Introduction

A MEETING OF TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

Camote and Kūmara

My journey into the study of Indigenous food systems started, like any hearty and fruitful endeavor, in the ground—more specifically, with a sweet potato. Western-trained ethnobotanists call it *ipomoea batatas*, but it is known to me and my community in Peru as camote. Camote is native to South America but has traversed the world; so have I. I was born and raised in Chorrillos, Peru, a seaside town near the postcolonial capital city of Lima. Although Chorrillos was a relatively urbanized environment, my family instilled in me a deep appreciation of my Indigenous Quechua heritage, kept alive through oral traditions, traditional foods, and festivals passed from generation to generation. I loved the mid-year holidays I took to the remote highland town of Acarí in the Department of Arequipa, where my paternal Quechua grandmother owned a chakra (agricultural field). As a child, I was fascinated by the many varieties of potatoes, sweet potatoes, and corn seeds growing there. The colors and textures of these food crops differed markedly from those I ate regularly in coastal Peru. I would spend days in the chakra drawing the different shapes of the camote/sweet potato and recording the names of various local fruits.

Back in Chorrillos I regularly took part in the Indigenous agricultural celebration of yunza, a tradition of Indigenous farmers and the
The festival signifies that the harvesting season is approaching and offers gratitude to Pachamama (Mother Earth) for gifting us with an abundance of food from the sea and land. While my family and I lost yunza and many other communal food traditions when the political instability, economic crisis, and social unrest of the 1980s and 1990s brought us to Aotearoa New Zealand (hereafter Aotearoa) when I was a teenager, I quickly realized that I was not alone in my love of ancestral foodways. In the interaction that would ultimately lead to this book, during a road trip in the North Island of the country, my younger sister Patty and I had stopped for a coffee break in a small Māori town of Tokoroa, and we got to talking with some of the patrons. Upon learning that we came from Peru, a local man asked me if I had heard about the kūmara, a starchy and sweet-tasting tuber similar to the potato that grows below the soil.

“Ah yes,” I replied joyfully, “that’s camote!” With his evocative description of this tuber, I knew well, my new friend had brought me right back to my grandmother’s chakra. I told him of the importance of camote in my own traditions. I explained that like potatoes, corn, and other native food crops, camote is a vital source of food and nutrition in Peru. It is a staple of Peruvian cuisine and a reminder of the country’s vibrant biodiversity and millennia of cultural heritage.

“Ah, we are related!” the man replied. “We are related because we both share the whakapapa [genealogy] and gift of the kūmara.” This unexpected encounter got me interested in the many unheard stories of the deep-rooted cultural connections that exist between Indigenous peoples—in this case, between my Peruvian ancestors in South America and the Māori in Oceania. This interest soon became a journey into the study of Quechua and Māori peoples’ “foodways,” that is, the food systems of Indigenous peoples grounded in their holistic philosophies of life, science, and traditions as they feature within particular eco-cultural landscapes. The camote/kūmara provided me with a starting point for exploring the richness and breadth of Māori and Quechua peoples’ culture and social and ecological wisdom as a member of both communities, one by birth and the other by bond.

A primary goal of this book is to demonstrate how to ethically conduct research in Indigenous communities through a research methodology that
I call the Khipu Model. A core part of the model is the need to establish relationships within a community before starting a study, identify the community’s needs and interests, and co-design projects that benefit the community. The research for this book took place in two distinct places that I have chosen to bring together because I believed these were the sites where I was most able to undertake these steps. My connections to Peru and to Aotearoa allowed me to bring context-specific cultural knowledge, language skills, and longevity to my research. I was able to establish long-lasting relationships with food growers, gardeners, seed keepers, food sovereignty advocates, academics, and grassroots activists. One outcome of my work was the establishment of a knowledge-sharing network between these two Indigenous communities. Given their distance they would likely have otherwise been unconnected, yet they share similar epistemological, ontological, and ethical philosophies of food sovereignty. Ultimately, my friends on both sides of the Pacific gave me the context in which to model what I believe to be the most ethical way to do research in Indigenous communities. Building an Indigenous knowledge network across an ocean for the benefit of both communities was one of the triumphs of this project.

Fostering a Healthy Food System: The Power of Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Metaphorically speaking, just as the kūmara/sweet potato crossed the Pacific Ocean to arrive in Aotearoa, and spread out rapidly around the country, laying roots in environments where it could flourish, I, too, had crossed oceans to reach Aotearoa. I had arrived first in Napier, a beachside city on the eastern coast of the North Island of Aotearoa, where I began building kinships with the people who tend it, the Māori. Over time, long-lasting relationships stretched to various cities where I lived, visited often, and did the research for this book—Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), Te Papa-i-Oea (Palmerston North), Taupō, Whangārei, Tūranga-nui-a-Kiwa (Gisborne), and Whakatāne—all in the North Island. In all these cross-cultural exchanges, I learned personal stories from my Māori friends, reveling in learning about a culture rich in storytelling, myths, legends, and proverbs. My connections with Māori were upheld with our shared
history of colonization, disruption of our ancestral foodways, and intergenerational trauma. Our shared experiences generally, and our love and respect for the kūmara/camote specifically, brought us closer together and reinforced our determination to protect and restore Indigenous philosophies, languages, ancestral knowledge, and food systems.

My cross-cultural experience in my homeland of Peru and my new home of Aotearoa was crystallized in the chance encounter connecting over the kūmara/camote/sweet potato that shaped my intellectual trajectory. It motivated my interest in pursuing international comparative research on indigeneity, food systems, environmental justice, sustainability, and public policy, especially between Peru, Aotearoa, and, in the past seven years, Turtle Island (North America). I began my academic trajectory in Aotearoa in 2000, studying international business and trade, sustainable development, and the globalization of the food system in my undergraduate years, earning a bachelor’s degree in 2004, a postgraduate diploma in 2009, and a master’s degree in 2011. As a graduate student, I conducted studies on Peru’s and Aotearoa’s agricultural sectors from 2007 to 2012, assessing their sustainability, environmental policies, and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). TEK is the context-specific wisdom and practices of Indigenous peoples that is dynamic and constantly evolving and culturally transmitted from one generation to the other.

This initial work revealed that the connection I had perceived between Aotearoa’s and Peru’s Indigenous peoples’ cosmovision/worldview was real. It is based on a kinship-centric system wherein all community members, human and non-human (deities, rivers, mountains), have duties and responsibilities to respect Nature and care for one another. Beyond the kūmara/camote/sweet potato, their foodways share a similar Indigenous cosmovision about preserving soil health, agrobiodiversity, and traditional agricultural knowledge. Peru and Aotearoa are rich in biodiversity, are major agricultural exporters, and their Indigenous populations still sustain and celebrate the ecological and cultural value of their foodways.

However, both Peru’s and Aotearoa’s Indigenous populations face high levels of food insecurity, which reflect their history of colonization. Colonial orientations are palpable in the dominant capitalist food system, which keeps the costs of producing food, such as labor, to a minimum, making food cheap and accessible at the expense of human and
environmental health. Because of their access to food that is not nourishing, Māori people suffer the highest rates of type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases of any ethnic group in Aotearoa. Indigenous people of Peru share a similar fate. In Cusco, in the rural Andean region of Peru, 18 percent of Indigenous children are chronically undernourished; their daily diets have insufficient calories, nutrients, and proteins for healthy growth, a rate almost twice that of the most privileged comparably aged group in Peru.

The loss of Indigenous lands, disruption of their foodways, racial discrimination, and policies increasing the presence of processed foods into their diets are some of the key drivers of Indigenous food insecurity and nutrition inequities. Thus, efforts by both Māori and Quechua people to preserve their TEK and cultural heritage—and with them their cultures, languages, lands, and foodways—to beat back food insecurity and undernourishment are vital. They are also increasingly successful.

Research on how Indigenous ideologies and traditions shape sustainable food systems is likewise vital, but it is not yet abundant. This book emerges from this gap in the academic literature and asks how Indigenous peoples’ philosophies—in this case, those of the Quechua and Māori—can contribute to fostering a more inclusive, equitable, and healthy food system in their own communities and at a broader scale.

To best answer this question through my study, I developed the “Khipu Model,” an Indigenous-based research methodology. I provide a detailed explanation of the conceptualization and application of the Khipu Model in chapter 2; here, I will note that I developed it by adapting the configuration of the Andean Khipu, a complex and colorful knowledge-keeping system containing knotted cords to use it as framework of knowledge creation. The Khipu Model is rooted in the ways of knowing, values, and principles of Quechua and Māori; incorporates a community-based participatory action research approach; and engages traditional ecological knowledge theory. The Khipu Model also draws from a substantive literature review of the Kaupapa Māori, a Māori research framework, and the body of scholarship addressing postcolonial research methods.

This book draws from a wide range of research literature, including on subjects such as food sovereignty, settler colonialism, food security, and environmental justice. It gives special attention to how research has
engaged with food sovereignty, that is, having autonomy and control over the food you (as an individual or group) consume as both a social movement and conceptual framework. An extensive body of food sovereignty scholarship focusing on human rights-based approaches to food and nutrition points to the deficiencies in today’s industrial food system. While the industrial food system has supplied large volumes of food to global markets, it destroys ecosystems, exacerbates the exploitation of farmers and farm workers, and compromises the health and well-being of the eaters and the harvesters alike. We need a “food system” that produces healthier and more sustainable diets and provides decent pay and working conditions.

Global food systems scholars and practitioners increasingly go beyond questioning the unsustainable methods of industrial agriculture to seek the development of a healthier and more equitable food system model. Indigenous scholars, too, have highlighted the connection between food sovereignty and settler colonialism, pointing to the negative socio-ecological and economic impacts of settler agrarian systems on Indigenous land and people. They offer an essential corrective in the literature on food systems and food sovereignty through arguments for the need to understand and support Indigenous Food Sovereignty—access to traditional foodways, the reclamation and affirmation of Indigenous food-related knowledge, eco-cultural values and practices built up over thousands of years—to drive global sustainability transitions.

Building on more than a decade of research, this book traces two examples of the political project of practicing and defining context-based Indigenous philosophies of food sovereignty. My comparison of the Quechua and Māori recounts how they are employing their collective practices toward mending human-Nature relationships that have been disrupted due to colonization, the capitalist food system, and alarming rates of environmental degradation. Quechua and Māori research collaborators’ collective organization to stay culturally and spiritually connected to their land exudes a context-specific holistic ideology of living well, strengthened by values and principles like reciprocity, solidarity, and intergenerational TEK. These holistic philosophies of life assert their Indigenous cosmovision and control over the resources of their lands. Such assertion of control is itself a political act in support of a radically
holistic approach to food systems that would supersede any specific Indigenous community.

This book describes the creative and constructive ways in which both the Quechua and Māori are reclaiming, revitalizing, and upholding Indigenous philosophies of well-being and food sovereignty. I recount the Quechua and Māori foodways and TEK of sustainable food systems stories, positioning both these foodways and TEK as core strategies of Indigenous communities, strategies that aim to move beyond the ameliorative task of “Indigenizing” existing industrial food systems and toward the radical reshaping of global food systems through Indigenous-based frameworks. In this book, when I use the term “food system” or “food systems,” I am referring to all actors and institutions involved in the producing, processing, consuming, selling, transporting, or otherwise managing of the food upon which humanity depends. The focus on Indigenous-based frameworks of food sovereignty is crucial for disentangling food systems from Eurocentric, capitalist norms and practices. Such a reorientation to these Indigenous-based frameworks is essentially a political act and an important step toward healing our ancestral lands and our bodies and living in harmony with one another and with Nature.

In line with such arguments, this book centers on stories, philosophies, and practices of Indigenous Food Sovereignty actors—specifically Quechua and Māori—in pursuit of more equitable, health-promoting, and ecologically resilient food systems. Additionally, through a lens that validates Indigenous science, I explore the TEK and place-based discourse centralized in Indigenous philosophies and foodways to broaden the meaning of Indigenous philosophies of food sovereignty. In conducting research for this book, I learned again and again that the shared ancestral kūmara/camote was just one of many connections between Quechua and Māori research collaborators. These two Indigenous communities that are geographically far apart share various epistemological and ontological similarities, not the least of which is a similar Indigenous cosmovision. I am grateful for the chance to, with permission, tell Māori and Quechua stories in a way that is original and true to them, though certainly not definitive. In telling their stories, I do not claim to speak for my own Quechua ancestors or for Māori people. Rather, I draw on the grounded knowledge that each research partner generously shared with me to
explore the relationship between foodways, holistic philosophies of well-being, and food sovereignty. I also draw on the knowledge I attained from my lived cultural experiences as an Indigenous woman of Peru and resident of Aotearoa.

Come with me, then, on a journey through the South Pacific Ocean from Peru to Aotearoa. You will learn how the Quechua and Māori are bolstering the resilience and resurgence of their foodways and Indigenous Food Sovereignty by holding fast to their traditions, ancestral wisdom, cultural heritage, and values for a sustainable future. The painful and complex history of colonization and settler colonization in Quechua and Māori territories is an inevitable part of this journey. A modern driver of colonialism is industrial food production, which insists that we embrace mechanized farming to feed the world. It mistakenly assumes Indigenous science or TEK are unscalable and ignores TEK’s crucial role in sustainable agricultural systems. This book looks at this painful history and its contemporary consequences. Its two synergistic case studies from Peru and Aotearoa offer a counter-narrative that elevates the significance of Indigenous TEK and holistic Indigenous philosophies of well-being in achieving sustainable food systems.

As we travel on this alternative path, unearthing the beautiful and millennia-old foodways and traditions of Quechua and Māori, I recognize that Indigenous societies are distinct and diverse, and that knowledge is place-based. Therefore, no single Indigenous philosophy or Indigenous Food Sovereignty framework will serve all contexts and situations. However, my research points to epistemological and ontological similarities between the Quechua and Māori, noting foundational values, principles, and methods of Indigenous philosophies of food sovereignty. These food sovereignty philosophies, I suggest, provide a pathway toward flourishing livelihoods. They may resonate with other Indigenous societies and thereby contribute to the restoration of cultural foodways and working landscapes on the local and global scale.

The central aims of this study are threefold. First, I seek to reposition the significance of Indigenous peoples’ philosophies of well-being, Indigenous Food Sovereignty, and TEK at the core of innovative solutions to make global food systems more sustainable. By bringing the Indigenous foodways
and holistic philosophies of well-being of the Quechua and the Māori into conversation with one another, I demonstrate the synergies of TEK as well as its attentive flexibility toward local land differences. The significance of Indigenous-based frameworks of foodways is not their homogeneous approach to food production (which Western scientific practices at a high price) but their common disposition toward the interconnections of life, soil health, and well-being. Second, I offer an exploration of how the two communities on which I focus developed their own research-based frameworks and philosophies of food sovereignty, drawing from their TEK. This exploration clarifies how different communities align foodways and TEK with their cosmovision and use this alignment in their political strivings toward food sovereignty. Third, I aim to support building global/planetary connections between Quechua and Māori and other Indigenous communities globally. What became clear through my research was how important it is for these two Indigenous communities and others to reconnect and strengthen their relationships with their ancestral foodways and philosophies of well-being. Demonstrating how food binds communities across generations and the importance of building synergies and knowledge sharing about Indigenous Food Sovereignty, TEK, traditions, and methods to make growing, hunting, and gathering food possible, save seeds, and feed ourselves and wider networks that lack food. I hope that this book will link Indigenous people, farmers, seed keepers, activists, academics, and allies at the local level and internationally in transnational advocacy networks to scale up knowledge about and methods of food sovereignty.

The kūmara/camote/sweet potato and other Indigenous food crops are not forgotten in colonial lands in which mass-produced, processed foods reign. Indigenous foodways still exist as living proof of the value of Indigenous traditions, resiliency, and the powerful means of Indigenous reunification not only bringing Indigenous communities together against settler colonial violations but providing a framework for living well and healing the land. If Quechua and Māori can still find that kinship at the intersection—the sweet, starchy heart of their ancestral foodways—centuries later, so can other Indigenous peoples. Geography might keep us apart, but shared traditions can bring us together.
INTRODUCTION

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

The book begins with an account of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in chapter 1. I provide a historical context of the dominant Anglo/Eurocentric way of thinking about food systems, followed by describing settler colonialism and how it has disrupted Indigenous lifeways and foodways. I then turn to a discussion on the revival of Indigenous Food Sovereignty and the role of Indigenous philosophies in “rematriating” cultures of well-being.

In chapter 2, I provide an in-depth account of the Khipu Model in practice, including its theoretical background and how I use it to deeply understand the historical and contemporary political, cultural, and food struggles of my Quechua and Māori research partners. I also discuss how the Khipu Model represents an innovative research model for studying food systems transformation.

Through rich narratives that emerge from the Khipu Model, chapter 3 explores the foundations of an Indigenous philosophy of well-being within Quechua and Māori peoples’ traditional settings. Then, I present common philosophical principles that emerge from this analysis, such as spirituality and relational well-being, self-determination, and intergenerational equity, justice, and accountability. Finally, I discuss the role of Indigenous thinking in driving a well-being agenda in the twenty-first century.

Chapters 4 and 5 outline and analyze core values and beliefs entrenched in Quechua and Māori philosophies of well-being, which are not merely a matter of philosophical inquiry: they have profound implications in developing food security and food sovereignty policies to strengthen sustainable food systems.

Chapter 6 provides in-depth accounts of how shared ontological and epistemological similarities emerging from Quechua and Māori research partners support the development of an Indigenous-based Food Sovereignty framework as a pathway toward sustainable food systems anchored on rematriating “holistic/collective well-being” philosophies. I do this through a relational case study of the Papatūānuku Kōkiri Marae (Māori urban community garden) and the Andean seed keepers, or “women of Choquecancha,” a subsistence farming community in the highlands of Peru. These case studies are emblematic of how Indigenous peoples are asserting their right to food and Indigenous Food Sovereignty.