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Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous Foodways

RESEARCH PAPERS

Decolonizing Diet: Healing by Reclaiming Traditional Indigenous Foodways

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Abstract

Traditional Indigenous foodways remain important for the ongoing health and well being of contemporary Indigenous North American peoples. Drawing partly on primary research on food-related knowledge and experience within the First Nations community of Toronto, the authors trace how colonial policies of assimilation attempted to destroy Indigenous knowledge and in so doing spawned numerous trans-generational health consequences for Indigenous populations, which are still felt today. While colonial attempts at assimilation seriously undermined the integrity of traditional Indigenous foodways, today this cultural knowledge is undergoing a resurgence. Contemporary Indigenous peoples have expanded upon oral traditions with written stories of food gathering and recipes as a means to revitalize food knowledge, cultural integrity and community -- all inextricably linked to health. As such, the authors argue that fostering the resurgence of traditional Indigenous knowledge about food is a necessary in healing the trauma emerging from colonialism. Indigenous cookbooks provide opportunities to share information about traditional culture and food knowledge along with the recipes more conventionally associated with cookbooks.

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Résumé

Les pratiques alimentaires traditionnelles restent importantes pour la santé et le bien-être des populations autochtones contemporaines en Amérique du Nord. À partir de travaux de recherche portant sur les pratiques et les connaissances alimentaires au sein de la communauté autochtone de Toronto, cet article se penche sur les nombreux problèmes de santé trans-générationnels qui résultent de la destruction du savoir autochtone orchestré par les politiques coloniales d'assimilation. Bien que ces tentatives d'assimilation coloniale aient sérieusement ébranlé l'intégrité des pratiques alimentaires autochtones, on assiste aujourd'hui à une résurgence de ces connaissances culturelles. Les traditions orales sont maintenues et renforcées par les populations autochtones contemporaines qui développent une littérature autour de recettes traditionnelles et de récits de cueillette comme moyen de revitaliser la connaissance culinaire, l'intégrité culturelle et le sens de la communauté, tous intimement liés aux questions de santé autochtones. Cette résurgence des connaissances traditionnelles culinaires autochtones est un facteur nécessaire à la réparation des traumatismes dus au colonialisme. Les livres de recettes autochtones sont un excellent médium pour continuer dans ce sens. Ces ouvrages permettent d'interpeller les lecteurs et de partager des ressources pratiques autour de la culture et des connaissances alimentaires tout en fournissant des recettes (à la fois contemporaines et traditionnelles), plus couramment associées à ce genre d'ouvrage.

Introduction

> "*North American Indians didn't have books such as European and other races had, but they had the greatest book of all, `Mother Earth,' a book that preceded all other books.*" [1]

For thousands of years Indigenous North Americans maintained sacred relationships among themselves, with their food and the environment. Storytelling served as a means to share vital lessons across generations about the relationship between plants, animals, and people, and the importance of maintaining relations of respect and reciprocity between humans and their world. [2] The imposition of colonial rule sought to undermine Indigenous peoples' relationships to their ancestral lands and, in turn, to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the larger European body politic. The Indian Act, reserve system, and residential schooling each undermined traditional knowledge, ceremonies, and healing systems, to the extent that now many Indigenous peoples have not learned the knowledge, stories, and ceremonies that had sustained their peoples for millennia before European intervention.

Many of the illnesses disproportionately plaguing contemporary First Nations populations, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, are direct results of colonial measures such as the reserve system, the Indian Act, and residential schooling. These combined factors nearly eradicated traditional Indigenous culture. Nevertheless, much of the knowledge and ceremony of ancient First Nations oral traditions has survived and is now being reclaimed by current generations.

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Recent research on the intergenerational impacts of colonial institutions including the reserve system, Indian Act, and residential schooling point to the specific and largely deleterious effects on traditional Indigenous diets and food knowledge. However, although the 400 year colonial campaign against Indigenous lifeways had devastating and lasting implications for Indigenous peoples, it ultimately failed to completely sever Indigenous peoples from the teachings that allowed them to live an intricately balanced and healthy way of life. Nevertheless, an increasing number of First Nations people [3] are currently re-learning and passing down ancient Indigenous wisdom to future generations, thereby partaking in a cultural resurgence. The stories, teachings, and ceremonies which comprise First Nations' oral traditions play an integral role in this cultural revitalization. While oral traditions still constitute the most appropriate, dynamic, and durable [4] method for encoding and sharing traditional Indigenous knowledge, given current realities, many First Nations people are also turning to print, audio recording, video, and the internet to share knowledge and experiences with wider Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. In relation to traditional Indigenous foodways, the emergence of Indigenous cookbooks can be understood as an extension of this broader trend to revitalize Indigenous knowledge. Cookbooks serve as a potentially useful medium for encoding and sharing traditional food knowledge as well as healing diet-related colonial trauma.

Traditional Indigenous Foodways

As in Genesis, Indigenous creation stories describe how earth, water, wind, plants, and animals were all created first, while human beings were formed last. However, while the western God gives humans dominion over the rest of creation and instructs them to subdue and rule over the Earth, the Creator spirit of Indigenous creation stories gives humans no such instructions. In many Indigenous stories, the Creator instead instructs the plants and animals to take pity on their younger siblings, the humans, and to teach them how to live successfully and ethically with the rest of Creation. It is for this reason that Indigenous North Americans understand that everything in Nature—be it land, water, plant, or animal—has spirit and consciousness and should be treated with respect. From this perspective, plants and animals are considered to be older relatives and teachers who possess valuable teachings concerning how to live harmoniously in specific environments. [5] Margo Greenwood and Sarah de Leeuw relate a teaching by Shushwap elder Mary Thomas, during a mountain hike with one of the authors:

> She came across a small spot in the tall pine trees, a tiny place littered with pine cone pieces: "See these scattered pine cone pieces?" asked Mary. "If you look carefully, you will find a pile of pieces nearby. Underneath the pile will be a cache of pine cones belonging to a squirrel. The little cones will be arranged in rows with the tops pointed downward. This is what my Grandmother taught me. When I was a little girl, I asked my Grandmother why the cones were all pointed downward. 'Because,' she told me, 'when the winter snows begin to melt, and water drips into the cache, it will run downward off the cones and not wreck the nutmeats inside them.' I asked, 'How do the little squirrels know to do that?' Granny said, 'They learn like we do, and then they pass their knowledge onto us.'" [6]

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Anishnaube author Basil Johnston describes how the Indigenous peoples understand the delicate balance between food and the environment:

> Weather, rain, tornado, gale, thunderstorm, cloud, sunshine, winds and their directions, rainlessness, snow, sleet, hail, prolonged cold, sudden warm spells, snowless winters all made some change in the growth of plants and harvest, which in turn altered and had a bearing upon the habits and movement of birds, animals, insects and fish. [7]

Through such keen observations of ecological relationships and the behaviour of plants and animals described above, Indigenous groups across the continent gained in-depth knowledge of the intricacies and potential of local environments and foods.

Consequently, Indigenous peoples knew an incredible variety of foods which were available to be hunted and gathered in their territories. Wild rice, or *Mino-meen*, as it is called by the Anishnaube, is actually a wild grass that

> ...grew in warm waters from the Kawarthas in Eastern Ontario to the Northern States of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota and on into Northwestern Ontario. To the people in the Northwest "Mino-meen" was a staple in much the same way as corn was a staple in the south. [8]

The story of the "discovery" of wild rice is figured within the legend of the Anishnaube "First Man" Nana ’b’ oozoo, who observed birds picking the seeds from the drooping heads of the wild rice.

Corn has been a staple in the traditional diets of many different Indigenous groups. The Anishnaube call corn *Maunda-meen* and describe it as an introduced food that originated from the Mayan people of Latin America. Johnston relates a story in which a grandmother tells her grandson of the coming of *Maunda-meen*; "A stranger will come, listen to him." [9] For the Hopi people of the high deserts of Northern Arizona, corn permeates all aspects of community and ceremonial life. It is viewed simultaneously as "...sustenance, ceremonial object, prayer offering, symbol, and sentient being unto itself." [10] According to Victor Masayesva, a Hopi corn farmer, "You sing to [corn] because they're just like humans, they have their own lives and they like to hear you singing to them." [11]

For the Haudenonshonee, or Iroquoian people, of Southern Ontario and upstate New York the "Three Sisters"—corn, beans, and squash—are *the* life-giving foods. Jeff Metoxen, manager of *Tsyunhehkwa*, the Oneida Community Food System, shares how they came to be food staples for the Oneida:

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> The seeds that Sky Women had brought with her [*sic*] began to grow into the plants and herbal life needed for survival. Plants grown from those first seeds included Corn, Beans, and Squash, and became the Three Sisters for our people. They are the main providers for our sustenance. It is our tradition and responsibility to honor our sustainers. [12]

In many versions of the "Three Sisters" story, corn, beans, and squash must always be planted together. This is sound agricultural advice because these three plants form a symbiotic triad. As Michael Milburn notes:

> Corn is a heavy nitrogen feeder, while beans are nitrogen "fixers," bringing atmospheric nitrogen into the soil with the help of symbiotic bacteria. Corn provides structure to the trailing bean plants, while squash plants reduce weeds and shade the soil. Integrated plantings also reduce pest problems. [13]

Elder Janice Longboat, of the Turtle clan of the Mohawk nation, works as a traditional herbalist who conducts independent research on nutrition and current First Nations health, including corn. In one of several conversations shared over many years at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Longboat discussed her own studies of corn and the glycemic index, or blood sugar levels. She puzzled over the fact that corn, though a long time dietary staple of her people, is restricted in diets for those with diabetes because of its negative effect on blood sugar levels. Through years of observation, discussion, and research, Longboat realized that the traditional corn eaten by the Mohawk people was prepared with a specific type of lye. This lye, when applied to corn as a preservative and drying agent, also affected the sugar content and slowed its absorption. Longboat concluded that this process renders corn safe to consume for those with diabetes. [14] This lye treatment also helps increase the amount of niacin and calcium in the corn. [15] Longboat adds a cautionary note that not all lye is equal, and that there are many dry-lyed corn preparations currently available which are not blood-sugar friendly. Her willingness to share this, along with her wealth of traditional herbal wisdom, has contributed greatly to our understanding of nutrition and Indigenous diets. Other such efforts may reveal important health benefits. For example, game, a traditional component of Indigenous food culture, is dense in protein and low in fat. [16] A breakdown of nutritional components such as this would help educate others about the health benefits of Indigenous foods compared to many Western dietary staples. Such efforts may also instill and promote a sense of cultural pride through food and foodways.

Berries constitute another food source consumed by First Nations peoples which figure prominently in traditional Indigenous foodways and health. Many First Nations members of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto have fond memories of gathering berries for ceremonies or preserves. In 2006 the Toronto Native Community History Project (*Gete-Kindasiwiin Gamig*), together with the Aboriginal Seniors' Circle of Life Program at the Centre, worked together to document a series of planned activities designed to promote health and wellness among their seniors by encouraging activities that would help eliminate social isolation and also reconnect the participants to the land. One of the first activities included a day trip to a farm near the Grand River to pick strawberries. Berry picking became a social event, and one elder took the time to

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explain the importance of Anishnaube berry fasting. She explained how young Anishnaube women refrain from eating berries for a full year after the onset of puberty. This custom functions as a ceremony of serious spiritual commitment, and is still commonly practiced today. She explained how those who missed the ceremony because of residential school or adoption into white families were allowed to enter the fast as adults. She smiled and said that berries were chosen because they were the hardest thing to give up. [17] Fasting is a common practice among many Indigenous groups, which has long been understood to have therapeutic benefits. Raymond Obomsawin writes,

> Indigenous peoples, always keen to observe nature's ways, found that both wild and domesticated animals when injured will refuse all food until recovered. This important lesson was not lost on them and in time fasting became an integral therapeutic as well as spiritual measure for Amerindian people throughout the North American continent. [18]

These are just a few examples of the sophisticated, holistic, and balanced understandings of food among Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island which demonstrate how food is inseparable from Indigenous identity, culture, community, and ceremonial life.

Colonial Trauma and Indigenous Dietary Change

Various colonial measures disrupted these strong relationships between Indigenous culture, foodways, and the land. The circumscription and cessation of First Nations ancestral hunting and fishing grounds through treaties and reserves severely curtailed the viability of traditional subsistence activities, such as hunting and gathering. At the same time, the marginal location of many reserves (economically, politically, geographically and agriculturally) enforced dependence on imported, processed Western foods which tended to be much higher in fat, carbohydrates, and sugar, and lowered their consumption of fruits and vegetables, relative to traditional subsistence diets. [19]

The Indian Act, until relatively recently, included measures which criminalized the ceremonial life of many different First Nations groups. Many Indigenous people were jailed when they persisted in conducting traditional ceremonies in defiance of the Act. In some cases, government rations were withheld from communities which refused to comply with the measures of the Act. Since ceremonies often involved more than one community, another one of the ways to restrict First Nations ceremonial life was to enact restrictions on off-reserve travel. [20] These travel restrictions also curtailed off-reserve subsistence activities such as hunting and gathering.

The separation of Indigenous people from the land has been further exacerbated by the ongoing resource extraction and industrial development on many Canadian reserves which has left damaged ecologies incapable of supporting healthy fish, game, water, and plants. Activities such as logging, mining, and

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manufacturing disrupted the formerly intact, healthy ecosystems and have had deleterious effects on the types and quality of foods available. Winona LaDuke has documented the massive degree of environmental degradation in and around reserves in the United States and Canada. She writes:

> While Native peoples have been massacred and fought, cheated, and robbed of their historical lands, today their lands are subject to some of the most invasive industrial interventions imaginable...317 reservations in the United States are threatened by environmental hazards, ranging from toxic wastes to clearcuts...Over 100 proposals have been floated in recent years to dump toxic waste in Indian communities...Seventy-seven sacred sites have been disturbed or desecrated through resource extraction and development activities...Over the last 45 years, there have been 1,000 atomic explosions on Western Shoshone land in Nevada, making the Western Shoshone the most bombed nation on Earth. [21]

Michael Millburn also notes the deleterious effects of environmental degradation on the integrity of traditional subsistence in Cape Breton:

> I was dismayed by many changes in the natural and cultural environments. Ground?sh have become scarce; in some cases species are listed as threatened. Traditional clam beds are exhausted, and there are problems with heavy metal contamination of seafood. Off-road vehicles now crisscross the island, damaging sensitive coastal ecosystems, riparian zones, and streambeds. Young people are increasingly overweight and inactive and favor fast foods grown and produced in distant lands. [22]

The destruction of traditional food sources has, in turn, led to further reliance on highly processed Western foods.

The residential school system constitutes another major contributor to the incidence of diabetes, high blood pressure, and obesity among contemporary First Nations populations. The Roman Catholic and Anglican churches in tandem with the Canadian government created residential schools in Canada. Although the school system was discussed in the 1830s, schools were fully operative by the 1860s. Some First Nations leaders such as Chief Shingwaukonce, or "Little Pine" of Garden River, were initially in favour of the schools, which they viewed as necessary for their own survival, given colonial realities. [23] However, it was not clear to Indigenous leaders at the time that the prevailing racist and assimilationist assumptions would ultimately lead to a curriculum focused primarily on cultural genocide rather than quality education.

For over 150 years, children attended schools that taught them little more than rudimentary sewing, cooking, and farming skills. What may have been seen as an opportunity for First Nations children to receive a good education became a sadly deficient and offensive system rife with abuse. As stated in Miller's book, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*,

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> A Fundamental problem was poorly prepared or untrained staff. It was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that Indian Affairs and the missionary organizations began to pay serious attention to the selection and training of administrators, teachers, and childcare workers. [24]

This, coupled with "...a tendency to use residential schools as dumping grounds for missionary workers who were a problem for the evangelical bodies," [25] created schools run by either dysfunctional or ill-trained workers in charge of children's lives and education. Miller adds, "Missionary bodies all too often were unwilling or unable to weed out—and keep out—staff who were proven to be guilty of misconduct." [26] Systemic racism along with inadequate training compounded an already tenuous situation. "The essence of the missionary indictment was that Natives were morally and intellectually degenerate, either as a result of post-contact debasement, or from an innately infantile moral nature." [27] This racist line of thinking often justified the severe instances of mistreatment and abuse of children at the hands of residential school staff and administration.

Despite an increase in awareness of the brutal physical and psychological abuses First Nations children suffered at residential schools, discussions rarely focus on the specific affects of food abuse at these institutions. Within these institutions, the quality of food and the context in which it was presented has left a lasting and injurious view of food amongst contemporary survivors. In her book, *Out of the Depths*, Mi'kmaw author Isabelle Knockwood recalls, "Although more than fifty years have passed since their first arrival at the school, many former pupils share vivid memories of being constantly hungry." [28] Miller writes that "...the usual practice was to provide the children exclusively with skim milk, and to substitute less attractive substances for the butter that was destined for the staff or the local market." [29] While Miller elaborates that there were many factors contributing to the food-related issues at residential schools he argues that "...the insistence of missionaries on providing themselves with separate eating facilities and food superior to that served to the children" [30] compounded the feeling among residential school students that they were being treated unfairly. The constant hunger the students experienced forced them to find alternate ways to survive. Peter Julian recalls some of the strategies he used as a small child at the Indian residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia: "[W]e stole all the milk we could to get. A little extra for breakfast. For dinner, we stole all the carrots and turnips we could get a hold of. And we picked leftover food, such as chicken bones from the priest's and Sisters' garbage pails." [31] Such hunger has left many survivors with an unhealthy attitude towards food. Isabelle Knockwood also recalled the many instances of food being withheld as punishment. In her book, she includes this excerpt from survivor Alice Paul:

> One day when some kid made a mistake and threw some potato peelings in a milk can, we were all punished until that person confessed. We had no meals for two days. I was ten and my sister was fourteen. She took a sandwich from the kitchen and sat me on the last hopper in the toilet room. I was so hungry. I was eating my sandwich trying not to make any noise to avoid getting caught. [32]

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Betsey Paul, another Shubenacadie survivor, describes how at dinner she "...used to sit at the same table with Dorothy Doucette. She was so sick, she used to puke right in her plate and Wikew used to beat her in the mouth with a spoon and stuff the food mixed with the vomit right back into her mouth again." [33] One of the strongest reminders of the harsh contrast between traditional Indigenous subsistence and that experienced in residential schools was the child's inability to remedy the situation:

> It seemed when you're brought up in your own home, where you live, if you're lacking in something, you just went in the bush and picked berries. If you needed something to make you healthy, you just went in the bush and it was there for you to make yourself well. [34]

Knockwood summarizes her own food experiences at Shubenacadie this way: "Day after day, week after week, month after month and year after year for seven, eight, nine or ten years, this was the atmosphere we ate our meals in—an atmosphere of fear of the unknown, the unexpected and the reality that you could be next." [35]

Only recently have researchers begun to take note of the horrible food-related abuses at residential schools and their long-term health effects. According to Milburn,

> Indigenous populations are often disproportionately affected by changing diet and lifestyle patterns. Canada's Aboriginal people for example, have rates of diabetes some three times the national average and higher rates of other chronic diseases. [36]

Factors such as stress, inactivity, and diet are frequently cited as directly contributing to the occurrence of both diabetes type one and two.

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To create a connection between residential school food experiences and diabetes awareness, the Toronto Native Community History Program and the Aboriginal Seniors Circle of Life Program at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto planned and implemented an initiative with the assistance of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. [37] The initiative was titled "Keep the Campfires Burning" and was spearheaded by Heather Howard (PhD) and Ruth Cyr, a residential school survivor and Registered Nurse. In her dissertation, Howard describes the function of the initiative:

> Survivors' [*sic*] were asked to reflect on the rupture caused by the residential school experience in access to and knowledge of traditional nutrition, as well as links between the physical abuse associated with diet in residential schools, and survivors' and their families' current eating patterns, physical activity, health status, particularly the diabetes. [38]

The program involved group discussions with residential school survivors as well as exercise and nutrition counseling. It amounted to a huge success. Although participants generally understood diet as a contributory

factor in diabetes, the positive effects of exercise were not so widely known. [39] Subsequently, many program participants took control of their diabetes with diet and exercise and began to understand how they came to their unhealthy diets and relationships with food.

During the ten sessions, 122 discussions were recorded providing a wealth of information and a view into the food experiences of many survivors. Discussions relating a preoccupation with food were directly linked to survivors' own current unhealthy habits, such as overeating, eating too quickly, or hoarding. Howard describes some survivors as marginally better equipped to deal with residential schools because they

> ...were adept at traditional subsistence such as hunting, fishing, gathering, and the ceremonial life that went along with these activities. These survivors could draw on the value of these cultural lessons to cope with hunger, abuse, and other forms of deprivation in the schools. For example, many talked about gathering what they could around the schoolgrounds, and snaring small game to temporarily squash hunger pain that endured throughout the day, every day. [40]

Sharing circle discussions also detailed the hollow or non-nutritional foods such as white flour, white sugar, lard, and watery cereals which were common menu items at residential schools. This was particularly disturbing to many attendees who recall watching staff, nuns, and priests eating full, well-balanced meals consisting of vegetables, butter or margarine instead of lard, and meat dishes. This sharing of experiences was successful, and, as Heather Howard concluded:

> The overall result of this project was to work towards positive health results by turning around the negative collective experience of residential school. Here the living history circles served as a powerful tool to shift the direction of social memory from one in which only the traumatic, awful things about residential school were recalled, to one in which the creativity and resilience of survivors was highlighted. [41]

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The residential schools, through the forced removal of First Nations children from their communities and its misguided assimilationist curriculum, has had many negative intergenerational effects on many First Nations perceptions of food and diet. But perhaps the most insidious result of the residential school system was that it disrupted the integrity of the oral traditions of First Nations groups across the country by forbidding all First Nations languages from being spoken. When children eventually returned to their communities, they were like strangers, many of whom could no longer communicate with their families, friends, and elders. This disrupted the transmission of traditional stories, knowledge, and ceremony from one generation to the next and resulted in generations of First Nations people essentially cut off from languages and cultural heritages which were millennia in the making. Abuses suffered while at residential school have left many Native communities reeling with the effects of intergenerational trauma.

While the damage caused to Indigenous knowledge and cultural forms by various colonial institutions such as the reserve system, Indian Act, and residential schools has severely undermined traditional Indigenous cultures, much of the knowledge, as well as the oral tradition, has survived or been recovered. Today it is undergoing a renaissance. Many contemporary First Nations elders and teachers, whether living in cities or on reserves, have continued to tell traditional stories, hold sacred ceremonies, and pass on ancestral teachings. While oral storytelling has always been a central method for sharing traditional Indigenous knowledge, contemporary Indigenous people have begun to utilize other media of communication to keep and share traditional knowledge. The Four Directions Teachings Website , [42] Aboriginal Voices Radio (AVR), Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), Toronto's "Imaginative" film festival, and the vast amount of printed literature and articles, theatrical plays, and visual arts comprise a short list of the many different ways of traditional Indigenous knowledge currently being shared. While these media, for the most part, lack the dynamism, presence, and longevity of Indigenous oral traditions, and present legitimate concerns about how the Indigenous knowledge and ceremonies recorded through these media will be used, they are useful for recording Indigenous traditions in danger of being lost. [43] These media also offer a means for sharing this information with audiences much larger than otherwise possible, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

An increasingly popular medium for sharing Indigenous food knowledge and food-related traditions is the cookbook. Although cookbooks lack the traditional pedagogy of intact oral traditions, given current realities they can act as a vital tool for recording and sharing Indigenous food knowledge which otherwise risks being forgotten. As such, the merit of Indigenous cookbooks should be measured not only by the simplicity, utility, and succulence of the recipes, but also by the degree to which they are able to preserve the stories, practices, ceremonies, and knowledge that constitute the context in which those recipes were created. To this end, there are some good examples of Indigenous cookbooks which provide traditional knowledge and stories related to the specific recipes. For example, *The Rural and Native Heritage Cookbook*, [44] and *Traditional In* *Recipes from Fort George, Quebec*, [45] each offer insights into traditional Indigenous cuisine, nutrition, and food knowledge through a relatively new media. These books contain recipes for a variety of traditional bu foods, such as porcupine, bear, lichens, and fiddleheads and include such offerings as pemmican, Indigenou "popcorn" (using dried water lily seeds), and Cattails on the Cob. Both books include instructions on how to find wild game, fish, and edible plants, how to skin, clean, and butcher wild game, and how to cook such foods in the bush using simple and portable implements. The books also provide some instruction on how to tan animal hides. [46] In addition to providing a variety of traditional recipes and food preparations, these books encode a large quantity of traditional knowledge on how to live a successful and balanced life in the bush, including the medicinal uses and nutritional value of a variety of Indigenous plants and animals. As such, both books represent important resources for reinvigorating traditional Indigenous knowledge of cuisine, medicine, and nutrition.

Where People Feast: An Indigenous People's Cookbook, written by mother-daughter team Dolly and Annie Watts, [47] offers culinary innovations inspired by tradition with a contemporary twist. Dishes include Sopalali Mousse, made from the berries of the Sopalali bush, and Gitsekgukla wedding cake, a specialty of Dolly's

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Grandmother, which uses bannock dough. Dolly Watts is a member of the Gitk'san First Nation in British Columbia, and daughter Annie is Nuu-Chah-Nulth, Kwakiutl, Makah, and English. The traditional foods included in this book reflect the culture and feast traditions of the Gitk'san territory in central British Columbia and the Nu-chah-nulth territory of the west coast of Vancouver Island.

Storytelling surfaces immediately in this cookbook, beginning with a story about berry picking by Dolly Watts. In this way *Where People Feast* brings the First Nations context of storytelling back into the world of Indigenous foods, yet through the medium of print. The inclusion of such food-related stories represents a means for regaining what has been lost, and reflects the disjunctures created between food, land, and culture created by various colonial assimilationist measures. More stories about the different seasons, traditional legends, or personal reminiscences about Indigenous food traditions need to be recorded for perpetuation. The Watts' book shows that Indigenous cookbooks can contribute greatly to this effort of recovery, however, inclusion of more research and knowledge about the healing properties and nutritional values of Indigenous foods is also necessary for this knowledge to be reintegrated.

Part of the process of revitalizing Indigenous oral traditions involves the use of contemporary media to collect, record, and share oral knowledge that is in danger of disappearing. Indigenous cookbooks may also serve as vehicles for delivering and revitalizing traditional Indigenous food knowledge, as long as the context in which the recipes originated is also preserved through the inclusion of the stories, history, and knowledge related to those recipes. In this way, the simple sharing of recipes has become a contemporary method of reinforcing, preserving, and introducing traditional Indigenous knowledge of cuisine as well as medicine and nutrition. More information on how, where, when, and why Indigenous peoples collected and consumed certain traditional foods is needed.

Traditional knowledge of Indigenous people in North America was never completely forgotten. A large amount of knowledge survived intact despite colonial measures to eradicate it. Many people were not taught this knowledge, since colonial repression forced elders and teachers to be very secretive about ceremonies and traditions for about 100 years. Yet many tribal groups passed on vital knowledge of ceremonies and traditions to a handful of trusted individuals, who in turn kept and passed on that knowledge. Thus, with the knowledge never fully lost, it is now undergoing a renaissance as more people pick up what was temporarily left by the trail.

The reconstitution of traditional Indigenous foodways is a precondition to healing the many traumas of colonization, including unhealthy attitudes toward food and diet that were learned through Western institutions. In this sense, perhaps one of the best methods of reclaiming culture and treating the modern epidemics of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease affecting many Indigenous people is to attend to their root causes by supporting the revitalization of traditional Indigenous knowledge and foodways.

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Footnotes

[1] Basil Johnston, *Honour Earth Mother* (Cape Croker: Kegedonce Press, 2003), xix.

[2] Gregory Cajete, *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education* (Skyland, NC: Kivaki Press, 1994); Raymond Obomsawin, "Traditional Life Styles and Freedom from the Dark Seas of Disease," *Community Development Journal* 18, no. 2 (1983): 187-197.

[3] In this article we use the terms "Indigenous" and "Aboriginal" as broad terms identifying original peoples across the globe, who are understood to share many cultural affinities. We use the terms "First Nations" and "Native" to refer to non-Inuit Indigenous peoples in the Canadian context. The Inuit, although also Indigenous, possess cultural forms which, by virtue of their extremely different environment, differ in many ways from non-Inuit peoples. The term "First Nations" excludes the Métis who are also considered a distinct society.

[4] Harold Adams Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

[5] Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 2.

[6] Margo Greenwood and Sarah de Leeuw, "Teachings from the Land: Indigenous People, Our Health, Our Land, and Our People," *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 30, no. 1 (2007): 49.

[7] Johnston, 20.

[8] Ibid., 44.

[9] Ibid., 40.

[10] Dennis Wall and Virgil Masayesva, "People of the Corn: Teachings in Hopi Traditional Agriculture, Spirituality, and Sustainability," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3 and 4 (2004):436.

[11] Ibid., 437.

[12] Tsyunhehkwa, "Tsyunhehkwa: Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems," Welcome to Tsyunhehkwa (2005), http://tsyunhehkwa.org/.

[13] Michael Milburn, "Indigenous Nutrition: Using Traditional Food Knowledge to Solve Contemporary Health Problems," *American Indian Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2004): 423.

[14] Elder Janice Longboat, conversation with the author at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, 2002.

[15] Milburn, 423.

[16] Lovesick Lake Native Women's Association, 141-143.

[17] Longboat, conversation.

[18] Obomsawin, 193-194.

[19] Kibbe Conti, "Diabetes Prevention in Indian Country: Developing Nutrition Models to Tell the Story of Food-System Change," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 17, no. 3 (2006): 237.

[20] Maureen K. Lux, *Medicine That Walks: Disease, Medicine and Canadian Plains Native, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

[21] LaDuke, 2-3.

[22] Milburn, 412.

[23] J.R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

[24] Miller, 318.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 320.

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[27] Ibid., 186.

[28] Isabelle Knockwood, *Out of the Depths: The Experiences of Mi'kmaw Children at the Residential School at Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia*, 2nd ed. (Lockeport, N.S: Roseway, 1992): 35.

[29] Miller, 293.

[30] Miller, 292.

[31] Knockwood, 36.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 87.

[34] *Living History Circle* (Aboriginal Healing Foundation Project Audio cassette, Toronto Native Community History Program, August 23, 2002).

[35] Knochwood, 44.

[36] Milburn, 414.

[37] Residential School information is from personal accounts shared by community members while author Bodrisky worked as the History Program Coordinator at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, 2002 – 2007.

[38] Heather Howard, *Dreamcatchers in the City: An Ethnohistory of Social Action, Gender and Class in Native Community Production in Toronto* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 2005): 257-258.

[39] According to Milburn, a study conducted in the United States combining both nutrition and exercise to pre-diabetic patients was effective in reducing the incidence of new cases of diabetes by 60% over three years compared to the 31% reduction by a pharmaceutical drug which was administered.

[40] Howard, 260.

[41] Howard, 268.

[42] "4D Interactive," Aboriginal Online Teachings and Resource Centre, http://www.fourdirectionsteachings.com/main.html.

[43] In his book, *Orality and Literacy*, Ong suggests that orality is inherently dynamic, since to speak is to invite dialogue with another (even a fictional other). When one speaks, the speaker enters into a dialogic relationship with their audience, whereby the speaker tailors their utterances in response to cues from a physically present audience. Writing, by contrast, although created for an intended audience, invites no dialogue between the writer and the reader. Thus speech is inherently more dynamic than writing (W.J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (London and New York: Routeledge, 2002)). Since oral traditions are highly dynamic and can be easily changed to reflect new circumstances or emerging knowledge, there is a common misunderstanding that oral traditions are not very persistent through time relative to writing, print, and more recently, electronic media. However, as Harold Innis has insightfully argued, oral traditions are, all things being equal, incredibly persistent and difficult to eradicate (J.W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 161). For instance, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were passed on orally for hundreds of years before being committed to writing circa. 700 BC (Ong, 23). Likewise, Deloria Jr. notes several Indigenous stories that provide detailed knowledge of ancient geological and hydrological events that occurred thousands of years ago (V. Deloria Jr., *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 194-198). It is in this sense that oral traditions are incredibly durable. That residential schools came so close to eradicating oral traditions which had persisted for thousands of years is a testament to the extreme and pervasive nature of the cultural genocide perpetuated by those involved.

[44] Lovesick Lake Native Women's Association, *The Rural and Native Heritage Cookbook* (Toronto: Totem Books, 1985).

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[45] First Nations and Inuit students of St. Philips School, Fort George, *Traditional Indian Recipes from Fort George, Quebec* (Cobalt, Ont: Highway Book Shop, 1971).

[46] Lovesick Lake Native Women's Association; First Nations and Inuit Students of St. Philips School.

[47] Dolly and Annie Watts, *Where People Feast: An Indigenous People's Cookbook*, 1st ed. (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2007).

Biographical notices

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Jon Johnson lectures on Indigenous health and healing in the Health and Society program at York University. He completed his BA and MA in Anthropology at the University of Western Ontario and is currently in the process of completing a PhD in the Communication and Culture program at York University. His doctoral dissertation is focused on First Nations oral traditions told within and about Toronto and their importance to the ongoing health of First Nations people living within the city.

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