Eating Roo: Of Things That Become Food

Elspeth Probyn

Abstract *This essay pursues the processes and obstacles involved in making food out of an animal. Taking kangaroos and roo meat as the object of investigation, the essay follows roo through environmentalist arguments, promotional campaigns, animal activists and decades of* Skippy. *Following kangaroo entails tracking the interconnections and disconnections between assessments of environmental sustainability and the sentiment that the kangaroo is a 'friend'; between the association of roo meat as pet food and the attempt to produce a cuisine around it. It also means following roo from Australia to Russia and the Czech Republic. Based on the assumption that food is intractably and simultaneously both cultural and 'beyond-cultural' (agricultural, metabolic, biological and so on) the essay argues for a complex description of its phenomenal forms.*

Keywords kangaroo, global-local, alienation, intimacy, metabolic, food scares,

The other GFC, the global food crisis, has brought a renewed public and academic attention to questions of what we eat, where it comes from, how much it costs, and whether it is sustainable. Diseases of over-eating mingle with starvation and, although globally disconnected, are often caused by malnutrition: the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' health still comes down to colonial staples of white flour, white sugar, and white power (to coin the title of Tim Rowse's 1998 book).[1] Coinciding, in ways that are more than coincidental, with a growing awareness and at times panic about global warming and climate change, people are becoming attuned to how what we always deemed as edible (corn, soya) are being turned into non-edible things like bio-fuels. And as one of the most virulent forms of globalisation, there is a seemingly endless circulation of food scares about things we had thought were edible - chickens that carry flu, cows that turn mad, eggs that are bad.

Studying food has never been so crucial, or so complex. Over the last several years, I have been working to bring together my previous research in feminist cultural studies - with a particular focus on subjectivities, practices and the materiality of culture - to bear on questions of food. What I am calling alimentary cultural studies of necessity studies the whole gamut of factors and feeling associated with the production and consumption of food. It must consider the places where food is produced, where it is eaten, how natural entities are transformed into commodities within a context of globalisation and local communities. In addition, questions of uneven distribution and inequalities are never far from the surface. As a project[2] it roams widely over

1. Tim Rowse, *White Flour, White Power: From Rations to Citizenship in Central Australia*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511518287

2. 'Taste & Place: The Transglobal Production and Consumption of Food and Drink', Funded by the Australian Research Council, 2009-2011.

different disciplines and areas of study: to name a few, I take from rural sociology, history, social anthropology, human and non-human geography - or what is called more-than-human geography - ethology, economics, and community development.

Moving the study of food beyond the cultural makes intuitive sense, and is supported by a wealth of research; it also makes sense to put the cultural squarely back into agri-culture. As John Law and Annemarie Mol so beautifully put it, animals and humans have a long history of being coupled within what they call 'metabolic intimacy'.[3] Their analysis of the outbreak of pig foot and mouth disease in the UK in 2001 centres on what happened when the dictates of boiling pigswill were recklessly ignored. Pigs have long lived in close proximity with people - a fact rendered spectacular by porcine xeno-transplants. More prosaically the cottage pig was a common feature of many households where the pig would eat (what humans deemed) were the inedible remains of dinner.[4] Commonsense dictated that these remains were boiled before being fed to the pig, hence the term 'pigswill'. However greed and haste resulted in the case that they study, when a pig farm neglected to boil the industrial quantities of catering waste, and the pigs developed foot and mouth. The waste must have contained contaminated animal flesh, most likely cheap meat from countries in the South where foot and mouth is endemic. With the banning of feeding pigs with boiled swill, the industry turned to feeding them animal meal - made of corn and soya. So more waste of human meals is added to the overflowing landfills, and vast tracts of land pump out food that won't be fed to humans anywhere, let alone to those that produce it. The global state of eating gets ever more complicated - and sad.[5]

Arguments such as Mol and Law's join a growing literature that attempts to cross many boundaries: the edible and non-edible, the North and the South, the industrial, the ethical, the structural, the governmental, the personal and the practical. As Emma Roe puts it: 'how do things become food? How do things become edible?'[6] Food, things that become edible or inedible, casts anew debates about the local and the global, and foreground 'disjuncture and difference in the global *agri*cultural economy', and flag that 'one man's imagined *food* is another man's political *poison*' (to paraphrase Appadurai's 1990 influential argument on the imaginary within globalisation). In a heart-felt argument entitled 'The Oil We Eat: following the food chain back to Iraq', Richard Manning reminds us that 'the food-processing industry in the United States uses about ten calories of fossil-fuel energy for every calorie of food energy it produces'.[7] The two major uses of corn are to produce corn sweetener, followed by processing it into fuel alcohol. Lesley Head and Jennifer Atchison's comprehensive analysis of wheat pioneers a human-plant geography to note how the vast bulk of wheat disappears from sight as food: 'the plant becomes invisible in the supermarket when it is turned into starch and used in a range of non-food products whose contents do not have to be labelled'.[8] In perhaps more savoury instances, fish around the world is

3. John Law and Annemarie Mol, 'Globalisation in Practice: On the politics of boiling pigswill', *Geoforum*, 39, 1, (2006): 133-143.

4. The trading between what is deemed edible and non-edible leftovers is an interesting case in itself. Prior to the French Revolution there was a busy trade in what were called 'les restes' or 'les bijoux' - the titbits left over from the tables of the rich that were sold in the streets of Paris.

5. Of the many, many tragic aspects, food waste must be one of the stupidest. Foodwise, a not-for-profit campaign backed by business and activists estimates: that 'the 3 million tonnes of food waste Australians are throwing out every year is equivalent to 136kg of food waste for each Australian. We've now reached the point where we are spending $5 billion a year on food that we buy but don't eat. … [in] the UK, the government's Waste Resources Action programme (WRAP) estimates that a 1/3 of the food bought is wasted'. <www.foodwise.com.au>, accessed Aug 18, 2010.

6. Emma Roe, 'Things becoming food and the embodied, material practices of an organic food consumer', *Sociologia Ruralis* 46:2, (2006): 110.

being domesticated and farmed in places unrelated to its natural habitat. In Marianne Lien's studies of farmed fish in Tasmania, we see a snapshot of what was weird becoming normal - kind of - as a global economy of knowledge turns Norwegian salmon 'into a global universal artefact' whether it is farmed in Australia, Chile or Scotland.[9]

These arguments begin to sketch the vexed entanglements in which human eating is mired. As I will argue in this essay, at a very fundamental level it messes with the seemingly straightforward ethics of food advocated by vegetarians, or mouthed by (some) food polemicists. What I call the 'feel-good' politics of food, published in best-selling books by journalists like Michael Pollan or novelists such as Barbara Kingsolver or ethicists/animal liberationists like Peter Singer simply begin to seem simplistic.[10] Julie Guthman's argument pushes the critique deeper, mining the neo-liberalism which rules over the regulation of the food industry into a matter of consumer choice, as well as the ways in which the local and localism is privileged in the arguments of the privileged, which see the local as self-evidently 'always a place of resistance … [always] assumed to be the place of caring'.[11] As Guthman argues, such articulations of localism 'equated the local with the small-scale ... and became a proxy for social justice'. Her colleague Patricia Allen follows this argument with a pointed discussion of how the local is usually defined geographically, which ignores the ways in which 'localities define themselves in relation to others localities, and are often shaped by global relationships'.[12]

FOLLOWING KANGAROO[13]

With these ideas in mind I now want to consider the case of kangaroo - a thing about which I am immensely fond. There really is nothing in the world to compare to the sight of kangaroos gently sloping across the outback of Australia, the greys blurring with the red earth, the reds framed by the gentle greys of eucalypts. Increasingly they appear in upmarket restaurants, best cooked rare and often accompanied by a native Australian sauce made of quandongs or bush tomato.

I had been a vegetarian for many years before I immigrated to Australia. I wasn't of the warm-and-fuzzy-animal-loving brand. I grew up surrounded by farmers and farming. That experience disabused me of any connection between cute images of animals and the reality. Cleaning out the pigsty or even worse the chicken coop does not encourage fluffy fantasies about domesticated animals. It did not lend itself to a romanticisation of farmers either. Some were fine and I'm sure they worked hard under tough circumstances. But animal welfare wasn't high on their priorities. Nor was environmental care: we grew up skirting the rotting carcasses and the empty fertilizer bags which littered the river.[14]

Perhaps it was the first-hand experience of the sad nature of Welsh farming back then which turned me vegetarian. My rationale was that eating

7. Richard Manning, 'The Oil We Eat: Following the food chain back to Iraq', *Harper's Magazine*, February 2004, p55.

8. Lesley Head and Jennifer Atchison, 'Cultural ecology: emerging human-plant geographies', *Progress in Human Geography*, 33, 2, (2009): 237.

9. Marianne Elisabeth Lien, 'Feeding fish efficiently: Mobilising knowledge in Tasmanian salmon farming', *Social Anthropology/ Anthropologie Sociale*, 15, 2, (2007): 183.

10. Michael Pollan, *In Defence of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, London, Penguin, 2009, Michael Pollan *Food Rules: An Eater's Manual*, London, Penguin, 2010; Barbara Kingsolver, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: Our Year of Seasonal Eating*, London, Faber and Faber, 2008; Peter Singer and Jim Mason *Eating: what we eat and why it matters*, London, Arrow Books, 2006.

11. Julie Guthman, 'Neoliberalism and the making of food politics in California', *Geoforum*, 39, 3, (2008): 1177.

12. Patricia Allen, 'Realizing justice in local farm systems', *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 3: 301.

13. *Pace* Ian Cook et al, 'Follow the thing: Papaya', *Antipode*, 36, 4, (2004): 642-666.

other than animal forms of protein could help distribute food more equably around the world. I didn't find it a hardship not to eat meat, and at the time I had plenty of company (universities crawled with vegetarians, and to be a feminist meant per force to refuse meat). My practice began to splinter as I spent much of my time flying long-distance to conferences. Airlines seem to be better now but back then the veg options were pretty poor. So I began eating airplane chicken. One of my all-time favourites was the chicken mole on Aero Mexicana. It began to seem silly to eat chicken in the sky but not on land. I started out eating chicken wings figuring that they were kind of leftover bits. I hate waste.

When I moved to Australia, I just had to try eating kangaroo and crocodile. It was, I admit, novelty value. Strangely enough it was not that easy to find a restaurant in Sydney which served kangaroo, especially if you wanted an Aboriginal restaurant. Now it's fairly easy to find roo on a menu but nigh on impossible to find an Aboriginal restaurant - despite the fact that an overwhelming number of tourists, especially the Chinese, say they want to eat Aboriginal food. I had my first taste of roo and emu at Edna's At Your Table, a legendary restaurant run by Jennice and Raymond Kersh, a sister and brother team. It would have been cooked very rare and I think had a native fruit sauce. The crocodile was light, and yes, did taste of chicken, which the roo didn't - more like hare.

It is strange that people often compare the taste of something new or different with chicken. I suppose there is something comforting and domesticated about the humble chook. However, problems arise when food sources are too domesticated. This is the case with kangaroo. For many in Australia and elsewhere, kangaroo is Skippy. An Australian children's TV show called *Skippy the bush kangaroo*, which aired in the late 1960s and early 1970s, was one of the most successful programs in the history of Australian television.[15] It aired on over 100 channels in the US and you can still watch reruns in Hong Kong. Skippy was a female Eastern Grey Kangaroo and she was a star. Thanks to YouTube you can still watch the opening.[16] Sonny, the young human hero, whistles through a eucalypt leaf and along hops Skippy to a chorus of kids singing 'Skippy, Skippy, Skippy the bush kangaroo'. As the boy hugs a young kangaroo and she kisses him, the theme continues with: 'Skippy, Skippy, Skippy a friend ever true'. For some, memories of the show make it hard to envision eating the friend ever true. Skippy has also become a common term for Australians, although mainly outside the country. And of course the kangaroo and the emu feature on the country's coat of arms.

Both factors propel the fury against the kangaroo meat industry, which seems to come more from outsiders and especially from the British. A letter from a non-Australian sent to the Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia sums up one view: 'There must be a better way for people to earn a living than to slaughter these harmless, beautiful and iconic creatures. They are your national emblems, are they not? Please change this awful situation. Please go

14. The 1960s and 1970s were tough years for Welsh farmers. Researchers at Cardiff University describe the ways that Welsh farming faced: 'an unfavourable combination of soil, terrain and climate' (Kevin Morgan, Terry Marsden and Jonathan Murdoch, *Worlds of Food: place, power & provenance in the food chain*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006, p145). When the UK entered the European Union in 1973 it inherited the 'EU Designations of Less Favoured Area (LFA)' labelling. This label covered seventy-seven percent of Welsh farming areas compared to only ten percent in England.

15. *Skippy the bush kangaroo*, Nine Network, Australia, 1968–1970.

16. YouTube Skippy', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DCHY6n907OE>, accessed 24 September 2008.

in for another way of life'.[17] In contrast, this response from an Australian to an article in the *London Times* about kangaroo culling is typical: 'Let's not forget that these fatal shores were far healthier prior to the English introduction of foxes, rabbits, hard-hoofed livestock and the naive attempts to manage the alien extremities of the Australian environment as if they were the Yorkshire dales - traditions that sadly continue to this day'.[18]

It's true that Europeans did not know how to deal with the lands they invaded. A case study about the use of indigenous wildlife in Africa points out: 'The colonial powers neglected the utility of indigenous resources ... Europeans saw little need to learn from indigenous people as they concentrated their efforts on husbanding crops and livestock that they had domesticated in Europe. After an exploitation phase, Africa's wildlife was to become regarded as exotic recreational goods ... Wildlife was displaced by exotic plants and livestock on all the most productive land'.[19] It takes a while living down-under to learn that 'exotic' here means such mundane species as cows. The point, however, of this report and of the case study it is based upon in Zimbabwe, is the deep colonial mistrust of the native animals, which used to very adequately feed the Indigenous populations. Simon Metcalf, the author of the report, was taken by the possibilities of promoting wildlife as a good source of nutrition from his days working with Save the Children and seeing at first hand starving Zimbabweans. His idea, backed by many others, is that it is not enough to enclose native species in wildlife parks, and in fact this can lead to the dwindling and even extinction of many species (and encourages illegal raiding for food or for export). The parks are mainly owned by the State and in a country as politically precarious as Zimbabwe they will be the first places to be under funded. The tourism dollars provided by safaris often do not return to local communities. So the locals have no economic reason to invest in their wildlife. The point is to make the preservation and care of wildlife economically and culturally sustainable, and one way to do this is to promote them as part of people's everyday diets.

Tim Flannery, one of Australia's most respected environmental scientists, backs this view, arguing that 'It's only in recent times that the concept of utilizing this land with the animals that belong here has emerged. Doing so has the potential to deliver enormous environmental benefits'.[20] There are roughly the same numbers of kangaroos as cattle (around 26 million) however cattle and sheep cause much more damage to the rangelands. In a recent essay, Flannery points out that some four billion hectares of the world's rangelands are under threat.[21] Soil erosion is one of the main causes of their demise and greatly contributes to the amount of carbon emissions. Seemingly inconsequential inventions have added to this situation. Who would have thought that when Joseph Glidden came up with the idea of twisting barbs onto wire in 1874 that it would have such long-lasting effects? Barbed wire, or what religionists of the time called 'the devil's rope' because of the injuries to animals, quickly allowed for the effective fencing in of livestock.[22]

17. Kangaroo Industry, <http://www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au/news/vol42.pdf>, accessed 19 September 2008.

18. Paul Larter, 'Human shield to defy kangaroo killers', *Times Online*, 14 march 2008, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/article3549006.ece>, accessed 19 September 2008.

19. Simon Metcalfe, 'The Zimbabwe Communal areas management programme for indigenous resources (CAMPFIRE)' in *Natural connections: perspectives in community-based conservation*, David Western and Michael R Wright (eds), Washington, Island Press, 1994, p162.

20. Tim Flannery, 'Kangaroo Industry', <http://www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au>, accessed 19 September 2008.

21. Tim Flannery, 'Now or Never: a sustainable future for Australia?' *Quarterly Essay*, 31, 2008.

22. 'Barbed Wire History', <http://www.barbwiremuseum.com/barbedwirehistory02.htm>, accessed 29 July 2008.

With fencing comes assurance of proprietorship. And as Flannery says, with barb-wired fencing the cattle stay put and 'selectively eat the sweetest feed, and this gives the less palatable plants an advantage. Soon, farmers find that their pasture is invaded by shrub land or weedy species, which severely limits the productivity of their land'.[23] The cattle's hooves pack the land, rendering it useless for feeding themselves or for growing other sources of food.

23. Flannery, 'Now or Never', op. cit., p52.

It's one thing to pose the science of why kangaroos are good and another to convince people that they are good to eat. Few Australians eat kangaroo, probably because it is associated with pet food. Frozen roo was normally just thrown to dogs. Now Del Monte has a more upmarket version of dog food called Skippy Premium, with chunks of kangaroo in gravy with cheese bits.

MARKETING THE NEW, FORGETTING THE OLD

Horror at the idea of eating kangaroo goes a long way back amongst white people. In the seventeenth century a Dutch explorer and sea captain, Dirk Hartog, managed to run into the west of Australia having been blown off course en route to Batavia, modern-day Jakarta. He was on his way to the Spice Islands, now the Moluccas between the north coast of Western Australia and Indonesia. Hartog may have known his spices but his opinion of the kangaroo was as low as his view of 'this land, which is cursed; animals hop not run'.[24] White settlers relegated the poor roo to the status of pest, unfit for human consumption. It's arrogant: the kangaroo has existed in Australia for some 125 million years, and Aboriginal people have eaten them for some 60,000.

24. Cited in Flannery, 'Kangaroo Industry', op. cit.

The question remains of how to get non-Indigenous Australians to eat and love roo? This was the topic at 'A Taste of Kangaroo', an event hosted by the New South Wales Parliament and sponsored by the Australian Government and the Kangaroo Industry Association of Australia, or KIAA. The event was pitched to the media, and especially the food media. The speakers were mostly associated with the kangaroo industry. Outside, three or four animal rights' demonstrators waved the flag.

The tasting took place in the middle of the afternoon - not my favourite time of the day to eat copious amounts of kangaroo. The NSW Parliament dining room was kitted out in white tablecloths and the wine poured easily. The MC was Lyndey Milan, who as the food director of the *Women's Weekly* for nine years was one of the most influential food writers in Australia. KIAA had obviously done its homework. *Women's Weekly* is squarely aimed at middle Australia and in its 75 years history the magazine has been at the forefront of introducing white Australian women to new tastes - from Thai stir fries to Vietnamese pho. One could argue that it was *Women's Weekly*, not the top chefs, that transformed Australian English stodge into our multicultural cuisine of today. One of Milan's regrets is that in all her time at the magazine she only once managed to sneak in a recipe for kangaroo (and that was for the Sydney

2000 Olympics).

Another smart move by KIAA was to bring in well-known chefs to conduct a cooking master class in front of our eyes. I sat next to two burly blokes (one of whom introduced himself as a member of parliament from the Shooter's Party). They kept our end of the table busy as course upon course of roo arrived. First up were enoki mushrooms wrapped in a loin of kangaroo in a pandanus leaf sauce, and kangaroo, corn and nori bonbons. Grown men groaned in pleasure and spontaneously broke into shouts of appreciation. The roo tartare was particularly good. Chef Sean Connolly took us through the preparation in his broad Yorkshire accent: raw loin minced, Dijon mustard, Worcestershire sauce and Tabasco topped with quail egg yokes. The dish that won the most applause was prepared by the Chinese chef duo of Darren Ho and John Leong, nationally famous for their dim sum. They made kangaroo fried gee ma dumplings, which were fantastic - spicy and sweet, with an amazing texture where your teeth punctured the crisp sesame-seed coated outside to get at the oozing kangaroo, water chestnuts and Five Spice, Hoi Sin sauce. Jean-Paul Bruneteau, a Frenchman who has spent his life valiantly trying to get Australians to eat bush tucker, prepared roo shanks, which are roasted for ten hours with merlot and root veg. It was good. They may have featured at his restaurant in Paris called Woolloomooloo, where Parisians flocked to eat *le kangourou*.

So what's not to like about roo? They're obviously cosmopolitan. In between dishes we learned that kangaroo is the ultimate in free-range meats. You just can't fence them because they just jump over them. The greatest danger to kangaroos comes from cars. They love to come out to graze at dusk and come down to the highways where water sometimes gathers. They blend in so beautifully with the land that they are very hard to see. The other common connection about them in Australia is as road-kill. Because kangaroos have been around so long they don't get the diseases that the recent arrivals are prone to. Evolution has taken care of that. In contrast to sheep and cattle, whose hooves destroy the precious topsoil, kangaroo pads are soft on the earth. They consume a third less water than sheep. Both aspects mean that their impact on the land is a fraction of standard stock. Unlike cattle they don't fart methane. In New Zealand cattle and sheep produce half of that country's carbon emissions.[25]

But then there's the question of how kangaroos are killed. For animal rights activists they are 'slaughtered'. In the roo industry they are 'harvested,' which makes it sounds as if they grow on trees. The reality is somewhere in between. According to the RSPCA, if killed properly (and they estimate 96 per cent are) shooting kangaroos is one of the most humane ways to kill livestock. Licensed hunters shoot at night using spotlights to blind and mesmerise the roos and then they shoot them through the head. They are immediately gutted and put in chillers before being taken to meat processors. This should compare favourably with some of the unpalatable ways in which cattle and sheep are

25. Kangaroo farts could ease global warming, 6 December 2007, <http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,22879895-13762,00.html>, accessed 30 September 2008.

transported to abattoirs before being killed - a practice that is inhumane and also spoils the taste of the final product because the poor things are so scared.

There are a lot of kangaroos in Australia, which means they have to be culled or they will out propagate and starve. Five species are subject to quotas for culling and about 20 per cent are killed a year.[26] The animal rights activists regularly spread the idea that eating kangaroo will lead to extinction. The sheer numbers makes this unlikely. Michael Archer, a scientist specialising in the conservation of native animals through sustainable consumption, has this to say about kangaroos: 'love it, hug it, lick it, and eat it'. 'Valuing and eating these animals is the only way to avoid their extinction'.[27] While this seems counter-intuitive it boils down to economics. We may love the idea of kangaroos, and they may be integral to an imagined idea about Australia but if they don't generate financial interest their population will dwindle. The problem is that kangaroos are socialists - they don't respect property boundaries, and hop from one farmer's land to another. This means that unless the farmer shoots roo, kangaroos that move through the property will bring no economic gain.

26. John Kelly, 'The Kangaroo Industry Background' (2008), <http://www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au/morinfo/BACKGR1.HTM>, accessed 30September 2008.

27. Cited in Anthony Hoy, 'Cull of the Wild', <http://www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au/media/Bulletin_24401.html>, accessed 24 September 2008.

The two major stumbling blocks in expanding the roo industry (now worth over $AUD 200 million) are image, and lack of interest throughout the retail supply chain. The image problem is damning and seems to be growing. Groups like the UK based VIVA! (Vegetarians International Voice for Animals) and the US based PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) have been highly successful in their campaigns against the use of kangaroo. VIVA! has focused on the use of kangaroo skin in the manufacture of soccer boots. Apparently roo leather has a high tensile composition, making it very thin and tough. In 2006 VIVA! convinced David Beckham to swap his roo boots for synthetic ones. And in 2007 it won against Adidas in California, where Beckham now plays, blocking them from selling products made from kangaroo. VIVA! is a force to be reckoned with. They have a very impressive roll call of major celebrities behind them, including Sir Paul McCartney. Their site savethekangaroo.com has some rather arresting visuals: an Adidas soccer boot drips with blood, little joeys and their mothers are caught in the spotlight and look beseechingly up at their presumed killers.[28]

28. Save the Kangaroo', <savethekangaroo.com>, accessed 8 January 2009.

It turns out that images like this may be rigged. KIAA reports that:

> A video was taken by a radical animal liberation group who encouraged a unlicensed shooter, who did not have permission to shoot on the property in question to commit gross acts of cruelty to kangaroos whilst they quietly stood by and filmed. The man has since been prosecuted, as probably also would have the animal liberation film crew if they hadn't left the country. This video is portrayed as representative of the commercial industry, however the shooter was not supplying the kangaroo industry and not involved in it in any way. In the Court case it was revealed that

he was actively encouraged by the film crew to commit his illegal actions, who told him they were from an American game shooting magazine.[29]

Juliet Gellatley, the force behind VIVA!, regularly paints Australia as having a culture of blame, which encourages cruelty and she equates Australia with 'Auschwitz and Rwanda, Bosnia and Iraq'.[30]

This is a bloody PR battle. On the side of the industry there are the seemingly rational points about the unsustainability of farming imported stock. This is a point on which both sides concur. From VIVA!'s site we learn: '[Australia's] environmental record is depressing, with vast tracts of the country turning to desert because of its insistence on grazing sheep and cattle - 160 million of them - on land which is entirely unsuited to these animals' hard hooves'.[31] It should be remembered that this is a vegetarian group, which obviously sees little sense in converting eating habits from beef to kangaroo. More to the point they have no solution as to what to do with the farmers and others who try to make a living off that land. The kangaroo industry alone employs about 4,000 people, mainly in what are economically depressed rural areas.[32] VIVA! does not offer alternatives for producing protein in a country where water is constantly on people's minds and threatens farming futures. I'm not sure whether anyone has calculated whether you could feed the Australian population on non-animal protein alone. I suppose it's possible but the loss of revenue would be devastating. The livestock industry generates about $AUD700 million a year. On the retail side, domestically the industry doesn't really seem to care. Eighty percent of kangaroo for human consumption is exported. So the home market is too small and retailers won't do much until the consumption of roo is 'normalised'. This is hard to do with the few products that are widely available - large packs of fillets or mince.

A big problem is the placement of roo in supermarkets. At my local Coles (the second largest supermarket chain in Australia) the section for kangaroo is at the far end of the chilled meats. Under the banner of 'offal' - not a great selling point for many, and misleading because kangaroo offal cannot be sold for human consumption - is a small display of not very appetising-looking meat. Being right next to the pet meat section, most of which is kangaroo, definitely does not help. I found that the supermarket meat was badly butchered, leaving the membrane on, which will make any meat tough.

There is an impasse between the enthusiasm of the kangaroo industry and its promoters and the customer, who is by and large bewildered about how to prepare this iconic meat. Kangaroo is extremely lean, which makes a good selling point in a diet-fixated world. But it becomes tough if overcooked, and given how squeamish customers are about meat in its natural state, it's hard to convince them to eat it bloody. Rare roo looks dangerously close to raw roo, which is too reminiscent of the animal the meat comes from that goes into our mouths.

29. Kelly, 'The Kangaroo Industry', op cit.

30. Juliette Gellatley, <http://www.savethekangaroo.com/adidas/vivaresponse.shtml>, accessed 30 September 2008.

31. Viva Response', <http://www.savethekangaroo.com/adidas/vivaresponse.shtml>, accessed 24 September 2008.

32. Kangaroo Industry, <www.kangaroo-industry.asn.au/>, accessed19 September 2008.

How do we instil new tastes for an ancient beast? How do we, as Roe reminds us, think about the networks involved in turning a thing into food? We've already begun to see how many actors are connected by the consumption of kangaroo. Developing a taste for eating roo connects us to the environment, it reminds us of how old this country is and how fragile its future. It ties us to the views of animal rights campaigners, for (a few of) whom a taste for roo equates to a taste for genocide. It places us in an ephemeral yet very physical web of farmers, Aboriginal peoples, the kangaroo industry, and its critics. As Antoine Hennion says, 'taste is a problematic modality of attachment to the world'.[33] When Hennion raises taste as a problematic modality what he gestures to is the ways in which taste foregrounds complex and interesting connections to the world. I want to now turn to how kangaroo travels the world and the types of attachment it may forge at the global-local level. Can the taste of kangaroo, a very new taste for most people, compel reflection on its and our attachments to each other and the messy and deep local-global connections of our modern world?

33. Antoine Hennion, 'Those things that hold us together: taste and sociology', *Cultural Sociology*, 1, 1, (2007): 104.

As I've mentioned, 80 per cent of kangaroo for human consumption is exported mainly to Europe. In the UK, the BSE scare had shoppers turning to other kinds of meat than beef. The Mad Cow/BSE crisis was profoundly shocking. It awakened consumers to some of the most unsavoury facts about industrial beef production. How deeply and disgustingly unnatural is the idea that herbivore cattle were being fed animal protein? Cows should eat grass - they like it and grass makes them taste better, and gives them higher yields of Omega 3. It's bad enough that the beef industry has turned to soya, used to quickly beef up beef. This has encouraged the production of huge monocultures of soya to the detriment of pretty well everyone and everything. But then to find out that the remains of animals and cattle themselves had been processed into fodder was for many a wake-up call to change. In addition the average consumer had to contend with the images of sick cows and the news of people dying from BSE, and the giant pyres of burning cattle carcases. In many ways, BSE was a much more graphic reminder than foot and mouth of the shocking state of agri-business.

The kangaroo industry, along with other 'exotic' meats processors, was fast to move into the vacuum in the market for meat. Headlines in the British newspapers vied for bad puns. The *Independent* announced: 'Kangaroo hops into the supermarket: It bounded into the menus of the more modern restaurants, and took a giant leap forward to public acceptability when BSE hit the beef market'.[34] All the major supermarkets in Britain were soon stocking kangaroo. And then came VIVA! From 1997 to 2000 the group focused their attacks on Sainsbury's and Tescos holding protests in front of the supermarkets. The pickets in front of UK supermarkets with their blown-up posters of bloody animals are reminiscent of tactics used by the anti-abortion

34. Louise Jury, 'Kangaroo hops into the supermarket', *The Independent*, 6 September 1996, <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_19960906/ai_n14055646>, accessed 8 January 2009.

protesters in the USA in front of clinics. Other animal rights groups joined in the fray, accusing:

> Tesco [of] trying to make money from the nightly bloodbath. The superstore chain is now, quite legally, marketing kangaroo flesh as 'exotic meat'. Human greed and cynicism have few limits. In the light of history, it is hard to be shocked at the nastier extremes of human behaviour. Yet profiting from this vile and gruesome business is morally indefensible in any civilized society. In all conscience, it should be banned by law.[35]

Kangaroo was not at that time banned by law in the UK. The UK government and Australian representatives strongly presented the case for killing and eating kangaroo. However Sainsbury's gave up the unequal struggle, as did Tescos, and withdrew the sale of roo. The president of VIVA, Gellatley, proudly claimed her victory, which had disastrous consequences on Australian kangaroo processing companies, stating that: 'South Australia-based Australian Meats, one of five major exporters of kangaroo, said that the ban on the sale of meat in Britain had destroyed its $1 million a year export business. The company handed back their export licence'.[36]

One of the issues here is that VIVA's stance does not allow much room for reflection. For an association that proclaims ethics as its modus vivendi, there is little self-reflection within their group. There's little evidence that they operate in an economic and cultural world. The victory of closing down a million dollar business does not happen in a vacuum. Jobs are lost, possibilities gone. In contrast, Greenpeace - an equally worthy and at times problematic group - champions the consumption of kangaroo as a major way that Australians can dramatically reduce their nation's carbon footprint by cutting down on beef. In *The Independent*'s words: '"Throw another roo" on the barbie, we're saving the planet tonight'. These are the words Greenpeace hope will soon be echoing around Australian backyards as the nation responds to the latest suggestion of how it might reduce its carbon footprint: eat less beef and more of the local wildlife'.[37]

In other parts of Europe the reception was much more nuanced. The *Prague Post*'s headline was: 'Skippy is bouncing back'. As the newspaper describes:

> It may be revered as the national symbol of Australia, but for a growing number of Europeans, it's dinner. From steaks to shish kabobs, kangaroo meat is on the menu at scores of restaurants in the Czech Republic. And home cooks can increasingly find this exotic meat in the frozen-goods aisle of chain supermarkets. But perhaps the real measure of its local acceptance is that it has made it onto the roster of items delivered to Czech towns and villages via the fleet of Family Frost frozen-goods trucks.[38]

35. 'Tescos: sick tastes: healthy profits', <http://www.kemptown.co.uk/freerad/meatvile.htm>, accessed 8 January 2009.

36. 'Kangaroo Report', <http://www.savethekangaroo.com/resources/KangarooReport.shtml#export>, accessed 8 January 2009.

37. Tom McTague and Will Dowling, 'Aussies told: save the planet - eat more 'roo', *The Independent*, 21 October 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/aussies-told-save-the-planet--eat-more-roo-397447.html>, accessed 29 October 2008.

38. Mimi Rogers, 'Skippy is bouncing back', *The Prague Post*, 10 May 2006, <http://www.praguepost.com/articles/2006/05/10/skippy-is-bouncing-back.php>, accessed 10 October 2008.

The tone is lovely: acknowledging where kangaroo comes from they localize it in the retail routes amongst the small villages of the Czech Republic. I wonder what the women greeting the food trucks say to each other? Do they swap recipes, dream of holidays in Australia or compare the stories of relatives who emigrated to Australia escaping from the harsh political times in the 1980s? Or perhaps they are just happy to have found an inexpensive way of feeding their families. Another report from the Czech Republic brings together consideration of their own cuisine, the health qualities of kangaroo and a nostalgic comment about their lost landscape and environment.

> Let's be completely honest, Czech cuisine is quite heavy and unhealthy ... Kangaroo meat is the most diet brand of meat you can get in the Czech Republic. Now this might be new to most of us, but let's check out for the details. It's interesting to know that there were no toxic substances found in kangaroo meat and that's because the environment in which the animals live in Australia is equal to that of early nineteenth century Europe.[39]

39. 'Kangaroo', <http://archiv.radio.cz/english/weekly/6-6-97.htmlkangaroo>, accessed 30 September 2008.

In admittedly a small way, this shows openness and interest in a taste that is connected to a faraway place and a faraway time. And of course as the debates about food miles heats up there will be concern about shipping roo steaks all those thousands of miles.

By far the largest market for kangaroo is in Russia's Far East, where a third of all Australian export ends up. The Russian market consumes about $15 million in kangaroo. The reason it goes there is because the Far East region is far poorer. Gregory Klumov, head of the commercial section at the Australian Embassy in Moscow reports that: 'They were looking for lean, red meat at a good price, and kangaroo meat fitted the bill. The roughly eight million residents of Russia's Far East tend to have more eclectic culinary tastes because of historic meat shortages and the proximity of China and Japan'.[40]

40. Gregory Klumov, 'Food and beverage to Russia', <http://www.austrade.gov.au/Food-and-beverage-to-Russia/default.aspx>, accessed 24 September 2008.

METABOLIC ALIENATION

Years ago, Garrett Hardin wrote of the 'tragedy of the commons'. His argument was of course about population, and he has been roundly critiqued on several fronts (see, for instance, *new formations*, 2010). As Crystal Bartolovich rightly puts it, the question should really be how 'Four centuries of capitalism, the "Tragedy of Privatisation" - not the "Tragedy of the Commons" - has brought us the unequal, exploited and depleted world we currently inhabit'.[41] However Hardin's essay contains a sobering check to ideas that we can remedy our food system through technology or moral prohibitions. Thus he skewered those who sought to change the status quo 'without relinquishing any of the privileges they now enjoy. They think that farming the seas or developing new strains of wheat will solve the problem - technologically'.[42]

41. Crystal Bartolovich, 'A Natural History of Food Riots', *new formations* 36, (2010): 61.

42. Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science* 162, (1968): 1243, http://dx.doi.org/10.1126/science.162.3859.1243

To shift away from Hardin's object of analysis (population) and to his

reception as a leader of neo-liberal thought, it does strike me that the kangaroo is a tragic figure within the commons. This thing that cannot be contained by enclosure, and yet a being restrained by the limits of anthropomorphic thinking, now figures only as a symbolic entity - deprived that is of any connection in the world. Skippy the kangaroo, Skippy the abused overseas Australian, Skippy only good to be culled, not to be eaten, Skippy left high and dry in theme parks.

To return to Mol and Law's phrase, kangaroos are routinely alienated from any metabolic intimacy with humans. To be more precise, in an imaginary fuelled by some activist organisations' hysterics, the kangaroo is domesticated and rendered inedible. Of course this is not the case for Aboriginal people who have long lived in symbiosis with the roo, and for whom land was a common - held in common with ancestors and spirits. The place in which I write (Adelaide, South Australia) is situated on Kaurna land. According to Rob Amery and Georgina Yambo Williams, the latter a Kaurna writer, the Kaurna name for Adelaide is Tarndanya: from *tarnda* 'red kangaroo' (principal totem of 'red kangaroo rock' the Adelaide clan) and *kanya* 'rock'.[43] It is unlikely that the Kaurna would have eaten their totem but they certainly would have eaten the grey kangaroo that is common to the north. And it is not surprising that celebrations of Adelaide's identity often laud the arrival of migrants such as the Germans, the Vietnamese, the Italians and Greeks who are said to have saved Anglo-Celtic stomachs with the introduction of their cuisines. Such guides are silent about the eating of kangaroo. But as kangaroo unevenly travels the world, it may still awaken us to the intricate local and global, and to the pre- and post-colonial ties that bind roos and humans, land and mouth.

43. Rob Amery and Georgina Yamba Williams, 'Reclaiming through renaming: the reinstatement of Kaurna toponyms in Adelaide and the Adelaide plains', in *The Land is a Map*, Luise Hercll s, Flavie Hodges and Jane Simpson eds), Canberra, Pandanus Books in association with Pacific Linguistics, 2002, p272.