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Nourishing Solidarity: Critical Food Pedagogy and Storytelling for Community

N. Tanner Johnson
Western Washington University

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Nourishing Solidarity: Critical Food Pedagogy and Storytelling for Community

N. Tanner Johnson, Western Washington University

Abstract

This piece was delivered in four parts in tandem with a four-course meal, with the intention of providing the audience with time to engage in the sharing of their own perspectives around food and eating. Foodways, the particular cultural and social contexts within which food sits offer a unique entry point into deeper, more connective opportunities for environmental education. The food justice and food sovereignty movements provide a foil for traditional forms of environmental education which reinforce settler-colonial narratives about the more-than-human world. Food is something that everyone has some sort of interaction with every single day. At the same time, historically food has been used as both a tool of liberation and oppression. Because of the interconnectedness of food, spirituality and identity, the denial of Indigenous communities of their traditional foodways is an intentional act of cultural genocide. Teaching about and acknowledging these atrocities is a step towards reparations, and inviting discussion about personal connection to food is a way forward. Indeed, the simple act of eating is itself a pedagogical act: it speaks to both the identity of the person who prepared it, as well as to the experience of the eater.

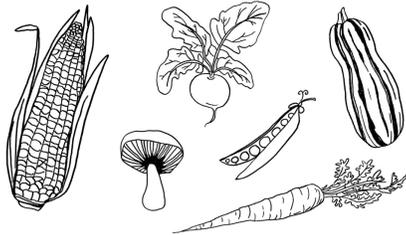
Keyword: food justice, environmental education, foodways,

Menu

Nourishing Solidarity

a capstone presentation by Tanner Johnson

3.21.2019



appetizer

grilled polenta cakes with black beans and squash

course one

family-style spring salad with dressing

fry bread

*pork and hominy stew**

course two

*cedar planked coho salmon**

roasted seasonal vegetables

farro pilaf

dessert

*pie with blueberries from whitehorse meadows farm
served with ice cream*



* vegetarian option available upon request

S2SS

Introduction

Welcome to dinner. We are currently seated at the table together which sits on land both ceded and unceded by the Indigenous peoples of this place. The Upper Skagit, Nlaka'pamux, Sauk-Suiattle, Swinomish, Nooksack, and many others whose names are lost to us have been careful stewards of this land since time immemorial, and I want to acknowledge the work they have done and continue to do in maintaining this place as a healthy ecosystem. This speech is about food, and it is impossible to speak about food without acknowledging the importance of food to the first peoples of this place. While speaking to our cohort during our place-based learning course at the beginning of this graduate program, Swinomish tribal elder Larry Campbell addressed the importance of traditional foods for his people, saying "Doctors say if you crave something it's because you're deficient in it, traditional foods are something we crave because our *spirit* needs it" (L. Campbell, personal communication, August 26, 2017). I believe that food is necessarily tied up in personal identity because it can be a reflection of culture and the society from which it originates.

You may wonder why we are sitting here eating food while I speak to you. It may seem kind of strange, that I have chosen to speak to you as you are engaged in something more than just sitting and listening. For me, this is one way I have found helps me stay engaged in classroom settings. Although I have never had a full multi-course meal while in a lecture hall, I find that snacking periodically has always helped me stay focused. As we move through the meal, courses will be brought out to you all family style, on platters. I would like to encourage you to pass food to each other. As we are eating, take note of what food is being served. Notice what the individual ingredients are and see if you can make meaning for yourself out of what is being served and at what times. Eating is a subjective experience, and our interpretations of the process can be reflective of personal identity.

We are going to begin appetizer service, and I would invite you all to really take your time eating the grilled polenta cakes with black beans and squash. See if you can identify which senses you are using other than taste while you are eating. Again, I want to encourage everyone to eat while I speak.

Acknowledgement of Author Positionality (APPETIZER)

Because of the deeply personal nature of identity-based research, it is of the utmost importance to situate and make clear my identity as it relates to food. The choices I have made about food throughout my life have had a large influence on my personal identity, but more importantly they were just that: choices. As a cis-gendered, male-identifying white settler, I have been and continue to be afforded social privileges because of my identity. My economic privilege and whiteness have given me the ability to choose which foods I identify with and give me a large degree of agency in food choice because there are no particular foods with cultural ties to my race.

All of this is in stark contrast to the current reality of food access in the United States. Many people in this country are not afforded the privileges I have as a white person. Because food is a reflection of cultural identity, it is situated in the bigger system of white supremacy and systemic racism which dominate American society, and in many cases food has been used to perpetuate these systems of oppression. For example, all across the Pacific Northwest and North America at large, Indigenous peoples have been consistently denied access to their traditional foodways, the cultural and spiritual practices surrounding food production and consumption.

The disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples from their traditional food sources also included the forced halting of cultural practices surrounding food. In 1885 the Canadian government specifically outlawed the practice of potlatch by amending the Indian Act. Potlatch was made criminal, punishable by up to six years in prison. Potlatch is a deeply important piece of the social and cultural fabric of the Indigenous cultures who have lived in this place since time immemorial. Barb Cranmer, a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw and 'Namgis First Nations has spoken about the significance of potlatch, saying

The non-Native society tried to change us and our culture. They viewed [the potlatch] as a bad thing...They didn't understand that it was part of how all things are interconnected and that it was a way of showing how we gave thanks (U'mista Cultural Society, 2019).

By making potlatch illegal, the Canadian government essentially made being a Native person illegal. Potlatch and many other cultural practices which include food were intentionally taken away from Indigenous peoples across the continent in an attempt to force them to assimilate into settler-colonial culture. The Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest have relied on Land for food and spiritual practice since time immemorial, and these important facets of culture were leveraged by settlers in an attempt to eliminate Indigenous cultures (U'mista Cultural Society, 2019).

Many tribes were forced to cede or give up their territory after populations decreased due to intentionally introduced diseases. The many treaties of the 1800's forcibly removed the first peoples of this area from their land, families, and traditional food sources. Children were taken from their families and forced into assimilative boarding schools intended to eliminate Indigenous languages, foodways, and cultural practices entirely. This methodical genocide began half a century before treaties were signed and continued well into the twentieth century. For instance, the decision by Judge George Hugo Boldt granting the tribes of Washington State fifty percent of the annual salmon harvest was made as recently as 1974. The lead up to this historic decision was a bloody period known as the Fish Wars during which white fishermen along with Washington State and local law enforcement violently attacked Indigenous fisherpeople for harvesting salmon and lamprey as they had for generations (Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, 2008). The Western Oregon Indian Termination Act, which terminated the peaceful trust relationship between the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and Oregon State and ended federal material support for 61 tribes, was signed into law as recently as August 13, 1954 (Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, 2019). The trauma resulting from these

actions continues to this day and has vastly negative impacts on the daily lives of Indigenous people. Two of the main weapons used in the attempted eradication of Indigenous peoples were education and food access.

Dr. David Lewis, Professor of Anthropology at Oregon State University and enrolled member of the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde writes on his blog, *Ndn History Research* of the first peoples whose ancestral lands are the modern day Willamette Valley in Oregon. He writes:

From original 25,000 Kalapuyan people (estimated) in 19 tribes and bands, they were reduced to about 800 by 1850 through diseases like malaria. The loss of population caused cultural collapse and the confederation of many different villages to a very few. This left the land open to settlement from other tribes and American settlers. Americans encountered a park-like setting, a vast flat clear prairie with a mild climate and plenty of water, perfect for agriculture (Lewis, 2016).

It is because of the elimination of the traditional food and lifeways of the Kalapuyan people that the state of Oregon has such a rich agricultural economy. Indigenous peoples such as the Kalapuya have been practicing agriculture in the form of intentional fire-setting, and their whole lifeways have been organized around seasonal food availability for thousands of years.

Botanist and Indigenous Scholar Robin Wall Kimmerer writes that in Indigenous ways of knowing, “plants are respected as bearers of gifts, as persons, indeed oftentimes as teachers... Creative, wise, and powerful, plants are imbued with spirit in a way that the western worldview reserves only for humans”(Kimmerer 2018). For many Indigenous cultures plants, and therefore food is a deeply important facet of spirituality and identity. For the Kalapuya, the Land is a living being, and their entire culture is structured around the seasonal availability of food (Lewis 2017). Because of the central role food plays in traditional cultures, their displacement from the Land is akin to cultural genocide.

The story of the Kalapuyan people is not unique. Across the land we now call the United States and indeed, across the world, the specter of colonialism has weaponized food and food access in order to consolidate control of food systems into the hands of the oppressive and powerful elite class. The use of food as a tool for control is not a new concept, however the particular ways in which food systems in the United States have evolved are inextricably linked to neoliberal economics.

The Food Systems Problem: a Neoliberal Trap

The use of land management and, by proxy food systems management as a tool for colonialism has historical roots and modern implications. The consolidation of the modern American agriculture has been well documented, following a pattern of disenfranchising small farmers for the benefit of large agribusiness corporations. This process started with the expropriation of Indigenous lands but did not stop there. Big

business knows where the money is, and some of the most reliable investments are in sectors necessary to human life.

The development of the modern agricultural system has relied heavily on the use of pesticides and what is known as monoculture, the growing of huge swaths of a single crop. This practice runs contrary to what farmers have known for millennia, that a diversity of plant varieties grown together means the land is healthy. For the land, one need look no further than accounts such as *The Grapes of Wrath* and countless stories of the American Dust Bowl to understand the adverse impacts of poor agricultural practices.

My own family history is tied to this event. In addition to monoculture practices, the introduction of motorized farm equipment ushered in an era of uprooting native plants to make space for agriculture in the Great Plains of the Midwestern United States. The result was massive dust storms caused by topsoil blowing away. There were no more native grasses to keep it in place. My ninety-six year old Grandfather, Mel Hays still remembers when his family packed up their farm in Osawatomie, Kansas into a pickup truck and set out for California. There are photos of their truck from this time and it looks straight out of the Beverly Hillbillies. My Great Grandparents moved to California and eventually Oregon in search of land more suited for agriculture, that land which was open to settlement because of the removal of Indigenous people. In so many ways my being here today is a direct result of both colonialism and the Dust Bowl.

This disaster of the 1930's gave way to what is commonly known as the Green Revolution in the 1950's. Unlike the name suggests, the Green Revolution was not a radical environmental movement, but rather a rapid uptick in the exportation to majority world countries of devastatingly damaging herbicides, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers which drain soil of nutrients. The Green Revolution along with what is known as neoliberal economic policy which "asserts that human well-being can best be achieved if the so-called free market is allowed to function with little to no intervention from the state," has resulted in the increased commodification of food we know today (Alkon, 2014). While there are exceptions, most folks in the United States obtain food by purchasing it from supermarkets rather than growing it themselves or trading for it with other goods they have produced. In exchange for convenience, traditional knowledge about food was lost. In this way, food parallels the fate of the entire modern economy in the United States. We have shifted from a system based on small, localized producers of goods to mass production and cash-based economy. However, unlike other sectors of the economy, food is something that each of us needs every day in order to survive. Food is a right everyone deserves equal access to. This statement can be understood in multiple ways, including the right to access healthy organic food, culturally appropriate food, or even just the right to have a consistent source of any food at all. This right is being addressed by movements many of you may have heard of known as Food Justice and Food Sovereignty. I want to talk about this next.

Food Justice vs. Food Sovereignty (SOUP)

While it is important to acknowledge the history of food systems in the United States in order to fully grasp the situation, the entire history of food systems is not the focus of this speech. What I am more interested in is the particular social and cultural contexts food sits within, and how teaching about that can promote deeper understanding about how humans interact with the more-than-human world across cultures. This concept, “the intersection of food with culture and history...[and] all of the activities associated with food in our daily lives” is known as foodways (Darnton, 2012). Foodways are necessarily bound up in the cultural context they occur within, and education about food cannot be separated from that context. In this way, not only is access to food an important issue, but so is the right to practice culturally relevant foodways because each of us experiences them in a different way based on our individual socialized experiences of food.

The topic of food in the context of modern environmentalism comes heavily laden with cultural implications. It can conjure up images of children working in community gardens, tasting the sweetness of a carrot freshly plucked from the ground for the first time or people rallying in the streets to protest genetically modified foods. Because of the current vogueishness of food education, it is important to distinguish between some of the buzzwords surrounding the movements for social change focused on food and eating.

A common problem is the conflation of food justice and food sovereignty. Although they may overlap in terms of goals at times, the differences between the two are important to distinguish in order to engage in meaningful dialogue on movements for social change with food as impetus for that change.

Food Justice, as defined by Alkon (2014) tends to focus on “...the roles that race, class, gender, and other forms of inequality play in both conventional and alternative food systems”(28). It is an intersectional movement, meaning it overlaps with many areas of study in the social sciences such as feminism, anti-oppression, and anti-racism work. In that sense, food justice can be seen to be working towards addressing issues such as food sovereignty, as well as farmworkers’ rights, environmental racism, and sustainable agriculture practices. It is important to note that the food justice movement aims to create a future not only of sustainable agriculture, but of equitable social interactions in all areas relating to food, from production to consumption. Providing equitable access to quality food does not look the same for every community, and those working towards food justice must take into account cultural differences in order to truly promote a food system that works for all.

Similarly, as defined at the 2007 Forum for Food Sovereignty in Nyéléni, Mali, “Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems”(Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). Whereas food justice is the process, food sovereignty is a right of the people. Food Justice grew out of the Environmental Justice movement in the United States, Food Sovereignty is a peasant’s movement, first championed by international activist organization, La Via Campesina.

In 1993, representatives of farmers from four different continents banded together to form La Via Campesina, in response to the increasing consolidation and commercialization of agriculture across the world. They saw that small farmers were increasingly being forced to grow monoculture commodity crops like corn and wheat for export to countries like the United States as a threat to global food security. The approach they take is three-pronged: defending the rights of people to culturally appropriate food; defending seed and plant biodiversity; and amplifying the voices of and fighting criminalization of peasants. La Via Campesina operates under a decentralized power structure with decisions being made every four years at an international conference. Making space for the stories of organizations like La Via Campesina to be told is exactly what Food Justice education can do, and the work they are doing is a beautiful example of the intersections between food and social justice (La Via Campesina, n.d.).

One way I find Food Justice education to be so poignant is how it stands in contrast to traditional forms of environmental education which often focus on western settler narratives of pristine wilderness and objective scientific facts (Crosley, 2013). Food is anything but objective, it is messy, contextual, and tied up in innumerable aspects of culture, just like this soup you are eating right now. The frybread you are eating is an excellent example of the complexity surrounding food and culture. Although frybread is itself a huge part of many modern Indigenous cultures in the United States, it's creation is linked to the forced assimilation of Indigenous people. As a result of the genocide of Indigenous peoples and the eradication of their foodways, many communities have come to rely on government food aid, also known as commodity foods. This aid often includes wheat flour and lard, the basis for frybread. The imposition of Western foods like wheat has corresponded with a massive rise in obesity and diabetes in Indigenous communities. While frybread is certainly a central part of many Indigenous cultures modern foodways, this food is simultaneously a source of pride and a reminder of the violence experienced by Indigenous communities for generations (Vantrease, 2013).

The pork and hominy soup can be seen as a metaphor for the power of Food Justice education. Of course, each of you experiences this soup in a different way. To some, it may not be your favorite, others may really enjoy it. But either way, this soup is bound together by a common narrative around what food is; soups exist all over the world and are as different from each other as they are similar. Soup is a culinary medium that invites individual expression and the sharing of experience, much like Food Justice education.

What sets Food Justice education apart from other forms of environmental education, is that food is something every person has interaction with every single day in some form. Unlike more traditional forms of environmental education, Food Justice education invites a discussion around the more complex societal issues associated with environmental education by decentering wilderness and meeting people where they are. It invites folks to share their personal experiences rather than basing the experience around an established canon.

The work being done in both the Food Justice and Food Sovereignty arenas is important work for folks attempting to shift the dominant narrative around food through education to be participating in. One reason this work is so powerful is that it engages

people in thinking about food as a form of communication, and as a powerful way of expressing one's identity. By reclaiming food systems and foodways the food sovereignty and food justice movements are asserting the rights of individuals to fully practice all aspects of their identities.

Communicating through food (MAIN)

We are going to start bringing out the main course now. Salmon cooked on cedar planks is, to me, probably the quintessential Pacific Northwest food. It is a food that has been at the center of life in this place since time immemorial. For me, salmon is such an appropriate representation of my process in writing this capstone. It wasn't until I was in my junior year at University of Oregon that I really discovered my love for gardening and teaching about food. When I swam downstream and came to graduate school at NCI, I was set on focusing my inquiry on food education. But then I met all of you, C17. With your inspiring passions and wealth of knowledge on such a huge variety of topics, I wanted to learn everything, and I had a really hard time focusing my inquiry on a particular subject. After spending some time out in the ocean expanding my awareness and feeling confused, I feel like I have finally returned to what I came here to study and I now feel like I have a better understanding of what it means to bring myself to my teaching practice. The process of getting here felt to me like swimming against the current at times, but now I feel like I am home. This is just one way I connect to this particular food, nevermind the countless memories I have of eating cedar plank salmon with my parents outside in the heat of summer, or the complicated history surrounding the politics and ecology of salmon in this area. With just one bite of this food, a cascade of emotions and memories flood my brain because food is a form of communication.

In a moment, I am going to ask you to think about how each of you relates to this food. I would ask that you take a minute to consider the questions I will pose to yourself before turning to a neighbor to discuss, I will let you know when it is time to discuss and will set a timer for five minutes to signal the end of our discussion time. For the sake of time, I would really appreciate everyone listening for the timer and keeping conversations to that five minute period. I will then ask for a few folks who feel comfortable to share out what they discussed with their partners. Is anyone unclear on what we are about to do?

Please turn over your menus and have a look at the following questions: Where does this food come from? Who do you think grew the food or harvested it? How did it get to you? Who cooked it? How does it feel in your mouth? What does the food we are currently eating mean to you? You might want to start by thinking about when you first encountered this particular food, moving on to consider what memories you have associated with it. This might be the first time you have had this food, and that is okay. How is this food affecting your experience of this presentation? In a moment, I will ask those of you who feel comfortable to share out what you discuss.

I am setting a timer for one minute for everyone to think to themselves, then I will set another timer and we will discuss for five minutes. The time starts now.

Thank you all for your participation, and thank you to those of you who shared what you discussed. We live in times fraught with political and social divisiveness and in order to enact real meaningful change, I think engagement with each other in conversation is extremely important. By communicating with each other, we often discover each person experiences the world in quite different ways. It is imperative to seek out and amplify the spaces in which common ground can be found. The stories we tell through food we eat have the power to convey vast amounts of information about personal identity. Indeed, food itself can be viewed as an expression of communication, a nonverbal vehicle for the conveyance of meaning to others (Greene and Cramer, 2011).

Just as language is tied up in personal and cultural identity, the communicative act of growing, preparing, and eating food is necessarily tied to these facets. Few could argue the significance food plays in culture and indeed many folks' first interactions with a particular culture comes in the arena of food. While this is a place to start, Food Justice education seeks to go beyond the surface-level interactions such as eating food from a culture other than your own. As a pedagogical tool, food is uniquely positioned to offer entry points into cultural understanding and to foster empathy across cultural divides.

This has been one of the major shortcomings of food education in recent iterations, and indeed for environmental education in general; the lack of attention to cultural relevance and community needs often ends up manifesting as a sort of educator-missionary complex where educators are focused on delivering value-laden content based on assumptions of what is right for every person. Structural inequities and economics play a huge part in determining modern food systems but many of the conversations around food education still focus on "bringing good food to others" (Guthman, 2008). As Guthman (2008) writes,

...the intention to do good on behalf of those deemed other has the markings of colonial projects, in that it seeks to improve the other while eliding the historical developments that produced these material and cultural distinctions in the first place.

The imposition of socionormative values onto curriculum, whether intentional or not, ends up alienating the very people for whom programs are intended because it fails to address the real scope of the problem; that these issues sit within a broader social context of oppression. This focus on teaching a "right way to eat," in addition to being totally insensitive to cultural variations surrounding foodways, is a missed opportunity to engage in the myriad ways food can help to promote understanding of how environmental issues intersect with social justice.

Critical Pedagogy of Food

Despite problems surrounding the ways food education has been done to date, food is an extremely important and useful tool for connecting personal actions to the greater environmental and social issues that environmental education seeks to address (Stapleton 2015). Revolutionary educator Paulo Freire writes that "solidarity requires true communication" and that "authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about

reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication.” (Freire 2018). Truly if we are to strive towards an education focused on liberation instead of oppression, communication between student-teachers and teacher-students is paramount. As outlined in the previous section, food is an incredibly salient form of communication as it conveys much about one’s cultural identity, and thus can and should be a tool used by environmental educators to engage in questions of social change. Much of current thinking on food systems pedagogy is focused specifically on those entering into the fields of food science, nutrition, agronomy, and animal biology (Valley et al, 2017). What I am proposing is an educational approach focused on foodways rather than food systems, an education focused on the liberation of communities as an antidote to the largely neoliberal approaches that have been taken thus far.

Alkon writes that “...food movements have largely promoted market-based strategies for social change, such as starting an organic farm-based business or purchasing from them.” (2014, p. 30) Indeed, much of the thinking on the so-called sustainable food movement to date focuses on the idea that citizens can affect change by “voting with their forks” (Alkon, 2014). However, this strategy does little to address the structural inequities that have produced the problems in the first place. Truly, a focus on sustainable food systems education as purely scientific is a missed opportunity because as Crosley (2013) writes:

Another characteristic of food justice is its focus on the distribution of one specific good-for-all and the factors involved in the production and consumption of it, including ecological health, agricultural practices, pricing, distribution, and access. This singular, though multifaceted, emphasis lends food justice a tangible and relatable focus around which to rally a wider audience (Crosley, 2013, p.52).

This focus provides a common ground through which all can see themselves, because it is an aspect of society with which everyone interacts on a daily basis. Stapleton (2015) aptly points out that “not every food is identity-significant, and individuals may have different relationships with the same food. Sometimes food is, in fact, just food.” While this is certainly true, every person’s livelihood is linked to food, and the myriad social issues surrounding it provide fertile ground as an entry point for addressing structural inequities such as Indigenous sovereignty, systemic racism, economic disparity, and the complex interplay between all of these as well as many other issues.

Emergence and Food- Building Community (DESSERT)

As we begin to bring out dessert, take a moment to consider the pie. The soft, warm aroma of buttery crust and bright smell of blueberries and lemon zest transport me to another time and place, a warm breeze blowing in from an open window. When I think of pie, I picture many pieces coming together to make a whole. The whole pie would not exist if not for the individual slices, much like a community would not exist without individual relationships.

Wendell Berry (2009) famously admonishes the agricultural industry, writing “eating is an agricultural act,” and popular interpretations of this quote posit that the choices we make about food as individuals have effects on the larger agricultural-industrial complex. But this interpretation is a fallacy. I believe what Berry is getting at is more in line with the concepts of Emergent Strategy as outlined by adrienne maree brown. Eating is also a communal act, something we do everyday that necessarily puts us into relationship with other people. The way that we choose to engage in those relationships is the key. Rather than glorifying the power of individuals, it is through small, scalable actions that community has power. (Inter)action allows us to dream big and act at all levels of our lives with the intent and impetus to work together towards real change (brown 2017). Food *is* community interaction, and because it so intimately connects personal identity to the natural world it carries a great amount of importance. To bring about change in food systems, there must be a focus on addressing the structural inequities that produce those systems in the first place.

This work can best be achieved by “what John Brown Childs has called transcommunality, referring to the constructive and developmental interaction among diverse communities which through shared political action ‘flows increased communication, mutual respect, and understanding.’” (Guthman, 2008, p. 433). It is through solidarity in these spaces of intersectional struggle where we will find solutions, not through the imposition of the values of one group onto another. We must celebrate each others foodways and work to defend the rights of everyone to practice them. The stories that the foods we eat tell will help to find this common ground, build relationships, and forge a new path forward together based on mutual respect and shared values. In this way, eating is a *pedagogical* act, that is by eating we are engaging in education. Through eating we can communicate a lot about personal identity and thus by simply eating together we are engaged in community with each other. You do not have to have conversations about the food you are eating like we did together earlier in order to perceive food as education. You do not have to go to a farm and sink your hands in the earthy richness of soil, or only buy food from the farmers market in order to understand where your food comes from. You do not have to do any of this because when we eat together we *are* building community capacity. We have already made it to the table.

Conclusion

At this point, I would like to take a pause. Each table should have a teapot with some dried stinging nettle in the strainer, and each of you should have a sprig of mint. In a moment I am going to ask each of you to pass around your teapot, gently tearing the leaves of mint from the stem and in half. As you do this take the time to bathe in the wonderfully pungent aroma of the mint right before adding it to the pot and passing it to your neighbor. Once everyone has done this, elect one person at your table to come over to the hot water tap and fill your pot.

You can go ahead and begin that process now. I want to acknowledge that I did not invent this tea. Indigenous communities have been making tea from herbs like nettle and mint since time immemorial, and as a settler I have the privilege to prepare this tea only because of those who discovered it's healing properties before me. As I was writing this capstone speech I underwent a few moments of utter terror, feeling like I had no idea what I was doing or why I was doing it. Most recently, I overcame this feeling by acknowledging a strange craving I was having for this very tea you are collectively making right now. For whatever reason I *needed* this tea, and I drank it everyday, multiple times a day. In the darkest parts of winter, what I was craving was the taste of spring, the budding vibrance represented by these two powerful herbs, nettle and mint. One of the striking things about these plants is that they are both often thought of as weeds. Mint spreads like wildfire, taking over gardens with fragrant leaves crushed underfoot. Nettle's barbs release formic acid, whipping bare skin into irritated, rashy redness as you walk through particularly wet disturbed outdoor areas like trails and roads.

You can go ahead and pour your tea so that everyone at your table gets some. To one person, nettle and mint could be the bane of their existence, constantly getting in the way of plans and taking up space where they are unwanted. And yet to me, I needed them to get through writing. I needed to taste what was to come, to breathe in the stored newness of spring in the dried nettle and feel awake from the intensity of the mint's oils. You might hate the taste of this tea, but for me it is restorative and utterly comforting.

When I was young, I remember clambering through the brush on a family camping trip on the Oregon coast. I don't remember exactly where we were, but I do remember walking through a patch of nettle. This was my first experience with the plant, and it was not a pleasant one. However, the physical pain I felt from the sting of the nettle plant in many ways was the start of this journey of environmental education I am now on. Nettle grabbed me by the shoulders and shook me, it forced me to pay attention to the land. I am certain that nettle was the first wild plant I was able to identify, and the relationship I have with this plant has changed a lot. Now instead of fear, I seek it out for comfort. Harvesting nettle is one of the things I look forward to most in springtime and its emergence is one of the most concrete connections I have to the seasons. Much like the sweet pop of cherry tomatoes freshly harvested from my garden in summer, or the buttery indulgence of chanterelle mushrooms foraged in autumn, nettle has become a part of my identity.

Food is important precisely because of its fundamental necessity to existence- without it we die, but through it comes pain, joy, existential crisis, and a whole host of emotions which work to shape cultural and individual identities. Folks have been using food as a form of communication for as long as we have existed as a common species, likely well before written or even verbal communication (Harari, 2018). If it is true that solidarity and therefore liberation is achieved through communication, then food is undoubtedly a key to that process. In so many ways, food is at the center of liberation. It is an entry point that helps language revitalize, allows teaching to come from a culturally centered place, and brings communities together both philosophically as well as physically. By being more intentional about how we use food to communicate social identity formation

through both formal and informal educational spaces, we can work towards that liberation in a more concrete and socially relevant way.

I think this is what I keep coming back to, that food is a form of identity expression. This tea is in many ways an expression of my identity because of the significance I place on it. This tea is communication because of the story I can tell through it. Most importantly for me, this tea is building community because each of you had a hand in making it, it was shaped by your collective experience and it brings a little bit of each of you with it in every sip. This tea is pedagogy because it has a history that holds the power to teach about all of these things and more. This tea is liberation.

A handwritten signature consisting of the letters 'S2SS' in a cursive, stylized font. The signature is enclosed within a light blue diamond-shaped background.

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