

Indigenous Food Sovereignty, Renewal and U.S. Settler Colonialism

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Abstract

Indigenous peoples often embrace different versions of the concept of food sovereignty. Yet some of these concepts are seemingly based on impossible ideals of food self-sufficiency. I will suggest in this essay that for at least some North American Indigenous peoples, food sovereignty movements are not based on such ideals, even though they invoke concepts of cultural revitalization and political sovereignty. Instead, food sovereignty is a strategy of Indigenous resurgence that negotiates structures of settler colonialism that erase the ecological value of certain foods for Indigenous peoples.

Introduction

Indigenous peoples often embrace different concepts of food sovereignty to frame their ongoing efforts to achieve self-determination and justice. Yet concepts of food sovereignty can come across as so many impossible ideals of community food self-sufficiency and cultural autonomy. I will suggest in this essay that some North American Indigenous peoples, food sovereignty movements are not really based on such ideals, even though they invoke concepts of cultural revitalization and political sovereignty in relation to food. Instead, food sovereignty should be seen—at least in part—as a strategic process of Indigenous resurgence that negotiates structures

of settler colonialism that erase what I will call the ecological value of certain foods for Indigenous peoples.

The strategic process involves prioritizing certain foods for renewal. These foods can motivate Indigenous collective capacities to address multiple health, cultural, educational, and political issues associated with settler-colonial erasure. To understand this concept of food sovereignty, it is critical to be able connect settler colonialism with the ecological value of food. I will begin by discussing criticisms of food sovereignty based on concerns that it represents impractical ideals before moving on to covering the ideas of the ecological value of food, settler colonialism and food sovereignty as a strategic process.

Food Sovereignty and Food Self-Sufficiency

There are many concepts of food sovereignty that express diverse themes about the relationship between communities and food systems. Often, concepts of food sovereignty emphasize food-production systems characterized by community food self-sufficiency or cultural autonomy in relation to food. These concepts refer to community-based control over the major dimensions of food production, distribution, and consumption, and the recycling or disposal of food refuse—from cultural customs to political institutions. The Detroit Food Justice Task Force, for example, describes food sovereignty as “liberating land . . . for the production of food for communities,” “hosting collective meals in our communities as a way of connecting people across generations and cultural backgrounds . . .,” and “forging new models of collective control of land and waterways” (Detroit Food Justice Task Force 2014). The Indigenous Circle of the People’s Food

Policy Project in Canada describes food sovereignty as embodying the idea of “food as sacred, part of the web of relationships with the natural world that define culture and community” (People’s Food Policy Project 2014). The International Institute for Development claims that realizing food sovereignty involves “reclaiming autonomous food systems” (Pimbert 2009).

Ideas of food self-sufficiency and cultural autonomy appear across the variety of sovereigns that are referenced through the several origins of concepts of food sovereignty cited by scholars.

Some scholars see the origin of food sovereignty as La Via Campesina’s (LVC) 1996 involvement in the World Food Summit. LVC defined food sovereignty as the “right of each nation to maintain and develop their own capacity to produce foods that are crucial to national and community food security, respecting cultural diversity and diversity of production methods” (cited in Hospes 2014: 120).¹ Other scholars suggest that food sovereignty originated in earlier instances, such as Mexico’s 1983 National Food Program that used the concept as a form of national control, as opposed to the control of local communities, over the food system (Edelman 2014).

Some scholars are concerned that food sovereignty suggests so many unreasonable or impossible ideals of a community’s complete control over its own food system. Bernstein (2014), for example, argues that food sovereignty discourses invoke “emblematic instances of the virtues of pleasant/small-scale/family farming as capital’s other. The two are often connected, so that the individual peasant farm (and community) exemplifies the way forward to save the planet, to feed its population in socially more equitable and ecologically more sustainable ways” (1032). The challenge posed by Bernstein, as I read the essay, is that the viability of some concepts of food

sovereignty rests on whether we can claim that communities can live up to this ideal. But this ideal is of course rather problematic. Many communities cannot extricate themselves from dependency on trade or aid stemming from globalized food systems. Nor is it clear whether farming based on peasant “virtues” could provide sufficient food quality and quantity for both feeding local communities or trading with other local communities.

Thompson (2015) discusses how if food sovereignty refers to the idea of a nation feeding its entire population, there will be “some degree of skepticism about food sovereignty among the policy specialists that have focused on getting nutritionally adequate diets to poor people for the last fifty years” (75). Though Thompson also suggests that “the idea points to the way entire rural communities, local cultures, and longstanding social relations are brought together through the production, preparation, and consumption of food . . . The continuance of community depends upon people to care for one another . . . The survival and maintenance of these food practices is critical to the sustainability of these communities in every sense of the word” (ibid., 75–76). For Thompson, concepts of food sovereignty are useful for cultural continuance and identity, but too idealistic for dealing with the challenges of food security in the context of globalization.

Other scholars emphasize that many local communities do not even embody enough of the values and tastes associated with the food self-sufficiency and cultural autonomy aspects of food sovereignty. For example, some communities have developed tastes for and dependencies on nonlocal foods, so that today it is incorrect to suggest that there is a resounding distaste for foreign foods by some communities that embrace food sovereignty (Steckley 2015). Moreover,

food sovereignty and local agrarian reform movements often rely on problematic, whether ahistorical or “traditional”, class and gender categories that are oppressive for some community members (Bernstein 2010, Park et al. 2015, Minkoff-Zern 2012). There are also concerns raised that certain ideals of local food fail to consider the responsibilities that different sovereigns and groups have to aid and trade equitably with one another (Navin 2014).

Much of the literature just described addresses the uses of food sovereignty by groups outside of North American-US sphere Indigenous contexts. Though the exact term “food sovereignty” in English was rarely used by these groups until recently, we should consider that North American Indigenous peoples, going back several hundred years, were using English-language concepts and frames associated with concepts of inherent sovereignty, self-determination, cultural integrity, subsistence harvesting, and treaty rights as ways of justifying their own control over foods that matter culturally, economically, and nutritionally. For example, in the process of treaty-making in the 19th century, many Indigenous peoples ensured their retention of rights to continue harvesting foods in the territories they ceded to the US. Well over a century after signing these treaties, the same Indigenous groups continue to protect and exercise these rights, often working with the US court system and co-management arrangements with the US federal and state governments (Wilkinson 2005, Nesper 2002, Brown 1994, Weaver 1996).

As a Potawatomi scholar-activist, I began to wonder whether Indigenous North American food sovereignties were just so many ideals with little practical value for true change and transformation of our food systems. Upon further reflection, I realized that these concerns were not taking into account how I would understand the ways Indigenous peoples often understand

the value of food that uses of food sovereignty seek to invoke. Moreover, the concerns did not seem to address a particular form of oppression that many Indigenous peoples face in North America, settler colonialism. In the rest of this essay, I will connect these missing pieces together in order to suggest that concepts of food sovereignty need not always be ideals, but strategic processes for negotiating structures of settler colonialism that promote Indigenous resurgence.

The Hub-like or Ecological Value of Food

North American Indigenous peoples living in the US settler sphere are visible actors addressing the impacts of colonialism on the food systems that affect them. Food systems are complex chains of food production, distribution, consumption, and the recirculation of refuse. Indigenous organizations, such as the *Indigenous Environmental Network* and *Honor the Earth*, are at the forefront of many food debates such as the debate over the ethics of genetically modified organisms. Through organizations such the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and the Northwest Indian Fish Commission (NIFC), Tribes and First Nations in North America resisted US and Canadian attempts to deny Indigenous persons their rights to harvest in treaty areas. Various Indigenous peoples in North America have formed large network and cooperative organizations, such as the *Intertribal Agriculture Council*, to protect native seeds, to cultivate supply chains separate from capture by powerful corporations, and to protect subsistence and sacred foods from pollution and other forms of ecological degradation.

Indigenous persons have sought to redefine the connections among nutrition, colonialism and conditions such as diabetes and hypertension that affect Indigenous peoples disproportionately (Walters and Simoni 2002, Arquette et al. 2002). In many of these anti-colonial food movements,

Indigenous persons claim that the issues they face concern values associated with food that are not reducible to the taste, quantity, or nutrient content of food. Consider some examples.

Speaking on the relation between treaty rights and mining, genetic modification, and other threats to wild rice agriculture, Norman Deschampe, former Minnesota Chippewa Tribal President, said, “We are of the opinion that the wild rice rights assured by treaty accrue not only to individual grains of rice, but to the very essence of the resource. We were not promised just any wild rice; that promise could be kept by delivering sacks of grain to our members each year. We were promised the rice that grew in the waters of our people, and all the value that rice holds” (Andow et al. 2009: 3). Here, Deschampe references the value of the rice connected to a particular kind of habitat, with intrinsic value to Ojibwe people that cannot be replaced by importing rice from somewhere else.

In Alaska, extraction industries, especially oil and gas, pose threats to many foods that Indigenous communities there depend on. In an article on the threat of oil drilling to the whaling tradition of a particular Alaska Native village, Edward Itta, former mayor of that village, describes whaling as not merely important for distribution of nutrition. “No one person can catch a whale. It takes a whole community. Because of the whale, we share, we are very close, we come together. Without it, our way of life—what we pass on to our kids and grandkids—would be diminished” (Birger 2012). Again, we see reference to a value of food that extends beyond its taste and nutrient content. For communities with comprehensive practices associated with particular foods, immediate threats to those foods are also threats to the fabric of the communities.

In another case, involving threats from oil industry to Indigenous peoples in the Yukon Territory, Norma Kassi says of her Gwich'in community: "We cannot, however, simply change our diet. If we were to change suddenly and start eating store-bought foods more, then disease would increase and our rate of death would be higher, because it would be too rapid a change, too much of a shock to our systems" (Kassi 1996: 80). For Kassi, while adaptation is always possible, food nonetheless has a special value that makes certain rapid adaptations harmful for communities.

Winona LaDuke, writing on the restoration of sturgeon, which figures importantly as part of her Ojibwe community's culture and subsistence, writes about the words of a fellow tribal member: "As Holkamm surmises, . . . 'We are lucky that [sturgeon] are coming back to White Earth. The fish themselves never knew that invisible border of the US, Canada, or any of the counties' (or any other jurisdictions)." LaDuke writes, "Maybe the fish will help a diverse set of people work together to make something right. . . .The fish help us remember all of those relations, and in their own way, help us recover ourselves" (LaDuke 1999: 41–42). Sturgeon has the type of value that can serve the collective renewal of Ojibwe people—a complex form of remembering that is suitable for today's challenges.

Elizabeth Hoover's work, describing issues with pollution and fish, quotes Haudenosaunee community leader Henry Lickers on the language and culture of tying knots, the continuance of which is being challenged as the fishery is affected by pollution: "People forget, in their own culture, what you call the knot that you tie in a net. And so, a whole section of your language and culture is lost because no one is tying those nets anymore. The interrelation between men and

women, when they tied nets, the relationship between adults or elders and young people, as they tied nets together, the stories. . . that whole social infrastructure that was around the fabrication of that net disappeared” (Hoover 2013: 5). Lickers focuses heavily on the value of fish in relation to the intergenerational connections that keep communities vibrant and self-supporting.

The Diné Policy Institute recently put out a report on food sovereignty in the Navajo Nation. The report states:

In relation to cultivated plants, it is said that the Holy People shared with the Diné people the teachings of how to plant, nurture, prepare, eat and store our sacred cultivated crops, such as corn. The importance of these teachings to our well-being was made clear in that the Holy People shared that we would be safe and healthy until the day that we forgot our seeds, our farms, and our agriculture. It was said that when we forgot these things, we would be afflicted by disease and hardship again, which is what some elders point to as the onset of diabetes, obesity and other ills facing Diné people today. (Diné Policy Institute 2014: 38)

The value of sacred crops serves as an indicator of people’s collective health and well-being today according to the report.

In these examples, Indigenous persons are articulating a distinct value for food that is not reducible to scientifically assessable nutritional qualities or the quantities of food produced by or administered to particular populations. For the voices just featured, food production, labor, preparation, consumption, and disposal are woven tightly with land tenure, a community’s way of life, reciprocal gift giving and life sustenance, connecting people in a community, and respect

for nonhuman life. In these ways, food's value is that it serves as a type of hub. For food can somehow bring together, or convene, many of the relationships required for people to live well and make plans for the future. The hub-like value of certain foods, such as whale or sturgeon, allows them to convene biological, environmental, cultural, social, economic, political, and spiritual aspects of communities. While social institutions such as harvesting groups, ceremonies, and treaty organizations help to distribute goods associated with many of the foods described above, from nutrition to cultural preference fulfillment, the Indigenous persons quoted earlier believe that these social institutions would be not be able to thrive if another food were substituted too quickly.

Food's value is hub-like, in the sense of a centripetal force pulling certain people, nonhumans and ecosystems together in ways that promote collective action. More generally, food serves as a particular kind of motivator of the collective capacities of particular Indigenous peoples to cultivate and tend, produce, distribute, and consume their own foods, to recirculate refuse, and to acquire trusted foods and ingredients from other populations. The concept of collective capacities aims to describe an ecology, i.e., an ecological system, of interacting humans, nonhuman beings (animals, plants, etc.), entities (spiritual, inanimate, etc.), and landscapes (climate regions, boreal zones, etc.) that are conceptualized and operate purposefully to facilitate a collective's range of adaptation options to metascale forces. Metascale forces refer to disruptions and perturbations to systems that require those systems to adapt and adjust. They may be associated with changes in rainfall patterns (i.e., climate change) or with invasions by other populations brought about through global forces (e.g., the gold rushes and the fur trade). So, they can be either anthropogenic or based on complex earth systems over which humans

exercise little influence. Like most conceptions of ecology (including agroecology) today, I use the term *ecology* not to designate a system always seeking to return to a particular equilibrium. Rather, ecology refers to systems that are organized in ways that reflect perspectives on more or less suitable ranges of adaptations to various metascale forces that have acted over time (Whyte 2015).

We can understand an ecology as another way of describing a people's homeland. For food to express its role as a hub-like value, then, the entire ecology of the place where human communities live, work, worship, and play has to have certain aquatic, terrestrial, and climatic conditions in which humans are actively engaged socially, culturally, economically, and politically. In this sense, I will refer to the hub-like value of food as its ecological value. The ecological value of certain foods involves the ways in which those foods are irreplaceable elements of a community's range of collective capacities to adapt to change. That is, in many cases food systems have evolved so that they are resilient to many of the challenges they have faced over time. But newer challenges that fall outside that range, especially intervention of other human groups, may interfere with, perturb, or degrade the ability of a system to provide valued aspects of a collective's quality of life, such as cultural integrity, freedom, food security, public health, among others. A people's homeland is a place where they can participate in an ecology that is conducive to a range of options for adaptation.

Food Injustice and Settler Colonialism

To understand some of the senses of Indigenous food sovereignty in which I am concerned here, we first have to understand how a particular form of colonialism in North America specifically targets the ecological, or homeland, value of food. The ecological value of food is connected to the range of adaptation options to local and metascale forces that groups have. *Settler* colonialism is a structure of oppression that wrongfully interferes with Indigenous capacities to maintain an adaptive capacity in their homelands. I will discuss how the structure of interference is a settlement-driven homeland-inscription process that motivates settler populations to erase Indigenous homelands, replacing them with their own homelands and futurity. In this sense, *settler colonization* is a structured process of erasing another population's range of adaptation options. My brief description in this section only touches on some of the themes from the diverse literature on settler colonialism (Lefevre 2015). My own interpretations of settler colonialism draw from literatures in Indigenous gender studies, feminism, environmental and climate justice and education, some of which have developed concepts of settler colonialism as a structure of oppression before "settler colonialism" became coined academically in more recent times (Calhoun et. al. 2007; Goeman and Denetdale 2009; LaDuke 1993; Grinde & Johansen 1995; Whyte 2015; Walker et. al 2013; Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013).

Settlers come to permanently inscribe—that is, incise or physically engrave—a homeland for themselves into Indigenous ecologies or homelands. While part of the motivation for settlement involves capitalist extraction of resources to the place settlers originate from and labor exploitation of Indigenous populations, the ultimate desire is to create a homeland in the "new" territory so that the settlers will never have to return permanently. Making a homeland is a process of inscription, that is, it is an ecological endeavor in the sense in which I have been using

the concept of ecology. A territory will only emerge as a settler homeland if the origin, religious and cultural narratives, social ways of life, and political and economic systems (e.g., property) are physically incised and engraved into the waters, soils, air, and other environmental dimensions of the landscape. Settler *ecologies* are inscribed so that settlers can activate their own cultural, economic, and political aspirations and collective capacities. In this sense, waves of settlement seek to embed ecologies required for their own collective capacities to flourish in the landscapes they seek to occupy permanently.

As discussed earlier, the ecologies on which Indigenous collective capacities are based have their own origin, religious and cultural narratives, societal ways of life, and political and economic systems. For settlers, Indigenous ecologies can impede settler tactics to establish the legitimacy of their homelands, including settlers' claims to have title to land, morally praiseworthy religious missions, and exclusive political and cultural sovereignty. So as to eradicate any markers or physical obstacles challenging their legitimacy, settlers seek to erase the ecologies required for Indigenous capacity to adapt to change.

Settlement, then, actively erases Indigenous peoples' collective capacities as a means of inscribing settler ecologies into Indigenous homelands. In this way, settlers actually seek to eliminate themselves *as settlers*. Settlers seek to render the territory *their* homeland in every dimension—cultural, social, economic, political and so on. Settlers engage in a process, then, that seeks to make their ecologies permanent and inevitable. They do so through creating origin stories and myths that seek to justify their arrival and development of the land (e.g. “the pilgrims”) to the political formation of their own polities, from national governments to

municipal and subnational governments, that serve to shelter the homeland-inscription process through laws, policies and military and economic force.

In the US and Canada, settler-inscription and replacement engenders settler collective capacities through what are now known to be rather unsustainable, industrial means: deforestation, mineral and fossil fuel extraction, petrochemical and other industries producing water and air pollution, commodity agriculture, urban sprawl and widespread automobile use, and so on. These means are built into the settler narratives of homeland, such as in narratives of the “Americanness” and wholesomeness of industrious “blue collar” work that built the economy. They are sometimes hidden in plain sight, such as in narratives of recreation and natural beauty of parts of the US that mask histories of how people of color, Indigenous and other communities have been forcibly relocated and made to live in places with disproportionately greater levels of risk from pollution and radiation.

The erasure, through industrial means, of Indigenous food systems is particularly pronounced. As a large literature on environmental injustice in North America shows, industrial technologies, from weaponry to mining to petrochemical facilities, have polluted and destroyed terrestrial and aquatic habitats that Indigenous peoples cultivated for food (Grinde and Johansen 1995; Grijalva 2008; Agyeman et al. 2010; Hoover et al. 2012). The examples from the previous section each testified to the hub-like or ecological value of food for particular Indigenous peoples, pushing back against industrial technologies and practices that curtailed the cultivated-habitats and cultivated-landscapes Indigenous peoples maintained in order for certain foods to express this

form of value. Industrialization was and continues to be part of a settlement process aimed at erasing Indigenous homelands that developed around the ecological value of certain foods.

Food Sovereignty, Ecologies, and Settlement

Settlement, then, refers to processes of ecological, or homeland, inscription that combine military, commercial, and cultural structures. The fallout of the homeland-inscription process is that, as Indigenous peoples, we continue to exercise political and cultural self-determination, even though there are now these states, such as the US and Canada, that are perceived by many people as the major sovereigns in the places where Indigenous peoples live, work, and play.

Settlement has altered North American Indigenous ecologies to such a degree that it is hard to recognize any dimensions of historic or contemporary Indigenous homelands in them.

Though one important form of settler erasure is to motivate Indigenous assimilation, Indigenous populations do not even gain the same privileges and benefits as understood from a settler worldview through the assimilation process. Indeed, the outcomes of the settler inscription process are higher health-risk factors for many Indigenous peoples from relatively high environmental exposures to natural and industrial toxins (Grijalva 2008), diabetes from inadequate or improper diets (Milburn 2004), and mental health concerns from historical and personal trauma (Evans-Campbell 2008). Socioeconomic factors can magnify health risks for Indigenous persons living in impoverished urban, rural, or remote communities with high suicide, alcoholism, or infant/child mortality rates (Sarche and Spicer 2008, Kuhnlein and Receveur 1996, Kuhnlein et al. 2004).

At base, settler erasure challenges the very root of Indigenous touchstones for planning for future generations, because the future embedded within the landscape becomes a settler one (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013; Walker et. al 2013). If we go along with the settler ecologies, we face numerous immediate problems that are hard to solve (e.g., suicide) and that can be divisive (poverty and drug abuse). Yet the habitats and landscapes needed to establish more beneficial collective capacities and trade with other groups are degraded beyond our ability to fully adapt with them to our contemporary needs. Our range of adaptive options have been substantially curtailed. In the face of settler colonialism, one of the primary issues Indigenous peoples face concerns how to design, plan and implement ecologies that can create physical, cultural, and social well-being in our societies. Food sovereignty represents a particular strategy for how to live in spite of this structure of oppression.

Consider, for example, *Anishinaabek*² food sovereignty in relation to wild rice in the Great Lakes region in North America. Anishinaabek have a complex heritage of adaptive, seasonal, group activities of tending, cultivating, gathering, harvesting, processing, distributing, storing, and consuming diverse animal and plant foods, recirculating the refuse and unharvested materials within the ecosystem. These activities form Anishinaabe ecologies. Foods in this systematic cycle that are still harvested today include walleye, blueberries, deer, hare, maple, sturgeon, and wild rice, among others—for there were many more foods and medicinal plants in this system historically. As an ecology, the activities associated with the seasonal round renew the family, community, cultural, economic, social, and political relationships that connect Anishinaabe persons with one another and with all the plants, animals and other entities in the environment,

even the water itself. As Frances Van Zile, a Sokaogon Chippewa member, puts it, describing a future without wild rice: “My whole way of being as an Indian would be destroyed. I can’t imagine being without it. And there is no substitute for this lake’s rice.” (Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission 1995). According to these words, wild rice has ecological value.

In the case of wild rice, Anishinaabek have prioritized its revitalization or renewal, as settler Americans have done quite a bit to threaten wild rice. For example, in Minnesota, wild rice has declined by half in the last 100 years (Andow et al. 2009). Neighboring settler American groups engage in activities such as mining, damming, growing commercial paddy rice for mass distribution, and recreational boating that directly affect wild rice and its habitat—particularly the relationship between water and wild rice. These activities can modify water levels, water flow, water quality, and the diversity of plants and animals in the lake. Many Anishinaabe are also concerned that settler Americans who breed and grow varieties of commercial paddy rice for mass harvest are not careful enough to ensure that these strains avoid affecting wild rice. Settler Americans also began to adopt “wild rice” as their own, and some Anishinaabe people adapted by selling their harvest to others who would process it off reservation. The Anishinaabe rice was sold at a premium price as a hand harvested product. In the 1960s and 1970s, when Settler Americans determined how to domesticate wild rice, the price dropped, shutting Anishinaabek out of the market. Settler Americans further captured the market through accepting the idea that it is appropriate for settler companies to market wild rice as if it were harvested and processed by Anishinaabek (LaDuke 2007, Wallwork 1997).

Declines and threats to wild rice in such a short time period put immense and rapid pressures on the ecological value of food for Anishinaabek—forcing them to adapt at a harmful pace that disrupted the maintenance of a range of adaptation options. Without wild rice, Anishinaabe lose an integral glue holding together biological, family, social, cultural, economic, ecological, political, and spiritual dimensions of group life. Anishinaabe nations today face many challenges, including relatively higher rates of diabetes, food insecurity, and hunger (Sarche and Spicer 2008, Cho et al. 2014). Culturally, certain ceremonies are becoming less common (Wallwork 1997). Though, according to some, the US has improved the quality and distribution of commodity foods on reservations, Anishinaabe persons in nations such as White Earth see the protection and revitalization of wild rice as integral to fully addressing problems of nutrition, cultural decline, and poverty (Siple 2011).

Motivation to protect wild rice has produced an incredibly diverse set of strategic responses that support the protection of Anishinaabek from numerous problems associated with settler colonialism. The responses seek to establish institutions that renew and restore cultural, social, and political systems associated with wild rice. In this way, wild rice is an invaluable motivator for institutional and community responses to create a range of adaptation options that do not require Anishinaabe to succumb to settler erasure.

Consider some examples. The natural resources and environmental agencies of many Anishinaabe Tribal governments, such as the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe or the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, devote institutional and staff resources to learning about the biology and ecology of wild rice through connecting with elders and ricers and performing in-

house scientific research and habitat restoration (Circle of Flight and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative 2014). Anishinaabe treaty organizations, such as the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) and Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority (CORA), engage in research and advocate for law and policy reforms that protect wild rice in ceded territories, where many Anishinaabe communities exercise stewardship and harvesting rights. For example, “GLIFWC focuses on the preservation and enhancement of wild rice in ceded territory lakes. Annual surveys are performed on existing beds to determine density and overall health of bed. Select lakes are also reseeded for the purpose of enhancement or re-establishing old beds. Recently, GLIFWC completed a comprehensive wild rice lake inventory in the ceded territories with documentation necessary to develop and launch a comprehensive wild rice management plan.” This information is often used in law and policy contexts as evidence that environmental threats, such as mining, are harming rice populations (Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission 2013, 1995).

Anishinaabe-led nongovernmental organizations, such as the White Earth Land Recovery Project or the Native Wild Rice Coalition, are involved in many projects promoting cultural life and economic viability around wild rice (LaDuke and Carlson 2003). Some of these organizations seek to create markets for wild rice on terms that are financially viable Anishinaabek and to educate settler populations. The *Nibi and Manoomin* (water and rice) *Symposium*, which is held every two years, attempts to bring together different parties that can affect wild rice, from paddy rice growers and representatives of mining companies to Anishinaabe leaders, family members, elders, and representatives of Indigenous organizations. The symposium seeks to create cross-cultural education so that people sharing the Great Lakes can respect each other’s ways of life

and act ethically toward one another. The symposium is hosted by an Ojibwe Tribe in the region (Andow et al. 2009).

In these examples, wild rice has the power to convene Anishinaabe around a number of strategic responses to settler erasure of their ecologies, or homelands. Other foods, such as the commodity cheese and spam distributed through US food assistance programs, or microwave meals, cannot replace wild rice as comparable contributors to the establishment and maintenance of such an array of institutional responses. Wild rice continues to have an ecological value that, if prioritized, can support the renewal of both the rice itself and of Anishinaabek well-being, even though much of the settler damage to the Indigenous food system is permanent in the sense that Anishinaabek will likely continue to eat mixed diets of different foods, from Indigenous and local foods to industrially-produced foods.

Food sovereignty for some North American Indigenous persons, on my view, is not really based on ideals of food self-sufficiency and cultural autonomy. Indeed, food sovereignty is a practical response to a particular structure of oppression that seeks to erase the ecologies that constitute Indigenous homelands. In the case of wild rice, Anishinaabe people prioritize rice for renewal as a way of adapting to today's circumstances, planning for the future, finding new terms of trade and exchange, and educating and reconciling with the settler society. Food sovereignty, then, serves more as a strategic process whereby foods that are renewed serve to engender ranges of adaptive options that are appropriate when confronted with the challenges of Indigenous erasure in settler landscapes.

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¹ I wish to note here that LVC has developed a complex and evolving concept of food sovereignty and that the definition quoted here is just an excerpt.

² I tried to use English spellings of words in Anishinaabemowin (the language of the Anishinaabek) that can be identified by diverse Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Odawa people and people who work in relation to this language. I recognize that there are many accents and spelling systems, and that the one I am using is in some ways the least similar to how members of my Tribe (Potawatomi) engage in English-language spelling.