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This special issue of *Food, Culture and Society* celebrates the founding of the Canadian Association of Food Studies (CAFS) by showcasing some of the best contemporary scholarship in Canadian food studies research. CAFS was conceived in the spring of 2005 to promote critical, interdisciplinary scholarship in the broad areas of food policy, production, distribution and consumption. As two of its founders, we were stunned—and thrilled—at the interest in this new academic association; seventy papers were presented at the first CAFS scholarly meeting in Toronto a year after its founding. It was clear to us that CAFS was an idea whose time had come. At the time of this writing, CAFS is planning its third conference, in Vancouver, in conjunction with the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, and anticipating full society membership in the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

Why a *Canadian* Association of Food Studies? One of the main thrusts of CAFS is to contribute to interdisciplinary scholarship addressing the complex relationships and interconnections between food-related issues. CAFS members emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach to food studies as crucial for understanding the historically specific web of social relations, processes, structures and institutional arrangements that cover human interaction with nature and with other humans involving production, distribution, preparation and consumption of food. From its founding, many CAFS members have also emphasized policy relevance: to provide Canadian policy makers with solid food systems research to inform public policy, and particularly food policy. Moreover, CAFS has quickly become an important arena to profile the work of Canadian food studies scholars, and for those scholars to network and support each other. This is particularly important for an interdisciplinary field in which scholars often travail alone in their discipline-based university departments (see Johnston, this issue). CAFS is helping to provide legitimacy for food studies in Canada; indeed, junior food studies academics have been advised to request that their tenure applications be reviewed by at least one CAFS member.

Canada presents significant historical and cultural similarities to its neighbor to the south as a European settler society/immigrant nation. In both cases, similar historical influences played a role in shaping patterns of social inequalities and cultural differences, between settlers and aboriginal peoples, francophones and anglophones (the Canadian version of the North-South conflict in the United States), and among various immigrant communities that came in different waves throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A nation with a land mass of 10 million square kilometers and a population of just over 30 million people spread thinly over a 150-kilometer strip along the US border, Canadian identity and politics has been more open to influences from the North-South axis than the East-West. In this process, emphasizing differences from our neighbor to the

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south has become a key feature of Canadian identity (Banting 1997; Lipset 1998).

By nurturing food studies scholarship, CAFS is helping us in Canada do what food studies does so well: to use food as means of understanding who we are. And heaven knows, Canadians need all the help we can get in understanding who we are! Indeed, several writers in a recent collection on the topic of *What is a Canadian?* (Studin 2006) concur that "A Canadian is … almost always unsure of what it means to be a Canadian" (Homer-Dixon 2006: 8). Perhaps it is vainglorious (and thus not very Canadian), or at least naïve, to assume that food studies can do what no other Canadian academic association or society has been able to do—help us solve our perennial identity crisis—but, all Canadians eat don't they?

In particular, Canadians eat doughnuts (not *donuts*), more doughnuts per capita than any other country in the world. The doughnut "is widely believed to be the unofficial national food" (Penfold 2002: 48). In the contemporary Canadian imaginary, the doughnut is connected to a specific chain, Tim Hortons, where the standard "double-double" will get you a coffee with two creams and two sugars, in case your sweet, fatty doughnut treat is not sweet and fatty enough. For a nation that has no strong sense of self except as defined in opposition to its politically and culturally dominant neighbor to the south, it is particularly ironic (but of course not at all unusual) that the national Canadian food is an American invention, and for several years, the Canadian cultural icon, Tim Hortons, was owned by an American multinational company.

As the offerings in this special issue demonstrate, doughnuts are not the only food that Canadians use to create a sense of who we are. From molasses to tinola, food connects us, divides us, and marks us, creating boundaries and identities. Before we move to the papers exploring food and identity, we first present invited papers by three Canadian food scholars in different disciplines and at different stages of their careers to reflect on key issues in Canadian Food Studies. Josée Johnston writes eloquently of two major challenges facing food studies scholars, particularly those who are junior: the institutional tyranny of disciplinary boundaries, and the individualizing discipline of the "neo-liberal culture of productivity." She calls on us to resist, by eating together and embracing politics, to take hope in our students' interest in food studies, and be inspired by committed food activists who are working to change the food system. Valerie Tarasuk draws us into the neo-liberal supermarket, where food choices have proliferated, as well as the marketing claims that specific foods will make us healthy. She highlights the significant gaps in the research that informs Canadian food policy decision-making, which fails to consider the social, economic and environmental consequences of changes to food regulations—changes which may benefit corporate sales and profits more than population health.

Finally, Jennifer Clapp bids us to consider food and food studies in its neo-liberal global context. Like Tarasuk, she is concerned with the growing corporate influence in the food system, particularly the ways in which transnational corporations are influencing the global governance of food and agriculture. She is also concerned with the impact of the trade talks at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and how they may exacerbate existing global food system inequities. She invites us to keep our eye on food system decisions made at the global level because they have implications for us all.

Moving to the contributed papers, Rhona Richman Kenneally sets the stage for exploring themes of constructing Canadian identities through food. She demonstrates how a particular version of Canadian cuisine was constructed and communicated at Expo 67, a world fair held in Montreal to celebrate Canada's centenary, notably at the Canada Pavilion restaurant La Toundra. Richman Kenneally argues that the Canadian cuisine constructed at Expo 67 reflected broader national themes and questions of Canadian identity, including relations with aboriginal peoples, the integration of immigrants, and Quebec nationalism. She shows how the constructed unity of Expo 67's Canadian cuisine, and thus the imagined Canadian national identity it was meant to reflect, is rife with ambiguities, complexities, contradictions and ironies, falling apart on closer examination.

The designers of the La Toundra restaurant offered a version of Canada's northern aboriginal people, the Inuit, that sits uneasily with Maura Hanrahan's presentation of the history of the Inuit and Inuit-Métis who live in Labrador, the most eastern part of northern Canada. She explores three phases of social change in the post-contact period, using research on nutrition to show the effects of massive social change on food habits and disease. The appearance of so-called "lifestyle diseases," as well as troubling rates of violence, suicide, accidents and substance abuse among the Labrador Inuit and Inuit-Métis suggests that the social changes imposed upon them since contact with white Europeans has had significant negative effects.

Diane Tye also tells a story of the historical transformation of foodways in eastern Canada, in this case, the transformation of the iconic status of molasses. Molasses was ubiquitous in regional culture, used as an ingredient in countless recipes and folk remedies and a metaphor in folk speech. But most commonly, it was eaten on its own, or with butter, on bread, as an accompaniment to a meal, or by itself. When there was nothing else to eat, there was always (homemade) bread and molasses. Molasses has been replaced as a food associated with poverty, leaving its dark, sweet stickiness as an icon of a regional identity that celebrates a nostalgic, romanticized past associated with resourcefulness; tight-knit, slow-paced rural communities; loving extended families and home-cooked meals.

Using food to remember who we are (or were) is also the theme of Helen Vallianatos and Kim Raine's paper about Arabic and South Asian women who

immigrated to Edmonton, Alberta in the recent and not-so-recent past. Using food as a vehicle, the women in their study speak eloquently of the struggles of (re)constructing gender and ethnic identities in a new country, often with constrained financial resources and limited access to culturally important foods.

And finally, Jacqui Gingras and Lara Tiro engage in a student–teacher "narrative conversation" that invites us to use cultural food narratives as the basis of a critical anti-colonial food studies pedagogy. They see the potential of cultural food narratives in the university curriculum to help us explain ourselves and tell each other who we are, in all the complexities of our identities including our Canadianness. Mindful of the risk of exploiting and exoticizing the Other, they offer cultural food narratives as a means to a rich, robust and complex Canadian multiculturalism.

We hope that you will agree with us that Canadian Food Studies scholars have much to offer Canadians in search of their own identity.

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