CHAPTER ONE

tiičʕaqƛ̓

Understanding Food Sovereignty and Its Potential for Indigenous Health and Decolonization

To begin this chapter on food sovereignty I share a story about my family and our tradition of picking qaałqaawi, trailing blackberries, to help understand its correlation with tiičʕaqƛ̓, holistic health, and decolonization, and for creating spaces where our food traditions are centralized and self-determined. As mentioned in the previous chapter, picking qaałqaawi was one of my favorite activities as a young girl and I have continued this tradition throughout my life. I have many wonderful stories about berry picking. I was raised in the berry-picking tradition, and each summer my family would gather together in a caravan of vehicles and head to the mountains in search of the delectable qaałqaawi. My grandpa, Hughie Watts, was the berry-picking location specialist and always knew where to find the most and best ṅačyuu, or berry patch. As I also discussed in my opening chapter, colonization and removal led to the loss of many of our traditional harvesting sites, and many of these lands then fell under the control of forestry companies, which, through a slash-and-burn technique, engineered the lands for timber production. Still, my grandfather knew how to turn this settler-colonial desecration to his advantage. Having been raised with traditional ecological knowledge of land burning, he knew that these areas that were cleared to remove logs were also ideal places for wild blackberry growth. Grandpa would drive through our former harvesting sites and when he saw the areas that had been burned by forest companies, he would tell us, “In a couple of years this is going to be a great spot to pick berries.” And sure enough, it was.

When the qaałqaawi season arrived, my grandpa and other family members would get the vehicles ready and gather all of us together to begin our journey into the mountains where the qaałqaawi grew. We would pack our food and water for the day and grab our berry-picking containers. We no longer utilized the beautiful cedar-woven baskets that were used by our ancestors for picking berries. Instead, we found new and innovative containers brought to our communities by settler society in the form of metal pots and plastic ice cream containers. When I was young, the main type of berry-picking container was a metal cooking pot, which changed to plastic Tupperware bowls, and then eventually we began using the Neapolitan ice cream 128-ounce circular plastic container, which was ideal with its lid and handle. I am not an ice cream lover, but when my mom brought it home, I devoured that ice cream until I got brain freeze, just so that I could have this container for picking! I cannot tell you how much this container transformed the way young kids picked qaałqaawi. The number one issue we had when we were trekking up and down the mountains was spilling our berries. There is nothing worse than when you fill your container, only to have all its delicious contents spill out before you can make your way back to the vehicle to transfer the berries into the larger bins. But sometimes those flimsy containers with no tops worked to our advantage. Occasionally, we kids would get a little carried away when we were picking and more berries ended up in our mouths than in our containers. When we got back to the vehicle to transfer our berries into the larger pots, my grandparents would see that we only had a few berries. We would put on our saddest faces and tell them about our “mishaps” and how we fell and spilled most of them. My grandpa would look at us with a stern face and say, “You need to be more careful next time.” And then he would turn away, and we could see a slight flicker of a smile on his face because he knew we were fibbing; the giveaway—the deep red stains on our lips and tongues. We could never pull anything over on our grandpa.

The drive up the mountains could take anywhere from one to several hours, depending on where my grandpa chose to look first or where there had been slash burning the year before. We would make our way up the windy, dusty roads with kids either in the back of the trucks or squished in the back seats of the cars, happy with anticipation and excitement for our next berry-picking adventure. Many times, as we were driving along the mountain roads, we would run into other community members who were also out for a day of berry picking. And we would usually run into my grandpa's sister Agnes Sam, or Green Aunty, as she was also known,[1] who shared the love of berry picking and would also be out with her family looking for the ultimate qaałqaawi ṅačyuu, blackberry patch.

Never, Ever Reveal Your ṅačyuu!

We would pull up beside Green Aunty's vehicle driven by one of her sons, and with her younger children and grandchildren crammed in the back seat. My grandpa would roll down his window and say to his sister, "Did you find any berries on that mountain?" pointing to a mountain nearby. Green Aunty would reply, "No, nothing on that mountain." They would chat for a little longer, tell a few stories, laugh, catch up on the local community gossip, and then we would drive away. As soon as Green Aunty was out of sight my grandpa would head his vehicle straight up that very mountain where Green Aunty said there were no qaałqaawi. My grandpa knew his sister was lying because he would tell her the exact same story when she asked him if he had found any good ṅačyuu. And we were sworn to secrecy and told never to reveal where a good berry patch was, and we would keep this secret even when Green Aunty or any of our other relatives would try to get us to spill the beans. My grandpa and his sister loved each other dearly, but we all grew up with this family rule that we still keep today: Never, ever reveal your ṅačyuu!

When Grandpa would find the perfect ṅačyuu we would pile out of our caravan of vehicles and head up the mountain following the narrow, grassy paths, spreading out across the landscape in search of berry vines. Once we found a good patch, we would take out our containers and get ready for hours of picking. Every so often we would stand up and stretch out our backs, see how our other relatives were doing, and compare our picking accomplishments. We would scan the mountainside for my grandpa, who was always easy to find because he loved to wear a white cap on his head, which clearly stood out among the blankets of green trees and bushes, even if he was on another mountain slope. He, too, was keeping track of us, making sure we were safe but, most of all, making sure we young ones were picking berries and not horsing around.

My grandma, Grace, always got first dibs on the qaałqaawi that were growing close to the road where we parked our vehicles, and she would shoo us younger ones away and tell us to go farther up the mountain path to pick. One afternoon my cousin Daryl and I were walking back to the vehicle to transfer the berries from our small container into the larger ones that were in the trunk. As we were nearing the road, we saw our grandma hunched over behind a fallen tree, picking berries from the vines growing along the stump. On the other side of the tree stump was a black bear eating berries from the same vine. Trying to stay calm we inched closer to Grandma, trying not to startle the bear. When we were near enough, we said to her softly, "Grandma, there's a bear on the other side of the stump." My grandma replied, "I know. I see her. Leave her alone. She loves the berries too." And my grandma just kept on picking.

After a couple of hours of picking qaałqaawi, we would all meet back at the vehicles, take out the foods and beverages we had packed, and sit down for a meal, typically salmon sandwiches and usually Tang (obviously not a traditional food, but it was the big drink back in the 1970s). While eating, the adults would catch up with each other, sharing stories in a familial exchange of love and laughter. Once we completed our meal, we would head back up the mountain paths to continue picking berries. On a good day of picking we would average about five gallons of berries. When all of the large containers in the vehicles were filled, we called it a day and began our drive down the mountainside headed toward home to begin processing the qaałqaawi. Sometimes, if it was not too late and if we were driving past Sproat or Great Central Lake on our way home, Grandpa and the other adults driving in our family caravan would stop the vehicles so that we kids could go for a quick dip. We especially loved this on a particularly hot and dry day; it was so refreshing to jump into the cool water. My grandpa did this as a way to show his appreciation for the work we did in contributing berries to our communal pots. But I also think he and the other adults knew this would be a great way to get the dust and dirt off us before we got back to my grandparents' home.

When we arrived back at my grandparents' home, my grandma, my mom, and my aunties would divide the berries and get them ready to process. This usually meant canning them, a process that involves cleaning off all the stems, small sticks, and other debris, washing the berries in cold water, then placing them in jars. Pectin and a little sugar or honey may be added for taste. The jars are then sealed with lids and rings and placed in a large canner that is filled with hot water up to an inch from the top of the jars in the bottom row. A lid is placed on the canner and the water is brought to a boil. The cooking time is short, ten to fifteen minutes. Once cooked, the jars are removed and placed on a table until they cool down. Once cooled, they can be stored away for future use. Or, sometimes, we would just put the berries in plastic bags and freeze them. My grandparents would keep a larger share for when we would get together for our large family dinners at their house. And some berries were always put aside for my grandma to make her delicious blackberry dumplings (a recipe I wish I remembered!), which she would make for that evening's dinner. We would all gather around the table, sharing our berry-picking stories as we ate one of our delicious traditional foods.

The Northwest Coast—Land of Salmon and Cedar

My Nuu-chah-nulth community of Tseshaht is situated within the larger area defined as the Northwest Coast, extending over 1,400 miles and encompassing the jagged coastlines of southeastern Alaska, British Columbia, Washington and Oregon states, and Northern California. It is an area characterized as the "land of salmon and cedar," and was the home of some of the most diverse and richest Indigenous cultures in the world, nations that flourished in abundances of marine mammals and dense vegetation in an area with mild winters and wet summers.[2] The waterways provided us with an abundance of food, and the rainforest, populated by western red and yellow cedar, provided us with an impressive material culture. We fished primarily for salmon, but also harvested other local fish, sea mammals, and shellfish, and in the case of my people, the Nuu-chah-nulth, and our relatives the Makah in Washington State, we hunted whales. Land animals such as deer, elk, and mountain goat were also hunted.

Biological diversity created an abundance of foods along the Northwest Coast, which we and other Coastal Nations harvested by fishing, hunting, gathering, and cultivating plants and medicines. The harvesting, cultivation, preparation, sharing, and trading of our foods was conducted within our prescribed cultural values based on respect, reciprocity, interdependency, and ecological sustainability. Our food systems functioned in healthy interdependent relationships with our environment and were maintained through the active participation in traditional land and food systems.[3] The kinds and quantities of foods that were available to us were dependent on keeping this symbiotic relationship strong and healthy, and resources were maintained through the transfer of traditional ecological knowledge monitoring the environmental health and species diversity, as stewards and protectors. As a result, our traditional foodways are enmeshed in the ecosystems in which we thrive.

When I was growing up a good portion of my daily diet consisted of haʔum, or traditional food, and we frequently ate salmon, halibut, herring eggs, and seafood as well as deer and moose meat and a variety of berries and plants, which we harvested and processed. I was raised on very healthy foods, eating salmon or seafood three or four times a week, accompanied by wild berries as well as fruit from the orchard behind my grandparent's home that was planted by the Indian agents in the late 1800s, when they were attempting to make us into farmers. So how did we get to this place of unhealthiness? As an Indigenous food studies scholar born and raised in my Nuu-chah-nulth community of Tseshaht I have studied, witnessed, and experienced how colonization, the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism, boarding schools, habitat destruction, socioeconomic marginalization, and the imposition of a Western diet have impacted my people's physical, nutritional, and spiritual health and caused us and Indigenous peoples globally to be food insecure.

Food Sovereignty and the Centrality of qaałqaawi to Tseshaht Culture

Food sovereignty has been defined as "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods."[4] Beyond nutritional health, Indigenous food sovereignty reinforces familial and social bonds of generosity and reciprocity in harvesting, sharing, and eating our food while also decreasing our dependence on processed foods. I have witnessed this firsthand. Our berry-picking tradition united my family and strengthened our social and ancestral relationships to one another while reaffirming our physical relationships to the qaałqaawi, to other plants and animals we came in contact with while harvesting, and to the lands, soil, air, and water that provided this nutritious and wholesome source of food. Within these mutual and symbiotic relationships of respect and reciprocity, my family was enacting food sovereignty.

In the pre-contact and early contact periods, in my Tseshaht community, berry picking and gathering roots and camas were considered a women's economic activity. Men's activities were harvesting fish and seafood as well as hunting deer and elk. While many studies of Northwest Coast Indigenous economies focus on males as the main food providers through fishing and hunting activities, women's roles as berry and root harvesters were equally important and contributed just as much to the dietary health of our communities. For my community, we ate many different varieties of berries, but qaałqaawi were central to our diet and significant to our health, having a high nutritional value with lots of dietary fiber, vitamin C, vitamin K, folic acid, vitamin B, and the essential mineral manganese.[5]

Prior to colonization, when our hereditary chiefdom system was strong, our ḥaw̓iiḥ (chiefs) had stewardship over the ḥaḥuułi, or ancestral homelands, and would oversee the economic resources and activities of their ʔuuštaqimł, family or lineage group, and masčim, community members, including the root-digging and berry-picking sites, which were part of their tupaati, or hereditary prerogative.[6] The ḥaw̓iiḥ had clearly defined tangible and intangible rights to lands, waterways, plants, and animals as well as to names, songs, dances, and ceremonies that were acknowledged and that were affirmed in our Potlatch system. An important feature of these rights was understanding the responsibilities that came with them, especially in treating all living things within his ḥaḥuułi with the utmost respect and reverence so that a relationship based on reciprocity would be upheld and reinforced. Thus the word ḥaḥuułi meant more than just a right of ownership, as explained by Nuu-chah-nulth elder Roy Haiyupis:

> [ḥaḥuułi] indicates . . . that the hereditary chiefs have the responsibility to take care of the forests, the land and the sea within his [ḥaḥuułi], and a responsibility to look after his [masčim], or tribal members. . . . Embedded within the [ḥaḥuułi] initiated from [the chief's] rights to ownership of tribal territories, lies the key to the social and cultural practices, tribal membership and property ownership—economic, environmental and resource controls to . . . sustain life for the tribe today and for generations to come.[7]

Nuu-chah-nulth-aht,[8] and other Indigenous peoples, have a belief that all things in our natural world have spirits, which we recognize through ceremony.

First Species and First Foods ceremonies were conducted to honor them for gifting themselves as food, eliciting a relationship based on reciprocity and a sense of sacredness and gratitude attached to the spirit of a plant or animal that gives itself to humans. These are what Robin Kimmerer calls "cultures of reciprocity," where humans and other living things exist in an interconnected world in which all are equally worthy of respect.[9]

The ḥaw̓iiḥ had clearly defined areas that they protected, managed, and cared for. Berry-picking sites were clearly marked with cedar stakes driven into the ground to serve as boundaries for the berry patches and to let others know that these harvesting areas were under the stewardship of a particular chief. When the berries were ripe the chief would have first claim to the n̓ačyuu, or berry patch, and women within his ʔuuštaqimł would be sent to gather the berries for him. The harvesting of plants, roots, and berries would begin in late spring with salmonberry shoots, which we call m̓aayi, one of my favorite traditional foods when I was growing up. It has a delicious sweet taste, and you eat it by peeling back the outer skin to reveal a soft and crunchy inner shoot. Many community members still pick and eat m̓aayi, but like our other traditional foods, it now competes with store-bought sweet foods and candy.

By early summer the berry crops would start to ripen and the women would take their baskets made of woven cedar bark, which they carried on their backs secured with a strap over the forehead or chest. They would paddle their canoes, travelling along the waterways collecting berries, along with roots and plants, emptying their baskets into large boxes in the canoe as they paddled along the shores."[10] They would leave their villages for several days as they travelled through the territory, making temporary bark shelters in the places they stopped to sleep. After they had enough berries for the winter months, they would return to the village to begin processing them. Some berries would be eaten immediately, but most of them would be preserved by spreading them out on planks and then pressing the planks together for drying the berries. Once they were dried, the berries would be stored in baskets until eaten, traded, or fed or gifted to guests at Potlatch ceremonies. The first qaałqaawi harvest would be welcomed through a feast held by the chief to pay respect to the berry plant that provided this food, to acknowledge and show gratitude to the women who picked the berries, and to share his bounty with community members and other guests who were invited to his Potlatch. Berries would be eaten with an accompaniment of whale or seal oil.[11]

Berries were also significant to the Indigenous trade economy that developed along the Northwest Coast. Once berries and other plant foods were processed and preserved, the chiefs would trade them through this network, thus distributing foods to areas that may have had scarcity while also increasing the chief's importance and wealth. In the early contact period, non-Indigenous explorers, traders, missionaries, and settlers also received berries through the food trade. In some cases, receiving these nutritious foods meant the difference between starvation and survival for them.[12]

Understanding Food Sovereignty

In 1993 peasants, small-scale farmers, and Indigenous communities organized into a global agrarian movement, La Via Campesina, representing 148 organizations from sixty-nine countries, forming the strongest voice yet in radical opposition to what they described as a "globalized, neoliberal model of agricultural food production." The movement linked the growing food, economic, and environmental crises to the continued growth of an industrial, capital-intensive, and corporate-led model of agriculture. Created by destructive economic policies that marginalized small-scale farmers at the expense of multinational corporations, the model called for the removal of farmers from their land and forced them into the global market economy as wage laborers.[13]

In a conference held in 1996 in Tlaxcala, Mexico, La Via Campesina criticized the state-led food security movement to end global hunger.[14] This food security program, they asserted, did little to address the real issue, the control over food production and distribution. Via Campesina also argued that the current regime continued to promote agricultural practices that benefitted transnational corporations and undermined small-scale farmers.[15] The Tlaxcala conference introduced a new concept, "food sovereignty," and established eleven principles that were integrated into La Via Campesina's Position on Food Sovereignty, presented at the World Food Summit in Rome in November 1996.

The World Food Summit brought together representatives from 185 countries and the European Community with close to ten thousand participants, who debated one of the most important issues facing the planet: the eradication of hunger. In the NGO Response to the Rome Declaration on World Food Security a six-point plan was presented, which relied on a rights-based discourse that challenged transnational capitalist control over the globalized food market and proposed a new framework for ending global hunger:

> We propose a new model for achieving food security that calls into question many of the existing assumptions, policies and practices. This model, based on decentralization, challenges the current model, based on a concentration of wealth and power, which now threatens global food security, cultural diversity, and the very ecosystems that sustain life on the planet. . . . Each nation must have the right to food sovereignty to achieve the level of food sufficiency and nutritional quality it considers appropriate without suffering retaliation of any kind.[16]

The definition of food sovereignty was further developed in various forums and meetings. The Nyéléni International Forum for Food Sovereignty, held in Sélingué, Mali, in 2007, brought together five hundred delegates from various organizations in eighty countries to address the need for an international plan for resistance. They agreed that the plan would need to support political autonomy and privilege the rights and interests of local producers, distributors, and consumers. Together, they concluded, these stakeholders could establish a decision-making process to alleviate hunger and food insecurity. The Nyéléni Declaration articulated what is now the most-cited definition of food sovereignty:

> 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 agricultural systems. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather that the demands of markets and corporations.[17]

The concept of food sovereignty was framed within a larger rights discourse and the ability for all people to produce their own foods freely and independently in a political framework that recognized territorial autonomy. Food sovereignty, the delegates stressed, could only operate in a world where political sovereignty of all peoples was recognized.[18] This emerging food sovereignty movement challenged the hegemony of transnational capital in the food system, articulating the need to stop viewing food as a “commodity,” and asserting that the political rights to produce and distribute food be returned to the producers and consumers.[19]

This notion of food sovereignty became a uniting call to small-scale farmers and Indigenous peoples throughout the world. While this movement developed in an agrarian-based, Latin American context,[20] Indigenous peoples with fishing, hunting, and gathering traditions were able to connect to its underlying philosophy that all nations, including Indigenous Nations, have the right to define strategies and policies and develop food systems and practices that reflect their own cultural values around producing, consuming, and distributing food.

Indigenizing Food Sovereignty

In the mid-1990s Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States began exploring ways in which food sovereignty could be employed as a concept to create dialogue and action around the revitalization of Indigenous food practices and ecological knowledge. The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) was created in 2006 and was one of the first Indigenous groups in Canada to explore the new concept of food sovereignty. Through its participation with the British Columbia Food Systems Network (BCFSN), the WGIFS began to articulate ways food sovereignty could be defined and applied in order to address pressing issues facing Indigenous communities as they responded to their own health needs.[21] Coming together in meetings, conferences, and discussion groups, Indigenous elders, traditional harvesters, and community members redefined food sovereignty by moving it beyond a "rights-based" discourse and centering it in Indigenous foods and ecological knowledge, which emphasized ancestral values and wisdom.[22]

The WGIFS developed four key principles of Indigenous food sovereignty that Indigenous peoples and communities could use as a framework as they addressed their food needs. (1) Sacred sovereignty: food is a sacred gift from the Creator. (2) Participatory: this is a call to action, whereby people have a responsibility to uphold and nurture healthy and interdependent relationships with the ecosystem that provides the land, water, plants, and animals as food. (3) Self-determination: food sovereignty needs to be placed within a context of Indigenous self-determination with the freedom and ability to respond to community needs around food. (4) Policy: it provides a restorative framework for reconciling Indigenous food and cultural values with colonial laws and policies.[23]

Enacting Indigenous food sovereignty requires peeling away the layers of colonialism that have been the Indigenous lived experience and redefining our lives within our own philosophical and ancestral teachings and wisdom. At the same time, Indigenous communities are distinct and unique, making it impossible to define food sovereignty in a way that reflects all of our realities. Still, as WGIFS director Dawn Morrison points out, we Indigenous peoples are united by eco-philosophical principles that have guided our interactions with the environment and the nonhuman world and have informed our food systems.[24]

In the next sections I discuss four themes: building relationships and affirming responsibilities; restorative food justice; fostering health and well-being; and strengthening social, familial, and community bonds. These themes intersect with and build on the WGIFS four principles that I feel help contextualize Indigenous food sovereignty and situate it within the decolonial struggles taking place in our communities today.

Building Relationships and Affirming Responsibilities

As I stated earlier, the concept of food sovereignty was framed within a larger rights discourse, that being the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food, and the right to define their own food and agricultural systems freely and independently. Having the political and cultural right to your traditional foods recognized by governments through policy, as the WGIFS has identified, can provide a framework for reconciling Indigenous food and cultural values with colonial laws and policies. This would align with and support the rights contained in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and more specifically with Article 20, which states, "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities."[25] In 2016 Canada took some legal steps and endorsed the document as part of the movement toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, but it has not officially adopted the UNDRIP into law.[26] In 2019 British Columbia and the Northwest Territories went further and made a political move to write the UNDRIP into their provincial and territorial laws.[27]

In looking at Indigenous food sovereignty through a "rights-based" lens, scholars such as Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) argue that "the existing rights discourse can only take Indigenous peoples so far" through its emphasis on state political and legal recognition of Indigenous rights. Rather than focus on achieving political and legal recognition of the right to food sovereignty, Corntassel turns the attention toward Indigenous community action in emphasizing the cultural responsibilities and relationships Indigenous peoples have with the land, water, plants, and animals that have sustained their cultures.[28]

Placed within the concept of self-determination as defined in the WGIFS principles, Indigenous food sovereignty aligns with principles developed by Corntassel's notion of "sustainable self-determination," which positions responsibilities and relationships at the core of Indigenous self-determination. In order to decolonize, Indigenous peoples need to direct change from within and through action, change, strategies, and policies in working toward becoming sustainable self-determining nations.[29] Indigenizing food sovereignty places emphasis on Indigenous responsibility, mutuality, kinship, and relationships with the natural world; a world, as Kimmerer contends, that is built on reciprocity between humans and nonhumans, creating duties and responsibilities for both: "Just as all beings have a duty to me, I have a duty to them," Kimmerer writes. "If an animal gives its life to feed me, I am in turn bound to support its life. If I receive a stream's gift of pure water, then I am responsible for returning a gift in kind. An integral part of a human's education is to know those duties and how to perform them."[30] Embedded within Indigenous eco-philosophy and worldview is the cultural knowledge and understanding that people, animals, land, water, and air are interconnected in a web of life that emphasizes good relationships based on gratitude and respect. Indigenous food sovereignty, therefore, embodies a deep spiritual appreciation for food as a sacred gift. Understanding our traditional foods in this way, Morrison says, keeps "foods alive spiritually" and is recognized in rituals, offerings, and ceremonies.[31]

Restorative Food Justice

Indigenous food sovereignty entails a rebuilding of the relationships between humans and nonhumans in a restorative framework. The human-ecosystem relationship is characterized as one of reciprocity and respect, where humans do not control nature but live in harmony with it. Thus restoring the health of Indigenous communities requires restoring the health of the land. Or, as Kimmerer so aptly states, "We restore the land and the land restores us."[32] In his book *Eating the Landscape*, Indigenous ethnobotanist Enrique Salmón weaves his historical and cultural knowledge into a tapestry of understanding Indigenous environmental stewardship and the ancestral relationship Indigenous peoples have to the world around them.

> The knowledge I learned from my family was one aspect of a trove of culturally accumulated ecological knowledge. When they introduced me to individual plants, they also introduced my kinship to the plants and to the land from where they and we emerged. They were introducing me to my relatives. Through this way of knowing, especially with regard to kinship, I realized a comfort and a sense of security that I was bound to everything around me in a reciprocal relationship.[33]

Indigenous food sovereignty is defined within a restorative context, one that works to nurture individual and community health by repairing and fostering these healthy relationships. In the Indigenous worldview a healthy landscape sustains humans and nonhumans in what Kimmerer characterizes as "circles of reciprocity." Hence rebuilding and restoring sustainable and healthy relationships between humans and nonhumans through food sovereignty is not only good medicine for each; it is, as Kimmerer states, "medicine for the earth."[34] Within Indigenous cosmologies, scholars Sam Grey and Raj Patel assert, both landscapes and foodscapes occupy a simultaneously physical, spiritual, and social geography:

> Just as kinship is not restricted to consanguine human beings, sacredness does not merely congeal in particular places, but is a quality of the totality of the natural world—including all of the life-forms that provide sustenance and frame trade networks. Thus, food can be seen as the most direct manifestation of the relationships between Indigenous peoples and homelands, and it consequently occupies a central space in traditional thought.[35]

The Indigenous food sovereignty movement embodies a decolonization framework and through action and practice seeks to heal the wounds of colonialism and repair our relationships to the natural world. Throughout his life, Salmón's identity was grounded in what he calls "an encoded library of cultural and ecological knowledge" that united his relatives through the foods they ate and the recipes they shared, connecting them to the landscape in a familial relationship of respect.[36] For Indigenous peoples, our health and well-being are tied to our ancestral lands, to the waters, and to the plants and animals. In order to return to healthy communities, we need to restore healthy relationships to our ecosystems, which requires having access to our lands and waters, where we harvested, fished, and hunted. Our foods and ecological knowledge are embedded in our land and seascapes. The land and the food that comes from it are our source of knowledge and history. As Salmón asserts, "the food and the land where it grows remain the source of cultural memory."[37]

Fostering Health and Well-Being

Within the history of Indigenous peoples, colonization plays a key role in determining poor health through its disruption of our healthy relationships with our ecosystems, traditional foodways, and transfer of ecological and ancestral knowledge. Colonial policies such as the boarding schools weakened cultural practices and broke down our languages, creating disconnection from our cultural identity. Even for those not in the schools, colonialism maintained perpetual marginalization, leading to lack of autonomy and self-esteem, exacerbating the health disparities we see in our Indigenous communities today.[38]

As discussed in the introduction to this book, the industrialization of foods globally and the rise of processed food have created food insecurity throughout the world. For Indigenous peoples with place-based food economies, our food insecurity has reached epidemic levels with heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune disease, and others rising at alarming rates, making a return to our subsistence economies crucial to our cultural survival.[39] But what does it mean to be healthy?

Indigenous health has physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects that work together to heal and protect from disease through traditional foodways and ecosystems that maintain them. Being "healthy" is more than just our physical well-being; it means being spiritually and emotionally healthy—feeding our bodies with traditional and healthy foods and feeding our minds and spirits with our cultural teachings. For Indigenous people, our physical, spiritual, and emotional health is directly related to our ability to eat our traditional foods.[40] Restoring our traditional food practices allows us to experience a special connection to our cultures and our lands because every plant and animal carries its own spiritual gifts, and thus there is "a sense of vitality and belonging" that comes with eating the foods that provided our ancestors with optimum health and longevity.[41]

The Inuit in northern Alaska have a saying: "I am what I am because of what I eat."[42] Studies of the Indigenous whaling nations in the Arctic demonstrate how traditional foods, especially whales, are more than just nutritional sustenance; they have social, cultural, spiritual, and psychological significance as well. While a high value is placed on whales as a healthy food source, the tradition of whaling maintains community solidarity and collective security through the communal hunts and the processing, distributing, and consuming of whale products by the community members. Whaling serves to link the Inuit materially, symbolically, and spiritually to their cultural heritage and ancestral knowledge.[43]

As Indigenous people, we have an emotional connection to our traditional foods and see them as impacting our physical and nutritional well-being and having strong cultural and social values. There is a delicate balance between nutrition, emotional health, and social contact through complex interactions between people, brain chemistry, and the foods being eaten.[44] Eating traditional healthy foods turns on our neurotransmitters that release what are referred to as "happy chemicals": dopamine, endorphins, oxytocin, and serotonin, which send messages to the brain that make us feel joyful and content.[45] Many studies have been conducted with Indigenous peoples in northern Canada and Alaska to examine cultural and dietary change resulting from an increase in industrialized and processed foods. These communities have stayed connected to their traditional harvesting practices even with the increase in market and processed foods. Studies showed that even though these store-bought foods were available, traditional foods still retained their cultural and social importance and were associated with good feelings, health, and pleasurable events, especially when the foods were harvested. Similarly, a study conducted with the Yukon First Nations, Dene/Métis and Inuit women in Canada's Arctic communities between 1993 and 2003, included the question, "What do you think are the most important advantages of traditional food?" Women in these communities responded, "traditional food is healthy," "[traditional food] has more iron," and "[traditional food] makes your blood strong."[46] When asked what the socio-political benefits were of eating traditional foods the respondents remarked, "keeps our tradition," "brings people together," and "involves family in food prep[aration]."[47]

Strengthening Social, Familial, and Community Bonds

As I reflect back on berry picking with my relatives, I realized as I got older how important this tradition was to maintaining and strengthening the social and cultural bonds among us. I grew up in a large, tight-knit family. My mother was one of eleven siblings, who all grew up in close geographic proximity to each other. I was raised next door to my grandparents and they, along with my aunts and uncles, my mother's sisters and brothers, shared in the upbringing of their grandchildren. Our haʔum and traditions of berry picking and salmon fishing are important in reinforcing social and familial ties. The harvesting, processing, and sharing of qaałqaawi created a space where our elders transferred their cultural and foods knowledge to us younger ones, reaffirming our cultural identity as Tseshaht while strengthening our relationships and connections to our traditional lands, ecosystems, and the plants and animals where harvesting took place.

As we are social creatures, our ability to function in healthy interdependent relationships is directly influenced by our ability to maintain balance and harmony within our own bodies. In turn, our ability to maintain healthy bodies is directly influenced by the emotions we experience in positive social interactions. Working with family and community members to hunt, fish, gather, or prepare Indigenous foods can increase mental and emotional health through bonding and creating memories that can help build or enhance relationships.[48] In *Eating the Landscape*, Enrique Salmón connects his Rarámuri (Tarahumara) identity to his family's tradition of eating and sharing tamales, one of their traditional foods:

> My reaffirmation of identity and connection to place is not a direct result of the tamales, but come more from the processes that surround tamales, beans, raisins inside tamales, and my grandmother's herbal teas. The processes interconnect family, landscape, collection knowledge, all of which sustain and revitalize a sense of self and place. . . . I am eating the memories and knowledge associated with those foods. The elements of the stories, the jokes, and the intricate contextualized experience become embedded every time the eating

> takes place. It becomes a form of mimetic regeneration to eat one's family's recipes.[49]

In the summer of 2015 I held a luncheon at our Tseshaht Administration Building and invited community members to come and share a meal with me while sharing their food tradition stories. Many of the stories about our haʔum focused on salmon, with salmon remaining one of the central traditional foods in our diets. Most of our community members continue to fish and process salmon, which I discuss in the next chapter. However, not too many people in my community still pick qaałqaawi on a regular or annual basis anymore, and as the community members shared with me, it was not because they or their relatives lost the taste for these berries. There were other factors, mainly economic ones, that kept them from exercising this tradition. In most Tseshaht families, the husband and wife worked, and they could not afford to take a couple of days off work to pick berries, or were too tired after a week of working to gather their families together to pick berries during the weekends. With other community members, it was just not having the economic resources for gas and vehicles to travel long distances to the berry harvesting sites in the mountains. Some community members did share family berry-picking stories, but these were usually in the past tense, stories from their childhood.

Integral to coastal Indigenous people's cultures is the social gathering or feast known as the Potlatch.[50] The word Potlatch comes from the Chinook trade language and was derived from the Nuu-chah-nulth word, p̓ačiƛ, which means "to give." The Potlatch reflected and perpetuated Nuu-chah-nulth social organization, and in pre-contact times only the ḥaw̓iiḥ or chiefs held Potlatches, which they used to announce, make a claim to, and validate the hereditary privileges or rights they acquired at birth. They were also used as a social mechanism to maintain harmony within their ʔuuštaqimł, family or lineage group, by acknowledging their skills and labor. The ḥaw̓ił (chief) and his family invited guests to witness the claim being made and assumed the role of host. The chief declared his intentions to the guests, and their acceptance and reciprocation in their Potlatches validated these claims to status and privilege. While the purpose of Potlatches was to pass on titles of rank and their associated privileges to designated heirs of the ḥaw̓iiḥ, they functioned also to distribute food surpluses and special local products to the people invited to witness the claim being made.[51] These foods and other items were given as gifts to the invited guests, whose acceptance of them acknowledged their acceptance of the claim being made.[52]

Today anyone in our community can host a Potlatch. They are still held to transfer and bestow names, to celebrate marriages, to recognize a youth's coming of age, and to mourn and recognize the death of a tribal member. The Potlatch continues to serve an important economic and social function through the sharing and distribution of food and material goods. Community member Darrell Ross Sr. shared a contemporary berry-picking story, one that connected this food tradition to our coastal Potlatch and to the social, family, and community bonding aspect of this tradition. In 1992 Darrell and his family were preparing for a Potlatch they were holding to name their three children and were gathering haʔum that they were going to share with their guests. One of the foods was qaałqaawi. In preparation, he and his family packed into their vehicles and headed to some of their favorite berry-picking areas and eventually found a huge n̓ačyuu, one that took them three days to pick. They harvested over five gallons of qaałqaawi, which they fed to their guests attending the Potlatch. Darrell says:

> It was my proudest moment. I felt so happy that we could share these berries with our guests and that gathering these berries was something that we did together as a family. This is the communal aspect of our foods, and the practice of feasting. Getting ready for this feast made me really understand this. These food gathering activities such as berry picking brought our families together.[53]

Darrell and many other community members connect our food traditions to ḥaaḥuupa, a traditional form of teaching to pass on knowledge, guidance, counsel, or advice. Throughout the years I have attended many feasts, gatherings, and Potlatches and listened to our elders talk about the importance of ḥaaḥuupa and passing down of knowledge through observance and stories. This, as Darrell explained, was central to social bonding and knowledge transfer while sharing a meal. He says, "In Nuu-chah-nulth culture there is a strong belief in mealtime ḥaaḥuupa and that you talk to your kids when you feed them. As they take in the food, they also take in what you are telling them, and they retain this knowledge. At mealtime you have their attention at the table."[54] Linda Thomas grew up picking berries and reflected on the social aspects of this tradition and the gathering together of their family to process the berries after a day of harvesting. She says, “We would pick berries in the morning and then start making the jam late at night when it cooled off. To think how our mothers and grandmothers all did this to teach us so that we understood this was our job. To this day, I have never forgotten these teachings.”[55]

Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiatives

Today many Indigenous communities throughout Canada and the United States are enacting food sovereignty as a way to reconnect to their traditional food sources, to restore and strengthen individual and community health and wellness, and to assert their cultural and political autonomy. Traditional foods have become a potent cultural symbol as Indigenous peoples recognize that eating our traditional foods, and making the choice to eat these foods, is in itself a political act, a resistance to colonialism. It is central to decolonization and is an exercise in self-determination. Food sovereignty is intricately linked to cultural sovereignty, and as Ojibwe environmentalist, economist, and writer Winona LaDuke states, “You can’t say you’re sovereign if you can’t feed yourself,” a phrase shared with her by Oneida elder Paul “Sugar Bear” Smith.[56]

Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives continue to grow and expand upon foundational work from Anishinaabe environmental and food activist Winona LaDuke and others. LaDuke is the founding director of the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP). WELRP was created in 1989 to recover ancestral lands of the White Earth Anishinaabeg lost through colonization and to return these lands to the stewardship of the White Earth tribal government. Central to this project were the revitalization of their language, reinstating traditional agricultural practices, restoration of their traditional corn seed stocks, and strengthening self-reliance and self-determination.[57] WELRP established one of the first seed-saving programs and libraries, creating a seed-saving movement that spread throughout the United States and Canada. They grow a variety of Indigenous corn seeds and share their seed growing information with other Indigenous communities who are seeking to create their own seed sovereignty projects and seed banks.[58]

Enriching the growing canon of Indigenous foods studies is the 2019 book *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States: Restoring Cultural Knowledge, Protecting Environments, and Regaining Health,* which brings together Indigenous voices from US geographical regions ranging from Alaska, Hawaii, to the Southwest, Southeast, Northwest, Great Plains, and California, articulating their understanding of food sovereignty and its potential for strengthening Indigenous food traditions and restoring health and wellness in Indigenous communities. The book was edited by Devon Mihesuah (Choctaw) and Elizabeth Hoover (Mohawk), two Indigenous scholars whose own academic and community-based work has created awareness of Indigenous food sovereignty. Both have played fundamental roles in the growing Indigenous foods movement. Mihesuah has written numerous publications on Indigenous health and wellness issues and manages the American Indian Health and Diet Project at the University of Kansas.[59] Hoover's teaching, research, and publications focus on environmental health and justice.[60] She created and manages the blog *From Garden Warriors to Good Seeds: Indigenizing the Local Food Movement*, and serves on the Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance (NAFSA) and the Slow Food Turtle Island Association.[61]

The essays Mihesuah and Hoover curate are written by Indigenous scholars, activists, and chefs who address important topics such as defining and enacting food sovereignty, restoring community health and wellness by strengthening traditional ecological knowledge, restoring seed banks, revitalizing traditional ecosystems, and finding solutions to the issue of environmental degradation brought on by climate change. These personal stories demonstrate how Indigenous communities are distinct and unique, making it impossible to define food sovereignty in a way that reflects all Indigenous realities. Each contributor draws from a particular cultural background, history, and set of traditions in sharing personal perspectives and insights into revitalizing and maintaining traditional foods systems and practices, restoring Indigenous individual and community health, and the challenges that arise in carrying out this work.[62]

In the Northwest Coast region the contemporary Indigenous foods movement emerged out of the foundational work by Indigenous people such as Valerie Segrest and Dawn Morrison. Segrest is an herbalist and nutrition educator and an enrolled member of the Muckleshoot Tribe in western Washington. In 2003 she and Elise Krohn, who is also an herbalist, native foods specialist, educator, and author, conducted research for the Traditional Foods of Puget Sound Project (2008–10), which explored the cultural significance of reviving traditional foodways as a way to improve individual, family, and community wellness.

This report led to the publication of their 2010 book, *Feeding the People, Feeding the Spirit: Revitalizing Northwest Coastal Indian Food Culture,* published by the Northwest Indian College, which is administered by the Lummi Nation in western Washington, and was connected to the college's Traditional Plants and Foods Program. Segrest and Krohn examine pre-contact coastal Indigenous food traditions, the disruption to these foodways as a result of colonization, the contemporary barriers to revitalizing food practices, and the revival of Indigenous food traditions as told through the voices, stories, and photos from the peoples of this region. The book includes important data on Northwest Coast plants and animals utilized as food by coastal Indigenous peoples, and provides delicious recipes that come from the heart of these communities.[63] Segrest has continued her important work with the Northwest Indian College's Traditional Plants and Foods Program and serves as coordinator of the Muckleshoot Food Sovereignty Project, where she teaches classes and holds workshops on Northwest Coast traditional foods.[64]

Dawn Morrison, mentioned earlier in this chapter, is the founder, chair, and coordinator of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) in British Columbia. Morrison is from the interior B.C. Secwepemc (Shuswap) community but has lived in Vancouver for over twenty years. Since 1983 Dawn has worked in horticulture, ethnobotany, adult education, and restoration of natural ecosystems. She has dedicated her life to land-based healing and learning.[65]

Morrison's work has been central to the Northwest Coast Indigenous food sovereignty movement, and she was one of the first people to utilize the concept of food sovereignty in creating spaces for dialogue and action. In August 2006 she coordinated the first annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference. The conference focused on the development of regional networks and community-based, culturally relevant action plans that promote the protection, conservation, and restoration of Indigenous food systems and that work to ensure that traditional Indigenous hunters, fishermen, and gatherers in the interior of British Columbia have access to their traditional foodways.[66] For the last thirteen years, Morrison has led community-based, regional, and international decolonizing food systems discourse, creating a critical pathway where Indigenous food sovereignty meets social justice, climate change, and food systems research, action, and adaptive policy, planning, and governance.[67] Morrison also manages the Wild Salmon Caravan Team created in 2014, the purpose of which is to "build capacity of coalitions and campaigns that link Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, artists, food systems networks, individuals, organizations, and communities who are working to protect, conserve and restore wild salmon and its habitat in the Fraser Basin and Salish Seas corridor."[68] In 2019 Morrison and the WGIFS launched the Indigenous Food and Freedom School to support food sovereignty initiatives in British Columbia through restoration and regeneration of sustainable Indigenous food systems.[69]

Indigenous peoples are revitalizing their traditional food systems, practices, and knowledge by utilizing their own food principles and philosophies, which has framed Indigenous scholarship such as Mariaelena Huambachano's research on the "good living philosophies" of the Andean people of Peru and the Māori of Aotearoa, New Zealand, and Michelle Daigle's work on the Anishinaabe law of mino bimaadiziwin, "living the good life."[70] Huambachano (Quechua) defines good living philosophies as the "collective, harmonious, and spiritual approach to the preservation of all life forms," which is at the center of Quechua and Māori food security.[71] These philosophies, Huambachano asserts, are grounded in cultural and environmental principles that pervade and infuse holistic practices "that preserve and cultivate the ecological and social conditions necessary for the continuance of their intrinsic connection with the land."[72] Quechua and Māori intergenerational accumulation of ancestral knowledge is centered in what Huambachano describes as an "Indigenous cosmovision," creating a harmonious and holistic relationship between humans, nonhumans, and nonliving things, which is the basis for food security and sovereignty.[73] She connects Quechua and Māori food sovereignty to their self-determination, struggles for autonomy, and "regaining control over their overall wellbeing."[74]

Daigle (Mushkegowuk/Swampy Cree) focuses her research on the Anishinaabe people in Ontario, Canada, and their efforts to protect and renew harvesting grounds and waters that sustain their traditional foodways, which are rooted in their law of mino bimaadiziwin and the principle of "living the good life."[75] She quotes Anishinaabe elder Ogiimaagwanebiik, who bases mino bimaadiziwin in reciprocity and relationships: "It is about helping one another and respecting the Creator's creation, mutual respect. It is about sharing [our traditional foods]. I think it is also about being thankful."[76] To illuminate the law of mino bimaadiziwin, Daigle uses as an example the revitalization of the Anishinaabe fall harvest, where in precolonial gatherings, communities across Anishinaabe territory would prepare, process, trade, and gift foods. These harvests strengthened political and economic relationships through the protocols and ceremonies attached to this event.[77] Today the reviving of the harvest also rebuilds and reinforces relationships between youth, adults, and elders, where Anishinaabe foods and ecological knowledge are transferred as youth are mentored and taught food processing and preparation.[78] Like Haumbachano, Daigle connects the revitalization of Anishinaabe foodways and "living and acting on relational responsibilities and accountabilities" to their struggles for autonomy and self-determination; efforts that are not constrained by "the oppressive parameters of settler colonial authorities and jurisdictions."[79]

tiičʕaqƛ̓: Nuu-chah-nulth Food Sovereignty

My people, the Nuu-chah-nulth, are restoring respectful and meaningful relationships with our environment that are situated within the concept of food sovereignty. We are actively engaging decolonization and sustainable self-determination through reinstatement of authority over our ḥaḥuułi, ancestral territory, and through the development of strategies and implementation of policies aimed at the sustainable production and consumption of traditional foods through ecologically sound food systems. Our Nuu-chah-nulth communities maintain the understanding that we must honor the wisdom and values of ancestral knowledge in maintaining responsible and respectful relationships with the natural world; therefore, these efforts are grounded in Nuu-chah-nulth philosophies of hišukʔiš c̓awaak,[80] everything is interconnected; ʔuʔaałuk, to take care of; and ʔiisaak, to be respectful, as discussed in the introduction to this book.

In March 2005 the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (NTC), which provides services and support to fourteen Nuu-chah-nulth Nations, launched Uu-a-thluk, an aquatic resource management organization administered through the NTC. The vision of Uu-a-thluk is to "take care of" the ḥaḥuułi in a way that is consistent with Nuu-chah-nulth values and principles, a responsibility given to our people through n̓aas, our Creator.[81] The organization is guided by a Council of Ḥaw̓iiḥ (hereditary chiefs) who meet three times a year to provide guidance and direction through the sharing of ecological knowledge and ancestral wisdom with the staff and seasonal interns. This philosophy of marine management is consistent with efforts to become sustainable, self-determining nations and reinforces the ruling authority of our ḥaw̓iłp̓atak ḥaw̓iiḥ, traditional governance.[82]

One of the main functions of Uu-a-thluk is to manage and protect our marine foods and the habitats in which they thrive, and to work with non-Indigenous governmental authorities in creating management schemes that are culturally sensitive and include Nuu-chah-nulth ecological knowledge. Our communities depend on salmon for our cultural and economic survival and for our tiičʕaqƛ, holistic health. Uu-a-thluk works at protecting and advancing Nuu-chah-nulth salmon fishing rights through the T'aaq-wiihak Fishery, meaning "fishing with permission of the ḥaw̓iiḥ," and provides training, education, mentorship, and workplace opportunities to get more community members involved in salmon and marine management.[83] Uu-a-thluk is framed within the overarching Nuu-chah-nulth philosophy of hišukʔiš c̓awaak, that protecting our marine foods and ecosystems for ceremonial and societal sustenance needs is at the center of our food sovereignty efforts and vital to restoring tiičʕaqƛ in our communities.

While these food sovereignty initiatives continue to expand and flourish, Indigenous people continue to face challenges to enacting food sovereignty. This is exemplified in the antiwhaling protest that arose when the Makah Tribe in Washington State announced in 1994 that it was reviving its tradition of hunting whales, a conflict I analyze in my 2010 book *Spirits of Our Whaling Ancestors: Revitalizing Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth Traditions*.

Settler Colonialism, Culinary Imperialism, and Contemporary Challenges to Enacting Food Sovereignty: The 1999 Makah Whale Hunt

In 1999 the Makah tribe on the western tip of Washington State harvested a sixʷa·wix̌,[84] the Makah word for gray whale, and with one throw of their harpoon they enacted food sovereignty by revitalizing and reinforcing a cultural tradition that is central to their identities. For the qʷidiččaʔa·tx̌[85] or Makah, and my people, the Nuu-chah-nulth, whaling was the foundation of our political, social, spiritual, and economic structures. However, colonization, federal policies, and the depletion of whales as a result of an unregulated West Coast whaling industry, forced us to put away our harpoons in the early 1900s.[86] Before the arrival of mamałn̓i, white settlers, the Indigenous people in the Northwest Coast lived in natural environments that were rich in material goods and a variety of foods. Our marine-based economies provided us with a wealth of foods that not only sustained our communities but were nutritious, rich in vitamins and minerals. Our societies maintained optimum health by consuming large quantities of meat, fat, and oil from whales and

1.1 Cutting up the gray whale—the Makah Tribe's 1999 whale hunt. *Photograph courtesy of Debbie Ross-Preston, Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.*

other sea mammals that provided us with health-promoting nourishment and an overall sense of well-being.[87] Studies conducted among the Indigenous people in northern Canada and Alaska affirm the health benefits of eating whale, finding that a diet rich in sea mammal oil dramatically decreased the risk of death from heart disease, reduced symptoms of diabetes, and helped alleviate symptoms of arthritis and other chronic diseases.[88]

Three significant factors were key in the Makah tribe's decision to revive their whale hunts. First, the gray whale, the main whale the Makah hunted, rebounded from near extinction to the point where they could be sustainably hunted again, and in 1994 the species was removed from the Endangered Species List. Second, in the 1970s a major storm uncovered thousands of whaling artifacts in the abandoned Makah village of Ozette, sparking a cultural renaissance among tribal members and a renewed interest in their whaling tradition. Third, in the 1974 case *United States v. Washington* (also known as the Boldt decision), Judge Boldt reaffirmed the Washington state tribe's treaty rights, with one of these rights exclusive to the Makah tribe being the right to hunt whales. These factors created an opportunity for the Makah tribe to restore their whale hunts, placing them within a larger context of cultural revitalization and self-determination movements that Indigenous peoples were experiencing since the 1960s.[89] The Nuu-chah-nulth, following the lead of our Makah relatives, announced the decision to revitalize our whale hunts as well, understanding this as a necessary process of decolonization and a strategy for enriching and strengthening our cultures and reaffirming our identities as whaling people.[90]

While the Makah tribe's whale hunt was received with overwhelming support from people and nations throughout the world, there were also those who opposed it and began organizing an antiwhaling campaign immediately after the Makah's announcement in 1994. The antiwhaling coalition consisted of a wide range of interests, from environmental groups to right-wing politicians, who effectively waged a campaign in the court of public opinion that relied on false stereotypes and misconceived ideas to discredit the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth people's whaling cultures. In response to a Canadian radio program on the Makah tribe reviving their tradition of hunting whales, a reader wrote:

> Personally, I think it is a stupid, senseless, and needless slaughter by a bunch of jerks. They didn't go out in their canoes as their forefathers had done, with spears, etc., no they went out with a motor driven craft, armed with high caliber rifles and took unfair advantage of a creature that was not bothering them. . . . Who do they think they are? . . . They still appear to be ruthless savages.[91]

In a letter to the *Seattle Times* a reader responded to this notion of revitalizing tradition, writing:

> I am anxious to know where I may apply for a license to kill Indians. My forefathers helped settle the west and it was their tradition to kill every Redskin they saw. "The only good Indian is a dead Indian," they believed. I also want to keep faith with my ancestors.[92]

When the Makah tribe began preparing for their hunt, members of the anti-whaling coalition condemned it, arguing that the hunt was not "traditional" because the Makah were using motorized boats, high-powered weapons, and cellular phones, ultimately denying us the very right that all societies strive toward—the right to cultural change and technological advancement.[93] Makah tribal member Janine Bowechop, director of the Makah Cultural and Research Center, responded to this argument:

> For some reason some people like to freeze us in the past. If you're not doing something the way it was done prior to contact, then you're not doing it right—you're not doing it in the Native way. But we allow other cultures to make changes. One of my friends said, "I'm a White American but I don't make my butter in a butter churn anymore, and I'm not criticized for that." . . . Folks don't ride around in covered wagons anymore, but we don't turn around and say, "Gee, you're not a real American. . . . But, unfortunately, we're continually criticized if we do anything different than we did 500 years ago.[94]

One of the main arguments against the Makah tribe was centered in a foods-based discourse with members of the coalition arguing that the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth peoples did not need to hunt whales for food because we had all the food we needed.[95] Indigenous peoples globally have struggled to control access to and production of their food sources as the colonizing nations appropriated our lands, and through a history of Western hegemonic control over food production and consumption that kept us from our traditional food sources.[96] Through these assertions of cultural and culinary imperialism, people from other cultures continue to impose their own symbolic and aesthetic food values on our societies, making it difficult for Indigenous peoples to reconnect to their traditional foods. And through their political power, wealthy Western states and NGOs influence what is acceptable as food and what animals or mammals should or should not be eaten. The antiwhaling discourse that arose over killing and eating whales was couched in moral and legal terms, but as ecologist Russel Barsh maintains, the larger issue is one of power—the power to determine what we eat.

> Privileged societies have acquired the power to determine what the world eats and to impose their own symbolic and aesthetic food taboos on others. Placed in proper historical context, contemporary efforts to abolish whaling and sealing are exposed as the flip side of Western European domination of world food supplies. . . . Moral indignation, rather than conservation, has driven the antiharvesting campaigns for the last twenty-five years.[97]

In my culture we have an understanding that we all exist, humans, animals, plants, etc., in a shared environment where we are all equal. Indigenous cultures thrive in a world of reciprocity between us and our environment. Our relationship with animals has always been one based on respect and gratitude and there is a sense of sacredness attached to the spirit of the animal for giving itself to us for sustenance. The First Species Ceremonies of my people, for example, is a sacred event that affirms the "personhood" of these animals and mammals and honors them for giving themselves to feed us. And within this symbiotic relationship is the understanding that death is ultimately integrated into life. The whaling opponents saw the death of the whale through a Western cultural lens and, thus, ignored the spiritual and sacred elements attached to the Makah and Nuu-chah-nulth whaling tradition.[98]

Indigenous peoples have always been respectful custodians and protectors of the environments that provided them and their future generations with sustenance. The land, water, and the plants, animals, and their habitats were safeguarded to maintain their sustainability.[99] In an Indigenous worldview, plants and animals that provide us with food are seen as "spiritual gifts,"[100] and their spirits are honored through rituals and prayers that are passed down through ancestral knowledge to the following generations.[101] In the Northwest Coast, we have many First Foods ceremonies honoring the spirits of the animals and plants that give their lives to feed us. For example, as discussed in the next chapter, our coastal marine space provides an exceptionally rich and nurturing environment for salmon and a sustainable balance between salmon and human ecosystems evolved through thousands of years, developing into a respectful and reciprocal relationship.

I have written about our Nuu-chah-nulth whaling tradition and how special rituals, prayers, taboos, and ceremonies were central to a successful whale hunt, which was attributed to the ḥaw̓ił, chief, and his ḥakum, wife, and which developed a respectful and sacred relationship with the animal. If they and the whaling crew adhered to the proper protocols and ritual preparations, they then earned respect from the whale's spirit, and the whale allowed itself to be taken as food for them and their community.[102] This is exemplified in the Nuu-chah-nulth story of the great Ahousaht whaler Keesta, as told by Umeek, Richard Atleo, in his book, *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview*. Keesta, Umeek's great-grandfather, was born in 1866 and was raised to be a whaling ḥaw̓ił. Throughout his lifetime he would ʔuusimč, which is a rigorous spiritual cleansing that involved prayer, fasting, and observances of taboos.[103] Keesta understood that a successful hunt meant creating this sacred relationship and that "the great personage of the whale demanded the honor of extended ceremony."[104]

> Every protocol had been observed between the whaling chief and the spirit of the whale. Keesta . . . had thrown the harpoon, and the whale had accepted it, had grabbed and held onto the harpoon according to the agreement they had made through prayers and petitions. Harmony prevailed, whale and whaler were one.

Animals and plants that gave themselves to us as food nourished not only our bodies but also our souls. The rituals practiced around our haʔum created what Indigenous scholar Clara Sue Kidwell (White Earth Chippewa/Choctaw) describes as a "sense of communion."[105] Animals and plants are considered our relatives, a concept that many non-Indigenous peoples have difficulty in understanding because they do not have—or have lost—their own spiritual relationship to the foods they eat. The physical act of eating plants and animals, Kidwell says, reinforces the social and sacred bonds we have to their spirits that give themselves as food.

> Consuming food is the most basic form of establishing relationships among humans, plants, animals, and the forces in the environment that are the ultimate sources of life. It is an integral element of both physical and spiritual being. Gifts of food solidify human relation-

ships; offerings of plant and animal life establish and maintain relationships between humans and the spiritual world.[106]

Viewed from this standpoint of animals and plants as gifts, a culture of gratitude is embedded within the relationship between humans and nonhumans, where reciprocity is the foundation. Animals and plants that are treated with respect will, in turn, provide their physical forms as food and are regarded as "gifts from the earth," says Robin Kimmerer, which establishes a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, and to reciprocate.[107]

Indigenous food traditions are central to food sovereignty and security and they reinforce familial and social bonds of generosity and reciprocity in harvesting, sharing, and eating our haʔum, or traditional foods. For the Makah, the capture, distribution, sharing, and eating of the sixʷa·wix̌ they harvested in 1999 strengthened their community; revived prayers, songs, ceremonies, and stories integral to their whaling tradition; and strengthened their cultural identity as whalers. Enacting food sovereignty through the revival of their whaling practices reaffirmed the spiritual, emotional, and physical relationships the Makah have to their waterways and to the whale. After the hunt they followed the tradition passed down from their whaling ancestors. After all the sacred rituals were conducted to show respect to the whale's spirit and to the whale for giving itself to the Makah people, tribal members held a huge Potlatch in honor of this historic event to thank the people who supported the revival of their hunts. On May 22, 1999, more than three thousand people came to the small Makah village of Neah Bay to share in the celebration and to show their support for the revitalization of the Makah tribe's whaling tradition. There were people from the local Native and non-Native communities, people from tribes across the United States and from the First Nations communities in Canada, and people from throughout the world, as far away as Africa.

The Makah people sang songs and performed dances for their guests and to honor the return of the whale to their community. Living up to their Makah name, meaning "generous with food," the tribal members provided their guests with a traditional feast, serving them heaping plates filled with salmon, halibut, steamed clams, and oysters. And for the first time in over eighty years, whale was the main food on the menu. The Makah were excited about offering such an important food to their guests, and they experimented with various ways to prepare it so that even those with more finicky palates would enjoy it. The whale meat was baked, roasted, and broiled. The blubber was served both cooked and raw. Many people from our Nuu-chah-nulth communities attended the celebration and partook in the tasting of our shared traditional food for the very first time. Nuu-chah-nulth member Denise Ambrose said sharing in this feast of whale meat made her feel proud to be Nuu-chah-nulth.

> This was the first time that I would taste whale meat, a food that I, as a Nuu-chah-nulth person, should have been brought up on. The meat looked somewhat like dark chicken meat. To me, it smelled and tasted like corned beef. It is hard to describe my feelings after tasting the roasted meat. I was proud to be Nuu-chah-nulth-aht. . . . So many other [Nuu-chah-nulth] people have passed on without having the opportunity to share in what was the most integral part of our culture: the whale. I felt honoured.[108]

Two years after the Makah whale hunt, the Makah Cultural and Research Center administered a survey of the Makah households to clarify and quantify the reactions of Makah tribal members to the revival of their whaling practices. The results of the Makah Household Whaling Survey were overwhelmingly positive, with over 95 percent of the respondents indicating full support for restoring their whale hunts. The survey also indicated an eagerness of all Makah members to incorporate more traditions and cultural practices into their daily lives.[109] A second Makah Household Whaling Survey was conducted in 2006 to see if the Makah people still supported continuing their whale hunts. The responses were still overwhelmingly positive for whaling. Over 88 percent of the Makah people surveyed believed that revitalizing their whaling tradition was a positive move, especially for its cultural value and political importance, and continued their support of their whale hunts.[110]

Food sovereignty is the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food defined through our own cultural food practices, but in December 2002 a Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals decision legally stopped the Makah tribe from exercising this right, and their cultural and treaty right, by banning their whale hunts. In *Anderson v. Evans* (314 F.3d 1006), the court ruled that Makah whaling must cease until the tribe prepares an environmental impact statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is more stringent than the

Environmental Assessment (EA) that was conducted for the 1999 hunt.[111] The court also determined that the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) applied to the Makah tribe and that their 1855 treaty, which affirmed and protected their whaling right, did not exempt them from the scrutiny of this act.[112] The Makah were now required to obtain an MMPA waiver from the federal government through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), which could authorize a whaling quota.[113]

In examining the Makah tribe's efforts to revitalize their whaling tradition, we see the complexities and challenges that Indigenous peoples face when attempting to enact food sovereignty. Indigenous scholars such as Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) place these challenges squarely within colonialism and as a derivative of settler colonial domination and food injustice. Food injustice, Whyte maintains, is a violation of Indigenous collective self-determination over their food systems:

> Food injustice can manifest as violations of food sovereignty that some Indigenous people associate with the destruction of particular foods or food systems. Violations of food sovereignty are one strategy of colonial societies, such as U.S. settler colonialism, to undermine Indigenous collective continuance in Indigenous peoples' own homelands.[114]

It has been more than twenty years since the Makah threw the harpoon that reaffirmed their cultural identity as whaling people, and since then their cultural and treaty right to whaling has been tied up in political and legal challenges fueled by racial and food injustice that are at the core of settler colonialism. The destruction of Indigenous foodways was one of the many colonial erasures utilized by settler society in their attempts to dismantle Indigenous lifeways, and its weakening of our political, economic, social, and spiritual systems continues to this day. The ban on the Potlatch, the refusal to allow Indigenous children to speak their languages or practice their spirituality in boarding schools, the removal from ancestral homelands, the attempt to replace our ḥaw̓iiḥ, hereditary chief system, with an elected governing system—these are some of the many ways in which colonial erasure was used against us, along with removing us from our traditional foods. Violating Indigenous food sovereignty, Whyte asserts, "is a strategy of settler colonial domination that erases Indigenous capacities for exercising collective self-determination."[115]