

GOOD NEWS IN FOOD

Understanding the value and promise of Indigenous food sovereignty in western Canada

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ABSTRACT

Food sovereignty has recently emerged as a means of addressing food-related problems that confront many Indigenous and rural communities around the world. It moves beyond access to food, and is grounded in the idea that people should self-determine their food systems and cultural traditions. This is particularly important for Indigenous people who still face threats to their food systems linked to colonialism. I explore Indigenous food sovereignty by examining 24 community-located food initiatives across western Canada. Outcomes were summarized using a circle metaphor describing four key elements of Indigenous food sovereignty: history, connection to the land, relationships and identity. A related Indigenous Food Gathering was also held, focusing on reflection, the importance of cultural identity to Indigenous food sovereignty and informing the thesis through a personal narrative. Moving forward requires a shift in how Indigenous food relationships are understood, incorporating Indigenous worldviews and perspectives as part of a larger resurgence movement.

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DEDICATION

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Rationale

Many Indigenous communities across Canada, and certainly around the world, are finding it increasingly difficult to access fresh, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate foods. Over the last ten years, a varied terminology has arisen to describe and categorize the challenges the global food system can create. Terms such as “*food crisis*” and “*food insecurity*” refer to any number of conditions in the North and in remote and isolated Indigenous¹ communities (Power 2008; Willows, Veugelers, Raine, & Kuhlein, 2008). These conditions of food insecurity, in turn, reflect a host of underlying factors that include high prices for fruits and vegetables in local stores, changes in the availability of traditional foods due to access issues, landscape changes, and concerns about the health of the soil, plants, and wildlife, to name a few (Skinner, Hanning, & Tsuji, 2006; Willows, 2005).

Yet, Indigenous people across the country are responding to the challenges in novel, proactive, and ultimately hopeful ways. Food sovereignty, or the increased control over food systems, has emerged as an important way of framing these types of responses for Indigenous people and small-scale farmers the world over. Although often overlooked in the food sovereignty literature (see for example Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe’s 2011 book *Food Sovereignty*), Indigenous food sovereignty has special resonance for First Nations in Canada whose rights continue to be eroded despite the existence of treaties (Cidro & Martens, 2014). Expressions of food sovereignty, through community gardens and direct markets, the development of country foods programs, as well as the construction of greenhouses have developed over the last decade. The Urban Aboriginal Garden Project in British

¹ In Canada, Section 35 of the Constitution recognizes Aboriginal people as three distinctive peoples: Indian, Inuit and Métis. First Nation is often used instead of Indian and typically applies to both Status and non Status Indians. Inuit refers to a cultural group of people living in far northern regions in territories such as Nunavut, parts of Labrador, Quebec and the Northwest Territories. Métis refers both to historically created communities along the Red River in Manitoba and Saskatchewan created by mixed unions between French and Scottish fur traders and Native people and in some cases, to contemporary unions between non-Native and Native people. The term “Indigenous” is now increasingly used in the literature. As Wilson (2008) describes: “*No longer are tribally specific or local terms such as Indian, Métis, Inuit, or Native (as used in Canada) or Aborigine or Aboriginal (as used in Australia) inclusive enough to encompass a growing resurgence of knowledge that encompasses the underlying systemic knowledge bases of the original peoples of the world. The term Indigenous is now used to refer to that knowledge system which is inclusive of all*” (p.54).

For the purposes of this paper, the term Indigenous will be primarily used, and especially in the context of Indigenous food sovereignty, an established term in Canada (Morrison 2011; Peoples Food Policy Project 2011). However, Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit and Métis will be used when citing specific research.

Columbia (Mundel & Chapman, 2010) and the Learning Garden in Ontario (Stroink & Nelson, 2009) have been documented with Indigenous communities. Country foods initiatives, like those in Tukisigiavik in Nunavut (Lardeau, Ford, Healey, & Vanderbilt, 2011) and Nelson House in Manitoba have also been reported (Thompson, Lozeznik, Gulrukh, Ballard, Islam, Beardy, et al., 2011) and notable greenhouses have been developed in Matsqui First Nation, in Inuvik in the Northwest Territories (First Nations Health Council, 2009), and in Fort Albany First Nation in northern Ontario (Skinner, Hanning, & Metatawabin, 2014). These projects allow for greater control over what is grown, raised, produced, and consumed, ultimately resulting in greater control over local and regional food systems.

Despite their successes and the excitement that these initiatives engender locally, most are by their nature community-focused in scale, and thus there is little opportunity for communication, learning, or support among project proponents. The food challenges - and many of the supporting factors - facing these communities continue to be framed in solely negative ways, especially by the conventional media, and few people anywhere are aware of the vision, strength, and resilience that many communities and their food initiatives reflect. Gaps in the media around Indigenous issues, especially those pertaining to the land contribute, at best, to a lack of understanding of Indigenous worldviews, relationships with each other and the land; at worst, these gaps reflect a form of racism (Harding, 2005; Harding, 2006; Sloan-Morgan & Castleden, 2014). The “us versus them” dichotomy, for example, so often presented through the media creates opposition towards Indigenous people and Indigenous issues and has been traced back over a hundred years, when the general public was informed of the opening of residential schools to help “Indians” learn what to do with their land (Harding, 2006). Following the events at Burnt Church/ Eskenoôpetitj in New Brunswick, Fitzgerald (2006) analyzed media stories and found some of the major news outlets presented a “set up for the reader for the “us versus them” debate that would ensue by... not including a Native perspective” (p. 50). Indigenous voices are often missing from media accounts (Follett, 2010; Sloan-Morgan &

Castleden, 2014), and when present, misrepresented to the point where many Indigenous people are “disinclined to participate” in a process that doesn’t reflect reality (Follett, 2010, p. 27).

News discourse around Indigenous issues can be dangerous. When media refuses to offer an analysis of colonialism in Canada the historical and socio-political context to the issues presented is missing (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Harding, 2006) and the oppositional dichotomy continues. Even worse, this neglect contributes to a country where Indigenous people suffer hardships by nearly every recordable measure, from higher than average infant mortality rates to a lack of supports for elderly Indigenous people and yet, many Canadians deny there is any race problem (Gilmore, 2015). Stepping away from this racism requires an increased education on the context of these issues, and an acknowledgment of racism itself. Importantly, it also requires a space for those news stories that shed light on the good, the positive, and inspiring truths that many Indigenous people are working to create. Good news in food becomes important, for it presents an opportunity to share the positive, while still reflecting the socio-political backdrop.

Good news stories offer a pathway towards reconciling Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews around land use, sharing, and food culture. Sharing Indigenous food practices and beliefs can “facilitate, through the narrative tradition, the successful exchange of information” within and among Indigenous communities (Vazquez 2011, p.2). Moreover, there is an opportunity for Indigenous communities to share stories of food and the land so that the general public can learn a more holistic approach to caring for and considering the environment (Cajete, 1999; Follett, 2006). This research project is an attempt to start a network of sharing and learning amongst project participants and others looking to learn from and create community food initiatives *by, for, and with* Indigenous communities. Moreover, this project was designed to start a new discourse around positive food stories in Indigenous communities. These are stories of history, culture, healing, land, and life. They are presenting another reality, one where Indigenous people are represented, can speak to the damages of colonialism, and can steer the direction of their projects in collaboration with others.

1.2 Objectives

The purpose of this thesis is to better describe and characterize Indigenous food sovereignty and to identify promising practices that may benefit Indigenous communities in western Canada.

The specific objectives are:

1. To describe what Indigenous food sovereignty looks like;
2. To identify and characterize good-news stories around food sovereignty in Indigenous communities in western Canada;
3. To determine those features, both barriers and opportunities, that affect the outcomes of these projects;
4. To identify and facilitate promising practices and connections that would benefit Indigenous communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Undertaking a literature review in the area of Indigenous food sovereignty in Canada has been a challenging endeavor. Food sovereignty was first defined in a highly visible way by an international movement of small-farm, peasant and Indigenous people called La Vía Campesina in 1996. Yet, there is little published information on Indigenous food sovereignty, specifically in Canada (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). Food security, a related food justice term, has received far more attention through the literature. This review is based on literature in the areas of Aboriginal food security and Indigenous food sovereignty. I present these concepts as themes: Aboriginal food security; food sovereignty; Indigenous sovereignty; Indigenous food sovereignty; and threats to food security and food sovereignty (also known as colonial impacts). These subjects are lacking a sufficient historical and political perspective, however, and warrant further attention. Indigenous food sovereignty means different things to different people and as a term, it is one without a true definition. This is where its strength lies. The discussion around food security, on the other hand, has grown to a point where a single term no longer seems adequate, the result being a phrase that is too far removed to describe the food conditions, and importantly, food relationships of Indigenous people.

2.1 Food Security

The study and history of food security provides an important backdrop for understanding food sovereignty. Over the years, the term food security has evolved considerably, and as it became part of a larger discussion regarding needs and rights, the definition has become more complex (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2013). Food security was first proposed at the 1974 World Food Conference, in response to the world food crisis of the early 1970s (Shaw, 2007). According to the World Food Summit, food security exists “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (1996). This definition is recognized for capturing the hallmarks of food security, namely access to food, availability of food, and use of food. Food *access* refers to the ability of households to achieve sufficient resources to acquire

foods for a nutritious diet (Ford, 2009). Food *availability* describes the adequacy of foods to meet any needs, while food *quality* refers more explicitly to the availability of safe, healthy and nutritious food (Ford, 2009). Food *utilization*, or the use of food, describes an individual's ability to make healthy food choices in their local environment (Power, 2008). Food *acceptability*, *adequacy*, and *agency* have also been suggested as fundamental components of food security (Myers, Duhaime, & Powell, 2004; Ryerson Centre for Studies in Food Security, 2014). Food *acceptability* refers to food being culturally acceptable and appropriate (Myers et al., 2004). Expanding on accessibility, food *adequacy* encompasses access to safe, nutritious food that is produced sustainably, while food *agency* covers the policies and processes to achieve food security (RCFSF, 2014). Importantly, food insecurity happens when a food system is stressed to the point that food is not available, and/or accessible, and/or of adequate quality (Ford, 2009). It “refers to both the inability to secure an adequate diet today and the risk of being unable to do so in the future” (Council of Canadian Academies, 2014, p. XXV).

In 2012, the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) proposed the term food and nutrition security to stress the nutritional intent of food security including components regarding the right to food. Thus, food and nutrition security exists:

when all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care, allowing for a healthy and active life. (CFS, 2012, p. 7)

Nevertheless, food and nutrition security studies have yet to enter the literature on food security and sovereignty for Indigenous people in Canada, and a literature review revealed zero mention pertaining to Indigenous people.

Also related, community food security has been defined as a “situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm & Bellows, 2003, p. 37). It

has been proposed as an alternative to food security (Power, 2005) and is recognized as being a level of food security separate from that experienced at the individual, household, or national level (RCFSF, 2014). Community food security seeks to reconnect food production with consumption and is a comprehensive approach that combines planning, direct marketing and retail plans, community and urban gardens, food production, re-thinking food assistance, and community economic development (Allen, 1999). While this concept comes closer to understanding the practices needed to address food insecurity, again, there is no mention of community food security for Indigenous communities² in the literature, demonstrating a need for food security researchers to broaden their research areas to encompass more holistic approaches. Both community food security and food and nutrition security share systems-based principles with food sovereignty, and move away from a focus solely on the mechanics of a food system. These concepts are certainly on the path towards food sovereignty, however, they lack the political dimension that food sovereignty proposes to capture. The gaps around research with Indigenous communities in these community-focused food security areas demonstrate a need to look at food from another perspective, one that considers the people of food systems and not just food. Similar criticisms exist for how food security is measured. For Indigenous people, these studies have been numerous, and yet it is still unclear if the realities of their food crisis are known.

2.1.1 Food Security Studies

Around the globe, Indigenous communities face disproportionately higher levels of poverty, food insecurity, and health problems than non-Indigenous communities (Kuhnlein, Erasmus, Creed-Kanashiro, Englberger, Okeke & Turner, et al., 2006). These conditions are not mutually exclusive. In Canada, the link between poverty and food insecurity, and the link between food insecurity and health problems is a strong one (Ford, 2009). Food insecurity first emerged in the literature when poverty levels became more severe in the 1980s and food banks first appeared, originally seen as a temporary solution (McIntyre, 2003). Aboriginal people in Canada experience higher than average food security

² It is important to note, however, that community food security emphasizes low-income population food needs (Hamm & Bellows, 2003).

challenges than the general Canadian population (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2012; Ledrou & Gervais, 2005). The 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) discovered one in three (33.3%) off-reserve Aboriginal households were affected by food insecurity, as compared to 8.8% of non-Aboriginal households. Of the food insecure households, 14.4% households reported a severe insecurity (compared to 2.7% of non-Indigenous households) defined as “reduced food intake and disruption in eating patterns” (Health Canada, 2007). Tarasuk and colleagues (2013) found the rate of food insecurity in Aboriginal households to be more than double that of all non-Aboriginal households. Indeed, the authors remark that “being Aboriginal” is a “household characteristic associated with a higher likelihood of food insecurity” (Tarasuk, Mitchell & Dachner, 2013, p.3). Food insecurity becomes heightened for Indigenous communities because they are more likely to experience low incomes (Power, 2005; Socha, Zahaf, Chambers, Abraham, & Fiddler, 2012). It is measured directly using surveys and interviews, or indirectly by examining food bank usage, and income levels.

Nunavut faces the highest level of food insecurity in Canada, with 36% of households reporting food insecurity (Tarasuk, et al., 2013). A 2007/2008 Inuit Health Survey in the regions of Kivalliq and Qikiqtaaluk of Nunavut discovered even higher levels; 70.8% of households reported food insecurity. As a result of having more mouths to feed, households with children reported higher levels than those without children, with income-related problems ranking in the top three reasons households were not able to afford enough food (Rosol, 2009). A 2010 study conducted in Iqaluit found similar results, with 89.2% of individuals reporting food insecurity. For 62% of the individuals experiencing insecurity, the lack of food was identified as an income-related problem (Lardeau, Ford, Healey, & Vanderbilt, 2011). While some of these studies included questions about traditional food³, these questions were separate from the food security measures. Northern communities, specifically, face a multitude of geography-

³ Gathered foods, country foods, and traditional foods are all terms that are used to describe the diets of Indigenous peoples historically (or pre-contact). While these terms are frequently used inter-changeably, the term traditional is to be considered with caution. As Luppens (2009) noted, it is difficult for researchers that are outsiders to ascribe the term traditional to the group in question when there is no experience with what that term describes. Moreover, the term is not flexible, in that foods that are store-bought (salmon or berries, for example) may not be considered traditional despite their historic use, because they were purchased. Similarly, foods that have been used since European contact, such as flour, may also not be considered traditional despite the hundreds of years of use (Luppens, 2009). However, since the term traditional is used so widely in literature, and was the term used by most of the research participants, its use will be continued throughout this thesis.

related food challenges, and the northern food crisis has been presented as a unique situation by a number of authors (Rudolph, 2012; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Thompson, et al., 2011). Despite these unique attributes, many southern Indigenous communities face similar challenges (regarding development impacts, for example) and certainly a whole host of obstacles exist around food access for urban Indigenous people (Cidro, Adekunle, Peters & Martens, 2014). In this regard, there is a definite lack of focus in the literature. Further attention is warranted to discover how many of these challenges are geographically isolated, and how many are connected and shared through colonial impacts such as government policies and residential schools. Similar knowledge gaps exist around Métis people and First Nations people living off reserve (CCA, 2014; Willows, 2005).

The 2008/10 Regional Health Survey (RHS) is the first Canadian survey to measure income-related household food security on reserve (First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), 2012). Over half of First Nations households (54.2%) reported moderate to severe food insecurity through the Regional Health Survey (FNIGC, 2012). Through the RHS, First Nations communities are able to define and control survey questions according to local priorities.⁴ Consequently, food security estimates across regions are not available, and are difficult to compare. For the four provinces involved in this study (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba) food security through the RHS was described as follows. For British Columbia, 43.5% of First Nations households were classified as food secure, 37.7% were classified as moderately food insecure, and 18.8% were classified as severely food insecure (First Nations Health Authority, 2012). Alberta RHS food security results were based on the availability of household amenities and do not give a comparable food security measure, while RHS results for Saskatchewan were not reported (First Nations Adult Education Consortium, 2007). In Manitoba, food security was described as the absence of meals, with 14% of adults and 5.6% of young adults stating they did not eat because there wasn't enough money for food, while 20.8% of adults and

⁴ The Regional Health Survey is a First Nations governed, national health survey that adheres to its own code of ethics (the RHS Code of Ethics) (FNIGC, 2012). In Manitoba, for example, the RHS is housed by the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, and requires ethics approval through a committee-based approach.

21.9% of young adults reported skipping a meal or cutting their portions (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, 2012).

The First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study (FNFNES) provides additional insight into Aboriginal food security for British Columbia, Manitoba, and now Alberta. Like the RHS, the FNFNES covers traditional food, and use CCHS questions about food security related to income levels. The results from the British Columbia FNFNES conducted in 2008/2009 found that 41% of First Nations households were affected by food insecurity: 34% of households were moderately affected, while 7% of households were severely affected (Chan, Receveur, Sharp, Schwartz, Ing & Tikhonov, 2011). The 2010 Manitoba results were comparable, with 38% of First Nations households experiencing food insecurity. Of that, 32% reported being moderately food insecure and 6% were severely food insecure (Chan, Receveur, Sharp, Schwartz, Ing, Fediuk, et al., 2012). Thompson and colleagues (2011) found similar results for northern Manitoba. In a survey of 534 households comprising fourteen First Nations and Métis communities, 75% of respondents surveyed experienced food insecurity. Of that 75%, 33% of households experienced severe food insecurity. South Indian Lake, a First Nation found northwest of Thompson, Manitoba reported the highest level of food insecurity at 100% (Thompson, 2011). It is important to note, however, that these studies used CCHS 2.2 food security measures, along with the National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB)⁵, and thus did not include traditional food.

Most food security measures are based upon income and household finances, and do not cover traditional food (Thompson, et al., 2011). Food security, for many Indigenous communities, cannot be achieved without traditional food, and security measures need to acknowledge this element of Indigenous culture (Lambden, Receveur & Kuhnlein, 2007; Power, 2008). Over 80% of First Nations (85.5%) reported someone had shared traditional food with their household within a year (FNIGC,

⁵ According to Health Canada (2009), “The NNFB describes the quantity (and purchase units) of approximately 60 foods that represent a nutritious diet for individuals in various age and gender groups.”

2012). According to Power (2008) experiences around traditional foods, in traditional languages, are critical to understanding a household or community's food security. Given the deep connection between language and culture, terminology used in food security studies may not allow for cultural perceptions and personal experiences to be represented in a response. Without these perceptions and stories, a household's or community's food security may be incomplete (Power, 2008). Food security, self-determination, and colonization are considered to be social determinants of health for Indigenous people (Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2007; McIntyre, 2003). The importance of food security for Indigenous health, and specifically for the need to broaden the understanding of food security to include a cultural component has been well documented (Cidro, et al., 2014; Loppie Reading & Wien, 2009; Power, 2008; Willows, 2005). Willows (2005) identified knowledge gaps around traditional food culture and Indigenous perspectives on food security. As she points out, "information is required about how food insecurity affects food selection, given traditions of obligation, sharing and reciprocity that are inherent to many Aboriginal peoples' cultures" (Willows, 2005, p.35). Food security has also been criticized for not addressing the issues of power or control, key elements in creating local and just food systems (Engler-Stringer, 2011; Hansen, 2011; Wiebe & Wipf, 2011). Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) argue that with its supply-side focus, food security will not solve the northern Indigenous food crisis. Instead, solutions must focus on food sovereignty (Rudolph and McLachlan, 2013). Food sovereignty works to challenge social determinants by addressing how people eat, taking into account history, geography, politics and power.

2.2 Food Sovereignty

The roots of food sovereignty lie in the right of people to determine their own food needs and control their food systems. The term food sovereignty was devised in 1996 to capture the political and economic powers that characterize food production by La Via Campesina, an international movement

of peasant, small-farm workers, and Indigenous peoples (Wiebe and Wipf, 2011).⁶ This movement sought to push beyond food security, which historically has been favoured over local production regardless of the environmental or cultural impacts of imported food (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010). As an example, Wiebe and Wipf (2011) offer one food security effort where African governments opposed genetically modified corn as food rations for fear of contaminating their local seeds, pointing to the need to address the power dimensions in food. The language of food sovereignty is deliberately political, specifically in contrast to the “neutral and technical language” of food security (Fairburn, 2010, p. 30). However, food security is still considered to be a more widely accepted term precisely because it avoids the politics of food (Haugen, 2009).

For La Vía Campesina, food security could no longer guarantee local access to culturally appropriate and nutritious food and there was a need for a “radical” alternative (Wittman et al., 2010). Thus, food sovereignty was born to articulate these struggles. Food sovereignty has been described as:

the right of peoples to decide and produce their own food. It is a political right to organize ourselves, to decide what to plant, to have control of seeds. Food sovereignty is a very broad concept that includes the right of access to seeds, the right to produce, to trade, to consume one’s own foods.... it is a concept that is linked to the autonomy and sovereignty of peoples. (Masioli & Nicholson, 2010, p. 34)

While food sovereignty can improve community independence (Socha et al., 2012) it does not necessarily require self-sufficiency (Patel, 2012). Instead, it allows for people to define their own food systems. While the principles and ideas around food sovereignty may be vague to some, in a sense, this is deliberate; they are designed so that food sovereignty provides local solutions to local issues.

Through the food sovereignty movement, the protection and redistribution of land is key, along with the recognition that people of the land should have the right to be on the land to produce food (Desmarais, 2008) and to control land-based resources such as water and seeds (Wittman et al., 2010).

⁶ Recently, authors have argued that the Spanish term ‘*soberania alimentara*’ predates the English term food sovereignty (Edelman, 2014; Grey and Patel, 2014). Despite this, the works of Patel (2009), Desmarais (2007), Wittman, Wiebe, and Desmarais (2010), among others, firmly establish the birth of the food sovereignty movement with La Vía Campesina. While the etymology of food sovereignty certainly deserves more attention, the food sovereignty movement, which has been discussed at length by the above authors, is the focus of this literature review.

Food sovereignty requires protective measures and environmental regulation to ensure future productivity along with an individual change in environmental behavior (Wittman et al., 2010). A new land-based ethic that considers the principles of justice, respect for life, and democracy guides this movement. Through food sovereignty, food must be produced in ecologically sound ways, with special attention to economic, environmental and social sustainability (Nyéléni, 2007).

Food sovereignty advocates that new relationships form between people and the land, but also emphasizes those relationships *among* people (Wittman et al., 2010). Indeed, one of La Vía Campesina's many food sovereignty campaigns involves ending violence against women (Wittman et al., 2010). Patel (2012) has argued that one of food sovereignty's greatest strengths is its commitment to women's rights, especially given the important role women play as food providers. With an emphasis on *how* food is produced and consumed, and by whom, gender matters are a vital concern of food sovereignty (Desmarais, 2003). In 2007, the Forum for Food Sovereignty in Mali developed six principles of food sovereignty that focus on the importance of people in food systems. The principles articulated these key issues: (1) food is not a commodity and is for people; (2) the rights and values of food providers are respected; (3) food systems are localized; (4) control over and access to food and land are localized; (5) local knowledge and skills are supported; and (6) food systems work in cooperation with natural systems (Nyéléni, 2007). The Nyéléni forum helped to shift attention towards consumers, along with producers, in an attempt to build allies and lessen the gap between the two groups (Wittman, Desmarais, & Wiebe, 2010).

Although the food sovereignty movement arose out of the global south, in Canada it emerged through the active involvement of the National Farmer's Union and the Union Paysanne, early adopters and supporters of the work of La Vía Campesina (Andrée, Cobb, Moussa, & Norgang, 2011; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). Other adopters include non-profit organizations working in the international agriculture arena, such as the Unitarian Service Committee of Canada, Aboriginal organizations and urban food security networks such as Food Secure Canada (Andrée et al., 2011). The

Toronto Food Policy Council, for example, has moved towards a food sovereignty focus, and Food Secure Canada's People's Food Policy Project (PFPP) was based on the principles established through Nyéléni (Blay-Palmer, 2009; PFPP, 2011). Indeed, the participation of Food Secure Canada members at the Nyéléni International Forum for Food Sovereignty served as a catalyst for the People's Food Policy Project (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014), demonstrating the power of grassroots organizations in the food sovereignty movement.

Nonetheless, Wiebe and Wipf (2012) explain that challenges to food sovereignty in Canada are numerous, including a largely short Canadian history of agriculture; the displacement of family farms due to the industrialization of agriculture; and a disconnection from the land that comes from living in urban centres. These ideas are largely focused on agriculture, however, and in the context of Indigenous communities receive much less attention. As these authors note, "Indigenous food systems were complex, ranging from intensive agriculture in some regions, to mixed farming, hunting, and gathering, and intensive fishing in others" (p. 6). It is in part due to these complex food systems that Indigenous food sovereignty falls into another realm entirely; a realm that considers a food system revival, but also a "more general Indigenous cultural, social, and political resurgence" (Grey & Patel, 2014). These political considerations include Indigenous self-determination (Fairburn, 2010), as well as "a sovereignty of having the right to produce culture" (Masioli & Nicholson, 2010, p. 34). In any discussion of Indigenous food sovereignty then, these layered and political dimensions warrant further consideration. A brief examination of Indigenous sovereignty can help to explain these complexities.

2.3 Indigenous Sovereignty

Indigenous sovereignty can be considered through a number of different lenses. The history of the concept is not without its own intricacies. One must first consider the perspectives of sovereignty prior to European contact. This is the sovereignty of a people and the sovereignty of culture as the original inhabitants of Canada. Later, sovereignty takes on a different meaning with treaty negotiations between the Crown and Aboriginal nations. It is here that we start to see tensions. As Hoehn notes, "the

extent to which European powers viewed Aboriginal nations as sovereign in law during the early days of settlement remain controversial” (2012, p. 8). A current look at Indigenous sovereignty reveals even more friction, and becomes part of a larger dialogue on self-determination and self-governance.

This section does not endeavor to examine the multiple understandings of sovereignty from a western perspective or sovereignty as it is understood through international law. Roy (2001) cautions that there is a danger in avoiding these contexts as it contributes to a narrow perspective where the scope of an issue is often misunderstood. However, to cover larger implications of the international sovereignty conversation adequately is beyond the scope of this research. Rather, this discussion is concentrated around Indigenous food sovereignty and around those points of intersection, where Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty meet, for it is nearly impossible for people of the land to obtain food from the land without protected land (Morrison, 2011).

Indigenous views of sovereignty are as varied and complex as Indigenous culture. According to Wiessner (2008), to be sovereign means to hold power; the power to enforce compliance, control community and also create agreements outside of your own borders. It also refers to the ability to control your own fate (Porter, 2005). Notions of power, however, vary greatly amongst Indigenous communities, tribes, and nations. According to Grey and Patel (2014), sovereignty always involves jurisdiction, although subject to differing understandings of the term that are not explained. Archer (2012) describes sovereignty “as a social construct” that is “ultimately a reflection a group’s values regarding their place in the world and their relationship with others” (p. 20). Varese (2010) proposes two levels of Indigenous sovereignty: “communal sovereignty” and “ethnic sovereignty.” Communal sovereignty refers to a level where local Indigenous institutions and social-ethnic boundaries are in place, but does not extend to areas such as resource control (Varese, 2010). In contrast, he proposes that Indigenous communities are increasingly moving towards ethnic sovereignty, an effort working towards the return of “historically traceable ethnic frontiers... even if these are not presently under

control” (Varese, 2010, p. 270). With all of these variances, then, what role does Indigenous sovereignty play in guiding Indigenous food sovereignty?

First, it is important to note that both terms allow for modifications regarding people and place. Food sovereignty argues for the right of people to define their own food systems given the diversity of people and their geography (Grey & Patel, 2014; Morrison, 2011). Similarly, Indigenous sovereignty allows for variances in the concept due to the great diversity of Indigenous cultures (Archer, 2012). Both concepts allow for local definitions and recognize the importance of avoiding a “pan-Indian” approach. Likewise, both concepts are rooted in value systems that acknowledge the inherent value of the land (Archer, 2012). Respect for the epistemologies that underlie Indigenous cultural values, language, and identity must form the basis for sovereignty discourse (Archer, 2012). Thus, we must look to the past, and remember those traditional values that existed prior to western influence. In thinking about both terms, these are the guiding points for moving forward. In the words of Simpson (2008), land is key:

In the times prior to colonization, Indigenous peoples lived in independent, sovereign nations governed by complex political and social systems. Rooted in the land, with a strong spiritual and religious foundation, these systems ensured our citizens were taken care of and that contentious issues were resolved in a peaceful and just manner. (p. 13)

The values of sharing, respect, honesty, and balance all guided traditional lifestyles and formed the basis of Indigenous governance (Hall, 2008; Metallic, 2008; Price, 2008). Later, Indigenous nations used the treaty process to protect the values that guided these governance systems, affirming the right to self-government, to land and to resources (Ladner, 2009). Indigenous food sovereignty marks a return to these values, but the term sovereignty must be approached with caution, both as part of Indigenous food sovereignty, and on its own.

The evolution of the term sovereignty is problematic. Alfred (1999) explains that the way sovereignty has been constructed today is not compatible with traditional Indigenous ideas regarding

power and control. Importantly, Alfred (2009) argues that today's sovereignty discourse is so rooted in colonialism that it reflects the goals of western sovereignty. In an interview with Saskatchewan student Shana, he shares: "there's this massive push for sovereignty or for freedom or liberation from the government which oppresses us. But then, the result will in my opinion, be the same. We'll be under the same structures, the way we've been educated..." (2009, p. 264).

Recently, Desmarais and Wittman (2014) have argued that within the food sovereignty discourse, the western concept of Indigenous sovereignty works in contrast to the ideas of "self-determination and the relationship between autonomy, and respectful inter-dependency between communities" that Indigenous food sovereignty aims to protect (p. 1165). The authors propose detaching the term sovereignty from its historical and legal meanings, instead focusing on autonomy, control, and connections (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). Not surprisingly then, in the context of Indigenous food sovereignty, this concept has been replaced with self-determination (Grey & Patel, 2014). Self-determination requires that Indigenous nations determine their own futures (Cornell & Kalt, 2003). Certainly self-determination and sovereignty are connected; claims to rights and powers are necessary to guide one's future (Cornell & Kalt, 2003). In this sense, sovereignty via self-determination is compatible with Indigenous food sovereignty. However, Indigenous food sovereignty need not get stuck on specifics. True food sovereignty comes from a peoples' own vision of their food systems, and the ability to advocate and protect those food systems with their own institutions and policies. While self-determination may be the better fit, sovereignty, importantly reminds us to look to the past to rebuild a future. Individuals and communities will need to work out the role and place of sovereignty and self-determination in their own futures⁷. In *Wasáse*, Ray Halbitter, an Oneida lawyer, notes that sovereignty is about "self-sufficiency" (Alfred, 2009, p.220). Perhaps from this viewpoint, we can

⁷ With so many variations on the definition of sovereignty it is difficult to provide examples of Indigenous communities that have achieved sovereignty. Perhaps most famously, the Nisga'a Final Agreement, or the Nisga'a treaty, has been examined under the lens of sovereignty. While the agreement does recognize Nisga'a citizenship as separate, but part of Canadian citizenship, the federal government has insisted this is not a level of sovereignty (Blackburn, 2009). Through the agreement the Nisga'a own 2000 square kilometres of land, and a set of wildlife harvest entitlements, among other things (Blackburn, 2009).

move towards Indigenous food sovereignty and a return to caring for each other and meeting our needs from the gifts of the land, as our ancestors have done for so many years.

2.4 Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Indigenous food sovereignty (IFS) has only recently appeared in the literature, yet has been part of a “living reality” for Indigenous communities for thousands of years (Morrison, 2011). As the original inhabitants of Canada, this history separates Indigenous food sovereignty from the food sovereignty discourse, bringing attention to such issues as treaties, government policy, and other forms of colonialism (PFPP, 2011). Across the world, Indigenous people are experiencing threats to their land, culture and food systems. This has become the new living reality (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Indeed, land rights have become one of the biggest issues facing Indigenous people around the globe (Stavenhagen, 2006). Interest in Indigenous food sovereignty comes at a critical time- a time for resurgence, reconnections to the land and to each other and a revitalization of Indigenous food systems. Simpson (2011) refers to resurgence as a collective, political act in which “our traditions, our culture, our songs, dances and performances” are practiced once again; “a celebration, that after everything we are still here” (p. 12). Through the resurgence of Indigenous food cultures, we see elements of Indigenous sovereignty at work. Ideas around rights, land reform, and self-determination become the norm.

In Canada, the origins of the concept of IFS lie in a grassroots movement to reconnect Indigenous peoples with their food systems. The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Discussion Paper, as part of the People’s Food Policy Project’s (PFPP) Indigenous Circle, was one of the first written accounts of IFS in Canada, acknowledging that for food sovereignty to exist, Indigenous peoples must speak for themselves (PFPP, 2011). The Indigenous Circle’s priority recommendations include: a return to the agreements of the treaties and reform and redistribute land; the Indigenous concepts of harmony with nature in resource-based policy; to address the socioeconomic determinants that are

negatively affecting Indigenous health; and rebuilding relationships between Indigenous peoples and other stakeholders (PFPP, 2011).

Through IFS, food is sacred, and sustainable harvest and production practices are fundamental (PFPP, 2011). These are practices that consider the land and the people that use the land. Morrison (2011) describes this notion further: “Indigenous food sovereignty is ultimately achieved by upholding our long-standing sacred responsibilities to nurture healthy, interdependent relationships with the land, plants, and animals that provide us with our food” (p. 100). Thus, IFS must consider both the people and the land, for they are inextricably linked. Thousands of years of highly diversified and local food systems demonstrate this sacred knowledge and sustainable land use (PFPP, 2011). According to the Indigenous Food System Network, a major grassroots contributor to the IFS movement in Canada, key principles of Indigenous food sovereignty include the sacredness of food; action through continued participation in traditional harvesting practices; self-determination; and policy reform (Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, 2011). Self-determination has been described by a number of authors as a key component to Indigenous food sovereignty (Bell-Sheetter, 2004; Cidro & Martens, 2014; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Grey & Patel, 2014; Morrison, 2011; PFPP, 2011). The First Nations Healthy Food Guidelines, for example, defines food sovereignty as “the Right of the peoples, communities, and countries, to define their own agricultural, labour, fishing, food, and land policies which are ecologically, socially, spiritually, economically, and culturally appropriate to their own unique circumstances,” and stresses the importance of a self-determined food system (First Nations Health Council, 2009, p. 1).

The ability to define one’s own food system has been further explained by Morrison (2011) who notes there is no “universal definition of food sovereignty that reflects all of the realities of the myriad of Indigenous communities around the world” (p. 97). IFS must reflect local realities- the geography, the history, and the circumstances of a people and a place. Locally determined food systems and food distribution practices are a key element of Indigenous food sovereignty (Socha et al., 2012).

IFS “describes, rather than defines, the present day strategies that enable and support the ability of Indigenous communities to sustain traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and distribution practices” (Morrison 2011, p. 97). These strategies are evidence of food in practice. Farming, hunting, gathering, fishing, and growing demonstrate the richness and diversity of traditional food systems, and range from bee keeping on the prairies to beach foraging on Canada’s coasts (Grey & Patel, 2014). IFS celebrates revitalizing these traditional food systems, and therefore, a movement towards taking health and culture into one’s own hands. Traditional foods are seen as healthier and eating these foods and participating in these food systems has the ability to reduce diet-related disease such as diabetes and obesity (Bell-Sheetter, 2004). A self-determined food system is one in which people can respond to their own health needs along with their food security (WGISF, 2011). The starting point in revitalizing a traditional food system must revolve around community input given the diversity of cultures and their needs (Bell-Sheetter, 2011; Cidro & Martens, 2014; Socha et al., 2012). These tools allow for community control, so that community members become and are recognized as experts on food needs and the resources to achieve food sovereignty rather than “‘samples’ in an outsider’s research” (Bell-Sheetter, 2004, p. 37).

In operation, Indigenous food sovereignty has been documented by a number of researchers scattered across North America. The work of Winona LaDuke (2005) and the White Earth Land Recovery Project has been recorded, specifically around the fight to protect their local wild rice from the impacts of genetically modified seeds. Vazquez’s (2011) efforts with the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin promoted food system revitalization through the regeneration of local traditional knowledge and a holistic approach that involved sustainable field preparation, seed collection, and food preservation. IFS research has also been documented in Manitoba by Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) who share the need for politicized sovereignty to achieve Indigenous food sovereignty. Rudolph (2012) examined a north-south exchange around skill and knowledge development to expand land-based food skills. Kamal and Thompson (2013) have noted that IFS involves food-based action and a “special

bond with nature,” in documenting the success of a country food program in O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation, Manitoba. IFS has also been examined through a CED framework as a way to remove some food production from the market and reclaim local access (Thompson et al., 2011).

In an urban context Cidro and colleagues (2014) discovered that while participants experienced food insecurity, they were also working towards elements of IFS, namely through participation in traditional food activities and sharing of traditional food. Mundel and Chapman (2010) found that participants in the Urban Aboriginal Garden Project viewed the experience of gaining more food skills as empowering and decolonizing. The project used teachings of the medicine wheel such as holism and the interconnections between the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional parts of being, and demonstrated a revitalization of traditional growing practices in the city (Mundel & Chapman, 2010). Yet, despite these examples and the success around these initiatives, traditional food systems are still under threat. These threats started with European contact, and as the arms of colonialism reached into every day lifestyles, they began to erode a culture.

2.5 Threats to Food Security and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

For most Indigenous cultures, food is a large part of identity. It is an expression of how and where people live, reflecting the history and geography of a place (Panelli & Tipa, 2009). As an element of culture, however, relationships with food are not static (Luppens, 2009). For many hundreds of years, Indigenous peoples in Canada have been subject to colonial forces, and both the diets of Indigenous people and their relationships with food have shifted (Luppens, 2009). As a consequence, communities are facing food insecurity and a loss of food sovereignty (Vazquez, 2011). Conflict surrounding land and food has been an historical theme for Indigenous people and a colonial tool to control both communities and people. Denial of and control over food access, for both traditional and market-based foods, began long ago (Socha et al., 2012). Through Europeans settling the land, herd animals such as the bison were destroyed, both as a means to clear the space and to cash in on the bison hides (Grey & Patel, 2014). Not surprisingly, the eradication of the bison also pushed Indigenous

leaders into treaty negotiations so that they could provide food for their people (Grey & Patel, 2014; LaDuke, 2004). Indigenous nations were forced to move on to reserves where they would face additional hardships (Cariou 2006; Smits 1994). In *Clearing the Plains*, Daschuk (2013) reported a history of government negligence where Indigenous people were deliberately given rancid rations, with thousands dying from eating rotten flour and pork. These conditions made communities even more vulnerable, and the sexual abuse of Indigenous women was common (Daschuk, 2013). Similar land struggles occurred around farming. Carter (1990) reports that while agriculture was once a competitive industry for Indigenous communities, it was later smothered by government policies that aimed to limit production on reserves, and to limit the amount of reserve lands that could be used for farming. Further policies focused on reducing competition between Indigenous and non-Indigenous farmers in order to favour settler farmers (Ladner, 2009). Stripped from all cultural and spiritual meaning and forced into a survival mode, this marked the beginning of an Indigenous power struggle around food.

Deterrents to on-reserve farming continue today. Reserve lands cannot be leveraged for operating loans from banks and many of the farming subsidy programs are not available to Indigenous farmers (Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Saskatchewan Western Development Museum (SWDM), 2010). Treaty obligations around the right to agriculture and agricultural implements may also be neglected; in Manitoba, for example, the regional treaty office does not acknowledge these rights as promised through Treaty 1 (C. McCorrister, personal communication, August 22, 2013). Concern over the safety of land for growing or harvesting food is a more current constraint to agriculture that may result in a change in diet away from land-based foods (Willows, 2005). Brown and colleagues (2008), for example, discovered that participants moving from the reserve to the city had greater trust in city land for growing food. Water and soil pollution, environmental contaminants, and heavy metals have also created safety issues for traditional harvests (Chan et al., 2011; Chan et al., 2012; Luppens, 2009; McLachlan 2014). Indigenous food systems are also more susceptible to climate change with shifts in

migration routes used for hunting, and changes in ice conditions resulting in late-season freeze up (Guyot, Dickson, Paci, Furgal, & Chan, 2006; Lougheed, 2010). Additional landscape-level changes such as resource extraction and large-scale hydro operations (resulting in flooding) are additional obstacles to eating from the land (Thompson et al., 2011).

Government restrictions on hunting, fishing, and trapping further deny access to traditional foods, limiting the amount of food harvested, the time of year for harvest, and even the routes used for traditional harvesting⁸ (Socha et al., 2012). The costs associated with traditional food practices also impacts the ability of individuals to participate in traditional food systems. A survey of Yukon First Nations, Inuit, and Dene/Métis communities discovered that over half of respondents did not have sufficient equipment for fishing. Similar results were found for hunting equipment; hunting was considered too expensive for 14.7% of Yukon First Nations, 35.8% Dene/Métis, and 42.1% of Inuit respondents (Lambden, Receveur, Marshall, & Kuhnlein, 2006). In the face of a changing landscape, the ability to invest in hunting and fishing supplies is critical for Indigenous peoples to adapt and provide food for their families (Furgal & Seguin, 2006). Related cost barriers exist for growing food in many communities. Greenhouses and hydroponics are expensive solutions. Start-up and maintenance costs are not an economical choice for most Indigenous communities (Paci, Dickson, Nickels, Chan & Furgal, 2004). Temperature, light conditions, and precipitation along with concerns surrounding soil and water quality are complicating and expensive factors.

Changes to Indigenous food systems are exacerbated by a loss of knowledge around traditional food harvests and resource management practices, once again, a direct impact of colonial pressures and policies to “marginalize traditional foods” (Turner & Turner, 2008, p. 109). Indigenous people have

⁸ Government restrictions are often placed in the name of conservation. Perhaps most famously, the Marshall decision in Nova Scotia affirmed rights recognized in treaties, however, the Supreme Court clarified the decision by adding that the Federal government had the power to regulate fishing for conservation purposes. This clarification was based on a request by the West Nova Scotia Fishermen’s Coalition, and was rejected by some members of the Burnt Church First Nation who argued conservation measures had already been established (Fitzgerald, 2006). In another example, Morrison (2011, p. 108) shared the story of the *Nu chah nulth* legal battle with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, a ten-year dispute that resulted in the “nation’s right to implement fishing and harvesting strategies according to its own unique cultural, economic, and ecological considerations.” These struggles speak to the need for scientific knowledge to honour the validity of traditional and cultural knowledge regarding natural resources.

faced a history of social, economic, and political inequalities and imposed traumas such as residential schools, that continue to impact their food systems today (Adelson, 2005; Mundel & Chapman, 2010; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013). The loss of language, homelands, and the broken family bonds experienced through residential schools has been incredibly damaging (Grey & Patel, 2014; Socha et al., 2012). The break in intergenerational knowledge, particularly for women as the primary food providers, has destroyed many traditional family food practices (Grey & Patel, 2014).

Colonial impacts also come in the form of income issues and high prices for food staples for Indigenous communities, particularly in the north. The forced relocation to reserve lands, at the hands of the federal government, has resulted in marginal lands that are often geographically isolated (Grey & Patel, 2014). Freight adds costs to food prices, and in northern communities, there isn't the infrastructure to support road access (Thompson et al., 2011; Walker, Kassi, & Eamer, 2009). Indeed, a 2009 Manitoba study discovered food basket prices were 60% higher in northern Manitoba than southern Manitoba, with the average prices of fruits and vegetables 79% higher in the North (Thompson, 2009). The availability of fresh food is also unreliable in most communities because it spoils quickly. These conditions are, of course, barriers to healthy living (Skinner, et al., 2006; Walker et al., 2009).

Indigenous food sovereignty is a process of decolonization (Grey & Patel, 2014; Waziyatawin, 2005). While food security provides insight into some of the ways that colonialism has impacted Indigenous people, it is a tool to measure hunger and for Indigenous people it is not the whole story. Culture, spirituality, sharing, language and traditional foods are missing from food security studies (Cidro & Martens, 2014; Power, 2008; Willows, 2005). The human element- those important lived experiences- is generally lacking in these studies, and often there is a disregard for the cultural considerations that would broaden our understanding of food security. As Indigenous people, we cannot separate culture from food. Indigenous food sovereignty provides a framework for returning back to our traditional food practices, and back to the values that shape how we relate to each other and

the environment. It is a timely response, and one that speaks to the power of people, the past, and the land. However, in order for Indigenous food sovereignty to move forward, a closer examination of land rights and land reform are required (Morrison, 2011; Waziyatawin, 2005). Land, and all that it encompasses, is key to recovering Indigenous cultures and diets. Also necessary is a closer look at the notion of Indigenous sovereignty. For Indigenous food sovereignty to resonate with communities, there must be an opportunity for communities to understand and relate to the idea of Indigenous sovereignty. However, it does not prevent people from living with the land, or re-connecting with their food systems. This is a multi-step process, with self-determination as the driving force along the path. Relationships among Indigenous people and their food systems are complex, and more research is needed to start to unpack these complexities. Importantly, more research is needed by Indigenous communities to examine the role that food security, and food sovereignty play in their lives.

3. STUDY DESIGN

3.1 Research Design

3.1.1 Participatory Action Research

This research design is based primarily on qualitative methodology. Initially, a very basic understanding of participatory action research (PAR) was used to guide this study. PAR is a type of action research that aims to bring about change through the meaningful participation and the practical knowledge of local people and researchers (MacDonald, 2012). As a form of research, PAR attempts to understand the social world by creating change (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood & Maguire, 2003). Further, the concept of reciprocity has been proposed as an ethic for PAR to help create respectful relationships with research participants (Maiter, Simich, Jacobson, & Wise, 2008). For this thesis, PAR was at first the best fit given that I wanted to explore the Indigenous food sovereignty in western Canada, an issue related in part to social justice. However, I did not consider the reciprocal nature of these relationships to be about an ethic or protocol. Rather, they are about conducting yourself in a good way. This is how I first challenged my research process. I considered my research to be Indigenist: *for* Indigenous people, *by* Indigenous people, and *with* Indigenous people, rather than just research with Indigenous people (Hart, 2009). I did not have the language to describe this process early on in my studies. Later, I came to see that Indigenous research should aim to empower and heal, and to consider the perspectives, beliefs and knowledge systems of the Indigenous communities involved (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2005; Settee, 2013; Smith, 1999). I also came to see that voice and experience are an inherent part of methodology (Graveline, 2000).

3.1.2 Situating Myself

As I moved into and around my research topic, I began to see my role as an Indigenous researcher influencing both the research process and my personal journey (the two being interrelated). I am Cree-Metis and have worked in Aboriginal education for ten years, with a focus around land-based education. These experiences helped to form my passion around Indigenous food. In an attempt to

provide transparency and understand any biases or lack of knowledge around Indigenous research, I have located myself in my research. Indigenous scholars have documented the importance of situating yourself in your research (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Absolon (2011) describes positioning yourself through your story: who you are and how you came to be. This comes first because it is what you know first. By situating yourself in your research, you make yourself accountable for your work. In any research project, Indigenous communities need to know who is doing the research and how, along with your purpose and any benefits to the community (Absolon & Willet, 2005). Smith (1999) describes elements of conduct for researchers working with Maori people including “the seen face” (p. 120). Part of my “seen face” has been understanding my identity, who I am and where I come from. These ideas became “front and center” in my thinking, and led to a re-examination of my research framework.

3.1.3 Indigenous Research Framework

To understand the changing nature of the data collection as it moved towards these considerations, I had to first examine and consider what was driving this process. At this point, and with guidance, I began to consider an Indigenous research framework. This framework provided me with a skeleton of ideas about how we relate to and understand knowledge to help articulate my research process. A conceptual framework provides a way for researchers to demonstrate the “theoretical and practical underpinnings of their research” (Kovach, 2009, p. 39). It is through a framework that we can align what we do with why we do it and acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing (Kovach, 2009). A framework can guide your process, and help you build your research methods. This is especially important in the context of decolonizing research (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002; Lavallee, 2007). Lavallee’s (2009) framework, for example, incorporated the values, beliefs, and practices of the Indigenous community; situated herself in her research; and used the teachings of the medicine wheel and sharing circles as her foundational theory. An Indigenous research framework can help ensure researchers are conducting research in a good way (Hill, 2008). My framework consisted of

an epistemology, a methodology, and research protocol. To break down each component of my framework further, I have presented examples that demonstrate the importance of experiential learning, relationships, relevance, and reciprocity; they have deeply informed this study.

The value of experiential learning drove my research epistemology. Wilson (2008) describes epistemology as the theory of how we come to know. Indeed, the interview questions and the research participants themselves were situated around their experience with their food projects. I made every effort to meet these participants in person (where feasible, although location and budget were sometimes real challenges), and to participate or contribute to their projects where possible. Following the interviews, a final gathering was held where hands-on and ceremonial experiences were the focus. During the gathering I acted as a participant and observer, a process of “watching and doing in a scientific⁹ manner” (Wilson, 2008, p. 40). These experiences were a vital part of my research process. As part of an Indigenous research paradigm, Hart (2010) articulates that an epistemology “includes a subjectively based process for knowledge development and a reliance on Elders and individuals who have or are developing this insight.” From an Indigenous epistemology, Kovach (2005) has offered four guiding points for Indigenous research:

- (a) experience as a legitimate way of knowing; (b) Indigenous methods, such as storytelling, a legitimate way of knowing; (c) receptivity and relationship between researcher and participants as a natural part of the research “methodology”; and (d) collectivity as a way of knowing that assumes reciprocity to the community (meaning both two-legged and four-legged creatures) (p. 28).

With this understanding, I have presented the food projects through stories as “lived experience.” Similarly, I have presented my own story throughout this thesis. A personal narrative is an appropriate research method in that it allows me to describe my own insights into my own Indigenous research journey (Simpson, 1999). Importantly, it fits here as part of a connection between food and

⁹ Wilson (2009) goes on to say: “The aim of this strategy is to gain a closeness or familiarity with the group, through taking part in their day-to-day activities over a long period of time” (p.40). I have interpreted this to be an example of how Indigenous research methods also contain elements of rigor or consistency often associated with scientific research. There are, indeed, points of intersection when examining knowledge systems and the research methods surrounding those systems.

identity. That is, our cultural identity can be shaped by our food practices, culture, and beliefs.

Experience is one way that we come to know ourselves (Simpson, 1999), and experience was a vital component of my research framework.

The second component to my framework involved my methodology. Our methods, as part of our methodology, are the tools that we use to conduct our research. Methodology has been described as the philosophy that explains the techniques used by the researcher (Van Manen, 2001). Ristock and Pennell (1996) refer to it as a culture where norms and practices are used to carry out research. The methodological guides used for this research were based on relational accountability to all the research participants (Wilson, 2001). Through relational accountability we demonstrate respect, take responsibility for our research and all of the connections that it forms, and follow the principle of reciprocity (Wilson, 2008). Thus, I am accountable to research participants, but also to my family and community, and to the land, water, sky, and beyond - to all my relations. I felt a sense of pressure, but also pride in knowing that how I carried myself would reflect on my family and friends. The relationships that were formed through this research were significant in helping me develop and understand my role as an Indigenous researcher, and the role of cultural identity in the context of self-determination and food sovereignty. I have since provided preliminary findings, spoken at conferences, and shared news about these projects with other groups as a part of the reciprocal agreement I made with participants. The relationships formed with participants throughout the entire process helped me consider who I am, how I came to know myself and understand Indigenous food sovereignty. Relational accountability and reciprocity were, thus, key elements to my research framework.

The third component of my research framework emphasized conduct. Protocol deals with how we conduct ourselves, including ethical considerations. Approval from the University of Manitoba Fort Garry Campus Research Ethics Board was obtained prior to conducting interviews as part of Protocol J2011:043. All participants signed a consent form stating their participation in the research project and outlining the project and any risks involved. They were also given the opportunity to request anonymity

and the opportunity to withdraw from the process at any time. Beyond the ethical requirements, I generally refrained from asking potential participants for an interview during our first email contact. I would ask to talk about food, namely what they had grown or harvested or hunted, and based on their comfort level and interest I would determine whether I would ask for the interview at the end of the conversation, at a later date, or not at all (see also, Settee, 2013, p.85). I made many of my decisions based on feeling and the values of respect (Kovach, 2009). I consider this to be an important part of my research protocol.

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

The first step in preparing for the interviews involved identifying local food champions across western Canada. Since little information was available through the literature review, an Internet search was significant in creating a contact list. This search used the key words Indigenous food sovereignty and Aboriginal food security suggested by my advisor, Dr. Stéphane McLachlan. As well, major food organizations in each province such as Food Matters Manitoba, Farm Folk City Folk, the Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance (MAFRA), and Heifer Canada were approached to help identify individuals that could speak to Indigenous food sovereignty. Government reports, funding documents and other grey literature were also searched to find Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. I situated myself as an insider by connecting with individuals through family and friends in Fisher River Cree Nation and Peguis First Nation. Regional food sovereignty “experts” were also contacted to help me better conceptualize Indigenous food sovereignty. These “experts” included a mix of academics, Elders, and food activists from the four provinces under study. While some had “lived experience”, others were more rooted in an academic discourse around Indigenous food sovereignty. These “experts” suggested food initiatives in Indigenous communities that they considered to be good candidates for this study, helped to shape the interview questions and also provided key contacts and readings. While the importance of these interviews cannot be understated, it was also an experience

that further affirmed my decision to focus on the projects themselves, and on what was happening at the community level from a local perspective.

The outcomes of these discussions, as well as literature, and Internet searches were used to identify Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives. The nature of these food projects varied. While only one project explicitly identified itself as focusing on food sovereignty, all projects were community-based in origin and involved participation and a re-connection to local and traditional food systems. Proponents and representatives associated with each of these initiatives were contacted and asked to participate in a phone-based interview as a means of understanding their initiatives. Thirty-two participants were interviewed regarding 24 food projects. Fourteen participants were from British Columbia; three from Alberta; seven from Saskatchewan and nine from Manitoba. For some projects, participants requested that more than one individual speak on behalf of the project (together or separately), however for the majority of projects, I spoke with only one proponent. In one instance, a participant asked me to feature two separate food initiatives that she was working on. Since there was variation in the number of project proponents willing to speak on behalf of a project, I have chosen not to compare the differences between the number of participants per province. These numbers reflect both a willingness to speak with me, and my ability to seek out and find projects in each area. Certainly my positioning in Manitoba made it more difficult for me to effectively engage in other provinces, and this is where my relationships with the food “experts” were helpful.

Participants were asked about the characteristics of their food projects and about promising practices and any challenges the projects faced. For each project, an Internet review was undertaken to find supporting grey literature through funding and band council reports and newsletters, and supporting multi-media such as online videos and blogs. This information helped to build relationships with the participants. It was important that I was informed and considerate of their undertakings, and in some cases, this information allowed me to approach strangers through email to ask about their food projects. Although most of these interviews were phone-based, attempts were made to connect with

individuals in person when requested. Twelve interviews were conducted in person at the request of the participants; six of these took place in Winnipeg, two in British Columbia and five in Saskatchewan.

As a final phase of the research, an Indigenous food gathering was held at Tommy's Point, Manitoba, with research participants from Peguis First Nation in August 2013. I worked with an advisory committee to organize the gathering. Participants from all 24 projects highlighted in this research were invited to the gathering, and ultimately representatives from seven of these projects attended. The gathering focused on food practices, with workshops on fishing, filleting, trapping, skinning, cooking wild foods, and preserving. We also held discussions on promising practices and treaty obligations to agriculture where participants could share their stories with others. There was an optional field trip to the Peguis community garden and an evening sweat. We concluded the event by gathering for a feast.

No recordings or interviews were involved in this last phase. The practice of respectful witnessing has been documented by West Coast Elders (Spencer, Hank, Carson, Headworth, & Holland, 2006), and was suggested by one of the Elders involved in this research. The gathering, as a final action-based approach, was written up through an observer/participant lens (Wilson, 2008). Throughout the entire research process, I maintained a reflective journal to record observations, insights, and changes to the process. These accounts were woven into a personal narrative.

3.3 Data Analysis

Interviews from the first two phases of the research were transcribed (either by me or by an undergrad student) with the permission of the participants. All transcribed interviews were reviewed by me, and I worked closely with the transcriber to sort through any language barriers or areas that needed clarification. Interviews transcribed by me were done so at the request of the participant. Results were shared with the participants for a review period for accuracy and so that they could shape how the information came together (Macdonald, 2012). Moreover, participants were asked to provide any

recommendations that they would like to include as part of the thesis and community reports. These recommendations are reflected in the results and discussion sections of this thesis.

Creswell (2009) describes data analysis as an ongoing process allowing the researcher to gain a more in-depth understanding of the research. Several approaches were used to analyze the data. As an initial step, all interviews were read through to obtain a general sense of what was being said by the participants (Creswell, 2009). I attempted to code using a computer program called dedoose™, but found this process did not fit into my overarching methodological framework of encouraging conversations and narratives. In coding, I was breaking the narratives into disparate parts, much like Wilson (2008) describes: “And if we are saying that an Indigenous methodology includes all of these relationships, if you are breaking things down into their smallest pieces, you are destroying all of those relationships around it” (p.119). In some cases, I knew from other conversations with the participants that what they were referring to hadn’t always been captured on the recording. In these instances, I understood they were referring to something, but not expanding on it since we had already discussed it.

Later, I tried coding using a Microsoft Word document, trying to answer the interview questions. While more tactile, I still felt as though I was dissecting the stories, that I was looking for answers to questions rather than what, overall, was being told to me. I even experimented with using a more quantitative approach to data analysis, where numbers were used to suggest common themes and the importance of those themes. There is a difference here, between what I attempted to achieve and what the research was trying to tell me. I needed to step away from taking the narratives apart, and instead focus on what and where the connections were.

3.3.1 Metaphor

Following these struggles, it was suggested by one of my committee members (Dr. Michael Hart) that I look to scholars who had used metaphor as a tool for describing their research. Kovach (2009) argues there is a place for metaphor in research. Kathy Absolon’s book *Kaandossiwin* (2011) has been instrumental in helping me find my way and in understanding how metaphor could be used in

my work. Absolon (2011) presents a petal flower to describe an Indigenous research framework that is “wholistic.” Relatedly, Lavallee (2007) describes the use of symbols in her research so that participants may tell the story of their experiences. In my case, I already knew that I had a metaphor for food sovereignty. It was something I had already been using, and dreaming about; it was how I saw food sovereignty. Here is a journal entry from September 2012, my first experience at the Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference; note the repeated use of the word “hands”.

On the morning of the conference we gathered in the long house for opening prayers, songs and welcomes from an Elder’s Advisory group. We were given pieces of smoked fish to hold in our hands and eat as we listened, tearing small pieces with each prayer, with each lesson, with each piece of guidance, and understanding...Local classes attended parts of the day and a daycare sang us songs in their traditional language. There was a berry-picking song where tiny hands danced and reached for imagined berries; a salmon swimming song with hands swimming through an imagined sea, and a deer song called Come out of the woods, you fat little deer... There are so many hands involved in important, valuable, and meaningful work, so many people re-vitalizing their food systems. (Journal, October 17, 2012)

Having this metaphor allowed me to look at my research through fresh eyes. I began to see stories and connections that I hadn’t been able to articulate before.

3.3.2 The Circle

Yet, feeling this wasn’t nearly enough for me to know how to make meaning out of my research. I sat with this and read through my interviews again and again. I read the journal that I had kept through this process and I looked at the tables I had created as I was coding, and I started to see things as part of a bigger picture. As a cleansing ceremony, I smudged using sweetgrass given to me at the gathering and waited, and then asked for help (Stevenson, 1999). I considered the advice of Hart (2010) to listen with my whole being and pay attention to my heart. I sat with a respected Elder, an Indigenous writer and one of my teachers, and explained my situation. He sat with me and talked to me about circles. He drew me a circle and had me place these elements, as I had begun to call them, around that circle. We worked through a few drafts, and ended up with a circle model covering four main elements of Indigenous food sovereignty that had emerged through the interviews (Figure 1, p. 39).

Descriptive information about each food initiative was organized into a table (Table 1, p. 38) to provide an overview of their operations.

Circles have been used by a number of authors to understand and describe research concepts (e.g., Absolon, 2010; Anderson, 2000; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2002; Hill, 2008; Lavallee, 2009). Variations in circle teachings come from differences in “context, teacher, and Nation” (Absolon, 2010). To describe the theoretical foundations of an Indigenous “wholistic” theory for social work practice, Absolon (2010) presented a series of circle diagrams using the four directions and concentric circles. Circles help demonstrate the connections and relationships that exist between elements (Hart, 2002). The medicine wheel, for example, can represent a number of concepts including wholeness, balance, harmony, growth, and healing (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984; Hart, 2002). Considering the power of circles, a circle model felt like an appropriate method of analysis for a study of Indigenous food sovereignty.

My research journey and path to understanding my identity as an Indigenous person was shaped by my research participants. They formed a new community; a network of contacts, family, and friends that I am now accountable to. Given this shift in my person, I began to consider Indigenous ways of knowing and thinking. I felt a pull towards explaining these stories and understanding my research in a way that was consistent with an Indigenous research framework. While I am not new to this thinking, finding a voice and the words to describe these concepts are new to me. Although I have help and guidance, any errors or omissions are my own. I only hope to present my way of thinking, and the processes that were involved in helping me develop this framework. Despite this, I am reminded by a conversation with an Elder who counseled me that there will come a time when how I present this process will feel right. This feels right.

Presenting the results of the interviews as community stories woven around and through the use of the hands metaphor is an important step in acknowledging and respecting Indigenous knowledges inherent in this research. The use of the circle model is both a “wholistic” and empowering fit for the

topic. In examining Indigenous food sovereignty as a living experience, the model allows for connections to emerge organically. Indeed, there is a strong symmetry between the framework presented and the research topic, as demonstrated in the community stories found in the following chapter.

4. UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: COMMUNITY STORIES

4.1 Elements of Indigenous Food Sovereignty

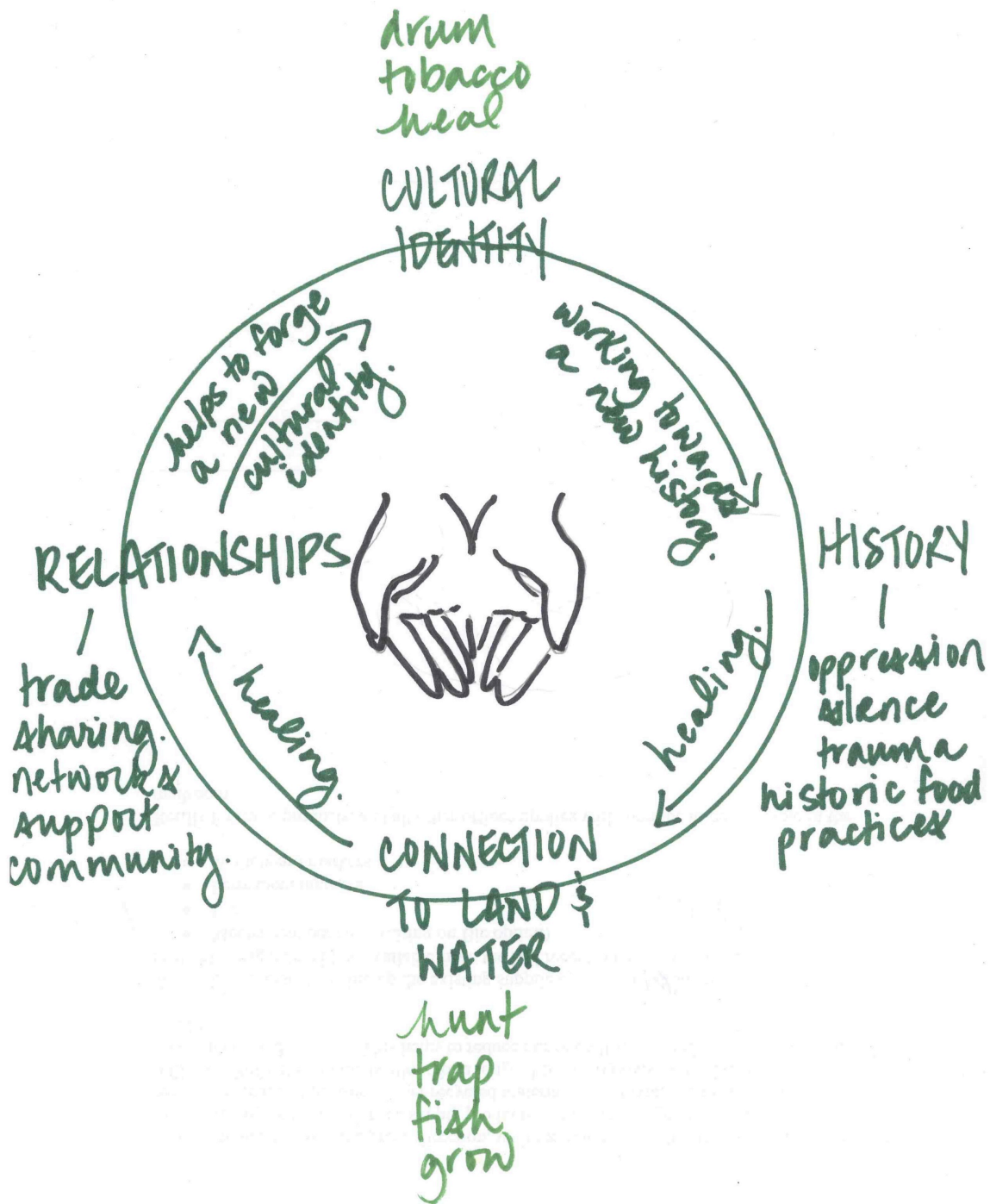
When I think of food sovereignty I think of hands. I think of how those hands plant a seed or tend to the earth. I think of those hands as filleting the fish or skinning the muskrat, tanning the hides. I think of those hands as healing- with the power of touch, knowledge and prayer, through the work of our healers. Or the hands that pick the medicine that make us well. They are the hands that sound the drum to awaken our spirit. The hands that reach out to help and share our food with family and friends, the hands that stir the pot of stew. They are the hands that write letters to government or hold protest signs when our land is in danger. They are the hands that can extend out to our neighbours, across provinces and territories to share and trade and create a powerful network of food. And they are the hands that are brown, or red, or white, or some combination of those colours, that speak to our ancestors; they remind us who we are and where we come from. They are the hands that have been oppressed- tied by colonialism- or slapped by government, by residential schools, by racism. And of course, there are the hands of others that have covered our mouths, trying to silence Indigenous voices.

The four elements presented in Figure 1- history, connection to land, relationships and cultural identity- came from the participants and are the elements of Indigenous food sovereignty that arose through this research. Using the hands metaphor, key words from the interviews, conversations, and readings I began to see how each element related to the hands. I placed these key words alongside each element; as prompts, as reminders of the narrative. Each element will be described further, through the stories of the participants and their food projects. Descriptive information summarizing each project featured through this research is displayed in Table 1. I consider this to be an introduction to the projects. This is basic, but important information about the origins of the projects, where they are located and the focus of the work they do. The stories, however, speak to the processes and power of these initiatives and are presented throughout this chapter.

Table 1: Summary of the 24 Indigenous Food Sovereignty initiatives represented in this research

PROJECT NAME	LOCATION	PROJECT FOCUS	YEARS IN OPERATION
<i>Ahms Tah Ow</i> School Garden	Sliammon First Nation, BC	school garden	5
Alexis First Nation Greenhouse	Alexis Nakota Sioux First Natio, AB	greenhouse	7
Back to the Land Camp	Peguis First Nation, MB	traditional foods education	5
BC Food Systems Network Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty	BC	research, action & policy/advocacy	8
BEADS Program	Canim Lake Band, Shuswap Nation, BC	market garden co-operative	6 (on hiatus)
<i>Cha Me Ta Ha-uuk Hesquiaht</i> Project	Hesquiaht First Nation, BC	community garden	2
Coastal Stewardship Network	Gitga'at, Haida, Haisla, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xai'Xais, Metlakatla, Nuxalk & Wuikinuxv First Nations, BC	bio-monitoring & ocean stewardship	9
Community Based Monitoring	Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation & Mikisew Cree First Nation, AB	bio-monitoring program	7
Dog Creek & Canoe Creek Community Garden	Dog Creek & Canoe Creek Communities, Canoe Creek Band, Secwepemc First Nation, BC	market garden	4
Cree8 Co-op	Flying Dust First Nation, SK	market garden co-operative	4
Earth Boxes	Alexander First Nation, AB	school garden	2 (on hiatus)
First Nations Wildcrafters	Tseshah First Nation, BC	culturally sustainable forest management training	9
Four Arrows Regional Health Authority Food Security Programs	Island Lake Communities; Wasagamack, Ste. Theresa Point, Garden Hill & Red Sucker Lake First Nations, MB	community garden & poultry	7
Indigenous Food First Website	Canada-wide	traditional foods education	3
Ladybug Garden & Greenhouse Project	T'Sou-ke First Nation, BC	traditional foods education	5
Masset-Haida Gwaii Farm to School Salad Bar Program	Haida Gwaii, BC	traditional foods education & healthy eating program	3
Matheson Island Community Garden	Matheson Island, MB	community garden	1
Muskoday Organic Grower's Co-op	Muskoday First Nation, SK	market garden co-operative	8 (on hiatus)
Nelson House Country Foods Program	Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation (Nelson House), MB	country foods program	12
Splatsin Cultural Use Market Garden	Splatsin Band, Shuswap Nation, BC	traditional foods market garden	In development
Traditional Foods & Healthy Eating Program	La Ronge, SK	traditional foods education	3
Turtle Mountain Metis Community Garden	Turtle Mountain Local Metis, MB	community garden	3
Water Guardians Program	Pine Creek First Nation, Sagkeeng First Nation, Fisher River Cree Nation, & Duck Bay, MB	bio-monitoring education program	3
Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference	Various- Vancouver Island & Coastal Communities, BC	traditional foods education	7

Figure 1: Food Sovereignty Elements



4.1.1 History

In preparing this circle, I thought first of the rising sun, the east direction. I considered how things begin. I thought of history, and all of the historical elements that have affected Indigenous people. I also considered how the stories I heard were about creating a new future by connecting to the past. Food sovereignty is historical, and is shaping the future. This is where and how it all began. For each community, and certainly for most nations, food history looks slightly different from nation to nation. This is, of course, is a reflection of geography. What can be grown, gathered, fished, and hunted differs across western Canada. Community traditions and cultural practices also vary from place to place. On Vancouver Island, I learned of the *Nuu chah nulth* nation's practice of eating while you are receiving a teaching, for example.

Importantly, there are also differences in the interruptions that have occurred over time to change food systems and food relationships for Indigenous communities across the prairies. Certainly, the differences in the treaty-making processes between the western provinces are evident through the “abandonment of the treaty-making as a method of dealing with Aboriginal title” in British Columbia as compared to the numbered treaties in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta (Usher, Tough & Galois, 1992, p.10). The complicated scrip process¹⁰ of Metis land claims provides a further example of the differences around Indigenous land claims. The impact of residential schools and current colonization forces, such as industry development, also vary from place to place. However, this history- this complex, rich and often troubled history- speaks to the why and the how communities continue with their food journeys today. These factors weave together to tell the story of how communities have started to reconnect with their food systems, and how these food systems are being redefined. History is the reason most communities started their food program. Participants referenced the past and returning to how things used to be. They talked of reconnecting with their heritage, honouring their

¹⁰ In an effort to extinguish Aboriginal Métis title to the land, the scrip process offered Métis people scrip certificates that entitled the scrip bearer to 160 acres of pre-determined land, or \$160. Many of these scrips were sold because the land that was offered was too far from families and people chose to stay together as a community (SWDM, 2010). This, of course, differs from the treaty process in which negotiations to protect Indigenous constitutional orders took place between “representatives of Indigenous nations and settler societies. That is to say, Indigenous leaders sought to protect and thus, maintain their constitutional orders through treaty relationships just as they had in the past in their dealings with other Indigenous nations” (Ladner, 2006, p.5).

ancestors, and moving back towards providing food for their communities that comes from the land. In

Peguis First Nation (MB), Mike Sutherland spoke of why the Back to the Land Camp started:

“And that’s why the camp is called Back to the Land, because we go back to the land to understand those teachings and traditions - how to gather and preserve. Because that was our basis of survival and that’s what our families formed around, right, the hunting and the gathering... We can look all we want, but unless we understand who we are, and our history and where we came, from we’ll always have that portion of our life, that very important aspect, our understanding of who we are missing.”

Returning back to the land is an important motivating factor for those involved in these food initiatives, and part of the advice that many participants shared: *“Go back, go back to the good way of living off the land. Do your own gardening. Do your own hunting. Preserve your meats, your berries”* (Gerralyne Cochrane, Peguis Back to the Land Camp, MB). Youth play a vital role in communities reconnecting to their food histories, and can be seen as the catalyst for change: *“We’re moving further and further from our connections to the land and the water, the Elders and our teachings. And I feel it is time to reconnect. And that starts with the young people, to create this movement and impact change”* (Shianne McKay, Water Guardians, MB).

Historically, communities generally experienced a level of self-sufficiency that was enhanced through trade networks with other First Nations. As Cree Elder Ipswa Mescacakanis explains: *“We know that at one time before the interruption that we’ve had of the modern world, we had very elaborate and very diverse food exchanges, particularly in the interior of BC and the caribou country”* (Vancouver Island Traditional Food Conference, BC). Many communities referred to how food used to come from the land, and shared stories from the Elders: *“There are still some Elders that are alive that can remember going out on walks with their mother or their grandmother for the day and they never even had to pack a lunch”* (Jean Jackson, *Cha Me Ta Ha-uuk Hesquiaht* Project, BC).

There were practical considerations to this self-sufficiency; hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, and growing were common skills before the arrival of the Europeans. But, over time the impacts of contact and the processes of colonization changed lifestyles, skills sets, and importantly,

relationships with food. These impacts are still felt by Indigenous people today: *“whether real or not, oppression is what limits a lot of their ability to visualize or dream or even to overcome some of these things”* (Ipswa Mescacakanis, Vancouver Island Traditional Food Conference, BC). Residential schools further damaged food and family relationships, and the history of these schools is still felt acutely and sometimes acts to undermine food initiatives. As Byron Beardy explains: *“They don’t even want to think gardening because of the memories I guess, from the residential schools where they were worked to the bone to get their food to feed their peers”* (Four Arrows Food Security Program, MB).

Yet history can also be empowering. Keith Hunter describes the important relationship between food and culture, as a kind of living history: *“To see that living continuity continue to the next generation I think that’s the most satisfaction that I get from this, to be able to see that living history”* (First Nations Wildcrafters, BC). The idea of living history, and the transformative potential of food programs, was echoed by Jesse Archie:

“Lot of them still go out and gather foods from out in the wilderness, whereas they never did before. They learned how to preserve their foods and meats and fish. Such as drying and jarring and stuff like that. And they do it now. It’s great to see them do it. Try to carry on that tradition that wasn’t actually passed on to them, but now they’ve learned.” (BEADS Program, BC)

Likewise, in Manitoba, Mona Ladouceur describes the excitement around the Matheson Island Community Garden project, and the power it holds:

“People here, Elders, long ago used to garden, so they’re all really excited, the few that are left. They’re saying that’s how they raised their families. It’s all the store-bought stuff that’s causing the diseases, such as the diabetes in the community. We just want to try to get back into that tradition.”

Many communities are working towards reconnecting with their agricultural history. Harvey Knight, in Muskoday First Nation, Saskatchewan, explains the importance of knowing his community’s history:

“We have to find a good enough reason to motivate ourselves and our communities to do that. And that is to find a reason in our past, in our history and understand who we were, what we did in terms of being food secure in the past that we need to, we need to reclaim that, we need to

reclaim that history. So our bottom line is to reclaim our Indigenous heritage in agriculture because we had an Indigenous heritage. We have an Indigenous heritage in agriculture.” (Muskoday Organic Grower’s Co-op, SK)

In British Columbia, the Dog Creek and Canoe Creek communities are similarly re-connecting with their farming roots, although these initiatives need more attention and support: *“Agriculture doesn’t get the attention in our area here. The mining and forestry do. Agriculture has a lot of the social and health benefits. So I’d like to see more of that. More funding coming to the agriculture sector in BC. Especially First Nations.”* (Patrick Harry, Canoe Creek & Dog Creek Garden Project, British Columbia)

4.1.2 Connection to the Land

Returning to the land has more than just historical significance. Land represents past, present, and future. Finding the means to re-connect with food systems today through a holistic relationship with the land was a common story amongst participants. Land is sacred. It is the source of life and ceremony to honour that life. Land is also our teacher; we learn from the animals, the trees, the sun, the moon, and the water. Land is found in the southern direction, for it represents a time of intense learning; and as Indigenous people, we learn through our connection to the land. As King (2012) explains, “land has always been a defining element of Aboriginal culture. Land contains the languages, the stories, and the histories of a people. It provides water, air, shelter, and food. Land participates in the ceremonies and the songs. And land is home” (p. 218). Land is also territory; a place that helps define a people and their history. It is grounding and helps us understand our place in the world.

Sharon Sutherland describes the teachings offered through the Back to the Land Camp in Manitoba: *“We teach them, when we’re out on the land, to respect and offer tobacco when we’re taking off the land. Only take what you need. Don’t shoot anything if you’re not going to eat it.”* This reinforces an Indigenous perspective where plants and animals are harvested in a manner that respects life; by offering tobacco and prayers, by honouring the changes of the seasons for plants and animals, and always ensuring there is some left for future generations. The term ‘*all our relations*’ fits here. It

references how we honour our connection to the world around us, and consider all living things. Jennie Leading Cloud (1984), a Lakota woman from the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, has explained the term as follows:

We Indians think of the earth and the whole universe as a never-ending circle, and in this circle man is just another animal. The buffalo and the coyote are our brothers; the birds, our cousins. Even the tiniest any, even a louse, even the smallest flower you can find- they are all relatives. We end our prayers with the words *mitakuye oyasin*- 'all my relations'- and that includes everything that grows, crawls, runs, creeps, hops, and flies on this continent (p. 5).

Being on the land presents an opportunity to work with and understand the soil, air, water, plants, animals, and all other living things. For some, food is a means of spending time on the land, a place where they grew up: *"I've been outdoors all my life. Ever since I was a young, young boy I was always outdoors, hunting and trapping and fishing, that's where I was kinda brought up"* (Floyd Flett, *Back to the Land Camp*, MB). Thus, connection to the land forms another key element of food sovereignty (Figure 1).

Land is where life begins to grow, take shape and move forward from our history. For thousands of years, Indigenous people have had relationships to the land rooted in the understanding that life contains spirit. Living and non-living things, as part of the land, contain spirit, teachings and lessons for growth. Consideration for living things has served to guide many of the food initiatives highlighted through this research. Certainly, these food initiatives are viewed as a way of honouring the land:

"There's got to be consideration for every living thing. Besides the humans, it's not all about the humans, it's about everything. So when we actually plan to propagate a certain species then there's got to be a share, a portion of that goes to the plants, the animals, right? And the birds and fish and whatever else needs to eat too. The four-legged, the winged ones; on and on it goes, right?" (Mike Christian, Splantsin Market Garden & Agroforestry, BC)

They also help explain our relationship to and place in the web of life:

"Every plant that we grow in the garden, every food plant we have an agreement with each of those plants, you know. And it's a reciprocal agreement that says that we will take care of you and protect you from your enemies and we'll feed you, we'll nourish you, we'll bring you up, and then at the end of your life, at the end of your time you in turn as part of this agreement will

give us life. And that's the agreement." (Harvey Knight, Muskoday Organic Grower's Co-op, SK)

Over time, the land has been subject to change, and Indigenous people have been subject to colonial impacts that have altered their food systems. In some cases, skills such as hunting, fishing, and trapping have been lost. In other cases, communities are working to bring these skills back, starting with the youth. Lessons from the land can be learned in many ways. In Alberta, school principal Raymond Soetaert discusses the Earth Box Program and how the teachings of respect were interwoven into the program:

"We get them to treat the plants with respect. We have them talk to the plants. So they're seeing all the plants from seed and growing up. That is educationally sound all by itself. Then you get the part where kids actually put their hands in the dirt and actually plant something and see it grow. That's not just culturally satisfying, but it does the soul good to grow something."

Likewise, through the Water Guardians Program, youth learn about water in a variety of ways. They start to see the connections that exist in nature:

"We go through scientific activities such as understanding about ground water. Watersheds. Wetlands. Water and land formations over time. Bio-accumulation. Bio-magnification. And we also study tree rings. Then the Elders talk about the cultural and historic significance of water, and how it's impacted their community over time. How it's impacted their fisheries, and the food the community eats." (Shianne McKay, MB)

There is space here for both scientific and traditional knowledge. Indeed, many of the projects successfully incorporated the two components; however, the emphasis lies in validating traditional knowledge, or the knowledge that comes from *"people who are on the land who have been living and breathing the practices"* (John Rampanen, Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC). Peter Ross, a former scientist at Fisheries & Oceans Canada and now Director of the Ocean Pollution Research Program at the Vancouver Aquarium, explains his research on contamination and the importance of traditional ecological knowledge: *"There was direct connection between what we were collecting in terms of samples and information and what was going on in the food chain, food supply. So that was it. We came at this from a strong science perspective, but it would*

have been meaningless without the cultural context” (Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC).

The link between western science and traditional ecological knowledge becomes increasingly important as climate change and environmental pollution affect food resources. A number of participants discussed these threats. And yet, for some, these food initiatives have created a sense of empowerment:

“I remember having this sense of futility of, you know, there’s so much out there that’s causing problems when it comes especially to Indigenous foods, and to the lands, and to the waters that harbour those foods. But becoming involved with the Traditional Foods Conference enabled me as one person to become involved with many other individuals who were concerned about the toxicity and pollutants and all these other things that are adversely impacting our foods and actually be able to strategize and have discussions on not only what the negative aspects are that are impacting our foods, but what can we do to create a positive shift?” (John Rampanen, Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC)

In Fort Chipewyan Alberta, the importance of the Community Based Monitoring Project was shared by the Program Coordinator, Bruce Maclean, as he spoke about the program in the context of upstream Oil Sands development: *“If you’re looking for work that’s largely defending your territory or your rights as an Indigenous person, this is a great way for people to become active on the land, but also working to protect their own interests.”*

In moving towards food sovereignty, there must be care for and teachings shared about the land. After all, Indigenous people are *“the original caretakers of the land”* (Mike Christian, Splatsin Market Garden & Agroforestry, BC). The cultural significance of the land cannot be overstated. The land contains teachings, and it is here that food projects really start to grow:

“And I think it’s important to start at the grassroots level. To actually get the hunters and fisher people and the people that know the land and the food and still practice traditional food harvesting strategies and have the traditional knowledge and have some, have some insight into what are some of the issues, why is it- what needs to change, what’s working well, what are some of those traditional teachings we can build on.” (Anonymous, Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, BC)

4.1.3 Relationships

Food sovereignty has, of course, a strong human element. It is about caring for people as much as it is caring for the land. Relationships are a third key element of Indigenous food sovereignty discussed by participants, placed in the western direction of Figure 1. The western direction reminds us that as we grow, we nurture, and we extend this nurturing outwards to our families and friends. Food relationships expand beyond the physical components of the land, as seen above. Certainly, we have a relationship to our food system and are accountable to it. However, for many of the research participants, that accountability extends even further. Food sovereignty, then, must also include the relationships that exist among people. These are the relationships that help food grow, but along the way, they help people grow and communities come together. For the Alexis Greenhouse Program, in Alberta, personal development was important to Councillor Darwin Alexis: *“I believe some of those people took pride, well, it brought out some pride in what they were able to do. And then following year, some of the people that did do the work before wanted to know if it’s continuing.”* This is how food communities are built.

Recognizing the opportunities for personal growth was a strong motivating factor for many of these food initiatives. Similar stories were shared about the Muskoday Organic Grower’s Co-op: *“It seems when we had them working it built up their confidence because they were working for and then they weren’t afraid to go out and look and find something else that they wanted to do”* (Elder Florence Harper, Muskoday Organic Grower’s Co-op, SK). Likewise, in British Columbia, the BEADS program taught people how to grow food; the process gave people the confidence to pursue further education and employment opportunities:

“I forget what year it was that I took a listing of all the trainees that had gone through it and looked at where they were at that time. I believe there was about 75% of them had either gone on to go back to school, or further training, or had gone to work in other areas and other jobs. So that, to us, was a huge success, where before none of them were employed or in school.”
(Jesse Archie, BEADS Program, BC)

In Manitoba, the Four Arrows Food Security Program has seen success in their gardening and chicken-raising programs as a result of the training they provide for community members:

We give opportunities for our Go-To gardeners to get more exposure to learning, more exposure to new techniques, new gardening. New plants, new harvest that they can utilize. We use these people as mentors if you want to call them that within their communities, the Go-To people in those communities... we get gardeners to come into local conferences within Winnipeg or northern Manitoba to gain more training in gardening or chicken-raising.” (Byron Beardy, Four Arrows Food Security Program, MB)

Food relationships require working together so that we can fulfill our duties to care for each other and the land. These are the messages that the Elders tell us, messages that were taught by grandparents and aunties and uncles. Taking care of others in the community, helping them to learn and to grow was mentioned a number of times by participants. Indeed, the importance of giving back, sharing food, and taking care of your Elders is the foundation of many of these projects. Douglas Hart, Manager of the Nelson House Country Foods Program in Manitoba explains why his program started:

“We were supposed to look after the elderly. People who can’t hunt, 55+. That’s how it started. It’s not only the Elders. We do it for the whole community, infirm, people are not making enough money, they usually come and get their stuff here. Usually distribute like, it’s free, you don’t charge them, you just give it away free.”

There is strength in working together and building community. Support can come from a strong community that understands and believes in the food projects. The Turtle Mountain Metis Garden was fortunate to receive support from their community, both in terms of time and donated plant material:

“So I would think that was one of our biggest successes and from that stemmed so much more generosity and in-kind gestures. The cultivating and the hulling of the topsoil, the first loads of topsoil themselves, the vegetable seeds, the flowers, tomato plants, cucumber plants, rhubarb and the stump removal was all donated in-kind. This project really brought our community together.” (Crystal Stewart, Turtle Mountain Metis Garden, MB)

Support is vital for community food projects. Building community support can include training for local volunteers and other food activists, or through inviting community members to share in the bounty of the seasons:

“We promote this [project] by not only our garden plots and involvement by individuals, but we have workshops where we promote foods that come from the garden and foods that we gather with the youth. We take them out on foraging outings. We get game meat that our members hunt for us for our workshops where we teach how to process the game. We also get fish from food fish caught by our members.” (Christine George, Ladybug Garden and Greenhouse Programs, BC)

In many cases fostering support includes creating partnerships with outside sources, including other communities, government, universities, and funding agencies. Finding ways to work together becomes important for land that is under threat and under the jurisdiction of countless organizations and government agencies:

“One thing identified by the Guardian Watchmen was having better relationships with the agencies that are working on the coast. So that’s one thing that’s been facilitated over time through the Network. For example, having BC Parks come to the annual gathering, builds those relationships so that nations now go on joint patrols. I think that does a bunch of things. But it certainly brings legitimacy and credibility to the role that the Guardian Watchmen have, and really contributes to all these nations asserting authority as laid out in the plans that have developed.” (Sandra Thomson, Coastal Guardian Watchmen Network, BC).

Supporting the local community and revitalizing traditional knowledge was discussed by Michelle Biden as being essential: *“We bring in lots of local resource people, male and female, that have a lot of knowledge about, and are able to teach about the values and how to process an animal from start to finish”* (Traditional Foods & Healthy Eating Program, SK). This program also worked with community from the start, designing programs using community input, a process by which they would *“talk about what’s going on in the community, what they know about the food, and find the interests, and the needs within all those conversations”* (Michelle Biden, Traditional Foods & Healthy Eating Program, SK). Starting a project by first building relationships helps ensure that programs are on the right track, and are meaningful and relevant to communities. Relationships are central to Indigenous culture. It is how we know our place in the world, and how we identify and honour those around us, especially our Elders.

While these and other stories highlight the positive role of relationships, there are instances in where relationships have also caused challenges. Jesse Archie explains the lack of support in

starting the BEADS program: *“Right in the beginning our biggest barrier was getting information about these types of programs from other places. It was almost like it was a competition and they didn’t want to help out the competition, so it was pretty hard to get that information.”* In Alexis, Alberta, community politics resulted in a lack of support that was seen by some as a political statement: *“Politics, they didn’t like the leadership’s idea. They actually trashed the greenhouse and wrecked some plants. We had to restart everything, and replant what we could”* (Darwin Alexis, Alexis Greenhouse Program, AB). Sometimes the initiatives themselves are controversial, and those disagreements can hinder their functioning. This can be a reflection of local politics, family politics, and the lack of continuity that comes with changing leadership.

Along the way, there is give and take, but also an opportunity for learning and to help those outside partners understand an Indigenous worldview. This is important in moving forward. For successful partnerships to exist, there must be careful and considerate effort by outside partners to recognize, respect, and accommodate the needs and worldviews of Indigenous communities and their food systems. Many of the projects discovered the power of creating networks of like-minded people. These allied networks help guide future projects and raise and increase awareness of key community issues, including land issues. They play a vital role in connecting people and place, across nations.

“The flurry of activity is really the most positive experience, to see it grow so much.... And now people are looking at how to decolonize within the land and food systems and one of the ways of doing that is expanding the scope to go beyond the mainstream agriculture and look at the larger Indigenous land and food system issues, concerns and strategies, and you know, so people, the willingness and openness to understand and explore and figure out where all meets up is really exciting.” (Anonymous, Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, BC)

For some communities, this has gone a step further to talks of revitalizing trade networks between tribes and nations. This is part of re-building a food community and honouring the past. We see in this element the fluid interaction between history, the sacredness of the land, and relationship building. Together, they begin to tell the story of a people, a culture, and a way of life.

4.1.4 Cultural Identity

Continuing along our circle diagram we arrive at the northern direction, the fourth and final element of food sovereignty, cultural identity. Cultural identity requires that we connect to a way of being. Elements of culture, the sum total of the way we live, are in fact of way of life. They contribute to a larger picture, one that is individual, but multi-faceted and interconnected. It is fitting then, that here in our circle all elements come together. In this northern direction, we find cultural identity, through understanding our history, honouring our connection to the land, and the relationships to those around us. We come to know ourselves and strengthen our identities as Indigenous people. Along this journey, we build and shape identity. This is the place where who you are and what you do becomes part of you. It sits in your body, your mind, your heart, and in your spirit. This is where you find yourself, start to understand your roles and responsibilities and move forward. The concept of roles and responsibilities is often missing today. Mike Sutherland explains how the Back to the Land Camp in Manitoba teaches youth how understanding your role is part of identity:

“That’s why we have the Elders come, the Grandmothers, to talk to the youth about what their roles and responsibilities are. And as we grow, we have different roles and responsibilities within the household, you know getting wood, carrying water, cleaning up, cooking, cleaning, preparation of food, the preservation of food. Food is the hunting and food is the skinning and so on and so forth... but we do some of the basic stuff and it helps give some of the kids identity, as to who they are and where they come from and what their roles and responsibilities were as people of the land. As First Nations people.”

Being people of the land is a large component of identity. However, not all Indigenous people have had the opportunity to spend time on the land. It becomes important to acknowledge how identity has been shaped and damaged as a result of such impacts as residential schools. Erin Rowsell shares some of the emotional experiences around the Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference in British Columbia: *“We’ve had ladies who are in their 50s or 60s brought to tears seeing the traditional foods practices, because it’s been something that hasn’t been active in their families, because their*

generation and their parent's generation were in residential schools.” There is a revival happening however, around traditional foods, and new opportunities for Indigenous communities to reconnect with their cultural food practices through the work of these food projects. Byron Beardy describes this process as: *“Reigniting the fire again, bringing back that knowledge of harvesting your foods. It kind of died out with the residential school”* (Four Arrows Food Security Program, MB).

The Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference has also seen tremendous benefits for youth, in reconnecting with their traditional food practices: *“We had some students I’ve worked with in the past, and [this conference] has instilled a huge sense of pride to know their culture in terms of seeing a cultural food practice they may not have seen before”* (Erin Rowsell, Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC).

A key component to identity is, of course, belonging. Having a place to go to learn and practice food skills helps create a new community, one that supports these interests and helps Indigenous people learn traditional practices and self-sufficiency. Brendtro and colleagues (2002) argue that because of their long-term relationships with youth, schools can help to support and care for youth, thus acting as their new “tribes” or family units (p. 12). Education, then, plays a large role in creating cultural identity. Michelle Biden talks about belonging in the context of traditional foods workshops:

“Students who weren’t in our class were hanging around and asked if they could stay and do this with us. A couple of the girls went back to their teachers and asked if they could miss class and do this instead. They were really attentive when they were listening and totally involved while we were processing the animals. They kept saying how cool this was. When they’re seeking us out, to me that was such a positive experience. Because lots of students don’t go out of their way to ask for things or seek out opportunities.” (Our Food Our Health Our Culture, SK)

Elders also play a significant role in helping us understand cultural identity. The respected role of Elders is, indeed, a keystone element of Indigenous culture. They help to provide positive mentorships, counselling, guidance, and can share stories of food harvests and other practices. As Crystal Stewart explains: *“It’s really important to talk to the Elders, because- I mean, experience is everything”* (Turtle Mountain Métis Garden, MB). Pauline Prell further explains how Elders can contribute to food

initiatives: *“The role of Elders is very important. You know, to teach the grandchildren, to talk to the grandchildren about gardening, picking berries, how to preserve them”* (Muskoday Organic Grower’s Co-op, SK). They are knowledge keepers, and often language keepers.

The language contains the stories, the culture, and all elements of being. According to Kirkness (1998): “Language is the principal means whereby culture is accumulated, shared, and transmitted from one generation to another” (p. 4). Many projects found strength in incorporating language components and discovered these practices enriched their programming. Christine George shares some of the activities practiced through the Ladybug Garden and Greenhouse Program (BC):

“We also take our members and youth out onto our traditional territories for hikes to practice our culture by way of prayers and blessings, exercise, plant identification, language practices and again, I always do the same thing. We learn the words of things around us on everything that we do.”

Understanding cultural practices, norms, ideologies and perspectives is crucial to supporting cultural identity. There is a need for dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations to help support these projects; however, this dialogue must come from a place of understanding and an attempt to create supportive systems that reflect Indigenous worldviews. This need is described below:

“Yeah, there’s just cross-cultural challenges quite often and the issue of the capacity of getting non-native societies to understand the Indigenous worldview and come to our worldview to talk to us rather than us always having to fit into the western scientific paradigm to understand what’s going on in the institutions that have been set up within the modern colonial structures and institutions.” (Anonymous, Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty, BC)

Western notions of success are often challenged at this point. My understanding of success was shaped through the stories of the participants; I was taught the importance of process and Indigenous values. Keith Hunter shares how recognizing learning opportunities is part of the First Nations Wildcrafters business practice in British Columbia. He offers this advice:

“I think, going back in, I would advise this to any community looking at this, is just because something didn’t work doesn’t mean it won’t ever work. Look at why something didn’t work, and see if the situation has changed. What would make it different than before? It might not

have worked because of factors that have changed...We need to learn from our mistakes too. That can be just as valuable in a business, or food security, as knowing what does work.”

Other communities have found there is power in putting projects on hold. Sometimes stepping back and re-evaluating is part of the process. Funding challenges are often the reason for many of these hiatuses. However, hope is not lost and a break does not necessarily mean the end of these programs. The BEADS Program, for example, is hoping to restart:

“Last go around, we had, after many years of struggling for funding and support we decided to give it a rest. Hopefully it will go back to it again. We have band members and community members who are asking, who keep asking, when it is coming back. So, get a little more energy back and get back into it.” (Jesse Archie, BEADS Program, BC)

In Muskoday, the Organic Grower’s Co-op is also on hold due to funding cuts. Joe Munroe explains: *“Well, there’s been erratic funding from the province, from the feds they’ve pulled their funding essentially on reserve. And Heifer International [a US-based NGO] has been a supportive funder from time to time. And it’s like a domino effect, they pulled out when the band pulled out, then the province pulled out.”* However- and here’s where this project speaks to the power of cultural identity, this hiatus has given the Co-op the opportunity to reflect on their Cree values in moving forward and getting more community members involved.

“The state of the co-op is such that the co-op has made the decision to take that final step to change over to culturally-appropriate governance within the co-op. The board has decided that they will change, that the matriarchs will select or elect from their families somebody for the board and that’s how you’ve got to try and get that buy-in.” (Joe Munroe, Muskoday Organic Grower’s Co-op, SK)

Harvey Knight expressed further values in describing the importance of women in Indigenous culture as follows: *“Because they were in charge of the gardens, they were in charge of agriculture, they were in charge of plant gathering for the medicine, medicine-women, you know. They had the exclusive, almost exclusive domain of plant knowledge; the women were the ones that carried that, they made plant medicines.”* Turner and Turner (2008) have commented on the valuable role women played, historically, in gathering plant foods. Likewise, M.K. Anderson referred to women as the first

ethnobotanists (Grey & Patel, 2014), while Anderson (2000) has discussed the economic power of Indigenous women historically in food production (p. 60).

Food is also seen as medicine; belief in and knowledge of medicine is part of an Indigenous identity: *“You know we said that our food is our medicine and sharing that medicine is part of the healing process for the rest of the people”* (John Rampanen, Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC). A number of the projects also focus on traditional medicines, as part of their food programming or initiatives. From Manitoba, Shianne McKay notes: *“There is tremendous medicinal value in many Indigenous foods”* (Indigenous Foods First). In British Columbia, the Ladybug Garden and Greenhouse Programs incorporates medicine picking into their programs. The Manitoba-based Nelson House Country Foods Program similarly includes medicine picking as part of their community food program, and growing and picking medicines are also components of the Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference. Medicines are an important part of a food system, and must be protected. Mike Sutherland shares the need for this protection: *“And today, the land, Mother Nature is hurting bad.... And within that land are all our components to live- health, you know, shelter, and clothing it all comes from the land, medicines, and we’re not fighting to go do anything about it”* (Back to the Land Camp, MB).

In creating this circle, I placed history in the east, representing that we must acknowledge the past in order to rebuild the future. Connection to the land was placed next, land as the original teacher, and a place where we can grow from. Relationships I saw fitting in the west, for they represent the next stage of life; one where we start to connect with and relate to each other. And cultural identity was placed in the north, for I saw it as an opportunity to re-affirm our identities, and practice our ceremonies, our food, and our culture. We can build and re-build our identities over time; food can provide us with the means to do so. And as we move on in our circle, we can re-build a new history where people still heal through food. This circle describes how food sovereignty is a journey where we move from one stage to the next, or across to another, but always with the potential to keep growing.

4.1.5 Power

Perhaps the overarching theme of these elements, the influencing force, deals with power. In this circle, the hands, centrally located, represent the element of power, an often subtle, but sometimes overt, factor found throughout each element discussed above. This is the power of a people, and is grounded in our connection to the land, our culture, and each other. Corntassel (2012) has referred to true power as being found in our inherent responsibilities to our homelands. This is not a power that references control or authority over the land, or over our nations, our food systems, and ways of life. Rather, this is a power that is demonstrated by and that emerges from our care for and responsibility to our traditional food systems. Indeed, according to Alfred (1999):

Nowhere is the contrast between Indigenous and (dominant) Western traditions sharper than in their philosophical approaches to the fundamental issues of power and nature. In indigenous philosophies, power flows from respect for nature and the natural order. In the dominant Western philosophy, power derives from coercion and artifice- in effect, alienation from nature. (p. 60)

In considering power as stemming from a respect for the natural world and order of things, we can see the metaphor of hands is hard at work in helping to describe this notion. From an Indigenous perspective power comes from respect and responsibility for the natural world and each other (Alfred, 1999). It manifests itself through our relationships to those living and non-living things around us. Hands represent the source of power and the lack of power experienced for thousands years by Indigenous people. The hands have the ability to work, to be active in food systems and active in culture. This is how power is exerted, an example of our inherent responsibilities. In food sovereignty, as we have seen, food systems are a part of culture and culture a part of food systems. They work together, and yet, have been broken down, taken apart by outside forces. In looking at a lack of power, this is where hands have been tied back, or slapped, or removed - taken from community, family, culture, and life. There is a struggle between re-asserting power and experiencing a loss of power. This tug-of-war is present throughout the four elements. Power expressed, and powerlessness. These projects speak to both experiences. They are stories of history, and a connection to the land, to the

water and air, stories of relationships and identity, certainly. But they are also stories about power. In the case of history, these are stories about the assertion of power, and ancestors living off the land. But it is also a traumatic history, where the settlers asserted full power through force, through oppression, and colonization, which have adversely affected communities in complicated ways. In connecting to the land, the push-pull is also present and seen today in the extraction of nature from Indigenous lands and the failure of government and industry to recognize treaty rights. In contrast, the practices of caring for the land, through values such as respect, harmony, and balance represent the power of our responsibilities to the land.

Relationships too, contain a power balance. Politics play a large role in these food initiatives, with a lack of support and funding creating or threatening the future of these projects. On the other hand, networks of people connecting, gathering, supporting each other are a source of power. Cultural identities are still affected by racism, and a history that has left a need to access traditional food *skills*, to re-learn what was lost- the powerful hands being slapped away. Identities are also built through a connection to people, to the land, to who we are and where we come from; this is the hand that sounds the drum to heal people. Power, along with the freedom to make choices and to meet our own needs, is a necessary component of self-determination (Morrison, 2011). Indeed, the two are closely linked and in the realm of Indigenous food sovereignty it can be challenging to tease the two apart. Desmarais and Wittman (2014) have pointed out that power, in the sense of domination, is more relevant to food security than food sovereignty, arguing instead for a new engagement of “reconsidering and reframing concepts of collective political will, appropriate authority, governance, self-determination, solidarity, and individual and collective rights” (p.1154). These are important considerations for the future, and while not spoken of directly, participants did talk about the power of their projects in terms of self-sufficiency, and providing healthy, affordable, and reliable food for their communities.

Food sovereignty can provide a lens for looking at the power elements of these projects, however, few participants spoke specifically of food sovereignty, as a concept or a goal in our

interviews. This does not mean, however, that without the language of food sovereignty it is not in practice. Alma Bear, describes her reason for getting involved with the Flying Dust Cree-8 Workers Co-op in Saskatchewan: *“Food sovereignty, I would think. Sustainability, where people can just sustain their own food and feed your community.”* The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty also started with food sovereignty in mind. Through their work, they have seen access and decision-making matters over land and water as major issues in the traditional territories of the 27 Nations who are the original inhabitants of what is known to the settlers as British Columbia:

“Well, I think the main thing would be to, one thing I’ve been saying everywhere is probably the biggest recommendation that has come out of all of food sovereignty discussions that I’ve had with Indigenous communities in B.C. is just the call for the setting aside of adequate tracts of land for hunting and fishing and gathering.” (Anonymous)

Having a homeland, and adequate access to hunting, fishing, trapping, and gathering grounds can be part of an Indigenous identity, but at a practical level, food sovereignty is also about feeding people. Feeding community is important, especially in the context of an ongoing food crisis and the number of associated health concerns communities are facing (Settee, 2014). For many participants, these initiatives helped to provide fresh, healthy and often traditional foods to their communities. In Alexis First Nation, the greenhouse and garden project developed as a way to *“look at what foods we could grow that would help with chronic illnesses we have”* (Darwin Alexis, AB). In Saskatchewan, William Gladue describes the Flying Dust Cree-8 Workers Co-op:

“So we’re basically after the healthy-food portion of it now. Like you know, as you look around First Nations you’ve got all kinds of things happening, and we figured maybe we could contribute towards that in a way, to try to supply fresh food to First Nations, or whoever wants to buy our product, that’s what we’re all about.”

These food projects also help to combat the high food prices that many communities face, remote road access being an enormous and expensive challenge to obtaining healthy food. Shelly Crack explains Masset-Haida-Gwaii’s experience: *“Those are sort of big priorities for the island. Food security issues. We are definitely dependent on a ferry for our food here. The food doesn’t always look good and it’s expensive”* (Masset Haida Gwaii Farm to School Program, BC).

Concerns over future food supplies were mentioned by a number of participants. William Gladue shares why the Flying Dust Cree-8 Workers Co-op is so significant: *“That and the fact of what if something happens in the future or something and then our food source is gone. We want to keep that, to sustain our own food source. That’s where the idea comes from.”* At the Ahms Tah Ow School Garden in Sliammon, BC, Michael Peterson talks about future planning.

“Where we’re situated, you have to take two ferries to get here from Vancouver. If the supply of outside food were to stop for whatever reason it wouldn’t take long for things to get bad here. You can imagine some scenarios. I was told by a Safeway [grocery store] manager that we would last three days and I’ve heard since that it’s probably two days....This is something that is necessary for the entire community. We really need to develop a higher level of self-sufficiency than we have right now.”

These projects serve as teaching models with self-sufficiency as a main goal. Shelly Crack shares a story from the school programs at Masset- Haida Gwaii in British Columbia:

“One story from a teacher, they went hunting, they got this deer, they processed it, put it in their freezer. They grew potatoes, they grew vegetables. They made a meal that was totally local. One of the students said, “I could do this for my family.” It was like, “Exactly!” That was what it was all about, getting his students to know that this was totally doable. A way to support their families and feed their families.”

Similarly, those at the Turtle Mountain Metis Garden *“wanted to have the garden as a learning tool to teach the youth how to grow and preserve their own food and become more self-sufficient”* (Crystal Stewart, MB).

In some cases, the goal of these projects is also to increase understanding of and awareness about food issues and to work with communities to understand the links among food, the environment, and health. Shianne McKay shares why the Manitoba-based Indigenous Food First Website advocates food from the land:

“Yet still we are bombarded with consumerism, saving time, so we choose those unhealthy foods. Because it’s easier, cheaper, easier to access. But at the same time it’s detrimental to our health and our well-being. And that’s very evident in the rates of diabetes that have increased. Also, it is suspected that the increase in cancer rates is being attributed to the foods we consume.”

Traditional foods are at the heart of many of these food initiatives. As John Rampanen expresses: “*It became abundantly clear that foods, Indigenous foods specifically, play a very important part within the revitalization and the healing of Indigenous peoples*” (Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC). Indeed, Sharon Sutherland explains the benefits of traditional foods:

“It is also a lot healthier, the cooking off the land. The wild meat and fish. It doesn’t have a bunch of preservatives like the meat we’re buying in the stores. I think that’s why there’s so much diabetes nowadays. Long ago our people used to eat off the land, and it was so much healthier.” (Back to the Land Camp, MB)

There is an opportunity for these projects to affect the health of their communities through an increased awareness of food issues, increased access to healthy foods and an increased connection to the land. According to Christine George: “*Our people, they seem to be living healthier, having more knowledge of how to grow things properly and how to store it*” (Ladybug Garden and Greenhouse Project, BC).

Adequate support, including financial and technical, is also essential to these operations. Almost all participants highlighted and shared stories of funding challenges. Although outside financing can be seen as a source of powerlessness, many communities recognize it is part of a process and hope to create their own funding in the long run.

“The challenges are stable and sustained funding for a few years to build that stable institution, the co-op to the point where it doesn’t need cash injections anymore. The challenge is having that sustained funding from government and other places to get it established, to keep it going. So being reliant on the whims of government for what they fund and what they won’t fund, is very challenging. We need to find other, more stable sources of funding or else get the income up very quickly, the generated income from sales. Which is not a long-term solution, you know, growing potatoes here and shipping them to California, that’s not sustainable. But the reason we’re looking at doing that is for the short-term. While we build local markets, that organic food, we’re using that as a short-term strategy to build our stable relationships and our infrastructure for the co-op to keep it going.” (Joe Munroe, Muskoday Organic Grower's Co-op, SK).

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Indigenous food sovereignty & self determination

I started this research trying to understand what Indigenous food sovereignty looks like in western Canada. Several authors have pointed to food sovereignty in action (e.g., Grey & Patel, 2014; Hansen, 2011; Socha et al., 2012; Wiebe & Wipf, 2011), paying particular attention to community gardens as local examples (e.g., Mundel & Chapman, 2010; Hansen, 2011). In an Indigenous context, however, fewer examples are available in the literature. Grey and Patel (2014) have listed examples of Indigenous food sovereignty such as hunting, gathering, fishing, harvesting, and agriculture. Socha and colleagues (2012) have described Indigenous food sovereignty as increased access to traditional foods and traditional food systems, which, ultimately, requires a level of political sovereignty.

Starting this research, I would not have thought to look for specific examples of political sovereignty, and even today, I am not certain that I have the tools to adequately describe political sovereignty. Those reflections should come from the participants, and for this research project there were no direct mentions of political sovereignty in the interviews. Upon reflection, I see now that many of the projects can be viewed as examples of political sovereignty; projects such as advocacy work, returning to a matriarchal system of governance, and the self-determined research around oil sands development, speak to a kind of political sovereignty however, this is my own view and it is limited. More insight into political sovereignty may have been revealed through another or different series of interview questions, but my own thinking about Indigenous food sovereignty was too new for that to have been a consideration at the time my research questions were developed. It becomes further complicated by the word sovereignty, one that has been debated as being inappropriate and inadequate in an Indigenous context (Alfred, 2005).

Regardless, the literature provided a backdrop for my understanding of Indigenous food sovereignty. I spent some time familiarizing myself with grey literature- health reports, conference proceedings, and websites such as the Indigenous Food Systems Network- to learn more about food

sovereignty initiatives. I talked with my family members and friends, along with food organizations and Elders about what Indigenous food sovereignty meant, and what it looked like. Later, the regional “experts” I spoke with helped me conceptualize Indigenous food sovereignty and pointed me in the direction of projects they felt were strong examples. I steered away from trying to define the term or trying to create criteria for Indigenous food sovereignty projects. I was attempting to learn what Indigenous food sovereignty looked like in a more holistic or emergent way, rather than determining whether a project indeed reflected Indigenous food sovereignty. It was not my place to do so.

In asking these contacts what Indigenous food sovereignty looked like, I also heard stories of what Indigenous food sovereignty felt like, how the participants felt or had observed community members as responding, because feeling is associated with doing. Indigenous food sovereignty is visceral, and elements of it are intuitive, for it asks that we listen to our ancestors through our hands, our hearts, and our prayers. Hart (2010) refers to this as listening with your whole being, and in doing so I felt that Indigenous food sovereignty could not be understood through purely analytical terms, but rather feelings. It involves your whole being. Food sovereignty is action-oriented and requires that you participate in your food system, but it also contains a human element and human elements are generally harder to define or quantify; the sharing, the respect for food, family bonds, connections to the land, ancestral ties, and of course, the resurgence-, the practice of being Indigenous (Simpson, 2012)- and the push back from a colonized, or imposed, food system. Because of these complexities and because of the nature of this research and what I was trying to capture, I left the decisions about whether or not the communities wanted to participate in this project about IFS up to the communities. Smith (1999) has referred to self-determination as critical to Indigenous research: “It becomes a goal of social justice....and necessarily involves the process of transformation, of decolonization, of healing, and of mobilization as peoples” (p. 116). I felt the decisions about the levels of participation and also whether or not a project was an example of Indigenous food sovereignty should be left with the participants. There is a healing component for those that viewed their project as such.

Despite this, not everyone is comfortable with the phrase Indigenous food sovereignty. Through her research, Rudolph (2012) shared a conversation with an Indigenous food activist who suggested that Indigenous communities need time to develop their own understandings of food sovereignty outside of the other more common non-Indigenous and agriculture-based perspectives. I have also heard stories from my advisor's work with Indigenous communities that the word sovereignty could suggest autonomy or control over nature and this is not in keeping with most traditional perspectives of the natural world. I worried then, over my choice of research topics. So far, there had some confusion, and a few chuckles over my "fancy words" (although it is important to note that none of the participants debated the term Indigenous food sovereignty). I was advised by a friend to be mindful of my fancy words; he counseled me to approach people as though we were talking around a kitchen table. Ask yourself, he said, what you need to tell people, how you need to describe yourself and your project to open that door of communication. This was an early lesson in reciprocity. In asking for people to share their stories with me, a stranger for the most part, I needed to first share my story with them. While I didn't drop the term food sovereignty from my conversations, I couched it with some broader and less academic descriptions: community-led local food initiatives, such as freezers, gardening, culture and language camps, examples that had been given to me by the "experts" during my search for food sovereignty initiatives. I am grateful for an early correspondence with Indigenous academic and activist, Leanne Simpson, who pointed out:

Food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples is linked to sovereignty over our lands, our minds and our bodies. We can't have food sovereignty without those basic building blocks. This then, includes all of the practices that make up our Indigenous intelligence networks - on the land practices, ceremonies, our intellectual and political systems, our languages, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding and our relationships to our land and our bodies. (Personal communication, May 16, 2011 & April 4, 2015)

I tried to capture these elements through my research, although it was difficult to find stories of community breastfeeding initiatives, and as an outsider, I chose to let stories about ceremonies come organically through the research rather than ask about them directly.

It has been suggested, and will perhaps give rise to further criticism of my research, that I didn't first establish parameters for the projects under study. Indeed, they are wide-ranging in scope, scale, and content, and influenced by various factors that can be debated as making a project a success or even true Indigenous food sovereignty. However, and I think importantly, I chose to let people point me in the direction of food sovereignty initiatives. I encouraged communities to define their projects in their own ways and to talk about what success looked like to them. This is a living reality, after all, and a lived experience can and should first be told by those that live it. To me, and perhaps my understanding is limited, sovereignty is not something that can be prescribed, nor dictated. As an outsider, I could never point to a community and say, this isn't sovereignty because you aren't meeting the criteria or principles according to the research (e.g., Thompson, Kamal, Alam & Wiebe, 2012). It was up to those that were identified as "experts" or food champions to point me in that direction, and then up to the community and those that spoke on behalf of the projects whether or not they agreed their project fit into this study. One project (that has requested anonymity) I approached declined to participate in this study, citing too much red tape around the protocols of their working partners. Often these protocols are put in place to "protect" the participants. At the same time, I felt that a certain level of self-determination should be afforded to the participants so that they could decide whether or not a research project was a valuable exercise and respectful of their time.

Participants were given the option to further expand on how I described Indigenous food sovereignty and their projects, and to provide any feedback during a review period. I did not push for any responses, and instead let them approach me, asking only that they agree as to how their quotes were being used in the context of my findings. All participants approved the results chapter, albeit with some changes that I will discuss below. Specifically, the participants were asked if they felt that I had captured Indigenous food sovereignty through my circle model and with the elements that I had chosen. They were also asked if they felt their project fit, and if they had any further recommendations for moving this Indigenous food sovereignty conversation forward.

4.2.2 Towards food sovereignty

The feedback I received varied. Ten of the 36 research participants responded to the second set of reflective questions that I posed. These questions included whether or not they felt their project fit into the model I had proposed as examples of food sovereignty, and also if they had any insight into moving the dialogue from the results forward. I include them here, as part of the discussion rather than as results, because I feel that they are part of a discussion that I had with my participants on the nature of my results. All ten responded that they felt their projects fit within the elements I had presented, and were examples of Indigenous food sovereignty. However, many emphasized that Indigenous food sovereignty is an ongoing and evolving goal, and something that they are working towards. Indigenous food sovereignty was seen as a pathway, and their projects were seen as steps along that path. Joe Munroe (Muskoday Organic Grower's Co-op, SK) explained the pathway that Muskoday is taking with their food co-operative in Saskatchewan: *“Our food sovereignty is a journey. Having the matriarchs take their rightful place as key decision-makers in our food issues is a huge step in the right direction.”* Similarly, Raymond Soetaert reflected that the Earth Box program in Alberta, despite being on hiatus, is also on a path: *“Our project fit perfectly as an example of **the beginning** of a movement towards food sovereignty (emphasis added by participant).”* These insights reveal that there are many pathways and experiences around food sovereignty. They also show that Indigenous food sovereignty is a process, with stops and starts being part of the process. In this, I feel that the circle model I presented captured the cyclical and continuous journey these projects face. Bruce Maclean talks about how the Community Based Bio-Monitoring Project in Alberta fits into the circle:

“I am quite happy that our project fits into this circle. Our project was about re-connecting with the land in an effort to protect it from further harm. We are, however, wrapped up into history and healing, and this in itself tied to cultural identity. I see once more, the choice you took to use the circle as a way to convey your information/knowledge as the correct choice.”

The circle model also helped me as I struggled with the term “success”. Initially, I had asked people to direct me towards examples of *successful* Indigenous food sovereignty projects, and there

was confusion. What constituted success? Could something be too small, too insignificant to be successful? What about projects that were just starting- how do you know it will be successful? What about projects that have ended? Despite their completion (or, as in most cases, their hiatus), could they still be successful? I tried to include as many different kinds of projects as in as many different regions and stages as possible. I wanted to re-examine success, another loaded term, and one that I learned to approach cautiously, but with fresh eyes. The importance of self-determination, again, was front and center in my thinking and I chose to let those involved in the food sovereignty arena guide me towards successful or strong food initiatives.

I've talked with a lot of people at this point about the idea of a successful food project. What that looks like. There is an enormous range to the definition of success and many have struggled with that term. It is a term that a lot of Indigenous people don't use, or feel it adequately reflect something that is meaningful, something that is valuable for a community. Success, or a substitute for it, needs to come from the people. It needs to be defined by the people in their own language, on their own terms with their own history and geography as it stands. What I saw, and heard in visiting the Muskoday Organic Grower's Co-op gardens, and the Flying Dust Cree8 Co-op gardens, was that these gardens make many people happy. But more than that- there is a great belief in the gardens. They have faith in the gardens, hope that it will create change. And there has been change, positive effects. It is felt and noticed by the community. The idea of hope, happiness, faith, belief- this is something that is key to success. (Journal, July 13, 2012)

Movement, whether forwards or backwards, is still movement and may lead elsewhere. In fact, more than one participant reflected on how they hoped that their project would continue beyond and outside of the initial anticipated project itself, and that the experiences would lead people towards their own pathways, and that they might influence others because of it. Michelle Biden (Traditional Foods & Healthy Eating Program, SK) shared the following in response to the model I had presented:

"Yes. We are teaching our students about the land, about gardening, about traditional foods. We try to give them hands-on experiences and hope that down the road they might want to learn more. And if they decide they want to learn more then they have a starting point. Some of our students have already started talking to their families and learning more based on experiences that they have had at the school. One of the students, after learning how to set a trap in our trapper's club went home with a trap to practice and his grandfather was showing him some tricks. I think that's how we start. We peak people's interests, especially young people, and then see where the reverberations go."

The idea of process is key here. Indeed, my own understanding of Indigenous food sovereignty and the processes surrounding it changed significantly through my own research journey:

Some of the projects I looked at and interviewed people for are no longer in operation; some are on hiatus, and looking at options for moving forward. But they were important projects to include to better understand the process, but also to better understand what characteristics were important for success and what barriers they faced. I wanted to, and I hope that I was able to, feature projects at all points in their journey. Some were still ideas and plans, some were in full operation, and some were no longer in operation. As I am writing this, I am seeing the connection to the medicine wheel and the idea of phases of life, the lifecycle of these initiatives. (Journal, February 28, 2013)

In a further reminder of the various pathways towards food sovereignty, Christine George (Ladybug Garden & Greenhouse Program, BC) responded to the results chapter positively by stating that “*there are so many versions by so many nations; every one is different and deals with their Indigenous foods slightly different from each other.*” In Masset-Haida Gwaii, Shelly Crack (Masset-Haida Gwaii Farm to School Salad Bar Program, BC) shared her own learning experiences around food sovereignty:

“There is another piece that I have learned recently about food sovereignty which is that it may not look exactly like it did 100 or 1000 years ago - it changes. For example, Haida did not traditionally eat deer; however deer are an introduced species, we have lots of them and now they are a local food. Another example is that there has been a lot of funding to support greenhouses and garden projects however the Haida are less farmers than they are hunters, fishers and gatherers, yet gardening is being embraced as part of food sovereignty because it directly connects food and people.”

Again, it becomes important to consider that the variations and changes to food systems often exist because communities made the decision to expand their food systems. As Shelly explained, greenhouses are not a historic example of Indigenous food sovereignty; however, they may represent steps that a community has taken to create their own food sovereignty.

While Indigenous food sovereignty is dynamic and should reflect the needs and priorities of a community, all participants did agree that traditional foods and the traditional teachings around food and the land must be emphasized in this journey. Mike Christian (Splatsin Cultural Use Market Garden, BC) reflects: “*In our culture food sovereignty is holistic and in being/doing so addresses the needs of “ALL OUR RELATIONS” (all the living beings that share the earth with us) and there is also a strong*

spiritual connection as well.” Considering this, the question then becomes how to move the food sovereignty conversation forward? What supports or what kind of dialogue is needed on that pathway?

The power of youth is a key step:

“Currently, Indigenous youth are the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population. Efforts in creating food sovereignty awareness and action should be focused on this group because they are the future leaders and creators of positive environmental change in their communities. It is up to us, the leaders of today, to share our knowledge with the youth to empower them to take action in food sovereignty initiatives in their communities.” (Shianne McKay, Indigenous Food First, MB)

Similarly, John Rampanen (Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC) talks about the potential of youth, starting in infancy, in moving the dialogue forward:

“An additional recommendation that I would make for moving the food sovereignty conversation forward would be to start as early as possible with young children. Ultimately, it would be most ideal to begin these efforts prenatally so that our children are born into a natural connection and relationship with our foods, lands and waters.”

The importance of youth in the food sovereignty movement has been examined by other authors and is certainly not a new recommendation. The Oneida Community Integrated Food Systems program, for example, centers on re-connecting youth with the land through internship programs that could ultimately lead to employment (Bell-Sheetter, 2004; Vazquez, 2011). In two Manitoba studies knowledge exchange between youth and Elders was seen as a social benefit to the community (Rudolph & McLachlan 2013; Thompson, et al., 2012). Community and backyard gardens have also been identified as a mechanism to conserve traditional knowledge through youth and Elder participation (Spiegelhaar, 2011). However, approaches to education are equally important to the learning process. Settee (2013) refers to this as *how* education occurs, and not just what the topic is about. Thus, experiential knowledge and opportunities for hands-on participation, observation and storytelling are necessary in contributing to the Indigenous food sovereignty movement.

Other participant feedback included building networks between nations, and importantly, examining the policies and practices that affect Indigenous food sovereignty, as Bruce Maclean

(Community Based Bio-Monitoring Project, AB) describes:

“Where can people turn when their food quality or quantity is being taken away? How can Indigenous laws and rules about harvesting be returned into the decision-making structures that protect these resources? What are some of these laws and rules? How do they differ from southern/western/ science driven policy and law? What would your ideal institute/centre look like on reserve that would support all four directions of your circle to support/promote food sovereignty?”

Morrison (2011) has further argued for a movement towards cooperative interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people with all individuals recognizing that “everyone is to blame, and everyone is responsible” (p.107). In this situation, and certainly through an increased awareness of the sacredness of food, land, and water, there is potential on the horizon. Likewise, Food Secure Canada’s Indigenous Food Sovereignty Discussion Paper (n.d.) has called for collaboration among all sectors influencing Indigenous food sovereignty, and to work with Indigenous communities to best map out adequate tracts of land. These recommendations require a closer examination of land reform and cannot be adequately covered in this thesis. While the recent decision in *Tsilhqot’in* recognized land as belonging to an unceded First Nation for the first time in history, the burden of the process of proving Aboriginal title, yet another example of colonialism, is still placed on Indigenous communities (Bains, 2014). Indeed, the multitude of these court cases place a significant amount of stress on First Nations (Morrison, 2011). However, the *Tsilhqot’in* decision may represent a shifting dynamic where Aboriginal title has the potential to affect treaty negotiations and land development. It certainly a cause for celebration, albeit one with some caution (Bains, 2014). Moving the food sovereignty conversation forward for Indigenous people requires a major reform to land policies (Morrison, 2011). Without access to traditional territories, a loss of access to traditional food, knowledge and practices (McMullen, 2004) impedes Indigenous food sovereignty. Corntassel (2008) has proposed the concept “sustainable self-determination” as a foundation for Indigenous political mobilization. Indeed, “sustainable self-determination” provides a lens through which land reform, in the context of Indigenous food sovereignty can be considered.

Sustainable self-determination as a process is premised on the notion that evolving indigenous livelihoods, food security, community governance, relationships to homelands and the natural world, and ceremonial life can be practiced today locally and regionally, thus enabling the transmission of these traditions and practices to future generations. Operating at multiple levels, sustainable self-determination seeks to regenerate the implementation of indigenous natural laws on indigenous homelands and expand the scope of an indigenous self-determination process. (Cornassel, 2008, p. 119)

4.2.3 Celebration

This Masters research experience has been a labour of love, and a journey that I will always be grateful for. Coming back to school later in life, and while working full time, meant that I craved the research process. I wasn't looking for a quick study. I was looking for a project that felt good and right. The ins and outs, the starts and stops, and being turned around again and again were actually why I wanted to do this research in the first place. Perhaps selfishly, I wanted to be part of a research process for the opportunity to grow and gain new experiences in every realm of my being - mentally, spiritually, physically, and emotionally. But mostly, I wanted to look at stories of transformation; stories about the connection of food to culture, stories about the land and the power of food, and stories of people in the hopes that I could further tell them in an affirming way, with a focus on the good, the beautiful, and the true. I wanted to be part of something that didn't tell the plight of the Indigenous community, but rather reflected the strength, the resilience, and what life looked like outside the great number of "outsider" studies that speak to illness, hunger, and poverty.¹¹ Up to this point, these studies were the only Indigenous research I knew, and I had worked for 10 years in Indigenous education, travelling to communities and was aware of the disparities. The thought of an Indigenous research-based Master's program was disheartening to me, because I didn't know there was a way to tell stories of the good, the beautiful, and the true.

I'm dealing with situations where people don't necessarily want to share - there is a long history of research being done in Aboriginal communities and with Aboriginal people. I don't know how to differentiate my project or myself from that research, but I do feel that there is a

¹¹ I use the term outsider throughout this research, and recognize that for the majority of the communities I worked with in this research, I was an outsider. However, in specific instances, and certainly from a personal narrative, I consider myself to be, in part, an "insider"; that is, someone who is working on behalf of her people, regardless of location.

difference. This is why I have been contacting people through email to ask if they have time to talk with me, so that they can share and hear what I am doing and decide if they want to participate. I keep thinking that if only I could meet the people I am trying to connect with and talk with them in person, then the relationship part, the sharing part would be a lot easier. My goal is for it to be empowering, and also as involved as possible. (Journal, March 15, 2012)

I had a conversation with another researcher recently, an academic at a conference, certainly someone with infinite more experience than I have, and she cautioned me not to focus exclusively on the positive at the risk of diminishing the adverse, colonial impacts that have threatened people and the land. She advised me that distance from those elements could be damaging because they are still part of the larger story. Her comment left me turned around again and feeling as though I was facing the wrong direction, so I didn't say anything. Now I want to say this: as Indigenous people, the colonial story, whether we speak of it or not, is in our bones. It is part of the ancestral knowledge that we carry. I didn't know that when I started, but I know this now. I know because I heard it over and over again and again, explained in myriad ways, sometimes with anger, sometimes with sadness, and often times with humour: colonialism and its continuing legacy has really complicated things for our people. And I also know this because I live, and have lived, it. It was my family experience, and it is an experience that I, too, carry in my bones.

I see now and have read stories of how when you take the children away, or you send them away to school, you take away their identity, their spirit, and the family dies away (Elliot, Jayatilaka, Brown, Varley & Corbett, 2012; Ross, 2014). They lose the ability to be a family, are lost without their children, and are lost as parents; on and on the cycle goes. Food is something we celebrate and share with family and it is part of our identities, regardless of our cultural backgrounds. Returning back to the land, back to the teachings, and back to our food is a process of decolonization, and importantly, healing (Corntassel, 2008; Corntassel, 2012; Simpson, 2011). These were the positive stories I wanted to share; this was the celebration that I wanted to discuss. There can be so much good in food, and this is what I felt when participants talked about their food initiatives. So instead, and without dismissing

the difficult stories for they are carefully woven throughout this thesis, I remembered why I started this, and am reminded of the words of Smith (1999): “Events and accounts which focus on the positive are important not just because they speak to our survival, but because they celebrate our resistances at an ordinary human level and they affirm our identities as indigenous woman and men” (p. 145).

4.2.4 Power versus control

Initially I had written the results chapter with a section on control. I saw this as representing the middle of the circle, as the mediating factor between the elements of the circle, but it didn't sit well with me. Control wasn't the right word to capture what I was trying to say, and I'm still not sure that I've found that word. Three participants (of the ten who provided further reflections on the chapter) commented that they felt control was the wrong fit. One pointed out that Indigenous peoples are seeking to reclaim power, and not control, for control suggests an inappropriate domination over land. Another commented that since you cannot control the elements of the circle model I was presenting, they didn't see how control could fit in this section. I reflected on the words of the participants, but still felt at a loss for how to describe what I wanted to say. I looked to the literature and felt similar confusion, for these are not topics that I could find straightforward answers to. And so I went to an Elder, a mentor, and friend, and he reminded me to look to the past.

It would be interesting to examine these words - power and control- in their traditional languages, and try to understand what they mean, to who and why. What would power look like, feel like, and sound like in these languages? These concepts have been corrupted and molded by Western influences that don't reflect traditional value systems. But that is for another research project, another thesis. For this purpose, I was reminded again to look to the past to understand how these concepts fit. I had to consider the difference between power and control, and mindful of the words of the participants and also Simpson (2008) whose words “rooted in the land” have provided me with much insight, I began to unpack the terms from a land-based perspective (p. 13). Historically, Indigenous peoples had the power to move and follow the changing seasons and migrating animals. We had the power to

understand and work with the seasons, and any challenges that we were faced with. However, we could and cannot control if the blueberry patch is depleted or another food source is gone. We cannot control the rain, or the drought, but we have power in us to pray for the rains, to practice our ceremonies and make decisions that support the sacredness of these food systems. Alfred (1999) refers to the Indigenous concept of power as existing through and beyond relationships with each other, the natural world, and our spirit (p. 43). Power, then, is something that resides in your spirit. This sentiment was echoed and reflected upon by Cree Elder Ipswa Mescacakanis (Vancouver Island Traditional Foods Conference, BC):

“I think of control- strike that word- but rather of connected relatedness of choice and empowerment. We cannot control anything but we can co-create new opportunities. I think also of the heart, the hands on my heart (where our native mind exists). I think of the relatedness I have when my hands touch all living things and the co-creation together.”

There is power in the hands, in our blood and bones and spirit. Power resides inside you and me, in our hearts and through our visions and dreams, and thus, in our ability to make decisions. The hands do not represent control; rather, control is a learned and often dictated act, something that has developed over time due to outside forces. According to Alfred (1999, p. 47):

In the conventional Western understanding, a leader’s power is based on control of certain strategic resources: for example, service provision, connections to the outside, and specific symbols with special meaning within the culture. It is exercised by manipulating various resources to secure changes in a target. Thus, power in the Western sense involves the imposition of an individual’s will upon others.

Control, I see now, is a harsh term and - indeed - it is disempowering. It represents the opposite of what I wanted to explore in my research. Likewise, I did not control the process for this research in how I selected the projects to be studied, but I was careful to ensure that participants felt they had the power to change the narrative of their interviews and how their interviews were used.

4.2.5 Reflections on my process

In reflecting on my process, there are so many things I would have done differently or considered with more or less caution than I did. But, research is an iterative or evolving practice and when I started this project I wasn't aware that an Indigenous research paradigm even existed, that I could have a voice or play a personal role in my research process. In that sense, it would have been helpful and my process may have looked different had I started with an Indigenous research paradigm rather than a cursory knowledge of participatory action research, and then move towards the framework I created. However, the evolution of my own thinking allowed for me to see and feel the importance of an Indigenous research paradigm. My initial experience had been learning through books, and not through feeling or doing. Without the three years spent on the land, visiting communities, attending feasts and ceremonies, I am not sure an Indigenous research paradigm would have made sense to me. I am grateful to have had the support to develop my own paradigm for this research, and proud of my role in what I feel ultimately has been an exercise in activism. In my department (Environment and Geography), my research project has been unique in many ways, and at times I've had to push boundaries regarding issues such as the ethics process, my thesis proposal defense, and even the structure of my data analysis.¹² I do so, because this is my offering to my people, to my ancestors and to other Indigenous students so that they know it is worth the fight. Indigenous research, by Indigenous researchers, that works with and for Indigenous communities is an act of decolonization in itself (Hart, 2009).

However, this act may have been stronger or even more empowering had I the capacity to meet all of the participants in person. Indigenous cultures are relationship-based and while I did the best I could, personal contact may have added a depth and richness to the interviews, but I can only speculate. I also didn't get to see many of the projects in action, and again, I missed out on that level of experiential knowledge. In order to visit all of these projects in person, I would have had to reduce the

¹² The research and thesis of Misty Potts-Sanderson (2010), through the Department of Environment and Geography, has been important to my journey and I am grateful for her work in this area.

number of projects that I examined for this research or focused solely on one province, and I feel that something might have been lost there too. Certainly, creating a network of sharing and contacts was one of the motivations for this research and focusing on just a few communities would not have reflected my initial research objectives.

One of the participants discussed an issue that revolved around whether or not all of the other participants were Indigenous, despite the fact that all the projects were based on working with and in Indigenous communities. In considering this feedback, I had to reflect on my research questions about what Indigenous food sovereignty looks like. My goal was always to focus on the characteristics of the projects, rather than the identities of the participants. I see now that the two are linked; however, at this stage, I feel it is important to respect that the communities and projects put forward the person they felt best to speak on behalf of their project. Moreover, as an outsider, it is not my role to determine who the best spokesperson is. I do think this is an important perspective, however, and had I started by asking to speak with Indigenous people only, my entire process would have looked different. Because the experiences of colonization are carried through our blood, a non-Indigenous person involved in the project likely experiences or perceives the impacts of and the role of colonization in fundamentally different ways. How they understand the characteristics of the food initiative itself as someone non-Indigenous could be different than if they had all been Indigenous participants. Similarly, had the interviews been conducted in traditional languages, further insight may have been provided. Each language contains and might have conveyed more meaning than these interviews have captured in English. It would have been interesting to have these interviews conducted in traditional languages, and this is an important step in moving Indigenous food sovereignty research forward (Leanne Simpson, personal communication, April 5, 2015). I am also missing important contributions from urban Indigenous people, the territories, and all the provinces east of Manitoba. These pieces, then, are worth future consideration for researchers – me or others - looking at Indigenous food sovereignty in the future.

5. LOOKING INWARDS, LOOKING OUTWARDS: THE INDIGENOUS FOOD GATHERING

On August 22nd and 23rd, 2013, I hosted an Indigenous Food Gathering as a final chapter to my research. The gathering was an opportunity for me to meet some of the participants in my research in person, and celebrate their food initiatives. It was also a way for me to connect people with each other; participants came from as far as Vancouver Island and Nelson House, Manitoba to Tommy's Point, Manitoba. I brought people together to share their experiences and stories, but also to learn together. And I brought people together so that I could say thank you. As an element of Indigenous culture, food has the potential to heal and transform on many levels.

Being a part of this story, and relating to all of these food projects and participant stories, has changed me in a way that I can't begin to explain. Instead, I present a narrative chapter that describes the process from the beginning to this point in time. My entire thesis would have been written differently had I not hosted the gathering. At the gathering, I became a participant too, and while I had the opportunity to look outwards and make observations, perhaps most striking was when I looked inwards to see who I was, how I came to be here, and why. This gathering allowed me the opportunity to look inwards and see how my own history was connected to food sovereignty. I present this chapter separate from my results for this is my story, affected by and on behalf of those that contributed to this research process. To call this chapter results feels far too analytical. After all, where I am today is not a result. It is a work in progress, part of a cycle, and in many ways a re-birth. This is me looking inwards.

5.1 The Beginning

My name is Tabitha Martens. I am Cree Metis, and have family from Fisher River Cree Nation. I did not grow up knowing that I was Indigenous. My family was troubled and we were disconnected from the things that could help keep us well. While I had reasons for understanding these troubles, I had never fully considered where or how they started. I came to know I was Indigenous through an uncle I met while completing my undergraduate degree many years ago. During high school, a

guidance counselor had suggested I apply for a scholarship for Aboriginal students so I knew it was part of my make-up, but I had never connected deeply and personally with my heritage. There were no resources in my life to pursue my cultural connection, and the teasing that I experienced when I told my friends made me feel as though it was best not to look into my past. I did not come to know with my being; I did not feel it, hear it, or listen to it with my heart, hold it in my hands, or feel it in my bones. A good friend told me recently that being Indigenous is bigger than you. She meant that the ancestors, the spirits and the life that exist in and around us are part of your own true being, regardless of how you identify. These components are there for you if you choose to listen for them.

In my Bachelor's program, my uncle was a guest speaker in my Aboriginal People and the Law course and while we had never met, I understood that he was a relative. There were too many familiarities- his hands and the way that they moved as he spoke; his laugh and voice; the way that he carried himself. I now believe this was ancestral knowledge, that feeling in my bones. We became friends and his community, Fisher River Cree Nation, became a place that I travelled to, a place where I would meet and celebrate with my newly found family. I made close friends with my family's friends in the neighbouring Peguis First Nation and discovered that the lines between friends and family are very blurry. My maternal grandmother is Cree, but I have never felt the need to examine where she is from. Fisher River became my family community. Before I began my research, I thought this was enough- the small family connection, the visits, the laughter and friends. I began to see that this did not form part of my identity, but instead became how willing I was to understand what identity means.

When I began this personal journey, I had a close relationship with my food system. I had gardened, and canned, gathered and foraged. I read labels, wrote letters and asked questions about where from food came from, how it travelled and why. I was actively involved in the local environmental community and relished my weekly trips to the farmer's market. I did not, however, feel strongly connected to my family or my heritage. I thought the two were separate, when indeed they were not. I could not have known that I would feel compelled to ask questions and unearth that some of

my family's troubles were entwined with the trauma of residential schools. Discovering this while trying to maintain your distance in your research would have been impossible. I understood my research in a way that I hadn't previously. I was a part of my research; I felt it in my heart, in my hands, and in my bones. The stories of my participants resonated with me so deeply and I was moved in ways that I didn't understand. It was a relief to know that it need not be that way. I discovered and immersed myself in readings on Indigenous research, research as ceremony, and discovering self through process.

Throughout my research, I kept a reflective journal to document notable events, conversations, new ideas and how the research changed over time. My first journal entry speaks to the level of disconnection I had in understanding how my identity was connected to my research:

I am now the in the process of connecting with communities I am also in the process of putting together an introductory letter, and I am struggling with a bit of an identity issue. I can't seem to write that I am Indigenous; answering the question makes me blush. Even though it's true, it's a question that always makes me uncomfortable. Not because I am embarrassed of the ancestry, but because I am embarrassed at how little I know about what it means. I don't feel Aboriginal 'enough.' My family history is too complicated to provide any support or resources. (Journal, January 20, 2012)

In later entries, I felt differently. There is a connection to my people, to the land, the food, and the water that was not there when I started. This entry describes a ceremony I was invited to attend by an Elder/mentor/friend/participant:

I was struck (at the ceremony and feast) by the cohesiveness of Indigenous culture into mainstream university culture. They are one and the same. It did not feel token or disparate, but part of the overall culture.... It was an incredible experience and made me realize that as an Indigenous person, student, and researcher I have a role to play in my research that I had previously ignored. (Journal, March 29, 2013)

Identity struggles are common for many Indigenous people. As Cidro (2012) notes, feeling authentic can be affected by three major causes: "growing up off the reserve, not having access to traditional people and subsequently culture, traditions, and language, and struggling with issues around Indian status" (p. 162). In my situation, I had been disconnected from my family and culture and was too used to being on my own to know how to connect with the ones I had. This is partly related to a

challenging childhood. For me, family meant dysfunction and as I came into adulthood I chose not to continue many of my familial relationships. During a research visit to Saskatchewan in the summer of 2012 I shared a story about my grandmother with an Elder. I told him how tenuous our relationship was, how rude and uncooperative she had been to the point where she would not help me with a family tree project in junior high school. I had called her and asked for information on her parents and siblings and she wouldn't help me, because she claimed she did not know their names. I felt shunned and interpreted this incident as her being difficult. The Elder I shared this with pointed out it was possible she didn't know her family; in many cases residential schools had eroded these cultural connections. This was not something I was ready to hear, however, so I left it alone. By the time the gathering came around, my thinking had changed considerably. I had met so many supportive people, strong individuals rooted in their culture and in their land, that I began to slowly unpeel layers of my identity struggles.

This practice, of examining self, proved to be a valuable part of my learning. It allowed for me to ask questions, and look for answers. It allowed me to be honest about what I knew and did not know. I was able to look at Indigenous food sovereignty through a lens I hadn't seen through when I started. I saw the importance of self-determination, decolonization, identity, recovery, and healing in Indigenous food sovereignty. Absolon and Willet (2011) describe our ability to write about what we know based on our experiences and observations. Indeed, this is the only way that we can write from a place of truth. I cannot write from an Anishinabe perspective or a male perspective. I can only write what I know. I write this from a place of still coming to know who I am and what that means, but also from a place of having seen and participated in community formation. I write this as honestly as I can, as true as I felt it, and with a grateful heart for having the opportunity to undertake this journey.

It is difficult to describe when this narrative research first began. With two distinct phases of research, the interviews and the Indigenous Food Gathering, it would seem clear. However, both phases

wove into and out of each other. Each step, interview, conversation, and idea resulted in many more connections and helped me to better understand the complex nature of both my research and the subject. I see this design as more of a series of circles than a linear trajectory. The gathering was not recorded and no interviews took place before, during or after the event. Instead, I used journals and notes to describe my development and observations at the gathering. This is a process that has been described as reflexive. According to Bryman and Teevan (2005) reflexivity is a process whereby a “researcher’s cultural, political, and social context” is described with the knowledge being captured constructed from that lens (p. 361). Reflexivity has also been defined as a practice of “turning back on oneself” (Aull Davies, 2008, p. 4) and here I have attempted to do so. This writing outlines the process of my thinking and knowing, and allows me to explain the steps of my research and how I was affected. I have started out by explaining who I am, but this section could have also been found at the end of this chapter. In truth, I am not sure I would have been able to articulate my past the way that I have without this research process, and the gathering was the final moment where I realized I could walk forward while looking backward. Simpson (2002) argues for process-driven rather than content-driven research in understanding Indigenous knowledge. This is a chapter about process.

5.2 The Process: How and Why

Through my searching, I discovered a rich and varied number of food sovereignty initiatives occurring in Indigenous communities across the country. In fact, I found more stories of people, place, and food than I could adequately cover in my research. This was in sharp contrast to the food security literature that describes the high rate of food insecurity in Indigenous households. I began to see the need for extending the knowledge around these projects and for providing a mechanism for sharing. I learned through the interviews that many of the project proponents (the workers, the administrators, the volunteers) felt unsupported by the larger food community. However, most proponents were excited by the thought of talking to me and sharing their stories. In the end I spoke with 36 project proponents,

and wish I could tell you why they chose to share their stories with me, a stranger for the most part. I can say that I was considerate in my conduct; that I was honest about who I was and what this research means to me; that I took time to listen- always to listen; and that I took time to research the projects ahead of time out of respect for the projects and the participant's time. I maintained transparency through the process and honoured the relationships in the best ways that I could. The level of generosity and the commitment that proponents had to their initiatives allowed me to re-think how I was going to approach the last phase of my research journey. To the best of my abilities, the planning for the gathering began in November 2012 with the closing activities taking place in December 2013. The Indigenous Foods Gathering served as a final phase of my research on the promising practices and characteristics of Indigenous food sovereignty initiatives in western Canada.

In the fall of 2012, I met with my advisor to discuss the idea of a food sovereignty gathering where research participants would be invited to attend, network, and share their stories and knowledge with others. Over the fall and into the winter, the gathering slowly took shape. I obtained funding through the Manitoba Alternative Food Research Alliance (MAFRA) through the help of an Elder, mentor, and friend. We decided to host the gathering in Manitoba for ease of organization and cost efficiency. It would have been difficult to organize in another province while I was living in Winnipeg. The gathering was originally planned for Turtle Lodge in Sagkeeng First Nation, Manitoba under the advice of the Elder mentor. However, this was to be my first lesson in Indigenous research relationships. When word of the gathering travelled to my friends and research participants in Peguis First Nation (where I also had family and had attended their food-based culture camp), I understood the importance of reciprocal relationships. While I was able to diffuse this situation and explain to Sagkeeng the nature of my error, the lesson did not leave me. In my attempt to belong to a community held highly by my Elder mentor, I overlooked my friends, my mentors and the research participants in Peguis First Nation. I realized that I would have to be mindful of these moments where my fear of

belonging clouded my judgment. Reciprocal relationships are a cornerstone of any Indigenous methodology. Wilson (2008) describes the tenets of an Indigenous methodology as consisting of, in part, relationality, accountability, and reciprocity. When information and ideas and opportunities are shared between partners (the researcher and the participants) we are moving towards reciprocity (Wilson, 2008). Hart (2010) echoes the importance of reciprocity in an Indigenous methodology and points to “sharing and presenting ideas with the intent of supporting community” (p. 10). This was certainly my intent in moving the location of the gathering to Peguis First Nation, and offering the research participants the opportunity to highlight their program, *The Ways of our People: Back to the Land Camp*.

During the early spring, I proposed the idea of forming a working group to advise and help me plan for this gathering. I chose participants from across nations and provinces, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals that had mentored me through my research. In the end, the working group consisted of two participants from British Columbia, one from Saskatchewan, and two from Manitoba. I was unable to find a representative from Alberta, although I did extend a few invitations. Through conversations and visits, I was aware that for many of these communities, the project proponents were over-extended, which I respected and chose not to push. The working group proposed that we change the name from Indigenous Food Sovereignty Gathering to Indigenous Food Gathering, feeling that the term wasn't accessible. I realized that it didn't describe what I was hoping the gathering would be - a place for food sovereignty to express itself organically, by bringing people together and providing skills, knowledge, tools, and support to participate in a local food system.

To bring people together to deliberately practice Indigenous food sovereignty felt loaded, presumptuous, and also ignorant of the word itself. Indigenous food sovereignty asks for communities to define their own food systems to respond to their own needs (First Nations Health Council, 2009). Practicing food - through hunting, fishing, trapping, growing, trapping, foraging and cooking- and being on the land, listening to the changes of the seasons, and interacting with the water, air, soil, and

wildlife are key steps towards the path of food sovereignty. All of these considerations are what encouraged me to host a gathering that was experiential, hands-on, community-driven, and importantly, on the land.

Respecting that each journey towards food sovereignty would be unique and not necessarily characterized by our gathering, I chose, instead, to allow the working group and participants to drive the gathering. Together we came up with a list of workshops that the host community felt comfortable and ready to deliver. In the end, we offered workshops on fishing, skinning and preparing beaver, building a smokehouse and smoking fish, making bannock and jam and building a sweat lodge. These were the learning experiences that were part of the Ways of Our People program and while we may have missed other traditional activities, I chose to let the Ways Of Our People mentors determine the workshops they wanted to feature based on cost, seasonal availability, time, and local expertise. The learning experiences were very informal and deliberately unstructured. We only asked that people participate and gather where they would like to, that the focus be hands-on, and that everyone have an opportunity to listen and share and ask questions. One of the challenges we faced in planning and delivering the event was the expectation that people had to attend these workshops, take notes or account for time in some way. We did not have sign-up sheets or strictly defined times for these activities. Some took longer than others and people were allowed to move freely between stations. We also ran two sharing sessions that we called open forums; one on promising practices in food projects and the other on treaty obligations to agriculture. I hosted these sessions, but loosely. I let the participants lead, and only offered introductions of the people that asked to speak at these forums. They were open for everyone to speak at, but there were key facilitators who had asked for or been invited by the working group to speak at the forum, as a way of introducing a topic and discussing ideas.

The Gathering took place over two days on August 22nd and 23rd, 2013 along the shores of Lake Winnipeg, at Tommy's Point. Tommy's Point is home to a small camp site operated by the Peguis School Board. The School Board uses the camp for overnight visits and outdoor and cultural education

programs. There are no roads into the camp; it's a half-hour drive through the bush after you get to the reserve, with little reception and no Internet access. The site has a main house and a series of camp bunkhouses along the lake, although there is plenty of room for camping. There is no power or running water, however, we were able to secure use of a generator while we were there to provide electricity during the day. There is a floating dock and a pontoon boat that we used for fishing, along with a tipi and numerous fire pits and a kitchen and dining hall. It is a beautiful site, surrounded by trees and rocky shores and small stretches of white beach, hidden along the bay. We were fortunate to have warm days, hot enough to appreciate our proximity to water.

5.3 The Details

5.3.1 Early Lessons

I arrived the day before the gathering to set up camp, and drove back to the city to pick up an Elder, visiting from Vancouver Island, from the airport. This Elder played an important role in my journey. I met him earlier in the year in Nanaimo, where I visited him at his home. He invited me to a feast at the local university and we became fast friends. He also served on the working group for the gathering and was thrilled to be brought out to the event. A food lover and a great believer in the spirit of food, it was an honour to have him visit. When we got back to camp that night, there was a group of mentors and friends from Peguis cooking a late dinner outside. We watched thunderbirds dance over the water, and took a moment to breathe and appreciate why we were there. Seeing the thunderbirds in the sky that night meant we were being watched over, and that the good work we had been brought together to do would be aided by those spirits; we had taken on the role of helpers, and the thunderbirds were there to help us too. I talked with the Elder that night about thunderbirds and spirits, about prayers and food and the importance of water. Water is the source of life for all things, and a food sovereignty journey would be remiss to ignore its importance. Water is often forgotten in talking about food. And yet, without it we would be unable to grow food, fish, hunt, trap, and gather. Members of the British Columbia

network that I had worked with shared many insights into the importance of healthy oceans, a new element to food sovereignty for me, although it may seem obvious.

How we care for and protect water is an important component to Indigenous food sovereignty. As with many environmental issues, Indigenous people are facing a series of threats that compromise the health of the water. I began to learn, through this gathering and my research journey, that water is a responsibility that we must share; it is something that we must acknowledge and make space for in all of the work we do. My grandfather and his father were fishermen on these waters. My grandfather talked often of the moods of Lake Winnipeg and spoke of the surrounding First Nations in helping Icelandic immigrants (one side of my family) survive those long, hard winters. These connections offer insight into how my Indigenous and Icelandic grandparents would later connect, and the history of these waters.

The night before the gathering started, I stayed up until the wee hours so that I could greet guests and help them set up camp. I woke a few hours later to the bright sun to do it all over again as the last of the participants made their way to camp. We gathered in the morning for a prayer, a kind word and introduction from the Chief, and a song from our Island Elder. He sang to us, and with his drum, we gathered in a circle to listen. As we gathered and looked over the water an eagle flew over us. After these blessings, I understood that we were on the right path and that the long hours and sleepless nights were worth it.

I did my best to contact every one of the research participants, but many had not been able to attend. While we offered travel stipends, being away from work for a stretch during the summer (when it is growing and harvesting season in Canada) was challenging. In the end, we had guests from all of the western provinces but Alberta, and were able to offer invitations to others that were involved in the Indigenous food movement in Manitoba. Peguis had requested a smaller group size, believing that the quality of the visit and workshop experiences would be compromised by the quantity of people. From working with the Peguis team, I learned the importance of slow, steady growth. This was part of the

model they used in developing their Ways Of Our People program. In the end, this group size (approximately 45 participants plus twelve or so community mentors and guests) proved to be an important part of the way people related to each other. This size of group meant that all activities were accessible and that everyone felt included, but that there was still enough time for people to sit quietly, or swim on their own if they chose to.

5.3.2 Relationality

My hosting duties were important to me because I wanted to pay respect to all of the individuals who had shaped my journey. This gathering was my offering to the participants to thank them for taking me along their food journeys. It was a way of acknowledging the hard work that they do in their communities and, for me, it was part of the reciprocal agreement I made with them - that my research would benefit both parties. Each food story influenced my next steps. The ways that I understood Indigenous food sovereignty had shifted and grown over the two years I spent visiting and listening and sharing and learning. I was the link to connect all of these individuals, and I wanted to honour that by ensuring that the guests/participants (and I use those two terms interchangeably, because they were both) felt welcome and included in all that we did. Truthfully, I hoped through talking, sharing and practicing food together new relationships would form. I hoped that a more spiritual connection would develop, one that was guided by powers greater than me. I wanted people to connect and relate through food. I introduced myself to each and every guest when they arrived, but also as we gathered for our first morning session.

We met under an arbour, a covered wooden area, in a circle, and I welcomed everyone and explained who I was and how I came to be there. In doing so, I offered my relationality. I tried to explain how I fit there, why it was important to me, and how we had arrived at our schedule for the two days. I wanted the guests to feel as though this gathering was ours, that I had listened to their stories and interviews and needs and was offering this gathering as a way of saying thank you. This was my way of saying to the group, I am here, this is me and I am doing my best to listen, learn, and

understand. I wanted the group to understand this was my journey; that I was beginning to understand that this was my family, my history, my passion and my being. Doing so, I think, allows doors of communication to open. I am still struggling with my identity, but my research is allowing me to pursue that path of knowledge. I took the opportunity to admit to what I don't know and how I had hoped that this group of food champions, those that fight to protect the land and food systems, and food practitioners would steer me in the right direction. It also allowed and helped to set the stage for others to relate that way. By starting the circle off this way, in the role that I had as host and facilitator, observer and participant, I could weave this narrative into how we related to each other. As I sat with the participants in a circle, I explained my plans for writing up the gathering as part of my identity journey for my research and offered consent forms. One of the Elders stood up, with hands held out, and said he would give his consent orally, on behalf of all his relations, and that this was how he felt comfortable offering his permission. The rest of the group followed and all agreed their preference was to provide support orally. All participants were offered to sign a consent form stating their participation in the research project and outlining the project and any risks involved. Participants were also informed that they would be anonymous. However, all participants declined to sign the consent form¹³.

As we moved through the circle, introducing ourselves, it was an opportunity for us to learn what we do, where we come from, why what we do is important, and what food means to us. I had set the tone for describing where I come from and most others followed suit, many referring to similar struggles with identity. Later, we talked about cooperatives and farming and seeds, but we also talked about treaties and colonization and growing food using traditional planting techniques. There was laughter and new bonds were forged; two of the Manitoba participants discovered they were both working on projects about treaty obligations to agriculture and were able to share their research with each other. Many participants shared that these sessions were healing. They felt that being able to come

¹³ This experience resulted in me having to add an amendment to the University of Manitoba Joint Faculty Research Ethics Board. While it took a bit of explaining, in the end they agreed that this would be appropriate. It struck me that this practice is not more common in Indigenous research, and speaks to a balance that must exist between University requirements and cultural protocols. These offerings of consent are traditional and present a new kind of ethic.

together as a group and learn the food skills of their ancestors or to re-practice skills that had been forgotten allowed them to reconnect with their culture and brought a sense of empowerment, but also peace. Peace at being able to practice their traditional food skills and eat their traditional foods after years of colonial interruptions. Over the next two days, I was presented with many tokens of thanks. I received hugs and handshakes, heard stories of hardships and healing, and was offered tears, gifts, tobacco, and sweetgrass. I write this here because it is honest, but also because it surprised me, the generosity of these gifts, whether tobacco or tears. I did not expect to receive anything of the sort, but was honoured to have all of these offerings. Like our thunderbird and eagle friends, I felt that these were signs I was moving in the right direction.

5.3.3 Self Determination

Food brought us together, but the gathering was much more than food. The gathering became what we made it. It grew and shifted and settled into a quiet rhythm of work and new friendships. We worked with a local caterer to provide meals for the gathering. The caterers were friends, mentors and family, although the family connection was unknown to me at the time. This gathering brought me closer to my family than I could have imagined. We spent time together as friends, unknowingly related, so it was a treat to discover those familial ties. This is how I began to understand that family is more than how you are connected. My experience at the gathering was one of belonging, perhaps for the first time in my life. I began to feel that I was part of a collective, I was Indigenous, I had family in the area and that sufficed. The lesson in belonging was not lost on me. I had struggled with trying to make others happy trying to belong to a circle that I wasn't part of and had overlooked my family and friends in Peguis and Fisher River. And yet, the opportunity to belong was always right there.

In developing the menu, we tried to incorporate as many local and wild foods as possible: berries and fish and potatoes and wild rice. The caterers acquired and prepared the food; we only asked that no food was wasted and for people to be part of the process of cleaning up after dinner and sharing some of the responsibilities of tending to camp. Beyond being practical, this had, I hoped, helped to

build a sense of camaraderie. Some of the most touching conversations, the times where people offered glimpses into their past or current journey or shared photo albums and stories took place over meals. For our final meal together, we prepared a feast. The feast consisted of food made throughout the gathering - fish that was caught from our time on the lake, the beaver that was skinned, bannock and jam made that afternoon - and also food that was brought to share with others. In preparing for the gathering, we sent welcome letters to participants inviting them to bring food to share with others if they were able to. We asked for foods that reflected homelands, their projects, and their traditions. Participants brought frozen fish and homemade jam, herbs, potatoes, greens, carrots and onions from their gardens. It was a way of sharing and acknowledging the work of others, and also continuing the practice of sharing food within community. This is how we show our gratefulness to the land, and to the food. We share with our families and our communities as a way of giving thanks and acknowledging all of the hard work that went in to preparing this food. Having those personal connections to the food and seeing the involvement of everyone in preparing for the feast helped to remind us that the feast is for all of us. In a feast, everyone is included. The principles of inclusion and sharing were important parts of our feast.

We lit fires outside to cook locally gathered mushrooms, and tended to the smokehouse that was built, where fish had been smoking for two days. It was a meal touched by many hands. The feast was an opportunity for us to gather and reflect and celebrate the gifts of nature. This was a meal that most everyone contributed to in some way. We feasted to honour new friendships and alliances; we feasted to thank our hosts and mentors; we feasted to thank the water, the plants, and the animals for offering their lives to us; and we feasted to thank the many hands that had touched our food along the way, acknowledging and thanking the ancestors for watching out for us, for bringing us together. The protocol for our feast was set by our host community. With their direction, we asked women to wear skirts and invited men to wear their ribbon shirts. I worked with an Elder, who blessed our food, to collect food for a spirit plate that we offered back to the land, back to the ancestors.

While our host community guided the protocol surrounding the feast¹⁴, they also felt it was important for guests to have the opportunity to participate in the creation of the food and offer their stories, blessings, and songs since we were representing so many nations across western Canada. It is important to acknowledge the host community, Peguis land, and their food system and cultural protocols around food. But our hosts also encouraged a group dynamic, respecting that each participant had a story. There was a level of self-determination to our feast, in that people had the opportunity to define and describe what was important to this feast and could share their food with us. Self-determination was an important thread to our meals. Incorporating cultural practices such as tobacco offerings, the use of spirit names, languages, pipes, medicines and songs were elements of this. Guided by a visiting Elder, a sweat lodge was built and an evening ceremony was offered for anyone to attend. These practices acknowledged the relationship between food and culture. In practicing food, we practice culture. More than that, these practices are a recognition of a way of being.

Around the food, we were also respectful and considerate. We offered prayers to the water for the animals that shared their lives and to the land for the meat and berries that we harvested. While most meals were catered, some were more participatory. This was out of necessity because our caterers were also our workshop mentors and they needed time to prepare. The same individuals that cooked our meals shared their gifts through food preservation workshops. In preparing breakfasts, the group came together to share food and to cook together. It was also an opportunity to collaborate and connect. Despite the sound of the dinner bells, we didn't see nearly a response to the catered meals as we saw during breakfast.

At breakfast, I awoke to the smell of campfire and an always-brewing pot of tea. I saw the cycle of night transform into day with new adventures on the horizon. It is incredible to watch a group of near-strangers come together to cook a meal. There was no announcement, no plan, and no direction

¹⁴ Host communities typically guide the practices surrounding ceremonies such as a feast, unless otherwise stated. In this case, Peguis First Nation set the protocol for us to follow for the feast, however, they also requested input from other nations that were present.

given. People pulled up chairs and started to help. One by one, as the guests awoke, they came to the fire. We had a couple of large fires started, around the lake, and had pulled picnic tables around the fires. These tables were used for food prep, as guests offered bits of the food they brought for breakfast. The caterers brought out leftovers that we added, mashed potatoes and fish, to go with the sausages and wild meat, and more bits of fish. There were garden offerings too, ripe tomatoes, berries and jam. A new collective formed over breakfast. People cooked together. Food brought us together, over and over again. It is a great equalizer, something we all need to survive, but also something we all need to be well- in mind, body, and spirit. Right until the end, this gathering was shaped and driven by the people that attended.

5.4 Looking Inwards

Morrison (2011) identifies four guiding principles for Indigenous food sovereignty: the recognition that food is sacred; participation in food systems; self-determination; and supportive legislation and policy. These guiding principles were echoed throughout the gathering. The gathering operated on the idea of a collective; we created mechanisms and were flexible enough in the structure to allow the participants to have a voice, to help guide our time together. We came together to learn and share from each other by actively participating in a local food system. Using the water as our guide, we fished, cooked, gathered, preserved, built, created, and worked with, in, and around food. There were blessings and ceremonies, prayers and songs to support our journey and recognize that food is sacred. Food is part of our spirit and the spirit of our ancestors. Through these events I learned about the spiritual power of food. And I became part of a food community. But mostly, I learned about the power of self-determination. For food sovereignty, this means the right to determine your food system, to establish priorities for your food needs, and to describe and define what food is and means to you. That food comes from the land, of course, means that self-determination must consider supportive land policies. But, again, these policies should be determined by those who live on the land.

Perhaps most importantly, my experience has been one of identity. A friend once remarked that to know where you are going you must know where you came from. At the time, I didn't agree. I didn't recognize that ancestral knowledge, that a pull of a homeland, of community, of people and place would rattle me so. I didn't understand that it was possible to feel so connected to people, to place, and to a way of being until I started this research. Absolon (2011) has called Indigenous research *re-search*, a process where you are looking outward and inward at the same time. It is a cycle, where you are constantly thinking and re-thinking, moving from past to present to future, and coming to know things that are a part of you and have been with you always, but at the same time entirely new. This describes my journey as well. I started by looking at food sovereignty initiatives and learning what that looks like to the communities involved. At some point there was a shift and I started to connect to my research and to my past internally. I imagine most researchers feel an affinity for the work they do. My experience felt different. I looked inside as much as out, and pushed myself to confront long-buried stories and hurts. From there, I related to my research differently. I understood stories differently. I began to carry them with me, considered what was really being told to me, and felt this shift in my bones. I listened to stories again and again, I sat with tea and bannock, spent time on the land, watched for the eagles, and the thunderbirds, and listened to the drum and the voices of the land. And I realized in re-playing those stories in my head that I was supposed to look beyond what the research was telling me. I was supposed to look beyond the proposed models, and the political discourse that had been written of Indigenous food sovereignty. I was to look to the people and places and step back from the literature and my research goals to look instead at the fundamentals of being. I was told, through my journey, that the word culture is what others would describe as a way of being. You say culture, I say a way of life.

What is involved in culture? I am still discovering this. Instead, I write what I know, and what I know, although with much trepidation, is self. I can speak to the power of identity. Self-determination, I discovered, requires identity. It involves a movement of Indigenous people understanding who they

are, what that looks and feels like. Only from that point can we define food systems and all that is necessary to defend them. Cultural identity requires that we re-connect with a way of being. Without identity it is difficult to move Indigenous food sovereignty forward.

I have been thinking about the gathering, wondering if there was one moment where I felt connected or understood some greater truth. There isn't. It's all woven together in stories and tears and laughter. I was surprised by how emotional this gathering was for participants. The healing that took place because people were able to practice their traditional food skills again was something that I could not have asked for. It was time, and so it came. Likewise, being part of this process was healing for me too. I felt it was finally time to start asking questions of my family, time to start having hard conversations about the past. The parallels between my identity struggles and my grandmother's inability to share her family history have been pointed out to me recently, and for that I am grateful. I find myself looking at stories of residential schools and asking questions, trying to understand my family experience. I started to have nightmares shortly after, nightmares of schoolhouses and uniforms and being strapped to desks. I can't say this is easy. But, there is a freedom to this knowledge. This journey has allowed me a greater understanding of my family. And I know now that if I need or want to talk about it, if I need to pray or sweat or cry, I have a whole community of people who are there to support me. Towards the end of the gathering, one of the participants took my hands in theirs and said, thank you for bringing me here. To all of my participants, I would like to say: thank you. For bringing me here.

6. CONCLUSION

How to describe a culture, a way of life? That was never my intention. However, through my discussions with participants, four strong elements of Indigenous food sovereignty have emerged: history, connection to the land, relationships and cultural identity. These insights also reflected my own experience; they've helped me relate to the land, and to my people, along a path that has helped me to understand my past and re-examine my future.

Taken together, as a web of connections, these four elements provide a foundation for examining Indigenous food sovereignty, and can also provide a starting point for communities that want to develop or enhance existing food programs. The food projects presented here are examples of how to create local food systems that describe the practices and elements of Indigenous food sovereignty. For each interview, I tried to consider why what the participants were sharing with me was important. I felt the stories were trying to tell me: this is who we are and what that means. This is how and why food is important, and we, as a people, are part of this research story.

Seeking out and working within an Indigenous research paradigm was a critical part of this research. It allowed me to offer my story in return for all of the stories that were shared with me. Perhaps even more importantly, the use of these stories, both mine and the participants, were the focus of this research. Indigenous people are active participants in Indigenous food sovereignty and their voices provide an opportunity for self-determination in research and in their food systems. When we start to look at models, or to analyze a community's capital or capacity, we do so as outsiders. And despite our best intentions, these conventional research processes often ends up excluding a wide diversity of community voices and their mechanisms for being heard may not resonate with those who implement changes. Metaphors, stories, and other traditional teachings are an important way of understanding Indigenous research and do so in an organic, iterative, and inclusive way. Indeed, in the context of food, an Indigenous research paradigm is an appropriate and more holistic means of understanding and examining Indigenous food sovereignty, because it is grounded in the worldview

that we are a people that share similar values such as respect for the land. The principles and elements that have been documented by Morrison (2011), for example, closely align with the principles of an Indigenous research paradigm as presented by Hart (2010) and Lavallee (2009).

These elements- history, connection to the land, relationships and cultural identity- also provide a lens through which we can discuss the complex concept of Indigenous food sovereignty. Indigenous food sovereignty is an historical and lived experience that, in many cases, has been dismantled by colonialism and replaced with food that is quick to make, and quicker to consume. This new food is full of ingredients that our bodies aren't meant to process, leading to health conditions such as heart disease and type II diabetes that have become so prevalent in communities. These issues are complex because they speak to damage to the environment and a fear that our traditional foods are no longer safe (fear that has been confirmed through recent health reports). This issue is tied to the residual impacts of a traditional food system that was deliberately destroyed by European settlers. When we start to have conversations about colonialism and contamination, disease and family dysfunctions, and start to make these connections to our food systems, we start to connect to the idea of food sovereignty, and ultimately, control over our health, land, and culture. It is a journey and it will take time, but in listening to the participants, and becoming an active participant in my own food system, I can say: the rewards are worth it. This is how healing begins.

Indigenous food sovereignty is part of a resurgence in culture. As Simpson (2011) notes: “Resurgence movements then, must be movements to create more life, propel life, nurture life, motion, presence, and emergence” (p. 143). This is an important contribution to how we think about the food sovereignty movement. Caring for and bringing forward more life is an act of resurgence. But, as Alfred (2009) points out, “Resurgence also involves changing social conditions so that even within unaltered mind frames, new rationales for action emerge” (p. 63). Thus, without the conditions to support these initiatives, it will be difficult to pursue and recognize Indigenous food sovereignty as an act of resurgence. These issues range from having adequate tracts of land and recognized treaty rights,

to community support and encouragement from local political leaders. We are at a moment in time, following the footsteps of the Idle No More movement, where the politicized term Indigenous food sovereignty may just be what is needed to contribute to resurgence of culture, a way of saying this is who we are and this is what we believe in. Further to this research, it would be interesting to examine the term Indigenous food sovereignty using traditional languages. Perhaps in looking to the language, we will see a more suitable term, one that reconciles the tensions of sovereignty with the harmony of a land-based way of life. For the purpose of this study, and indeed, for the hope that this study will help further the community-led local food movements, Indigenous food sovereignty is a term I will promote going forward.

7. REFERENCES

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APPENDIX A: Informed Consent Form



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Informed Consent Form (One-on-One Interview)

Research Project Title: Good news in food: Understanding the value and promise of Indigenous food sovereignty projects in Canada

Graduate Researcher: Tabitha Martens, University of Manitoba

Research Advisor: Dr. Stéphane McLachlan, University of Manitoba

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

You are about to participate in a one-on-one interview. This will allow you to share your experiences and opinions about food-related projects that are happening in your community. We are interested in learning more about the good news food stories in your community and how these food projects contribute to making your community more food secure. We will ask about the specifics of your project; where it is located and who is involved. We will ask about the reasons for starting the project, including any food-related needs in your community that your project may address. We will also be asking some questions about the success of your project and any barriers the project may have faced. Your knowledge is very important in this research. It will help us all understand what makes food-related projects successful in Indigenous communities.

If you agree, we will record your interview as audio (sound only). If you don't agree to be recorded, that is also fine. We would then translate these recordings into a written form. If you don't want people to know that this is you on the recordings, we can do this as well. You can demand this kind of confidentiality at any time during the research. We would like to share some of the information about your project through a newsletter. This newsletter will help celebrate your project and will also connect your project with other similar projects across the country. If you do not want your information shared through the newsletter, we will not include it.

The information you share with us will be stored in a locked cabinet at the university for five years. Only the researchers will be able to see the original information. Another copy of the information will be given to you and your community. We will destroy the university copy after five years.

Your information will be used to create a final report. The report will be given to you and your community. This information may be used in research papers that are published in scientific journals. Some of the information will be put on the Internet website for our research project. Again, we will show you copies of all reports, academic papers, and newsletters before we share them with a wider audience. This will allow you to give us feedback on this information. It will also allow you to correct any mistakes. You can drop out of this research project at any time. If you wish, we can then take your information out of the research project and give it back to you.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about this research, please feel free to contact Tabitha Martens, Graduate Researcher, anytime, at 204 *.**** or ummar292@myumanitoba.ca You can also contact Stef McLachlan, Research Advisor, from the University Manitoba at 204.474.9316 or mclachla@cc.umanitoba.ca anytime.**

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

The University of Manitoba Research Ethics Board(s) and a representative(s) of the University of Manitoba Research Quality Management / Assurance office may also require access to your research records for safety and quality assurance purposes.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board at the University of Manitoba. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you can also contact Margret Bowman at the Human Ethics Secretariat. You can phone Margaret at 204.474.7122. You can also e-mail her at <margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca>.

In conclusion, please indicate in the boxes below which of the following you agree to:

- Permission to **audio-record** for research purposes.
or
 No permission to **audio-record** for research purposes.

And

- Permission to **release confidentiality** in any research outcomes that arise from these interviews.
or
 No permission to **release confidentiality** in any research outcomes that arise from these interviews.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

