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Making Kai in Godzone: New Zealand Food Programming, Nostalgia and National Identity

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how national boundaries and shared belonging can be evoked through the mediation of food culture and the past. The dynamic terrain traversed is where food culture, nostalgia and collective national identity meet on the television screen. New Zealand is a compelling nation in which to undertake such a study as nation-making continues to take place against a backdrop of post colonialism, competing national visions, the impact of modernity, the centrality of food to national survival and increased global interdependence.

The key to accessing these insights are two highly popular local television productions which utilise food narratives; *Coasters* (2011) and *The Food Truck* (2012). This genre of television programming is becoming increasingly important with the growing global emphasis on utilising food as a language for telling stories about personal identity and collective narratives. This study provides a unique insight with an analysis informed by the principles of Michel Foucault and reinforced by first hand industry perspectives. Clear patterns of statements are identified in a study of narrative form, aesthetic signs and representations of food culture. There is also an exploration of what powers the making of these statements through an investigation of the unique business and institutional environment for television in New Zealand.

This thesis uncovers a number of key negotiations which take place through food and the use of nostalgia which reengage and redraw the legacy of colonialism and modernity. A fantasy food culture is evoked which attempts to re-forge the mythical link between food and memory and in doing so informs notions of shared identity. These statements of the past and food are reinforced by the industrial popularity for food narratives. However, this popularity also reveals risks to broader and more inclusive statements being made through food and the past which may provide “Kiwis” with richer insights into what it means to be New Zealanders.

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