

## Diversifying Syllabi 2018 Text Summary and Teaching Tips

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**Article Title:** Food Sovereignty, Justice, and Indigenous Peoples: An Essay on Settler Colonialism and Collective Continuance

**Author:** Kyle P. Whyte

**Readability:** Intermediate

### Thesis:

“I will argue that Indigenous peoples’ claims about the connections of particular foods to collective self-determination [...] are more about how colonial domination, in contexts such as U.S. settler colonialism, is organized to undermine certain human institutions that are pivotal to Indigenous peoples’ capacities to exercise collective self-determination, food sovereignty being a significant part of that” (2).

### Key Definitions:

**Food injustice:** “when at least one human group systematically dominates one or more other human groups through their connections to and interactions with one another in local and global food systems” (1).

**Collective continuance:** “the overall degree of adaptive capacity a society has when we take all its collective capacities into account, from food systems to gender systems” (3).

**Collective self-determination:** “a society’s overall capacity to adapt to social and environmental changes, or resilience” (6).

**Resilience:** “a society’s persistence in the face of environmental variability” (6).

**Ecological redundancy:** “refers to the idea that relationships contribute to high degrees of collective continuance only if there are a lot of opportunities to discharge the responsibilities and repeat doing so” (12).

### Brief Summary:

In section one, Whyte elaborates on the claim that food systems are connected to a society’s ability to exercise their collective self-determination. He uses the example of salmon habitat to illustrate the connection between Indigenous self-determination and ecology. As the salmon disappear, tribal cultures and customs are threatened. Whyte argues that settler colonial domination occurs when one society secures its culture by permanently inhabiting the other and erasing the capacities that were already there for its own self-determination.

In section two, he describes several of the reasons Indigenous people often provide for why particular foods are associated with collective self-determination. For example, he uses the example of the potlatch ceremony, where titleholders were responsible for decision making and giving away wealth, such as salmon. The threat to the salmon population had serious implications for the relationships that were cultivated through this practice. Interference with Indigenous food systems compromised the capacity of Indigenous peoples to be resilient by

“striking a blow to both salmon populations and human relations to salmon” (8). Whyte argues that entwinements between human institutions and food are important to protect precisely because of their contribution to collective self-determination. He also uses this section to develop the idea of collective continuance, or the degree to which a society can adapt to change. For instance, the rapid change of salmon habitat made it difficult for responsibilities and relationships to endure because of the deep entwinement of the practices with the food source.

In section three, Whyte argues that U.S. settler colonialism has undermined the qualities of relationships, and in turn, Indigenous collective continuance. Settler colonialism “targets the relationships that create collective capacities” (13). Whyte uses several examples to illustrate the how U.S. settler colonialism undermined the contexts for building trust and redundancy, such as outlawing fire burning and restricting food sources. He argues that the limitation of these practices have negative consequences, both for family relationships and traditional conceptions of life itself.

SECTION TWO: to be completed by note taker during discussion

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**Possible Applications:**

- Political theory
- Philosophy of law (especially if one includes a section on cultural property)
- Oppression
- Intersectionality
- Environmental ethics
- Social ontology

**Complementary Texts/Resources:**

- Naomi Mezey, [“The Paradoxes of Cultural Property”](#) Addresses the problems of focusing on cultural property as objects, versus viewing them as embedded practices and cultural identities
- Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope*
- Selections from [philosophical literature on collective responsibility](#) (e.g. Virginia Held, “Group Responsibility for Ethnic Harms”)
- Sandra Bartky, “Feminism, Foucault, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power”

**Possible Class Activities:**

- Show a video of a potlatch and a participant explaining it
- Find an analogous example of an item or practice that grounds relationships and other practices (e.g. a smart phone, or family heirloom, or the free food available on collect campuses)
- Go to the Museum of the American Indian if in DC, especially the exhibit “Americans” on uses of Native imagery in advertising and dominant cultural imagination
- Rebecca Kukla [video lecture](#) on distributed autonomy