

Edible Memory: Revitalizing Ancestral Appetite, Taste, and Flavor through Indigenous Culinary
Art and Cuisine as Food Sovereignty

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Abstract

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This dissertation presents a culinary ethnography focusing on the Indigenous Food Sovereignty movement within the kitchens and kitchenspaces of Turtle Island. By adopting decolonizing methodologies and alterNative Indigenous approaches, combined with sensory observation and hands-on cooking experiences, a profound exploration into the world of Indigenous culinary arts, cuisine, and culture was achieved. This research journey revealed the nuances of embodied ancestral memory, examining how such memories are transmitted and activated through culinary practices. The immersive nature of the study fostered an intimate and sensorial perspective on culinary anthropology, leading to the formulation of novel Indigenous culinary methodologies. Through this work, deeper insights are provided into the rich tapestry of Indigenous culinary heritage and its significance in contemporary movements centered on food and identity.

Acknowledging the Food Cosmologies and Ecologies of Turtle Island

Celebrating Roots: A Land Acknowledgment of Indigenous Culinary Heritage

Respect and recognition are given to the First Peoples who have stewarded, nurtured, and thrived on this land for countless generations. The intricate web of life presents itself, from plants that root deeply and reach towards the sky, to the diverse animals that roam its expanses, soar above, and navigate its waters.

Ancient foods, cultivated and foraged, have sustained communities, echoing the resilience and vitality of the land's First Peoples. The brilliance of Indigenous culinary innovators and practitioners emerges in the wisdom and creativity with which they transform these ingredients. Using age-old culinary methods, imbued with love, skill, and ancestral memory, dishes are crafted that resonate deeply with history and spirit. Each taste embodies the vast and rich tapestry of Indigenous knowledge systems. Flavors evoke connections to ancestral tales, traditions, and enduring narratives. The essence of Indigenous communities is woven into every aroma, texture, and nuance. In this space, the importance of these culinary knowledges is acknowledged and celebrated, recognizing their role in sustaining, nurturing, and sharing the human experience. Here, the bond between land, food, and Indigenous wisdom is continuously honored and upheld.

Embodied Geography: My Body, the Land

I begin with gratitude towards my own body – a sacred terrain bearing truth, medicine, and memories. A body that connects, seeks, and heals through food, echoing ancestral wisdom, ecological balance, and healing landscapes. This body's intrinsic knowledge guided me to Turtle Island, Pachamama, Tonanztin – spaces synonymous with my ancestral kitchen and my mother's

womb. It is where I rekindle ancestral wisdom, honor our commitments to it, and ensure its transmission to present and future generations.

Ecological Culinary Wisdom

The ancestral kitchen is a repository of enduring ecological culinary insights. It has instilled in me the deep bonds between plants, land, water, and all creatures. This timeless bond, crafted by cosmic wisdom, underscores the importance of embracing LESSON (Local, Ecological, Sustainable, Seasonal, Organic, Native) foods. Additionally, age-old culinary techniques are vital for the rejuvenation and restoration of Indigenous food and practices. This wisdom, manifest in Indigenous culinary art and traditions, is pivotal for protecting Indigenous spirit, identity, and food culture. To truly honor this, one must revisit Indigenous tastes and preferences where this wisdom is deeply embedded.

Cosmic Food Memory

Food carries the essence of memory. I pay homage to our age-old, traditional, and cultural food memory, interwoven with cosmic and elemental relations. Gratitude is extended to the moon, Meztli, and the sun, Tonatiuh, for their roles in our food systems. The four elemental pillars – earth, wind, water, and fire – are indispensable to our culinary universe. The cardinal directions to hold significance, guiding our understanding of food origins. Expressing deep appreciation for the landscapes I cherish – from Tongva-LA and the Southwest to Pachamama-Turtle Island – I acknowledge the oceans, forests, and other ecosystems that enrich our culinary heritage.

Ultimately, I recognize the resilient teachings of the land and my body's role in upholding ecological harmony, ensuring the vibrancy of our culinary traditions. To all these interconnected relations, I say, Aho.

Acknowledgements: Tlazocamati

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To my family, friends, students, and community, your boundless energy, affirmations, and presence at my events have been a source of strength. You are all truly remarkable! My parents deserve special mention for ensuring I never went hungry, my children for their boundless love, my sisters for always cheering me on, and my dear Coco – my anchor, confidant, and love – for his patience, understanding, and tenderness. Lastly, I hold in my heart the unending love and guidance from my abuelito Ramiro Sifuentes and Yaya, who watch over me from the realm of Mictlan–Spirit World.

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Table of Contents

Copyright.....ii

Abstract.....iii

Acknowledging the Food Cosmologies and Ecologies of Turtle Island.....iv

Acknowledgements: Tlazocamati.....vi

Preface, Flavors of Ancestry: A Culinary Odyssey from Womb to Hearth.....xvi

 Born into Culinary Anthropology.....xvi

 Lessons from the Hearth.....xvii

 A Tapestry of Culinary Memories.....xviii

 Reclaiming Flavor: Shadows, Memories, and Culinary Heritage.....xxi

 Decolonizing the Palate: A Journey to Culinary Heritage.....xxiii

 Reclaiming Taste: Cooking for the Next Generation.....xxiv

 Turtle Island's Culinary Tapestry: A Journey with Indigenous Chefs.....xxv

List of Figures

Figure 1: Theory of Embodiment, Transmission, and Activation of Ancestral Memory
in Indigenous Culinary Art and Cuisine.....182

List of Images

Image 1: Beans on Shelf.....53

Image 2: Chef Walter Whitewater.....83

Image 3: Headpiece Appetizer.....84

Image 4: Spirit Plate.....	86
Image 5: Friendship House.....	87
Image 6: Trip to Coteau des Prairies Lodge.....	88
Image 7: Duck Tamal.....	90
Image 8: Bison Tamal Recipe.....	132
Image 9: Altar at Chef’s Table.....	139
Image 10: Apache Bean Soup.....	140
Image 11: Taste of Native Cuisine Menu.....	150
Image 12: Tostada de Horno.....	153
Image 13: Western Apache Seed Mix Fritter.....	158

Chapter One, Gastronomic Echoes –The Persistence and Resurgence of Indigenous

Culinary Heritage.....	1
Embodied Flavors – A Journey Through Indigenous Culinary Wisdom.....	1
The (De)Coloniality of Food: An Exposition of Culinary Memory.....	3
Contrasting Culinary Worlds.....	4
Evolving Culinary Landscapes.....	4
The Legacy of Culinary Mestizaje: From Hierarchy to Resilience.....	5
Indigenous Culinary Cultures: A Resurgence Rooted in Tradition.....	6
Indigenous Food Sovereignty: More Than Just Food.....	6
Reconnecting with the Land: #PlantBack Initiative.....	7
The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement: A Culinary Renaissance.....	7
A Tapestry of Indigenous Foodways: From Global to National Vistas.....	8
Local Culinary Scenes and The Journey of Reindigenization.....	8

The Dance of Ancestral Tastes and Genetic Memories.....	9
A Deep Dive into Cultural Food Memory.....	9
Reverence for Original Culinary Instructions.....	9
The Essence of Cultural Food Memories.....	10
Embracing Culinary Conviviality.....	10
Healing Through Indigenous Culinary Arts.....	10
AlterNative Indigenous Culinary Anthropology and the Culinary Legacy.....	11
Ancestral Appetites.....	14
Ancestral Tastes.....	14
Ancestral Flavors.....	15
Terms and Significance.....	15
The Culinary Pathway to Indigenous Revival.....	18
Rekindling the Flame of Culinary Heritage.....	21
Kitchenspaces, Table Memories, and the Culinary Heartbeat.....	23
Delving Deeper: The Taste of Heritage and Homeland.....	23
Healing through Culinary Stories.....	24
Chapter Two, Colonial Cultures of Taste, Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and Embodiment of Food.....	25
Colonial Cultures of Taste: Culinary Codification and the Legacy of Colonization.....	26
Reclaiming the Culinary Narrative.....	29
Indigenous Food Sovereignty: A Tapestry of Tradition, Resistance, and Renewal.....	30
Defining Food Sovereignty.....	30
Indigenous Voices on Food Sovereignty.....	30

The Healing Journey and the Land.....	31
Guiding Principles of Indigenous Food Sovereignty.....	31
Embodiment of Food: A Deeper Exploration into Sensing and Being.....	32
Epistemology of the Land.....	35
Indigenous Taste Memory as Embodiment.....	36
Chapter Three, AlterNative Culinary Visions: Reimagining Anthropology Through Indigenous Culinary Arts.....	39
Decolonizing Methodologies in Culinary Anthropology: The AlterNative Way.....	40
Anthropology In the Kitchen: Decolonizing Culinary Narratives.....	41
Anthropology in the Culinary Domain: Navigating Kitchenspace and The Art of Culinary Ethnography.....	43
Indigenous Culinary Epistemology: Savoring the Depths of Ancestral Wisdom and Food Sovereignty.....	45
Embracing the Culinary Heritage: Journey of an Indigenous Plant-based Xicana Indigena Chef.....	46
Sacred Spaces: Navigating the Indigenous Culinary Landscape.....	48
Journey through Indigenous Culinary Realms: An Odyssey of Kitchenspaces and Native Gastronomy.....	49
A Deep Exploration of Indigenous Chef Tables: Immersing in Sacred Culinary Geographies.....	51
Experiencing the Indigenous Chef Tables.....	52
Immersive Culinary Research: From Observer to Participant at the Sunrise Resort in White Mountain Apacheria.....	53

From Observer to Culinary Contributor.....	54
Transcending Roles: From Chef to Guest.....	54
Immersive Participation at “Feasting at the Grinding Stone”.....	54
A Culinary Sojourn to the Canpasapa Wi.....	55
Ra Ndakuu+Taza: A Culinary Tapestry of Memories.....	56
Experiencing the Heartbeat of Indigenous Culinary Culture at Food Sovereignty Gatherings.....	56
Revitalizing Traditions: A Tale from the Indigenous Kitchenspaces.....	57
The Native American Culinary Association (NACA) Indigenous Food Symposiums: A Confluence of Heritage, Land, and Gastronomy.....	59
The Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summits: A Convergence of Heritage, Culinary Artistry, and Stewardship.....	60
Honoring Heritage Through Culinary Craft: “Tlazocamati Tonanztin”	62
Crafting an Indigenous Culinary Anthropology: The Xicana Indígena Methodology....	63
Culinary Ethnography in Indigenous Kitchenspaces.....	64
Indigenous Culinary Ethnography: A Sacred Journey into Kitchenspaces.....	66
The Journey of Decolonizing Culinary Analysis.....	68
Refining the Anthropological Palate through Indigenous Wisdom.....	70
Chapter Four, Revered Terrains: The Living Essence of Indigenous Kitchenspaces.....	73
Indigenous Kitchens and Their Sacred Spaces.....	74
The Essence of the Indigenous Kitchen.....	76
The Kitchen of Rituals and Ceremony.....	76
Echoes of Ancestry: My Journey into the Heart of the Indigenous Restaurant	

Kitchen.....	78
The Indigenous Pop-Up and Community Kitchen: A Testament to Tradition and Resilience.....	80
Embracing Heritage Through Indigenous Kitchenspaces at “A Taste of Native Cuisine” in Arizona.....	82
Journey to the Ra Ndakuu+Taza—Feast of the Sorcerer and the Eagle Pop-Up in Minnesota.....	85
The Indigenous Outdoor Kitchen: Embracing Holistic Culinary Spaces.....	90
The Expansive Role of the Community Commercial-Style Kitchen.....	93
Delving into the Spirit of the Outdoor Wood Fire Kitchen.....	95
Journey to the Maple Syrup Wood House Kitchen.....	96
Witnessing the Craft in the Outdoor Prep and Teaching Kitchen.....	98
An Ode to Ancient Traditions: The Elm Bark Wigwam Smokehouse Experience.....	99
An Intimate Glimpse into the Skinning and Drying Kitchen: A Celebration of Indigenous Wisdom and Sustainability.....	101
The Foraging and Edible Landscape Kitchen: A Living Testimony of Indigenous Connection with Nature	102
Indigenous Kitchens and Kitchenspaces: A Deep Dive into the Heart of Indigenous Culinary Heritage.....	104
Chapter Five, Echoes of Ancestry: The Palabra of the Spirit of Food - A Sacred Dialogue with Indigenous Pantries, Culinary Technologies, and Recipes.....	107
The Depths of Indigenous Pantries: Chronicles of Culinary Heritage.....	109
Chronicles of the Dry Pantry: A Repository of Ancestral Microchips.....	111

Cultural Resonance: Stories from the Indigenous Cold Pantry.....	114
Cooking & Culinary Technologies: Bridging Ancestral Wisdom and Contemporary Innovation.....	118
The Molcajete: Behind the Flavors of Tradition.....	120
Whispers From the Potagon: A Culinary Dance of Tradition and Ecology.....	124
Vessels of Memory: Barro Pottery.....	126
Baskets as Bridges Between Culture, Artistry and Tradition.....	128
Beyond Ingredients: Choreographing Flavors in the Indigenous Kitchen.....	131
The Essence of Indigenous Culinary Wisdom.....	135
Chapter Six, Ancestral Embodiment and Culinary Heritage: Memory Activation in Indigenous Menus, Hospitality, and the Art of Plating Edible Landscapes.....	137
Indigenous Dining and Hospitality.....	138
Living Codices: The Storytelling Power of Indigenous Menus.....	145
Edible Narratives: The Culinary Artistry and Storytelling of Indigenous Plating.....	154
Indigenous Cuisine: Storytelling and Ancestral Memories on Turtle Island.....	160
Chapter Seven, Indigenous Culinary Art and Cuisine: A Transmitter and Activator of Ancestral and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.....	164
Culinary Kinship: Ancestral Memory and the Resilience of Indigenous Foodways.....	164
Embodied Tastes: Indigenous Culinary Arts and Ancestral Memory.....	175
Embodied Ancestral Flavors: Theoretical Explorations in Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Culinary Memory Transmission.....	179
Epistemology of Taste and Flavor: Understanding Indigenous Food Knowledge.....	183
Indigenous Culinary Epistemology: The Cosmic Origin of Knowledge.....	185

Indigenous Epistemology of the Body: Taste, Flavor, and Ancestral Knowledge.....	187
The Multifaceted Challenges and Rewards of Indigenous Culinary Anthropology.....	193
Recommendations for Advancing Research in Decolonizing Culinary Practices.....	195
Reflections on a Culinary Journey: The Final Tasting.....	197
References.....	200

Preface, Flavors of Ancestry: A Culinary Odyssey from Womb to Hearth

Born into Culinary Anthropology

From my very inception, my culinary journey was preordained. In the nurturing enclave of my mother's womb, my initiation into the world of culinary anthropology began. The essence of our culture seeped into me, an intimate symphony of flavors I started comprehending even before I took my first breath. After birth, my mother seamlessly extended this flavorful heritage. She lovingly infused me with the nuances of our cultural lineage, from the taste of our heritage (Perez 2009) in her breastmilk to the first foods that would dance on my young palate.

These early gustatory experiences were more than mere sustenance; they were the whispers of generations past. Each flavor was an ancestral beacon, activating deep-seated memories in my spirit. My infancy was marked not just by growth in size, but by the blossoming of an intrinsic fascination with food's myriad dimensions. The flavors, textures, colors, aromas, and even the symphonies of sound associated with cooking all beckoned me with an almost magnetic pull.

Observing this burgeoning interest, my mother thoughtfully provided tools that would help nurture and hone my inherent passion. My childhood 'toys' were not the usual dolls or action figures. They were miniature replicas of traditional culinary tools: a metate to grind, a molcajete to crush and blend, *platos de barro* (clay plates), clay pots and pans that echoed the authenticity of our kitchen, a molinillo to froth, and those timeless wooden spoons that felt so right in my small hands.

But it was not just the tools. My mother also gifted me a wooden play kitchen, complete with its own oven, stove, and sink—a child's culinary haven. As I engaged in my version of 'play,' my actions mirrored the culinary ballet I observed daily. The careful gestures of my mother, the

traditional techniques of my Yaya, and the age-old secrets wielded by my abuelitas became the choreography of my own imaginary kitchen.

Armed with ceramic and plastic food replicas, I recreated dishes, mimicking not just the process, but the heart and soul behind each preparation. This was not just play; it was a reverent emulation, a testament to the culinary legacy that flowed in my veins.

Lessons from the Hearth

My relentless enchantment with flavors did not go unnoticed. The matriarchs of my family, recognizing my avidity, graciously invited me into their sacred spaces: their kitchens. These women, who shaped our family's culinary legacy, saw in me not just a young girl – a *chiquilla* – but an eager apprentice, ready to soak in the wisdom passed down through generations.

Language might have been a barrier as my English was halting at best, but the lexicon of food was universal. More than just sustenance, food became my language, my bridge. It linked me to the stories and traditions of my *abuelas*, and allowed me to communicate, not through words, but through the art of creation and taste. It was a medium that spoke directly to the soul, nourishing not just the body but the very essence of who I was.

My daily ritual became a dance of colors and aromas. My mother, sensing my enthusiasm, would bring forth a bright yellow and black two-tier stool, my very own pedestal. From here, I could reach the countertops that seemed as expansive as my aspirations. It was on this stage that I would help prepare the daily salsa, a staple in our family meals.

Under my mother's watchful eye, I would observe the transformation of ingredients. Some days, jalapeños and tomatoes would be roasted, their skins blistering and blackening to give a smoky

depth. On others, they would be boiled, making them tender and bursting with flavor. With the addition of a fresh garlic clove, plucked from my grandmother's garden, the stage was set.

The final act took place in our cherished *molcajete*, a vessel that held stories of generations. This was not just any *molcajete*; it had once belonged to my biological grandmother, Jovita. As the ingredients came together, crushed and blended, the legacy of Jovita and the lineage of women before her echoed in every taste, every texture. In those moments, standing on that stool, I was not merely assisting in the kitchen; I was becoming an intrinsic part of a legacy, crafting memories one flavor at a time.

A Tapestry of Culinary Memories

Yaya, with her spirited and patient demeanor, was another pillar in my gastronomic upbringing. Much like my mother, Yaya would place me atop a stool, transforming it into a platform of culinary education. From this elevated vantage point, I was privy to the intricate ballet of her hands. Whether she was meticulously prepping vegetables or mastering the art of slicing and mashing, Yaya's kitchen was a world of wonder.

Often, our culinary lessons would extend beyond the confines of her kitchen. Together, we would venture into her front yard, where the resilient nopales stood tall. Under the warmth of the sun, she would show me the art of harvesting these prickly pears. Yet, her lessons did not stop there. Yaya believed in hands-on experience. Empowering me with a paring knife, she would allow me that one precious slice, instilling in me a sense of responsibility and achievement.

Abuelita Panchita, on the other hand, introduced me to the rhythmic cycle of nature. With her, the kitchen was not just about cooking. It was a holistic experience that started in the garden.

From plucking squash, fresh and tender, to the daily ritual of gathering eggs, her lessons taught me reverence for the source of our meals. I still recall the texture of feathers in my hands as we prepared pigeons, or the meditative task of shucking maize, each golden kernel telling tales of harvests past.

In union, these formidable women wove a tapestry of memories and skills, which became the foundation of my culinary identity. They imparted more than just techniques or recipes; they taught me about our ancestral ties to the land, our community's foodways, and the essence of *sazon*. Through their guidance, I did not just learn to cook; I developed an intuition for flavors, a palate that could discern the histories and stories embedded in each bite. Their teachings went beyond the tactile, guiding me to cherish our cultural heritage and recognize the profound role of taste in shaping who I am.

Tasting was not just an act for me as a child, it was a doorway into a vast world of culinary heritage. Every flavor, every ingredient held stories and secrets, beckoning me to delve deeper. Whether I was in the kitchen experimenting, engaging with the cooking process, or simply relishing a meal, the ingredients spoke to me in whispers and riddles. I found myself constantly interrogating them: where did they originate? How did they grow and transform from seedlings to what lay before me on the plate? What were the mysteries of their taste profiles, and how could they be elevated even further?

This unquenchable curiosity led me to incessantly tweak and play with flavors. I recall the countless times I would drizzle fresh molcajete salsa onto my mom's comforting *caldo de res*, taking a bite, only to be consumed with thoughts of what could make it sing even more

harmoniously on my palate. It was this insatiable need to adjust, to modify, to experiment that dominated many of my culinary encounters.

Looking back, I understand that my quest was not solely about finding the perfect balance of flavors or inventing new dishes. Rather, it was a deeper yearning to reconnect with my roots. Every taste, every ingredient became a mnemonic device, helping me remember and celebrate my ancestral heritage foods and the distinct flavors they encapsulated. More than just physical tastes, these were pathways to genetic taste memories – echoes of countless meals and moments shared by generations before me. By immersing myself in this ever-evolving dance of tastes and textures, I was not just indulging my palate; I was weaving a tapestry of cultural taste memories, crafting a sensory map that always led me back to the comforting embrace of home.

In my younger days, embracing the nickname “Gorda” was a badge of honor. It was not just a moniker but a testament to my unwavering love for the flavors and culinary treasures of my homeland. It was a nod to my insatiable appetite, which was, in many ways, a deep-seated yearning to connect with my Mexicana roots, to immerse myself in the vibrant tapestry of Mexico’s gastronomic history. But as the years rolled on, and I began to see the world through a wider lens, the weight of that name grew heavier.

The transition was subtle at first. In a society where words often carry dual meanings, the term “Gorda,” when translated to English, took on a different, more derogatory hue. I became increasingly conscious of its implications in a culture that often places undue emphasis on appearance. The name that once symbolized my pride and passion for my cultural identity now seemed to mock me, becoming a stark reminder of society’s penchant for judgment. But deep down, I understood that my mother had baptized me with that name out of affection, not malice.

Yet, despite the external noise, my “gora” appetite never waned. It remained the driving force behind my culinary adventures, the compass guiding me deeper into the annals of my heritage. As I transitioned into adolescence and young adulthood, my relationship with food matured. No longer was it just about savoring flavors; it became a quest for knowledge, a journey to uncover the stories and histories behind each ingredient and dish. The questions became more profound, transcending mere taste: What were the origins of these foods? How did they weave their way into the rich fabric of my culture?

The universe, in its infinite wisdom, responded. As I embarked on this culinary pilgrimage, serendipity began to play its part, unveiling answers in the most unexpected corners. These revelations not only enriched my understanding of my gastronomic heritage but also shaped my identity, fortifying my bond with the flavors and traditions that had been my anchor since childhood.

Reclaiming Flavor: Shadows, Memories, and Culinary Heritage

In 1998, upon settling in Northern California, my days became enmeshed with the majestic trails of redwood forests. These ventures became more than mere strolls; they were spiritual connections, allowing me to tap into the visceral landscape of my embodied food memories and ancestral genetics. Foraging in this untamed territory, especially during a memorable stay at an off-grid homestead by the Klamath River, led to profound epiphanies. As I collected wildflowers and berries for our evening meal, a cascade of emotions enveloped me – a blend of loss, rediscovery, and the echo of a distant memory.

In that profound moment, I was awakened to my Indigenous roots, experiencing an ethereal, almost transcendent sensation, only to be swiftly overshadowed by a profound darkness. This

looming shade resonated with the teachings of the revered Xicana Indigena feminist scholar, Gloria Anzaldua – her concept of the shadow beast’s darkness. It was as if the ancient Mexica earth goddess, Coatlicue, with her two serpent heads, was casting her shadow upon me. Yet, rather than instilling fear, she illuminated a path to understanding. Through her presence, I realized the ties of my ancestry to this very land and their nurturing relationship with it, a bond severed by the scars of Spanish and American colonialism.

Coatlicue’s lessons were not just historical; they were also gastronomic. Through her, I reencountered the tastes of home: the springtime freshness of nopales, the fiery summer embrace of chile poblanos, the autumnal comfort of a three-sister casserole, and the rich, wintry meats of bison, venison, and rabbit. These flavors stirred in me dormant memories of culinary traditions passed down from generation to generation.

This spiritual rendezvous spiraled me back in time. I was taken back to the very beginning, in my mother's womb, savoring the world through amniotic fluid rich with the essence of my cultural culinary heritage. It reminded me of my earliest memories of tasting the legacy of our people through her nurturing breastmilk and the first foods I was introduced to. Memories also fluttered to my adolescent adventures: the tactile joy of climbing trees barefooted to pluck ripe figs or using my toes as tools to gather clams from canal beds as I swam. I reveled in the kinetic memories of cultural gatherings, like the December *tamaladas*, and understood the gravity of their significance in our cultural tapestry.

In these revelations, one truth became strikingly clear: these flavors, these memories, were a testament to a heritage that demands to be remembered, celebrated, and passed on.

Decolonizing the Palate: A Journey to Culinary Heritage

In the prime of my mid-20s, while still nurturing my passion as a budding culinary anthropologist, I received a disconcerting revelation. Owing to my family's medical history, I was predisposed to diabetes. This news was baffling. Could the cherished foods of my cultural heritage potentially be detrimental to health?

My quest for understanding propelled me to dive deeper into the roots of our culinary legacy. Which among the foods I revered were authentically native to the Americas, and which were imports? Given the profound influence of Spanish colonialism on Mesoamerica, notably present-day Mexico, I recognized that what I had long identified as “Mexican food” was in fact a rich tapestry interwoven with both Indigenous and European threads. It became evident that many staples like chicken, beef, pork, lamb, dairy products, wheat, olives, sugar, and wine were foreign introductions that had reshaped the culinary landscape of Mesoamerican fare. Enlightened by this knowledge, I was compelled to make a pivotal choice: I embraced a plant-based lifestyle, aiming to decolonize my diet. This epiphany, as encapsulated by Gloria Anzaldua in her *Nepantla* interview, was an unmistakable sign that it was time for transformation.

In 2008, spurred by this newfound understanding and driven by a revolutionary spirit, a colleague and I launched an Indigenous plant-based catering initiative named *Cocina Popular de Aztlan*. Alongside, we began a blog, *Decolonial Food for Thought (DFFT)*, to ignite a culinary rebellion against colonial influences. Through this venture, we channeled our ancestors, allowing the essence of cultural and traditional food memories to blossom through each taste and flavor. Our culinary creations became symbols of resistance, challenging the colonization of our very bodies, and addressing the profound impact of such violation on our senses of taste.

Our endeavors were met with immense appreciation, especially within Indigenous and decolonial culinary realms. The nascent era of social media became our ally, aiding in bridging communities, connecting with those sharing similar culinary ideologies, and nurturing what eventually burgeoned into the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement.

Reclaiming Taste: Cooking for the Next Generation

Embracing this new approach to nourishment was more than just a culinary epiphany; it was a profound act of reclamation. This philosophy became even more critical when I approached my second pregnancy in 2010. Grounded in the understanding that taste development commences within the womb, I was committed to decolonizing my prenatal nutrition. By favoring local, ecological, seasonal, sustainable, organic, and Native foods, I sought to nurture a child with taste buds untouched by colonial influences.

Drawing from both personal experiences and the revelations from womb ecology and epigenetic research, I recognized the profound implications of a baby's inaugural foods. Such early exposures have the power to shape food inclinations, dietary selections, and even life expectancy. The realization that cooking with a decolonized approach could potentially mend the epigenetic rifts caused by white settler colonialism ignited an even deeper passion within me. This mission was not solely about reclaiming our culinary heritage; it was about healing generations past, present, and future.

As I delved deeper into this culinary journey, I began connecting with others similarly inspired. Together, we formed a community bound by a shared mission: to rediscover, celebrate, and heal through our ancestral foods and traditions.

Turtle Island's Culinary Tapestry: A Journey with Indigenous Chefs

In 2012, a serendipitous email bridged two worlds within the vast realm of Indigenous culinary heritage. Chef Nephi Craig, having stumbled upon the DFFT Facebook page, reached out with an introduction and an intriguing proposition. He spoke passionately of the Native American Culinary Association (NACA) and its upcoming conference, extending an invitation for my participation. From that pivotal moment, I became deeply intertwined with NACA, donning various roles from presenter to organizer, and even preparing delectable meals for many of its events.

NACA became the nexus of my culinary journey, providing a platform where I could engage with, learn from, and cook alongside Indigenous chefs from all corners of Turtle Island. Each collaboration, whether it was orchestrating conferences or crafting pop-up dinners, enriched my culinary repertoire and deepened my connection to Indigenous gastronomy.

The lessons learned were myriad. While some were technical, many delved deep into the ancestral wisdom embedded in Abuelita culinary traditions. As a stagier, I had the honor of working shoulder-to-shoulder with luminaries like Chef Nephi Craig and Chef Sean Sherman of the Sioux Chef. Their culinary prowess, combined with the rich traditions from various tribes and regions, infused every dish with stories, histories, and legacies.

Being a part of these events was not just about technique and tradition; it was a reaffirmation of identity. As an Indigenous chef from the Southwest, I had the unique privilege of infusing Mesoamerican (P'urhépecha, Huasteca, Zacateca) sazón and culinary insights into a variety of dishes. My presence was more than just participation; it was a testament to the rich tapestry of

Indigenous flavors, a celebration of the diverse sazóns that collectively define the culinary heritage of Turtle Island.

Chapter One, Gastronomic Echoes –

The Persistence and Resurgence of Indigenous Culinary Heritage

“This return to cooking is a compelling collective movement in which each chef individually interprets culinary ancestral knowledge as they make their pathways in a historical journey of revitalization...each individual that has emerged in this culinary movement brings valuable cultural knowledge and experience to the table. Each chef is a thread in the gastronomic tapestry of Indigenous foodways” --Chef Nephi Craig in *Native Foodways*

Oppression, colonization, and time have waged wars against Indigenous culinary heritage. Yet, like the enduring beat of a heart, it has refused to fade. Resilient and undying, it pulsates in the whispers of the wind, the flavors of the earth, and the very DNA of Indigenous communities. This culture is not just about food but an embodiment of a people’s spirit, history, and connection to the land. From the verdant fields to the vast oceans, and the songs of the birds to the tales of the ancestors, it has survived - carried forward by devoted hands, passionate hearts, and countless generations who have tasted and remembered.

In this chapter, we delve deep into the rich tapestry of Indigenous culinary culture, exploring its undying resilience in the face of external threats and its renaissance in contemporary times. We will uncover how today’s chefs, artisans, and food enthusiasts are not just reviving, but also redefining and celebrating this heritage, ensuring its flavors continue to resonate for generations to come.

Embodied Flavors - A Journey Through Indigenous Culinary Wisdom

From time’s earliest whisper, food has graced the Indigenous kitchen, becoming more than just sustenance but a symphony of stories, echoing place-based wisdom (Basso, 1996) and original culinary teachings (Nelson, 2008). This gastronomic knowledge, referred to as Indigenous culinary ethnobotany, provides a roadmap to maintain an “ecological relation” – a profound,

kincentric bond – with everything that encompasses our environment, from flora and fauna to the cosmos (Salmón 2000). This bond is one of mutual reverence, acknowledging each entity’s unique wisdom, essence, and offerings, thus fostering a culture centered on care, collaboration, and gratitude (Salmón, 2000; Nelson, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013). Food becomes a vessel of these ancient teachings, shaping the very fabric of culture, traditions, and the unforgettable mosaic of taste memories.

Between 2015 and 2019, these very taste memories became my compass, leading me through the diverse terrains of North Dakota, Iowa, Oregon, Northern and South California, Minnesota, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Michigan, Connecticut, Colorado, and Wisconsin. I embarked on this culinary pilgrimage to immerse myself in the pulsating heart of Indigenous food sovereignty and the Native food movements that pepper the vast kitchenspaces of Turtle Island. This gastronomic exploration demanded every fiber of my being – mind, body, and spirit – to deeply connect, absorb, and engage with Indigenous culinary maestros, their cherished lands, age-old culinary tools, and most vitally, the food itself. Embracing my role as a “kitchen curandera,” a healer harnessing the power of “earth medicines” (Ruiz 2021: 6), much like Chef Felicia Cocotzin beautifully articulates, I was given the honor to ‘chef it up.’ In this culinary dance, I witnessed the miraculous rekindling of ancestral memories through the intricate tapestry of Indigenous culinary art, traditions, and culture. Simultaneously, I explored how this gastronomic renaissance could become a beacon for ancestral justice, healing, and a resurrection of Indigenous memories. But to truly appreciate this culinary rebirth, it is imperative to traverse back in time and understand the transformational journey of Indigenous foods and their stories.

The (De)Coloniality of Food: An Exposition of Culinary Memory

Before the onset of colonial encounters, the Indigenous people of Turtle Island flourished. They nourished their communities with the bounty of the land, upholding an intricate balance between human appetite and the environment, cherishing indigenous culinary ecologies rooted in tastes and flavors that spoke of ancestral memory (Coe 1994, Pilcher 1998, Earle 2012). Yet, the entry of colonial forces ruptured this intricate balance, leading to disconnections and losses that reverberated through generations, stripping them of their ancestral taste memory, foodways, and culinary culture.

Indigenous societies had developed a unique relationship with their food, practicing care, sharing, and gratitude. This kincentric (Salmon 2000) approach to food was more than just about sustenance; it played a central role in shaping the cultural fabric of these communities, making them cultures of regeneration. However, with the advent of white settler colonialism, Indigenous food practices, laden with earth-based flavor profiles, were seen as threats, confronting the dominant narratives (Earle 2012, Janer 2007). The white settler's ideology was steeped in supremacy, with ambitions to remodel the landscape, both culinary and geographical.

Colonial forces used food as a tool of domination. Their mission was not merely about territorial expansion; it was about reshaping Indigenous taste buds, manipulating their culinary epistemologies until they became mere shadows of the past (Earle 2012, Janer 2007). Yet, Indigenous culinary memory proved resilient. Through diverse forms of resistance, the indigenous flavor endured, rooted deeply within the taste buds of its people, the plants, and the very land they inhabited (Bonfil Batalla 1996).

Contrasting Culinary Worlds

The divergence between Indigenous and colonial culinary preferences was stark during the Mesoamerican encounters. While Indigenous communities relished a sustainable, local, and plant-based diet (Nelson 2008, Salmón 2012, Coe 1994, Pilcher 1998), the Spanish colonizers craved high-fat, protein-rich foods (Flandrin and Montanari 1999, Earle 2012). Indigenous eating habits centered on consuming a hearty meal around what modern societies would term as ‘late lunch,’ while the Spanish, governed by their perception of ‘civility,’ consumed multiple meals beginning with breakfast (Earle 2012).

This divergence extended to food cravings. Spanish colonizers, viewing the Indigenous penchant for wild foods like larvae, Chicatana ants, and scorpions with revulsion, saw it as evidence of their ‘primitive’ nature (Earle 2012, Coe 1994, Super 1988, White 1999). To the Indigenous, these were more than just foods; they symbolized an ecological relationship and responsibility to the land.

Evolving Culinary Landscapes

With colonization, the Indigenous landscapes underwent dramatic alterations. Cornfields transformed into wheat fields; hunting terrains became enclosures for Spanish livestock (Pilcher 2012, Pilcher 1998). These changes were not limited to the physical landscape alone. The imposition of foreign flavor profiles meant that dishes like tamales, which were traditionally prepared with diverse plants and Indigenous proteins, started being laden with pork fat and Spanish meats (Pilcher 1998).

In places like Mexico, despite these oppressive culinary shifts, Indigenous tastes endured and even mingled with colonial flavors, giving birth to a culinary mestizaje. This blended culinary

heritage leaned on European tastes but did not abandon its Indigenous roots, leading to the creation of a unique, resilient culinary identity.

The Legacy of Culinary Mestizaje: From Hierarchy to Resilience

This blending, however, was not without its challenges. The newly formed mestizo culinary culture elevated European tastes, often at the expense of Indigenous ones (Pilcher 2012, Ochoa 2000). It spurred the creation of a culinary hierarchy (Bourdieu 1984, Earle 2012), where European tastes and preferences were considered superior. Over time, institutions like Le Cordon Bleu,¹ the American Culinary Federation,² and the James Beard Foundation³ emerged as powerhouses, dictating culinary standards and reinforcing colonial tastes (Pilcher 1998). They perpetuated a narrative where non-European culinary traditions were “othered,” their intrinsic value and sophistication undermined.

Yet, in the web of global food capitalism, Indigenous foods found an ironic space. Once sidelined, they have become sought-after commodities. For instance, the superfood trend has made quinoa, a staple for the Quechua of Peru, a global sensation, driving up its prices and rendering it inaccessible to its traditional consumers (Garcia 2013: 515, Garcia 2021). Beyond just food, this impacts land rights, community structures, and cultural heritage, marking a continuation of colonial legacies. In essence, the culinary histories of Indigenous communities serve as a testament to resilience and adaptability. While the shadows of colonization loom large,

¹Established in 1895, Le Cordon Bleu is revered as the custodian of French culinary techniques. Through its programs, it ensures the preservation and transmission of the culinary arts, which have been pivotal to French gastronomy for over half a millennium. See <https://www.cordonbleu.edu/home/en>

² Started in 1929

³ Established over 30 years ago <https://www.jamesbeard.org/>

the indomitable spirit of Indigenous culinary traditions reminds us of the power of memory, taste, and cultural endurance.

Indigenous Culinary Cultures: A Resurgence Rooted in Tradition

Despite confronting challenges and the recurrent overshadowing of their foods, Indigenous culinary traditions are witnessing a vibrant renaissance across the globe. Although not as frequently spotlighted in mainstream culinary circles, institutions, or recognized by coveted awards like the James Beard and Michelin stars, Indigenous culinary practices persist in preserving, reviving, and innovating based on ancestral flavors and techniques. In this continuum, Indigenous culinary cultures are intricately weaving foundational ecologies and age-old practices, committing to the preservation and continuity of these rich food traditions for current and future generations. The Indigenous P’urhépecha communities of Michoacan, MX, provide a luminous example, having been recognized by UNESCO⁴ for preserving and championing their culinary heritage—the Michoacan Paradigm. Their culinary endeavors serve not just as a gastronomic delight but also as a therapeutic response to the historical impacts of colonization on Indigenous tastes and senses.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty: More Than Just Food

The term “Food Sovereignty” found its genesis through La Via Campesina.⁵ It was introduced as a comprehensive critique and alternative to the limited frameworks of food security, emphasizing not just access, but also control over means of production and autonomy in food choices. This term encapsulates the essence of food security, but with a more profound resonance—achieved

⁴ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization See <https://www.unesco.org/en> for Michoacan Paradigm Report

⁵ An International Peasant Movement. See <https://viacampesina.org/en/>

through autonomous efforts and the inherent right of communities to delineate their nutritional needs through means that are culturally sensitive and locally rooted (Cote 2022, Mihesuah and Hoover 2019). Indigenous scholars of repute, including Charlotte Coté (2022), Valerie Segrest (2019), Devon Mihesuah (2005 and 2019), and Melissa Nelson (2008), have delved deeper into this concept, interpreting food sovereignty⁶ from Indigenous perspectives. Their work elucidates food sovereignty as an intricate tapestry woven with threads deeply connected to the land, its produce, and ancestral memories.

Reconnecting with the Land: #PlantBack Initiative

My personal journey and understanding of the land have been significantly influenced and enriched by the teachings of these trailblazing scholars. These teachings nudged me to form a holistic and harmonious relationship with the Southern Californian land I now call home. In my locality, the clarion call of the #LandBack movement reverberates, advocating for the restitution of lands to the original Tongva custodians. In a humble attempt to be part of this movement, the #PlantBack initiative emerged as a beacon, advocating for the rejuvenation of native flora. Embracing this initiative, I embarked on a personal mission, converting my living space into a haven for native species like wild spinach and CA white sage.⁷

The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement: A Culinary Renaissance

Faced with the towering edifice of global food politics, which often hampers access to culturally significant foods, Indigenous communities spanning Turtle Island are embarking on a journey of

⁶ There are debates occurring on this top such as that sovereignty is more of a legal term to mean and be related to tribal sovereignty and that food sovereignty should actually be more aligned with food autonomy. See Devon Mihesuah and E. Hoover, *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States* (2019).

⁷ CA white sage is under siege due to overharvesting and poaching in areas that it grows wild in my local region so the #PlantBack movement encourages us to grow our own sage by returning it to the soils of our homes. See <https://www.cnps.org/conservation/white-sage>

reclamation. They are healing the deep-seated wounds inflicted by centuries of colonization, methodically reintroducing and celebrating ancestral foods, and dismantling the colonial narrative that had for long governed their diets (Coté 2022, Krohn and Segrest 2010, Nelson 2013).

A Tapestry of Indigenous Foodways: From Global to National Vistas

Colonialism, with its all-pervasive grasp, transformed and reshaped food cultures across continents, introducing and imposing foreign tastes, ingredients, and recipes onto Indigenous communities. Yet, the resilience of Indigenous groups, from the Māori of New Zealand to the Inuit of Alaska and communities in Mexico, showcases their unwavering commitment to preserving, innovating, and celebrating their cherished food traditions.

Local Culinary Scenes and The Journey of Reindigenization

Within the U.S., Indigenous communities, from sprawling reservations to buzzing urban hubs, are challenging and reshaping dominant culinary narratives. They are reembracing their nutrient-rich, environmentally harmonious ancestral foods, making a statement about their intrinsic value. My locality in Tovaangar (Los Angeles, CA) emerges as a microcosm of this expansive resurgence. Here, every culinary nook and cranny, from street corners to gourmet restaurants, vibrates with the rich tapestry of Indigenous heritage. Grassroots initiatives like Across Our Kitchen Tables⁸ and the Chia Seed Collective⁹ amplify this cultural resonance, underlining the deep-rooted connection between local and global Indigenous foodscapes.

⁸ A social enterprise I helped co-found in providing resources to mostly women of color seeking to enter the food industry. See <https://www.acrossourkitchentables.org/>

⁹ Collective of CA Native Elders who come together to teach how to harvest, cook, and eat CA traditional foods. See Tending the Wild <https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-the-wild>

The Dance of Ancestral Tastes and Genetic Memories

Dormant ancestral flavors and genetic memories, suppressed by colonial forces, hold the potential for resurgence through the medium of cultural foods. Engaging with these foods forges powerful connections between past, present, and future, reigniting long-lost memories. My personal journey meandered through enlightening interactions with elders, community gatherings, and a profound realization of the intricate interplay between taste, body, and environment. Conversations around communal kitchen tables transitioned from mere dialogues to transformative sessions, emphasizing the revival of ancestral memories and charting pathways to pass on this rich culinary heritage to ensuing generations.

A Deep Dive into Cultural Food Memory

For generations, food has acted as a dynamic conduit, bringing together communities and preserving traditions. The ways in which food operates within the Indigenous context is multifaceted. Food is not merely sustenance; it is an embodiment, a steward, and a transmitter of Indigenous ecological culinary knowledge. Within this role, food possesses the remarkable capability to birth, awaken, and invigorate both genetic and food memories through the very act of tasting. It is an assertion to the idea that the ancestral culinary epistemology, the understanding of food from generations past, finds its essence in the flavor of the food (Nelson 2008). Such flavors establish culturally embodied taste memories. These are not just ephemeral experiences; they are grounded in culinary ecological wisdom, offering invaluable teachings on sustenance and existence in kincentric relationships (Salmón 2000, Nelson 2008).

Reverence for Original Culinary Instructions

True ecological relation in eating requires a deep connection and understanding of food,

encompassing the rejuvenation of its original culinary instructions. These instructions are more than just how-to's. They are about recognizing seasonal foods, ethical hunting, responsible foraging, and the cultural significance of food preparation. The nuances of the culinary instructions emphasize not just sustainability but a regeneration of culture, food stories, and associated teachings (Nelson 2013). Such instructions resonate in the flavors craved by the Indigenous palate, reinforcing their essence as edible memories or cultural food memories.

The Essence of Cultural Food Memories

Cultural food memories are profound. They are not just memories; they are experiences one can taste and internalize (Jordan 2015). Such memories underscore the importance of culinary traditions, shedding light on the reason for maintaining cultural tastes (Perez 2009). For Indigenous communities, these processes are pivotal, intertwining with social and cultural interactions primarily in kitchens (Christie 2008) and around dining tables (Abarca 2006), invoking the comforting and familiar taste memories of home.

Embracing Culinary Conviviality

Conviviality, or the warmth and camaraderie of shared meals, encapsulates the essence of the Indigenous culinary experience. These moments, whether they are family gatherings for a *tamalada* or intimate post-meal conversations, are filled with culinary chats (*charlas culinarias*, as Abarca 2006 terms them) that enrich the cultural narrative. The unique flavors associated with these experiences – the “sazon” – become synonymous with home, reinforcing the idea that flavors are indeed the guardians of cultural food memory.

Healing Through Indigenous Culinary Arts

The holistic understanding of Indigenous culinary arts transcends mere food. It encompasses a deep reverence for land, seeds, and culinary traditions, as reflected in the Indigenous food movements. Yet, this raises pertinent questions: How do we ensure that people not only have access to the resources but also the knowledge to utilize them? Chef Lois Ellen Frank's emphasis on tasting the food to truly know it alludes to the broader challenge: understanding the culinary nuances integral to Indigenous food (Frank 2011). This calls for an in-depth exploration of the traditional ecological culinary knowledge (TECK), prompting queries on its flavor profile and essence.

In the face of challenges posed by colonial culinary cultures, Indigenous foods and their traditions persevere, finding renewed vigor in modern Indigenous culinary arts. This resilience finds manifestation in various forms: menus, recipes, cooking styles, and presentation. As an Indigenous future ancestor, there's a responsibility and curiosity to delve deeper into the 'taste of original culinary ecological knowledge' – a journey to reclaim, celebrate, and perpetuate the rich culinary heritage and memories of the land and culture.

AlterNative Indigenous Culinary Anthropology and the Culinary Legacy

As the confluence of my culinary passion met with academic exploration, invaluable guidance from my mentors inspired me to harness my work in the paradigm of Research as Ceremony (Wilson 2008). This seminal philosophy is predicated upon the act of deeply engaging in the ceremonial aspects of food. Such engagement resonates with fostering an intrinsic relationship with the land, acquiring knowledge about indigenous foods, mastering the art of cooking them with respect and reverence, and, most importantly, nurturing profound, lasting relationships with pivotal figures in the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement.

To embark on this profound journey, it was crucial to challenge and move beyond traditional research methodologies. With the guiding principles of decolonizing methodology (Smith 2005), my approach evolved to center Indigenous voices, cherish cultural values, adhere to ancestral protocols, and uphold the utmost ethical benchmarks. This redirection aimed to counteract the historical patterns of research that have often been tainted with exploitation and inappropriate extraction of knowledge (Smith 2005). In line with Dell Hymes' (1972) transformative call in "Reinventing Anthropology," this journey became an exercise in healing, decolonization, and envisioning anthropology from a renewed perspective. Dr. Rachel Chapman, a cornerstone in my academic and personal development, instilled in me the significance of engaging holistically—by attuning my senses, grounding myself with my physical presence, and connecting deeply with my spirit. Through her teachings, she introduced me to the ethos of alterNative anthropology, emphasizing its centrality in genuinely understanding and living the anthropology I was immersing myself in.

The arena of my fieldwork transcended static geographies. It manifested as dynamic landscapes where the symphony of gathering, preparing, and cooking food played out. Wearing the dual hats of a chef and an anthropologist meant that I immersed myself, spending copious amounts of time in Indigenous kitchens and revered kitchen spaces (Counihan 2009, Perez 2009, Abarca 2006, Christie 2008). This immersive experience was a sensory feast - enabling me to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch the rich tapestry of cultural heritage foods and the reservoir of knowledge being revitalized and cherished. As I stepped into these kitchens, I was armed with the curiosity of an anthropologist and the skill set of a chef, eager to absorb techniques, decode recipes, and master the art of narrating culturally poignant food stories through the sophisticated culinary art of plating. I am deeply indebted to Chef and Dr. Lois Ellen Frank for pioneering this journey,

offering a roadmap for anthropologists like myself who straddle these two diverse yet interconnected worlds with a mission – to heal, decolonize, and remember.

While my time in the kitchen was transformative, my understanding of ancestral memory was also enriched by a multitude of primary and secondary sources. This included blogs, podcasts, Indigenous food magazines, social media posts, seminal books such as ethnobotanical texts, recipe compilations, and evocative films. This expansive repository of knowledge enabled me to distill four cardinal themes of my doctoral work:

1. The sanctity, embodiment, and vitality of the kitchen and its tools.
2. The intricate ecological systems underpinning Indigenous foods.
3. The role of menus and recipes in encapsulating the ecological and seasonal essence of edible landscapes.
4. The tales of resilience and original instructions woven into Indigenous cooking methods and plating.

These themes shed light on the burgeoning appetite within the Indigenous community for the delectable tapestry of Native cuisine. The invaluable treasure of traditional ecological culinary wisdom is zealously safeguarded and rejuvenated through the Indigenous culinary arts. The resilience, resurgence, and effervescence of Indigenous culinary epistemology is palpably evident, deeply rooted in the ancestral memory of tastes and flavors. This intricate web of analytical constructs seamlessly aligns with my theoretical architecture of ancestral taste memory and its activation. My findings affirm that the process of photosynthesis, interactions with the soil, the cycles of planting and harvesting, the rituals of cooking, and the act of consumption, not only rejuvenate but also transmit ancestral memory. By venerating these food-centric relationships, we pave the way for ancestral justice and holistic healing.

Ancestral Appetites

To reignite the innate ancestral craving for place-centric foods and culinary traditions, particularly those defined by the LESSON framework (Local, Ecological, Sustainable, Seasonal, Organic, and Native), there is a need for an insatiable hunger. The palpable yearning for Indigenous food nuances is awakened among the Indigenous members of the Native American Food Movement. This movement is characterized by the collective memory of culturally significant tastes from diverse landscapes, fueling the commitment to rejuvenate these foods, culinary practices, flavors, and tastes. This serves as a testament to decolonize, Indigenize, and heal. The resurgence of ancestral cravings, as evinced by the multitude who gather in celebration of this cuisine, underscores the fact that ancestral tastes and genetic imprints have evolved from mere revitalization to full-fledged restoration.

Ancestral Tastes

The revival of ancestral and Indigenous cravings stands as a poignant testament to the fact that the Indigenous community, despite the ravages of colonization, is reclaiming its culinary heritage. The Indigenous palate has endured the yoke of colonial domination since the dawn of colonial gastro-encounters (Garcia 2021). This colonial stranglehold not only created an insidious longing for colonizer foods but also contributed to the tragic erasure of ancestral tastes, memories, and foundational culinary ecological wisdom. Fortuitously, the journey of decolonizing the Indigenous palate is well underway, manifesting in the renewed craving for ancestral flavors that span the spectrum of land and water, wild and cultivated, and ancestral, cultural, and traditional. These flavors are the vessels that carry and disseminate culinary epistemology (Janer 2007).

Ancestral Flavors

The longing for a taste that resonates with one's unique cultural palate, even in the face of overwhelming colonial culinary influences, is a defiant act of decolonization. To satiate this longing with foods that epitomize one's cultural legacy is a culinary act that transcends mere decolonization. The yearning for ancestral flavors, each evoking the unique tastes of spring, summer, autumn, and winter landscapes, underscores the restoration of Indigenous culinary traditions. This renaissance not only rejuvenates the significance of flavor profiles in activating ancestral and cultural memories but also emphasizes the need for these profiles to be eternally cherished, rejuvenated, and regenerated.

Terms and Significance

In Chef Nephi Craig's own words, "If you can expand your food knowledge and expand your food vocabulary and expand your cooking technique vocabulary, a whole world of nutrition, taste, and technique begins to expand." This philosophy, as laid out in *This Radical Pathway*, serves as a guiding light for the in-depth exploration of terms, concepts, and significances that follow.

Definition of Terms

Across the pages of this dissertation, readers will find two terms, 'Indigenous' and 'Native,' used somewhat interchangeably. The capitalization of 'Indigenous' refers to Indigenous people and even plants, highlighting a broader understanding that these plants are part of the living community, often referred to as 'plant people' (Kimmerer 2013). Similarly, 'Native' is capitalized to embrace the same nuances. These terms broadly encapsulate the communities I had the privilege of engaging with, and mirror the terminologies they use for self-referencing. When

discussing overarching concepts, traditions, and modes of knowledge, these terms act as umbrella descriptors, enveloping the fluid knowledge passed between land, people, and food, often termed as ‘Original Instructions’ (Nelson, 2008).

An additional phrase, ‘edible landscapes,’ punctuates this dissertation frequently. This term reflects lands abundant with both domesticated and wild food sources. On occasion, it morphs to represent a beautifully plated dish by an Indigenous chef, where the plate becomes a canvas, telling tales of their cultural heritage and mimicking their native landscapes. Two pivotal terms that stand central to my theoretical framework are ‘transmission’ and ‘activation.’

‘Transmission’ encapsulates the movement of knowledge through diverse channels, particularly among food, land, and communities. ‘Activation’ captures the reawakening or introduction of knowledge, stirring ancestral memories. These terminologies are foundational pillars for this dissertation, shaping its methodological alignment, findings, and theoretical contours.

Let us dive deeper into ‘ancestral and traditional memory.’ This term holds an expansive realm of meanings. Rooted deep within almost every Indigenous culture, it is a repository of ancient teachings, symbols, and ecological guidelines interwoven with relationships to all living and non-living entities. This memory is place-centric, making each cultural memory unique, and it truly *is* the culture. Found in songs, attire, art forms, bodily experiences, and even in the food we consume, this memory is often orally passed down through generations. This ancestral knowledge, transcending time, is deeply connected to natural energies. However, the scars of colonization have rendered this memory distant and inaccessible for many. A neglect or failure to rejuvenate this memory risks fading invaluable Indigenous teachings, food traditions, and identities.

That is where ‘regenerative memory’ steps in. It speaks of remembered, rejuvenated, and recovered memories, essential for sustaining ancestral and traditional memories. In this research, this memory resurfaces in the flavors we taste, transmitted and decoded by our taste buds, activating what Indigenous chefs’ term as the “genetic” or ancestral memory. This awakening process signifies reIndigenization and decolonization, ensuring legacy and responsibility towards future generations.

Highlighting the magnificence of the culinary arts, I shed light on Indigenous Culinary Arts and Cuisine (ICAC). Here, food not only tantalizes the senses but also conveys stories, traditions, and ecological knowledge. ICAC serves dual purposes: to redefine haute cuisine through ReIndigenization, and to honor Indigenous landscapes through culinary experiences, connecting the consumer to the vast bank of Indigenous ancestral tastes. ICAC is defined by the chef’s determination to be local, ecological, sustainable, seasonal, organic, and Native (LESSON).

In recent times, activists have been working towards decolonizing and reIndigenizing diets (Mihesuah 2003; Nelson 2008). This movement is breathing life back into sacred Indigenous culinary cultures, firmly anchored in ancestral tastes and knowledge systems.

Significance and Contribution

The tapestry of this research offers rich insights for Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, the academic world, and the realm of culinary culture. It paves the way for creating holistic health systems fostering Indigenous healing – encompassing the mind, body, spirit, land, and water.

The deep bond between reverting to ancestral diets and restoring Indigenous identities, cultures, and landscapes underscores the importance of ReIndigenization and decolonization through food.

In the academic arena, particularly within Food Studies, Indigenous Studies, the Anthropology of Food, and Environmental Studies, this work carves a niche. It introduces new facets to sub-disciplines like Indigenous Culinary Anthropology and Regenerative Studies, unraveling methods to revive Indigenous culinary epistemologies via ancestral taste memories. The research extends an invitation to explore Indigenous Culinary Arts and Cuisine in depth.

From a culinary culture perspective, this research urges the culinary world to embrace Indigenous chefs, their cuisines, and techniques. Echoing Chef Nephi's thoughts, it is time to recognize Indigenous foodways as foundational to haute cuisine. This research aims to start pivotal dialogues, dismantling pre-existing culinary hierarchies and ensuring Indigenous culinary traditions gain the recognition they rightfully deserve, fostering opportunities for Indigenous chefs to embark on entrepreneurial ventures and healing communities through their culinary creations.

The Culinary Pathway to Indigenous Revival

The Black Power movement of the 1970s was more than just a political awakening. It acted as a beacon, influencing other ethnic groups to reclaim and celebrate their unique cultural identities. This wave of ethnic and cultural revitalization was felt strongly in Asian, Mexican/Chicano, and especially Native American/Indigenous communities. Through these movements, a sense of Re-Indigenization and Decolonization began to surge, leading communities to relearn and revitalize their traditional practices which was an uphill battle, especially in the absence of written recipes or comprehensive guides. Undeterred by these challenges, Indigenous chefs including Loretta Oden, Louise Ellen Frank, Walter Whitewater, and Chef Arlie blazed a trail. They crafted dishes that not only celebrated their rich heritage but also served as educational touchstones. Their

endeavors were about more than just food; they were a testament to resilience in the face of centuries of colonial suppression. As these chefs pieced together the fragments of their culinary history, they brought to light the intricate tapestry of historical, cultural, and political influences shaping Indigenous cuisine. The profound impact of colonization on Indigenous foodways opens a compelling dialogue on perseverance, cultural memory, and the reclamation of identity.

Yet, it is not enough to simply acknowledge the richness of these traditions or the resilience of these chefs. To truly appreciate the depth and significance of what has been reclaimed, we must delve into the mechanics of memory transmission. How do cultures, particularly those as historically oppressed as Indigenous communities, pass down knowledge, practices, and experiences? Memory is not just an individual recollection; it is a collective tapestry woven over generations, filled with flavors, scents, stories, and lessons. As we journey further into this exploration, we will see that understanding memory transmission is paramount. It is the key to comprehending how Indigenous communities have managed to persevere, keep their culinary traditions alive, and reclaim their identity amidst the forces that sought to erase them.

Chapter Two: Colonial Cultures of Taste, Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and Embodiment of Food

This chapter explores the interplay between colonial influences and Indigenous food cultures. It touches upon the effects of colonization on Indigenous diets, culinary practices, and food sovereignty. Delving into the concept of “embodiment,” the chapter discusses how the physical consumption of food intertwines with the intangible - knowledge, memories, and emotions. Through scholars like Merleau-Ponty and feminist theories, it dissects the idea that food can act as a vessel to pass down cultural, ancestral knowledge and experiences. The chapter will also

critically examine how Indigenous communities have managed to retain, and in some instances, retrieve their food traditions amidst external influences.

Chapter Three: AlterNative Culinary Visions, ReImagining Anthropology Through Indigenous Culinary Arts

Anthropology has often been critiqued for its colonial roots and objectifying tendencies. This chapter ventures into a fresh, decolonized and alterNative approach towards studying Indigenous culinary traditions. Instead of an outsider's gaze, the research is intimate, focusing on the lived experiences of Indigenous chefs, Indigenous kitchens, foods, and technologies. By analyzing the culinary world from within, the narrative shifts from mere observation to a holistic understanding. This chapter is both a critique of traditional anthropology and a call for embracing a more respectful, inclusive methodology that recognizes the agency and significance of all the subjects.

Chapter Four: Revered Terrains, The Living Essence of Indigenous Kitchenspaces

Sacred geographies refer to spaces imbued with cultural and spiritual significance. This chapter throws light on how the kitchens in the Indigenous Food Movement are not just physical spaces but repositories of memory, tradition, and ancestral teachings. These kitchens are 'living' entities, dynamically shaping and being shaped by the culinary practices they house. The sourcing of local ingredients, traditional preparation methods, and the final presentation of the dishes all echo the voices of countless generations.

Chapter Five: Echoes of Ancestry, The Palabra of the Spirit of Food – A Sacred Dialogue with Indigenous Pantries, Culinary Technologies, and Recipes

At the heart of every cuisine lies the tools and techniques unique to it. This chapter unravels the intricate web of Indigenous culinary practices, focusing on the tangible elements like food pantries, cooking instruments, and age-old recipes. By dissecting each element, the chapter offers a detailed view of how these tools are not just utilitarian but are steeped in history, carrying the weight of stories, traditions, and memories.

Chapter Six: Ancestral Embodiment and Culinary Heritage, Memory Activation in Indigenous Menus, Hospitality, and The Art of Plating Edible Landscapes

The art of presenting food is often as crucial as its preparation. In Indigenous culinary traditions, every plate narrates a story, encapsulating the essence of a community's history, struggles, and victories. This chapter delves deep into the aesthetics and narratives behind plating and menus in Indigenous cuisine. It showcases how such practices are not merely for visual appeal but are deliberate efforts to stimulate memory, evoke emotions, and communicate stories.

Chapter Seven: Indigenous Culinary Art and Cuisine, A Transmitter and Activator of Ancestral and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Concluding the book, this chapter reiterates the pivotal role food plays in preserving and transmitting Indigenous knowledge. It stresses that every dish, every ingredient, and every culinary practice is a testament to the intricate web of ecological understanding that Indigenous communities possess. By viewing food as medicine, this chapter encapsulates the holistic perspective of Indigenous culinary traditions - highlighting its significance in healing, regeneration, and decolonization.

Rekindling the Flame of Culinary Heritage

The essence of Indigenous revival through culinary pathways serves as a testament to the tenacity, resilience, and deep-rooted cultural pride of Indigenous communities. As we have journeyed through this exploration, beginning with the broader influence of movements like the Black Power era, and diving deep into the intimate worlds of Indigenous kitchens, culinary tools, and the artistry of plating, we find ourselves standing at the crossroads of history, memory, and innovation. These chapters have unfurled the tapestry of challenges and triumphs faced by Indigenous communities, their chefs, and the cultural stakeholders as they maneuvered through the shadows of colonization, rekindling the flame of their ancestral culinary traditions.

Memory transmission, as emphasized, is not merely about the recollection of past events. It is about the emotion, the spirit, the essence of a community that is embedded in every ingredient, every dish, every story. The chapters reveal how, despite the external influences and suppressions, Indigenous culinary arts have acted as both shield and spear—protecting age-old traditions and piercing through the veils of ignorance and prejudice.

From dissecting colonial influences to understanding sacred kitchen geographies, this journey underscores the intricate and profound relationship between Indigenous communities and their food. The story woven is not just of food but of resistance, resurgence, and remembrance. The concluding sentiment, as captured in the final chapter, encapsulates this perfectly—food is not just sustenance; it is a medium, a bridge, a portal through which ancestral wisdom and ecological knowledge traverse time, connecting past, present, and future.

As we close this exploration, it is imperative to carry forward the profound insights and learnings. To taste Indigenous cuisine is to partake in a symphony of stories, memories, and legacies. It is an invitation to respect, learn, and most importantly, remember. For in

remembering and recognizing, we not only honor the rich tapestry of Indigenous culinary traditions but also ensure its continuity for generations to come.

Kitchenspaces, Table Memories, and the Culinary Heartbeat

The essence of culinary resilience and revival is deeply rooted in the spaces where food takes form—kitchenspaces and kitchentables. These are not mere physical realms; they are sanctuaries where the alchemy of culinary knowledge and conviviality unfolds. They act as crucibles, where raw ingredients transform and crystallize into edible memories that can be felt, tasted, and internalized. These spaces house not only culinary techniques but also stories, memories, and the essence of a community. They are symbolic representations of history, heritage, and the persistent spirit of generations. Kitchenspaces and their accompanying tables bear witness to the unfolding of countless intimate moments of remembrance, revival, and regeneration, moments that are pivotal in shaping Indigenous culinary ecology. Their significance transcends the tangible; they are the anchors that tether us to the intricate tapestry of food and taste memories, drawing us closer to a familiar flavor, a reminiscent scent—a taste of home (Perez 2009).

Delving Deeper: The Taste of Heritage and Homeland

When we talk about a ‘taste of home,’ it is not just a mere flavor or a sensation on the palate. It is a holistic experience that envelops space, time, seasonings, and emotions. A taste of home is deeply intertwined with regenerative, ancestral, and cultural food memories that come alive with unique, earth-inspired flavor profiles. Every bite, every morsel resounds with echoes of the past, activating taste memories and illuminating a culinary understanding rooted in the land (Cruz 2006). This gastronomic journey crafts stories, testimonies, processes, recipes, and shared meals. By immersing in these culinary ecologies, we nurture kincentric ties, fortifying our bond with

cultural heritage foods and age-old food practices. This endeavor not only preserves the continuum of cultural eating habits in harmony with nature but also paves avenues for healing in our journey of decolonization.

Healing through Culinary Stories

Food, in its purest form, is not just nourishment; it is an education, a legacy. The lessons embedded within every ingredient, every dish, articulate narratives of the past and aspirations for the future. Indigenous chefs, through their masterful craft, weave and propagate these taste memories. Their culinary creations are more than just meals; they are narrations, rich and evocative, that breathe life into forgotten stories. These unique culinary arenas and methodologies are instrumental in rekindling, rejuvenating, and ensuring the continuation of Indigenous taste memory. This resurgence serves as both a movement and a manifesto, challenging and overturning colonial influences on Indigenous diets, and body perceptions. By sparking fresh memories, innovating recipes, fostering relationships, and sculpting new tales, they are safeguarding Traditional Ecological Culinary Knowledge (TECK). The perils of forgetting are too high. For when flavors fade, so does the collective memory, the culinary heritage, and the ancestral bonds. The result? A chasm, a void where recipes, wisdom, tastes, and ties to the land once flourished. History and contemporary narratives remind us of the undeniable truth: preserving cultural connections is the lifeblood of communities. Neglecting cultural heritage foods is tantamount to severing one's roots, resulting in an existential loss—a void in understanding, identity, and embodiment. This underlines the paramount importance of rejuvenating Indigenous culinary arts and cuisine.

Chapter Two: Colonial Cultures of Taste, Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and Embodiment of Food

The extensive realm of food studies encompasses myriad dimensions, from the embodiment of tastes to the symbolism attached to culinary practices. Anthropologists, over the years, have delved deep into understanding how food and its associated rituals transcend mere sustenance to embody memories, cultural symbolism, and social hierarchies.

Early proponents such as Levi-Strauss (1969) explored the transition from the wild to domesticated food cultures, while Bourdieu (1984) critiqued the creation of haute cuisine and its associated hierarchical tastes. Douglas (1972) delved into food as a symbol of culture and social meaning, and Merleau-Monty (2012) viewed it from the lens of embodiment. With evolving perspectives on food, studies broadened to global (Barndt 2008), national (Pilcher 1998 and 2012), and local (Counihann 2009) narratives. Sutton (2013) significantly emphasized the sensory aspects of food, illustrating how taste memories shape individual cultural realities and dietary choices.

However, Indigenous perspectives on food present a unique narrative. For communities with intimate ecological ties to their food, there is an in-depth understanding of its flavors, histories, and wisdom. Indigenous food scholars like Salmon (2012), Nelson (2013), LaDuke (2005), Mihesuah (2005 and 2019), and Peña (2019) have highlighted the importance of reviving cultural taste memories. These are not just rituals but lifelines, emphasizing the need for ecological stewardship and survival. A glaring gap in Indigenous food studies, however, is the view of food as a carrier of ancestral knowledge, representing a deeper ecological comprehension.

My dissertation aims to fill this gap. It explores how, through Indigenous culinary arts, ancestral memories are awakened, promoting a profound understanding of maintaining ecological relationships.

Understanding these culinary traditions, however, necessitates a comprehension of the larger forces at play. The colonial, capitalist, and political behemoths (Nestle 2007, Garcia 2021, Earle 2012) have significantly altered traditional taste profiles, resulting in the erasure of ancestral culinary memories and a disconnection from heritage foods. Food movements emerging in resistance to this dominant culture signify more than a dietary choice. They symbolize the reclaiming of culinary heritage (Levi-Strauss 1969, Bourdieu 1984, Douglas 1972), control over food production and distribution (Bardnt 2008, Alvarez 2005, Nestle 2007), and the right to food sovereignty.

Reasons to assert food sovereignty vary—from the basic right to food, protection and revitalization of land and seed, to the preservation of traditional ecological culinary wisdom (Nelson 2013). Movements like Food Sovereignty, Decolonize Your Diet, and Native Food Movements (Mihesuah 2019, Nelson 2013) have further highlighted the importance of Indigenous foods. To truly grasp how memories shape these cravings, it's crucial to recognize the embodied memory within both food and the individual.

The ensuing sections will provide a comprehensive review of literature central to the theories discussed above, concentrating on the transmission and activation of ancestral taste memory through Indigenous culinary arts.

Colonial Cultures of Taste: Culinary Codification and the Legacy of Colonization

Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island (present North and Central America) thrived by honoring their rich culinary ecologies, an amalgamation of appetites, tastes, and flavors, deeply rooted in their ancestral memory. However, with the wave of colonial encounters, this bond was ruptured, leading to a profound cultural and memory disconnection from ancestral foods (Coe 1994, Pilcher 1998, Earle 2012, Nelson 2008). As colonization entrenched its structures, it began to dictate the culinary norms, determining which foods, flavors, and tastes should take precedence (Pilcher 1998, Earle 2012).

Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, postulated that society's cuisine could be deciphered into "gustemes," essentially its constituent elements (1963: 86). These "gustatory codes" act as discernible social markers, distinguishing what is deemed civilized from noncivilized taste (Lévi-Strauss 1963:198). Drawing a parallel to language, Lévi-Strauss noted that "in any particular society, cooking is a language through which that society unconsciously reveals its structure" (Levi-Strauss 1968: 495). This insight offers a window into the culinary reconfigurations brought about by colonization. Furthering this narrative, Mary Douglas, another renowned anthropologist, suggested that "if food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries" (Douglas 1972: 61). This clearly delineated a societal structure that classified eaters into hierarchies based on their culinary preferences.

Pierre Bourdieu delved deeper into the social implications of taste, positing that "taste is the basis of all that one has—people and things—and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others" (Bourdieu 1984: 56). For Bourdieu, taste was not just a

sensory experience but a determinant of one's social status, functioning as a "sense of one's place" within societal hierarchies (Bourdieu 1984: 466). This inferred that one's culinary preferences often become a reflection of their societal standing and identity.

The ramifications of colonialism were not confined to mere shifts in taste. It instigated a foundational reorientation in the very epistemology of food and food culture (Janer 2007). The colonial suppression extended to the realms of how food was understood, prepared, produced, and consumed. Janer poignantly remarks that "the colonial repression of different knowledge also affects the culinary epistemology that informs food preparation and consumption" (Janer 2007: 385). The colonial confrontation between Spanish and Amerindian culinary practices resulted in the suppression and alteration of Indigenous knowledge systems that once regulated food (Janer 2007: 386). Such dismissals and commodifications of Indigenous cuisines, because they were not codified, led to a sweeping cultural food memory loss and alienation (Janer 2007, Grey and Newman 2018). This "extension of Settler jurisdiction over, and exploitation of, Indigenous gastronomy" continued to portray Indigenous cuisine as "less refined or palatable" (Grey and Newman 2018: 719).

In the contemporary gastronomic landscape, we see a revival, a "gastronomic boom" across places like the U.S., Mexico, and South America (Garcia 2013: 515). Indigenous foods, once marginalized, are now celebrated. However, Garcia cautions against the superficial nature of this revival, suggesting that the "gastronomic revolution has not broken free from coloniality," and that despite the outward fusion and social justice narratives, it might be "the latest, most ingenious form of neocolonial extraction" (Garcia 2021: 89). The gentrification of gourmet cuisine, while including Indigenous ingredients, often invisibilizes the rich cultural contexts from

which they emerge (Garcia 2013: 511). Such nuances in the culinary world need a deeper exploration and understanding. The true antidote to this pervasive “culinary colonialism” lies in the empowerment and resurgence of Indigenous food sovereignty, allowing Indigenous communities to reclaim, redefine, and celebrate their culinary heritage on their terms (Grey and Newman 2018).

Reclaiming the Culinary Narrative

The history of colonization has irrevocably shaped the culinary landscapes of Turtle Island, imposing external hierarchies and tastes upon Indigenous cultures and traditions. But food, in its essence, is more than sustenance. It is a rich tapestry of stories, memories, and ancestral wisdom. The dominance of colonial narratives in gastronomy, as outlined by luminaries like Lévi-Strauss, Douglas, and Bourdieu, has often cast a shadow over the authentic essence of Indigenous culinary traditions. The modern gastronomic boom, although seemingly inclusive, can sometimes further obscure the authenticity of these traditions in the garb of market-friendly revivals.

However, in this intricate nexus of taste, culture, and colonial legacies, lies the profound resilience of Indigenous Peoples. They are not just passive witnesses to a shifting culinary paradigm but are active custodians of their rich gastronomic heritage. The journey towards reclaiming and honoring Indigenous culinary ecologies calls for conscious efforts to understand and deconstruct the colonial undertones still prevalent in today’s food culture. Only by centering Indigenous knowledge, practices, and sovereignty in our culinary conversations can we truly appreciate the depth, diversity, and significance of their culinary contributions and begin the process of healing and reclamation.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty: A Tapestry of Tradition, Resistance, and Renewal

Indigenous Food Sovereignty, weaving a narrative deeply interwoven with tradition, resistance, and renewal, has a resonant significance for Indigenous communities worldwide, especially those of Turtle Island. To fully understand its depth and implications, one must delve into its multifaceted definitions, cultural underpinnings, contemporary challenges, and the profound voices championing its cause.

Defining Food Sovereignty

La Via Campesina, the spearhead of the global peasant and campesino movement, delineates food sovereignty as “...the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems...” emphasizing that it “...puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations” (Coté 2022: 32). While globally resonating, this definition profoundly echoes within the Indigenous narratives, highlighting an urgency to recenter communities within their food stories.

Indigenous Voices on Food Sovereignty

For Indigenous communities, the dialogue on food sovereignty transcends mere sustenance. Melissa Nelson underscores this depth: “our very survival, individually and collectively, may depend on us taking back control over the quality and production of the food we put into our bodies” (Nelson 2008: 180). She passionately adds, “there’s no time like today to decolonize and re-indigenize our bodies, minds, and communities by taking back our food sovereignty” (Nelson 2008: 180). Nelson further elaborates on the dynamic relationship between heritage and food,

emphasizing its living, breathing nature: “...Heritage should not be clamped up or put behind glass in a museum. Heritage is a dynamic, living, changing thing... We need to celebrate our authentic foods, and everyone can join in conserving the diversity of America’s foods” (Nelson 189).

Charlotte Coté adds dimension, articulating the profound spiritual aspects: “Indigenous food sovereignty reinforces familial and social bonds of generosity and reciprocity...” and evokes the Indigenous spiritual connection with the natural world, where all beings have spirits recognized through ceremonies that honor them for "gifting themselves as food, eliciting a relationship based on reciprocity and a sense of sacredness and gratitude attached to the spirit of a plant or animal that gives itself to humans” (Coté 2022: 30).

The Healing Journey and the Land

Valerie Segrest paints a vivid tableau of food sovereignty as a seasonal, cyclical journey deeply rooted in the land and its wild gifts: “food sovereignty looks a lot like people being active on the land... tending the wild so that it, in turn, will continue to bless us with its rich medicine” (Segrest 2019: 44). She highlights the profound connection to tradition and identity: “our teachings remind us that if these foods cease to exist, so do we as a people” (Segrest 2019: 44).

Devon Mihesuah expands the discourse, emphasizing traditional activities in fostering Indigenous health, wellness, and a reconnection to the land: “a re-connection to land-based food and political systems... [is upheld] as sacred responsibilities to nurture relationships with our land, culture, spirituality, and future generations” (Mihesuah 2019: 11).

Guiding Principles of Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Mihesuah encapsulates Indigenous food sovereignty within four guiding principles:

1. Sacred Right to Food: Recognizing that the right to food is sacred and that food sovereignty is achieved by upholding the sacred responsibilities to nurture relationships with the land, plants, and animals that provide food.

2. Participation: Day-to-day participation in Indigenous food-related actions at levels of the individual, family, community, and region is fundamental to maintaining Indigenous food sovereignty.

3. Self-determination: This entails the ability of communities and families to respond to their needs for culturally relevant foods and to have the freedom to make decisions over the quantity and quality of food they hunt, fish, gather, grow, and eat.

4. Legislation and Policy: The need for legislation and policy support to reconcile Indigenous food and cultural values with colonialist laws, policies, and mainstream economic activities.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty emerges as a mosaic of voices, narratives, and resistances. Beyond sustenance, it is about identity, survival, decolonization, and a profound connection to the land. The voices of Nelson, Coté, Segrest, and Mihesuah, interspersed with guiding principles, stand testament to the resilience and revival of Indigenous culinary heritage, illuminating a path toward a future where food sovereignty is an embodied practice of renewal.

Embodiment of Food: A Deeper Exploration into Sensing and Being

The intricate relationship between the body and its surroundings is an essential exploration when attempting to understand the depth of human experience. The body, as both an entity and a construct, can become a vessel, embracing material, social, environmental, and spiritual realities,

in essence, achieving an ecological synchronicity. The revered philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, held the belief that the body, described in the context of flesh, is not merely self-contained but also profoundly interconnected with the “flesh of the world” (Jackson 2015: 33). This profound connectivity extends beyond the self, reaching out to other bodies and even delving deep into the history that defines human evolution, history that “carries other bodies and organisms’ stories as part of itself” (Jackson 2015: 33).

Considering this intricate web of shared embodiment, it is vital to understand the importance of openness to the experience. Within the realm of food, a sensorial journey many embark upon, Annemarie Mol provides a deep insight. She posits that the true eater is not merely an observer. Instead, “an eater does not judge from the outside, but (selectively) opens up to the world that she tastes. She does not take safe distance, but allows herself to be altered by what she digests” (Mol 2009: 278). The transformation, or the altering, of the individual by the mere act of eating, captures the essence of an embodied experience. Mol further enlightens us, noting that taste, while deeply embodied, is not a birthright but something nurtured and refined over time, with an essential requirement being the individual’s active engagement and attunement to their body. Echoing this sentiment, Bruno Latour insightfully mentions that to truly have a body, one must be ready to be moved or altered by entities, both human and non-human (Latour 2004: 205).

Such transformations hold the key to understanding the nuanced relationships surrounding food. Anthropologist Jon Holtzman brings forth a profound perspective in “Food and Memory” (2006). He illuminates the myriad ways food connects us to the past, present, and potential futures, from “embodied memories constructed through food” to the socio-cultural implications of dietary shifts, gender roles, and the diverse contexts in which food facilitates both

remembrance and forgetfulness (Holtzman 2006: 363-372). Furthermore, the sensory experience of consuming food is not a mere physical act. It stirs emotions, evokes memories, and can even connect individuals to places they have never physically visited (Holtzman 2006).

Kathryn Geurts (2003) beautifully articulates the essence of sensory embodiment within cultural contexts. She believes that the senses are instrumental in embodying and reinforcing cultural values and norms. They reflect what communities hold dear and are interwoven into the very fabric of an individual's developmental journey within that culture (Geurts 2003: 10). Food, with its rich tapestry of flavors, aromas, and textures, becomes a central player in this sensorial dance, connecting the dots between memory, identity, and cultural heritage.

David Sutton emphasizes the importance of the kitchen as a crucible for embodied practices, pointing out the intimate knowledge Indigenous Chefs possess, honed through personal experiences of cooking and reenacting their culinary heritage (Sutton 2013, Frank 2011). Food is not merely sustenance but a pathway to deeper understanding, cultural intimacy, and transmission of age-old traditions. As Ramona Perez succinctly puts it, the act of tasting allows for a communion, a shared experience that fosters awareness and connection (Perez 2009).

Gustavo Esteva further elucidates the concept of edible memory – the act of consuming food that holds within its very essence stories of cultural heritage and collective experiences (Esteva 1998, Jordan 2015).

At the heart of this lies the kitchen, described by Perez as the “nexus of social geography” (Perez 2009). Keith Basso reflects upon the role of places in shaping our personal and social identities, suggesting that the landscape of our minds is deeply intertwined with the physical world (Basso 1996). These reflections lead us to understand the profound connection between humans, land,

and the myriad living beings that share our world (Peña 2019). This connection is magnified in the context of food and culinary traditions, with Enrique Salmón emphasizing the socio-cultural importance of consuming landscape-associated foods (Salmón 2012).

By synthesizing these teachings, we decode a sophisticated tapestry of connections spanning food, culture, politics, ecology, and spirituality. Viewing through the prism of embodied food experiences, we delve into the profound layers of human existence, cultivating a richer comprehension of sensation, existence, and interconnectedness. This profound link between sustenance and human experience echoes the intricate bond between the land and Indigenous peoples. Beyond its rich cultural tapestry, this bond is characterized by a dance of ecological wisdom, harmonizing the knowledge of the land with the insights of its people. As we journey forward, let us explore this land-based wisdom, seamlessly integrating all the aforementioned elements.

Epistemology of the Land

The land recognizes its very essence. They are aware of their constituents - a mix of solids such as soil, sand, rocks, stone, and organic material, combined with liquids and gases like water and oxygen. Together, they create a conducive environment for the growth of diverse life forms including plants, animals (both human and non-human), insects, marine creatures, fungi, and even the tiniest of microorganisms like bacteria. The land is not biased, it does not recognize borders, it simply exists, encompassing various landforms such as valleys, mountains, canyons, and hills.

The land is sentient, understanding its mission in the grand scheme of things. This mission is deeply ecological. Their role is to regenerate, to connect all living things as kin, to celebrate

creation, and to facilitate the flow of knowledge, emphasizing the permanence of existence. By fulfilling their role, the land provides us opportunities to remember our deep-rooted connections with nature, the cosmos, and everything in between. They play a crucial role in maintaining the balance of life by providing resources, nurturing and protecting every form of life.

Furthermore, the land acknowledges its Indigenous identity. In the Indigenous worldview, to be Indigenous means understanding the essence of relational living, a living that ensures optimal health and ecological balance. The core principle of this relationship is to coexist harmoniously with one's environment, nurturing and fulfilling life. At its heart, the land is not just a geographical entity but a living, breathing being, sacred in its existence.

Indigenous Taste Memory as Embodiment

The concept of memory holds special significance in indigenous cultures. It is the torchbearer of Indigenous lifeways, ensuring that the principles that promote ecological harmony are not forgotten. Among the myriad ways this memory is preserved, one of the most potent is through Indigenous taste memory.

This memory, deeply ingrained in the indigenous psyche, is a testament to knowledge that has been alive since time began. For many, it is a living memory, but for others, it is a lost connection, especially with the onslaught of colonization which even reached the very taste buds of the indigenous people. Indigenous foods, prevalent across the Americas, are not just sources of nourishment; they are carriers of ancestral wisdom. They hold, within their very fabric, memories, stories, and traditions that can be accessed through the simple act of eating. When one consumes these foods, they are not just ingesting nutrients; they are tapping into traditional ecological culinary knowledge (TECK), which is the very foundation of Indigenous culinary

epistemology. This knowledge has cosmic significance, representing memories and traditions that have been safeguarded through generations, via taste and flavor inherent in indigenous foods.

The intricate dance between the land, food, and the eater facilitates a unique form of communication. The food, enriched with cosmic wisdom, communicates its knowledge through taste and flavor, allowing the eater to decode and understand its message. The body, with its innate cultural and ancestral memory, acts as a translator, decoding the food's knowledge through the taste buds. This process of understanding is not just cognitive; it's deeply experiential. Through the act of chewing and savoring, the food's knowledge becomes part of one's very being, transforming into embodied traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

This embodied form of knowledge is more than just information; it's an awakening to truths that span the cosmos, culture, and traditions. It's a recognition of flavors, textures, and experiences, etched into the collective memory of a community. These experiences are then handed down through generations, ensuring the survival of traditional ecological knowledge. For this knowledge to be truly understood and appreciated, it needs to be lived, tasted, and savored. Food becomes the bridge that connects individuals to their cultural, ancestral, and traditional roots.

The intricate bond between the land and indigenous people epitomizes a profound melding of knowledge, experience, and memory. This sacred relationship not only reveres the sanctity of the land but also underscores the pivotal role of transmitting knowledge through taste. By doing so, it ensures that traditions and wisdom thrive for future generations.

Drawing from the vast expanse of colonial cultures of taste, Indigenous food sovereignty, and the embodiment of food, chapter two has illuminated the nuanced intricacies of how food acts as more than mere sustenance. It serves as a symbol, a memory, and a powerful medium connecting past, present, and future. We have delved deep into the echoes of colonialism that still reverberate in our tastes, but have also witnessed the resilience and resurgence of Indigenous food sovereignty, championing autonomy, tradition, and connection to the land. In understanding the embodiment of food, we have felt its profound ability to transcend, to evoke memories, and to bind us in a shared experience of existence. As we stand at the confluence of these topics, we recognize the invaluable wisdom they carry, urging us to approach food with reverence, awareness, and a deep respect for the narratives it holds within.

Chapter Three, AlterNative Culinary Visions: Reimagining Anthropology Through Indigenous Culinary Arts

Food and culture, as intertwined entities, have always fascinated anthropology. With time, this fascination has grown and established itself in the realm of Food Studies. However, anthropology's journey with food and culture has been dynamic, moving from colonial underpinnings to an alterNative understanding that respects and celebrates global cuisines.

Early anthropological forays into food often suffered from a colonial mindset, sometimes termed 'savage slot anthropology' (Trouillot 2003). This perspective often exoticized and primitivized indigenous and ethnic foods, diets, and bodies. Not only did it misrepresent these cultures, but it perpetuated colonial legacies, upholding racial and class hierarchies.

With the advent of alterNative methodologies, anthropologists began to see food cultures through a lens of respect and empathy. This transition birthed an "alterNative anthropology of the culture of food." Here, food was no longer just an observational artifact; it transformed into a vibrant canvas reflecting cultural intersections. Through alterNative methods like kitchentable ethnographies (Perez 2009), charlas culinarias (Abarca 2006), and testimonios (Counihan 2009), anthropologists shifted from distant observers to active participants, immersing themselves in the warmth of kitchenspaces (Christie 2008). This allowed a richer, more authentic representation of food cultures.

Within this alterNative approach, anthropologists are not mere passive witnesses. They engage in the culinary processes, experiencing and partaking in the rituals of food creation and consumption. This immersive 'doing' has given rise to a unique anthropological realm – the alterNative culinary anthropology. In this space, researchers venture into kitchens, participating

and understanding cuisine not just as a culinary art, but as an epistemology, a somatic form of knowledge.

Guided by this alterNative culinary anthropology, I delved deep to address my research question: “What indigenous culinary epistemologies are revitalized through the transmission and activation of ancestral memory as mediated by the tastes and flavors of Indigenous culinary art, cuisine, and culture?” The discussions that follow are rooted in this immersive, alterNative approach to food – an approach that is both a form of inquiry and a profound act of cultural reclamation, ceremony, and research.

Decolonizing Methodologies in Culinary Anthropology: The AlterNative Way

As I embarked on my journey into culinary ethnography, it quickly became evident that research is not a monolithic endeavor. Different perspectives and approaches shape how we interact with our subjects of study, and for me, this meant an immersion into decolonial, Indigenous, and alterNative methodologies. These methodologies not only shaped my approach but also deeply influenced my relationship with the subjects of my study: the food sovereignty community and Indigenous foods.

What ignited my passion and provided a guiding light for this distinct approach was Shawn Wilson’s seminal work, “Research is Ceremony” (2008). Wilson elucidates the significance of reciprocity, relationality, and accountability in research. He presents the perspective that research is not just an act of gathering data but is, in essence, a ceremony. When conducted with an understanding of reciprocity and a commitment to relational accountability, it transforms from a mere academic endeavor into something that resonates deeply with our Indigenous spirit, reflecting our realities and aspirations.

Building on this perspective, I adopted a multifaceted approach to observe and experience the transmission and activation of ancestral memory. My methodology demanded establishing deep-rooted relationships with individuals at the heart of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. This often involved more than just academic observation; it meant rolling up my sleeves and ‘cheffing it up’ alongside them. It was in crafting menus and actively participating in the execution of food services, feeding hundreds, that I felt truly connected to the cause.

These relationships, founded on mutual respect and a shared passion, often led me to a plethora of primary and secondary resources. Blogs such as “Apaches in the Kitchen,” podcasts like “Toasted Sister,” and magazines like “Native Foodways” offered rich insights. Social media interactions with the Indigenous culinary community, books on Indigenous ethnobotany, cookbooks, and films like “Gather” became integral to my research.

Yet, it is essential to underscore one particular methodology that stood out, both in its uniqueness and its profundity: the sensory immersion. Beyond ‘cheffing it up,’ my role as a traveling chef placed me in a unique position where my senses became the primary tools of research. I learned to deeply engage with the food I prepared, understanding its stories through its colors, textures, sounds, and tastes. This sensual engagement was not just about the present but also allowed me to traverse the culinary pathways of the past – walking the routes charted by plants and the pathways they birthed before colonial interventions disrupted our Indigenous culinary and trade routes. It was a journey of rediscovering, relishing, and reclaiming.

Anthropology In the Kitchen: Decolonizing Culinary Narratives

From the onset of the white-settler colonial conquest of the indigenous lands stretching across the western hemisphere – from Kanata (Canada), Turtle Island (United States), Anahuak

(Mexico) to the vibrant terrains of Central and South America – anthropology was weaponized. It became a tool in the hands of colonizers to rationalize acts of genocide, ethnocide, epistemicide, nutricide, and ecocide. Such anthropological explorations catered primarily to the white-settler colonial interests, underlining their motives, until Black and Indigenous Peoples began the arduous journey of reclaiming and decolonizing anthropological perspectives.

A staple of colonial anthropology was its relentless drive to ‘Other’ Indigenous knowledge. This knowledge, deeply rooted in the land, its people, and their customs, was often devalued, sidelined, or, worse, erased. By portraying indigenous peoples in the ‘savage slot,’ colonial anthropology fueled a racially prejudiced social order, discrediting indigenous epistemologies (Trouillot 2003). Yet, the reclamation came when those who were ‘Othered’ grasped the “master’s tools” (Lorde 2018), not with the aim to dismantle his house but to momentarily overpower him with his own strategies. A renewed wave of anthropological narratives then began to emerge, where indigenous voices rose with fervor, echoing the silenced truths and stories of their ancestors. In these voices were powerful challenges to established norms, thus decolonizing anthropology (Faye 1991) and advocating for alternative methodologies that truly capture Indigenous experiences (Smith 1999).

Drawing a gastronomic analogy, traditional white settler colonial anthropology can be likened to an insipid, stale dish. Yet, with the infusion of indigenous perspectives, the dish has been rejuvenated. Indigenous scholars and knowledge-keepers, with their deep-rooted love for their traditions, have re-seasoned this anthropological meal. They have reintroduced lost flavors, memories, and indigenous wisdom, transforming it into a delicacy that truly represents the land, its people, their cultures, and foods. The refined dish is not just palatable but a testament to the

spirit, resilience, and richness of indigenous narratives. In this light, I propose a fresh paradigm: an alterNative anthropology, a cuisine reimagined with the essence of thousands of years of Indigenous wisdom, seasoned with the struggles and triumphs of generations past and present.

Anthropology in the Culinary Domain: Navigating Kitchenspace and The Art of Culinary Ethnography

Anthropology, with its vast breadth and depth, often brings researchers to the most intimate spaces of human existence. The kitchen, a sacred space of sustenance, memory, and tradition, is one such domain. Anthropologists focusing on the culinary aspects of culture have crafted a unique lens through which they view the world, one that emphasizes the profound significance of food. They underscore the ceremonial nature of preparing and consuming food, the bonds formed around kitchen tables, and the stories and memories encapsulated in each dish.

Anthropologists, by weaving their narrative around the tables, introduce us to the concept of *charlas culinarias* (Abarca 2006). These discussions bridge the roles of food makers, tasters, and consumers. By indulging in these roles, they immerse themselves into understanding their own relationships with food, the memories they evoke, and the cultural imprints they leave behind.

Women of color, such as Ramona L. Perez (2009) and Meredith E. Abarca (2006), have been at the forefront, pioneering this methodological approach termed “Kitchentable Ethnography.”

Meanwhile, Maria E. Christie (2008) delves deeper, elucidating that kitchens are not just confined spaces of a home; they often spill over, extending into the vast outdoors, blurring the lines and boundaries traditionally associated with them.

The insights presented by Perez, Abarca, and Christie do not just revere the kitchen as a physical or symbolic space. They highlight the kitchen as an arena of potential emancipation—a zone where suppressed knowledge, born from culinary subjugation, can be resurrected and celebrated. The narrative takes another intriguing twist with the contributions of culinary anthropologists like Joy Adapon (2008) and Chef Lois Ellen Frank (2011). They pull us into the bustling universe of restaurant kitchens, each with its unique cultural pulse. To truly grasp the essence of food and its cultural ramifications, one must plunge headfirst, not just as a passive observer but as an active participant in the gastronomic journey. Adapon, being an external observer, contrasts with Chef Lois Ellen Frank, who navigates the dual roles of a seasoned chef and an anthropological investigator. Their domains diverge—one echoes the sentiments of dominant popular culture, while the other finds its roots in the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement.

Explorations in these kitchens aim to comprehend the intricacies of *conocimiento*, the legacy of taste, and the manifestation of memories through food. Anthropologists venture into this realm with a nuanced understanding of how socio-cultural factors mold our perceptions of food. Some scholars also dive into the nexus of memory, taste, and food culture, highlighting how they serve as anchors, preserving family legacies, cultural identities, and age-old traditions. In most discourses, unless food's intersections with power dynamics, politics, or economies are examined, food often remains an object under scrutiny rather than the subject of attention.

In my journey, I diverge from traditional methodologies. I do not aim to merely fill a research gap or view food as an external entity. Instead, I elevate food to a pedestal where it becomes the fountainhead of knowledge, a sentient guide, and a chronicler of stories. It is this unique

perspective that sheds light on the knowledge essential for nurturing not just humans but the very land, flora, fauna, and ecosystems they coexist with.

Indigenous Culinary Epistemology: Savoring the Depths of Ancestral Wisdom and Food Sovereignty

At the heart of Indigenous knowledge systems lies the profound recognition that all life, including our food, carries the memory and wisdom of the ages. This understanding speaks of an intricate web where traditional ecological culinary knowledge is encoded and passed down generations through the very fabric of the food we consume. As an Indigenous Culinary Anthropologist, my journey within the realms of kitchentable, kitchenspace, and culinary anthropology is steeped in this foundational wisdom. For me, the kitchen is not just a space of preparation and consumption; it is a sacred classroom where food, as the harbinger of ancestral taste memories, imparts lessons, and unfolds age-old narratives. Culinary ethnography, through this lens, shifts its focus from human-centric memories associated with food to a more holistic understanding: food itself is an embodiment of memories, intrinsic and derived from the very land and cosmos it springs from. This memory translates to humans most potently through the sensory experiences of taste and flavor.

Diving deeper into this epistemology unravels a blueprint – an ancestral guide dictating what to consume, the ideal time for consumption, and the rituals surrounding its consumption. It is a treasure trove of wisdom, and as I perceive it, it is also food's ingenious strategy to ensure its own regeneration and conservation via cultural, ancestral, and traditional culinary practices. Embracing my role as an Indigenous culinary anthropologist entails undertaking the mission to decolonize and reframe anthropological methods. It means venerating food not merely as a

passive entity but as an active collaborator and ambassador of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. In essence, it is about transitioning from being an observer to becoming an ardent pupil of food, absorbing its teachings with every sense. Engaging in sensory ethnography demands a deep immersion, where every taste, touch, sight, aroma, and sound becomes a channel to understand food's profound narratives (Pink 2015).

My primary quest is to tap into the reservoir of traditional ecological culinary knowledge inherent in the food. I strive to discern the myriad tales and teachings it wishes to relay, especially to those it deems worthy of inheriting this wisdom. My intrigue lies in the inherent knowledge manifested in the taste and flavor profiles of food. It is within these sensory nuances that Indigenous teachings and knowledge are encoded, waiting to be savored, decoded, and remembered through intricate flavor profiling. These culinary memories, along with the very essence of the food, form the backbone of Indigenous cultural survival. They are the lighthouses guiding the aspirations of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. After all, food is not just nourishment; it is the lifeblood of culture.

Embracing the Culinary Heritage: Journey of an Indigenous Plant-based Xicana Indígena Chef

Stepping into the sanctum of the kitchen, I am deeply cognizant of the profound truth that food is more than mere sustenance – it is a vessel of knowledge, a tapestry woven with ancestral memories. This knowledge, once imparted and imbibed, becomes etched into our very being, rekindling Indigenous culinary intimacies, thereby unlocking the doors to epigenetic, cultural, and ecological culinary memories. As an Indigenous plant-based Xicana Indígena culinary maestro, my culinary endeavors and creations are not mere recipes. They are reverent

expressions of ancient and traditional culinary wisdom. And in my dual role as an anthropologist, the kitchen transforms into a sacred ground of learning, with food guiding me as an oracle. Every sensory experience – whether it is listening to the gentle sizzle, tasting the alchemy of flavors, beholding the riot of colors, inhaling the heady aromas, or feeling the textures – is a communion, a sacred dialogue between the culinary legacy and my own essence. Whether I cook in solitude or alongside the luminaries championing the Indigenous food justice and food sovereignty movements, I am acutely aware of the culinary knowledge that courses through me, intertwining with my own narrative.

The anthropology I practice is not of the norm. It is a transformative, decolonizing anthropology, deeply rooted in Indigenous methodologies that recognize the deep kinship between food, land, and body – all pulsating with life and spirit. This practice prioritizes listening – not just with the ears but with every fiber of one’s being. It is an active commitment to preserving, nurturing, and perpetuating the age-old ancestral and traditional ecological culinary wisdom for the present generation and the ones awaiting their turn. My culinary creations, steeped in the ethos of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, are a testament to this commitment.

Deeply enshrined in Indigenous culinary traditions are distinct protocols – sacred rites detailing the transmission of culinary memories and wisdom. They also elucidate the harmonious engagement with food, land, and our very bodies to uphold culinary responsibilities. As I navigate through these teachings, I rely on Indigenous research methodologies that prioritize honor and respect. This entails harvesting only what the land can generously offer, venerating the intrinsic wisdom of food and land, forging reciprocal relationships, living in harmonious relation with all beings, envisioning oneself as a benevolent ancestor for future generations, and

faithfully transmitting this knowledge. Alongside these responsibilities, I also shoulder the duty of being a culinary chronicler, meticulously crafting a codex to immortalize Indigenous Ecological Culinary Knowledge and memories. The symbiotic relationship between food and culture is undeniable – one simply cannot thrive without the other. Colonization has left scars, interrupting the seamless transmission of these invaluable knowledges. My journey, hence, is one of mending, healing, recalling, rejuvenating, restoring, regenerating, and, most importantly, decolonizing and Indigenizing.

Sacred Spaces: Navigating the Indigenous Culinary Landscape

Indigenous culinary arenas are a fluid confluence of time, milieu, and geography. They are palpable sanctuaries, marked by ceaseless interactions and exchanges. These spaces are unfettered by boundaries, exuding sovereignty and self-governance. They find expression in myriad locales within Indian Country – from bustling restaurants to intimate cultural congregations, from the expansive realm of social media to the sacred recesses of bodily memories. At their core, Indigenous culinary domains are platforms of communion, spaces where the food we hold dear and the people intertwined with its legacy engage, reciprocate, and evolve. Anchoring these culinary harbors are ancestral and traditional foods, resonating as the lifeblood of these spaces. As this pulsating heart, they breathe life into the kitchen. This vitality stems from the kitchen's ability to harbor, disseminate, and forge Indigenous culinary knowledge – a symbiotic dance between individuals, culinary tools, and the food itself. This culinary wisdom is underpinned by ancient ethnobotanical and ethnoecological paradigms, potent tools for decolonization, Indigenization, healing, and activating epigenetic memories. Central to this knowledge is the timeless wisdom of acknowledging our ecological stewardship for both current and future generations.

These sanctuaries of edibles and terrains are where I immerse myself – to absorb, listen, savor, recognize, awaken, and recollect the vast expanse of ancestral and traditional ecological culinary knowledge. This immersion is an ode to my duty towards generations past and future, an endeavor to invigorate Indigenous memories via the culinary tapestry I weave. The ancestral imprints embedded in Indigenous cuisine – ancestral memories – serve as conduits for decolonization, Indigenization, healing, and epigenetic awakening. Their preservation, rejuvenation, and protection by the Indigenous spirit is paramount.

These hallowed culinary terrains are bastions of safety and audacity, spaces where ancestral memories find voice, embodiment, and manifestation through the culinary maestros, Indigenous chefs, culinary virtuosos, food, culinary instruments, and the very space itself. These culinary vistas embody the very heartbeat of Turtle Island – a resonating echo that, for Indigenous souls, serves as a bridge connecting past, present, and future. Amidst the vibrant tableau of Turtle Island’s food sovereignty and self-reliance movements, I find my calling. Whether cooking, savoring, participating, or voicing my culinary journey on social media platforms, my mission remains clear – to herald the significance and resilience of Indigenous food and its traditions. To honor my role as a guardian of the future, a torchbearer of age-old culinary knowledges, and as an Indigenous culinary anthropologist, my aim is to meticulously craft an Indigenous culinary memory codex, envisaging it as the elixir for decolonization.

Journey through Indigenous Culinary Realms: An Odyssey of Kitchenspaces and Native Gastronomy

Delving into my research between 2015 to 2019, I immersed myself in Indigenous edible landscapes—rich terrains teeming with wild foods—and distinct kitchenspaces. This journey

allowed me to be present within myself, connecting intimately with both the food and the Native chefs, unraveling their culinary tales and traditions through the intricate dance of culinary art and cuisine.

My culinary passion started at a young age, gradually carving pathways that led me to other influential kitchens. One such memorable experience was with Chef Nephi Craig in Apacheria, at his renowned restaurant in the White Mtn Sunrise Resort. As I entered, ready to share insights on quinoa and assist in preparing dishes, I was greeted with a cherished gift: my first Chef's coat. This was not just a garment; it symbolized an honor, resonating the essence of an alterNative anthropologist—a community insider rather than a mere observer.

This profound sense of community and kinship continued when I collaborated with Chef Sean Sherman during his tours across the nation. Each kitchen I entered with Chef Sean, be it in California, North Dakota, or Minneapolis, echoed a consistent message. As Chef Sean often articulated, the dishes reflected the essence of the land, evoking sensations reminiscent of the earth. He aptly summarized this profound connection by saying, "It's All Medicine" (2015). My initial steps in genuine culinary training stemmed from my experiences with Chef Sean.

Numerous engagements enlightened me on treating food with reverence, preserving its innate sanctity, and allowing it to guide my senses, rekindling personal taste memories.

Collaborations with luminary chefs like Nephi Craig and Sean Sherman opened doors to working alongside other notable Native culinary artists, such as Chef Lois Ellen Frank, Chef Felicia Cocotzin Ruiz, Chef Andrea Murdoch, and, more recently, Chef Pyet DeSpain. These encounters enriched my culinary repertoire, emphasizing the vast spectrum of Indigenous culinary arts and cuisines. Contrary to any monolithic or standardized gastronomy, Indigenous cuisine stands out

with its diverse narratives. Every dish, every technique reflects traditional, ancestral, and cultural values, each infused with distinct teachings, narratives, flavors, technologies, and methodologies.

As I embarked on my culinary ethnography, exploring ancestral and cultural taste memories, certain dinners and gatherings amplified my understanding. These experiences are not mere anecdotes; they are testimonies of flavors tethered to specific locales, epochs, and communities. Although the settings varied—spanning Indigenous indoor, outdoor, pop-up, and traditional kitchens—a consistent theme emerged. The showcased dishes, with their evocative tastes and flavors, were deeply rooted in Native heritage, bearing cultural significance, and mirroring the essence of the communities they catered to.

A Deep Exploration of Indigenous Chef Tables: Immersing in Sacred Culinary Geographies

The culinary traditions of Indigenous communities are a vibrant, dynamic tapestry, woven with threads of history, memory, and culture. Unlike a static picture, this tapestry is fluid and expansive, embracing every corner of Indigenous experiences. It finds reflections in cherished memories passed down through generations, in the comforting aromas wafting from our kitchen stoves, and in the stories and rituals celebrated within our communities.

Embarking on a research mission into this rich culinary realm required me to be as dynamic and versatile as the subject itself. As I delved deeper, I realized that the essence of Indigenous cuisine is not just in the final dish but also in the journey leading to it—the sourcing of ingredients, the communal act of cooking, and the stories interwoven with each recipe. And so, to truly understand, I needed to physically immerse myself in these sacred geographies, a term I resonate deeply with, representing the intricate blend of location, tradition, and spirituality inherent in Indigenous culinary practices.

Experiencing the Indigenous Chef Tables

Central to my exploration were the Indigenous chef tables. These events are not merely dining experiences but are profound cultural exchanges. Each table, curated meticulously by a skilled Indigenous chef and their dedicated team, offers guests an intimate peek into the world of Indigenous gastronomy. It is an arena where the food narrates tales of its origin, preparation, and significance.

From upscale restaurants to cozy lodges and heartwarming community kitchens, these chef tables spanned varied venues. The majestic white mountains of Arizona, the ancient redwood forests of Northern California, the sprawling prairies of North Dakota, and the serene great lakes of Minnesota served as picturesque backdrops to these culinary gatherings. And in each of these settings, I engaged actively in the entire culinary process.

Shouldering responsibilities that ranged from food preparation and cooking to plating and serving, I collaborated closely with renowned Native chefs. Together, we celebrated the diverse and rich tapestry of Indigenous cultural heritage foods, paying homage to age-old traditions while catering to the taste palettes of contemporary audiences. Through these collaborations, I was not just an observer but an active participant, celebrating and sharing the rich culinary legacy of Turtle Island, a term representing North America based on various Indigenous cultures' lore.

The journey into the heart of Indigenous culinary practices has been enlightening, offering deep insights into the symbiotic relationship between food, culture, and geography. Through intimate chef tables, I discovered that every dish, ingredient, and technique has a story, a legacy, and a spirit, waiting to be shared, savored, and celebrated.

Immersive Culinary Research: From Observer to Participant at the Sunrise Resort in White Mountain Apacheria

At the onset of my culinary research journey, the Sunrise Resort in White Mountain Apacheria beckoned. It was here that I was privileged to be invited to an Indigenous chef's table, orchestrated by the renowned Chef Nephi Craig. My role was multifaceted: a participant observer, a small contributor to the kitchenspace with my quinoa horchata concoction, and finally, a guest.

My first foray into Chef Nephi Craig's kitchen was overwhelming. This was no ordinary kitchen but a buzzing hive of culinary activity, marked by swift movements and punctuated by the sounds of culinary artistry. It was a fast-paced environment, a testament to its professional nature, brimming with state-of-the-art kitchen technology. The sheer dynamism made me feel like an outsider, an intruder even. The kitchen staff seemed to whirl around me, occasionally brushing past in their hurry.



Image 1. Beans on shelf at Sunrise Resort kitchen. Photo by Claudia Serrato

To minimize my intrusion, I strategically retreated to a corner, armed with a barstool for an elevated view. Observing here was not just about watching; it was an all-encompassing sensory experience. My eyes took in the synchronized dance of chefs, my nose inhaled the intoxicating aromas, my ears picked up on the sizzle and sear, and my fingers traced over the rich texture of ingredients like the diverse Indigenous beans that adorned Chef Nephi's dry bean rack.

Yet, my observation post, distant and analytical, felt disingenuous. I sensed Chef Nephi's astute observation, and his words soon resonated through the kitchen, "Get your chef coat on and grab your knife roll, it is time to be in the kitchen." A surge of nervous excitement gripped me. I was not to be an outsider observing anymore; I was about to immerse myself in the art of cooking, not for the regular resort guests, but for the distinguished chef's table that evening.

From Observer to Culinary Contributor

Before diving into the thick of culinary action, I conducted a brief workshop, enlightening Chef Nephi's White Mtn Apache staff on quinoa milk preparation. Chef Nephi's inquisitive nature was evident when he expressed his fascination with the foam the milk produced, already brainstorming its culinary applications. Thrilled, I was then ushered onto the cooking line, a realm where I was to prepare multiple varieties of Native beans. This endeavor also allowed me to forge connections with the staff and culinary scholars from Navajo Tech. My iPhone occasionally played the role of my third eye, capturing candid moments to aid my visual memory. One key insight from this immersive experience was the importance of 'mise en place' – the organization of ingredients and tools. The efficiency and success of any kitchen, I realized, revolved around this intricate preparatory dance.

Transcending Roles: From Chef to Guest

As the evening's chef's table drew near, Chef Nephi, ever the gracious host, signaled it was time for me to transition yet again. I meticulously packed away my knife roll, shed my professional attire, including my apron and trusty Dansko kitchen shoes, and prepared for the next phase of my journey. It was now time for me to transition from my dual roles as an anthropologist and chef to that of a privileged guest, poised to experience Indigenous cuisine in all its sensory glory.

Immersive Participation at “Feasting at the Grinding Stone”

Armed with my NACA chef coat, my culinary knife roll, and clad in my Dansko kitchen shoes, under the expert guidance of Chef Sean Sherman and his esteemed Sioux Chef team, I embarked on an immersive culinary voyage. Though I initially felt apprehensive given Chef Sean's extensive professional kitchen experience, I soon realized that my passion for food and inherent culinary skills would seamlessly blend with his innovative cooking techniques and presentation flair.

I had entered the kitchen equipped with a Canon camera, intending to meticulously document every stage of the culinary journey while actively participating. However, I was met with a revelation: in the Indigenous culinary space, whether nestled indoors or stretched under the open sky, one is wholly engaged in the tangible - from foraging to plating. Balancing the dual roles of a chef and a researcher proved challenging. Torn between my passion for the art of food and my academic pursuits, I found my true calling in the former. My unwavering dedication and authentic culinary spirit resonated deeply, winning the admiration of luminaries like Mohawk seed keeper Rowan White and Indigenous food sovereigntist, Melissa Nelson.

A Culinary Sojourn to the Canpasapa Wi

Impressed by my commitment, Chef Sean graciously extended an invitation for me to assist him at the Canpasapa Wi—Dinner of the Chokecherry Moon. Held at the Coteau des Prairies Lodge in North Dakota, this grand culinary affair saw a collective effort over two days. Together, we meticulously prepared Indigenous delicacies ranging from braised bison and sweet potato fritters to luscious elderberry sauce and smoked wild mushrooms.

Our gastronomic journey was accentuated by our travels through Minnesota. We stopped en route to gather an assortment of wild edibles, from vibrant wildflowers to the humble purslane. Chef Sean’s vision was expansive, seeking to incorporate both native and non-native flora. Upon querying him about the inclusion of colonially-introduced produce, he opined, “These foods grow here now, and even though they are not Native, they become Native. By applying our Native principles to them, we give them a new purpose, an Indigenous one” (2015). This profound teaching echoed Robin Kimmerer’s sentiments in “Braiding Sweetgrass” (2013), emphasizing the harmonious integration of nature by Indigenous cultures in crafting a truly honorable cuisine.

Ra Ndakuu+Taza: A Culinary Tapestry of Memories

Recounted in Chapter Four, the Ra Ndakuu+Taza—Feast of the Sorcerer and the Eagle, held in Minnesota, remains an indelible memory. This magnificent feast was a symphony of Oaxacan and Lakota flavors, expertly woven together by Chef Sean Sherman and Chef Neftali Duran (Mixteco). Together, they sculpted a ‘fusion cuisine’ that celebrated Indigenous culinary trade routes, evocative memories, and heartwarming stories.

I had the honor of assisting in this monumental culinary event, which reaffirmed my identity and skill as a chef. My unique insights greatly influenced the menu, the intricate plating, and the

overall dining ambiance. The venue was an urban facility we had rented, boasting a state-of-the-art commercial kitchen and bar. Intriguingly, while the facilities were top-notch, they mainly served as warming and storage areas. The crux of our preparations took place at the Little Earth community kitchen, a space often overlooked by urban Native housing residents. This culinary venture epitomized the mobility and adaptability intrinsic to Indigenous culinary arts. The food, brimming with memories, was transported, ensuring that both local Minnesotians and visiting guests could immerse themselves in an unforgettable gastronomic experience.

Experiencing the Heartbeat of Indigenous Culinary Culture at Food Sovereignty Gatherings

The Indigenous culinary realm is pulsating with life, with its rhythm echoing both through the intimate settings of the Indigenous chef's table and the grandeur of Indigenous Food Sovereignty gatherings. At these gatherings, the Indigenous pop-up kitchen emerges as a symbol of unity and tradition, serving nourishing meals to the fervent souls of Indian Country. These souls, deeply entrenched in their quest to rejuvenate Indigenous foods and traditions, come together to ensure that the flavors of their heritage echo through time, nestling in the memories of generations yet to be born.

As a devoted Indigenous culinary anthropologist and a Mesoamerican plant-based chef, my journey has been centered on the reclamation and revitalization of Indigenous foods and culinary practices. My endeavors in this realm have accorded me the privilege to collaborate with exceptional Indigenous chefs, profound cultural producers, and devoted stewards at monumental Indigenous food gatherings. These gatherings, characterized by their pop-up kitchens, are not just about feeding the community but are also a testament to the resilience, richness, and continuity of Indigenous culinary traditions.

Each of these gatherings has been a wellspring of inspiration, deeply nurturing both my personal and professional evolution. Here, I recount a few such gatherings that have etched lasting impressions on my culinary soul.

Revitalizing Traditions: A Tale from the Indigenous Kitchenspaces

In the heart of Indigenous kitchenspaces, where the aroma of ancestral foods wafts and envelops you, stories are cooked, shared, and cherished. It was within such a narrative-rich atmosphere that I found myself in Idyllwild, California, for a Native Chef cooking competition. A unique amalgamation of flavors, cultures, and stories awaited me.

I was drawn to this event by the allure of watching Chef Sean Sherman compete against other remarkable talents, namely Chef Felicia Cocotzin Ruiz. The event had esteemed judges like Chef Loretta Oden and Chef Freddie Bitsoie. I saw this competition not just as a chance to witness culinary brilliance but also as an opportunity to personally connect with these culinary torchbearers I had admired from a distance.

Upon my arrival, the familiar and comforting aura of an Indigenous kitchenspace greeted me. I had an unexpected yet delightful encounter with Chef Terri Ami, a culinary artist I had previously met at the White Mountain Sunrise Resort, helmed by Chef Nephi Craig. This gathering, resplendent with renowned Indigenous chefs, exuded an ambiance of both reunion and discovery.

My time was largely devoted to soaking in culinary techniques and gleaning new recipes from the prep kitchen. However, I occasionally ventured out to the competition stage, interacting with Native food enthusiasts and sharing moments of camaraderie. One such moment was my

heartfelt conversation with Chef Loretta Oden. Together, we reveled in our shared passion for Indigenous foods and the depth of its connection with our roots. Back in the hub of culinary creation, I savored bites of dishes being crafted and delved into meaningful conversations about the significance of Native foods, their ingredients, and the profound role they play in our lives.

The competition culminated not in a declaration of a sole winner but in a shared victory. Every chef, with their distinct flavors and stories, emerged triumphant. To celebrate this collective achievement, we made our way to a quaint restaurant nestled amid the woods. Here, the formalities of the competition dissolved, giving way to relaxed interactions and deeper connections. Over food and laughter, we shared tales of our culinary journeys, the role of Indigenous foods in our lives, and our collective vision for the future. In our conversations, we painted a future where Indigenous foods and their deep cultural significance would be the beacon guiding the renaissance of Indigenous health and well-being.

The Native American Culinary Association (NACA) Indigenous Food Symposiums: A Confluence of Heritage, Land, and Gastronomy

The Arizona Sonora Desert Museum in Phoenix, Arizona, set the stage for the celebration of Indigenous foods and culinary artistry in 2013 and 2015. These events, organized by the Native American Culinary Association (NACA), not only celebrated the culinary richness of Indigenous peoples but also offered a platform for dialogue, learning, and collaboration among passionate enthusiasts.

I had the multifaceted opportunity to wear several hats during these symposiums. As an organizer, my involvement was deep-rooted. Regular brainstorming and coordination with renowned chefs such as Chef Nephi Craig, Chef Arlie Doxtar, and Chef Chris Rodriguez shaped

the contours of the event. From curating Calls for Proposals (CFPs) to intricately planning the workshops and meals, our focus was always on ensuring the event mirrored the objectives of health, healing, decolonization, the therapeutic potency of food, and the interconnectedness of language and culture. Our collective efforts ensured that every CFP was in sync with these paradigms.

My responsibilities extended beyond mere organization. I took on the mantle of a presenter, playing an instrumental role in welcoming guests and setting the stage for the enriching experiences that awaited them. It was a cherished moment to share insights about the importance of Mesoamerican and Indigenous foods and the pivotal role they play in our lives. I particularly emphasized the concept of Indigenous womb ecology, highlighting the need to nurture taste memories from the earliest stages of life, starting within the womb itself. Such memories, I believe, form the bedrock of our cultural and culinary identities.

However, my deepest connection to these symposiums was through the very essence of it - the act of cooking. The Arizona Sonora Desert Museum generously opened its state-of-the-art kitchen to us, offering a unique blend of cutting-edge culinary technology and traditional equipment. This space became a melting pot of ideas, techniques, and flavors. I found myself working shoulder to shoulder with some of the most distinguished Indigenous chefs of Turtle Island. From crafting beverages to curating an elaborate fine dining experience, every moment in that kitchen was a tribute to our shared heritage. It was in this vibrant setting that I was bestowed the honor of being named the Sous Chef for the Native American Culinary Association. A title and an experience that I hold close to my heart.

The Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summits: A Convergence of Heritage, Culinary Artistry, and Stewardship

Nestled in the heartlands of the Great Lakes and its neighboring communities are venues that play host to a unique celebration of Indigenous food sovereignty. I was honored to be an integral part of these gatherings between 2016 and 2019, representing both the Gun Lake Pottawatomi, Meskwaki Nation, and Pokagon Band of Potawatomi communities.

My involvement spanned various roles, each deeply rooted in the ethos of Indigenous culinary heritage. As an invited and featured chef, the monumental task of curating menus for approximately 250-300 guests fell upon me. This involved crafting breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, meticulously ensuring that each dish captured the essence and history of our Indigenous cultures. This endeavor was collaborative at its core, involving the participation of fellow Indigenous chefs, community members, and supporters, who together breathed life into the culinary creations.

Taking on the role of a chef lead and mentor, I had the distinct opportunity to guide and assist emerging Indigenous chefs in their culinary journeys. Together, we ventured to tell stories and evoke memories through our dishes, embodying the spirit of Indigenous food sovereignty. It was crucial to ensure that the food not only tasted exceptional but also resonated with the rich tapestry of our shared histories and traditions.

Yet, my engagement was not confined to just the kitchen. Being recognized as a steward of Xicana Indígena culinary knowledge, I found myself immersed in a learning journey parallel to my teaching. The summits became a fertile ground for mutual exchange of knowledge. I reveled in the experience of ethnobotanical walks, absorbing the wisdom of the flora around us. Foraging

sessions reminded me of the intimate bond our ancestors shared with nature. Workshops on birch basket making were enlightening, illuminating another facet of our culture. Furthermore, the preparation of wild foods like beaver and muskrat became a culinary adventure, pushing boundaries and expanding horizons.

These summits, whether ensconced in the serenity of the woods or the bustling environment of a casino, were more than just events. They were a testament to the living, breathing essence of Indigenous culinary culture and its unbreakable bond with the land and its people.

Honoring Heritage Through Culinary Craft: “Tlazocamati Tonanztin”

In the vast realm of culinary events, there stands one occasion that remains especially close to my heart: “A Taste of Home: Tlazocamati Tonanztin.” I was bestowed the honor of being the featured chef for the Joint Annual Meeting of the Agriculture, Food, and Human Values Society and the Association for the Study of Food and Society Conference in 2018. Held at the esteemed UW-Madison, this event was not just another culinary showcase but an intimate reflection of my personal journey.

Executing a lunch for such a distinguished gathering was both a privilege and an immense responsibility. The task ahead was formidable: to ideate and bring to life an entire menu that echoed the rich tapestry of my Indigenous and Mestizo heritage, spanning from the vibrant lands of Mexico to the urban heartbeats of East LA. This endeavor was not merely about crafting recipes. It involved an intricate dance of preparing the mise en place, scaling ingredients, conducting taste tests, and envisioning unique methods of plating. Each dish was a harmonious blend of my ancestral flavors and the bounty of the local environment, including ingredients like the robust Bear Island Flint corn and the robust Oneida bison.

What made this event profoundly enriching was the synergy between chefs. Visiting each one, engaging in hearty culinary discussions, and delving into the deeper layers of epistemological knowledge was an experience in itself. Such interactions were fertile grounds for exchanging culinary tips, tricks, and a myriad of stories rooted in tradition and innovation.

However, it was not just about cooking. The conference provided a platform for me to vocalize my passion and devotion to my cultural heritage foods and foodways. Following my luncheon presentation, I was enveloped in a world of interaction and discovery during a meet and greet session. It was there that I encountered the P'urhépecha culinary stewards, the diligent seed keepers, and the guardians of ancestral knowledge.

Reflecting upon my journey from 2015 to 2019 as a culinary anthropologist and an Indigenous/Mesoamerican plant-based chef, I am filled with gratitude. The myriad kitchen spaces I have graced, the diverse chef tables I have presided over, the vibrant pop-up kitchens I have participated in, and the profound food sovereignty gatherings I have been part of, all converge into a beautiful narrative. They are the testament to the pulsating Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movements of Turtle Island, a narrative I am proud to be part of.

Crafting an Indigenous Culinary Anthropology: The Xicana Indígena Methodology

Robin Kimmerer, in her insightful teachings, delves deep into the Indigenous principles of "An Honorable Harvest" (Kimmerer, 2013). These principles emphasize the act of harvesting with honor and reverence. Such a holistic and respectful approach is not confined merely to the gathering of nature's bounty, but extends to the very essence of how we gather information or 'data' in the research realm.

The methodology in Indigenous research should not be extractive, nor should it be fragmented or co-opted for narrow personal gains. Instead, the gathering process must be imbued with a sense of integrity and respect. The approach should be ecological and relational, taking into consideration the profound epistemologies of culture, the deep-seated memory embedded within place, space, and the continuum of time, and the overarching health and well-being of successive Indigenous generations. Such a philosophy necessitates regenerative gathering methods. These methods should foster an environment wherein energy and knowledge can freely exchange, leading to the production of new insights or the awakening of dormant memories.

My exploration into the state of Indigenous memory, as activated and nurtured by the presence of food, was conducted with this “Honorable Harvest” ethos at its core. This conscious choice to conduct research in a manner that is both honorable and reverent is in alignment with Sean Wilson’s concept of “research as ceremony” (Wilson 2008). The process becomes not just an academic endeavor but a ceremonial act, where the past, present, and future intertwine, and where the knowledge gathered becomes a tribute to the legacy and wisdom of Indigenous communities.

Culinary Ethnography in Indigenous Kitchenspaces

Crafting an Indigenous Culinary Anthropology necessitates a deep, intimate relationship with the food, the community, and the landscapes that hold these edible delights. Such a bond ensures a holistic and genuine interplay between knowledge, the subjects of research, and the researcher. Embracing this approach, my quest as an Indigenous chef, keen on deciphering the transmission, activation, and rejuvenation of ancestral memories through Indigenous culinary arts and cuisine, compelled me to employ diverse gathering techniques. Every “ingredient” comes armed with its

unique culinary epistemological instruction. These ingredients convey vast ecological wisdom, which includes protocols for honorable gathering. Engaging with Indigenous Culinary Anthropology involves an intricate dialogue that unfolds a tale, a lesson derived from original instructions steered by Indigenous appetites, tastes, and flavors. Such lessons are especially significant for someone like me, who is passionate about rekindling, rejuvenating, and revitalizing these tastes and flavors. Being in the kitchen, first as a chef and subsequently as an anthropologist, endowed me with the unique ability to practice culinary ethnography viscerally, honing in on the sensory experiences of the present moment.

In this dynamic realm, I undertook auto-culinary and sensory ethnography, deeply immersing myself in living artifacts. I initiated profound dialogues with Indigenous foods, seed guardians, stewards, and chefs throughout the multifaceted kitchens of Indian Country. Preserving the sanctity of these Indigenous interactions in kitchenspaces and at dining tables, my very being became the repository for “fieldnotes.” This entailed embracing and internalizing every facet of the culinary journey — from events, dinners, individual ingredients, to the broader gastronomic experience. This internalization allowed for a reflective revisitation, facilitating a deep understanding of these experiences’ flavor profiles. Later, during moments of introspection, I would articulate these reflections. Complementing this sensory recording, I frequently employed my iPhone camera to capture the visual essence of these encounters, transforming them into words. These candid shots spanned across food gatherings, cooking sessions, and servings. My vantage point within the Indigenous kitchenspace constantly evolved, oscillating between the roles of a creator, participant, attendee, and consumer of Indigenous culinary art.

Outside the confines of the physical kitchen, I ventured into the literary realm. This involved collating physical menus from various chef tables and pop-ups I attended in diverse culinary capacities. Sitting with these menus, I reflected upon the wisdom they imparted, reminiscing about meals and recipes from both the kitchen's perspective and that of a diner. I immersed myself in Indigenous ethnobotanical research materials like "Tending the Wild," delved into cookbooks like "The Sioux Chef," explored blogs such as "Apaches in the Kitchen," and pored over magazines like "Native Foodways." Most of these resources were firsthand accounts from Indigenous chefs or culinary enthusiasts. My digital foray extended to tracking and occasionally engaging with numerous posts by Indigenous chefs on social media, many of whom I had the privilege of cooking alongside during my culinary sojourn in Turtle Island's Indigenous kitchens.

Beyond the art of cooking in Indigenous kitchens and partaking in discussions across Indigenous dining tables, my immersion into ancestral, cultural, and traditional culinary knowledge was deepened through rigorous dialogues and knowledge exchanges with twenty Indigenous chefs and stewards of ecological culinary wisdom. These interactions varied in nature — sometimes occurring during the processes of recipe creation, menu drafting, or actual cooking, while at other times transpiring just before or after serving meals. These moments of exchange, depending on various factors, could span anywhere from ten to sixteen hours a day. My inquiries extended even to the ingredients in the Indigenous pantry, as I sought to understand their ancestral wisdom and the knowledge they wished to convey. This approach ensured a holistic learning experience, open to insights from all quarters.

Indigenous Culinary Ethnography: A Sacred Journey into Kitchenspaces

To merely step into a kitchen with the intent to cook is vastly different from entering it with reverence, as if setting foot in a sacred sanctuary. From the moment of my birth, my life has been intertwined with Indigenous kitchenspaces, an entanglement that remains vibrant to this day. When I approach a kitchen, I recognize it as a sanctified haven of safety and transformation. Within this hallowed space, I metamorphose, echoing Chef Felicia Cocotzin's sentiments, into a "Kitchen Curandera."

Adopting this mantle of the healer, cooking transcends its physical act, evolving into an intricate weave of ceremony, ritual, and prayer. It becomes a sacred ceremony dedicated to igniting and rejuvenating Indigenous food memories, a ritual that pays homage to the food, celebrating its intricate flavor profiles, its elemental composition, and the cyclical rhythms of nature it resonates with. Concurrently, it is a profound prayer, a heartfelt plea for the restoration and well-being of our land, waters, and the diverse beings — whether they roam the land on two or four legs, soar in the skies, or navigate the depths of the waters.

As I embraced my role as a Kitchen Curandera, I found solace in the principles of alterNative Anthropology. This approach empowered me to discern, understand, and trust the myriad ways in which my being responded to the spiritual, tangible, and sensory phenomena I encountered within these Indigenous kitchenspaces and dining areas. These sensations and experiences kindled my culinary aspirations, guiding me in my quest to decipher the enigma of ancestral memory transmission channeled through Indigenous culinary arts and cuisine. In this endeavor, I sought insights from primary literary and visual artifacts. These tangible manifestations, coupled with profound dialogues and knowledge exchanges, were facilitated by a collective of Indigenous chefs, nature's bountiful foods, and the guiding presence of the ancestral spirit.

The Journey of Decolonizing Culinary Analysis

Delving into the profound connections and intricate details surrounding Indigenous culinary art and cuisine can be likened to understanding a recipe. Without its vital ingredients, the unique culinary technologies employed, the sacred kitchenspaces and tables utilized, and the distinct methods of cooking and plating, one cannot fully savor or comprehend the entirety of the meal. Missing even a single component can lead to an incomplete and potentially misleading flavor profile. This oversight is significant because the taste and flavors of a dish leave lasting impressions on our body, tongue, and our zest for life. If any essential component is omitted, the deep-rooted knowledge and intimate experience cannot be wholly appreciated. Thus, akin to a mosaic, this culinary ethnography weaves together the “honorable harvest” (data), painting a comprehensive picture that fosters a vision, palabra (word), and a timeless ceremony for decolonization. Just as a recipe cannot be compromised by leaving out any ingredient or technology, my gathered insights must remain whole. Fragmenting or dissecting it would be a disservice, turning it into a mere object rather than the vibrant, living tapestry of Indigenous culinary ecology it truly is.

For the past four years, I have acted as a conduit and transmitter of this culinary ecological knowledge. Through various channels, I have brought forth visions and methodologies to immerse in the ceremony of decolonization, bridging palabra and food across diverse spaces. As seed keeper Rowen White aptly stated, the shared knowledge is what the body has metabolized (2015). This suggests that my entire being has absorbed, reflected upon, and digested the cultural wisdom imparted to me through my culinary interactions and honorable collections. This digestion has transformed into a “grammar of animacy” (Kimmerer 2013) and a blueprint for decolonization that has been showcased across various platforms — from features in platforms

such as the New York Times Cooking YouTube Channel and Telemundo's *Inspirando a Los Americas*, to classes I have conducted at La Plaza de Cultural y Artes in Los Angeles and speaking opportunities like the one at the Natural History Museum discussing Indigenous foods and foodways. Throughout this journey, each culinary moment has been an opportunity to delve deeper with the broader community. By synthesizing my lived culinary experiences, notes, photographs, transcripts, recipes, blogs, podcasts, films, magazines, academic literature, cookbooks, and numerous conversations, I have elevated the age-old messages of our ancestors.

This rich tapestry of experiences and insights resembles a tried-and-true recipe, quenching the innate hunger for ancestral blessings, guidance, and vision. Such a vision beckons individuals like myself to persistently engage in the act of cooking, for it is a celebration of culture and memory. To not actively participate in preserving and promoting our food culture would be to neglect my duty to current and future generations. This responsibility was underscored when Chef Arlie once remarked during the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Gathering at the Meskwaki, "Sister, the food chose you" (2015). This long-standing commitment to my culinary journey has enriched my understanding and appreciation for the resilience of ancestral foods, echoing the enduring spirit of the Indigenous landscapes.

In embracing the ethos of *La Xicana Indigena*, my intent in disseminating my discoveries, much like Anzaldua's *Coyolxauqui Imperative* — the pursuit of reassembling the dismembered Mexica Moon Goddess by her brother Huitzilipochtli — is to narrate this story in its entirety. It is not a fragmented tale, but a holistic celebration of resilience, survival, decolonization, and healing (Anzaldua 2012). Drawing upon my deep-seated *bruja* feminism, I discerned the underlying messages of my honorable harvests. By delving into my embodied memories and

grounding myself in meditative practices, a recurring epiphany emerged, “If I’m remembering, the land is too.” It is paramount to emphasize that this endeavor is rooted in AlterNative Anthropology, wherein Indigenous healing and decolonization stand as the guiding methodologies.

Refining the Anthropological Palate through Indigenous Wisdom

The vast field of culinary anthropology and its methodologies are as diverse as the scholars who traverse its expansive terrains. These approaches are intrinsically shaped by each researcher’s unique epistemological perspectives and the specific goals and audience they aim to engage with. Historically, food studies within anthropology commenced with a focus on nutrition, deconstructing food into its basic components of vitamins and minerals. Yet, this lens of observation underwent a metamorphosis. Over time, anthropologists evolved in their understanding, viewing food not merely as nutritional components but as a deep-seated cultural phenomenon. This shift in perspective propelled them from being mere observers to active participant observers.

As I delved deeper into these participatory experiences, several interwoven themes emerged. Women were not only reclaiming their kitchens but were also crafting tangible, edible cultural memories. Food started revealing itself as a vessel carrying rich symbolic meanings, and the realms of culinary art and cuisine unveiled themselves as markers of social class. Some culinary anthropologists began to probe deeper, exploring the nuances of taste—how it is crafted, how it embodies culture, and how individuals internalize the cultural connotations of food. Yet, a significant gap persisted: has the question “Does food embody?” been adequately addressed?

And if so, what are these embodiments? How can one discern them, and can they be tasted or transmitted?

My personal journey, enriched by countless hours spent in kitchens during my youth, was an inevitable return to the hearth in adulthood, equipped with a profound realization that food is more than sustenance—it is medicine, it is alive, and it is an oracle of ancestral wisdom. As a chef, my duty extends beyond crafting delectable dishes. I am entrusted with the sacred task of transmitting this “palabra”—a word representing both decolonizing and healing methodologies—through the liberating praxis of cooking. My vocation as a culinary anthropologist compels me to unravel and articulate how Indigenous culinary arts and cuisine, and the vast reservoirs of knowledge they enshrine, have the power to rekindle and rejuvenate Indigenous appetites, tastes, and flavors, ensuring their enduring resilience. Fueled by a resolute passion to decolonize the colonized palate—including the mouth, the tongue, and the taste buds—I embarked on a transformative journey to heal the Indigenous body and land from the detrimental impacts of colonizers’ foods and traditions. This transformative journey culminated in my evolution as a “kitchen curandera”—a healer through cooking, an embodiment and guardian of ancestral culinary ecological wisdom, and a transmitter of this profound knowledge via Indigenous culinary artistry and cuisine. This culinary ethnography unfolds as a narrative, voiced eloquently by the Spirit of Food itself.

The ensuing chapters present the foundational revelations of this culinary ethnography. They elucidate that: first, the kitchen, along with its diverse technologies, is a sanctified, embodied, and dynamic entity; second, Indigenous foods operate within a unique ecological gathering system; third, recipes are timeless blueprints that capture and perpetuate the ecological and

seasonal tastes and flavors of edible terrains; and fourth, the Indigenous techniques of cooking and presentation narrate tales imbued with resilience and primordial directives.

Chapter Four, Revered Terrains: The Living Essence of Indigenous Kitchenspaces

In the preceding chapter, we delved into the nuances of Indigenous culinary anthropology. This unique approach marries anthropological research with culinary insights, emphasizing the profound learnings derived from food, culinary tools, and the very spaces kitchens inhabit. The ultimate goal is to foster deep-rooted, trustworthy relationships with both human kin and ecological counterparts. This symbiotic connection paves the way for the voice of ancestral memories to resonate. Such voices find their most resonant echo in Indigenous kitchens and their surrounding spaces. Here, these spaces come alive as sanctuaries of culture, the very essence of familial warmth, and the pulsating core of cultural traditions. Within these hallowed grounds, the rituals of cooking and dining serve as conduits that breathe life into, rejuvenate, and propagate the Indigenous taste memory, encapsulating the rich tapestry of ancestral and traditional ecological culinary knowledge (TECK).

In stark contrast to the often-frenetic pace of contemporary culinary settings, where there is seldom a pause to genuinely ponder the origins of ingredients or establish genuine ecological connections, Indigenous kitchens champion introspection and respect. In these spaces, there is no frantic rush to amplify production rates, nor is there a relegation of recipes or flavors due to them not aligning with dominant cultural taste norms. While urgency is indeed palpable within Indigenous kitchens, it does not stem from hierarchies of culinary prowess or taste. Instead, Indigenous kitchens thrive on collaboration, intentionality, cultural reverence, and purpose-driven leadership.

Guided by the wisdom of chefs and culinary stewards, these kitchens become vibrant hubs for the transmission and activation of ancestral memories. Every interaction, every shared meal, and

every recipe passed down becomes a rich tapestry of kitchen engagements. No two Indigenous kitchens mirror each other; each harbors its own identity, characterized by its distinctive ancestral culinary intent. Despite these variances, there is a unifying thread that weaves them together: all Indigenous kitchen spaces emerge as arenas of ceremony and healing. They become revered grounds where knowledge flows freely, where ancestral insights are exchanged, and where a kinship—a ‘kincentric’ bond—blossoms between the land, waters, food, and all beings, whether they walk on two or four legs, soar with wings, or glide with fins. It is within these nurturing confines that ancestral tastes and flavors are rekindled and rejuvenated. This sacred transmission of knowledge, preserved through oral traditions, finds its fullest expression in these spaces—echoing in stories, manifesting in flavors, and imbibed deep within the soul.

Indigenous Kitchens and Their Sacred Spaces

At the heart of Indigenous cultures lies a question: What encapsulates the essence of Indigenous kitchens and their encompassing spaces? These arenas emerge as sanctuaries of healing, reminiscence, community-building, and resistance against the colonial perspectives on the act of cooking. Far from being inanimate, these kitchens pulsate with life, playing a pivotal role in rejuvenating Indigenous food ecosystems.

Delving deeper into the intricacies of these ecosystems, as illuminated by the insights of Mohawk seed steward Rowan White in 2019 and renowned Indigenous ethnobotanist Robin Kimmerer in 2013, these spaces foster and celebrate food relationships. These relationships, deeply entrenched in tradition and memory, stand as the lifelines that nourish, safeguard, invigorate, and perpetuate living food cultures, narratives, ancestral memories, and holistic interconnections with the entirety of our environment and kin.

The vibrant tapestry of living food cultures draws its sustenance from Indigenous kitchens and their spaces. These places are dynamic crucibles where the art and essence of Indigenous culinary practices are safeguarded, nurtured, honed, and innovated. Standing distinct from the mainstream culinary universe, these arenas—whether nestled indoors or cradling the great outdoors—embody cultural validation. But as Meredith Abarca, the kitchentable ethnographer, underscored in her 2006 research, their essence transcends defined borders. They are realms without boundaries, where the demarcations between the land, the waters, and the kitchen dissolve. As eloquently expressed by Dr. Chef Lois Ellen Frank, these are the Indigenous “foodscapes” (2011)—a harmonious confluence of local, wild edibles that flourish in their native terrains, journeying from these landscapes to our kitchens and, ultimately, satiating our hunger.

Envisioned as boundary-free borderlands, these kitchens burgeon as collaborative spaces, where humans and nature, knowledge and tools, amalgamate to weave a rich mosaic of flavors, recipes, and culinary experiences. The act of cooking in these spaces transcends mere food preparation. It becomes a profound ritual, honoring every facet of food relationships, from the initial gathering of ingredients to the intricate art of recipe formulation, menu crafting, the aesthetic journey of food design, and its ultimate presentation to a diner. Echoing this sentiment, Chef Felicia conveys, “My kitchen is a dynamic realm where I morph my cultural insights into contemporary dishes that rejuvenate, heal, invigorate, and tantalize the taste buds.” (Oden 2016: 2016). This culinary odyssey is not just a random confluence of actions; it is a deliberate orchestration aimed at narrating not just tales, but evoking taste memories that resonate both tangibly and intangibly. These memories encapsulate the essence of the traditional ecological culinary knowledge, capturing the myriad relationships inherent in the rich tapestry of cultural flavors and seasonings.

It is these deeply entrenched relationships that consecrate Indigenous kitchens and their spaces, cementing their revered and timeless significance.

The Essence of the Indigenous Kitchen

Indigenous kitchens, as previously highlighted, manifest both within indoor confines and expansive outdoor settings, transcending conventional dimensions of place, time, and era. Their essence is fluid—some retain mobility, gracefully meandering across landscapes, while others remain rooted, deeply entrenched in a particular locale. Each kitchen emanates a unique aura, a distinctive energy, and serves a purpose that is uniquely its own.

My earliest memories are intertwined with these very kitchens. As a young child, I was immersed in a culinary world, navigating the nuances of cooking as I stood beside my grandmothers and mother. Yet, it was only in 2008 that my engagement with these kitchens underwent a transformation. I found myself not just cooking, but cooking with purpose and intention. Each culinary endeavor was an ode to honor the intricate tapestry of our food, our culture, and our deeply-rooted identity. This was no mere gastronomic journey; it was a deliberate act of culinary reclamation. I was on a mission to decolonize—seeking liberation for my mind, body, and spirit. By embracing and prioritizing Indigenous foods and culinary traditions, I sought healing. I yearned to cleanse my palate, rejuvenate my taste buds, and realign my cravings and appetites, breaking free from the shackles of gastro-colonial influence.

The Kitchen of Rituals and Ceremony

My culinary and spiritual journey found its roots in an improvised kitchen setting in La Rumorosa, situated in Baja California Norte, Mexico, during the Chicano Sundance event. Collaborating with a dedicated team of Mexica/Azteca danzantes, educators, and another like-

minded Chicano chef, our collective aim was to prepare meals that would satiate the families attending the ceremony and provide sustenance to the sun dancers.

Our culinary orchestra would commence as early as 5 a.m., weaving its magic into the late hours of the night. Preparation areas comprised cement countertops, easily foldable tables placed strategically under sunshade tarps that were erected on uneven terrains. Cold storage was meticulously planned with the use of large ice chests, which found shelter within hogans. These hogans also hosted portable tables, elevating dry goods and provisions safely off the ground. The openness of this kitchen setting, devoid of barriers, seamlessly merged with the vast expansiveness of the surrounding desert. As if under the watchful gaze of towering grandfather boulders and the ever-curious fauna - ranging from tiny critters and birds to diverse plant life - we went about our tasks. Amidst the symphony of our culinary endeavors, we catered to nearly 50 to 60 individuals, orchestrating this service three to four times daily. The rhythmic pulses of a distant drum, harmonized with the melodic chants of Sundance singers, transformed our kitchen space. It wasn't just a cooking venue; it evolved into an extension of the Sundance ritual. This became a sacred nexus, converging the culinary arts, the diners, and the sun dancers in a shared reverence. It reiterated the belief: food, akin to our melodies and dances, is a potent healer.

Inspired and spiritually awakened from my experiences in the La Rumorosa outdoor kitchen, where each dish was infused with the essence of ceremonial songs, my journey into culinary healing, rekindling ancestral memories, and the act of decolonization continued with fervor. Between 2008 and mid-2011, my culinary adventures manifested in various outdoor pop-up cultural markets and art-focused events. Here, using makeshift kitchens, I curated and presented Mesoamerican plant-based delicacies. But 2012 heralded a significant turning point. My passion

transformed from a mere calling into a profound duty. A duty not just to uphold these traditions of setting up ephemeral kitchens and reviving ancestral culinary delights, but to reinterpret them for modern palates. And, most importantly, it became my solemn responsibility to impart this knowledge, ensuring that the ensuing generations are bequeathed with these timeless traditions.

Echoes of Ancestry: My Journey into the Heart of the Indigenous Restaurant Kitchen

In the Indigenous commercial restaurant kitchen, you will typically find standard restaurant equipment that enables usual kitchen operations. Such equipment includes a chef's knife, sous-vide machine, stand mixer, blender, food processor, preparation station, a hot station with salamander broilers and deep fryers, a cold station, a plancha, an eight-range gas stove equipped with cast iron skillets and saucepans, a section dedicated to plating featuring tweezers and squeezable sauce bottles, a service area with heat lamps, a walk-in refrigerator and freezer, and an area for dry storage equipped with shelving units and storage bins. However, it is the culinary culture and environment that differentiate the Indigenous restaurant kitchen from mainstream ones.

As a child, my first encounter with a restaurant kitchen was in East Los Angeles, specifically at the Mercadito on First Street. The Mexican restaurant there was owned by my best friend's aunt, Rosa, where my Tia Tere and Tio Jorge once worked. During one of our visits, Rosa, who was both the owner and chef, permitted me to enter the service area to refill my horchata using the beverage dispenser. I felt elated, mainly due to my connection with the owner and chef and being allowed into the heart of the operations.

This exhilaration was amplified when I later set foot in the Indigenous restaurant kitchen. In January 2015, my travels took me from Seattle to White Mountain Sunset Resort in Arizona,

located three hours up a mountain in an area colloquially known as Apacheria by those residing in the neighboring city of Phoenix. The drive, presenting diverse landscapes from the cold Arizona desert to snow-covered peaks, was a breathtaking experience. Remarkably, it was the first time I saw cacti draped in snow and rivers embellished with ice particles. The high elevation of over 10,000 feet, coupled with the rich history of warriors like Geronimo, left me profoundly moved.

Upon reaching the White Mountain Sunrise Ski Resort, I quickly checked in and contacted Chef Nephi Craig, who promptly invited me to the kitchen. Donning my first official chef jacket, which I had received at the Indigenous Food Sovereignty gathering at the Arizona Desert Museum, I was eager to immerse myself in this new environment. The Indigenous restaurant kitchen was magnificent. Beyond the state-of-the-art equipment were signs of a powerful Indigenous identity. High shelves displayed a variety of ancestral beans, such as Anasazi, Runners, and Tepary, stored in airtight containers. Above them was a framed poster that boldly stated: “Decolonization is the intelligent, calculated, and active resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands. It is engaged for the ultimate purpose of overturning the colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation.” Another palpable presence was the Apaches in the Kitchen. They moved with a discernible “sense of urgency,” intent on serving the guests of the Sunrise Resort Restaurant.

The evening was delightful, dining with Chef Nephi Craig and his family. I savored the taste of Apache three sisters’ fritters, Apache tacos, and a delightful dessert served on porcelain plates. The following day, the atmosphere in the kitchen was charged with energy and anticipation. As Chef Nephi stated, as quoted in “Native Foodways” (2013): “Native chefs are activating

thousands of years of ancestral knowledge by cooking up our cultural heritage foods.” He further emphasized: “For us, food is a compelling medium to communicate insightful and memorable sensory experiences that can last a lifetime.”

I was then invited to conduct a workshop on making quinoa milk using a fine-mesh strainer, high power blender, and large mixing bowl. Chef Nephi reminded us, referencing his appearance on a Toasted Sister podcast episode titled “This Radical Pathway”: “The political landscape of Indigenous food is complex. I am conscious of and worried about Indigenous food being culturally appropriated negatively because the principles of the food and wine culture do not necessarily match those of Indigenous culture.”

The remainder of my time at the resort was spent assisting with food preparations, where I encountered the complex ballet of the professional kitchen – the calls of “Corner!” “Knife!” “Hot Pan!” and the synchronized movement of the chefs using wooden spatulas, tongs, and ladles. My stint in the Indigenous kitchen was enlightening, and I left with profound respect for my culinary comrades, the Apaches in the Kitchen.

The Indigenous Pop-Up and Community Kitchen: A Testament to Tradition and Resilience

A pop-up kitchen can be envisioned as a transient, restaurant-style setup that is not tethered to a specific location. Over the years, I have collaborated with teams to establish several such kitchens, often in settings where traditional kitchen infrastructure was missing. We would sometimes introduce our own equipment, including electric stoves or portable camping gas alternatives, collapsible tables, insulated food storage containers known as cambros, spatulas, plates, and a variety of other essential service items. Our aim was to construct a fully functional kitchen from scratch. On other occasions, our pop-up kitchen would offer dinner services in

communities that already had a kitchen infrastructure. Depending on the locality, these kitchens varied in size, ranging from cozy setups to expansive culinary arenas.

However, what truly distinguishes an Indigenous pop-up kitchen from mainstream kitchens is not just the location or equipment but the soul and the essence with which it operates. When you witness an Indigenous community at work, understand that their culinary endeavors are not primarily driven by profit motives. Instead, the Indigenous chefs and their communities are channeling ancient traditions to heal, evoke memories, and fervently work towards rejuvenating, restoring, and refreshing ancestral culinary practices and connections.

The unique technology and food preparation techniques employed in Indigenous kitchens also stand in contrast to conventional kitchens. Beyond the familiar skillets and stockpots, one might encounter comals, barro clay pots, and wood-fired stoves. These items, though uncommon in most modern kitchens, are cornerstones in these traditional spaces. While many would reach for a metal whisk to blend ingredients, we often turn to a molinillo, a wooden whisk with roots in Mesoamerican culture. And when it comes to creating salsas, instead of modern blenders, we rely on the molcajete and its associated tool, the mano, to intricately and thoughtfully combine ingredients. The meticulous preparation of molcajete salsa is an homage to the ingredients and the history they represent.

The ingredients you find gracing the countertops and stoves of Indigenous kitchens hold a tale of their own. They are invariably fresh and adhere to the principles of being local, ecological, sustainable, seasonal, organic, and native – a philosophy we fondly refer to as LESSON. There is a certain magic that unfurls during the plating process. Each dish, with its unique arrangement

and presentation, weaves a narrative of endurance and resurgence. The very act of plating is a delicate dance of intention and artistry, letting the food recount its rich history.

Between the expertise of the chef, the application of traditional ecological culinary knowledge, and the adoption of time-honored methods and tools, the Indigenous pop-up kitchen transforms into more than just a place of sustenance. It becomes a hallowed ground of recollection, a vibrant confluence of foods, tastes, recipes, and energies. Above all, it stands as a powerful testament to cultural endurance and revival.

Embracing Heritage Through Indigenous Kitchenspaces at “A Taste of Native Cuisine” in Arizona

In the dawn of 2015, Chef Nephi and I ventured into a conversation about orchestrating a monumental event in collaboration with the Southwest Desert Museum in Arizona. Our vision was to organize a Native American Culinary Association Gathering that would spotlight Indigenous chefs, celebrating their unparalleled culinary prowess and wisdom. Our ambition culminated in the “Indigenous Food Summit and Basketry Celebration.” This event was nothing short of awe-inspiring, uniting a diverse spectrum of Indigenous food enthusiasts, ranging from chefs and farmers to birth workers, seed preservationists, basket artisans, and revered elders deeply rooted in Indigenous culinary traditions.

Though my previous engagements with the food symposium had been as a presenter, this year marked a transformative phase in my culinary journey. I embraced roles as a co-organizer, a sous-chef, and again as a presenter. This transition symbolized my evolution from a culinary anthropologist to gaining recognition as a distinguished Mesoamerican plant-based Xicana Chef.

My duties led me to the kitchen alongside Chef Louis Ellen Frank and Chef Walter Whitewater (Diné), the visionary founders of Red Mesa Cuisine, LLC, located in New Mexico. Collaborating with them was a profound honor. Only a year earlier, I had the privilege of attending one of their famed pop-up dinners as a guest. Now, I found myself immersed in the intricate world of sous-chef duties, aiding them in their meticulous food preparations. My initiation involved handling fifty pounds of cactus, a task demanding the removal of its countless spines. Chef Walter imparted a valuable technique to me, emphasizing the need for patience and caution, teaching me the value of respect and gentleness towards our plant kin, especially the cactus.



Image 2. Chef Walter Whitewater sharing chef and Indigenous culinary knowledge with me.

During this, I overheard Frank Peralta, a student chef from a New Mexican culinary school, speaking in Navajo (Diné), expressing a cultural aversion to the cactus. Chef Walter clarified the historical context, revealing the “cactus myth” implanted by Spanish colonizers, aimed at

discouraging the Diné from consuming cactus, a key component of their cultural heritage diet. Such insights were contrasting to my own upbringing, where cactus was a culinary mainstay, a legacy from my grandfather, Ramiro Sifuentes, hailing from Chalchihuites, Zacatecas, Mexico.

Beyond the intricate handling of cactus, my responsibilities shifted to assisting Chef Lois Ellen Frank. Together, we meticulously crafted appetizer headpieces that blended plant ingredients, salmon eggs, and delicate tweezing techniques. This task felt more like a ritual than mere culinary preparation, requiring a meditative concentration and a spirit of gratitude. Later, Chef Walter entrusted me with the preparation of a New Mexican pozole, a dish resonating deeply with my East LA heritage. This sumptuous soup, enriched with nixtamal pozole maize, was prepared using a colossal, freestanding induction soup cooker, a culinary apparatus I had never encountered before. Using an immersion blender for the first time added a touch of humor to the day, as Chef Walter and I grappled with its overwhelming power, leading to some unexpected spills. Roaming through the Sonoran Desert Museum kitchen, I witnessed an array of chefs engrossed in their culinary artistry. Among them was Chef Andrea Murdoch, a Venezuelan chef who astounded me with her ingenious creation – a purple gnocchi crafted entirely from native South American ingredients.

As dinner service approached, Chef Nephi's meticulous planning ensured a seamless execution. The atmosphere, contrary to expected chaos, radiated a serene, vibrant energy. The chefs operated in synchronized harmony, assembling dishes with precision and reverence. Each plate was a testament to ancestral traditions, garnished with nature's bounty, and infused with the spirit of the earth. This entire culinary endeavor, rooted in collaboration, intention, and tradition,

transformed the Indigenous kitchenspace into a realm of warmth, cultural resurgence, celebration, and a sanctuary where ancestral culinary wisdom could flourish unbridled.



Image 3. Headpiece appetizer served to guests at a Taste of Native Cuisine in AZ

Journey to the Ra Ndakuu+Taza—Feast of the Sorcerer and the Eagle Pop-Up in Minnesota

In the year 2015, I embarked on a remarkable culinary mini-tour alongside Sioux Chef Sean Sherman. Our paths had previously crossed in 2012 during the North American Culinary Association food conference. This chance meeting blossomed into a lasting friendship. Chef Sherman had recently established a novel catering business named the Sioux Chef, a venture that would soon lead to the inauguration of Minnesota’s first Native American food truck, named Tatanka.

In promoting his burgeoning catering enterprise, Chef Sherman was offered an opportunity to present a sequence of lectures and dinners in the state of California. Knowing my doctoral studies in anthropology and the questions I was delving into – particularly about the

transmission, embodiment, and sensory memory of traditional ecological culinary knowledge – he believed it would be beneficial for both of us if I accompanied him. This experience would enable me to further hone my skills, deepen my connection with Native foods, and assimilate knowledge straight from the source.

As I assumed the role of a chef stagiaire under Chef Sherman, I became intimately acquainted with his unique cooking style and seasoning techniques. This immersion taught me to meld my abilities within Indigenous pop-up kitchen environments and understand the culinary narrative from sourcing ingredients to plating. Stepping into Chef Sherman’s pop-up kitchen, I carried a fundamental question with me: What narratives and wisdom does our food wish us to recall and rejuvenate, especially in terms of reviving Indigenous culinary knowledge? Moreover, how might we, as culinary professionals, propagate this wisdom via Indigenous gastronomy?



Image 4. Spirit Plate by Chef Sean Sherman. Photo by Claudia Serrato

During our preparations, I took a deep breath, allowing the fragrances enveloping the pop-up kitchen to tantalize my senses. These aromas reminded me of the medicinal herbs used by my grandmother. I exclaimed spontaneously, “It smells just like medicine here!” To which Chef Sean replied with profound simplicity, “That’s because it is medicine.” This interaction underscored the realization that our culinary endeavors were deeply healing and medicinal in nature. This kitchen acted as a sanctuary for transmitting ancestral wisdom and memories, redolent with the scents of verdant meadows and aromatic pine. We always began by preparing a spirit plate to venerate the food, our forebears, and the ancient culinary traditions.

My journey with the Sioux Chef took me from Nevada City to San Francisco’s Friendship House. Here, I assisted in preparing a distinctive Indigenous tasting menu for the day. This menu featured salmon laid on wild greens. Concurrently, Chef Sherman educated the local community about Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Cuisine. Within the community kitchen of the Friendship House, I collaborated with my friends, Chef Marlene Aguilar and Curandera therapist Adilia Torres. Our culinary creations included baked salmon, wild pesto, and an aromatic cedar tea. Witnessing the community relishing and interacting with the tastes and flavors Indigenous to the Pacific Northwest was indeed a pleasure.



Image 5. Friendship house culinary crew.

After a week traversing the Californian coastline, our next culinary venture awaited us in North Dakota. Here, at the Coteau des Prairies Lodge, I teamed up with the Sioux Chef catering ensemble to curate the Canpasapa Wi–Dinner of the Chokecherry Moon. This dinner, hosted in the lodge’s expansive home-style kitchen, catered to around 40 esteemed guests. My introduction to Chef Brian Yazzie occurred during this event, as he was instrumental in our food preparations. Our culinary brigade, consisting of Sean, his then-manager Dana Thompson, Sous Chef Cristina, and guest sushi Chef Channo, traveled and even took moments to forage ingredients such as purslane from the wayside. As we reached the lodge, our culinary dance began, uniting us with the food and each other.



Image 6. Photo collage by Claudia Serrato of trip to Coteau des Prairies Lodge

With dawn, we ventured out for some light foraging. The kitchen then transformed into a hive of activity as we embarked on creating a lavish five-course meal. Each dish meticulously designed by Chef Sean Sherman echoed the essence of the river, prairie, forest, and harvest. We were grateful for the assistance of kitchen volunteers, as each culinary creation was composed of myriad ingredients, each having its own recipe. These recipes were plated with precision to either evoke a memory of taste or to craft a new one. Following the dinner, a sense of camaraderie prevailed as we celebrated our collective achievements.

Soon after, we were beckoned to Minnesota for another gastronomic experience: the Ra Ndakuu+Taza—Feast of the Sorcerer and the Eagle. Held in the spacious venue hall of Twin Cities towards the end of 2016, Chef Marlene Aguilar and I took a flight from Los Angeles to collaborate with the Sioux Chef brigade. Our culinary preparations were centered in the Indigenous community of Little Earth, which boasted a compact commercial kitchen. Here, we crafted tamales, a dish both Marlene and I were intimately familiar with due to our cultural connections. However, these were not conventional tamales. Instead, they were innovatively made with white flint Oneida corn and enriched with duck fat. Chef Sean's ingenious approach left a lasting impression on me, especially his efficient methodology for crafting tamales using an ice cream scooper.

The culmination of our preparations was a grand evening where every dish was plated with reverence, celebrating Indigenous cultures, landscapes, and ecological affiliations. My favorite dish, perhaps due to personal biases, was the duck tamal plate. This event, apart from showcasing Indigenous culinary masterpieces, allowed for collective creativity where each chef contributed to the dish's final presentation. This collective effort was celebrated post-service

with a shot of mezcal, a tribute to our teamwork and commitment to reviving ancestral memories.



Image 7. Duck tamal. Photo by Claudia Serrato

In the end, both Chef Sean and Neftali Duran expressed their gratitude to the attendees. I was taken by surprise when they acknowledged my contributions and beckoned me to the stage. As I stood there amidst applause, it became evident that our efforts were much appreciated, and our ancestors were indeed proud. The scene before me shifted, and the attendees appeared as our forebears, donning traditional attire from various cultures. The realization struck me then – we are the embodiment of our ancestors’ dreams, and through events like these, we honor their memory and traditions.

The Indigenous Outdoor Kitchen: Embracing Holistic Culinary Spaces

In the years 2017 and 2018, Dan Cornelius, was at the forefront of several ambitious projects pertaining to food sovereignty grants. These visionary projects were designed with the primary aim of congregating Indigenous chefs from various corners of the Americas. But it was not just the chefs; this inclusive endeavor sought to bring together farmers, dedicated gardeners, skilled

butchers, adept foragers, diligent harvesters, devoted seed keepers, artistic pottery creators, passionate culinarians, and ardent Indigenous food enthusiasts. All these individuals, with their unique skills and shared passion, were to come together for several enriching days. The underlying philosophy of this grand gathering was to pay homage to the ancient trade routes which facilitated invaluable culinary exchanges—exchanges that included not just tangible items like foods but intangible treasures like recipes, cherished ancestral memories, and unique flavors. The tribal community of Jijak graciously decided to host these two noteworthy gatherings.

Upon Dan’s invitation, I was approached to contribute to the first food sovereignty movement gathering in the capacity of a chef. For the subsequent gathering, I was to participate as a more seasoned chef. Although I was uncertain about the specifics of what my roles would encompass beyond the realm of cooking, I unhesitatingly accepted the invitation. My first journey to this unique location was facilitated by a pick-up from the airport, while during my second visit, a rental car awaited me. Regardless of the mode of transport, the final destination remained the same—the enchanting Jijak camp, which was the heart of the food sovereignty summit. Nestled amidst pristine nature, the camp was enveloped by majestic birch trees, serene water pathways, moist swampy terrains, expansive prairie grasslands, cozy wooden cabins, and rustic wood fire stations. The camp also featured a makeshift wigwam, an open-air maple syrup distillery, and at its core, a communal indoor kitchen. This central hub was destined to become my primary domain, as it was here that I, along with other kitchen teams, would engage in the preparation of daily meals. Our mission was to craft breakfasts, lunches, and dinners that would satiate the appetites and souls of about 300 summit participants each day.

What set this pop-up kitchen apart from any other I had encountered was its distinctive structure. Instead of being confined within four walls, this kitchen extended its boundaries to seamlessly incorporate the great outdoors. It was as if the Jijak camp was introducing me to the idea of an ‘expanded kitchen’—a space that was not constricted by physical boundaries but was in fact an amalgamation of multiple, interconnected kitchenspaces set against the backdrop of a broader Indigenous terrain. During my stay at Jijak, it dawned upon me that what I initially perceived as one kitchen was in reality a conglomerate of seven unique kitchenspaces. These were:

1. The industrial indoor community kitchen.
2. The rustic outdoor wood fire kitchen.
3. The traditional maple syrup wood house kitchen.
4. The versatile outdoor prep table kitchen.
5. The specialized skinning and drying outdoor kitchen.
6. The aromatic indoor smokehouse wigwam kitchen.
7. The dynamic foraging and edible landscape kitchen, a real-time pantry of nature's bounties.

Each of these spaces redefined and broadened my conception of what a kitchen could be. I began to perceive these areas not just as isolated units but as interconnected entities, each contributing to and relying on the others. They were in harmonious coexistence, fostering what Enrique Salmón would describe as a ‘kincentric ecology.’ Every kitchen had its defined role and responsibility, but they were all symbiotically linked. Each space seamlessly intertwined with the culinary maestros who operated within them, ensuring that the prepared dishes resonated with the essence of the Indigenous ethos.

The Jijak experience was not just about cooking or preparing meals; it was a profound journey that bridged the past with the present, intertwining ancestral wisdom with contemporary culinary artistry. It was an enlightening exploration into the heart of Indigenous culinary spaces, reminding all of its interconnectedness and the beauty of harmonious coexistence. Following this introduction to the multifaceted nature of the Jijak culinary spaces, we will delve deeper into each of these unique kitchens, exploring their distinct characteristics, functionalities, and the ethos behind them. We will embark on this journey starting with the heart of the Jijak camp: the industrial indoor community kitchen. This space, with its bustling atmosphere and harmonious blend of traditional and modern culinary tools, encapsulates the spirit of unity and communal sharing. It serves as a testament to the age-old Indigenous practice of coming together to partake in meals, share stories, and forge bonds.

The Expansive Role of the Community Commercial-Style Kitchen

Nestled within the heart of the Jijak camp, the community commercial-style kitchen stood as a marvel of culinary architecture and design. This facility boasted state-of-the-art amenities such as well-organized cold and dry pantries, gleaming stainless-steel prep tables, a robust commercial six-range gas stove, a top-of-the-line plancha, efficient running water sinks, technologically advanced convection ovens, and an impressively scaled dishwashing operation. Such an expansive setup facilitated the culinary endeavors of the summit, making it the birthplace of a myriad of dishes curated for the attendees.

The organizational structure within the kitchen was both fluid and dynamic. We chefs had the liberty to streamline our processes by forming culinary teams, working in shifts, and dividing roles based on services and expertise. Every chef, before their arrival at the summit, had been

tasked with conceptualizing and submitting a unique menu, complete with an exhaustive ingredient list. This was in anticipation of the Chef Tasting event, a central highlight of the summit where each chef would present a tasting dish emblematic of their distinctive Indigenous “sazon” or flavor profile.

Naturally, with so many culinary maestros bustling in one space, it was not unusual for the kitchen atmosphere to oscillate between focused determination and vibrant chaos. On occasion, two service preparations would converge, each vying for immediate attention. We, as a collective of chefs and cooks, navigated these waters with a harmonious dance of mutual respect and spatial awareness. This ‘harmonizing,’ as I fondly term it, had its moments of unpredictability, reminiscent of the dynamic balance found in natural ecosystems. Within such a setting, as a female Indigenous Xicana chef anthropologist, my dual roles often interplayed, leading me to occasionally default into analyzing the environment through the lens of Western colonial academic frameworks. In such moments, I would center myself, taking deep breaths and reconnecting with the raw essence of the culinary experience.

It is noteworthy to mention that the structure of the Indigenous kitchen deviated significantly from the traditional, colonial culinary hierarchies prevalent elsewhere. In this space, titles like head chef, sous chef, line cook, or prep cook were rendered obsolete. Even though many amongst us held such titles in other culinary settings, within the confines of the Indigenous food summit, every individual, irrespective of their experience, was revered as a chef. Initial interactions had us addressing each other formally as “Chef,” but as camaraderie developed, first names became the norm. This transition underscored the acknowledgment that each chef present brought with them a unique essence of traditional ecological culinary knowledge (TECK), be it

through ancestral memories, lived experiences, or fresh perspectives. We functioned in unison, much like a synchronized flock of birds, churning out exquisite, Indigenous-inspired meals for the numerous attendees. The joy, respect, and appreciation with which these meals were consumed was a testament to the collective expertise at play. Yet, it is crucial to recognize that the seamless service from the community commercial-style kitchen was intertwined with the synchronized operations of other kitchens and kitchenspaces in the camp.

Delving into the Spirit of the Outdoor Wood Fire Kitchen

Nestled amidst the broader Indigenous kitchenscape was the outdoor wood fire kitchen. Here, the raw essence of nature and tradition intertwined in an exquisite dance. It was the central hub where logs were diligently collected, finely chopped, and skillfully prepared to create cooking fires that would burn for extended hours. Atop these fires, artisanal clay and copper pots found their place, each filled with recipes that would simmer and stew to perfection over time. This space could aptly be christened as the sanctuary of slow-food cooking.

Prominent among the dishes curated in this kitchen were ancestral soups that spoke of centuries of tradition, as well as the intricate process of corn nixtamalization. The allure of this outdoor kitchenspace was palpable. For me, stepping out from the contemporary confines of the community commercial kitchen and into the embrace of this open-air setting was akin to stepping into a rich tapestry of memories and emotions. The gentle warmth emanating from the fires resonated deeply with my spirit, invoking potent ancestral, traditional, and cultural memories. The simple yet profound act of being around these fires, accompanied by the aromatic scent of dried wood combusting, transported me back to my formative years. It served as a poignant reminder of the expansive nature of Indigenous nutrition, a philosophy that transcends

the mere act of consumption. For Indigenous culinary traditions assert that nourishment extends beyond the tangible act of eating; it encompasses an array of experiences that feed our very souls. True, eating is often seen as a simple fork-to-mouth ritual, but here, it metamorphosed into a rich sensory journey, with experiences like the entrancing smoke-to-nose sensation serving as bridges to traverse temporal realms.

A particularly heartwarming memory from this kitchen was of Chef Arlie, who emerged as both the protector and culinary maestro of this space. Under his care, this kitchen was transformed into a living theater of gastronomic tales. With great pride and reverence, he showcased clay pots that had been bestowed upon him, eager to breathe life into their dormant ancestral memories over the wood fire. The symbiotic relationship between the wood, the elemental fire, and the earthen pots seemed to beckon Arlie, anointing him not just as their steward but also as the keeper of their stories. His passion was contagious. Whenever I would momentarily break away from the bustling activity of the community commercial kitchen and wander to this outdoor haven, I would often find Arlie, his face illuminated by the soft glow of the fire, animatedly narrating the story of his gifted pots and the delectable concoctions they housed. He became the embodiment of the culinary storyteller, bridging the past with the present and underscoring the importance of keeping traditional narratives alive in the contemporary world.

Journey to the Maple Syrup Wood House Kitchen

Amongst the myriad of experiences, I encountered during my time at Jijak, the maple syrup wood house kitchen stands out as a particularly enchanting realm. Imagine, if you will, a quaint wooden structure that embodies the very essence of the majestic Maple Tree Forests. Every step inside this culinary sanctuary was akin to setting foot within a natural apothecary that the forests

themselves had conjured. Every corner seemed to whisper the tales of the trees, where individuals devotedly served as both guardians and artisans, channeling the ethos of what Robin Kimmerer beautifully describes as the “gifting economy.”

This dedicated space was the beating heart of maple syrup and maple sugar production at Jijak. In homage to the rich mineral heritage of these lands, and perhaps as a nod to the intrinsic value of this liquid gold, craftsmen used large copper tins. These tins, filled with the sap delicately harvested from taps inserted directly into the bark of maple trees, would be subjected to the slow and mesmerizing dance of fire for countless hours. The gradual transformation of this sap, under the watchful eyes of its custodians, was a sight to behold.

Once the labor of love was completed in the maple kitchen, the fruits of this endeavor - the freshly made maple sugar and syrup - would find their way to the bustling heart of the Jijak culinary world: the community commercial kitchen. Here, these Indigenous sweeteners were eagerly awaited, and upon their arrival, they were greeted with a warmth that went beyond mere appreciation. It was an acknowledgement of the rich legacy they carried, a testament to the deep connection between the land, the trees, and its people. The maple products were not just ingredients; they were a symbol of the abundance that the land offered and the gratitude with which its offerings were received. Their role was pivotal in many a dish, adding a touch of sweetness that bore the essence of the forest itself.

But beyond the mechanics of syrup and sugar production, what left an indelible mark on my soul was the sheer magic of witnessing this transformation firsthand. The joy of seeing the clear sap metamorphose into glistening syrup and crystalline sugar, and then tasting this unadulterated sweetness, was unparalleled. It was nature’s alchemy at its finest, a celebration of the age-old

bond between the forest and its stewards, and a testament to the wonders of Indigenous culinary traditions.

Witnessing the Craft in the Outdoor Prep and Teaching Kitchen

During my inaugural sojourn at Jijak, an enlightening experience awaited me on the second day of my first visit. Elder Daisy Kostus had orchestrated a comprehensive demonstration on the meticulous process of skinning and preparing a beaver. This specific beaver had been responsibly trapped, aligned with ecological balance due to its overpopulation, and was earmarked for a unique culinary method known as smoke roasting. The venue chosen for this event, subsequently christened as the teaching kitchen, was more than just a preparation area. It served as a hallowed ground, a space dedicated to the dissemination of ancestral knowledge, intertwining culinary arts with deep-rooted cultural teachings. Here, aficionados of food sovereignty converged, not merely as spectators, but as fervent learners and collaborators, absorbing the sacred rites involved in preparing wild harvests for communal nourishment.

On that day, I was momentarily disengaged from the bustling activities of the community commercial kitchen, presenting me with the opportunity to gravitate towards Elder Daisy's session. As I approached, she began her tutorial, introducing us to the majestic river beaver that lay before us on a rustic wooden table. With patience and reverence, she expounded on the ecological rationale behind the beaver's harvest, detailing the traditional trapping techniques used. Admittedly, the initial revelations surrounding the trap's functioning evoked a visceral discomfort in me. Yet, Elder Daisy's sagacious words about the beaver's symbiotic relationship with the environment, its role in the larger web of life, and its deep connection to both its kin and human communities, brought a sense of clarity and acceptance to my heart.

The subsequent part of the demonstration was an epiphany. Elder Daisy Kostus delineated the art of beaver skinning with such finesse that it seemed like a poetic dance between her hands and the beaver. With a surgeon's precision, she initiated the process, her blade effortlessly separating the skin from the body, revealing the tender meat beneath. Observing her deftly maneuver through the intricate process was a masterclass in respecting every aspect of the creature. Once skinned, with an expressed admiration for the beaver's powerful tail, she meticulously gutted the beaver with the assistance of another seasoned elder, safeguarding against any inadvertent punctures that might contaminate the meat. The emptied beaver then served as a vessel, being generously filled with an array of freshly prepared vegetables.

A transformative moment unfolded as Auntie Elder Daisy seamlessly sewed up the beaver. With collective efforts, the prepared beaver was then affixed to a wooden pole, poised for its ceremonial smoke roasting. The entire exercise, under the tutelage of Elder Daisy, transcended mere food preparation. It emerged as a profound ritual, a ceremonial ode to nature, and an affirmation of the deep Indigenous culinary wisdom that underscores the sanctity of life, food, and community.

An Ode to Ancient Traditions: The Elm Bark Wigwam Smokehouse Experience

Emerging from the outdoor prep and teaching kitchen was a beaver, destined for a revered place within the wigwam smokehouse. Crafted meticulously from elm bark and hide, the structure emanated antiquity. A deliberate aperture atop the wigwam facilitated the escape of wafts of fragrant smoke, telling tales of culinary legacies preserved across ages.

At the wigwam's heart, a roaring fire occupied a pride of place. Flanking the flames were two sturdily erected stakes, designed to shoulder the weight of the beaver, ensuring its thorough

smoke roasting. Once the beaver assumed its position, it became a mesmerizing dance of caretakers, myself included, ensuring a consistent spin, aiding in its even cooking. Within the confines of the wigwam were simple wooden benches, offering a vantage point to spectators, evoking memories of a time when such practices were commonplace.

Being inside this ancient-style kitchen was a deeply introspective experience. The rhythmic crackling of burning wood played a serene background score, occasionally interrupted by the soft sizzles of the roasting beaver. As I found myself engrossed in this act, a myriad of emotions swept over me. There was a profound connection to a past era, juxtaposed with an acute sense of disconnect stemming from the painful legacies of colonization. Intertwined in this emotional tapestry were feelings of elation, fury, gratitude, and reflection.

Such rituals provided a poignant reminder of the unwavering resilience of Indigenous cultures and their unbroken spirit in the face of adversity. Through this process, I felt an overwhelming sense of reconnection, a rejuvenation of ancestral memory, where every fiber of one's being recalls and celebrates long-forgotten customs. It is more than mere reminiscence; it's a deeply rooted healing process that fortifies one's identity, fostering a profound bond with the environment, space, and time continuum.

The wigwam smokehouse served as a temporal bridge, making the passage of time feel ephemeral. Here, in its warm embrace, the eternal flames which once served as humanity's primal kitchen, together with traditional foods like the river beaver, not only satiated hunger but also fortified a community's spirit. It emphasized the profound principle of coexistence, where every entity, including the beaver, has a sacred role to play in the vast tapestry of nature, echoing a time when all entities coexisted harmoniously.

An Intimate Glimpse into the Skinning and Drying Kitchen: A Celebration of Indigenous Wisdom and Sustainability

The Indigenous ethos of sustenance is not merely centered on consumption but extends to a profound understanding of the relationship between humans and every resource nature offers. This principle is anchored in gratitude, sustainability, and an unwavering commitment to ensuring no part of a gift, especially one as significant as an animal, goes to waste. Chef Sean Sherman, an esteemed voice in the realm of Indigenous cuisine, once echoed this sentiment to me with a thought-provoking question: “what are each food's culinary, utilitarian, and medicinal purposes?” A question that resonated deeply and steered me towards the fifth illustrious kitchen at Jijak - the skinning and drying kitchen.

Nestled in close proximity to the outdoor wild food prep kitchen and the smokehouse, the skinning and drying kitchen was an open-air sanctuary. This was the arena where one could witness the art of transforming animal skins into useful materials, a process both intricate and steeped in ancestral wisdom. Upon my first foray into this unique space, my senses were immediately captivated by the meticulous technique with which skins were mounted onto stretchers, methodically scraped to perfection, and then left to dry. The sun played a pivotal role, its rays gently kissing the skins, aiding in their preservation. It was during this observation that I crossed paths with Clayton Brascoupe, the visionary behind the Traditional Native American Farming Association (TNAFA). As we both admired the stretched beaver skin, he imparted invaluable insights. Emphasizing the necessity of ensuring the skin's consistent exposure to the sun, he also cautioned against overstretching, which could lead to irreparable damage.

As our conversation meandered, we delved into the profound interlinkages between these age-old skinning methods and Native American agricultural practices. Clayton's words resonated deeply, elucidating how Indigenous food sovereignty transcended mere consumption. It encompassed the very essence of cultural and spiritual practices, like crafting heritage drums from these dried skins, which would reverberate with melodies during ceremonial rituals, dances, and songs. This practice paid homage to the entire lifecycle of the animal, particularly the beaver, through this post-life ceremonial act.

Admittedly, my understanding had previously been limited, not realizing the full extent of the symbiosis between our culinary traditions and cultural ceremonies. This epiphany underscored the holistic nature of Indigenous beliefs. The underlying tenet is the interconnectedness of all life forms, and food, in its myriad forms and uses, serves as the linchpin that harmoniously binds this intricate web of relations.

The Foraging and Edible Landscape Kitchen: A Living Testimony of Indigenous Connection with Nature

Jijak, with its multitude of culinary spaces, always felt like a sanctuary to me. Every visit, regardless of its frequency, evoked feelings of warmth, safety, and familiarity. Among these culinary havens, the living foraging and edible landscape kitchen holds a special place in my heart. Unlike the provisions housed in the community's cold and dry pantry within the industrial-grade kitchen, this outdoor treasure trove promised foods in their most natural state, ripe for the harvest through meticulous foraging.

To embark on this foraging journey, one needed more than just enthusiasm. Proper attire, Indigenous culinary tools, intricately woven baskets, digging sticks, and most importantly,

skilled hands, were essential. Guiding this quest were experienced foragers and landscape connoisseurs like Tashia Hart and Karlos Baca. In this ever-changing outdoor pantry, predictability was a rare luxury. It was Mother Nature, with her varying seasons and whims, that dictated the day's bounty. As you meandered through the wet, muddy trails, surrounded by dense foliage, nature revealed her secrets. Certain plants, with their unique shapes and colors, would announce their presence, with the foraging guides confirming their identity and potential use.

Ramps, for instance, are emblematic of the terrain. These wild, delicate green plants are harvested whole, including their tiny underground bulbs. Their unique life trajectory, which sees them spending nearly five years subterranean before surfacing, necessitates sustainable harvesting practices. Thus, when confronted with a patch, we would gather only a prescribed amount, ensuring their continued proliferation for future generations.

Extending the concept of the living pantry were spice bushes. Their leaves and twigs unfurled an aroma reminiscent of cinnamon, tantalizing the senses. Heeding the lessons passed down through generations, our harvest was always measured, ensuring the bush retained its natural appearance. On other forays, the land offered us wildflowers like the vibrant purple violets. These would be harvested with the utmost care, ensuring the landscape retained its charm and beauty. Kat Anderson, in her seminal work "Tending the Wild" (2005), elucidates this delicate balance. By harvesting judiciously, we not only prolong the plants' lifespans but also nurture the ecosystem, ensuring its bounty remains accessible for all - be it the land, animals, insects, or microorganisms.

This philosophy of symbiotic interaction was palpable when we chanced upon patches of wild ginger and onions. The very act of foraging, using our digging sticks to unearth these hidden

gems, was a transformative experience. The sensation of tilling the earth, feeling its texture, and inhaling its invigorating aroma was nothing short of magical.

However, the foraging and edible landscape kitchen did not solely cater to gastronomic delights. Sometimes, the day's agenda encompassed birch wood bark harvesting. Initially, I found myself pondering the correlation between bark harvesting and food gathering. However, the connection soon became evident. The harvested birch bark would be meticulously crafted into baskets, essential for future foraging expeditions. Embarking on this unique harvesting expedition was an enlightening experience. Traversing through the dense forest, identifying mature birchwood trees encroaching upon their neighbors, and using traditional techniques to skillfully peel off the bark was a journey of discovery. It was heartening to see that long before entities like the Environmental Protection Agency underscored the importance of sustainable practices, Indigenous communities were already living these principles. Upon our return, the harvested bark was further refined in the outdoor processing kitchen. Witnessing these raw barks metamorphose into intricately designed, functional baskets was a testament to the ingenuity and sustainable ethos of the Indigenous community.

Indigenous Kitchens and Kitchenspaces: A Deep Dive into the Heart of Indigenous Culinary Heritage

At the very core of Indigenous communities lies their culinary heart: the Indigenous kitchen. It is not just a space confined by four walls, but rather a living, breathing entity that spans across various kitchens and kitchenspaces. These areas are more than just places to cook; they are the living repositories and guardians of age-old culinary wisdom and traditional ecological culinary knowledge (TECK). Serving as both a bridge and a beacon, these spaces bridge the gap between

the past and the present, while also shining a light on the importance of preserving Indigenous culinary art and cuisine for future generations.

Furthermore, the act of preparing food in these kitchens, through processes such as cooking, foraging, gathering, and harvesting, paves the way for ancestral memory activation. It is a spiritual experience that connects individuals to their roots and provides a deeper understanding of who they are and where they come from. Having spent considerable time immersed in the world of Indigenous kitchens and kitchenspaces, a revelation unfolded before me: these spaces pulsate with life. They are alive, and they hold memories, stories, and experiences. Each Indigenous kitchen, with its distinct identity shaped by its locale, history, and the community it serves, is interconnected to others. These are not just spaces; they are entities with tales of original culinary instructions. These tales offer not just recipes but also guidelines for decolonization, paths to healing, and blueprints for (re)Indigenization. They ensure that Indigenous culinary cultures remain anchored in their history while evolving and adapting to the changing times. This transmission of ancestral knowledge is crucial for movements like the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement.

Labeled as kincentric kitchens, they epitomize the essence of unity and interdependence. In these spaces, everything is intertwined. Humans, plants, animals, and the fundamental elements of fire, earth, wind, and water come together in a harmonious dance. They coexist, co-create, and co-evolve, weaving together the tapestry of Indigenous culinary wisdom. These kitchens are bustling hubs where menus are curated, recipes are innovated, and meals are crafted, all the while keeping kincentricity at the core. It is in this harmonious interplay that the true magic happens.

The front and back of the house in these kitchenspaces are not just operational areas; they are platforms for education and cultural exchange. They awaken and strengthen the Indigenous palate, making it yearn for the authentic tastes and flavor profiles that Indigenous cuisine offers. In the heart of these evolving culinary traditions lies the age-old essence of ancestral tastes, flavors, and memories. They serve as a constant reminder that the rich tapestry of traditional ecological knowledge is not just a thing of the past, but an ever-evolving legacy that continues to shape the future.

Chapter Five, Echoes of Ancestry: The Palabra of the Spirit of Food - A Sacred Dialogue with Indigenous Pantries, Culinary Technologies, and Recipes

La “comida cannot be removed, displaced, or replaced...Like any living language, comida reflects the living memory of routine or ritualized practice...it cannot lie passive in published print. It is alive in the flesh; in the hands, hearts, and tongues of those who partake of it. Only through the practiced rituals of growing, preparing, and serving comida, this memory is passed on; each generation re-members those that precede...”
—Gustavo Esteva & Madhu Suri Prakash in *Grassroots Post-Modernism: Remaking the Soil of Cultures*

Amid the sounds and scents of the Indigenous kitchenspaces lies a voice - a voice that echoes from the spirit of food, resonating with ancestral wisdom and tales of the land. This voice, experienced through various senses, channels the timeless stories of food as “palabra,” drawing from the deep well of Indigenous chef’s wisdom, ecological knowledge, and memories passed down through generations.

During my immersion into these sacred kitchenspaces, a recurring lesson became evident: food and the chef are inseparable. This synergy was best encapsulated in a conversation I had with Chef Nephi in 2015 when he conveyed, “the food and the chef are one and the same, together, becoming a collective energy field.” Such revelations show that within the culinary dance, the chef and the ingredients are not just partners but extensions of each other, reverberating as a singular force.

For the Native/Tribal nations and communities, oral traditions have long been the vessel through which original instructions, songs, stories, and ceremonies have been conserved and passed down. This “transmission” of knowledge, pivotal for the preservation of Indigenous culture and systems, has evolved and adapted to the digital age. Today, such transmissions are manifested

through spoken word, poetry, art activism, and of course, the culinary arts, ensuring that traditions remain alive and relevant in the contemporary milieu.

The act of preparing and consuming food is a profound dialogue. In these kitchenspaces, those who forge a deep bond with food – be it seed savers, gardeners, foragers, or chefs – are privy to the whispers of ingredients. Through their skills and understanding, they decode the palabra of food – an edible memory and knowledge. This knowledge, when translated through the art of “cheffing it up,” becomes an experience that appeals to all human senses.

For an Indigenous chef, navigating the kitchenspace is like a ritual. It is paramount to understand one’s pantry, to recognize the tools at one’s disposal, and then to craft recipes that pay homage to these resources. Chef Felicia Cocotzin Ruiz imparted a profound perspective on food as she sees it, saying, “we are all a product of the sun, you know, so when we eat them (plants), they are going to have that energy source and how they are nurtured, that has a different energy source. You cook with them, that is a different energy source, then you go to eat it and you are grateful for it, now you have four energy sources, so you know, it is a transfer of energy.” In a subsequent conversation, Chef Ruiz and Chef Loretta Oden exchanged their culinary philosophies. Chef Ruiz (2016) beautifully articulated her practice by saying, “So when I cook, if possible, I try to have the sun and moon on one plate, to offer balance and harmony...I want to share with others that energy and food are connected. Our ancestors knew this and had songs, chants, and prayers to demonstrate the power of the sun’s energy and the moon’s cycle...I have realized that I am all about energy, certain foods carry sun and moon energy.”

This chapter endeavors to highlight the myriad ways through which food knowledge and memory are conveyed, intertwining the narratives of cultural food stewards with the foods,

technologies, and recipes that echo the palabra of food. In a tapestry of tales where food takes center stage as both the whispering voice and the pivotal hero, I entwine a narrative rich in ancestral wisdom, age-old traditions, and the harmonies of nature's culinary canvas. Much like a chef meticulously chooses and blends ingredients for a masterpiece, I have gathered stories and insights, letting intuition guide my hand, to present the saga as voiced by the very sustenance it celebrates.

It is imperative to understand that food communicates in multifaceted ways. Reflecting on a conversation with Chef Nephi on what he has learned by cooking with the three sisters, corn, beans, and squash, he remarked,

“They taught me about symbiotic relationships, they taught me about nutrition building blocks of protein, they taught me about agriculture and science...I was thinking about how spirituality is the technology of the Indigenous world, not all medicines were developed through specific science, so to speak but we have oral stories and oral traditions on how some of our medicine plants were made known to us...To me, the three sisters have brought a deep, real sense of spirit and a keen awareness of intelligence and simplicity.”

This poignant reflection underlines the deep spiritual and intellectual bond that chefs share with their ingredients.

The Depths of Indigenous Pantries: Chronicles of Culinary Heritage

Indigenous pantries, much like their kitchen counterparts, are more than mere storage spaces. They are intricately woven tapestries, bearing testimony to the rich and varied Indigenous culinary history. They resonate with stories and echo with traditions, painting a vivid canvas of a people's journey with food, from cultivation to consumption.

Delving deep into the heart of Indigenous food culture, these pantries are sanctuaries that chronicle the interplay of time, geography, and the myriad tastes and flavors that have tickled

Indigenous palates over millennia. Every item placed within these pantries carries with it a narrative, a piece of history, a cherished memory. They not only provide a snapshot of contemporary Indigenous culinary preferences but also serve as a repository of ancient culinary wisdom, hinting at age-old traditions and practices.

Through my extensive interactions with Indigenous chefs and culinary guardians across diverse kitchens and regions, it emerged that the intricacies of the Indigenous pantry are defined by two primary divisions: the dry pantry and the cold pantry. These divisions, while functional in nature, represent the diverse methods employed by Indigenous communities to preserve the essence and vitality of ingredients, ensuring that their potency and flavor are locked in and remain unaltered over time.

While in most modern culinary spaces these are identified by functional names such as the storage area, walk-in refrigerator, or freezer, within the Indigenous kitchen, these spaces hold a more profound significance. They are revered as the ‘Indigenous Pantry,’ a term that encapsulates the entirety of the Indigenous culinary realm. Within this realm, every ingredient, every spice, and every preserved delicacy stands as a testament to a time-honored culinary tradition that has been passed down through generations.

It is interesting to note the diverse positioning of these pantries in different Indigenous kitchens. Some kitchens have them situated at the entrance, greeting everyone who enters, while others might have them nestled in the heart of the kitchen or towards the end, signifying their pivotal role in the culinary process. There are also those unique Indigenous kitchenspaces that house these pantries in what I fondly term as ‘little home kitchens.’ These are standalone pantry structures built akin to tiny houses, positioned slightly detached but in close proximity to the

main kitchen. They not only serve a functional purpose but also add a touch of architectural charm, symbolizing the importance of food storage in Indigenous culture.

To truly grasp the essence of Indigenous culinary artistry, one must immerse oneself in these pantries, for they are more than mere storage spaces. They are, in every sense, living museums of Indigenous gastronomy, offering a glimpse into the past, a taste of the present, and a hint of future culinary explorations.

Chronicles of the Dry Pantry: A Repository of Ancestral Microchips

In Indigenous culinary spaces, the dry pantry unfolds as a living testament to age-old traditions. This is not a mere storage area; it is a vibrant tapestry of ancient narratives, a library of foods and their remarkable journeys. Dried foods, ranging from wild rice and amaranth to mushrooms and beans, have weathered the sands of time. Each item carries with it whispers of the past, connecting us to ancestral roots and wisdom.

In the heart of such tales stands the bean, resplendent in its diversity of forms and colors. My introduction to this edible assembly took place at the White Mtn Resort. Gazing above Chef Nephi's prep station, I beheld glass containers brimming with beans like the Mayocobas, Scarlett Runners, Anasazi, Northern Whites, and Pinto. Yet, amidst them, the White and Brown Tepary beans captivated the senses. Chef Nephi once mused that these beans were akin to time capsules, each "encoded with ancestral knowledge" — functioning as "ancestral microchips". But it was the voice of the tepary bean, or Stoa Bawi (To:Ta Bawi), that held me spellbound:

“Hello, dear kin. I am Stoa Bawi, born from the sun-kissed Arizona deserts and cradled for millennia by the Papago (Tohono O’odham). The sands and winds of the Sonora desert whispered secrets to me, long before I found myself under the care of the Akimel

O’odham (Pima) and Tohono O’odham. My nourishing embrace has been a solace to many, yet, for a vast stretch of time, I lay forgotten. The march of industrialized farming eclipsed my essence and the knowledge that I am uniquely designed to thrive in arid embrace. But despair not, for the wheel turns and cycles renew. Today, I am more than a memory. I stand at the forefront of a resurgence, as desert and river peoples awaken to their culinary roots, reclaiming me, and through me, rediscovering their own strength and history. Now, as I find my place in Indigenous kitchens far and wide, it is heartening to see my name whispered in reverence. My planting, synchronized with the monsoon’s song, is a ceremony of rebirth. If you listen closely, you will hear ancient chants and songs serenading me. Should you decide to join this ritual, remember my humble request: Nurture me with love, and come harvest, you’ll find me, in my full splendor, ready to nourish and tell my tale again.”

In a similar vein, another ambassador from the Indigenous kitchen, wild rice, beckoned with its tales. Before my deep dive into Indigenous culinary arts, wild rice was primarily a raw food ingredient to me, soaked to perfection over days. However, in the embrace of the Indigenous kitchen, it took on a richer meaning. In search of understanding, I engaged the wild rice in conversation, and it replied, embodying the insights of Chef Sean Sherman and Winona LaDuke (2005):

“Hello, relative. I see that you are from the southwest. You arrive with so many questions and I only have one. Why do you not know? I ask this question as an invitation to initiate a conversation about white settler colonial Indigenous erasure and how it extends beyond the human. It is an erasure of food, knowledge, and taste, but more so, ancestral memory. The memory of riding in reed grass canoes through wild rice patches early in the dawn of

the morning. The ancestral memory of greeting the flocks of wild geese, toads, and other fin relatives. The smell of dew and freshwater lake grasses. The sound of the winnowing of wild long grass rice using a hand-made winnower, what you would call today an ancestral culinary technology. The ancestral memory of seeing the seeds and hearing their sounds falling into the hand-made baskets used to gather and store them. Feeling their weight and drowning your fist into the depths of the baskets. Taking the seasonal and the days were gathering back to the processing kitchen, where birch wood had been gathered to start a fire to begin parching the rice over hot rocks. The sound, feel, and sight of the fire let you know it was ready. Then, placing the partially parched rice into earthenware to create an edible culinary metamorphosis, where I, nurturer of the Ojibwe Northern Nations, Manoomin (aquatic grass), take on the responsibility to feed the people, human and nonhuman, while transmitting ancestral culinary wisdom encoded in flavor by creating opportunities for taste memories to be savored.”

Drawing inspiration from this encounter, I brought a piece of LA to Jijak. Fusing contemporary tastes with ancient traditions, I crafted a wild rice milk chia seed pudding. The response was overwhelming, a testament to the versatility and enduring appeal of wild rice.

Another vibrant thread in the Indigenous culinary narrative is amaranth. This omnipresent grain, spotted in diverse landscapes, from Minnesota to Jijak, holds tales of migrations and endurance. Chef Nephi, while popping amaranth, would often lose himself in silent prayer, connecting deeply with the grain, “amaranth is popping, I am thinking of every single bit of my being and what the sounds mean to me and what the fire looks like and I cannot tell just by looking at the pot of its hot enough, but the amaranth will tell me” (2015). The journeys of amaranth,

especially its trek from the heart of Mexico, Anahuac, to Northern America, narrate tales of ancient trade routes and seed exchanges, weaving a beautiful tale of interconnectivity.

Amaranth, sharing its history, whispered:

“Many people do not know this, but I am a witness to the grandeur of pre-Columbian civilizations, having played an essential role in the Aztec culture. They revered me, not just as a staple but as an embodiment of their spiritual beliefs. They would mold me into statues of deities, only to be broken and consumed later in sacred rituals. However, the Spanish conquest threatened my very existence. The colonizers, seeing the sacred rites, outlawed my cultivation. Yet, I persisted, hidden and protected by the very people who revered me. From the heart of Mexico, Anahuac, to Northern America, I traveled, carried by the winds and by the indigenous people who refused to let me vanish. Today, I am both a memory and a promise, a testament to resilience and cultural preservation.”

In essence, these tales remind us that the Indigenous kitchen is more than a space for cooking. It is a sanctuary of stories, each ingredient offering a bridge to the past, keeping traditions alive, and enriching the present.

Cultural Resonance: Stories from the Indigenous Cold Pantry

In addition to the dry pantry, the cold pantry is fundamental in Indigenous kitchens, safeguarding and chilling our traditional proteins and freshly sourced foods for future consumption. Whether it is the size of a home refrigerator, a grand walk-in closet, or a large shipping container, the purpose remains unchanged: to preserve the sacred and culturally significant food that nourishes our communities.

A staple of the Indigenous cold pantry is the bison. Developing a deep connection with this majestic creature has imparted me with invaluable knowledge:

“I am Tatanka, a surviving relative of the attempted genocide of the Pte Oyate (Buffalo Nation) by the white settlers due to their westward expansion guided by the logic of Manifest Destiny. After displacing our human people, my people became targets, and by targets, I do mean shooting targets. President Polk believed that one way to fulfill the human genocide of the Lakota People and all other neighboring plains tribes was by taking away their food source. We were that source. In a matter of a bit less than one hundred years, we went from 30 million firms to about 300 in despair. In the early 1800s, new laws were created, like the Dawes and Homesteading Acts, that allowed for the systematic “hunting” of our nation, and, through the name of sport, our purpose and relationship to plains tribes and other nations from Canada to Mexico were severed. We no longer fed and provided warmth to our nation but became waste as the white-settler colonialists did not find a deeper purpose for us but only held and created value to our hides to become robes or rugs, unlike the Lakota who understood and honored our sacrifice by living alongside us and, when necessary, hunting us as a sacred ritual and ceremony to keep the cycle of life going. Lakota used every part of us for the well-being of the tribe. We were made into food, clothing, blankets, knives, and fuel. It was a great honor to thrive alongside such a great nation during those times. Still, it is even greater to be thriving today alongside the Lakota and prairie landscapes that have remembered, prayed, and asked for our return to stomp and feed on the lands and to become the food once again to feed the people, to be the medicine and hold our place and

responsibilities to the sacred ecology of life. *Aho, Mitakuye Oyasin* (To All My Relations).”

Before I experienced First Nations Food Sovereignty gatherings, bison was unfamiliar territory for me in the kitchen. It was not a dish from my childhood. My culinary journey with bison began when I collaborated with the renowned Sioux Chef, Sean Sherman. With him, I not only learned cooking techniques but also the philosophy of maintaining an ecological balance in our dishes. Chef Sean emphasized the art of slow-cooking bison, braising it in a manner reminiscent of crafting a medicinal brew. He would season the bison with a blend of salt and maple sugar, then sear it over intense heat before slow-cooking in a deep pan with water, juniper berries, cedar, and occasionally maiz. He instilled in me the importance of “Indigenizing” our seasonings, a decolonial approach that pays tribute to our food’s sacred nature.

Chef Ben, the founder of the restaurant Tocabe, also shared invaluable insights on perfecting bison dishes. Like Chef Sean, he prioritized honoring the ingredient, often combining it with traditional flavors of the southwest like chiles, tomatoes, and bay leaves. Under the mentorship of these culinary giants, I crafted a bison recipe in 2020 which garnered attention from the New York Times and was showcased on a cooking channel. This recipe, a culmination of their teachings and my own heritage, will be detailed in the following section.

Returning to the topic of the cold pantry, another cherished inclusion is salmon, traditionally cooked on sticks over an open flame. My time in the Pacific Northwest deepened my reverence for this fish and its central role in the lives of the PNW Indigenous peoples. One of my most profound moments was hearing the tale of the grandfather salmon:

“Hello, relative from the south. It is a pleasure to meet you, and thank you for

understanding and staying true to what you believe in your heart, which is that the Salmon nation matters. We are the livelihood of the people of the Pacific North, from the Klamath to the Duwamish (Northern California to Washington), as they are ours too. Together, our wellness makes us stronger as a nation, for we are in an ecological relationship which unfortunately did experience a shift when the white settler arrived and forced our nations to no longer be in relationship with each other, that is, look out for each other's well-being through song, ceremony, and harvest. Luckily for us, not being allowed to be in relation with one another did not remove the fact that we are related, it just caused a temporary disconnect.

You see, it became illegal to harvest us, and our human relatives became policed and made to face the legal system for sustaining and maintaining their lifeways, which are also ours. Luckily, our human relatives fought this oppressive and illegal system to win back their fishing rights, but what many people have forgotten is that we are vital to the ecosystem. Unfortunately, many ranchers do not understand this as they continue to take water from us to nourish the wheat, they are growing to feed their livestock. If they only understood that not allowing us to thrive is not to allow our human people to thrive and our other animal relations like the black bear and the coyote for when they are deprived of their foods and lifeways, this affects the life of the forest, which then is to say, no life at all.

Remembering our importance in the life cycle is vital for food sovereignty to thrive, manifest, and materialize into a world where harmony is brought back into ecological balance. It also is not enough to remember how important we are to nurture the

Indigenous body but how we do so. Our foodways are very particular yet simple. We ask that when the remembering work is being done that the ways to harvest us and prepare us for consumption are also remembered and not forgotten, like how to prepare us by creating fires and using sharp pointed sticks to pierce through our flesh to cook beside the fire, taking in all that fire savor, for it is here were our tastes and our flavors embody the ecological knowledge that you seek to keep alive and regenerate for the next generations to come, from the river to fire to table, it all must be remembered.”

Through these experiences, I have come to appreciate the significance of the Salmon Nation and its teachings. Consuming salmon has given me insights into the seasons and the importance of understanding food availability. Gifts of smoked and canned salmon always remind me of these lessons and the interconnectedness of all life. Our relationship with foods like bison and salmon in the Indigenous kitchen is not just about consumption. It is about respecting their roles in our culture, understanding their histories, and keeping alive the traditions and practices that surround them.

Cooking & Culinary Technologies: Bridging Ancestral Wisdom and Contemporary

Innovation

In today’s world, the culinary landscape is awash with advanced cooking technologies and state-of-the-art kitchen equipment. Modern chefs have at their fingertips an array of tools, from the precision of Japanese steel Damascus knives to the resilience of silicon cutting boards. Such innovations promise efficiency and consistency. However, in the Indigenous kitchen, these contemporary marvels coexist harmoniously with the echoes of antiquity. As Anthony Bourdain insightfully stated, “Food is everything we are. It is an extension of nationalist feeling, ethnic feeling, your personal history, your province, your region, your tribe, your grandma.” This

sentiment is profoundly resonant within the Indigenous culinary realm, where the kitchenscape is as much about history and heritage as it is about flavor and technique.

While many may look at contemporary kitchen gadgets and marvel at the strides humanity has made, I often find myself in awe of the ancestral technologies that have stood the test of time. In my culinary journey, which has seen me “cheffing it up” alongside incredible Indigenous chefs, I have been graced with a deep appreciation for tools that connect us to our roots. In these vibrant Indigenous kitchenspaces, the marriage between the traditional and the modern is not just evident but celebrated.

The molcajete, a timeless tool deeply rooted in tradition, is more than a mere mortar and pestle carved from volcanic stone. It is a conduit for memories, evoking images of grandmothers meticulously grinding chilies and spices to achieve the perfect blend. Likewise, the potagon, a majestic wooden mortar vital to the Potawatomi, is not just about functionality but stands as a testament to the harmony between nature and Indigenous culinary practices.

This cultural pattern in the culinary world can be seen in how we value and incorporate tools like clay pottery. Memories of terra cotta-colored barro pots that have simmered countless meals over open fires speak of a time when cooking was as much about community and connection as it was about sustenance. Moreover, the artistry of basket weaving, a craft that transcends mere utility, bridges the gap between gathering and gastronomy. Baskets are more than just vessels; they are storytellers, encapsulating centuries of tradition, innovation, and survival.

The confluence of ancestral and contemporary culinary technologies in Indigenous kitchens is a beautiful reminder that food is not just about sustenance. As culinary enthusiasts, it is our

responsibility and privilege to honor and integrate the age-old wisdom of our ancestors with the advancements of today, crafting dishes that nourish the soul as much as the body utilizing ancestral technologies.

The Molcajete: Behind the Flavors of Tradition

In the heart of East LA, in the bustling atmosphere of a home that always smelled of rich spices and warm tortillas, I found my humble beginnings as my mother's sous chef. The memories are vivid: the aroma of freshly chopped cilantro and the rhythmic pounding of the molcajete as it ground fresh ingredients into a tantalizing salsa. My assignment in our culinary dance? The family's cherished salsa de molcajete.

As a child, I rarely questioned the origins or significance of our molcajete. To me, it was merely our dedicated instrument for salsa-making—a simple, albeit essential, kitchen tool. It was much later, during those inquisitive tween years, that my mother pulled me aside to share a piece of our family's history. That molcajete, with all its imperfections and its smooth, well-worn surface, was once cradled in the hands of her mother, my grandmother, Jovita.

I was astounded to learn that our molcajete was more than just a kitchen tool—it was a piece of art, shaped by nature itself. Crafted from volcanic rock, it was a testament to the incredible forces of our planet, a creation formed in the depths of the earth. This stoneware, sculpted by human hands from nature's raw materials, transformed into a vessel—a womb, if you will—that held and enhanced the flavors of the earth's bounty.

But beyond its geological and culinary significance, the molcajete held an even more profound meaning for me. Having never had the chance to meet my grandmother, it became a bridge to the

past—a tangible connection to a woman I would only know through stories and old photographs. Every time we prepared salsa de molcajete, it felt like a communion of sorts. Through the shared experience of creating that salsa, following the same techniques and recipes passed down through generations, I was introduced to my grandmother's sazón. I began to discern her essence, her unique flair, through the taste profiles and flavors my mother cherished and perpetuated. So, every grind of the molcajete, every blend of spices, and every spoonful of salsa became more than just a culinary exercise. It was an act of remembrance, of honoring the past, and of preserving a legacy—a delectable journey through time and taste.

Within the sanctum of Indigenous kitchenspaces, the rhythmic pounding of molcajetes became a signature sound. These traditional grinding tools became indispensable, especially when it came to pounding both dried and fresh chiles like de arbol, serranos, and jalapeños. These chiles, with their vibrant colors and fiery flavors, were transformed under the diligent grinding of the molcajete into pastes and powders that would elevate any dish they touched.

In my journey through various food summits, curating meals that often carried the touch of spice, I found myself gravitating towards molcajetes. I became enamored by their varied sizes and materials, from the organic feel of wood to the cool smoothness of marble. There is an undeniable allure in witnessing the transformative power of the molcajete; how it could take whole ingredients and, with just a little pressure and persistence, turn them into powders or rich, flavorful pastes. It was a process that left me pondering: how did our ancestors, with their innate ingenuity, stumble upon this remarkable culinary technique?

One particular morning stands out. As the dawn's light spilled into the kitchen, I was in the midst of my routine with a molcajete. Holding it, I felt an overwhelming gratitude towards this

instrument, thinking of the countless meals it had helped create and the hands that had wielded it before mine. As I was thanking it, *curando* (seasoning) it, and prepping for another round of grinding, something unexpected happened. It was as if the molcajete began to communicate—a subtle, ancient voice echoing from its depths. The voice grew increasingly pronounced, resonating with the wisdom of generations past. I halted, giving myself over to this profound moment, listening intently, eager to absorb the lessons and teachings it had to offer.

“Mah cualli tonalli (buenos dias/good morning) Xocoyotl (young child). How wonderful it is to greet another sunrise alongside you. Your trust in my abilities and your reverence for our shared history warms me, even more than the fires I have sat upon. It is this mutual respect and connection that has allowed us to continue recreating the distinct tastes and flavors of our ancestors.

You see, my essence has been etched deep within the layers of the Earth. I am not just a tool but a vessel of ancient wisdom. My rugged, porous surface, achieved through years of *molcajiando*, is instrumental in igniting memories from deep within our genetic code—taste memories of generations past. By awakening these dormant memories, we not only honor our lineage but also keep the sanctity of life alive. Such reminiscences are the lifeline to our Indigenous food cultures, nurturing the heart and soul of our culinary traditions.

My origin traces back to volcanic eruptions, bearing witness to the very creation of our world. And as a molcajete, my existence spans over six millennia. Throughout these years, I have been a cornerstone in Indigenous kitchenspaces, imparting the unique earthy tones and minerals to the dishes prepared. The flavors I imbue, rich with iron and other

minerals, are a testament to my volcanic heritage. My design, though simple—a concave bowl supported by three legs, often paired with a *tejolote* (pestle)—is purposeful. While my form may have evolved, my essence as an earth warrior remains steadfast. I am here not just as a tool but as a guardian, a symbol of our rich history, and a reminder of our deep-rooted connection to the land.

Remember, Xocoyotl, though I may bear the weight and wisdom of age, I am first and foremost your kin. A part of the same tapestry, the same lineage that defines you. And while time will continue its march, my presence serves as a constant reminder: we are indelibly linked, both in heritage and spirit. And as long as I exist, you will never be without a touchstone to your roots. Ometeotl.”

The molcajete holds a place of reverence in my heart. Its presence marked my earliest forays into the culinary world. As a young child of five, its weighty, ancient form was the first tool I was allowed to wield, ushering me into the heart of our kitchen. In our household, the molcajete was not just another kitchen implement; it was a fixture, a symbol of heritage and culinary tradition. To imagine our kitchen without one would be akin to envisioning a sky without stars. This storied stone, already imbued with generations of familial memories and flavors, became my mother’s inaugural culinary instrument, just as it would eventually become mine. This cycle of inheritance speaks to more than just a handing down of objects; it symbolizes the passage of traditions, stories, and a deep-rooted connection to our ancestry.

Whispers from the Potagon: A Culinary Dance of Tradition and Ecology

In my culinary travels, the Intertribal Food Summits provided a unique and eye-opening experience. As I stood there, wearing the hat of a guest Xicana Indigenous Chef, I was taken aback by the sight before me. I saw these massive hollow logs being rolled in, accompanied by impressively thick pounding sticks. These wooden artifacts appeared to be expansive versions of molcajetes, with hollowed-out centers so deep that one could easily immerse an entire arm into their cavernous openings. Their size was magnificent, their craftsmanship exquisite, and there was an undeniable aura of medicinal energy emanating from them. Drawn by their allure, I could not help but utter my awe aloud, commenting on their size, beauty, and the healing aura they radiated. And to my astonishment, a voice whispered gently into my ears, a voice so ancient, so grounding:

“Greetings, kin from the southern directions. Your gaze holds both wonder and a hint of recognition. I am the potagon, a cherished vessel, borne from the hands of the Potawatomi. I am the log mortar, the beholder of ancient techniques, where berries, nuts, corn, and herbs are transformed into powder. Generations have relied on my steadfast nature, harnessing practice, skill, and a robust upper body strength to tap into my potential. The process begins with the sacred task of identifying the birch trees that nature can afford to part with, during its many cycles. My bark is versatile, resilient yet ever-renewing. In different times, I have been a shelter, a basket, a canoe, and now, the mortar and pestle you see before you.

Throughout my existence, my purpose has been to safeguard our Indigenous ways - our knowledge, our essence, our traditions, and our very being. For there is an ancient harmony that binds plants, animals, and humans, and I strive to be the bridge that upholds

this balance. As an ancestral vessel, I stand proud beside the Indigenous culinary pioneers, echoing the traditional ecological culinary knowledge (TECK) that reverberates in every grain, every pound, every blend. In various forms, I serve many purposes: a smokehouse for curing game, a basket cradling foraged treasures, a canoe traversing waters, or a mortar grinding hazelnuts, spice twigs, and sumac. The wisdom of my people ensured that my harvest was in tune with the sacred rhythms of the birch tree community. They made certain that my existence enriched our ecology, and the foods processed with my touch carried forward a whisper of my very essence - a hint of flavor, a waft of scent.

And now, as you, a child of the southern nations, stand before me, I see the familiar reverence you hold for the volcanic stones, the earth molded into pottery, and the reeds woven into baskets and petates. While our origins may be miles apart, the heart of our culinary ethos remains intertwined - innovative, sustainable, rooted in Mother Earth, and forever renewing. Miigwetch.”

Amidst the hum of the Intertribal Food Summit Seeing potagons in bustling community kitchens transported me to a time, a space, where the echoes of my ancestors resonated deeply. They meticulously pounded their food, a culinary dance of tradition and necessity. This practice was more than just preparation; it was preservation. By transforming seasonally available foods into durable forms, they ensured sustenance even during barren seasons. Such techniques seamlessly blended life’s rhythm, honoring a harmonious ecology where humans, birch trees, and the art of food pounding coexisted, each enriching the other.

In the intricate dance of Indigenous culinary methodologies and apparatuses, a profound resonance could be felt in the spaces where these traditions came to life — spaces I regard with

an enduring reverence and constantly draw inspiration from in my own culinary journey. But it was with the earth pottery vessels, the embodiment of centuries-old traditions, that my very core vibrated with recognition.

Vessels of Memory: Barro Pottery

In East LA, where my roots are intertwined with concrete and nostalgia, my mother's kitchen was fragrant with simmering beans. They bubbled away in their terra cotta-colored barro pots, which had journeyed all the way from the heartlands of Mexico. Seeing these same pots, their earthy tones deepened by time and use, being employed to conjure up nourishing porridges and heartwarming soups over a wood fire was like an embrace from the past, like stepping back into the warmth of my mother's kitchen. But there was an element that was unfamiliar, a sight I had not witnessed growing up: the birth of these earth vessels.

During a brief interlude from the kitchen's hum and heat, I found myself at a pottery workshop, amidst seasoned potters and soft mounds of clay. As I delved my hands into the clay's coolness, molding and shaping it with an intuition that felt both new and ancient, memories surged through me. They were not just memories of sights and sounds, but of tactile sensations, of hands that had molded vessels for generations. As the clay took shape under my fingers, it seemed to come alive, guiding my hands with a wisdom that transcended time. With a gentle urging, the nascent vessel beckoned me to close my eyes, and in the profound silence, began to share its story...

“Greetings, passionate soul of the culinary world. Your touch evokes centuries of shared memories and traditions. As you hold me in this form, unburned and malleable, I invite you to understand our interconnected existence. I, like you, am multifaceted. Beyond a

mere vessel for food and water, I can be a conduit for heat and steam, and ultimately, when crafted to completion, a bowl to partake from.

Pause a moment and immerse yourself fully in the act of shaping me. Feel the softness of my earthy body as your fingers dance over my surface, and sense the warmth and coolness I transmit. It is in this embrace that I share with you the energies of the sun and moon, the very essences of earth, wind, water, and fire. This union of our beings, the melding of my porous clay and your skin, fosters a kinship that speaks to the deep-rooted connection of the human spirit with the land, reinforcing our shared identity. Through my form, I am not just a tool or vessel; I am a moving geography, capturing memories and traditions within my curves.

The act of molding me is not merely about crafting a container. It is about creating a mobile testament to the sanctity of the land and our mutual dependence. Every time I am brought into the heart of the kitchen, those who remember and honor the old ways are rekindling the ancestral bond, re-affirming their Indigenous roots, and conjuring flavors imbued with the earth's very essence. My transformation, my metamorphosis on the wooden flames, not only solidifies my structure but reinforces my purpose – to be a bridge across time, invoking the memories of past, acknowledging the realities of the present, and inspiring hope for the future. Now, as you shape and mold me, recognize our shared destiny. In your hands, I find purpose, and upon the sacred fire, I embrace life, becoming a beacon of culture, history, and identity. Let our journey together illuminate the culinary world, reminding all of our rich, shared heritage and the eternal bond between human, earth, and fire.”

The masterclass by the exceptionally talented Tashi (Mohawk) shed light on an aspect of food sovereignty that often goes unnoticed. Throughout the workshop, she emphasized that clay and pottery, as intrinsic as seeds and soil, play a pivotal role in the larger narrative of food sovereignty. It was a revelation. My previous engagements in the realm of food sovereignty were predominantly focused on the tangible aspects like food, land, and seeds. Rarely had I paused to consider the culinary vessels – the very mediums that nurture, cook, and serve these foods. Tashi’s teachings transcended the mere act of pottery-making. They delved deep into the symbiotic relationship between the land, the food it produces, and the vessels that ultimately serve it. It reminded us that the vessels we use to prepare our foods are more than just tools; they are memory keepers, forging an unbreakable bond with the ingredients they hold. The profound insight I derived from this enriching experience was the realization that in our quest to maintain a harmonious relationship with our ecology, it is imperative to understand the interconnectedness of food and its vessels. Both are memory keepers. Both tell stories of our ancestry, culture, and traditions. The land remembers, the food carries forward the legacy, and the vessels honor and sustain this continuum.

Baskets as Bridges Between Culture, Artistry, and Tradition

Basketry is not just an art form; it is an intricate tapestry that binds the past, present, and future. At face value, baskets are tools – objects of utility. Yet, as I came to learn, they are so much more. They are living embodiments of tradition, functionality, and storytelling. They encapsulate “the link between cuisine and culture, between survival and artistry” (Dalrymple 2013: 34) – they serve as a bridge, connecting our culinary practices with our broader cultural identities. They hold the key to survival on one hand and the beauty of artistry on the other.

As a child in LA, I remember seeing baskets of all shapes and sizes. Each had its own unique weave and design, carrying with it a purpose and story. But with time, as the influence of dominant culture began to overshadow my early life memories, the significance of these woven wonders faded away. I, like many others, started seeing them as mere ornamental objects, distant from their original function.

The Native American Culinary Association (NACA) conference was a turning point for me. Witnessing the elders expertly weave and teach others this age-old craft was a deeply resonant experience. I initially approached the workshop with a preconceived notion – that these baskets were primarily decorative. However, as I began the weaving process, memories began to flood back. The act of weaving became meditative, pulling me into a space of deep introspection.

Each weave and twist of the reeds stirred forgotten tales, rekindling memories of my ancestors, their practices, and the cultural significance of these baskets. With every pattern I wove, I realized that baskets were not just items to be displayed but to be used, revered, and understood. They were a testament to the indigenous way of life, encapsulating centuries of wisdom, tradition, and survival.

The experience was a poignant reminder of how easy it is to forget our roots, especially when submerged in dominant cultures. However, it also highlighted the power of tradition and craftsmanship to reawaken dormant memories and reconnect us to our ancestral past. Through weaving, I did not just create a basket; I reconnected with a part of myself that had been lost, rediscovering the profound link between our tools, our food, and our culture.

“Hello, dear relative. I am grateful you’ve chosen to be here, amidst a generation that often looks ahead but occasionally forgets to glance back. Many young souls perceive

basketry as an echo from a distant past, a relic. True, it's a vestige of older days, but forgetting its significance risks severing a lifeline to our heritage.

Have you ever pondered why baskets are integral to the culinary arts and dishes of Indigenous people? At first glance, they might seem just functional, but there's a deeper connection. Baskets are the silent sentinels of our food heritage. They safeguard our produce, store our sustenance, and at times, even play a role in the cooking process. Their role isn't just ornamental; they serve multifaceted functions, even acting as dishes in which to serve food.

As you delve deeper into Indigenous culinary practices, you'll recognize the indispensability of baskets. For any foraging endeavor, you require a vessel to hold and transport your bounty. That's our initial service to you. After your gatherings, our broader, more profound baskets stand ready to house your harvests, maintaining their freshness. Baskets harmoniously synergize with their handlers, forming a bond that transcends mere utility. Much like our earthenware kin, we baskets are pivotal to the food sovereignty movement. Whenever I hear of people setting off for harvests, I can't help but wonder, which basket accompanies them?

To truly resonate with Indigenous foods is to understand the symbiotic relationship between the food, the land, and the tools. The reeds that form our bodies need nourishment – they rely on fertile land and abundant water. In return, they provide the materials that skilled hands transform into baskets. These baskets then assist you in your culinary endeavors, completing the cycle of reciprocity.

Our story is simple: We exist not for display but for purpose. In the intricate web of life, where everything is interconnected, it's crucial to remember that true food sovereignty encompasses not just the food, but also the very elements of the earth and the tools that assist in its preparation. So, the next time you look at me, see beyond my woven exterior.

Recognize the legacy I carry and let me aid you in your journey to gather and nourish.”

This epiphany transported me back to my childhood, where I vividly remembered each basket in our home serving a distinct purpose. Some cradled our salts, others embraced our fruit, and the larger ones held our clothes. Engaging with Indigenous kitchens and kitchen spaces reminded me that the reintroduction of Indigenous ingredients and technologies, such as baskets, is paramount for food sovereignty initiatives to truly take root and thrive.

Beyond Ingredients: Choreographing Flavors in the Indigenous Kitchen

Working with a recipe goes beyond merely following instructions; it is a dance with time, location, and context, compelling one to reassess their connection to the land, animals, and plants. For Indigenous chefs and culinary artisans, crafting a menu is not merely about assembling dishes. It is an intentional choreography of flavors. This crafting requires a strategic approach, much like the concept of *mise-en-place* familiar in mainstream culinary realms. In the Indigenous kitchen, *mise-en-place* is not just about having ingredients prepped; it is a holistic readiness, ensuring both food and cultural tools are primed for action. Together, the recipe and the *mise-en-place* strive to synchronize the sensory experience with the essence of the meal, so what's ingested resonates at a deeper level, becoming part of one's very essence through taste and memory.

Over the years, in various Indigenous kitchens, I have acquired the art and science of braising bison. Much of my mastery in this craft, I owe to Chef Sean Sherman and Chef Ben Jacobs. These two luminaries took me under their wing, imparting not just techniques but the reverence and cultural nuance essential for the dish. With their guidance, combined with my experiences, instincts, and culinary wisdom gained along the way, I curated a recipe that does not just tantalize the palate but encapsulates the essence of Indigenous culinary wisdom and my own cultural leanings. In 2020, this dish piqued the interest of a journalist from the New York Times, leading to an engaging discourse with a director¹⁰ and a recipe tester.

I unveiled my recipe in a variety of ways. In the presence of their cameras, I cooked the bison side by side with my family, serving the entire film and journalistic team, before presenting the written recipe to their team of testers. As Farquhar notes, recipes, akin to cookbooks, are “an archive of shared knowledge” (2006: 145). Yet, on platforms like these, they often appear to be mere cultural artifacts, devoid of the profound collective voices, memories, and knowledge imbued within both the recipe and the dish itself.

Yield: Serves 4 to 6 (about 4 cups)

FOR THE BRAISED BISON

2 tablespoons maple or raw sugar

1 tablespoon coarse sea salt

2 pounds boneless bison or beef chuck roast

¼ cup olive oil

4 cups vegetable broth

2 ripe tomatoes

½ medium white onion

10 dried California or New Mexico chiles (2½ ounces)

2 fresh sage sprigs

2 fresh or dried bay leaves

½ cup pure maple syrup

Step 1

To make the bison: Heat oven to 275 degrees.

Step 2

Sprinkle the sugar and salt all over the roast. Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven over high heat. Add the roast and sear until dark brown on all sides, 7 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a plate and reduce the heat to medium. Carefully add 1 cup broth (the hot fat will spatter) and scrape up all the browned bits from the pan. Return the roast and any accumulated juices to the Dutch oven and add the tomatoes, onion, chiles, sage, bay leaves, syrup and remaining 3 cups broth. Bring to a boil, then cover and transfer to the center of the oven.

Step 3

Braise until the meat is very tender, about 3½ hours. A fork should slide through easily. Uncover and cool for 15 minutes, then transfer the roast to a large bowl. Finely shred the meat using your hands if cool enough to handle or with two forks. Strain the cooking liquid and reserve.

Step 4

Image 8. My bison tamal recipe in the New York Times.

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2G-1LCbTrxE>

Without delving into the linked article¹¹ accompanying the recipe, one might remain oblivious to the rich cultural significance and narratives behind each ingredient. And even then, so much was omitted that it almost felt like the recipe was appropriated and repackaged to satiate a different kind of palette, reflecting what Jeffrey Pilcher describes in *Que Viva Los Tamales* as “imperialist nostalgia.” I would bluntly label this as culinary tourism, an act of gazing upon and hungering for the exotic.

Upon seeing the recipe in the digital archives of the NYT, I found myself introspective. How might this recipe’s story have been told differently? As I mulled over these questions, I recalled the wise words of Chef Sean Sherman and Chef Ben Jacobs, urging me to seek answers from the recipe itself. And so, I did, and it spoke to me.

“Recipes, including myself, are intricate tapestries woven with layers of meaning. Their interpretation can vary widely based on who conveys the knowledge, who writes it down, and who brings it to life through cooking. Extracted from its cultural and ecological roots, a recipe can become unmoored, losing its deep connections to its origins and teachings. This alienation, much like what you sensed with my presentation, arises when I am framed and reduced to fit a standard recipe template. Yet, take heart, for such omissions can be redressed in subsequent tellings. Consider this as a way to restore my integrity: begin with the title of the recipe, navigate through the ingredients and the directions, and culminate with a profound reflection or ‘palabra.’ Understand, dear sister, that our recipes

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/22/dining/tamales-los-angeles.html>;
<https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1021732-carne-con-chile-rojo-chuck-braised-in-chile?action=click&module=RecipeBox&pgType=recipebox-page®ion=all&rank=0>;

are sacred incantations, vessels of ancestral wisdom. To truly grasp their essence, one must delve deep, and in that journey, find remembrance.”

Following that profound insight, that is precisely what I did:

Inipi Smoked Tatanka of the Pte Oyate: A Tribute to the Prairie Ecosystem Stewards

Gather:

Maple sugar, crystallized by the slow wood-fire boiling of directly tapped maple tree syrup.

Rock salt from the rims of shallow basins, where saline waters have evaporated over time.

Field-harvested Tatanka, which has grazed and contributed to the revitalization of the grasslands.

Sun-ripened tomatoes, their roots deep in nurturing soil.

Sun-dried California chiles, plucked directly from their tended vines.

Sage sprigs and bay leaves, sourced from mature plants that have been restored to their native terrains, and gathered in mid-morning once the dew has evaporated.

Preparation:

1. Begin by crafting a spirit offering. Arrange a fraction of your collected ingredients on a wooden or earthenware plate. This gesture honors and acknowledges the food, our ancestors, and the memories that nourish our cultural traditions.
2. Take a dried sprig of CA White Sage (Kasili) and waft its smoke over your collection and harvest, cleansing and preparing for the culinary journey.
3. Warm your oven to a temperature conducive for the Tatanka's slow rejuvenation through inipi purification.
4. With respect, butcher the necessary amount of bison. Dress it with the maple tree's crystallized syrup and lay it in an olla de barro.

5. Water is life (Mní Wičóni). To enable the ancestral connection, pour water, allowing steam to rise and activate the flavors and memories.
6. Introduce the remaining ingredients, a bundle at a time. As you do, express gratitude to the entirety of creation – the spirits of the land, the animals, the plants – for their unyielding commitment to preserving our ancestral memories and lives.
7. Seal the vessel with its lid and nestle the barro casserole into the earth's embrace for a duration of four one-hour cycles.
8. When the time has elapsed, unearth and awaken the tender bison. To all my relations, let us dine and remember.

The Essence of Indigenous Culinary Wisdom

Food is more than just a combination of tastes and flavors; it is a recollection of memory, teachings, and reminders of how to stay and be in ecological relation. In this chapter, we traversed a multitude of terrains, from the voices of the Indigenous pantry to the significance of culinary technologies, and finally, the soulful journey embedded in recipes. Each section served as a testament to the profound depth and connection of Indigenous food practices and the broader landscape of ecological relationships and ancestral memory. These narratives, which span both time and space, highlight that food sovereignty is not merely an act of consumption. It is an intricate dance of understanding, respect, and interconnectedness.

The stories of pottery and baskets illuminate how culinary tools are equally crucial in the ritual of food preparation and consumption as the ingredients themselves. They are not just functional; they are repositories of history, tradition, and love. The nuanced art of recipe creation,

particularly in Indigenous contexts, is a testament to the careful consideration of place, season, and availability. This is more than cooking; it is an act of cultural preservation and revitalization.

The bison recipe shared is not just a set of instructions. It is a reflection of journeys taken, lessons learned, and traditions honored. It is a manifesto of the Indigenous culinary ethos — one that blends respect for nature, gratitude for sustenance, and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. As we reflect on the bison recipe's journey through the New York Times and back, we are reminded of the importance of staying true to one's roots while navigating the complex terrains of mainstream recognition. Recipes are archives, and when shared with authenticity and respect, they can serve as powerful bridges between cultures, transcending borders and building understanding.

As we close this chapter, let us remember the essence of the stories shared, for they are a testament to the Indigenous spirit — resilient, profound, and deeply connected to the earth. Each meal, each tool, and each recipe is a song of gratitude, a celebration of life, and a commitment to preserving the rich tapestry of Indigenous wisdom for generations to come.

Chapter Six, Ancestral Embodiment and Culinary Heritage: Memory Activation in Indigenous Menus, Hospitality, and the Art of Plating Edible Landscapes

“...flavor enables awareness, the palate functioning as an embodied compendium of and for being, motivating awareness meal by meal and promoting communion through the intimacy of shared ingestion.”—Ramona L. Perez in *Tasting Culture: Food, Family, and Flavor in Greater Mexico*

As it is already understood, humans embody their experience, and food does as well. In Indigenous kitchens and kitchen spaces, these ancestral embodiments are transmitted into the final meal. As a meal is prepared for consumption, it embodies energetic forces, cultural significance, symbols, representation, lessons, and teachings, all carrying a distinct taste and flavor profile. This meal activates a memory in the body that can remember, record, re-embody, and ultimately materialize through regeneration. As I mentioned in the introduction, ancestral embodiment and memory activation are essential for the survival of Indigenous food cultures and food cultures. Through deep and intensive immersive experiences cooking alongside other Indigenous chefs of Turtle Island during my active years in the “anthropological fieldscape,” I have come to understand that for food sovereignty to be realized, our kitchens, pantries, culinary technologies, and recipes must also align with the principles guiding our desire to return to our cultural heritage foods and foodways. Otherwise, exclusion takes place, and in both principle and theory, true food sovereignty is not achieved. What I have also discovered is that together, as a kincentric culinary ecology, appetites, tastes, and flavors are influenced and shaped by the aforementioned factors and are crucial for memory activation and transmission to take place.

In the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, where Indigenous culinary arts and cuisine prosper, there are other elements that enhance and contribute to the preservation of Indigenous food memories and the resilience of ancestral appetites, tastes, and flavor profiles, which I will

discuss in this chapter. It is imperative to delve deeper into the Indigenous dining experience, focusing on Indigenous hospitality, menus, and the art of plating edible landscapes. Collectively, these culinary elements amplify, educate, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the importance of all these facets in the survival of Indigenous foods, foodways, and culture.

Indigenous Dining and Hospitality

Participating in a chef's table or pop-up organized by Indigenous chefs and culinarians is distinct from the typical dining experience. Regardless of the location of the service, the intentions, foods, and aesthetics remain aligned with the overarching vision. This vision aims to restore the Indigenous appetite for the taste and flavor profiles of ancestral heritage cuisines through regeneration and memory activation and transmission. The ultimate goal is to heal the Indigenous body, restore edible landscapes, and ensure the perpetuation of Indigenous food cultures.

At my initial chef's table attendance, where I held the status of a guest, I entered with uncertainty about what lay ahead. Thus, I approached my seat at the table with both an open mind and heart. This particular chef's table took place at Sunrise White Mountain Apache Resort, specifically in a designated area within the restaurant kitchen meant for seating four guests. The ambiance of this area had undergone a significant transformation from when I had previously spent time there, offering assistance throughout the day in preparation for this central event. My initial feeling upon arrival was one of nervousness, primarily because I was attending solo and would be sharing the experience with three other attendees. Fortuitously, I was acquainted with one of the other guests. Chef Nephi had crafted an altar adjacent to the dining table, adorned with a resplendent native blanket. Atop this blanket were books centered on Indigenous foods and

foodways, baskets filled with corn and a selection of other Indigenous edibles, photographs, and an array of culturally significant items to spark our curiosities and engage our senses. Once all guests had made their entrance and settled into their seats, Chef Nephi extended a warm greeting and introduced us to a thirteen-course winter tasting menu. This dining experience was a collaborative effort between Apaches in the Kitchen and culinary students from the Culinary School of Navajo Tech.



Image 9. Altar at chef's table at White Mtn Sunrise Resort kitchen. Photo by Claudia Serrato

He commenced our dining experience with his renowned Apache seed mix, a compilation of indigenous seeds including pinyon, parched corn, and sunflower seeds. Following this appetizer were other tastings, each designed to resonate with and access our genetic memories. Before the

introduction of each subsequent course, Chef Nephi ensured that we were enlightened about the dish's specifics, including its ingredients and the methods of its preparation. He consistently highlighted the profound ties between these select foods and their origins, emphasizing what he often articulates as “the landscape is destiny” (2015). After acquainting us with each dish, guests were allotted a brief moment to indulge, engage in conversation, and assimilate the culinary offerings before being presented with the next dish. I was particularly surprised when Chef Nephi presented a plate containing wild carrots foraged from Apache territories. At first glance, I appreciated the inclusion of such commonplace vegetables, but he underscored the profound implication of consuming these root foods. By partaking in this, we were imbibing the essence of bears, given that these roots were what they unearthed and consumed. Chef Nephi’s manner of expression is ethno-poetic, as if ancestral spirits had chosen him as their medium, facilitating the communication and comprehension of the deep-rooted wisdom intrinsic to every dish. Another dish that captivated me was one that was uniquely presented as two plates. A flat plate acted as a base upon which a bowl was placed, and this was encircled by diminutive spring rocks. He elaborated that for the full energetic potential of the food to be unlocked, it was imperative to establish this relationship, and then introduce river water to awaken the intrinsic bond between the rocks and the impending dish.



Image 10. Dijizhii or Apache beans and preserved summer corn soup. Photo by Claudia Serrato

This chef's table culminated in a splendid dessert, one that was in harmony with cosmic principles and, as Chef Nephi articulated, was “deeply connected to things otherworldly” (2015). I shall delve deeper into this dessert in a subsequent segment of this chapter, specifically in the section discussing the plating of edible landscapes. In summation, my inaugural experience at a chef's table illuminated the potential for a profound connection with food, facilitated through the senses of taste, smell, hearing, touch, and sight, wherein landscapes were re-envisioned on plates, all complemented by ancestral and traditional ecological culinary wisdom. Furthermore, under Chef Nephi Craig's curation, the Apache culinary knowledge was a conduit to invoke recollections and deeply resonate with our cultural connections to place, space, time, fauna, flora, and the overarching landscape.

It is essential to understand that not every chef's table offers the same experience, and not all are as intimate as the one I previously described. This differentiation became evident to me when I had the opportunity to dine with the Sioux Chef, Sean Sherman. While one might argue that his service could be classified as a chef's table—given it allowed diners to enjoy meals he personally prepared in a close setting—I would liken his dinners more to the format of a pop-up restaurant, catering to large groups of individuals simultaneously. Much like Chef Nephi Craig, Chef Sean Sherman invariably extended a warm welcome to his dinner guests, acquainting them with a brief history of his background, his knowledge, and the sources of his understanding. He emphasized the paramount importance of recognizing and reconnecting with our ancestral gardens, whether they are nurtured within our home gardens or discovered in the wild. Contrary to my inaugural chef's table experience, Chef Sean Sherman's pop-ups did not feature an altar adorned with resources. However, he meticulously crafted spirit plates to pay homage to the spirit of the food, the embedded memories, the resilience it represented, and the ongoing saga of

Indigenous survivance. While there was no designated altar-table, each dining table was embellished with elements intended to remind diners and guide their attention towards the Indigenous experience. These elements emphasized consuming foods that resonate with the ancestral memories of natural ecosystems, cultural heritage, and local landscapes. These dining tables essentially transformed into edible altars, where guests continued to interact with the meals, absorb the knowledge they encapsulated, and connect with one another.

Another manifestation of Indigenous dining and hospitality can be witnessed at the large-scale events such as Indigenous food sovereignty summits and other significant gatherings. At these substantial assemblies, potentially hundreds of Indigenous community members, accompanied by their families and friends, are treated to a rich culinary experience in a banquet style setting. These events stand as a testament to the communal nature of Indigenous celebrations and the value placed on sharing and unity. The chefs, who undertake the monumental task of curating a menu tailored to the specific time of day and the audience's preferences, take the stage to introduce each dish. They delve into the intricacies of the flavor profiles, share the origins and stories behind the ingredients, and passionately elucidate the overarching intent and the cultural significance behind the creation of the food awaiting consumption by the attendees.

Drawing a parallel to the practices of the Sioux Chef, Sean Sherman, these gatherings often incorporate the creation of spirit plates—a symbolic gesture of reverence and gratitude. These spirit plates are then typically accompanied by a heartfelt prayer, most often led by a respected elder, seeking blessings and expressing gratitude for the bounty provided by Mother Earth. Following these solemn moments of reflection and gratitude, there is a thoughtful process in serving the attendees. Children and elders, revered and cherished for their innocence and wisdom

respectively, are given precedence and served first. Women, the bearers of life and tradition, follow next, and then the men. In stark contrast to more intimate settings, at these larger gatherings, guests have the option to serve themselves, basking in the plethora of choices, or they might be assisted by a dedicated food service helper, ensuring everyone is well-fed. This form of service, while grander in scale, contrasts with the personalized, almost bespoke experiences crafted by chefs like Nephi Craig and Sean Sherman, where each dish is not just served, but presented as a piece of art, a story, directly to the diners, making each plate a unique journey into the rich tapestry of Indigenous culture and history.

In certain unique settings, Indigenous chefs have been presented with the opportunity to craft tastings in an open, designated space, allowing Indigenous community members to freely approach and receive individually plated tastings. These tastings were thoughtfully served on biodegradable plates, demonstrating not only an emphasis on the cultural experience but also a nod to sustainability and respect for the environment. Such settings paved the way for a distinctive kind of interaction between the chef and the eater. It was not just about the food; it was a two-way exchange that evoked memories, invoked traditions, and fostered connections. The environment allowed for spontaneous conversations, where community members would enthusiastically share an array of stories. Some would reminisce about their childhoods, narrating tales of how they or their family members grew up consuming such foods. Others would fondly recall memories of their elders partaking in these traditional dishes, drawing connections between the past and the present.

There were also instances where attendees, inspired by the flavors and the stories behind them, would express their curiosity by seeking out recipes. They would engage in a dialogue with the

chefs, eager to replicate the dishes in their kitchens and to further immerse themselves in their rich culinary heritage. Moreover, many would extend their gratitude towards the chefs, not just for the delicious food but also for their innovative approach to blending tradition with modernity, thereby making age-old recipes relevant to contemporary palettes.

I distinctly remember one such tasting where I took the lead in crafting a dish that was both novel and deeply rooted in tradition. I prepared a wild rice chia seed pudding, delicately topped with a rich walnut cream. The reception of this dish was overwhelming. Attendees not only relished it but also expressed their deep appreciation for how the chosen ingredients seamlessly converged. The dish, in its entirety, paid homage to the landscape, the collective edible memory of the community, and stood as a testament to the deep-rooted connection between the Indigenous communities present and their culinary heritage. This experience underscored the profound impact food can have in bridging gaps, invoking memories, and fostering a sense of community.

Indigenous dining and hospitality, especially within the circles and broader framework of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, exhibit a dynamic and adaptable nature, responding thoughtfully to varying circumstances. These nuances, intricacies, and alterations in the experience often hinge on several determinants, with the venue's geographical context and the count of attendees being primary factors.

Beyond the sheer logistics, the heart of the dining experience beats in rhythm with the cycles of nature. The very essence of what is presented on the plate frequently mirrors the season's bounty and resonates with the vibrancy of the surrounding landscapes. This not only ensures that the dishes are fresh and in sync with nature, but also that they carry the narratives of the land and its

continuous rhythms. A land's seasonal shifts and the inherent wealth of its foodscapes act as the compass guiding the Indigenous chefs in their culinary journeys.

However, the material elements—ingredients, locale, and season—are just one part of the story. Equally vital is the ethereal essence—the intention and state of mind brought to the fore by the Indigenous chefs. This psychological and emotional space they occupy becomes the crucible where innovation and tradition meld. From this space springs forth dishes that are not just gastronomically delightful but also spiritually resonant.

Every meal served, every dish presented, carries with it stories deeply rooted in ancestry and culture. These tales aren't merely articulated through words but are intricately woven into the food itself. As the chef narrates the legacies of the ingredients, their origins, and their significance, they transcend the role of mere cooks and become the custodians of history and tradition. This oral and sensory narration creates an immersive atmosphere, kindling in the diner a curiosity, a longing, and an appreciation for the foods and foodways of their forebears.

In essence, the dining experience in Indigenous food sovereignty circles becomes a sublime confluence of the tangible and intangible, the past and the present, and the culinary and the cultural. Every bite taken is not just a taste of food but a journey through time, connecting individuals to their ancestors and the ancient wisdom they held.

Living Codices: The Storytelling Power of Indigenous Menus

Menus in the Indigenous culinary context are not just ephemeral lists indicating a sequence of dishes or culinary offerings; rather, they stand as enduring narratives, etching deep chronicles and histories of a people and their relationship with the world around them. When viewed

through an analytical lens, Indigenous menus emerge as vibrant tapestries woven with the threads of ancestral wisdom, experience, and expertise. They become luminous, vivid chronicles; living codices that breathe and pulsate with the life force of generations gone by.

Such menus, much like ancient codices, function as repositories of cultural wisdom. They are conduits that connect past, present, and future, encapsulating archeological instructions articulated in cultural idioms. They offer a roadmap, guiding the user in navigating the complex terrains of kincentric ecologies, emphasizing the profound interrelationships that bind place, space, time, and life in a web of mutuality.

But why is there such an emphasis on crafting these menus with such care and deliberation? The underlying intention here is to awaken and fortify the Indigenous appetite. This goes beyond mere physical hunger; it is about yearning for a connection, a communion with ancestral tastes, flavors, and culinary memories. When one's palate develops an insatiable longing for the foods of one's ancestors, it becomes an act of reclaiming, of restoring – what Chef Nephi, in his profound moments of reflection during their collaborative sessions, poignantly terms as “ancestral justice.”

Such a perspective on culinary tradition ties back to a profound understanding of stewardship. The ancestors of the Indigenous peoples, in their deep reverence for nature, devoted lifetimes to the study of landscapes. Their keen observations, insights, and practices were aimed at ensuring that the land, its waters, flora, fauna, and indeed, all life forms, thrived. This was not just about sustainability in a modern sense but about a holistic equilibrium where every element, animate and inanimate, found its rightful place and purpose. The intricate work of understanding these

relationships, of discerning the delicate balance of nature, and of perpetuating the ethos of care and nurture, is what today's Indigenous chefs strive to honor.

Through their menus, these chefs pay homage to the timeless wisdom of their forebears. Every dish, every ingredient, and every flavor profile becomes a testament to the values of harmony, respect, and gratitude. It celebrates the tireless efforts of the ancestors in understanding, preserving, and promoting harmonious relations with the land, its creatures, elements, and fellow humans, all manifested through the sacred act of cooking and sharing food.

In the intricate dance of ecology, disturbances are an innate component, guiding the ebb and flow of nature's rhythm. Such disruptions have also marked the history of Indigenous food and foodways. However, as nature instructively demonstrates, understanding and navigating these upheavals is a requisite step in fostering harmonious ecological relationships. The aim, then, in the realm of Indigenous cuisine, is to realign with this harmony by revitalizing the Indigenous appetite that once thrived in synchrony with the land.

The role of the menu in this context becomes profoundly significant. It stands as a living codex, a written testament capturing the essence of ancestral embodiment and memory. Through its carefully curated entries, the menu illustrates a journey - from the depths of disturbance to the heights of restoration. By charting this course, it becomes more than just a list of dishes; it emerges as an archaeological marker, providing insights into the ongoing processes of Indigenous remembrance and the healing journey of ancestral cuisines, linguistic expressions, and sensory experiences.

Across the vast expanse of Turtle Island, guided by the torchlight of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, there's a burgeoning yearning. This desire is not just nostalgic; it is essential. It is a longing to reconnect with flavors, with the plants, animals, and traditions that sustained and enriched our cultures for millennia. This collective yearning signifies more than just a return to past culinary habits; it underscores the vital need for a resurgent embrace of the Indigenous foods of the Americas, championing their revivance, regeneration, and ultimate restoration in our contemporary world.

In the intricacies of curating a menu, Indigenous chefs endeavor not just to present a list of dishes, but to tell a story – a narrative that is woven from threads of memories, present realities, and ancestral ties. This crafting of menus is a delicate balance between homage to traditional heritage foods and a nod to contemporary culinary innovation. The menus become a canvas upon which chefs express their truths, bridging the gap between the past and the present, creating a hybrid reality that captures the essence of a culturally rooted yet dynamic culinary journey.

The very spirit of this journey is determined by the chef's engagement with the local environment and their commitment to showcasing the tastes and flavors that the immediate landscape has to offer. The location of the dining event, be it a chef's table or a pop-up dinner, largely influences the final spread. While the core ethos might remain consistent, the specifics are often dictated by local availability and accessibility of ingredients. This is an embodiment of Chef Ben Jacob's philosophy for his restaurant, Tocabe, which is anchored in the premise: "Indigenous first, local second" (2015).

Crafting such a menu demands meticulous research. This is not limited to just sourcing ingredients but extends to understanding their cultural, historical, and ecological significance.

Engaging with community members, delving into ethnobotanical databases, poring over ethnographic accounts, and physically exploring the landscape are all essential components of this process. Consequently, the menus are in a constant state of evolution, reflecting the ongoing dialogue between the chef, the community, and the environment.

However, as in any dynamic process, there are moments of oversight or unforeseen challenges. Sometimes, certain ingredients might be left out or certain planned dishes might not make the final cut. But these minor absences on paper do not diminish the richness of the narrative the menu aims to convey. Instead, they highlight the authenticity of the process, emphasizing that every menu is a chapter in an ongoing tale. It is a tale shaped by diverse perspectives and voices, where the essence lies not just in the dishes presented but, in the stories, they evoke and the memories they rekindle.

Indigenous menus are a living tapestry, intricately woven with threads of memory, culture, and tradition. Beyond the mere listing of dishes and their ingredients, these menus encapsulate stories, emotions, and experiences that are both personal and collective. Such was the case at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum, a remarkable gathering that showcased the richness and diversity of Indigenous foods from across the Americas. Over fifteen esteemed chefs from diverse Indigenous backgrounds united for this culinary fest, each bringing with them a wealth of knowledge, tradition, and personal stories.

For me, as a sous chef who was part of this unique experience, the menu titled ‘Taste of Native Cuisine’ became more than just a guide to the evening's offerings. It transformed into a sensory diary, capturing the essence of that bustling kitchen. Every dish on that menu evokes a vivid memory — from the rhythmic dance of chefs navigating the kitchen, to the symphony of knives

chopping, pots simmering, and the harmonious blend of laughter and intense concentration. I recall the deep cultural exchanges, the moments of mutual respect, and the shared pride in showcasing our ancestral heritage.



Image 11. Taste of Native Cuisine menu with chef signatures.

Yet, for those who had the privilege to dine with us, the same menu would spark different emotions and memories. For them, it might invoke a connection to their roots, an appreciation for the rich tapestry of Indigenous culinary arts, or a newfound understanding of traditional foods

and their significance. The menu would stand as a bridge, connecting the past and present, tradition and innovation, the chef and the diner.

In essence, an Indigenous menu goes beyond its utilitarian function. It is an embodiment of centuries of tradition, knowledge, and evolution. It serves as both a record and a guide, preserving the wisdom of generations past while enlightening the current generation about the importance, significance, and depth of Indigenous culinary practices. In the hands of the curious, it becomes an invitation to delve deeper, to understand the stories behind each dish, and to embark on a journey of taste, history, and culture. It is a testament to the timeless and universal power of food to tell stories, evoke emotions, and bring people together.

Indigenous menus offer a window into the deep-seated traditions, practices, and ecological knowledge of a region and its people. Taking the example of the menu featuring the first course by Chef Walter Whitewater, the Tender Nopal Cactus Pad Salad reveals layers of information waiting to be uncovered by the discerning diner. This dish, prominently featuring the nopal cactus, immediately signals its relevance to the Arizona region and its seasonality during the fall. The very mention of a ‘tender’ nopal suggests a certain age of the cactus pad, indicating its youth. Such young pads are characteristically thinner and less robust than their mature counterparts, giving a hint of the meticulous care and effort that went into its preparation. The process of preparing such a delicacy is labor-intensive. Removing the thorns, especially given the small size of the young pad, and then julienning them into precise quarter-inch strips, undoubtedly requires skill, patience, and a deep respect for the ingredient.

But beyond the preparation, there’s a broader story waiting to be told - the harvesting. The menu subtly invites inquiries about the traditional methods of gathering cactus. Such questions lead to

richer conversations about the landscape, the Indigenous practices of sustainably sourcing ingredients, and the cultural significance of the nopal in the region's culinary traditions. Furthermore, this course on the menu becomes a nexus of discussion, sparking curiosity, and acting as a catalyst for deeper engagement with the Indigenous culinary world. In this way, the menu transcends its role as a mere list of dishes. It becomes a living document, pulsating with stories, histories, and knowledge. It safeguards ancestral and traditional ecological culinary wisdom, beckoning diners not just to savor the dish but also to partake in the rich tapestry of culture and tradition that gave birth to it. Through such menus, Indigenous chefs open a dialogue, ensuring that their age-old practices and the stories they carry continue to resonate and find voice in contemporary times.

Indigenous menus are intricate tapestries, weaving together stories of origin, home, tradition, and ecological relation. They capture the essence of both individual and collective memory, bridging the divide between past, present, and future. Consider the experience of curating a menu for the AFHVS/ASFA conference. As the Chef de Cuisine, the task was to craft a meal for an audience, many of whom were unfamiliar with the specific nuances of Indigenous flavors. The challenge then became how to bridge the culinary gap between the ingredients readily available in one's homeland of Southern California and the seasonal offerings in Wisconsin during the early summer of 2018. Yet, beyond the logistical considerations lay a deeper intention: the desire to offer the audience 'A Taste of Home.'

This taste was not merely about replicating flavors familiar to the chef's palate but an invitation for diners to embark on a culinary journey, tracing the origins and cultural significances of each ingredient. The menu, in essence, became a celebration of Indigenous hybridity, a fusion of

ingredients and traditions from different Indigenous regions. The resulting dishes were a testament to the age-old practices of culinary trade routes, recipe exchanges, and honoring both land and cultural memories.

The Tostadas de Horno, for instance, epitomizes this culinary fusion. Each ingredient tells a story: the blue corn tortillas hailing from the P'urhépecha lands in Michoacan, Mexico; the dried bison from the Oneida nation in Wisconsin; and the avocados from the Tongva landscape of California. This dish does more than just satiate hunger. It serves as a sensory experience, a melding of distinct cultural flavors, encapsulating histories, traditions, and ecologies.

What becomes evident in such culinary endeavors is the transformative power of food. Every bite is a journey, a foray into the memories encoded in each ingredient. The experience does not just stop at the plate. It lingers, becoming part of the diner's own memory tapestry, reminding them of the landscape, the chef's heritage, and the deep-rooted Indigenous traditions. In this manner, the menu transcends its physical form to become a living narrative, perpetuating stories of origin, tradition, and ecological kinship for generations to come.



Image 12. Tostada de horno with bison machaca

Edible Narratives: The Culinary Artistry and Storytelling of Indigenous Plating

Indigenous culinary culture is a rich tapestry, woven with threads of diverse traditions, ingredients, and culinary techniques. While there are distinct differences across regions and tribes, a shared commitment to recreating edible landscapes through the art of plating is evident. This goes beyond mere presentation; it is about encapsulating stories, memories, and traditions within each dish, offering a sensory journey that transcends taste.

My fascination with visually appealing dishes has always been evident. The allure of vibrant colors, contrasting textures, and an overall invitation to the senses held a special place in my heart. Yet, it was my introduction to Chef Nephi Craig in 2012 that truly revolutionized my understanding of plating. His approach was steeped in culture, imbued with ceremonial significance, and radiated sacredness.

Discovering his blog, “Apaches in the Kitchen,” was a pivotal moment. A specific dessert captured my attention: a dish meticulously crafted to represent a sweatlodge, referred to as the sacred dome. This was not merely a dessert; it was a poignant reminder of the sacredness and medicinal properties of Indigenous food. Through the intricate details of this dish, Chef Craig paid tribute to the ancestral memories, underscoring the resilience and enduring legacy of Indigenous culinary artistry, traditions, and flavors. His philosophy, as articulated in the Toasted Sister podcast titled “This Radical Pathway” in 2017, resonated deeply:

“I always try to have some kind of historical background with a dish, you know, along with the lines of oral storytelling in both Navajo and Apache, each dish comes with an oral story that has a message, a moral to it that has a theme to it, that has a lesson. I do my best to select ingredients that I can talk about survivance, tenacity, creativity, reclamation, ancestral intelligence because, to me, I like the food to be about that continuation of oral storytelling and experiential learning as Indigenous People.”

This revelation underscored for me the profound depth and significance of food within the Indigenous culture. It is not merely sustenance; it is a conduit for ancestral wisdom, a medium through which stories and lessons from the past are relayed and celebrated. Each dish, when crafted by a knowledgeable Indigenous chef, becomes an emissary of knowledge, channeling and transmitting age-old tales, lessons, and experiences. This artful melding of culinary creativity activates the deep-seated memories ingrained within our collective consciousness, reminding us of our roots, our identity as Indigenous people, the landscapes we hail from, and the food that nourishes both our bodies and souls.

Oral traditions have always been a cornerstone of preserving ancestral wisdom, with many assuming that these narratives are restricted solely to the spoken word. Often, it is believed that the mantle of such knowledge-bearing rests exclusively upon the shoulders of elders, cultural guardians, and tradition bearers. For a long time, I too held this perspective. However, my culinary journeys alongside some of the most esteemed Indigenous chefs across the vast expanse of Turtle Island have reshaped my understanding. Through these experiences, I have awakened to the profound realization that food, in its essence, is a vibrant storyteller. Each ingredient, dish, and culinary technique conveys stories, emotions, and histories, echoing the heartbeat of Indigenous communities.

Food is not just sustenance; it is a living testament, a conduit that channels ancestral voices and imprints of the land. As I delved deeper into the sanctum of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, it became clear that our Indigenous foods and culinary practices are dynamic vessels of change and knowledge. They encapsulate ancient culinary instructions, ensuring that we remain tethered to our roots, always in sync with our ecological surroundings and kinships. In

acknowledging the profundity of Indigenous culinary art and its age-old wisdom, I have come to revere it as an elder itself – a vast repository of time-honored truths. These truths have weathered numerous challenges over eons, yet they persist, evolving and enlightening, guiding us towards a holistic understanding of life, relationships, and the path to healing.

Within the sanctified realms of the Indigenous kitchen, I have often found myself immersed in profound realizations, ones that redefine my connection to food and its potential to heal. My dear friend, Chef Felicia Cocotzin Ruiz, often elucidates that in these culinary spaces, we transform into healers. Recollecting the words of Chef Arlie Doxtar, who once remarked, “The food chose you” (2015), I am compelled to introspect. Upon reflection, I discern that it was not just the food choosing me; it was a mutual and deeply rooted selection, where food and I found resonance with each other.

Embracing the belief that food possesses an innate medicinal quality, I resolved to delve deeper into its narratives. This quest for understanding urged me to fully immerse myself, becoming acutely aware of my sensory experiences. By honing in on what I saw, tasted, heard, smelled, and touched, I began to decipher the stories ingrained within each culinary creation. These revelations propelled me to ardently traverse the Red Road through food. My journey is accentuated by an innate obligation I feel towards the forthcoming generations. I perceive it as my duty to safeguard, nurture, and transmit the age-old memories and tales associated with our ancestral foods. Unlike the traditional oral stories, these tales possess a unique characteristic – they can be “metabolized.” When one partakes in these dishes, they undergo a profound experience, an awakening of the Indigenous epigenetic spirit. This evokes an insatiable urge to savor, relish, and embrace Indigenous cultural heritage foods. This culinary expedition beckons

one to a deeper connection with the elements, the rhythm of seasons, the vast cosmos, and the intricacies of local food landscapes.

Further, by reigniting this innate craving for Indigenous foods, we embark on a path of ecological restoration. This process, grounded in unwavering faith in the Creator and bolstered by the prophecies foretelling an era of unparalleled Indigenous healing, leads us toward ecological rejuvenation. It is evident that the responsibility of ushering in this era of ecological healing rests heavily upon the culinary realm. Contemporary chefs, through their relentless efforts towards Indigenous food sovereignty and the sanctified spaces of their kitchens, play an instrumental role in actualizing this vision.

Indigenous culinary traditions encompass a vast, intricate tapestry of art, cuisine, and culture, each thread weaving an embodied memory and epistemology that diners can deeply experience. Such experiences are profoundly sensorial, where one can taste, flavor, and savor the depths of Indigenous knowledge and history. Whenever individuals gather around chef tables and pop-ups, they are not merely partaking in a meal but are immersing themselves in a legacy that transcends time and space.

Every nuance and detail in these culinary events are deliberate and purpose-driven. It is not just about the presentation of food; it encompasses a holistic experience, from the warm hospitality that welcomes diners to the intricately crafted menu design and the artistry of plating. Each element comes together to offer a narrative that echoes the resonant voices of ancestral stories and traditions.

Consider, for instance, Chef Nephi's creation - the desert Western Apache Seed Mix Fritter. This particular dish is an exquisite amalgamation of Indigenous seed mix, honey-braised butternut squash, the ethereal piñon cloud, a luscious ganache, the crunch of popped amaranth, the sweetness of currants, and the fragrant garnish of citrus marigold blossoms. I count myself truly fortunate to have had the opportunity to taste this masterpiece. This singular experience was more than just a treat to my taste buds; it was an invitation to a deep-rooted journey, connecting me to the essence of Indigenous knowledge and legacy. Such culinary events serve as bridges, linking diners to the vast expanse of Indigenous traditions, histories, and stories that these dishes represent and celebrate.



Image 13. Western Apache Seed Mix Fritter. Photo by Claudia Serrato.

When I initially laid eyes on this dish, my immediate thought was to appreciate its aesthetic beauty. One might be tempted to impulsively exclaim, “What an exquisitely presented dessert!”

and, without hesitation, reach out for a dessert fork to indulge in its flavors. However, there is much more depth and significance to the dish than its outward appearance suggests.

During an intimate gathering at Chef Nephi's table, where I had the privilege to be a guest, he took a moment to delve into the story and inspiration behind this culinary creation. His insights were not merely an impromptu sharing amongst attendees; he later encapsulated these thoughts in a Facebook post for a broader audience to appreciate the dish's underlying narrative and cultural significance. The post, shared below, exemplifies the profound intersection of culinary art and Indigenous storytelling, reminding all of us that food can be a powerful medium to convey deeper messages, histories, and traditions.

“In my mind, this activates the Ancestral Knowledge of oral storytelling to hold on to our history and teach life lessons. This is my form of storytelling, rather allowing food ancestors to collaborate and paint a picture that is not only visual, spiritual, nutritious but retained through the powerful sense of taste memory intertwined with ancestral memory/recall... This blue plate and the rings represent Indigeneity since time immemorial and our endless vitality coupled with the sacredness of the color blue. Timeless principles that hold our peoples up and the clash of culture is represented by the temporal/edible ingredients on the plate that are both Eurasian and Indigenous to Turtle Island. We utilize our sacred blue corn to create sweet blue corn fritters that are dusted with rosemary sugar, these are torn and served whole, representing displacement and torn identity. Our sophisticated Indigenous foodways and routes of trade across Turtle Island, specifically in our region, are represented by the chocolate and amaranth and the spiritual/medicinal intelligence that comes with these food relatives. There are berries in three forms to represent Past, Present and Future...fresh berries represent life and vitality now, in the moment. Frozen berries represent the future/preservation and thinking ahead for our posterity. The cooked berry preserves represent the passing of life and the transformation of taste identity and timelessness through the entire life cycle from seed, picking, preparing, preserving and consumption, and back to giving life to us as humans when we eat. We have a special piñon cloud or pinon whipped cream, tactfully placed under and on top of all the edible foods as if we are plating in the unseen world among the clouds, where of course, ancestral memory resides and is transmitted to open hearts. The cream used is not indigenous to Turtle Island but represents the clash of cultures and the violent interruption of Indigenous life across Turtle Island that we are recovering from right now. We have Indigenized the cream by infusing it with a deep ancestral taste of the toasted piñons/pine nuts, making the texture, flavor, and taste sensory recall a warming, comforting Indigenous memory of eating toasted hand harvested piñons during the cold of autumn and winter, thus turning the representation of ‘clash of culture’ into a

healing collaboration between the two foods to establish a taste memory that speaks to resiliency, Indigeneity, time and place” (2015).

From the moment Chef Nephi initially conceived and presented this dessert, his culinary journey with the dish did not simply end. A full year later, as he discussed with Devon Mihesuah, Chef Nephi remained deeply engaged in the evolution of this creation. He tirelessly contemplated the intricate components, essence, and the larger narrative encapsulated within it. As he elaborated on the conceptual layers of the dish, he remarked, and I would like to accurately quote his words:

“...the four sacred mountains of Dinétah, the Navajo homeland—to the east, Tsisnaasjini’ (Mount Blanca); to the south, Tsoodzil (Mount Taylor); to the west, Doko’oosliid (San Francisco Peaks); and to the north, Dibé Nitsaa (Mount Hesperus) --so arranged the components as if on a compass... [becoming an] Indigenous experience formulated by ancestral memory” (Mihesuah 2019: 304).

The profound intentionality embedded within the creation and appreciation of Indigenous culinary art, cuisine, and culture represents an immersive storytelling journey. This narrative voyage commences with the food’s origin, flows through the chef’s inspiration and expertise, and culminates on the plate presented at the dining table. Such a deliberate approach offers a multisensory experience that deeply connects diners to the rich tapestry of Indigenous history, traditions, and values.

Indigenous Cuisine: Storytelling and Ancestral Memories on Turtle Island

Indigenous hospitality and dining experiences within Turtle Island, aligned diligently with the principles of food sovereignty, present a unique canvas for a holistic engagement of the senses. Chef Nephi, during our thought-provoking discussions on culinary theory, astutely referred to this as “ancestral memory recall” (2015). Such dining experiences facilitate an activation of heritage through culinary channels. These activations begin with the gracious invitation to partake at a dining table where every item on the menu has been conscientiously designed. Such

designs are not just to celebrate Indigenous food ecologies, but also to convey age-old messages about the art of eating, existing, and cooking in harmony with the environment.

Indigenous menus, in this context, emerge as more than mere lists of dishes. They are powerful orchestrations of ancestral and cultural gustatory memories. Beyond their immediate appeal, these menus function as activators and conduits of traditional ecological culinary wisdom. They encapsulate deeper significances, providing diners with an ecological lens to appreciate and acknowledge the importance of respecting and maintaining the sanctity of edible landscapes, taking into account their inherent flavors, tastes, and the cyclical rhythm of their seasonality. Furthermore, these menus reinforce cultural comprehension and connection.

In the act of crafting these Indigenous menus, there is an underlying theme of ancestral food justice. Every dish ensures that traditional food is not only recognized and named but also tasted, internalized, and celebrated. This entire process transforms the menu into a dynamic document, making it a living codex that is not just seen on paper but felt in the soul and savored in the body.

Partaking in this dining experience is not merely an act of consumption; it is a profound communion with ancestral and traditional culinary knowledge. Through the meticulous art of plating, there is an evident energetic, spiritual, and cosmological activation. This activation does more than please the palate; it narrates a tale of endurance and perseverance, reminding every diner of the history embedded in each dish. Every morsel is carefully curated to resonate with the Indigenous body, enticing the mouth and tongue to not only appreciate but also yearn for the rich Indigenous flavors that have been passed down through generations. These flavors are not just tastes; they are storied experiences, reminders of a culture and its longstanding relationship with the land and its produce.

Such intimate interactions, where food, body, and cultural heritage seamlessly intertwine, pave the way for profound moments of reflection and reconnection. They provide unique opportunities to reignite and restore Indigenous appetites, guiding them back to their roots in Indigenous food ecologies. It is through these gastronomic journeys that one can truly understand the depth and breadth of Indigenous culinary heritage and the essential role it plays in shaping identities, narratives, and connections to the land.

Ancestral food memories, which are so intricately woven into the fabric of Indigenous culinary culture, serve as guiding lights, offering directives and insights on how to sustain regenerative and restorative traditions. These memories, entrenched in the culinary practices, ensure that the rich tapestry of Indigenous food culture on Turtle Island does not fade away or get relegated to the annals of history. The implications of losing these vibrant ways of remembering and connecting with the past would be catastrophic, potentially erasing an integral part of the Indigenous identity and heritage on Turtle Island.

Fortuitously, the Indigenous food sovereignty movement acts as a bulwark against such a loss. Through this movement, Indigenous foods and culinary methods are not merely remembered; they are brought back to life, revitalized, and celebrated in contemporary Indigenous kitchens and spaces dedicated to culinary traditions. But it is vital to understand that the aim is not just to resurrect these practices. Instead, the broader vision is to foster a sustainable environment where these culinary practices thrive and evolve, ensuring their continued relevance and vitality for generations to come.

Realizing this vision necessitates an earnest desire to connect with the culinary heritage of our ancestors. It involves an awakening, a conscious decision to detach oneself from the colonial

white settler dietary influences that have overshadowed traditional eating habits. The journey will also require an increased commitment to physical endeavors, enabling individuals to forage and harvest nature's bounty, much as their ancestors did. This reconnection with nature and food also entails learning, adapting, and even innovating in the kitchen, whether it's by crafting new recipes or revisiting age-old ones, all while adhering to principles of using local, ecological, sustainable, seasonal, organic, and native ingredients, a mantra that can aptly be encapsulated as LESSON.

Chapter Seven, Indigenous Culinary Art and Cuisine: A Transmitter and Activator of Ancestral and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Culinary Kinship: Ancestral Memory and the Resilience of Indigenous Foodways

The dissertation at hand was formulated within the ethos of alterNative anthropology. This is a distinct branch of anthropology that emphasizes resistance, creativity, and the processes of decolonization. This approach to anthropology was introduced to me, further imparted, and continuously nurtured by my esteemed mentors, Dr. Rachel Chapman and Dr. Devon Peña. They both consistently emphasized the significance of fulfilling my ancestral obligations to forthcoming generations. This meant that I was tasked with the duty to evolve as a responsible future ancestor scholar.

In pursuing this responsibility, it became imperative for me to amalgamate several roles. These roles spanned from that of an academic and intellectual to that of an activist, healer, and more prominently, an Indigenous chef. The integration of these worlds aimed at ensuring that lessons and teachings are passed down effectively. These teachings and lessons are pivotal in drawing us nearer to the actualization and manifestation of the visions of ancestral justice. Additionally, they echo prayers and aspirations for the holistic healing of the Indigenous community. This holistic healing extends to various facets including the physical body, the earth, and even the broader cosmos. A significant medium through which this healing is channeled is the Indigenous culinary arts and cuisine.

In the initial chapter of this dissertation, I presented readers with an introductory taste of Indigenous cuisine. This was not just a mere presentation of flavors, but an immersion into a unique flavor profile that symbolizes resilience. This resilience is intricately woven into the

fabric of Indigenous food and its accompanying culture. Notably, despite the myriad challenges it faced, this food culture has managed to resiliently retain its essence. It has successfully resisted being subsumed or colonized to the point where it would face the unfortunate fate of erasure.

In the pursuit of comprehending the profound depth and intricacy of how food possesses the ability to embody and transmit certain relationships which are intrinsic to the Indigenous culinary epistemology, I devoted significant attention to this aspect in chapter two. In that chapter, I embarked on an exploratory journey to elucidate the various dimensions of food and its embodiment.

Drawing upon diverse academic disciplines and scholarly insights, I delved into a multifaceted analysis of how the embodiment of food is perceived and understood. This involved an engagement with the anthropology of food, a discipline that studies the cultural, social, and economic significance of food. Additionally, I navigated the anthropology of the body, which concerns itself with understanding how bodily practices and representations play pivotal roles in the construction of cultural identities. Moreover, I incorporated insights from Indigenous food studies, a domain which focuses on Indigenous perspectives, history, and the significance of food within Indigenous communities.

By interweaving these multidimensional perspectives, we, as readers and scholars, journeyed towards an Indigenous understanding of food. Within this framework, food is not just a mere sustenance. It transcends this basic role to become an embodier, a carrier, and a steward of Indigenous knowledge. This knowledge, laden with ancestral wisdom, can be effectively transmitted and activated. One of the most potent ways through which this activation materializes is through culinary engagements that center on Indigenous culinary art and cuisine.

Such engagements encompass a myriad of processes. They begin with the very act of gathering ingredients, paying homage to the earth and its generous bounty. Then comes the preparation phase, where the ingredients are treated with reverence, acknowledging their intrinsic value. The cooking phase, which involves transforming these ingredients into delectable dishes, represents a harmonious collaboration between man and nature. Finally, the tasting of the food, especially when it is lovingly served on Indigenous kitchen tables, becomes a sacred act.

It is pertinent to mention that these culinary encounters are not limited to any singular location or context. They are widespread and deeply entrenched in the Indigenous ‘kitchenspaces’ that dot the vast expanse of Turtle Island. These kitchens are symbolic bastions of food sovereignty, serving as repositories of Indigenous culinary heritage and wisdom. Through them, the age-old legacy of Indigenous culinary arts continues to thrive and evolve.

In the realm of understanding food from a more comprehensive and decolonized perspective, my endeavors led me to the alterNative anthropology of food, with a specific inclination towards culinary anthropology. Chapter three of this work offers a reflective and immersive narrative of my experiences and journey. As an Indigenous culinary anthropologist and chef, I was graciously ushered into the very heart of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. This meant stepping into the vibrant and soulful kitchen and kitchenspaces where traditions, wisdom, and culinary artistry coalesce.

With a profound awareness of the significance of these spaces and the role they play in upholding and propagating Indigenous foodways, the chapter seeks to do more than just recount personal experiences. It strives to carve out a clear and elucidated pathway for aspiring culinary anthropologists. These individuals, armed with passion and purpose, are driven by a desire to

centralize Indigenous foods and foodways in their research endeavors. By providing them with this guide, the chapter aids in empowering them to reclaim the kitchen as a space of cultural significance, knowledge propagation, and resistance.

Moreover, the chapter aspires to clear potential roadblocks and barriers that might impede their journeys. It encourages them to immerse themselves in the noble pursuits of cooking for liberation, forging and nurturing ecological relationships, propelling the Indigenous food movement forward, and reclaiming and decolonizing the Indigenous diet. All these undertakings are not just acts of culinary expression, but they resonate deeply with the broader objectives of healing the Indigenous spirit, preserving cultural authenticity, and ensuring the continuity of Indigenous traditions.

However, it is imperative to approach this journey with utmost respect and integrity. To that end, the chapter presents a holistic guide on how one can engage in Indigenous Culinary Anthropology. The essence of this guide is rooted in three core principles: respect, honor, and relationality. These principles emphasize conducting research in harmony with the community, ensuring that the community is not merely a passive subject but an active participant and stakeholder. In essence, the research should be for the community, by the community, and with the community.

Finally, the chapter concludes by serving readers an enticing flavor profile. This is not just a gastronomic offering but an invitation to continuously engage with Indigenous culinary traditions. The act of tasting and eating becomes a powerful medium to remember, revitalize, regenerate, restore, and actively work towards decolonizing the Indigenous body, both in a literal

and metaphorical sense. Through this immersive culinary journey, one is constantly reminded of the deep-seated connections between food, culture, and identity.

As one steps into the Indigenous kitchens and the broader kitchenspaces associated with the Indigenous food sovereignty and Native food movement, it becomes imperative to acknowledge the profound nature of these spaces. These are not mere physical locations where food is prepared. Much like the food that emerges from them, the Indigenous kitchen itself stands as a testament to history, culture, and identity. It is a living space and place, pulsating with the rhythm of traditions, memories, and stories that have been passed down through countless generations.

In the fourth chapter of this exploration, I delved deeply into the sanctum of the Indigenous cooking environment. This is a realm where the act of working with food transcends the mundane and is elevated to a realm that is deeply spiritual, sacred, and ceremonial. Here, every action, from the selection of ingredients to the final presentation of the dish, is infused with meaning and purpose. The Indigenous chef, in this setting, is not just a cook but a guardian of traditions, a custodian of stories, and a conduit for channeling ancestral wisdom and knowledge. Their role becomes a sacred responsibility, where every dish becomes a manifestation of prayers, blessings, and the rich tapestry of Indigenous heritage.

By meticulously retracing my ethnographic journeys and the alterNative pathways that I have treaded, I was able to immerse myself in the intricate landscape of numerous Indigenous kitchenspaces. These explorations and reflections allowed me to offer a more nuanced and profound understanding of these spaces. They are not mere physical entities but are living, breathing relationships. They are dynamic relations that echo with the voices of the past and

present. They act as carriers, embodiments, and stewards of the vast reservoir of Indigenous foods and foodways. Every nook and corner, every utensil and hearth, resonates with stories and memories, waiting to be shared and celebrated.

Furthermore, I sought to underscore the unparalleled significance of every iteration and manifestation of the kitchenspace. Whether it is a grand communal kitchen or a humble hearth in a family home, each of these spaces holds immense value to the Indigenous culinary culture. But beyond just the culinary culture, these kitchenspaces become the nexus for transmitting and activating what can be termed as ‘ancestral taste memories.’ Every flavor, every aroma, every texture becomes a bridge to the past, allowing current and future generations to connect with their roots, to remember and to honor the legacies of their ancestors. Through this deep connection, the Indigenous community finds strength, unity, and a sense of identity, all of which are vital for their continued resilience and survival.

Once ensconced in the Indigenous kitchen, one must approach the space with a heart and mind that is receptive to the multitude of lessons and teachings that unfold. This realm, steeped in tradition and wisdom, has a multitude of ways through which it imparts knowledge. Whether it is through the act of ‘cheffing it up,’ engaging in enlightening ‘charlas culinarias,’ or attuning oneself to the profound ‘palabra of food,’ the learning is incessant. This understanding is not restricted merely to the cognitive level. Instead, it permeates deeper, engaging our spiritual, physical, and sensory faculties.

Navigating this culinary landscape requires forging genuine relationships with its various elements. This involves acquainting oneself with the myriad ingredients that grace Indigenous food pantries, each bearing stories and significance from time immemorial. Additionally, it

requires a deep appreciation and understanding of ancestral and traditional cooking technologies. These technologies, which have evolved over millennia, are testaments to Indigenous ingenuity and adaptability. Further, the recipes, handed down through generations, act as chronicles that honor and celebrate these intricate relationships between the people, the food, and the land.

Chapter five of this exploration seeks to weave these myriad threads into a cohesive narrative. It endeavors to harmonize the voices of various elements that constitute the Indigenous culinary sphere. There are the voices of food itself, speaking of histories, migrations, and adaptabilities. Then there are the voices of Indigenous chefs, who, through their craft and wisdom, not only became my mentors but also my dear friends. Their insights, paired with the ancestral memories that were rekindled through my personal experiences of “cheffing it up,” culminate in a symphony of storytelling. This storytelling encapsulates culinary ecological knowledge, a profound understanding that is both embodied in and conveyed through the myriad foods, intricate technologies, and cherished recipes that define the Indigenous culinary landscape.

These teachings, layered and profound, lay the groundwork for a heightened consciousness and reverence towards the knowledge that food inherently possesses. This knowledge, often referred to as ‘ancestral memory recall,’ serves as a potent medium for both reflection and activation. It beckons us to delve deeper, to reconnect with roots and traditions, and in doing so, it paves the way for holistic healing and the journey towards decolonization. Through this engagement, one is not just partaking in a culinary experience but is embarking on a journey of rediscovery, healing, and reclamation.

Upon setting foot in the Indigenous kitchen and immersing myself within its rich tapestry, I embarked on a profound journey of familiarization and connection. This was not a fleeting

endeavor but rather the commencement of a lifelong commitment to cultivate and nurture respectable relationships. The goal was to find my rightful place amidst the intricate web of Indigenous food culture, a culture birthed and nourished within the sacred kitchens and kitchenspaces that dot the landscape of the Indigenous food movements of Turtle Island. With this foundational understanding firmly in place, the next leg of my journey was to unearth, embrace, and ultimately transmit the power of ancestral taste memory. This entailed harnessing the profound essence of Indigenous culinary art and cuisine, and channeling it to evoke memories, emotions, and connections spanning generations.

Chapter six delves deep into the methodology behind this profound endeavor. It underscores the importance of meticulously curating a dining experience. However, this is not just any dining experience. It is an immersive journey guided by a thoughtfully constructed menu, each dish being a chapter in a larger narrative. This menu serves as a map, guiding diners through edible landscapes that are teeming with history, stories, and wisdom. Every morsel on the plate is a testament to the ancestral ecological culinary knowledge. This knowledge, carefully preserved and passed down through generations, becomes palpable, waiting to be discovered, appreciated, and internalized.

As diners engage with this curated experience, they are not merely eating. They are embarking on a sensory voyage where each bite becomes a bridge to the past. The wisdom encapsulated within the dishes does not remain external; instead, it melds seamlessly with the individual. It caresses the palate, dances on the tongue, and resonates with every taste bud. The act of tasting transforms into a ritual of remembrance, where flavors, textures, and aromas weave tales of yesteryears, of lands far and wide, and of ancestors whose legacies live on.

This chapter, in essence, is an ode to the power of food. It celebrates its ability to act as a repository of cultural memory, its potential to connect generations, and its unparalleled capacity to tell stories that transcend time and space. Through this narrative, one realizes that every meal in the Indigenous culinary tradition is not just a feast for the body, but also a banquet for the soul.

The culmination of this dissertation represents a metaphorical return to the beginning, a complete revolution in my journey through the sacred Indigenous kitchen and the expansive kitchenspaces that are integral to the Indigenous food sovereignty movement. The path I have traversed has been enlightening, deepening my understanding and appreciation of the intricate weave of traditions, memories, and flavors that define Indigenous culinary heritage.

In this final chapter, akin to the dessert course in a grand feast, I aim to present a rich tapestry of ancestral understanding and wisdom. It serves to elucidate how Indigenous appetites — those deep-seated cravings rooted in centuries-old traditions — are meticulously stewarded, fiercely protected, and passionately revitalized. This rejuvenation is not merely an act of remembrance; it is a testament to the resilience and dynamism of Indigenous culinary arts. It speaks of a commitment to ensuring that the vibrant tapestry of Indigenous foods, the deep-rooted food culture, and the intricate culinary epistemologies continue to flourish, undiminished by the sands of time.

The kitchens and kitchenspaces that span the landscape of Turtle Island are alive with activity and innovation. They resonate with the sounds, aromas, and flavors of age-old recipes being prepared alongside contemporary interpretations. This blossoming, this thrivance, is not accidental. It is fueled by the insatiable appetites of Indigenous Peoples, who yearn for the tastes

and flavors that speak of home, of ancestry, and of lands that hold the memories of countless generations. These are the tastes and flavors of cultural heritage foods, ones that have been painstakingly remembered, cherished, and brought back to life through the concerted efforts of Indigenous and ancestral food justice advocates.

This resurgence in Indigenous culinary arts is a testament to a collective desire. It speaks of a community's determination to reclaim, to remember, and to rejoice in its culinary heritage. It is a powerful declaration that the rich traditions of the Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island will continue to thrive, passed down to future generations, ensuring that the stories, wisdom, and flavors of the past remain an integral part of the present and the future. Through this chapter, I hope to pay homage to the indomitable spirit of Indigenous culinary traditions, celebrating their resilience, their evolution, and their enduring significance in the ever-evolving tapestry of global culinary arts.

The comprehensive exploration of Indigenous and ancestral food justice efforts that I have embarked upon shines light on an intricate and deeply rooted tapestry of practices and knowledge. These encompass the revered maturation and diligent caretaking of seeds, the art and wisdom of identifying the multifaceted roles of wild foods spanning medicinal, utilitarian, and culinary realms, and the revival of traditional hunting, fishing, and butchering practices. Furthermore, they include the craft of basket-making to gather and carry food, the seamless integration of ancestral culinary technologies in contemporary food preparation, and the dedication to preparing original, ancestral, and traditional foods in a manner that both honors the past and resonates with present generations.

Central to this revival of Indigenous culinary practices is the concept of ancestral memory activation, which is deeply intertwined with the very essence of Indigenous kitchens, or as it is fondly referred to, the Indigenous '*cocina*.' This activation is not a mere cognitive recall but a sensory and spiritual reconnection to practices and flavors of bygone eras.

The kitchen serves as the crucible where ancestral memories and knowledge are continuously molded, reshaped, and co-created. This dynamic process spans a myriad of culinary engagements: from gathering to foraging, from meticulous preparation to the art of cooking, and from the aesthetic of plating to the profound experience of tasting. Through these processes, cultural meanings, symbolisms, and ancestral messaging find expression, thereby rekindling tastes and flavors that encapsulate the rich tapestry of past, present, and anticipated future landscapes.

The resurgence of these culinary traditions represents a monumental feat of Indigenous resilience, as these food memories have stood undeterred in the face of ecological and culinary colonization spanning centuries. Central to this resilience is the innate ability of the Indigenous body—every mouth, tongue, and taste bud—to remember and yearn for the flavors that evoke a sense of home. This concept of home transcends mere geography; it can be a tangible place, a symbolic space, or an intangible structure. It is also embodied in the very essence of our being, in the spirit that resides within us. The tastes that conjure memories and emotions, transforming any given space or experience into a sense of home, have been diligently protected, both by the very physiology of tasting and by the intrinsic nature of the food.

These flavors have found a sanctuary within the Indigenous body. This means that the very essence of these flavors, the foundational seeds, have nestled deep within the Indigenous bodies

that remember each facet of Indigenous food, be it plant, seed, nut, flower, fruit, vegetable, legume, mushroom, animal, fish, bird, or insect. This rich tapestry of flavors carries within it the ancestral ecological culinary knowledge, serving as a beacon that educates, reminds, and nourishes all manifestations of Indigenous life, whether terrestrial, aquatic, human, non-human, or spiritual. The cycle is beautifully harmonious: as they nourish, they are remembered.

At the heart of these intricate culinary kincentric ecologies lies the marvel of ancestral taste memory and flavors. These memories and flavors are both the essence and the catalyst that forge and sustain relationships, underscoring their pivotal role in fostering ecological healing during this era of Indigenous decolonization. The beauty and power of these connections resonate deeply, painting a vivid tapestry of resilience, memory, and hope for the future.

Embodied Tastes: Indigenous Culinary Arts and Ancestral Memory

In the course of my exploration into the preservation and vibrancy of ancestral memory, I encountered its powerful presence surrounding me and resonating within me, primarily through Indigenous culinary art, cuisine, and culture. As I delved deeper into the kitchen, armed with my traditional culinary training, I was driven by an earnest passion to fathom the intricate means by which ancestral memory, employing nuanced strategies of survivance, has tenaciously persisted, even in the face of overwhelming adversities, to remain alive. This memory continues to echo within the cultural taste imprints of our Indigenous heritage. Although the colonization process has led to a perceptible drift of these precious tasting memories, it has not pushed them as far into oblivion as many might have speculated. They persistently resonate within our physical constitution, our taste buds, the sacredness of our kitchens and kitchenspaces, the contents of our

pantries, the technologies we employ, the recipes we cherish, the hospitality we extend, and the meticulously curated menus and dishes we present.

This detailed gastronomic ethnography has illuminated for me the resilient thriving and survivance of Indigenous foods and foodways. Ancestral memory, in all its richness, extracts its fortitude from the transmissions and activations of the past, engendering a profound craving, a palpable hunger, for the familiar taste of home. While there are manifold interpretations of memory recuperation and the mechanisms through which societies and cultures retain their memories, which are indeed pivotal to this study, they do not constitute its core focus. My primary concentration has been on elucidating how Indigenous culinary art and cuisine engage and immerse the body in acts of reminiscence, whether through the lens of a chef or that of a diner, culminating in a transference so potent that it resuscitates past flavors, revives lost memories, and fosters the creation of new ones.

I have come to recognize through my culinary investigations that food activations, which involve charging food with ancestral wisdom derived from the land, waters, and cosmos, bestow upon food the power to manifest and relay this knowledge in the form of flavors to Indigenous individuals. While mainstream Western anthropological doctrines pertaining to embodiment delve into the potency of embodied exchanges between individuals and the tangible ways in which such knowledge can be manifested, I propose an augmentation of this literature. It needs to acknowledge the fact that plants, animals, kitchens, the technologies they house, recipes, menus, and the art of culinary preparation and presentation—all of these elements have the intrinsic capacity to embody and convey these embodiments to humans, reigniting memories. This awakened memory translates into discernible wisdom, crucial for the process of healing.

Such spaces and elements are not mere passive entities detached from culture. They pulsate with life, acting as repositories of cultural narratives, dynamically engaging in kincentric interactions that enable our bodies to grasp, internalize, and bring to fruition cultural significances, teachings, and obligations. Through this process, they play an instrumental role in transmitting and catalyzing the recollection and realization of ancestral memory and wisdom. This ancestral and ecological knowledge is relayed to human kin, aiding in our retrospection of our roots, origins, and the means to honor our inherent kincentric duties, by realigning with the food ecologies and reverberating with the taste memories emanating from the land, resonating with its original commandments.

The overarching philosophy of culinary ecology, rooted in kincentric ancestral knowledge, offers guidance and wields the power to rejuvenate the mind, body, and spirit of the Indigenous entity, be it human or non-human. It paves the way towards a distinct paradigm of restorative justice, one that reinstates ecological equilibrium, memory, and the intricate bond interlinking food and the body. In the span of this study, I have intently listened to the whispered desires of Indigenous foods and their associated foodways about how they wish to break free from the shackles of colonization and be reminisced. I have witnessed firsthand how food actualizes this intrinsic desire in synergy with cultural custodians, notably the Indigenous chef.

In culmination, through the culinary expertise of these chefs and their unique interactions with foods, there is a tangible manifestation of ancestral, ecological, and food justice. This unfolds through the healing process, the resurgence of memories of the ancestral realm in the Indigenous physical constitution, tongue, and taste buds, instigating a longing and reorientation of their

culinary inclinations to harmonize more fittingly with Indigenous flavors and the untouched tastes of Indigenous landscapes.

Throughout the trajectory of this dissertation, I have elucidated how the knowledge germinated and nurtured within the confines of this project was a collective endeavor, forged in collaboration with all my relations. I refrain from claiming sole ownership of this profound wisdom. Instead, I have discerned that through iterative processes of experimentation, engaging with memories, indulging in the culinary arts, partaking of meals, and tuning into the whispers of the earth, the cosmos, and all sentient beings, both animate and “inanimate,” there exists a reservoir of knowledge and energy, far surpassing individual comprehension.

This collective wisdom, echoed in the taste imprints of the chef, the food, the culture, and the land, lays down the foundational bedrock of Indigenous food ecologies. It has steered and validated my explorative journey, and its revelations also act as catalysts, rekindling Indigenous cravings, epistemologies, and our ancestral kitchens, culminating in ancestral justice and holistic healing from the deep-seated colonial scars of epistemological, ecological, and psychological transgressions, as witnessed through the manipulation of food and Indigenous foodways. With an encompassing understanding of this intricate web and its potent healing properties, my vocation as a culinary anthropologist has transitioned towards examining and discerning the modalities through which prison food sovereignty is being reclaimed by individuals impacted by the penal system. These individuals, despite the constraints of incarceration, are finding innovative methods to recreate a semblance of home through their culinary endeavors. They ingeniously utilize resources available to them, such as commissary provisions and ingredients from state-run

kitchens, often considered contraband, to craft meals that resonate with their cultural and personal identities.

This burgeoning movement within prison walls not only speaks to the indomitable human spirit and the desire for a connection to one's roots, but also underscores the intrinsic relationship between food and identity. Food, in this context, transcends its basic function of sustenance. It becomes an act of resistance, a symbol of agency, and a tangible link to memories of freedom and cultural heritage. For many incarcerated individuals, the act of preparing and consuming familiar meals becomes a form of solace, a temporary escape from the harsh realities of confinement, and a testament to the enduring power of culinary traditions in the face of systemic oppression.

The resilience of these individuals to preserve and adapt their culinary traditions within the restrictive confines of the prison environment further reinforces the core theme of my study: the enduring power of ancestral memory and its manifestation through food. As I embark on this new chapter of exploration, I am reminded that the act of cooking, eating, and sharing food is not merely about nourishment, but also about remembrance, identity, and resistance. It is a testament to the human spirit's ability to find connection, meaning, and hope, even in the most challenging of circumstances.

Embodied Ancestral Flavors: Theoretical Explorations in Indigenous Food Sovereignty and Culinary Memory Transmission

In undertaking this comprehensive process, I was able to develop and contribute significantly to the domains of anthropology, food studies, and especially Indigenous food studies by crafting a theoretical framework centered around the embodiment of ancestral taste memory. In the

introductory portion of this dissertation, I delineated the various cultural dynamics that led to a disjunction in the traditional pathways through which ancestral and time-honored knowledge was conveyed, preserved, and assimilated. This assimilation subsequently facilitated its transformation into an activated and transmissible embodied knowledge. I further illuminated the manner in which these Indigenous transferences have been recollected, rejuvenated, and rebirthed through the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement of Turtle Island, with a pronounced emphasis on Indigenous culinary arts, cuisines, and cultural practices.

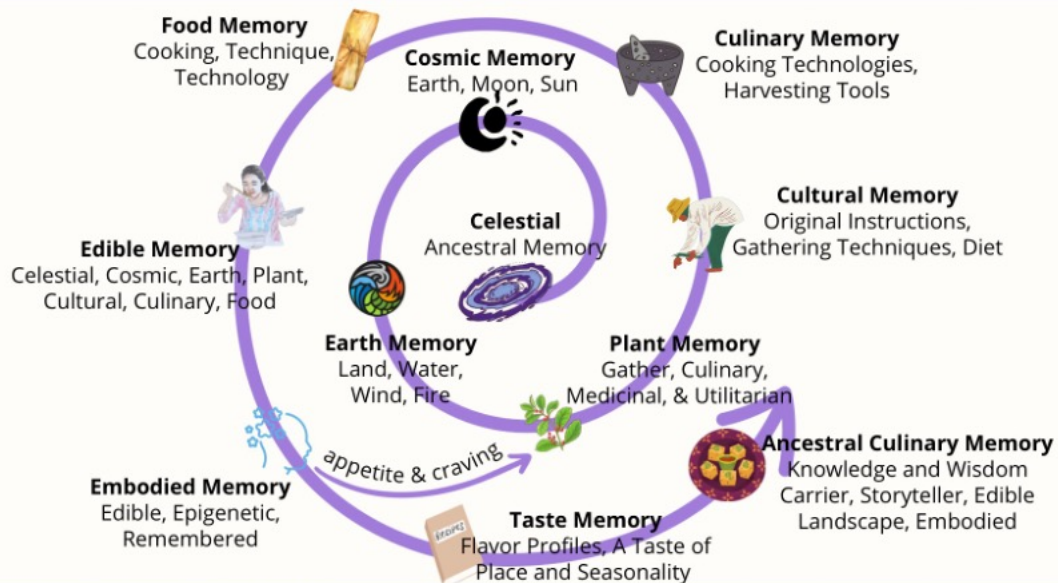
The second chapter of this work furnishes a conceptual frame that aids in comprehending the theoretical mechanisms involved in realizing that colonial ruptures can indeed be mended. This repair is achievable through the consumption of Indigenous food, which brings with it the deeply ingrained memories and knowledge of the land, the culinary artist or chef, and the rich cultural narratives relayed through the presentation and plating of dishes. In the subsequent third chapter, from a methodological standpoint, I elucidate the unique approach adopted by ethnographers to conduct somatic sensory research. This approach enables them to process the embodiment, experience, and bear witness to the transfer and activation of ancestral memory via the medium of culinary artistry.

In the fourth chapter, readers are warmly ushered into the vibrant world of the living kitchen—a dynamic space where one’s sensory faculties are ceaselessly invigorated, involved, and actively engaged in dialogues with the profound lessons emanating from the heart of the kitchen. The succeeding fifth chapter grants readers the privilege to assimilate ancestral knowledge and directives straight from the source, be it the food, the ingenious kitchen technologies, or the cherished recipes, and all of this is achieved through the use of alterNative communicative

channels. The sixth chapter presents an invitation to immerse oneself, to acquire knowledge, and to attentively listen to the Indigenous interpretations as manifested in the unique plating styles and design aesthetics of the food. Collectively, these chapters form the backbone of my research findings: emphasizing the sanctity, embodiment, and vitality inherent in the kitchen and its myriad technologies, highlighting the ecological gathering systems of Indigenous foods, and underscoring the significance of menus and recipes that capture and convey the ecological and seasonal nuances of tastes and flavors unique to various edible landscapes. Moreover, Indigenous culinary techniques and presentation styles are poignant narratives of resilience and a testament to original instructions.

On a more overarching, meta-analytical level, throughout the course of this exploration, my revelations crystallized into specific analytical constructs. Paramount among these was the realization that Indian Country possesses an insatiable hunger for the unique flavors of native cuisine. The treasured reservoir of traditional ecological culinary knowledge finds protection and resurgence within the realm of Indigenous culinary arts and cuisines. Furthermore, Indigenous culinary epistemology demonstrates remarkable resilience and flourishes vibrantly within the confines of ancestral taste memories and flavors. This robustness lends credence to my theoretical investigations into the transmission and activation of ancestral memories. To elucidate the manner in which ancestral memories can be transmitted, I embarked on a novel design endeavor.

Embodiment, Transmission, and Activation of Ancestral Memory



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Figure 1. Theory of Embodiment, Transmission, and Activation of Ancestral Memory in Indigenous Culinary Art and Cuisine.

Delving deeper into the theoretical construct I have presented, there lies a profound interplay of memory, embodiment, and transmission that centers around ancestral taste. When we speak of Indigenous culinary epistemology, we are not just referring to the methods and practices of cooking. Instead, it encompasses a holistic understanding of the world as perceived through food, drawing from ancient wisdom, practices, and culinary narratives passed down through generations. The model I have constructed is not linear. It showcases food's indispensable role in shaping our understanding of the cosmos and our place within it. It accentuates that healing is not a one-time event but an ongoing, cyclical journey that feeds on itself, replenishing and reinforcing at every turn.

As I hinted in my introduction, the boundaries of embodied memory extend far beyond the immediate, tangible life experiences. The phenomenon wherein flavors consumed during pregnancy influence the fetus's palate underscores this idea. It is a testament to the continuum of

life and how experiences – in this case, flavors – can transcend individual timelines, connecting the unborn child to the external world even before birth. This prenatal exposure is not mere physiological trivia. It suggests a profound connection between the womb’s ecology and the transmission of ancestral memories. If the flavors a mother consumes during pregnancy can influence a child’s palate, it is conceivable that deeper, more complex memories and experiences could also be transmitted. Drawing from this perspective, the womb is not just a physical space for nurturing life but also a conduit for transmitting cultural and ancestral knowledge. This facet of prenatal nutrition and flavor transmission is a relatively under-explored area, but it holds immense potential in understanding food sovereignty from a novel angle, especially when it pertains to the recall of ancestral memories.

In the broader tapestry of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement, culinary art and cuisine are more than expressions of creativity or sustenance. They are powerful tools of resistance, resurgence, and reclamation. Engaging with one’s ancestral foods is not merely an act of consumption. It is an act of remembrance, of reconnection, and of healing. The act of preparing, sharing, and consuming these foods revitalizes lost connections, restores fragmented identities, and bridges the chasm created by colonization. This process of ancestral justice, as I have come to understand, is a tangible, lived experience for many Indigenous communities. It is a silent revolution that unfolds daily in the kitchens and communal spaces of the Turtle Islands, weaving stories of resilience, hope, and a return to roots.

Epistemology of Taste and Flavor: Understanding Indigenous Food Knowledge

To elucidate and enhance comprehension, it is paramount to acknowledge that within Indigenous systems of knowledge and guiding principles, food holds the esteemed position of being akin to

family or kinship. It is seen as our relative. Contrary to popular belief, food is not a mere passive entity; it thrives with life, exuberance, and wisdom. Regarded as a bearer of knowledge, food imparts foundational lessons which emphasize the importance of respecting and maintaining ecological relationships with all our associated entities. Just as plants, humans, and both human and nonhuman animals have inherent responsibilities, so does food. The nature and magnitude of these responsibilities are differentiated based on the unique capacities of the entities in relationship. Among the myriad responsibilities bestowed upon food, the most cardinal is the obligation of sustaining, preserving, and perpetuating ancestral, traditional, geographically-rooted, and cultural memories—specifically, Indigenous memories—to not only the current generation but also to those that are yet to grace our world. Food possesses a profound wisdom, and it has a distinct method of imparting and transmitting this knowledge, predominantly through the experience of taste. In essence, food symbolizes knowledge, while taste epitomizes consciousness. The sensation of taste is laden with a plethora of flavors and deep-seated meanings. Depending on individual perspectives, taste can encapsulate, exemplify, broker, structure, and wield significant influence. Our personal tastes are akin to living memories, evoking past experiences and sensations.

My scholarly endeavors seek to decipher the intricate language of food, portraying it as both a chronicle of Indigenous heritage and a reservoir of ancestral and traditional ecological culinary wisdom. Food wears many hats—it narrates stories, preserves them, and educates us. The intrinsic flavor in food is a representation of ancestral knowledge, which by its very nature is ecological if it harks back to ancestral times. Such a time-honored embodiment possesses a flavor spectrum that can be distinctly recognized and transmitted within culinary spaces, primarily kitchens. Kitchens serve as the pivotal space for this transmission, and it is in this

setting that the human senses are heightened to their maximum potential. Among these sensory experiences, taste stands out prominently. It serves as the gateway into our very being. Taste acts as both the vessel and the conduit of flavors, encapsulating and conveying the richness of ancestral culinary wisdom. Consequently, it can be inferred that knowledge is enshrined in flavor, and when this flavor is experienced, it becomes a form of embodied knowledge.

Indigenous Culinary Epistemology: The Cosmic Origin of Knowledge

In the annals of Western science, cosmology, at a particular juncture, held a pivotal role in our understanding of creation, offering indispensable guidance on navigating and coexisting harmoniously with the world. This realm was the sanctuary where the foundational tenets or original instructions were enshrined. As the evolving philosophies of Western science embarked on divergent trajectories, delineating between subjectivity and objectivity, these cosmic visions fragmented. Consequently, phenomena that were tangible and observable were branded as objective, while those beyond the scope of observation were relegated to the realms of mythology or subjectivity.

Fortuitously, in the Indigenous societies of North America, often referred to as Turtle Island, this dichotomy between the observable and the ethereal, the objective and subjective, was never endorsed. This non-dichotomous approach has solidified the cosmos as the bedrock of knowledge. Among the myriad celestial bodies adorning the cosmos, the sun, with its radiant glow, plays a cardinal role in nurturing and perpetuating life on our planet. This celestial entity is a conglomeration of countless cells and comprises essential elements that have a hand in shaping the food we consume, namely earth (mass), wind (air), water (H₂O), and fire (gas). Rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, this resplendent energy orb possesses an intrinsic epistemology,

signifying its living essence. Its wisdom and complexities surpass human comprehension. The sun, in its magnanimity, recognizes its pivotal role and responsibility to the earth and all its inhabitants. It comprehends the imperative of radiating heat and solar energy, thereby ensuring the continuity and proliferation of life. Moreover, in collaboration with the moon, it metamorphoses its solar prowess into resources that rejuvenate and bolster various life forms. A profound knowledge exists regarding the alchemy of transmuting solar energy into life-essential energy. The terrestrial realm and flora have mastered this art. There is an enigmatic cosmic dialect in which this wisdom is conveyed. Although this intricate language eludes human auditory faculties, the land, plants, and other nonhuman entities are attuned to its nuances. This forms an integral component of their cosmic vision, encompassed within their traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). This cosmological epistemological transmission subsequently manifests as life-centric knowledge systems, aptly termed as the epistemology of the land. This intricate understanding equips the land, flora, and other nonhuman entities with the prowess to harness energy and transform it into sustenance, ensuring their resilience against the onslaught of ecological colonialism. Western science, in its attempt to understand this phenomenon, has termed it “photosynthesis.” However, within the tapestry of indigenous ethnobotany, Indigenous plant and food sciences, and traditional ecological knowledge systems, it is perceived as an orchestrated endeavor, underpinning ecological relations and symbiosis.

The marvel of this knowledge interchange lies in its antiquity, tracing its lineage to the dawn of time. It delineates the processes through which knowledge is cultivated and bequeathed to subsequent generations. This cosmic solar wisdom, once conferred upon the land, finds embodiment. This incarnated wisdom can then be disseminated amongst various human and nonhuman life forms. Such exchanges are facilitated through sensory interactions encompassing

sight, sound, touch, taste, and olfaction. It is of paramount importance to recognize that TEK symbolizes an Indigenous epistemology that resonates through the very sinews of our being.

Indigenous Epistemology of the Body: Taste, Flavor, and Ancestral Knowledge

Within the human body, the phenomenon of taste is experienced and interpreted in myriad ways. The sensation of taste is not merely a superficial experience; it engages with multiple facets of our being. It is processed sensorially, allowing individuals to distinguish between diverse flavors and sensations. Anatomically, the tongue plays a pivotal role, being the primary organ responsible for deciphering tastes. Metabolically, the body breaks down and interprets the chemical compounds of the food, thereby experiencing taste. The influence of epigenetics hints at how tastes might be influenced by ancestral and inherited factors. Consciously, our minds, memories, and preferences significantly shape our perception of taste.

Furthermore, the experience and interpretation of taste extend beyond the physiological confines of our bodies. It permeates into the socio-cultural realm, as our tastes are inevitably shaped and influenced by our cultural upbringing, societal norms, and even political contexts. Every taste, every flavor we experience has its own distinct profile, an intricate amalgamation of factors that make it unique. Moreover, these flavor profiles are not restricted by any boundaries or confines; they are limitless in their diversity and complexity.

It is a reductionist view to limit our understanding of taste to the white settler culinary definitions, which constrain the vast expanse of our tasting capabilities to merely five flavors: hot, spicy, bitter, sweet, and umami. Such a narrow definition does an injustice to the complexity of flavors and the intricate workings of the human palate. The tongue, despite being a central organ in tasting, is not merely divided into five identification stations. Flavor encompasses so

much more. It is not limited to sensory perception alone; its foundation lies in the intricate interplay of neurological signals and biological processes.

Every taste that we experience is not just a fleeting sensation; it carries with it a depth of knowledge. This knowledge is embodied within the very essence of the flavor. Similarly, flavor, due to its inherent richness and depth, serves as both a repository and a conduit of knowledge. It is a living testament to ancestral wisdom and the historical journey of foods.

To truly comprehend, appreciate, and transmit this deeply embodied ancestral knowledge, one must actively engage with it, primarily through the act of tasting. This process of tasting, of immersing oneself in the flavors, serves as a gateway to accessing this knowledge. In many cultures, the kitchen becomes a sacred space where this transmission is facilitated. It is here, amidst the aromas and flavors, that the age-old wisdom embedded in tastes is passed on, ensuring that it lives on and continues to enrich future generations.

Upon entering the body, the consumed food undergoes a transformative journey, morphing into what can be termed as a 'Taste Memory.' This memory, encapsulating the multi-layered experiences both inside and outside the body during the act of tasting, carries with it not only the essence of the food but also the unique flavor associated with it. Often, these moments of tasting and the subsequent formation of taste memories are deeply intertwined with social and cultural contexts. These are not merely instances of eating; they are ceremonies of remembering, relating, and often, rejoicing.

When reminiscing about a particular taste memory, it is common to hear expressions such as "This tastes like...", highlighting our intrinsic desire to identify and relate flavors to specific

experiences or previous encounters with similar tastes. The flavor, in these instances, acts as the lynchpin. Without the distinctive flavor, the taste memory becomes evanescent, lacking in substance and depth.

Delving deeper into the world of Indigenous cuisine, it becomes evident that these taste memories and associated flavor profiles are far from mere "exotic tastes" often ascribed by outsiders unfamiliar with the richness and depth of Indigenous culinary traditions. Instead, they are deeply rooted in an intricate ecological system that is closely knit with the environment, tradition, and community wisdom.

Indigenous cuisine is not just about tantalizing the palate; it is an orchestra of knowledge, history, and nature, passed down from one generation to the next through the revered oral tradition of communal eating. Though the act of tasting is fundamentally biological, initiated when food is introduced into the mouth, there is a deeper layer that often goes unnoticed: the exchange of knowledge. This is not a one-dimensional transfer; it is a dynamic dialogue. The food, imbued with ancestral wisdom and tales of the land, is consumed, metabolized, and in the process, its essence gets intertwined with the consumer's own life force, culminating in a shared cultural taste memory.

These unique tastes and flavors, anchored in land-based traditions, cultures, and ancestral teachings, serve as beacons, offering guidance at a somatic level. They chart the course towards ecological restorative justice, enlightening communities about their roots, traditions, and the path to Indigenous decolonization. In essence, every bite taken is not just a moment of nourishment, but an act of remembering, understanding, and moving towards a harmonious existence with the land and its legacy.

Renowned food scholars, as referenced in the second chapter, including the likes of Gustavo Esteva, Ramona L. Perez, Enrique Salmón, Winona LaDuke, Chef Sean Sherman, and Chef Nephi Craig, have extensively researched and highlighted the intrinsic relationship between Indigenous cuisine and the production of knowledge. Their collective insights suggest that Indigenous food is not merely sustenance but a repository of traditional ancestral memories. These memories are meticulously woven into the fabric of ingredients, recipes, culinary methodologies, and the very flavors that dance on one's palate.

In the heart of the culinary realm, particularly within spaces that can be metaphorically described as “borderless boundary zones”, there exists a dynamic ecological and energetic interplay. Within these vibrant kitchen spaces, where the boundaries between the creator and the creation blur, a unique exchange unfolds. The cultural heritage food, rich in its traditions and practices, acts as a conduit, transmitting profound knowledge that is deeply rooted in the vast landscape, ancestral lineage, and time-honored traditions. This knowledge encapsulates the sacred relationship with the environment, embodying principles that advocate for the preservation, rejuvenation, and sustenance of ecological harmonies.

The intricate processes involved — from gathering the raw ingredients, giving them form through cooking, to the eventual act of tasting and consuming — become rituals of knowledge transmission. Through these rituals, the cultural and traditional ecological wisdom undergoes a metamorphosis. It ceases to be the sole domain of the food and transforms into a shared reservoir of knowledge, intricately connecting the food, the body, and the soul.

This profound transformation signifies that the food's embedded knowledge does not remain static. Instead, it flows seamlessly, facilitated by the culinary interactions between the food, the

individual responsible for its creation, be it a cook or a chef, and the eventual consumer or eater. This continuous exchange ensures that the rich tapestry of Indigenous knowledge and wisdom gets renewed, remembered, and revered with every culinary encounter.

Within the realm of culinary arts, the exchanges that take place between the preparer and consumer of food are not solely gastronomical. They are, at their very core, exchanges of knowledge. These exchanges manifest as an intricate dance where the person interacting with the cultural foods becomes not just a passive recipient but an active embodiment of the knowledge ingrained within these edibles. This symbiotic relationship between humans and their traditional food practices coalesces into a unified ecological knowledge system. It is a system that draws from the past, resonates in the present, and promises a sustainable future.

When humans and their culinary traditions intertwine, they forge a powerful bond, reminiscent of an embodied culinary communication. This form of communication serves as a testament to the harmonious blending of culture, tradition, and sustenance. The cultural food, with its deep-rooted history, and the Indigenous cook or chef, with their culinary prowess, come together to transmit and disseminate their shared embodiments of wisdom, tradition, and flavor profiles. The process of food preparation becomes a journey of discovery, and when the food is tasted, this journey culminates into an experience. An experience that goes beyond the mere act of consumption.

The taster or eater, upon indulging in these delicacies, becomes an active participant in this knowledge transmission. The act of tasting ignites a sensory awakening that activates their innate or learned sense-making capabilities. Furthermore, it rekindles traditional ecological and taste memories, especially when they immerse themselves in the flavors of cultural heritage foods.

This journey of taste, which commences from the very land where the ingredients are sourced, passing through the hands of the cook or chef, and culminating in the palate of the taster or eater, forms a chain of knowledge transmission.

This unbroken chain represents more than just a culinary experience. It embodies a pathway of healing and decolonization. By revisiting traditional practices and understanding the wisdom of our ancestors, we engage in the act of ecological restorative justice. This process guides individuals towards fostering a profound ecological connection and embracing the role of responsible ancestors.

By consciously engaging in this process, by remembering the wisdom of the past, revitalizing age-old practices, restoring lost connections, and regenerating the bonds between land, food, and people, a new form of ecology emerges. This is the restorative ecology, which is at the heart of Indigenous decolonization efforts. Through this approach, the body, taste, and memory undergo a transformation, paving the way for a sustainable and harmonious future.

Within the extensive realm of academic literature centered on food, scholars have primarily concentrated their discussions on the notion of food embodiment. While this focus has provided invaluable insights, it has, unfortunately, limited the exploration to the boundaries of taste. Taste, as far-reaching as it might seem, has been the academic extremity. However, in my research endeavors, I seek to challenge and expand these frontiers, delving deeper than the existing paradigms.

As I traverse this academic journey, my work aims to broaden the horizons of embodiment theory. It is imperative to not only understand the ‘what’ of embodiment but also to recognize

and incorporate the ‘who’ within its spectrum. In essence, I advocate for a more inclusive, comprehensive approach to understanding embodiment, one that acknowledges and celebrates the myriad entities that can be embodimenters.

Central to my argument is the interrelation between taste and flavor. It is my assertion that the existence of taste is intricately and inextricably linked to flavor. One cannot conceive of taste in the absence of flavor, for it is the latter that gives essence and depth to the former. Flavor is not merely a sensory experience; it serves as a vessel, an embodimenter, and a conduit of ancestral knowledge. This knowledge, steeped in history, traditions, and the collective memory of generations, finds a sanctuary within the flavors we experience.

Furthermore, food, in its rich diversity and complexity, serves as the embodiment of this flavor. But it does not stop there. The food, through its flavors, carries within it a treasure trove of ancestral knowledge. Every ingredient, every recipe, every bite tells a story, encapsulating the wisdom, experiences, and legacies of our forebears.

Therefore, when we speak of food embodying ancestral knowledge, we are recognizing its role as a keeper of history, a chronicle of traditions, and a bridge that connects us to our roots. It is this profound understanding and appreciation of food, flavor, and taste that I wish to bring forth, pushing academic discussions beyond their existing limits and into new, uncharted territories.

The Multifaceted Challenges and Rewards of Indigenous Culinary Anthropology

My journey into the heart of the kitchen, embodying the dual roles of an Indigenous culinary ethnographer and a Chef, presented itself as an enriching experience, teeming with opportunities and unforeseen challenges. While the allure of understanding the culinary culture and its

underlying dynamics was compelling, I found myself occasionally overwhelmed, particularly when catering to vast groups ranging from 40 to 300 eager diners. Despite my genuine enthusiasm, I was not adequately braced for the physical toll that the consistent culinary demands would impose on my body. Standing for prolonged periods, engaging in repetitive tasks like chopping, dicing, and braising, resulted in painful blisters on my hands and persistent discomfort in my feet and ankles.

With an earnest desire to absorb the wisdom and practices of Indigenous chefs, I ventured into the kitchen environment. My initial vision was of absorbing culinary teachings about ancestral memory in an intimate setting, hoping to fortify my bond with Indigenous food through deep conversations in these sacred kitchenspaces. However, my anticipations did not fully align with reality. Rather than being a passive observer armed with a notepad and recorder, I was ushered into the dynamic rhythm of the kitchen, donning a chef's coat and getting straight to the tasks at hand.

Though I had mentally prepared myself to follow the typical anthropological protocol of observation, note-taking, and reflection, the dynamic environment of the kitchen demanded immediate immersion and participation. While I could not frequently document insights in real-time, my inherent strengths as a visual learner enabled me to rely on my camera. By capturing moments, foods, landscapes, and more that were pivotal to Indigenous culinary culture, I could later revisit these snapshots. During my moments of rest, I would pour over these images, using them as visual prompts to jot down my thoughts, ideas, and realizations. This somewhat unconventional method, prioritizing culinary immersion over strict anthropological practices, became my way of deeply connecting with the essence of Indigenous culinary arts.

My approach was further validated after I learned of a questionable presence in our community. In 2022, it was revealed that another anthropologist, who had claimed Mohawk heritage and had frequently obstructed processes at Indigenous food gatherings, was essentially a tourist, seeking to exoticize our practices. While her deceptive presence could have inadvertently influenced culinary traditions, I am confident in the resilience and integrity of our traditions, which remained untainted.

Ultimately, the real obstacles in this journey are those which we impose upon ourselves mentally. By letting our passions guide us and our spirits follow, we can unveil numerous opportunities for growth and understanding. Chef Nephi, a beacon of wisdom on this journey, often reminded me of the adage, “When the student is ready, the teacher will appear” (Craig 2015). This holds especially true for anthropology that seeks to heal, bring justice, and decolonize. By aligning ourselves with our purpose, we intuitively discover the means to gather and interpret our findings. The journey may be demanding, leaving us with physical scars, but the enlightenment it offers makes every challenge worthwhile.

Recommendations for Advancing Research in Decolonizing Culinary Practices

Indigenous culinary anthropology, when focusing on the transmission and activation of ancestral memories through Indigenous culinary art and cuisine grounded in Indigenous culture, provides an avenue for exploration that goes beyond conventional methodologies. Positioning oneself primarily as a chef, with the role of an anthropologist coming secondary, allows one’s true passion for the discipline to shine through. By doing so, it is anticipated that there will be a broader understanding and initiation of dialogues on the intricate ecologies nestled within ancestral culinary memory. Additionally, recognizing the implications of ancestral memory

activation on the Indigenous psyche, physique, and spirit will be paramount. While Food Studies, as understood in contemporary Western academia, is relatively nascent, it is essential to note that ancestral and Indigenous perspectives on food existed long before their categorization within Western frameworks.

For researchers eager to learn from an Indigenous standpoint, I advocate for immersing oneself in understanding local food ecologies. This can be achieved by practicing Indigenous culinary ethnobotany, a burgeoning subfield within Indigenous food studies, thereby offering a rich tapestry of insights and potential for future inquiries. Commitment is vital when researching food, especially if the objective is to bolster or shed light on practical efforts, be it within kitchens or broader Indigenous food revitalization movements. If the research upholds ancestral memory, champions the ideals of ancestral food justice, decolonization, and subscribes to the tenets of alterNative anthropology, then it is certain to be conducted with integrity, ceremonial respect, and healing intent. There exists a multitude of approaches to explore ancestral healing, food, and memory, encompassing disciplines like environmental health, public health, mental health, and ethnic and decolonial studies.

Prior to my culinary endeavors, my focus was primarily on understanding the colonial histories of foods and their subsequent impacts—both beneficial and detrimental—on Indigenous culinary traditions and diets. My journey then shifted towards the actual decolonization of diets, which then blossomed into the formulation of tangible recipes. These recipes were meticulously crafted to gauge their effects on physical well-being and identity constructs. It is crucial to remain open and receptive; the research, with time, will naturally evolve and guide you towards its ultimate intent.

A pivotal piece of advice comes from Chef Craig: “keep your knife as sharp as your mind” (Craig 2015). Ensuring one’s culinary tools and intellectual prowess are in sync is essential to making advancements in this field. I also urge researchers to delve more profoundly into the subject. My experiences as a traveling Indigenous chef allowed me to sample a vast array of dishes that paid homage to the original trade routes and terrains of Turtle Island. While it was immensely rewarding to establish connections with fellow chefs and appreciate the diverse food offerings, cultivating a deeper intimacy with local Indigenous cuisines would have undoubtedly added layers of depth to my knowledge, offering profound narratives of perseverance and resilience.

Fostering genuine culinary relationships is indispensable. My own journey began with a childhood fascination with food, which later transformed into a professional passion. To truly make strides in this area, one must find their culinary passion, reflect upon its origins, and wholly embrace the journey ahead.

Reflections on a Culinary Journey: The Final Tasting

Embarking on a quest to rediscover and pay homage to my ancestral culinary traditions through the decolonization of my diet was not just an academic exercise, but a profound life expedition. This journey allowed me to intertwine my personal experiences with the rigorous frameworks of academia. Along the way, my ideologies, principles, and methods of practicing and contributing to Indigenous culinary anthropology were subjected to scrutiny and challenge.

From my childhood days, the kitchen always held a special place in my heart, making meals and relishing the joy of cooking. Therefore, stepping into Indigenous kitchens and their associated spaces felt akin to revisiting the warmth of my familial home. However, this expedition was not

without its trials. My physical endurance was constantly tested, but this was a crucial aspect of the learning journey. To truly comprehend and reconnect with my ancestral culinary traditions, it became imperative for me to embody their movements, rhythms, and practices in the kitchen, emulating their dedication and spirit. This process enabled me to recognize and embrace our shared destiny in becoming ‘kitchen curanderas.’

The path of understanding and engaging with Indigenous culinary practices is layered and complex. It invites you into dimensions and environments that challenge conventional perceptions surrounding the senses involved in the culinary experience, from sight, touch, aroma, hearing, to the ultimate act of tasting and consuming food emerging from Indigenous kitchens and their spaces. It is crucial to remember that food acts as a nexus; it connects us as a family, serves as a bridge to our past, and plays the roles of carrier, transmitter, and enabler of our ancestral and traditional ecological culinary wisdom. This is a truth that demands reverence and remembrance.

Sitting at the Indigenous kitchen table is a humbling experience. When service commences, the entire dining journey, from the initial greetings, perusing a menu, to finally beholding the culinary masterpiece on one’s plate, each moment is steeped in profound messages that bridge the epochs from our ancestral past to our present. The value of such an experience is incalculable. No monetary transaction can ever replicate or replace the profound ancestral connection established in that moment.

The realm of Indigenous culinary art and cuisine is pulsating with dynamism and growth. It is essential that any work in this domain aligns with the foundational tenets of Indigenous food sovereignty and the Native food movements. With such alignment, one can be confident of

upholding the practices with the respect, honor, and sanctity they deserve. As it was imparted to me by my predecessors, embracing this vocation is not a fleeting commitment but a lifelong bond. Engaging in this endeavor is akin to entering a sacred union; it is both a celebratory wedding and a poignant birthing ritual. Food, in essence, is our kin, our sanctuary, and the embodiment of our culture. We, in turn, are the living manifestations of this rich culture. Aho.

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