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Tastes of the 'Mongrel' City: Geographies of Memory, Spice, Hospitality and Forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

This article examines cultural fragments – local places, people’s gestures, stories, tastes, affective landscapes – to map geographies of ‘Africa’ in a historically ‘mixed’ urban Australian neighbourhood. Focusing on a small Ethiopian business, Addis Ababa Café, the article develops an analysis framed by economies of nostalgic flavours and intimations of transnational belonging. Conceptually, the article approaches the question of how different people manage the task of living together in ‘our mongrel cities’ from two directions. Firstly, it reworks Giard’s celebrations of ‘doing-cooking’ as embedded knowledge to argue that, in the postcolonial city, memories and spices together constitutes significant cultural capital for identity-based trading. Secondly, it worries at Derrida’s arguments that hospitality and forgiveness are paradoxical. Do their contradictions actually preclude productive analytical connections, even when connections are haunted by ambivalence? Commensality based on alliances of ‘others’ might question at least ethnocentric assumptions of who offers hospitality, who forgives.

KEYWORDS

Food, culture, African cuisine, spices, memory

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