Indigenous Food Sovereignty
Literature Review

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Introduction

Traditional foods are central to culture and self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have practiced food systems intertwined with the plants, animals, lands, and waters around them for thousands of years. The essential link between Indigenous cultures and the environments they are part of is exemplified in the names of peoples such as the Tsleil-Waututh Nation, known as the People of the Inlet, and the Anishinaabe, known as the People of the Wild Rice. These connections have frequently been severed by colonialism, producing devastating effects on Indigenous health, culture, and sovereignty. In the face of this devastation, the flourishing of Indigenous food sovereignty constitutes a critical form of resistance to colonial violence.

This paper provides a broad review of the academic literature on Indigenous food sovereignty, analyzing themes and case studies. I argue that the 5 themes (health, law and the state, social perceptions of food, gender, and free trade) reflect helpful entry points for understanding this multidimensional topic. The case studies detail important aspects of food sovereignty, including data ownership, anticolonial resistance, relationality, and seed saving. I begin with a background on traditional food systems and their disruption, then examine how food sovereignty, Indigenous food sovereignty, and food security are defined in the literature. Then, I explore the 5 themes to ground Indigenous food sovereignty in key debates and challenges. Finally, I detail 5 case

studies. This review aims to give the reader a sense of the inherently political nature of food systems through the experiences of Indigenous peoples, drawing on a wide range of illustrative texts, examples, and cases.

Background

Traditional foods are critical to the physical and cultural survival of Indigenous peoples worldwide. Research has consistently shown that Indigenous peoples who consume traditional foods are physically and mentally healthier, experience greater food security, and have more connection with their cultures (Bersamin *et al.,* 2008; Schultz, 1999; Smith *et al.,* 2019; Walch and Bersamin, 2019, cited in Land *et al.,* 2021). Traditional foodways serve as an important infrastructure for passing cultural and traditional knowledge down through generations (Drugova, Curtis, and Kim 2022, cited in Gutierrez, Kaloostian, and Redvers, 2023), making them essential to the survivance of Native cultures.

Settler colonialism has devastated Indigenous food systems. As a practice, structure, and logic, settler colonialism consistently entails the weaponization of food against Native peoples as a tool of genocide and a mechanism of colonial power. Burnett, Hay, and Chambers (2016) demonstrate how North American settler governments have intentionally and systematically imposed hunger, malnutrition, and food insecurity in order "to erase and replace Indigenous peoples and cultures" (cited in McKinley and Jernigan, 2023). This form of colonial violence transcends geographic and temporal boundaries: food has been weaponized throughout Israel's occupation of Palestine (Abu Awwad, 2016; Haddad, 2024; Meneley, 2014) and by the settler colonial state of Australia (Fazzino, 2019).

Common technique colonizers use to disrupt traditional foodways is imposing bans on traditional foods. Amaranth is a staple food for Aztec people and other groups in Mesoamerica. It is a crucial source of protein and amino acids, and, beyond its nutritional value, is a cultural centerpiece with immense spiritual importance (Siegel, 2022). The amaranth plant was used in celebrations of Huītzilōpōchtli, the god of the sun and war (Siegel, 2022). Seeing this spiritual importance as a threat to the spread of Christianity, Spanish colonizers banned amaranth and punished Aztecs for saving amaranth seeds (Siegel, 2022). However, through covert acts of resistance, Indigenous farmers secretly saved and cultivated amaranth seeds, allowing it to remain a prominent food today (Siegel, 2022). Likewise, in Palestine, foraging for the culturally important za'atar, 'akkoub, and miramiyyeh plants was made a criminal offense by the Israeli state beginning in 1977, under the paradigm of nature conservation (Snaije, 2022), despite a lack of evidence that the foraging practices of Palestinians were harming the ecosystem. In 2019, Palestinian human rights lawyer Rabea Eghbariah challenged the ban, arguing that it went deeper than "protecting nature" and instead was part of the ongoing dispossession of Palestinians from their land and cultural practices (Snaije, 2022). As a result, the ban was modified to allow the collection of a small number of edible plants.

Colonizers have also banned ceremonial practices associated with food to disrupt traditional foodways. In Canada, between 1885 and 1951, Indigenous ceremonies known as the Potlatch were prohibited by a federal ban (Noakes, 2023). While the specific forms of Potlatch ceremonies vary by Nation and clan, they are usually centered on a feast and include other cultural practices such as ceremonial dancing. The Potlatch is important for wealth redistribution,

governance, reinforcing solidarity, and the celebration of important events (Noakes, 2023). The ban resulted not only in the disruption of these feasts and the material and social exchanges and practices that accompanied them but also in the confiscation of important cultural objects. There are also adverse social impacts, including a lingering patriarchal culture resulting from colonial influence. When the ban was imposed, the Potlatch had to be practiced in secret, so men would tell federal "Indian agents" that they were going hunting, and then practice the Potlatch in secret (Monkman, 2017). Women, however, could not use this same excuse, leading to the Potlatch being celebrated with only men present (Monkman, 2017). After decades of this pattern, the Potlatch became a male-centric practice, which has marginalized the participation and role of women.

Figure 1: Potlatch Ceremony

Note. Photo by Pillsbury, A. C. (1898) *Dancers at Klukwan Potlatch ceremony, Alaska, October 14, 1898.* In the public domain

In the face of multi-pronged attacks on their food sovereignty, Indigenous peoples have used the flourishing of traditional foodways as a site of resistance. Projects that restore the traditional foods and medicinal practices of Indigenous peoples embody the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty. I will define the term Indigenous food sovereignty in the next section, in which I establish distinctions among food security, food sovereignty, and Indigenous food sovereignty.

Disentangling Food Security, Food Sovereignty, and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

In the following section, I will engage with the literature that defines and distinguishes between three terms used in food politics: food security, food sovereignty, and Indigenous food

sovereignty. I argue that Indigenous food sovereignty is a distinct concept because it incorporates Indigenous knowledge of relationality and reciprocity and extends beyond the legal and rights-based approaches that constitute the (non-Indigenous) food sovereignty approach.

Food Security

Readers have likely encountered the term "food security" before, which the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines as "*access* by all peoples at all times to *enough* food for an active, healthy life [emphasis added]" (Maudrie *et al.,* 2023, p. 1076). Following this definition, food security policies tend to focus on the *quantity* and *availability* of food. However, this can come at the expense of considering the nutritious or cultural *quality* of food. Ultimately, it is not enough to have access to sufficient quantities of food: that food must also be culturally appropriate and healthy.

Food security's narrow focus on access eludes how communities might control the wider social and political conditions that shape that access. After all, one can be "food secure in a prison,] where one might continually *access* safe and nutritious food, yet remain fundamentally disempowered over the process and politics of the food's production, consumption, and distribution (Patel, 2012, p. 1). This is the key limitation of food security: its compatibility with dependency, and therefore its incompatibility with self-determination. It is thus an inadequate framework for addressing the food systems concerns of Indigenous peoples, for whom, like any population, self-determination is paramount.

Food Sovereignty

The limitations of food security contributed to the rise of alternative frameworks, such as food sovereignty. As its name suggests, food sovereignty differs from food security in its emphasis on a people's expanded parameters of control and determination over food systems. Food sovereignty was popularized by the international grassroots peasant movement La Vía Campesina (LVC) at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, Italy. The most popular definition of the term comes from the Nyéléni Declaration, which asserts that "food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (*Declaration of Nyéléni*, 2007).

This illustrates food sovereignty's expanded focus compared with food security, as evidenced by its inclusion of concerns such as ecological sustainability, the cultural nature of food, and the importance of self-definition. While it is a broader category, food sovereignty is not necessarily incompatible with food security. As Edelman (2014, cited in Trauger, 2014) shows, the food sovereignty approach is sometimes positioned purely *against* food security, but at other times it is positioned as a means of *achieving* food security.

In either case, what makes food sovereignty unique is its radical challenge to neoliberalism's impact on the global food system. Beginning in the early 1990s, the global food system came to be dominated by the notion that food should be determined as a market relation (rather than an inherent right). Under this neoliberal logic, the "corporate food regime shifted the locus of control for food security away from the nation-state to the world market" (Kaur Plahe, Hawkes, and Ponnamperuma, 2013, p. 309).

This shift was supported by the United States, which used its hegemonic position in the 1993 Uruguay Round of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations to promote the power of US agribusiness firms in the global food system (Kaur Plahe, Hawkes, and Ponnamperuma, 2013, p. 309). This was part of the wider era of neoliberalism, which promoted the retreat of states and the expansion of the power of multinational corporations as actors in trade and development. Food sovereignty movements like LVC partly emerged as a response to this global shift, aiming to resecure nation-state support for small, Indigenous, and peasant producers who were being displaced by multinationals. Food sovereignty movements reframed self-determination and small food producers as a right that could be protected by state law. Since its popularization in the 1990s, food sovereignty has become a widespread movement and term, leading some to argue that it has become too all-encompassing, while others point to its breadth, which allows a variety of actors to contribute to the movement (Portman, 2018; Bellinger and Fakhri, 2013).

Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty resonates with Indigenous peoples by emphasizing self-determination over food systems (Huambachano, 2019, p. 1). Despite this resonance, Indigenous scholars have demonstrated that *Indigenous* food sovereignty takes the concept in a new direction, expanding it beyond legal and rights-based approaches. Indigenous food sovereignty does this by incorporating relationality, reciprocity, and place. Hoover and Mihesuah (2019, p. 11) argue that "Indigenous food sovereignty places primacy on [...] sacred responsibilities and connections to land, culture, relationships, spirituality, and ancestral peoples." Indigenous food sovereignty can therefore be understood as a separate concept from food sovereignty, due to its embeddedness in

worldviews articulated by Indigenous peoples, which understand the place of humans in their food systems differently than other, non-Indigenous food sovereignty discourses.

As Maudrie (*et al.,* 2023, p. 1075) have shown in their research, Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) *is a holistic approach to food that incorporates values of relationality, reciprocity, and relationships. Fundamental differences exist between food security and food sovereignty, yet dominant society often reduces IFS as a solution to food security, rather than an entirely different food system that is predicated on values that contrast with those of dominant society"* (2023, p. 1075).

The distinctions between food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty and between food security and these concepts are important to understand because they reveal the unique nature of Indigenous food sovereignty. In the following section, I explore the literature on Indigenous food sovereignty through 5 thematic entry points, selected for their prominence and capacity to highlight key elements of these concepts.

Core Themes in the Literature

Theme 1: Health

The necessity of food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples' health is an omnipresent theme in the literature. The essence of the link between harvesting, preparing, and consuming traditional foods, and being able to live healthy lives, is encapsulated in the dictum "nature cures" (Korn, 2023); this phrase refers to the longstanding practice of using products from one's natural environment to ward off illnesses, eat a healthy diet, and cure ailments.

Traditional foods are critical to Indigenous peoples' health in several ways. Firstly, they are important in maintaining physical health and avoiding diet-related illnesses that have become prevalent among Indigenous communities because of colonial disruption to their foodways (such as bans on amaranth or the Potlatch, detailed above). Burnett, Hay, and Chambers (2016) suggest that imposing malnutrition on Indigenous peoples is a core settler colonial strategy to eradicate Native people. In North America, many Indigenous populations, after being forced onto reservations, were made dependent on commodity foods and government food aid programs. Research has consistently demonstrated that Indigenous families who are more reliant on commodity foods (as opposed to those with greater access to traditional foods) experience higher rates of diseases like diabetes (McKinley and Jernigan, 2023; Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 0). This has been partly due to the impacts on the body of the rapid diet transitions that followed assimilation policies (such as the abduction of Native American youth to boarding schools.

The rapid diet transition from traditional to introduced foods has been characterized as "nutrition trauma", which is defined as "the disruption in access to endemic, natural food resources due to overwhelming forces that make inaccessible foods that are bio-culturally and biochemically suited to healthy digestion and nutrient utilization" (Korn, 2023). It is important to understand the causes of nutrition trauma as political rather than natural. Dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands results in loss of access to their food systems, which in turn harms their nutritional well-being.

The external forces of market expansion of commodity foods into Indigenous communities "overwhelm the capacity of the local Indigenous peoples to digest and metabolize these new

foods, which often cause conditions that were unknown or rare before the colonial process" (Korn, 2023). By harming the physical health of Indigenous peoples, the erosion of traditional foodways harms their self-determination. Some argue this represents cultural genocide (Ryser, Marchand, and Parker, 2020), due to food and water constituting the "second pillar" of culture, following language. The reciprocity between the land, the food, and the survival of cultures is evident in the base word *túm* in *nsexlcin*, a Salish language, which means 'mother', being part of the word *túmx(w)lax(w),* meaning 'the land in all its diversity' (Ryser, Marchand, and Parker, 2020). Thus, the land is the mother that provides the sustenance that keeps culture alive. When the land is taken away or polluted, the culture will struggle to survive.

Traditional foods are central to the cultural health of Indigenous peoples. In many Indigenous cultures, such as those of the Puget Sound region of the northwest United States and southwest Canada, food is "a living part of the culture" (Krohn and Segrest, 2006, p. 0). The plants, animals, land, water, and skies of a nation's territory are integral not only to its food systems, but also to its knowledge systems, ceremonial and cultural practices, and broader understandings of the world. In Māori understandings of the world, Papatūānuku, the Earth Mother, is a sacred space where "all human and non-human kin…flourish within a symbiotic and nurturing environment" (Huambachano, 2019, p. 3).

By harming traditional foods, whether through contamination, dispossession, deforestation, legal prohibition, or other means, the overarching network and personhood of Papatūānuku are damaged, and, along with them, the culture for which their survival is integral. Additionally, harvesting, preparing, and consuming traditional foods are vital to culture and provide a forum

for elders to transfer cultural knowledge to younger generations. Impeding these harvesting practices also prevents this intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge.

Traditional foods are also critical for the mental health of Indigenous peoples. The mental health of Indigenous peoples is a vital area of concern, given the high rates of suicide and substance abuse experienced by Indigenous peoples in the United States (Polcano, 2022) and elsewhere. The activities associated with the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty, such as gardening, communal cooking, food preparation, foraging, hunting, and connecting with land, are all helpful in building relationships that facilitate positive mental health (Jernigan *et al.,* 2023; Jonasson *et al.,* 2019). Indigenous people may also be displaced, which occurs as a result of dislocation from ancestral lands. Minkoff-Zern *et al. (*2023) demonstrate the many positive impacts of gardening and food-growing programs on the mental health of displaced people, including fostering a sense of self-sufficiency and providing a forum for socializing.

The mental health impacts of traditional foodways disruption on Indigenous peoples are a form of traumatic stress. Just as "nutrition trauma" describes the bodily trauma a population can experience from a rapid diet transition, traumatic psychological stress can result from the impacts of development on a community's life and foodways. Development projects have impacted the Cowlitz Tribal territory by damming rivers, cutting forests, and damaging topsoil through road construction (Korn, 1997), inflicting trauma on the Cowlitz Tribe, who face overwhelming external forces they cannot control. When stress responses are constantly induced, people experience chemical changes, including lactic acid buildup, as well as weakened immune

systems, worsened digestion, and other stress-related impacts (including substance abuse, self-medication, and dissociative responses aimed at restoring control) (Korn, 1997).

Southern Ute Tribe member Shereena Baker describes how her struggles with mental health were linked to her use of alcohol, as well as her poor diet consisting of pasta, bread, rice, and fast food (Polanco, 2022). But, after turning to a diet of traditional foods, she experienced profound benefits in alleviating her anxiety and boosting her general mental health. Baker's new diet, including Southern Ute traditional foods such as elk, deer, pumpkin seeds, and dried cherries, also helped her regain cultural knowledge of her ancestors' foods and practices (Polcano, 2022).

The principles of Indigenous food sovereignty can provide an alternative path to some of the ways that harm is being inflicted on Indigenous health. In Canada, the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion poses a health threat to the Tsleil-Waututh Nation by contaminating the culturally and nutritionally important shellfish harvest (Jonasson *et al.,* 2019). The pipeline also risks the health of the Orca whale communities, who are co-residents of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation's territory (Jonasson *et al.,* 2019, p. 511). But, through the integration of Indigenous food sovereignty principles of relationality and reciprocity with lands, waters, plants, and animals, which would recognize the needs of humans, as well as those of the seas, shellfish, and Orcas, and their complex and codependent interrelation, an alternative path for development and cohabitation emerges as possible.

Theme 2: Law and the State

The relationship between state laws and food sovereignty is nuanced: these laws sometimes facilitate and at other times obstruct the practice of sovereign foodways. As I have argued above, Indigenous food sovereignty is distinct from other food sovereignty movements in that it expands beyond legal approaches. This sometimes means pursuing traditional foods even when doing so is illegal, through acts of civil disobedience. The White Earth Tribe of Anishinabe provides one example of this practice. In 1837, the Chippewa/Ojibwe Tribes of the Upper Midwest ceded 3 million acres of land to the United States in a Treaty, retaining rights to hunting, fishing, and ricing. Ricing is essential for Ojibwe groups such as the Anishinabe, as rice has been a staple crop for centuries (Trauger, 2014). However, when White Earth Tribe members try to assert their Treaty rights by seeding rice or fishing in lakes off-reservation, they are harassed by state conservation officials and issued citations (because seeding lakes is illegal in Minnesota unless practiced by state conservation officials) (Trauger, 2014). This highlights how, in asserting its governance rights to protect commercial fishing and farming, the state's sovereignty can impede Indigenous peoples' attempts to access traditional foods. Despite this, Trauger (2014) shows that in practicing traditional foodways illicitly, food sovereignty can "[reconfigure] notions of power (through [civil] disobedience), economy (through acting on rights to subsistence and non-commodified food exchanges) and shared access to property through overlapping zones of authority (tribal, state, federal) over territory".

State conservation laws also inhibit the food sovereignty of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations of Vancouver Island, Canada. Before settler contact, the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations managed local sea otter populations by selectively hunting individual otters from a demarcated area to ward off otters from harvesting shellfish in that area. This enabled both Nuu-chah-nulth peoples and sea

otters to flourish in mutual conditions of food security (Salomon *et al*. 2015, 2020), and sea otter hunts were carefully regulated by the principle of *ʔiisaak,* meaning respect for all things (Popken *et al.,* 2023).

However, reflecting how settler-led conservation projects often disrupt Indigenous lifeways, economies, and food sovereignty (Sandlos, 2001; Binnema and Niemi, 2006; Coté, 2010, 2022; Purdy, 2015; Schmidt and Peterson, 2009; Herriman, 2017), Canada's sea otter management program made the hunt of sea otters illegal (Plummer, 2018), harming the ability of the Nuu-chah-nulth peoples to carry out the culturally and nutritiously important shellfish harvest (despite the fact the Nuu-chah-nulth otter hunting was and is not a threat to sea otter population health). This reflects the broader importance of using Indigenous knowledge when designing conservation programs, to ensure they do not harm human subsistence while protecting animal populations. However, it is not enough to simply integrate/incorporate Indigenous knowledge performatively into management, which is still led by settlers.

Following this logic, Popken (*et al.,* 2023) thus suggest that sea otter conservation governance be restructured around Nuu-chah-nulth principles of *hišukʔiš c̓awaak* (everything is one), *ʔiisaak* (respect with caring), and *ʔuʔaaɬuk* (taking care of) via environmental self-governance by Nuu-chah-nulth Nations.

The state's role as a sovereign lawmaker is not always at odds with Indigenous food sovereignty, as the experiences of Indigenous activists in Ecuador demonstrate. While I have defined Indigenous food sovereignty as a distinct concept, in part because it extends *beyond* legal

approaches, this does not mean that Indigenous peoples do not use legal forums to pursue food sovereignty when opportunities arise. Rather, when the state and its laws provide avenues for pursuing food sovereignty, Indigenous peoples have engaged with legal approaches. In Ecuador, the 2008 constitution provided an entry point for Indigenous activists to incorporate food sovereignty into state structures, including securing legal guarantees. A central component of this strategy's success was the decision to frame food sovereignty as a necessary part of achieving the right to *sumak kawsay,* a Kichwa term meaning living well (Peña, 2016, p. 221). This enabled the Red Agraria coalition (the main actor pushing for food sovereignty to be in the constitution) to build a broad base of support across different groups in the country. While the choice to integrate a grassroots social movement into the institutions of the state may seem to risk its co-optation away from its more radical aims, Peña (2016) points out that it provided an opportunity for the food sovereignty movement in Ecuador to channel underrepresented voices and claims directly into policy-making processes (p. 230), which would not have been possible without this integration.

The contrast between Ecuadorian and White Earth Tribe & Nuu-chah-nulth experiences with the state and law *vis-a-vis* food sovereignty reveals a nuanced relationship between law and food sovereignty. Law is neither necessarily a barrier nor a tool for achieving food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples. However, where it obstructs and enables citizens to develop and practice sovereign foodways, analyzing, challenging, and/or using the law plays an important role in the food sovereignty movement. Bellinger and Fakhri (2013) note the variety of legal approaches used to pursue food sovereignty globally: from a community ordinance in Maine to the national constitution in Ecuador to legislation such as Nicaragua’s food sovereignty law to regional trade agreements such as the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas.

While it is outside the scope of this paper to examine, comparing the cases of bottom-up approaches (like community food sovereignty ordinances, or the civil disobedience of the White Earth Tribe members in Minnesota) with top-down approaches (like the constitutional provision in Ecuador) raises questions about which approach can more effectively guarantee food sovereignty (Bellinger and Fakhri, 2013). Ultimately, a core reason it is important to analyze the impacts of laws on food sovereignty lies in how many legal frameworks currently serve as major barriers to its realization, from international trade laws to federal and state laws that preempt local ordinances (Bellinger and Fakhri, 2013).

Theme 3: Social perceptions of food

Food sovereignty discourse tends to assume that the barriers to food sovereignty are primarily political and economic. Furthermore, there is a common assumption that consumers will prefer local and traditional foods and that the root causes of "poor" food choices are financial and time poverty (Steckley, 2016, p. 26). These assumptions are challenged by analyzing the social perceptions that communities and individuals have of different foods. Understanding how social perceptions complicate these assumptions is important for Indigenous food sovereignty movements because it highlights often-overlooked ideological (rather than material) barriers to achieving food sovereignty.

Sociologists have extensively analyzed how consumption choices shape people's identity formation and sense of social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984). These processes extend to food; it is well documented that people's ideas about food, not just its actual nutritional or economic value,

will influence their choice to consume it. Higgs and Thomas (2016) illustrate how eating behaviors are strongly shaped by social context through the influence of "social eating norms". These social norms can harm public health and food sovereignty by stigmatizing healthy, accessible foods while valorizing those that are not.

Different eating patterns among socio-economic groups are often attributed to differences in food access, driven by price and geography. Fielding-Singh (2017) shows that these differences are also due to disparate *meanings* attached to foods. In contexts of material deprivation, Fielding-Singh (2017, p. 424-425) found that parents of low socio-economic status use food as a "symbolic antidote" to this deprivation, and thus "can often oblige adolescents' inexpensive food requests," which can bolster their worth as caregivers, but also undermine healthy nutrition. This insight is pertinent to the experiences of Alaska Native and Native American families, who experience starkly higher rates of poverty than other groups in the United States (*American Indians and Alaska Natives - by the numbers*, 2012).

Classed ideas about food also intersect with race, particularly in colonial contexts. In Haiti, Steckley (2016, p. 27) shows that foods considered "prestigious" are those associated with lighter-skinned, urban elites, while those foods associated with the Black peasantry are deemed inferior and rejected. Foods like pitimi, despite having nutritious, economic, and caloric value, are considered shameful due to their association with "the poor" (Steckley, 2016, p. 28). The role of race in these preferences is evident in subtler ways as well, such as preferences for white sugar, considered more "prestigious," over brown sugar, or for imported white crackers over traditional (brown) molasses bread (Steckley, 2016, p. 28). An area that requires further

investigation is how perceptions of race, color, and class may shape food preferences among Native peoples in settler colonial contexts.

Racism and classism also shape food systems in broader ways. Barry *et al.* (2020) have shown how the influence of race, color, class, and gender over 500 years in the Caribbean food system has led to a societal dynamic in which "perceived social status and economic mobility…matter more than social welfare and economic justice" (Scott, 2002). This influences consumption choices against the interests of food sovereignty, e.g.,, through preferences for plastic-wrapped, imported vegetables over local or home-grown produce (Barry *et al.,* 2020). But the issue goes deeper than consumption choices and reflects how ideas about what it means to be "developed" have become "deeply, psycho-socially, ingrained" (Barry *et al.,* 2020). Looking at race and class in postcolonial Caribbean agriculture, Giovinnetti (2006, cited in Barry *et al.,* 2020), shows how local food and farm work, which was not particularly stigmatized by Indigenous, Black, or South Asian groups before colonial plantation economies taking hold, has become a badge of being "lowly" and "pitiable", undermining local production in favor of neoliberal structural adjustment policies that undermine community self-determination over food.

The question of race and social perceptions of food also permeates the causes of diet-related illnesses and the erosion of food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples. Examining the experiences of the Marind people in West Papua, Chao (2021) shows how palm oil plantations and the expansion of agribusiness "obliterates the very environments from which Marind derive their culturally valued forms of subsistence". Despite this, racist rhetoric blames the experience of Marind people with diet-related illnesses not on attacks on their traditional foods, but instead, on

their own ‘ignorance’ or ‘backwardness’. Development projects that harm Marind lifeways are made possible, and acceptable, through racist rhetorics of “gastrocolonialism” which infantilize and animalize Papuan bodies, foods, and traditional subsistence practices (Chao, 2021). Gastrocolonialism describes imposed food regimes that perpetuate the racist violences of imperialism and capitalism through the racialization of food (Chao, 2021). Gastrocolonialism is a useful overarching framework for understanding the link between discursive and material obstacles to Indigenous food sovereignty, as it connects ideas about food, race, and Indigeneity to their influence on material processes, including access to traditional foods, healthcare, and ancestral land.

From individual consumption choices to the broader economic and political regimes that shape food systems, perceptions of food are highly social and influential. Research in Haiti, the Caribbean, and West Papua demonstrates that ideas about race and class are particularly impactful. To realize food sovereignty across contexts permeated by racism and classism, Indigenous food sovereignty movements must account not only for material and economic barriers to self-determined food systems, but also for those ideological barriers deeply embedded within and reproduced by social orders.

Theme 4: Gender

The link between gender and food sovereignty is important and underexplored in the literature. Since the earliest articulations of the concept, food sovereignty has included commitments to gender equality (Portman, 2018). The most common argument as to why food sovereignty movements must explicitly address gender injustice is that, as women constitute the majority of

the world's food producers (including up to 80% of food production in developing countries), then the policies that govern food systems are a women's issue; and, that changing agriculture policies will require a focus on gender injustice because it influences relations like access to credit, land, and inputs (Davies, 2023; Portman, 2018).

Patriarchal social norms can hinder women's equitable access to land and agricultural inputs in various ways, depending on the specific context. However, when applying "patriarchy" or "gender" as analytical categories, it is important to consider decolonial feminist critiques which show the tendency in Western feminisms to reproduce racist and other prejudices (like Islamaphobia) in the name of women's liberation (Bechiche, 2021); e.g, for Indigenous peoples, the striking reality that "'native sovereignty, land rights and reparations[...] for massive dispossessions; displacements; and acts of violence, abuse, and ethnocide' have been missing on the feminist agenda" (Grey, 2004, p. 16, cited in Lemke and Delormier, 2017, p. 4).

Some cases rooted in local/particular contexts demonstrate how gender can limit access to land critical for food production. Giovarelli, Wamalwa, and Hannay (2018) show that, in India and Pakistan, low rates of women's land ownership are due in part to the practice of dowries, in which a woman's inheritance of land can be given to her husband's family. While women do not need to own land individually to produce food on it, the lack of ownership can mean greater vulnerability to seizure in land grabs or expropriation, less determination about the inputs that can be used on the land, and generally having less self-determination over the process of food production, which takes place on that land.

Another barrier to women's equitable access to land is postcolonial land distribution, transactions, and laws, which frequently displaced more gender-egalitarian traditional rules (Giovarelli, Wamalwa, and Hannay, 2018). For example, in southern Ethiopia, the traditional rules of the Borana pastoral communities provided strong protections for women's land rights at both the primary and secondary levels (Flintan, 2010). However, the weakening of customary institutions and the lack of effective state provisions to protect women's property rights have led to an increasing set of challenges to Borana women's land access in pastoral areas (Flintan, 2010).

While the argument that food sovereignty must include gender justice in its framework is bolstered by the global pattern wherein gender discrimination limits the opportunities, security, and self-determination of female food producers, critics have questioned whether food sovereignty is being made too expansive a concept (Portman, 2018) by trying to incorporate gender justice. This critique raises the question of whether food sovereignty risks becoming "all-encompassing to the point of incoherence" by trying also to be a feminist framework (Portman, 2018). Yet, as Portman (2018) argues, an ecofeminist perspective allows one to see gender justice as a natural part of food sovereignty as a coherent and counter-hegemonic worldview, which grounds the concept's main claims around "the interplay between ecological health, economic and political self-determination, and social justice" (Portman, 2018, p. 465).

From an ecofeminist perspective, all three of these aims can be linked to logics of masculine, rationalist, and economistic domination that undermine gender justice and the realization of self-determined, equitable, and ecologically sustainable food systems. That is, food sovereignty is a

feminist issue because the same ideologies and logics that subjugate women globally also underpin corporate-controlled, environmentally damaging, and anti-poor food systems. This argument aligns with Calvário and Desmarais' (2023) identification of the "nuanced" school of thought on the feminist potential of food sovereignty, which characterizes the framework as "potentially feminist" depending on the specific context in which it is embedded.

Given this potential, food sovereignty movements must look at how their aims and practices are embedded in the 'gender order' of a given society (Zinn and Hofmeister, 2022), defined as the invisible expectations around gender that underlie visible interactions. In other words, food sovereignty must be attentive to how, in seeking self-determination for a community over its food system, that self-determination is only legitimate to the extent that it is accessible to all genders.

Theme 5: Free Trade

One of the greatest obstacles to Indigenous food sovereignty globally is the doctrine of free trade. Associated with the ideology of neoliberalism, free trade holds that states should minimize barriers to the movement of goods across their borders. It is based on the principles of a capitalist global market, which dictates that states should import goods they cannot produce as efficiently and specialize in exporting goods they can produce efficiently. This pattern was produced by colonialism and remains structured by colonial legacies. Many of today's states were historically forced by their colonizers to develop specialized, export-oriented economies, without being allowed to retain the wealth they produced for the global core, leading to underdevelopment (Wallerstein, 2019; Rodney, 1972), often through the labor of enslaved Indigenous and Black people, as was the case in much of Latin America and the Caribbean under colonial rule.

Free trade is institutionalized primarily through free trade agreements, which are agreements between 2 or more states to lower barriers to exchange; free trade principles have also been institutionalized in many countries in the global South through aid conditionality and loans from organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Free trade agreements can harm Indigenous peoples' food sovereignty in several ways.

Free trade agreements can hurt Indigenous peoples' agricultural livelihoods. In 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect, eliminating policies like tariffs designed to protect small domestic producers. On the same day that NAFTA went into force, January 1, 1994, the largely Mayan Zapatista movement led an uprising against the Mexican government in Chiapas, southern Mexico; the Zapatistas called NAFTA a "death certificate" for the country's Indigenous peoples (Gahman, 2017). By 'opening up' Mexico's economy to cheap imported corn from the United States, NAFTA meant that corn produced by Indigenous peasants would not be competitive, leaving them unable to support themselves and their families through sales to local and national markets (Gahman, 2017). The result of free trade agreements like NAFTA has been a widespread worsening of food insecurity and poverty for Indigenous peoples (Gahman, 2017).

Figure 2: Zapatista March

Note. Photo by Tlacaelel, L. (2012) *EZLN March 2012.* (The EZLN, *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional,* is the Zapatistas' Liberation Army.) CC-BY-NC

The negative impacts of free trade policies on the livelihoods of Indigenous farmers have led movements such as the Zapatistas and La Vía Campesina to propose local and sustainable food systems as an alternative to the neoliberal model of industrial, unsustainable, export-oriented farming. However, not all Indigenous and smallholder farmers desire or follow a local and sustainable model. Despite this, food sovereignty discourses can problematically and erroneously essentialize Indigenous peasant farmers as 'inherently' supportive of local and agroecological food systems. Soper (2019) notes that some Indigenous peasant communities in Ecuador practice chemically intensive, monocrop, export-oriented farming. This example emphasizes that, as Bernstein (2014) argues, Indigenous peasants are not "capitalism's other" but rather are a social

group that has experienced class differentiation, wherein some peasants pursue livelihoods through models that follow neoliberal and free trade ideals (such as efficiency-increasing inputs, export-orientation, and engagement with global markets).

Indigenous peasants like those in the Quiloa quinoa cooperative in Ecuador, "gladly engage with global industrial agriculture…[seeing] modern industrial production methods and global markets as necessary in order to maintain viable agrarian livelihoods" (Soper, 2019). Additionally, Soper (2015) notes that many Indigenous Andean peasant producers, counter to mainstream assumptions of the food sovereignty movement, view export markets as fairer than local markets because they provide more stable and viable livelihoods. This highlights the importance of movements that intend to support Indigenous and peasant producers in considering the multitude of diverse and often conflicting perspectives within these groups.

However, against the retreating-state logic of neoliberalism, the Ecuadorian government has facilitated engagement with global and export markets by pursuing policies that integrate peasant producers into global and industrial agricultural commodity chains (including through price supports and technical assistance) (Soper, 2019). Thus, while some communities *are* pursuing global markets, they do so with state support and therefore in opposition to the neoliberal model. Thus, the relationship between free trade and Indigenous farmers' livelihoods is evidently complex. The principle remains, though, that without intervention (such as by the state), neoliberal free trade policies harm the ability of Indigenous peasant producers to maintain their livelihoods, leading to issues like food insecurity and poverty.

Among Pacific Island countries, WTO free trade policies have harmed Indigenous peoples' ability to pursue local food systems and have increased dependency on imported foods, leading to public health crises for Native communities. In Fiji, policies such as the Fijian Farm Assistance Scheme were designed to help Indigenous Fijians grow food for local markets, providing inputs such as outboard motors, chainsaws, and planting material (Kaur Plahe, Hawkes, and Ponnamperuma, 2013, p. 323). However, these policies are discouraged under pressure from the WTO, which opposes them on the grounds that they favor less efficient local farmers over more efficient food imports from industrial producers abroad. The prioritization of efficiency and, therefore, profit over healthy, local food harms Indigenous food sovereignty by diminishing support mechanisms for Native farmers who grow (often healthier) foods for their communities.

When countries become dependent on imported foods, populations are highly vulnerable to price fluctuations and may be unable to grow their own food if they cannot afford to purchase staple crops at market prices, leading to malnutrition (Kaur Plahe, Hawkes, and Ponnamperuma, 2013, p. 324). Additionally, states may be unable to ban unhealthy imported foods for fear that such policies would harm their ability to join the WTO. This was the case in Tonga, where unhealthy meat imports were contributing to health issues among the Indigenous population. However, in its efforts to join the WTO, the Tongan Health Ministry overturned the ban on these imports. The external pressures faced by states like Tonga from the WTO highlight one limitation of treating the state as a guarantor of food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples. While it is beyond the scope of this review to explore it, it is worth noting that the influence of supranational organizations such as the WTO and the IMF on postcolonial states' domestic policies underscores the colonial

nature of state sovereignty itself. The coloniality of sovereignty, including its conditionality based on Eurocentric notions, has implications for Indigenous peoples in several areas, including in violent 'humanitarian' interventions and neocolonialism (see Pourmokhtari, 2013; Glanville, 2013)

Free trade agreements have the potential to seriously harm Indigenous food sovereignty when state protections for Indigenous producers are removed, enabling actors with a competitive advantage (such as large-scale, industrial corn farming in the United States, or imported white flour in Fiji) to displace their livelihoods. Markets are flooded with imported foods, which are often less healthy than locally produced, traditional foods, and issues like poverty and resultant malnutrition follow. However, some Indigenous peasant producers pursue global markets, export orientation, and non-agroecological (e.g., chemical-input and monocropping) farming, notably in Ecuador. Thus, food sovereignty discourses should not essentialize Indigenous farmers as inherently local and sustainable producers; rather, they must recognize that, while free trade policies can harm Indigenous peoples, these producers may still use the state to secure their access to capitalist global markets.

Case Studies of IFS Initiatives

In the final section, I examine 5 case studies of Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives that are revitalizing traditional foodways and advancing Indigenous self-determination. In reviewing these cases, I aim to highlight their intersection with the key themes established above and provide a more detailed picture of what Indigenous food sovereignty looks like in practice.

Case 1: The Restoring Shoshone Ancestral Food Gathering (RSAFG) Community Group (The Great Plains)

On the Wind River Reservation of the Eastern Shoshone people, located in what is now the US state of Wyoming, the Restoring Shoshone Ancestral Food Gathering (RSAFG) project is the leading grassroots effort to restore Eastern Shoshone Indigenous Food Sovereignty (Land *et al*., 2021). In this case study, the reader will see information about the RSAFG cited with the author's name, "Land". This is because the Shoshone Ancestral Land is the lead author of the article detailing the RSAFG, as it is the "primary source of knowledge" embodied in the paper, representing a practice of "decenter[ing] colonial frames of knowledge" (Land *et al.*, 2021) by recognizing the personhood of the land and its reciprocal relationship with the Eastern Shoshone people. The RSAFG emerged from a fall 2016 meeting of tribal elders who, working with the Tohono O'odham Nation, Eastern Shoshone tribal members, and a non-Indigenous ethnobotanist and nutrition researcher, came up with the name of the Restoring Shoshone Ancestral Food Gathering project to name what they were doing (Land *et al.*, 2021).

At its core, the story of the RSAFG is one of Indigenous food sovereignty as a decolonial practice. Its members articulate it as promoting community empowerment through three "acts of decolonization: 1) enacting treaty rights through gathering traditional plants, 2) demanding equitable partnerships in community-based research, and 3) sharing the story through radical authorship via layered narrative" (Land *et al.*, 2021). By enacting the Treaty rights which constitute external recognition of the Eastern Shoshone's sovereignty, and engaging in a reciprocal relationship with land (negating the colonial, capitalist logic of an extractive, property relationship with land), the community plant gathering program of the RSAFG is a "radical act

of decolonization, self-determination, and sovereignty" (RSAFG member 'L.O.' cited in Land *et al.*, 2021).

The RSAFG is situated within the ongoing colonial occupation of Shoshone lands, where, for thousands of years, the Eastern Shoshone people have survived and thrived through their traditional foodways (Land *et al.*, 2021). But as Land (*et al.*, 2021) show, over a couple of hundred years, "imperialism, settler-colonization, war and massacres, bison slaughter, boarding schools, and conscription to reservations have decimated traditional foodways and, today, have yielded enormous health disparities between Indigenous and white communities in the US". The RSAFG directly intervenes to address these disparities by redressing their root causes, namely the decimation of traditional foods. This redress of health disparities is articulated by RSAFG members like 'L.O' as a broader process of healing (Land *et al.*, 2021):

Although reclaiming ancestral foods is hard work, much easier to go to the store, it's not just about feeding the body it's also physical exercise. It's about healing the past so we can go on in a good way. Because when you think about the way food has been used to genocide us--weaponized to destroy our health, our connection to the land, each other, our culture and the way we lived--regenerating food knowledge and food practices becomes a way to heal from these multiple harms. –LO

The RSAFG is also decolonial in the realm of knowledge, intellectual property, and research. Reflecting the second "act of decolonization", "demanding equitable partnerships in community-based research", the RSAFG places primacy on Eastern Shoshone data sovereignty by controlling the data-sharing agreement with researchers. RSAFG member "J.L" describes the

importance of data ownership for the IFS project: the "study of our native plants belongs to us the Eastern Shoshone Tribe. This aspect of hunting our native plants makes our treaty stronger. If our data is controlled by colleges or Euro-Americans it get exploited", but if the Eastern Shoshone own it, "the knowledge cannot be co-opted, commodified and sold for the benefit of others outside the community" (Land *et al.*, 2021). The process of co-optation, commodification, and ultimately, theft of the intellectual knowledge and plant resources which the Eastern Shoshone are trying to fight is what Efferth (*et al*., 2019) call "biopiracy", a "term used to blame the use of biological resources and knowledge of indigenous communities without sharing the venues generated by the economic exploitation of these resources and knowledge, respectively".

The RSAFG rejects the principle of biopiracy, wherein, by failing to acknowledge the ownership of Indigenous knowledge as their intellectual property, contemporary sciences view Indigenous peoples "simply as *raw material*" in a knowledge-extraction procedure that mirrors colonial processes (Efferth *et al.*, 2016 cited in Efferth *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, RSAFG is assertive of Eastern Shoshone self-determination on two fronts: in its revitalization of traditional foodways to restore health and culture, and in its assertion of ownership over data and intellectual property in research partnerships. These elements, together, provide an example of Indigenous food sovereignty as an explicitly decolonial project.

Case 2: The Traditional Foods of Puget Sound Project (The Pacific Northwest)

The Traditional Foods of Puget Sound Project, launched by Northwest Indian College, aims to "improve individual, family, and community wellness" among Coastal Salish people in western Washington by reviving traditional foods. The wellness benefits derived from traditional foods

are nutritional, and in the connections, they cultivate with place and culture (Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 1). As in the first core theme highlighted above, and in the RSAFG program, health and nutrition are core aims of the Traditional Foods of Puget Sound Project.

Members of the Squaxin Island Tribe of the Medicine Creek Nation confirm that it used to be common for their people to live beyond 100 years of age, but, with the loss of traditional foodways engendered by colonization, new diet patterns emerged, which produced increased incidences of diseases like diabetes, which were unheard of before the colonial process (Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 0). To combat these disparities, the Project mirrors the RSAFG's conscious approach to ensuring that research is non-extractive and generates genuine benefits within the community. The Project included discussions that revealed participants' perspectives on current access to traditional foods, barriers to access, and ways to increase it.

These discussions emphasized the importance of a land base. Members of the Cowlitz and Snoqualmie tribes have said that their lack of a land base impedes their ability to harvest traditional foods (Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 7). The experiences of the Cowlitz and Snoqualmie peoples intersect with the problem of state sovereignty over Indigenous foods, as they describe the need to form difficult-to-form partnerships with actors such as the US Forest Service (USFS), which controls many of the lands from which they harvest. Conversely, members of tribes like the Lummi, which have larger land bases, expressed that harvesting traditional foods was easier (Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 7).

Fishing laws and marine toxins further hinder tribes in the Puget Sound area's efforts to exercise food sovereignty. As in Minnesota, where the struggles of the White Earth Tribe of Anishinabe to enact sovereign ricing and fishing rights are blocked by state conservation officials, "tension among sports and commercial fishers, the State of Washington, tribes and tribal fishers has persisted to the present" (Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 9). Even where Washington state tribal members can access waters to harvest traditional foods, they must navigate the dangers of environmental toxins, which every group in the Project identified as "one of the most powerful barriers to accessing traditional foods" (Krohn and Segrest, p. 7-8).

In the face of these and other barriers, participants in the Project provided their perspectives on some ways Indigenous food sovereignty can be realized. Tribal members named food restoration programs such as community food gardens, food education programs, small family gardens, restoration projects for native plants, fish, and shellfish, community food banks where hunters, fishermen, and gatherers can donate extra food, partnerships with the USFS and private landowners, and partnering with local farmers to access produce as important routes to traditional food restoration (Krohn and Segrest, 2008, p. 16).

This myriad of programs illustrates that Indigenous food sovereignty movements, even when concentrated in a specific region, need not take a single form or approach. Instead, a plurality of strategies can be deployed to achieve greater access to traditional foods and the cultural continuance of long-standing foodways, despite barriers that may arise from multiple directions.

Case 3: Urban Indigenous Food Sovereignty in Canada (Winnipeg and Grand River Territory, southern Ontario)

The third case study, which examines urban Indigenous food sovereignty movements in southern Canada, highlights the unique yet frequently overlooked experiences of Indigenous peoples in

urban centers. The insufficient academic attention to experiences of Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in urban areas stems in part from the oversimplified perception that First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people who migrate to cities leave their cultures "behind" (Cidro et al., 2015, p. 31). However, Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in cities prove this notion false.

In Winnipeg, Canada, a city with one of the highest urban Aboriginal populations in the country, a variety of Indigenous food sovereignty efforts are underway. These efforts are situated within a resurgence of Indigenous culture across Canadian cities: Cidro *et al.* (2015, p. 31) point out that "urban communities…have become centres of cultural identity and resurgence…as urban Indigenous people became increasingly mobilized, urban organizations began to develop and flourish". Food sovereignty has been a key focus of this mobilization.

Participants in Cidro's (*et al.,* 2015) study of urban Indigenous food sovereignty in Winnipeg described three areas as particularly pertinent to the link between Indigenous food sovereignty and food security: (1) "growing, harvesting, preparing and eating cultural food as ceremony, (2), cultural food as part of connection to land through reciprocity and (3) re-learning IFS practices to address food security" (p. 33). Growing, harvesting, and consuming culturally important foods bring forth the spiritual connections to food that Indigenous people in Winnipeg experience and emphasize the community-building, relationship-cultivating impacts of food sovereignty programs (Cidro *et al.,* 2015, p. 34). Some of the most important relationships to urban Indigenous food sovereignty are connections with friends and family from rural areas who provide access to traditional foods through gifts such as bison, moose, and fish when visiting their relatives in the city. Participants in the Cidro (*et al.,* 2015) study also described using connections in the food industry or even links on Facebook to access traditional foods (p. 36).

Across the Grand River Territory in southern Ontario, urban Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives also noted the importance of relationships. Grand River Territory food sovereignty programs have four common principles: “land-based knowledge and relationships, land and food-based practices, relational principles, and place” (Miltenburg, Neufeld, and Anderson, 2022, p. 1). All four of the initiatives in Miltenburg, Neufeld, and Anderson’s (2022, p. 1) study (the Indigenous garden collective Wisahkotewinowak, the Waterloo Region Indigenous Food Sovereignty Collective, the University of Waterloo Indigenous Student Centre ‘Shatitsirótha’, and the North End Harvest Market in Guelph) include an emphasis on relationships with Land, seeds, plants, foods, and people (p. 6). As in Winnipeg, Indigenous peoples throughout southern Ontario noted the importance of gifts of traditional foods from visitors to maintain connections to the Land even when they cannot access it (Miltenburg, Neufeld, and Anderson, 2022, p. 11).

The importance of relationships is a throughline between urban and rural food sovereignty initiatives. For Indigenous food sovereignty, this includes relationships with people in one's community, and with the Land, waters, flora, and fauna that are one's kin. While urban Indigenous peoples’ food sovereignty faces challenges specific to its geography, such as dislocation from areas where traditional foods can be harvested, these initiatives demonstrate the creativity and survivance of Native cultures that pursue cultural continuity and traditional foodways in the face of profound disruption and violence.

Case 4: Braiding the Sacred Indigenous Corn Growers Network and the Onondaga Nation Farm crew (Turtle Island & Onondaga Lands)

Braiding the Sacred is a network of Indigenous corn keepers aiming to help Indigenous nations across Turtle Island recover sacred seeds and food sources (Bleir, 2020). The organization, founded by Onondaga Nation member Angela Ferguson, works with the Onondaga Nation Farm crew to cultivate and return seeds to their peoples, and to help restore ancestral methods of hunting, fishing, agriculture, and food preparation (Bleir, 2020). The story of Braiding the Sacred is ultimately a story of the importance of seeds–culturally, historically, and for the future. Seeds are vital to many Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives (such as the Palestine Heirloom Seed Library and the White Earth Seed Library) because they are key to the continuation of traditional crop cultivation and consumption. Seeds embody longstanding cultures and carry the memories of the peoples who cultivated them, even when those peoples no longer exist–some of the seed varieties in Braiding the Sacred's seed bank have no people left, but through this organization, they can continue to be cultivated (Bleir, 2020). The living legacies of past peoples in their seed varieties demonstrate the close connection between foods and the cultures and peoples that consume them.

As many of the seeds in the collection are the last of their kind on the planet and are no longer actively cultivated by their people, Braiding the Sacred's intervention is vital in growing and returning these seeds to the communities they originate from (Bleir, 2020). While restoring the culinary and cultural heritage embodied in the corn plant, this project also resists the colonial erasure of Indigeneity–both in plants and people.

The process of propagating and sharing seeds builds connections within and between nations, reinforcing community and solidarity. After propagating seeds at home in the Onondaga Nation,

Ferguson takes them to the Mohawk Nation to propagate them. The Mohawk can then pass these seeds on to other Native communities, representing a journey that incrementally restores Indigenous seed sovereignty and builds relationships along the way. Within the Onondaga community, coming together to harvest, prepare, and eat traditional foods is healing: as Ferguson describes, “it’s not just the food that’s the medicine, it’s also the coming together, the exchange, the laughter, the conversation, food energy, and then the food at the end is the gift” (Bleir, 2020). Beyond its seed initiative, the broader work of the Onondaga Nation Farm crew toward restoring the Onondaga traditional food system underscores the importance of traditional knowledge in sustainably acquiring food and in restoring ancestral skills among community members. The Farm crew’s hunts provide access to fresh, local turkey, deer, rabbit, and fish, reducing dependence on packaged meats and aligning with traditional hunting cycles to prevent over-harvesting (Bleir, 2020). These hunts revive skills that people's ancestors have known and practiced for centuries: e.g., how to clean, skin, and distribute the meat of the deer in a respectful and effective manner to nourish oneself and one's community, directly from the land. Having ancestral skills restored empowers community members to become educators themselves. Thomas Benedict, who is part of the Onondaga hunting and fishing crews, describes how, following hands-on learning during the hunting season, he “could confidently go out and get a deer…and what I’ve been taught I can pass on to the next group that comes in” (Bleir, 2020). Additionally, reflecting the importance of connections to the land in Indigenous agriculture, the crew’s farming practices use traditional methods, with all labor done by hand. This promotes sustainable production, in contrast to mainstream US agriculture, which is heavily reliant on non-renewable energy, while also making the garden a Sacred Space (Bleir, 2020).

Through hands-on experience with agroecological farming on the land, people can resist the disconnection from the earth that industrial, market-based food systems promote. Food preparation and cooking in the initiative have also helped to challenge harmful colonial legacies like patriarchy. While today, some people believe that cooking is 'women's work', the work of this food sovereignty initiative reconnects Onondaga men with the practice of meat and soup preparation (a common male task prior to colonialism) (Bleir, 2020).

Braiding the Sacred and the Onondaga Nation Farm crew are the driving force behind the restoration and continuation of Onondaga food sovereignty. But their work highlights universal elements of Indigenous food sovereignty. By connecting people with the land through preparing and eating traditional foods, this initiative mirrors the experiences of urban Indigenous peoples in Canada, even when the methods of acquiring these foods differ. Additionally, the focus on educating community members about traditional practices is reflected in other Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives, such as those of the Zapatistas (Gahman, 2017) in Chiapas, Mexico, who use a land-based, hands-on approach to agroecological pedagogy.

Case 5: Sharaka (Palestine)

Sharaka is a volunteer-run food sovereignty initiative operating in Ramallah, Palestine. It runs a weekly farmers market, provides produce baskets to subscribers, operates a seed exchange, volunteers with farmers, and runs a mobile restaurant 2-4 times per year with dishes made from local crops (Isma'il and Dajani, 2021; Meneley, 2014, p. 73). The core of the Sharaka initiative is the concept of *baladi*, an Arabic word that translates to the English word "local", but has a deeper connotation: *baladi* is authenticity, the connection of the Palestinian people to their land

and country, and to the agricultural products that sustain them (Meneley, 2014, p. 73). While *baladi* is a concept specific to Sharaka's context, it reflects the universality of connections with land and place in Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. Sharaka's vision is of a food-sovereign Palestine where Palestinians have a sufficient supply of traditional, sustainably farmed foods (Meneley, 2014, p. 73).

The principles of self-determination and self-sufficiency are central to Sharaka's work. The initiative achieves this by rejecting foreign aid, which fosters dependency and comes with conditions (Isma'il and Dajani, 2021). Like Braiding the Sacred, Sharaka views seed saving and exchange as crucial to Indigenous food sovereignty and holds a local seed exchange at the start of farming seasons so people can grow their own food. One of the founders of Sharaka, Aisha Mansour, described the importance of seeds to the concept of *baladi:* "When we refer to *baladi*, we are referring to our heirloom seeds that have been saved by our *falaheen* [peasant farmers] year after year" (Meneley, 2014, p. 73). The resilience of heirloom seed cultivation takes on a special significance in the Palestinian context, where a core aim of the occupying power has been the denial of Palestinian sovereignty in all aspects of daily life.

All Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives are political, but Sharaka pursues political strategies and faces challenges unique to the context of the occupation in which it operates. One of these strategies is supporting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. Sharaka's support for BDS entails the general rejection of consuming Israeli goods (and therefore rejecting supporting the economy of the occupying power), as well as encouraging people to grow and prepare their own food to reduce/eliminate dependence on Israeli produce and foods. For

example, by pickling and preserving foods, Sharaka envisions a revival of Palestinian preservation practices that, in providing people with food throughout the winter, enables them to boycott Israeli imports (Meneley, 2014, p. 74). Growing food is made particularly difficult, though, by the occupation's control over water, as well as land and farming inputs. One of Mansour's tomato crops, for example, died out because Israel withheld water, and the plants could not be bathed (Meneley, 2014, p. 73). Fertilizers, seeds, and other planting materials can be held up at military checkpoints for long periods, making farming difficult, precarious, and unpredictable.

Like many Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives, Sharaka demonstrates that people can pursue food sovereignty without political sovereignty, as part of reclaiming their overall self-determination. Sharaka emphasizes connections with the land, ancestral practices, traditional foods, and relationship-building with other initiatives. It also practices political strategies unique to its context, such as boycotting goods from the occupier. Ultimately, it highlights the political nature of food and farming and articulates agriculture as a site of resistance to colonialism.

Figure 3: Woman at Sharaka Initiative

Note. Photo by Vieira, M. (2015). [Woman at Sharaka initiative]. CC-BY-NC

Conclusion

Food systems are inherently political. They are intimately tied to self-determination and are a key site at which colonial power is exercised and contested. Decolonial resistance is the essence of Indigenous food sovereignty. It has been through food systems that settler occupations, government policies, and development projects have attacked the health and culture of Native communities; and, as the case studies presented demonstrate, it has been through the resurgence of ancestral food systems that Indigenous peoples have resisted these attacks. Indigenous food sovereignty movements represent Indigenous innovations that, in addressing the limitations of food security and food sovereignty paradigms, present a valuable approach to pursuing food justice. The realization of Indigenous food sovereignty continues to be impeded by a range of factors, including, as this review has explored, laws, introduced foods and diet changes, racism, classism, gender injustice, and free trade. Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives are in

resurgence across North America, South America, and worldwide. These initiatives produce improved results for Indigenous health and self-determination and represent great promise, despite ongoing significant challenges, for a decolonial, self-determined future for food systems across geographies.

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Appendix A: List of Organizations and Initiatives working on Indigenous Food Sovereignty Worldwide (by Region)

Turtle Island (North America)

- Braiding the Sacred https://braidingthesacred.org/
- The Restoring Shoshone Ancestral Food Gathering Program https://restoring-shoshone-ancestral-food.org/
- Lakota Food Sovereignty Coalition https://lakotafoodscoalition.wixsite.com/website
- Cheyenne River Youth Project https://lakotayouth.org/
- Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative https://www.indigenousfoodandag.com/
- Intertribal Agriculture Council https://www.indianag.org/
- Inuit Circumpolar Council–Alaska https://iccalaska.org/
- Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation https://thundervalley.org/
- Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance https://nativefoodalliance.org/
- Montana Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative https://www.montana.edu/smallfarms/mifsi/

- Na-ah Illahee food sovereignty fund https://naahillahee.org/food-sovereignty-fund/
- The Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe Community Gardens https://www.elwha.org/
- The Muckleshoot tribal food school program https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/pnw-history-culture/muckleshoot
- The Nooksack Indian Tribe Diabetes Program and Traditional Plants Grant https://nooksacktribe.org/departments/health/community-health-fund-program/
- The Suquamish Tribe Community Health Program https://suquamish.nsn.us/health-division/community-health/
- Zuni Youth Enrichment Project https://www.zyep.org/
- Sierra Seeds https://sierraseeds.org/
- North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems https://natifs.org/#:~:text=our%20ancestors'%20prayers-,North%20American%20Traditional%20Indigenous%20Food%20Systems%20(N%C4%80TIFS)%2C%20founded%20by,by%20re%2Destablishing%20Native%20foodways.
- Native Seed Search https://www.nativeseeds.org/
- US Food Sovereignty Alliance https://usfoodsovereigntyalliance.org/

Asia & Oceania

- The Palestine Heirloom Seed Library https://viviensansour.com/Palestine-Heirloom
- Sharaka https://www.facebook.com/SlowFoodPalestineAklyBldy
- Café Melanesia https://pawankafund.org/blog-news/cafemelanesia/
- Tebtebba https://www.tebtebba.org/
- Pakistan Kissan Rabita Committee https://www.facebook.com/p/Pakistan-Kissan-Rabita-Committee-100063802850639/

Africa

- South African Food Sovereignty Campaign https://www.safsc.org.za/
- Mtandao wa Vikundi vya Wakulima Tanzania (MVIWATA) https://www.mviwata.or.tz/
- Eastern and Southern Africa Small Scale Farmers Forum https://esaff.org/index-php/
- Kenyan Peasants League https://kenyanpeasantsleague.org/
- Alliance for Food Sovereignty in Africa https://afsafrica.org/
- Food Sovereignty Ghana https://www.fian.org/en/news/article/food-sovereignty-ghana-fights-for-right-to-seeds-3005

South & Central America

- Tirakam Association https://www.forestpeoples.org/en/node/50346
- Wangki Tangni https://www.facebook.com/WangkiTangni/
- Trabajadores Unidos por la Tierra https://www.facebook.com/TrabajadoresUnidosporlaTierra/?locale=es_LA
- Movimiento Nacional Campesinas e Indígena https://proyectoballena.cck.gob.ar/movimiento-nacional-campesino-e-indigena-mnci/
- Movimento de Pescadores e Pescadoras Artesanais https://mpppeloterritorio.blogspot.com/
- Federación Nacional de Asociaciones Cooperativas Agropecuarias https://www.confras.org/fenacoa/
- Confederación Nacional Agraria (CNA) https://www.cna.org.pe/

- Confederación de Pueblos, Organizaciones indígenas Campesinas del Ecuador (FEI) https://confederacionfei.org/
- La Red de Semillas https://www.redsemillas.info/presentacion/
- National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women (Chile) https://www.anamuri.cl/

Global

- La Vía Campesina https://viacampesina.org/en/
- International Planning Committee for Food Sovereignty https://www.foodsovereignty.org/

Appendix B: Glossary

Food security: defined by the USDA as "access by all peoples at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life", food security is an access-based paradigm for understanding food politics.

Food sovereignty: the most widely used definition in the academic literature is from the Nyéléni Declaration, where food sovereignty is defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems"

Food systems: the network of processes and relationships that shape how food makes it from production to distribution to consumption, including the economic, cultural, political, and social aspects of these processes

Foodways: the traditional practices and beliefs of a society governing how food is produced, collected, and consumed

Hegemon(ic): the dominant political actor or discourse in an area or network

Indigenous Food Sovereignty: The principle wherein Indigenous peoples define, control, and practice their own, traditional, place-based foodways, including notions of relationality and reciprocity with the territories from which they derive their food systems

Patriarchy: a social system wherein men and masculinity are privileged and women and femininity are subjugated

Relationality: the concept of connectedness and existing in relationships

Settler colonialism: a form of colonialism where a group invades a region and displaces, eradicates, or subjugates the Indigenous population with the intention of permanently occupying and resettling in the new territory; it entails gradual or immediate attempts to eliminate the Native population and their cultures and histories and their replacement with a settler population, culture, and history

Self-Determination: The ability of an individual or group to make decisions and pursue actions about itself free from external influence, based solely on its own desires and intentions

Sovereignty: the supreme power or authority of a state or government, often linked with the power to make laws and use force, and to govern free from outside influence or interference

Survivance: a term originating in Native American studies that combines survival and resistance to describe the continued, active practice and presence of Indigeneity and Indigenous culture in the face of erasure and genocide; used to counter the static nature of the word "survival" and highlight the active nature of resistance by Indigenous peoples

Traditional foods: The foods that a society has historically chosen to sustain itself from its environment, often associated with culture, rituals, knowledge systems, and values

The Uruguay Round: a series of international trade negotiations that covered wide-ranging issues governing the global exchange of goods and services, leading to the founding of the World Trade Organization in Marrakesh, Morocco at its conclusion