen in the sixteenth century, it was the lure of codfish and whales that led to settlement, a trend that caught on with other Europeans. The descendants of these entrepreneurs call themselves “Coasters,” because their culture is so steeped in fishing on this coast. In this sense, the discourse of wild foods in this place has always been tied to notions of cultural survival through reliance on natural resources.

The collapse of the fishing industry on the LNS has precipitated an identity crisis for many fishermen there whose lives and sustenance have been so bound to their prey. Maxim Tardif, an expert involved in economic development on the LNS, explained:

They lost their livelihood. All those folks there were fishermen, twenty years ago. Now they’ve all become migrants, you know? They go where the wind blows, guiding for caribou because that’s where the jobs are…. They go to Fort McMurray, they work in construction…. You know, they were fishermen from the Lower North Shore! But now they don’t have that same pride. (author’s translation)

Tardif describes the pride that was associated with being identi- fied as a fisherman on the LNS. Some residents are now hoping to reconstruct that same pride of place based on wild berries as a new staple industry that will create jobs for locals.

Place-Branding on the LNS

In my interviews, older residents expressed concern over the emigration of youth due to lack of job prospects. The Lower North Shore Bioproducts Solidarity Cooperative (hereafter “the Coop”) has been developed by non-Indigenous locals as a long-term solution. Their aim is to produce value-added arti- sanal NTFP, using wild local foods that are harvested season- ally. Coop members are learning from both the failures and the successes of its fishing history. Their organizational structure is modeled after that of fishing cooperatives as a founda- tion for a more sustainable industry, based on environmental management practices that support local communities.11

Cloudberries are central to current branding processes by the Coop, and are being used not only to encourage tourism in the region, but also to brand the place as “pure,” “natural,” and “wild.” Similar developments have taken place in Finland, Norway, Scotland, northwest Russia, and Latvia, where promotion of the positive health attributes of the fruit have been used to increase consumption, and marketing has
focused on “a Northern image of purity and healthiness.”

In 2009, the Centre de recherche Les Buissons presented a report on the sustainable development of the Québec cloudberry industry through domestication (Naess 2009). The cloudberry is being used as a symbol to represent a new, uplifting version of the LNS, countering what some in the now defunct LNS-Concordia Partnership Initiative described as the depressing tone of the name: “Lower North Shore.”

Take the package design for the Coop’s Wildberry Jellies, for example, which depicts the LNS as a pristine landscape. Its black and white photograph features deserted, rocky, alpine islands reflected on clear water with mountains in the distance. On the side of the box are illustrations of five vibrant, plump fruit that, according to the other side of the box, are “carefully handpicked from the Canadian subarctic region.” While the text goes on to claim that this product is “made without any artificial colour nor flavoring,” the origins of the processed white sugar and chocolate coatings on the candies are notably omitted. These ingredients would, after all, complicate the image of a wild artisanal product. The new brand name, Parallèle 51, emphasizes the Nordic origins of the product, presumably to establish its authenticity.

These branding efforts are connected to wilderness tourism initiatives that promote activities such as wilderness camping and wild berry picking. Both the sign value and the material properties of the cloudberry are thus crucial for current “development” plans on the LNS. In both artisanal food products and tourism development, the underlying selling features are the product’s pure, natural, and wild characteristics. For leaders of the Coop, what gives their wild berry foodstuffs value is the fact that they are “hand-picked by locals,” “healthy,” “pesticide-free,” “rare,” “unique,” and of course, “wild”—all ideas that are communicated through imagery on their product packaging. Former Wildberry Coordinator for the Coop Priscilla Griffin explained to me that, in selling a package of Wildberry Jellies, “you aren’t only selling your redberry, you are selling your area, you are selling your community.”

Gastronomy: Mediation of Self and Other

According to Michel Lambert in his history of Québec culinary traditions, cuisine on the LNS is heavily influenced by Newfoundland and Québec traditions, as well as British and Innu customs. Lambert lists chicouté squares, of Acadian ancestry; bakeapple crumble, from Newfoundland; wildberry flan, French; and pâté aux chicoutés (common to all groups) among the most common dishes in the area. Lambert remarks that intercultural mixing has produced a “cuisine métissée.” In their book *Edible Wild Fruits and Nuts of Canada*, (ethno)botanists Nancy Turner and Adam Szczawinski (1988: 174) offer a recipe for Eskimo Cloudberry Preserves, a dish of Indigenous origins that was adapted by LNS communities using “saindoux” or lard instead of seal fat. The classification of dishes according to ancestry raises questions about the origins and identities represented by the cloudberry products currently being produced and marketed on the LNS. Are these hybrid products that reflect the mixing of peoples over the region’s several-thousand-year-old history?
Sociologist Allison James (1996: 78) asks whether “in the context of an increasingly (global) international food production-consumption system and a seemingly ‘creolized’ world, food still acts as a marker of (local) cultural identity.” In her critique of the discourse of food nostalgia, in which “tradition and authenticity are marshaled to defend local interests in the face of global threats to standardize” food production, she notes a resistance to heterogeneity and an “insistence on the distinctive homogeneity of local food traditions” (88–89).

This is a cautionary reminder of the contradictions inherent in arguing for the recognition of culinary traditions belonging to specific groups. The LNS has a long history of miscegenation that has involved the mixing of both people and food practices. Nevertheless, there are distinct Indigenous and settler histories and customs in this place, and gastronomy can be a significant means of recognizing and celebrating their distinctiveness.

Case studies of similarly remote and economically depressed communities may offer suggestions for how this can be achieved through tourism. In their study of slow gastronomy in the small town of Paraty, Brazil, Fabio Parascocoli and Paulo de Abreu e Lima (2012: 72) note many dangers inherent in touristic development of small, coastal communities, including limited interaction between tourists and locals that leads to “tourist bubbles.” The presentation of traditional foodways as “authentic” and “traditional” also risks construction of dichotomies that oppose global versus local, homogeneity versus diversity, past versus modern. On the other hand, international exposure to dynamic local cuisines can lead to increased demand and prices, in turn nurturing and revitalizing culinary dishes and practices.

In Paraty, the key to the successful “grafting of local projects onto global consumption networks” is the involvement of the community itself, and its showcasing of culture that “reflects the realities of the local mixed-race communities” through cuisine. “Local producers, restaurateurs and media professionals in Paraty have started working together on a project that aims to ‘research, develop, and diffuse a cuisine with international standards, inspired by the local culture and the utilization of organic agroforestry, livestock, and fishery products, ecologically produced by local communities’ without denying the commercial and economic downfall of the new interest towards the local cuisine” (ibid., 75).

Are local producers the only ones responsible for maintaining the complexity of wild regional foods? As sociologist Jacinthe Bessière (1998: 23) points out: “Rural tourism can be a part of the re-appropriation of history in terms of eating habits.” Will a cloudberry industry on the LNS function to reappropriate Innu culture, perpetuate settler-colonial historiography, or present opportunities for local youth of both Innu and non-Indigenous descent? Tourists have a role to play in generating demand for complex food cultures.

The emphasis on wilderness and sustainability by the Coop, North Tours, Tourism Lower North Shore, and the travel agency Voyages CoSte is in part a response to market studies of the region that show visitors to the LNS to be interested in ecotourism. The use of wilderness discourse in the construction of a local gastronomy on the LNS is thus driven not only by non-Indigenous locals, but by tourist demand. Bessière (1998: 22) points to the quest of the tourist for places that represent a foil to everyday urban existence:

Tourism in rural areas seems to be influenced and idealized today by the myth of nature, the quest for an original communitas, as Amioun (1999) puts it, and is often related to the mental perception of the countryside. This tendency, characterized by a re-activation of well-established stereotypes about nature and purity, holds a remarkable appeal in the collective consciousness. After all, isn’t tourism a quest for identity, a place and other people?

Sustainability and Development

The Coop has built a branding strategy in response to market demand for ecotourism. Ida Jones, who was taking Priscilla Griffin’s place as the Coop’s Wildberry Coordinator when I interviewed the pair in 2013, defines “sustainability” in this way:

Because we are the ones that are benefitting from the resources, so we need to make sure that we have some kind of plan put in place.

Griffin and Jones wrote to me in 2017:

The Coop’s Board of Directors are there to make sure that things run properly for the population and for its members. The Coop’s mandate is to preserve and protect our resources. That is the mindset we as a population must have as we continue to develop. These resources should be there for our children, our grandchildren and those after them.

This commitment to sustainable development is also a response to local history. Determined not to repeat mistakes from the past, namely overharvesting local resources, LNS entrepreneurs have been prompted to develop a greater awareness of the nonhuman actors in their home. For example, the Coop engaged a student intern from Montreal to identify a range of local plants and their uses. In this fascinating process, the undifferentiated “moss and short, stunted shrub” that explorer Jacques Cartier (1993: 21–22) described on his first encounter with the LNS is transformed into NTFP, with far-reaching potential for economic development and jobs.
The student presented her findings (marshberry, redberry, blackberry, bakeapple, squashberry, wild blueberry, blueberry, raspberry, dewberry, and teaberry) in a slideshow to LNS schoolchildren as part of the Coop’s pedagogical mandate. A compelling part of the Coop’s mission is to educate locals about “sustainability” and the need to protect “natural resources” for younger generations. The Coop has recently held public meetings to discuss potential economic development in a fish waste/peat moss fertilizer project and is exploring greenhouse gardens for local produce production and year-round job creation. These projects will build on the wild berry and birch sap industries that had already been launched at the time of writing.

This concern for sustainability education was echoed by Ashley Morency, Bio-Food Development Officer at the Local Development Centre in Blanc Sablon, which provided early support for the Coop. Morency believes that all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) trails should be expanded and maintained, to allow access to berry marshes. She argues that fines should be implemented for driving outside of those trails, since ATVs are currently responsible for the destruction of large berry patches and beach areas. Morency is also in favor of permits, which would help to define areas in which picking can take place. She believes that these measures would address the gap in local understanding of individuals’ environmental impact.

Morency’s views are contested by other locals, however, who express disagreement with having to stay on trails, harvest within set dates, or pay for access to berries on their own land. A precedent has already been set in relation to fishing, regulation of which is affecting both livelihoods and family traditions. One resident of St. Paul’s River, for instance, complained about Québec’s governmental regulations, since these are controlled by “people sitting at desks in offices” who have no experience with the realities of life here, including fishing and harvesting practices. Off the record, people talked about the problem of “people in Ottawa” deciding on arbitrary dates for fishing, hunting, and gathering seasons. These testimonies suggest acute anxieties about private and public encroachment on traditional ways of managing human–nonhuman relationships on the coast.

The Paradox of Wilderness Management

The cloudberry as a unifying symbol for the region is complicated by potential restrictions around harvesting practices, which would affect forms of emplacement there. For instance, there is disagreement about regulating labor and remuneration for “pickers.” It seems that, for some people, wilderness entails the ability to pick when and where and as much as they want, and the choice to sell, for cash or not, to whomever they wish. For others, long-term economic and environmental independence depends upon the regulation of labor and land.

The trope of wilderness tied to freedom and unspoiled nature is not only manufactured for tourists, but is also internalized by locals. Arriving at a tiny island off the coast of Unamen Shipu for berry picking, my Innu host and guide Théo Mark breathes in deeply and proclaims, “This is freedom.” Similarly, tour guide, storyteller, trapper, and historian Garland Nadeau of St. Paul’s River explains that, for him, berry picking is “a source of freedom.” From his perspective, “you’re making a few dollars and it’s just being free over the hills, where you can just feel that freedom…. That’s something to think: bakeapple, I just feel free.” He adds that part of this freedom comes from the “pleasure of being in the wild, open fresh air” and “getting away from the rat race.” These comments resonate with those heard by Tsing from her interlocutors, one of whom believed that “[c]escaping from apartment life, she had the freedom of the hills. The money was less important than the freedom” (2015: 77). Tsing explains: “Matsutake pickers act as if the forest was an extensive commons” (78). This is comparable to the situation on the LNS, where unrestricted access to land, plants, and animals provides a deep sense of well-being for locals.

Many residents of St. Paul’s River and Blanc Sablon express fear of losing such freedoms, which is one reason why some locals sell berries to “outsiders” rather than to the Coop. Because of the unpredictable nature of the berry, its price fluctuates, with locals in 2013 able to find outside buyers who will pay up to twelve dollars per pound, as opposed to the five to seven that the Coop can offer. This makes it a challenge for the Coop to invest in a surplus that will serve as security in lean years like this one.

In the years past, it was always cash. People came up, they paid cash. Now, you see more check form for bakeapples, but everyone enjoyed the cash….You know, we’re more or less a people that grew up with freedom, and constraints and restrictions really make us feel kind of, a little anxiety. (Garland Nadeau)

Local understandings of sustainability cannot be disentangled from competing notions of independence. While some residents are resentful of regulations for impinging on freedom of travel and sustenance, others understand regulations to be the result of unsustainable practices that indicate a need to change behaviors. Development of bioproducts is thus raising questions about the transformation of life and emplacement on the coast. Biopierre project manager Maxim Tardif describes his vision for the future of LNS locals:

First, what I’d like for them is for it to become a source of pride. That we stop going out picking berries and selling them under the table … but
that it becomes recognized, that we have people who are paid at a fair value, that we have folks who are proud. It would be great to have a local enterprise that receives the benefits, and ultimately to have families that decide to settle there because there’s a cooperative. (author’s translation)

For Tardif then, hope and pride are attached to stable, regulated work on the LNS. Specifically, this entails the elimination of under-the-table berry sales. For him, regulation of picking practices is a prerequisite for restoring the region’s pride and economic independence.

The accounts above indicate new forms of emplacement as LNS locals debate how to best manage the land where they live. Residents want to maintain their ability to roam and eat wild foods, while also protecting their home. Plant biologist Kristine Naess points to the paradox of these twin aims. She explains that growing market demand for cloudberry increases damage to bogs as people clamber to access far-flung peat lands with their ATVs. She wrote to me: “Domesticating cloudberrries could relieve the pressure on natural boglands but the bog where the domestication occurs will be changed into basically a field of cloudberrries pretty much like a commercial cranberry bog.” Clearly, cloudberrries are taking on new significance through tourism and artisanal food products on the LNS. At the same time, their management represents a significant relational transformation between residents and the land where they live.

In addition to the difficulties of managing human behaviors to protect plants, it should be noted that there are significant complications to regulating the cloudberry through domestication due to the defiant nature of the berry itself. One local described cloudberrries as “fickle” because of the numerous variables at play in their growth. In 2013, everyone in the communities I visited was talking about what a bad season it was. There was much speculation about what had led to the low yield, including lightning, heavy rains, light snowfall, late frost, and heavy winds. Many also blamed global warming.

**Berry Picking in Nitassinan**

The debates about how local wild berries should serve economic development on the LNS grow only more knotty when taking into account the region’s Innu population. Nametau Innu is a website dedicated to the knowledge and memory of Nitassinan.18 The site claims: “This vast territory in North-Eastern Quebec has been guarded jealously by the Innu for 8,000 years. The nomadic Innu walked it and took care of it with the purpose of passing it on to further generations. However, the Europeans who arrived about 400 years ago see it rather as a reservoir of consumer goods for their own use.” Many of my Innu interlocutors described the importance of wild berries within trade-based economies. For instance, according to former chief of Pakua Shipi Christiane Lalo, it is common for people in that community to exchange cloudberry for lobster from Unamen Shipu. Berries are also commonly brought to people who are too sick or otherwise unable to pick. How would these informal economies be affected by state regulation, privatization, and even potentially the cultivation of “wild” fruit?

During one berry-picking outing, I chat with Théo, Rachel, and other family members, while squatting low among the blackflies, mosquitoes, and other flesh-eaters. This experience visiting the family’s ancestral islands contributed to my understanding that gathering berries is just one element in a network of intertwined social practices that includes boating, long-distance walking, camping, and cooking outdoors. Through these activities relationships are formed and reformed. Berry picking is a family ritual in which everyone, from children to the elderly, participates. In describing berry picking, I am told repeatedly: “We used to walk the land.” Théo Mark, Étienne Mullen, and Jean-Baptiste Lalo of Unamen Shipu, and Jean Mark and Charles Mark of Pakua Shipi all say the same thing, although walking is now being constrained due to widespread use of ATVs and land development that is encroaching upon cloudberry bogs.

For the Innu, education is a process of emplacement; skills are developed through learning to live on the land. Canadian anthropologist José Mailhot (1997) outlines the importance of walking long distances in groups to the formation and reformation of kinship ties for Innu across Nitassinan. Similarly, Cree educator Herman Michell (2000: 66) writes:

Gathering berries brings family together. Any sense of alienation and isolation quickly dissipates as people actively engage in simple talk. Getting in touch with the earth fosters an overall sense of interconnectedness… It is through berry picking and prolonged periods of time out on the land that we bond with the natural world.

While it is not my intention to essentialize traditional activities, I point out the connections between harvesting, cooking, eating, and other cultural practices like walking to show that place is relational and dynamic. To restrict one of these practices, such as berry picking, is to affect all associated forms of human–nonhuman connection. Traditions themselves inevitably adapt over time with the introduction of new technologies, such as the ATVs, but the point is that place-branding through culinary tourism featuring wild berries also has transformative implications for local forms of emplacement. For example, community organizer in Pakua Shipi Christiane Lalo told me:

We used to pick blueberries. Then people started coming to tell us that picking is prohibited. We have to care for things. We pick just enough for
FIGURE 4: Berry-picking with Rachel Mark, August 1, 2014.
PHOTOGRAPH BY NATALIE DOONAN © 2014

FIGURE 5: Théo Mark cooks Spam and salmon over a fire for lunch, August 1, 2014.
PHOTOGRAPH BY NATALIE DOONAN © 2014
ourselves, not to sell. If we said yes, then at a certain point we will be asked to pay for permits. For me, I think that chicoutai will be developed by the government and Innu will be regulated. (author’s translation)

As in any community, feelings about development in Unamen Shipu and Pakua Shipi are divided. However, colonial-capitalist development has certainly affected cultural and spiritual forms of well-being that have been long established in Nitisinan. “We need to use things well and eat natural foods,” Lalo explains. “The Creator gave us things, not to develop with chemicals.” She talks about the chicoutai liqueur produced by the Société des alcools du Québec and her worry that chemicals are going into such products. “This is not our lifestyle,” she says.

Cultural, spiritual, physiological, and social health are all intertwined in this perspective. Lalo claims that in the past, there were no diseases like cancer. People were in good shape because they worked outside, doing exercise, an idea that was echoed by Rachel Mark from Unamen Shipu. It is something I heard from other Innu too. For instance Jean Mark, a trapper from Pakua Shipi, expresses his suspicion toward industrial products and the dependence that is created for items available at the local grocery:

We get all our food from the woods. Even cloudberries and other things that grow here. Maybe it’s because of that, the sickness—when we buy products from over there at the corner store…. Everything we do here, we do it like the ancestors did before. I do not want to lose my traditions. As my father ate before, I eat all that. (author’s translation)

Indeed, according to my interlocutors, it is uncommon for Innu people to sell cloudberries because the berries fit into an economy of trade and gifting that defies reduction to abstract capital. Rather than being seen as products, the berries are part of a healthy ecosystem. In fact, cloudberries are understood to be medicine. As former chief of Unamen Shipu Jean-Baptiste Lalo explains: “In Innu culture, when there is plenty of chicoutai, the Innu are very satisfied because they can provide for themselves. The ancestors used to say that chicoutai is also a kind of medication that cleanses the stomach, that improves the intestines—it aids the digestive system’” (author’s translation). Pakua Shipi grandmother Agnes Mestenapue concurs: “When someone gets sick, they should be treated with chicoutai” (author’s translation). She learned from her grandmother that if someone is having stomach or chest pain, or problems with blood circulation, berry consumption could be the cure.

Likewise, in Rachel Mark’s stories told during berry picking on “her father’s island,” cloudberries emerge as good for both the stomach and the heart:

Of all the wild berries that we have, chicoutai are the best. They’re packed with vitamins. If someone has no appetite, or is very sick, they’re good. We can eat them just like that, and they provide lots of energy…. And they digest well…

My Dad used to bring us here in his big boat, and we would walk for an hour. Ah, the walk was so long! …My Dad would lift me up on his back … with a bag, a backpack, and I would also climb up on his back with two pails. Ay! That was fun! (author’s translation)

For Mark, traveling to islands and harvesting berries are acts of remembrance. They are performances of family traditions taught to her by her parents and lived alongside her siblings and their spouses, who travel together. The berry is not a static symbol; it is part of a relational knot and central to local emplacement.

Cloudberries are inseparable from important family gatherings and celebrations. Former chief of Pakua Shipi Charles Mark, for instance, talks about cloudberry picking as a seasonal activity that he learned from his parents for subsistence, and how it is coordinated with other local berries and fish so that there is something available to eat throughout the year. According to Charles Mark, “the old people” talked about cloudberries as medicine that would keep you strong. “White man” likes them too. He says they used to come and “can them up” and sell them through the Hudson’s Bay Company.

Indeed, cloudberries have become significant in much the same ways for non-Indigenous communities along the coast. Sandra Organ, proprietor of the Korner Kafe in Blanc Sablon, recounted a touching story about her early bakeapple harvesting with her father. It was a time when Tenderflake lard came in big, three-gallon metal tubs. Her father would set out with one of those buckets, sometimes towing little Sandra up and over the hills for hours, collecting bakeapples. At the end of the day, getting hot and impatient, Sandra would complain that her father picked even the “kernels”—the tiniest, underdeveloped berries that take so much longer to fill up a bucket. They would come home with Dad lugging twelve liters of bakeapples, and Sandra with her child-sized harvest. “Now that he’s not with us anymore,” says Sandra, “I pick the kernels too, for him.”

Blanc Sablon local Eddy Jones has been picking bakeapples for over fifty years. He was raised on bakeapples, and bakeapple jam, though he says the young ones don’t like it or pick it anymore. As kids, he says, they had to help with the harvest; it was the only thing that was preserved. In those days before fridges, they would boil the jam down and keep it in a bottle with wax on top. These would be used throughout the winter in pies, tarts, with boiled veggies in “doughboys,” on toast, upside-down cakes, cheesecake, or served as is with sugar and milk or cream. Even as I chatted with Jones in his kitchen, he had just returned from a day’s harvest, and was boiling down some berries for jam, which he generously shared with me. Stories like his attest to
long histories on the land, which is paradoxically pictured in wilderness branding as untouched.

**Innu Land Claims**

American historian William Cronon (1996: 21) warns that wilderness represents a “flight from history” that obfuscates human involvement with the land, of particular insult to Indigenous peoples who occupied that land before European incursions. He demonstrates the centrality of wilderness narratives to the myth of the frontier—an ever-receding boundary to be conquered. His critique seems pertinent in these plans for the LNS, an area of outstanding First Nations land claims. Local debates about the management and regulation of “natural resources” have political implications that should be addressed.

As first peoples of Nitassinan, the Innu have never ceded their ancestral lands nor signed any treaties. Since 1979 the Innu Nation has had an open Comprehensive Land Claim with the federal and provincial governments. This document outlines the main objectives of Atikamek and Montagnais (Innu) groups in Québec. According to Paul Charest, who acted as research advisor and/or director for the Conseil Atikamek-Montagnais (CAM) between 1976 and 1990, these include: opposition to any exploitation of resources or lands by “members of the dominant society” if Innu rights are not respected; control over exploitation of the land and its resources; and an economic base that ensures “our economic, social and cultural well-being into future generations, as was the case before the invasion of our lands by merchants, colonizers and industrial enterprises” (Charest 2001: 257).

A settlement proposal put forward by the government of Québec in 1994 was rejected by Atikamekw and Innu nations because Aboriginal self-government as exercised within its parameters entailed that management of forest and wildlife resources be harmonized with provincial regulations (ibid., 264). Charest quotes then-chief of Mashteniash, Remy Kuntness: “Our goal is to obtain enough territory with full control of natural resources to ensure our economic, cultural and spiritual development. If there is no territory and control of resources, there is no self-government” (ibid.).
A framework agreement was completed in 1996, but since then, negotiations have seen little progress. According to political scientist Christopher Alcantara (2015), the stalling of these negotiations is due to the so-called stubborn and unrealistic demands of the Innu for “sovereignty,” which have consistently been rejected by federal and provincial governments. The claim remains open. In the interim, Innu communities in other areas of the province have signed ad hoc agreements with Hydro Québec in order to minimize losses and damages to land and resources as development ensues in the absence of protections for ancestral lands. Furthermore, because it has not been possible to come to an agreement on interim measures, development continues on contested territory.

Thus, when picking permits, quotas, or seasons are introduced on the LNS, they carry with them real political implications for Innu people, who understand their sovereignty to be tied to the control of berries and other wild foods. Furthermore, cultivating the berries may or may not interfere with their value and that of the land on multiple cultural levels. For instance, cultivating berries in concentrated areas to rationalize production could have the auxiliary effect of eliminating long-distance walking and foraging trips, meaning that significant social practices that are tied to berry picking could be lost. This would affect forms of emplacement of not only Indigenous but all communities on the LNS. Also, cultivating berries involves selecting for certain traits, such as size, at the expense of others, such as antioxidant content (Kristine Naess). This means that the berry itself will be transformed into something new. In what ways might its value and usefulness also change as a result? Will it still, for instance, be cherished as a digestive aid and appetite stimulant, as described by some of my interlocutors? The example of cloudberries makes clear that digging deeper into the so-called wild foods that ostensibly define Canadian cuisine raises thorny questions about how land and resources are and should be managed in this country.

Kanien’kehaka author, educator, and activist Taiaiake Alfred (1999: 47) writes: “In the midst of Western societies that pride themselves on their respect for freedom, the freedom of indigenous people to realize their own goals has been extinguished by the state in law and to a great degree in practice. Above all, indigenous nationhood is about reconstructing a power base for the assertion of control over Native land and life. This should be the primary objective of Native politics.” Indigenous food sovereignty is an example of asserting control over Native land and life, and should be addressed in local development plans.

Elders from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities expressed their desire to see economic opportunities for youth. Voyages CoSte has made attempts to provide Innu-led tours of the region, but more work should be done to ascertain Innu needs and promote intercultural exchange.

Wild Canadian Cuisine

When the notion of wilderness tied to national identity is investigated at close range, its significance is exposed as more nuanced and contested than might otherwise be imagined. Culinary capital is defined by English and Communication scholars Naccarato and Lebesco (2012: 2) as the “multiple and potentially contradictory” values that communities invest in their foods of choice, “on a continuous and ever-changing basis.” In the case of the cloudberry on the LNS, its value and cultural cache rests on its rarity, the effort that is invested in its harvest, its magnetic ability to assemble families in walking, camping, boating, cooking, and eating activities, its promise of economic opportunities through NTFP and tourism industries, its medicinal properties, and of course its taste. All of these values, it seems, depend upon the fruit’s quality of wildness.

Paradoxically, the more successful the effort to sell this place and its natural resources, the more restricted this wildness becomes. Coop organizers recognize that wild berries are appealing to ecotourists and consumers who value artisanal foods. The Coop is also aware that sustainability discourse is important for those consumers and for residents, who need to care for local resources so that wild berries can sustain generations to come. They are therefore invested in sustainable development.

In the context of this development, “the cloudberry” emerges as a wild phenomenon serving as an engine of economic development, specifically NTFP, and a natural resource to be seen and tasted in its natural environment. It should be remembered, though, that the trope of Canada as a barren wilderness has been used to promote waves of Western European immigration and displacement of First Nations people. It has advanced a myth that large swaths of ancestral lands are unpeopled and thus available for economic development. Furthermore, developing and marketing wild foods has impacts on local ecologies to be considered.

If “wild” food is indeed a defining feature of Canadian cuisine, then the contested nature of this “wildness” should be disclosed. Canadian identity is disputed, and respecting its unresolved status, rather than trying to define it once and for all, including through its cuisine, is part of maintaining a commitment to creating alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in this country. By simply celebrating Canadian food as “wild,” we gloss over critical socioeconomic and environmental issues at stake in the management of these foods. The development of a growing market for wild products...
has significant impacts on the land where those foods grow and on the “nature” of those ingredients themselves. In the Canadian context specifically, much of our “wild” products are sourced on unceded Indigenous land, further politicizing our use of this moniker.

The interviews from which I draw in this study complicate the wilderness trope by conveying a sense of emplacement through stories of hunting and living on the land. These accounts locate the intersection of berries and humans within a sociopolitical scene that includes bogs, boats, bugs, and business. The complex and irresolvable negotiations that take place between humans and nonhuman animals, plants, air, earth, and water can be described as wilderness management. And to learn about it, you have to go outside and get your hands dirty.

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NOTES

1. Wilderness representations made with the explicit purpose of producing national discourse extend at least as far back as the early twentieth century in Canada. See for example: Scott Watson’s “Race, Wilderness, Territory and the Origins of Modern Canadian Landscape Painting” (1994), Lynda Jessup’s “Art for a Nation?” (1996), and John O’Brian and Peter White, Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art (2007).

2. Using an oft-repeated argument, CBC reporter Andrew Coppolino (2017) writes: “What we source locally and seasonally defines a culinary identity, to which we can add that which is foraged from the wild, like Canada’s first peoples thousands of years ago. Perhaps that defines us and unites us?” To the contrary, Canadians are divided over what constitutes wild foods and regional dishes, and over why these foods are important.

3. See Cronon (1996: 13), where he argues: “To protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation’s most sacred myth of origin”—a frontier ideology.

4. See Kosek (2004), who argues that “wilderness” is a notion that is motivated by a will to purity rooted in racism and classism. He shows that notions of “wilderness” are historically linked to masculinity, nationalism, and colonialism that represent “progress,” “development,” and “civilization” as antidotes to the so-called backwardness of “ignorant” and “savage” lands/people.

5. See for example Cole Harris’s excellent Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia, where he writes: “For English colonists, planting a garden and, in the process, subduing the land, was much more than a horticultural experience. A properly fenced garden was property. It followed from this that those who did not plant gardens, or did not fence them, or did not create landscapes that bore imprints familiar to the English, did not possess the land and could not have property rights to it. English settlers in early colonial America considered that even a Native garden, unfenced, was an inadequate measure of property” (2002: 48).

6. See Kay Anderson (2011: 260), who writes: “a mythologized equation of North/nature/Native has been a thick thread in the discursive formation that became the modern Canadian nation.”

7. The total population of this region is approximately 5,505 (Statistics Canada, 2011 Census).


9. In 2012 I was invited to meetings of the now defunct LNS-Concordia University Partnership committee, which was seeking artists and researchers to assist in their place-branding efforts. This introduction led to my interest in the present study.

10. Hashimoto and Telfer (2008) stress the importance of linking regional food with other local activities as a way of selling destinations to tourists. Activities on the LNS employ this strategy.

11. For membership structure see http://bioproducts.wecopoly.com/become-a-member.html.

12. The Northernberries project is being conducted through the University of Kuopio, Finland, and could thus be an interesting precedent for the LNS-university partnerships. www.uku.fi/northernberries.

13. See, for example, http://tourismlownorthshore.com/outdoors.asp. See also www.youtube.com/watch?v=ie8XxicfQ8_U; www.youtube.com/watch?v=lJpMaoSNjmPs.

14. “In analysing socio-economic and psychological factors of visitors to the Lower North Shore in 1995, it was revealed that they can be categorised as ecotourists … tourists are curious to learn more about nature and culture in the region” (Hull 1998: 157–38).

15. Efforts are also under way to involve Québec universities in this process. For example, the company Arclay Natural Technologies has proposed funding a Research Chair in LNS development to be held at the Université du Québec-Trois Rivières. See the 21st Annual General Meeting notes of the Coasters Association at www.coastersassociation.com/assets/2016-general-meeting-business-arising%20-agm-minutes—march%202016.pdf. See also the Executive Director’s Annual Report 2016 at www.coastersassociation.com/assets/executive-directors-annual-report—agm-2017.pdf.

16. See Everett (2007), which examines the ways in which tourists adopt the discourse that circulates in state and commercial tourist literature and advertising. Everett notes in particular that tourists reiterate notions of purity and nature (68) as well as authenticity, tradition, health, and hard work (73).

17. Bioperre supports private companies in the development of bioproducts derived from agricultural and agroforestry activities. The LNS Coop hired Bioperre to develop its first array of wildberry products.

18. www.nametauinnu.ca.

19. In Pakua Shipi, for example, the council settled for $1.5 million of their $10 million claim, in exchange for the “loss of access to this part of their territory and the loss of their traditional hunting and fishing activities” (Radio-Canada, Est du Québec, October 16, 2003). Furthermore, Charest (2001) explains that because large hydroelectric and mining developments were carried out before the institution of land claims policies, lands were appropriated without any consultation with the Innu. Overall, projects proceed on an ad
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hoc basis, facilitated by the division of the Innu into small “bands,” segregated onto “reserves” administered by “councils” and headed by “chiefs”—all colonial frameworks imposed since the 1960s as means to further the Canadian government’s assimilationist policies (Samson 2003: 27–39).

20. For example, on January 24, 2011, the Globe and Mail (“Innu Reach Deal with Hydro-Québec on $6.5-Billion Project”) reported: “A major legal hurdle that threatened to jeopardize Hydro-Québec’s $6.5-billion La Romaine hydroelectric project has been cleared with the signing of an agreement in principle with Innu leaders.” This so-called agreement however, remains contested, with Red Power Media reporting as recently as July 16, 2015 (“Quebec: Innu Natshkuan Blockade Access to Le Romaine Construction Site”): “The gigantic Hydro-Québec project is now completely paralyzed by barricades erected by two Innu communities of the North Shore.” Furthermore, La Presse reported on March 23, 2015 (“Les Innu de La Romaine contestent l’entente avec Hydro“): “Les Innu de La Romaine réclament réparation auprès de Hydro”. Since the cloudberry is a distinctive wild berry characteristic of the region, it is perhaps possible to draw on the Law on Cultural Heritage of Québec as a means of achieving Innu goals of protecting natural resources, within the government’s language of “property.” Another document to consider is the Quebec Declaration on the Preservation of the Spirit of Place, developed by the International Council on Monuments and Sites, which takes into account the memories, narratives, written documents, rituals, festivals, values, textures, colors, odors, beliefs, traditional knowledge, and attachments to place of local communities, as “the custodians of these values.” However, these solutions also present the risk of rigidifying lively naturecultures and reducing the complexity of entangled relationships between taste and place. Coombe, Ives and Huizenga (2014: 207) warn against the literalization of what they call “geographic entangled relationships between taste and place.” C. Cronon, W. 1996. “Geographical Indications: The Promise, Perils and Politics of Protecting Place-Based Products.” In SAGE Handbook of Intellectual Property, edited by Matthew David and Debora Halbert, 207–23. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.


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