



Constellating “the Nourishing Arts,” Decolonial Theory, Land, and Indigenous Food Sovereignty Activism through Story, Relations, and Making

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Abstract: With an academic focus at the intersection of the disciplines of Indigenous Studies and Rhetoric and Composition, this essay reviews the practices and literature on Indigenous food sovereignty, rhetorics of cooking, Indigenous ways of knowing, and cultural rhetorics to learn more about how Native foodways and cooking practices figure into cultural rhetorics. In my review, I began to see across the texts an emphasis on relationships. The connections between food and land and people are explicit in my findings both on Native food sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge production. My review of cooking rhetorics, which includes both theoretical studies and cookbooks, finds that food, embodiment, everyday practice, cultural memory, and story are intrinsically tied. The cultural rhetorics texts included in this study emphasize relationships and relational practices as rhetorical.

Keywords: Foodways, Indigenous sovereignty, survivance, Cherokee culture, Wishi

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“The nourishing arts have come down to us from the depths of the past, immobile in appearance in the short term, but profoundly reworked in reality over the long term. Provisions, preparation, cooking, and compatibility rules may very well change from one generation to another, or from one society to another. But the everyday work in kitchens remains a way of unifying matter and memory, life and tenderness, the present moment and the abolished past, invention and necessity, imagination and tradition—tastes, smells, colors, flavors, shapes, consistencies, actions, gestures, movements, people and things, heat, savorings, spices, and condiments.”—Luce Giard (de Certeau et al. 222)

“Food, for us, comes from our relatives. Food has culture. It has histories. It has stories. It has relationships.”—Winona LaDuke (“Seeds of our Ancestors”)

Introduction

Let me begin with a story. My father loves wishi,² which is the Cherokee word for a hen-of-the-woods mushroom, also called a maitake mushroom. Every autumn, he heads out into the woods to gather wishi from the bases of oak trees. He usually has several spots to harvest wishi because he spends months tracking them every year. Wishi can grow to be very large, so when my father finds young wishi, he puts a stick into the ground near the wishi to indicate that someone (he) has claimed it, and then he waits. He marks the location on a piece of paper, his wishi map, and returns periodically to check on it. Once the wishi has matured, he harvests it, using care to do so sustainably, and leaving an offering to the land so that the wishi will return next year.

My father brings the wishi home in shopping bags, and sometimes big garbage bags if the wishi are that large or if he has collected several in one day. He and my mother wash them carefully in the kitchen sink, painstakingly rinsing the dirt from between the layers upon layers of mushroom. They blanch the wishi, then freeze some of it for future use and leave some out to be cooked.³

As I was growing up in Oklahoma, my father and I would be driving along a country road, and he would suddenly and without warning pull the car over and point into the woods and say, “Look! There’s a wishi over there,” gesturing with his lips, as Indians are apt to do. I would look in the direction that he indicated, but I was never able to see them at first.⁴ He would say, “over there!” and point again, this time with his chin, like Natives

² A young wishi pictured right

³ Usually battered in flour and fried until crispy—a way of cooking that was introduced to tribal communities through the distribution of federally-subsidized rations following the systematic displacement of Native peoples from homelands and traditionally-sourced foods.

⁴ The picture (right), shows how difficult it can be to see wishi in a wooded area. If you look closely, you may be able to see the small wishi at the base of the tree on the right side of the image.

often do. I would look and look, and still not see it. I still have much more difficulty spotting wishi that he does. My eyes are not trained as his are. He and his siblings went out harvesting wishi with the parents, who went out with their parents before them, all from the time they could walk. He has been foraging wishi his entire life. I never had to rely solely on foraging for food like he sometimes did growing up.



As a mixed-blood Native, I was raised in a space between tribal culture and Western mainstream culture, and in the intersections of Cherokee food traditions and contemporary American food culture. When I was growing up, most of my food came from the supermarket and, yes, sometimes federally-subsidized commodities. With the growing distances between tribal people, our land, and our foodways throughout Indian Country, I see this happening on the local scale in my own family. My father has a closer relationship with the land than I do, and his father's relationship with the land was closer still. With each passing generation, we seem to shift further and further from our tribal foods and from the lands on which they are grown. I wonder, how will all of this affect our future generations?

In my story, the concern is for the survival of our cultural knowledge and practices of our foodways, yet the fight for food sovereignty and food security for Indigenous peoples has even deeper implications. Lives are at stake. With many Native communities facing or currently experiencing the poisoning of their water and land (and, therefore, food), the aim of this work stretches beyond the recovery of our traditions—it is about physical survival.

With an academic focus at the intersection of the disciplines of Indigenous Studies and Rhetoric and Composition,⁵ I reviewed the literature on Indigenous food sovereignty, rhetorics of cooking, Indigenous ways of knowing, and cultural rhetorics to learn more about how Native foodways and cooking practices figure into cultural rhetorics. In my review, I began to see across the texts an emphasis on relationships. The connections between food and land and people are explicit in my findings both on Native food sovereignty and Indigenous knowledge production. My review of cooking rhetorics, which includes both theoretical studies and cookbooks, finds that food, embodiment, everyday practice, cultural memory, and story are intrinsically tied. The cultural rhetorics texts included in this study emphasize relationships and relational practices as rhetorical:

The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (2014) uses the term *constellate* as a metaphor for a relational network that allows for multiply-situated subjects to connect to multiple discourses at the same time, as well as for those relationships (among subjects, among discourses, among the kinds of connections) to shift and change without holding a subject captive. (Powell, et al. Act I)

The cultural rhetorics texts in this study articulate the meaning-making practice of constellating to build and sustain connections through story,⁶ making, land, space, time, people, bodies,⁷ language, writing, and communities.

⁵ i.e. Rhet/Comp

⁶ Including histories

⁷ Here, I refer to embodied knowledge and practices, but also to physical bodies, institutional bodies, collective bodies, etc.

Guided by cultural rhetorics theoretical and methodological frameworks, such as story, embodiment, and land-based ways of knowing, my intent for this essay is to constellate my research in Cherokee foodways in relation to American Indian food rhetorics and to the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. This leads me to my primary question: How can Cultural Rhetorics help us to constellate a framework for American Indian food rhetorics research? In this review essay, I will attempt *an* answer for that question through my research experience. Secondary questions that I consider along the way include: How has settler colonial rhetoric affected American Indian foodways? How do rhetorical practices, such as mapping, figure into the foodways of Indigenous peoples? What kinds of stories do Native foodways and recipes tell? I organize this essay across three parts: Story, Relations, and Making. The parts, concepts that are central to both Indigenous studies and cultural rhetorics, provide orientations to guide us through the review. I begin by prefacing each of these three sections with a story to show how my understanding of these practices are informed by my own lived experience. Each of the three parts are organized further into three sections:⁸ Theory, Methodology, and Practice.

In the first sections of each part, Theory, I consider the theoretical findings of the review and attempt to listen to learn from these texts as I begin building a theoretical frame for my own research, so bits of my own story are woven in as well. Indigenous food sovereignty scholarship and activism is inherently linked to cultural knowledge and practice, and so I look to theory in the areas of both Indigenous Studies and cultural rhetorics.

In the second section, methodology, I look to the methodological frameworks in this study to show how they can help me to build a framework for my research in Native foodways. Much of the methodological texts included in my review focus on Indigenous ways of knowing. Kathleen Absolon (2011) tells us, “Our own knowledges and methodologies are there and can be applied to the work we are doing in the academy” (p. 47). Indigenous research methodologies offer a culturally relevant approach to knowledge production, and, in doing so, “raise Indigenous voices out of suppression” (Absolon, 92).

In the Practice sections, I consider how the work of writers of Indigenous cookbooks practice story, relationality, and making their own food sovereignty work. Indigenous cookbooks make meaning of Native foods by adapting traditional food practices of tribal communities across Turtle Island into contemporary foodways. I posit that cookbooks focused on native foods, in conversation with the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, can help to restore land-based relationships with food for Indigenous peoples. Native cookbook writers are writing the land. And their writing leads to practice. And this writing, these recipes, help us, as readers and practitioners, to join in, armed with cooking utensils, as active agents in the much larger resistance effort of restoring our ancestral connections to the land.

⁸ This work of categorizing, of separating interconnected threads, is messy. Please bear with me.

Part One: Story

My father no longer needs to forage wishi for sustenance. He could just buy maitake mushrooms from a store—or he could buy plugs online and grow them in a log—but that is unthinkable for him. Like his father before him, he will probably be out collecting wishi every autumn until he is no longer able. He forages wishi because he likes it—yes—but also because he has always done so. For my father, gathering wishi reminds him of his family and their foodways traditions, of his history. It is a way for him to participate in our culture, and for him to continue the work of the generations before him. It is his way of resisting.

It is also an embodied practice, and with it comes a deep-rooted, generational knowledge. I return here to Luce Giard (1988) because of her work with cooking as an embodied, everyday practice. She points to the “multiple memory” of cooking, the embodied knowledge that tells when a food is at the right temperature or consistency (de Certeau et al., p. 157). It is a memory that is developed over the years, and sometimes generations, of practice. When my father cooks wishi, as when he harvests it, he knows when it is just right. For him, the stakes are high. After tracking a wishi over a season, gathering it, and carrying it home in a bag, it would be a shame to overcook it.

Theory

An emphasis on story and storytelling practices is visible across many of the texts reviewed in my essay. The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (2014) acknowledges that the “practice of story is integral to doing cultural rhetorics” because storytelling helps us to constellate people, ideas, communities, and histories (Powell, et al. Act I). As Andrea Riley-Mukavetz affirms, “...story is theory” (Towards a Cultural..., p. 110). A cultural rhetorics approach to story makes explicit how stories connect us all and how we can it can help us to theorize these connections.

Cruikshank, Dunbar-Ortiz, Brooks, Powell, and King each describe how stories shape history. They remind us that there are other stories than the Western story. King laments that some stories, typically the Western ones, become histories while other stories, typically the Native ones, become “entertainment” (*The Inconvenient* 20). For Native peoples, many of our stories have, historically, been ignored and erased in favor of the stories privileged by Western society. Through his example of Pocahontas, King demonstrates how even Western stories *about* Indigenous peoples are valued over stories written/told by Indigenous peoples about ourselves (*Inconvenient Indian* 9).

King (2005) tells us that “stories are all that we are” (*The Truth About Stories*, 32). Our stories may not always align with Western scientific knowledge, or with Western histories, but they are how we Natives peoples understand the world. In relation to my

research in Native foods, stories tells us how we came to be, how our foods came to be, why they are important, and how we can use them in the right way. The literature on Indigenous food sovereignty includes stories about corn, stories about rice, stories about pineapple (Erdrich, Goldberg-Hiller and Silva, LaDuke).

Powell (2012) asserts that “stories take place” (2012 CCCC..., p. 384). She defines space as “a place that has been practiced into being through the acts of storied making” (2012 CCCC..., p. 388). This means that land is storied, that it has history. King suggests that “if you understand nothing else about the history of Indians in North American, you need to understand that the question that really matters is the question of land” (*The Inconvenient Indian* 218). The readings on land and food sovereignty⁹ all point to the history and continued impact of settler colonialism land policy in the Americas as the cause of food insecurity for Indigenous peoples.

Methodology

Several of the readings in my study point to storytelling as an Indigenous methodology for research. Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) explains that “...the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 1). Smith, along with Mignolo, Powell, Brooks, Dunbar-Ortiz, King, and Absolon, describes the ways that Western concepts of research, knowledge, and literacy have long been used as tools of colonization. She argues that, as an Indigenous methodology, story makes space for healing and reconciliation through the research process (pp. 115-118). Riley-Mukavetz (2014) tells us that “We can learn from the stories we tell and retell what we do with cultural communities and the experiences of working with those communities. Those research stories are data for analysis” (*Towards a Cultural...*, p. 110).

Storytelling is both a way of knowing and a way of producing knowledge. “By taking role of storyteller rather than researcher/author,” Wilson (2008) describes his approach to research “in a way that is more culturally appropriate for Indigenous people” (p. 32). As a methodology, story allows us to research through our own knowledge systems and our own cultural protocols. Absolon (2011) suggests that “Indigenous searchers talk about storytelling as a methodology to help our people tell stories so they can leave their mark. These stories help us to not get lost. We build on our stories and each other’s stories, and eventually our stories weave together as we share them” (p. 137). Stories are how we know.

⁹ Including Horsman’s *Feast or Famine*, though Horsman attends to the devastation of native plants and animals as a necessary evil of Westward Expansion

Practice

Story is represented not only in the scholarly texts of this study, but also in the cookbooks. I see each of these cookbooks as mixed-genre texts comprised of part history, part memoir, part cultural studies, part methodology, and part theory.¹⁰ The cookbook writers are not only giving us instructions for recipes; they are also telling us their own stories and the stories of their tribal communities, and in doing so, encourage us, as readers, to actively participate in those stories through the practice of cooking.

In *Original Local*, Heid Erdrich (2013) reminds us that “a recipe is a story” (p. 12). Through story, Erdrich guides the reader through the cookbook, weaving together the lists and cooking directions with narratives that orient the recipes in relation to one another. These stories remind us of the ways that foodways have changed in relation to the conditions of the earth and of the people that inhabit the Americas: “Indigenous foods evolved over many thousands of years to suit themselves to our climate” (Erdrich, p. 6). Through these recipes, Erdrich tells stories of survivance¹¹ and continuance.

In *Modern Native Feasts* and *A Feast for All Seasons* (2013), Chef Andrew George tell stories also. His stories tell of his childhood where he and his family relied primarily on the foods they gathered from the land. He describes in his cookbooks the experiences of eating smoked trout with boiled potatoes as a kid, or making potato and leek soup with moose broth (*Modern Native*, pp. 56, 71). In addition, he tells stories of Wet’suwet’en culture, including ceremonies and the hereditary chiefdoms of his tribal community. He tells of teaching his students how to make indigenous foods, and how they were, at times, nervous about the unfamiliarity of traditional tribal ways of processing food. He tells us stories about his experiences as a contemporary Indigenous chef making traditional foods for contemporary peoples.

In *Recovering Our Ancestor’s Gardens*, (2006) Devon Abbot Mihesuah’s recipes, like George’s, contain annotations from her memories growing up eating Native foods, as well as photographs, but also giving commentary on possible adaptations to the recipes. Her straightforward book is intended as a health guide for Indigenous peoples rather than an homage to native foods, so the commentary is health-oriented. Mihesuah’s book and the recipes therein tell stories of hope for recovery both of our foodways and of our health.

The stories included in these cookbooks, both in the recipes and alongside them, tells us our histories as Indigenous peoples. They tell us about our ancestral ways of life, of displacement and genocide, of survivance and continuance. These cookbooks practice story, and they encourage us to practice story along with them, and to make our own through both our ancestral foods and our contemporary ones. They show us how to

¹⁰ Because my study was not particularly concerned with gender, the scope of my reading did not include resources on cookbooks as products of gendered writing practices, of which there are several

¹¹As Powell defines it: “survival + resistance” (“Rhetorics of Survivance” 400)

weave these two different ways of life together to create foods that will nourish and sustain us.

Part Two: Relations



During my first spring in Michigan, one of my instructors took my classmates and I to the Jijak Foundation¹² grounds in Hopkins, where we spent the day working at their sugarbush¹³ with members of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians.¹⁴ We made put out offerings to the land, and the Jijak folks showed us how to harvest and collect sap from their maple grove and how to use a big wood-burning stove and copper kettles¹⁵ to boil the sap down to syrup over the course of many hours. They showed us how to spin the syrup into sugar using a mixing machine and wooden paddles,¹⁶ and then how to cream the syrup into maple cream.¹⁷ After a long day but wonderful day of working with them, we shared a feast, then said our goodbyes, gifted our hosts, and drove the hour and a half back to East Lansing.

¹² The Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish tribal non-profit cultural organization

¹³ A grove of trees, usually maple, where sap is harvested. It usually includes a sugar shack, a small building where the sap is filtered and boiled to syrup

¹⁴ Formerly called the Gun Lake Tribe

¹⁵ Pictured right

¹⁶ Pictured left

¹⁷ Pictured right on the following page



I was not able to return to the Jijak Foundation to visit their sugarbush last year, but I was able to help with a sugarbush at Fenner Nature Center¹⁸ in partnership with the American Indian and Indigenous Studies Program here at Michigan State. For several days in early spring, I, along with other faculty and students, joined the staff at Fenner in harvesting sap, collecting it in large barrels, and boiling it down in their sugar shack. At the end of the season, I helped to give demonstrations for the public on the process of syrup-making.



As an Oklahoman in Michigan, so far away from home, far away from wishí hunting with my dad and the land that I know, I have had to build new relationships with people and with land. Working in the sugarbush, both at Jijak and at Fenner,¹⁹ has given me the opportunity to work towards a reciprocal relationship with the land here and to practice

¹⁸ A local non-profit nature center

¹⁹ The sugarbush at Fenner Nature Center pictured left

foodways that may not be part of my own culture, but foodways that are vital to the cultures of the Native peoples of the Great Lakes region. To participate in their foodways practices helps me to also be accountable to them, to better understand their relationships with the land and how it affects their cultural foods. It helps me to understand the hard work that goes into making life-sustaining syrup from the land in the harsh cold of early springtime. It helps me to understand the medicine that is the steam from the boiling sap and the smoke from the fire below. It helps me to understand the sustainable tree-tapping processes which allow the trees to heal after their sap has been harvested and to continue producing more sap for the next year, and for years to come.

Theory

Economist and environmental activist Winona LaDuke, founder of the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP)²⁰ and Honor the Earth,²¹ argues that “food sovereignty is an affirmation of who we are as Indigenous peoples, and one of the most sure-footed ways to restore our relationship with the world around us” (1999, *Food Systems*). Across my reading, American Indian food sovereignty is linked to decolonial theory,^{22,23} as well as to the history of colonization in the Americas and to the survivance²⁴ of Indigenous peoples. Our foodways, linked as they are to our history, have long been impacted by displacement, violence, and erasure at the hands of settler colonialists (Whyte, p. 12). Kyle Powys Whyte (2016) describes in his studies on environmental ethics and climate justice a direct correlation between the devastating impact of climate change, *food sovereignty*,²⁵ and *settler colonialism*.²⁶

As suggested in the previous sections of this essay, my research findings emphasize relationships. One of the primary relationships that surfaces in this study is the relationship between land, food, and people. Some may argue that this relationship is actually several relationships (land and food, land and people, people and food), but I argue that this is one constellative relationship.²⁷ Goeman (2008) tells us that:

²⁰ A land and culture recovery project for the White Earth Ojibwe tribe

²¹ An environmental justice organization

²² As a Native researcher, this is not surprising.

²³ Mignolo defines *decolonization* as “the horizon of thinking and being that originated as response to the capitalist and communist imperial designs” (xiii).

²⁴ Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor defines survivance as an “active sense of Native presence, the continuance of Native stories, ...renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (vii).

²⁵ which he defines as “community food self-sufficiency or cultural autonomy in relation to food” (???)

²⁶ which he defines as “a structure of oppression that wrongfully interferes with Indigenous capacities to maintain an adaptive capacity in their homelands” (12??)

²⁷ Or a system of relationships at the very least

Land is a word with much currency often utilized by Native American, First Nations, Pacific Islanders, and Aboriginal scholars to invoke responsibility, rights, sovereignty, and belonging. From the physical homelands of Indigenous peoples stem a production of our social, economical, and political relationships to our community, other tribal Nations, and nation-states. (From Place to Territories, p. 23)

The work of constellating is the work of building relationships, and the work of relationality is the active practice of maintaining and being accountable to those relationships through responsibility and reciprocity. To practice relational accountability with the land means that we must honor our relationship with it through respect, responsibility, and reciprocity.

In the work of Indigenous food sovereignty, this means to come to the land with respect, to impose upon it as little as possible, to harvest our foods and our materials from it in ethical and sustainable ways, and to give back to it as much as possible. Gabriela Raquel Rios affirms that “Indigenous relationality recognizes that humans and the environment are in a relationship that is co-constituted and not just interdependent. Additionally, Indigenous relationality recognizes the environment’s capacity to produce relations” (p. 64). We must work to maintain our relationship with the land and with our environment.

We ask the land to provide us with food, shelter, water, air, medicine—the basic needs of life—but, now in our contemporary consumerist society, we also ask it to fuel our cars, to light our skyscrapers, to power our industries. We pay it back by filling our oceans with garbage, by poisoning it with contaminants and nuclear waste, by fracking until the ground trembles beneath us. In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, biologist Robin Kimmerer (2013) weaves Indigenous knowledge production with science as she calls for humans to work towards reciprocity with the land, hoping for “the day when we can hear the land give thanks to the people in return” (p. 117). During a time when tribal peoples from across Turtle Island are gathering at the frontlines of the Standing Rock protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline with the intent of preventing yet another industrial pipeline from contaminating Native land and water, accountability to the land is an issue of vital concern.

Methodology

Wilson (2008) suggests that “for Indigenous people, research is a ceremony” (p. 69). Within his Indigenous paradigm, Shawn Wilson describes methodology as “the more relationships between yourself and the other thing, the more you can fully comprehend its form and the greater the understanding becomes” (p. 79). He argues that the four

elements²⁸ of a research paradigm “are inseparable,” “all related,” and “all have to do with relationships” (p. 70). Wilson contends that “an Indigenous research paradigm is relational and maintains relational accountability” (p. 71).

In working to articulate a cultural rhetorics methodology, Riley-Mukavetz looks to Wilson’s research paradigm and his emphasis on relational accountability. She tells us that “practicing relationality is partly about how we embody and carry stories and relationships with us” (p. 116). Riley-Mukavetz’ study with a group of Odawa women shows us what this accountability looks like within a cultural rhetorics frame through her demonstration of responsible, respectful, and reciprocal research practices.

Practice

Erdrich includes a narrative titled “Water Keepers,” in which Erdrich shares with us a story about the Anishinaabeg Seven Fires Prophecy, which guided the Anishinaabeg on their diaspora from the Atlantic Coast to the Great Lakes region, including in this narrative a part of the prophecy which tells the Anishinaabeg that they “will know the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water” (p. 48). This narrative prefaces a statement about land and water rights granted through treaties, leading to the crux of her message that: “What is at stake for indigenous people goes beyond our treaty rights and our food: what is happening today threatens the essence of our way of being in this world—our ceremonies, tied as they are to harvests, to maple tapping, to animals and plants with which we share the world and without which we cannot survive” (p. 49). Erdrich demonstrates here that we are all connected in a series of relationships, and that we have to be accountable to those relationships.

Likewise, George situates his cookbook, *A Feast for All Seasons*, in conversation with the land and with the shifting seasons. Book 2 is dedicated to recipes for seasonal feasts, while Book 3 is focused on the elements: water, earth, sky, and land. He speaks to his tribal communities’ connection to the elements and to the seasons, how these connections guide their food practices. He describes how harvesting times and migrations of game and fish were linked to seasonal shifts, and how, traditionally, tribal communities listened to these movements of the earth, prepared for the changing seasons, and worked in accordance with natural systems to ensure continued harvests and growth.

Part Three: Making

Like many other Cherokees who forage mushrooms or other foods, my father uses cartographic tools to track his wishi. He makes wishi maps. He maps the wishi so that he can find his way back to the area where he is tending the wishi, waiting for it to mature

²⁸ Ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology

to full size, before he harvests it. He tracks this wishi, returning to check on it every now and then, from late summer into the fall months. He is a steward of several wishi each year, and he uses his maps to keep track of them.

My father practices a code in his mapping. His maps are kept secret. I have seen his map(s) only a few times, though he knows that I know better than to tell anyone where his “wish trees” are. His maps, sketched on small pieces of paper that he keeps folded up in his wallet, are coded in relation to landmarks—trees, rocks, houses— and to landscapes—hills, hollows, streams, but not to county lines or even property lines. The wish maps that my father makes re envision the land without imperial boundaries. They are imprecise, yes, but he knows the land, and he relies on his maps to help him remember. For him, his mapping will take him to the general area, and his sense, cultural memory, and knowledge of the land will guide him to the oak trees, perhaps in a wooded area full of oak trees, where he knows that wish grows. His body, his senses, have the knowledge, and they show him where the wish are.

The Cherokees who forage for wish this way have a shared ethical code that one should not harvest food that has been “claimed,” as indicated by the presence of a stick or place marker staked into the ground near it. This stake, though a colonialist practice, shows that someone has a connection to that food (in this case, wish), and so foragers who practice this code will look elsewhere for their food. Without some sort of marker, any forager may come and take the food, which might mean that my father’s work in tracking the wish may be in vain. Even with the stick, this happens sometimes, more frequently now that foraging for mushrooms has become a popular pastime with the widespread shift towards artisanal and local foods in North America. The new foragers, or the ones who do not understand the cultural importance of our foods or our foraging codes, just take them. Often, they do not take the care to harvest the wish sustainably, nor do they leave offerings to the earth, so that the wish will grow back next year. They do not realize—or care—that someone has cultivated a relationship with that tree, with that mushroom, that someone has been tending it for months, that someone has mapped it.

Theory

Scholars doing cultural rhetorics are, ultimately, concerned with bodies, and with the relationships between cultures and bodies. Qwo-Li Driskill (2015) explains that “decolonization is learned through embodied practices that restore cultural memory to our bodies and communities” (p. 57). When we consider the rhetorics of sovereignty, of nationhood, we are talking about which bodies will be governed, and by which bodies of government. It is a discourse about bodies of people and bodies of institutions. Embodied rhetoric disrupts Western codes of knowledge (knowledge as felt or experienced vs. knowledge that is tested and observed).

In thinking about the relationship between rhetorical practices of making and embodiment, I look to one of Malea Powell's (2010) points in "Rhetorical Powwows," that our relationships to material objects²⁹ and making³⁰ are "translated through the body." The embodied experience is part of the rhetorical production. Whether we are weaving baskets or chopping onions, the body is an agent in that relationship. The basket does not weave itself, nor does the food cook itself. Instead, the body produces the baskets and meals, alike. The "nourishing arts,"³¹ in this sense, are at the intersection(s) of culture, physical movement, sensory experiences, and human connections with land. Rios (2010) indicates that "One implication of land-based rhetorics, then, is the valuing of embodied ways of knowing/being derived from land and from with working/living/being with land" (p. 65). I consider within the section of making two different types of making that were present in my readings and in my stories: cooking and mapping.

Michel de Certeau (1988) finds that, through everyday practice, ordinary people tactically resist institutional strategies that aim to subjugate us. Within the context of cooking, and, specifically in the case of this study, Indigenous cooking practices, the tactics are subtle. You, dear reader, may be wondering how cooking can be resistant. When we consider the second section about relational accountability, we can see that to engage in traditional foodways means to participate in a reciprocal relationship with the land. When we look, however, to the earlier section of this text, the history of colonization and its strategic impact on our access to ancestral foods, we can understand the political nature of our cultural food practices. De Certeau's colleague Luce Giard (1998) explains that "humans do not nourish themselves from natural nutrients, nor from pure dietary principles, but from cultured foodstuffs, chosen and prepared according to the laws of compatibility and rules of propriety unique to each cultural area" (de Certeau et al., p. 168).

In this section, I have attempted to demonstrate how sovereignty is embodied, how making is embodied, and how practicing Native food sovereignty through making is also embodied. When we cook our native foods and act in reciprocity with the land, we are subverting the settler colonialist institutions that seek³² to separate us from our traditions, from our cultures. When we eat the foods that we have gathered from the earth, we are not participating in commercial agribusiness. We are resisting the ongoing Western project of assimilation and erasure.

Some of the stories from my lived experience that bring me to this research are related to the maps³³ that my father and other members of my community make to mark

²⁹ In Powell's example, baskets, and in the context of this essay, food

³⁰ i.e. basket-weaving and cooking, respectively

³¹ To borrow from Luce Giard (222)

³² Both historically and presently

³³ Cultural protocol requires that the maps be kept secret so that other foragers do not take the food that the map-makers have been tracking for months.

the places where wishi³⁴ grows. Mapping, however, is surprisingly absent in food sovereignty texts—surprising because I know it to be an important geospatial tool for foraging and tracking food. In my readings of land-based rhetoric, narrative mapping appears in the works of scholars such as Lisa Brooks, Mishuana Goeman, and Malea Powell. The readings indicate that mapping is an important tool, also, for decolonial land-based rhetorics. Goeman argues that “it is important to see mapping as a means of discourse that mapped an imperial imaginary” (p. 20).

Mapping can help us to reimagine the boundaries imposed upon us by settler colonialists, and to envision other possibilities for shifting borders, border-relations, and nation-building. Anzaldúa’s work with geographical and sociocultural borderlands theorizes the impact of imposed borders, with the lines³⁵ drawn between nations and peoples and communities and families. Goeman indicates that mapping gives us “the power to rethink the way we engage with territory, with our relationships to one another, and with other Native nations and settler nations” (p. 59).

Methodology

Absolon (2011) describes Indigenous methods of knowledge production through the terminology of food: “searching, harvesting, picking, gathering, hunting, and trapping” (p. 21). She frames her “holistic” methodology through the metaphor of foodways. Absolon tells us that “Meaning making is what we do with knowledge, and when we gather berries, we make meaning of those berries by making jams or pies and then we share all that we have gathered with the people” (p. 22). For her, gathering the knowledge is important, but we must make meaning of the knowledge by sharing it with our communities.

This is similar to the work of Native food sovereignty activism. While it is critical that we learn how to grow ancestral varieties of corn, if we cannot share it with the people, then that knowledge does not benefit the community. If I do not learn my father’s ways of mapping and gathering wishi and pass that knowledge on to the children in my family so that they can pass it on to their children, that cultural knowledge will be lost and the multigenerational tradition will die. There are numerous studies on how the loss of cultural knowledge impacts tribal languages, and we are beginning to see how this loss impacts our food systems.

Practice

Erdich does not claim to rely solely on Indigenous foods for her recipes, explaining that “the idea behind the recipes in this book is to explore using mostly indigenous ingredients from the Upper Midwest (p. 12). Erdich attempts to avoid recipes that rely heavily on

³⁴ Hen-of-the-Woods mushrooms—one of our most valued foods

³⁵ Often invisible, yet with very real implications

foods that were introduced into Indigenous communities by colonizers, such as fry bread, and instead emphasizes foods that “have grown in and been planted, stewarded, and eaten in the Great Lakes and Mississippi watersheds for centuries, if not millennia” (Erdrich, p. 13).

Across the Indigenous foods cookbooks, I notice a hesitancy surrounding the inclusion of recipes for or involving frybread. Mihesuah calls it “Death by Fried Bread” (p. 55). Frybread, a direct link to both historical and continued trauma, has, nevertheless, become an iconic Native dish. Erdrich discusses the discordant relationship that many Indigenous peoples have with fry bread:

Fry bread was treaty ration food made of flour and lard many Indigenous people waited for—and starved for—when promised provisions did not arrive from governments that demanded we stop hunting and start eating the colonial diet. Yet, even with that conflicting history, we love fry bread. It’s a complex world. (p. 96)

Frybread is a narrative that tells of Native communities who starved because they did not know how to use the unfamiliar government rations, of cultural assimilation efforts, of painful separation from homelands, and of colonized food practices.

The complexity of frybread as a cultural food speaks to the tensions between ancestral foods and colonized foods that have become ingrained in Native culture. This is a point that arises for me in my research on wishi. Wishi can be prepared in any number of ways, yet, since the introduction of frying with oil and white flour that came with the distribution of federally-subsidized rations, *commodities*,³⁶ Cherokees often use flour to batter and oil to fry the wishi they have gathered from the land (Hetzler, p. 141). Wishi are mushrooms with a variety of nutritional benefits,³⁷ but we prepare them now in an unhealthful way. Like Victor Villanueva (1993) tells us in *Bootstraps*, we “carry the colony wherever we go. Internal colonialism: a political economy, an ideology, a psychology” (xiv). Like frybread, I see fried wishi as symbolic of the subtle stronghold of colonialism that infiltrates even in our kitchens; while we are making the effort to recover and retain traditional foodways, we have trouble delinking³⁸ the preparation of our food from Western practices.

³⁶ These, until recently, typically consisted of white flour, oil (sometimes lard), cornmeal, powdered eggs, powdered milk, meat, and canned goods—oh, and the famous “commod cheese” (a large block of heavily processed American-style cheese)

³⁷ Maitake mushrooms have been studied extensively in Japan for their anti-tumoric properties and additional health benefits.

³⁸ I borrow this term from Mignolo

Conclusion

I see this work fitting into my dissertation project to guide me in theorizing the foodways of my tribal community. I intend for my dissertation to be, primarily, an oral history project in which I will speak with my father and with two tribal elders to learn more from them about our foodways. I will interview them and hear their stories. I will gather foods with them to learn more about their reciprocal relationships with the land and about their mapping practices. I will cook with them to learn about the embodied knowledge of their cooking practices and the histories of our foods. Ultimately, my work in this exam will help to shape my understanding of our foodways as rhetorical knowledge and practices. Though I have attempted answers, this essay has also left me with some questions. When I consider relational accountability within the context of my own work, work that is rooted in the knowledge and practices of my tribal community and of my own family, I find myself realizing that I must not only be accountable to my family and community, but also to their relations—not just my own. When I represent my father's teachings in my project(s), I must not just "do right" by him, but by his friends, relatives, community—the people to whom he must be accountable. How might this build upon the work of Wilson and Riley-Mukavetz? What does this sort of extended-scope of accountability look like?

I see space for further scholarship in this area on questions like those, as well as on Indigenous foodways practices and food sovereignty initiatives across Turtle Island and beyond. There is a lot of work to be done in that area. I also space for work in cooking and food rhetorics, particularly within the area of cultural rhetorics. Food and culture are so deeply connected that there is a wide range of possibilities for study, especially in relation to topics like identity, consumerism, activism, tourism, race, gender, space/place, etc. I will conclude with a story. As I sit here, nine hundred miles and over two years away from the people and the places that brought me to this research in the first place, far away from my funny, good-natured father and the sparkle in his eyes and crinkle in his nose as he teaches me how to be an Indian in this society that is constantly trying to erase us, I think about the work ahead, my dissertation project, and how it all ties back to those cultural practices he has been trying to teach me as long as I can remember. I think about the embodied knowledge that I carry with me and my connections to the land. I think about how I always know which direction north is, no matter the circumstances, because I can always feel the pull of the earth in my heart. I think about how doing cultural rhetorics means that this knowledge, this land, the work of gathering and preparing cultural foods, and the relationships between them and between us all make meaning and are all rhetorical and how we must be accountable to them all. I suppose this is what it can look like to constellate disciplinary relations with Native food sovereignty.

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