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Stories that Nourish: Minnesota Anishinaabe Wild Rice Narratives

Amelia V. Katanski

The industrial food system operates under a settler-colonial mentality that views food as commodity, as a series of chemical components that can be taken apart, modified, and rebuilt to create digestible results that fail to nourish bodies and spirits. Contemporary food activist Michael Pollan argues that the United States' industrial agricultural system "would never have happened in a culture in possession of deeply rooted traditions surrounding food and eating."¹ Commodity corn—Pollan's prime example of industrial food—has been not only separated from stories of its origins in indigenous communities, but also broken into molecular building blocks that are manipulated into pages-long lists of compounds and additives that fill most of the unhealthy, processed foods that constitute the mainstream North American diet.² "Forgetting," Pollan says, "or not knowing in the first place, is what the industrial food chain is all about."³ In the case of industrial or paddy-grown wild rice as well as in the case of corn, this process of forgetting (really, a process of erasure) is part of the settler-colonial project.

Indigenous foodways, in contrast, are built upon relationships that are, in the words of Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete, "established, justified and remembered in mythological traditions."⁴ Cajete argues in his study of Native science that scientific knowledge is "wrapped" in storytelling, and that through the process of storytelling, scientific, ecological, and cultural knowledge is created, maintained, and transmitted from one generation to the next.⁵ Tsalagi poet and storyteller Marilou Awiakta, for example, remembers and values corn not as industrial commodity but as *Selu*, the

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Corn Mother, a source of health, knowledge, and balance. She teaches that to have access to “the whole grain,” we must maintain the connection between seed and story and further asserts, “Americans eat corn every day—in fresh kernels, meal, syrup, and oil. What if every time we encounter the grain, we remember the Corn-Mother—the law and wisdoms embedded in her story? What if we connect this law and wisdoms to kindred ones in other spiritual traditions we hold? What if we then create new harmony in ourselves, with each other and with Mother Earth?”⁶

These goals—maintaining the connection between story and seed to provide healthy food, spiritual sustenance, and sustainable harvest—are very much present in Anishinaabe communities, for whom wild rice, or *manoomin*, is a life and culture-sustaining food.⁷ *Manoomin* figures centrally in the story of the Anishinaabe people’s migration from the Atlantic coastline to the Great Lakes region, or Anishinaabe Aki, the land of the people. The Anishinaabe received a prophecy more than five hundred years ago telling them to follow a *miigis* (cowrie shell) that would appear in the sky ahead of them until they reached a place where food grows on the water. Upon seeing *manoomin* growing on the lakes and rivers around the Great Lakes when their migration led them there in the mid-1500s, the Anishinaabe knew that they had found their home.⁸ *Manoomin*, recognized as a gift from the Creator and a marker of home, became a staple food for the Anishinaabe due to its abundance, storability, and nutritional richness.⁹ Because of its centrality to Ojibwe origin stories, identity, and survival, “managing wild rice in its natural state is a moral obligation,” as well as a treaty right, as Rachel Walker and Jill Doerfler assert.¹⁰ *Manoomin* is also “a sacred food intertwined in countless ways with Ojibwe spiritual practices, kinship relations, economies, gender roles, history, place, and contemporary existence,” explains historian Brenda Child.¹¹ It is no understatement, then, to view *manoomin*, as Winona LaDuke does, as “one of the quintessential elements of being Ojibwe.”¹²

Anishinaabe scholar-poet Kimberly Blaeser connects the *manoomin* harvest and the continuation of the Anishinaabe people to the very process of storytelling, writing: “Rice kernels fall back upon the fall waters, sink slowly again to the soft silt. Stories, too, must seek fruitful grounds, settle, arise again in new voice. We only continue by the grace of these spirit acts. Somewhere there is intersection between the motion of stories, the motions of life, and the mobile centers of meaning.”¹³ For Blaeser, both storytelling and the *manoomin* harvest are spiritual acts that intersect in the creation of meaning that enables a people to live and to thrive, across seasons and generations, in the full knowledge of who they are and what feeds them. Blaeser’s poem, “Passing Time,” values the multiple kinds of sustenance that come from ricing stories, telling of her Uncle Bill who was talking ricing: “naming his poling partner / and the lakes and rivers they paddled, / telling how long they stayed out, / how many pounds they harvested, / where they slept each night.” Removing the husk from the kernel (seed) is itself an aesthetic practice—dancing the rice—that further links nourishment of the body and nourishment of the soul: “All those details / the husk around a kernel. / Do you ever just ache for something a sliver of beauty / so tightly encased? / *Dance, dance the rice*” (lines 11–15).¹⁴

Husk and kernel, story and seed, together create beauty, movement, and knowledge. And the practice of sharing ricing stories reminds both tellers and listeners of the kernel (core/essence) of who they are as a people. In both her poetry and her scholarship, Blaeser joins many Anishinaabe storytellers and writers in maintaining this connection between story and seed. *Manoomin* thus feeds the Anishinaabe by nourishing not only bodies, but also spirits, economies, and sovereignties.

This essay will discuss how Anishinaabe wild rice narratives maintain core aspects of Anishinaabe identity and epistemology, constituting what Wendy Makoons Geniusz calls “botanical *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin*,” that is, Anishinaabe knowledge or Anishinaabe ways of knowing.¹⁵ For approximately 250 years (since British naturalists sought to commercialize production of wild rice to feed colonists across the British empire), *manoomin* and Anishinaabeg communities have faced the threat of those who want to separate seed and story. This threat continues today in the production of paddy-grown wild rice and in ongoing agribusiness attempts to genetically modify, patent, and control wild rice. These separations, which are part and parcel of ongoing processes of colonization that limit Native access to land and resources, also challenge indigenous economies and thus food security and sovereignty.

The wild rice narratives examined here are but a few of the many, many stories of *manoomin* that Anishinaabeg tell.¹⁶ They elucidate the close historical, spiritual, ecological, and material relationships between Anishinaabe communities and *manoomin* and demonstrate the importance to Anishinaabe self-determination of maintaining such connection. Just as *manoomin* feeds the people, stories about the seed propagate *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin* and provide the nourishment that helps Anishinaabe communities to thrive. These stories undergird the contemporary movement for food sovereignty and the allied drives to regain, maintain, and protect the land that provides habitat for indigenous foods and the movement to maintain or regain physical and community health.

WILD RICE NARRATIVES AS *ANISHINAABE-GIKENDAASOWIN*

The scholarship of Wendy Makoons Geniusz provides a framework for understanding Anishinaabe wild rice narratives as a particular kind of indigenous knowledge. In her book *Our Knowledge is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings*, Geniusz explains that much written Anishinaabe botanical information is contained in colonized texts that are alien to *anishinaabe-inaadiziwin*, which she defines as “anishinaabe psychology and way of being.” These botanical texts serve “the interests of the colonizers and the processes of systemic racism and oppression, or [they present] information according to the philosophies, cosmologies, and knowledge-keeping systems of the colonizers.” To decolonize such texts—or to produce new, decolonized, texts—involves understanding how culture maintains knowledge. As Geniusz further explains, “We are not just talking about ‘knowledge,’ we are talking about *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin*, our own specific knowledge, unique to the Anishinaabe people, which includes not just information but also the synthesis of our personal teachings.”¹⁷ Geniusz lists storytelling as one of several ways (including song, oral teachings, apprenticeships, and recording systems) that botanical *gikendaasowin* is maintained.¹⁸

Speakers of Anishinaabemowin distinguish between two major types of stories: *aadizokaanag* (stories that tell of social events or truths learned and collected) and *dibaajimowinan* (powerful stories that create the world and communicate the complexity of life). Specifically, Geniusz explains that “Dibaajimowin and aadizookaan are one method used by the Anishinaabeg to maintain and pass on *gikendaasowin* about plants and trees. Often *gikendaasowin* is found in an aadizookaan or a dibaajimowin explaining a plant origin or the origin of how the Anishinaabeg learned how to use a certain plant.”¹⁹ For Geniusz, then, connecting seed and story is part of the process of decolonization, the ultimate goal of which is to ensure that botanical *gikendaasowin* is useful to Anishinaabe communities. Moreover, because these stories containing botanical knowledge flower from both *dibaajimowinan* and *aadizokaanag*, they are deeply rooted in Anishinaabe literature.²⁰

The particular processes of the *manoomin* harvest constitute a multifaceted ritual that contains its own aesthetic sensibility and requires varied and complex ecological, spiritual, and legal knowledge and skills. Through the 1930s, the process began when women would bind stalks of rice together approximately ten days before the rice field fully ripened, a practice, Brenda Child reports, that had many purposes, from marking ricing territory to allowing the rice to ripen uniformly.²¹ This procedure, along with an elected ricing committee that ensured an ecologically sound and organized harvest, constituted what Child calls “an Indigenous legal system to protect wild rice in its unique ecosystem.”²² While the women’s binding procedure ended by 1940, other elements of hand harvesting continue today in many communities. Once a member of the tribal government or committee, or an elder (sometimes called a “rice chief”) declares the *manoomin* ripe and ready for harvest, ricers make an offering of *asemaa* (tobacco) before taking to the water.

Partners move through rice beds in a boat, with one person poling it forward while the other uses cedar ricing sticks to knock the ripe kernels into the boat. The ricers allow some kernels to fall into the lake bed to reseed for the next year. The kernels are briefly dried on mats and then parched and stirred with a canoe paddle in a kettle over a wood fire, drying and toasting them. The twisting pressure of feet removes the seed from the hull, called dancing or jiggling the rice. Winnowing, when the hulled rice is tossed in a winnowing tray into the air, then removes the chaff.²³ Learning how to complete these steps and how to act as stewards of the ecosystem in which *manoomin* grows requires that *gikendaasowin* be shared from generation to generation in *dibaajimowinan* and *aadizokaanag*. Blaeser explains that “the reciprocity involved in seasonal rituals is woven by the similar reciprocity of story. . . . When we ritualize appropriate action, we ritualize tribal continuance.”²⁴

COLONIZED TEXTS AND THE SEPARATION OF SEED AND STORY

While Anishinaabe literary practices maintain and support the connection between story and seed, colonized texts do the opposite—that is, they separate *manoomin* from Anishinaabe systems of knowledge—to the detriment of the people. This history of cultural separation perhaps begins in the late 1760s at the end of the “Little Ice Age”

that preceded the industrial revolution, a time when British naturalists investigated the potential for wild rice to be adapted for cultivation and use throughout the British empire, particularly in England and other areas that were quite cold.²⁵ European observers “assumed that *Ziziana aquaticai* [*manoomin*’s name under the Linnaean classification system] ‘sows itself’—that Indians only harvested but did nothing to control or develop the plant, which reproduced as independently and copiously as a weed.”²⁶ They recognized that *manoomin* was nutritious and plentiful, but knew very little about its connection to indigenous cultures and clearly did not even begin to understand its sacred and ceremonial meaning.

The colonizers envisioned uprooting and transplanting *manoomin*, theorizing and planning how to change and commercially cultivate wild rice. Virginia-born physician and botanist John Mitchell argued in a 1767 treatise that “once improved for commercial cultivation . . . wild rice would also provide a unique commodity for the imperial trade, one that would not interfere with the mother country’s own produce.”²⁷ A 1789 *Gentleman’s Magazine* article encouraged English farmers “to create an ‘enlarge[d]’ variety with a hypertrophied fruit like all other domesticated grains ‘we have at present in common use.’”²⁸ While these naturalists saw themselves as working toward the “improvement” and “adaptation” of *manoomin*, they did not understand the basics of its biology and had paid no attention to the details, or even the existence, of Anishinaabe resource management practices, or *gikendaasowin*.²⁹ In the 1780s and 1790s, several botanists in England, France, and North America attempted to export *manoomin* and to cultivate it in Europe but almost completely failed.³⁰ It became clear that *manoomin* would not go along with their plans to feed the empire.³¹ Wild rice remained a uniquely North American crop, despite these efforts to remove it from its ecological and cultural matrices.

The separation of story and seed continued in the United States in the nineteenth century. One key example is Albert Jenks’s 1899 report for the Bureau of American Ethnology, “The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes: A Study in American Primitive Economics.” Jenks, a University of Minnesota researcher, wrote his study during allotment and its aftermath, when Minnesota Anishinaabeg were fighting hard to hold onto their land and resources while white settlers and resource extraction corporations forcefully (and often illegally) worked to alienate these nations from their land.³² Jenks’s main thesis is that looking at indigenous wild rice production can help us to understand “the ascendance of economic motive” in “primitive humans.”³³ Although his report does include Anishinaabe *aadizokaanag* about *manoomin*, these stories are isolated in a chapter titled “General Social and Economic Interpretations.” Hence, they are both textually and intellectually separated from Jenks’s scientific analyses in chapters on botany, habitat, and nutrition, as well as his process-oriented chapters on Anishinaabe production, harvest, use, and consumption of the grain. As this split structure indicates, Jenks argues that “mythology” is “an attempted explanation of phenomena,” but that these stories do not shed light on the use, management, nutrition, or structure of *manoomin*.³⁴

In addition, he denigrates Anishinaabe stewardship of *manoomin*, claiming that “the Indian, by his use of the wild rice seed is a great enemy of the plant, for it will be shown

that the plant, unless it is artificially sown, is gradually being *extinguished* in such beds as are continually used.”³⁵ Jenks also numbers waterfowl among wild rice’s enemies. Yet undermining his own statements on the limitations of “mythology,” Jenks later recounts the Ojibwe story of the trickster Wenibojó (also known as Nanabozho/Nanaboozhoo), who returns from an unsuccessful hunt to find that a duck, which had sat on the edge of his kettle of boiling water, had left behind a grain that made the best soup he had ever tasted, and which afterward fed him when game was scarce. This trickster *aadizokaanan* not only conveys one way that *manoomin* came to the people, but also points to the ways in which birds, people, and *manoomin* function together in a thriving ecosystem.³⁶

Even as he suggests they deplete rice beds, the information Jenks gathers about Anishinaabe harvesting practices demonstrates that the people harvested carefully, leaving a portion of the *manoomin* behind to reseed itself. He interprets this stewardship, though, as “primitive Indians [not taking] production very seriously”³⁷ and quotes an agent who devalued the social and ceremonial aspects of ricing, alleging “they could gather more if they did not spend so much time feasting and dancing every day and night during the time they are here for the purpose of gathering.”³⁸ Jenks’s conclusion, that “it must be regretted that so nutritious a cereal was a precarious crop and has not, apparently, warranted extensive cultivation,”³⁹ was another call for the “domestication” and “commercialization” of wild rice. As Ojibwe scholars and activists like Brenda Child and Winona LaDuke have detailed, these processes would damage both Ojibwe economies and the *manoomin* itself. Child’s research demonstrates how depression-era, New Deal programs to commercialize wild rice production not only changed gender patterns in harvest by moving men into roles previously inhabited by women, but also positioned Anishinaabe people as students who needed to learn from white US government program administrators how to “improve” and “modernize” the *manoomin* harvest.⁴⁰

Winona LaDuke explains the development of domesticated wild rice—grown on paddies and harvested with combines—that has further altered reservation economies by driving down the price of hand-harvested *manoomin*.⁴¹ LaDuke documents how big producers of paddy-grown rice try to muddy the distinction between their product and lake-grown *manoomin* in their packaging, labeling, and marketing.⁴² Furthermore, projects to map the genome of *manoomin* and to patent sterile versions of the plant have raised serious concerns about cross-pollination of wild *manoomin* with GMO rice, threatening the very existence of the Anishinaabe staple.⁴³ One can only argue that paddy-grown rice is the same as lake-grown rice if one separates the *manoomin* from the *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* that sustains the seed and the people. Joe LaGarde, a White Earth ricer and historian, clarifies the very high stakes of this separation: “We stand to lose everything. That’s what we’re looking at—the future of our people. If we lose our rice, we won’t exist as a people for long. We’ll be done, too.”⁴⁴

MANOOMIN STORIES: ENACTING FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

In contrast to Jenks’s narrative colonization of *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* about *manoomin*, Anishinaabe writers like Jim Northrup, Heid Erdrich, Linda LeGarde Grover, and Gerald Vizenor (in addition to Blaeser, Child, and LaDuke), provide

decolonizing narratives that maintain the connection between story, culture, and knowledge. These narratives teach *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin* and illustrate the centrality of *manoomin* to Anishinaabe life in the past, present, and future. These stories are not merely case studies that increase understanding of indigenous food sovereignty movements. Rather, they themselves enact food sovereignty, which Via Campesina has defined as “the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods, respecting cultural and productive capacity’ as well as the ‘right of peoples to define their agricultural and food policy.’”⁴⁵ In addition to teaching the details of *manoomin* history, stewardship, and harvest—the *gikendaasowin* that maintains Anishinaabe capacity to conserve and harvest *manoomin*—these narratives demonstrate the power of storytelling to make meaning and enable the Anishinaabeg to reach toward *mino-bimaadiziwin*, a right way of living and being in the world.

“The world working the way it should”: *Manoomin Narratives of Jim Northrup and Heid Erdrich*

Ricing was a meaningful part of many aspects of the life and work of Jim Northrup, a storyteller, newspaper columnist, playwright, poet, Anishinaabemowin teacher, and weaver of *nooskaachanaganan* (rice-winnowing baskets). Northrup’s stories frequently turn and return to *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin*; indeed, Margaret Noodin has pointed out Northrup’s “ability to relax and revel in the Anishinaabe aesthetic of repetition. Years roll by and stories seem at first to repeat now and then, and yet the stories are never really the same. . . . Some years the rice is plentiful, some years there is less, but always there is enough.”⁴⁶ Providing complexly interwoven strands of knowledge, Northrup’s *manoomin* stories hold meaning like *nooskaachanaganan* hold rice. Additionally, the process of their various tellings and retellings reflects the movements of winnowing grain. By looking closely at three short Northrup works focusing on *manoomin*—an article from his “Fond du Lac Follies” newspaper column that was reprinted in the compilation *Anishinaabe Syndicated*; an essay, “Seasons: Ziigwang Niibing Dagwaaging Biboong” (Seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter); and a poem, “*mahnomin*”—we can see how his *manoomin* stories connect the people to one another, to Anishinaabe language and history, and to the land.⁴⁷

Moreover, his narratives clearly articulate the implicit connection between *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin* and Anishinaabe food sovereignty. Northrup’s newspaper column demonstrates the layers of knowledge and significance that constitute a single moment of ricing. The present moment of ricing recalls many past engagements in this same process and “evokes memories and stories of relatives that have passed on” and the knowledge and experience they shared with him: “Ricing is a bittersweet time of the year. The preparations remind me of seasons of the past.”⁴⁸ He ties his canoe to the car with “knots I learned from my dad,” recalls which lakes his uncles preferred and which hidden lakes required long canoe portages, and passes on this knowledge to his family: “I remembered to tell my family these stories as we were getting ready for ricing. I thought of ricers who once lived and were now memories. I remembered

who riced with whom, who were the best knockers. I knew which lakes were best for long-grain rice, which rivers were easy to pole through. Ricing is full of remembered places and relatives” (62–63). Here, knowledge about the land intertwines with family memories and interpersonal connections; indeed, places and relatives are woven together so closely that particular lakes and rivers are themselves close relations.

Northrup acknowledges the hard work of processing rice, but notes that his family chooses labor-intensive traditional methods because dancing on the rice “lets us stay close to the food” and fanning it “makes you realize how important wind is in the process of making food” (63). Ricing time is a social, storytelling occasion, and Northrup’s narrative evokes this time of community connection and celebration, which also teaches his readers the *gikendaasowin* that he has gathered from his elders over the years. It is important to him, and to his community, that this process continues, and he recognizes, implicitly, the threat to its continuance when he says, “I thought about how lucky I was to be able to make rice again,” and “I felt sorry for the people who had to eat paddy rice” (63). Ricing and story are intertwined in Northrup’s feelings of connection and gratitude, so that “parching rice brings smells that reminded me of my relatives,” while the paddy-grown rice—a grain without a story—produces calories without nourishment.

In his “Seasons” essay, Northrup further connects *manoominikewin* (ricing) to Anishinaabe history. Speaking of the parching kettle his family uses to dry the rice and prepare it for hulling, Northrup identifies it as an *okaadakik*, or “treaty kettle”:

Our kettle has been handed down from family to family since treaty signing times in the nineteenth century. The story that came with the kettle says it first came to the Anishinaabeg in Sandy Lake, a village west of our Reservation. Smallpox wiped out the village so the kettle came to Sawyer, our village. It lived with one family through many seasons of ricing and sugar bush. The son of the man who brought it to our village wanted to go to bingo one night so the kettle came to live with us.⁴⁹

As Northrup’s syntax indicates, *okaadakik* is an animate noun in Anishinaabemowin. The kettle *lives* with his family, and it carries with it over a century of Anishinaabe history and resistance to colonization. The kettle holds its own story even as it is part of Northrup’s story of ricing. Through the decimation of smallpox, the ongoing challenges of poverty, and perhaps addiction—all related to colonialism—the kettle persists through its presence and function as an active creator of Anishinaabe survivance. It recalls the treaties that demonstrate Anishinaabe sovereignty and that protect Anishinaabe ricing rights. It also references bingo, a complex trope that also appears in the work of other Anishinaabe writers like Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor, where it is associated with chance; here it is both a marker of sovereignty and the catalyst for reckless or compulsive behavior. Finally, the treaty kettle assists with the processing of both rice and maple sugar, foods that keep the people alive and connect them with their ancestors through their knowledge of how and when to use the *okaadakik*. Northrup also teaches an even older form of parching rice: “We’ve heard that before treaty kettles, the Anishinaabeg used woven mats to parch the rice. They used a reed that doesn’t burn to dry the rice over the fire” (41). Stretching back before colonialism,

Anishinaabe *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin* is a through line that reminds the people of how they have remained themselves despite colonial assaults on their sovereignty and identity. As Northrup expresses, “Ricing is so central to our life that it could be as much a purpose as a privilege. It is true that we live with, and in some ways, for the rice” (42).

Published both in English and in Anishinaabemowin, Northrup’s poem “mahnoomin” offers an opportunity to see how Northrup weaves linguistic knowledge into his ricing stories. The first two lines of the poem, “Tobacco swirled in the lake / as we offered our thanks” reminds (or teaches) readers that ricing protocol begins with giving thanks to the Creator for the gift of the harvest.⁵⁰ Margaret Noodin’s insightful analysis reveals how this poem emphasizes the ways in which nouns in Anishinaabemowin can be animate or inanimate, and the ways in which the Anishinaabe recognition of animacy in many categories of beings shapes the way the people relate to the world.⁵¹ Northrup’s poem emphasizes the animacy of the tobacco, water, cedar, and sun: The tobacco swirls, water “welcomed us,” cedar “caressed the heads,” the sun “smiled everywhere” (lines 1, 3, 6, 12). Furthermore, the poem emphasizes the agency of *manoomin* itself: “rice heads nodded in agreement / . . . ripe rice came along to join us / in many meals this winter. The rice bearded up” (lines 4, 7–9). In these lines the *manoomin* recognizes the importance of giving thanks for the harvest; it gives itself willingly as food—and indeed, sees itself as a partner in the meal, not as a sacrifice for it. Further, since the “beard” is the barbed part of the hull that anchors the seed to the bottom of a lake or river so that the seed can germinate, by “bearding up” it prepares itself for its own reseeding and renewal. Noodin points out, “As a student of the language, [Northrup] knows that the words for tobacco, the sun, and cedar are naturally animate in Anishinaabemowin. As a poet, he pulls the water and rice into the poem as animate nouns.”⁵² Although *manoomin* is not generally used as an animate word in Anishinaabemowin,⁵³ Northrup’s fluency enables him to creatively use this aspect of the language to emphasize the relationship of *manoomin* to the people and the active part it plays in nourishing their sense of who they are.

As it consciously recategorizes *manoomin* as an animate noun and an agent in its own sowing and harvest who willingly joins Anishinaabe meals, this poetic use of Anishinaabemowin not only points to the way that *gikendaasowin* is layered in language and storytelling, but also elucidates a specific Anishinaabe relationship to the natural world. How could a person begin to understand wild rice—its value, its meaning, its vitality, its agency—and understand how to be in appropriate relationship with it, without *dibaajimowinan* like those of Northrup? Without the story, the seed loses its animacy and becomes an object or commodity to be assigned a monetary value and manipulated. Northrup’s poem ends “It’s easy to feel a part of the generations that have riced here before / It felt good to get on the lake. It felt better getting off / carrying a canoe load of food and centuries of memories” (lines 17–23).

Ricing with attentiveness, with full awareness of the presence and participation of the sun, cedar (present in the wooden knockers), tobacco, and *manoomin* itself in the process, alongside relatives who harvest “while / laughing, gossiping, remembering” (lines 15–16) sustains the people physically, emotionally, and culturally.

Northrup's stories and poems about *manoomin* have impacted generations of listeners. He talks frequently in his work about teaching his grandchildren how to move through the seasons as Anishinaabeg, and his impact has gone far beyond his immediate family. One example is Heid Erdrich's poem "First Rice/For Jim Northrup."⁵⁴ The poem begins as a lesson on when to harvest: "The grains should be green as river rocks" (line 1) and acknowledges the importance of giving thanks: "First *manoomin*, feast plate laid for the spirits— / berries and tobacco offered with song" (lines 4–5). Having established this protocol, the poem reflects on the significance of this offering, even in times of scarcity: "What it must have meant to give / what little the people had to give" (lines 6–7). Giving thanks for the food, the water that "gives up that food" and "for the world working the way it should," results in a world that is "living and full of living god" (lines 9–11). Erdrich's dedication of her poem to Northrup testifies to the way that storytelling about *manoomin* is itself a connection among Anishinaabe. Through the dedication, Erdrich acknowledges Northrup as a teacher and the poem becomes, itself, an enactment of protocol, as Erdrich offers these words about first rice to Northrup in thanks for his teachings, as one would offer the *manoomin* after harvest.

Reflected in Erdrich's words, Northrup's lessons are the starting point for her own poetic exploration of the physical, cultural, and spiritual relationship between the people and *manoomin*. As she links her poem to Northrup's *manoomin* narratives, they both articulate *anishinaabe-inaadiziwin*, an Anishinaabe way of being in the world, and thus actively engage in decolonial knowledge production. Decolonial *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin* is itself an assertion of food sovereignty and is the intellectual basis of Anishinaabe food activism. "Certainly the *manoomin* itself is tangible and valuable as sustenance," Noodin explains, "but it becomes much more than a grain. The act of finding it, recognizing it, and knowing to thank *Manidoo* with an offering of tobacco is key to actually ricing. Writing about the rice in an Anishinaabe way, Northrup offers poetic support for efforts against genetic modification of wild rice. . . . Northrup speaks of ricing as only an Anishinaabe ricer could."⁵⁵ Erdrich's writing joins with Northrup's to reveal a history, process, and protocol of Anishinaabe food sovereignty through ricing.

"You can't rice without somebody knocking": Linda LeGarde Grover's The Road Back to Sweetgrass

Set on the fictional Mozhay Point Indian Reservation, Linda LeGarde Grover's novel *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* positions ricing as central to a series of returns and connections to land, kin, and culture experienced by Ojibwe people.⁵⁶ The novel begins on the opening day of the reservation's wild rice harvest, one of several opening day stories that are eventually narrated. The ricers, of varied age and relationship, all smell the scent of sweetgrass in the air, coming from the nearby Muskrat family land/LaForce family allotment. Though they are all aware that no sweetgrass actually grows on this land, "the scent reminds us that we have been blessed by the creator in all ways, understood or otherwise, here during our time on Mother Earth and so we accept the mystery for what it is" (1). The scent, we find, actually comes from an *odissima* pouch

that contains the umbilical cord of a member of the Muskrat family born on, and linked to, this land a century before. More than one hundred years old, the *odissimaa* bag's continuing aromatic presence is a reminder of the deep connection to ceremonies, land, and kinship that stretch back before allotment and other colonial trespasses. Perhaps ricing, a highly sensory experience itself, stimulates awareness of the scent of sweetgrass; Grover's text suggests that ricing season is a time of recognition that opens participants to connections across generations and between everyday life and the sacred that Jim Northrup, Heid Erdrich, and Kim Blaeser also speak of in their poetry.

Among the many returns the novel traces is that of a young "stranger" who shows up on opening day of the *manoomin* harvest in 1998. This young man, Dag Bjornborg, drives a Jeep Cherokee and wears unsuitable gear that highlights "the incompatibilities of his carefully planned sporting style and the hard and muddy labor of the wild rice harvest" (122). He has a ricing permit, evidence of band membership, but has no idea how to rice and no ricing partner. He has, however, watched a video at the county historical society's library of elders ricing with the thought, "this is where I come from, this is my home, this is the goodness and simplicity and the beauty of my home. My home" (142). Dag's birth mother is Mozhay Point Ojibwe; he was adopted by a Norwegian family who told him nothing of his birth parents and named him Dagfinn after his adoptive grandfather, a name that sounds like "Dog" or "Dog fin" to those at the boat landing. Through the "quintessentially Ojibwe"⁵⁷ experience of the rice harvest, Dag seeks a way home, an opportunity to build some kind of connection to his mother's community and an Ojibwe identity.

Dag's ricing experience unfolds as a trickster-style disaster, and as often happens in trickster *aadizokaanan*, the trickster's failure is also a source of continuance and survival. Dag's ricing story turns on his inability to find a ricing partner. Harvesting *manoomin* requires two people, one to pole the boat through stands of rice and the other to knock the kernels into the boat. Walker and Doerfler point out that "It would be nearly impossible for one person to harvest rice using a canoe and knocking sticks; cooperation between the paddler and harvester is essential. Acts of cooperation remind harvesters of their relationship with rice and keep the community strong" (511). But when Dag looks for a partner along the shore, "there weren't any takers; everyone already had their partners, it appeared, or already knew someone else there who was looking" (123).

Eventually, an elder named Beryl takes pity on Dag and introduces herself to him. Upon hearing his name, Beryl "pictured a Mozhay Point rez dog, big and shaggy, humble and scrappy, swimming through the slough with the help of magical fins, perhaps a Nanaboozhoo trick" (126). Immediately visualizing Dag as an *aadizokaanan* character in a story featuring the trickster credited with bringing *manoomin* to the people, Beryl begins the process of connecting the youth to the community. And she finds him a ricing partner—her hung-over, troubled great-niece Crystal. If Dag is overtly seeking in ricing a process by which to become whole, Crystal too, with her troubling cough and bottle of vodka, is in need of reconnection and healing. Her mother looks at her and thinks, "You look like hell; who would want to rice with you?" (14). Even though her

cousin Tommy thinks she looks “a little like death warmed over,” he tells a concerned-looking Dag that “she’s a pretty good ricer . . . she just needs a partner” (130).

Dag imagines ricing as a transcendent experience that will solidify his connection to Mozhay Point, while Crystal is most engaged by Dag’s offer of a spicy Italian sub for lunch and asks him, “So, are you Italian or what?” (132). Though she is sympathetic when she finds out that Dag was adopted out at birth, she soon falls asleep and turned into “a small, broad-shouldered puddle of hungover Indian girl on the bottom of a rowboat,” leaving Dag to imagine a dialogue with her (133). He wonders, “Crystal, Crystal. Who are you; who might you be? Who might I be?” (133). Later, as he trades places with her so that he can try knocking the rice, they brush against each other and Dag envisions himself “an unknown, mysterious Indian brave with long black hair and brown arms, hard and muscular, who held Crystal’s slenderness against his rocklike warrior strength, his hawklike face nearly brutal in its pride and survival, its Indianness, crushing to his burnished copper chest a nearly breathless, swooning, succumbing Crystal” (136).

Caught up in the throes of this fantasy Indian identity, and acting like a typical, oversexed trickster, he kisses her and proclaims, “That’s the Indian boy in me” (137). In response, Crystal rolls her eyes, looks at the sky while saying “Animoosh,” and takes a few drinks from her bottle of vodka, effectively dismissing his advances. When Dag refuses a drink and asks to start ricing again, Crystal refuses to participate further in his identity fantasies and tells him: “Forget it, Animoosh. Quit your barking! You can’t rice without somebody knocking, and I’m not gonna do it, and so you might as well just settle down” (138). When Dag asks what Animoosh means (thinking it must be “something like Kemosabe”), Crystal informs him it means “Dog. Get it? Like your name?” (139). Crystal, like her great-aunt Beryl, associates Dag with a dog—close relation to Coyote, a trickster figure in other Native nations—and indigenizes Dag’s extremely Norwegian name.

Gerald Vizenor notes, in a section of *Fugitive Poses* titled “Animosh Transmotion,” that dogs are “literary totem[s]” who are “teased as creatures of ambiguity and duality.”⁵⁸ As Crystal renames Dag “Animoosh,” she mocks his stereotypical ideas of “Indian” maleness and identity (what Vizenor would identify as the “immovable simulations, the tragic archives of dominance and victimry” that constitute manifest manners)⁵⁹ while simultaneously referencing a trickster paradigm that explains his ambiguous identity in an empowering, thoroughly Anishinaabe way. And in accordance with this trickster identity, Dag’s overreaching leads to calamity. Crystal passes out and awakens to find Dag trying to loosen an oar so he can return them to shore. Unfortunately, his actions begin to tip the boat and while Crystal yells “The rice! Jump! Save the rice!” the boat tips and they lose their harvest (140). Crystal is furious, but points out to their rescuers that the lost harvest is “good for next year’s rice” and one replies, “we’ll have to make sure we remember that spot next year! . . . Lots of good rice there!” (141–142). Once they reach the shore and Dag takes responsibility for the capsizing, an elder says:

“Hey, didn’t Zho Wash [Crystal’s father] do that, that one time? Tipped over the rowboat, all his rice went into the lake, remember that? Tried to act all Indianish:

‘It was meant to be,’ he said, but oh, you could tell he was mad, though!’ The two men in the canoe began to tell all of the stories they could remember about tipping their boats and losing their rice in the lake, each funnier to them than the last, by what Dag heard, but not a single one funny to him. Why in the world had he even come to Lost Lake? What made him think he could rice? (142)

As the men engage in the process of remembering previous ricing seasons, their stories and laughter are meant to demonstrate to Dag that he isn’t the first one to tip a boat and indeed, that his and Crystal’s accident connect them to her father.⁶⁰ Zho Wash holds their respect, even as they laugh at his attempts to hide his frustration at losing his harvest of *manoomin*. Far from indicating failure to belong, then, Dag’s ricing disaster links him to *dibaajimowinan* about ricing disasters. The laughter and memories and stories, even stories of mishaps, are moments that feed the community by creating and sharing *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin*.

Although Dag leaves the lake discouraged and feeling distant from the community at Mozhay Point, Beryl helps him to find his mother, who still lives on the reservation. Later in the novel, we find that not only has Dag been reunited with his mother, but has also married Crystal and they are expecting a baby. As they wait for the birth, Zho Wash tells Crystal the story of their family’s presence on the land next to Lost Lake, the *odissimaa* bag that connected his ancestor to this land, and explaining that his family was forced to leave but then returned. Crystal’s *odissimaa* has been buried on this land and here the family will bury the *odissimaa* of Crystal and Dag’s child. Beryl thinks, “the past is always with us, and Crystal will carry it into the future when she brings new life into the world” (171).

Crystal and Dag’s hilarious and failed ricing partnership has turned out to be the catalyst for finding their places within the community, for connecting those who were separated from one another, and for keeping the community alive and together despite allotment, relocation, and other internal and external challenges to its survival. Being Mozhay Point Ojibwe is not enacting some stereotypical version of Indianness, the novel argues, but rather embracing trickster ambiguity and cultivating an openness and willingness to hear and participate in the stories and experiences, like ricing, that pull people together. The *gikendaasowin* that these experiences and stories convey is a centripetal force that moves people along the road back home.

MANOOMINIKEWIN AS SOVEREIGNTY, JUSTICE, AND TRANSMOTION

The continuous presence of a rich and varied collection of wild rice stories among Anishinaabeg signifies a long-standing legal claim of connection between *manoomin* and the people. Wild rice stories are not only told alongside the lake and during family gatherings, but also in the courtroom, where Anishinaabeg fight for recognition of their rights to their land and their role as stewards of ricing habitats. As Blaeser examines, over the course of his career Gerald Vizenor has returned to a particular courtroom scene in which Anishinaabe elder Charles Aubid testifies that under their 1837 treaty, the Anishinaabeg have the right to regulate wild rice harvest on ceded public lands. In telling and retelling his story, Vizenor emphasizes how Aubid’s testimony supports

sovereignty. He writes, "Aubid . . . testified in *anishinaabemowin* that he was present as a young man when the government agents told Old John Squirrel that the *anishinaabe* would always have control of the *manoomin* harvest. Aubid told the judge that there once was a document, but the *anishinaabe* always understood their rights in stories, not hearsay."⁶¹ By calling his own observation of John Squirrel's conversation "evidence," and legal documents "heresay," Aubid flips the meaning of these legal terms so that *manoomin* stories are the true testimony of Anishinaabe treaty rights, and indeed, defines this *manoomin dibaajimowin* as the presence of sovereignty. "Aubid named the storied *anishinaabe* as a presence," Vizenor writes, "not an absence; as the virtual evidence, not as mere hearsay."⁶²

In Blaeser's summary, "Vizenor suggests that we see in the 1968 courtroom drama an example of transmotion, with implications for the larger national, perhaps global relations with Native Nations."⁶³ As Vizenor conceives it, narrative transmotion is "the sense of 'eternal return' with 'difference'" that keeps stories alive, in movement, teaching the lessons people today need to know.⁶⁴ This understanding of the relationship between storytelling, law, and sovereignty resonates with the work of Anishinaabe legal scholars such as John Borrows, who argues that storytelling should be central to Anishinaabe jurisprudence:

Precedent should not be confined to dusty old law books but should be alive to the authority of our teachings and life-ways. . . . Our traditions and stories should guide how we answer the problems we face. They are a necessary part of our internal regulation and organization. Our customs are necessary to meet challenges that lie ahead. . . . We should be able to dream about what our own law should look like in our contemporary lives.⁶⁵

Understood as transmotion, Aubid's courtroom story is simultaneously legal precedent and source of *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin* stewardship. While transmotion is a process through which communities retell and remake stories to pass on *gikendaasowin* and apply it to contemporary concerns, it is not necessarily linked to a particular content (in other words, the concept is not only linked to stories about *manoomin*). It is, nevertheless, significant that Vizenor develops this important concept by telling and retelling stories of *manoomin*, pointing to the strong relationship between wild rice, sovereignty, and continuance. Transmotion is, simultaneously, a process by which *gikendaasowin* is transmitted and a creative, trickster process—Anishinaabe renewal, sovereignty, and survivance through storytelling.

Thinking of Vizenor's concept of survivance as "survival and resistance" or "survival and continuance," helps us to see that Winona LaDuke, too, writes multiple narratives of wild rice as survivance. Blaeser affiliates Vizenor's discussion of *manoomin* and transmotion with LaDuke's work to protect *manoomin* from genetic modification.⁶⁶ And, certainly, in her prolific writing that asserts that treaties provide Anishinaabeg people the right to *their* rice, not genetically modified organisms that have been built upon the genetic code of the grass, LaDuke tells stories of generations of ricing and resistance. "The wild rice harvest not only feeds the body, it feeds the soul," she explains.⁶⁷ "The Anishinaabe wild rice moon, *Manoominike Giizis*—is the season of

a harvest, a ceremony, and a way of life.”⁶⁸ Continuing the harvest maintains not just a way of life, but *mino-bimaadiziwin*, the good life—life as it was meant to be. In her novel *Last Standing Woman*, for example, LaDuke shapes ricing into a central trope: it becomes an embodiment of justice that helps the community at White Earth to reclaim itself and move away from the legacies of colonization and toward the good life when *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* is put to work to protect the safety and dignity of a young girl.

Frances Graves is being sexually abused by her father Fred Graves, a tribal councilman who continued a family cycle of sexual assault that began when his grandfather was assaulted by a priest. After identifying the abuse, and determining to address it despite the considerable power of Frances’s father, a group of women identified as the *Ogichidaakweg*, or “Women’s Warrior Society,” take action. The women intervene as Fred attempts to rape Frances and protect her while they drive Fred out of his house and onto the street, where other women in cars turn their lights on him and honk their horns, bringing his abuse into the public eye. The women chase him down the street “with the might of their ricing sticks” as their tool of justice: “*Bawa’iganaak oog*, the ricing stick, is carved from soft, light cedar, and is used to coax the *manoomin*, the wild rice, from its stalks. In the fall, the sound of the sticks hitting against each other and on the rice makes a soothing sound of harvest. This winter night, the sticks would make a different sound.”⁶⁹ LaDuke’s literalization of the use of cultural tools to fight for justice is a vivid image that also affiliates her story with many other narratives in which *manoomin* signifies community health.

I further argue that, in this scene, *manoomin* and the process of ricing are more than metaphor: when the Women’s Warrior Society evokes ricing as the presence of community health and justice, LaDuke is also dramatizing the process of transmotion. That is, to borrow Blaeser’s words, transmotion “embod[ies] tribal sovereignty through the imaginative and visionary links of story, tribal memory, and environmental knowledge.”⁷⁰ Using ricing sticks, the Women’s Warrior Society protects their youth and brings the perpetrator to trial, not only for his abuse of his daughter, but eventually, also for his abuse of the entire community by selling community environmental resources for personal gain.

In the passage from the scene quoted above, LaDuke uses the Anishinaabe word for rice knockers: *bawa’iganaak oog*. The “oog” at the end of the word signals that it is a plural, animate word, and, in addition, the ending is set apart from the main body of the word, which draws attention to it as a marker of animacy.⁷¹ Significantly, while knocking sticks are animate in Anishinaabemowin, most weapons are generally inanimate; thus, while the standard Anishinaabemowin grammar signals that a person who takes action with a weapon has responsibility for its use, LaDuke’s weaponized knockers maintain agency.⁷² In emphasizing the animacy of the knockers, though, LaDuke is not undercutting the agency of the strong women who call Fred Graves to account for his crimes. Rather, the sentience of both the women and the knockers reminds readers that prior to the 1930s, women were the primary ricers, a powerful role providing for the well-being of their communities.⁷³ By taking up the knocking sticks that “coax” the *manoomin* and using them much more aggressively to stop Fred

Graves, the Ojichidaakweg reclaim power and step into the vital role ascribed to them in decolonized *gikendaasowin*. Brenda Child writes that contemporary Ojibwe women take on “some of the most important work that sustain[s] community life. . . . Like their Ojibwe grandmothers, they continue to work as women did in the wild rice economy—not only for material sustenance but for their own empowerment and the spiritual well-being of their family and community.”⁷⁴ The knocking sticks thus take on yet another layer of meaning as a tool of survivance.

WILD RICE NARRATIVES AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY MOVEMENTS

In an essay on Native literature and food sovereignty, Joni Adamson astutely remarks that “it is important at the outset of any discussion or course focused on indigenous food sovereignty to state clearly that the act of gardening and farming is not just a symbol among indigenous peoples and/or urban communities which are organizing around access to fresh, healthy foods.”⁷⁵ Given the astronomical rates of diabetes and other health problems among indigenous people related to colonization of Native foodways, Adamson explains that “many indigenous and urban gardeners are not so much interested in symbolic politics as they are in simply providing traditional ‘first food’ cuisines that may likely improve the health of their families.”⁷⁶ While Adamson speaks of “farming” in these passages, her work makes clear that she is referring to food production in a way that includes ricing. She goes on to claim that, “it is likely that few Native farmers themselves are necessarily familiar with the creative works of native North American writers, though it is understood that poetry and novels can inspire organized acts of political-discursive resistance.”⁷⁷

Even as Adamson acknowledges the active role literary texts can play, she assumes a separation between those who work with the seed and those who tell or write the stories. However, the narratives of *manoomin* discussed here demonstrate that Anishinaabe people who harvest the rice *are* aware of *manoomin* stories, whether through published accounts or other forms of cultural transmission. Walker and Doerfler note that “Ojibwe understand their relationship to wild rice through stories, known to many from childhood.”⁷⁸ In fact, Anishinaabeg storytellers and food activists are often one and the same, and both connect the process of ricing to the telling of ricing stories, speaking often about how stories maintain *gikendaasowin*. Adamson sees the literary works she examines as “case studies” for food sovereignty, but *manoomin* narratives play a much more vital and active role than this. As Blaeser explains, “When I investigate the Native seed banks that seek to preserve Indigenous varieties of tribal foods like wild rice, I think also of the vast ‘story banks’ that preserve Anishinaabeg beliefs and tradition. . . . [E]ach storytelling is both harvest and reseeding.”⁷⁹ Story and action intertwine, and ricing becomes decolonized and decolonizing knowledge and process, which can never be separated from story.

Anishinaabe communities today create and sustain *mino-bimaadiziwin*, a good and healthy life, by fighting to maintain the wildness of wild rice. Working together, writers, activists, ricers, and storytellers act as cultural and environmental stewards by engaging in projects that affirm Anishinaabe rights to *manoomin* and to community health

and self-determination. Programs like Native Harvest, Red Lake Nation Foods, and Nett Lake Wild Rice simultaneously work on food access, habitat sustainability, and reinventing traditional economies.⁸⁰ The Intertribal Agricultural Council hosts an annual Great Lakes Intertribal Food Summit, at which storytellers, elders, researchers, foodways teachers, and chefs can share their knowledge of *manoomin* and cook and eat together. Collections of recipes, such as Heid Erdrich's *Original Local: Indigenous Foods, Stories and Recipes from the Upper Midwest*, Native Harvest's *Jiibaakweda Gijimininaan: Let's Cook Our Foods*, and the Dream of Wild Health Farm cookbook, juxtapose recipes and *dibaajimowinan* and teach how to prepare healthy meals from *manoomin* and other indigenous foods.⁸¹ Organizations like the White Earth Land Recovery Project fight against genetic modification of *manoomin* and biopiracy.⁸² All of these projects, and many others, tell *manoomin* narratives to propagate *gikendaasowin* in order to achieve their goals of food sovereignty and Anishinaabe cultural, spiritual, and physical health. Geniusz explains that the priority of decolonized *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* "is to revitalize this knowledge within our own lives so that it will be there for our children and grandchildren and their children and grandchildren."⁸³ Clearly, then, Marilou Awiakta's insistence on the importance of keeping story and seed together rings as true for *manoomin* as it does for corn. In a time when climate change, pipelines, and continued experimentation with GMOs and paddy-grown rice continue to threaten *manoomin*, Anishinaabe people create and convey *gikendaasowin* about *manoomin*: telling these stories that nourish as an act of survivance.

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NOTES

Author's note: Words in Anishinaabemowin will appear in italics in accordance with AICRJ house style (with the exception of proper names), or alternatively, will follow the styling of the texts from which I am quoting. I also use the spelling and orthography provided by the speakers and writers of Anishinaabemowin I am quoting (for example, Margaret Noodin writes "*aadizokaan*," whereas Wendy Makoons Geniusz writes "*aadizookaan*"). When not quoting a word, I use the spelling provided in

the Ojibwe People's Dictionary at <http://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/>. This results in what may seem like small inconsistencies in the text, but are actually an accurate reflection of the vibrant variation in the use of Anishinaabemowin today. As Louise Erdrich explains throughout her Birchbark House series for young readers, "Ojibwa [also Ojibwemowin or Anishinaabemowin] was originally a spoken, not written, language, and for that reason spellings are often idiosyncratic. There are also many, many dialects of Ojibwa in use." Louise Erdrich, *The Birchbark House* (New York: Hyperion, 1999), 240.

1. Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 2.

2. Pollan claims that there are "some 45,000 items in the average American supermarket and more than a quarter of them contain corn." *Ibid.*, 19.

3. *Ibid.*, 10.

4. Gregory Cajete, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Publishers, 2000), 141.

5. Cajete explains, "Native science is thoroughly wrapped in a blanket of metaphor, expressed in story, art, community, dance, song, ritual, music, astronomical knowledge and technologies such as hunting, fishing, farming, or healing." *Ibid.*, 30–31.

6. Marilou Awiakta, *Selu: Seeking the Corn Mother's Wisdom* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 1993), 20, 227.

7. *Manoomin* means "good seed" in Anishinaabemowin (the Anishinaabe language). The plant is known as "wild rice" in English, as *Ziziana aquatica* in Linnaean/scientific classificatory nomenclature, and as *riz sauvage* in (French) colonial texts.

8. See Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (Cambridge, South End, 2005), 168; and Heid Erdrich, *Original Local: Indigenous Foods, Stories, and Recipes from the Upper Midwest* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2013), 48, which quotes the website "Protect Our Manoomin": "The First Fire [of the Seven Fires Prophecy] reads: 'You will know the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water.' We then set forth on our Great Migration that began over 500 years ago. We traveled down the St. Lawrence River, into the Great Lakes region, and thence came to Anishinaabe Aki [the people's land] where we found the food that grows on water." See <http://protectourmanoomin.weebly.com/protect-our-manoomin---mission-statement--declaration.html>; see also Gordon Regguinti, *The Sacred Harvest: Ojibway Wild Rice Gathering* (Minneapolis: Lerner Publications Co., 1992).

9. LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 168–69.

10. Rachel Durkee Walker and Jill Doerfler, "Wild Rice: the Minnesota Legislature, a Distinctive Crop, GMOs, and Ojibwe Perspectives," *Hamline Law Review* 32, no. 2 (2009): 509.

11. Brenda Child, *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks: Ojibwe Family Life and Labor on the Reservation* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2014), 161.

12. LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 167. *Manoomin* is a centrally important plant to indigenous peoples other than the Anishinaabe as well. For example, as Thomas Weso explains, "*Meno* is the Menominee word for good, and *min* is grain, seed, or berry, so the word means 'good grain' or good seed.' The Menominee Tribe of Wisconsin is named for this—*ee* means people, so we are the Wild Rice People. . . . This foodstuff is ubiquitous throughout the Algonquian-speaking region." *Good Seeds: A Menominee Food Memoir* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society, 2016), 48. All of the narratives I will focus on in this essay, however, are Anishinaabe, and more specifically Ojibwe.

13. Kimberly Blaeser, "Wild Rice Rights: Gerald Vizenor and an Affiliation of Story," in *Centering Anishinaabeg Studies: Understanding the World Through Stories*, ed. Jill Doerfler, Niigaanwe-widam James Sinclair, and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiiik Stark (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 2013), 237–57, 253.

14. Quoted in Blaeser, “Wild Rice Rights,” 238; originally published in “Passing Time,” in Kimberly Blaeser, *Absentee Indians & Other Poems* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001), 21–22.

15. Wendy Makoons Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 3.

16. While this essay primarily focuses on literary texts and other published narratives, these published stories/poems/essays/histories demonstrate the ubiquity of *manoomin* narratives in the daily life of many Anishinaabeg.

17. Geniusz, *Our Knowledge is Not Primitive*, 4, 10, 11.

18. *Ibid.*, 51.

19. *Ibid.*, 72.

20. “The English translation of these words and categories is inadequate,” explains Margaret Noodin. “The closest literal translation is one that connects *dibaajimowinan* to the act of collecting and redistributing the truth that you’ve heard. This is a simpler, more direct narrative style. *Aadizookaanag*, by contrast, in poetry, would be the bones of self-knowing, the core means of communicating the complexity of life. . . . Sometimes *aadizookaan* is translated as ‘myth,’ but that term is laden with implications of fiction that are not necessarily part of the Anishinaabe classification. Together, the *dibaajimowinan* and *aadizookaanag* comprise Anishinaabe literature.” Margaret Noodin, *Bawaaajimo: A Dialect of Dreams in Anishinaabe Language and Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2014), 21. Dylan Miner further explains *aadizookaanag* when he writes: “I have heard *aadizookaanag* described in many ways, which includes traditional stories, myths, and legends. However, I have also been told that the *aadizookaanag* are stories that are so significant that they become beings and know that they are being told. *Aadizookaanag* are stories but they are also living beings. One could say that their telling actually creates them in this world. Their telling also creates the world.” Dylan Miner, “Mshkikiwaaboo minken e piichi-aadizookaanigwaa aanikoobijiganag,” in *Catalog for the Exhibition Four Faces of the Moon* by Amanda Strong, 34–45 (grunt gallery, Vancouver, BC, 2016), 34–35.

21. Child, *My Grandfather’s Knocking Sticks*, 167–68.

22. *Ibid.*, 168.

23. While many of the sources I cite in this essay describe the ricing process, a particularly detailed and well-researched source is Thomas Vennum, Jr., *Wild Rice and the Ojibway People* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1988). Geniusz identifies Vennum’s work as an example of decolonized Anishinaabeg *gikendaasowin*. The film *Mino- Bimadiziwin: The Good Life, Ojibwe Wild Rice Harvesting in Minnesota* (Red Eye Video) provides historical photos and contemporary footage of harvesting and processing *manoomin* (by hand and by small, Native-owned, on-reservation processors).

24. Blaeser, “Wild Rice Rights,” 241.

25. Anya Zilberstein, “Inured to Empire: Wild Rice and Climate Change,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2015): 127–58, <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.72.1.0127>.

26. *Ibid.*, 128.

27. *Ibid.*, 129.

28. *Ibid.*, 142.

29. *Ibid.*, 127.

30. *Ibid.*, 143–45.

31. *Ibid.*, 158.

32. See, for example, Melissa Meyer, *The White Earth Tragedy: Ethnicity and Dispossession at a Minnesota Anishinaabe Reservation, 1889–1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1994); and Jill Doerfler, *Those Who Belong: Identity, Family, Blood, and Citizenship among the White Earth Anishinaabeg* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015).

33. *Ibid.*, 1019.

34. Albert Ernest Jenks, "The Wild Rice Gatherers of the Upper Lakes: A Study in American Primitive Economics," *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1900), 1090.
35. *Ibid.*, 1026.
36. *Ibid.*, 1094.
37. *Ibid.*, 1073.
38. *Ibid.*, 1074.
39. *Ibid.*, 1105.
40. Child, *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks*, 180–85.
41. Winona LaDuke with Brian Carlson, *Our Manoomin, Our Life: The Anishinaabeg Struggle to Protect Wild Rice* (Pondsford, MN: White Earth Land Recovery Project, 2003), 3–5.
42. LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 172–73.
43. *Ibid.*, 174–80 and 180–84.
44. Quoted in *ibid.*, 174.
45. Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi, *Food Justice* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013), 116; also see <https://viacampesina.org/en/food-sovereignty/>.
46. Margaret Noodin [Noori], "Introduction: Awenen Aawaad," in Jim Northrup, *Anishinaabe Syndicated: A View from the Rez* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2011), xii.
47. Jim Northrup, *Anishinaabe Syndicated*, 47–68; Jim Northrup, "Seasons: Ziigwang Niibing Dagwaaging Biboong," in *Rez Road Follies: Canoes, Casinos, Computers, and Birch Bark Baskets* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 37–97; Jim Northrup, "mahnommin," in *Walking the Rez Road* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 1993), 80.
48. Northrup, *Anishinaabe Syndicated*, 62. Subsequent quotations from this chapter are cited parenthetically in the text.
49. Northrup, "Seasons," 40. Subsequent quotations from this essay are cited parenthetically in the main text.
50. Northrup, "mahnommin," 80. One can view ricing scenes and hear Northrup recite the poem at <https://youtu.be/Kk1vjJpYQjQ>. Subsequent quotations from the poem are cited by line numbers in parentheses in the text.
51. Margaret Noodin, *Bawaajimo: A Dialect of Dreams*, 96.
52. *Ibid.*, 97.
53. Geniusz discusses the role of Anishinaabemowin in encoding the animacy of plants: "The question will inevitably arise here if, from the perspective of izhitwaawin [Anishinaabe culture, teachings, custom, history], plants and trees are considered to be animate beings. Keewaydinoquay says they are. . . . People who work with Ojibwe language, however, tend to say that some plants are animate while others are inanimate. There really has not been enough research in this area to give a definite answer one way or the other, but it seems that a lot of the inanimate names refer not to the entire plant, but to a part of the plant. . . . Rose says that names for plants and trees that end in *-min* are referring not to the whole plant, but just to a part of the plant or tree, such as a nut or berry. Many of these names ending in *-min* are inanimate. I do not have enough names for plants and trees to be certain if they are all considered animate, but of the ones I have collected from elders so far all are animate." Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive*, 59–60.
54. Heid Erdrich, "First Rice," in *Cell Traffic: New and Selected Poems* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012), 147.
55. Noodin, *Bawaajimo*, 97.
56. Linda LeGarde Grover, *The Road Back to Sweetgrass* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014). Subsequent page references to this novel are cited parenthetically in the text.
57. LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 167.

58. Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 124.
59. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), ix–x.
60. Zho Wash and Crystal's mother, Margie, are also indirectly brought together through ricing. Margie declares her love for Michael, Zho Wash's son, as they rice together, but Michael rejects her and leaves for Minneapolis. Devastated by this rejection, Margie shows up on Zho Wash's doorstep. The older man, who has always treated her with kindness and tenderness, takes her in and the two grow to love one another deeply. In the next ricing season, Margie gives birth to their daughter Crystal.
61. Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, 168.
62. *Ibid.*, 169.
63. Blaeser, "Wild Rice Rights," 250.
64. *Ibid.*, 251.
65. John Borrows, *Drawing Out Law: A Spirit's Guide* (University of Toronto Press, 2010), 197.
66. Blaeser, "Wild Rice Rights," 251.
67. LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred*, 167.
68. *Ibid.*, 190.
69. Winona LaDuke, *Last Standing Woman* (Stillwater, MN: Voyageur Press, 1997), 233, 235.
70. Blaeser, "Wild Rice Rights," 244.
71. In Anishinaabemowin, plural animate nouns have several endings (all of which have "g" as the final letter), including *-oog*. Inanimate nouns, in contrast, have endings with "n" as the final letter. In the singular, either animate or inanimate nouns can end in a "k," so the plural makes the animacy of the *bawa'iganaak oog* more apparent, as does the way LaDuke writes the word, with the ending separate from the root. See Gresczyk, Rick (Gwayakogaabaw), *Our Ojibwe Grammar, Volume 1: A Reference Grammar in the Chippewa Language* (Wright, MN: Eagle Works, 1997), 29–30.
72. Telephone conversation between the author and Margaret Noodin, July 21, 2017.
73. See Child, *My Grandfather's Knocking Sticks*, 161–91, and Brenda Child, *Holding Our World Together: Ojibwe Women and the Survival of Community* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2012).
74. Child, *Keeping Our World Together*, 160.
75. Joni Adamson, "Medicine Food: Critical Environmental Justice Studies, Native North American Literature, and the Movement for Food Sovereignty," *Environmental Justice* 4, no. 4 (2011) 213–219, 214.
76. *Ibid.*
77. *Ibid.*
78. Walker and Doerfler, "Wild Rice," 509.
79. Blaeser, "Wild Rice Rights," 253.
80. See <http://www.nativeharvest.com>; <http://www.redlakenationfoods.com>; and <http://www.nettlakewildrice.com/>.
81. Erdrich, *Original Local; Native Harvest, Jiibaakweda Gijimininaan: Let's Cook Our Food* (Morris Press Cookbooks, 2003); *The Dream of Wild Health Cookbook*, published by Dream of Wild Health Farm, is available for purchase at <https://dreamofwildhealth.org/product/cookbook>.
82. See <http://welrp.org> for more about the White Earth Land Recovery Project and its programs.
83. Geniusz, *Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive*, 8.

