Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of **Anthropology**

Volume 19 | Issue 1 Article 8

6-21-2011

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Recommended Citation

Hammer, Brent A. (2011) "Nk'Mip: Creating a "Taste of Place"," Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology: Vol. 19: Iss. 1, Article 8.

Available at: http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol19/iss1/8

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Keywords

taste, place, cultural identity, wine, terroir

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Nk'Mip: Creating a "Taste of Place"

Brent A. Hammer

Introduction

The significance of place to identity and the relationship it has to food and drink has become an important discourse in the study of cultural anthropology (Korsmeyer 2005; Nabhan 2004; Trubek 2005, 2008). Amy Trubek, an anthropologist and author of The Taste of Place: A Cultural Journey into Terroir (2008) examines the question of how and why we think about food and wine. She expands upon the French concept of terroir, a Latin root word meaning earth, and emphasizes its role in creating a "taste of place". In this context, taste includes more than the physiological or sensory sensation of eating and drinking; it encompasses all the human senses as well as the full cognitive and cultural realm elicited by a product to the extent one is capable of experiencing it. Place not only refers to geographic location but, more significantly, includes the cultural milieu in which it is located. Therefore, "taste of place" is understood as a concept that frames and explains relationships people have to taste, the soil, their heritage, and the places where they live. Trubek, while building on French gastronomic and viticulture (the cultivation of grapes) histories, demonstrates that "taste of place" and its practices are successfully employed in different regions, using different food and beverage products, and by different groups of people to reconnect or create new connections to the land, an ancestral heritage, or cultural traditions.

Viticulture has a long and storied history rooted in specific places, ancestral heritage, and real and imagined traditions that emphasize the literal and symbolic attributes of wine and wine culture (Demossier 2010; Fadiman and Aaron

1975). But what happens when the place in question does not have a long and storied history of grape growing or wine production? Or when the people's ancestral heritage is rooted in movement rather than in an attachment to a specific place? And what of traditions that display little resemblance to a recognized wine culture?

The Osoyoos Indian Band (OIB) presently lives in such a place, the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, and their ancestral heritage is not well documented. Their traditions are generally understood in the literature within a broader context of an expansive and diverse archaeological and anthropological culture group (Wright 1995). The purpose of this article is to explore how the concepts of terroir, taste, and "taste of place" (Trubek 2005, 2008) may be applied to the relationships the OIB have with their ancestral heritage, past traditions, and physical and spiritual places in the world. Specifically, how do these concepts reflect and represent their present and future in shaping their cultural identity? The OIB claim that they are the first Aboriginal owned and managed winery in North America (Aspler 2006). Therefore, within this context. I seek to address in this paper the following questions: How does the ownership and management of a winery reflect and shape their identity as a First people, business corporation, Nations cultural group, and as individuals?; how do they equate the literal or sensory taste of wine with aesthetic or symbolic meanings connected to their cultural, business, or personal beliefs, practices, and values?; and have the OIB created a "taste of place", and if so, what does that mean to them?

To explore these questions and to frame this research, I provide a brief methodological outline and theoretical perspective. I then situate the OIB as a people within a physical location: the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia. This

is followed by a discussion on how and why they create a "taste of place". I conclude this paper by suggesting that the OIB, through the incorporation of their traditional name – Nk'Mip – have successfully used their culture and cultural identity to create and promote a product – wine. At the same time, they have used that product to promote their culture and cultural identity to others.

Methodology

In this paper I employ a range of research methods to address my research questions. Standard historical texts (books, articles, journals) are used to establish spatial and temporal references for possible origins and present location of the (Fagan 2005; OIB McMillan Yellowhorn 2004; Miller 2000; Prentiss and Kuijt 2004). While there is a paucity of well-documented archaeological anthropological evidence to substantiate an accurate historical perspective of the people and the region (Wright 1995), I believe it is still essential to provide a working context in attempting to understand them as a cultural group today. As Ortner (2005) suggests, it is important to put the human experience back into anthropological study. Readings in narrative and autobiographical collections provide a glimpse into some of the early people and places of the regional communities in the area (Bicknell and White 1995; Dueling 1973; Fraser 1967; Osoyoos Club 1967). These informal Lions documents give a sense of agency to the people and texture to the locations, placing them within a real-world context.

Books that deal specifically with the art of the people and the region provide some insight into the OIB's real and spiritual world, past and present (Keyser 1992; Walsh 2005). The significance of artwork to their cultural identity today may also be seen in the labels they place on their wine bottles. A collection of illustrated

Okanagan Legends (Marchand demonstrates the people's deep connection with and knowledge of their environment and their place within it. The re-telling of "The Legend of Shuswap Falls" (Deuling 1973) as narrated by the elders of the Okanagan Tribe in their own dialect, reveals the powerful connection of physical place to spiritual space for their ancestors. It also suggests, through the confrontations between the Shuswap and Okanagan tribes, that the creation of place is a dynamic and fluid process, especially when it matters to the people involved. This process is an important component towards an understanding of a "taste of place".

An academic perspective on the OIB's economic development and its importance to them as a First Nations people provides a contemporary view of their relationship to the national, international, and global world in which they live (Anderson et al. 2007). The use of material from their websites is valuable demonstrating their use of technology to communicate and promote not only a product but their cultural identity. For example, the Nk'Mip Cellars website includes a page on the history of the Nk'Mip people and a link to the website for their Desert and Heritage Centre.³ Finally, the fact that the OIB produces a product that may be consumed, literally drank, presents the opportunity to explore the concepts of terroir, taste, and taste of place from not only the symbolic or metaphorical level but also from a "taste sensation" and "taste experience" perspective. Taste sensation refers to how a product may literally taste when consumed and is often considered subjective, while taste sensation refers to the knowledge the product may convey about the outside world and is usually considered objective. This diverse range of sources, along with the literal taste experience, are all

key to exploring the questions of how the Nk'Mip create a "taste of place".

Theoretical perspectives

Pierre Bourdieu's sociological work, Distinction: A Social Critique of the of Taste (1984)remains Judgement influential in contemporary anthropological thought today. He argued that aesthetic taste, as in the appreciation for fine food and wine, is a means to mark and maintain social boundaries between and within different class structures. While Bourdieu focused on French society and their social class systems within a particular spatial and temporal context, his theories on taste provide an interesting parallel when applied to the OIB and their recent foray into the production of wine and the accompanying wine culture. Is the OIB using their cultural and symbolic capital to build economic capital and acquire power which has historically, social intentionally, and unintentionally been stripped from them? Is the production and distribution of wine an attempt to create an identity in a social world that has traditionally been the privilege of the elite and wealthy upper classes of Western society (Korsmeyer 1999; Warde 1997)?

These questions illustrate that power and control of decision making is a vital component of marking and maintaining one's identity (Bourdieu 1984). decision making practice fits with the OIB's philosophy of striving for self-reliance through economic development (Anderson et al. 2007). The more interesting question is whether this represents what Bourdieu terms habitus, an aspect of culture where the participants are not fully conscious of their actions. This is interesting because the OIB have publically made the claim that Nk'Mip Cellars is North America's first Aboriginal owned and managed winery, yet how aware are they of the symbolic and metaphorical taste, as well as the literal gustatory taste, of the wine that they producing and marketing to the public? Are they consumers of their own product? Are they exploiting their economic capital to gain cultural capital or vice versa (Wright, Nancarrow, and Kwok 2001)?

Carolyn Korsmeyer is a philosopher with a strong interest in the anthropological perspectives of food and gustatory pleasures. 4 In Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy (1999), she discusses the hierarchy of the five senses and challenges modern Western philosophical perspective that relegates taste (and smell) to the bottom of the list. Korsmeyer suggests that contemporary theorists must move "beyond Bourdieu" and the "wholesale flattening of the territories of taste into the sociology of eating" (67). This idea is important to the concept of "taste" and how it may be understood in the context of the OIB and the establishment of their winery and acknowledges that traditions and cultures are dynamic and fluid concepts with agentive properties, not static or frozen in time.

Korsmeyer (1999) argues that the Western predilection to employ science and empiricism, to quantify and explain all phenomena, has unfortunately relegated the sense of taste to a neglected, misunderstood position at the bottom of the sense hierarchy. Taste is often considered very subjective, relative only to the individual experiencing it, and therefore unworthy of objective philosophical discussion. In fact, because taste is associated with bodily senses dealing with eating and drinking (as opposed to the higher senses of sight and hearing which are clearly identified with functions of the mind and intellect), it was classified as a lower or a "primitive" sense (84).

One of the ways Korsmeyer (1999) addresses this hierarchal positioning is to make the distinction between taste in the literal or gustatory sense and its use as a

symbolic or metaphoric way to describe an aesthetic sense. She argues that this represents a difference between taste sensation and taste experience. Taste sensation refers to the chemical analysis of the scientifically accepted four basic tastes of sweet, sour, salt, and bitter as taste categories.⁵ It thus encompasses the physiological properties of taste buds and taste receptors on the tongue and in the mouth. Taste experience, on the other hand, encompasses all the senses, which would include the realm of learned knowledge, symbolic and otherwise. Korsmeyer (1999) even suggests that knowledge is a precondition of pleasure, as a certain vocabulary and amount of knowledge is needed to enhance the taste experience. Her point is that even though "taste" may be subjective, it is still capable of telling us something about the world.

Taste experience is a key component in my exploration of the OIB and the creation of their winery, as it relates to the concept of experiential knowledge that Trubek (2008) discusses in her book. She emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge in the concept of goût de terroir or "taste of place". Trubek, an American anthropologist, local food movement activist, and professionally-trained chef, became fascinated by what people's discussions about taste and terroir revealed about what mattered in their community and how these revelations informed their everyday choices. Trubek (2005) builds on the French understanding of terroir, which is derived from the Latin root meaning earth. She proposes that the word has many meanings even for the French, and is often associated with a person's history with a particular place or described as their roots. Many people believe terroir has its origins in viticulture (Heath and Menely 2007) and that it refers to the relationship between quality, style, and taste of the wine with its geographic origin (Van Leeuwen and Seguin 2006).

Trubek (2008) critiques Bourdieu's perspective of taste, within the social context of identity formation of having "good taste", by flipping the words and the metaphorical meaning to represent "tastes good" (8). "Taste", for Trubek (2008), includes more than the physiological or sensory sensation of eating or drinking; it encompasses all the human senses as well as the full cognitive and cultural realm elicited by the product to the extent one is capable of experiencing it. For Trubek, "place matters" (2005:260), as cultural tastes frame our physiological taste experiences. "Place" includes all the physical characteristics of geography and the scientific elements of geology, climate and weather. importantly, "place" includes the people, their customs and traditions, and their ancestral heritage within a physical and spiritual space.

Trubek (2005) continues to expand on this by suggesting that "taste of place" become a concept to frame and explain relationships people have to taste, the land, their roots, and the places they have created. She then asks whether these relationships may serve as "categories that frame perceptions and practices - a worldview, or... a foodview?" (2005: 261). A foodview, in broad terms, may be defined as how we think about food and drink, our eating patterns, choices and habits. More specifically, a foodview may be considered as a discourse that combines food, drink, and taste with physiological and ecological factors (Trubek 2008). A foodview, like a worldview, can become a way to examine the physical and spiritual world and our place within it. Such a view may provide alternative perspectives and influence the beliefs and behaviours that we practice and use to shape our values regarding kinship,

politics, economics, religion, and the environment.

This research has implications for anthropology as a discipline as it explores notions of identity formation within a global context of shifting ethnoscapes (Appadurai 1996). It suggests that identity, like the concept of culture, may be the product of fluid processes of creation and reinvention. These processes, operating within contemporary societal contexts, resonate with connections to the land, one's ancestry, and past traditions and customs. Trubek (2008) acknowledges the power of food and eating and drinking to bring the natural and cultural worlds together, and she proposes that the concept of "taste of place" suggests a human universal; that it may be possible, crossculturally, for people to taste "how place intersects with unique flavours" (6). It is within this theoretical framework that I begin my exploration of how these concepts may be reflected in the OIB, creating a "taste of place" that shapes and reinforces their cultural identity.

The people

Nk'Mip (pronounced "in ka meep") was the traditional tribal name used by the OIB's ancestors (Baptiste 1995). It is now being reclaimed and used by the OIB to represent some of their business projects and as a way to connect with their past. The OIB, formed in 1877, is located in Oliver in the Southern Okanagan region of British Columbia. The OIB members are classified in general anthropological terms as part of the Plateau Culture in North America (Hudson and Ignace 2004). They are considered to be Interior Salish speaking people and are one of seven bands that comprise the Okanagan Nation.

Historical accounts suggest that for the people of the Central Plateau region of British Columbia, salmon fishing was a primary subsistence activity (McMillan and

Yellowhorn 2004). But what about the Nk'Mip who inhabited the southernmost territory of the Okanagan Valley where salmon resources were more scarce? Fraser (1967) states that the Nk'Mip relied on lake fish and game hunting, primarily deer, mountain sheep, and bear. She claims their diet also included various tubers and berries. Hudson and Ignace (2004) support this claim of a heavy reliance on root plants, including camas and bitterroot, citing evidence for the harvesting of vegetable and fruit crops and suggest the Nk'Mip were practicing a form of horticulture in the early nineteenth century, including intensification and pruning to encourage growth. Prentiss and Kuijt (2004) suggest this may have been done to improve palatability and taste.

The Okanagan legend of "How Food Was Given" provides an excellent example of the connection the people have to their food, the animals and the environment (Marchand 2004). The animals and the landscape are portrayed as spirit beings having knowledge and souls. The legend highlights the spiritual connection and the reciprocal relationships that formed an understanding that everything, including people, are all part of the same cosmic world. The fish must be respected if it is to be caught. The legend is retold and creatively illustrated by Marchand (2004) in the book Kou-Skelowh/We Are The People in both English and the Okanagan language.

Early historical documents reveal settlements in the Southern Okanagan around ranching, farming and trading. In the words of Virg Baptiste (1995), an OIB member and researcher, "my people were survivalists. They depended absolutely on nature for their livelihood" (38). These characteristics, resiliency, perseverance, and the ability to adapt to changing environments, both physical and cultural, are evident in the Nk'Mip today as they

continue to change to meet the demands of a contemporary global world.

Today the Nk'Mip's land base consists of over 32,000 acres comprising residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and eco-tourism development. In 1968, they planted a 200 acre vineyard, selling all the grapes to other wineries. In 2002, they opened Nk'Mip Cellars⁸ to bottle and sell wine from their own grapes, and have recently opened the Nk'Mip Desert and Heritage Centre. The Nk'Mip incorporated a Development Council in 1988 to oversee their many business interests and they now manage operations with an annual budget of million dollars.⁹ The Band also administers its own health, social, educational, and municipal services. One of the Band's main objectives is to achieve full employment for its members. 10 Currently, there are approximately 450 band members, 370 of which inhabit the Osoyoos Indian Reservation near the town of Osoyoos (Black 2004).

Place

Geography and geology

Place, as a natural environment encompassing soil, vegetation, climate, and weather conditions, may be viewed as an interactive ecosystem with the potential to influence the quality, taste, and style characteristics of wines grown and produced in that environment (Van Leewen and Seguin 2006). These characteristics may then be viewed as imbuing a distinctive identity to the wine associated with that specific place or region. Osoyoos, where the Nk'Mip winery is located, lies in the southern-most region of the Okanagan Valley in British Columbia and is part of the Great Basin or Sonora Desert that reaches all the way to northern Mexico (Bowers 1978). The topographical features seen today are the result of the Pleistocene, the last major glacial age. The bedrock of the valley is hundreds of millions of years old. Osoyoos receives between seven to ten inches of rain a year and was at one time considered the driest and warmest place in Canada (Fraser 1967). These features represent a distinct micro-biotic zone that would appear to make agriculture challenging, especially viticulture.

The significance of location is reflected by the descriptive references to the place names given by people of the Okanagan Nation. The term Okanagan originally referred not to people but to a place, "the head of the river" (Hudson 2004:353) in reference to the farthest point that salmon could ascend in the Okanagan Valley. Osoyoos is an Okanagan language word meaning the narrows or the place where the two lakes come together. This describes the ancient crossing place, a natural ford, where early people gathered to catch and smoke fish (Fraser 1967). The term Nk'Mip is also from the Okanagan language and means bottomland, referring directly to where they live at the bottom of the long and narrow valley (Aspler 2006).

Southern Okanagan Valley today

The Okanagan Valley presents a landscape of many contrasts, especially in the southern end where the towns of Osoyoos and Oliver are located. Evidence of the original desert can still be found in the surrounding hills where you may see sagebrush, creosote bush, cactus harbor burrowing owls, rattlesnakes, and scorpions (Aspler 2006). What you will also see along the valley floor are lush green orchards, and now, vineyards. A major irrigation program in the early 1900's helped to transform the region into an agricultural oasis.

By the 1970's, grape growers began to notice the potential of elevated benches, naturally-formed landscape terraces, along

the valley sides. The benches on the east side of the valley were found to consist of deep sand while the western side possessed a more rocky composition. The climate of the Southern Okanagan is moderated by two river systems that line the valley floor. This is a feature that Aspler (2006) believes "produces some interesting viticultural effects" (98), such as soils ranging from post-glacial sediments, to glacial meltwater deposits, to deep sandy soils, all with good nutrient content and drainage. The region enjoys long summers with intense light, because of its northern latitude, and short mild winters. Blistering hot summer days and cool nights help achieve desirable acid levels in the wines and have made the Southern Okanagan "red-wine country par excellence" (Aspler 2006:98).

Creating a taste of place

It may seem ironic that the people brought disease and cultural who devastation (Euro-Canadian explorers and settlers) and educational and spiritual suppression (the Catholic Church and other religious missionaries) (Hudson 2004), are also the people largely responsible for introducing the Nk'Mip to one of their most distinguishable methods of promoting their cultural identity to a global audience: viticulture and wine sales. It was in the 1860's that Father Charles Pandowsky, a Catholic priest, planted a vineyard in the Okanagan Valley to supply his Oblate mission and the settlers with wine (Aspler 2006). It is through these efforts that he became recognized as the father of the B.C. wine industry. Indeed, the Catholic Church is one of the main institutions responsible for the flourishing wine industry around the world (Aspler 2006). So it is not surprising that the Catholic Church was influential in establishing the wine industry in the Okanagan Valley. However, what is unique is the fact that 140 years later, the Nk'Mip promote themselves as North America's first Aboriginal owned and managed winery (Aspler 2006).

One contemporary academic understanding today is that most Canadian First Nations people saw themselves as stewards of the land and the resources on it rather than owners (Feit 2004). They believed the land, wind, water, and animals were all spirit beings associated with personal beings and it was only through mutual respect, obligation, and reciprocity between these elements that balance and harmony could be achieved and maintained with nature (Hudson 2004).

pre-historical The and early historical periods of the Okanagan - the place and the people - were about movement. The Okanagan Valley represented a means of getting somewhere else, whether during seasonal migrations or participating in ceremonial gatherings, as a route for shipping furs and trade goods to distant markets, or as a passageway to the gold fields (Hudson 2004). Events and the landscape began to change rapidly in the 1860s, for along with grapes, the era brought ranchers, gold prospectors, and other business entrepreneurs. All of these new categories of people represented demands for land claims on territories traditionally used by the Okanagan people. Increasing settlement pressures led the provincial and federal governments to restrict the landholdings of the Aboriginal people, relegating a territory where they had previously recognized no fixed boundaries or ownership into plots of land now owned by Euro-Canadians. The Indian Reservation system was implemented into the region and for the first time, the Nk'Mip, as members of the Okanagan Aboriginal family, found themselves within a Euro-Canadian defined, politically ascribed, and socially and legallyenforced sanctioned "place".

In 1968, the Nk'Mip began planting grapes on 200 acres of their land and called

it Nk'Mip Vineyards. In 1969, they became the largest vineyard in the Okanagan Valley, supplying grapes to many wineries in the region (Aspler 2006). At this time they were only growing grapes and selling them to others. In 1981, Brights, an early Canadian producer of wine and other beverages, built a modern facility on Nk'Mip land to process grapes grown in the Nk'Mip Vineyards. This was the beginning of a fortuitous relationship, as in 1994, Brights merged with Cartier-Inniskillin to form Vincor International, now Canada's largest winery and a global player in the wine industry (Aspler 2006).

Today huge vineyards are spread across the OID's 32,000 acres. These vineyards are operated under long-term leases with many different wineries. In total, 1,155 acres of vines are planted on the OIB's land; this represents 25% of the total acreage planted in the entire Okanagan Valley (Aspler 2006). The Nk'Mip now micro-manage 40 acres of the vineyard specifically for Nk'Mip Cellars, a company created in 2002 to bottle and sell their own wine under their own name or identity (Anderson et al 2007, Aspler 2006).

Cultural identity and branding

1988 was considered a watershed year for the Canadian wine industry. It was the year of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States that saw the removal of trade tariffs on imported wines. The local wine industry lost its government protection and had to compete on a level playing field with better quality imported wines. Four major factors helped the Canadian wine industry not only survive but thrive: 1) global free trade; 2) the switch from grapes of poor-quality native *labrusca*, to the world-class *vinifera* varieties; 3) the introduction of the Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA), a national quality-control system; 4)

an explosion of viticultural expertise in the country (Aspler 2006).

I argue that 2002 was also a watershed year for the Nk'Mip. Their business experience and acumen, their understanding of the new global economy, and a entrepreneurial spirit steered them forward and provided a successful business model (Anderson et al. 2007). Getting into the wine production business is not always considered a sound investment (Hansen 2004). There is a significant business difference between leasing your vast and fruitful land to others (to let them toil in the fields, worrying about weather, bank rates, and the economy) and doing it all yourself.

So why make the decision to grow, produce, bottle, and sell a wine under your own brand name? People in the wine industry often talk about their passion for the grape, the way it needs to be tended and nurtured into 'nectar of the gods' (Bachelder 1990). They talk about how it is a powerfully spiritual way to connect with the land and nature. ¹² This statement sounds similar to Feit's description of First Nation's people mentioned earlier and suggests the metaphoric notion of the 'noble savage' and the noble grape. And why choose a name and label that clearly promotes, through direct association (literal) and graphic design (symbolic), a distinct Aboriginal identity? The name Nk'Mip Cellars represents their Okanagan language word 'Nk'Mip' to describe their physical and spiritual place as "bottomland". A cellar may also be seen as a spiritual place connecting indigenous people to the underworld. The label on the wine bottles¹³ features the company logo: a turtle (a symbol of wisdom and vision) painted as a pictograph on an arrowhead as a symbol of the power and heritage of the vineyard (Aspler 2006). This reflects the Nk'Mip's conscious decision to incorporate traditional elements from their past to create a new

tradition, the wine label, as a way to make meanings.

Warde (1997) suggests that the invention of traditions may produce a sense of having historical roots for some people. These new invented traditions may then be used to allow consumers to connect with the historical roots of the Nk'Mip. The choice of winery name and label design suggests a conscious decision by the Nk'Mip to mark their business identity within the parameters of the wine industry but also to mark and maintain their cultural identity within a global society. Nk'Mip's decision to produce limited quantities of high-quality wine, all with the VQA label to display the highest level of quality control in the country, reflects not only Boudieus's notion of taste as a metaphor to mark social class or prestige, but also reflects a clear understanding of the power and significance of the sensory taste of the wine. This suggests the Nk'Mip are aware of the literal and symbolic taste distinction of their wines as proposed by Korsmeyer (1999). They create and distribute a product that not only allows you to "taste" their wine, but also to metaphorically (through the use of language and symbols) "taste" aspects of their culture as well.

The Nk'Mip make a product that is generally consumed by a discerning audience (Warde 1997). They choose to sell their wines only through their own winery and properties (40%), high end restaurants, specialty wine stores and the international market (Anderson et al. 2007). Their awareness of the importance of the sensory experience and literal quality of taste is reflected in the fact that they have won over 50 international wine awards.¹⁴

An understanding of the association of *terroir* with sensory taste and quality is further demonstrated by the introduction of a series of reserve wines, labelled as Qwan Owmt, to critical acclaim (Black 2004).

Reserve wine is a term given to a specific wine to denote higher quality or wines made in a style suited to longer aging periods (Bachelder 1990). It originated from the simple notion that the wine was held in reserve, or held onto by the winemakers for their private consumption, because the wine represented grapes from a superior vintage (largely related to the weather that season) or from a special vineyard that had favourable terroir (soil, microclimate, or superior craftsmanship). Terroir is invoked through the comments of Chief Clarence Louie, "the expression of the vineyard is displayed in the bottle" and from "soil to glass". 15

A specific characteristic of the terroir of the region is highlighted by David Lawrason, editor of Wine Access magazine and founder of the Canadian Wine Awards, when he said, "The other distinguishing factor I get from the southern reds is the quality of their tannins. There's a really gritty, desert-like texture to them" (in Aslper 2007:60). Although "desert-like texture" may not sound appealing to the consumer, it presented within a context possessing an identifiable terroir attribute. The significance of *terroir* to each wine may be seen in their vintage reports and tasting notes. 16 These notes provide detailed information about the weather and the qualities it produced in the grapes. They list aging practices and timeframes that add terroir characteristics which affect the "taste" of the wine by contributing experiential knowledge.

Terroir, as Trubek (2008) emphasizes, also includes the people involved in the process, or who she refers to as the taste makers. A popular axiom in the wine industry, "good wine begins with good grapes" (Louis 2009), reflects the essential connection between the land, the grape, and the people. The process of planting, growing, tending, and harvesting grapes to

produce wine, while generated by nature, is a complex process guided by the nurturing hands and spirits of humans.

The significance of individual agency in creating a "taste of place" is illustrated by the fact that the Nk'Mip Vineyard is supervised by Sam Baptiste, an OIB member and trained viticulturist. The cellar supervisor of Nk'Mip Cellars, Justin Hall, is also a member of the Band whose commitment and passion is reflected in his comments: "This is the job I was born to do. I love it" (Hall, 2009). Hall supplemented his enthusiasm with classes in the viticulture program at Okanagan University College (OUC). He has travelled to Australia to participate in a vineyard harvest and plans to become a chief winemaker one day. Aaron Crey, the cellar supervisor, is a member of the Cheam Indian Band, who came to work for the Nk'Mip in 2002. He has completed the winery assistant program at OUC and is participating in the viticulture program at the same institution.

Randy Picton, the chief winemaker, is not a member of the Band nor is he of Aboriginal heritage, but he is an experienced and innovative Okanagan Valley winemaker who recognizes the connection between the grape in the vineyard and the practice in the winery. His strategy is to work closely with the vineyard supervisor, the entire vineyard crew, as well as his own staff in the winery. The philosophy of his position is one of mentorship for his two young assistants, with the goal of them one day taking over to become Nk'Mip Cellars chief winemakers (Picton 2009).

I believe Picton's position reflects a thorough understanding of the importance of people to the concept of *terroir* and to creating a "taste of place". I also believe this reflects the entrepreneurial willingness of the Nk'Mip to work with non-Aboriginal people to create successful partnerships and participate in the global economy as long as

they share respective values towards the Nk'Mip's culture, institutions, and history (Anderson et al. 2007).

The decision to bottle and sell their own wine under the name Nk'Mip Cellars reflects an understanding of the concepts of *terroir*, taste, and "taste of place", but it also demonstrates an astute awareness of the power of branding of a product (Anderson et al. 2007). However, as Trubek (2008) argues "taste of place" can also be about branding your local or cultural identity. Branding is primarily about creating a language for communicating or of discernment.

Parallels may be seen in Trubek's (2008) example of how the French use terroir, taste, and taste of place to promote tourism and the Nk'Mip's expansion into the wine industry. Nk'Mip Cellars is not just about the market branding of a product, it is also about the market branding of the Nk'Mip as a First Nation's cultural group. This is made evident by the fact that Nk'Mip Cellars is just one part of a larger project built around the development of the Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre and the neighboring Spirit Ridge Vineyard Resort and Spa. The Nk'Mip Project is a 25 million dollar investment in eco-tourism and part of the development Band's overall strategy (Anderson et al. 2007).

The proof of the wine is not only in the tasting

My take on the idiom "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" is meant to suggest that it is not as simple as eating or drinking something to explore the "taste of place" literally or metaphorically. I have experienced the literal or gustatory taste of Nk'Mip Cellars' wine and it indeed was an enjoyable and pleasant drink. However, if I was to drink it in a blind taste test, not knowing whose wine it is or where it is from, I would have had no idea that it was a

wine from Nk'Mip Cellars, nor experience any symbolic "taste" of their culture.

It is possible that an individual with a highly trained and educated palette may be able to discern that "desert-like texture" referenced earlier and speculate that the terroir is that of the Southern Okanagan region but only if they had previous experience with those wines. Impressive as that would be, I do not think that is the point for most people, whether they are wine drinkers or not. What is important to the discussion of "taste of place" is the combination of taste sensation, the literal consumption of the wine (Trubek's "tastes good") with taste experience; as Korsmeyer (1999) points out, taste experience requires more information. The Nk'Mip may want people to enjoy the literal taste of their wine but I also believe that through the taste experience and the information it provides, they want people to learn about their world. Their wine is a way for them to make meaning and express their history, their values, and their identity through symbols and metaphors.

The production of Nk'Mip wines by the OIB is way to invite people to visit their place, as a geographical location, but also a place that encompasses the concepts of terroir and taste. The OIB, through their Nk'Mip Project, want to create opportunities for people to taste their wines in unique settings, at wine festivals, at their own winery, resorts, and golf courses. They are promoting wine and eco-tourism based on their own culture. They are trying to capitalize on the growing tourist demand to travel to wine-producing regions to taste new wines and seek out "authentic" indigenous experiences (Anderson et al. 2007).

The Nk'Mip Desert Cultural Centre features Aboriginal architecture, designed and constructed to display native art and artifacts. Its purpose is to share the history

of the people and the place through interpretation and preservation of the culture and the landscape. A traditional tule mat tepee, an underground pit house, and a sweat lodge are some of the recreated structures of their past. A trail system wandering through the desert features signs that describe plant life, terrain, and the history of the Okanagan The Nk'Mip are continually people. exploring ways to protect the remaining portions of this biologically diverse pocket of the Sonoran Desert. They are actively working on ways to restore habitat and reintroduce threatened species to this wildsage countryside (Black 2004).

It may be argued that the Nk'Mip lack tradition in the wine industry, which is an essential part of Trubek's construction of the concept of "taste of place". And without that tradition, how can they market the concept of terroir to evoke a nostalgia that has no ancestral heritage? I believe this makes the Nk'Mip's decision to bottle and sell their wine branded with their name all the more intriguing. I agree with Trubek's (2008) assertion that wine, when theorizing about taste and identity, is a different type of most products commodity than consumption that focus on the economic exchange and use values (Warde 1997). Wine, like culture, represents a fluid, dynamic process. It is influenced by the subjectivity of a complex matrix of variables. Each grape variety and vintage is supposed to taste different. Each winery and winemaker wants to create different tastes that reflect these variables. They want to create a taste experience that conveys specific information.

The Nk'Mip seem to understand this notion that wine presents the perfect combination of taste sensation and taste experience, of subjective and objective discernment. It involves pleasure but also requires shared standards of assessment (Korsmeyer 1999). Through the invention of

a new tradition, producing internationally recognized wines, the Nk'Mip are able to promote their culture. Their venture into grape growing and wine production, while part of a business plan to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of their people, also reflects the ancestry and traditions of a people who have always adapted to the environment and changed with the times (Sarell 1995). They are doing this by participating in the global economy on their own terms, using a collective approach centered on the local community and grass roots participation (Anderson et al. 2007).

Anderson and colleagues (2007) define the Nk'Mip's understanding of entrepreneurship as an economy-building process which reflects an ideology, or what Trubek (2005) would call a foodview. This ideology or foodview has the Nk'Mip rejecting industrial development imposed on them and instead focusing on shaping their businesses and lives on things they view as distinctly Aboriginal. This is clearly reflected in one of their mottos: "working with business to preserve our past by strengthening our future" (Anderson et al. 2007:213). This ideology represents an understanding of and conscious decision to employ their cultural capital (Turner 1978) to draw attention to their products. It also illustrates their willingness to participate in the commodification of their culture to a national and global marketplace (Anderson et al 2007, Gottdiener 2000, Warde 1997). This reflects the trend in Indigenous development towards economic entrepreneurial approach to the new world economy (Agrawal 1995). The Nk'Mip subscribe to the collective economic objectives of ending dependency on federal government payments and taking control over economic activity on their traditional lands (Anderson et al 2007). The Nk'Mip use their wines, and indeed many of their business ventures, as part of a unified way to develop and promote self sustainability, independence, and prosperity for their people.

Some interesting questions remain after this exploration and suggest further research is required. A more in-depth ethnographic study of the Nk'Mip and their involvement in the wine industry would require on-site fieldwork. This would ideally involve qualitative interviewing of band members, vineyard and winery workers; observation; participant surveys demographic information of consumers of their wines; detailed sales information; and more historical research.¹⁷ One of the main questions, and one that my exploration did not uncover any relevant information to address, is whether the Nk'Mip band members actually consume their own wine and if so, what does it "taste" like to them?. Can you be a taste maker if you are not a taste consumer?

Do the Nk'Mip make any connection to the reported health benefits of moderate wine consumption?¹⁸ How does the Nk'Mip's apparent economic success affect their relationships with the other six Bands in the Okanagan Nation? Do the Nk'Mip see this "taste of place" concept as a way to make meaning for their lives?

Perhaps an individualistic perspective is not important to the Nk'Mip themselves. To the people of the OIB, the Nk'Mip Project appears to be a celebration of their history and their contemporary lives. The Nk'Mip see business as a way to promote and preserve their culture. Anderson and colleagues (2007) even suggest that the desire and actions of the Nk'Mip to improve the socio-economic circumstances of their people represents "nation rebuilding" (202). Despite the potential challenges and negative implications of this rebuilding process 19 the Nk'Mip are committed to participating in the global economy on their own terms.

Trubek (2008) sees "taste of place" (248) as a shared aspiration to build experiential knowledge. The Nk'Mip have successfully used their culture, past and present, and cultural identity to create and promote a product: wine. At the same time, they have used that product to promote their culture and cultural identity to others.

The "taste of place" concept contributes to anthropology by relating place, time, and people - their customs and ancestral heritage, to the invention of new traditions and products that shape and reinforce cultural identities. This paper illustrates that identity formation is a dynamic process, shaped by past and present physical and social environments, a process people use in different ways to construct meanings in and about their lives. In this regard, through literal and symbolic meanings I suggest the Nk'Mip have created a "taste of place", and the proof is in and on the bottle.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Helen Vallianatos, my graduate program advisor, for her guidance and support on this paper, and on all my past, present and future anthropological endeavours. I also wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their constructive comments and suggestions.

Notes

- ¹ The intention of Walsh, the editor, and Walsh, the school teacher (no relation to the editor), was to demonstrate that the children's art, grounded in Okanagan history and identity, could contribute meaningfully to Canadian society.
- ² For an example of their wine labels, see Uhttp://www.nkmipcellars.comU.

- ³ Uhttp://www.oib.caU and Uhttp://www.oibdc.comU, accessed March 6, 2009.
- ⁴ See Korsmeyer's edited volume on related articles in The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink (2005).
- ⁵ *Umami*, or savoriness, is frequently cited as a scientifically accepted addition to the basic taste sense categories.
- ⁶ For a list of the OIB's business projects, see Uhttp://www.oibdc.comU, accessed March 3, 2009.
- ⁷ For an overview on the origins of the Plateau people of British Columbia see Wright (1995), Baptiste (1995), Hudson and Ignace (2004), Prentiss and Kuijt (2004), and Hudson (2004).
- ⁸ Vincor International, a major participant in the North American super-premium wine market, is a 49% partner in this project. They are noted for their wine expertise and ability to successfully acquire and profitably integrate wine companies under a common vision (Anderson et al. 2007:214).
- ⁹ Figures from <u>Uhttp://oib.ca/gateway.asp</u>U, accessed on March 6, 2009.
- ¹⁰ See Anderson et al. (2007:213) for statistics on revenue growth, employment income, and unemployment rates.
- An Overview of the British Columbia Grape Industry, Ministry of Agriculture, Food And Fisheries, December 2004.
- ¹² See Smith's (2006) edited volume *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine* for a collection of scholarly essays about the experience of wine in the glass and in the mind.
- For an example of their wine labels see Uhttp://www.nkmipcellars.comU.
- For a list of some of the awards see Uhttp://www.nkmipcellars.comU.
- ¹⁵ Quotes from Uhttp://www.oibdc.com/vine.htmU, accessed March 3, 2009.
- ¹⁶ To view their tasting notes and vintage reports see Uhttp://www.nkmipcellars.comU.
- ¹⁷ I had the opportunity to meet with Chief Louie and the Band's Chief Operating Officer, at the OIB offices located in Oliver, British Columbia, in August of 2009. I discussed with them the possibility of conducting future onsite fieldwork at the winery and in their community. They were receptive to further discussions on the matter.
- ¹⁸ See U<u>http://wine.about.com/health</u>U for links to current research postings, accessed April 5, 2009.
- ¹⁹ For a discussion on challenges and implications on this Indigenous economic development approach to nation building see Anderson et al. (2007) and Beddington (1993).

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