

SOVEREIGNTY OF AND THROUGH FOOD

Sovereignty *of* and *through* food: Possibilities, constraints, and innovations in northern Ontario First Nations

Keira A. Loukes

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School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa

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Abstract

First Nations communities in northern Ontario continue to grapple with food insecurity despite community leaders, social justice activists, reporters, and scholars drawing attention to this multi-faceted issue for decades. Improving food security has been approached by many different actors and directions, such as neo-liberal initiatives to make market food more financially accessible, alternative food procurement programs such as incorporating greenhouses and gardening, and food system resurgent efforts such as increasing funding and training for land-based harvesting practices. Compared to food security, which focuses on access to affordable and nutritious food, food sovereignty offers a more compelling framework to understand food shortages in the settler-colonial context of northern Ontario as it emphasizes the roots of that insecurity, specifically at the way that colonial impositions disrupted Indigenous food systems. Using a community-based participatory methodology within a decolonial feminist theoretical lens and a community of practice of political ecology, this thesis will explore the ways that First Nations communities in northern Ontario are working against and within colonial impositions to improve access to traditional foods in their communities. I will examine some of the tensions and opportunities community members experience and the various approaches they are using or imagining for the future. Lastly, I will explore the ways that the concept of food sovereignty risks becoming symbolic in northern Ontario unless it is accompanied by movements towards land restitution. At the same time, I will argue that food and land sovereignty are inextricably linked, and that practicing Indigenous food systems can lead to food sovereignty with or without government approved land restitution. Finally, I will suggest that sovereignty *of* and *through* food may be a more appropriate voicing or inversion of the term to more explicitly acknowledge that food sovereignty and land restitution are inherently and intimately tied.

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Student Contribution

As a first author of Chapter 5, I was responsible for attending, recording, and transcribing interviews, conducting the thematic analysis, conceptualizing, and writing the first draft, leading the revisions with the co-authors, and submitting to the journal. The interviews were possible due to the ongoing relationships MAR, JCG, and CF have fostered in the communities that the Indigenous Health Research Group (IHRG) partner with. I was also able to organize and lead interviews with a few of my friends from one of the partnering communities. After transcribing the interviews, I led the thematic analysis and conceptualized and wrote the first draft. I incorporated the valuable feedback from each author and integrated their ideas to improve the paper in each new draft. Finally, I was responsible for liaising with the journal for submitting and revising the paper.

Loukes, K. A., Ferreira, C., Gaudet, J.C., & Robidoux, M. A. (2021). Can selling traditional food increase food sovereignty for First Nations in northwestern Ontario (Canada)? *Food and Foodways*, 29 (2), 157-183.

As the first author of Chapter 6, I was responsible for co-leading, recording, and transcribing interviews, analyzing transcripts, tying the narratives together in a first draft, and leading subsequent edits with co-authors. The conception of the paper as well as the organization of the fieldwork was led by SA, MAR, and JB. Once a draft was completed, MAR and I edited it and shared it with JB and SA to review and adjust. I was responsible for submission as well as completing subsequent revisions from the journal. It was published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* in 2022.

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I am the sole author of Chapter 7. It will be prepared for publication following the dissertation.

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Harvesting seeds

What follows are three journal reflections written each year (2020, 2021, 2022) after harvesting manoomin in my grandfather's community.

Reflections on the harvest

October 2020

How special to join my uncle and our friends harvesting and reseeding manoomin (“the good seed”) (wild rice) three weeks ago on Rice Lake, upon whose shore my Grandpa’s (and Dad’s and Uncles’) reserve lies. Wild rice is not actually “wild” (it has been deliberately and consciously cultivated by Anishinaabe for thousands of years - yet since it was not grown and controlled in isolated, mono-cropped rows, European settlers did not recognize it as such. It seemed “wild” to them. The geese, muskrat and fish that are sustained by the rice beds are not to be fenced out - they are also harvested) nor is it “rice” (it is an aquatic grass). Although many lakes (and thus manoomin) were flooded out by the Trent-Severn Waterway (which created the “clear empty pristine lakes” so many people feel are their “natural” state), the fact that rice beds remain in the Kawarthas is a testament to and symbol of the continued presence and resistance of the Anishinaabe. This small seed is not just about food - it is also about so much more - and these seeds will continue to be spread. Chi-miigwech for those that continue to care for and cultivate manoomin, resistance, resurgence, and Indigenous sovereignty over land, language, and food.

Manoominike – s/he goes ricing

September 2021

Manoomin knows when the conditions are right to flourish.
 Manoomin seeds will lay dormant for years and years
 and years
 and years
 until the system is fertile enough to support growth.
 At that time,
 manoomin will fill the waters thick with long green stalks
 heavy and dripping,
 pregnant with the grains
 that will feed everyone -
 Humans, muskrat, duck and geese.
 Spiders will build their webs.
 Muskrat will build their nests.
 Within THIS seed -
 “the good seed” -
 Is an ecosystem.
 The ecosystem WILL come back, IS coming back
 - rest assured -
 after years of being drowned
 by Parks Canada’s Trent-Severn Waterway.
 I wonder if they knew when they made the choice to drown the manoomin
 that the seeds also made their own choice.
 They spiraled and dove deep into the mud
 to wait
 and wait
 and wait
 Until the conditions are right.
 At that time,
 they will explode in a bloom and flourish with such abundance,
 manoominikaa
 so thick, we’ll need to push our paddles into the mud to pull our canoes through.
 The people who do not understand manoomin, and do not value it
 will leave.
 And the rest of us – humans and more-than-humans -
 Will eat.
 In this seed
 Is manoomin’s own agency -
 To choose when to flourish and who to feed.
 THIS.
 Is food sovereignty.

Zaagi'diwin*September 2022*

If there is a better example of a
healthy relationship
than
the relationship between
manoomin and Anishinaabeg,
I do not know it.

Long-term and devoted
- 10,000 years and then some -
this relationship is renewed every fall, as harvesters
are intimately engulfed by the thick mat of manoomin,
canoes gently parting the plants, gratefully accepting the seeds that fall into laps,
hair,
and mouths.

In this relationship,
one's flourishing nurtures another's.
The more that we harvest manoomin,
The more manoomin grows.
The more that manoomin grows,
The more we flourish.

As manoomin expanded northwest along the Great Lakes,
the Anishinaabe followed.
Seeding and leading each other.

It is not a subtractive relationship,
it is not rooted in scarcity.
Harvesters do not "receive less" when muskrat, ducks, fish, geese, and insects feed,
hide,
and nest in manoomin.

Everyone receives more, as these relations too sustain and strengthen us.
This relationship can support an entire community. An entire ecosystem.

I wonder why some people despise manoomin.

They say it is because it gets in the way of their boats. They say it is "taking over" "their" peaceful lake. They say it is to
"protect" their cottages. They say it is to "save" the lake.

I pity them. Their relationship with the lake is panicked, gripping, and fearful, only affirmed by state sanctioned legal
frameworks and rising property values.

I am so grateful to have had my hands in manoomin so I can learn from an example which is opposite to that.

May I be in such relations with everyone in my life.
Where my flourishing does not subtract from yours, but is part of yours.
Where your flourishing nourishes mine, and mine, yours.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

Chapter 1: Introduction

As my uncle drives his pontoon boat up the lake, our friend Jeff Beaver, a manoomin¹ harvester from Alderville First Nation (my grandfather, father, and uncles' community), walks me through a small folder of information, stories, photos, and maps he has amassed through his time working with manoomin. He points out on the map where the rice beds used to be. As we pass islands on the boat ride on a bluebird sunny September day, he points to them and tells me stories about people gathering there to harvest, parch, dance, and winnow the manoomin. He describes the abundance of this region – in manoomin, muskrat, duck, and fish – before it was flooded out by the Trent-Severn Waterway. I wonder what it would have looked like. I watch the cottages on the shore flash by and wonder how many of them would leave if this lake was restored to that state. Eventually, we slow the motor and anchor next to a small rice bed. We pull Jeff's canoe out of the back of the pontoon boat and load it with a gunny sack and two cedar ricing sticks. Jeff is in the front paddling the canoe forwards, and I am in the back, bending the flexible rice stalks across my lap with one hand, and gently tapping the seeds from the husks with the other. The seeds fall everywhere – in my hair, mouth, shirt, lap, in the bottom of the canoe and back into the lake. The more we harvest, the more we reseed. As we paddle through the rice, we weave through stories of the past and present in a spiral-like fashion, akin to the way we meander through the rice stalks, akin to the way the seeds that fall outside of the canoe spin, spiral, and dive into the mud bottom of the shallow lake. We are surrounded by the rice – around our canoes, bodies and at our feet, and I feel that fullness and abundance I imagined. When we

¹ Manoomin is an Anishinaabemowin word for *Zizania sp.*, known commonly in English as “wild rice”. It is an aquatic grass which grows predominantly around the Great Lakes region of North America.

finally emerge from the rice bed, however, I am hit with a rude awakening – memories of manoomin’s abundance sharply slam into the reality of its absence.

Gaudet (2014) invites all researchers to “look back into [their] own life history” (p. 79) to understand their decision to engage in research. Many other scholars advocate for a recognition of all of the relationships in our lives that influence our perspectives and paths (Bishop, 1998; Kovach, 2009; McGuire-Adams, 2020; Wilson, 2008). I was encouraged to study Indigenous food sovereignty by a mentor at Four Directions Aboriginal Student Centre at Queen’s University who questioned my decision to study food issues in Nepal and not here at home. She reminded me, “we cannot be sovereign unless we can feed ourselves” (personal communication). This, along with my growing frustration with rice conflicts in the Kawarthas motivated me to learn more.

I come from German, Scottish, and Anishinaabe relatives whose perspectives and life experiences have all influenced who I am. My grandfather is Anishinaabe (Turtle Clan) from Alderville First Nation, and my father is also a band member. My grandfather was “voluntarily” enfranchised under section 109(1) of the *Indian Act* at the age of one, along with his father and 3-year old sister, only regaining his status in 1985 under Bill C-31. My father is designated a “Status Indian” under Section 6(2) which does not permit status to be passed on to myself or my siblings. I live in a white body, grew up in a predominantly white community, and had a Western education in a world that interacts with me as a white woman. This gives me access to all the privileges of whiteness in a white-dominant society and allows me to move through white spaces unremarkably. While I do not wish to overstate my community understandings, connections, and knowings (I am still very much a learner), I also do not wish to participate in their erasure. To some, denying my Anishinaabe roots is an erasure – to others, explicitly stating them, as a

woman living in a white body, is another kind of erasure. Indeed, erasure of Indigeneity is the goal of the *Indian Act*, and I do not intend to participate in that. Throughout my life I have attempted to navigate these realities relationally, reflexively, openly, and with immense care. I introduce myself in this way to say, in the words of Leanne Simpson, “Anishinaabe knowledge is part of my internal environment, it is part of who I am, and it comes to me through relationships with family, Elders, spiritual leaders...and interactions with the spiritual world,” (Simpson, 2001, p. 138). While harvesting and seeding manoomin, I am settled in knowing who I am and where my family comes from. I understand that building relationships with family, community, and the land is the pathway for resisting that erasure. In the same way, being in relationship with manoomin fights its erasure from the land. There is a kinship in that. The more that we harvest, the more we seed. The more we seed, the more we can harvest. Although a disconnection from land and food harvesting practices was part of the colonial goal of erasing Indigeneity, I have noticed in myself that harvesting traditional foods, such as manoomin, mends those connections in powerful ways.

There are many who do not see manoomin this way. The Kawartha region continues to experience conflicts between rice harvesters and cottagers, inspiring Drew Hayden Taylor’s play “Cottagers and Indians” and a CBC documentary by the same name (Hayden Taylor, 2015, 2019; Kemp & Hayden Taylor, 2020). Construction of the Trent Severn Waterway created multiple lakes which brought settlers to the shores and increased the population in the region, promoted and encouraged by private land ownership, colonial state policies, and a poor settler understanding of the economic, political, ecological, cultural, and social value of manoomin. While I feel connected, inspired, and grounded while harvesting and seeding with Jeff and my uncle, I also feel an overwhelming sense of frustration and anger. This lake, and many like it in

the region, used to feed entire socio-ecological systems. And now, feeding communities takes place within an imposed reality which is antithetical to a land-based existence in this region. It was clear to me in my studies during my PhD that these same impositions impacted communities, albeit differently, across Turtle Island. I noticed the connections between what was happening with manoomin harvesting in southern Ontario to what was happening with traditional food harvesting in northern Ontario where my research with the Indigenous Health Research Group (IHRG) was based.

Brief context of Indigenous food shortages in northern Ontario

When studying Indigenous food security and food sovereignty in Canada, it is common to read papers which start with the same staggering numbers – while 15.9% of Canadian households face food insecurity (Tarasuk, et al., 2022), 30.7% of off-reserve (Tarasuk et al., 2022) and 47% of on-reserve Indigenous households in Canada face food insecurity (Batal et al., 2021; Chan et al., 2019). In northern Ontario specifically, this rate can rise to 70% (Food Secure Canada, 2016), where most meals are nutritionally inadequate due to limited access to and exorbitant costs of healthy food options (Chan et al., 2019). While there are discrepancies in the way that household food insecurity is calculated in Canada (Tarasuk et al., 2022), the difference between Indigenous food security and overall Canadian food security still remains stark. These high rates of food insecurity are especially troubling as they are connected to high rates of food-related diseases (Power, 2008).

Although it is important to point to these inequitable trends, I also wonder if continually repeating them contributes to a litany of deficit-based research. This can lead to greater surveillance and implementation of colonial ideas of health and wellbeing as governments, researchers, and policymakers develop and implement solutions. Indeed, in response to statistics

of food insecurity, there has been extensive research, government funding, and community-led programming to address these disparities (Haman et al., 2010, 2017; LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017; O'Hare-Gordon, 2016; Pal et al., 2013; Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Simpson & Coulthard, 2014; Thompson, 2018; Thompson et al., 2018). Despite these efforts, food security challenges in Indigenous communities in Canada persist (Nutrition North Canada, 2017) because they are logistically complicated and require long-term systemic change for real and long-lasting impacts, which the settler-colonial government of Canada has been unwilling to make (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017). Although it is important to hold the government of Canada responsible for their historical and continual role in creating food insecurity and associated long-term health inequities in Indigenous communities, it is also important to highlight the innovation and ingenuity of Indigenous communities who are working towards their own definitions of well-being (Dennis & Robin, 2020).

Research questions, process, and chapter summary

Question

Navigating this balance – holding colonial governments accountable for their role in creating inequities while simultaneously highlighting the ways communities have enacted their own agency and care – is incredibly important to ensure we do not contribute to deficit-based research nor downplay colonial impositions. Tuck (2009) argues that a desire-based framework to research is an antidote to damage-centred research. She explains:

Desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives. Such an axiology is intent on depathologizing the experience of dispossessed and disenfranchised communities so that

people are seen as more than broken and conquered. That is to say that even when communities are broken and conquered they are so much more than that – so much more that this incomplete story is an act of aggression (p. 416).

Throughout this dissertation, I attempted to interrupt deficit-focused research by focusing on the nuances and contours of food insecurity and resurgence in First Nations communities in northern Ontario. Many scholars have argued the importance of moving from a deficit-based to a strength-based approach in health related research, cautioning that it is imperative that these strengths are identified by the community (Kennedy et al., 2022). While defining my research question and process, I aimed to centre community-led initiatives while also pointing to the colonial structures which continue to work against them.

My broad research question is: What are the possibilities, constraints, and innovations communities in Treaty 9 are working within and around to increase food sovereignty? My question is intentionally open-ended and broad in order to capture the multiple realities, approaches, and imaginations of First Nations communities in Treaty 9. Also, as a visitor and novice food sovereignty researcher in the region, starting with a question that was inquiry-based allowed my direction to shift as I learnt more. When I started this project, I did not have set goals – indeed, to me, having set goals as a visitor researcher without strong established relationships in community felt antithetical to the ethical, theoretical, and methodological frameworks that I aim to utilize. I did not want my research question to lead me down a linear path, but instead to be an overarching inquiry.

Process

“Research must then be conceived in less linear ways without necessarily knowable goals at the outset”

(TallBear, 2014, p. 2).

When I started my doctoral studies in January 2020, I was brought into the long-term community-based work of the IHRG, a team of multi-disciplinary researchers from various institutions. Shortly after starting, the COVID-19 global pandemic was announced and put a stand-still on and immense uncertainty around what this doctoral research could look like. Just before entering lockdown, the IHRG had started to work on a request from a Manitoba community for support in applying for funding to start a business around selling manoomin. This challenged my assumptions around the alignment of commodification of traditional foods and food sovereignty and piqued my interest in investigating the ways that these economic opportunities could potentially improve food sovereignty. Although the proposal for the funding fell through as it did not make it through band council approval, this experience, along with interest in the Country Food Market model in Greenland, led the IHRG to ask what kind of potential a traditional food market may have in partnering communities in northern Ontario. In the summer of 2020, under a travel ban, the IHRG conducted online interviews with members of partnering communities in northern Ontario to get a sense of what potential they saw in selling traditional food as a move towards food sovereignty. Chapter 5 asks: Does selling traditional food move towards or away from food sovereignty, from the perspective of community members? Through conversations initiated from this question, I was able to understand some of the barriers and innovations that community members had identified and initiated towards food sovereignty, and some of the opportunities and challenges they foresaw in selling traditional food. For example, we noticed there was interest in women-led economies around selling

pemmican². Interestingly, most participants felt that selling traditional food that had been processed or changed in some way, a stage in the food system generally carried out by women, was not out of line with cultural protocol instructing people not to sell. At this stage in my PhD, I wrote up a proposal for research that intended to explore the potential selling pemmican had to work towards supporting Indigenous women's governance over ecosystems and economies while creating a local, community controlled, sustainable source of income to fund food sovereignty activities.

However, successive COVID-19 outbreaks in Ontario forced the research to shift. Given the dearth of infrastructure in many northern Ontario First Nations communities, including health facilities, running water, and housing, accompanied by high rates of co-morbidities, this research was neither feasible (i.e., travel bans) nor of timely relevance to communities. The communities were working to take care of themselves during an uncertain time with limited and delayed government funding under continual threat of supply chain disruption and new viral strains. In this context, we noticed a marked increase in traditional food harvesting, processing, and distribution activities in Wapekeka First Nation as part of community efforts to ensure household food security amidst pandemic uncertainty. We were invited to learn more about these efforts during a week in the fall of 2021 when COVID-19 cases were under control following vaccination campaigns across Canada. Chapter 6 narrates the COVID-19 response of Wapekeka First Nation and the role that traditional food harvesting, processing, and distribution played in managing that health crisis in the community. Wapekeka's story demonstrates how removal of some of the barriers expressed in Chapter 5 impacts traditional food systems. For example,

² Pemmican is a common food in northern Ontario First Nations made of dried fish flakes. Women generally make this dish and add local and in-season berries, such as blueberries. In the prairies, bison is used often instead of fish.

hunters had the time, financial support, and intergenerational learning opportunities to hunt on the land for the full year and provide consistent traditional food for the community. This was supported by the voluntary labour of women processing and distributing the food to community members. This story emphasized the importance of a community approach to Indigenous food sovereignty, the gendered-nature of the labour, and the immense effort and energy required to support traditional food systems. Wapekeka's story also demonstrated the capacity and limitations of the boreal forest ecosystem to support household food access, and the implications this has for long term food sovereignty in the community.

This pushed me to investigate a growing discomfort I was feeling with the way my research question was framed - what do I mean by "food sovereignty"? While I still believed food sovereignty was imperative as a concept to theoretically capture the experience of Indigenous communities and food systems in a settler-colonial context, I started to wonder if it was realizable in the ecological, social, economic, and political context of Treaty 9.

In January 2022, with the surge of the Omicron strain in northern Ontario, this research was again constrained by our inability to visit communities. At this time, I decided to return to some of the questions that came up for me after completing Chapter 6. I wanted to have a clearer understanding of what I meant by "food sovereignty" in the Treaty 9 context. I took this opportunity to turn inwards and reflect on the concept of food security, food sovereignty, and Indigenous food sovereignty through integrating what I had read, experienced, seen, heard, and thought about over the past few years. I noticed that the more I wrote and spoke about food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty the more I was confused about what I meant by this. I also started to notice the terminology increasingly being appropriated by the government of Canada. How can the settler-colonial state, which intentionally destroyed Indigenous food

systems, now claim to support food sovereignty? This led me to explore the historical and contemporary ways that food sovereignty is used in different contexts and the colonial constraints that limit its realizability in northern Ontario. In this chapter, I ask what we mean, as researchers, when we use the terms “food sovereignty”. Will it ever be realizable in settler-colonial contexts, such as Treaty 9? The readings and thinking in this chapter helped me to understand and articulate that Indigenous food sovereignty without Indigenous land restitution risks becoming a chimera or symbol of food sovereignty. This is not to conflate Indigenous sovereignty and governance with Indigenous food sovereignty, but to argue that they are inherently and inextricably interwoven and must work together if their goals are genuine.

As 2022 continued, the successive outbreaks of COVID-19 waned and one of IHRG’s community partners, Moose Cree First Nation (MCFN), invited us to fly in to support their efforts to initiate a home gardening program. In the spring of 2022, myself along with three other IHRG members worked with MCFN in Moose Factory for three weeks. We returned in the fall of 2022 to celebrate the harvest with the gardeners and to make plans for the following year. A paper which outlines the community’s initiatives and our partnership has been submitted to *Canadian Food Studies* for review. Although a record of this experience does not appear in this thesis, working in community on community-driven local food initiatives heavily influenced my thinking and understanding about Indigenous methodologies, community-based research, and being a good visitor. The work with MCFN will continue in 2023 and 2024, as our partnership has been approved for two years of Climate Change Adaptation funding to continue and expand this work together.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 begins with a literature review situating food shortages in northern Ontario First Nations within global debates of food security and food sovereignty discourses, and amid tensions that exist within food sovereignty conversations particularly for Indigenous communities of North America. I will demonstrate through historical contextualization that food shortages in First Nations communities in northern Ontario are the result of a cascade of colonial interventions and dispossessions from access to and governance over land. Here, I argue that framing food challenges in Indigenous communities as an issue of “food sovereignty” rather than “food security” more adequately address the roots of these challenges. In Chapter 3, I will justify my decision to use post-colonial, decolonial, and feminist theoretical frameworks in this dissertation, and how scholars in these fields have shaped my thinking and continue to influence my approaches to research. I will also discuss the value of connecting these frameworks to a community of practice of political ecology. These frameworks together equip me with the vocabulary and to ask questions about colonial structures, systems, and uninterrogated discourses which perpetuate the gross disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous food access in Canada. Chapter 4 discusses the ways that Indigenous Methodologies (IM) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) guidelines were used in this research, and how my research question and theoretical frameworks necessitate their use. I briefly discuss some of the methods used in the dissertation.

In Chapter 5, I explore the potential impact that selling traditional foods could have towards increasing food sovereignty in northern Ontario. Specifically, I ask whether this is a step towards or away from a more nuanced and robust conception and exercise of Indigenous food sovereignty. This chapter demonstrates that there is curiosity, uncertainty, enthusiasm, and

discomfort with the idea of selling traditional foods in four communities in northern Ontario (Loukes et al., 2021). Chapter 6 highlights the role traditional knowledge and food harvesting, processing, and distribution played in Wapekeka First Nation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes the importance Indigenous food systems play not only in food security and food sovereignty, but in political sovereignty and crisis management (Loukes et al., 2022). Chapter 7 wrestles with the historical and contemporary framings of food sovereignty and reflects on whether researchers who are using these terms (including myself) are aligning with its literal or symbolic conception. It asks whether claiming to work towards food sovereignty symbolically works against efforts to bolster Indigenous food harvesting practices. Finally, this dissertation concludes in Chapter 8 with a discussion of the limitations in this research as well as the questions that will guide me moving forward in this work. Overall, this research hopes to contribute to the expanding work in Indigenous food sovereignty, highlighting the imperative role of community innovation, care, governance, and relationship with land.

Chapter 2:
Literature Review

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The historical and contemporary roots of food shortages in Indigenous communities in northern Ontario are a result of colonial dispossessions of Indigenous peoples from their lands, languages, ceremonies, systems of governance, and knowledges. This literature review argues that a food sovereignty approach is necessary given these historical and contemporary realities. First, this section will briefly outline the genealogy of food security, food sovereignty, and Indigenous food sovereignty and their respective relevance to the settler-colonial Canadian context. Next, it will describe the ways that Indigenous food systems, and thus, Indigenous food sovereignty, has been disrupted in northern Ontario. Finally, it will discuss some of the initiatives led by communities, scholars, activists, and advocacy groups working towards food sovereignty in northern Ontario.

Food security

Global inequity around food access has been discussed in international debates, conferences, summits, and meetings for decades. Although the Right to Food was first recognized in 1948 in the UN Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) and the Right to Adequate Food was formally adopted by the World Food Summit in 1996, over 2 billion people worldwide continue to experience moderate to severe food insecurity (Chappell, 2018; FAO, 2023a, 2023b; WHO, 2019). Discourses of food security and insecurity, understood at “a macro-economic level relating to food supply and price stability” (Wills, 2017, p. 102), came into popular use about thirty years ago. The World Food Summit (1996) states that food security:

... exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (FAO, 2006).

Food security discourses have encouraged global efforts, backed by philanthropic organizations such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, to substantially increase agricultural productivity and efficiency to produce more food. Solutions based on paradigms of food security focus on the idea that “caloric deficiencies can be met by simply increasing the availability of more calories” (Chappell, 2018, p. 50). This modernist approach is based on the belief that the environment can be changed with scientific rationality and technological innovation to produce more food for more people (Patel, 2013). The increase in inputs such as chemical pesticides and fertilizers, along with high-yield crop varieties in order to increase agricultural output is referred to as the Green Revolution (Patel, 2013).

Scholars have argued that discourses of food security at the international level do the work of consolidating and expanding the neo-liberal responses to food shortages to facilitate global trade (Wills, 2017) while devastating locally adapted food systems (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). The intensive chemical inputs, genetically modified seeds, and movement towards cash cropping has “led to dramatic loss[es] of biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge, favoured wealthier farmers, and [has] left many poor farmers deeper in debt” (Altieri, 2009, p. 102), where “soil [has become] a medium for chemicals to flow through” (Bernstein, 2010, p. 90). LaDuke and Alexandra (2004) discuss the impact that agriculture’s Green Revolution has had on Indigenous food systems, such as manoomin.

However, “hunger and malnutrition are [not] simply products of fate, geographic location or climate phenomena” (Wills, 2017, p. 95). It is estimated that enough food is grown worldwide to feed 10 billion people, which suggests that “hunger is caused by poverty and inequality, not scarcity” (Holt-Giménez et al., 2012, p. 595). In an Indigenous North American context, food security discourses have led to government initiatives such as the Nutrition North subsidy,

implemented in 2012, as an extension of the former Mail Food program. While it was designed to “make nutritious food and some essential items more affordable and more accessible” (Nutrition North Canada, 2020), food insecurity became more prevalent in some areas after this program was initiated (St-Germain et al., 2019). It is important to note that currently Nutrition North is in the process of expanding its programming to be more relevant to First Nations communities, such as through providing funding for local traditional harvesting initiatives in some communities in Treaty 9.

In Indigenous communities in Canada, “this food crisis is inherently political and is, at its roots, linked to land and treaty rights and many generations of colonization” (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013, p. 1080). Canada’s food security policies and solutions do not capture or address the unique geographical, social, and cultural positions of Indigenous households in Canada, especially related to traditional food acquisition, processing, and distribution (Power, 2008).

Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty is presented as a more appropriate framework to challenge the structural inequities that lead to limited access to food, especially those related to the impositions of settler-colonialism on Indigenous food systems (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017; Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016; Morrison, 2008; Wilson et al., 2020). The concept of food sovereignty was introduced by *La Via Campesina* (LVC), a farmer led NGO conceived in South America and consolidated in Mons, Belgium in April 1993, months before the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). LVC recognized that GATT, along with the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), had the potential to shift national food economies to market-driven global economies.

At the World Summit in 1996, LVC described food sovereignty as a movement which centred “the rights of local peoples to determine their own agricultural and food policy, organize production and consumption to meet local needs, and secure access to land, water, and seed” (Wittman, 2010). Food sovereignty is based on seven pillars: food for people; building traditional knowledge and skill; working with nature; valuing food providers; localizing food systems; putting control locally; and the belief that food is sacred (Food Secure Canada, 2022). LVC posits food sovereignty as a meta-right, or the right to have rights over food, which is “*inherently* opposed to neo-liberal food security discourse” (Wills, 2017, p. 109). LVC, which traces the roots of the food crisis to “over four decades of neoliberal policies that had fostered a market-based, technologically-driven, environmentally devastating global food system” (Desmarais & Nicholson, 2013, p. 5), brings together 148 organizations from 69 countries around the world. Over the years, they have pushed governments to “think beyond the limitations of food security and to imagine another agriculture” stressing that “viable solutions could not possibly come from those very national governments, international institutions, and corporations that had created the crisis in the first place” (Desmarais & Nicholson, 2013, p. 5).

Although food sovereignty’s focus on the role of global power inequities in global food shortages makes it a more appropriate lens through which to view colonial imposition on Indigenous food systems in North America, its agri-centric origin does not perfectly capture the context of First Nations’ food systems in the boreal forest (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020). Indigenous food sovereignty aims to account for some of these gaps.

Indigenous food sovereignty

Morrison (2008) describes four principles to Indigenous food sovereignty which augment LVC’s definition of food sovereignty, including the sacredness of food, the importance of the

health of entire ecosystems, reducing the dependency on market economies, prioritizing traditional food harvesting strategies, and enabling the opportunity to impact policies which govern food systems (Morrison, 2008). This concept has been taken up by organizations dedicated to the resurgence of Indigenous seed varieties (Indigenous Seed Sovereignty Network, 2020; Mohawk Seedkeepers, 2020; Sierra Seeds, 2020). and Indigenous crops such as manoomin (Whetung, 2020). There has been a growing body of literature on Indigenous food sovereignty in urban, remote, and rural communities (Blanchet et al., 2021; Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2021; Levkoe et al., 2021; Lowitt et al., 2019; Morrison, 2020; Settee & Shukla, 2020). Still, this definition does not completely account for the myriad ways Indigenous communities view relationships with food. For example, while food sovereignty proponents tend to advocate against the commodification of food, some communities do not feel there is anything culturally inappropriate about selling traditional foods. Morris & FitzHerbert (2016) illustrate this with their work with Māori communities' commercial sale of the Māori potato, which most community members did not see as reducing the sacredness of this food source. Gombay (2009) describes how the Hunter Support Program (HSP) in Nunavik, a program where hunters are paid to supply country food which is then freely distributed to households requiring support, allows country food to move fluidly in and out of commodity status – it is not one or the other. Kuokkanen (2011) explains that “attempts to draw sharp divisions between subsistence and market economies usually result in misunderstandings of the scope of traditional economic systems and the ways in which they continue to be embedded in larger social organization of communities” (p. 222). It is important to consider that Indigenous food sovereignty discourses risk essentializing all Indigenous peoples by invoking the “indigenous imaginary,” a long standing assumption and belief that Indigenous people are “closer to nature than Western

people” (Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016, p. 15). Although for such a long time, a closeness with nature was seen as a negative thing – rendering Indigenous peoples “less developed, less civilized, less rational”– it has recently been “valorized” by food activists who view Indigenous peoples as more “in touch with what is authentic, original and uncontaminated” (Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016, pp. 15–16). Any attempt to define Indigenous food sovereignty or to create criteria to be considered as such will be resisted as “Indigenous people repeatedly and consistently refuse to be contained by discourses of Indigeneity which reflect the dominant groups’ understanding of them, what they should *be* and what they should *do*” (Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016, p. 16).

The English language will always be inadequate when defining Indigenous concepts. The following chapter on theoretical frameworks addresses this in more depth. For example, when speaking of the term “sovereignty”, Louis Bird (2023) an Elder and researcher from Peawanuk in northern Ontario, states:

to call this land our own in terms of Whiteman language in the legal system and also in institution, we speak forked tongue...explain this or saying this in Whiteman’s language, I feel very foolish. I should be speaking in my own language (p.3)

Alfred (2005) differentiates the concept of sovereignty between a colonial state and Indigenous perspective, explaining that:

the inter/counterplay of state sovereignty doctrines – rooted in notions of dominion – with and against Indigenous concepts of political relations – rooted in notions of freedom, respect, and autonomy – frames the discourse on Indigenous “sovereignty” at its broadest level (p. 33).

Barker (2005) reminds us that there are also deep Protestant and Catholic roots to the term, where:

the church maintained that only God was the true sovereign and the church was the medium of God's will on earth, while the king claimed to be a sovereign who inherited from God the right to rule...this 'divine right' was understood to be absolute, a power that was accountable only to the god from whom it originated (p. 2).

To Mills (2017), from an Anishinaabe perspective on constitutionalism, “within the logic of mutual aid [as opposed to a colonial conception of constitutional rights of the individual], a society doesn't have a sovereignty *because the role of the sovereign would be redundant*. Our leaders, *ogimaag*, are rather spokespersons and facilitators” (p. 234). Alfred (2005) argues that “sovereignty is inappropriate as a political objective for Indigenous peoples” (p. 38) and that “the next phase of scholarship and activism, then, will need to transcend the mentality that supports the colonization of Indigenous nations, beginning with the rejection of the term and notion of indigenous ‘sovereignty’” (p. 41). However, the term “sovereignty”, connected with bodies, languages, intellectual rights, and food continue to be used by Indigenous scholars. Is it problematic, then, to use the phrase “Indigenous food sovereignty” (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2021; Martens et al., 2016; Morrison, 2011, 2020; Settee & Shukla, 2020). Barker summarizes that for many Indigenous scholars, “sovereignty emanates from the unique identity and culture of peoples and is therefore an inherent and inalienable right of peoples to the qualities customarily associated with nations” (2005, p. 3). She explains that there is no fixed meaning of sovereignty, and that and “its related histories, perspectives, and identities – is embedded within the specific social relations in which it is invoked and given meaning” (Barker, 2005, p. 21).

She concludes:

Sovereignty carries the horrible stench of colonialism. It is incomplete, inaccurate, and troubled. But it has also been rearticulated to mean altogether different things by Indigenous peoples. In its links to concepts of self-determination and self-government, it insists on the recognition of inherent rights to the respect for political affiliations that are historical and located and for the unique cultural identities that continue to find meaning in those histories and relations (Barker, 2005, p. 26).

Rather than a strict adherence to what sovereignty, or Indigenous food sovereignty, *must be*, it is important for fluidity, creativity, and autonomy around how this concept is understood and enacted differently within and between communities. Indigenous communities are not monolithic – there are many different experiences of food that are determined by socio-economic status, life experience, and gender.

Gender relations in Indigenous food systems

Women's interactions with social, economic, political, and ecological spaces are shaped by systems of domination which “have rendered Indigenous women's knowledge invisible and politically marginal” (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal, 2016, p. 5). For example, patriarchal colonial logics continue to limit women from decision making in their communities, and render their activities in Indigenous economies “invisible” (Kuokkanen, 2011, pp. 225–226). Through applying a gender analysis, approaches such as feminist food studies attempt to make visible “the ways that various forms of oppression and privilege including, but not limited to, gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and age are shaped and experienced in relation to food” (Parker et al., 2019, p. 1). Parker (2019) further argues:

to fully understand the complex everyday contexts in which women labour in food systems, do food provisioning work, and embody their food practices, feminist food

studies must attend to the social and structural inequalities of systems of intersecting oppressions that are produced and reproduced through global and local food systems and food practices (p. 2).

Globally, scholars from a variety of fields have stressed the gendered nature of food and food provisioning, with an emphasis on the need for women to be central in research and policy discussions around food (Phillipps et al., 2022; Shiva, 2009; Van Esterik, 1999). While Indigenous women are “most often the gatekeepers to family food” (Lambden et al., 2006, p. 333) and play multiple roles in maintaining food security of a household, including the transmission of traditional knowledge, historically there has been very little research which documents these activities and knowledge (Todd et al., 2016). The “long standing ethnographic assumptions to the effect that men hunt, while women gather and process” (Kuokkanen, 2011, p. 227) may have limited their involvement in many traditional food research projects. Contrary to this belief, notokwew mâcîwin (old lady hunting) as described by Elder Maria Campbell (Cree Métis) refers to a traditional practice of centring women’s knowledge in hunting specifically. Campbell recalls that in her community, grandmothers were the first teachers of hunting and trapping, transmitting not only technical skills but also cultural protocols (Anderson, 2009). In this specific context, grandmothers “were deemed to be the most appropriate first teachers of hunting because of their experience and wisdom as life givers” (Anderson, 2010, p. 82). Corntassel and Bryce (2012) highlight the connection between Lekwungen women’s roles managing the kwetlal (a nutritious tuber) food systems and their role in sustaining communities. In her book on the role of Anishinaabe women in the Great Lakes region, Child (2012) describes the essential role women played in agriculture, such as tending manoomin, and the way that was disrupted and devalued by European patriarchal society as it did not align with the domestic role

women played in their own societies. Child (2012) explains, “Ojibwe ideas about property were not invested in patriarchy, as in European legal traditions. Therefore, when early travelers and settlers observed Indigenous women working, it would have involved a paradigm shift for them to appreciate that for the Ojibwe, water was a gendered space where women held property rights” (p. 25).

Initiatives that attempt to improve food security through land-based harvesting tend to focus on hunting - a stage in the food system which is currently predominantly (yet not exclusively) controlled by men (Hall, 2019; Kuokkanen, 2011; Todd et al., 2016) where it is common that “women’s wisdom is not sought” (Todd et al., 2016, p. 196). In this way, focusing on food security, and thus, supply and access, works to limit women’s participation in these programs and conversations. Although the “male bias” in research around traditional food has been widely recognized, some scholars argue that there is still much room to increase the magnitude and frequency of Indigenous women’s voices, concerns, and community perspectives (Todd et al., 2016, p. 209). Although beyond the scope of this thesis, a review of the representation of Indigenous women’s voices from the community in food sovereignty literature would be insightful in determining whether this gap has yet been adequately addressed. Given the role women played in food provisioning, harvesting, and distribution (Child, 2012), it is unsurprising that current and growing action (Indigenous Seed Sovereignty Network, 2020) and scholarship towards Indigenous food sovereignty is increasingly being led by Indigenous women scholars (see: Cidro, 2015; LaDuke, 2005; LaDuke & Alexander, 2004; Martens et al., 2016; Martens, 2021; Morrison, 2008, 2011, 2020; Settee, 2018; Settee & Shukla, 2020). This thesis aims to add to this growing food sovereignty literature by “respectfully centr[ing] what Indigenous women give careful attention to” (Ferreira et al., 2022, p. 210).

Contextualizing food security and food sovereignty in the Treaty 9 region of northern Ontario

Food has long been used by the Government of Canada as a tool of colonial control over Indigenous lands, families and bodies (Daschuk, 2013; Mosby, 2013; Mosby & Galloway, 2017; Settee & Shukla, 2020). Yet, the narrative of food shortages tends to be “apolitical and uncritical of the dominant paradigm that informs solutions to the northern food crisis” (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013, p. 1094). It continues to emphasize social issues such as hunger and poverty, and widely ignores existing community-driven efforts to address these challenges (Hiebert & Power, 2016). Many Indigenous communities have repeatedly emphasized the importance of reviving and strengthening traditional land-based practices and food systems that have existed in their communities for generations to improve access to nutritious food. Historical and contemporary realities of systemic racism and colonial control over Indigenous resources, lives, bodies and governance, along with the high cost of hunting, gaps in intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, and environmental changes have led to a steady decline in land-based food practices (Domingo et al., 2021; Guyot et al., 2006; Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2019; Lemelin et al., 2010; Pal, Haman, et al., 2013; Richmond et al., 2021; Skinner et al., 2013). While most on-reserve households across Canada expressed interest in having access to traditional food in their diet, “over half of all adults reported that industrial activities (i.e., mining, hydro-electricity, forestry, farming) affected their harvesting in addition to other factors including climate change, financial (money and equipment or transportation) and household constraints (no hunter, time, traditional knowledge, and health)” (Batal et al., 2021, p. 555). As opposed to processed food from grocery stores, traditional food including land mammals (e.g., moose, caribou), fish (e.g., whitefish, sturgeon), water fowl (e.g., geese, ducks),

and harvested plants (e.g., berries, medicines) is important on a nutritional, medicinal (Wilson 2003), emotional, spiritual and cultural level (Kelm, 1998; LaDuke, 2005, pp. 191–210).

Reflecting these values, long-standing efforts to strengthen traditional land-based food systems are emerging in recent research (Cidro, 2015; Domingo et al., 2021; Gaudet, 2017; Levkoe et al., 2019; Richmond et al., 2021; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Settee, 2018; Simpson & Coulthard, 2014; Thompson, 2018).

Colonial controls over Indigenous food systems in northern Ontario

To understand the context of food shortages northern Ontario, it is imperative to understand how social, political, ecological, cultural, and ecological changes were negotiated and adapted to. To do so, I relied on secondary source analysis of primary documents such as HBC ledgers and notes, missionary accounts, and Treaty commissioner diaries. Steegman Jr.'s (1983a) *Boreal Forest Adaptations* was useful in developing a general historical picture of northern Ontario food systems. While using this source, I was keenly aware that this book is a compilation of analyses of outsider reports (HBC ledgers and missionary accounts) and research by outsider anthropologists. This does not make the work irrelevant, however it leaves many opportunities for historical and cultural misunderstanding. I also relied on Louis Bird's "Our Voices"(2020), a compilation of the oral history of Hudson's Bay and James Bay communities. Although these stories cannot and do not speak for all experiences in northern Ontario, their origins in First Nations' experiences ensure they offer a closer and more accurate understanding and memory of the region than the accounts of Euro-Christian traders, missionaries, and anthropologists. John Long's (2010) important book, *Treaty 9*, was integral in capturing the sentiments and experiences of the federal and provincial commissioners from their own diaries. Long (2010) demonstrated Canada's intentional deception of communities in the proceedings. I go into more

depth with this literature in Chapter 7. Although the history I present in Chapter 7 is corroborated in the literature (Rogers, 1963; Taylor, 1972), there are still many gaps. It should be considered a broad picture with a high probability of missing many experiences and accounts of the region, especially pre-HBC arrival in 1670.

Multiple foreign colonial impositions and relationships have impacted Indigenous food systems in northern Ontario. While it is likely that First Nations in northern Ontario were involved in the fur trade by proxy before the HBC landed (e.g., using middlemen who would travel with the furs to Montreal), the company's arrival on the shores of James Bay in 1668 brought the fur trade much closer. This deeply impacted the nature of hunting and trapping, as the existing economy around food systems suddenly became part of international capitalist trade. It is important to note that prior to the onset of the fur trade with Europe, economies around food, fur, and goods did exist. However, becoming a part of the international and capitalist system of Europe was a major shift, as North America moved into a peripheral position in the World System while England remained in the centre, collecting all the profit (Kardulias, 1990; Wynn Edwards IV, 2009). This was the beginning of colonial exploitation of resources in northern Ontario that only heightened after Rupert's land, previously the private hunting and corporate grounds of the HBC, was purchased by Canada in 1870.

In 1905, First Nations communities south of the Albany River signed Treaty 9. At this point, many community leaders believed that signing the Treaty with Canada was in their best interest, as it would ensure their health and education needs would be met, as well as additional financial support and protection from the government (Long, 2010). According to Canada, after signing, communities in this region became wards of the state, beholden to colonial laws. The impetus for the Canadian government to sign Treaties in northern Ontario came from their desire

to extract mineral, energy, and forestry resources in the region (Long, 2010). The Crown's perspective remains, as current treaties are entered similarly, to "provide a secure property regime and a stable environment for economic development throughout Canada" (Mills, 2017, p. 221). First Nations communities were relocated onto small parcels of land called "reserves" in order to make space for these extractive economic developments and industries. While settlement around fur trading posts had started before the Treaties, it was based on choice, access to food and resources, and proximity to family. During the Treaty 9 signings, there were no negotiations around where these reserves were located, and it was frequent that chiefs and other signatories would be apprehensive and skeptical about how they were expected to survive and feed themselves on such a small parcel of land (Long, 2010).

This stands in contrast to Indigenous perspectives and understandings of Treaties. Alfred (2005) explains: "all Dutch and French treaties with Indigenous peoples, the Treaty of Utrecht, the Articles of Capitulation, and the Royal Proclamation (made in a context of military interdependency between the British and Indigenous nations) all contain explicit reference to the independent nationhood of indigenous peoples" (p. 34). Mills (2017) argues that from an Anishinaabe perspective, "Treaties aren't legal instruments; they're frameworks for right relationships" (p. 225). The Treaties are interpreted by Indigenous signatories as a shared sovereignty over land, and by colonial signatories, as a surrender of sovereignty (Drake, 2018).

The colonial state is inconsistent in this, however – if there is a surrender of sovereignty, that would necessarily require an original sovereignty. However, this stands in stark contrast to the concept of *terra nullius* and the doctrine of discovery, concepts which are still very much rooted within Canada's legal system (Borrows, 2019; Drake, 2018). Mills (2017) points out that "despite its participation in 'treaty' processes, Canada nonetheless claims radical title to all of

Turtle Island, knowing full well that Indigenous peoples were already living on it as persons, peoples, and confederacies of distinct constitutional orders before settlers arrived” (p. 222). It remains unclear how the Vatican’s recent repudiation of the doctrine of discovery, connected to a 15th-century papal bill, will change Canada’s legal system’s interpretation of the Treaties (Winfield, 2023).

Following the Treaty signings, a cascade of impositions, including the *Indian Act* (1867), Indian Residential Schools (IRS), and game laws (Phillipps et al., 2022) were enforced. Some Acts that continue to impact First Nations’ access to their food systems include:

the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture Food, and Rural Affairs Food Safety and Quality Act (which houses meat regulations), the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care Health Protections and Promotions Act (which houses Food Premise regulations) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry’s Fishing and Wildlife Conservation Act (which houses regulations surrounding hunting, fishing, trapping – and the possession, buying, and selling of wildlife) (Phillipps et al., 2022).

Amidst multiple traumas experienced in residential school (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), survivors also recall being hungry (Mosby & Galloway, 2017), missing their traditional foods and in some cases, being forced to endure Canada’s nutrition experiments which required children coerced by participating schools to stay malnourished for up to five years as control subjects (Mosby, 2013). In addition, the imposition of the wage-labour economy limited the amount of time traditional food harvesters were able to be on the land.

These impositions have disrupted intergenerational knowledge transmission, time, and financial capacity to be on the land. Because of this, communities became more dependent on market food sold at grocery stores. While some communities have independent community run

grocery stores, the vast majority are owned by the Northern store. These transnational chains have a monopoly in northern Ontario, and with minimal competition, charge exorbitant prices for food. However, due to the changes in technology necessary for hunting animals whose migration and spawning patterns are changing, hunters and trappers need to travel further in riskier conditions to access traditional foods. In some instances, this has made traditional food more expensive than market food (Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2019; Robidoux et al., 2021). Batal et. al's (2021) study on food security in Indigenous communities across Canada found that households who participated in traditional food activities were associated with higher food insecurity. They suggest that this could be related to the extra costs associated with these activities, or that those people experiencing food insecurity may rely on traditional foods more heavily. However, they are clear to state that their data cannot offer the reasons for these observations (Batal et al., 2021). Some other elements that are not suggested here could be related to language in the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) (the 18 questions assessment tool used as part of this study). For example, interpretations of what constitutes a balanced meal may be different for households harvesting traditional food, and the distribution and sharing networks present in many communities may mean that those who hunt are supporting households beyond their own. In other words, traditional food harvesting may not have a great impact on one household but could be integral to the food security of a kin-network.

Communities have long recognized the importance of maintaining these traditional food systems for nutritional, spiritual and cultural reasons. Communities across Turtle Island are in a period of strong resurgence of these land-based practices (Cidro, 2015; Joseph, 2021; Kamal et al., 2015; Morrison, 2008; Ore, 2021; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Settee & Shukla, 2020; Thompson & Pritty, 2020; Todd et al., 2016). Northern Ontario is no

exception, and communities, activists, and scholars have been initiating and supporting programs which centre traditional food harvesting (Levesque, 2022; Levkoe et al., 2017; Loukes et al., 2022; Lowitt et al., 2019; Pinto, 2021; Robidoux et al., 2009, 2021), alternative food harvesting (Ferreira et al., 2021; Hadley, 2021; Skinner et al., 2014; Thompson et al., 2018), and concerted funding and policy change advocacy (Levkoe et al., 2019, 2021; Turner, 2022).

The work in this dissertation hopes to make a small contribution to the aforementioned efforts by deepening our understandings of the elements necessary to improve local control over and local access to food. This research endeavours to highlight the important community-led work already being done in community while critically reflecting on the ways that our own research aligns or diverges from the multiple conceptions of food sovereignty. Post-colonial, decolonial, and feminist theoretical frameworks operationalized within a community of practice of political ecology help to guide my approach to explore and present these ideas critically and self-reflexively. The next section further describes and justifies the use of these theories.

Chapter 3:
Theoretical Frameworks

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

The theoretical approach for this research has been informed by post-colonial (Fanon, 1963; Loomba, 2005; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988), decolonial (Mignolo, 1993, 2007, 2009; Quijano, 2000, 2007), and feminist (Butler, 1990; Haraway, 1991; Mohanty, 1984) lenses. While there are distinctions between these approaches, when used together, there are opportunities for these theories to support each other. This theoretical approach informs this thesis, and in the last chapter, is operationalized within a community of practice of political ecology to reflect on the ways that food sovereignty and the ecosystem is framed by researchers (Robbins, 2012). In the following section, I discuss my justification for using these theoretical lenses when studying Indigenous food systems, security, and sovereignty given the historical and ongoing colonial impositions on Indigenous lands, languages, and systems of governance.

Postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist theories, although exhibiting different foci, histories and contexts, share a common ancestral root in critical theory by questioning dominant Eurocentric patriarchal discourses and grand narratives of unquestioned “truths” (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson & Lohmann, 1994; Lincoln et al., 2011; Writers, 2009). These three theories deconstruct colonial, patriarchal, and modernist discourses present in many overarching stories of solutions to global crises, such as food shortages. This section gives a brief overview of the key concepts and thinkers of each theory.

Postcolonial theories

Postcolonial theory emerged in newly independent (hence, post-) colonial nations in South East Asia and Africa (Loomba, 2005). Loomba (2005) gives a deep and critical account of this theoretical perspective’s genealogy as well as the current and historical debates within postcolonial theory, which will be briefly overviewed here. Scholars such as Edward Said,

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon (who straddles postcolonial and decolonial theories) are leaders in post-colonial thought. These theorists demonstrate the ways that discourse, for example, in the form of literature, shapes historical and current colonial power dynamics. Post-colonial theorists such as Said are often cited as being heavily influenced by Foucauldian notions of power (Mason, 2014), while others believe that this has been “overstated” and that Frantz Fanon’s anti-colonial and revolutionary work was more influential to Said than Foucault. Nonetheless, Foucault’s ideas of power/knowledge and discourse were useful to postcolonial studies (Mason, 2014). Foucault’s (1975) theory of power/knowledge states that power shapes what is considered knowledge, and those who control knowledge have power. This knowledge then becomes a dominant truth, or discourse, and has the potential to confine human thoughts and beliefs, and thus, actions. In this way, Foucault (1975) argues that discourse is more effective at controlling the body politic than grand displays of corporeal violence and punishment as it moves elusively and productively through their minds in what he calls biopower.

The connection between discourse and material reality is important to postcolonial scholars who discursively analyze colonial texts, such as artwork, policies, film, and travelers’ stories, to reveal how their representations of the “Other” (i.e. anyone outside of “the West”) help the West construct and therefore, control them (Loomba, 2005). For example, Said explains that “Orientalism,” a discourse which constructed and represented the “Orient” from the perspective of the West, produced and managed the Orient “politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively by Europe” (Said, 1978, p. 11). In other words, Orientalism signified European power over the Orient rather than actual representations of the area, and thus equally shaped the identity of the “Occident” (Said, 1978, p. 14).

Said (1978) and Loomba (2005) use Gramsci's notion of hegemony to explain the strength and durability of these discourses (which he would call ideology) and to argue that domination by the West was not achieved solely by force, but also by "creating subjects who willingly submit to being ruled" (Loomba, 2005, p. 32). Postcolonial theory deconstructs colonial knowledge produced by "professionals" (Mosse, 2007) and "experts" (Mitchell, 2002; Mosse, 2007) in an attempt to "challenge and subvert the hegemony of Western knowledges" by continually "questioning its authority, objectivity and universality" (Strongman, 2014, p. 1344).

One of the most prominent critiques of postcolonial theory is the prefix "post." It is argued that this prefix can distract from the fact that a post-colonial (i.e. formally independent) state still contends with the inequities of the colonial regime and the "psychological, economic and cultural effects of being a colony" (Hulme, 1995, pp. 121–122). It has the potential to conceal that many of these countries remain "economically and/or culturally dependent" on the very centres they sought independence from (Loomba, 2005, p. 12) and continue to live in "the crude exploitation of the capitalist world-system" (Grosfoguel, 2002, p. 204). Many postcolonial theorists encourage readers to view postcolonialism instead "as the contestation of colonial domination and the legacies of colonialism" (Loomba, 2005), or as "a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (Hulme, 1995, p. 120) while paying close attention to "the legacy of its aftermath" (Strongman, 2014).

Even with these contentions, many theorists do not believe postcolonial critique is radical enough to truly break from colonial power and control and must work towards "decolonizing" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 212). Decolonial theorists draw on the discursive analysis provided by postcolonial theorists, while centring the importance of voices that colonial and patriarchal powers have deemed marginal.

Decolonial theories

Whereas postcolonial theories tend to study and deconstruct systems and discourses of colonialism, decolonial theories focus on dismantling these systems through social transformation (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Decolonial theorists argue that post-colonial theory's reliance on Western epistemologies limits the theory's "radicality" to a critique of Eurocentrism (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 212). Decolonial projects emerged in Latin America, beginning with Peruvian scholar José Carlos Mariátegui in the 1920s, influenced by dependency theory and the "philosophy of liberation in the 70s" (Mignolo, 2007, p. 164). Decolonial scholars such as Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano use the term "coloniality" to describe the underlying logic of Western modern/colonialism (Hoffman, 2017). The goal of decolonial theory is decolonization through the transformation of "the rigidity of the epistemic and territorial *frontiers* established and controlled by the coloniality of power in the process of building the modern/colonial world system" (Mignolo, 2000, p. 23). Quijano (2000)'s concept of the colonial matrix describes how this power maintains control in four interrelated domains:

control of the economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources); control of authority (institutions, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and; control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education, and formation of subjectivity) (Mignolo, 2007, p. 156).

Grosfoguel (2007) incorporates the feminist concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) to understand coloniality of power as "an entanglement...of multiple and heterogenous global hierarchies...of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures" (p. 217).

Decolonial projects place emphasis on the borders of the colonial matrix, or in other words, on “a colonial subaltern epistemology” (Mignolo, 2007, p. 165). Decolonial scholars argue that a “decolonial epistemic perspective” needs to rely on thought outside of the West by focusing on “critical thinkers from the Global South thinking *from* and *with* subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 212). They endeavour to shift the “loci of enunciation” (who is speaking and from where) and challenge modernity/coloniality to make space for alternative knowledges and epistemologies.

Feminist theories

Decolonial theory’s emphasis on social transformation is shared by feminist theorists. Due to the patriarchal nature of European coloniality/modernity, feminist thinkers add an important gender, sexuality, and intersectional lens to post-colonial and decolonial theories. Feminist theories have long challenged modernity’s binaries of difference and scientific objectivity through deconstructing grand narratives that “naturalize” difference and domination. They see dominating relations “as a derivative of theory, not nature” (Haraway, 1991, p. 23). Feminist thinkers question the nature-culture binary and the assumption that market economies and capitalism are a “natural” progression in human societies owing to our shared “selfish gene” (Braidotti, 2007, p. 65). Additionally, feminist scholars have long insisted that many narratives of modernity have “hidden women from history” (Loomba, 2005, p. 17). At the same time, feminist theories, which have many iterations (see Crotty, 1998), have been critiqued for hiding certain women’s perspectives and colonizing the experiences of feminist women of colour (Mohanty, 1984, p. 333).

While each of these theoretical approaches are applicable in different ways to the Indigenous context in Canada, many Indigenous scholars have rejected the relevance of any form

of feminist theory for themselves and communities, as it can be perceived as a racist, colonial, irrelevant European construction that does not address or centre their concerns nor the interrelated and even more important oppressions endured (this history of critique is outlined in: Barker, 2017; Green, 2017; Nickel, 2020; St. Denis, 2017). However, St. Denis (2017) reminds us that feminist theory is not homogenous - liberal feminism (which focuses on issues such as gender equality and wage disparity) is not the only form of feminism, and has been critiqued for years by radical and cultural feminists (p. 53). LaRocque (2017) urges Indigenous scholars to reconsider the dismissal of feminist theory under the guise that racism is more urgent than sexism - rather, these forms of oppression are intricately linked. In this way, decolonial and postcolonial theories augment feminist theories, and vice versa.

Indigenous feminism

Indigenous feminism aligns aspects of feminist theory with Indigenous epistemologies and worldviews. “Indigenous feminism,” Green (2017b) explains, “is focused not only on the big ‘P’ patriarchy but also the big ‘C’ colonialism” (p. 11). Patriarchy is indeed “shaped by and used as a tool of colonization” (Pyle, 2020, p. 10). Barker (2017), Green (2017a) and Nickel & Fehr’s (2020) books highlight multiple ways Indigenous feminist theorists are using this lens. Nickel (2020) argues that Indigenous feminism is important as it has “the potential to expose and destabilize patriarchal gender roles and the structures that sustain and promote continued Indigenous dispossession and disempowerment through colonialism” and further, can challenge assumptions of “sexism, identity, the gender binary, normative sexualities, and time and space” (p. 3).

Although it is argued that many Indigenous societies pre-contact were matriarchal (for example, the Haudenosaunee clan mothers) and thus women were “revered” (St. Denis, 2017,

pp. 48–49), there are examples of oppression in pre-colonial societies (Green, 2017b) and not all were “non-sexist” (LaRocque, 2017, p. 137). The belief that Indigenous communities are inherently egalitarian can potentially deny the ways in which Indigenous women currently experience marginalization within and outside their communities (LaRocque, 2017). Pyle (2020) argues that “the real problem with many of the gender roles presented as traditional today, particularly in Pan-Indian circles, is that they reproduce colonial heteropatriarchy under a thin Indigenous veneer” (p.112). A danger in some definitions of traditional gender roles is that they can promote the idea that women’s power is in the domestic sphere and in the “trope of Indigenous womanhood as motherhood” (Pyle, 2020, p. 114). This renders Indigenous womanhood a biological determination, overshadowing other roles women hold in community (Green, 2017; Pyle, 2020). Indigenous feminist scholars argue that gender relations are often overlooked in critical Indigenous studies which limits the extent to which this research accounts for patriarchy within and outside of Indigenous communities (Green, 2017; LaRocque, 2017).

Integrating theories

As highlighted above, each theory has been conceived in a different context with different foci. However, these three theories align and support each other as they deconstruct modernity’s hierarchical binaries allowing space for agency, resistance, and social transformation integral in research which interrogates colonial constraints on Indigenous food systems and celebrates community initiatives which work against, within, and/or outside of these constraints. Indeed, one theory can never do all the work (Hulme, 1995).

Postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist theorists play an important role in interrogating the colonial constraints on Indigenous food systems because they deconstruct modernity/coloniality’s unstable hierarchical binaries. Resource distribution, accumulation and

geo-political power continue to follow racial, national, ethnic and gendered lines akin to those introduced to the colonized by the colonizers (Quijano, 2007). This is not surprising as the economies of the colonies such as Canada were restructured in specific ways to “feed [Europe’s] capitalist belly” (Loomba, 2005, p. 12) while colonial/modern discourses colonized “the imagination of the dominated” (Quijano, 2007, p. 169; see also Fanon, 1963). Although modernity’s faith in free markets, technocratic solutions, and rational thought is presented as societal “progress”, it omits the fact that it depends on coloniality to thrive (Mignolo, 2007). These concepts of modernity are present in discourses around global hunger and food scarcity, with technology and free markets emerging as the financially and politically backed solutions to the crisis, as was seen in the Green Revolution (Patel, 2013).

In many ways, the hierarchical binaries noted above maintain coloniality. One of the key binaries that arose out of the European enlightenment was the non-body/body split, which led to the binary of reason/body, where the body could be nothing but an object of study – a part of nature (Quijano, 2000). Quijano (2000) believes this divide had key implications for colonized peoples because:

without this objectification of the body as nature, its expulsion from the sphere of the spirit (and this is my strong thesis), the ‘scientific’ theorization of the problem of race...would have hardly been possible. From the Eurocentric perspective, certain races are condemned as inferior for not being rational subjects. They are objects of study, consequently bodies closer to nature. In a sense, they become dominable and exploitable (p. 555).

To Europeans, who saw themselves as superior, it made perfect sense that they were the “exclusive bearers, creators, and protagonists of modernity” (Quijano, 2000, p. 542). These racial

lines of social classification extended to sexual relations, where women (especially women of colour) were more closely aligned with bodies, and therefore, considered closer to nature (Quijano, 2000). These hierarchical binaries of mind/body, male/female, culture/nature, and subject/object were naturalized through scientific studies, especially social biology which physiologized the superior/inferior relationship of domination (Haraway, 1991). Western scientific knowledge is framed as objective, universal, and apolitical, a grand narrative challenged by postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist theorists alike (Haraway, 1988; Haraway, 1991; Loomba, 2005; Wallerstein, 2004). Scientific studies were used to justify why Europeans would always be subjects while everyone else was an object who did not have valuable knowledge or culture to share (Quijano, 2007). Indeed, anthropological studies that work in the opposite fashion exist only as “ironical parodies” (Quijano, 2007, p. 174) (see, for example Featherstone, 1986; Sandiford, 2006). The legacy of these binaries remains in much research in Indigenous communities.

Being guided by theories that expose and critique these binaries is incredibly important for researchers working in Indigenous communities to avoid complicity in their perpetuation and to work towards interrupting them. These racial and gender binaries are commonplace in colonized nations like Canada, where upon contact, Indigenous peoples were associated with the body, irrationality, and thus, closer to nature. Such discourses constructed Indigenous peoples as objects of study and recipients of colonial development programs and policies, such as education and agriculture. In modernity’s view, “nature” also becomes a passive recipient of scientific knowledge which is acted on, controlled, and subdued by science. In the chapter “Can the Mosquito Speak?” in his book *Rule of Experts*, Mitchell (2002) effectively challenges this by demonstrating how nature asserts agency by molding science. This reveals that the “acting

subject” and “passive object” is a myth – rather than two distinct binaries, they are actors who shape each other. Indeed, if both have agency, can there be a pure “subject” who acts and a pure “object” who receives? Mitchell (2002)’s work is part of the community of practice of political ecology. The questions of agency of the non-human and more-than-human world has been addressed by Indigenous feminist thinkers as well (Kimmerer, 2015) and is an important theoretical framework while exploring the limitations of the English concept of “food sovereignty” in First Nations of northern Ontario.

Although feminist thinkers have helped to deconstruct modernist binaries, they have also been accused of being active in constructing others. For example, feminist theories have been accused of constructing an image of the “Third World Woman” as disempowered and oppressed, monolithic, racialized and in need of liberation (Mohanty, 1984). Framing her as religious, family-oriented, illiterate, and domestic allows Western women to present themselves as “secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives,” whether or not this is their reality (Mohanty, 1984, p. 353). Western feminism has also been critiqued for assuming a “universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy,” which does not account for matriarchal societies nor the ways that patriarchy is exercised in various cultural contexts (Butler, 1990, p. 5; Mohanty, 1984). Uninterrogated feminist theories run the risk of further colonizing non-Western women and cultures, where a “homogenous ‘powerless’ group of women [is] often located as implicit *victims* of particular socio-economic systems” (Mohanty, 1984, p. 338), which is “subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non-Western barbarism” (Butler, 1990, p. 5). Decolonial and feminist theories have relied on each other to more adequately represent the complex ways that colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism interact with gender and sexuality.

By analyzing these binaries and their jagged edges, post-colonial, decolonial, and feminist theorists are able to identify cracks in their foundation and cast light on the agency and resistance of the usual “recipients” of solutions and aid in crises such as food shortages. Disrupting these binaries creates space for voices and knowledges that have been intentionally and systematically marginalized to shape, transform, “de-link” (Mignolo, 2007) and “de-think” (Alfred, 2005, p. 46) from the colonial matrix.

Agency, Resistance, and Social Transformation

This section will outline the ways that agency, resistance, and knowledges from outside the West can arise out of exposing the myths and instabilities in modernity’s hierarchical binaries. Indigenous food sovereignty inherently challenges corporate colonial food systems and therefore is an example of agency, resistance, and social transformation. These theoretical frameworks helped to guide me in my thinking on resistance and reproduction. Systems of power do not work absolutely and colonial violence and control, epistemic and corporeal, historically met (and continues to meet) “mockery” (Fanon, 1963, p. 8) and “anything but docile bodies” (Moore, 1999, p. 655). Colonial power, like any kind of power, is “never total or monolithic, never totally successful in incorporating all individuals or subjects into their structure” (Loomba, 2005, p. 60). Indeed, global discourses are reworked and “subverted” in multiple ways at the local level (Moore, 1999, p. 655).

The promises of modernity can be seducing, as the colonized aspire for the material, epistemic and corporeal benefits that the colonizers have (Fanon, 1963; Quijano, 2007). This seduction could result in a “mimicry,” where the colonized mimic the behaviours, habits, looks, values, and language of the colonizer (Bhabha, 1997). In the Indian colonial context, Loomba reminds us that “in fact, many Indians themselves *demand*ed English education, including

reformers and nationalists who were opposed to British rule in India” (Loomba, 2005, p. 77).

Yet, this is not always a sign of submission– it can be a way to disguise oneself to escape colonial control and to appear unthreatening to the colonial regime, where one is almost the same “*but not quite*” (Bhabha, 1997, p. 153). In many ways, mimicry can be a performative submission and fertile ground for resistance where the colonized learn the language and tools of the colonizer in order to use them to resist and revolt (Bhabha, 1997). While “subordinate classes often times fall in line in public, [they] privately critique their conditions and those responsible for it” (Jain, 2018, p. 165). These are the spaces from which radical action can arise.

Critics of postcolonial theories argue that there is a hyper-focus on discursively analyzing dominating forces such as modernity/coloniality, capitalism, and patriarchy without that same time and attention paid to the knowledges, languages and agency of the colonized (Jain, 2018). To shift this focus, postcolonial theorists call for the recovery of non-Western literatures (Loomba, 2005, p. 82) while decolonial scholars, including those in Canada (Alfred, 2009; Battiste, 2000; Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2012) call for a focus on the epistemologies and lived experiences of the colonized.

Decolonial scholars argue that “border gnosis” (where *gnosis* encompasses both doxa [common belief or popular opinion] and episteme [“knowledge”]), or knowledge that is from a “subaltern” perspective (on the “border of the modern/colonial world system”) is the key to de-linking from the colonial matrix (Mignolo, 2000, p. 22). Indeed, it is from these locations, led “by the resurgent ‘others’” that “the great emancipatory movements” are driven (Braidotti, 2007, p. 67). While these knowledges and consciousnesses are important, attempting to find a “pure” peasants’ consciousness is a positivist idea (Spivak, 1988, p. 81), risks essentialization (Jain, 2018), and if driven by academics, could be a perpetuation of the colonial and academic

tendency to represent or invent subaltern knowledges, thereby continuing to deny them of their own subjectivity (Jain, 2018) and “disguis[ing] new forms of colonization” (Mignolo, 1993, p. 130). Haraway (1988) agrees that there is “a serious danger in romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions. To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic” (p. 584). However, TallBear (2014) cautions against the pursuit of pure representation, and argues that:

rather, one speaks as an individual “in concert with,” not silenced by one’s inability to fully represent one’s people...[this] involves speaking as faith – as furthering the claims of a people while refusing to be excised from that people by some imperialistic, naïve notion of perfect representation” (p. 4).

Decolonial theorists stress the importance of shifting the “critical locus of enunciation” from the European West to those in the subaltern, including academics from these spaces (Mignolo, 1993, pp. 120–121). Feminist theorists call for the valuation of “epistemologies of location” where one’s specific knowledge based on their positioning is what justifies their ability to create knowledge on a topic and be heard (Haraway, 1988, p. 589). Shifting this locus of enunciation is important, as “to author is to have the power to originate, to name” (Haraway, 1991, p. 72). Decolonial theorists believe this shift in authorship is the only way to dismantle the “coloniality of world power” (Quijano, 2007, p. 177). In an Indigenous context in Canada, this necessitates that Indigenous communities have control over developing their own programs which meet needs that the communities determine themselves (Alfred, 2009).

Too much focus on colonized/colonizer and powerful/powerless can “lock all revolutionary struggles into binary structures – possessing power versus being powerless” (Mohanty, 1984, p. 350). This can trap postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist thinkers into the

very binary thinking they wish to challenge and contest. Jain (2018) recognizes that while dominant ideologies are critiqued as totalizing, that she herself “can be accused of the opposite, framing subordinate ideology as always resistant” (p. 165). This is a power structure that is inverted, not transformed (Mohanty, 1984). Robidoux (2012) urges “moving beyond this dichotomous relationship of dominance and resistance” so “we do not reduce human experience to an endless struggle against global designs” (p. 21). Tuck’s (2009) theoretical concept of desire-centred research is intended to “interrupt the binary of reproduction versus resistance” (Tuck, 2009b, p. 419). People negotiate power structures and struggles every day in multiple ways. Indeed – if we are advocating agency – choosing not to resist is also an exercise of that agency.

Along with Fanon, I believe that one can “appropriate theory from other authors, and yet [manage] to redeploy these in such a fashion as to not lose but rather alter and augment the theory’s charge” (Courville, 2007, p. 223). I engaged these three theories in conversation with each other as well as with Indigenous decolonial and feminist scholars from North America as I explored the opportunities, constraints, and innovations towards food sovereignty in Treaty 9 First Nations throughout my dissertation. Not only do postcolonial, decolonial, and feminist theories offer useful frameworks for deconstructing development research and work in North America, Indigenous scholars, epistemologies, and experiences with colonialism, patriarchy, and modernity/coloniality offer important perspectives and critiques to strengthen these theories.

Postcolonial, decolonial, and Indigenous feminist analyses reveal the cracks in modernity/coloniality’s discourse and propose ways out of its matrix of power. These thinkers support this research as they provide examples of how to recenter the multitude of Indigenous women’s embodied knowledges and experiences. As Kuokkanen (2011) points out “Indigenous

feminist analysis...reveals and calls attention to ways in which women's work in subsistence economies has been concealed and ignored" (p. 225). The strength of these theories is only realized in practice, as "Indigenous theory ...is not only about knowing, but is also about *being in relationship*" (Kovach, 2018, p. 223). The next section will argue that community-based participatory research (CBPR) and Indigenous Methodologies (IM) are integral to the theoretical frameworks that I am guided by.

Chapter 4:
Methodology and Methods

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“A researcher who is willing to learn how to ‘stand with’ a community of subjects is willing to be altered, to revise her stakes in the knowledge to be produced.... ‘Giving back,’ on the other hand, sounds more akin to standing on two sides of a boundary that parties view as pretty much set.”

(Tallbear, 2014, p. 2).

Given my theoretical frameworks and visitor/outsider status in the communities partnering in this research, participatory methodologies such as Indigenous Methodologies (IM) and community-based participatory research (CBPR) offer the most appropriate guidance for building relationships and centring community voices. While Chapters 5 and 6 are each presented as a stand-alone journal article, they both follow these methodologies while employing different methods. Chapter 7, a critical and self-reflective look at the concept of food sovereignty, is informed by the work of these two chapters. The following section describes and critiques these methodologies and the ways they facilitate more respectful, relevant, and reciprocal research relationships.

Participatory methodologies

Participatory methodologies refer broadly to research approaches which work to blur the barrier between the “researcher” and the “researched.” These methodologies share the fundamental belief that when participants, who were traditionally considered the “objects” of study, create, evaluate and implement their own strategies to improve their situations, the results are more effective (Chilisa, 2020; Darroch & Giles, 2014; Lincoln et al., 2011; Minkler, 2005). Social psychologist Kurt Lewin is widely cited as being the first to call this approach “action research” in the 1940s (Chilisa, 2020; Darroch & Giles, 2014; Minkler, 2005). Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire’s (1970) conception of critical pedagogy significantly influenced the field, creating a more transformative, political and social revolutionary approach to research,

necessitating the active participation of the “oppressed” in their own emancipation (Cervone, 2015; Chilisa, 2020; Darroch & Giles, 2014; Minkler, 2005). Although he was discussing pedagogy, his concepts of disrupting the teacher-student hierarchy, developing *conscientização* (conscientization or critical consciousness) and creating long-term systemic change “forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed” (Freire, 1970, p. 22) has significantly influenced these methodologies’ strategies. Feminist theories, which “evolved out of a refusal to accept theory, research, and ethical perspectives that ignore, devalue, and erase women’s lives, experiences, and contributions to social science research,” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 3) have also significantly influenced participatory methodologies. Scholars led by feminist thinking have long challenged “biases inherent in traditional research practices” as the academic lens continues to be predominantly “western, white, and patriarchal” (Darroch & Giles, 2014, p. 24). Indigenous scholar Linda Smith’s (1999) critique of traditional top-down research in Indigenous communities also significantly influenced participatory methodologies. She highlights the intimate relationship between colonialism and academic research and how they facilitate each other.

The focus on co-construction of knowledge, social transformation, and questioning colonial patriarchal approaches to research position participatory methodologies to be more appropriate in communities that have long experienced “extractive” (Gaudry, 2011, p. 113), “exploitative” (Smith, 1999, p. 9), “smash and grab” (Kovach, 2009, p. 36), and “drive-by” (Horowitz et al., 2009, p. 2636) research. Participatory methodologies, which go by many different names, including participatory action research, cooperative inquiry, feminist research, and community-based research (Israel et al., 1998; Jull et al., 2017; McIntyre, 2008), are lauded as alternatives to colonial, exploitative, inaccurate, and harmful research. However, these

methods are not unproblematic, and in response, Indigenous communities and scholars are increasingly choosing to use methodologies grounded in Indigenous epistemologies and values, such as IM. The next sections briefly outline both approaches.

Community-based participatory research (CBPR)

CBPR is seen less as a method, and more as an orientation to research (Horowitz et al., 2009; Minkler, 2005), with an emphasis on sharing power, information, and responsibilities; developing respectful and reciprocal relationships in marginalized communities to reduce or eliminate injustices, and; a commitment to capacity building (Horowitz et al., 2009; Jull et al., 2015; McIntyre, 2008; Minkler, 2005). Horowitz et. al (2009) emphasize that within CBPR, the ownership of research is shared among scholars and participants who commit to building long-term relationships. Doing this effectively requires a foundation of trust, which relies on a process of continuous reflection and dialogue about who benefits from the project, who makes decisions, and which, how, and if information will be shared (McIntyre, 2008). McIntyre (2008) states that beyond following a set of ethical guidelines, the researchers “must *be* ethical, honest, and forthright people.” Horowitz et al. (2009) adds that researchers should embody “humility, patience, curiosity, interpersonal skills, and the abilities to mentor, inspire, share control, and focus on community concerns” (p. 2637).

CBPR “is not a panacea” as “engagement... is not an unproblematic, universally valid or flawless form of inquiry” (Cervone, 2015, p. 109) and its “decolonizing potential” is challenged from many different angles (Darroch & Giles, 2014, p. 22). As with any methodology, CBPR has potential pitfalls which could conversely work to further marginalize participants. For example, while CBPR is becoming more popular and can sound more inclusive, Gaudet (2014) cautions us to think critically about “whether Western models continue to prevail in a knowledge-making

that can unknowingly masquerade under the participatory umbrella” (p. 74). Kovach posits that “while we may currently be in a more inclusive moment of qualitative research, Indigenous communities are still being ‘researched’, albeit with more political finesse” (Kovach, 2009, p. 28). To be truly community-based, CBPR should be embedded in epistemologies of the communities they are working with.

Some authors view that the true nature of CBPR is grounded in the “revolutionary approaches” that emerged in South America, Asia, and Africa in the 1970s (Minkler, 2005, p. ii4). McIntyre (2008) distinguishes CBPR from other action-research due to its “emphasis on equity, oppression, and access to resources for research participants” (p. 5). Chilisa (2020) makes a useful distinction between “Participant as Coresearcher” and “Transformative Participatory Research” (see p. 271 – 280), where the latter requires more active political engagement from the researcher and participants. She encourages scholars who claim to use transformative participatory research to reflect on how the research question is asked, whether it is deficit-based or strengths-based, and if it addresses “power struggles, oppression, and social differences such as race, gender, age, and class” (Chilisa, 2020, p. 276).

With the shift of participants from “objects of study” to active decision makers in the question design, research plan, data analysis, and results dissemination, CBPR has the potential to not only improve the research experience for the participants, but to improve research overall as it is more deeply grounded in social experiences (Israel et al., 1998). This has the potential to address Indigenous communities’ concerns about exploitation, “story-taking” (Archibald, 2019, p. 5), racist assumptions and representations, and overall irrelevant research. Yet, CBPR is still steeped in Western epistemologies and languages, and has the potential to further colonize Indigenous communities if it is used without strong relationships and partnerships.

Indigenous Methodologies (IM)

In response, many Indigenous scholars have advocated for the use of Indigenous research paradigms when working with Indigenous communities (Archibald et al., 2019; Kovach, 2005, 2009, 2018; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Baker (2009) stresses that Indigenous scholars need to produce research “*by, for and about ourselves*” (p. 497). Indigenous methodologies are distinct from CBPR because of the emphasis on the spiritual source of Indigenous epistemologies (Kovach, 2009; Little Bear, 2000; Simpson, 2001; Wilson, 2008), the lack of a hierarchical binary between humans and the natural world (Holmes, 2000; Little Bear, 2000; Nelson, 2017), the variance between Western and Indigenous languages (Kovach, 2009), and the different valuations of relationships (Gaudet, 2019; Wilson, 2008), ethics (Anderson, 2009) and reciprocity (Gaudet, 2014). Archibald et al. (2019) lay out seven key principles of Indigenous theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical frameworks as “respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy” (p. 1). Many Indigenous scholars clarify that they are not calling for the outright denial of all Western theory and research (Deloria, 1991; Gaudry, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999) but instead, to use the best tools available (Kovach, 2009). Where the tools are inadequate, IM develops new approaches (Kovach, 2009).

While this framework is distinct, important, and useful for Indigenous researchers and communities, it is not intended to be dogmatic (Wilson, 2008). Due to the epistemic and corporeal violence of colonialism and ongoing colonality, not all communities relate to the same Indigenous knowledges, some do not speak their Indigenous languages, and their lived realities may not reflect the deep reciprocity and relationality that Indigenous scholars argue exists in Indigenous communities and between humans and nature. Indigenous methodologies do not intend to impose a way of thinking, being, or speaking, but instead to centre those knowledges

that are relevant to the community and their own interpretations, valuations, and process of building relationships to research ideas (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous methodologies do not follow a specific set of rules of what knowledge is, and how the research must be conducted as with “such recipes come the danger of outsiders controlling what constitutes reality for other people” (Bishop, 1998, p. 210). Kovach argues that “because so much of Indigenous ways of knowing is internal, personal, and experiential, creating one standardized, externalized framework for Indigenous research is nearly impossible, and inevitably heartbreaking for Indigenous people” (Kovach, 2009, p. 43).

Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies are imbedded in Indigenous languages (Wilson, 2008) and stories (Archibald et al., 2019; Monture, 2009). Little Bear (2000) explains that “language embodies the way a society thinks” (p.78) and the way it is organized, so it is not surprising that language is the first thing to attack when attempting to “erase a culture” (Kovach, 2009, p. 60). McGuire-Adams (2020) emphasizes the importance of using Anishinaabemowin in research as a way to privilege Indigenous knowledges and resist colonialism. Her Anishinaabeg research paradigm is conceptualized as a series of concentric circles, with Gikendaasowin (Anishinaabeg wisdom) in the centre, connecting Inaadiziwin (Anishinaabeg way of being), Biskaabiiyang (returning to ourselves), the Niizhwaaswi kchtwaa kinomaadiwinan (the seven grandfather teachings), and Wiisokotaatiwin (gathering together for a purpose) (McGuire-Adams, 2020). Indigenous epistemologies are distinct from Western epistemologies in various ways. Little Bear (2000) describes the Indigenous philosophical understandings that “existence consists of energy,” where all things have a spirit, are animate, in constant motion, and are deeply interrelated (p.77). The animacy of all things is reflected in Indigenous languages (Little Bear, 2000). Holmes’ (2000) research asserts that in Indigenous epistemologies, “corpus,

emotion, intent and purpose manifest themselves in every creature and feature in the cosmos” (p. 48). In this worldview, all of life is sacred (Getty, 2010). The land is central to Indigenous epistemologies and is inseparable from Indigenous identity (Little Bear, 2000). This is distinct from a Western view (which transcends political, paradigmatic and disciplinary boundaries) where land is something to be tamed, owned and brought under human control as humans “are placed on a higher plane” than plants and animals (Smith, 1999, p. 47). In contrast, Bishop (1998) writes, “we Māori people...do not objectify nature, nor do we subjectify nature...we learn of our total integration, connectedness, and commitment to the world and the need to let go of the focus on self” (p. 215). These connections to land strengthen Indigenous cultural identities which recognize the spiritual and healing power of the environment (Archibald, 2001). The connection to non-human life is deeply embedded in Indigenous cosmologies and creation stories such as Skywoman (Horn-Miller et al., 2016; Kimmerer, 2015). Skywoman also highlights women’s power to create and build intimate connections with creation. Nelson argues that in Indigenous stories and thus epistemologies, the line between humans (especially women) and nature is so blurry that relationships between “human and more-than-human can provide critical eco-erotic experiences that are conducive to embodying an ethic of kinship” which she argues is “deeply human” (Nelson, 2017, p. 232).

Relationships with humans, more-than-humans, the land, the spirit world, and the entire cosmos are at the heart of Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies (Anderson, 2009). Wilson (2008) asserts that “Indigenous epistemology and ontology are most importantly based on relationality. Our axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability” (p. 11). In this way, relationships and bonds with community are more important than the work produced (Wilson, 2008), provided those relationships are “not opportunistic,

exploitative, or taxing for the community” (Kovach, 2018, p. 224). The relational aspect of Indigenous methodology relies on:

sincere, authentic investment in the community; the ability to take time to visit with people from the community (whether or not they are research participants); the ability to be humble about the goals; and conversations at the start about who owns the research, its use and purpose (Kovach, 2005, p. 30).

Some Indigenous scholars feel that Indigenous methodologies need to be more political. For example, Indigenous scholar Gaudry (2011) advocates for “insurgent” research, emphasizing more “egalitarian and autonomous” relationships between researchers and participants (p. 115), where the insurgent researcher’s primary goal is “that the project will produce a better and freer life for community, members, study participants, and Indigenous peoples in general” (p. 125) with a “significant responsibility to remind people of their own power” (p. 134). He argues this approach is distinct due to its emphasis on a “sense of responsibility towards community liberation and challenging colonial systems” (Gaudry, 2011, p. 133). It is imperative that communities define what that liberation is and what challenging colonial systems looks like – and this will very likely look different across and within communities. For example, as Jain (2018) has reflected on in her own research, what if the *community* does not want to work towards political activism? What if the community felt that the best “resistance” was exercising agency while within the system, through “non-participation” (Simpson, 2001, p. 144) or by making the system work for them? Speaking from his Māori context, Bishop (1998) argues that “in many ways, the radical/emancipatory approach is perhaps more insidious, for it purports to side with Māori struggles, yet insists that Māori people are an ‘oppressed minority’ who ‘suffer’ from the malady of ‘false consciousness’” (Bishop, 1998, p. 213). Bishop (1998) mentions that

the Māori have consistently and successfully resisted outside attempts to “emancipate” them (p. 213). Hokowhitu (2009) critiques “decolonisation” approaches as they keep Indigenous peoples in positions of “victimhood” and search for traditional pasts while overlooking the “immediacy” of Indigenous cultures (p.104). Indigenous methodologies, like all methodologies, must be continually critically reflected on and discussed. The important difference for Indigenous academics using Indigenous methodologies is distinguishing between critiques intended to improve the field, and those intended to discredit it (Baker, 2009).

Indigenous methodologies focus on disrupting power hierarchies and the ongoing legacy of colonialism. Their emphasis on establishing Indigenous sovereignty, relationality, and Indigenous epistemologies and languages distinguish IM from CBPR. While participatory methodologies offer a refreshing and important alternative view of the relationship between researcher and researched, the distinctions between epistemological foundations of Indigenous and Western thought warrant a separate Indigenous framework. This is not to argue the dismissal of all Western theory and tools because they do not come from Indigenous communities, an argument which Kovach (2009) calls “a load of bull” (p. 91). It is important for Indigenous research to use the best tools available to answer questions that the community designs. Using Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies that are distinct from Western paradigms such as CBPR is precisely the conscientization and resistance that participatory methodologies have always advocated for.

Integrating methodologies

IM and CBPR are distinct but related, and each offer tools that were useful for this current research. I aimed to emulate researchers conducting CBPR with IM using decolonial and Indigenous feminisms as a theoretical framework (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal, 2016;

Anderson, 2009; Anderson & Cidro, 2019; Archibald et al., 2019; Barker, 2017; Chilisa, 2020; Gaudet, 2014; Green, 2017a; McGuire-Adams, 2020; Nickel & Fehr, 2020; Simpson, 2014; Smith, 1999; Suzack et al., 2010; Wilson, 2003). Each paper uses tenets of CBPR and IM in different ways, which affirmed for me the use of these methodologies, not as prescriptive methods, but as approaches to research. Overall, I was guided by CBPR and IM concepts of relational accountability (Kovach, 2009; McGuire-Adams, 2020; Wilson, 2008). Whether or not I am physically present in the community, when I speak to community members or write about a community, I am accountable to my relationships in that community, as well as my relationships with the network of people who introduced me to the community. I am accountable to my colleagues and peers and to my family. For example, the first paper relied on the strong social networks my research team had built over sixteen years. The paper on the Wapekeka's COVID-19 response was only possible because of positive prior relationships with members of IHRG that I was invited into. Through those relationships, we became part of wider social networks. For example, Stan Anderson, deputy chief of Wapekeka First Nation, directed us to the people to speak with to tell the story, communicated back and forth about how to share this information, and was a co-author on the paper, as it was his story – not ours. I approached this thesis, and hope to approach all future research, guided by the principle that building and maintaining positive relationships is paramount to the research question and work produced (Wilson, 2008).

Methods

IM and CBPR necessitate that the research questions, design, goals, and objectives are determined *by* and *with* the community, and that these methods are flexible and responsive to insights gained throughout the process, the passing of the seasons, and the interests and energies of the community members involved. However, CBPR practitioners have noted that although

initiation from the community is ideal, in reality some questions are more likely to be posed by the researchers (Castleden et al., 2012), which is not necessarily a negative thing, depending on the nature of the project (Anderson & Cidro, 2019) and the nature of the relationship. Indigenous methods, or in other words, “techniques to gather data” (Kovach, 2005, p. 31), include multiple sources. There are many ways to better collect information and data when in community, some of which include authentic relationships and experiential participation (Manitowabi & Gauthier-Frohlick, 2012), talking circles (Wilson, 2008), and “yarning,” a conversational process that facilitates free flowing story sharing (Walker et al., 2014). My research has relied on participation, semi-structured interviews, and endeavoring to follow the “visiting way” (Gaudet, 2019). The specific methods used are interwoven into the chapters below.

In Chapter 5, “Can selling traditional food increase food sovereignty for First Nations in northwestern Ontario (Canada)?”, I used semi-structured interviews with a conversational method. The conversations took place between May and July 2020 over Zoom, text, telephone, and Facebook audio. We conducted semi-structured interviews with 16 people from partnering communities in northern Ontario: Kasabonika Lake First Nation; Moose Cree First Nation; Wunnumin Lake First Nation; and Wapekeka First Nation. As I had just commenced my PhD, I relied on the relationships that other members of the IHRG (specifically, M.A. Robidoux, J.C. Gaudet, and C. Ferreira) had built over the last 16 years working in community. I also was able to have conversations with three people I had built relationships with while working as a teacher in Kasabonika Lake First Nation in 2016. This purposive sampling was accompanied by snowball sampling, as those we initially spoke to pointed us to other community members interested in food related issues in their communities. All members of our research team were present for each interview which created informal, candid, and meandering conversations that

lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. We recorded all interviews with voice memo apps and other online and external recording devices, while all team members who were not leading the conversation took notes. Audio recordings were transcribed, and a thematic analysis was conducted following three readings of the transcripts to determine, organize, and consolidate themes. After the paper was written, copies were sent out to participants for verification.

In Chapter 6: “Wapekeka’s COVID-19 Response: A Local Response to a Global Pandemic,” we were able to find a brief window in October 2021 to visit Wapekeka First Nation to speak with community members in person. On our way to Wapekeka, we met up with the deputy chief (S.A.) and key player in Wapekeka’s COVID-19 food response in Thunder Bay who advised us of others to meet with. Over our seven days in community, we were able to conduct semi-structured interviews with five people in between visits, dinners, beaver trapping, and volleyball games. Upon our return to Ottawa, we conducted one interview over the phone. The semi-structured interviews were recorded with voice memos app or through note-taking, and all audio recordings were transcribed. All interview transcriptions and notes were read over multiple times to determine points of convergence and divergence in experiences in order to stitch the stories into a narrative of Wapekeka’s pandemic response together. A draft paper was sent out to participants for accuracy and feedback.

Chapter 7 used vastly different methods as its approach was more of a critical reflection on the possibility of achieving food sovereignty in northern Ontario. It relied on reviewing literature of relevant scholarship in food sovereignty, Indigenous food sovereignty, and the ecology of northern Ontario with a decolonial feminist political ecologist lens.

Chapter 5:

Can Selling Traditional Food Increase Food Sovereignty for First Nations in Northwestern Ontario (Canada)?

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Chapter 5: Can Selling Traditional Food Increase Food Sovereignty for First Nations in Northwestern Ontario (Canada)?

Keira Loukes^{a,c*}, Celeste Ferreira^{a,c}, Cindy Gaudet^{b,c} and Michael Robidoux^{a,c}

^aSchool of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada; ^bCampus Saint-Jean, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada; ^cIndigenous Health Research Group, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada K1N6N5

Abstract

The disparity between rates of food insecurity experienced in households across Canada (8.3%) and in Indigenous households specifically (nearly half) is alarming. Many previous studies have demonstrated the physical, spiritual, mental, social, and emotional benefits of consuming traditional foods (primarily wild animal food sources and wild edible plants), yet many Indigenous peoples in northern Ontario feel they do not have access to enough of them. Our research engaged in conversation with sixteen participants from four different First Nations communities in northern Ontario to explore the potential application of Greenland's "Country Food Market" (CFM) as a model to increase accessibility of traditional food while maintaining community sovereignty over the resource. In this model, full-time hunters are financially sustained through selling their harvest at local markets. While participants were curious about the potential an economy around traditional food could have for improving access, this was tempered by cultural ethics, teachings and laws which instruct hunters to share their food and by concerns of resource overexploitation. As our research confirms, conversations and actions must move away from a binary approach to the question – either to sell or not to sell – and move towards a diverse range of economic models that center Indigenous peoples' sovereignty.

Keywords: food sovereignty, Indigenous, food security, traditional food market, northern Ontario

Introduction

“Some people can’t afford not to sell. Then there’s some people who can’t afford to buy.”

- Knowledge Keeper from Moose Factory, 2020

Canada is a resource rich country that typically ranks amongst the highest in the world for most economic and quality of life categories, yet nearly half of all Indigenous households in Canada face moderate to severe food insecurity (Chan et al., 2019). In northern Ontario specifically, this rate can rise to 70% (Food Secure Canada, 2016), where most meals are nutritionally inadequate due to limited access to and exorbitant costs of healthy food options (Chan et al., 2019). These alarming numbers become particularly concerning because they are so much higher than the national food insecurity average (8.3%) (Statistics Canada, 2015). There has been extensive research and many community-based initiatives responding to the disproportionate rates of food insecurity and consequent health issues related to food shortages (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2018). Despite these efforts, food security challenges persist (Batal et al., 2021) because they are logistically complicated and require long-term systemic change for real and long-lasting impacts (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017). The historical and contemporary roots of these inequities are systemically informed by a long trajectory of colonial and capitalist ideologies (see Loomba, 2005) dating as far back as the 17th Century.

Many Indigenous communities have repeatedly emphasized and focused on the importance of reviving and strengthening traditional land-based practices and food systems that have existed in their communities for generations in an effort to improve access to nutritious food. Their long-standing efforts to strengthen traditional land-based food systems are emerging in recent research (Gaudet, 2017; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Settee, 2018; Simpson &

Coulthard, 2014; Thompson, 2018). These efforts are celebrated and supported by community members yet tend to rely on piecemeal funding from government initiatives, pilot-projects, and short-term research grants. While many initiatives are effective, working with the State (in the way intended by the Treaties) remains difficult for communities who are often dealing with delayed release of funding, onerous applications, and reporting requirements. These imposed impediments further exhaust communities already strained by responding to many other challenges such as healing historical trauma, accessing healthcare and educational opportunities, navigating extractive resource development agreements, and advocating for Treaty rights and land claims to be acknowledged and respected, in addition to managing food shortages, which are intricately tied to the aforementioned challenges.

Country Food Markets in Greenland, known locally as *kalaalimineerniarfik* (“the area where the sale of Greenlandic food occurs”) provide a potential model for improving access to traditional food³ sources without relying on external funding. Initiated in 1996, these markets were designed to encourage the sustainable consumption of nutritious and culturally valued foods, while at the same time, delivering economic support to local hunters. These markets have been found to decrease the need for imported foods, promote Indigenous hunting practices, reduce reliance on government subsidies and promote consumption of nutritious and culturally valued foods (Marquardt & Caulfield, 1996). This model has piqued the interest of food advocates and researchers in northern Canada as a way to increase access to country food and economic opportunities (Ford et al., 2016; MacDonald et al., n.d.; Searles, 2016). A Country Food Market driven by the Nunavut government was attempted in Iqaluit in 2012 and

³ While arctic regions tend to refer to wild food sources as “country food”, in northern Ontario, the term “traditional food” is more commonly used.

subsequently discontinued in 2013 for a variety of reasons (see Searles, 2016). Although we recognize there are many differences between Greenland, Nunavut and Ontario, like Searles (2016), our research team was interested in exploring, with members of our partnering communities, how an iteration of Greenland's Country Food Markets might "make nutrient-rich country food more accessible" (Searles, 2016, p. 196) for remote First Nations communities in northern Ontario.

Conversations with local community members in four remote First Nations in this region explored insights around the barriers hunters and community members face in accessing traditional food, the initiatives that are working to improve access, and the potential development of a traditional food market model in this region. We have summarized these conversations into two broad themes: 1) access and barriers to traditional foods in northern Ontario; and 2) the ways in which creating an economy around traditional food could be a viable means of increasing harvesting capacity to facilitate more regular access to traditional foods.

Research Project Context

Historical and contemporary realities of systemic racism and colonial control over Indigenous resources, lives, bodies and governance, along with the high cost of hunting, gaps in intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, and environmental changes have led to a steady decline in land-based food practices (Guyot et al., 2006; Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2019; Lemelin et al., 2010; Pal, Haman, et al., 2013; Skinner et al., 2013). As opposed to processed food from grocery stores, traditional food including land mammals (e.g., moose, caribou), fish (e.g., whitefish, sturgeon), water fowl (e.g., geese, ducks), and harvested plants (e.g., berries, medicines) is important on a nutritional, medicinal (Wilson, 2003), emotional, spiritual and cultural level (Kelm, 1998; LaDuke, 2005, pp. 191–210). Yet, the ongoing

suggestion to simply eat more traditional food does not acknowledge or address the barriers many northwestern Ontario families face accessing the land.

Dominant discourses of “food security” rely on apolitical framings of food shortages and focus on the idea that “caloric deficiencies can be met by simply increasing the availability of more calories” (Chappell, 2018, p. 50). These frameworks remain inadequate to address the colonial context in which Indigenous food shortages and subsequent health issues are situated. Food *sovereignty* serves as a more appropriate framework to challenge the structural inequities that lead to limited access to food (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017; Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016). Food sovereignty, a term coined by *La Via Campesina*, focuses on “the rights of local peoples to determine their own agricultural and food policy, organize production and consumption to meet local needs, and secure access to land, water, and seed” (Wittman 2010, 96). Food sovereignty, as opposed to food security, is believed to be the “most innovative approach to addressing the complex issues impacting the ability of individuals, families and communities to respond to their own needs for healthy, culturally adapted Indigenous foods” (Morrison, 2008, p. 11). For food sovereignty to be an appropriate framework for Indigenous food shortages, it must account for the colonial claim of “possession” of land in the context of ongoing land and treaty disputes and Indigenous peoples’ worldview of food sovereignty (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019; Morrison, 2008, p. 12; Settee, 2018).

Historical context

There are important historical and political factors that have led to the dismantling of Indigenous food systems and ongoing food shortages. Although food shortages were periodically experienced by Indigenous populations in pre-colonial years, Daschuk’s (2013) research in western Canada reveals how Indigenous land based food systems were in direct competition with

the Canadian government's demand for land and resources. Canada's nation-building efforts involved disrupting, or in some cases eradicating, Indigenous land access and undermining Indigenous food sovereignty (Asch, 1998; Borrows, 2010; Daschuk, 2013; Long, 2010; McAdam, 2015; Simpson, 2003, 2014; Tully, 2000). Before contact with Europeans, Indigenous families in northern Ontario lived in small (10-15) kin based hunting groups that followed land mammal food sources throughout much of the year, remaining more stationary in the summer months to live by water sources with a steady supply of fish (Steege Jr., 1983a; Taylor, 1972). These small, intimate kin-based groups facilitated experiential and intergenerational on-the-land learning for the entire family (Bird, 2020). This way of life began to shift with the arrival of Europeans in the 1600s, who required First Nations partnerships largely to establish their own position in the fur trade (Long 2010; Pal et al. 2013). By 1670, the British had set up a Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) post on the western shore of James Bay and Hudson's Bay, and the post staff and traders became dependent on "homeguard" food providers (the Oji-Cree, Anishinaabe, and Cree hunters) for a century.

While the establishment of the HBC and the introduction of a new economy to northern Ontario brought some prosperity to some communities—specifically those who engaged with "middlemen" trade (Daschuk, 2013)—it also drastically altered their lifestyles (Herring & Swedlund, 2003; Long, 2010). The demands of the fur trade combined with booming fur populations put so much rapid and intense pressure on wild food sources, it became increasingly difficult to sustain families by relying solely on the land. Hunters traded wild game (as food and pelts) for western goods from the HBC and the Northwest Company. The increased relocation around trading posts for better access to western goods, such as food and tools, put new pressures on the area surrounding settlements. As fur trade resources started to deplete on the coast,

traders, and thus their forts, started to move into the interior of northern Ontario. The building of the Canadian Pacific Railway enabled non-Indigenous hunters and trappers to move further north for their game (especially beaver), which further decimated food sources (Morrison, 1986). The food shortages that ensued left many communities with limited choices, vulnerable to government promises and deals such as James Bay Treaty (Treaty 9, 1905-1906)⁴ (see Pal et al. 2013, 136–38; Long 2010). Food shortages in Indigenous communities were leveraged by the Canadian government to entice Indigenous communities to “cede” their land in exchange for the promise of food, protection, health care, and education (Daschuk, 2013). With limited resources remaining, many community leaders reluctantly signed Treaty 9 in order to protect their communities from further encroachment of settlers on their lands and to ensure adequate health care, education and safety for their families (Long, 2010). As with many treaties signed across Canada, “the government’s primary intentions concerning the treaties were to convince Indigenous peoples to relinquish their land rights and to assimilate them into broader Anglo and Franco Euro-Canadian society” (Mason, 2014, p. 30).

John Long’s extensive Treaty 9 research reveals that the oral agreement of “respectful reciprocity” between Canada and Indigenous nations included promises of prosperity, land rights, and continued sovereignty in all its senses (2010). He (2010) explains,

Canada, the new *ogimaa* or *akiwmaaw* [meaning leader who looks after you in Cree and Anishinaabemowin], would betray Indigenous expectations in far northern Ontario, as it already had among their Great Lakes neighbors... Indigenous peoples might still expect

⁴ Treaty 9 (James Bay Treaty) is one of the Treaties signed with communities in northwestern Ontario. Unlike other numbered treaties, Treaty 9 was written by the provincial and federal governments prior to being presented to the communities – there were no changes to the written document after meeting with Indigenous leaders. All communities in this particular study fall within Treaty 9 territory.

to be treated as respected allies in the negotiated and balanced coexistence, but their former partners had moved on to a new paradigm of control and marginalization (p. 23). Although Treaty 9 does state that signatories “shall have the right to pursue their usual vocations of hunting, trapping and fishing throughout the tract surrendered” it stipulates, “saving and excepting such tracts as may be required or taken up from time to time for settlement, mining, lumbering, trading or other purposes” (James Bay Treaty (Treaty 9), 1905-6). It is important to note that there is ongoing research into the disparity between the oral promises of Treaty 9 and the written document itself (Kennedy, 2011; Obamsawin, 2014).

The colonial government of Canada’s overt dominance created further vulnerabilities to subsequent policies controlling Indigenous livelihoods, education, and families, such as the *Indian Act* of 1876. For example, mandatory attendance at residential schools forced relocation of Indigenous children away from their homes and families, separating them from their traditional and land-based teachings. Among other abuses, lack of access to nutritious food was a common theme; in fact, malnutrition was so pervasive, the Canadian government used children attending Indian Residential Schools (IRS) in their national food experiments⁵ (Mosby, 2013; Mosby & Galloway, 2017). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s inquiry (2015) and the extensive research into IRS demonstrates the far reaching intergenerational impacts IRS has had on the health of Indigenous communities (Bombay et al., 2009, 2011, 2014; Kirmayer et al., 2007; TRC, 2016; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004; Wilk et al., 2017). The overt racialization of Indigenous peoples’ lives and bodies was so deeply entrenched in

⁵ Between 1942 and 1952, the Canadian government conducted nutritional experiments on Indigenous populations in Northern Manitoba and in six ‘Indian Residential Schools’ without consent or knowledge from the participants. These experiments were conducted by the Department of Indian Affairs of Canada and continued despite children’s deaths. Control and treatment groups of malnourished children were denied adequate nutrition so different treatments could be experimented (see Mosby et al., 2013).

colonial superiority and laws that it justified the State's attempt to take over the control of Indigenous people's land, food, governance, knowledge, education and family.

It is important to make clear that Canada's interference with Indigenous lives and control over Indigenous bodies is not solely a historical phenomenon. The education system and racist child welfare policies (Blackstock, 2016) continue to perpetuate the historical legacy of separating children from their homes and ways of knowing by educating and raising Indigenous youth in western-centric schools and non-Indigenous families. Today, many youths are forced to leave their communities and travel upwards of 500 km to live with a family that receives financial support to board students in order to attend high school. Not only does living in a city limit access to their community's traditional knowledge, it can also be an unsafe place for Indigenous youth to live (Talaga, 2017). Although elementary education is largely band run, secondary school continues to follow the western-centric Ontario curriculum, with little focus on Indigenous cultures, practices, livelihoods and ways of knowing. It is important to note, however, that there are examples of programs that are working to centre land-based Indigenous knowledges into western education systems (CBC, 2020; Cram, 2019; Hadley, 2019). Program funding, such as *Choose Life*⁶, which is viewed with overwhelming positivity by many communities (Barrera, 2019), provides a large budget which allows communities to provide land-based learning opportunities for their youth. However, government control over the amount and release timing of this funding is not in line with the concept of Indigenous sovereignty over

⁶ *Choose Life* is a program that Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) (the Tribal Council representing communities in Treaty 9) advocated for and developed "to ensure no First Nation community would be denied programming funding that promotes the mental, emotional and behavioral well-being of youth" (NAN 2020). It was initiated in response to a crisis of suicides in the region and was designed to simplify, streamline and fast track community applications for federal funding through Jordan's Principle, which is federal funding designated to support mental, emotional well-being of Indigenous youth (ISC, 2020).

food systems. If the funding to build community capacity, rights to the land and minerals, and control over education is governed by the government of Canada, how do Indigenous communities in northern Ontario exercise sovereignty over the revitalization and growth of Indigenous food systems?

Methods

In an effort to explore the possibility of the Greenland country food market model and to learn together the best ways to address the ongoing food security and food sovereignty challenges in northern Canada, our multidisciplinary research group engaged in conversations with remote northern First Nations communities to learn about the potential to develop an economy around traditional food to support hunters, increase access to traditional food, and guide our continued research efforts. This research builds on over fifteen years of ethnographic and participatory action research throughout northern Canada but focuses specifically on the most northern regions of Ontario (see Figure 1). This includes fieldwork involving researchers living in communities for extended periods of time participating in food harvesting activities, wild food processing, family meals and community feasts, assisting in the development of local food harvesting infrastructure (e.g., purchasing community freezers, building greenhouses and gardens) and supporting local food strategies. Our Indigenous Health Research Group (IHRG), made up of researchers from fields ranging from ethnology, biology, nutrition, and health sciences, has worked in partnership with Tribal Councils and remote northern First Nation communities to learn about and experience firsthand local food systems, land-based food patterns, and challenges faced in accessing food from the land, and continues to work alongside leadership as they build local food capacity and distribution models. Research ethics approval was granted by the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board (H-05-18-607).

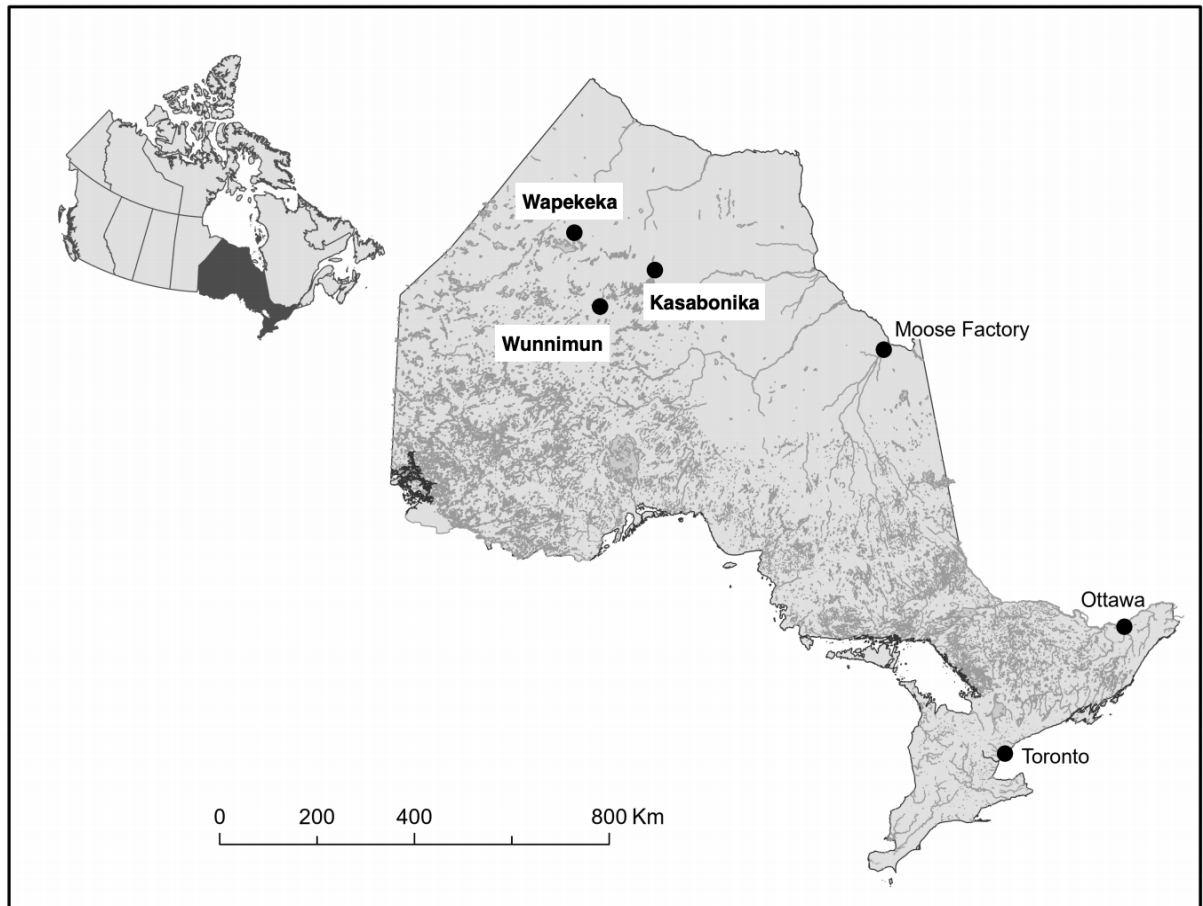


Figure 1. Map identifying the location of the northern First Nation communities of Moose Cree (Moose Factory), Kasabonika, Wunnimun and Wapekeka in Ontario, Canada.

Conversations took place between May and July 2020 and involved semi-structured interviews with 16 people from four partnering communities in northern Ontario: Kasabonika Lake First Nation; Moose Cree First Nation (Moose Factory); Wunnimun Lake First Nation; and Wapekeka First Nation. The initial people we approached to participate in the interviews were people we have come to know over the course of our fieldwork either as a result of their active involvement in food procurement initiatives in their communities or simply through relationships we have established over the years. This type of purposive sampling was accompanied by snowball sampling, where those initially approached introduced us to other community members who were interested in food related issues in their community. This mix of purposive and

snowball sampling led to a diverse range of participants made up of community leaders, food harvesters/preparers, and general community members of different ages and gender. To help demonstrate participant diversity while maintaining participant anonymity, a participant table is included (Table 1) where each participant is assigned a code and referenced in the manuscript with this code.⁷ All participants were provided informed consent forms to confirm their voluntary participation in the study. The semi-structured interview guide covered themes related to: 1) participants' overall perception of access to traditional food; 2) barriers experienced in accessing traditional food and; 3) whether selling traditional food through a market system was viewed as a viable way to improve food access. All members of the research team attempted to be present for each interview in order to have varied conversational methods and diverse perspectives on the participants' responses. This created an interview space that was more akin to a candid and meandering conversation than a research interview, exploring together the possibilities of an economic model to support initiatives already occurring at the community level.

⁷ KF= Kasabonika Female; KM = Kasabonika Male; WF = Wapekeka Female; WM = Wapekeka Male; MCF = Moose Cree Female; MCM = Moose Cree Male; WuM = Wunnumin Male (only one participant from Wunnumin First Nation).

Table 1: List of participant codes and associated community.

Participant code	Community	Gender	Age range
KF1	Kasabonika	F	55-65
KF2	Kasabonika	F	55-65
KF3	Kasabonika	F	40-50
KF4	Kasabonika	F	35-45
KM1	Kasabonika	M	40-50
KM2	Kasabonika	M	20-25
WM1	Wapekeka	M	25-35
WM2	Wapekeka	M	35-45
WM3	Wapekeka	M	35-45
WF	Wapekeka	F	35-45
MCM1	Moose Cree	M	60-65
MCM2	Moose Cree	M	60-65
MCM3	Moose Cree	M	60-65
MCF1	Moose Cree	F	60-65
MCF2	Moose Cree	F	60-65
WuM	Wunnumin	M	35-45

Unfortunately, due to travel restrictions and risks associated with COVID-19, no interviews were conducted in person. Interviews were conducted over Zoom, Skype, FaceTime (audio and video), phone and/or Facebook discussion. All interviews were audio-recorded with voice memo apps, online recorders, and external recording devices, conducted in English, and varied from 30 – 90 minutes in length. The researchers who were not leading the discussion took notes, observed, and augmented the conversation with new questions and perspectives as they arose. Following the interview, all researchers added key concepts and ideas that stood out to them into a shared document and continued the meeting to discuss some recurring themes and any adjustments that could be made to strengthen future interviews. After completing the 16 interviews, they were transcribed by two members of the research team. A thematic analysis was conducted which required deep listening, multiple readings, and immersion in the data. The first

reading of each transcript involved adding notes in the documents' margins to highlight recurrent themes and poignant points. The second reading involved organizing these notes and quotes under theme headings. A third reading involved consolidating various themes from each interview. The themes developed across interviews were then grouped and reorganized to give a summarized and nuanced picture of all of the participants' perspectives. Finally, interviewers' initial reflections and perspectives were reviewed and included in an attempt to capture the varied interpretations of our diverse research team.

It is important to state that the research for this project, as all other IHRG projects, is community based, in that it involves working with communities to find community led solutions. As we reveal later in the Discussion section, the ideas being put forth in this paper are not new to northern communities and we do not pretend to have magic solutions. Instead we work from the premise "that people know and can reflect on their own lives, have questions and priorities of their own, have skills and sensitivities which can enhance (or undermine) any community-based projects" (Smith, 1999, p. 127). The research for this project is part of a five-year research program that was designed with community leaders which Smith (1999) describes as an important first step in demystifying and decolonizing the methods, focus, questions, analysis, and results of the research. The meaningful relationships that we have and continue to establish with community members is extremely important for the overall effectiveness of these research collaborations. Indeed, the research we conduct is only valuable if it is of interest and service to the communities.

Results

All participants want greater access to traditional foods. This went beyond caloric necessities; participants commented that traditional food makes them feel "alive," is healthier

than store-bought food, and that they feel “something is missing” when they go without it. All participants stated that their communities had an interest in having greater access to traditional food, but that certain barriers interacted to greatly limit that access. There was also considerable ambivalence around the idea of selling traditional food. The following presentation of results is broken into primary categories of responses: “Challenges to accessing traditional foods” and “Traditional food market potential in northern Ontario.”

Challenges to accessing traditional food

Twelve participants raised concerns that available traditional food (including wild game, fish, and berries) is decreasing and has become consistently unreliable as climatic changes impact the migration patterns and habitats of the desired game (e.g., geese) and enable new species (e.g., eagle, cormorants) to settle. A woman in her forties explained that “It was not uncommon for families to get like 300 [geese]...and it was maybe within the last 10 years we only got that amount once” (WF). A male in the same age range explained that with fewer migratory birds, hunters “have to travel to the coast [of James Bay] to get waterfowl and other types of birds that costs a lot for the Band [community leadership] to support” (WM). Many people explained that these new species put more pressure on food resources as they deplete fish stocks for the community and increase fecal pollution in the waters (e.g., cormorants): “This year I saw 3 flocks of about 20 cormorants; they were never around here before and they eat a lot of fish. And their poop is really toxic. It kills the vegetation” (MCM2). Hot summers and dams interact to dry up rivers and further limit hunters’ access to game. Another factor identified was the introduction of industries such as mining and forestry which were said to decrease habitat available for wild game, and that efforts to replant trees have failed to create diverse forests. One male elder told us that “What we are finding is that forestry companies will go in and cut down a

forest and then they would replant but they replant for forestry, not an actual forest. They don't replant to redevelop the habitat, so you end up with dead forests" (MCM3).

The most cited barrier to getting on the land, mentioned by fifteen of the sixteen participants, was the cost of equipment. Equipment such as boats, motors, snowmobiles, nets, ammunition, storage facilities, community freezers, personal freezers and outdoor clothing are some of the essentials for harvesting and storing food, which have become prohibitively expensive. One woman in her fifties said, "there are families who don't have the equipment to go out there, like boats and motors and Skidoos and stuff like that; if you want more people out there hunting, they would need to get more Skidoos for them" (KF1). This was echoed by one man who said that things have "changed a lot like financially... nowadays we need a lot of money to buy gas, to buy equipment, hunting stuff, supplies, ammunition, stuff like that. Even boats, motors, they cost a lot" (WM2). In response to these financial barriers, many communities: 1) funded hunters to purchase fuel and equipment; and 2) shared traditional food with those who could not access it. For example, one Band Council "lower[s] the price of fuel from \$2.50/L to \$1.75/L for about 2-3 weeks during hunting season" (KF4). All participants expressed that their communities rely on sharing networks to reduce the gap in access to traditional food. This involves distributing food amongst extended families first, followed by community elders, single parent homes, and those on social assistance. One woman described this informal food sharing networks as follows: "People will distribute what they catch with the people who haven't had a chance to go out there...mostly the elders and young families who are not able to go out there as much...it's been like that for a while...mostly everybody gets something" (KF1). All participants said that food was distributed equally to anyone who wanted it. To many, providing food was a source of pride and signified a resurgence in cultural practices

and community unity: “What I see that’s going on is that we’re able to go back to the way we were, using those same principles of kinship and families; that is what they have done for time immemorial” (MCM1).

One final theme around barriers to time on the land was intergenerational knowledge disruption as a result of the government introduced and religious led residential school system in Canada. In this system, created in the late 19th Century and in operation into the 1990s, children were forced to leave their homes to attend school which prevented many from learning critical life skills including learning to live on the land. One woman in her late fifties revealed that she is only now learning traditional ways. She said, “a lot of things I did not learn as a child because I was in residential school and then on to high school: and some of the things I am just learning right now” (KF1). Another woman stated that she “started hunting, like using my own firearms in my early 20s in which my father and brother taught me...I was busy being in school out of town before then” (KF3). This has resulted in a stark reduction in the number of hunters who know the land and how to navigate the river systems. It is this rupture in generational knowledge that has made educating youth so vital in the land-based initiatives. Many participants voiced that the knowledge is not completely lost – but they had to catch up and learn these skills when they returned to their community. One male in his early forties described how “the whole community is making pemmican because my wife has been teaching young girls how to do it, so there’s a lot of young people that are learning. And that’s what I see in the community now, that people are starting to do what they learn, or whatever they were taught from community” (WuM). The participants discussed the need for more mentors to teach the youth land-based skills, as many youths who want to learn do not have anyone to teach them. All participants commented that their community and leaders notice these breaks in land-based knowledge

transmission and in response, have implemented strategies to revitalize these traditional teachings through government funded programs. *Choose Life* was consistently cited as a very positive solution to the gaps in intergenerational knowledge: “I have noticed in my community the decline in hunters and the amount of traditional food the community gets each year, but programs such as *Choose Life* have taught the youth to hunt and therefore have distributed food to the people” (KF3). Other participants made similar connections to the *Choose Life* funding and mentors and a recent resurgence in the number of hunters in their communities.

Traditional food market potential in northern Ontario

When participants were asked to offer their thoughts on the potential for developing some form of traditional food market to generate economic return to help support local harvesting activities, there were mixed responses. One young man was strongly opposed to the idea saying selling wild game “is something I would never do. I was always taught to give away traditional food. Better to give than to take. My grandfather taught me that if you sell wild game you won’t get ‘em” (KM2). Some participants were wary of the “corporate” mindset and greed that could accompany commoditization of traditional foods: “people will start to think ‘Oh yeah, I can make some money off of it, there’s lots of moose this year, let’s go shoot them and smoke them and sell them just because we can make money.’ So there’s a danger to that, pushing for traditional food markets” (MCM1). Conversely, one respondent was quite open to the idea: “I am pretty sure the new hunters would be interested in a traditional food market” (WM3). Another man said people are already selling traditional food: “even in town too, they sell fish, wild food plates...and so I can buy sturgeon plates and pickerel plates and goose plates, moose plates, so there are people that do sell wild meat” (MCM2). All participants noted that their communities have always shared traditional food following long-held distribution networks, yet it was clear

that there was some flexibility in how economic exchange was defined by communities. One woman shared, “I know ladies that do sell pemmican and, you know, the people are always asking for that, even from other communities, or people that live in the city. They’ll buy it from the ladies that do that in the community. I know when it is blueberry season, people sell their blueberries as well” (WF). Another example was provided by a male in his thirties who explained that trading or compensating a hunter for fuel is in line with the value of sharing. He said, “you get something, you give something back. I didn’t pay a single dollar for killing these geese...as long as I got some gas money for the boat, I was happy with that; there’s a lot of costs to going out hunting” (WM3). Although all participants said that selling traditional food was not widely viewed as culturally appropriate in their communities, one third of all participants believed that a market could improve overall access to traditional foods and all participants acknowledged that some people were selling their wild game already. There were positive reactions to the idea of hiring hunters. Currently, one requires an income to afford to get on the land, but if income was secured through hunting, hunters would be able to dedicate more time to food harvesting. This would also lead to more hunter training and bring in more traditional food for the community. It was also believed that the availability of hunting jobs would entice more youth to learn to hunt.

In addition to concerns around the cultural appropriateness of selling traditional food, there were concerns raised about overhunting and stressing scarce resources. In general, participants were not comfortable with selling certain types of food resources, such as moose and some types of fish, for the fear of overexploitation: “There’s not enough rabbits, there’s not enough fish, there’s not enough birds, there just isn’t; you can’t overkill” (MCM1). Another person associated selling wild food with a failed commercial fishery in his region. He said “when

I was a kid back in the 1980s, there was a commercial fishery here... What happened that time was that they overkilled the walleye, and that's what happens, they overkilled the fish when there [was] a commercial fishery" (WuM). With this said, there were a couple of participants who believed that a market and the associated community governance it would require could actually help to regulate and sustain these resources in the community. One person provided this detailed response:

Traditional food markets could be an opportunity to make an economy out of conservation. And this could be part of it, creating markets for land users, stewardship, things of that nature. If people saw the benefits of doing something like that, they would consider it. You know we have had ideas of doing stuff like that too, like access to resources that we have within the area without digging holes with mining, or things like that, you know? (MCF2)

A woman similarly stated that a traditional food market could "maintain resources within the community, increase the possibility of training youth/children in schools on local ecological systems/knowledge with an effort of engaging them at a younger age in the process" (MCM3).

Finally, while the majority of participants felt that Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) did not govern their hunting and fishing rights in their own territories, they were aware that the sale of wild game was illegal. One younger male was openly critical of OMNR regulations, stating, "According to the treaty we have the right to hunt; we don't have the right to sell our food. So the game wardens...they're always in there ensuring that we don't get to sell any of that food. As a matter of fact, they get so strict, they say you can't even give it to a white person to eat, you can't even share this with a white person, it's crazy" (WM3). There were also concerns that other hunters, including Indigenous hunters from nearby communities as

well as non-Indigenous hunters in the south, would be upset by the fact that some hunters were selling their game. This critique extended to concerns about how communities would be able to protect animal habitat necessary to enable an economy of traditional food when the province of Ontario is currently heavily focused on economic development through mining and forestry.

Discussion

This paper explored two broad themes: 1) the accessibility of traditional foods in northern Ontario and; 2) the ways in which a commodity economy around traditional food might improve access. In congruence with numerous previous studies, this research has demonstrated that Indigenous families in northern Ontario want more access to traditional, locally harvested foods (Chan et al., 2019; Melillo, 2018; Robidoux & Mason, 2017). Our results indicate that the barriers to accessing these foods are complex, interdependent, and inextricably linked to historical and contemporary colonial policies that continue to limit Indigenous governance over traditional lands, teachings, families, and food systems. The idea of a traditional food market was discussed within multiple scenarios holding together multiple realities. Participants saw the potential it held to revitalize Indigenous food systems and increase traditional food access, while acknowledging the potential it held to disrupt the cultural laws, practices, and teachings around traditional food as part of a sharing and gifting economy. Indeed, Indigenous economies emphasizing food sharing centre on the sustenance of communities as opposed to the exchange for profit and rely on principles of sustainability and reciprocity, conveying continuity of identity, culture and values to strengthen and reify relationships and social networks (Kuokkanen, 2011). Yet, there were some participants who felt there could be ways to maintain the integrity of these cultural laws while also creating an “economy of conservation” (MCM3). For example, the market would depend on the conservation of the resource, which is in line with

traditional teachings to “leave some” for the rest of the ecosystem (MCM1). Others suggested that the market could support sharing networks and bring in more food for the community - by selling food to people from outside the community (e.g., settlers or international markets), income could be generated to hire hunters and pay for equipment to bring in more food to be shared amongst the community. There are many examples of persistent Indigenous “mixed economies”, where subsistence activities and commodity production occur together (BurnSilver et al., 2016; Kuokkanen, 2011; Poppel & Kruse, 2009). However, some participants felt that the introduction of a “corporate” mindset (MCM1) that may accompany economizing traditional food could work against their communities’ growing cultural resurgence.

It became overtly evident in our conversations that our western-trained approach and questions which uphold a binary - “to sell or not to sell” (Searles, 2016) - limited the ways in which creating an economy around traditional food could in fact fit within cultural laws and practices. The fact that economies around traditional food already exist in communities is evidence that communities have already developed solutions to navigate these nuances. Kuokkanen (2011) explains that “attempts to draw sharp divisions between subsistence and market economies usually result in misunderstandings of the scope of traditional economic systems and the ways in which they continue to be embedded in larger social organization of communities” (p. 222). The desire for research to come up with a “solution” or an answer to the question “to sell or not to sell” is a part of the problem itself as it implies that Indigenous peoples have not themselves engaged, advocated for, or explored solutions. In conversation with community membership, ideas from community members and our research team were explored such as creating a system where consumers do not directly buy the meat, but instead, pay into a fund to help the hunters to pay for their equipment, gas, and time on the land. This idea is akin to

the Hunter Support Program (HSP) in Nunavik, where hunters are paid to supply country food which is given away to those who need it, allowing Inuit to navigate their “obligation to share country foods and the need to sell them” (Gombay, 2005, p. 116) by allowing country food to flexibly move into and out of commodity status (Gombay, 2009). Other ideas explored with participants included the possibility that abundant resources (such as cranberries and/or wild rice) are sold internationally at a premium price which funds the hunters to continue food sharing amongst the community. To enable social equity and collective wellbeing, diverse pricing systems could vary depending on circumstances, as well as for Indigenous consumers and non-Indigenous settlers. Our reflections and conversations became richer when we detached from an either-or question or solution, and when ideas were envisioned to be built on the Indigenous economies that already exist.

Greenland’s model of “Country Food Markets,” in which full time hunters harvest food to sell to others for prices more affordable than store-bought foods, was discussed as a potential model for northern Ontario to explore in order to improve access to traditional food and sovereignty over local food systems. The ability to support full time hunters could potentially increase access to traditional food, support hunters, and generate revenue to be used in hunter-development and land-based youth programs. Overall, the question of how a traditional food market could be a viable and effective way to increase community access to traditional food was met with curiosity, resistance, enthusiasm, and hesitation. Although every participant noted that selling wild game was not aligned with cultural laws, teachings, and traditions, they all knew of hunters who did sell their harvest within a specific context that was meaningful to them.

Participants felt that the sale of processed foods (i.e., canned moose, pemmican, plates of food)

and pelts was more socially acceptable than the sale of unprocessed wild game.⁸ The importance of sharing traditional food as a cultural expectation as well as an adaptation to food insecurity has been previously documented (Skinner et al., 2013). While all participants said that they would not directly *ask* someone for money, they would accept money in the form of fuel payments or trade. This allows the hunter to be supported financially without requiring them to ask their friends, family, and/or community members directly for money and allows the buyer to set the price they can afford. It also demonstrates that the hunters in this study are not attempting to make a profit off of their harvest – they are more interested in sharing the cost of hunting. This is a clear difference between a relational, reciprocal economic exchange and a capitalist economic exchange. It is important to note that the participants indicated that they *already* have a form of economy around traditional food, which involves informally compensating hunters through such measures as helping pay for fuel or ammunition. This led researchers to wonder, could an initiative which formalizes or organizes this augment the systems of exchange already present, or would it disrupt what is already working?

Some participants were optimistic that a traditional food market could improve access as more people would be able to afford to be on the land. Currently, only those who have some measure of gainful employment can afford to go hunting. For example, one person consciously reflected on his own privileged position in the community by saying, “Well today, I’m doing okay financially to be able to get out there. And so I can go out and do this kind of stuff whenever I want and wherever I want to go” (MCM1). This is in line with other findings which

⁸ We regretfully did not pursue this too much further with participants but is something we are currently exploring. We speculate that in a more processed state, the food is further removed from the original harvest and more acceptable for sale. From our preliminary conversations, this seems to be a stage generally practiced by women (but not exclusively). We are exploring these ideas further with communities.

show that high-income households tend to be high-harvest and high-sharing households (BurnSilver et al., 2016). Yet many people without regular employment have difficulty purchasing exorbitantly priced food from the store and cannot “afford to really go out and hunt and stay out there [on the land]” (MCM2). This was a source of ambivalence for people about the potential selling of traditional food, in that hunters were not comfortable with the idea of asking those who cannot afford to hunt to pay for the food they bring in. In fact, one person openly stated that “The community doesn’t want to sell it to the Indigenous people, but we could sell it to white people” (WuM). Some of the participants were interested in changing this dynamic by paying people to bring back food to the community and generating employment for harvesters and for those people who process the food.

The financial barriers expressed here and evidenced throughout much of the northern Canada (Chan et al., 2006; Lambden et al., 2006; Nelson et al., 2005) is perhaps already prompting the types of informal economic exchanges the participants of this research knew existed in and around their communities. While the participants we spoke with said they did not sell food themselves, they all referred to the fact that they know people who did. The fact that the sale of wild game takes place in communities despite cultural laws and teachings indicates that there are hunters who are in financial situations which require them to be compensated for the time and costs involved with hunting. It also indicates the breadth, complexity and depths of these particular Indigenous laws and economies: they are not binary but are context dependent. As one participant said, “some people can’t afford not to sell. Then there’s some people who can’t afford to buy” (MCM 1). Both ideas – selling and not selling – have the potential to further burden or support those who face financial hardships.

If not for the cultural sensitivities around selling traditional food, many participants believed a traditional food market would be an effective way to allow hunters to be on the land full time year-round as opposed to hunting being viewed as a pastime. Participants believed this would improve the condition for the hunters as well as bring in more food for the community. The idea of employing hunters to support traditional food harvest is a recurring suggestion from Indigenous communities (Skinner et al., 2013). Further, one participant was intrigued by the sovereignty that ownership over the traditional food market could bring – he imagined creating a credit system akin to the Northern Store⁹ but with a lower interest, essentially making traditional food more economically accessible and equitably available than store-bought foods.

It is important to note the major differences between *Kalaallit Nuunat* (Greenlandic for Greenland) and northern Ontario. The introduction of Country Food Markets originally came from Danish colonial influence – prior to the beginning of colonization in 1721, Greenlanders were using trading systems and kinship-based sharing networks in much the same way as participants in this study described (Marquardt & Caulfield, 1996). While *Kalaallit Nuunat* also went through periods of colonization, missionary presence, residential schooling, and subsequent disconnection from their own culture, their current autonomy over their own governance and land is drastically different from northern Ontario's. Colonial status was abandoned in 1953, and regional Home Rule was approved by Danish parliament in 1979 (Møller, 2011). In 2009, the *Self-Government Act* was approved and recognized Greenlanders (89% of whom identify as Inuit (Kuokkanen, 2017; Møller, 2011)) as a people with the right to self-determination under

⁹ “The Northern” store is a grocery store found in many communities in Northern Ontario. They often have credit systems for community members, with an interest rate of about 15%, although this rate may differ from community to community. When they enter a community, they require non-competition agreements, and their contracts tend to be 10 years or more.

international law (Mortensen & Barten, 2016). The Act established Greenlandic as the official language (85% of Inuit speak Greenlandic/*Kalaallisut*, an Inuit language, as their mother tongue (Møller, 2011)), gives full mineral rights to the Greenlanders, and also gives Greenlanders the right to vote for full independence, should they so choose (Kuokkanen, 2017). It is true that “...under self-government, Greenlanders have achieved one of the most far-reaching self-determination arrangements of all Indigenous peoples worldwide” (Kuokkanen, 2017, p. 190).

This differs greatly from the self-determination and autonomy (or lack thereof) over land in northern Ontario. The right to sell harvested food has been granted (*R v. Marshall*, 1999) and denied (*R. v. Van der Peet*, 1996) at the Supreme Court of Canada in the past, where Section 35 (1) of the Constitution Act (“the existing treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples in Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed”) (The Canadian Constitution, Part II, 1982) interacted with interpretations of specific Treaties to justify each decision (King, 2011). While Indigenous collectives are sovereign nations and repeatedly assert a Nation to Nation relation with the government, Canada’s insistence that the land was surrendered (Krasowski & Wheeler, 2019) greatly limits Indigenous Nationhood which, as McAdam explains, “is primarily about land, language and culture” (2015, p. 25). The land, which is so critical for Indigenous worldviews of good-life continuity, is continuing to face pressures as industries such as mining and forestry continue to limit available habitat for wildlife, which perpetuates pressure on already scarce resources in a delicate ecosystem. The boreal forest ecosystem, which is exposed to greater warming due to climate change than most other terrestrial biomes, is at particular risk of tree disease, forest fires, and permafrost degradation (Price et al., 2013). As expressed by the participants, climatic changes could amplify the loss of traditional food sources as well as the costs of transporting market foods. Industries such as mining and forestry continue to disrupt

food sources by reducing available habitat and introducing toxins into the environment, traces of which can be found in traditional food (Gignac, 2016; Simpson, 2003).

Imagining the Greenland country food market model into new contexts is not unique - the proposition of introducing a CFM model in Nunavut was met with similar interests and hesitations as were found in this study (Ford et al., 2016; Searles, 2016). For example, the Nunavut Food Security Symposium determined that while this model worked well in Greenland, it may not be a solution to “fix” food insecurity and food access in Nunavut largely because demand outweighs supply, many people would not be able to afford the items from the market, and that it seems to be in place to support the hunters more than the consumers (NFSS 2013). MacDonald et. al found that there was a “lack of consensus” on Country Food Markets in Nunavut because of some of the potential risks of “deteriorating sharing networks, pressure on wildlife sustainability, barriers to harvesting (e.g., high cost, too few skilled hunters), [and] limited food preferences...” (MacDonald et al., n.d.). In northern Ontario, while traditional food markets would certainly not be a solution to all of the factors contributing to food shortages, they could potentially financially support the communities’ cultural approaches to hunting and food processing, to serve community membership with increased traditional food, and to have full autonomy over the funding of land-based youth programs and equipment.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that there is curiosity, uncertainty, enthusiasm, and discomfort with the idea of selling traditional foods in four communities in northern Ontario. The barriers to food sovereignty in Indigenous communities are nuanced, numerous, and historically embedded into laws, policies, and cultures in northern Ontario. This research revealed some of the barriers to accessing traditional food and some of the complexities that arise with food sovereignty

strategies involving the sale of wild game and other traditional foods. It is a slippery slope to commodify that which has long been a shared resource. Perhaps there is a way to “sell” wild game using a form of economic exchange that is just as nuanced as the communities and perspectives that exist in northern Ontario. Determining how to engage in commodification of traditional foods while upholding cultural laws has repercussions for food sovereignty and traditional cultural continuity of Indigenous communities around the world (for example, see Morris & Fitzherbert, 2016). Our conversations with participants led us to discuss a reframing of economies: they are not just either “capitalist” or nothing at all (Kuokkanen, 2011). By doing so, we can effectively move out of binary questions and solutions to unsettle capitalist economies and development that contributed and continues to affect the amount of traditional food consumed in northern communities as well as high costs of imported foods.

A traditional food market model could be further explored and piloted from within an Indigenous food sovereignty perspective so as to bring balance into a capitalistic economic food system. Although Greenland’s country food markets prove an inspiring model, the gulf in political and geographical contexts between Greenland and northern Ontario would mean that a traditional food market would look extraordinarily different in order to meet the cultural, economic, and political imaginations, constraints, and structures of northern Ontario.

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Chapter 6:
Wapekeka's COVID-19 Response: A Local Response to a Global Pandemic

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Chapter 6: Wapekeka's COVID-19 Response: A Local Response to a Global Pandemic

Keira A. Loukes ^{1,2*}, Stan Anderson ³, Jonas Beardy ³, Mayhève Clara Rondeau ⁴ and Michael A. Robidoux ^{2,5}

¹ School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks, and Tourism, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, ON, Canada, P7B5E1; (K.A.L.)

² Indigenous Health Research Group (IHRG), University of Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1N6N5; (M.A.R.)

³ Wapekeka First Nation, ON, Canada, P0V1B0; (S.A.); (J.B.)

⁴ Faculty of Law, University of Victoria, BC, Canada, V8P5C2; (M.C.R.)

⁵ School of Human Kinetics, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON, Canada, K1N6N5; (M.A.R.)

Abstract

Two years after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many nations and communities continue to grapple with waves of infection and social fallout from pandemic fatigue and frustration. While we are still years away from realizing the full impacts of COVID-19, reflecting on our collective responses has offered some insights into the impact that various public health policies and decisions had on nations' abilities to weather the multifaceted impacts of the pandemic. Widely believed to have the potential to be devastated by COVID-19, many Indigenous communities in Canada were extremely successful in managing outbreaks. This paper outlines one such example, Wapekeka First Nation, and the community's formidable response to the pandemic with a specific focus on food mobilization efforts. Built on over a decade of community-based participatory action research and informed by six interviews with key pandemic leaders in the community, this paper, co-led by two community hunters and band council members, emphasizes the various decisions and initiatives that led to Wapekeka's successful pandemic response. Proactive leadership, along with strong traditional harvesting and processing efforts, helped to take care of the community while they remained strictly isolated from virus exposure.

Keywords: First Nations; Indigenous health; COVID-19 response; food security; food sovereignty; First Nations governance; sub-arctic Ontario; traditional food

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and its devastating health and economic impacts continue to be felt unevenly around the world as varying health, economic, political, and geographic conditions have made certain groups of people more vulnerable to the virus than others. Indigenous communities in Canada, especially those in rural and remote regions of the country, were seen as particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infection for many reasons, most notably limited health resources and services, limited infrastructure (such as housing), and a disproportionately high prevalence of comorbidities (Anderson et al., 2021; Bajgain et al., 2021; Power et al., 2020; Valderas et al., 2009). The term “Indigenous” in Canada refers to First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, all living within intricate cultural systems connecting each Nation to its territory and homeland (Anderson et al., 2021). Each community within each Nation is distinct and unique (i.e., there are over 630 First Nations communities who speak over 50 different languages). The increased vulnerability to COVID-19 in Indigenous communities has been directly caused by historical and contemporary colonial policies which have disrupted traditional Indigenous food, governance, language, and knowledge transmission systems (Mosby & Swidrovich, 2021). While early on in the pandemic, Indigenous communities did not experience high infection rates as was expected (Banning, 2020b), as of 8 March 2022, COVID-19 infection rates in Indigenous communities were 2.1 times the respective rate of the Canadian population (Indigenous Services Canada, 2021). The fatality rate, however, was 73% that of the rest of the country, with 96% of those infected having recovered (Indigenous Services Canada, 2021). This could be attributed to timely, effective, and prepared community responses to COVID-19 in many Indigenous communities (Banning, 2020b; Rowe et al., 2021), such as organizing food packages, harvesting traditional medicines (Kyooun-Achan & Write, 2020), mobilizing funding from external networks

(Levkoe et al., 2021), and by controlling community borders (Richardson & Crawford, 2020). Despite these successes, stories of COVID-19 responses in Indigenous communities are not regularly acknowledged nor shared (Zavaleta-Cortijo et al., 2020).

In this article, our objectives are to highlight the formidable response of the Wapekeka First Nation, an Oji-Cree community in northwestern Ontario, to the potentially devastating impacts of COVID-19. Written alongside two hunters from the community (S.A. is Deputy Chief and J.B. is an elected Band Member) this article highlights food mobilization efforts in the community and their impact on food security and food sovereignty in the region (K.A.L. comes from German, Scottish, and Anishinaabe relatives; M.C.R. is a member of Moose Cree First Nation and of French-Canadian background, and M.A.R. is a settler scholar and ally to Indigenous land rights and traditions. All IHRG members are visitors in Wapekeka First Nation).

Colonial Impacts on Indigenous health

Contact with Europeans in northern Ontario started in the late 1600s with the development of trading posts on the Hudson's Bay coast. Prior to contact, Cree, Anishinaabe, and Oji-Cree families in the region tended to travel in small kinship groups of 10–15, following large mammals as a food source (Bird, 2020; Steegman Jr., 1983a; Taylor, 1972). The presence of the trading posts attracted more families to gather around their vicinity, trading furs and traditional food for European goods and food. The growing populations around these forts put more pressure on food resources in the surrounding areas. These pressures were further intensified with the development of the Canadian Pacific Railway, enabling non-Indigenous hunters to have access to the north to hunt game, most specifically, beaver (Morrison, 1986). The introduction of global capitalism through the commercialization of the hunt along with increased populations of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples around the forts led to an eventual decline in the

population of large land mammals. Without adequate access to food, many community leaders in the region decided to enter into Treaty with the Crown in order to receive protection, healthcare, and education from the Canadian government (Long, 2010). Treaty 9 was signed in 1905–1906, although Wapekeka First Nation did not enter Treaty 9 until signing the adhesion of 1929–1930. The Treaty signing process, however, did not involve any negotiations—it was written and signed by the Provincial and Federal governments before arriving in the community, and evidence suggests Indigenous leaders were intentionally misled by commissioners (Kennedy, 2011; Long, 2010, 2006; Obamsawin, 2014).

Before the signing of Treaty 9, the *Indian Act* (1876) was already in full effect in Canada. This race-based policy continues to govern Indigenous people today, ultimately disrupting Indigenous nationhood (McAdam, 2015). The *Indian Act* was designed to assimilate Indigenous peoples into European society and can be characterized as an act of cultural genocide (Allan & Smylie, 2015; Kingston, 2015; TRC, 2015). Among other control measures, the *Indian Act* limited mobility of Indigenous peoples, dismantled traditional governance systems by replacing them with colonial-style Band Councils, regulated who has “Indian status” and who does not, and mandated all school-aged children attend Indian Day Schools (IDS) and Indian Residential Schools (IRS) managed by Catholic, United, Presbyterian, and Anglican churches. Over 150,000 “Treaty-Status” youth between the ages 7 and 15 attended these schools (Hanson et al., 2020). The IRS system subjected generations of Indigenous youth to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (TRC, 2015) as well as medical and nutrition experiments (Mosby, 2013; Mosby & Swidrovich, 2021) resulting in devastating physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental trauma (Chansonneuve, 2005). The intergenerational impacts of the residential school system are affirmed by survivor statements documented within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

(TRC) and by scholars across settler-colonies (Bombay et al., 2011, 2014; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2021; Smallwood et al., 2021). For example, it has been demonstrated that prior stressors and early life trauma can contribute to an increased vulnerability to pathology (Bombay et al., 2009). As such, many of these traumas reverberate to this day, exemplified through the gap in socio-economic health disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (Bombay et al., 2009).

Internationally, the impacts of colonization have been recognized as a key determinant of health for Indigenous peoples (George et al., 2019). In Canada, multiple studies demonstrate how Indigenous communities experience a higher burden of chronic disease and higher rates of mortality related to service provision, poverty (Rowe et al., 2021), chronic underfunding and weak public infrastructure (Lamichhane et al., 2021). For example, despite being more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to comorbidities, Indigenous peoples (who make up 4.9% of the population) received only 1% of federal funds at the start of the pandemic (Hillier et al., 2020). Some First Nations have stated that funding has declined since June 2020, drastically limiting mental health supports (Mashford-Pringle et al., 2021). Public health guidelines for COVID-19, which focused on hand washing, social distancing, and COVID-19 testing as preventative measures, required access to clean running water, the ability to socially isolate, and adequate housing and healthcare infrastructure—resources which are not readily available in many First Nations in northern Ontario (and throughout much of Canada) (Mosby & Swidrovich, 2021; Power et al., 2020). In this way, the early years of the pandemic emphasized long-standing inequalities. For example, within Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), a political entity that represents 49 First Nation communities in northern Ontario, seven communities are under short term boil water advisories, and thirteen communities are under long term boil water advisories

(Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2021) (a “boil water advisory” is put in place by water treatment plants when the water has or could have bacteria or other pathogens that would be considered unsafe to drink). Thirty of the forty-nine communities face considerable infrastructure and access challenges as they are remote fly-in communities without permanent road access. Health services in these communities are provided through nursing clinics with rotating doctors and nurses (Dunne, 2021). Emergency and complex medical procedures require patients to be flown out to Sioux Lookout, Thunder Bay, or Winnipeg. Despite Indigenous healthcare being a Treaty obligation and inherent right (Neeganagwedgin, 2020), it is still insufficiently funded and supported by the Canadian government. This has led many communities to approach health crises on their own.

Indigenous Governance of Indigenous Health

Historically, Indigenous peoples have endured waves of infectious disease brought by European settlers to which they had no natural immunities, such as smallpox, tuberculosis, influenza, and measles throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Smithers, 2020). Throughout these crises, community intergenerational knowledge has been preserved through the creation of holistic and diverse pandemic responses, which are central to the ongoing “survivance” of Indigenous communities (Rowe et al., 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, many First Nations communities exercised their inherent rights to self-government by creating community-specific protocols to control infection rates (D’Elia Decembrini, 2020). For example, Cree Artist Donna “Dolores” Gull drew on her cultural strengths and teachings by designing and sewing over 60 ceremonial masks stuffed with cedar and sage for her community (Banning, 2020a). Due to rising food prices, many Indigenous communities shared traditional foods through community-based food markets (Mashford-Pringle et al., 2021). For example, Moose Cree First

Nation endeavored to provide traditional food to their members by recruiting volunteers to assist in moose hunting and fishing (Emergency Operations Team & MCFN Chief and Council, 2020). In Whitesand First Nation, community members delivered food hampers, cleaning supplies and craft supplies to those required to self-isolate (Banning, 2020a). These community-driven, nation-specific responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate immense community collaboration. Wapekeka First Nation's response is no exception to this.

Community Profile: Wapekeka First Nation

Wapekeka First Nation is a subarctic Oji-Cree community in northwestern Ontario, located 451 km northeast of Sioux Lookout (see Figure 1), with a population of 440 (Statistics Canada, 2020). Geographically remote, Wapekeka is accessible year-round by plane and by ice roads after freeze up, making the community heavily reliant on air-freight for access to goods such as market food. Wapekeka is connected by a year-round dirt road to Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwig (KI) (Big Trout Lake), a community of 1025. In ideal conditions, it is a 60-minute round trip to KI, which is important to Wapekeka, as it provides access to grocery stores with greater variety and selection. Wapekeka's community infrastructure includes residential housing, a small independent grocery store, two confectionary stores, a gym, a band council hall, a nursing clinic (with rotating nurses) and a primary school. Currently, the community is building a new school that will include a high school (to Grade 10), allowing the youth to stay in community beyond primary school instead of being required to stay with billet families to attend high school in Thunder Bay or Sioux Lookout, communities hundreds of kilometres away.

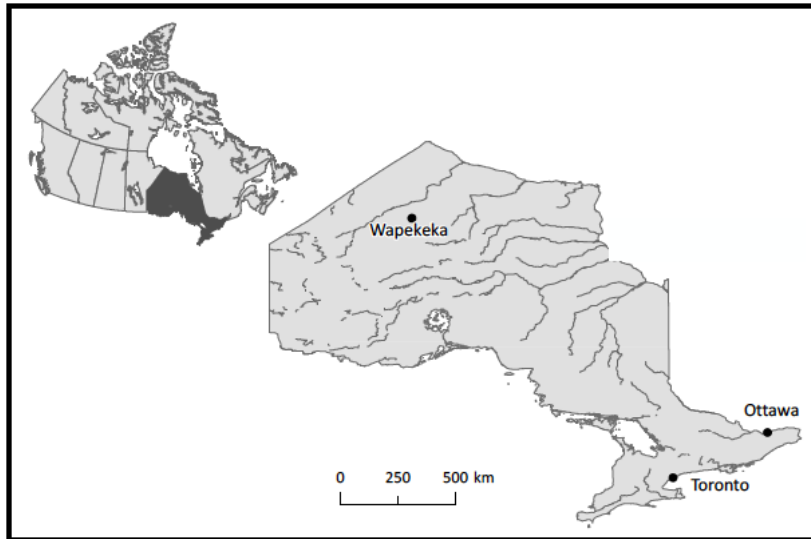


Figure 1. Map identifying the location of the First Nation community of Wapekeka in northern Ontario, Canada. Map created by Sarah Simpkin, University of Ottawa Library, on 1 November 2018 using Natural Earth data in ArcGIS Desktop.

Research Methodology and Methods

This paper builds on the Indigenous Health Research Group's (IHRG) over 16 years of strong relationships and local efforts in northern Ontario First Nations including Wapekeka First Nation. The IHRG is a multidisciplinary team of researchers working with First Nations leadership to address community needs, concerns, and solutions to ongoing food security challenges. The IHRG, along with four partnering First Nations communities, are supported by a five-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Insight Grant to explore and understand local food security challenges and to support local food initiatives. To foster a research process that is collaborative and holds Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing at its core, this project is guided by Indigenous methodologies (IM) and community-based participatory research (CBPR). Philosophically, IHRG works from the perspective that “the people know and can reflect on their own life, have questions and priorities of their own, [and] have skills and sensitivities which can enhance (or undermine) any community-based

projects” (Smith 1999, p. 127). Participatory action research such as CBPR and IM necessitate that the research design, questions, analysis, and dissemination are conducted *with* and *by* the community. Research conducted with these methodologies at its core works from the position that communities themselves, not outsider experts, are best situated to develop solutions to the challenges their members identify (Chilisa, 2020; Freire, 1970; Horowitz et al., 2009; McIntyre, 2008; Minkler, 2005). IM emphasizes authentic, long-term relationships building that centers Indigenous community members and ways of knowing in the research process (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999). This process also helps ensure that the community’s interests are prioritized and that access to sensitive material is appropriately guarded as highlighted by the First Nations Principles of OCAP® (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) ((FNIGC) First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2022). It is important to note that this research is conducted according to the University of Ottawa’s Research Ethics Board Guidelines (H-05-18-607), The First Nations Principles of OCAP®, and the community’s specific research protocols.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, our research team was unable to travel to partnering communities in 2020 and for most of 2021. During this time, the last author (M.A.R.), who maintains relationships with community members through text and Facebook messenger, noticed the pictures shared of the incredible traditional food harvesting, processing, and distribution that took place in Wapekeka. The community has long been strategizing how to increase traditional food harvesting and distribution while encouraging more young people to become interested in attaining these skills. By focusing on food mobilization amidst a global pandemic, the community achieved this.

To get the full picture, the second (SA) and third author (J.B.) invited the first (K.A.L.) and last (M.A.R.) author to visit Wapekeka to meet with a few key leaders of the COVID-19

response team during a week-long window between the hunters' return from their fall camps and governance meetings in Thunder Bay. This coincided with a brief window in October 2021 when COVID-19 restrictions were eased due to the increased rate of vaccinations and low case rates. After 18 months of travel bans, we were eager to take the opportunity to reconnect with friends and colleagues. K.A.L. and M.A.R. met with S.A. and J.B. in Thunder Bay and Wapekeka to strategize who to speak with throughout the week. During those seven days in the community, in between dinners with friends, volleyball games, partridge hunting, and setting beaver traps, five community members shared their experiences in semi-structured interviews (we spoke to a sixth participant over the phone upon our return to Ottawa). This time spent visiting outside of semi-structured interviews is an extremely important part of community-based participatory research and Indigenous methodologies (Gaudet, 2019), and led to many informal conversations that helped create a full story. Intentionally, two interviewees were men and four were women, as we wanted to place a greater emphasis on Indigenous women's perspectives which are often missing from research on food mobilization (Ferreira et al., 2022; Gaudet, 2017; Todd et al., 2016). Since J.B. was a key leader in the food mobilizing efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to "interview" him as well, and include some key quotes, as his front-line experiences in the field were invaluable contributions to understanding the experiences of the harvesters.

All participants in this study provided informed consent to participate in this paper. Both K.A.L. and M.A.R. were present at each interview. The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded with those participants who felt comfortable with it, which was dependent on our prior relationships. Where the interviews were not recorded, one interviewer would prompt the conversation and the other would take notes. All interviewees were given the option for anonymity, and all but the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee members chose to use their real

names. We called those who chose to remain anonymous “a Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member” in order to contextualize the quotes while maintaining anonymity. The audio recordings were transcribed and read over multiple times to achieve immersion in the data. The interviews corroborated each other and together told a more complete story of the various layers of Wapekeka’s pandemic response. We intentionally chose to use longer direct quotes to ensure the voice of each participant came through, as this is a story of Wapekeka’s response according to the community members, not outside perspectives. After piecing the narrative together, the first draft of the paper was reviewed, assessed, and commented on by all authors who approved and suggested revisions. What follows is a story of the pandemic response, pieced together through six different stories and perspectives of Wapekeka’s community-driven, proactive, and innovative pandemic response.

Results and Discussions

Proactive Community Leadership

“If you live in the community, you know what works and what doesn’t. I don’t try to bring someone else’s plans into my community, and if I do, we integrate them with what we know is best.”

- Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member, Wapekeka

In March of 2020, and in the months preceding, people all over the world were planning their response to a virus about which little was known. There were many unanswered questions about the spectrum of severity, mechanism of spread, rate of infection, potential for vaccine development, capacities of health care systems, resilience of global supply chains, and frequency of community-wide lockdowns. While these fears and uncertainties were shared globally, a Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member knew that local COVID-19 outbreaks or extended lockdown measures would have dire consequences in their remote, northern First Nation community:

For sure there was a lot of talk within the community. When I first heard of it personally, I mean, where it all escalated from—and after the previous pandemic of H1N1, when we lost one newborn baby—I know that I tried, or we tried our best to prepare for the next one because we have a plan. So we started listening in, you know, just watching how far it's escalating to our area, right? So we had meetings. I know everyone panicked.

Wapekeka does not have permanent health care staff (doctors and nurses fly in on a rotational schedule) nor does it have a fully stocked grocery store—it depends on all year access to KI's stores. Although Wapekeka is relatively isolated, this Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member, along with the rest of the community, did recognize that with the vast number of people coming in (rotating nurses, construction workers, and other professionals) and out (medical appointments) of their community, it was only a matter of time before the virus made its way there. Additionally, any impact in global food supply chains is felt exponentially in remote northern Ontario First Nations. In addition to the challenges of shipping market foods from the south to northern remote regions, Indigenous peoples' historical experiences with colonial governments has taught many First Nations that they will not be top priority in national crises. For example, during the H1N1 pandemic when First Nations asked for help to manage the outbreaks they were experiencing, the Canadian government infamously sent body bags and a package of masks and hand sanitizers to two remote First Nations in Manitoba (Alphonso & Ha, 2009; CBC, 2009). Chief Jerry Knott (Wasagamack First Nation) asked at the time “Is the body bags a statement from Canada that we as First Nations are on our own?” (CBC, 2009).

Wapekeka's leadership knew that they would need to initiate their own response to take care of their community instead of waiting on federal or provincial actions. Taking provincial and federal measures into consideration, the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee largely planned their

own pandemic action plan. Their records and plans from earlier crises guided their initial response, although the committee knew they needed to be extremely flexible in order to keep up with the ever-evolving science around the COVID-19 virus. As a Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member stated, “when we started working with our plan, there’s always changes to the plan, every week... there’s always going to be a change to it, because the virus changes”.

In March 2020, the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee held six to eight meetings a day with the band council, nurses, community, Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), and Sioux Lookout First Nations Authority (SLFNA). Although these broader governing bodies shared information and guided protocol development, Wapekeka’s response was self-led, independent of external financial support, and consciously employed protocols that were stricter than those advised. A Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member stated:

I’ve always said from the beginning, each community is different. They work-differently. If you live in the community you know what works and what doesn’t, and that’s what you have to work with. I don’t try to bring someone else’s plans into my community, and if I do, we integrate them with what we know is best.

Once plans were put into place, the pandemic Wapekeka Pandemic Committee focused on equipping the community with adequate PPE and sanitation supplies. The same person explained:

So the community set up a station at the gym where they did all the food preparation. The flights were closed. Nobody was coming in or going out unless it was an absolute medical emergency, meaning a med-evac. I know there was a lot of fear, there was a lot of stigma. Everyone worked hard. A lot of people or, most people, had to stay home and work out of homes. And even though with the limited housing, we have multiple families

in one household, the focus at that time was to get to keep the virus out. So there were times everything was—we couldn't get anything, we couldn't get any masks: they were all sold out. You know, all the cleaning supplies, PPE, stuff like that. We had to fly in all the stuff that we needed, chartering freight and chartering PPE or whatever we could find out there...The community membership didn't want nurses or any other professionals that came to the community to travel through major airports, like Toronto and Montreal, you know, all the way going west.

A priority for the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee was ensuring COVID-19 stayed out of the community. This meant banning all travel in and out of the community unless for essential (i.e., medical) purposes. If people did have to leave, they were required to isolate for 14 days upon their return with everyone in their household in one of four houses on the outskirts of the town. A team of women volunteers were responsible for cleaning and setting the homes up with beds, bathroom supplies, washers, driers, and refrigerators, while other community members were responsible for running errands for the family in isolation.

All of these measures were undertaken with the Band's budget, which has just started being compensated from the government. The same Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member expressed mixed feelings about the government's response in the pandemic:

Actually, in ways I was happy and some ways disappointed. For example, as soon as the vaccine was available, the communities' memberships were prioritized to get it first. But in other ways it was just talk and no action. It's just how it is with government...I think most of it, we're getting the money back: it's just a process.

When we asked the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member whether federal or provincial guidelines made any difference in how Wapekeka made decisions regarding protocols and guidelines during the pandemic, the person paused and then replied:

No, there was no immediate action—there might have been words that were said and that was it. But, I know they tried their best as soon as we started to figure out what was running low and what we needed because we couldn't find it. We got outside resources that helped and we got our PPE supplies flown in from other organizations such as NAN and SLFNHA.

Community meetings and Facebook posts were an important means of communication to update membership on pandemic protocols and actions. Facebook is a powerful and popular communication tool throughout the north. In Wapekeka, Facebook pages and groups such as the “Wapekeka Pandemic Plan and Events” and the “Wapekeka Pantry/Harvestry” were used to communicate pertinent information regarding the pandemic. This platform was essential for Wapekeka's mock drills, where a designated Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member would post that there was a confirmed positive case in the community. Everyone would be updated immediately and carry out community lockdown measures. These emergency lockdown procedures were followed by everyone in the community. These mock drills were extremely effective in helping the community prepare—one family recounted their six-year old's response upon being the first in the household to hear of a positive case in KI. He and his friends immediately followed the protocols they had practiced in the mock drills—they put on their masks, went home, and told their families to prepare for a lockdown. The family laughed as they recounted the story, yet their pride in the preparedness of their children was clear.

The first lockdown in March 2020 caused tremendous stress to the community as all flights were stopped and the road to KI was often closed. Following this, any time there was a reported

positive case in Wapekeka or KI, there was a lockdown. The Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member explained the intimate relationship Wapekeka has with KI:

We had to work with KI closely, our neighbouring community, because we have an all-season road [connecting the two communities]. The plane stops in KI and here, and if KI gets a positive [case], we have to notify whoever was on that flight. That's how it worked, that's how we communicated and worked together. But in the meantime, we had to close the road; there was no traffic coming or going except the police.

Overall, Wapekeka had a total of four cases, all of which were from the same household. When this family was in quarantine, the community would bring them food, supplies, and “home brewed” traditional medicines. A Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member explains:

Yeah, there were—even before the pandemic they were already practicing traditional medicines through our land-based programming. So they were already teaching that, people were learning, young ages, even with me. I knew what to get, because it was taught; I never knew it before. And that's what most people use even today. They would talk about it with the older people, were talking about when they first were hit with the—they said they had a pandemic before, I don't know if it was the Spanish, or whatever, from what I could gather is that everyone got sick, half of them died, but there was only one person that never got the virus, or a handful of people, and those were the ones that took care of the people within the community. They said this was expected they were saying and there's more to come.

This example of the community coming together to care for one another, a trend that quickly became a signature of Wapekeka's COVID-19 response, stands in contrast to the experiences of many families and individuals in much of the rest of Canada which tended towards more insular

and individual approaches. For example, the Angus Reid Institute recently published an online survey of 2550 Canadians which revealed that 82% of respondents believe the pandemic has pulled people further apart, 79% believe it has brought out the worst in people, and 61% believe their level of compassion for one another has grown weaker (Angus Reid Institute, 2022; Gollom, 2022; Kliem, 2022).

Wapekeka's lockdowns changed household food systems immensely as many families either rely on flights to Thunder Bay or Sioux Lookout to purchase food and other supplies for the year or drive to the larger grocery stores in KI to have access to greater variety and supply of groceries. Although shutting down travel was essential to keeping the virus out, it also made food supply for many families in the community more precarious. Initial pandemic panic created a purchase rush in the community as people tried to secure food for their families. This led the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee to come up with a plan in order to ensure the community continued to have access to both market food and traditional food. A Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member described how the plan came together:

I knew the store couldn't handle, wouldn't be able to provide all the necessities for the community, that's why we had opened up the gym and got our supplies in. And every household got a hamper. And it's not just food, it's diapers, baby formula, hygiene care, cleaning supplies, and PPE... And it's not just only that, we had to buy freezers, fridges to pack up all the meat and put it into those containers. All the stuff like that. And we only had so many people on the team because we were trying to limit the number of people in one room area. What we lacked was space, a lot of space.

The Wapekeka Pandemic Committee were not the only ones making plans to provide food for the community.

Mobilizing Traditional Food Systems

Harvesting

“You gotta be cautious when you’re out there, it’s pretty dangerous ... they know they’re in the safe hands because they know what they’re doing out there”.

- J.B.

In March 2020, at one of the “Hunters’ Meetings” over coffee in the front foyer of the band office, S.A., J.B., and a handful of other experienced hunters immediately recognized the threat that the COVID-19 pandemic presented in terms of food access for the community. J.B. recalls:

Basically, when all this planning started, me, Stan and some other hunters, we’re usually in the porch there, discussing everything like hunt-wise, and the planning and all that. So we were basically ready for whatever, yeah. So, all the planning just went from there... We knew eventually it [COVID-19] would make its way down here. We were already planning for what to do if it gets here, when it does get here. So ... we’ll just try and get as much stuff [traditional food] as we can out there. There were times, like, it was almost every day hunting trips.

They developed a team of seven hunters, four of which were experienced hunters and three young learners. J.B. explained:

Yes, the younger guys, they wanted to volunteer. Yeah, so the older guys that usually go out hunting, offered their time to teach them and see what to prepare for, and what they’re doing is very important, especially with the pandemic.

The team went out on the land that spring of 2020 and, with compensation support from the band council, continued their hunt, nearly daily, for the better part of the year.

Organizing a safe and effective hunt requires experienced coordination to schedule the flights which bring hunters, their equipment, and food supplies in and out of their hunt camps.

This usually requires 3–4 days of all day flights back and forth. During the pandemic, this was made more complicated as the flight coordinator had to ensure that the charter planes hired required their pilots to meet the same COVID-19 protocols that were set by Wapekeka.

The traditional food harvested varied with the seasons. Spring brought geese and caribou. Summer brought fish such as sturgeon and small game including partridge and beaver. The fall and winter brought moose, beaver, and caribou. Increasing the number of hunters along with the frequency and duration of the hunting trips resulted in a much greater yield than had been seen in years prior—at least for some of the main species. Geese harvesting was certainly an exception as the hunters were only able to harvest a similar amount that family harvests typically bring back in the spring. J.B. explained, “It’s changing, especially with the global warming, everything’s changing. Our numbers are just getting fewer and fewer every year—the migration is later.” In contrast, the fall and winter moose hunts were especially productive during the pandemic:

Our harvest was significant. I think that fall we had this many moose [made a wide gesture with his hands to show that it was a lot], plenty of it to go around...one of our better years I think.

Compared to the yield in other seasons, J.B. said with confidence “Oh, winter is way better.”

One reason the moose hunt is so successful in the winter is that hunters can access more territory by snowmobile over frozen waterways and land. Early in the season, right after freeze up, the bulls still have their antlers and stick to wide open areas which makes them easier to access. Later in the season, the moose drop their antlers and are much more proficient at moving through thicker brush. This adds a challenge and danger for the hunters, requiring them to follow the moose’s tracks through the dense bush of the forest. J.B. explained:

There's no trails where the moose goes! They can go pretty fast, but you have to be careful because there are times when we flip our machines out there and smack into trees. So, you gotta be cautious when you're out there; it can be dangerous.

Although the winter hunt usually brings in greater amounts of moose meat, it also requires lots of experience and skill to do safely. J.B. explained:

So you always gotta be prepared for everything, especially in 2019 or 2018, we were just like, kind of in a shock there. We were still living through the shock we had. We were [pause] what can I say, we were pretty wary, because of that hunting accident that happened. So that was still living with us in our minds, and we did manage it, so we kept on talking about it, be safe, be safe. We would have as many as 7, 6 people, so we usually say just make sure you bring everything extra. Extra boots, extra winter boots, rubbers, for when it gets slushy, like rubber boots, so that's what they were dealing with too just slush on the lakes—it was just [pause] snow machines getting stuck one after another.

It takes many years and a lot of guidance to learn how to hunt effectively, efficiently, and safely. Slush and unstable ice conditions can unexpectedly add to the duration of a hunting expedition. Getting stuck in slush is related to climactic changes as well as the heavy weight of moose and other supplies that hunters need with them. While moose are often field dressed, during the pandemic, the hunters were trying to harvest as many moose as they could in the limited daylight. Amongst the six to seven hunters, three to four moose can be carried back. J.B. explained:

Yeah, usually when I would go hunting with them, I would carry a whole moose on my sled. Because we are still searching after we get a moose early, so we take advantage of

the daylight. So we're still searching. I'm usually in the back when I carry the load because the trail's already packed.

This extra weight, combined with the changing snow and ice conditions, can increase the likelihood of getting stuck in slush. J.B. shared a story of one particularly long and arduous night where the team, with a few large moose in tow, were getting stuck in the slush repeatedly. The team was traveling in single file, as is common practice, so the hunters could stick together, keep track of each other, and help each other out if they got stuck. Jonas said that as a rule, "we never leave anybody behind." Yet, on this night, they had to make the difficult decision to either keep a new hunter out while they worked on a stuck skidoo, or to send him home on his own. His extra clothes had gotten wet, and his body temperature was dropping rapidly. They had to weigh the risk of him traveling alone against the risk of him becoming hypothermic. Since removing a skidoo from slush is a lot of work with no guaranteed timelines, they decided as a group that keeping the cold young man in the bush brought greater risk. The hunting team decided to send him home on a lightened skidoo on his own. Making these kinds of decisions requires immense field experience and intimate knowledge of the hunters on your team. In this case, the older more experienced hunters stayed out late into the night to dig the skidoo out. They communicated with the community via their inReach©, a satellite texting device. Although the community was worried, they were reassured by the fact that the hunters were building fires and doing what they could to warm up. In the field, J.B. recalls that the hunters were calm. He explained, "they know they're in safe hands because they know what they're doing out there." Ultimately, they were successful, and everyone came back safely. Yet, experienced hunters understand that this is not always a guaranteed outcome.

A tremendous amount of cultural knowledge is required to safely travel through the boreal forest, especially in the winter. Wapekeka's careful maintenance and growing resurgence of this knowledge is significant considering the colonial legislation, practices, and institutions, such as residential schools, that worked to separate Indigenous youth from their families, repress cultural practices, and disconnect communities from free movement through and governance over their traditional lands. These massive disruptions to the dissemination of land-based knowledge in northern Ontario have been pointed to as a challenge for communities attempting to strengthen their local food systems, food security and food sovereignty (Gaudet, 2017; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Settee & Shukla, 2020; Streit & Mason, 2017). In this context, Wapekeka's harvesting efforts are significant as not only did the hunters help meet the community's food needs during the pandemic, but the energy that experienced hunters extended to train new younger hunters builds community capacity to work towards meeting long-term access to traditional food.

Food Preparation and Distribution

"What should it look like, as a woman?"

- Sophie McKay

The hunters were not alone in their food provision concerns. This was on Sophie McKay's mind too. Sophie McKay, a member of the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee, was responsible for community updates. As the COVID-19 pandemic hit and continued, she started to think about how a lengthy pandemic and limiting travel in and out of the community would impact access to food. She approached Priscilla Anderson, a community member who, although not involved in the Band Council, is a leader and champion of community initiatives. Priscilla says she is "the kind of person that helps people". Sophie reached out to ask for her help in coordinating the processing, preparation, and distribution of food support to the community. Priscilla recalled her impressions of the early days of the pandemic.

I'm not sure when I first heard about it, but I didn't think anything of it at first, but when I started hearing stuff about people getting sick and-you know-when they passed on, that's when I started thinking about it, like thinking about the community, especially the children and the Elders. Those were the ones that I was worried about.

Sophie recalled asking Priscilla: "what should it look like as a woman?" While in this context, it is typical for men to hunt and women to process the food, there are many examples of women in the community who are active hunters. Sophie's words "what should it look like as a woman", importantly highlight the critical role women play, not only in preparing food, but in taking care of community needs at an even broader level.

Both women decided that they would work with the team of hunters to process and store the food they harvested in freezers. However, they also knew that traditional food alone would not be sufficient in meeting the needs of the community. They decided to focus their efforts on supporting both traditional food processing and distribution as well as the ordering, preparation, and distribution of market food. Knowing that each household had different needs and means, they wanted all food to be free to everyone. They decided to order enough for every household in the community to receive bi-weekly hampers of market and traditional food as well as other household sanitation and cleaning supplies.

The groceries were flown in on freight planes from Winnipeg. When the planes would land, Priscilla explained:

There were volunteers that went to meet the plane, rangers, and other volunteers, and they took the groceries, the bulk meat to the gym. And that's where we were, just getting ready to help out and to organize—where are we going to put the stuff, like the groceries, the meat. It

was a lot of work. And that was like, two buildings...It was a whole day thing...sometimes we were there like 14 hours.

Once the gym and memorial center were set up, a member from each household was invited to pick up items at specific times to ensure numbers did not exceed community limits. For those community members who were unable to physically collect their groceries, the women created and delivered hampers to them. The hampers contained a collection of different foods and household items—meats, fruits, vegetables, household cleaning, sanitation products, snacks for the kids, and a Ziploc bag of traditional food from the hunters. The items were distributed based on household demographics. Although they were able to round up about ten volunteers, due to COVID-19 protocols, only five were allowed in the gym at one time which increased the duration and workload of their shifts.

Providing a combination of market food and traditional food was a real priority for community leadership and those involved in harvesting, preparing and/or distributing the food. Traditional food preparation and distribution required considerably more time and physical labour, as well as extensive coordination between everyone involved. Priscilla describes the time this work would take:

Sometimes the hunters would be out all day hunting, moose hunting, and one of the hunters would contact us to tell us what time they're arriving and we would just go to the gym and wait for them and get the stuff ready, like, where to put the meat, and sometimes we just stayed there and butchered the meat. And then the next day we would continue. Oh my gosh, sometimes I would just go home, sleep, wake up, then we would go, keep doing the same thing every day.

The level of preparation and activity depended on the season and the type of wild game being harvested. Priscilla told us: “During the spring goose hunt, we prepared at least over 100 geese. It was a *lot* of work, not all at once but we had geese from—I’m not even sure—at least three camps.” When the hunters brought moose meat into the community in the fall, the women would begin processing immediately, regardless of what time the hunters came in. This would sometimes require them to work well into the night. The moose that were harvested in the winter would come in frozen, giving the women time to wait and begin processing the following day. Older and more experienced women would teach a couple of younger women by leading the fish, goose, and moose butchering. They would teach them all stages of the processing and distribution – from how to hold the knife to how to store and distribute the food. Overall, the combined efforts of the hunters and the processors provided each household with a Ziploc bag of traditional meat every two weeks. They were also able to share some of their meat with community members in KI. On some occasions, volunteer drivers would meet at the halfway point of the roadblock between the two communities, exchanging Wapekeka moose meat for KI fish.

The women were also in charge of coordinating the distribution of market and traditional food. This required an intimate knowledge of each household and their individual family needs. Sophie told us they developed a chart which had information about each family and led the distribution of items as follows:

Everybody would get the same items, except some, like the ones that have toddlers, babies, we would add formula, pampers [diapers], wipes, baby shampoo, whatever the baby needs. That’s what we included in some of the hampers. And for the large families, we would add more because they had a big family.

People who ran out of food in between hamper distribution weeks could get refills, but Sophie's master chart helped to make sure that everyone got something first before someone else could get more. Sometimes, people would contact Priscilla in the night asking for a refill, as they had run out of food and baby supplies. She would then go to the gym and put a hamper together for them, stating that, "if they're in need, if they're out of stuff...we just helped out".

The food efforts described here continued for a year, from spring 2020 to spring 2021. To keep this effort up, Priscilla and Sophie were working 12–14 h days, seven days a week. This took a physical toll on Priscilla's body. She explained:

Doing all that work, it made my back pretty sore. Sometimes I would go to the nursing station to get a shot to just ease that pain, the tension. I'm always—me not being 100%—I still showed up every day to help... I think it's when the loads of freight came with the groceries, doing the lifting and stocking them where they needed to be. Yeah. Putting the meat in the freezer; it's the lifting part that was hard for me. But I still did it.

Sophie and Priscilla expressed so much gratitude for the women who volunteered at different points throughout the year. Both women recognized that to take care of the community, the women volunteers had to leave their own children at home, and many of their husbands had to take over the work of childcare. Often, this would mean that women would leave the gym after a long shift of food organization and distribution to go home to manage their own households. This demonstrates the integral roles that women play in food procurement, a role that is often overlooked in research (Ferreira et al., 2022; Todd et al., 2016), even though women tend to bear a larger burden of food insecurity in households (Beaumier & Ford, 2010).

When Priscilla looks back, she laughed and said, "I was just so impressed with the hard work we did... Just looking back at the stuff we did, barely getting any sleep, we were just

running on fumes.” Priscilla was not the only one who was impressed. People from the community expressed their gratitude as well, which was evident in one Facebook post:

My wife and I are so grateful for your endless work. We feel lucky to have people like you looking after us during this pandemic from hygiene supplies to providing food for us. Food given to us we respect, we cook or heat up, we don't let it spoil, and store away for later use or eat. From the bottom of our hearts. We thank you and we feel lucky we have people like you.

Food mobilization efforts slowly began to wind down by summer 2021 with the gradual uptake of vaccinations in Wapekeka and in nearby communities. One Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member was impressed that despite some initial hesitancy, Wapekeka's vaccination rate is currently at around 90% for eligible adults. They credit the individuals in the community for this success, citing that protecting Elders and children were the main motivators for people to take the vaccine. They were surprised to see some of the most ardent opposers to the vaccine ultimately decide to get it out of a desire to protect the most vulnerable in the community. This is another example of a contrast between the success of Wapekeka's public health communication and the failures of much of Canada (Tasker, 2022). Strong leadership and a community desire to protect each other was a central factor in the success of Wapekeka's pandemic response that was repeated in all conversations with community members.

Conclusions

“I guess that's just how Wapekeka is, eh?”

- J.B.

Wapekeka's response to COVID-19 is a testament to the leadership, collaboration, and knowledge held by the community. The strength of Wapekeka's community leadership was repeated in many conversations we had over coffee, dinner, and in our semi-structured

interviews. A Wapekeka Pandemic Committee member confidently stated that “the leadership has been proactive and that’s what we need for every other community.” In each interview, participants were asked what it was about Wapekeka that enabled such successful collaboration to respond to a virus that was predicted to be devastating for remote and rural Indigenous communities. In each situation, people had difficulty articulating a specific reason. Perhaps J.B. summed it up best when he said with a smile, “I guess that’s just how Wapekeka is, eh?” In reality, it is most likely much deeper than a list of attributes or characteristics of a community and is perhaps so second-nature to the members of Wapekeka that it can feel like nothing special at all. It can feel like an obvious way to lead a community through a crisis. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic was an opportunity for many communities to reflect on the strength of their relationships, how they come together or not, and how they protected the most vulnerable or not.

While this story is a formidable example of individual and community effort to support and take care of themselves, it also highlights some of the ongoing challenges of land-based food procurement in the region. One challenge is the incredible cost of traditional food harvesting. A hunter must invest thousands of dollars in equipment, including float planes, skidoos, boats, seasonal clothing, nets, guns, ammunitions, etc., in order to navigate the land safely all year. It is a huge economic expense that without external supports, is not viable for many people in the community. Over the years, the hunters have needed to travel further and further from their hunting camps to access food sources, which increases costs dramatically. Policies and programs which aim to support communities in these efforts must fully understand what is involved in all aspects of traditional harvesting if support mechanisms are to have any meaningful impact.

This adds an important challenge to increasing traditional food in local diets, especially when taking the compounding challenges of environmental changes into consideration. While

there is literature that demonstrates that Indigenous communities have developed complex wildlife management strategies over their extensive relationships with ecosystems in ancestral lands (Binnema & Niemi, 2006; Cruikshank, 2005; Field, 2008), current research contends that unprecedented levels of environmental change in northern Canada present significant challenges to the resiliency of land-based food practices and the ecosystems they rely upon (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Golden et al., 2015; Ross & Mason, 2020; Spring et al., 2018; Tsuji et al., 2019).

All the hunters we spoke with in informal conversations and in interview contexts raised concerns about ecosystem pressures related to harvesting rates and climate change. The uncertainty associated with the pandemic added further pressure to bring in as much meat as possible to sustain the community, yet hunters were concerned about moose population sustainability at such a harvesting rate. Training more hunters, processors, and distributors could increase yield, yet the hunters recognize the ecosystem's limits and the importance of developing and employing their own protocols and systems of sustainable harvesting. There are also limits in terms of human labour. The physical and emotional labour involved in hunting, processing, and distributing food was immense, and tended to fall on the shoulders of a handful of people from the community.

Discussing the “enlightening” aspects or “silver linings” of the COVID-19 pandemic risks not fully acknowledging the devastating, divisive, and enduring impacts it has rendered globally. Yet, for a community that has been working towards strengthening local food harvesting, processing, and distribution for years, the COVID-19 pandemic was an opportunity to demonstrate how much food could be brought in within the limits of the boreal forest ecosystem, economic resources, physical bodies, and individual motivation. The response to this pandemic demonstrated to the community their own capacity for harvesting traditional food. The pandemic

also gave an opportunity for the experienced hunters and food processors to share their skills with the younger generation. Increasing youth interest in learning these skills has been a community goal for many years. J.B. noticed that during the pandemic, when the community got to see and experience the value of being able to share traditional food, he noticed that:

There's a lot of interest now, especially these new kids talking about it. This is what we're doing. Yeah, there's more and more kids wanting to go camping too. So that's why we had a pretty good number of campers this year, all kids.

There are many barriers for young people to get on the land and the opportunities provided through economic support did remove some of these barriers. This not only points to the importance of training, but also providing the economic means for the youth to get on the land in order to access that training. Observing what the lead hunters, processors, and community leaders were capable of reified the continuing relevance of these traditional harvesting skills in a real crisis. It valorizes this way of life that has not been part of Ontario's education systems and exposes the importance of acquiring skills that are critical for life in the north. Furthermore, seeing how important these efforts were for community health and wellbeing might be further motivation for younger people to learn these skills in order to take care of their own families and community in the future.

Overwhelmingly, chatting with community members and leaders about their response to COVID-19 was accompanied by an immense sense of pride. Under the uncertain and stress-filled situation of the pandemic, the community witnessed: (1) proactive leadership that collectively established safe and effective COVID-19 protocols that limited COVID-19 spread and serious illness; (2) tremendous efforts of hunters who went on the land almost every day, in often brutal conditions, to bring back food to the community; and (3) herculean efforts of the women who

organized market and traditional food preparation and distribution for the entire community. It is an example of what is possible when Indigenous communities—that are too often pathologized by the media, outsider researchers, politicians, health care professionals and educators—have greater autonomy over local governance, which is built on local values and strengths. This strength-based response from the Wapekeka First Nation highlights the ingenuity and perseverance of a people not unfamiliar with trauma but who continue to thrive on “what we have”, and “what we can do with what we have.” This does not suggest that the community does not face critical vulnerabilities: there are housing shortages and overcrowding; there are limited and grossly underfunded health care services; there are critical food security and economic challenges, all of which contribute to ongoing health disparities. Despite this, Wapekeka First Nation’s community-led response to the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the ways that a community’s own knowledge and leadership are imperative in response to health crises. It requires the leadership in the community to navigate the often murky waters of integration between traditional food systems and health practices with western market food systems and medical support.

Despite real and perceived vulnerabilities to COVID-19, Wapekeka First Nation’s community-led response effectively protected the community. The emphasis on community collaboration and collective responsibilities guided the Wapekeka Pandemic Committee’s public health messaging and initiatives designed to support families through difficult periods of lockdown. While an outbreak of COVID-19 was a risk to the community, so were the measures to keep the virus out. Although lockdowns did limit individual mobility and made food security more precarious, the overall compliance of the community to the directives from leadership is astounding when compared to other community responses around the world. While there are

probably many factors for this, one that stands out is the community's emphasis on collaboration, reliance on cultural and traditional knowledge, and the centering of care for each other. While new waves and strains of COVID-19 continue to emerge across the globe, Wapekeka continues to keep cases out (SLFNHA, 2022). This story is another example of what Indigenous communities, IM and CBPR scholars, and activists have been saying for years: communities already know their own challenges and strengths and are the most qualified to determine their own solutions. The decision to coordinate food hampers, purchase freezers, and support hunters to harvest all year long was a community decision, not an initiative driven from the outside. Wapekeka's story proves an important model of Indigenous "survivance" and sovereignty (Rowe et al., 2021), and an example of how to keep a community together through a crisis that in so many places, drove people apart.

Chapter 7:

Sovereignty *of* and *through* food: A decolonial feminist political ecology of Indigenous food sovereignty in Treaty 9

Chapter 7: Sovereignty *of* and *through* food: A decolonial feminist political ecology of Indigenous food sovereignty in Treaty 9

Abstract

“Food sovereignty,” a term conceived by peasant agriculturalists in South America, has become ubiquitous worldwide in academic and activist circles advocating for greater local control over local food. Its use has been adopted by various actors in North America, most notably by agriculturalists that tend to be small-scale, family-run, or permaculture focused. While Indigenous food sovereignty has emerged as an adaptation of this concept, ecological, economic, social, and political opportunities, and constraints in different locations across Turtle Island make its widespread application challenging, especially in contexts where communities do not want, or cannot (for a variety of reasons) eat exclusively from the land. In addition, “food sovereignty” can become a chimera in contexts where the “Crown” has absolute and final “sovereignty” over the land, which they have demonstrated through multiple enforcements across Turtle Island. Using a decolonial feminist lens within a political ecology community of practice, this paper describes and critiques current and historic framings of northern Ontario boreal forests as variously and simultaneously scarce and abundant. It also analyzes the ways that these framings have been discursively and materially constructed through colonial social, ecological, economic, and political impositions. It asks whether the concept of food sovereignty adequately challenges these constructions. Ultimately, this paper suggests that thinking about Indigenous food sovereignty as sovereignty *of* and *through* food may better describe the process, importance, and potential inherent in traditional and alternative Indigenous food harvesting and distribution practices in First Nations communities in northern Ontario, and indeed, beyond.

Introduction

While food insecurity impacts 15% of Canadians (Tarasuk, Li, et al., 2022), it impacts nearly fifty percent of on-reserve Indigenous households in Canada (Batal et al., 2021). For years, popular media, community, activist, and academic circles, as well as a scathing report from the UN's Special Rapporteur a decade ago, have brought attention to these grossly inequitable statistics (De Schutter, 2012). The issue has been extensively studied from health and wellness perspectives (Adamson, 2011; Borras & Mohamed, 2020; Gyapay, 2022; Imbeault et al., 2011; Pal, Blais, et al., 2013), critical social justice perspectives (Coté, 2016; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019; Keske, 2021; LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017; Lemke & Delormier, 2017; Levkoe et al., 2019; Morrison, 2011), and community resurgence perspectives (Cherofsky, 2013; Daigle, 2019, 2015; Martens et al., 2016; Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020; Robidoux & Mason, 2017; Settee & Shukla, 2020). In response to this work and accompanying public outcry, numerous programs have been implemented to attempt to address the food shortages, either from a top-down government approach (i.e. Nutrition North subsidy, harvester support programs, land-based education through Choose Life funding), non-governmental funding and research agencies, (Turner, 2022) community led land-based initiatives (Ferreira et al., 2021; Gaudet, 2021; Kamal et al., 2015; Loukes et al., 2022; Lowitt et al., 2019) or a combination of all three. Despite all the time, labour, ingenuity, resurgence, and conversation over the years, food insecurity prevails in northern Ontario First Nations (Robidoux et al., 2021). It is not my goal to dismantle or critique efforts to improve food access or strengthen Indigenous food systems nor to argue that these efforts are futile, but to bring attention to the structural factors outside of local food initiatives that continue to contain and constrain community efforts.

As an alternative to food security approaches, which focus on a more apolitical conception of food shortages such as using caloric intake and absolute amounts of food as indicators of success, food sovereignty has emerged as a political framework that highlights the social and economic roots that impede local control over local food sources which leads to food shortages (Chappell, 2018; Jarosz, 2014). While it is crucial that food access inequities are addressed, the focus on a “food” crisis centres the scarcity of affordable, nutritious, preferred food, and easily falls into environmental (e.g., climate change, animal scarcity), individual (e.g., household income and food choices), and geographical (e.g., remoteness) explanations and solutions. It has been repeatedly demonstrated that the root causes of food shortages in Indigenous communities across Turtle Island are colonial policies that continue to control the movement of Indigenous bodies disconnecting people, families, spiritualities, and governance from the land in order to make space for settlers, land use management practices (e.g., parks and tourism development, etc.), and resource extraction. It has been well documented that in some locations, food scarcity was engineered (Daschuk, 2013) and in others, was a direct result of increased settlement and exploitative industries which led to the destruction of land, forests, and river systems motivated by primitive accumulation and economic growth. In this context, the crisis is not of food, but of colonialism, modernity, development, and capitalist resource exploitation. Lack of access to and control over adequate, affordable, nutritious, and desired food sources is a symptom of a failing economic, political, cultural, and social system that has imposed itself in an ecosystem which cannot support it.

Written by a visitor to the region, this chapter does not represent the myriad ways food sovereignty is conceptualized, desired, rejected, and worked towards in the vastly different communities in Treaty 9 region of northern Ontario. Instead, my purpose is to analyze what we

mean as scholars, activists, traditional food harvesters, and gardeners by “food sovereignty”. Is the concept important as a process and goal, or does using it distract from the broader political structures that by their very existence prevent this vision from being realized? This paper begins by theoretically analyzing food sovereignty from a decolonial feminist lens operationalized within political ecology’s community of practice. Then, I will outline a brief history of the framings of food shortages throughout the fur trade to the signings of Treaty 9. Next, I will overview the more recent and current colonial constraints that Treaty 9 First Nations are working within, pushing against, and consciously ignoring while improving food access. Finally, I will discuss how hunters and land-users are reclaiming sovereignty— not *over* food, but *of* and *through* food. This view joins scholars who see food sovereignty as a process towards decolonization (Daigle, 2019; Grey & Patel, 2015; Kamal et al., 2015), but centres Indigenous land restitution as an imperative goal or entry point. Without this, food sovereignty risks working towards a metaphorical conception of decolonization (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This is not to argue that traditional food harvesting activities which work to decolonize minds, language, and education are futile, but to argue that although this is an integral element of decolonization, it is not complete without land restitution. In conclusion, the paper will suggest that sovereignty *of* and *through* food may be a more powerful conception than “food sovereignty” through which Indigenous presence, resurgence, and decolonial movements are asserted.

Theoretical perspectives on food security and food sovereignty

Using a framework of decolonial feminism within a community of practice of political ecology, in this section I will describe the historic and current context of food insecurity in northern Ontario. Decolonial feminism incorporates ideas from decolonial thinkers such as Walter Mignolo (2000, 2007, 2009), Franz Fanon (1963), and Aníbel Quijano (2000, 2007) with

feminist thinkers such as Mohanty (1984), hooks (2003, 2008), and Barker (2017) to analyze the ways that coloniality/modernity, Indigenous identity, and gender interact to marginalize Indigenous women's voices globally (Manning, 2021). Decolonial feminism, which "sets anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-racist form of feminism apart from others" (Paramaditha, 2022, p. 34), was led by Argentinian scholar María Cristina Lugones (2010) and has much convergence and uptake among Indigenous feminist thinkers in the settler-colonial context of North America (Barker, 2017; Ferreira et al., 2022; LaRocque, 2017; Nickel & Fehr, 2020). Using a decolonial feminist lens to analyze food sovereignty theory and discourse joins and expands the community of practice of political ecologists.

Political ecology practitioners question the division between social and ecological systems and are critical of concepts such as ecosystem limits by pointing to socio-economic and political systems which dictate social relationships to land. The concept of ecosystem limits, which have their origins in Malthusianism, simplifies the relationship between population growth and food availability and has strong ties to colonial capitalist imperialism (Robbins 2012). Political ecology is an approach "that attempts a synthesis of the social and natural sciences by retaining the social specificity of politico-economic systems whilst recognizing their inescapable bio-physical constitution and dependencies" (Tizley, 2018, p. 1). A central critique taken up by political ecology is the narrative that "people destroy ecosystems out of ignorance, selfishness, and overpopulation" which results in a justification for centralized government control of resources as opposed to local governance and management (Robbins, 2012, p. 106). While social systems are undoubtedly connected to the particular characteristics of the ecosystems within which they live, I will use political ecology to highlight that "these affordances and constraints

are always mediated, and in fact partly constructed, by human social relations and power structures that are specific in time and space” (Tizley, 2018, p. 2).

It could be argued that using a practice of political ecology within a lens of decolonial feminism is redundant as decolonial and feminist frameworks inherently challenge the hierarchies of modernity (e.g., culture/nature; man/woman; rational/intuitive; public/domestic), and therefore, also complicate the established lines between ecological and social systems. However, political ecology’s specific critiques of taken for granted assumptions in ecosystem sciences, such as the distinction between the agency of non-human actors and the necessity for state-controlled conservation to maintain ecosystem health (Robbins, 2012) are useful tools that are crucial in analyzing food sovereignty discourses. Mehta & Harcourt (2021) speak to the important ways that decolonial feminism pushes political ecology:

We know from decolonial feminists that the western-centric, hegemonic, patriarchal, and white imaginary of the world erases other knowledges and ways of living with nature.

This applies to concepts such as ‘ecological thresholds’ and planetary boundaries, which erase pluriversal possibilities and positions of radical alterity (p. 2).

Mehta & Harcourt (2021) point to the feminist concept of care, “a deeply gendered and time-consuming activity performed to support the bodily, emotional, and relational integrity of human (and more-than-human) beings”, as an important addition to political ecology arguments (p. 2).

There are multiple spaces of convergence between decolonial feminism and political ecology, for example political ecology’s concept of “symmetry”, in which all actors *act*, including the ecosystem as a whole and its individual parts (Robbins, 2012). Human and non-human relations and realities change as they become entangled with one another. This aligns with decolonial and feminist theories, which recognize that although colonial and patriarchal hierarchical binary

systems afford material and discursive power to some groups over others, the groups deemed “colonized”, “subaltern”, or “oppressed” are not mere passive recipients of patriarchal colonial power – all actors in social, ecological, political, and economic systems act and have a role in shaping the way that power manifests, by consciously or subconsciously resisting, submitting, negotiating, manipulating, ignoring, or appeasing those structures of power (Bhabha, 1997; Spivak, 1988).

In this paper, decolonial feminism theory is used to expose the patriarchal colonial institutions and economic systems that are the root cause of food insecurity in northern Ontario and beyond. In doing so, it joins a community of practice of political ecology as it destabilizes taken for granted truths about the ecological possibility of the realizability of food sovereignty in northern Ontario First Nations. Using this framework, this paper connects the material and discursive elements of modernity/coloniality (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2007) and how these power structures are indeed not separate but intimately interconnected (Anderson, 2010; Barker, 2017; Coburn, 2020; Green, 2017a; LaRocque, 2017; Nickel & Fehr, 2020) through the colonial matrix (Mignolo, 2000, 2007; Quijano, 2007). While political ecology offers a framework which helps to break down these narratives, decolonial feminist theories rebuild by emphasizing the imperative of shifting the “loci of enunciation” in order to achieve the “epistemic disobedience” necessary for social transformation (Mignolo, 2000, 2009; Paramaditha, 2022).

A decolonial feminist political ecology of food security and food sovereignty

It is contradictory for governments to marginally subsidize market and traditional food harvesting costs in the name of food sovereignty (e.g., Nutrition North’s “Support for hunting, harvesting, and local food initiatives” (Government of Canada, 2022)) while simultaneously limiting its realizability by continuing to push resource extraction which pollutes and encroaches

on the habitat necessary to support local food systems. Focusing solely on the shortages of food diverts attention away from colonial impositions and towards apolitical and individualized pressures such as household income, remoteness, and ecosystem limits which lend themselves to neo-liberal and corporate market-based solutions. Yet, this “oligopolistic market food system” itself is what has led to a global lack of nutritious and affordable foods which contribute to ill-health (Patel, 2007). Attempting to improve food security while maintaining the colonial structures which led to food shortages works to maintain both. The goal of food security is, therefore, incomplete. It has been argued extensively in literature that attempting to improve food security tends towards a more apolitical version of the crisis (Chappell, 2018), relying on the ability of the individuals or households to purchase enough food to live an active, healthy life through participation in a market-based food system (Power, 2008). “In other words,” Leblanc (2017) states, “people are reduced to consumers, and food insecurity, in this context, is regarded as primarily a symptom of poverty and inequality and not of larger factors rooted in a long history of colonialism and racism” (p. 17). In many cases, this has led to an increase in mechanization of agriculture, biotechnology, and efforts to make food more readily available (more food) and accessible (cheaper) (Patel, 2013). Globally, pursuing food security through these strategies has resulted in the destruction of soil and traditional ecological knowledge while small-holder farmers have increasingly more costs, less crop predictably, and less purchasing power to compete with the prices of large global corporations (Altieri, 2009; Bernstein, 2010; Holt-Giménez et al., 2012; McMichael, 2013; Patel, 2013). While seemingly isolated from this, indeed, northern Ontario First Nations are intimately connected to these systems, as a small number of large companies control all imports into the region, including food and supplies to acquire food (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017). Advocating for more affordable food in northern

Ontario, as per a food security approach, works to support colonial market-based solutions elsewhere in the world and ensures the maintenance of the global capitalist food system.

While food security focuses on securing access to an appropriate number of calories within the existing state and social relations, food sovereignty stresses local control over local food systems and highlights the global political, economic, and government structures which work to contain and constrain the options communities have to exercise this control. The Spanish term “*soberania alimentari*” predates the English term food sovereignty by several years and was initially coined by politically conservative economically neo-liberal Mexican president Miguel de las Madrid (Grey & Patel, 2015). The current and most popular use of the term, as coined by peasant agricultural group, *La Via Campesina* (LVC) at the Nyéléni International Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali, has become the dominant understanding of food sovereignty globally. They defined food sovereignty as a “multi-dimensional rights-based political framework” which advocates for:

the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural system. It puts the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute, and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies rather than the demands of markets and corporations (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007).

While the term “sovereignty” has more classical definitions related to a “state’s legal control over a particular geographical area and its population” (Kamal, 2015, p. 564) and is connected to the notion of private property and resource accumulation (Menser 2014), food sovereignty advocates have distinguished the term from this colonial understanding by arguing that food

sovereignty is opposed to capitalist accumulation and privatization. Instead, both consumers and producers, it is argued, have shared collective interests (Wittman, 2011).

Framing access to food as a right has been argued to be integral to achieving food security and sovereignty (Keske, 2021). Yet, using a rights-based framework inherently assumes that rights must be bestowed upon local food producers by the state, which requires an acceptance of the sovereignty of the state. However, extending more rights to more people does not change the “fundamental nature of the problem – the sustained imposition of alien economic and socio-cultural structures” (Leblanc, 2017, p. 20). In a settler-colonial state such as Canada, “rights-based approaches do not offer meaningful restoration of Indigenous homelands and food sovereignty” (Corntassel, 2012, p. 93), “can only take struggles for land reclamation and justice so far” (Corntassel & Bryce, 2012, p. 151), and fail to recognize Indigenous peoples’ political sovereignty (Morrison, 2011). To address Indigenous concerns and account for the inextricable link between Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous political resurgence, advocates, activists, and scholars have urged for food sovereignty to move beyond this focus on rights (Coté, 2016; Grey & Patel, 2015). This fundamentally resonates with the more radical understandings of food sovereignty as articulated by an attendee at the Nyéléni Conference:

Food sovereignty is more than a right; in order to be able to apply policies that allow autonomy in food production it is necessary to have political conditions that exercise autonomy in all the territorial spaces: countries, regions, cities and rural communities.

Food sovereignty is only possible if it takes place at the same time as political sovereignty of peoples (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007, p. 16).

This perspective beckons the question – how can Indigenous food sovereignty be achieved without Indigenous land restitution? What do we lose when we leave Indigenous land restitution

out of our conceptions of food sovereignty? I use land restitution not to refer to a colonial model of self-government, but to use it, as Mills (2017) outlines, within an Anishinaabe Constitutionalism, which he states, is based on the understanding that neither Indigenous nor settler societies are “*autonomous*. We’re *unique* to be sure, but we’re interdependent” (p. 231). Currently, the Crown claims underlying title of the land – which is a “fiction” leading to an “assumed Crown sovereignty” which is “a burden on Aboriginal title that must be removed” (Borrows, 2019, p. 112-3). In this position, I do not intend to conflate Indigenous land restitution, Indigenous food sovereignty and Indigenous resurgence of language, culture, and governance – I mean to highlight how deeply interrelated they are.

Food sovereignty is increasingly used in a variety of contexts to address a range of positions, interventions and struggles within the food system. Some argue that this is a “testament to the term’s adaptability” (Grey & Patel, 2015, p. 2) while others find the definitions of food sovereignty limiting because they do not address the wide variety of food systems practiced nor “the social meanings and relationships that different peoples and cultures have with their food and foodways” by allowing them all to fit under one term (LeBlanc & Burnett, 2017, p. 18). While designed to address the interlinking issues involved with food shortages, including the “industrialization of agriculture, colonial strategies of (under) development, commodification of food, and protection of the rights of farmers, women, and Indigenous peoples” (Nyéléni Declaration, 2007), the widespread use of the term is both a positive move forward and problematic mis-appropriation. It has been taken up in Canada by many small-holder family run farms as well as the permaculture movement (Food Secure Canada, 2022). These versions of food sovereignty have been critiqued as being depoliticized and agri-centric as they tend not to take colonial land relations into consideration (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2019) and leave little room

for harvesting activities such as gathering, hunting and fishing (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020).

Tilzey (2018) argues that the concept of food sovereignty has:

lost, or perhaps has never been accorded, the degree of precision it deserves. While it was arguably, even at its foundation in Latin America, a contested concept, combining elements of national developmentalism with post-developmental agroecology, food sovereignty as a concept has become increasingly diffuse as it has been embraced by an expanding array of class and class fractional interests (p. 4).

While a term developed in a South American agrarian setting will always fit imperfectly in other contexts, Grey and Patel (2015) find the “frictions and the consonances are enlightening” (p. 2). For many ecological and political reasons, the opportunities and challenges of the process and realization of food sovereignty is undoubtedly different in the boreal forests and Hudson Bay lowlands of northern Ontario than in the agricultural fields of South America.

Dawn Morrison asserts that “food sovereignty” was not used historically in Indigenous communities – instead, this concept was a “living reality” (Morrison, 2011, 97). She is a leading scholar in the conceptualization and practice of Indigenous food sovereignty, a term developed to account for the contours of Indigenous food systems that although in many cases do include agriculture and cultivation (e.g., manoomin), also rely on harvesting medicines, mammals, birds, and fish. Indigenous food sovereignty focuses on the sacredness of food, participation in traditional practices of harvesting food, and involvement in policies that support and protect Indigenous food systems (Morrison, 2011, 2020). This conceptual framework has been used in a variety of contexts, and some scholars have created more specific criteria for assessing food sovereignty in remote, rural, and urban environments (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2021). Morrison’s definition of Indigenous food sovereignty is broad enough to encapsulate Indigenous

food systems across Turtle Island which are shaped by “diverse dietary practices, ecological features, geographical variations, and social-political as well as historical experiences (e.g., residential school systems)” (Settee and Shukla, 2020, p. 4). These experiences vary widely, from abundant salmon fisheries and modern Treaties on the west coast to more minimally productive black spruce forest stands and political legacies of Treaty 9 in northern Ontario.

Political ecologists remind us not to look at the ways that ecosystems *are* limited or scarce, but instead, the ways they have been *made* scarce (Robbins, 2012). For example, although northern Ontario is considered a region of low bio-productivity and is therefore considered scarce in some regards (e.g., boreal caribou populations), it is and has been considered abundant in others, such as beaver furs, hydro-electric potential, and minerals such as diamond, chromium, palladium, and nickel. Indeed, the continued exploitation of these latter resources are part of the creation of the scarcity of the former. In this context, where federal and provincial colonial Acts, policies, and northern resource extraction continues to *create* ecological scarcity of food sources, is food sovereignty realizable? From a political ecology perspective, how do social relations shape the ecological “capacity” of the land? From a decolonial feminist lens, who is being asked to develop solutions (Ferreira et al., 2022)?

Holt-Giminez and Shattuck’s (2011) distinction between “progressives” and “radicals” is an important guide to answering this question. Tizley (2018) elaborates:

While the ‘progressives’, who comprise the main small and family commercial farms located differentially in the global North, advocate the localizing and ‘greening’ of food production and consumption networks, the ‘radicals’ by contrast, who comprise the subsistence peasantry and wage labourers...located differentially in the global South, advocated *social relational* change through land redistribution and the re-gaining of

appropriate access to the means of production. Thus, while both groups contest the neoliberal erosion of local markets, it is only the latter that adopts the *anti-capitalist* stance of challenging ‘primitive accumulation’ and market dependence (p. 4).

He further argues:

while ‘localization’ and ‘greening’ are important elements of food sovereignty, this concept remains incomplete if it fails to confront the key social relational bases of capitalism – ‘primitive accumulation’, the alienability of land, and market dependence. I will suggest, therefore, that if food sovereignty is to realize its full potential, by necessarily contesting the ecological *and* social contradictions of capitalism, it should embrace the counter-hegemony of the ‘radicals’ (p. 4).

This aligns with the ways that decolonial feminists draw caution to decolonizing rhetoric, wherein these terms risk “losing their radical origins as they become more mainstream and give the impression that something has been accomplished” (Paramaditha, 2022, p. 36). In this same way, I hope to hold food sovereignty accountable to itself, and myself accountable to its use. It is with this counter-hegemonic and radical conception that I argue, given the historical and contemporary political, social, ecological, and economic context of Treaty 9, food sovereignty in Indigenous communities in northern Ontario (and indeed, across Turtle Island) inherently, and must, align.

Historical social, economic, and political impositions

It is important to note that available academic literature creates an incomplete perspective of the history of the Treaty 9 region of northern Ontario before, during, and after the fur trade. The Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) provides the most consistent recordings of people, furs, and food between 1670 and 1940, along with some anthropological and missionary accounts. It is

important to note that these accounts will always be problematic as they carry with them an outsider, visitor, and/or intruder perspective, which can easily fall into the romanticization, misinterpretation or “Other”ing that travel writing and anthropological accounts of non-European communities have long been accused of by post-colonial writers (Loomba, 2005; Said, 1978; Smith, 1999; Spivak, 1988).

The thousands of lakes, several rivers and streams, peat bogs and wetlands of the boreal forest ecosystem were formed by glacial retreat and advancement, and make up 58% of Canada’s land mass which varies greatly depending on latitude and proximity to the coast (Golden et al., 2015; Steegman Jr., 1983a). Its climate experiences wide variation (-40C in the winter to 30C in the summer), with summers lasting three months and long winters making up most of the rest of the year, often severe due to continental polar and Arctic air masses (Golden et al., 2015). The landforms, climatic factors (snow, ice, wind), disturbances, vegetation dynamics, and animal dispersion combine to “create a complex and sharply defined mosaic” which Steegman Jr (1983a) refers to as “patchiness”(p. 48). In response, a “diffuse” subsistence economy developed, which has several advantages and requires much flexibility and adaptability (Steegman Jr., 1983a). It is commonly cited that small kin-based groups of 10-15 would travel together, following land mammals in the winter, and gathering together in the summers around sources of fish (Bird, 2020; Steegman Jr., 1983a). Steegman argues that “in the face of constantly changing resources and movements of people, a flexible kinship and social structure would be most adaptive” (Steegman Jr., 1983b, p. 345). Before the traders designated “chiefs” at trading posts, the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Oji-Cree of northern Ontario did not have official leaders and were not part of bands – their ties were through family (Long, 2010). Rogers’ (1983) research shows that summer gatherings were generally made up of several hunting groups with one male leader,

followed because of his hunting abilities, spiritual powers, generosity, and wisdom, although, people did not need to follow his advice. Unsurprisingly, this book does not go into depth about the leadership role of women – this is likely due to the fact that much research in the region is based on HBC and missionary records, which were written from the perspective of men with a European gaze – one steeped in assumptions of the universality of patriarchy. The infrequency of large animals in the boreal forest made gifting an important economic and social exchange to ensure general survival by “scattering economic risk” (Steegman Jr., 1983b, p. 253), whereby groups abundant in resources would offer a feast to another until they were out of food, trusting that they would be similarly supported in the likely chance they would require it in the future (Rogers, 1983).

Sahlin’s concept of the affluence of hunting and gathering societies is useful here (1974). He exposes the tendency in various anthropological works to “convey a sense of impending doom” of the survival of the hunters and gatherers, whereby “the specter of starvation stalks the stalker through these pages” (Sahlins, 1974, p. 1). For example, Steegman (1983b) asserts, “forest Algonkians lived with hunger through their domain and were never free of its threat, if not its actual presence” (p. 249). Others have described this region as “solitary” land inciting immense feelings of “desolation” (Scott, 1906, p. 581) due to limited primary productivity of the forest resulting in low species’ numbers and densities (Steegman Jr., 1983a). These interpretations of the land, “having equipped the hunter with bourgeois impulses and paleolithic tools...judge his situation hopeless in advance” (Sahlins, 1974, p. 4). However, to many, this region is a “grocery store” which has been “made productive by local peoples” (Palowska-Mainville, 2020, p. 75). Indeed, pre-contact, “the Cree population would’ve had abundant resources most of the time” (Winterhalder, 1983a, p. 236). It is important not to relegate pre-

contact years to either a romantic subsistence in a land of plenty nor a meagre existence of struggle and poverty (Sahlins, 1974), which European traders and their imported goods destroyed or improved, respectively. Both simplistic narratives work to entrench the idea that Europeans act, while Indigenous communities receive, and sidestep any possibility of mutually agential relationships.

Fur trading posts were typically established around areas where First Nations families already congregated (Long, 2010). By the 19th century, there was a greater congregation around these posts, however, families would still spend most of the year moving freely through the bush and gathering in the summers, much in the way they had done before the arrival of the traders (Rogers, 1983). Although it is often cited that congregation around posts was motivated by access to the fur trade market as well as to European goods and foods, intermarriage and family ties were likely another strong draw. Child's (2012) work highlights the important role that women played in the fur trade in the Great Lakes region. It was advantageous for a fur trader to marry an Anishinaabe woman from a prominent family in the community, as her knowledge of food harvesting, language, and her wide kin networks sustained the traders socially, economically, and politically. Winterhalder (1983a) argues that "irregular, partially phased, and dramatic population fluctuations make it impossible to assign a value to the carrying capacity of this environment" (p. 235), yet it is often stated that this congregation around fur trading posts led to an overharvesting of animals and to scarce hunting in the region. During this time period (between 1706 – 1840), HBC records indicate there were eleven examples of hunger, ten reports of famine, and four reports of death by starvation (Steegman Jr., 1983b). Long (2010) attributes these famines to corporate competition along with a corresponding period of geothermal cooling. Fritz et al. (1993) argues that at this point, the human population was still too small in northern

Ontario for overexploitation to have been a major factor and that pressures such as climatic factors and habitat disturbance (e.g. fire) would have had more of an impact on animal populations.

Focusing on population-driven depletion of animal sources could distract from other pressures on food systems such as changes in tenure and family trap lines (Rogers, 1983), series of disease epidemics working in concert followed by grief and recovery from the losses (Hurlich & Steegman, Jr., 1983; Lytwyn, 1999), corporate competition between the HBC and the North West Company (NWC) (Steegman, 1983; Long, 2010), shifts in hunting schedules (Hurlich & Steegman, Jr., 1983), industrial developments (Festa-Bianchet et al., 2011), and conservation policies. Eventually, the declining fur trade forced HBC to reluctantly sell Rupert's Land to Canada for \$1.5 million in 1869. While Duncan Campbell Scott, a federal commissioner for Treaty 9, explains the relationship between HBC and the First Nations hunters and trappers of the fur trade as a "sort of slavery" (Scott, 1906, p. 582), Long (2010) argues that trappers "had coexisted with fur traders for two centuries in a symbiotic relationship that usually benefitted both parties" (p. 352). Child's (2012) work demonstrates that in the Great Lakes regions, it was beneficial for the fur traders to adopt Anishinaabe languages and customs in order to form respectful and trusting relationships. This relationship experience with fur trading companies such as the HBC was vastly different than the relationship with the government of Canada which was solidified in Treaty 9.

The Treaty 9 signings which took place between 1905 and 1906 were unique among the treaties as the negotiations took place between Canada and Ontario without any input from the First Nations (Long, 2010). When communities signed the treaty, each person received \$4 and each family of 5 received 1 square mile of land on parcels called "reserves" while the swath of

land they once considered home or “pantry” (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020) was “ceded” to the Crown. This land distribution system is severely out of alignment with sustaining food systems in the boreal forest, in which each family needs to range over a territory of 50 to 100 square miles two-thirds of the year (Long, 2010). The reserve system demonstrates either a conscious effort to disconnect Indigenous families from their food systems in order to create dependency on the state, or a deep misunderstanding of the vast amounts of land that animals such as moose and caribou, which were important food sources to communities, require to subsist in the boreal forest ecosystem (Magoun et al., 2005; Timmermann & McNicol, 1988). While each community was told that they could “hunt and fish as they always have,” the Treaty further stipulates, “saving and excepting the land is needed for mining, lumber, or settlement” (Treaty 9, 1905). Chief Missabay of Osnaburgh First Nation anticipated this discrepancy between what the state offered and what the food systems of the boreal forest required and asked the Treaty 9 commissioners; “Well for all of this, we will have to give up our hunting and live on the land you give us, and how can we live without hunting?” (Long, 2010, p. 293). Eventually, communities north of the Albany River, whose hunters were being harassed by the Department of Lands and Forest and who were also experiencing the encroachment of miners and loggers, wanted to be included in Treaty 9 as they believed it would be an avenue to protect their ability to sustain themselves (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011). They signed the adhesions in 1929-1930.

It is important to note that colonial understandings and intentions of treaties in general differ vastly from Indigenous understandings and intentions. Mills (2017) argues that from an Anishinaabeg perspective, rather than a legal document akin to a contract, Treaties were entered as a binding law of how to be in right relationship to one another. As Mills (2017) states, “we are not and have never been *autonomous* peoples: as interdependent persons and communities within

creation, we're always already in relationship" (p. 210). For example, foundational Treaties between Indigenous Peoples and the British Crown, such as the Royal Proclamation (1763) and the Treaty of Niagara (1764) represented by the Covenant Chain and Twenty-Four Nations wampum, represent an ongoing and living relationship between Indigenous nations and the Crown, nations that are unique but choose to "stand together in a relationship" (p. 239). Mills (2017) points to an important distinction between Indigenous languages of "treaty partners", versus Canada's language of "treaty rights". He states that Anishinaabe constitutional order strives for harmony instead of justice, made up of individuals "*living in right relation*" (p. 236).

Yet, this was not the reality of Treaty 9. While seeing treaties as a contract hurts everyone, "Indigenous peoples, not having signed on but rather having had consent clubbed into them, experience the worst of it" (Mills, 2017, p. 17). Although First Nations were guaranteed that their livelihoods would "in no way be interfered with" (Long, 2010, p. 170) by signing Treaty 9, hunters became subject to provincial game laws when outside the boundaries of their reserve (Rogers, 1983). This, assisted by increased air transportation access in the area, allowed an increase in patrol, and the game wardens were able to confiscate furs and arrest trappers (Rogers, 1983). Ontario's wildlife and fish legislation, enforced through "amisk okimaaw" (beaver boss) (Long, 2010, p. 332), implemented game laws that controlled hunting seasons, harvest limits, and restricted people from selling furs trapped out of season, which led to uncertainty in peoples' abilities to survive winters (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011).

Treaty signings were only the beginning of the ways that the Dominion of Canada created a physical, discursive, and political container in which Indigenous peoples could exercise traditional harvesting rights. Along with limiting the physical space within which communities could exercise their hunting, fishing, gathering, and trapping livelihoods, the Canadian

government also enforced policies, governance, and economies which disrupted families, knowledges, and intergenerational learning, such as the *Indian Act* (1876), Indian Residential Schools (IRS), and the wage labour economy. Morrison explains:

Forced assimilation into Indian residential schools and participation in the capitalist wage economy has led to the breakdown of traditional social structures and intergenerational transfer of knowledge and has disconnected families and communities from one another and the land, plants, and animals that provide us with our food (p. 24).

Streit & Mason (2017) outline the ways that residential schooling and other assimilation strategies impacted northern Ontario specifically, pointing to the ways that Indigenous food systems were intentionally destroyed as they interfered with assimilation activities (i.e., residential schooling and missionary activities) that required people to stay in community (Streit & Mason, 2017). As impactful as these impositions were, it is important to recognize that Indigenous families did continue to resist these impositions in various ways – some did so by refusing to attend schools and others did so by engaging in them to learn the language and tools necessary to challenge the colonial government.

Despite resistances, these pressures have worked in myriad ways to limit the actual realizability of Indigenous food sovereignty, allowing the Government of Canada to support community-led initiatives for “food sovereignty” that will not actually challenge settler claims to land. However, First Nations communities in northern Ontario have always and continue to resist, negotiate, ignore, and defy these imposed constraints, although not without significant costs.

Ongoing colonial impositions

As has been outlined above, Treaty 9's imposition of the reserve systems was a "radical change" for Indigenous families whose food systems depended on traveling long distances following food (Long, 2010, p. 92), and years of experience and intergenerational knowledge transmission on the land. This was significantly disrupted by mandated attendance of all children at IRS as per the Indian Act. The intergenerational impacts of the physical, mental, emotional, and sexual abuses experienced at IRS has been extensively documented (Bombay et al., 2009, 2011, 2014; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) highlights that hunger was an extremely common experience in the residential schools across Canada (TRC, 2015). In some cases, the malnourished children in specific IRS were used by nutrition researchers to experiment with the importance of specific mineral, nutrients, and supplements (Mosby, 2013; Mosby & Galloway, 2017). During these studies, children were continually fed nutritionally inadequate diets, sometimes for up to five years (Coté, 2016). While IRS are no longer operational, many youth from northern Ontario First Nations are required to leave their communities and stay with billeted families hundreds of kilometres away in Thunder Bay and Sioux Lookout to attend high school. This creates enormous disruptions to the youths' ability to be mentored by experienced harvesters in their communities.

Engagement in the wage labour economy limits the time available to hunt, harvest, process, distribute and teach youth about traditional foods (Morrison, 2011; Streit & Mason, 2017). At the same time, one needs to be involved in the wage labour economy in order to afford the high cost of hunting, including equipment and fuel to travel further distances in search of food sources, whose migratory patterns have changed drastically due to climate change (Golden

et al., 2015). Often, traditional food access is as much or more expensive than buying food from the store (Golden et al., 2015; Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2019; Robidoux et al., 2021). While many programs and research grants do provide funding for local food harvesting, Robidoux et al. (2021) demonstrate that in one northern Ontario community, the actual impact local food harvesting has on food security (in terms of amount of calories from protein) is minimal. This, of course, is in a political and ecological landscape where food resources are continuously *made* scarce due to ongoing resource exploitation and climate change. It is a positive feedback loop of decreasing food availability - when food becomes scarce and hunting becomes more expensive, it logically follows that there will be fewer hunters who are able to afford to be on the land. When there are fewer hunters on the land, it is easier for the province to extract resources from the land unencumbered and unchallenged, which diminishes the abundance of plants and animals integral to sustaining the food system.

These extractions have had profound ecological and social impacts. The pulp and paper Mill in Dryden, Ontario has dumped mercury into the waters which has bioaccumulated in fish (Long, 2010, p. 160). Hydro-electric dams in northern Ontario and river diversions constructed in order to increase electricity output in the south have flooded out lakes and communities, forcing relocations (Kamal et al., 2015; Long, 2010), destroying manoomin beds (Mehlretter et al., 2020), releasing mercury into the food system (Calder et al., 2016), and disrupting commercial fisheries along with spawning and migratory patterns (Kamal et al., 2015). Forestry and mining developments, accompanied by the construction of access roads, disrupt caribou populations in the region by increasing habitat for alternate prey and increasing predator access (Abraham & Thompson, 1998; Boan et al., 2018). While these changes have led to “increased prosperity for Canadians generally, Anishinaabe lifestyles [have] suffered” (Mehlretter et al.,

2020). Essentially, First Nations in Treaty 9 are able to “hunt and fish as they always have” (James Bay Treaty, 1905) on whatever land is leftover after the province takes what it needs for economic development. For example, the Ontario’s Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) states:

In general, Aboriginal people exercising their Aboriginal and treaty rights on Crown land are free to do so and enforcement will not occur...enforcement activity is only undertaken where the activity appears to present a significant risk to ecological or resources sustainability, or where there are other compelling and competing land management program goals (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2005, p. 21).

While the MNR rhetoric seemingly is in support of Treaty rights, they explicitly re-establish the province’s jurisdictional control – First Nations can use the land as long as it does not interfere with the interests of the province. Alfred (2005) appropriately asks “...to what extent does that state-regulated ‘right’ to fish represent justice when you consider that Indigenous people have been fishing on their rivers and seas since time began?” (p. 43). Corntassel & Bryce (2012) remind us that “Rights are state constructions that do not necessarily reflect inherent Indigenous responsibilities to their homelands. Rather, rights are conditional in that the state can withdraw them at any time or selectively enforce them” (p.152). In line with this critique, Ontario justifies their enforcement and withdrawal of harvesting rights when necessary to maintain “ecological sustainability” yet are extremely vague about what other “competing land management program goals” might be.

King’s (2011) work importantly exposes the ways that conservation is used as a justification for colonial legislation and control over Indigenous peoples’ livelihoods, particularly related to food harvesting. There have been multiple examples where the Supreme Court “has demonstrated that it will continually assert the right and responsibility of the Crown

to manage and regulate the harvest” (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2005, p. 35). For example, *R. v. Jones and Nadjiwon* (1993) (Ministry of Natural Resources, 2005), *Platinex vs. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug* (2007) (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011), and *Grassy Narrows v. Ontario* (2005) (Townshend LLP, 2014) all resulted in rulings that affirm Ontario’s authority over natural resources in the region, bestowed upon the province by the Crown during Treaty proceedings. More recently, Chapleau First Nation, Missanaibi First Nation, and Brunswick House First Nation started to pursue legal action against the province of Ontario due to the forestry operations in the region that have disrupted Indigenous food systems and ways of life (CBC News, 2022).

Following *Platinex vs. Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug*, Ontario implemented the *Far North Act* (2010). Although publicly presented as heralding a new relationships with First Nations (Government of Ontario, 2021), analysis of the Act reveals it is merely a repackaging of the same relations which further entrench Ontario’s right to take up land as it needs for resource extraction (Gardner et al., 2012; Scott & Cutfeet, 2019). In 2021, Ontario’s Progressive Conservative Party passed an amendment to this Act with the intention to remove the ‘red tape’ in the Ring of Fire mining operations in northern Ontario (Scott et al., 2020; Scott & Cutfeet, 2019). Although the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) states that Indigenous people have the rights to control and develop their own lands, (UNDRIP, 2007), clearly, the kind of partnership or sovereignty necessary to work towards Indigenous food sovereignty in a settler-colonial nation is forcefully limited as “traditional harvesters who assert their inherent jurisdiction through direct action often face civil and criminal charges in a court system that is adversarial in nature and has demonstrated culturally biased tendency to make judgements in favour of corporate interests” (Morrison, 2011, p. 107).

Amidst these colonial impositions on Indigenous lands, an ecological climate emergency is further stressing traditional food systems. Much research demonstrates the connection between climate change, food security, and food sovereignty in northern Canada (Beaumier & Ford, 2010; Golden et al., 2015; Lemelin et al., 2010; Ross & Mason, 2020; Tsuji et al., 2019). Climate patterns are incredibly important for food systems in the boreal forest as shifts in water levels (Winterhalder, 1983b), snow depth (Winterhalder, 1983a), and the timing between ice formation and initial snowfall accumulation (Steezman Jr., 1983a) can shift migration patterns and increase the safety risks associated with hunting. While climate change is posing real challenges for traditional food systems in northern Ontario and must be addressed, it has the potential to be used as a political scapegoat in order to obscure the colonial social, economic, and political impositions which created food shortages in First Nations communities to begin with. In this political, social, and ecological context, is seeking food sovereignty a realizable goal or a distraction designed to make communities feel responsible for finding solutions to challenges that the state continues to perpetuate? While it may be inherent that political sovereignty should be a mandatory precursor of food sovereignty, it must also be consciously put at the forefront of the movements, lest Indigenous food sovereignty becomes relegated to exercising Treaty and constitutional rights within a container which is continually being suffocated. Sustaining what we can with what we have can easily slip into a performance of food sovereignty.

Futurity of Indigenous food sovereignty in northern Ontario

As has been outlined in the first two sections, food sovereignty in northern Ontario is highly contingent on the food resources available, the relative robustness of the ecosystem, a community's capacity and autonomy to adapt, and the ability of the community to negotiate the use of these resources with other communities. The settler colonial state of Canada has disrupted

all of these autonomies. This section asks: given these historical and ongoing impositions on Indigenous lifeways, what is the pathway forward for research, partnership, and innovation towards Indigenous food sovereignty in northern Ontario?

There is always a risk in transplanting concepts developed in one context and language to another, especially when Indigenous communities and groups use non-Indigenous terms to define our movements. Indigenous eco-philosophies sharply contrast Eurocentric hierarchical binaries of modernity (Morrison, 2011). The implications of coercion and domination inherent in the terms “sovereignty” defies “kin-centric ecology” which entails “an awareness that life in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin” (Salmón, 2000, p. 1332) and “foster[s] relationships with plants, animals, and land based on respect and reciprocity” (Coté, 2016, p. 8). In this view, even though life in the bush is hard, it is also “*pimachiowin aki* – ‘the land that gives life’” (Pawlowska-Mainville, 2020, p. 58) based on a “dynamic view of the land and food system, which assumes that nature cannot be controlled nor yields predicted” (Morrison, 2011, p. 104). In an Indigenous, decolonial worldview, the animal and/or plant that is consumed for food has agency, or sovereignty, over themselves. There is an element of needing to “dethink the concept of sovereignty and replace it with a notion of power that has at its root a more appropriate premise” (Alfred, 2005, p. 47). It is not sovereignty *over* food, but sovereignty *of* and *through* food. As activists, academics, and traditional food harvesters protect the sovereignty of the land itself, they protect their own political sovereignty.

While Indigenous food sovereignty and local food harvesting is an opportunity for decolonization (Kamal et al., 2015), we must be conscious not to accept it only as metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2011). While it may look like decolonization when people hunt and fish

traditionally, if the land is still in the control of the state, can we call it such? Barker (2005) explains:

[Some Indigenous scholars] find the links between sovereignty and particular cultural practices, such as certain aspects of basket weaving or food preparation, to flatten out, distort, or even make light of the legal importance and political substance of sovereignty (p. 21).

Reclaiming Indigenous homelands, and by extension food sovereignty, requires that all activities that “encroach on the sovereignty of these territories”, including mining, damming, and dumping toxins, must cease (Menser, 2014, p. 70). That is, if this is in line with communities’ interests.

There is nuance in this perspective, as many communities do see an economic potential in mining. However, Horowitz et al (2018) found that economic benefits from mining often leak out of Indigenous communities who deal with the ecological “sacrifice zones” (p. 407) and the acute and long-term ecological impacts. These impacts shift, however, when there is greater local ownership. Yet community consultation processes do not include veto power - instead, it is the power to negotiate within a predetermined outcome, as mining will take place regardless.

Horowitz et al. (2018) succinctly summarize:

Indeed, Indigenous communities may ultimately see no alternative but to negotiate with companies. As their land rights are restricted to a certain area, often imbued with great cultural, spiritual, and emotional significance to them, they do not have the option to go elsewhere. When it becomes apparent that the project will not go away, they may face a choice between continuing to resist in vain, at great cost and risk to themselves, or negotiating at least some benefits for their communities (p. 411).

At the same time, employment from industry has been shown to both increase land-harvesting due to increased income to afford to be on the land, and decrease land-harvesting activities due to limited time available to be on the land (Horowitz et al., 2018).

There are examples of hunter support programs which have found some success in offering an economic return for traditional food harvesting activities (Gombay, 2005, 2009; Government of Canada, 2022). Yet, initiatives such as Nutrition North Canada's (NNC) Harvesters Support Grant, which espouses to "support Northerners' own food priorities, while improving conditions for food sovereignty within northern communities" (Government of Canada, 2022), must be critically analyzed. When looking at it from a distance, we see that although these initiatives do align with the pillars of food sovereignty, they are missing an integral piece – Indigenous land restitution. It is unsurprising that this piece is avoided, as this theft of land is the basis of settler-colonialism (Tuck & Yang, 2012) – acknowledging that this land was home to political communities before they showed up elicits fear that "the home [they] live in and even [their] claim to call this country home are baseless" (Mills, 2017, p. 219). Keske (2021) argues that "Nyéléni Declaration and La Vía Campesina imply, but fall short of, explicitly advocating for local control and resource ownership" (p.4). Yet, I would argue instead that this is the central argument of LVC that has been lost as the concept has been enthusiastically co-opted by settler-colonial states – as to recognize the central tenet of food sovereignty is to deny the state's legitimacy.

In a socio-ecological context where local food production is unlikely to meet the caloric requirements needed to sustain a community alone (Robidoux et al., 2021), and where there are competitive advantages in climate, technological advancements, and transportation to growing food in more temperate climates and transporting it north (Keske, 2021, p. 4), what chance does

achieving food sovereignty have? Yet it is argued that current efforts to train young hunters and foragers to be on the land and supporting families to continue harvesting activities (Turner, 2022) does work towards achieving food sovereignty in a way that has little to do with the amount of food that is brought back (Bagelman, 2018; Bagelman et al., 2016) or whether or not there is state recognized Indigenous sovereignty to the land that is hunted. For example, Batchewana First Nation is reclaiming their traditional fishery and rejecting provincial jurisdiction by setting up their own fishing authority that does not depend on validation from the colonial state (Lowitt et al., 2019). Communities across northern Ontario have long resisted colonial impositions on food systems, such as Moose Cree First Nation challenging the Migratory Birds Act (Long, 2010) and the aforementioned court challenges to poor mining and forestry consultation and toxin introduction accountability.

More recently, Indigenous communities are asserting co-management over land through Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs). These designations are defined as “lands and waters where Indigenous government have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance and knowledge systems” (The Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018, p. 5). The government plans to spend \$800 million to support almost 1 million square kilometres under Indigenous protection and conservation by 2030 (Zimonjic, 2022). Although IPCAs differ across regions, they are all Indigenous-led, represent a long term commitment to conservation, and elevate Indigenous rights and responsibilities (The Indigenous Circle of Experts, 2018). Currently, funding is slated to protect the Hudson Bay and James Bay Lowlands, led by the Omushkego Cree (Zimonjic, 2022). Kitchenuhmaykoosib Inninuwug (KI) First Nation has also submitted a proposal to protect the Fawn River Watershed under their knowledge and authority (McIntosh, 2022). Although provinces tend to be resistant to IPCAs

because of the constraints on resource extraction, the federal government has been approving many across the country (Mason et al., 2022). Ontario, for example, has expressed resistance to IPCAs (McIntosh, 2022). This makes sense considering their focus on mining activities in Hudson Bay and James Bay watershed – this watershed is fed by multiple rivers, some of which are at risk of being impacted by the Ring of Fire (Stevenson, 2022). If the IPCA does not protect the entire watershed and cannot control upstream impacts, how will it work to protect the region? IPCAs still require government approval that are not guaranteed to be granted. While it is an important step towards Indigenous land management and co-management, it is not land restitution nor exclusive sovereignty (Wood, 2022). While regaining Indigenous title is possible through lengthy and expensive court negotiations and communities have demonstrated that they are willing to go through with this process, again, it requires immense amounts of time and energy.

Alternatively, Batchewana First Nation provides an example of reclaiming land sovereignty without waiting for Canada's approval of their jurisdiction. While this rejection of colonial authority is an important step towards Indigenous sovereignty, resurgence, and “de-linking”, at the same time, broader decisions about Lake Superior (e.g., shipping rates and regulations, invasive species legislation) are still held by the colonial government, and those pressures have great impacts on the stability and sustainability of the fishery. While choosing to ignore government set fishing limits in the lake is one measure of political sovereignty, without official land restitution, decisions about what happens to and on that lake still rest in the hands of the settler-colonial state. In the beginning of this section, I asked what the pathway forward is for Indigenous food sovereignty research in northern Ontario. Based on the research in this paper, it is clear that communities will always do what is in their power to protect land and water rights

and integrity. Yet if we as researchers do not place Indigenous land restitution, resurgence, and sovereignty, however defined by the community, at the heart of our questions, we risk sidestepping the foundations of Indigenous food sovereignty.

Conclusions

The colonial social, economic, cultural, ecological, and political impositions in the boreal forests of northern Ontario have created scarcity in traditional food systems which have led to food insecurity. While using an Indigenous food *sovereignty* as opposed to food *security* framework is widely argued as the most appropriate for Indigenous communities in Canada, the concept still has several serious limitations in the boreal forests of northern Ontario. Without explicitly addressing a more radical pursuit of food sovereignty through emphasizing land restitution, seeking food sovereignty can easily become a chimera (Holt Giménez & Shattuck, 2011). If food sovereignty does not work in concert with land restitution, it will be exercised in exponentially shrinking and segregated parcels of state-controlled land, which is becoming increasingly unpredictable due to climatic abnormalities. This is not to say that because of these imposed limits the pursuit of Indigenous food sovereignty is in vain; rather, it is *through* food that Indigenous land, political, and knowledge sovereignty may be most likely to be achieved, rebuilding land relations without requiring state approved restitution. This approach necessarily involves conflict, such as the KI Six (Ariss & Cutfeet, 2011) and Black Duck Wild Rice on Pigeon Lake (Hayden Taylor, 2020). Sustaining the defense of the land in this way requires massive physical, emotional, intellectual, and financial sacrifices from Indigenous communities, minds, hearts, and bodies, which have already had many of these resources strained.

If we do not challenge this misplaced use of food sovereignty in a settler-colonial society, we create a narrative that has a built-in justification for increased government intervention to

create economic opportunities and to provide market-based solutions to food shortages. It also justifies state surveillance to monitor wildlife and harvesting rates. Scarce food resources justify conservation and management policies, a complete opposite to, for example, Anishinaabeg teachings that:

the plant is not simply a resource to be managed but rather an active and agential partner for whose future generations one cares and is responsible. Whereas conservation is a form of management applied to other life forms by humans without their consent, in this interaction, the plant must give consent and can always refuse it... (Mitchell, 2020, p. 916).

This paper attempted to demonstrate that as opposed to food sovereignty, sovereignty *of* and *through* food is a more appropriate and useful way of conceptualizing improving access to food in northern Ontario. It is within this context that I am reminded of my earlier reflections on harvesting and reseeded manoomin which I outlined in the Introduction. Using our hands and participating in these harvesting activities has been argued to help re-establish kin-centric relationships to the entire ecosystem (Kamal et al., 2015; Morrison, 2020), reconnect with food and political systems (Martens et al., 2016), and “inherently asserts Indigenous peoples’ self-determination of their own culturally suitable food systems” (Settee & Shukla, 2020, p. 4). This aligns with Corntassel & Bryce’s (2012) emphasis on “moving away from the performativity of a rights discourse geared toward state affirmation and approval toward a daily existence conditioned by place-based cultural practices” (p. 153).

While I believe and feel all these elements, I also know that ultimate control over the lake remains in the hands of the settler-colonial state, which still has the ability, through legislative and indeed military power, to shape the space within which Indigenous food sovereignty is

practiced. How can Indigenous food sovereignty exist in this context? As long as we keep our rice bed within its allowed container, there is no problem. When we start to expand, to take up too much space, we meet resistance - and then we must decide what to do with that. While the costs of pushing against that container are great, so too are the costs of choosing not to.

Chapter 8:
Processing and Reseeding

Chapter 8: Processing and reseedling

Manoomin surrounds me. I look around and am happy to see that the rice bed has grown since last year thanks to the time, labour, and love that Jeff has put into harvesting and reseedling manoomin. He shows me this same generous care as he teaches me. With my hands in and on manoomin and manoomin all over me, my understanding of what Indigenous food sovereignty *feels* like, expands. It feels we are being introduced to each other – like the beginning of any relationship. Jeff does not own the rice bed – other community members, ducks, muskrat, fish, and insects are all regular visitors. Temperatures, wind, soil conditions, and manoomin's growth cycle are all completely outside of Jeff's control, but within his agency to shift with. It has never been sovereignty *over* food, but *relationship with* food accompanied by political, community, and individual agency - and this kind of relationship historically led to an abundance of rice. A cascade of colonial impositions, such as Indian Day Schools, private land ownership, dam projects, and Treaties shifted ecological, economic, social, cultural, and political structures that continue to disrupt this relationship in profound ways. I recognized that although harvesting manoomin is viewed as an exercise of food sovereignty— how much food sovereignty is “allowed” until it’s “too much”? On lakes around Ontario, cottagers have used state sanctioned legal frameworks to “protect” their lake from wild rice. As one of only a handful of ricers in the community, Jeff continues to harvest and seed with fewer resources in an area that the settler state maintains legislative control over. Yet, having limited access to space in which to harvest and seed manoomin constrains its ability to produce enough to feed everyone in the community.

At this stage in my PhD studies, I find myself with more questions than answers and more uncertainty than confidence. Perhaps this is to be expected - before I started these studies, an Elder from Kâpapâmachakwêw (Wandering Spirit) School, where I was a secondary school

teacher, warned me that this would happen. He told me, “as the diameter of your knowledge grows, so too does the circumference of your ignorance.” I see that he is correct – I am coming out of this experience with many more questions than I started with. I realize, however, that this ignorance also represents growth. The conversations, thinkers, and experiences I have been exposed to have shown me how much more there is to learn. In a way, this is akin to harvesting and seeding manoomin – the act of harvesting plants far more seeds than we bring home. Martens et al. (2016) argue that Indigenous research methodologies are exceedingly important to use when studying Indigenous food sovereignty, where metaphor can feature prominently in the analysis. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I will use the harvesting, processing, and reseedling of manoomin as a metaphor and guide to think through and explain my learnings, limitations, and future directions in Indigenous food sovereignty research.

Harvesting, processing, reseedling

The first batch of manoomin I processed looked nothing like I imagined it would. I was hoping it would look more like the polished manoomin I buy, with perfectly parched dark grains (see Figure 1). As you can see in Figure 2, the outcome was quite different. I feel similarly when I look back on my finished dissertation. Yet, when I reflect on the process of both endeavours, I recognize that they represent so much more than the finished product as within them, they also represent and contain layers of relationships, experiences, ideas, and learnings.

Harvesting manoomin, gathering ideas

Like harvesting manoomin, gathering the ideas, readings, and directions of this research was only possible because of all the work others had done before me, the relationships I was already in, and the new relationships I was able to form. My uncle invited me to harvest manoomin and through his relationships in Alderville, was able to introduce me to Jeff. We

traveled to the rice bed by using my uncle's boat. We harvested seeds with Jeff's canoe and ricing sticks. While I was focused on tapping seeds from rice stalks, Jeff guided us from the front to the stalks that he knew would be mature, based on his own experience. The following season, we did the same thing – I had more of a handle on how to harvest, so was able to have my eyes open to watch him as he guided us through. I watched him navigate the boat through the stalks without breaking them. I watched him recognize mature seeds from far away and observed him decide how many seeds to keep to process and how many to put back into the lake. The third season, Jeff was not able to make it, so he left his cedar sticks for me to borrow on his porch, and I went out with my uncle and another friend from Alderville. In this third year, I was able to show her what Jeff had shown me. This time, it was me guiding the canoe from the front while she tapped the seeds free from the stalks. I did my best to remember what Jeff had taught me and tried to steer towards the correct stalks without destroying them in the process. By the time we were done, I was happy with our harvest, but wondered if we had collected enough manoomin to process, share, and reseed.

As we were transferring the rice and canoe back into my uncle's boat, I heard two other voices in the rice bed. Eventually, a canoe emerged, paddled by the current chief of Alderville in the back, and one of his friends in the front. They were also out harvesting manoomin. I felt relieved – any manoomin seeds I missed would surely be picked up by them, and any other harvester that comes after them. I am reminded that expanding this manoomin bed requires many canoes, and many harvesters – we never do it alone. The manoomin that I harvested is only possible because harvesters before me reseeded this bed, either intentionally by sowing, or unintentionally by knocking them off into the water instead of their boat. The wind also helped to spread the seeds. Before we took the rice home to start to process it, we went to reseed in a

new rice bed that Jeff is trying to establish. With his guidance, my uncle, friend, and I spread manoomin there, too.

This feels akin to the way my research has moved, grown, and expanded. This work was only possible because of the thinking, work, and innovations of many thinkers, scholars, community members, activists, and advocates who came before me. I was guided through this work through conversations with my supervisors, committee members, academic mentors, peers, and community members. I could not have completed this work without their guidance.

It is clear when I read this dissertation that there are works I missed; akin to the full mature stalks of manoomin I missed. I remind myself that this does not diminish the overall harvest. Someone else will recognize what I missed and pick it up. Ultimately, it will still help the overall rice bed, or field of Indigenous food sovereignty research, to flourish. I will continue learning and growing, and next season, perhaps I will be able to recognize these stalks better. However, by then, the rice bed will have hopefully grown even more. As research and approaches to Indigenous food sovereignty continue to flourish, I know as I keep learning more, the field will continue to accelerate its expansion. If I take my guidance from a neo-liberal institutional approach, a gripping idea of ownership and individualism, this will feel daunting and impossible. Yet, if I take my guidance from manoomin, I trust that other researchers will pick up the pieces I missed, and I will do the same for them. In contrast to the status quo competitive atmosphere of the academy, manoomin reminds me that although different researchers may use different approaches, or harvest from different stalks, together we expand the rice bed. We need each other to be able to do that. I hope the bed of knowledge grows and I am always missing something, as this means that the rice bed, or the knowledge itself, is ever expanding.

At the same time, what I did miss does limit this research. First, I am not from Treaty 9, nor the communities referred to in these articles. While this may not undermine the research, it does leave vast gaps in understanding. I was not raised with the worldviews, languages, lands, or relationships of Treaty 9. I was brought up in various suburbs of southern Ontario and was not exposed to traditional harvesting. I am still learning how to hunt and fish and garden. There is an embodied knowing that is missing in this work. While I did learn from manoomin, the research articles are not based on harvesting that food source, and the communities we visited and spoke to speak different language dialects, are part of different Treaties, and have different colonial histories. I am still a visitor. For example, Chapter 7's analysis would have been stronger with the voices of community members. Although I am clear to state that it is from a visitor's view, this limits the overall relevance of the paper. Since the paper is not written *with* or *by* members of Treaty 9, I also see that this final chapter's research methodology cannot be considered CBPR or IM.

This represents another limitation in this research. I was interested to work with the IHRG because I appreciated their focus on CBPR and community relationships. However, several constraints limited my ability to conduct CBPR in the way I imagined. Despite not being able to be physically present as I originally imagined, I was able to have layered experiences working with communities which affirmed the importance of relationality. For example, my first article (Chapter 5) involved interviews that had to occur over the phone and Zoom and the second article (Chapter 6) involved a short visit to Wapekeka. These two experiences were only possible because of the relationships I had with people who had relationships with community members. This is much the same as harvesting manoomin with Jeff. Our relationship is not starting from nothing – it starts from layers of relationships we each have that bring us together

and that we are accountable to. It taught me, contrary to my original perception, that IM and CBPR can be transferred to contexts such as shorter visits and/or virtual experiences.

This is not to negate the value of being present in partnering research communities. Currently, I am working on parallel research with Moose Cree First Nation and the IHRG which involved four weeks of work in the community in the spring and fall of 2022. Four more weeks are planned in 2023. These subsequent experiences continue to reify the importance of long-term community relationships. It has affirmed my intentions to continue to learn and grow within these methodologies and the variety of contexts they can be practiced in.

Processing manoomin, processing ideas

The first season I harvested manoomin, Jeff took the seeds I had managed to knock into my canoe and rinsed them in a creek bed in a plastic gunny sack. After rinsing them for several days, he gave them to my uncle, who dried them in his garage and stored them until the following year when I returned for the harvesting season. At that time, we brought this dried manoomin to Jeff's house to begin processing. We started by lighting a small fire under a cast iron kettle until it was hot. We put a couple of handfuls of manoomin into the kettle to parch them. We used a canoe paddle to continually mix them to ensure they did not burn or "pop". However careful we were, we still ended up with several "popped/puffed" manoomin. While eating this popped manoomin was a treat (similar to popcorn), it was also a sign that the fire under the kettle was too hot and needed to cool down. The manoomin was also helping to teach us the process.

After parching the manoomin, we moved it to another cast iron kettle, and I donned Jeff's moccasins. At this stage, I danced the manoomin, which worked the grain free from its sheath. Jeff and I took turns doing this. I was worried. I asked him several times if I was potentially

breaking the grains. Many times, when I thought we were done, he told me to keep going. In between batches of parching and dancing, we all took turns leafing through a binder of photos, newspaper articles, and maps of manoomin in the region. My uncle pointed out pictures of some of our relatives harvesting rice while hunting ducks. In a way, it felt like they were there too. Like harvesting, processing manoomin takes many hands, minds, and memories.

Finally, we were at the winnowing stage. Jeff explains that traditionally, you would go to a windy place, and toss the danced batch up so the wind would blow the sheathes away. However, it was a very still day, so Jeff pulled out an electric fan and we used that instead. It reminded me that there are multiple ways to creatively approach processing.

This processing phase of harvesting wild rice reminds me of the processing phase of each chapter in this PhD. After gathering the information through reading literature, theory, and methodologies; through conversations, discussions, and interviews, and; through watching academic mentors work with their ideas, innovations, and learnings, I was able to process my questions and thinking into

something I could share with others. As I stated earlier, when I look at my dissertation, I feel the same way I do about my first batch of manoomin (Figure 2), compared to what I imagined it might look like (Figure 1). I see pieces in it that are positive and impactful, but I also see some parts that could have used more time in the kettle, I see parts that I danced too hard on, and I see certain perspectives that I tried to blow away in the wind, but that remained. It is not perfect. I still packed the batch up into four bags – one to my uncle, one to another friend who helped us to harvest, one to my dad, and one for me to keep. While everyone was grateful to receive it, the



Figure 1: A stock photo of processed manoomin – what I imagined my first batch would look like.



Figure 2: My first batch of processed manoomin.

reviews came back the same: “A little mushier than I expected...” In the same way that I learnt from the process of parching, dancing, and winnowing manoomin, I learnt from all the stages in this research. I hope that in both cases, my next batch, or my next research, learns from these gaps and limitations and continues to improve.

Sharing manoomin and research impacts

Just like the consumers of that batch of manoomin are in the best position to state how they felt about it, the Treaty 9 First Nations we worked with on the chapters in this dissertation are in the best position to assess the research’s impact. While it is important as researchers to have an idea of what we believe the benefits could be before we start, I am not sure we can ever know the full impact of the work. In the same way that the processed manoomin, each published chapter, and this final dissertation are evaluated as evidence of the success of the process, I also understand that there are many other impacts of this dissertation and rice harvest that have very little to do with the final product. For example, the laughter and stories shared with Jeff while harvesting. The late night and early morning conversations with my uncle. The ability to bring my friend from Toronto, an Alderville community member, manoomin harvesting for her first time. The time my uncle spent drying the rice. All the seeds I accidentally knocked into the lake instead of the canoe which will grow new manoomin. All the manoomin we reseeded in a new rice bed. The whole process had many impacts, although not necessarily obvious to the receiver of the final batch of manoomin. In the same way, this dissertation is only one part of this research. This is not to overstate this research’s impact –overall, it is minimal – it is simply to assert that it is not solely captured in publishing papers or completing a dissertation. In the following section, I attempt to summarize and piece together how I conceptualize the impact of each chapter. I fully acknowledge, however, that this discussion is grossly inadequate without the

perspectives of the community members who generously shared their stories and ideas and without whom, none of this would be possible.

Chapter summary and impacts

Chapter 5 captures community perspectives on and experiences with harvesting traditional foods, and asks whether selling traditional food would help to alleviate some of the barriers the community experiences. Throughout this process, many questions arose – would selling traditional food lead to exploitation? If traditional food was sold, would the community still be able to afford to eat it? Was there a way to work within the current economic systems to give greater financial value to the resource? If there is economic value to food resources, could that be a more ecologically sustainable alternative than the current extractive options (e.g., mining, forestry, hydro-electric projects)? If food sovereignty efforts fund themselves, could this reduce the burden of applying for and reporting back to outside funders, such as governments and research institutions? Community perspectives on economics around traditional food are important as they demonstrate some of the creative ways communities are increasing harvest and consumption of traditional foods. It is also important as it highlights the way that processing shifts a traditional food's ability to be considered a commodity. It is also an example of relational economies, demonstrating that communities are not held to static and rigid conceptions of food. It is a reminder that binary thinking is limiting – it is not about *either* selling *or* not selling – it is instead extremely nuanced. From our perspective as researchers, we left with many new ideas – ideally, the community members participating did too. Following these conversations, we were keen to explore the potential impact a women-led online market selling pemmican might have on food sovereignty. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns which occurred throughout most of my PhD studies, I was unable to be in communities the way I had

anticipated. I did not feel this kind of project could be followed up on without being in community. The fact that this idea did not have much traction after these initial conversations could have been due to many things. Perhaps the timing was not ideal considering the urgency of the COVID-19 pandemic, or perhaps the enthusiasm for the project was coming predominantly from the research team, and not the community. If the latter was the case, being in community would not have changed the outcome. In a way, the pandemic forced my research to be even more community-centred, as it was based on invitations instead of proposals.

The COVID-19 pandemic also presented an opportunity to learn from community approaches to care. Based on previous relationships with the IHRG, we received updates from hunters in Wapekeka First Nation as they attempted to provide as much traditional food as possible to the community. Chapter 6, co-authored by two hunters from Wapekeka, shares this story. Highlighting this story felt like an important interruption to the predominant conversations occurring around Indigenous vulnerability to COVID-19. Instead, this narrative provides an example of leadership and community care which much of Canada sorely lacked at that time. As well, this story demonstrates the potential and value traditional food brings to community food security. This paper was presented at a couple of different conferences, and each time it was shared, people in the audience would comment on how inspiring the story was. For example, during the question period, one attendee told us that she was smiling and laughing imagining the hunters meeting over coffee which reminded her of hunters in her own community, as well as the ways that her community managed the pandemic by taking care of each other. A student working with us on this paper, who is from Treaty 9, was inspired to learn more about how other First Nations communities in the region, including her own, responded to the pandemic. Her undergraduate thesis, capturing the leadership and success in Treaty 9 First Nations

communities, is in the final stages of being published in the *International Journal of Indigenous Health*. While Chapter 6 demonstrates the ingenuity, autonomy, leadership, and community care and highlights the increase in traditional food harvesting that is possible when barriers around economics, time, and intergenerational learning are removed, it also reveals the relatively limited amount of traditional food that was able to be brought back. This limited amount of traditional food available to each household despite extensive harvesting, processing, and distribution effort led to new questions – is food sovereignty realizable in ecosystems that are not readily abundant in traditional foods? What do we mean by food sovereignty?

I explored these questions in Chapter 7, where I took time to reflect critically about the ways in which researchers (including myself) use the term food sovereignty in vastly different ecological, social, economic, political, and cultural contexts. This exploration exposed the limitations of the term food sovereignty and the imperative for researchers to consciously engage with its complexities to use it more responsibly. In this chapter, I argue that these food harvesting activities, regardless of how much food is brought back, do have the potential to lead to more community autonomy over food and land, and are deeply significant. It also helped me to identify some of the aspects of Indigenous food sovereignty that did not sit right with me. While there is so much great work being done by communities and scholars in the field, and in no way do I intend to discredit or take away from that, I started to see how important it was for land restitution to accompany Indigenous food sovereignty. Not instead of, not conflated with, but alongside. When land is the entire basis for settler-colonial belonging, Indigenous restitution of land is a crucial aspect of Indigenous food sovereignty – if not, the Crown will continue to have legal justification to impose on Indigenous lands, and therefore, food systems. Writing this chapter helped me to understand that Indigenous food sovereignty is not solely about harvesting

food within the current colonial socio-political and economic structures. Instead, I see Indigenous food sovereignty as inherently political, necessarily accompanied by a shift in social land relations. This is not to say that simply restituting land would necessarily change abundance and valuation of Indigenous food systems – this is wholly dependent on a variety of factors that are highly contextual to the communities themselves. While land restitution alone will not shift that relationship, it is an important part of it. The potential impact of this paper is that it may invite other researchers and practitioners to reflect on the goals of Indigenous food sovereignty and to consider connecting with efforts towards land restitution simultaneously.

Reseeding

I believe that this research planted more seeds than it harvested. As a new harvester knocks more rice into the lake, so does a learning researcher. Some future seeds I hope to grow have come from various conversations with community members, family, and academic mentors. I hope to continue to learn from manoomin, moving towards the relationship between Indigenous sovereignty and food sovereignty, using manoomin as an example and teacher. I also hope to continue to learn from and with the concept of rematriating food systems, and the way that this may capture not only land restitution, but also resurgence of kinship, language, and governance systems. In future research questions, I plan to explore the ways that harvesting traditional foods, even within a colonial structure, can and does work to change that structure, with or without official restitution of land. I hope to continue to learn with and from communities, and I hope my research and academic work is not divorced from but reliant upon the work I do with my hands (Martens, 2016).

Having my hands in manoomin is what allowed my understanding of food sovereignty to expand. I hope that every batch of manoomin I process gets a little better. In the same way, when

I look back at this dissertation, after harvesting seeds of knowledge, drying, parching, dancing, and winnowing this learning, I hope all the research I do after this dissertation gets a little better.

Final thoughts

I opened this dissertation with a series of three reflections on my first three years of learning to harvest manoomin. I cannot help but notice how my view of Indigenous food sovereignty shifted from one of frustration and anger and resistance, to one of love and relationship. While the earlier versions are looking outwards – what is constraining manoomin? How do we challenge these constraints? How do we fight against them? – the later version looks instead at manoomin itself and ignores the imposition. In this way, manoomin has taught me to shift my energy from one that is focused only on the colonial limitations on traditional food harvesting towards a focus on restoration and resurgence of traditional food harvesting which inherently defies these limitations – not through resistance, but through relationship.

All of these activities – seeding manoomin, growing gardens, harvesting niska, walleye, and mooz – require people to be on the land. When people are on the land, they are able to monitor what is happening on the land. This surveillance gives harvesters the opportunity to support or reject activities they come across. This is not to suggest that all communities would reject extractive industries or non-resident hunting. For, although extractive industries do disrupt traditional food systems, the income they bring to community members can help hunters and processors to afford the equipment required to be on the land. Food sovereignty research must not discount these realities. Regardless of the choices communities make, the act of harvesting food is an act of sovereignty. As was stated in Chapter 7, perhaps sovereignty *of and through* food is a more appropriate way to conceptualize this relationship.

From an Anishinaabe perspective, there is nothing new or radical about this assertion. In the Anishinaabe creation story, as Skywoman falls to the Earth, she is supported by geese, muskrats, turtle, and the seeds in her hands to build the world (Kimmerer, 2015). She cannot create the world without them. Similarly, in the seven fire prophecies, the Anishinaabe are instructed to move west “to a land where food grows on water” (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 89). I think about this relationship as I harvest and seed manoomin. I am reminded that during the harvest, much more seed is knocked off into the lake than lands in our canoe. This means the more we harvest, the more the rice beds grow. The more these rice beds grow, the more they push on settler-colonial impositions which attempt to limit its growth. It is similar to the circle of knowledge and ignorance – as the diameter of the rice bed grows, so too does the circumference of its perimeter. This perimeter serves as a revelation of both the impositions on it and the opportunities for growth and restoration. Without enacting this agency of and through food, the settler colonial state can continue to encroach on the land unencumbered. Instead of accepting this, by practicing traditional harvesting, manoomin and the Anishinaabe (and many other Indigenous communities and food systems) are seeding and leading each other.

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