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Eating the Landscape: American Indian Stories of Food, Identity, and Resilience. By Enrique Salmón. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2012. 160 pages. \$17.95 paper.

Food: it is the centering and central force of nature that brings families, cultures, and civilizations together. The links provided by years spent learning about life, traditions, and events through food are palpable regardless of where we originate. The subject should not be set out without an earnest, compelling goal to portray a complete picture. Too many “cookbooks” or even simple lists come to mind when looking at some past examples of food or cultural ecology literature. Recently, authors including Wendy Makoons Geniusz have tied together ethnobotany with whole culture, being a part of that culture, while providing a written record of the connections of geographical place, plants and people. It is not enough simply to discuss food—it is imperative to a cultural experience to seep oneself into the cracks and crannies of a complete understanding. Beyond this, to link earth to plant and food preparation to ceremony as the table is spread is the starkest reminder of humankind and our dependence on the earth’s complex web of energy. To this end, Enrique Salmón has given us a book full of life force and insight; however, the extent of the details is limited. Each chapter could easily be expanded to a book on its own, with the details teased out. However, this is not the author’s goal, and moreover, he is a storyteller with a social conscience, with the perspective of a native speaker, researcher, and teacher. He successfully weaves together a series of lessons on food and culture in relationship with the earth.

Eating the Landscape opens with the author discussing *bawena* (peppermint) with his grandmother, painting the picture of the larger story of how cultural information is passed from one generation to the next. This snapshot of life connects family knowledge with cultural context. Salmón is Raramuri, and, as in the case of Geniusz, this gives him a more intimate qualification to assess and relate the information at hand. The discussion goes from herbs to plants to the world and how all in the traditional ecology are Raramuri spirits that have kinship. He expands on this by discussing his cultural memories of life in Chula Vista, where his grandfather introduced him to plants in the garden, and where he learns to respect all aspects of the earth. This is the introduction to the idea of the geography of childhood and nature—space made more intimate by experience.

From there, Salmón includes food in the context of family gatherings and cultural events by celebrating the place of the tamale in Raramuri life. In a topic echoed in future chapters, he bemoans the loss of this touchstone as modern life removes the need for handmade tamales and replaces them with purchased foods. The problem is the same as for all modern families—processed foods

are higher in fats and calories and not as healthy. There may not be an explicit comparison of homemade and manufactured, but the implication is that life is not better for many of the people, and that the loss has been one of not only information but identity. Later in the book Salmón discusses a more severe situation, a population of Pima who have psychologically “surrendered” to the idea that they will die of type II diabetes. This mind-set is startling, especially in light of the knowledge that returning to a traditional diet would stem the tide of disease in the community.

There are smatterings of history in the book, including that of the traditional foods, growing methods, adaptations made in growing new foods, and using new methods as introduced from outside cultures. The Native Movement in Flagstaff, Arizona works to expand resilience theory, the idea that one must discern what works and what fails in the current condition, and that current conditions change from year to year, illustrated by the way in which cultures react to global climate destabilization. Salmón shows ways that a variety of Colorado Plateau cultures create slow-food sources—locally grown—in available spaces, regardless of urban or rural setting. Although other authors have written on resilience theory from a more scientific perspective, Salmón makes a compelling argument for understanding the indigenous methodology of resilience.

The Edible Plants Project, also in Flagstaff, takes a long view of foods on the Colorado Plateau. Not only does this project protect and nurture dry climate-specific foods, it educates a new generation about the importance of nature itself as a sanctuary. This small garden project not only benefits the people who tend and enjoy the fruits and vegetables, but also helps the migratory birds and unique pollinators who otherwise are without sanctuary in the urban setting.

Another topic that is addressed is the loss of languages in relation to the loss of biodiversity. In the Colorado Plateau a concentrated diversity of languages is still in use, as well as having a lively biodiversity from mesa to mesa, with human beings as intrinsic to the living network as fire or flood. In describing the Hopi and Navajo, Salmón presents Corn as a central figure in the story of their people, in ritual, and in ecology. The peoples of the Colorado Plateau do not distinguish between humans and the diversity that is an ecosystem. There is an encoded knowledge in the stories that is available to any generation that needs it at a point not only in time, but geographical space: “The knowledge, when preserved in situ, maintains the cultural meanings plus the models and metaphors that affect action and land management systems that are still practiced” (57). Their long history in situ is a testament to a greater understanding of what can be done to live within the ecosystems, how the culture evolves to pass on this knowledge, and how eventually both intimate spaces and shared events become sacred when seen at the level of indigenous peoples.

The book offers many gems on growing trends, ranging from a new generation of biculturalism where singers from two bands join to sing for the earth, as in the case of the Cahuilla Bird Song Singers and the Paiute Salt Song singers, to the Seri in Mexico who “sing the turtles to the sea” and represent the long years of attachment to place, to youth-led groups that are bringing new ideas and technology to the old traditions. One of the outstanding methods brought out in this book is the DINÉ, Inc., a group on and off the Navajo Reservation that has joined together to share information and help via e-mail. Since nearly all Diné farmers hold day jobs, farmers were given laptop computers in order to e-mail how to share a truck, trailer, and tractor. Even though many Navajo do not have internet hookup, the Chapter Houses throughout the reservation have wireless internet. Since previously they would have had to drive fifty miles to see the next farmer, e-mail communication is both a timesaver and a way to organize more efficiently. Another project with the Seri in Mexico is the Geographic Information Systems cultural mapping project, used to reclaim traditional rights to fishing and ancestral territories.

There is much to consider when reading this book, and just when this reader felt sure that there were one too many topics, the author renewed my interest by turning to scientific issues that include food shortage politics and the historical and current facts of climate and plowing. The final chapters focus on cultural responsibility for geographic place, and how one must be connected to understand their relationship. Salmón concludes the book with his ecological philosophy as influenced by his Raramuri upbringing and his connection to land via the family garden, and his later work with the Center for Whole Communities.

In creating a vision where there is understanding of “environmental justice, social justice, ecological protection, economic concerns and all the rest of the human and natural world issues that are being attacked, threatened and oppressed” (155), Salmón has given us a valuable tool for the classroom and campus. It is useful for a range of courses from cultural or world regional geography, ethnobotany, American Indian studies, cultural anthropology, ecology, and peace studies and sustainability. The intertwining of environmental stewardship and the specter of food as a gauge of manmade climate change are truly brought home in this book. Salmón successfully speaks to larger ideas such as drawing a knowledge base from culture, relationships between language and biodiversity, and the place of humans within the ecosystem, simply by working on the most basic part of our everyday lives—food.

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