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Kaʾtshatstʌ́sla: "Strength of belief and vision as a people"—A case study of Oneida resilience and corn

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Abstract

The collective nations of the Haudenosaunee are governed by their shared ancestral knowledge of creation. This storied knowledge tells of an intellectual relationship with corn that has been cultivated by the Haudenosaunee through generations and represents core values that are built into community resilience, for the benefit of future generations. The Oneida, members of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, have been committed to this relationship since the beginning of time. The Oneida Nation of Wisconsin has been shaping resilience in the context of struggle, to work toward sovereign community food systems. This particular Oneida community has been geographically divided from all other Haudenosaunee nations, and even from its members own Oneida kin, for nearly 200 years; however, this community was able to re-establish its relationship with corn after years of disconnect. Oneida Nation community-driven projects in Wisconsin have reshaped and enhanced the connection to corn, which places them at the forefront of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement.

Keywords

White Corn, Haudenosaunee, Oneida, Community Resilience, Food Sovereignty

Introduction and Background

Often the words *Corn* and *Resilience* are formulated in the same sentences when considering their connective histories. This is a common misconception. While Corn, or at least the varying strains of Corn indigenous to the Americas, is biologically resilient, without understanding the relational context

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between Corn and Indigenous people the reality is that resilience is an incomplete story. Corn, or what the Oneida (an Indigenous tribe in North America and member of the Iroquois or Haudenosaunee Confederacy) call Oˑnʌ́steˀ, is resilient. However, resilience in the context of Oneida lifeways is a byproduct of a relationship born from reciprocity. Without working to fully understand the relationship between Corn, more specifically White Corn, and Oneida people, *resilience* is just a term used to shape dialogues about abstract ideologies in geographies apart from Haudenosaunee communities. The Oneida have been thinking about and committed to their familial relationship with White Corn since the beginning of time. It is a relationship built on the core Haudenosaunee epistemologies of thanksgiving: a continuous reminder that Haudenosaunee are a part of, not apart, from all that sustains life. And while the reciprocal relationship between White Corn and the people is merely one example of these very old and productive cultural and intellectual relationships that the Haudenosaunee people cultivate with the ecosphere, this relationship represents core values that are built into community resilience, for the benefit of future generations. Because of the spiritual relationship of reciprocity with White Corn, both Oneida and White Corn are resilient, and a byproduct of that relationship—within the uncertain confines of modernity—is healthy food systems, or what scholars call food sovereignty. The Oneida remain committed to revitalizing important intellectual traditions that would help them repair their shared identities as Haudenosaunee.

Through the framework of the Oneida, or more accurately Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ (People of the Standing Stone), intellectual traditions of thanksgiving, this paper works toward shaping resilience in the context of struggle, to work toward sovereign community food systems. This article will tell the story of resilience in an Oneida context, how the Oneida Nation[1] of Wisconsin revitalized cultural and intellectual practices grounded in the relationship between oˑnʌ́steˀ[2] and Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ. To appreciate the significance of cultural revitalization, we start this article first by highlighting key events in Oneida Nation of Wisconsin history that shaped current reality. Despite being geographically divided from all other Haudenosaunee nations, and even from their own Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ kin in the Northeastern United States, this community was able to re-establish its relationship with oˑnʌ́steˀ after years of disconnect. We then go back to the beginning of Haudenosaunee creation with the Haudenosaunee creation story, when the spiritual relationship with oˑnʌ́steˀ was established, and describe how it has evolved. Next, we focus on how communal resilience was rediscovered and has continued to drive all Haudenosaunee, particularly the Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ community in Wisconsin, through dedication to the preservation of oˑnʌ́steˀ. We finish by discussing how Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ community-driven projects in Wisconsin have reshaped and enhanced the connection to oˑnʌ́steˀ,[3] placing them at the forefront of the Indigenous food sovereignty movement.

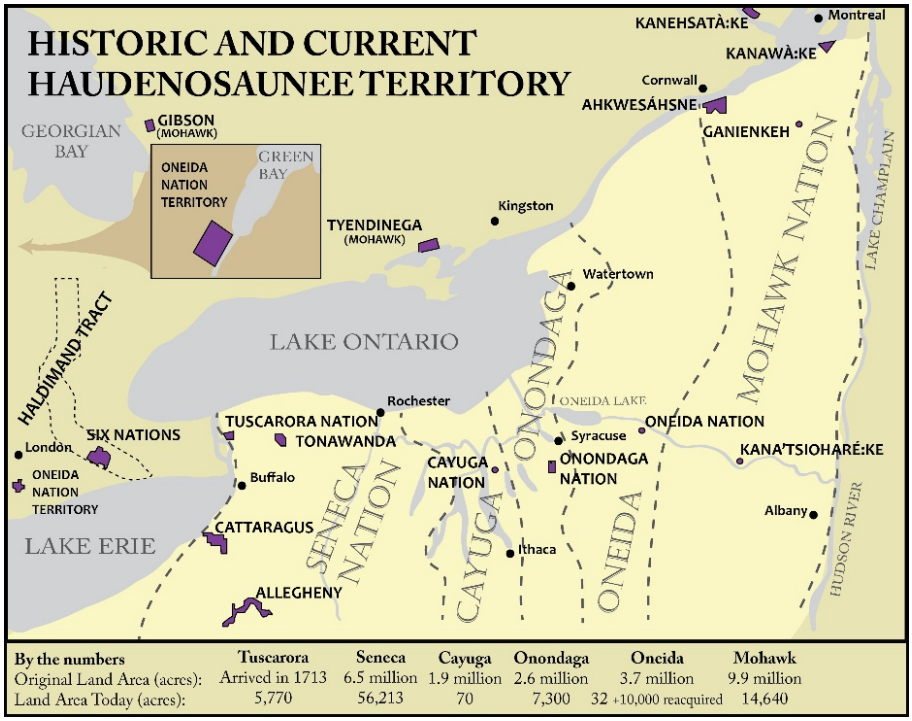
To better understand how resilience is inherent for Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ, we begin with their tribal history, one which separated them from other Haudenosaunee nations and strained their relationship with their cultural identities (Figure 1). The Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ of Wisconsin were displaced nearly 200 years ago from their brother nations. The Haudenosaunee (People of the Longhouse) Grand Council originally consisted of five nations, with Onondaga, Mohawk, and Seneca making up the Elder Brothers and the Oneida and Cayuga referred to as the Younger Brothers. In 1722 the Tuscarora would join after fleeing from warfare in the southeastern U.S., creating the six nations. Before contact from Western cultures, the Haudenosaunee lived in what is now the state of New York, in the United States. Not unlike many Indigenous nations globally, the Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ

[1] The term Onʌyoteˀaˑkáˑ will be used when referring to the people or community, while "Oneida Nation" will be used to refer to the tribal aspect or entity located in Wisconsin.

[2] The term oˑnʌ́steˀ will be used to refer to corn or White Corn in her spiritual sense, while "corn" will still be used to refer to products and/or plant descriptions.

[3] Through observation and lived experiences by one of the authors (who is an enrolled Oneida member).

Figure 1. Historic and Current Haudenosaunee Territory



Source: Two Row Wampum Renewal Campaign, n.d.

were targeted and subjected to colonial pressures. Devastating colonial impacts, include, but were not limited to, were coerced conversion to Christianity; loss of lands from theft, forced sale, and the construction of the American jurisprudence system; countless deaths due to diseases and warfare; loss of identity; and the physical separation from Haudenosaunee brother-nations (Hauptman & McLester, 2002; Lewis & Hill, 2005).

Beginning in the late 1700s, the Onʌyoteʔa·ká· were heavily influenced by Christianity. Countless missionaries and other pressures to convert to Christianity were constant, and after the newly formed United States established itself, the pressure to convert increased tenfold. With all of these colonial pressures, the people eventually found themselves at a crossroads: either stay in New York and face further marginalization and hardship, or embrace Christian values and relocate. A portion of Oneidas chose the latter. Led by missionary Eleazer Williams and under the guidance of Oneida Chief Elijah Skenandore, a group of Oneidas chose to relocate to a new settlement in the state of Wisconsin. The first group of 448 people left New York in 1822, with small groups following through 1840 (Hauptman & McLester, 2002; Lewis & Hill, 2005).

Onʌyoteʔa·ká· found themselves in a climate and on land in Wisconsin similar to their homelands in New York: heavily wooded areas, fertile soil, large meadows, rivers, as well as contiguous tributaries and lakes (Cornelius & Metoxen, 2010). Locals were impressed with how the Onʌyoteʔa·ká· managed these Wisconsin lands, referring to them as "ambitious people" (Hauptman & McLester, 1999, p. 122). Although the Onʌyoteʔa·ká· were highly productive farmers, the vices of modernity often forced Indigenous communities into uncertain futures. The timber industry, other employment opportunities, and U.S. wars would take the men and families away from the community. Federal policies, such as the Dawes Act of 1887, which took communal land away from the tribe and redistributed it in sections of 160 acres to heads of households (Hauptman & McLester, 2006), were created as "a mighty pulverizing engine to break up the tribal mass" (Roosevelt, 1901, para. 134). The tribe, and now individual landowners, were losing surplus lands left after allotment, lands in default from bank loans due primarily to the demand to adapt almost overnight to a new ownership regime that included paying taxes, new jurisdictional issues, and so forth. This era of Onʌyoteʔa·ká· history in Wisconsin resulted in a loss of 95% of tribal land ownership (McLester & Hauptman, 2010; Webster, 2016).

The Onʌyoteʔa·ká· were again a fractured and nearly landless people. As Holm, Pearson, and Chavis (2003) found in exploring the contributing factors to how Indigenous tribes endure colonial pressures and still maintain their identity, the key

contributing factor to the Onʌyoteʔa·ká· survival as Onʌyoteʔa·ká· was their connection to their peoplehood (language, history, land, and ceremony), as is true for many Indigenous peoples. An inherent commitment to remain resilient, is built into their language, history, land, and ceremony, with each cultural indicator reliant on the other for continuity (Holm et al., 2003). During the 1960s and '70s, the entire nation was experiencing a spiritual, social, political, legal, and civil awakening, and Indigenous Peoples were no exception. The American Indian Movement (AIM), a militant group founded in 1968 by American Indians of various tribes living in heavily populated inner cities, followed a mission to promote tribal sovereignty and Indigenous peoples' rights by protesting legal, political, and social issues of tribal peoples from a variety of geographies, spanning from reservation to inner-city communities (Doxtator & Zakhar, 2011). During the civil rights era, there was a intentional push by tribal peoples to reclaim and strengthen their traditional culture and identity.

For Haudenosaunee, the revitalization of language, agricultural crops, and foods became a central focus of the civil rights movement, even to those who had been displaced (Mt. Pleasant, 2011). In conversations with Ernie Stevens Jr., Oneida Nation of Wisconsin tribal member and chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association, he recalls a story from 1971, when at the young age of 12 he experienced his own cultural awakening (E. Stevens Jr., personal communication, 2018). AIM affiliates had helped to bring the White Roots of Peace, a group consisting of Haudenosaunee elders, to the Onʌyoteʔa·ká· people of Wisconsin with a mission to remind Indigenous groups of the importance of traditional language, ceremony, and knowledge systems (*Indian Country Today,* 2003; McLester & Hauptman, 2010). For the first time in his life, he heard Haudenosaunee songs, saw their dances, and listened to the language in a way he had never experienced. For Stevens, this one experience would result in an awakening that would drive a life-long commitment to his community, but for the collective community in Wisconsin this was a reconnection to their identity and the relationships that have always forged their survival as Onʌyoteʔa·ká·.

The collective nations of the Haudenosaunee are governed by their shared ancestral knowledge of creation, which was solidified through the Great Law of Peace, delivered to them by the Peace Maker and Hiawatha. Haudenosaunee ancestral knowledge not only tells of how they came into existence as a people, but how these cultural and intellectual relationships came to be and how they evolved. These stories are intellectual traditions of the tribe, which continue to guide the people in ceremony, history, language revitalization, agricultural preservation, and everyday life. At the core of these intellectual traditions of the tribe is kanehelatúksla?, or thanksgiving—not to be confused with the American holiday, which inaccurately celebrates the initial interactions between the first colonies in North America and Indigenous Peoples. This kanehelatúksla? is a tribal consciousness recognizing all living things in the world that are a part of life: not just human life, but all life. Stories of o·nʌ́ste? are stories of Haudenosaunee creation, they are inextricably linked, one does not survive without the other, it is familial in a way that is well beyond the common practice of plowing, planting, harvesting, and preserving, toward the very existence of a people, since the very beginning of creation.

The birth of o·nʌ́ste? is the birth of the Haudenosaunee. In the Haudenosaunee creation story, o·nʌ́ste? is said to have grown from the body of the first woman born on Turtle Island (North America). The first woman gave birth to twins, the right-handed twin and the left-handed twin, and in the process of giving birth she was killed when the left-handed twin pushed his way through her side in competition to be the first born. The right-handed twin would go on to create mankind; we now refer to him as Shukwaya?tísu. When the mother was buried in the earth, from her body grew tobacco, strawberries, wild potatoes, as well as o·nʌ́ste?, beans, and squash, or what is commonly referred to as Three Sisters*,* Áshʌ na?tekutʌhnu·téhle?. Other versions of this creation story tell of the o·nʌ́ste? growing from the mother's head or from her breast. These plants were interpreted as gifts of sustenance and medicine, as her body was returned to the land and she became known as Yukhinulhá Ohwʌtsya?, Mother

Earth (Cornplanter, 1938; Elm & Antone, 2000).

Haudenosaunee follow a series of cultural practices conducted throughout the year to align with the seasonal cycles of winter, spring, summer, and fall. The cultural practices are associated with preparation, planting, maintenance, harvesting, and preserving food crops. A significant part of the cyclical process is the annual renewal of relationships between Haudenosaunee and the Áshʌ na?tekutʌhnu·téhle? through ceremony. These include (1) Midwinter ceremony (normally in January, five days after our new moon); (2) Seed ceremony (normally held in May); (3) Green Bean ceremony (normally in July, when the beans are ripe); (4) Green Corn ceremony (usually in late August or early September when the o·nʌ́ste? is at its milky stage); and (5) Harvest ceremony (normally in October when the o·nʌ́ste? is gathered after it has matured). Other cultural practices are held to honor the life and life force of plant spirits. At the core of these cultural practices are a tribal consciousness of gratitude for the plants' ongoing commitment to provide sustenance and a giving of thanks for the bountiful harvest. While there are countless cultural practices that shape Haudenosaunee relationships to the universe, the sisters remain a foundational component of many of these practices. Not only are the stories of Áshʌ na?tekutʌhnu·téhle? told before many of these cultural practices can begin, e.g., in the Kanehelatúksla? (Thanksgiving Address), but there is a fundamental story told of how the practices themselves came to be.

Before time as human beings currently know it came to be, the Áshʌ na?tekutʌhnu·téhle? lived in a field. The youngest, dressed in green, was so small she could not yet walk, so she crawled along the ground. The middle sister wore a bright yellow dress and darted back and forth across the field. The eldest sister stood tall and straight and had yellow hair and a green shawl, while her body bent with the wind. One day, the sisters became very interested in a boy that wandered into the field. On a particular day in the summer, the youngest sister suddenly disappeared. In the fall, the boy returned and the middle sister suddenly disappeared. The eldest sister still stood tall, but she mourned her sisters. Struck with grief, the eldest sister began to lose her vibrant colors, and her hair started to wither in the cold, as she would cry for her sisters. The boy heard the eldest sister's cries, so he picked her up and took her to his home, where her younger and middle sisters had followed the boy and decided to stay. The middle and younger sisters explained how they could feel the cold winter coming, so they wanted to stay in the boy's warm and comfortable home, and in return for the hospitality the middle and younger sisters were making themselves useful to the boy and his family. The youngest sister kept the dinner pot full, while the middle sister, still in her yellow dress, dried herself on the shelf so she could fill the dinner pot later in the winter when sustenance was scarce. The eldest sister saw how happy everyone was and decided to stay and dry herself for the people (Eames-Sheavly, 1993).

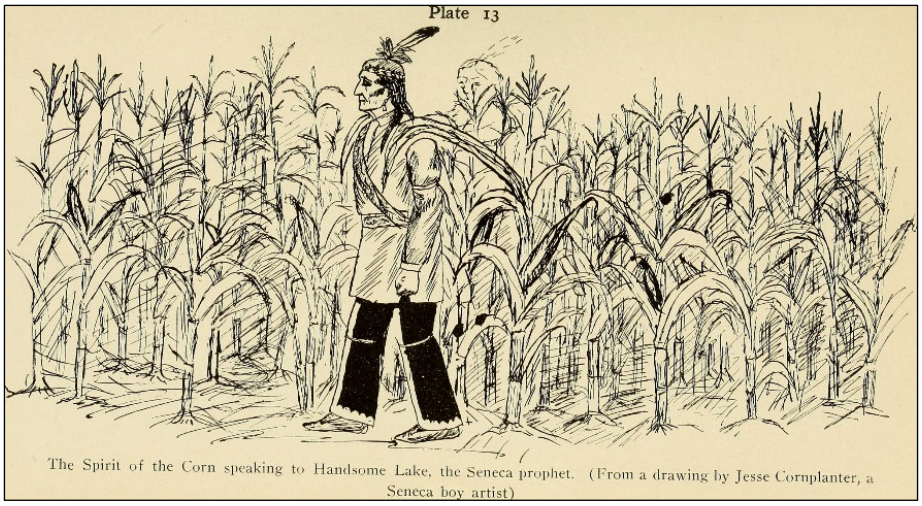
This story shows how Haudenosaunee stories align the sisters with the agricultural cycle and coinciding ceremonies. The youngest sister, beans, leaves the field first because this is the time that she is ripe and can best provide for the people. The middle sister, squash, follows when she has fully ripened and has the ability to provide for the people. The eldest sister, corn, leaves last after she has fully matured and is able to sustain the people throughout the winter months. This story shows how the sisters are a part of ceremonial or cultural responsibilities; in addition, they are active contributors in the homes, being able to provide sustenance for the people throughout the year. An interesting point to be made here is that each sister indicates and teaches the family that they have the ability and knowledge to preserve themselves by drying, to provide a kind of sustenance that is uncommon to find specifically during the winter months. Additionally, it shares nuances of how the sisters need the people just as the people need them, in order to care for them in a way that ensures they can keep returning to the fields every year. While this relationship is highly productive, it is also built on trust. In order to build and maintain trust in any relationship, your responsibility to one another cannot be taken for granted; for the Haudenosaunee, in this relationship they risk losing the sisters forever. The next story demonstrates how the Haudenosaunee nearly lost the Áshʌ

naʔtekutʌhnu·téhleʔ due to colonial influences that occupied and therefore temporarily misplaced their responsibilities.

In the late 1700s, an affliction overcame the Haudenosaunee people. Alcohol was introduced to the Haudenosaunee by European settlers, who pushed the substance on the people because of its trade profitability (Frank, Moore, & Ames, 2000). Without mechanisms to control abuse of this substance, it was not long before this affliction became an epidemic that overtook many Haudenosaunee communities. Alcohol abuse led men to abandon their homes, abandon their duties as fathers, uncles, and nephews, and commit wrongdoings against their own people. Haudenosaunee stories indicate that this era in their history upset the Creator. One man in particular offended the Creator by singing and dancing to ceremonial songs while under the influence of alcohol; this Seneca man was known as Skanyatali·yó (Handsome Lake), and he lived in the community known as Ganondagon in present-day Victor, New York (Figure 2). As punishment, Skanyatali·yó was stricken with illness; he became so sick that all he could do was lie in bed. Unable to consume alcohol, he was able to think, see, and appreciate the beauty of the world again, at which point he started to give thanks to the Creator every day for those things. In 1799, after four years of being bedridden, the Creator decided that Skanyatali·yó would be the one to deliver a message to the Haudenosaunee people, a message meant to remind them not only of their place in the world but their responsibility to Yukhinulhá Ohwʌtsyaʔ (Mother Earth). This message is known to Haudenosaunee as the Code of Handsome Lake or Kaliwiyo, the "good words" (Cornelius, 1999).

Shukwayaʔtísu sent three messengers to help Skanyatali·yó deliver this message to the Seneca people, and the message soon spread to the rest of the Haudenosaunee communities. The Creator's messengers informed Skanyatali·yó that once he had delivered his message, a fourth messenger would appear to him and it would be his time to return to Sky World. The Áshʌ naʔtekutʌhnu·téhleʔ heard of this and went to Skanyatali·yó to asked him for a favor; they wanted to go with him when he returned to Sky World, because the people had forgotten their responsibilities to them and had begun mistreating them as well as taking them for granted. Skanyatali·yó knew that if he took the Áshʌ naʔtekutʌhnu·téhleʔ with him, the Haudenosaunee would not survive. Skanyatali·yó convinced the sisters to stay until he could talk to the Haudenosaunee and explain the consequences if they continued to mistreat the Áshʌ naʔtekutʌhnu·téhleʔ. Once Skanyatali·yó explained, the Haudenosaunee quickly realized their error and began to once again care for the sisters and honor them through ceremony. This story acknowledges that the sisters are spiritual beings that rely on our support just as the people rely on them for sustenance. Haudenosaunee communities cannot expect the sisters to continue to provide them with a bountiful harvest if they are not caring for them properly, physically, spiritually, and in ceremony throughout the entire year (Cornelius, 1999).

Figure 2. Skanyatali·yó Approached by the Corn Spirit



Source: Finan, 2017.

Methods

The case study presented here includes archival analysis of documents and published materials related to the history, displacement, farming, and first-hand accounts of Oneida life. The findings presented are a part of an ongoing study about the relational contexts the Oneida maintain to a community-based consciousness of their history, language, land, and cultural practices. The researchers collaborated with Oneida culture bearers to better understand the deep relational dimensions of their experiences (Kovach, 2006; Wilson, 2008). The researchers also relied heavily on anecdotal observations and experiences, both as interested parties but more importantly because one of the authors is a life-long community member and Oneida Nation citizen. The study was guided by Indigenous research methods, specifically the adherence to diverse ontologies of Indigenous knowledge production, transmission, and acquisition (Kovach, 2006; Wilson, 2008).

Employing one of the author's anecdotal experiences and observations over a lifetime of living in and being an active community member, the authors were able to identify key themes of interest that assisted in the organization of all materials. Over the course of a year and a half we collected and organized literary materials from archives, journals, books, newspapers, biographies, and autobiographies. We organized our findings by categorizing them by the Oneida (1) removal from New York to Wisconsin; (2) agricultural activities; (3) cultural and spiritual practices that reflected a relationship to food; and (4) community-based and non-community-based Haudenosaunee scholars who write about culture and food. To accompany the literature, we identified and coded data collected from a larger study that fit key organizing themes created at the onset of the study. When questions arose about the material or data collected in the larger study, we were able to contact culture bearers and linguists to think through complex intellectual Oneida traditions, such as Oneida words and stories. Informed by one of the author's experiences and observations as an active community member, we were able to identify key themes of interest and proceed with a focused research agenda.

Case Study: O·nʌ́stəʔ Resurgence

When referring directly to food, John Mohawk, a Haudenosaunee leader, says that Haudenosaunee knowledge weighs the value of food in "life force," not in dollars, but that understanding has shifted in mainstream society, turning foods like o·nʌ́stəʔ into a corporate species driven by money (Nelson, 2008). Revitalizing this life force, the Oneida Nation is combating the corporate model through the creation and operation of the Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems (OCIFS). OCIFS is founded on a mission to help families with dietary and food needs by housing a community initiative, which incorporates traditional foods to help create as well as reestablish a local economy that provides jobs and promotes and encourages long-term solutions to farm and nutrition issues on the Oneida Reservation (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, n.d.). This multifaceted component of the tribe consists of the following entities: Tsyunhehkw^ (an 80-acre organic farm), the Oneida Farm (bison and grass-fed beef herds), the Oneida Apple Orchard, Farmer's Market, 4-H Club, Oneida Cannery, and the Food Distribution Center (Stevens, 2014). OCIFS has helped bring a healthy community together by providing traditionally significant, organic, and sustainably farmed food products. In addition, they have helped educate the community about the numerous health benefits of a traditional Haudenosaunee diet that will protect an Indigenous community from chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease (Webster, 2018).

While every aspect of OCIFS is impactful and beneficial, at the core of this tribal initiative is the tribe's reclamation and continuation of familial relationships to o·nʌ́stəʔ. Dating back to Onʌyoteʔa·ká· origins, this reciprocal relationship is one that cannot be so easily forgotten. Regardless of the struggles, the commitment to this relationship remains deeply embedded within the community's Haudenosaunee genetics. This relationship was revitalized on the Wisconsin reservation after years of communication-building between the Onʌyoteʔa·ká· in Wisconsin and other Haudenosaunee communities in Canada and New York. Oneida Nation's organic farm, Tsyunhehkw^, harnessed the intrinsic power

within the o·nʌ́ste? after a visit to traditional Haudenosaunee homelands in the state of New York in 1991, which was prompted by many tribal members' awakening during the civil rights era. Efforts made by Vicki Cornelius and Artley Skenandore to secure funding through the First Nations Development Institute reunited the Wisconsin Oneida community in 1991 with Indigenous seeds preserved by a Tuscarora farm in New York (V. Cornelius, personal communication, October 24, 2012). The base of Tsyunhehkw^ is *unhe,* symbolizing a genealogy that connects Onʌyote?a·ká· back to all life: it means "alive," so the word translates to "it provides us life," or simply, "life sustenance." Today, the farm lives up to its name by providing the community with life through the preparation, planting, growing, and harvesting of o·nʌ́ste?. Tsyunhehkw^ has brought life to the community by taking on the difficult task of caring for their reciprocal relationship with o·nʌ́ste?. While caring for o·nʌ́ste? comes with an important ceremonial responsibility, it is also a very labor-intensive process from start to finish.

Traditionally, the seeds are soaked in preparation for sowing them, utilizing a mounded earth system, generally three to five feet apart. Haudenosaunee communities practiced Áshʌ na?tekutʌhnu·téhle? mound planting by putting o·nʌ́ste? seeds in every mound, squash seeds in alternating hills, and beans between mounds (Mt. Pleasant, 2016; Parker, 1910). In this system, the beans take nitrogen from the air and deposit it into the soil for the other plants to use; the o·nʌ́ste? uses the nitrogen to grow a tall stalk that provides needed support for the bean's vines to climb. And the squash, otherwise known as the wild sister, shades the ground with her large and unruly leaves, protecting the soil and repelling herbivores. These intellectual traditions are knowledge systems providing a number of things that contribute to successful and sustainable outcomes, such as enhancing the soil's physical and biochemical environment, minimizing soil erosion, improving soil tilth, managing plant population and spacing, providing nutrients in appropriate quantities, and, at the time needed, controlling weeds (Mt. Pleasant, 2006). The Áshʌ na?tekutʌhnu·téhle? support each other in a way that is beneficial for the land as a whole, while at the same time allowing for the best harvest available to the people.

The harvest itself normally consists of two separate harvests. The initial Green Corn harvest, generally a short time during which the o·nʌ́ste? is picked while still soft, referred to as "sweet corn" (Mt. Pleasant, 2016; Parker, 1910). The larger and more intensive harvest comes in autumn after the o·nʌ́ste? has significantly hardened; this is known as the husking bee (Cornelius, 1999). At the husking bee, the community comes together to harvest, husk, and braid the cobs together into tall, beautiful collections that are a physical representation of years of resilience, imbued in the braids and community working together to create the braids (Figure 3). Historically, the braids were then hung from rafters in longhouses to dry. This method is still heavily utilized today by hanging the braids in more modern-style barns. Onʌyote?a·ká· maintain their traditional harvesting practices by continuing these relational commitments, specifically by inviting the community out every year for their

Figure 3. O·nʌ́ste? Braid

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Webster.

annual husking bee festival. This harvest provides a friendly, communal setting that encourages the transfer of knowledge, community healing, laughter, and enjoyment of the people, while they contribute to the overall well-being of the community. Also taking place during these husking bees are several information sessions, such as Corn Husk doll making, historical growing and cooking practices, as well as a Corn Soup competition. Tsyunhehkw^'s husking bee is open to anyone willing to lend a hand and learn about o·nʌ́ste?. They also host various area school trips so that students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, have the opportunity to learn about sustainable agriculture through relationships of reciprocity.

Once the o·nʌ́ste? has been dried and properly shelled, it is turned over to the cannery staff to be processed and packaged into several o·nʌ́ste? products, such as dehydrated white corn, corn mush, and corn bread flour, as well as premade corn mush and corn bread. Along with the creation of the tribe's own natural health store, the Oneida Market, they have been able to grow, harvest, process, and distribute o·nʌ́ste? products to their people, all within the boundaries of the Onʌyote?a·ká· reservation in Wisconsin. Demand for the o·nʌ́ste? has steadily increased over the years, requiring the market to supplement its o·nʌ́ste? stock with products from a Seneca operation out of New York, the Iroquois White Corn Project. Helping aid this issue is a group of Onʌyote?a·ká· families that were brought together by a mother and daughter duo, Laura Manthe and Lea Ziese, who saw a chance to contribute to their community. In the process, they formed a network of knowledge between members of the community that would allow for successful growth of the o·nʌ́ste?, while also assisting with the rising demand for the product on the reservation (Webster, 2018).

Figure 4. Orion (at left) and Lucia Stevens Shelling O·nʌ́ste? in their Home

Photo courtesy of Stephanie Stevens.

In conversations with the daughter, Zeise, she talked about her mother, Manthe (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin tribal member), feeling distraught after a visit in New York. She learned that Haudenosaunee community members were purchasing o·nʌ́ste? from a non-Indigenous farmer; this brought about many mixed emotions for Manthe (L. Zeise, personal communication, 2018). Soon after, Manthe began exploring ideas for growing her own o·nʌ́ste?, and with her daughter's help they have made significant efforts toward providing a place for their Onʌyote?a·ká· community in Wisconsin to expand their traditional agricultural knowledge through the care of their reciprocal relationship with o·nʌ́ste?. They have done this by bringing together eight families, securing funding through grants, utilizing very old but still intact knowledge systems in Tsyunhehkw^ staff members, and purchasing seeds from the Onondaga Nation in New York (Webster, 2018). This group of families call themselves Ohe·láku, which means "among the cornstalks." The group has focused on sharing knowledge and incorporating language and culture into their gardening practices by inviting more families to engage with the group, holding their own husking bee, and hosting other Haudenosaunee and Indigenous groups. The transference of this knowledge to the next generation is seen in two youth members, Orion and Lucia Stevens, shelling their o·nʌ́ste? in the comfort of their home on the reservation (Figure 4).

Figure 5. Ohe·láku Seed Braid

Photo courtesy of Rebecca Webster.

Ohe·láku is a shining example of what Onʌyoteˀa·ká· women are capable of when they approach something with a good mind, find strength in their relationship with o·nʌ́steˀ, and dedicate themselves to their community. When referring to one version of the origin of *Áshʌ naˀtekutʌhnu·téhleˀ*, where o·nʌ́steˀ is said to have grown from the breasts of Yukhinulhá Ohwʌtsyaˀ, Katsi Cook says, "At the breast of women, the generations are nourished. From the bodies of women flows the relationship of those generations both to society and to the natural world" (Cook, 1997). When asked why she decided to grow o·nʌ́steˀ, active Ohe·láku community member Rebecca Webster talked about her personal responsibility to provide for her community, due to multiple years of corn shortages experienced by the tribe (R, Webster, personal communication, 2018). Additionally, she spoke of the reciprocal relationship between o·nʌ́steˀ and the Onʌyoteˀa·ká·, by saying she understood that the o·nʌ́steˀ needed her just as much as she needed it. One of Webster's beautiful seed braids can be seen in Figure 5.

Discussion

While the world is subject to unstable and often unthoughtful industrial food systems with the intention of making food more accessible and convenient for humans, many people have lost access to their inherent right to safe, healthy food. As a global society, we have found ourselves here through a process that takes resilience away from humankind and has "impoverished millions of peasants and Indigenous peoples by displacing them from the land, resulting in many of them being forced into wage labor to serve the global food economy" (Coté, 2016, p. 7). For Indigenous peoples, however, it is not simply about food security; it is about the right to grow the foods that signify their ancestral knowledge of relationships to those foods, using the methods they deem important to cultural livelihood. Robin Kimmerer (2013) Indigenous scholar, says that we are bound to these reciprocal relationships with human and nonhuman entities through a "culture of gratitude," or Kanehelatúksla? (p. 146). Indigenous Knowledge systems take food sovereignty beyond the right to our food and include the protection of those

ancestral relationships built into intellectual traditions that inextricably link all living things to humans.

For the Onʌyoteˀa·ká· in Wisconsin, food sovereignty was never about using food systems to exercise power; rather, like a number of Indigenous peoples, they have an engrained history of respecting the power within our food, which reflects an understanding that the universe is alive and therefore should be treated respectfully (Little Bear, 2000). And while the interconnected aspects of culture, heritage, politics, and place can make it difficult to define Indigenous food sovereignty for all Indigenous communities, the inherent power within o·nʌ́steˀ represents something that goes beyond the concept of food sovereignty. It is a tribal consciousness that is acted upon, and while action indicates hard work, Deborah Bird Rose, an Aboriginal ecological ethnographer, speaks to this notion of work, saying "none of this work could be thought to rewrite the Anthropocene so as to give it a happy ending. . . . But it removes us from that singular position of spectator; it acknowledges the truly tangled up quality of our lives, and suggests some modes of action in a time of on-going trouble" (Rose, 2013, p. 10). For Onʌyoteˀa·ká· in Wisconsin, work, or the action of hard work, is relational; it is not only expected, it is of paramount importance.

Carol Cornelius (1999) found that "corn emerged as a vital element of the Haudenosaunee culture on spiritual, philosophical, political, sociological, and economic levels" (p. 67). More directly, she calls o·nʌ́steˀ the "cultural center of Haudenosaunee way of life" (p. 91). O·nʌ́steˀ is at our cultural center because it encompasses so much of what it means to be Oneida or Haudenosaunee; however, it does not simply represent a reciprocal relationship. O·nʌ́steˀ has a living spirit. Through the stories above, we see that o·nʌ́steˀ has the ability to think and feel emotion. In addition, o·nʌ́steˀ is like the people: while each outer husk shares a resemblance with every other, each thread of the corn silk attaches to a single kernel, forming a unique entity. One member of the Ohe·láku group compared growing o·nʌ́steˀ to pregnancy, adding, "I knew things were coming, but I didn't know what" (Manthe, n.d., "Results to Date," para. 4). Growing o·nʌ́steˀ is an intimate process, much like growing a child. We plant a seed, giving birth to a life, nurturing a living being the best we can, and giving it all the things it needs to grow, yet we do not know with certainty what the final result will be. Just like a child, each cob will have its own physical traits, its own personality, and its own way of communicating. Our job, not as parents in a paternalistic way but as partner, is to hold ourselves accountable to our end of the relationship, as our ancestors committed us to at the beginning of time.

Just as o·nʌ́steˀ has her own emotions, the people are able to transfer their emotions to her. This is why Manthe talked about the importance of starting out her group with good feelings, allowing for an atmosphere of laughter, good-natured teasing, and good food (Wisneski, 2016). In addition to ceremony, O·nʌ́steˀ needs to feel the good energy from the people in order to feel safe in returning every year. The Onʌyoteˀa·ká· call this kaˀnikuhli·yó, openness of a good spirit or mind, often referred to as having a "good mind." Oneida Nation cannery worker Jamie Betters echoes this idea by acknowledging the importance of kaˀnikuhli·yó when working with the o·nʌ́steˀ, because the cannery workers are the last ones to touch it before it goes out to the people (Herzog, 2009). Not only is this true in this relationship between Haudenosaunee and o·nʌ́steˀ, but western scientists are finding that many wild plants and vegetative species are healthier when they interact with humans (referred to as ethnophytopathology). Consequently, the transfer of emotion is given back to the community after the o·nʌ́steˀ has been processed and packaged for use in every Onʌyoteˀa·ká· home. Their reciprocal relationship goes beyond sustenance and ceremony; it is a deeply emotional bond that lives its life out in the o·nʌ́steˀ itself.

The Haudenosaunee live by the seven generations philosophy, which tells us that we must live in a way that ensures the welfare of the next seven generations, just as the seven generations before us did (Lyons, 2003). In our ancestral stories, the Áshʌ naˀtekutʌhnu·téhleˀ are sometimes referred to as "our sustainers" (Cornelius, 1999, p. 71), so the Haudenosaunee understand that in order to ensure those futures we must continue to value our

relationship with our sustainers in every aspect of life on a daily basis. Oren Lyons (2003), an Onondaga Faith Keeper and renowned scholar, refers to the ideology that all spirits of nature are relatives to the Haudenosaunee people, and he continues by calling out to our generation to not fear these relationships, but to find strength in them as we look toward the future. This is exactly what the Onʌyoteˀa·ká· in Wisconsin have been doing for the past several decades. Not only have they found strength in their relationship with o·nʌ́steˀ, they have nurtured it through years of communal resiliency. All these things are interconnected and represented through their reciprocal relationship with o·nʌ́steˀ.

Conclusion

> *Others have taken the challenging path of believing that we can respect the values of our ancestors while being good American citizens, in a thoughtful, determined, proactive way. That is both our responsibility and our children's, and to achieve it we rely on the Indian commitment to family and community. This commitment has never been lost; nor is it dependent on the outside for its vitality. It is the ultimate link we have to our ancestors.*
>
> —*Ernest Stevens Sr., longtime Onʌyoteˀa·ká· advocate for Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination, and former first vice-president of the National Congress of American Indians (Stevens, 2010, p. 251)*

Indigenous food sovereignty has given Indigenous communities a platform to honor the importance of intellectual relationships with nonhuman entities. Resilience on the Oneida Nation reservation in Wisconsin is inherently built into their commitment to all life, and a prime example of this is how the people have maintained those relationships through the commitment to community by harnessing the power within intellectual traditions imbued in very old relationships with o·nʌ́steˀ. While this article relied on the term "resilience" to help frame our central argument, the reality is that at no time did we as authors feel the need to define the term resilience to contextualize the Onʌyoteˀa·ká· or Haudenosaunee experience. Those intellectual exercises take away from what resilience is for the Haudenosaunee: beautiful. Further, while the idea of decolonization has assisted in bringing cultural and linguistic practices back to Indigenous communities, there is unimaginable value there if left undefined; establishing parameters can also limit the possibilities for future generations. Valid to this point is what Ernie Stevens Sr. believed, that it is possible to be active members in modern society while continuing to practice, respect, and honor our ancestors through tradition. Our ancestors trusted us to hold ourselves accountable to their commitments in order to build healthy communities that are inclusive of all life. The foundational underpinnings of these relationships are valuable knowledge, and with that knowledge we must make thoughtful decisions that will defend and protect the next seven generations to come. The evolution and innovation of traditional agricultural practices by the Onʌyoteˀa·ká· in Wisconsin exemplifies how o·nʌ́steˀ initiatives have become "*thoughtful, determined and proactive"* (Stevens, 2010, p. 251; emphasis added) in modern society, while still maintaining a respect for that knowledge.

The Onʌyoteˀa·ká· revitalized their reciprocal relationship with o·nʌ́steˀ away from their homelands in a relatively short amount of time, regardless of their difficult history. Tsyunhehkw^ continues to see a steady rise in demand for the products each year, and the Ohe·láku group has been growing to include more families since its beginnings in 2015. The people are engaging with o·nʌ́steˀ more and more by telling their stories, speaking their language, singing their songs, and dancing with the living universe. O·nʌ́steˀ for the Onʌyoteˀa·ká· is not just a food item, it is not just a tall stalk for our beans, and it is not just a story. It is a connection felt by the people, it is a deep spiritual emotion, and it is a resiliency celebrated at every ceremony or community gathering. All with the smell of o·nʌ́steˀ in the air.

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