

A Recipe for Change: Reclamation of Indigenous Food Sovereignty in *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation* for Decolonization, Resource Sharing, and Cultural Restoration

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ABSTRACT *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin Cree Nation (OPCN), an Indigenous community in northern Manitoba, Canada, was flooded and forced to relocate from ancestral lands to a nearby settlement under such circumstances. Regaining strength from their inherent cultural values grounded in their relationship with the land, OPCN eventually formed a community-based food program called Ithinto Mechisowin (IMP) ('food from the land'). This article uses OPCN's concept of resource (wechihituwin) and decolonization (pasekonekewin) to present a nuanced understanding of Indigenous food systems in Canada. We argue that the ways in which IMP inspires reconnection with land, thereby improving access to culturally appropriate healthy food, are steps forward in strengthening Indigenous food sovereignty.*

Keywords: Indigenous food sovereignty, decolonization, northern Manitoba, development induced poverty

Introduction

Hydroelectric projects in northern Manitoba, Canada, have undermined environmental, economic, and social welfare of Indigenous communities for decades (Kamal, Thompson, Linklater,

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& Ithinto Mechisowin Committee, 2014; Liénafa & Martin, 2010; Martin & Hoffman, 2008; Waldram, 1988). In 1976, one such project, Manitoba Hydro's Churchill River Diversion (CRD), flooded many northern Manitoba Indigenous¹ communities (Waldram, 1988). CRD damaged Indigenous food and medicine, leading to food insecurity, negative health impacts and a legacy of poverty among the affected populations (Kamal et al., 2014).

The community of *O-Pipon-Na-Piwin* Cree Nation (OPCN), a small First Nation reserve located on the shore of Southern Indian Lake (SIL), was one of the most negatively impacted of all the communities affected (Waldram, 1988). Despite OPCN's appeal for cultural and livelihood rights, community concern was purposely undermined by Manitoba Hydro and the province (Waldram, 1984, 236). A number of studies were published attesting to the severity of socioeconomic and environmental damages occurring in northern Manitoba, particularly in OPCN (Waldram, 1984, 1985, 1988; Hoffman, 2008; Hoffman & Martin, 2012; Loney, 1995). In 2009, a household food security survey confirmed that an alarming 75% of residents in 14 different northern Manitoba communities were food insecure (Thompson et al., 2011, 14). Of them, OPCN had the highest rate of food insecurity—100% (Thompson et al., 2011, 24).

However, within the existing socioeconomic challenges, communities in northern Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada, including OPCN, have worked persistently to preserve local food systems and cultural rights (Kamal et al., 2014; Thompson, Wiebe, Gulrukh, & Ashram, 2012). The recent wave of food sovereignty discourse in North America acknowledges the need to address Indigenous organizing against the tactics of contemporary colonization (Cornthassel, 2012a; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Grey & Patel, 2014; Kamal et al., 2014; Morrison, 2011). Few academic studies, however, have examined what Indigenous food sovereignty looks like as it is developed in practice.

Throughout this paper, we will argue that in Canada the practice of Indigenous food sovereignty through local food harvesting programs can provide an opportunity for decolonization. First, in order to gain a nuanced understanding of the current situation at OPCN, we must address the community's history and the establishment of hydropower production in northern Manitoba. Following this review, we will address the concepts of food security, food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty. Finally, we describe the history of the *Ithinto Mechisowin* program, hereafter IMP, and its contribution to decolonization within the community. As a means of establishing our argument from the local point of view, we will introduce OPCN's contextually specific concepts of resource sharing and decolonization.

Community History

It is believed that Indigenous people started living in SIL region 6000 years ago (Waldram, 1988, 116). Much later, in early nineteenth century, a community was formed and named after the lake (Waldram, 1988, 117). People used to live well, with a thriving food system based on harvesting different seasonal foods and medicines from the land until 'colonization intervened in the form of trade and treaties' (Elder Thomas Spence, personal communication, September 22, 2013). In Canada, such treaties were made between the reigning monarch and Indigenous communities, most of which were signed between 1871 and 1921 (Waldram, 1988, 27). The initial conditions of agreement promised to guarantee mutual peace and friendship; Indigenous rights to trade, fish, and hunt in allocated reserve land; and to receive annual supplies of food, provisions, and ammunition from the Crown 'as long as the sun shines above and the waters flow in the ocean' (Morris, 1880, 96). However, in reality, the treaties were constructed under Canadian imperialist politics.

At the time of the treaty process in Manitoba, the community of SIL was meant to receive reserve land, named *Ithinoway Sagahegan* (People's Lake), and benefits (Steve Ducharme, personal communication, August 8, 2013). However, this plan never materialized and, in 1908, SIL residents were registered as members of the nearby community of Nelson House Cree Nation, now *Nisichawayasihk Cree Nation* (NCN), under Treaty 5 (Waldram, 1988, 116).

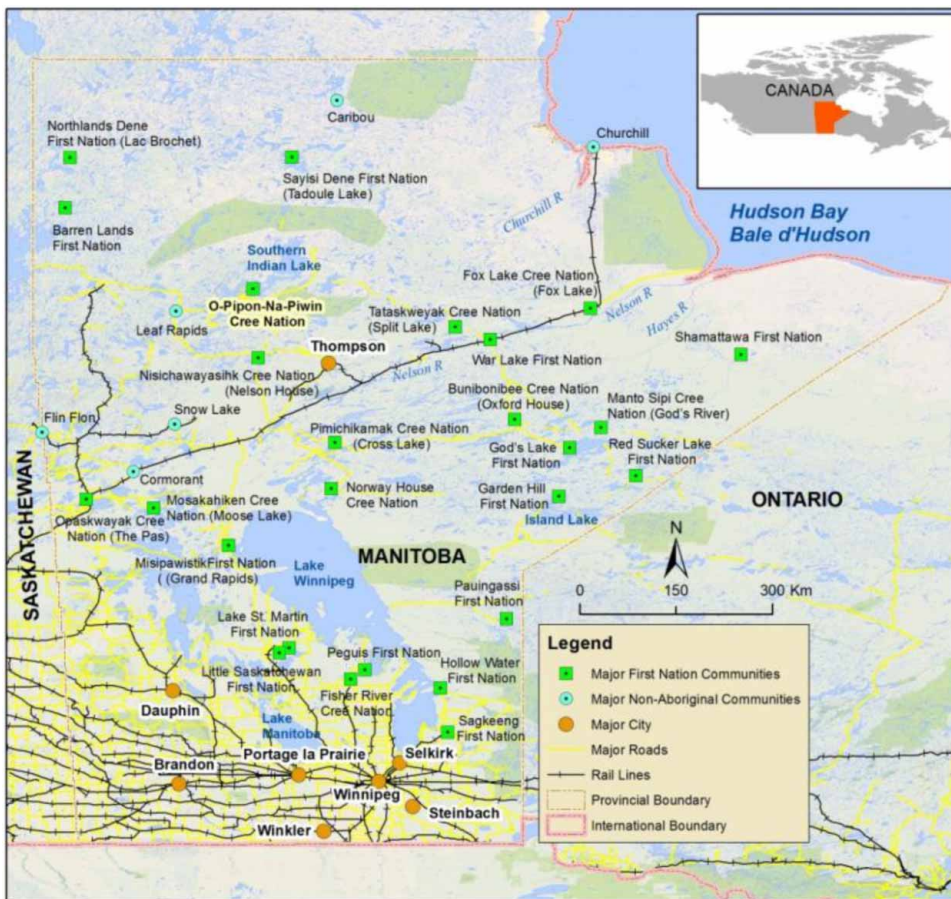
In 1942, a commercial fishery was established to take advantage of the quality and availability of whitefish in SIL (Waldram, 1988, 117). The lake became North America's second largest white fish fishery, producing approximately one million pounds of Grade A whitefish annually (Ducharme, 2013). Under contemporary measures of poverty in Canada, only 27.9% of the population at SIL would have been considered poor at the time (Hoffman, 2008, 113).

Beginning in the 1960s, Manitoba entered a phase of hydropower production directed towards the construction of mega projects along the Nelson River system (Liénafa & Martin, 2010; Hoffman, 2008; Hoffman & Martin, 2012; Waldram, 1988). The objective was to 'modernize' northern Indigenous communities with a 'hydro induced' program of 'modernization' and 're-development' (Robson, 1993, 106). Under Premier Duff Roblin, the province proposed a project, known as the CRD that would divert the waters of the Churchill River through SIL, the Rat and Burntwood Rivers and into the Nelson River system (Waldram, 1988, 119). Overall, this project would raise SIL by approximately 10 meters, effectively flooding the entirety of the community (Waldram, 1988). Upon receipt of this information, the community began a vigorous battle against the province, ultimately leading to a change of government and promises to cancel the project (McClullum & McClullum, 1975, 107). Ultimately, the project moved forward. The new, low-level diversion 'only' project increased the level of SIL by 3 meters, forcing half of the community to relocate (McClullum & McClullum, 1975, 107–108). Eventually, the entirety of the community was forced to move in order to access infrastructure, including the school and nursing station (Hilda Dysart, personal communication, 2012). Construction of Missi Falls, the CRD control structure at the outlet of SIL into the Churchill River, effectively converted the lake into a reservoir that stores approximately 40% of the water used to power Manitoba Hydro's arsenal of generating stations (Dysart, 2014, 1).

In response to the environmental destruction wrought by the construction of the CRD, five First Nations communities in northern Manitoba formed an alliance known as the Northern Flood Committee (NFC) (Waldram, 1988, 147). Although the NFC did not include the community at SIL, it did include the communities from Split Lake, Nelson House, Cross Lake, Norway House, and York Factory First Nations (Waldram, 1988). These communities challenged Manitoba and Manitoba Hydro and ultimately brought about the Northern Flood Agreement in 1977 (NFA) (Waldram, 1988, 160). This agreement, termed a modern day treaty by Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Eric Robison in 2000, established promises to the communities as a means of mitigation against the effects of hydropower production (Kulchyski, 2008, 134; Province of Manitoba, 2015). Most prominently, Schedule E of the NFA establishes the 'Substantive Purpose of Development Plan' and states it will affect 'the eradication of mass poverty and mass unemployment and the improvement of the physical, social and economic conditions and transportation' (NFA, 1977, 70). Strikingly, the SIL community was one of the most impacted by the CRD, but did not receive any compensation until much later, because they were not recognized as a reserve by the federal government and did not have title to the land (Hoffman & Martin, 2012, 37). A mitigation plan was needed to minimize social and environmental damages but never truly established (Dysart, 2014).

The timing of the formation of the contemporary OPCN reserve was influenced largely by hydroelectric dam construction (Hoffman & Martin, 2012). At that time, another hydroelectric

generating station, called *Wuskwatim*, was proposed by Manitoba Hydro, in financial partnership with NCN to be built on the Burntwood River system, which would further impact SIL (Hoffman & Martin, 2012, 45; Kulchyski, 2008). In order to establish the partnership and complete the project, Manitoba Hydro's proposal required community support (Leslie Dysart, personal communication, August 8, 2013). Rather than risk a defeat of the proposed *Wuskwatim* partnership at the hands of NCN band members living at SIL, who were predominantly against further construction, the rules were changed drastically by the federal government in regards to the creation of a new reserve at SIL, called OPCN (Kulchyski, 2008, 143). The reserve was established in 2005, less than a year prior to the vote on the *Wuskwatim* Generating Station. The divide and conquer strategy of government effectively changed the outcome of the NCN referendum on *Wuskwatim* (Kulchyski, 2008), as creation of the OPCN reserve eliminated 400 highly probable no votes from the NCN band (Dysart, 2014, 4). Construction on the dam began in 2006 and went into operation in 2012, resulting in further fluctuation of water levels around the community and impacts to OPCN. These impacts are ongoing.



Map source: Kamal et al. (2014, 144).

Impact of CRD on OPCN

Cultural, social and physical well-being of Indigenous peoples in Canada are deeply integrated with their food system, a food system that culturally incorporates harvesting and sharing food with sustainable care for land (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Morrison, 2011). OPCN members lost regular access to both culturally appropriate food and their livelihoods following completion of the CRD. Before the lake was flooded, people enjoyed diverse wild food harvested in different seasons (Hoffman & Martin, 2012). After the CRD flooding, wild food harvesting activities were compromised in all seasons. Continuous fluctuation of water levels created massive debris in the waterways, breaking the seasonal fish spawning cycle, and causing wild game migration to the inland (Kamal et al., 2014).

Indigenous people around the world value food as a source of medicine for numerous health benefits (Kuhnlein, Erasmus, Spigelski, & Burlingame, 2013). In Canada, land-based food is considered essential for 'identity, health and survival' (Power, 2008, 95). Following completion of the CRD, a lack of wild food has impacted all aspects of OPCN's community health. Wild food is important for physical nourishment, as it is rich in nutrients (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Mason, Dana, & Anderson, 2009, 347). It also inspires physical activities and health outdoor lifestyle (Kamal & Thompson, 2013, 6). Wild meat and fish can be both a source of protein and minerals and contain less fat and cholesterol than commercial meats (Waldram, 1985, 45). Environmental damage from the CRD caused mercury contamination in fish in OPCN and other flooded communities (Loney, 1995, 238). It also drowned the habitat for important medicinal plants. In addition, gradual dependency on poor quality store bought food and a lack of physical activity caused acute health disparities and chronic diseases such as diabetes in all CRD affected communities (Public Utility Board, 2014, 7).

Arguably, the most direct impact of CRD on OPCN's community was the near complete destruction of the fishery—to approximately 10% of its original capacity (Ducharme, 2013). As an outcome of this destruction, unemployment rates increased throughout the community (Waldram, 1985, 1988; Hoffman, 2008). Under these circumstances, people were forced to travel long distances by boat or floatplane to harvest wild food and medicine. A decade after CRD, Manitoba Hydro gave partial subsidy for harvesting activities, which they abruptly ended in 2013 without consultation or explanation (Dysart, 2014, 2). In addition, the high cost of living, particularly the cost of food and gas in the north, has contributed to the continuing impoverishment. The community was forced to rely upon government social assistance programs (Hoffman, 2008, 114–115).

Both food security and sovereignty over Indigenous food systems were severely impacted by the CRD. The following section presents an analysis of food security, food sovereignty and Indigenous food sovereignty in Canada. This will follow a discussion to reflect on the differences between colonial and Indigenous food systems.

Food Security, Food Sovereignty and Indigenous Food Sovereignty

Food security emerged in the 1970s and is defined as 'exist[ing] when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life' (FAO, 1996, 3). Household food security is taken as a technical measure to assess the severity of hunger, poverty and malnutrition in marginalized communities (Chandrasekera, 2008; Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, Steven, 2011; Council of Canadian Academics, 2014; Tarasuk, 2009; Thompson et al., 2011).

While the concept of food security has little to say about the means through which food is secured, it is often a part of a neoliberal framework that views food as a commodity most effectively delivered through the global market (Rudolph & MacLachlan, 2013, 1080).

Although food security and food sovereignty cover some common ground, they are considered to be different concepts (Jarosz, 2014; Menser, 2014; Rudolph & MacLachlan, 2013). The Via Campesina (1996) Declaration of Food Sovereignty defined food sovereignty as

the right of each nation to maintain and develop its own capacity to produce its basic foods respecting cultural and productive diversity. We have the right to produce our own food in our own territory. Food sovereignty is a precondition to genuine food security. (Via Campesina, 1996, 1)

Put forward as a multidimensional rights-based political framework, food sovereignty situates contemporary resource depletion, economic crisis, and environmental degradation within the context of neoliberal trade and production, with negative consequences for peoples' access to healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food. Besides a focus on the fundamental causes of hunger, other noteworthy and interlinked issues addressed in food sovereignty discourse include industrialization of agriculture, colonial strategies of (under)development, commodification of food, and protection of the rights of farmers, women, and Indigenous peoples (Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007, Desmarais & Wittman, 2014). As a growing social justice movement, food sovereignty offers alternative modes of producing and consuming food, suggesting participatory methods of intervention (Stédile & de Carvalho, 2011, 25). In short, the food sovereignty movement functions as a broad political alliance to rectify the problems wrought by the current food system at the local, regional, national, and global levels.

Food sovereignty distinguishes the concept of 'sovereignty' from its more rigid classical definitions (Menser, 2014). Traditionally, sovereignty has been understood as 'final and absolute authority in a political community' (Hinsley, 1966, 1) and is a concept related to a state's legal control over a particular geographical area and its population. It is connected to the notion of private property and resource accumulation, where nature is divided and extracted based on material value and state politics (Dean & Levi, 2003; Menser, 2014). In contrast, food sovereignty refers to increased control over the food system by both consumers and producers, who are seen as having shared collective interests contrary to the capitalist emphasis upon accumulation and privatization (Wittman, 2011). With influences ranging from Marxism to ecology, food sovereignty values growing food as a means of maintaining sustainable ecosystems and promoting cultural integrity as opposed to a means of maximizing and accumulating capital, resources, and property (Andree, Jeffery, Michael, & Marie-Jane, 2014; Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Holt-Giménez & Altieri, 2013; Menser, 2014).

Within this context, food sovereignty is a large and diverse movement encompassing a variety of perspectives, goals, and approaches. Regarding the state, in some cases, the goal is achieving self-determination—and the freedom of a dignified life—without political intervention from state, while in other cases, states are called upon to fulfill certain rights while respecting the ability of communities to assert their rights in a meaningful way (Menser, 2014). In the postcolonial era, a state's control over the marginalized is re-established through the imposition of universal human rights over Indigenous peoples (Kulchyski, 2013; Dean & Levi 2003, 9). The concept of universal human rights is not entirely negative. However, when it is used to undermine cultural distinctions and remove rights established to protect these distinctions, it becomes problematic (Alfred, 2009b; Kulchyski, 2013; Dean & Levi 2003, 10). As Corntassel argues, 'rights-based approaches do not offer meaningful

restoration of Indigenous homelands and food sovereignty' (2012a, 93). United Nations approved Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 and Canada adopted it in 2010 (Lum, 2014). However, in practice Canadian state regulations follow the historical blindness that can come with United Nation's universal plea of human rights (Kulchyski, 2013; Lum, 2014). It creates further authority for the state to determine the benefits and limitations of an already colonized population.

In Indigenous understanding sovereignty is inherent and collective (Barker, 2005, 20). It is infused with interconnected autonomy nurtured through relationship with land. A community, for Indigenous peoples, includes both human and non-human beings, particularly natural entities (Adelson, 2000; Simpson, 2004) and in a sovereign space, all aspects of culture (language, sacred ceremonies, food system, livelihood, relationship, and stories with land) are preserved, as they are essential for community health and sustainability; for example, Cree concept of health and collective well-being, 'has everything to do with connections to the land and to a rich and complex past' (Adelson, 2000, 25). Thus sovereignty for Indigenous people, 'cannot be separated from people or their culture' (Kickingbird, 1977, 2). That is why restoring the culture of a particular region is fundamental for Indigenous food sovereignty, generally more so than to non-Indigenous food sovereignty. Indigenous food sovereignty addresses 'Indigenous' aspirations for collective well-being and prefers to rectify inequality and acknowledge peoples' rights to land and cultural integrity (Morrison, 2011).

Relatedly, achieving food sovereignty for Indigenous people requires the inclusion of Indigenous cultural values in state policies and Indigenous participation in the economy (Desmarais & Wittman, 2014; Morrison, 2011). In Canada, incorporation of Indigenous values is essential for the reclamation of Indigenous Treaty rights, as opposed to continued colonization under the guise of modernization, development and national prosperity (Kulchyski, 2013). To be more specific, the meaning of reclamation is not 'collaboration, partnership or infrastructural development' provided from the state, but the removal of discriminatory state regulations, land and title transfers and

the stopping of practices that encroach upon the sovereignty of those territories (from active resource extraction to more passive but deadly forms of pollutions like the dumping of radioactive toxins proximate to watersheds, the siting of incinerators, overdrawn water tables, or damming rivers). (Menser, 2014, 70)

In light of this argument, food sovereignty for Indigenous people in Canada is contributing to past and ongoing commitment of Indigenous political mobilization in North America.²

Working to make sovereignty over cultural and livelihood resources and relationships a reality is a major step towards regeneration of a long oppressed people in Canada (Cornassel, 2008, 2012a, 2012b). To achieve this reality, decolonization must start at a personal, intimate, and collective level and must be realized both in mind and action (Fanon, 1952; Waziyatawin & Yellow Bird, 2005). Indigenous food sovereignty advocates for decolonizing activities—reclaiming land for hunting, fishing, trapping, berry picking, community gardens, wild food programs, and other cultural activities, along with their cultural meanings. These activities involve restoration and development of cultural practices, values, and thoughts that were overpowered but are still important and necessary for the continuance and renewal of ideas, well-being and empowerment of colonized people. According to OPCN leaders, these activities help to re-build sovereignty.

Within this context we introduce OPCN's concept of resource, best expressed through the word *wechihituwin*. *Wechihituwin* refers to any means of livelihood that is shared and used

to help another person, family, or the community. The term emphasizes the fact that food in the cultural tradition of OPCN is not a commodity; it is a set of relationships. Similarly, the concept of decolonization is defined as *pasekonekewin* which means taking the person by the hand and helping her or him stand. From this section, *wechihituwin* is used in place of 'resource' to provide a more nuanced and spiritual significance to land, water and food, as well as the life living within each. The term *pasekonekewin* is used to elaborate the integration of youth in food harvesting activities in OPCN. Using these concepts, we examine local food programs, understanding them not as isolated actions, but in the context of efforts to reestablish Indigenous sovereignty over resources, land and culture (Barker, 2005).

Research Background and Methodology

Following CRD, OPCN's food champions and Elders worked towards the maintenance and revitalization of their cultural livelihood and connection to the land, through community gatherings and individual efforts to train youth (Kamal et al., 2014). Upon receiving results from the 2009 survey on food insecurity, OPCN felt a need for an immediate response within the community. This study highlighted NCN's community-based country food³ program as a probable cause for their significantly lower food insecurity (Thompson et al., 2011). From this realization, OPCN envisioned a wild food program that could subsidize some of the prohibitively expensive costs of harvesting. In return for this subsidy, food champions would share some of the *wechihituwin* with the community through the wild food program. In response to community interest, in 2010, Ph.D. candidate Asfia Kamal, who conducted the 2009 survey at OPCN, focused her doctoral thesis on helping to establish a wild food program. The study was proposed as a collaborative initiative between the University of Manitoba and OPCN.

In order to complete this study, and help establish the wild food program, both parties agreed to use OCAP (Ownership, control, access, and possession) principles as a foundation of the study. OCAP is a set of research guidelines adopted and proposed by the Steering Committee of the Aboriginal Regional Longitudinal Health Survey in Canada. The objectives of these guidelines are to add self-determination, collective ownership, and community control over research information to studies conducted with Aboriginal people or in Aboriginal territory (Schnarch, 2004). As the project progressed, members of a University of Manitoba research team, led by Kamal, participated in a multitude of community events and programs in relation to the establishment of the wild food program. She learned and gathered information through multiple visits to the community, helped to orchestrate youth educational experiences and was invited to a number of community gatherings. These opportunities provided her with a sense of community and relationship with the people of OPCN, a relationship that greatly informs her knowledge.

Relationships formed through the advancement of this program facilitated a total of 44 open-ended interviews, 2 participatory video workshops, and 8 focus groups. These interviews allowed for what were probably the most informative and impactful interactions of the research—storytelling and personal narratives from harvesters and Elders. Stories and narratives have an important place in Indigenous cultures, and provide a wealth of knowledge about a number of different topics that are necessary to gain a nuanced understanding of the culture and life of a particular group of people (Fitznor, 2012; Iseke & Moore, 2011; Simpson, 2011). Additionally, these stories and narratives helped provide understanding of community

members' perception of Indigenous food sovereignty as well as the vision and establishment of the IMP ('food from the land').

IMP ('Food from the Land')

Hydroelectric power production in northern Manitoba removed the *wechihituwin* from the Cree people. As the community moves forward and attempts to assert its place as an Indigenous community, it must 'regain its *wechihituwin* from the destructive power of energy production' (Barb Spence, personal communication, November 8, 2013). IMP, as a program, has brought this option back to the community by supporting individual and community claims to the land surrounding, and including, SIL.

Community members decided to establish this program to support others within the community who are unable to access healthy, sustainable, and culturally appropriate food. From 2012 to 2013, the IMP evolved in three major phases. First, a committee was formed to discuss the needs of the program. OPCN's program is supported through sharing *wechihituwin*, in this case equipment, space, labor, skills from the community. In second phase, the community focused on local outreach, applied for funding to hire a community coordinator, and renovated the community's food handling area, as per Health Canada regulations (Kamal et al., 2014, 146). The program received funding from various local and provincial government organizations in January 2013. In the third phase, three industrial freezers were bought to store wild food and medicine. The program began distribution in June 2013. During the first four months of the program, the number of families receiving food from the program grew from 5 to 390 families. Money is provided to subsidize some harvesting costs if the food champion agrees to share the food through IMP. Food collected through program activities is labeled, stored in freezers, and distributed once a week to single mothers, low-income families, and Elders (Kamal et al., 2014, 147).

***Pasekonekewin*: Empowering Youth in OPCN**

Youth programs are of paramount importance to the IMP, and as such have been established in multiple occasions throughout the year. These programs consist of hunting, fishing, berry picking, preparation of wild food, gardening, and education on the health benefits of different wild foods. OPCN's Oscar Blackburn School plays an integral part of the educational aspect of the program and has helped instill culturally important principles in the community's youth through a life skills class. This class requires youth participation in the IMP, creates outdoor activities for food harvesting and involves Elders who teach youth about 'the Cree principles of responsibility, respect, focus, patience, sharing, listening and generosity', says class instructor Shirley Ducharme. Such activities contribute to community initiatives of *pasekonekewin* and youth empowerment. Applauding IMP's collaboration with the school, community members recommend the use of both educational methods as a means of continuing decolonization while remaining true to community heritage. 'My son should learn to read and learn to hunt, we need both to fight and stay close to our roots' (Dysart, personal communication, 2013).

IMP also uses storytelling, in Cree, throughout program activities, to engage the community through culturally appropriate educational methods. 'Each food harvested from the land has a story that teaches something to us', explained program advisor Steve Ducharme. Additionally, the program instills an understanding of the relationship and responsibilities community

Table 1. The importance of seasonal local food harvesting and the impact of the Churchill River Diversion⁴

Season	Seasonal traditional food and method of consumption	Health significance as understood by OPCN members	Cultural significance of harvesting and consuming the food	Stories of traditional food-related activities	Perceived damage due to CRD
Summer and winter	Fish (smoked, boiled and fried, dry fish with berries, fish head boiled, fish broth for soup)	White fish is good for diabetes and blood pressure. Jack fish guts are cold medicine. Fish head and broth are good sources of and calcium. (Jennifer Linklater)	Act of fishing teaches us that we need to work hard. (Fisherman Wilbur Wood)	'In summer spending time in the fish camp was like a ritual in the community. Youth loved playing by the beach and chasing fish.' (Louis Dumas)	Continuous fluctuation of water hampers fish egg spawning. Fish taste mushy. People need to travel to inland lakes to fish
Spring	Beaver and muskrat (smoked and boiled meat)	Beaver meat has pain relieving and anti-inflammatory element Muskrat meat is quality protein. (Roger Moose)	Trapping teaches focus, hard work, and respect for elders. Beavers are hard-working and youth must be too. (Elder Ross Moose)	'Trapping beaver and muskrat was a favorite past-time for us before the CRD. We used to catch hundreds of muskrats, now we can only catch a few if we are lucky.' (Steve Durcharme)	Continuous fluctuation of water froze and killed many beaver and muskrat
Spring	Ducks, geese, and other waterfowl (boiled meat and broth for soup with oats)	Duck and goose meat is good for heart health and high blood pressure. (Roger Moose)	Hunting ducks and geese can teach about determination, focus and is a form of meditation. (Barb Spence)	'We always like to save some of our birds for feasts and gatherings. Goose broth with oatmeal is a favorite dish in every gathering.' (Delia Dysart)	Loss of marsh and shoreline changed waterfowl migration paths
Summer	Seagull eggs(boiled)	Good sources of protein and is good for bones. (Barb Spence)	Harvesting seagull eggs teaches the rules of conservation. (Elder Vivian Moose)	'In summer before CRD fishermen used to bring baskets full of seagull eggs. It was a treat for us.' (Barb Spence)	Seagulls lay eggs in small rocky islands in Southern Indian Lake. After CRD many of these islands were drowned

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued

Season	Seasonal traditional food and method of consumption	Health significance as understood by OPCN members	Cultural significance of harvesting and consuming the food	Stories of traditional food-related activities	Perceived damage due to CRD
Summer	Berries (Blueberry, moss berry, raspberry, and cranberry)(mixed with dry meat and fish, raw and making jam with sugar)	Medicines for colds, diarrhea and other stomach problems, diabetes and detoxifying body. (Elder Florence Donkey)	Berry harvesting teaches sharing and caring for family. (Linda Baker)	'Women used to go out for berry picking with their families and children, make tea and socialize all day long sharing their harvest.' (Hilda Dysart)	Erosion of shoreline damaged and drowned berry patches.
Summer	Tea (Labrador, wild mint)	Medicine for cold and headache. (Elder Vivian Moose)	Spending time with medicinal plant is healing, and teaches generosity, peace, kindness and respect for the land. (Roger Moose)	'After you use a medicinal plant, you need to throw it on fire or somewhere safe where people will not walk on it. You also need to leave something behind when you pick them. I still do that. People leave tobacco when they pick wild mint.' (Shirley Ducharme)	Loss of land; shoreline drowned many medicinal plants
Fall	Moose (meat, lard from bone marrow, nose) (Boiled, smoked, dry)	Dry moose meat with berries is good for stomach and bones. (Elder Helen Moose)	Hunting moose teaches responsibility for feeding family and allows for sharing. (Shirley Ducharme)	'The common saying is one should not eat his first kill. This is to teach the young hunter about kindness and sharing.' (Shirley Ducharme)	Erosion creates debris and requires long travel to hunt moose.

members have with the land and waters of their homeland. Indigenous people in Canada use storytelling and knowledge sharing as an essential part of education and empowerment for youth (Iseke & Moore, 2011, Simpson, 2011). Storytelling has been a cultural framework for maintaining Cree collective memory in Canada for generations (McLeod, 2007). Scholars consider activities on the land with Elders and youth together as decolonizing, essential for Indigenous knowledge transmission and community cohesion (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005, 613; Simpson, 2004, 374).

OPCN's concept of decolonization, in particular, is inherently one of support and communal strength. Both Cree terms used in this paper; *wechihituwin* and *pasekonekewin*, have a common theme, communal support. Table 1 addresses this theme related to food.

Re-establishing *Wechihituwin*

IMP is an outcome of OPCN's growing spirit to reproduce and reuse *wechihituwin* within the community. The table above gives a contextual account of OPCN's existing practices that address life on the land. These practices are primary determinants of food sovereignty and community well-being. Being on the land and participating in any bush related activities resonates with Cree peoples' distinct culture, concepts of health and well-being and ratifies history of 'the connections between identity and personal, social, and political well-being' (Adelson, 2000, 99). The stories told to youth connect past with present and contribute to a future where food is a source of cultural strength. In this future, food, as *wechihituwin*, represents more than sustenance, it contains stories and memories that can heal the community. Similarly a food program building is not just infrastructure, it is a catalyst to regenerate *wechihituwin*, to inspire new ideas and collective will. The program's success has motivated other local organizations in OPCN to implement different youth focused programs. The program office itself is slowly becoming a place of community gathering, reinventing social bonds and collective well-being.

Conclusion

The OPCN wild food program is decolonizing, providing both practical control over resources and cultural restoration. Indigenous food sovereignty, which emphasizes the importance of cultural practices, is a pathway in this case towards decolonizing land and peoples. Through the IMP case study, we provide evidence that community defined programs similar to this can be beneficial in a number and variety of social and cultural domains. Additionally, Indigenous regional programs and organizations can work as a political actor to turn (sovereignty) theory into practice. For example, Inuit Circumpolar Council has been helping mobilizing Inuit sovereignty in the Arctic (Shadian, 2014).

The way in which OPCN's food champions use the term food sovereignty, neither 'food' nor 'sovereignty' retains their classical meanings. OPCN contested the predominant understanding of 'food'—understood as 'consumable commodities'—and struggled to restore its cultural meaning as the bond between people, health and land. IMP is OPCN's active vision to go beyond this struggle, becoming more food sovereign through the process of Elders and food champions sharing stories and teachings with youth, and through the process of sharing wild foods with those in need. The intention is to 'step out of the box' and make these stories and teachings as lived experience to 'remove our colonial blinders' (Simpson, 2011, 148).

Sovereignty is redefined by OPCN as a re-establishment of relationships with the land and *wechihituwin* of their area. OPCN does not perceive sovereignty as control over land, water, or wildlife, but a relationship with these entities that allows for the mutual benefit of all parties. The community does not perceive sovereignty as an ability to take from others or the environment, but to support the community through engagement and sharing of *wechihituwin*.

IMP has been successful as an outcome of the existing *wechihituwin*, as opposed to establishing a program on the basis of importing a predefined framework. However, it has faced challenges since its inception. Ensuring a food handling area as per Health Canada regulation was the primary challenge. Health Canada regulations are meant for good health, hygiene and food safety. However, in remote Indigenous communities, receiving external support to make any kind of change is time consuming and costly. Additionally, financing such programs can be immensely difficult, and at times when a budget is not available, community cohesion and support is necessary to provide the required equipment. Lack of infrastructure can also hamper attempts at supporting wild food programs.

Furthermore, establishing this case study as a permanent framework from which all communities are able to establish Indigenous food sovereignty can be problematic. Challenges within each and every community vary in type and severity, making a predefined framework difficult to implement. The impacts of colonization are so grave and continuous that long-term healing is required.

IMP shows that youth empowerment, through the practice of *pasekonekewin*, is one means of supporting the long-term healing of the community, which can be a combination of both Indigenous and Western education which is a welcoming approach present in Canadian Indigenous communities (Ball, 2004, 459–460). Additionally, transmission of knowledge through Elders and youth engagement in land-based activities is highly encouraged as a step towards Indigenous cultural regeneration (Alfred, 2009b, as cited in Corntassel, 2012a, 97). The IMP is a testament to Indigenous strength against colonial forces. Actions such as these call for a reinforcement of contemporary research with Indigenous wisdom and community driven projects. Related to policy, governments and corporations, for example, Manitoba Hydro, should accommodate Indigenous sovereignty cultural restoration in its policy and activities and consider issues surrounding natural resource extraction and exploitation, land-based industries and food production.

Outside researchers can provide a number of benefits to community programs, through grant writing and establishment of external relationships and partnerships. However, these programs must be community based and centered on the wants and needs of the community within which it will be situated. Any community hoping to establish Indigenous food sovereignty must find an approach that is right in their particular situation, though this case study can be used to help guide initial planning and decision-making. Communities must find their own spirit ‘to cause a mental awakening’ (Alfred, 2009a, 282). To quote Alfred and Corntassel (2005), we need

to start to use our Indigenous languages to frame our thoughts, the ethical framework of our philosophies to make decisions and to use our laws and institutions to govern ourselves. (614)

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Notes

- 1 Under Canadian constitution 1982, Section 35, Aboriginal refers to First Nation (recognized by constitution), Métis (cultural and ethnic identity of individuals who are the result of relationships between Indigenous and Europeans), and Inuit (Indigenous people from northern Canada considered "Indian" in Canadian constitution) people (Asch, 1984). OPCN is composed of both First Nations and Métis individuals who speak both Cree and English. This paper uses the term Indigenous to situate the community in the dialogue of Indigenous food sovereignty.
- 2 Indigenous resistance against colonial policies of the USA, Canada, and Central and South America to achieve sovereignty and cultural regeneration has been consistent. From the longest walk in early 70s to the most recent Idle No More movement there are many noteworthy examples of political mobilization (Johansen, 2013, 178–179; The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014).
- 3 Country food refers to locally harvested fish, mammals, plants, birds, and berries; however as a result of community preference wild food will be used in its place throughout this article.
- 4 Information obtained from OPCN community members through interviews and personal correspondence. Sources are noted following each section of information. Only texts in quotations are directly quoted; all other statements are paraphrased.

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