

# The Power of Food: The Ojibwe Food Sovereignty Movement

*A Movement Towards Regaining and  
Restoring Indigenous Lifeways Through  
Food in Minnesota*

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Sustainability

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# Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the significant cultural, physical, and emotional losses of the Ojibwe people and their current efforts to use food as a means of regaining their sovereignty and self-sufficiency. In Ojibwe communities across the state of Minnesota, many active players are dedicated to preserving and sustaining Ojibwe food traditions in order to recover the cultural practices and norms that were lost, or forgotten, during the time of colonization.

This ethnographic research study was conducted to observe and participate in the community-based projects of food. I achieved this through conducting in-depth interviews with key players, attending meetings, volunteering at non-profit organizations, and participating in all things food related within these communities; from planting and weeding, to harvesting and eating. Using low-level theoretical frames and community based examples, I will answer the following questions:

Why is food such an effective communicator in Ojibwe communities?

How is it being used to communicate the goals of the Ojibwe people?

I answer these questions using a series of theoretical ideas, including agency, notions of time, resistance, place and space, and finally, participation. I stray a bit from the formal structure expected in a master's thesis because I feel that a more fluid story-like approach is more conducive to my topic and the nature of Native culture. That being said, the structure is as follows. I begin with the historical losses of the Native peoples of the United States, and end with their empowered visions for the future. I examine their efforts through a historical lens, exploring notions of connectedness, sacredness, and relatedness, before examining the "projects of agency," from small scale cooking classes, to legal efforts to regain land and rights. All of these are dedicated to preserving and sustaining Ojibwe ways of life. While terms like, "regaining, returning, and revitalizing" are essential to communicating the significance of the cultural past, it became clear that the communities in question are moving into new paradigms of political process, participatory forms of government, and culturally appropriate means of food production, education, and economic self-sufficiency. They take into account their past losses and cultural heritage while incorporating new ideas and players into

their present. All of this is done with the hopes of a positive self-sufficient future in mind. This thesis is my attempt to understand and learn from these Ojibwe struggles and triumphs.



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# Acronyms

WELRP: White Earth Land Recovery Project

DOWH: Dream of Wild Health

BIA: Bureau of Indian Affairs

DNR: Department of Natural Resources

FDPIR: Food Distribution Program for Indian Reservations

USDA: United States Department of Agriculture

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 The Foodshed Mapping

On August sixth, 2014, I was invited to attend a “foodshed mapping” on the White Earth Indian Reservation in Northwestern Minnesota. I was not, at the time, familiar with the term “foodshed,” which was coined by Kloppenburg at the University of Wisconsin Madison. The term parallels that of a watershed, and as he puts it, describes the socio-geographical space from which our food comes from. “The foodshed can provide a place for us to ground ourselves in the biological and social realities of living on the land and from the land in a place that we call home” (Kloppenburg *et.al.* 1996).

With that in mind, I set out in my little red Prius from my home in St. Paul to find the *White Earth Land Recovery Project* (WELRP), a non-profit organization situated in the small town of Callaway, Minnesota on the White Earth Indian Reservation. Located in Northwestern Minnesota, White Earth, or *Gaa-waabaabiganikaag*, meaning ‘where there is abundance of white clay,’ is settled between three distinct biomes (Indian Affairs Council 2012). With the Red River Valley to the west boasting broad flatlands and immensely fertile soil, deep coniferous forest to the northeast known for ancient White Pines, and deciduous forest stretching southeast across much of the state, White Earth is uniquely diverse in its flora and fauna. With small fragments of ancient remnant prairie, groves of sprawling Oak Trees, and low-lying Tamarac Bogs, it is a truly stunning landscape. I, a little nervous about being an outsider from the city in a small rural community, arrived at the *White Earth Land Recovery Project* hoping to meet some of my contacts and see the facility. The White Earth Land Recovery Project formed in 1989 in response to land-based rights struggle. Eventually I met Bob Shimek, the current Executive Director of WELRP. A tall man with a ponytail and a wide-brimmed hat, Bob’s presence is easily felt – he is methodical and deliberate when he speaks, and it is clear that he is well respected in the community. Despite being slightly intimidating, Bob has a good sense of humor and a big laugh. Bob showed me around the facilities and the yard out back, where various old chairs and equipment were scattered around the yard, as well an old white Mercedes. After the tour, Bob introduced me to one of the interns, and asked if I would be willing to help her set up

for the foodshed mapping at the community center. I agreed and we got in our cars and headed to the Village of White Earth. As a native of the suburbs and a self-proclaimed urban dweller, I was not prepared for the length of distances between communities in rural Minnesota. After twenty minutes of driving, we arrived at a new building called the White Earth Community Center. We began setting up in a large seminar room filled with small round tables. I was in charge of snack and coffee set up, which consisted of opening several bags of potato chips and pork rinds, which are delicious crunchy little salty pork flavored goodies, opening the plastic package containing small single serving pies with cherry filling and donuts. I then began making coffee, which was fair trade and had come from the WELRP offices, and putting out creamer and some sugar packets.

Eventually attendees began trickling in, grabbing paper plates full of treats and pouring themselves coffee before settling in for the meeting. The group consisted of about 15 people, some community members, two researchers from Brown University, a member of the tribal liaison, a woman from the White Earth Community College, and several employees of WELRP, including Bob Shimek. One woman came from the Leech Lake Band for the meeting. An active member in her own community, she had a lot of positive things to say about foodshed mapping. She had been to a conference earlier in the year and heard a man speaking about food sovereignty.

He said we're 25 years away from regaining food sovereignty – I might live to see that! I keep telling people that because it's an encouraging thought. It's tangible and people are motivated to find things to do right now instead of waiting. It's happening, things are changing and we're getting better at remembering what we used to do (participant: meeting 06.08.14).

After the introductions, Bob began speaking about the project and the goal of the meeting. "Sorry, I was just getting my dose of junk food here." while smiling and grabbing an assortment of food from the table. "I just have to apologize; the person who was supposed to bring the healthy food didn't show up so we're stuck with the junk food." People chuckled and he began:

This project is part of a goal of getting to the point where we can start to think about the bigger picture of food sovereignty, food security, and food safety. Clearly when we talk about food, we know that we are what we eat



but it's also our first step. I believe that in order to know where we're going, we have to look back. What do we have that's available in terms of local foods? What if the global food grid shut down at 8 AM tomorrow morning? Then what? Where does that leave us? We are vulnerable and fossil fuel dependent. With the coming of the white man and the reservations, there's been an increased dependency on what I call the modern welfare system. Some of that was forced on us when they hauled our kids off to boarding schools and stole our land but the food is still out there and that's the point. It's good as long as it works but for those of us that want to look for alternatives, that's what foodshed mapping is all about. What do we imagine are the elements of a localized foodshed? (Shimek: meeting 06.08.14).

They began by determining the radius of the foodshed, which was set at the size of the reservation. At 2,831 square kilometers, the White Earth Reservation is the largest reservation in the state of Minnesota by landmass (Indian Affairs Council 2012). People started describing elements such as gardens, access to wild edibles, education of youth and knowledge sharing by elders, seed saving, ecosystem support, land access and policies. The intern brought up valuable points such as meeting the dietary needs of the community, assessing the population in terms of how many elders, children, and low-income members there are who need help accessing food. She noted the importance of infrastructure and posed questions such as; how do we support those who need help? Where can food be stored or frozen? What needs to be built? Who has knowledge they are willing to share and who has the resources necessary? I was interested to hear that knowledge sharing was noted as a significant aspect of the mapping, as I hadn't heard that brought up in other foodshed assessments. This struck me as one of the differences between Native and non-native communities, the sharing and acknowledgement of knowledge holders as a valuable part of the community.

With those questions in mind, they began to map local food sources, production sites, and distribution areas on the White Earth Reservation Map. They started with what was already present: farmer's markets in the area. Bob stood in the front of the room next to the large map of the reservation. People started throwing out suggestions about different markets, farmers, processing plants, and refrigeration sites food sources, sometimes disagreeing about the importance of one thing or another. One elder in particular started to reminisce about the old days when they had a root cellar and could keep cans down there for years, or about the old ricing days in the fall, and sugar bush

camp in the spring. This time dimension was present throughout the meeting. Several times, someone would begin to reminisce about the old days, bringing in the significance of incorporating the past into the present day foodshed.

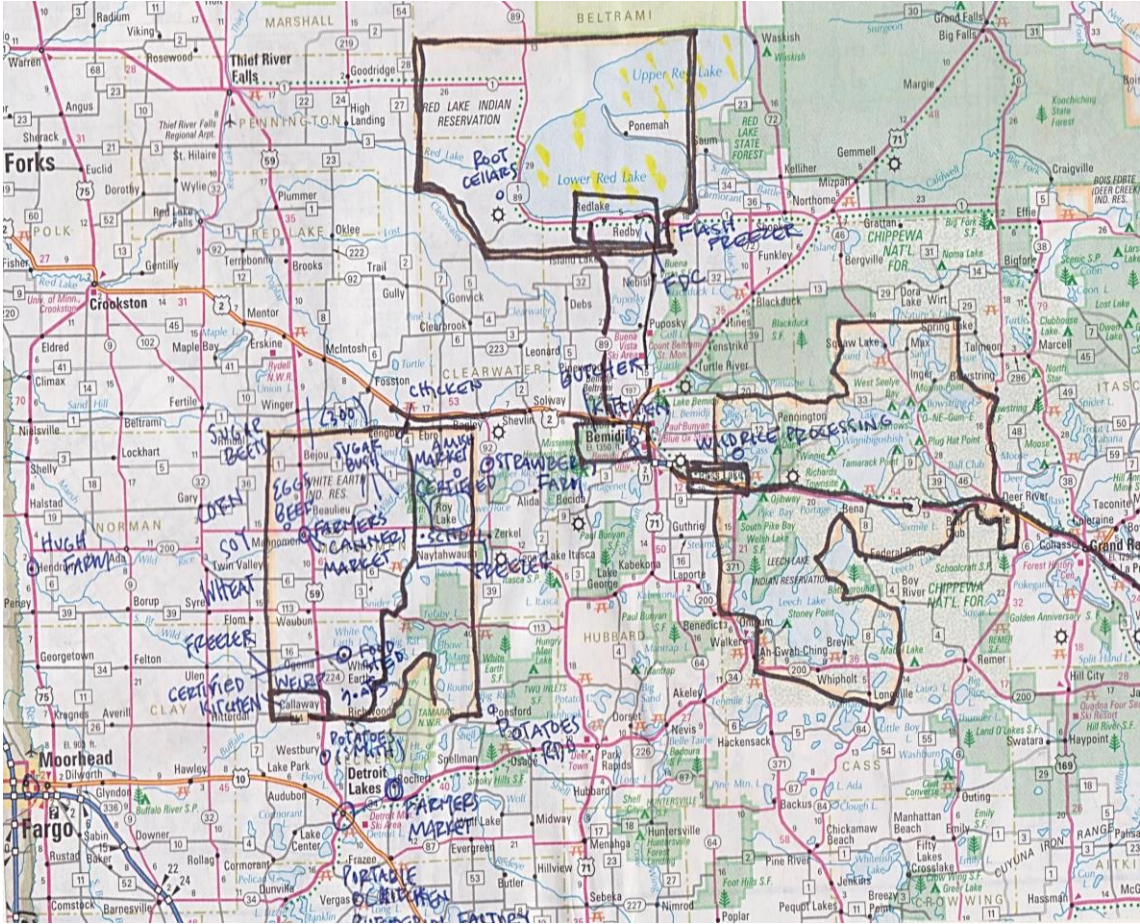


Figure 1: White Earth Foodshed Mapping

The meeting went on for several hours, until the junk food was long gone and the coffee was cold, yet no one lost attention, no one got restless or sidetracked – the room was fully involved and eager to keep working. I was moved by the dedication and determination of the group. There was such an energy of fortitude and it became clear to me the significance of what was occurring in the room around me; I was witnessing the shaping of the future through food. This small community had brought together a diverse group of scholars, activists, teachers, government officials, and concerned citizens to talk about food. And yet, I was struck by the irony of us attempting to regain control over the health and well-being of the community, while eating chips and donuts, the very foods that created many of the health and economic injustices facing American Indian communities across the United States. How could we be eating such heavily

processed foods that were so at odds with the mission of this group? The answer lies in the complex reality life on the reservations and the challenges of creating a new future from a present still coping with the issues of the past.

This meeting was not about regaining control over where this community's food comes from for the sake of going back to some idealized past. This meeting was about recognizing where this community has been, acknowledging their roots, and their struggles and their realities and progressing into a new paradigm keeping those realities in mind.

I began to realize the importance of food as a means of communicating these ideas, and to recognize the significance of the past when approaching the structural aspects of the present and future. The Native groups I worked with drew my attention to this simple fact – one must understand and respect the past to guide future choices. In a community where so much has been shaped at the hands of someone else, this is the first step in regaining social agency, independence and power. The Ojibwe have a very unique way of addressing economic, political, and structural issues that encompasses their deep spiritual and relational outlook on the world. It is a holistic perspective that uses its respect for tradition, and acknowledgement of the past to forge a new future.

This was a complex meeting and I came away from it with mixed feelings. I was impressed and inspired by the wise words and energy of the group, but at the same time, I was discouraged by the contradictions it presented in the form of junk food. The desires and efforts being undertaken to change current norms within Indigenous communities and groups in the State of Minnesota encouraged me to ask the questions, Why is food such an effective communicator and how is it being used to communicate the larger goals of the Ojibwe people? These emotions followed me throughout my time in the field. This thesis is about my experiences in the field within the food sovereignty movement, and how food is being used as a means of regaining social agency through traditional values in Ojibwe culture.

## **1.2 Livelihoods on the Reservation: Motivation and Rationale**

Before beginning this research, I was aware of the struggles and hardships occurring on Indian reservations across the United States. This has always troubled me, and I wished I had a better grasp of the history and issues facing the reservations in my home state of Minnesota. I was also aware of the past relationship between American Indians and the US government. Within the state of Minnesota, there are seven sovereign Ojibwe reservations, which were all established by treaties signed with the US government. These sovereign reservations are paradoxically not sovereign in that they are in many instances dependent on larger states, namely the United States. That said, the reservations maintain legal independence and self-governance (Barreiro and Johnson 2005:4). Despite their own means of governance, the US government has throughout history attempted to impose its laws on these sovereign bodies, making reservations sovereign without the means to exercise it. The efforts to eliminate and assimilate Native Americans created serious societal issues within the Tribes that are still very much present today. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is primarily responsible for providing 562 federally recognized tribes with federal services. Much literature supports the claim that this reliance on the US government for resources left Indigenous communities without traditionally appropriate means of feeding and clothing their communities. A large percentage of Native communities were forced to accept help from the US federal government. Unfortunately, the resources necessary to meet the needs of the reservations were, and continue to be vastly under met. Among these under-met needs include health, education, land access, and housing, which I will examine in more detail.

### **1.2.1 Health and Nutrition**

In general, Native Americans have a lower life-expectancy and the highest rates of diseases including Diabetes, Alcoholism, and Tuberculosis, as compared to the general populations, yet health facilities and medical attention are often obsolete on the reservations. 16.1 percent of Native Americans have diabetes, making it the highest age adjusted prevalence of diabetes among any racial group in the United States. The overall health status of the American Indians is poorer than that of the general

population by most indicators. (Regaining Food Sovereignty 2013). This holds true within the state of Minnesota, where reservations have some of the highest rates of poverty, alcoholism, diabetes, and heart disease per capita. Today one third of the service population at Indian Health Service has diabetes.

David Manuel is a member of the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe. We met briefly during a bee-keeping seminar at the Indigenous Environmental Network in Bemidji. He was featured in the documentary, *Regaining Food Sovereignty*, where he stated;

I've had four heart attacks in my life. I grew up on bacon and hamburger and McDonald's and all the not so good stuff... (Regaining Food Sovereignty 2012).

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, American Indians are twice as likely to face hunger and food insecurity as the general population. Due to economic instability, many reservations rely on federal funding from the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). Again, funding for this program has been cut, and is insufficient to meet the needs of the population. According to the White Earth Land Recovery Project, the situation on the reservation was dire. "People were starving. Not for something edible, but for actual food. The normal diet, which was similar to that in most impoverished communities, lack un-dyed, real, unprocessed options" (Jackson 2012). The White Earth Land Recovery Project feels that the restoration of traditional foods could dramatically transform the current obesity and diabetes epidemic and provide a foundation for food security in Native communities (WELRP 2012).

As an ancient staple of the Ojibwe diet, wild rice played an essential part of balanced nutrition in Ojibwe communities. The sudden shift from a hunter and gatherer society to a more sedentary lifestyle accompanied by the increased consumption of processed foods has created an epidemic of diabetes and obesity across the State. Frank Haney touched upon this during our lunch conversation:

When native people were put on reservations, they were no longer able to eat their traditional food sources so they were fed government commodity food, which basically consisted of fat and sugar and flour. That went on for generations. But as time went on and generations came and went, a lot of native people tended to prefer that kind of food. Even to this day you can get allotments of commodity foods every month (Haney: interviewed 07.14).

## **1.2.2 Education**

In addition to the health issues, it is well documented that Native American children are not offered the same educational opportunities as their non-native counterparts. A project undertaken by the University of California Los Angeles found that graduation rates for American Indians and Alaska Natives (46.6%) were lower than the graduation rates for all other racial/ethnic groups including whites (69.8%), Asians (77.9%), Blacks (54.7%) and Hispanics (50.8%) (Faircloth and Tippeconnic 2010). Many reservation schools are run by the Bureau of Indian Education or by tribes themselves and lack adequate teaching facilities, funds to pay teachers and develop sufficient curriculum, and a safe and just atmosphere for children to learn in (Faircloth and Tippeconnic 2010:6). There are 32 accredited tribal colleges nation-wide, with five non-affiliated offering associates, bachelors, and some master's degree programs (Butrymowicz 2014). Unfortunately, success rates are low. The average percentage of students who earn four-year degrees within six years (or two-year degrees within three years) at these schools is only 20 percent, according to a Hechinger Report analysis of federal graduation data—one third the national average and half the rate of Native students at non-tribal schools (Butrymowicz 2014). Higher educational institutes face similar problems owing to the fact that tribal colleges receive 60 percent less funding than their state operated counterparts (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2003). I encountered problems finding recent data on American Indian education and graduation rates. Faircloth and Tippeconnic describe encountering similar problems, explaining this lack of findings in part due to a highly mobile population, mistrust of the motives of the data gatherers, and a geographically dispersed population, making surveying difficult (Faircloth and Tippeconnic 2010). This aside, the numbers I found all point to an education gap between Native Americans and other ethnicities.

## **1.2.3 Land Access and Housing**

According to the United States Congress, almost 47 million of the more than 54 million acres of tribal and individual Indian trust lands are rangeland and cropland, an enormous potential food resource. Seventy percent of cropland and twenty percent of rangeland is leased to non-Indians, reducing Native control of land and food production

at its source. More than 8,000 Native farms operate on reservations, but they produce few crops for household consumption (Dwyer 2010).

Housing is provided on many reservations through the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Due to lack of funding to the agency, over 60 percent of the government housing available is considered inadequate and one in five reservation homes lack plumbing (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2003).

In the State of Minnesota, the 25,000 people living on the Red Lake, Leech Lake and White Earth Indian reservations go largely overlooked. Despite their size, little is understood by most Minnesotans about the sovereign bodies located within the State. Yet attention is being drawn to the unique efforts the reservations are making within the realm of food justice. In Ojibwe communities, many active players are paving the way through actively exercising their agency through mainly grassroots projects such as elementary farm to school educational programs that aim to reintroduce young people to their native language and traditions, land reform movements to regain access to traditionally held land, legal action for rights to hunting, fishing, and gathering privileges. All of these are dedicated to preserving and sustaining Ojibwe ways of life. These aspects have been my motivation for undertaking this research. This thesis is my attempt to understand and learn from these efforts, while finally acknowledging the serious injustices my home country has done on the very people who called it home first.

### **1.3 Research Questions**

I have spent much time assessing the themes and key aspects of this research. The questions and emotions raised during the foodshed mapping set the stage for this research. I began to question the reasons for the contradictions within the meeting, the importance of empowerment and the barriers to change. From there, I analyzed the theoretical foundations of anthropological work relating to agency, time and practice. This allowed me to see past approaches and methods to answering research questions. From very broad beginnings relating to what food sovereignty means, to how the movement has impacted the Ojibwe communities of Minnesota, I have narrowed down

my research questions to those I feel are both the most relevant, useful and the most interesting. They are as follows:

- 1.) Why is food such an effective communicator?
  
- 2.) How is food being used to communicate the larger goals of the Ojibwe people?

## 1.4 Concepts and Definitions

In order to understand this research and fully appreciate the significance of what communities are doing, it is important to have an understanding of the broader research and context of the growing “food movement”. Modern agriculture has had an astounding impact on the world’s ability to provide for its citizens, yet the serious environmental and health impacts it has made are becoming more and more difficult to ignore. According to Jonathan Foley of the University of Minnesota,

Agriculture is also the largest single source of greenhouse gas emissions from society, collectively accounting for about 35 percent of the carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide we release. That is more than the emissions from worldwide transportation (including all cars, trucks and planes) or electricity generation (Foley 2005)

In addition, water resources are becoming scarcer, the use of fertilizers and pesticides is more widespread than ever, and the runoff of the fertilizers nitrogen and phosphorus, are creating hypoxic, or oxygen depleted oceanic “dead zones” at the deltas of major waterways, which are void of life. These issues are becoming more and more problematic and conspicuous. With an increasing population and more mouths to feed, it is becoming clear that changes must be made to the way food is produced.

In response to these concerns and spurred on by environmental and social justice movements, food has become the new “buzz topic.” From local farmers markets and slogans such as *know your farmer*, *buy local*, and *support small scale farms* to celebrity chefs introducing the public to organic and local produce (see Syse 2015:165) and Vandana Shiva’s *Navdanya* campaign against genetically modified organisms (GMOs),



the concepts of “sustainable food systems” and “sustainable agriculture” have become widely recognized in many parts of the globe. In Minnesota, many projects and organizations are working to advance this arena. The *Land Stewardship Project*, *Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy*, *Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program*, and *The Minnesota Project* are just a few of the commonly heard names of firms working in these areas. Minnesota now has 43 cooperatives that support local, sustainable and organic food, reflecting the desire for small scale local options (Coop Directory). According to a case-study of Minnesota cooperatives undertaken by the Cooperative Development Services,

The Minnesota coop local food value chain comprises well over 300 producers, a cooperatively owned distributor of organic product, and 15 consumer cooperatives operating 17 retail food stores, backed by 91,000 co-op member-owners and an additional 50,000 shoppers. In the year leading up to this study, total retail sales through this cooperative system were \$179,000,000 (\$179M), with local product accounting for 30 percent of sales, or around \$54M. Local farm gate income (income flowing to producers) after distributor and retail margins is estimated to be over half of those local sales or \$30M (Tockinger and Gutknecht 2014).

The idea of a sustainable food system provides a means of recognizing the complex external natural forces as well as the intricate market forces related to food production and distribution. According to the *Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program*, which works across the United States to promote research, education, and innovation in sustainable agriculture,

A food system includes all processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a population: growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, and disposal of food and food-related items. A food system operates within and is influenced by social, political, economic and environmental contexts (SARE 2012).

SARE describes its core values as preserving resources and high levels of well-being across agricultural communities (SARE 2012). Their definition is useful for thinking about producing food. It allows people to think of food production as a complex ecosystem, in which all parts are connected and reliant upon the others. The food system is the overarching “ecosystem” in which all food related practices take place. Within this realm of the food system, are smaller keystone concepts and ideas which

govern specific pieces of the food system. The most influential keystone concept for this work, is that of food sovereignty, which first arose from the experience and analysis by farming peoples. *La Vía Campesina*, in 1996, first discussed food sovereignty at its Second International Conference, held on April 18–21, 1996, in Tlaxcala, Mexico (Wittman et al).

The definition they provided became the backbone of the movement and will do the same for this research.

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. It puts those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations. It defends the interests and inclusion of the next generation. It offers a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime, and directions for food, farming, pastoral and fisheries systems determined by local producers. Food sovereignty prioritizes local and national economies and markets and empowers peasant and family farmer-driven agriculture, artisanal fishing, pastoralist-led grazing, and food production, distribution and consumption based on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Food sovereignty promotes transparent trade that guarantees just income to all peoples and the rights of consumers to control their food and nutrition. It ensures that the rights to use and manage our lands, territories, waters, seeds, livestock and biodiversity are in the hands of those of us who produce food. Food sovereignty implies new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social classes and generations. (Via Campesina 2007)

I would like to point out that this definition takes care to acknowledge that *people have the right to culturally appropriate food*...which is an essential aspect of successful implementation of the projects of food. I will discuss this idea in more detail with respect to agency and the Ojibwe people in chapters to come.

It should be said that despite their close connection, there is a significant difference between the terms food security and food sovereignty. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) defines food security as, “ Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to

sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO 2015).

While this concept is an essential aspect of a well-functioning and healthy society, it has been argued that the term food security skirts the issues of social control of the food system, meaning for example, that it is possible to have food security under dictatorships or in prison. Democratization and political justice must therefore be included in the process. It can therefore be said that food sovereignty is a *precondition* for the existence of food security (Patel 2009: 2). In other words, what is significant and useful about food sovereignty is that it takes into consideration democratization and justice.

Food sovereignty as a concept has been widely accepted and used in the work of Non-Governmental Organizations, non-profits, and social movements, but has yet to take hold in the political sphere. Work has been undertaken by scholars to address the rhetoric of food sovereignty and its use in different circles. The vast majority of the literature pertains to defining and redefining food sovereignty, and understanding its historical context. Michel Pimbert illustrates this in “Toward Food Sovereignty: Reclaiming Autonomous Food Systems”, stating that

Many actors working for food sovereignty in a variety of rural and urban contexts recognize that more debate is needed to clarify the concept of food sovereignty at a time when many organizations make references to it without understanding its deeply political character, which is radically different from the dominant neo-liberal economic system. Moreover, several actors use the term food sovereignty in a restrictive manner, emphasizing self-sufficiency and isolationist proposals that reject exchanges and complementarities between regions (Pimbert 2006).

The work being done often describes the movements of Latin America. Many, such as Altieri (2009) and Patel (2009), focus on the positive contributions of groups such as *La Via Campesina* to food sovereignty. That said, food systems and the food sovereignty movement are relatively new concepts to academia. This thesis will acknowledge the work that has been undertaken by scholars, before moving their efforts forward into thinking of food sovereignty in relation to social agency in the context of the American system. While many studies focus on the impacts and significance of defining new terms and potential positive outcomes of new food systems and food sovereignty, I

struggled to find contextual evidence and lived examples of food as a process in specific Native communities. I did not find evidence of the use of traditional methods of ethnography in analyzing the Indigenous food sovereignty movement with respect to agentic projects. While on fieldwork, however, I met Elizabeth Hoover, an associate professor of American Studies and Ethnic Studies at Brown University, who was documenting the Indigenous Food sovereignty movement across the United States. She and her partner, Angelo Baca, a filmmaker and professor of Native American Literature and Native American Film, spent three months traveling the country observing and documenting farm, garden and food sovereignty projects to analyze their challenges and definitions of food sovereignty. While the breadth and scope of their research was vaster than my own, their work is a visual display of many projects and does not address food as a process in a specific community or group.

Following the 1998 World Health Organization designation of obesity as a global epidemic, much research has been conducted analyzing obesity and the nutritional transition. Some of this research addresses the difference in socioeconomic background and obesity rates, which reflect the trends seen in the Native American community. One such study published in the *International Journal of Pediatric Obesity* found that,

There is a strong body of evidence of an inverse socioeconomic gradient with childhood obesity in developed nations internationally. Our findings suggest that cultural factors (including language, religion, and health beliefs, values and behaviours) are likely to explain some of the marked ethnic differences seen in obesity prevalence in children and adults. We know the health and wellbeing of culturally and linguistically diverse communities is influenced by the interplay of social, economic, environmental, individual risk and protective factors (Waters et al. 2011)

A study in *The Obesity Reviews*, by Lobstein et al. found that children in lower income families within Industrialized nations were more likely to develop obesity and type two diabetes due to poor diet and lack of exercise. It was also found that child obesity is rising in wealthier sections of developing countries possibly due to the exposure to Westernized diets (Lobstein et al 2004: 5). With respect to the exposure to westernized diets, many have focused on the impacts of globalization on traditional diets. The nutrition transition has been defined as that shift in nutritional concerns, from excess malnutrition and even starvation, to overweight and obesity as predominant nutrition

patterns among members of a population, based on large shifts in diet structure related to changing economic and social factors (Popkin and Gordon-Larson qtd. in Compher 2006). As noted earlier, this has resulted in less culturally appropriate diversified food sources and more processed foods, coupled with lack of physical activity. A study of Arctic Indigenous groups found that despite traditionally high diversity in diet, fewer and fewer of these food sources are being used (Kuhnlein et al 2004). Others have conducted research that falls into the realm of food justice, addressing this as an issue of access to healthy food options in lower income communities. One study of food deserts in Minnesota stated that minority individuals living below the poverty line consume less fruits and vegetables than is currently recommended. This presents a problem due to the well-established evidence that fresh fruits and vegetables contribute vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fiber, and phytochemicals to the diet (Hendrickson 2004). The article found that the existence of food deserts and absence of these foods may be contributing to the higher prevalence of morbidity and mortality rates seen in this population (Hendrickson 2004). First Lady Michelle Obama has brought the issues of nutrition and obesity to the forefront of American policy by making it her mission to combat obesity and poor nutrition, specifically targeting low-income and minority communities with the program, *Let's Move!* (Let's Move! 2015). The research fields of health and nutrition have received much attention and has built the foundation for the food sovereignty and indigenous food sovereignty movements. Public health and nutrition are important political tools to communicating the issues of today's modern agricultural system.

The environmental, social, and health impacts of the current industrialized agricultural system have spurred a vast array of solutions and responses. Much of this attention is now focused on the concepts of food systems, food security and food sovereignty. Addressing these theories gives background and structure to this research, providing context to the communities I will be observing. I find that understanding the serious implications of current agricultural practices helps make clear the significance of the work being undertaken in Ojibwe communities.

Some linguistic aspects of this paper must also be acknowledged and defined. The word Ojibwe has several different spellings and interpretations. Ojibway, Ojibwa, Chippewa, and Ojibwey have all been used and there is some disagreement about where

the term comes from and how it should be spelled. Henry Schoolcraft, an author and scholar of the Ojibwe people said this about the name,

The word ojib or Ojibwa, means literally ‘puckered, or drawn up.’ The answer of their old men when questioned respecting the derivation of their tribal name, is that the name is derived from a peculiarity in the make or fashion of their moccasin, which has a puckered seam length ways over the foot, and which is termed, the O-jib-wa moccasin (Schoolcraft qtd. Warren 1885).

Despite his spelling, others have noted that the name was pronounced O-jib-way, or – way, which should be spelled with a –y. It is today common to see it spelled Ojibwe within much of the literature on the tribe. I will use the most common current spelling, Ojibwe throughout this work. In addition, the terms Indigenous and Native American and American Indian are all commonly used to describe the Ojibwe people. I will use them interchangeably.

The term reservation is, by many, either unknown or ill-understood. According to the US Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), a federal Indian reservation is an area of land reserved for a tribe or tribes under treaty or other agreement with the United States, executive order, or federal statute or administrative action as permanent tribal homelands, and where the federal government holds title to the land in trust on behalf of the tribe. Approximately 56.2 million acres are held in trust by the United States for various Indian tribes and individuals. There are approximately 326 Indian land areas in the U.S. administered as federal Indian reservations (Bureau of Indian Affairs 2015).

I would like to note that while I use the term “western” to compare the stark differences between historical Indigenous and European/colonial mindsets, I would like to make note that this is not a black and white juxtaposition, particularly in the modern age.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge that the concept of regaining agency through indigenous food systems is not a project undertaken by all community members. This effort is part of a civil movement, not simply a community project. This work does not wish to alienate members of the community who disagree with, or wish to be left out of the projects of food sovereignty. While these efforts are part of a larger civil movement, my concern is at the community level.

## 1.5 Shaping the Conceptual Framework

Many anthropologists and researchers have talked about cyclical time in native culture. Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux holy man, describes the indigenous perception of time in this eloquent quote:

Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle. The sky is round... the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same...even the seasons changing, and always come back again to where they were. The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood and so it is in everything where power moves (Neihart and Black Elk 2008).

Themes of cycles are abundant in Indigenous societies. As we will see later, this concept of the circle was mentioned during my time in the field. While this is valuable to shape more spiritual aspects of native culture, I will use a different frame to describe time in Ojibwe culture. While the terms I use to describe the efforts of the Ojibwe people are those that suggest returning to their cultural roots, I do not wish to think of this in terms of going back to the beginning. Regaining and revitalizing their cultural heritage is a vital aspect of this work, but I would like to make clear that these efforts are progressing Ojibwe communities into a new future built on the themes of the past. The Indigenous food sovereignty movement is incorporating traditional food practices into a vastly different present reality and vision for the future.

In this research, ignoring the significance of the past, present and future, would be a great injustice. Clearly, time is significant within this work and it is necessary to describe notions of time within anthropology. Despite time's presence in all aspects of anthropological study, it is often neglected as a theoretical frame. As Munn states, time has often been the handmaiden to other anthropological frames and issues... it is frequently fragmented into all other dimensions and topics anthropologists deal with in the social world (Munn 1992:93). "Time puts on mundane, empiricist clothing, instead of the 'qualitative,' myth-ritual dress of Durkheimian representations" (Munn 1992:96). She analyzes situations through a temporal lens, not merely as a backdrop in which research is conducted. While I acknowledge that there has likely been new research

undertaken in this realm, I appreciate Munn's terminology and unique understanding of time in Indigenous societies and find it helpful in describing my work.

To give a more concrete example of how this will be useful within my research, I will use Munn and her work with the Gawan people of the South Pacific. In her paper, "Constructing Regional Worlds in Experience: Kula Exchange, Witchcraft and Gawan Local Events," Munn refers to a unifying framework of "indigenous historical consciousness or historical memory: the experiential formulation of the past within any given present" (Munn 1990: 2). Munn uses the example of Kula shell exchange between island communities to describe the impacts of past events on the present, which will undeniably have future repercussions. I am interested in the way the Ojibwe use this same idea to articulate the meaningful relationship between people and food. As Munn states, the Gawan [people] do not simply reach back into the past to draw relations into the present, but they attempt to stop the expected destructive outcomes of certain past events and prefigure positive futures (Munn 1990: 12). This, is useful to describe Ojibwe relationships to food; the Ojibwe do not simply use food in a continuum to draw the past into the present, but to disrupt the potential negative impacts of the past on the future. The impacts of food are not static, but provide a horizon of possibilities for future events.

Current efforts within Ojibwe communities to use food as a means of regaining social agency are mindful of their unique relationship to the past. In the case of the indigenous food sovereignty movement, communities are using food to reshape the potential negative impacts of their unjust past. Without this acknowledgement of past tradition and culture, the creation of new spaces for participation and projects would be unsuccessful. This work will make a conscious effort to address time not as a backdrop, but as an active shaper in the process of regaining social agency in Ojibwe communities. Thus, I ask the questions, *How does food form direction? What are the past relations held within food?*

As humans act within a present created by past events, it is important to acknowledge the connection between temporality and agency. This definition from Carl Ratner is useful in its explicit connection between agency and time. "Agency is the active element of culture. Being a cultural phenomenon means that agency is a historical project which must be realized through humanizing society" (Ratner 2000: 413).



Society is both the ever-present condition and the continually reproduced outcome of human agency. Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische have also described agency as temporal.

Theoretically, our central contribution is to begin to reconceptualize human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) (Emirbayer, Mische 1998).

The term agency has many interpretations and potential frames. While I use Ratner, Emirbayer and Mische to illustrate the connection between Munn's work and social agency, I will be using Sherry Ortner's book, "Anthropology and Social Theory: Culture, Power and the Acting Subject" (2006) and her concept of agentic projects to frame the majority of this research.

There has been a great deal of criticism of the term agency, calling it ethnocentric in nature, individualistic instead of contextual and overly simplistic. Ortner argues that the goals of agency should be to theorize the desires and motivations of real people, as well as the practices in the social process. Agency is never a thing in itself, but part of a *process*; the making and reforming of larger social and cultural formations. Ortner envisions social agents as never acting outside the multitude of social relationships in which actors live. Thus agents, despite the individualistic connotations associated with the term, are never free to act outside social, cultural, and historical structures (Ortner 2006:134).

One key concept that must be acknowledged within her work is that of intentionality, which "includes a wide array of states, both cognitive and emotional, and at various levels of consciousness, that are directed forward toward some end" (Ortner 2006:134). Intentionality can range from highly conscious plots and schemes, less concrete aims and goals, and finally desires, or routine behaviors, which can be deeply buried and subconscious. Ortner call these two ends of a spectrum; soft agency on one end, with no intentionality, and hard agency on the other, with highly conscious intention. This research will fall within the harder aspect of agency, due to the fact that Ojibwe communities have conscious goals, missions and intentions. These goals and intentions

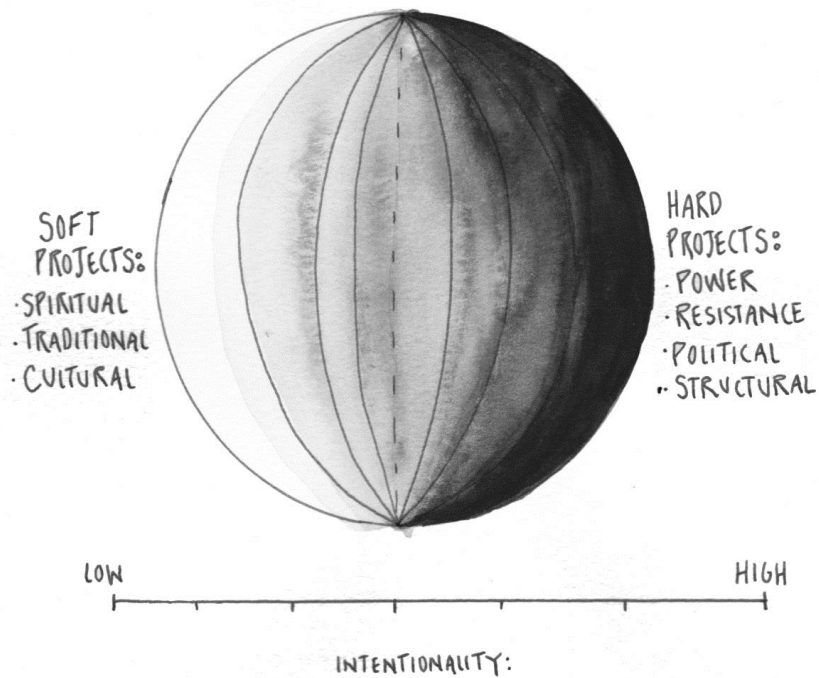
include creating a Native community that is more self-sufficient, empowered, and resilient, while revitalizing traditional values and customs.

I particularly appreciate Ortner's recognition of agency as a dual relationship between power and projects, resistance and domination, which I will address in greater detail.

Ortner states:

Broadly speaking, the notion of agency can be said to have two fields of meaning. In one field of meaning, agency is about intentionality and the pursuit of culturally defined projects. In the other field of meaning, agency is about power. About acting within relations of social inequality, asymmetry and force. Agency has two faces – as the pursuit of projects or as the exercise of or against power, which blend or bleed into one another, or else retain their distinctiveness but intertwine in a moebius-type relationship (Ortner 2006:139).

## SHADES OF AGENCY:



**Figure 2: Shades of Agency**

I will use two terms to describe this spectrum. First, shades of agency, which describes the type of agentic project from light to dark. Second, I will use the terms soft and hard agency as these are the words of Sherry Ortner. Soft agency is interchangeable with the light side of the sphere, and hard agency is interchangeable with the dark side of the sphere. These are all reflected in the diagram above. The projects of the Ojibwe encompass multiple aspects of soft and hard agency, resistance and power, spiritual and structural. Projects of agency are the actions taken by players – they are in a sense the tangible, grounded representation of agency. Ojibwe communities are highly agentic, in that they have projects of intention that aim to achieve a culturally appropriate goal. In their case, projects such as the food sovereignty movement act within a system of

inequality, and against it, resisting its impacts. Ojibwe communities are acting on the margins of power – both yearning to reestablish their own structures, while pushing against the realities of their everyday life. This research will explore these food-based projects as the visible manifestation of the process of agency within marginalized communities. These “projects of food,” include grassroots efforts and community participation, which I will expand upon throughout this work, using them as illustrations of the larger theme of agency.

These agentic projects of food, which act on a spectrum from soft cultural and spiritual projects to those of hard agency, using resistance and power, touch upon the themes of civil movements. These projects take place within larger more theoretical ideas. These include the state, the physical geographical places of the Ojibwe both positive and negative that motivate action, the spaces created from this motivation, and the new paradigms of participation and self-reliance the spaces encourage. These are interconnected, each influencing the creation of the next. I find that Andrea Cornwall and John Gaventa provide useful means of describing this relationship. Participation can be thought of as the process of creating spaces where there previously were none, enlarging spaces where previously there were very limited opportunities for public involvement, and about allowing people to occupy spaces that were previously denied to them (Cornwall 2004: 77). Used often in the context of development studies, participation often refers to creating a more dynamic and democratic relationship between citizens and governing institutions. Cornwall describes the dynamics of power through the concept of participation as a spatial practice (Cornwall 2004:78). Created ‘spaces’ for participation and engagement come in many forms. Lefebvre states that space is a social product...it is not simply ‘there’, a neutral container waiting to be filled, but is a dynamic, humanly constructed means of control and hence of domination, of power (Lefebvre 1991: 24). As Cornwall asserts,

the spaces in which citizens are invited to participate, as well as those they create, are never neutral. Creating spaces for participation and transformation calls for strengthening the possibilities of active citizen engagement in both institutions of power, and spaces which citizens make and shape themselves (Cornwall 2004 :85).

In terms of this fieldwork, the spaces created for active participation and engagement often occur at the grassroots level , much like the foodshed mapping which created a

new meeting space for community members, non-profits and scholars to voice opinions and ideas. The spaces also occur around the dinner table, when family and friends can come together and discuss issues over good food. Their goals and missions however, often incorporate the structural political level, and attempt to address much larger issues. Scale aside; the creation of these spaces is essential to this research and the larger theme of food sovereignty.

This work incorporates the frames and concepts discussed to address the notions of progress and innovation, acknowledging the fact that the projects undertaken by communities are by no means an effort to simply return to the past ways of doing things. While terms like, “regaining, returning, and revitalizing” are essential to communicating the significance of the cultural past, it is clear that the communities in question are moving into new paradigms of political process, participatory forms of government, more holistic views of food production and education, and economic self-sufficiency. They take into account new players and the globalizing world in the present, while instilling their goals and desires for the future. Using these low-level theoretical frames and community based examples, my attempt is to answer the questions, *what is it about food that makes it such an effective communicator? How is it being used to communicate the goals of the Ojibwe people?*

With this in mind, it was clear to me that culture is a resource within these communities and that experiencing these projects face to face was the only way to study them.

## **1.6 In the Field: Methodologies and Groundwork**

This need to understand projects and understand culture as a resource lent itself to the method of ethnography. It was clear to me that the projects and ideas being communicated in the field must be understood through the eyes of an active participant. I took this to heart, working hard throughout my time in the field to find opportunities to participate in projects. Ethnography allows researchers to observe their area of study through engagement and participation. This anthropological form of research focuses on the workings of the every day. My fieldwork did exactly this; I ate dinner with families, spent many meals with community members talking over dinners and lunches, and spent a lot of time literally in the field pulling weeds, picking crops, and planting.

Ethnographic research is grounded in constructivist methodology, and emphasizes the idea that truth cannot be found without immersing oneself in the area of study. Stewart states in, “The Ethnographer’s Method,” that ethnography can be defined by several major characteristics. Ethnography is based on observation, is holistic in nature, and typically occurs in the form of a long-term study. Ethnography involves sociocultural description, or studying and observing social dynamics and cultural norms.

Ethnography has characteristics in common with grounded theory, in that both view observations through contextual evidence before construing data in terms of an existing theory (Stewart 1998:5). I attempted to keep this in mind, observing before determining the set frame of my research. Researchers often employ a number of data collecting techniques when doing an ethnographic study including taking field notes, conducting interviews and surveys with community members, mapping the geography, relationships and power structures (see figure 2), and lastly analysis of texts and documents related to the work.

My ethnographic study took place over three months in the summer of 2014. I am referring to my fieldwork as focused ethnography, which relies more heavily on the analysis of texts, documents, and interviews with informants than on long term observation, while requiring fewer resources and less time in the field (Stewart 1998:16). Before I entered the field, I heavily researched the groups and individuals involved in the food sovereignty movement and contacted them. There were many existing texts, including films and other literature put out by the major organizations. I relied on these films and resources heavily during the initial phase of my research. When I arrived in the field, I began my work close to my home and expanded outward from there. This allowed me to “get my feet wet” and adjust my questions and scope based on the initial day trips and volunteer sessions. My study consisted of taking detailed field notes on cultural differences, observations, and informant comments, journaling about my thoughts and feelings in the field, participation within non-profits, cultural meetings, mapping of relationships and geographical location, textual analysis before entering the field, and in-depth informal interviews. Many interviews were over an hour long, occurring in places familiar to the interviewee. I traveled between several communities of varying geographical local, interviewing key informants and volunteering at non-profits. I played both an active role in the communities and the role of observer. I attended dinner with a family in Northern Minnesota and was introduced

to common topics of conversation and a relaxed atmosphere in which I could comfortably ask questions. This was an influential meeting and provided me with relevant themes for my work.

# PROJECTS, PEOPLE & CONNECTIONS:



Initial Assessment....

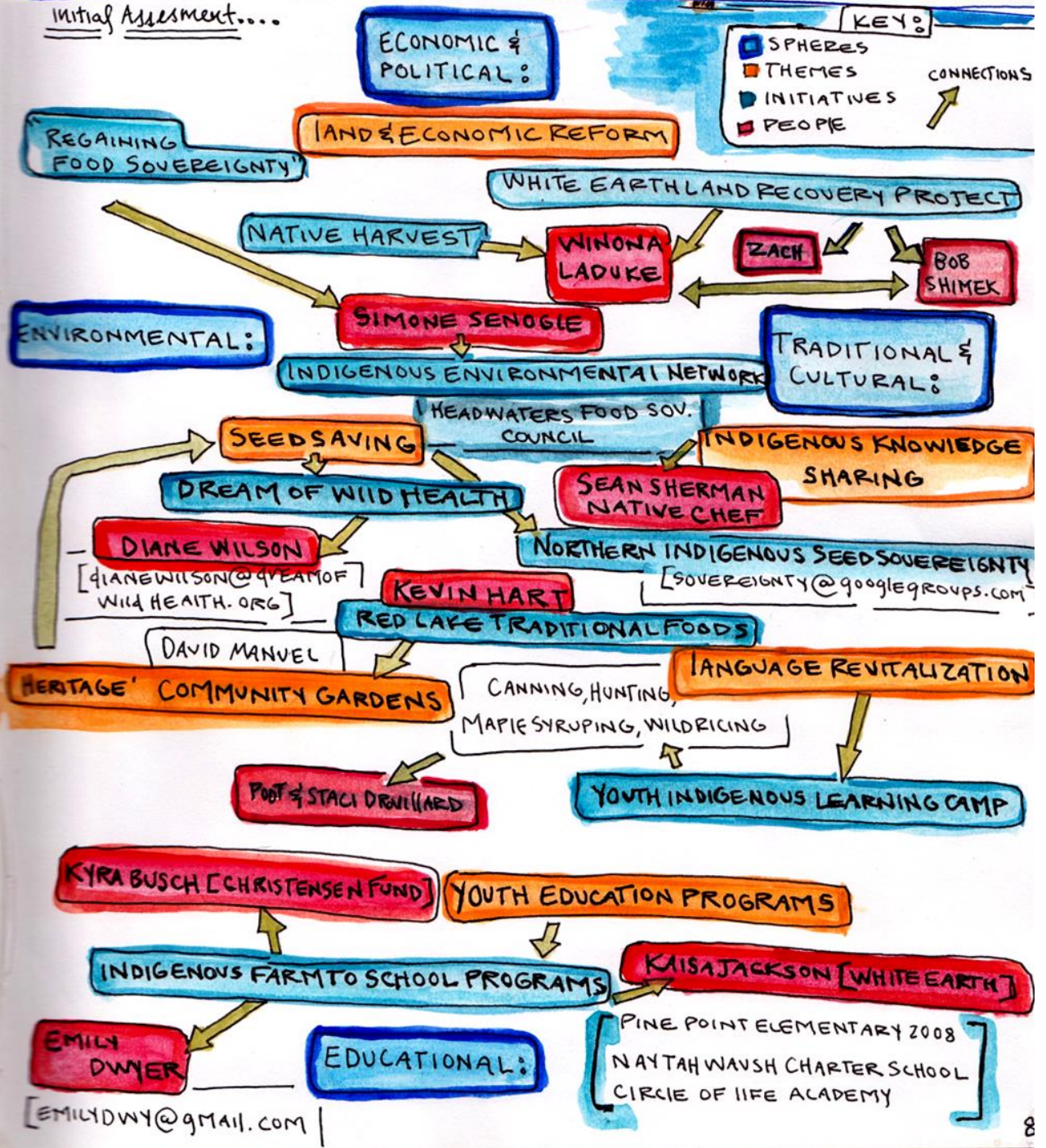


Figure 3: Initial Mapping of Field and Players (Donlin fieldnotes)



Focused ethnography does, however, present some potential barriers to research. A shorter period in the field could lead to mischaracterization and misunderstanding of observations (Stewart 1998:20). These shortcomings of modified ethnography were acknowledged during my time in the field. Some, such as the short time period spent in the field, were unavoidable due to my limited budget and timeline. In order to compensate for this shortened time, I narrowed the focus of this study to include informants and groups that were directly involved in the realm of food and food sovereignty. Although it can be argued that this narrow focus may affect my findings, I argue that it had no relevant impact on the scope of my research. Stewart states that “it should be conceded that the more targeted or limited the ethnography is to a particular and well-defined topic, the less time is needed for fieldwork (Stewart 20). I was working directly with the efforts being taken by communities to regain agency through the projects of food, which I believe justified my specific focus on non-profits and active community members. I argue that this short time spent in the field is acceptable considering that I was not presented with language barriers or significant cultural restrictions as I was in my home country and state. That being said, the overall context in a broader scale was that in which I grew up. It has been argued that it is most difficult to understand and observe cultural norms and habits in one’s own society. While I did initially worry about this “cultural blindness,” it became clear that the subject matter and area I was studying was specific enough to differentiate. I was presented with new norms and cultural differences as I am a non-Native Minnesotan and grew up in the suburbs of Minnesota’s largest cities.

I did face several challenges beyond time scale and resources, including security issues. I was often told not to travel alone or to journey to certain places at night. Due to this, I often returned to larger towns at night. Occasionally I did feel unsafe and out of place – some small reservation towns’ road signs sported numerous bullet holes and I observed several middle aged men walking along the road clearly inebriated. The high rate of substance abuse was visible at times and I stayed clear of situations in which I felt uncomfortable or uneasy. I was also concerned that I would be perceived as insensitive and naïve as a non-Native researcher studying Ojibwe culture. I was not sure how to present myself, and was uncomfortable knowing the treatment the Ojibwe have received

by non-natives over the past few centuries. To the contrary, I was very well received within the field and despite occasional initial apprehension toward me as a researcher this was always short lived. I was grateful and touched by the inviting nature of everyone I met – I was welcomed into people’s homes, and twice given directions when lost by complete strangers, who hopped in their cars to show me the way. It appeared that the topic of food and the nature of my research (understanding the growing food sovereignty movement) were keen subjects of discussion. That said, I did face some challenges contacting people and collecting data more recent than 2013. Several actually told me to remember that I was on “Indian time” which was meant to mean that time moves at a slower pace in Indian communities.

While this thesis assesses and focuses on the food sovereignty movement in Minnesota, it is not an all-encompassing. Although I hope that this thesis gives insight into a growing movement, the findings should not be used to make broad assumptions about indigenous peoples, food sovereignty, or social agency. This is a qualitative research project, which drew findings from six interviews with key players, participation and volunteer work, and in depth field notes. I would also like to acknowledge that while I aimed to focus directly on Ojibwe peoples and communities, I also received information from members of the Dakota, Arapaho, and Oneida tribes, who are working within the movement, namely at *Dream of Wild Health*, which has no tribal affiliation.

Ethical considerations must be taken when conducting master’s level research. During my time in the field, I always presented myself in a professional manner and introduced myself as a researcher from the University of Oslo. I gave a description of my project and when conducting interviews, asked whether I could take notes or record. My interviews were conducted with informants who acknowledged that they were being interviewed for my thesis. It was also important to introduce myself and acknowledge cultural norms. I felt that an informal attitude and interview structure was best suited to my study area.

## 1.7 Roadmap

The motivation for this work was the loss of lifeways in Ojibwe culture. I have always been disturbed by the injustices of the past and was keen to learn more about why Ojibwe communities are using food to come out of this vicious cycle of losses. Throughout this qualitative study, I use notions of past, present and future, space, and agency to describe the projects of food. This thesis is separated into six chapters, which focus on the different time horizons of the food sovereignty movement in Ojibwe communities. In chapter two, I am concerned with the holistic nature of Ojibwe society and culture. I return to their beginning to understand how this holism shapes the value seen in food. Understanding the history of the Ojibwe is important as it sets the stage for the time of great separation. I describe this great separation through a series of losses; land, youth, and food. These impacted the fabric of traditional Indigenous lifeways. The losses are essential to understand before being able to fully grasp the significance of why the Ojibwe food sovereignty movement is a means of regaining sovereignty and self-sufficiency. In chapter three, I address the question, *Why food?* Using Munn's concepts of time and notions of the past, present and future to support my ideas, I answer this question. I use the example of wild rice to illustrate this acknowledging historical and symbolic past, and impacts on the present. Chapter four, the "Transformative Power of Food" focuses again on the present time horizon, answering the question, *How food?* Using Sherry Ortner's thoughts on the "projects of agency," I analyze what I refer to as the agentic projects I came across in the field. These are projects of food that communicate a range of goals using resistance, as well as inclusive and culturally appropriate goals. "Envisioning New Horizons" expands to larger themes. First, the state, which is still an influential force manipulating sovereignty on the reservations. Second, geographical physical places, both created by the state, and the sacred lived places of the Ojibwe. Next, created spaces, which are formed in response to place. I will end with the new forms of participation that occur after the formation of spaces of empowerment. I aim to build each chapter off the previous to take the reader through a story of traditional cultural norms in Ojibwe society, to the new horizons of sovereignty and self-sufficiency. I conclude by reiterating my research question, why food is such an important communicator and summarize my most influential encounters in the field.



## 2 The Collective Nature of Things

During a meeting with Bob Shimek, he spoke of this intimate relationship with other beings:

When we go out and harvest chokecherries, it's not just about nurturing our body, it's about nurturing our soul and nurturing the plant that gave them. That's overlooked and when we take that tobacco and ask permission to go and take from that tree so we can have life, we're reaffirming an ages old relationship; we take care of that tree, that tree takes care of us. Maybe we're crazy, but I honestly believe it's true. When we talk about animate nouns, things have life-like qualities including spirit. They're just like us and who knows how strong that spirit is if we don't take care of it (Shimek: Interviewed 5.8.2014).

The story of the Ojibwe people begins with *Kitche Manitou*, The Creator, who the Ojibwe believe formed the materials from which all physical things are based, and gave them each purpose. He created the plants, and the animals; the elder brothers of the *Anishanaabeg Ojibwe*, or Original People, which points to the notion that plants and animals in Ojibwe culture have a certain amount of spiritual weight and respect attached to them. As the elder siblings of humanity, they signify the elders, and demand much reverence. He then created humans and the natural laws that govern all life on Earth. These laws of nature ensure the harmony and well-being of all things. They govern the winds, water, fire, rock, and the rhythm and continuity of life and death (Peacock and Wisuri 2002:19).

In the previous chapter, I provided background and context for the food systems and food sovereignty movements, and detailed the key concepts that I will use as a theoretical base for this research. From here, I wish to look back on the traditional and spiritual practices of the Ojibwe people, as they play a key role in the mindset and projects of the community at hand.

These relations are embedded in the Ojibwe language. *Modaywin* means, “we are all related” in the Ojibwe language and is a significant aspect of life and culture. Words are both gendered, and thought of as either animate or inanimate, bringing what are seen as objects in English to life. The Ojibwe have a deep understanding and respect for the languages of the non-human beings. This interrelatedness is innate in many Indigenous

cultures. Listening to the wisdom of forests gained through many frosts, the whispers of animals and flittings of birds, the quiet murmurs of the water and the rock, and the lamenting winds are all languages understood and relied upon. The Ojibwe regard their homelands as a gift from the Great Spirit, belonging to everyone in the tribe (Peacock and Wisuri 2002:44). Horace Axtell, a Nez Perce elder once spoke of the collective nature of the beings on earth. He was eloquently quoted in Peacock and Wisuri:

We must be reminded that all the things around us have a collective spirit. Acknowledging the collective nature of things is another essential part of our way of being. Some time ago I traveled to Red Cliff, Wisconsin the home of my father and grandparents and of their parents. I am often called to that place of our great Ojibwe homeland when I am in need of solace and reflection. This particular time, I stopped and walked a pathway to a bench my great grandfather had built overlooking the blue of Lake Superior. I was overcome with a sense of awe and wonderment at the collective spirit of that place. It was all around me - in the buzzing of insects and the chattering of birds, in the hush of grasses as they bowed to the wind, in the lapping sounds of the water on the rocks, in the blue of sky and sparkling of sun off the waves, and in my own muffled voice. I could feel the spirits of my father and great grandparents sitting on the bench with me that day, and it was as though I saw the world with the same sense of wonder that children, like my granddaughters, see the world with. The past, present and future, all were a part of the collective spirit of that place (Peacock and Wisuri 2002:45).

This is a powerful statement in that it embodies the idea that the past is never dead – it lives through and around every being. Traditionally, notions of power in Indigenous cultures are quite different from that of Western cultures. Power is not possessed by humans to be held over other beings, nor does it act to hold other beings in place. There is an inherent respect and acknowledgement of other beings within Native culture.

While visiting the non-profit organization *Dream of Wild Health* in Hugo, Minnesota, I had the privilege of experiencing several traditional Native American practices and observed this in person. On June 28<sup>th</sup>, I was invited to attend a wild-edible gathering and feast with a group of around ten other visitors. *Dream of Wild Health* holds many monthly gatherings with community members, which have become increasingly popular over the last several years. This event was held to gather Wild Potatoes, which grow in abundance along roadsides in Minnesota in late June.



**Figure 4: Hope and Ernie Dream of Wild Health**

Before setting out with our shovels and gloves, we were asked to join Ernie Whiteman, the organization’s Cultural Director and Spiritual Leader in a prayer, tobacco offering, and sage smudging. He started with a small introduction to the ceremony. “We begin our day every day with a sacred circle. We live in that circle, it’s the circle of life and it encompasses our everyday. The circle is very important to our culture.” As he spoke, burning sage was passed around the circle of guests along with a small bowl of tobacco, which we were told to take a pinch of. Everyone in turn scooped up the smoke and wafted it over their heads and bodies. He explained that cleansing with sage smoke is an ancient practice and that tobacco is also a vital part of Native American culture. It is traditionally tended by the men, and is considered the reincarnation of ancestors, which must be treated with the utmost respect. After introducing us to the tradition of sage smudging and offering tobacco, Ernie began a prayer:

Grandfathers we thank you for this wonderful day you have given us. We thank you for bringing everyone together in this circle today grandfathers. Look down on us and guide us today in everything we do, grandfathers. We t Thank you grandfathers for that wonderful sun, the air we breathe, the land we walk upon, and the waters, we thank you for the gift you give us every single day, grandfathers. Thank you for giving us these sacred plants we will be out looking for guide us in a good way. We thank you for the wonderful things that we grow here grandfathers. Help us to take care of these things. We thank you for all the animals and creatures you give us, the animals that are in the earth and in the water. Teach us to live in harmony and respect and honor these animals grandfathers (Whiteman: Prayer 28.06.14).

After this quiet respectful ceremony, each of us spread our pinch of tobacco at the feet of a small tree. This was an offering to be given before picking the ancestors. We then met Hope Flannigan, who is an expert gatherer and native plant specialist. She lay out a series of plants that she had picked earlier that day and began:

We always start with tobacco 'cause we're picking our relatives today. What I've been taught is that every plant has its gift to the people. One of my teachers was reiterating that when I went to see her she was talking about when the trickster was here and he named everything and that's when they offered up 'I'm going to do this for the people, I'm going to do this for the people' and all the plants and animals were eager to help us so we need to show that respect right back to them. What I've always heard or know to be true either has every plant has a gift of food, utility, or medicine. If we don't know what it is, that just means we don't know what it is -that's not their fault, that's on us. A lot of them have so many gifts just on one little plant. I was so so happy to find these and that they showed themselves to me. If they show themselves to you, oh you're so lucky. They are very rare. There is a Dakota teaching that sometimes they'd find food caches of wild potato or turnip of the mice or the voles. These are wonderful food so you can't steal from them - they're living just like us! So you would always make sure you would give a food offering to them if you found a food cache of wild potatoes. If you could find a cache of them, you might put corn in them to say thank you... (Flannigan: Interviewed 28.06.2014)

Before we left to gather the potatoes, she recited a little prayer:

I ask that I be guided today so that we respect the plants in their home. This isn't our home; it's their home. Plants are our older brothers and sisters. We must encourage them to live and give their gifts. I ask that the spirit take pity on me if I do things in an inappropriate or incorrect way (Flannigan: Prayer 28.06.14).

Here the historical differences between Indigenous and Western ideas of ownership, utility and power were clearly presented. The concept of property and ownership is commonplace in a Western philosophy. Yet property using an anthropological definition is not inherently personal and private, but changes based on one's society. Hoebel is quoted in Hann's book "Property Relations: Renewing Anthropological Tradition" stating:



Property is found in social relations rather than in any inherent attributes of the thing or object that we call property. Property in other words is not a thing, but a network of social relations that governs the conduct of people with respect to the use and disposition of things (Hann 1998:5).

This quote explains the difference in ideology between the dominant western ideology and that of Indigenous peoples. Dominant western ideology often attaches monetary or use value to objects, ignoring the inherent or spiritual value. Yet as Hope and Bob explain, these beings are our relatives, who have spirits and are there to help us. Through this, we must do the same to help them. The connectedness they illuminate may shed light on the power of food as a communicator in Indigenous communities. Lived examples such as this reflect the themes of respect and reciprocity, holding in it the past, while creating the potential for positive future actions. The idea that a food system is like an ecosystem and that care must be taken to balance the relationship between its components is a key part of Ojibwe identity and tradition, yet during the past century, many factors acted to dismantle this mindset.

## **2.1 The Lost Past**

The Indigenous understanding of the world's workings and focus on the notions of respect, interdependence, and relations was dealt a significant blow after the introduction of Europeans to North America. William Warren states that the Ojibwe affirm that the coming of the Europeans was prophesized by one of their elders, who said he knew they would be removed from their lands and that the coming of the whites would eventually lead to the end of the world (Peacock and Wisuri 2002).

As the United States grew in population and power, many Indigenous groups were forced to accommodate European ideals. There were many things that significantly impacted the self-sufficiency of Ojibwe communities during the past two centuries. These included treaties made between the US government and Indian tribes and bands, the creation of boarding schools, which aimed to stamp out traditional practices and language, and more recently, the loss of Indigenous crop diversity, privatization of Native seed, and the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). These aspects worked together to erode the structure of native communities.

### **2.1.1 Signing Away the Past: Treaties**

“They made us many promises, more than I can remember, but they only kept but one; they promised to take our land and they took it” (Red Cloud qtd. in Weeks). Michael Rogin quoted in Howard Zinn’s *People’s History of the United States* shows statistically the significance of this breaking of Native land. “In 1820, 120,000 Indians lived east of the Mississippi. By 1944, fewer than 30,000 were left. Most of them had been forced to migrate westward” (Rogin qtd. in Zinn 1995:124).

One of the most important aspects of this dependency is what is known as “the treaty period”, which lasted from 1783 to 1889. In this period, dozens of treaties were signed between sovereign nations; meaning the tribes and the US government. There are three major types of treaties, which acted as contracts between these sovereign bodies. These included land cession treaties, peace treaties, and reservation creators. This is one of the most complex chapters in the relationship between the United States government and the Native peoples of North America. Complexity aside, the goals of the US government and the means taken to achieve them are clear. The next page presents a map of the movement of the Ojibwe people from the eastern coast inland to the Great Lakes region. It illustrates the most influential treaties and the impacts they had.



Figure 5: Representation of Treaties and Ojibwe Migration (Donlin Fieldnotes)

**Figure 6: Symbolic Petition brought to Washington by Ojibwe delegates in 1849 (Wisuri and Peacock)**

Before the creation of the state of Minnesota in the mid 1850's, tribal leaders signed treaties with the federal government regarding land rights, hunting and fishing privileges, and payment for land, amongst other things. American Indians relinquished this rights the title to their lands and reserved the remaining rights, for themselves. According to Truer, the Ojibwe word for "reservation" is "Ishkonigan," which in English means "leftovers" (Truer 2012:39). He describes the Treaty of 1837 in "Rez Life." In 1837, the American government and representatives from Ojibwe bands across Minnesota and Wisconsin met to discuss the trade of land for money. Those groups who signed the treaties were still allowed to live on large tracts of land across the region and hunt, fish and trap on it.

In payment for the land rights, the government would pay them (in US dollars) the following every year for twenty years: 9,500 in cash, 19,000 in goods, 3,000 for establishing blacksmith shops, 1,000 for farmers, and 500 for tobacco.

Below are some of the relevant clauses to the Ojibwe people of Minnesota (Minnesota Indian Affairs Council):

**Treaty of 1837: ARTICLE 5.** The privilege of hunting, fishing, and gathering the wild rice, upon the lands, the rivers and the lakes included in the territory ceded, is guaranteed to the Indians, during the pleasure of the President of the United States.

This article sounds like it benefits and protects the Ojibwe by guaranteeing them the right to hunt, fish, and gather upon the lands ceded to them. Yet there are a few words that must be noted, for instance, that this is only during the pleasure of the president of the United States.

**Treaty with the Chippewa: 1854: Article 1.** The Chippewas of Lake Superior hereby cede to the United States all the lands heretofore owned by them in common with the Chippewas of the Mississippi.

Here, the US government has used the term 'ceded' to state that the Chippewa (Ojibwe) bands of Lake Superior and the Mississippi have, for all intents and purposes, sold their

land to the US government, marking a lack of acknowledgement that Indigenous views of ownership were significantly different from that of the government.

**1854: Article 11.** The Indians shall not be required to move from the homes hereby set apart for them. And such of them as reside in the territory hereby ceded, shall have the right to hunt and fish therein, until otherwise ordered by the President.

While this looks benevolent in that the Ojibwe were allowed to stay in the homes reserved by the US government. Yet this is only until further notice by the president. While some presidents were more sympathetic towards Native Americans, others were not, requiring them to move sometimes thousands of miles from their homelands.

**1855: Article 1.** The said Indians do further fully and entirely relinquish and convey to the United States, any and all right, title, and interest, of whatsoever nature the same may be, which they may now have in, and to any other lands in the Territory of Minnesota or elsewhere.

Here it is clear the intention of the US government. The Ojibwe were required to fully relinquish the title, right and interest of their land within Minnesota. This will become more and more significant after resources, such as deposits of iron ore, were found in much of northcentral Minnesota.

For the chiefs, the right to hunt fish and live on their land while receiving supplemental income from the government was a fine deal. Unfortunately, no mention was made of logging, which would become the dominant fuel of the industrial age in the United States, or of the small print noting that the rights to hunt, fish and trap were during the pleasure of the president of the United States, which changed during the Taylor administration (Truer 2012:70-71). Many feel that the treaty rights retained by the tribes were ignored after the territory of Minnesota assumed statehood and began regulating its own natural resources. The picture on the next page makes an emotional statement, depicting different clans bonding together to protect their homelands. It is said that the lines coming from their hearts and eyes represent their connection to their wild ricing lakes (Peacock and Wisuri 2002: 49).



The Department of Natural Resources in the state of Minnesota is in charge of managing and regulating all hunting and fishing activities in the state. Those regulations have been imposed on tribal members despite the reserved rights stated in the treaties. Tribal members exercising those rights are often given citations, taken to court, fined and had their equipment confiscated for harvesting fish or game without a state license (Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission). This has led to serious confrontations among both tribal and state governments and the citizens of the state of Minnesota, which will be touched upon later.

### **2.1.2 Loss of a Generation: Boarding schools**

During the mid-1800's, the US government devised a new system for assimilating Native Americans into white society. Henry Price, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs stated in 1881:

Savage and civilized life cannot live and prosper on the same ground. One of the two must die. If the Indians are to be civilized and become happy and prosperous persons, which is certainly the object and intention of our government, they must learn our language and adopt our modes of life (Adams 2002:156).

Reformers began a campaign to assimilate Native children through the introduction of on and off reservation boarding schools. This campaign assumed the position that if young native children were taught the ways of white society at an early age, they may adopt a more 'civilized' existence, and obtain the skills to live in the Anglo-American world. Annual congressional appropriations given to Indian education increased from

20,000 in 1877 to 1,364,368 dollars in 1890, while attendance in Indian boarding schools tripled from 3, 598 to 12,232 during the same years (Adams 2002:157). While young girls were taught to sew, clean, and cook traditional European food, the boys were taught to use industrial tools, produce food through traditional European methods of agriculture, and practice masonry. These measures to introduce young Native children to more European livelihoods hoped to assimilate the next generation of Native Americans into the capitalist economy. As Adams puts it, this transformation “sought to relieve the government of its moral responsibility to feed and clothe a people once proud and independent but now reduced to indolence and dependency” (Adams 2002:164). These ideas were largely ineffective due to the fact that many Indigenous cultures had opposing values to those of the capitalist American society. Property ownership, individualism, and competition were foreign concepts to many tribes who valued communal sharing and cooperation.



**Figure 7: Grand Portage Ojibwe Boarding School, 1889 (Wisuri and Peacock)**

Over time, boarding schools and the policies implemented by the United States government began to shape the future of Native communities across the country. Despite efforts to assimilate Native Americans into white society, the majority of Native communities were instead blighted by poverty and alcoholism. By ensuring that the youngest generation was well-versed in the commonalities of Anglo-American life, old

ways of being began to drift into the background. While some had been warned by their relatives that their traditions and cultural identity would be challenged, others listened to the new teachings. One Shawnee boy by the name of Thomas Wildcat Alford, recalled the pleas of his chief to remember the dignity and the integrity of his tribe while being warned not to accept the white man's religion. He was quoted in Adams recalling this experience. "But as time passed ... the interests of my teachers became stronger, their pleas more persistent, and I could not ignore the subject. I would come to know that deep in my soul, Jesus Christ was my savior" (Adams 2002:166). In a conversation over a fresh trout dinner with Francis Drouillard, of Grand Marais, I was told a little about the loss of language in the community and the impact of boarding school on one of his friends. When he was young, he states,

All the old Indian ladies would get together and gossip and they'd speak Ojibwe. I wish I spoke it, but I just know a few words, but Staci [his daughter] speaks it. The natives weren't allowed to speak it, it was awful. We had a good friend that was in the boarding school. He said, 'they didn't beat me, they fed me, but it made me hard. It was like I'd lost a child. My wife doesn't like it that I'm so hard' (Drouillard: Interviewed 10.06.14).

By the mid 1920's, some began to question to legitimacy of eradicating Native American identity and tradition through assimilation and boarding schools. By this time, Native Americans were among the poorest people in the United States. According to Taylor, less than 2 percent had an income of over \$500 a year, while more than half had incomes below \$200 a year. This is shocking considering that the average income across all industries in the US at the time was \$1,407 (US Embassy). Lewis Meriam, of the Brookings Institute, carried out an independent publication entitled, *The Problem with Indian Administration*, which concluded that, "Provisions of welfare, health, and education of the people on the reservations were grossly inadequate" (Taylor 2002:175). This harsh criticism became known as the Meriam Report and began a new era of Native American policy and spurred the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 (Peacock and Wisuri 2002). The Indian Reorganization Act ended allotments and the further sale of Indian lands, while putting in place the infrastructure for tribes to organize their own tribal governments.



### **2.1.3 The Loss of the Ancestors**

To a people who value and respect plants and other beings for their intrinsic, symbolic, and cultural sake, the modern agricultural age meant an end to their way of living. This new era put a serious burden on traditional practices of harvesting and cultivating native varieties of food and impacted every aspect of Ojibwe life, from health to economics.

#### **The History of “Big Agriculture”**

Since the Roosevelt administration, the US government has taken an active role in agriculture. Today, this is done through the “Farm Bill,” which is a package of federal farm and food legislation that represents billions of dollars in government expenditures and sets the farm, food, and rural policy goals and priorities for the United States. In the simplest terms, the Farm Bill has a tremendous impact on farming livelihoods, how food is grown, and what kinds of foods are grown, both off and on the reservations. Since the Nixon Administration, farmers have been incentivized to increase the size of their farm, which forces small-scale farms out of the market. Over the last decade, the percentage of subsidies going to large farms has doubled to 54 percent and the average size of a US farm has doubled as well. This significant growth in the size of farms has had unforeseen consequences of limiting the diversity of crops grown, and of forcing smaller scale producers to either consolidate or move off their farms (Donlin 2014).

This can be seen on Reservations such as White Earth where larger and larger swaths of land are being used to grow commodity crops. When driving through the region, it is easy to spot the large irrigation systems stretching for miles.

#### **Health and the American Food System**

As stated earlier, 16.1 percent of Native Americans have diabetes, making it the highest age adjusted prevalence of diabetes among any racial group in the United States (Regaining Food Sovereignty 2013). One study found that in 104 adult Ojibwe Indians from Minnesota and Wisconsin, fat intake supplied 37% of their daily caloric intake, saturated fat 13%, and sugars 13% (DeGonzague et al. 1999). According to Michael Pollan, 60 percent of government subsidies go to four main commodity crops including

corn, soybeans, wheat, and rice. These foods also make up 66 percent of the calories consumed by the average American (Pollan 2006). Subsidies that support commodity crops, but not fruits and vegetables, have shaped the eating habits of Americans and their waistlines. In 2012, over one-third of American adults were obese. Beginning in the 1970s, high fructose corn syrup was used as a way to make the most of the corn surplus and provide a cheap alternative to sugar. High fructose corn syrup now replaces sugar in a huge portion of processed products in US supermarkets.

Several studies show that the use of common pesticides on crops could be linked to higher rates of rare forms of cancer. A study by the National Cancer Institute found that farming communities have higher rates of leukemia, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, multiple myeloma, and soft tissue sarcoma, as well as cancers of the skin, stomach, brain, and lip (National Cancer Institute). While at a meeting titled, “Toxic Taters” at the University of Minnesota Duluth, I met with the Toxic Taters Coalition, which is a group of several organizations including the WELRP. The Coalition works to end pesticide drift in agricultural communities, particularly those in which RDO potatoes (used as McDonald’s french fries) are grown. Some of the attendees were residents of farming communities who were exposed to excessive amounts of pesticides on potato farms and were forced to leave their homes. One attendee owned a small farm in potato growing country and suffered from health problems and sensitivity to pesticides. She mentioned several others who spoke of thyroid problems in domestic pets, severe birth defects in colts, sheep dying of stomach cancer, miscarriages in people, children with cancer who’s mothers were exposed during pregnancy, neurological problems, and increased rates of mysterious conditions during potato rotation years. Many of these farms are on or near the White Earth Reservation.

### **The Economics of Access to Healthy Foods**

While on our way to the foodshed mapping, we stopped briefly to pick up coffee creamer at the local “grocery store”. The store was more of a gas station, or convenience store combined with a bus stop. It was quite crowded, and most of the cars parked outside sported Reservation license plates. The aisles were filled with processed foods such as chips, Betty Crocker microwaveable dinners, and prepackaged burgers. The refrigerated glass doors of the coolers containing sandwiches and soda were

marked with signs stating they no longer accepted Electronic Benefit Transfers (food stamps) for those purchases. I wondered if this was due to their lack of nutritional value. There were no fruits aside from a basket with apples and bananas near the cash register. There were no green vegetables either. This provided a perfect example of the serious barrier to healthy food options facing Ojibwe communities.

In addition to significant health issues associated with the dominant agricultural system in the US, many lack access to healthier options. The term “food desert” was first coined in the UK during the 1990s, but has become a common way to express a geographical area that lacks access to affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and other foods that make up a full and healthy diet. Many Americans living in rural, minority, or low-income areas are subjected to food deserts and may be unable to access affordable, healthy foods, leaving their diets lacking essential nutrients (CDC 2002). It is a common problem to be caught in a vicious cycle in which one lacks of means to pay for healthy food and must subsist on an insufficient diet. Often, one is then faced with serious health problems as a result, and must take on significant debt in order to pay for treatment, pushing them farther into poverty. The overconsumption of heavily processed corn based foods is in many cases an issue of access and class. While those with means and an understanding of the food system are turning to the slow, local, organic food movements, the vast majority of families in the US are unable to access expensive produce from the local coop or farmer’s market, and may not have a knowledge of the issues associated with the current food system (Donlin 2014).

### **Privatization of Seed**

In recent decades, the politics of seed has become complicated. As universities developed and companies patented new varieties of plants with drought, pest and stress resistance, saving seeds became a legal issue. Cases began to crop up with companies suing farmers for infringing on patent rights. In early 2014, the company Monsanto was upheld by the US Supreme court for having filed over 140 lawsuits against farmers for planting the company’s genetically-engineered seeds without permission, while settling around 700 other cases without suing (RT 2014). In the 1940s, non-native farmers developed their own processing plants and began harvesting wild rice using combine harvesters, thus initiating the decline of Ojibwe involvement in wild rice production. By

the late 1960s, non-Ojibwe growers had succeeded in growing wild rice in paddies. Meanwhile, researchers at the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, developed non-shattering wild rice strains, better harvesting equipment, and better disease control, thus increasing large-scale commercial production of wild rice. By 1986, California producers had become so successful in growing paddy wild rice that there was a glut on the market. The resulting drop in prices undercut one of the most important stable sources of income for the remaining Ojibwe ricers (Streiffer 2005). Wild rice is not only being genetically modified by corporate interests and research institutions, but has also been subjected to industrialization and large-scale production. Former Executive Director of WELRP, Winona LaDuke claimed that the diversity of wild rice is essential in order to ensure its survival in the face of changing weather and climate patterns. Diversity of the plant ensures resiliency and increases the chance of a good harvest regardless of the year's weather (LaDuke 2011). She voiced her concern about the commodification of wild rice in a Ted Talk lecture held in St. Paul in 2011

We have seen a 75 percent decrease in the diversity of cultivated crops – many of these have become extinct. The remaining seeds are also owned by fewer and fewer people. Seven corporations own most of the seed. We are losing our ancestors through the loss of this genetic material. We are concerned about our responsibility to our relatives. These plants have history and are culturally significant to our creation story. That's why we're fighting the genetic engineering and patenting of our rice (LaDuke 2011).

As LaDuke states, traditional methods of food production are imbued with more than just a means of feeding one's community. The Ojibwe feel that through this disintegration of their food systems, they have lost touch with their relatives. Ojibwe communities aren't just impacted by the spiritual, there are also serious health consequences associated with industrial forms of agriculture as observed during the Toxic Taters meeting. Yet despite the high health risks, and loss of symbolic cultural connections, fast food and heavily processed diets still dominate.

## 2.2 Loss of Relations

I have offered a concise overview of the pressures, problems and historical injustices endured by Indigenous communities across the United States. It is becoming indisputable within American society that the systematic and institutionalized destruction of native cultural identity has led to significant impacts to Indigenous culture and communal well-being. Some (Yellow Horse Brave Heart and DeBruyn) compare the grief and historical trauma felt by the Native peoples' of North America to that of the Holocaust . Witbeck et al. conducted a longitudinal study of Native American families using the *Historical Loss Scale* and found that,

Frequencies indicate that the current generation of American Indian adults have frequent thoughts pertaining to historical losses and that they associate these losses with negative feelings (Witbeck et al 2004:119).

The Native peoples of the United States were confronted with a breakup of their culture, a loss of the significant relations that shaped their understanding of the world. This provides a background for the present reality on Reservations across the state of Minnesota. Understanding these upheavals is necessary in the understanding of current norms and efforts for future success on reservations.

The loss of Indigenous lands and the privatization of what Native peoples feel are their relatives, is the basis for the current actions of the food sovereignty movement. As Shimek put it, “Things were put on hold, not lost. Food sovereignty is proactive. It’s a political, cultural, social, religious, health thing” (Shimek: Meeting 8.7.2014). Food sovereignty is a natural way to shape the desires of communities and reconnect the broken pieces – to work towards a future that holds something tangible and good. This quote provides a perfect example of how food represents a horizon for the positive and good, and shapes prospects for the future. In the following chapter, I will use Munn’s work to deepen the understanding of why food is an effective communicator of sovereignty, resilience, and empowerment, as it relates to notions of interconnectedness in Ojibwe culture.



### 3 The Case of Wild Rice: Bringing the Past into the Present

In the previous chapter, I illustrated the importance of connectedness and relations in Ojibwe society through lived examples. After exemplifying this worldview, I provided an overview of how these connections were systematically impacted by colonialization; loss of land, loss of culturally appropriate education, and loss of traditional foods. I ended the chapter with a small ray of hope – a quote from Bob Shimek exclaiming that these connections and relations were never lost – they were simply put on hold. He considered the food sovereignty movement a concrete means of regaining those connections. In this chapter, I will ask the questions, *why is food such an effective communicator? How does food form direction? What are the past relations held within food?* I will answer these questions using examples from the field and with guiding ideas from Nancy Munn’s description of past, present, future relationships. Later in this chapter, I use the example of wild rice to illustrate how food represents such an important cultural object, coming to life to structure the actions taken by communities.

As stated before, Munn refers to a unifying framework of “indigenous historical consciousness or historical memory: the experiential formulation of the past within any given present” (Munn 1990: 2). She describes the example of the Apache culture, in which people in the present feel that they are standing in their ancestors’ tracks. This is another way to describe lived history (Munn 1992:113). This idea of feeling “the then and there in the here and now” (113) was visible during the native plant discussion I took part in at *Dream of Wild Health*. In this case, this “lived history” was not in the form of a place, but in the form of an item. Ernie, upon seeing a wild Prairie Turnip, was brought back to his childhood. “I have not seen these for a long time... my grandmother used to have these hanging in her kitchen. It brought back memories of her when I saw these.” (Ernie Whiteman: Conversation 28.6.2014). Upon expressing this history, Hope Flannigan was overjoyed, as if Ernie and the plant were two relatives that had not met in many years. Ways of attending to the past create modes of apprehending certain futures (Munn 1992:115). Here, it is clear that the Ojibwe have a unique way of speaking about food and plants, expressing a past connection and relationship to them. This points to the possibility that these relationships can impact the potential paths of

the future. The impacts of food are not static, but provide a horizon of possibilities for future events. The Ojibwe reach into their positive past of relations and respect to address the more recent injustices thus redirecting their potential futures. Much like Munn's analysis of the impacts of the Kula Shell exchange in Gawan society, this chapter analyzes the impacts of cultural events around food on the relationship between the past, present and future in Ojibwe communities.

### **3.1 Traditional and Communal Significance**

Munn describes the means through which social worlds, events, and relations emerge within the experience of one's immediate reality (Munn, 1: 1990). She states that previously, theorists such as Giddens (1979) and Anderson (1983), failed to consider symbolic processes whereby distanced events or relations can become meaning horizons in an actor's present (1990:1). As shown above, relation to and respect for the non-human is particularly important in an indigenous mindset. Despite these connections being formed in the past, non-profits such as *Dream of Wild Health* exist to pull those notions forward, acknowledging them in a positive present event horizon.

This relationship can be extended to food, which in the majority of societies, is identity, culture, tradition, as well as a necessity for present and future survival. In many Native American cultures, the harvest of revered staples was celebrated with thanksgiving feasts and rituals. Laduke and Alexander state that Seeds are sacred heirlooms, which are 'witnesses to the past'(LaDuke and Alexander:2). The great spiritual and societal importance of food has been passed down from generation to generation bringing with it significant cultural weight. Ceremonies, practices, taboos, and oral traditions follow, giving influence to actions in the past on the present, while shaping the future.

Food grown and harvested is thought of as medicine for the mind and body, which must be maintained. In the publication "Food is Medicine",

Growing food is the centerpiece of the Indigenous relationship to birth and the land. By planting and nurturing seeds, Native peoples call forth and honor life through an intricate ceremonial cycle at the heart of Indigenous cultures. For thousands of years, the traditional practices of gardening, harvesting, fishing, and hunting provided for most Native American



communities not only essential nutrition, but also the essential physical activities required for good health (LaDuke and Alexander: 2).

The connectivity and relationship between people and plants used for food is reflected in this quote. The importance of honoring life, tradition, and ritual is not something that exists in the past, but is a vital aspect of a healthy life in the present. It is this relationship that makes clear the reasons why food can be seen as an active shaper of the future.

Ojibwe diets were traditionally diverse and highly dependent upon the time of year and geographical location of the particular band. Frances Densmore, renowned anthropologist and ethnographer, chronicled Indigenous traditions and life, and noted the traditional diets of the Ojibwe people.

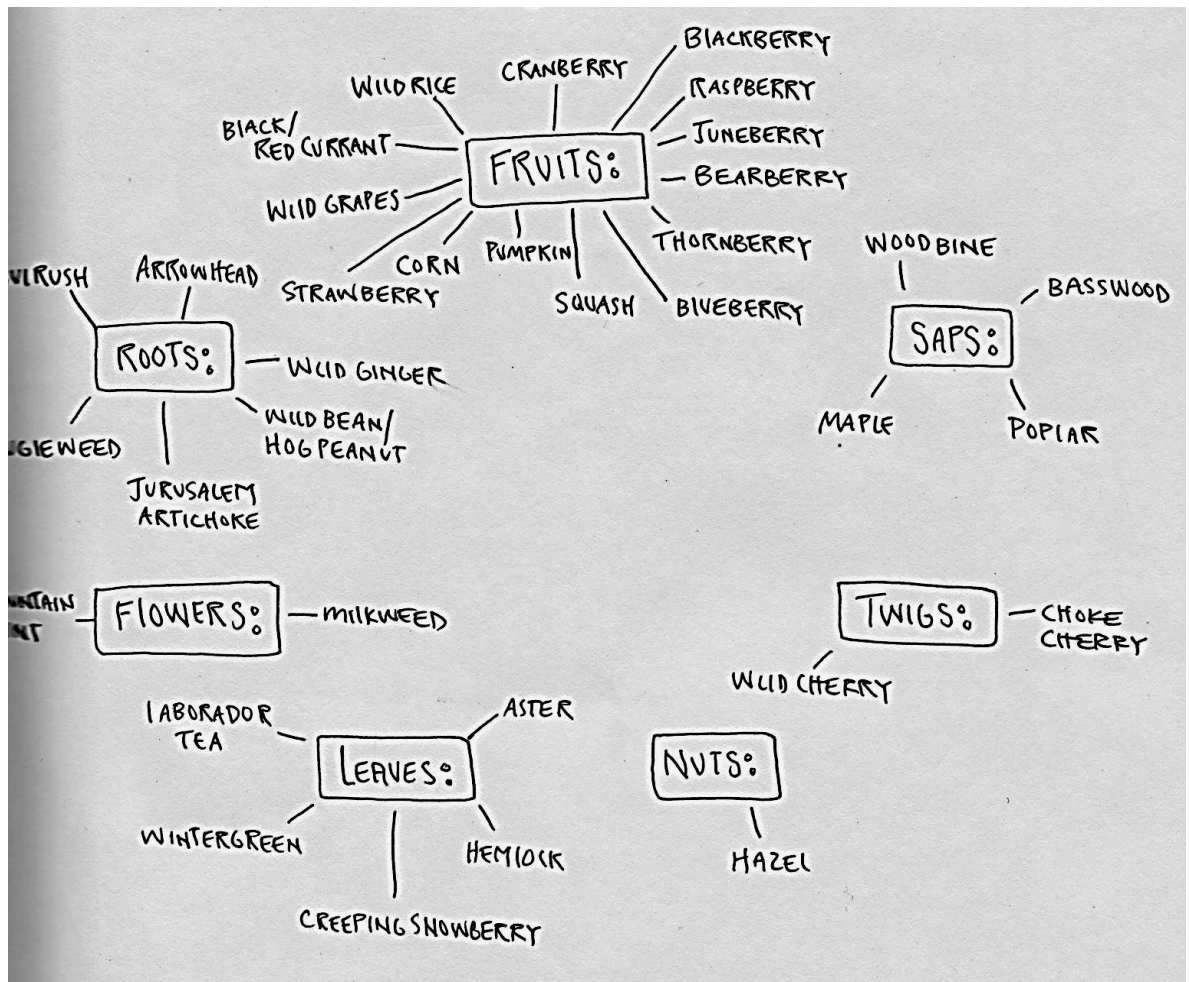


Figure 8: Traditional Diet of the Northwestern Ojibwe

Staples included wild rice, maple sugar, corn, squash and beans, known as the three sisters, as well as game, fish, and berries found in the region (Densmore 2004). The Ojibwe calendar reflects the significance of staple foods, in which months are named for both the foods that are in abundance at that time of the year, as well as the land and weather patterns associated with the season. Months, as seen of the following page, are based on the lunar cycle, and are given the names Budding Moon, Strawberry Moon, Sugarbushing Moon, Ricing Moon, and Leaves Falling off Trees Moon. These names reflect the deep understanding and connection to the landscape, as well as food's centrality in Ojibwe culture. Practices such as maple syruping, spear fishing, and wild ricing created a rhythm of the seasons that has been present for centuries. In this way, the past is clearly present through the seasonal food gathering practices associated with a particular time of year.

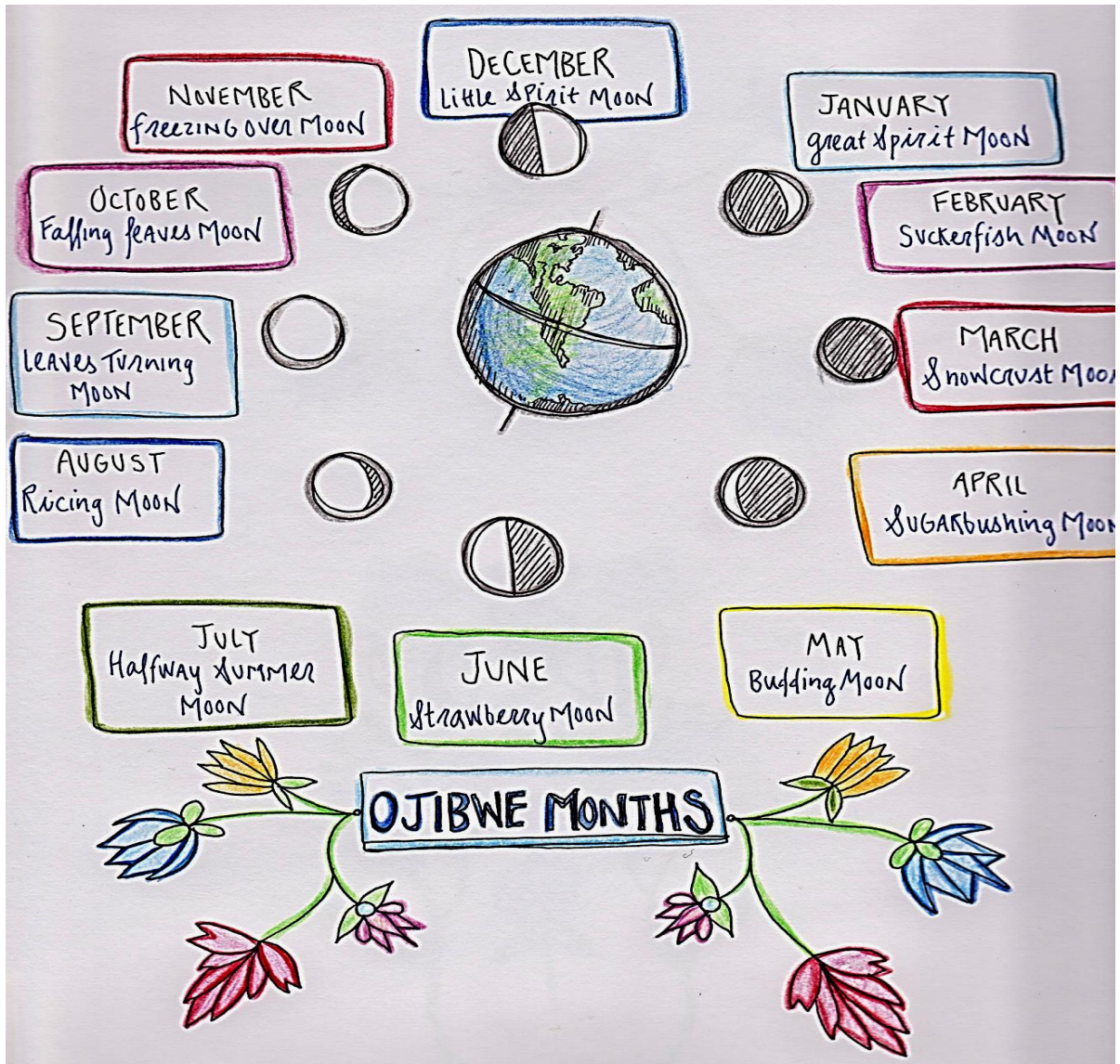


Figure 9: Names of Months for Northeastern Ojibwe

### 3.2 Wild Rice: The Sacred Staple

While there are many foods that carry significant cultural weight, wild rice (*Zizania palustris*), or *manoomin* in Ojibwe, is not only a vital staple to the Ojibwe diet, but in their view, a gift from the Creator, making it a sacred food (Indigenous Food Systems Network). According to Vennum, almost universally, Native American cultures have passed down stories attributing the discovery and importance of their staple foods to the supernatural. In the case of the Ojibwe, the Great Megis (seashell) instructed them to “go to the place where the food grows on the water” (Peacock and Wisuri 2002:25). The Ojibwe migrated from the Eastern coast of the United States west towards the Great

Lakes region, where wild rice and other food sources grew in abundance on fresh water lakes. Oral legends, as described in stories of the cultural hero, Nanobozho, point to *manoomin* as a crucial element into the realm of the supernatural and its interaction with animals and humans. Here is a retelling of the oral tale of Nanobozho (here called Waynaboozhoo) as he discovers wild rice by students Becky Maki and Heather Cardinal:

For several winters there had been very little food and the people had suffered. Waynaboozhoo wanted to put a stop to the suffering, so he went into the woods and fasted for four days in a wigwam. On the fourth day he started on a long walk, and as he walked, he thought about how to keep his people from starving. He continued walking until he came to the edge of a river. By that time, he was very tired, so he lay down to rest and fell asleep. Waynaboozhoo awoke late in the night when the moon was high in the sky. He walked along the edge of the river and saw what looked like dancers in the water. Waynaboozhoo thought he saw the feathers of the headdresses worn by Ojibwa men. He walked a little closer and asked if he could dance along. He danced and danced until he grew tired. He lay down and fell asleep again. The next morning when he awoke everything was calm. Waynaboozhoo remembered the dancers but thought it all had been a dream. Then he looked out at the tassels waving above the water. He waded out and found long seeds that hung from these tassels. He gathered some of these seeds in the palm of his hand and carried them with him back to his wigwam. There he continued fasting. Once again he grew tired and fell asleep, and as he slept, he had a vision. In the vision he learned that he had gathered wild rice and that it was to be eaten. He tasted the rice and found that it was good. Waynaboozhoo returned to the village and told his people about the rice. Together, they harvested enough to provide food for the long winter (Maki and Cardinal).

Symbolism often veils deeper meanings and tales of Ojibwe culture. For the Ojibwe, this meant incorporating the *manoomin* cycle into their most deeply held religious beliefs, ethical codes and explanations of natural phenomena (Vennum 1988:60). Many members of ricing tribes believe that humans cannot sow rice and that it only grows where the spirits want it. Poor yields, violent storms, and abundant harvests are all dictated by the spirits (Vennum 1984:60). There are traditionally many ceremonies and rituals around *manoomin*. These practices have been brought into the present day. One can still see such examples including leaving *manoomin* on the graves of the deceased, and abstaining from harvesting the food while menstruating or mourning. It

has been said that *manoomin* is the first solid food one eats as a baby and the last solid food one eats as an elder (White Earth Wild Rice Harvest). Today wild rice is a topic of everyday conversation and years and events are marked by the *manoomin* harvest (Vennum 1984:59). Author and Anthropologist Howard Papp, who has spent most of his life within an Ojibwe community, wrote about his observations regarding wild rice.

As in the past, wild rice is a great connector. I have seen it appear at Christmas time. A pound or so, in a small plastic sack tied with a short red ribbon. While a house might be filled with chatter of a family gathering, an uncle will step into another room and reappear with a small sack. He hands it to a niece who lives in a distant state. She accepts the gift, might say very little, or nothing at all, but might give him a quick hug. This is classic Ojibwe gift giving (Papp 2001).

The ricing harvest was spoken of multiple times in conversations I observed while in the field. No matter the original topic of conversation, almost all of the discussions I had with informants led back to wild rice at some point. These oral traditions and rituals are exemplars of Munn's emphasis that events and relations can be brought back into a lived reality and into a present event horizon. Events such as the rice harvest, which occurs every August, mark the rhythmic return of the past in the present day, re-energizing Indigenous values such as honor, respect, and thankfulness.

### **3.3 Processing Wild Rice**

Wild rice grows in the shallow waters and fertile alluvial soil deposited by glaciers during the last ice age. According to Vennum, there is evidence that early Indians settled along the ancient Lake Agassiz, and have been harvesting wild rice for thousands of years (Vennum 1984). Staci Drouillard of Grand Marais recently interviewed Susan Zimmerman, a member of the Grand Portage Band of Ojibwe. She spoke of the significance of wild ricing and hunting to her upbringing.

...When you rice, you thank the creator and give tobacco. The women always took care of the wild rice. The men harvested and the women processed it. It's a basic part of who I am (Anishanaabe Way 2012).

Wild rice is harvested using a canoe, which slides through the tall grass without breaking it. The canoe was maneuvered through the rice beds using a forked pole, which protected the plants' root systems. In a process called knocking, the Ojibwe used

sticks, called knockers, to knock the kernels of rice into the bottom of the canoe. After harvesting, the rice was dried to prevent molding on woven mats or animal skins. After the kernels dried, they were parched over a fire to roast the rice. This gives the rice its characteristic black shine. Next is hulling the rice from its shell. Traditionally, this practice was known as “dancing” the rice. A small pit was dug in the ground and lined with wooden slats and deer hide. Special knee-high moccasins were worn during the dancing. Lastly, the rice was winnowed, a process of tossing the rice in a bowl. Ideally, the wind would catch the chaff and blow it out of the bowl, leaving the edible rice intact (Allen et al).

Ellen Hawkins, a retired wilderness ranger from northern Minnesota mentioned how meaningful it was to observe young Ojibwe children eating the rice. “They were eating food that was harvested, processed and prepared by their aunts, uncles, parents and friends. Most of us have nothing in our diets that compares to that” (Hawkins: Interviewed 18.4.2015).

### **3.4 Connectedness to Land and Spirit**

Being able to make a good income from ricing while supporting other community members seems to be a means of power within Ojibwe communities. The themes apparent when speaking of wild rice are pride, tradition, family and communal relations. Rice seems to hold in it a deep intrinsic connection to the Ojibwe – the ability to heal, support and connect. “It’s hard work but we’re proud to feed our families, feed our bellies, and feed our souls” (White Earth Wild Rice Harvest 2013). This quote is from an elder, who was interviewed after a day of ricing. He was asked what wild rice means to the Ojibwe people:

Wild rice is our livelihood - that’s why we’re located here. Rice season is never more than 11 months away. I get out and make rice for my family and I give some of it away to people who need it if there’s a funeral or something. I rice with my friends, I just enjoy being out here. I’ve been ricing for 60 some years (What Does Rice Mean to the Ojibwe People? 2008).

Here, the connection between wild rice the food and wild rice the communicator is made clear. While supporting families, the grain also carries messages of kinship.

Providing rice for those who need it or during times of grief instills the past cultural significance of *manoomin* in the present day. Others have similar things to say about wild rice. Bob Rice, of Minneapolis was quoted in “Original Local” stating, “Everything in life revolves around wild rice – it’s how I know the seasons, the New Year, everything” (Rice, qtd. in Erdrich 2013). Heid Erdrich, Ojibwe author and teacher, describes a jar of wild rice found in her mother’s pantry,

I opened the jar and it smelled of parching kettles, wood fire and river water all at once. Forty-four years old and I would eat that rice today...Mom says she keeps it in a cool spot in the cellar and that she would use it for a special occasion. I think of all the enormous moments in our large family’s history: births, graduations, weddings, awards, more births, deaths, times of need, and times of rejoicing, and I wonder what occasion might be momentous enough (Erdrich 2013:33).

The concepts of self-sufficiency and pride are strong and deeply rooted. During my interview over dinner with Francis Drouillard on July 10<sup>th</sup>, I asked Francis if, when he was growing up, his family was self-sufficient in terms of food. This was his response:

I look back on my life, and I don’t have nothing to complain about. I don’t. I don’t have no hard feelings about nothing. Not my parents, nothing, you know... They did what they could, there were seven of us and we never went hungry, we never went on food stamps or any god dang commodities... we always had food on the table. I have no hard feelings. We learned you gotta work hard and you gotta stay honest and that’s how you got fed... Damn right (Drouillard: Interviewed 10.7.2014).

It was clear the pride Francis felt in the fact that his family was able to make due and live comfortably without any help from the government or others. While Francis could well have made mention of being economically self-sufficient, or sufficient in terms of housing or materials, he was exclaiming his pride in having enough food to feed their family. Self-sufficiency with respect to food seemed to be a very sought after quality and a sign of strength. It makes sense that the emotions that come with gathering wild rice are that of pride and dignity – ricing combines the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Ojibwe people, with the ability to acknowledge that past in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Quoted in the publication *Food is Medicine*, Rowen White explains what’s at stake:

A cultural community that persists in its farming tradition does not simply conserve indigenous seed stock because of economic justifications. The seeds themselves become symbols, reflections of the people's own spiritual and aesthetic identity, and of the land that shaped them (LaDuke and Alexander:17)

This quote reflects the notion that while wild rice provides economic stability to the Ojibwe, it represents a much bigger relationship to the community, spirituality, and cultural past. Wild rice represents a positive identity and pride that defines the Ojibwe people and influences the broader perceptions of Indigenous lifestyles and life-ways to Minnesotans. While on fieldwork, I asked what it was about food that made it so important and effective as a communicator in the struggle to regain power within Ojibwe communities. Frank Haney, the farm manager at Dream of Wild Health, had an interesting response to this question as we talked over a lunch of fresh garden vegetables and watermelon.

There's so much value and tradition and culture in food. Food and spirituality are at the center of things – food isn't separate from that - it's all one thing in a tribal mindset. ... You know, 300 years ago is when native people drifted away from their traditional tribal existence...European people, it's a lot further back and they're a lot more separated from [their food]. But it's always been my opinion that because of that fact, native people have a much better chance of reconnecting to their traditional food sources (Haney: Interviewed 07.2014).

In many cases, ricing is the only time of the year that allows one to spend several days away from the office, hustle and bustle of everyday life, and the many distractions one has in the modern age. It is an opportunity to return to the places of the past, where the ancestors have harvested the sacred grain for hundreds, or even thousands of years. In a recent conversation with Ellen Hawkins (Hawkins: Interviewed 18.4.2015), she reminisced about the almost spiritual connection she felt to the land while canoeing in ricing country. She noted how visible and present she felt, allowing herself to fully acknowledge her surroundings. She seemed to feel transported by her senses to that ancient ricing ground, so unchanged by time, the rhythmic knocking of the rice into the boats, the sharpness of the tall grass, and the smell of late summer.



### 3.5 Horizon of the Future

As the Minnesota State Grain, wild rice has an important place in the fabric of Minnesotan tradition and identity. Non-native Minnesotans take pride in wild rice and often give it as gifts and serve it with dinner to out of town guests. When buying wild rice in grocery stores in Minnesota, you have quite a few options to choose from. All the packages are similar, most sporting pictures of birch bark canoes, native women, and claiming some connection to the Ojibwe people who have harvested the rice for centuries. As a consumer, I always assumed that all wild rice was harvested from Minnesota lakes, but as it happens, many of the packages are marked as ‘cultivated’ or ‘paddy rice’ and many have been shipped from California, where industrialized cultivation of the grain has become the most profitable means of production. A few, however, come from the Indigenous communities of northern Minnesota, where the rice is harvested using traditional methods. These are harvested by hand and processed on the Indian Reservations of Northern Minnesota and sold from small-scale facilities. These facilities are real lived examples of the mission put forward by La Via Campesina in their definition of food sovereignty.

Before the commodification and mass production of paddy rice, Ojibwe communities supplied most of the rice consumed across the state. The ability to harvest and sell the rice provided vital resources for families. David Truer describes his family’s experience ricing.

In the 1950s when my mother was growing up, this was, for many, the single major source of cash income for the year. If not the only source, it was certainly the largest. In the 1950’s, green unprocessed rice fetched around one dollar per pound. This was a lot of money. My grandfather, grandmother, mother, aunt Barb, uncle Sonny and uncle Davey could make 600 dollars a day if the rice was good. A rice season could yield a few thousand dollars – the cash needed to buy clothes, shoes, kerosene, flour, lard, bullets, roofing material and everything they needed to stay dry, warm, and fed for the winter (Truer 2012: 117).

Rice is traditionally harvested and processed by hand and sold, meaning economic stability for many families over the winter months. With more and more rice being grown in patties, production has increased, thus decreasing the cost of rice. While this is good news for consumers, Native communities have suffered from the fall in prices. Yet

the recent growth in Minnesota's co-ops, which source wild rice from producers and the recent enthusiasm for "locally grown foods" and "sustainable food systems" has drawn Minnesotans' interest back to the traditional methods of harvest still practiced in Ojibwe communities. The market for native-grown and processed rice is growing across the state. Winona LaDuke quoted two men who had brought 300 pounds of wild rice off South Chippewa Lake saying, "This is the only job we can make \$50 an hour at up here" (LaDuke 2011). The significance of ricing still thrives culturally through creating and sustaining relationships, defining identities, and building self-sufficiency.

While recalling past traditions and practices of wild rice, these communities are shaping their future. The tremendous interconnectedness of cultural themes entwined with wild rice and the role it plays economically in the present will likely have an impact on the paths taken to community revitalization efforts. To say these communities are "returning" to their traditional lifeways would also be a mistake – acknowledging the importance of sacred staples is an advancement that takes into account progress and changing norms. During fieldwork, I had the privilege of interviewing the chef Sean Sherman, who makes a living bringing native traditional foods and dishes to the mainstream. I asked him what motivated him to use his skills as a chef as a cultural communicator. His response reflected a yearning to bring the knowledge of traditional foods back to his community.

I feel that a culture without food is such a lost culture, but I also feel we have a rare, albeit difficult, opportunity to bring back and re-write what is known of Native American foods and cuisine and can only hope our future generations will hold it as dear as other world cultures do with the food from their homelands (Sherman: Interviewed 20.10.2013).

This quote perfectly encompasses Munn's notions of past, present and future relations and the ability of food to shape a positive future. Now is a time of transformational change using Indigenous foods as their means of communication. In this chapter, I explored the question of why food is an important communicator. Food is an example of lived history bringing ancient traditions, sacred practices, and memories of the past into the present. These are the past relations held within food. Wild rice embodies culture; from traditional harvesting methods and a meaningful connection to the land, to the feelings of pride and self-reliance it brings about.

## 4 Transformative Power of Food: The Role of Non Profits and the Grassroots Movement

Thus far I have explained traditional ideas of Ojibwe relations, the systematic loss of those relations, and have addressed why food is such an important communicator through the example of wild rice. Wild rice exemplifies the reasons why food is so important; it holds in it traditional, communal, economic, and historical significance. In other words, food in the present inherently holds in it the past. Food is both a connection to the spiritual and the cultural while being a communicator in the present and a gateway to rejuvenation and innovation in the future. Presently, communities are acknowledging the importance of food to preserving their cultural identity and are designing new projects to advance and create a more self-sufficient future. This chapter will address *how* food is being used within projects of agency to guide communities towards this future. To support these ideas, I will use Sherry Ortner's concepts, which include useful descriptions of agency and projects.

First, I would like to re draw attention towards Ortner's description of agency. She described it as a dual relationship between power and projects, resistance and domination. Ortner calls the notion of agency double sided, on one hand defined as intentionality and the pursuit of culturally defined projects. On the other, agency is about power, asymmetry and social inequality. She describes these as intertwined, sometimes bleeding together, or else retaining their distinct differences (Ortner 2006:139). This relationship between resistance and power are are inextricably linked. The organizations focused on in this section will address both – the agency of power; that of domination and resistance against the injustices done to these communities and the soft agency of tradition, cultural and spirituality; agency that is defined by one's own values and ideals despite the injustice. The projects of agency reflect the spirituality and cultural values of the Ojibwe, while the agency of power uses those themes to guide their intentionality towards larger projects of resistance.

# SHADES OF AGENCY:

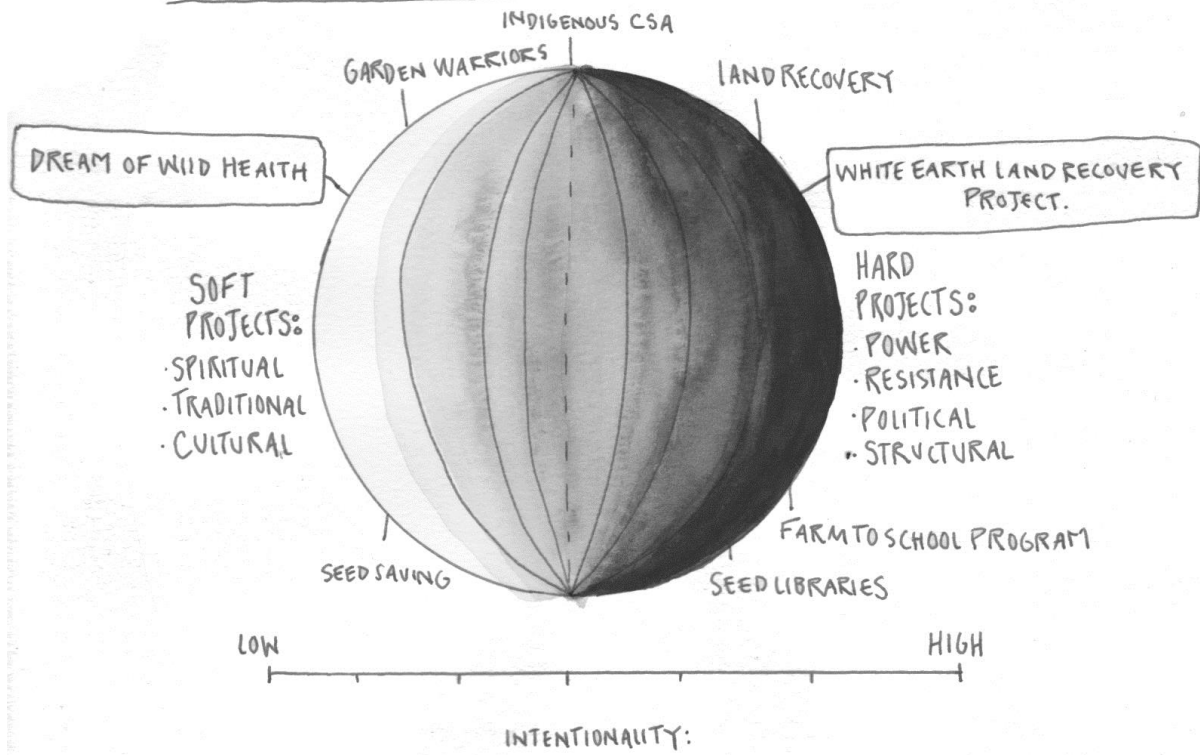


Figure 10: Shades of Agency and Projects

This diagram illustrates this relationship. On the right is the dark, harder aspects of agency, which I have also aligned with high intentionality. The diagram depicts a number of shades from dark to light, ending with soft agency, which I have aligned with low intentionality. While these projects have direction and set goals in mind, they are achieved using deeply held values and inherent ideas. This is done to differentiate the projects I will describe throughout this chapter and provide a visual representation of the term shades of agency.

Food itself, as I have touched on before, cannot have agency in itself, yet the processes related to food and the impact it has on aspects of society vital to regaining autonomy are hugely significant. The projects of food, namely those of the food sovereignty movement, address both of these fields of meaning. Some are on the light side of agency, finding culturally appropriate means of attending to their goals, using qualities and values deeply ingrained in Ojibwe culture. On the other hand, some are on the dark side of agency, combatting the ills felt in the community through resistance and power dynamics. Throughout this chapter, I will explore the organizations that all fall along the spectrum of projects, from light to dark. I will use the concept of agentic projects and illustrate using a number of non-profit organization efforts within the food sovereignty movement. They each address different shades of agency and aspects of the movement, including youth education, accessibility and rights, economic initiatives, and cultural recovery.

During my time in the field, grassroots efforts and non-profit organizations stood out as one of the most active participants in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. While some work within policy and law at the national and state levels, others focus on educating young children, or economic independence. Many are aimed at both revitalizing some aspect of Ojibwe culture and creating new paradigms within the realms of food, environmental health and policy. Terms such as strengthening, restoring, reviving, and participation are some of the common words used in the mission statements of these organizations. While there are numerous organizations working within this field, I will focus on two specific non-profits as exemplars of the work being undertaken within the Indigenous food community: *Dream of Wild Health* (DOWH), and the *White Earth Land Recovery Project* (WELRP). These use many different shades of agency through their projects of food. I will be drawing attention to them for

several reasons; first, I was able to spend a more significant amount of time getting to know the workings of these organizations and made connections with their staff. Second, their scale and outreach is large, allowing for a more diverse wealth of knowledge and experience. Lastly, their approaches differ in their means – while *Dream of Wild Health* focuses on spirituality and culturally appropriate means of achieving their goals, *White Earth Land Recovery Project* focuses on structural change and resistance. It is these differences that I will focus on, dividing this chapter first by non-profit and then by theme for the sake of organization. I would like to point out that the themes often “bleed together” reflecting Ortner’s description of agency, and are not easily divisible or classifiable. While their approaches are quite different, together, projects that address both the black and the white of agency work together to build a strong framework for a future built on self-sufficiency and renewed cultural identity.

## 4.1 Dream of Wild Health: The Creation of a Sacred Space



**Figure 11: Group of Volunteers with Hope Flannigan and Diane Wilson (Right)**

My first trip to *Dream of Wild Health* was several years ago on a fieldtrip during a class at the University of Minnesota. We were brought into the fields and had a brief lecture by Diane Wilson, the Executive Director of *Dream of Wild Health*. We spent the day weeding and were all rewarded for our efforts with a delicious native taco lunch. Four years later, I found myself on the farm again – this time on my own, as a volunteer. *Dream of Wild Health* is a 10-acre organic farm in Hugo, Minnesota that began in 1998.

This non-profit is unique in that it has no tribal affiliation and welcomes children to their summer programs regardless of tribal membership. Their mission statement is to:

*Restore health and well-being in the native community by recovering knowledge of and access to health Indigenous foods, medicines and life ways. We are committed to sharing our knowledge, resources and skills with others in an effort to reduce poverty, improve health and nutrition, and reconnect people and plants in a reciprocal relationship. We partner with dozens of urban and tribal organizations on programs that work to restore the mental, physical, and emotional health of our community. We value the personal character traits of honesty, integrity, generosity, humility, courage and fortitude. We value the belief and practice of kinship and reciprocity in our relationships with all people and with the natural world (Dream of Wild Health).*

The fact that *Dream of Wild Health* has no tribal affiliation points to the non-profit's unique soft agentic approach. The mission statement backs this argument, promoting ideas of recovering Indigenous lifeways, knowledge and reciprocity. Valuing positive character traits and kinship between all people and the natural world denotes the significance of cultural beliefs within the non-profit.

I spent several afternoons volunteering on the farm and quickly noticed the relaxed atmosphere and the care taken to make people feel that they had a stake in the land and the development of the farm. I was often asked to go out into the field and pull weeds with other volunteers, making conversation about how they found the farm and why they chose to volunteer there. Many mentioned the feeling they got while on the farm – a relaxed and deeply connected feeling they could not get anywhere else in their lives. *The Dream of Wild Health* webpage calls the farm “a safe and sacred place” and while I stood in the middle of a row of rainbow chard soaking in the July sun, I could see why. In this section, I will examine what I refer to as the triangle of positive action, which provides culturally appropriate solutions to the losses seen in chapter two.

#### **4.1.1 Seed Savers and Seed Keepers**

The first means of achieving *Dream of Wild Health*'s mission is seed saving. Seed saving is an ancient practice of harvesting, drying and storing seeds for the following year. I begin with this because it is at the root of the food sovereignty efforts. In response to the impacts of privatizing seeds which I discussed in chapter two, activists,

organizations, and concerned citizens, have started to boycott hybrid varieties of vegetables and fruits, plant native varieties, and save the seeds to be used again the following year. This idea of saving seeds is by no means new to the Indigenous peoples of North America. Seeds hold in them knowledge that was handed down through the totemic system and are important as they are said to be given to the Native people by the creator. Seed saving reflects the important spiritual connection Indigenous communities have to their ancestors and other beings. Seeds reflect the cyclical connectivity between generations as mentioned by Rowen White in the publication “Food is Medicine.”

From the traditional perspective, these seeds encompass more than just characteristics. They are sacred heirlooms, which are ‘witnesses to the past.’ These seeds hold cultural value and cultural memory that is a vital part of traditional culture and history (White qtd. LaDuke and Alexander).

His statement that seeds are witness to the past points to the importance of the past in the development of the future. They are a necessary and respected aspect of renewing Indigenous food systems.

The *Dream of Wild Health* program began in March of 2000 when a letter arrived from Cora Baker, a Potawatomi elder and Keeper of the Seeds. In the letter, she explained that she had gardened for many years, hanging her corn to dry on the side of the barn. People passing by on the road saw her garden and began giving her their seeds to save. Five months before she passed on, Cora wrote:

I had prayed and prayed that someone would take this gardening up again. I am very pleased to learn about your project. I feel that the Great Creator has answered my humble prayers. With the help of my great granddaughter and grandson, we set out to help you. I wish that someday the children will come to realize the importance of the garden (*Dream of Wild Health*).

Cora and her great-granddaughter sent many different varieties of corn, beans, and squash, plus several sunflower varieties, indigenous tobacco, and different plant medicines to *Dream of Wild Health*. Eventually, word caught on about the initiative and seeds began to be sent from across the country. “Some came knotted up in a handkerchief, with a note saying, ‘My grandmother wanted you to have these.’ Another family donated Cherokee seeds that were carried on the original Trail of Tears.” Today, the farm has a collection of some 300 varieties of seeds. Each year, the University of



Minnesota helps keep the seed viable by growing out different varieties (*Dream of Wild Health*). Seed saving is in this case, a connection to the elders and to the past. To Cora Baker, it was a spiritual mission to have someone care for her garden and continue on her tradition.

The seed saving program at *Dream of Wild Health* reflects respect and reciprocity, which are underlying themes of the non-profit. The efforts of this project are not undertaken for larger political goals, but to ensure that the fabric of seeds and the knowledge they hold remains intact. The seeds are propagated; their fruits are grown and enjoyed by the youngest generation, instilling in them the emotional connection they had to the elders. This leads to the argument that this project is undertaken as a softer project of agency, with spiritual, cultural and emotional goals in mind.

#### **4.1.2 Knowledge Sharing and Youth Education: The Making of a “Garden Warrior”**

This connection of elders to youth leads to the next project of food. One of the most sacred and important aspects of Ojibwe life is the sharing of knowledge between elders and youth. Historically, Ojibwe education addressed both the practical skills necessary for everyday life, and the life skills thought to enhance the soul. These two aspects formed a balance to aid the development of the path of life (Johnston 1976). Youth were taught through observation, fables, oral tradition, songs, prayers, games, and dances performed by other members of the tribe. Although much of this educational culture was lost with the introduction of boarding schools, many new Native schools and youth education projects have been erected to reintroduce youth to their cultural roots. *Dream of Wild Health* has taken an active role in reintroducing Native youth, particularly those from the inner-city, to those roots. They aim to address the problems of cultural disengagement through a series of programs aimed at all age groups.

*Cora’s Kids* is a week-long program designed for children age’s eight to twelve and their parents to learn about growing food, cooking, health, and culture. The summer program again health, organic food growing and cooking, and also money management and weekly work at a local farmer’s market. The *Youth Leaders Program* was created for older students who excel in school, and show responsibility and maturity. The year-round program encourages students to participate in the food sovereignty and food

justice movements in the broader community. *Dream of Wild Health* also serves the entire family through the *Mino-wiisinidaa* (we all eat well) program. The six week long course teaches families basic food safety and preparation. There are sessions on gathering, Native cooking techniques, and nutrition (Garden Warriors Good Seeds 2015). Each of these programs allows children to learn and grow while deepening their connection to their Indigenous roots. The age ranges overlap to allow children to attend all the programs consecutively. *The Garden Warrior Program* is geared towards children ages 13-18 and provides them with a stipend and chance to exercise the skills necessary for adult life. The kids are required to leave behind all of their electronics when arriving at the farm. They are not allowed to eat any junk food either. Executive director Diane Wilson was quoted on the *Garden Warriors Good Seeds* webpage saying,

We want them hearing the birds, we want them observing what is around them and you can't do that if you are disconnected from your surroundings. Out here we have really gifted teachers, but the most profound teacher of all is the land and the plants (Garden Warriors Good Seeds 2015).

During my time at the farm, I attended a celebration of the *Garden Warrior Program* graduates. It was a gathering of 40 or so people, including the DOWH staff, volunteers, and family members of the graduates. There were several tents put up for the feast, picnic tables scattered around the front lawn, an intricately hand-painted tepee, and traditional music playing. Bald Eagles and Vultures circled the scene, catching the warm summer drafts. Many stood watching them, respectfully talking and acknowledging them as a good omen. It did seem to be a sign in such a meaningful gathering – Bald Eagles are the National bird of the United States and a totem member of the *Baswenaazzhi* group charged with the task of communication (Warren 1984). In many Native American tribes, Eagles are seen as powerful leaders, or messengers between the creator and humans (Native Languages). After a short prayer led by Ernie, it was time to eat. The elders led the way through a line of delicious dishes, all homemade from farm-grown produce. Fresh summer squash casseroles and traditional Minnesotan hot dishes, wild rice, buns, fresh fish from a northern Minnesotan lake, and bison from the plains to the west. After the feast, Ernie began the graduation ceremony:

It's amazing to see these young people transform in such a short time. I've been here for a few years but I've learned so much from them - they have a lot to offer me so I'm not only teaching them but they're teaching me. They're our future leaders they are the ones that are going to be responsible and we are very fortunate we have a fine group of future leaders and I have no hesitation they will take command. The term Garden Warrior is a strong one. I come from a warrior clan –I was introduced into the Kit-Fox warrior society of my tribe the Northern Arapaho and I was probably the last group to be introduced into the warrior society. I have taught the kids that a warrior is not a person that fights; that is the last thing that you do. You have to be kind you have to be compassionate, you have to be caring, you protect your people and you have to be honest. That's a lot to be responsible for – so to be a garden warrior has a lot of responsibility to it" (Whiteman: Speech 20.7.2014).

After Ernie was finished, he introduced each of the ten or so students, most of whom were around 15 years of age, who shook hands with the staff. Some said a few words of thanks. One noted how much he had changed in his time on the farm. "I learned about the plants and the insects and when I first went here I was so stuck up I didn't know what to do but yeah I got to meet new people and have the big feast and I'm really honored to be here" (Garden Warrior: Speech 24.7. 2014). Another said,

I really enjoyed this program because it's really welcoming and I got to learn about my culture and I got to learn about food and how to cook. I enjoyed the staff and everyone here and I'm going to be coming back next year (Garden Warrior: Speech 24.7.2014).

The term Garden Warrior seems like a simple gesture – an innocent expression of an ancient tradition, yet the term holds much more than that. It seemed that Ernie was in fact voicing that it is up to the youth to fight for what is right, to uphold cultural customs and be a positive force for good through food. Others write about youth warriors and the role they play in Indigenous communities:

There are a number of young Indians taking a pledge to fight. To fight for themselves, to fight to be better Indians. Fighting in the sense that they will beat off the negative things; child violence, violence against women, drug abuse, corruption, low esteem, neglect. The people will vow to become good people... It's about not backing down. That is a very hard thing to do. To look at things and do what is right. To speak up for those that cannot. To be proud of being an Indian. To be able to work for your people. Above all to be kind. To be kind to yourself... Kindness is the toughest thing you

can face. In order to be kind you have to be strong. How many of us can have the courage to stand up for the poor, the hurt, the weak, the abused, the neglected, the persecuted? It is a difficult thing. A warrior must do this. She and he will speak up if things are not right (Jullian 2010).

This expression of strength through kindness is an example of Indigenous notions of power and the yearning to create spaces that are shaped not by negativity and past neglect, but of positive forces for community growth and well-being. Directing statements like this at youth is a means of forging a constructive future through instilling notions from the past.

I asked Frank Haney if the programs seemed to influence kids and if he'd seen changes in them from the time they began the program until the time they left.

It's small, but from what I've observed in the last few years, it's probably one of the most effective that I've ever witnessed. Being able to watch kids come here every year and be able to see them be affected by what happens while they're here is pretty impressive. Yeah, in the winter time, our nutritionist teaches the parents and connects the child and the caregiver of the child to the same focal point. I think it's really effective. Learning about nutrition and health is one thing, but practicing it is another. The kids – you know I was saying being connected to culture is important; getting out of the city getting in the sun, getting into the dirt, that's *really* important (Haney: interview 20.07.14).

Meeting the students and their families' was a meaningful experience for me. Many were from Minneapolis and hadn't spent much time in the country before the program. It was clear that the students were proud of what they had achieved. I watched as they led their parents and grandparents by the arm to look at the gardens they had helped plant and tend. Some picked produce off plants as they went, offering it to their loved-ones with expectant looks. The kids showed tremendous enthusiasm for their project and their achievements on the farm. This is another face of the soft-agentic side of projects. In a culture that puts so much emphasis on youth and learning, educational projects such as these could be the beginnings of new a generational trend.

### 4.1.3 Distributing the Dream

As mentioned previously, access to healthy and culturally appropriate food is a key aspect of food sovereignty. *Dream of Wild Health* is undertaking several projects to combat this. Along with the youth education projects, and the seed saving program, the *Indigenous Food Share* provides both a connection to the land and healthy organic food to families in the area. The program is modeled after the Community Supported Agriculture idea, in which members pay up-front for a share of the farm's produce. Each week, boxes are delivered to members at a drop site. Programs such as these are becoming increasingly popular in the US, creating more localized food systems that are less dependent on large scale globalized production. (Local Harvest).

The *Indigenous Food Share* program states this as its goal on the *DOWH* webpage:

Our weekly boxes will include 5-10 varieties of vegetables, fruits, and herbs, and fresh eggs are also available to add to a share. The produce follows the seasons, and may also include honey, our Indigenous dried beans, wild rice, and other Indigenous gathered or produced foods. Every week we'll include a newsletter from the farm, a recipe using the week's ingredients, and other info. There will also be opportunities for members to come out to the farm and pick their own produce, but the weekly boxes will be based on what is in season at the farm. A full share is \$500, which comes out to about \$20/week, and it is a lot of good food! You'll have plenty to share with relatives, freeze or can for the winter, or split between two or three families. We also offer half-shares for smaller families. The big thing is: we want to make our good food accessible to all, regardless of income. If you think cost would be a burden for your family, please contact us. The important thing is you'll get your veggies.

According to Haney, this program is gaining success every season and provides the farm with the funds needed to keep up with demand. The food share addresses several significant barriers, including access to land to grow one's own produce, which many in the city lack, educational information on how to cook and store the vegetables and fruits, and offers financial support and other options to families who cannot pay the deposit (Haney interview). The program offers significant environmental benefits as well. Growing native varieties of fruits and vegetables ensures more biodiversity in the local agricultural system. In addition, families are given the opportunity to buy local organic produce directly from the farm, decreasing the carbon footprint of the food.

This program addresses issues of access to healthy food within Native American communities. As stated throughout this paper, I have shown that this lost connection between culturally appropriate foods has been one of the most significant harms to Indigenous societies. This project contains another angle of culturally appropriate means of healing the ills faced by Ojibwe communities. The fact that the Indigenous food share program is inclusive and disregards tribal affiliation makes it clear that the aim is to create an inclusive space for everyone hoping to reconnect to native foods.

*Dream of Wild Health* has been successful at distributing the dream of a sacred place. They have created a group of motivated and educated young warriors, who will fight to spread the messages of kindness, respect, and responsibility. *Dream of Wild Health* has undertaken projects aimed at strengthening community engagement and respect. Their methodical acknowledgement of youth, culture and tradition and environmental stewardship creates a holistic solution to the serious issues faced in Indigenous communities. These programs do not incur the hard forms of agency, in which injustices are fought playing the game of the antagonists. The projects are not aimed at high level policy change or resistance to the status quo. Instead, they are born from the earth and a relationship to the elders. They can be thought of as the soft projects of agency, aimed at addressing issues through culturally appropriate and inclusive means of positive action.

## 4.2 White Earth Land Recovery Project: The Creation of a Political Space



**Figure 12: White Earth Land Recovery Project office**

I first visited the *White Earth Land Recovery Project* (WELRP) for the foodshed mapping last August. Located in an old converted school, the office stood out amongst the modest houses and few shops along the main street. The building was covered in large colorful murals depicting their founder, Winona LaDuke and other indigenous community members with backdrops of animals, plants, patterns, and beautiful landscapes. It was quite quiet and seemed deserted aside from a small boy, who asked me my name and told me he was 6 years old before insisting on showing me around the building. I was glad at my luck of finding such a willing guide. He pointed at different doors and explained what happened inside. “That’s the radio station so we should be quite. That’s where all the posters and pictures are, and that’s the classroom.” Eventually, we bumped into Bob Shimek, who I had spoken with at the Toxic Tater’s meeting and who had invited me to the foodshed mapping, which would take place later that day. He led me to the school’s gymnasium, which had been converted into their production and distribution center. It held rows of shelving units filled with merchandise including *Native Harvest* soups, jams and preserves, handmade birch bark crafts, books on indigenous food sovereignty and the Ojibwe language, wild rice and maple syrup. He led me outside to show me their wind turbine and their new brick oven for baking breads. I was impressed by the operation, if not a little surprised at the informality of it. Old yard chairs littered the backyard along with an old Mercedes,

which Bob referred to as “the lawn ornament”. The project carries with it a certain weight in Minnesota – many have heard of the organization and respect it as one of the most successful in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement.

*White Earth Land Recovery Project* is a multi-issue non-profit organization, which was founded in 1989. Based on the White Earth Indian Reservation in northwestern Minnesota, their interest is in structural change, and in restoring spiritual, economic, and cultural wealth. The projects undertaken by WELRP reflect stronger shades of agency, focusing less on the spiritual and more on structural resistance. Their mission statement is as follows:

*Our approach to systemic change is honed with almost two decades of experience, and today we're one of the largest reservation-based non-profit organizations in the United States. We emerged from a land rights struggle—a pitched battle in our community for many generations. WELRP facilitates the recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage. Our programs are structured in such a way as to strengthen community leadership and build citizen participation involving environmental and cultural justice and preservation work, restoration of sustainable communities, renewable energy, media, and youth and leadership development programs (WELRP 2012).*

The language used in this statement reflects this yearning to change norms using political rhetoric. Words like strengthening, participation, development, and recovery are strong, commanding a certain amount of force.

The founder of the project and former director, Winona LaDuke, was born in California in 1959. She attended Harvard University where she received a degree in rural economic development. After graduating, LaDuke moved to the White Earth reservation where she helped fight a legal battle to regain Native land. LaDuke also ran for vice president with Ralph Nader in 1996 (Voices from the Gaps 2009). Her background in economics and political science benefitted the organization and influenced the goals and missions of WELRP through firsthand experience with the US government and the philosophies communicated in large academic institutions. This greatly shaped the organization of WELRP and the scope of the projects, giving her an



in with key players in academia, industry, and politics. The history of this project supports the broader approach used to combat the issues on the reservation. Like *Dream of Wild Health*, WELRP employs a suite of programs to address the problems. I will organize their efforts based on themes expressed in the mission statement. First, environmental stewardship and justice, which I argue is the softest shade of WELRP's agentic projects and overlaps with those of *Dream of Wild Health*. Second, cultural preservation followed by economic resilience and lastly, land preservation. While these projects resemble harder shades of agency, it is important to note that agency is by no means a static structure. While the political undertones suggest resistance, it is also clear that the main goals of the projects are driven by deep spiritual and cultural themes, much like those of *Dream of Wild Health*, which align with the softer shades of agency. WELRP's approach is pragmatic, encompassing the economic feasibility as well as the cultural benefits of their projects. They work both to break down current paradigms and rebuild their own in a complex battle between the past, present and future.

#### **4.2.1 Environmental Stewardship and Access: The Seed Libraries**

To begin, it seems appropriate to reflect the fact that the projects of agency are not black and white, but occur as shades. In the first case of the seed libraries, it is clear that this effort has much in common with the sacred nature of *Dream of Wild Health*. The seed libraries represent the importance of cultural heritage and the spiritual significance of seed and relations. This being said, it is still clear that there are wider structural goals of community participation, increased access and self-sufficiency imbedded in the project.



While I was visiting the White Earth Reservation, I stayed in a tent on WELRP's small farm in Ponsford, which was then occupied by Zach Paige, a graduate of the Native Seed SEARCH Seed School and intern through the Americorp VISTA program. Zach was kind enough to be my guide throughout my time on White Earth. Although not Native himself, Zach spent several years in the community and seemed very at ease and well-respected in the community. He was an active participant in the Foodshed Mapping, offering many observations and much valuable knowledge about seeds and his connections to farmers around the area. After the foodshed mapping, Zach gave me, along with two other researchers from Brown University, a tour of the Callaway White Earth Seed Library, housed in a large classroom in the WELRP office. It consisted of a refrigerator and old cooktop, and tables holding glass jars full of different seeds. There were hand drawn signs by children that read things like, "come and get some seeds for your garden". According to WELRP's annual report for 2013, the seed library had collected over 100 varieties of seeds over the season. Ears of beautiful corn lay on the tables and Zach took care to show us the beautiful pink and white iridescence of the Pink Lady variety. His passion for seeds was obvious as he showed us the small envelopes filled with different varieties, sporting colors such as deep blue, shiny black, and speckled red orange. Zach's biggest passion appeared to be corn. The Seed Bank holds many different native varieties with names like Bear Island Flint, Saskatchewan White Flint, Seneca Blue Bear Dance, and Dakota Black Popcorn. The varieties differ in color and size, some stout and bright white, others black as night. It was easy to see the allure of such diverse varieties of the same plant.

The Callaway White Earth Seed Library is one branch of three seed libraries on the reservation including the Mahnomen Seed Library based out of the White Earth Tribal College, and the Naytahwaush Seed Library based out of the Naytahwaush Charter School. These three libraries are part of a larger project known as the Great Lakes Indigenous Restoration Network. According to the Anishinaabe Seed Project webpage, the goal of the project is to:

*Promote restoration of Indigenous cultural and agricultural knowledge in this region. Finding local food growers on the reservation to make the Anishinaabe Seed Library strong. This will also strengthen our farm to school program. Develop an active, participatory network among the existing groups (tribal colleges, land grant universities, tribal and non-*

*tribal growers and seed banks/networks) to enhance community seed libraries and banking. Document climate change related adaptation and viability of various traditional agricultural crops, and seek to further adapt, as needed our varieties. Document nutritional value of various varieties to allow for tribal communities and tribal nutritionists to better choose possible foods for undernourished and at risk community members (Indigenous Seed Library 2013).*

Terms such as increasing viability and adaptability, creating a participatory network, and helping the undernourished and at risk community members, communicate the fact that this program is aimed at the harder forms of agency. For the *White Earth Land Recovery Project*, saving seeds is not necessarily done for spiritual or traditional reasons; there seems to be more focus on the use of seed saving for larger structural and political motives. In addition, there is an economic motivation: “Saving seeds from our region allows us to develop seeds suited to our soil type and growing season; we also significantly reduce our organization’s food costs through this practice” (WELRP Annual Report 2013). The seed libraries address the problems of access, climate change, lack of self-sufficiency and poor nutrition while strengthening a participatory network of people working towards the same goals. This notes a clear marked difference in the projects undertaken by *Dream of Wild Health* and the *White Earth Land Recovery Project*.

#### **4.2.2 Economic Resiliency: Native Harvest**

The *White Earth Land Recovery Project* also has more concrete goals of reinvigorating the local economy. White Earth Nation is the largest reservation in the State with 19,000 enrolled members. It also has one of the highest rates of unemployment in the state of Minnesota (25%) while those living below the poverty line of 23,230 is over 50% according to the US census (Indian Affairs). With these disparities in mind, it is clear why the group has made it their mission to address them.

The gymnasium full of products is evidence of White Earth’s project *Native Harvest*, which works to protect and revive native crops while addressing the economic issues on the reservation. They sell an assortment of products ranging from jams, fruit spreads, soup mixes, hominy corn and maple syrup, to hair accessories, gift baskets and bulk wild rice to local shops and cooperatives across the state. I have on several occasions

seen the branded photo of the Native woman on packages of soups and mixes in my local coop. In 2011, the Project sold 150,000 dollars' worth of goods, and expected that number to rise to 250,000 in 2012 (WELRP Annual Report 2013). Their webpage gives a detailed description of the project, calling it "a means of resisting the global, industrialized food system that can corrupt our health, freedom, and culture through inappropriate food production and genetic engineering" (WELRP 2012).

*Native Harvest* has also acquired a building from the *Midwest Minnesota Community Development Corporation*, and received help re-modeling the kitchen into a state of the art commercial kitchen. The new building provides a space for community gatherings, workshops, and meetings. Florence Goodman, the *Native Harvest* Food Production Coordinator was quoted on the *Native Harvest* webpage noting how the new kitchen has impacted production:

Our new kitchen equipment has made it easier to roast our hominy, can our jellies and jams, and package all of the foods we sell. This facility will allow us to take our production to the next level, and hopefully create more jobs for the community. Already this spring, the area was put to good use holding community gardening and permaculture workshops, as well as art projects for youth" (Native Harvest).

This project is still in the making, but through the creation of new jobs, and infusion of 150,000 dollars into the local economy in 2011, *Native Harvest* is off to a strong start. It seems that this is a productive effort giving the community a chance to see the economic value of efforts to sustain and produce traditional foods. This has elements of both the softer more spiritual shades of agency, in that they are preserving the art of processing their native foods, and also the structural harder shades of agency in that they securing their economic future.

### **4.2.3 Cultural Preservation: Indigenous Farm to School Program**

The third aspect of WELRP's efforts comes in the form of cultural preservation. While many efforts being undertaken within this realm occur in the form of softer agentic projects, I will focus on the Indigenous Farm to School program, which I argue is harder in nature. It emphasizes the importance of food and youth in conserving tradition, which addressing the issue of self-sufficiency in school food programs. The significance

of starting a program such as this on a Reservation is that nutritional programs and school lunches are traditionally provided by the USDA. According to the WELRP's farm to cafeteria initiative, the US Federal Government has played a large role in the food consumed in schools.

...about half of all tribal communities in the United States currently participate in the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR). FDPIR is more commonly called the commodity food program. Tribal members use commodities to supplement their diets. FDPIR is an alternative to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Many native households opt to use FDPIR due to the fact that SNAP offices are usually far from reservations (Dwyer 2010).

The commodity foods provided by such programs have often been critiqued for lacking sufficient nutrients and being high in calories. In addition, the definition of 'healthy food' was determined by the US non-native government, which has traditionally excluded native foods. FDPIR boxes typically contained surplus agricultural products such as canned meats, canned fish, canned vegetables, canned fruit, dried beans, powdered milk, butter, corn syrup, sugar, shortening, sweetened juices, egg mix, and crackers, in addition to simple carbohydrates and starch (Dwyer 2010:15). The removal of traditional foods from the every-day diet of American Indians broke many ties to the past – the names of months no longer had serious significance, the oral traditions and superstitions lost meaning, and generations were no longer bound by a vital connection to the land. The loss of this generational bridge culturally and nutritionally is being addressed through the Indigenous Farm to School Program.

The Indigenous Farm to School Program reintroduces children to native whole foods grown within the community while decreasing dependence on the US federal government. The program is modeled after the National Farm to School Program, which is a hub for information, advocacy and networking to bring local foods and food education to schools and preschools across the US. Currently, the network includes over 40,000 schools and serves more than 23 million students (Farm to School Network 2015).

In 2008, the Farm to School Program was initiated in the Pine Point Elementary School and grew to include the Naytahwaush Charter School and the Circle of Life Academy. The program works with 50 different farmers and producers to provide over 60 different

varieties of foods including bison. They now serve over 100 students, elders, and school staff local produced grown by local farmers. Throughout 2013 farmers and the program provided three local elementary schools (Pine Point School, Naytahwaush Community Charter School, and Circle of Life Academy) with over 2,000 pounds of fresh, local food. WELRP also found that students are more likely to try new foods and like them when they have the opportunity to learn about local food varieties (WELRP Annual Report 2013). The projects impacts health and nutrition through providing fresh fruits, vegetables and meats to schools, economic resiliency by providing farmers with a market for a diversity of fruits and vegetables, self-sufficiency by decreasing dependence on FDPIR, and cultural preservation by renewing the connections between children and their food.

#### 4.2.4 Land Preservation

*White Earth Land Recovery Project* in many cases, uses the tools of the American government to combat and resist the disparities faced on the reservation. Their name alone points to the concrete aim of recovering land within the reservation. As described earlier, the American government strategically dismembered groups from their original land base and sold it to white farmers, forcing them onto smaller plots of land, without property rights. Currently, only ten percent of White Earth Reservation is held by Natives (Onaway Trust). According to Truer,

The land in side reservations such as Leech Lake and White Earth resembles a checkerboard: the reservation boundary is the edge of the board, and within it there are squares of different colors – black for tribally owned land, white for non-tribal land owned by private individuals, counties, states, the federal government, and corporations (Truer 2012:149).

Currently, 10% of the land within the reservation is owned by the tribe (compared to 6% in 1978). This in comparison to the federal government which owns 15%, the state of Minnesota, which owns 7%, counties with 17%, while private ownership is 51% (Indian Affairs Council 2012).

The *White Earth Land Recovery Project* is currently working on regaining Ojibwe lands through purchasing land back from non-Indian land owners and through donations from those who are moving off their reservation properties. According to the Indian Affairs Council, The White Earth land Settlement Act (WELSA) of 1986 required the transfer of 10,000 acres of state/county held land to the Tribe. The Tribe would be allowed cleared titles of 100,000 acres of privately owned land to trust status (Indian Affairs Council 2012). Winona La Duke explains:

In this way, acre by acre, we will restore our land base, protect our ancestor's graves and create a wider sustainable, traditional harvest-based economic foundation for members of our community. White Earth Land Recovery Project continues in the spirit of this movement, seeking to recover the original land base of the Reservation for collective, sustainable agricultural purposes. (Onaway Trust).

Through repurchasing the land lost to non-Native owners, White Earth is gaining power in the eyes of the government. Owning property is an important resource, displaying

power and economic stability to the state of Minnesota and federal government. For the Ojibwe, it means regaining control over their own resource base for the first time since the signing of the treaties.

It is clear based on the language used and the projects being undertaken by the *White Earth Land Recovery Project* that their goals are aimed at pragmatism, resistance and empowerment. The dichotomy between the soft shades of agency focused on reviving and encouraging the traditions of the community while communicating harder agentic ideals of resisting industrialized and liberalized forms of production, sets *White Earth Land Recovery Project* apart from *Dream of Wild Health*. Documenting climate change, creating a more self-reliant school nutrition program, increasing viability of native seeds and documenting nutrition for at risk community members all aim to address serious political issues at their root. Their terms and means of addressing problems is direct and structured, using phrases common in political campaigns and agendas. This points to a yearning to use the agentic power used by the US government for their own means.

### **4.3 Their Collective Agency**

While these two non-profits are based some 200 miles apart and have different methods of achieving change, both derive meaning and motivation from core values; to revitalize their unique culture, keep their traditional foods alive, and create self-sufficient futures for their communities. The projects address environmental and social justice through access to healthy foods and land, economic resiliency through the inclusion of community members such as farmers in their missions, and cultural preservation through communicating the themes of respect and reciprocity. Yet the contrast between the types of projects and exercise of agency in these two non-profits is noteworthy. *Dream of Wild Health* aims to address the sacred and to create a space that cultivates respect and inclusion through lighter and softer forms of agency. The seeds they save bring people from across the country together around the idea of saving their relatives. They instill kindness and reciprocity in youth, and create a unique inclusive environment that encourages cooking, listening, and growing. *White Earth Land Recovery Project* protects and guards against the ills of the past using legal and political tools to voice a strong message of resistance and subversion through culturally



appropriate and peaceful means. They work to address nutrition and health, accessibility, justice, climate, and rights through their suite of programs.

The types of agency employed by the groups seem equally successful, both engaging the community and working to progress the Native agenda within the broader society. They use their norms and practices to create spaces aimed at change. This is an encouraging sign, particularly when recognizing that this is by no means the extent of the efforts being undertaken within the Indigenous food sovereignty movement in Minnesota.



## 5 Envisioning New Horizons

Thus far, I have explored the reasoning behind the questions, why food and how food, beginning with historical and spiritual beginnings and moving through past injustices into the present day – a present riddled with healing scars and new visions for the future. In the previous chapter, I provided some optimism; giving in depth examples of the systematic ways Ojibwe communities are using agentic projects to address their scars. The projects assume different forms of agency, some addressing structural change, others cultural revitalization and education. These projects, hard or soft, highly intentional or not, work together to form a web, re-strengthening the connections that were lost and building the foundation for a more resilient future. In this chapter, I will bring these projects a step further, addressing important larger themes and potential impacts of these projects.

This chapter will address overarching ideas such as the visibility of the state, the significance of places in the creation of spaces for change, and participation. The existence of the state and the actions it has taken, define and create the structure and space for resistance and empowerment in Native communities. As Ortner has argued oppositional forms of agency cannot exist without a power of dominating force to resist against. It is this that obliges me to address these structures. This explains the intentionality and mission of the grassroots efforts I have described throughout this work; the dominating force that has forever been so present in Ojibwe communities is now being resisted. The American Indian community's newfound self-actualization over the past century gives rise to a new relationship between the state and Native Americans.

I will expand to include other cases that illustrate these themes. Here, the relationship between the Ojibwe food sovereignty movement and the progress communities are making to become centers of engagement, participation, and self-determination will become clear. This chapter will take grounded examples of the agentic projects and explain them using more overarching theoretical terms. I will begin with the broadest and most overarching theme of the state, and move into the concepts of place and the creation of space, finishing with new paradigms in participation.

## 5.1 Resisting the System

Within the context of the US, the state is a complex structure that is important to understand before moving on. The state can be thought of at three distinct levels; the federal US federal government, the state government of Minnesota, and lastly the local, in this case, tribal government. In addition, we must acknowledge that reservations are sovereign self-governing bodies, with independent legal systems. Despite this self-rule, the US federal governments and Minnesota state government are easily visible within the reservations. In order to contextualize Ojibwe resistance efforts, the states', a term I will use to address both the federal and Minnesotan governments, structures must be addressed. Understanding the state is useful in order to give context to the history of marginalization. I will be focusing directly on the impacts of federal and state governments before providing examples of how Ojibwe communities are progressing to new paradigms of place and space, as well as participatory governance.

Theorists such as Das and Poole acknowledge that anthropology views the state as a rationalized administrative form of political organization visible through bureaucratic and hierarchical institutions (Das and Poole 2004: 4). While reservations are sovereign entities with their own governing bodies, the federal government defined this way, is visible in native communities. The federal state is and has been an ever-present force in Native communities since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century during the formation of treaties when the US government established their ability to regulate relations with the tribes (Barreiro and Johnson 2005). The state's observable manifestations come in different forms, both seemingly benevolent and more aggressive. Examples of the states visibility are the school food program, the low-income tract housing on the reservations and in the conflicts between tribes and the Department of Natural Resources.

The first example appears to be benign. US federal government policies had large impacts on American Indians. During the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty began to be felt in Native communities. New community programs began to spring up in the hopes of developing tribal infrastructure to bring services to community members through tribal governments. One of the first projects was the US Department of Housing's (HUD) Tract housing development. All across the country, the government began to build suburb-style developments on reservations. David

Treuer, a former resident of Red Lake Reservation and author of “Rez Life,” writes about the housing.

These neighborhoods mainly consisted of split-level, or rambler-style suburban homes, arranged by either square grid or meandering culs-de-sac. It was believed that the suburban bioscape was the most conducive to success and happiness. Where once there had been fallow fields or deep wood there were, suddenly, clusters of houses set cheek to jowl, with paved streets and gutters, but no curbs. ...On large reservations such as Leech Lake and White Earth that had many small villages located within their boundaries, the age-old structure of these communities – the geographical manifestation of family ties, old rivalries, kinship, and warring factions – was completely ignored. (Treuer 2012:169).

The state, in this context, had both a significant negative and positive impacts on tribal life. The creation of low-income housing for those who had previously occupied dwellings without running water or electricity could in many ways be seen as a benevolent and beneficial act. Yet this creation of built space by the US government impacted the structure of native communities, disrupting cultural norms and creating new physical and cultural barriers. With built spaces that reflected modern westernized ideas of suburban life and not Tribal notions of community, confrontation and resentment has become more prominent. As we have seen earlier, state initiatives such as the commodity food program provided sustenance to tribes, but at the same time made them dependent on culturally inappropriate foods that caused many of the health disparities being dealt with today. This provides a case of a seemingly benign action seriously eroding the cultural fabric of Indigenous communities. While these examples occur within the communities themselves, the state has been felt within the land and waters as well. Significant conflicts have arisen over the years in response to resource management and state policies.

In conflicts such as these, the state manifests itself through the judicial system. In 1934, the Indian New Deal was born, in the form of the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA), otherwise known as the Wheeler-Howard Act. This legislation ushered in a new era of tribal constitutions and Native self-governing and rule. (Taylor qtd. in Weeks 2002). These newly regained rights and voice within the US government led to an era of empowerment within the American Indian community. The American Indian Movement, or AIM, began to receive media coverage in the 1960s, after their efforts to

draw attention to the treatment of Native Americans by the US government. As a result, new policies began to spring up around the idea of Indian “self- determination.” In Minnesota, these new policies encouraged political and economic power among tribal governments, who began to assert their influence to regain their treaty rights to hunt, fish, trap and gather on their lands; a promise previously made by the US Government. In many cases, their efforts were strongly opposed by sportsmen across the state, the State-run Department of Natural Resources, who claimed it was illegal for Natives to hunt or fish without a state issued permit, and the federal government. Truer describes one such example.

In the winter of 1974 the Tribble brothers, members of Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe reservation in northern Wisconsin, stepped off the reservation where it cut through the middle of Chief Lake. They cut a hole in the ice and began spearing fish. They had informed the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) of their intention to spear fish before the left, and the WDNR was there to greet them. The Tribbles were arrested, as many Ojibwe had been arrested for game and fish violations in the past and as other Indian activists in Washington state and Michigan were as well: to deliberately create a test case for their rights. They had sued the head of the WDNR, Lester Voight. They claimed that the treaty rights secured by Chief Buffalo had never been extinguished. The right to hunt and fish by whatever means necessary wherever necessary was a property right secured by their ancestors and they were the heirs to it. In 1978. Judge Doyle of the Federal District Court ruled against the Ojibwe of Wisconsin. White protesters formed the action committees Stop Treaty Abuse Wisconsin (STAW) and Protect America’s Rights and Resources (PARR), and they networked to prevent Indians from exercising their treaty rights... Doyle’s ruling was appealed in 1983 and the 7<sup>th</sup> District US Court of Appeals overturned it. The appeals court ruled clearly and decisively that when the Ojibwe in Wisconsin signed the treaties with the federal government they in no way relinquished their off-reservation hunting, fishing, and gathering rights... In 1990, the Mille Lacs Band...made a similar claim for their own treaty rights and sued the state of Minnesota... The Supreme Court chose to hear the Mille Lacs case and ruled five to four in favor of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe (Truer 2002: 85-91).

To this day, there are significant conflicts arising over rights to hunt and fish on tribal lands without a state permit. In November 2013 a federal judge dismissed charges against five individuals charged with a major crime for exercising treaty rights. The State of Minnesota currently ignores many treaty rights for American Indians both on-

and off-reservation. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and some tribal agents conducted a criminal investigation, known as Operation Squarehook, indicting more than 30 people in tribal, county, state, and federal court in April 2013 (Niijii Radio). During my time in the field, I met Bob Shimek, who was active in Operation Square Hook, at a park in Detroit Lakes to discuss the treaties and food sovereignty. Although we arrived well before the sun set, I watched as it disappeared below the horizon as we talked. The full moon rose over the lake while Shimek spoke articulately about the interconnectedness of food and spirituality, the creation story, and the treaties. He continued on, passionately telling me the intricate history of the largest and most influential federal legal battles of native judicial history. After a while, he told me that he was expecting a call from their lawyer in St. Paul the next day regarding Operation Square Hook. I was baffled that the battle that began two years earlier on Lake Bemidji was still being disputed with the federal government. This fight wasn't just for the sake of legality under the law, but a fight for food.

After some time, Bob said,

All of this is food sovereignty. They (the legal battles) were ensuring the right to protect and reaffirm our existence. They were recognizing those relationships – that was what those treaties were about – reserving food sovereignty into the future. Steps are being taken to get back all of those violated treaty rights (Shimek: Interviewed 4.08.2014).

Even after some 200 years, the battle for land and rights is still being waged against American Indians. It is a less violent and apparent fight, one that takes place behind the closed doors of a courtroom, but the influence of the state on reservations across the nation is still very much alive. Yet the conflicts between the groups are no longer a one-sided fight. Bands across Minnesota are exercising their constitutional treaty rights and agency- gaining empowerment and resisting marginalization. All of this occurred due to the desires of the Ojibwe people to regain their right to access culturally appropriate food.

## 5.2 Using Places to Create Spaces

This silent fight with the state to uphold the legal rights reserved to land and food has had an impact on the physical and spiritual places and spaces in Ojibwe society. In this section, I would like to draw attention to geographical place and the creation of positive spaces through projects. Andrea Cornwall's concept of space is very useful in achieving this. But first, I must acknowledge place and the impact it has on the creation of space.

It is important to recognize physical geographic place within Minnesotan reservations. Places can be both negative and positive. Positive places are the sacred grounds of the past. They seem to hold in them tribal ideals and respect. Throughout Ojibwe history, place has been an inherent aspect of language and being. Place, whether it be on the shores of Lake Superior or the inland woods of Northern Minnesota, is sacred. Earlier in this work, I noted a story of the sacred collective spirit of place. The land is not merely a home but the place of ancestors, a place of connectivity and spirituality. Wisuri and Peacock note the early beginnings of the Ojibwe homelands.

There is some comfort that we have always been in the places that we now call home. Many of the stories that explain our migrations to these contemporary places remind us that we may have been here once before, in a time now hidden somewhere in our ancestral memory. We do know that much of contemporary Ojibwe country was covered with a sheet of ice several miles thick nearly twelve thousand years ago during the last glacial period. With the retreat of the ice came the return of plants – the trees and grasses and flowers. Then our elder brothers, the four-leggeds and birds, called this home (Peacock and Wisuri 2002:22).

As we now know, many of the sacred places of the Ojibwe were lost over the years since European settlement. Hence the idea that places can hold negative connotations. These include the facades created by the US government in the form of suburban housing developments. HUD housing, as we have seen, created artificial barriers to communal relations, and increased tension amongst others. It has had long lasting impacts on the structure of the communities in question. In addition, the reservations are large areas of land with few inhabitants, making the physical space between each large. I was struck during my time in the field at the great distances I had to drive to get from one community to another. Most are very small, with fewer than 500 residents living few and far between with little by way of amenities. Some towns are too small to



contain a school so children must be bused in to larger cities for their education. This makes a difficult setting for creating a community.

The reason I focus on negative and positive places is that they set the stage for the creation of spaces for participation and change. Places are powerful reminders of the past, and prompt one to think about connections, history, losses and deep emotions. These reminders allow for the creation of spaces, which combat the ill-feelings associated with negative created places, as well as encourage the connections and nostalgia of positive sacred places.

Foucault argues that space is fundamental in any exercise of power (Foucault qtd. in Cornwall 2004). In the case of Ojibwe communities, it is more about *resisting* state power and *realizing* the power inherent in their own people. Cornwall reflects Foucault's statement in this excerpt on the nature of created space:

spaces are dynamic and are never neutral. They are infused with existing relations of power, interactions within them may come to reproduce rather than challenge hierarchies and inequalities. That being said, power relations and governmental actions, in themselves, are always sites of resistance that produce possibilities for subversion, appropriation and reconstitution (Cornwall 2004:81).

While her work mainly focuses on diverse invited spaces in development, Cornwall offers insights into the concept of space in this context too. She begins by acknowledging some spatial metaphors in contemporary development discourse, which include terms like “opening up, widening, extending opportunities, deepening” (Cornwall 2004:77). These terms are used in the projects of the Ojibwe, offering the concepts up to describe reconnecting people to the land, and engagement community members within the projects of food. She describes what she calls a continuum of spaces, ranging from closed spaces on one end of the spectrum, which occur behind closed doors with limited players, to invited spaces which include creating new spaces for participation. These she describes as created spaces, which are held by less powerful actors from or against the power-holders. Cornwall refers to these spaces as ‘organic’, as they emerge out of common concerns or identities, or as a result of social mobilization, for instance around identity or issue based concerns (Cornwall qtd. in Gaventa 2004:35).

These organic spaces come in many different forms, some simply constructed opportunities for ‘the people’ or their representatives to come together. They might involve more complex multi-stakeholder institutions involving representatives from civil society, the private sector, government, donors, or they may be popular spaces, those arenas in which like-minded people come together.

A gamut of cultural, social, historical, and political contextual factors are all tangled together in shaping the boundaries of what is possible in any given social encounter within invited spaces (Fraser qtd. in Cornwall 83).

The spaces I encountered during my work were diverse and consisted of invited spaces both of diverse interest groups of like-minded individuals. In the realm of organic spaces of like-minded people, *Dream of Wild Health* invites those who are interested in their cultural roots, and consists mainly of native peoples and non-Natives with some background in sustainable agriculture and Native culture. *Dream of Wild Health* creates an organic space that encourages youth and their families to explore cooking and growing foods, testing new flavors, and developing relationships with elders. This space reflects the significance of place, giving city dwellers the room to get their hands dirty and soak in the natural surroundings. This space is spiritual as well, exposing families to Indigenous ceremony and the sacred ideals of Native peoples.

On the other hand, I observed more diverse spaces with vastly different stakeholders and mindsets, such as the spaces created with regard to treaty rights and legislative action. Legal battles such as Operation Squarehook bring together groups that would ordinarily not interact, including politicians, fish and game officers, lawyers, concerned citizens, activists and scholars. Again, place is important. The lakes in question hold historical and cultural value to the Ojibwe who have fished and trapped on them for centuries. This fact brings about including voice, empowerment and marginalization become relevant. On the reservations, Ojibwe leaders shape the space, thus impacting the power dynamics it holds - those who are powerful off the reservations may hold less power on them due to the fact that they lack the historical sense of place. This may impact which actors voices are heard and acknowledged within the projects (Cornwall 2004:84). *White Earth Land Recovery Project* creates invited spaces aimed at motivating people to become stakeholders in the broader fight to regain land and rights. The foodshed mapping brought together a diverse group of people and gave community

members a chance to donate knowledge of their neighbors and landscape, in turn providing the information necessary to progress self-sufficiency. Seeing teachers, members of the tribal government, farmers, and activists sitting together and discussing where the best place to harvest and process wild fruits was encouraging. They weren't talking about complicated policies or how to cooperate – they weren't using political rhetoric – they were talking about food. They were reminiscing about their family root cellars, about whether or not the Smiths still had chickens or if they'd had to sell, about their grandparents' favorite ricing lake, and last year's sugarbushing season. This was a space defined by the Ojibwe. I, as an urban dweller and non-Native, had less say within this space. Despite this, the room was full of positive energy due to the fact that everyone could relate to the importance of food. Food is a universal communicator, forming the means to create diverse spaces of connection. It is a tangible force that inspires participation and empowerment.

### **5.3 Extending Opportunities: New Modes of Participation**

The creation of spaces and acknowledgement of places are vital aspects of participation in the Ojibwe projects of food. Without significant places to form spaces of motivation, empowerment, resistance and communication, participation would not exist. This section will address participation as the end result of the spaces created by the movement. I will use John Gaventa's ideas of participatory governance to direct this section. Participation, he states, is the way in which people exercise a voice through new forms of inclusion, consultation, and or mobilization designed to inform and to influence larger institutions and policies (Gaventa 2004:27). Ojibwe communities are achieving this through community gatherings and non-profits, meeting such as the Toxic Taters and the foodshed mapping. The Ojibwe are confronting past injustices and the state through creating spaces for participation, which in many cases represents a positive effort. Yet there are some issues with participation that need to be addressed.

Spaces created by outsiders for the purpose of public engagement often lack information about the norms and goals of the community. Cleaver underlines the contradictions of participation in her paper, "Paradoxes of Participation" (Cleaver 1999). She states that in development studies, participation is often separated into two

arguments; participation for efficiency, and participation for empowerment, yet in both cases, these are ill defined goals that often lack culturally appropriate means of achieving them. I observed similar misgivings with participation while in the field.

Simone Senogles, of the International Environmental Network and creator of the film, “Regaining Food Sovereignty,” spoke with me about the recent Native Health Summit, the issues with participation, and the importance of community led efforts and empowerment.

When grassroots efforts start taking off, money comes behind them and funding and then other people get involved because it’s the newest thing. There is a new research group up here that is, in theory, doing good things, but it’s important to remember that Native communities have been researched up the whazoo. A lot of times, it is very intrusive and external and not for the benefit of native people and it’s sometimes exploitive. I like the idea that this group is staying up here, but they were talking about doing a pre-summit meeting on food. The organizers were two non-native professional men who I had never seen at any of our meetings or anything and who were making an agenda talking about tradition and food. My take on that is that if we’re going to talk about food sovereignty in Native communities, it has to go hand in hand with empowerment and decolonization and that means leadership from within the community... For me that really matters. Otherwise the assumption is that we don’t know how to eat well – the assumption is that if you just teach us to eat well, we’ll be fine. But we know how, it’s just that there are so many complex issues that prevent it and that we’ve been so disconnected from all those things that make us healthy. It seems to me to completely defeat the purpose to have people act paternalistic about our issues. It’s important to keep in mind the power structures that are already in place (Senogles: Interviewed 7.15.2014).

Simone pointed out some of the common issues with participatory methods of governance and the creation of spaces. She noted that if efforts to revitalize traditional food systems are to succeed, they have to be done by the communities in question. She acknowledged the disregard for Indigenous knowledge and disrespect for culturally appropriate means of communicating. While most of the work being undertaken within Ojibwe food sovereignty is motivated by community members, there is still intervention by non-Natives. This has an impact on the space created for the movement, potentially leading to a paternalistic atmosphere and a less vocal community. Cleaver notes that in order to combat this in participatory efforts, a more dynamic vision of participation is

needed. One that incorporates social networks, recognizes disperse and contingent power relations, and the exclusionary as well as inclusionary nature of participation (Cleaver 1999:609).

Gaventa has made an effort to address this need through the findings in his chapter, “Towards Participatory Governance.” He finds several challenges that point to the need for citizen engagement and participatory transformations (Gaventa 2004:25). First, the need to conceptualize participation as an act of citizenship and a right, not simply an invitation from the beneficiaries. Gaventa states that continuums of power must be examined – how are the spaces for participation created? Who benefits from them? Who has a seat at the table? Lastly, he notes that voices within existing power structures must be receptive to community driven efforts. In the case of the Ojibwe, this would mean for example, that the DNR, as well as state and federal governments would be open to constructive discussion about treaty rights without the involvement of the court system. This could begin a time of positive interchange and healing between those who have been at odds for generations.

It is clear that there are positive and negative aspects of participation, particularly in situations that present a significant difference in power formations. The past efforts made by non-Native researchers and organizers, has often been seen as paternalistic. For this reason, Ojibwe communities are taking charge, forming their own projects and spaces for conversation and empowerment. With the recommendations put forward by Gaventa in mind, it is clear that the projects and efforts of the Ojibwe are bigger than community ventures undertaken for individual desires. Rather they are creating a base for new structures of empowerment and participation that considers their past relationships with the state.

## **5.4 All Things Considered**

In this chapter, I have explored the concept of the state and the ways in which it is visible in Ojibwe communities. Beginning with seemingly benign examples such as the HUD housing projects and commodity food program and ending with advert legal battles between tribal efforts and the state, the ways in which negative places were formed has been made clear. From there, I moved to the connections of place to space,

redirecting the outlook to positive created spaces for change and participation. As Shimek noted, the fights that took place with the state were about reaffirming Ojibwe existence and recognizing the relationship between traditional foods and legal rights. While fighting a silent battle with the state against the ills of the past, the Ojibwe are drawing upon their cultural roots to create new self-reliant spaces for the future. They are finding strength in their inherited sacred places and using them as motivation to encourage participation. Despite participation's shortcomings, it is clear after conversations such as the one I had with Simone Senogles that the Indigenous food sovereignty movement understands the steps that must be taken to encourage community-based positive projects of food. She stated that food sovereignty in native communities must go hand in hand with empowerment, and decolonization, meaning leadership from the inside and self-sufficiency. This is the horizon of the future.

## 6 Conclusions

This work was an attempt to address the losses of the Ojibwe and their efforts to regain Native sovereignty, and culturally appropriate means of self-sufficiency. By now, the relationship between the Ojibwe food sovereignty movement and the progress communities are making to move from spaces of loss to centers of engagement, participation, and self-determination has been made clear. Throughout the past chapter, I explained the multiple faces of the state and the power structures visible on the reservation. The existence of the state and its impacts define and create the structure and space for resistance and empowerment in Native communities. I considered the concept of negative and positive places and the ability they are having in shaping new spaces. From there, I moved on to the notion of participation within these created spaces. While it can be said that American Indians are disadvantaged; many communities face serious economic, health and societal issues, they are also thriving in their ability to create participatory spaces. Without created spaces such as the foodshed mapping, *Dream of Wild Health*, and dinner tables set with good conversation in mind, members of the community would lack the ability to voice their concerns, ideas, and reminisce about the past. As Simone Senogles mentioned, food sovereignty must go hand in hand with community leadership and empowerment. Now, Reservations across the state are exercising their sovereignty.

The Native peoples of the United States were confronted with a fragmentation of their cultures, a loss of the vital relations that shaped their understanding of the world. Yet more recently, they have been able to acknowledge their past and current realities and instill balance, holism, resistance and respect into their community members using food. The food sovereignty movement presents a tangible and inclusive means of regaining Native sovereignty, so long hidden under the rule of the US government. It is an intricate balance of confrontation and regeneration using traditional means.

As Ortner has argued oppositional forms of agency cannot exist without a power of dominating force to resist against. This explains the intentionality and mission of the grassroots efforts I have described throughout this work; the ever-present colonial forces within Ojibwe communities are being combated and resisted. *Dream of Wild Health* is achieving this through softer projects of agency, offering a sacred place to

reconnect with elders and the land while enjoying new gastronomical experiences. *White Earth Land Recovery Project* uses the harder forms of agency and resistance by creating invited spaces aimed at motivating people to become stakeholders in the broader fight to address political, environmental, economic, and social concerns. The foodshed mapping brought together members of diverse groups, some with little knowledge of the issues and a yearning to learn, others with centuries of traditional knowledge of local foods passed down to them through the generations. In both cases, the attendees contributed to a productive and positive discussion aimed at progressing self-sufficiency. I never ceased to be amazed that all of the conversations and relationships formed in these spaces were created around and through food. Whether for political and economic gains or simply to educate children and their parents about the best way to cook squash, these are the projects of food. They are aimed at revitalizing different aspects of Ojibwe culture and creating new paradigms within the realms of native sovereignty, rights and justice, as well as self-reliance and sufficiency.

The themes heard time and time again recalled notions of strengthening, restoring, and reviving Indigenous culture. Within the Ojibwe food sovereignty movement, this meant recognizing the sacred relationships inherent in their understanding of the past, present and future. This connectedness sheds light on the power of food as a communicator in Indigenous communities. Food holds in it the ceremonies, practices, taboos, and oral traditions of the past bringing them forward into the present.

This begins with seeds, the sacred witnesses to the past and the food knowledge passed from generation to generation. Like Cora Baker, the seed saver, who prayed that her seeds and connection to the past would be protected and handed down allowing the next generation to benefit from her gifts. I used the example of wild rice to exemplify this point and to draw attention to the essential economic, symbolic, and emotional significance of food. Food is both a connection to the spiritual and the cultural while being a gateway to rejuvenation and innovation. Harvesting, processing and eating wild rice brings about notions of pride, heritage, and a connectedness to the land and those who came before. This, as Munn put it in the words of the Apache, brings about a sense of lived history, as though standing in the tracks of one's ancestors.

Whether listening to the stories of loss and triumph while weeding a garden, processing honey, watching children picking vegetables with their parents, or eating freshly caught



trout and listening to the realities of life – it is clear that food is an active shaper. It is the ever present tie that keeps these communities bound together. It has always been there, sometimes visible, sometimes dormant and forgotten, but it is present. Slowly, communities are unearthing their roots, allowing them to guide the way to a new future.

After finishing this work, it is clear that food is not simply a means of sustenance. Wild rice is not simply a grain, and the seeds of ancient squash and maize are not saved and regrown simply for their fruits. The traditional foods of the Ojibwe people hold sacred in them their past relationships to the land and their ancestors, their present fight for communities, and their hopes for a self- reliant future. The Ojibwe food sovereignty movement, which is gaining more and more clout across stakeholder groups, is providing the structure necessary to communicate new ideas to the state of Minnesota and beyond.



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