

Tensions in fostering 'local food' in the Northwest
Territories: Contending with Settler Colonialism in
Northern Research

by

Molly Stollmeyer

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Abstract

Most food systems challenges in the Northwest Territories (NWT), including extractivism, climate change, and restrictive policies, are bound to processes of settler colonialism. Researchers working in northern contexts typically recognize the disruptive role colonialism *had* in shaping foodways, but often fail to contend with the *ongoing* realities of colonial forces and the role research has in upholding them. This thesis is situated in tensions I encountered in two research engagements working to support “local” food systems in the NWT: a community-academic partnership through FLEdGE Research and a traditional research project supported through a Mitacs fellowship. My aspirations to develop these engagements into a community-based participatory research (CBPR) thesis project brought me to the realization that settler colonialism had been insufficiently attended to. This thesis is the result of a reflexive analysis of my engagements as a southern-based settler researcher working in the North. It involves critically revisiting my preliminary fieldwork, interviews and observations, as well as literatures read, and writings formulated throughout my journey as a graduate student. It argues that southern-based researchers must attend to the ways our research reinforces harmful colonial narratives about the North and actively work to disrupt colonial continuities.

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List of Acronyms

CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EN	Ecology North
ENR	Environment and Natural Resources (GNWT)
FLEdGE	Food: Locally Embedded Globally Engaged
HSS	Health and Social Services (GNWT)
GNWT	Government of the Northwest Territories
ITI	Industry Tourism and Investment (GNWT)
LCAC	Land Claim Agreements Coalition
MA	Master of Arts
NWT	Northwest Territories
RA	Research Assistant
TFN	NWT Food Network (or NWT Agri-Food Association)
TGF	The Gordon Foundation
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
YKDFN	Yellowknives Dene First Nation
YKFC	Yellowknife Food Coalition
YKFM	Yellowknife Farmers Market

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Safe and secure access to locally procured foods in the Northwest Territories (NWT) is impacted by a host of factors including, but not limited to, changing climate (Spring, 2018; Spring et al., 2017), extractivism, contamination (O'Reilly, 2015; Sandlos & Keeling, 2016), and the over and under regulation of policy (Johnston & Andrée, 2019). These challenges have clear but distinct impacts on how and by whom foods can be harvested, caught, gathered, grown or raised locally. As a graduate student, I have engaged with these issues to varying extents through different projects that I have characterized by a common goal: to promote *local food systems*¹ in the territory. The first engagement taken up through this thesis is comprised of the direct food initiative support I provided in Yellowknife over two years (2018 & 2019) with multiple local organizations as a research assistant (RA) for the SSHRC-funded grant **Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged (FLEdGE)** Research. While my main partner in Yellowknife was the environmental non-profit Ecology North, working on these food initiatives involved collaboration with many other

¹ Whyte (2019) employs the term *food systems* to account for the ways, “nations, societies, or communities cultivate and tend, produce, distribute, and consume their own foods; recirculate refuse; and acquire trusted foods, ingredients, and technologies from others” (p. 327). I borrow his conceptualization as he extends the meaning of food systems to also include, “the collective capacities that are part of the production and exercise of certain valuable goods, including political self-determination, living a healthy lifestyle, and expressing spirituality and cultural uniqueness” (Whyte, 2019, p. 327). This definition is intentionally open-ended and flexible (notably not agri-centric) to not presume or exclude any food provisioning systems. However, I have added *local* to characterize food procured within the territory – to incorporate traditional/country, agricultural, aquatic and non-timber forest-related provisions into one frame. Excluding imported market-based foods from the conception of the local, making it distinct from what I consider northern food systems, as vital as they may be to contemporary food security – they are not northern-based, and they move through large-scale southern supply chains. It is my intention to umbrella under one frame a range of local procurement practices (foods that are grown, harvested, gathered, caught, raised) and actors (Indigenous and non-Indigenous). Though this conception is not without tensions, the combination of these food practices has been of concern in my research engagements and are pertinent to the questions posed within.

organizations, including the newly incorporated NWT Food Network², the Yellowknife Farmers Market, the Dechı̄ta Nàowo department of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, the Centre for Northern Families and Hope's Haven. These 'hands-on' experiences were intended to foster relationships to collaborate on a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project to complete as 'my' thesis work. My involvement with these initiatives included coordinating an annual fall fair and weekly supper clubs, as well as communications, tech/administrative, research, fundraising, and grant writing support for other food projects. It is important to mention that the majority of my direct support in this engagement was centred in and around Yellowknife, but my partnered organization and some their affiliates had territorial mandates.

The second engagement was a more traditional research project, funded by a charitable foundation (the Gordon Foundation) and their industry partner (Mitacs), structured around a pre-determined research topic, on country/traditional food³ and other food provisioning systems in northern Indigenous communities. This research focus was borne out of a Northern Policy Hackathon hosted by the foundation in Nain involving multiple food actors and representatives across the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat to make policy recommendations on country/traditional food harvesting. My work on this

² In early 2020, the NWT Food Network was renamed NWT Agri-Food Network which is pertinent to the issues to be discussed in my thesis, but I continue to use the name of the network (or TFN) at the time of incorporation and the duration of my research engagements.

³ Country or traditional food are terms used to refer to all food that is harvested from the land (Kuhnlein et al., 2014); often used interchangeably with wild or subsistence-based food, and include foods derived from the flesh, bone, organs, and other parts of marine mammals and water fowl, land mammals, and fish, and foods derived from various plants including berries, leaves, stems, etc. (Searles, 2016). Conjoining country/traditional follows its use in the Canadian Council of Academies' Expert Panel on the State of Knowledge of Food Security in Northern Canada and the Northern Policy Hackathon Recommendations. The joined-up term is used broadly to respect that *traditional food* is used more often in First Nations and Métis research contexts, and *country food* is used more frequently among Inuit (Kuhnlein et al. 2014, p. 76).

project was completed adjacent to the first engagement as well as the completion of the coursework in the first year of my master's studies (2019-2020). Accompanying these two research engagements were a wide range of reading material assigned, recommended and collected in their completion. Through these engagements and their corresponding literatures, I became sensitive to (what I perceived) as tensions that arise in efforts to foster local food systems, setting me on the trajectory that culminates in this thesis.

1.1 Problematic: (Settler) Colonialism in Northern Food Systems Research

The inextricable link between settler colonialism and the disruptions to food systems is what motivates the approach taken in this research. By 'settler colonialism', I mean the process of continued occupation of Indigenous lands "as structure not an event" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). Notwithstanding this definition of settler colonialism as an ongoing process, not everyone uses this term in the same way, or means the same thing by it. For example, there is broad recognition of the destructive role colonialism had in shaping Indigenous food systems, as an event in the past, but less often as ongoing processes of settler colonialism. While it is not uncommon to find northern-based research on food systems that fail to contend with colonialism altogether, in my reading, I have observed widespread engagement with the *legacies* of colonization and assimilation on food systems and diets. What I originally perceived as a depoliticized or benign framing of colonialism, I consider now a hesitation or unwillingness to consider the *ongoing realities* of settler colonial occupation in certain strands of northern-based food systems literature.

What many of these literatures lack is an understanding of settler colonialism as a *persisting structure*, as opposed to a *historical event* – which is the way colonization is often characterized (Wolfe, 2006). Under a settler colonial frame, food (in)security in

northern contexts is deeply tied to historical and ongoing colonialism. Taking this seriously requires situating both the ongoing challenges to procuring local food and the efforts to foster greater provisioning in the context of settler colonial processes – considering how these challenges vary according to who is harvesting and how. Tracing colonialism through my research engagements requires attention to the workings of settler colonialism as they impact the food systems that this research pertains to, but also in the processes of research involved in reaching these conclusions. The coloniality of these food systems research engagements combined with insufficient attention to *settler* colonialism in northern food systems literature has motivated the direction taken in my thesis. However, I am equally wary of centring colonialism too heavily in my analysis. While I may find problematic the refusal to recognize colonial forces in these contemporary food systems, I am concerned that a settler colonial determinism could preclude alternate possibilities and resistance to these processes. This wariness pushes me to strive to contend with the settler colonial dynamic through this research while avoiding being deterministic about what that means.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary research questions addressed in this thesis are as follows: What does a settler colonial framework offer to understanding the challenges of fostering local food systems in the NWT? What are the possibilities and limitations of such an approach? What lessons can be learned through a reflexive analysis of northern food system research engagements?

1.3 Acknowledgement of Land and Territory

In this section, I introduce the geographical scope of my work, by naming the land and territories which this research is concerned with. This is not what I conceive of as the ‘field,’ nor is it the only territory on which I carried out much of the researching, thinking,

reading and writing of this project. Denendeh refers to what is known today as the NWT, excluding the northernmost point of the territory which is home to the Inuvialuit (Coulthard, 2014). The name is made up of *Dene* (the people), and *ndeh* (the land), which “means about the same as the English word “environment”:...the soil and plants, the air and weather, birds, the waters and fish, trees, animals and people who use the land,” (Weledeh Yellowknives Dene Elders Advisory Council 1997 as cited in Hall, 2017, p. 89). While my “on-the-ground” engagements were entirely in Denendeh, and specifically, Chief Drygeese Territory, the traditional home of the Yellowknives Dene, some of the organizations with whom I was partnered are territorial in scope – therefore expanding the geographical scope of my research beyond the city of Yellowknife. Not only that, in my first and second research engagements, I also took the current colonial borders of the territory as the geographical scope, giving priority to literatures and research within these boundaries in what I read. I predominantly employ the Dene name for this territory where appropriate, along with the other placenames that fall outside of Denendeh, though, I continue to use the formal NWT with reference to relevant organizations, government bodies and policies.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

This section provides an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis. It also outlines, in broad strokes, the line of argument I develop through these chapters.

The second chapter of this thesis describes the methodological and theoretical approaches I bring to my research. I detail the methodological shift from a CBPR approach towards a theoretically situated reflexive analysis of my research engagements. I outline my methodological influences including CBPR, doing theory, feminist ethics of care and

positional reflexivity. I introduce my sources from two research engagements and the accompanying materials. Next, I highlight the theoretical considerations and thinkers whose work most influenced the development of my analytical framework. These include contributions from Indigenous resurgence, decolonial and settler colonial studies, Marxist political economy, and political ontology.

In the third chapter, I offer a critique of existing research literatures pertaining to northern food systems that motivated the questions I posed above. The literatures I critically engage with are comprised of research on food security/sovereignty, local food production, country/traditional food harvesting, and food/climate change in the North⁴. These research literatures have, in part, brought me to the conclusion that settler colonialism has been insufficiently attended to. This is not comprehensive review of the literatures consulted but instead, I demonstrate what can be generated with the application a settler colonial frame (along with critical food scholarship contributions). The main purpose of this chapter is to set up the problem of my research and trace through these literatures a series of narratives that I continue to challenge through the subsequent chapters of my thesis. I bring context to food systems research in the NWT, but also critically engage with these literatures as sources that make up part of the ‘field’ of my research.

In the fourth chapter, I trace the ways that colonial-capitalism shapes historical and contemporary food system issues in the NWT. In mapping the origins of extractivism,

⁴Through my research, I contain the geographical scope of ‘the North’ to Inuit Nunangat & the Territorial North. In some cases, I expand the scope to include the northernmost points of the other southern provinces, as well as Alaska and other regions of the Circumpolar North to a lesser extent. While I am cautious not to make sweeping generalizations, given the global nature of colonial-capitalism (Rojas, 2016), it is important not to relegate these experiences only to the local, with the risk of underrepresenting the broader, systematic forces at play (Cameron, 2012; Cruikshank, 2005).

conservationism and agrarianism in the territory, I apply a settler colonial framework to respond the primary question posed through this research. By historicizing contemporary food issues, I develop my argument that this (structural) framing completely shifts the conclusions we might draw on these issues than would be the case through a historical (temporal) portrayal of colonialism as part of the 'past'. This chapter is representative of how I came to understand food system challenges that sets up the following two chapters, which brings in my own experiences in navigating northern research. The rigid portrayal of settler colonialism that I maintain in this chapter is not without consequence. The conclusions I draw based on this framing represent some of the possibilities and limitations of the settler colonial framework that I continue to draw out through the rest of my thesis.

My fifth chapter is a reflexive analysis of the challenges I encountered in my efforts to build a CBPR project in Yellowknife. I weave the critical engagements of other researchers with CBPR through my reflections on the underlying assumptions and dilemmas associated with these methodologies. By reflecting on my experiences with partnered civil society organizations promoting comprehensive food system visions in the NWT, I recount some of the issues of inclusivity and representation in their efforts. From these experiences, I make the claim that the tensions that arise in collaborative food work and research (and there will be many) must be tended to. This chapter represents the methodological tensions I encountered and helps set up my final substantive chapter that addresses tensions in my research engagements that are more theoretically situated.

My sixth chapter is a reflexive analysis of what I term *colonial encounters* in my research engagements. After having made a strong case for the colonality of contemporary food system issues, I extend this to explore the colonality of *research* based on my own

experience and the contributions of others writing and working at this intersection. I reflect on three colonial tendencies encountered in my research engagements to exemplify how the *logics* of colonial-capitalism manifest in research. I contend with the fact that even with settler colonialism taken up as a central subject in my research that colonial tendencies persist. These logics are perpetrated through colonial binary thinking, colonial epistemic erasure, and colonial equivocations. I accompany each of these tendencies with theoretical or practical lessons for other researchers to ‘think with’ and attempt to challenge colonial-capitalist logic in their/our research.

In my concluding chapter, I return to the questions posed in this thesis to articulate what my reflexive analyses taught me about the possibilities and limitations of a settler colonial framework. It argues that southern-based researchers must attend to the ways our research reinforces harmful colonial narratives about the North and actively work to disrupt colonial continuities. The analysis undertaken in my thesis research leads me to conclude that attending to settler colonialism has implications on what subjects we take up in our research, but also requires confronting how research and researchers are implicated in settler colonial processes. There are many lessons that come with reaching these conclusions, and I present these as theoretical tools for other researchers to ‘think with.’

Chapter 2: Method and Theory

This chapter outlines the methodological and theoretical foundations of the approach I take in my research. I begin by introducing my methodological shift from a community-based approach towards a theoretically situated reflexive analysis of two specific northern-focused research engagements. I name the methodological influences of community-based participatory research (referred to as CBPR hereinafter), doing theory (*thinking through*), feminist ethics of care (*thinking with*) and positional reflexivity. I state my positionality in my methods section, but I also continue to position myself in relation to my research throughout this thesis. I introduce the circumstances that led to this research project, as well as the research partners, affiliated organizations and funders for whom I carried out varying aspects of the research engagements central to this thesis. This includes describing the sources (my two research engagements) and accompanying materials (both primary and secondary) that I consult and analyze through my subsequent chapters. I follow this by introducing the theoretical influences on my research. I describe the theorizations from several bodies of scholarship, namely Indigenous, decolonial, and settler colonial studies, Marxist political economy, and political ontology, that form my theoretical framework.

2.1 Methodological Influences

2.1.1 Aspirations of Community-Based Participatory Research

The methodological approach I have taken through this thesis is somewhat unconventional. I began my MA with the intention of carrying out a CBPR project and dedicated a great deal of time and energy to fostering relationships within community-academic partnerships to allow for this. I understand CBPR as the philosophy and methodology “by which decision-making power and ownership are shared between the researcher and the

community involved” (Castleden et al., 2008, 2012, p. 160). The experiences I gained and relationships I formed through these engagements are the foundation of the overall focus of my research (food systems in the NWT). Ultimately, however, this thesis is not the result of CBPR. The questions I pose are my own, as is the direction I take to answer them. The critical teachings of my coursework in political economy have continued to pull me in a different direction (methodologically speaking). I often felt a tension between my desire to work with critical social theory and pursue community-engaged methodologies. I am not suggesting that these cannot be simultaneously enacted, but I have not managed this here.

The principles and methods of CBPR (and their variations)⁵ continue to influence my research, even as I have taken an alternate approach. The history of research in the North is widely understood as having been highly extractive or appropriative (materially and intellectually), lacking culturally appropriate or ethical protocols; and often being harmful to those whose lives were the subjects of that research. In response to these colonial legacies, many researchers have embraced collaborative methodologies to overcome the uneven distribution of power in research relations (Castleden et al., 2012; Koster et al., 2012). Responding to the rise of CBPR within Indigenous geographies, de Leeuw, Cameron and Greenwood (2012) pose the critical questions of whether this research method “truly does move away from other styles of research and if so, in what ways, and under what conditions? If it does, how do we know it does?” (p. 182). I appreciate the fundamental principles of CBPR, from the desire to overcome power imbalances and establish relationships between researchers and the communities central to the research, to

⁵ When referring to the methodologies of community-based research and participatory action research, I use this common umbrella frame (CBPR). The guiding principles and philosophies of these methodologies are more significant to my research than technical variations between them.

the value placed on knowledge outside the academy (de Leeuw et al., 2012; Koster et al., 2012; Ochocka & Janzen, 2014). I also think that researchers should continue to strive towards more ethical, equitable and relational forms of knowledge generation in their work.

To this aim, de Leeuw et al. (2012) express the following concern:

[It] is not so much that participatory projects sometimes fail to live up to the ideals they are based on, but rather with the potential for such projects to actually reinscribe and retrench unjust relations in the very pursuit of opposite aims. (p. 185)

I take from these scholars that taking strides towards more sound research relationships should not preclude critical assessment of the impact of CBPR projects, as they argue, “the framing of particular methods as ‘best practices’ risks closing down necessary and ongoing critique” (p. 181).

My interest in pursuing CBPR methodologies is what brought me to FLEdGE Research and my northern engagements – but like many others, I encountered many dilemmas in my attempts to build a collaborative project (Gallagher, 2018; Kennelly, 2018). The primary research engagement I introduce in this chapter demonstrates that I did pursue many of the methodological steps of CBPR – including ‘preliminary fieldwork’ prior to starting my MA, collaboration with community-partners on ‘actionable’ projects over two years, iterative processes of research design and consistent application of self-reflection (Ochocka & Janzen, 2014). Based on these steps, I was even encouraged to consider if this project would qualify as my contribution as CBPR. I realize I am not alone in questioning whether a research project was participatory or collaborative enough. I took a lot of influence from Johnston’s (2018) master’s thesis in political economy using Participatory Action Research (PAR) with FLEdGE. She offers critical insights on this methodology as she examines the question whether she did in fact ‘do PAR?’ Despite her

uncertainties, she articulates how her “practical experiences related to the theory of PAR” (Johnston, 2018, p. 70). Kennelly (2018) argues that this question is, “on the one hand, an ethical question with material impact,” but situates it with the “generally feminized space of participatory research” (p. 43). To this, she shares that,

...the experience of female researchers such as myself of never being ‘participatory enough’ – and the guilt attached to that feeling – may be an indicator of something altogether different. The unspecified, and unspecifiable, metric for being sufficiently participatory, or for producing research that is sufficiently action-oriented...sets researchers up for inevitable failure – or, at least, the constant fear of not having done ‘enough.’ (Kennelly, 2018, p. 43)

The interrogation that Kennelly introduces on the fundamental nature of CPBR resonates with my own sentiment that I ‘failed’ to realize a collaborative project. I reflect further on the specific circumstances that led to my orientation towards an alternate, more theoretically situated, methodology in my fifth chapter, but part of that reflexive analysis is to also address the underlying assumptions of CBPR methodologies as well.

2.1.2 Reorientation towards ‘Doing’ Theory (*‘thinking through’*)

This research project is ultimately oriented towards a methodology of *doing theory*, rather than *using theory*. Doing theory means “to work the materials that social theorists and philosophers offer to engage in abstract knowledge and ideas” (Pryke et al., 2003, p. 1). My understanding of the method of ‘thinking through research’ is informed by human geographers, Pryke, Rose and Whatmore (2003) as well as their co-contributors cited here and has revolutionized how I understand research. The methodological steps for my research project did not follow the submission and approval of my thesis proposal. In many ways, the object(s) of the research existed, occurred or were consulted before I had formulated my research questions. An analysis is ultimately what I offer, and the objects of my analysis are a series of research engagements and the material consulted through

them. In this approach, I consider analysis and writing up, as Crang (2003) suggests, as a “creative process of producing order out of [my] materials” (p. 127). He urges us to recognize that “thinking and analysis are not abstract processes or theoretical models or rules that occur purely in our heads but involve the manipulation and orchestration of a range of materials that occur in specific places” (Crang, 2003, p. 128). As social scientists, Bingham (2003) offers that “it is all too rarely...that we are encouraged to bring writing up to the forefront of our thoughts in the same ways as we are other parts of the research process” (pp. 145–146). Taking this approach seriously requires dissolving the notion that writing up is “unproblematic and transparent in practice” (Bingham, 2003, p. 146). Even as my research engagements themselves had come to a close at the time of formulating this thesis, my intent of actively ‘doing theory’ – the process of reflexively writing up my materials – resulted in an ongoing data-generating process.

In this spirit, the ‘field’ as I have previously understood it (for instance: Yellowknife as the presumed site of my research), is not as Whatmore (2003) explains “out there waiting to be discovered; rather, it is already linguistically constructed, and the researcher’s aim must be imaginatively to reformulate this construction in such a way that new avenues can be opened up, new ideas and practices can flow” (p. 78). While it would be straightforward to define the field as the geographical region that my research is concerned with and my time spent within these confines, my research engagements exceed these spatial and temporal boundaries. The ‘field’ of this study is thus comprised of many experiences, interactions, materials, and sites where the analysis of these objects has and continues to take place. That includes everything from my predeparture orientation alongside other graduate student RAs, and the readings assigned before setting foot in

Denendeh, to my shared Yellowknife office space and its community gardens. My ‘field’ also extends from the windowless office of first year political economy students on the 15th floor of Dunton Tower to the sunny spare room in the house I was living in with my plants, where I spent more time than I ever imagined due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.1.3 Feminist Ethic of Care (*‘thinking with’*)

In the process of working through my research, I have been cautioned to be mindful of who I ‘think with’ (thanks to Dr. Emilie Cameron whose scholarship and teachings have had incredible influence on my research). María Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) challenges conventional approaches in academic thinking with regards to the creation of knowledge and building networks of solidarity. From her close reading of Donna Haraway’s standpoint feminist theory, Puig de la Bellacasa describes the method of *thinking with* to revalorize what we can consider ‘care’ – extending this notion to the manner in which we take up fellow thinkers and their ideas in academia. Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) conceptualizes *care* outside of the hegemonic conception of morals, ethics or romanticism, as a relational form of thinking and knowing. Building off of Haraway’s words, “nothing comes without its world,” Puig de la Bellacasa (2012) articulates a practice of reading – and thinking – with care. Puig de la Bellacasa (2011) extends Bruno Latour’s philosophical contribution – who presented a method of making matters of *fact*, matters of *concern* – by making these matters of *care*. She offers this a means of “troubling the distance of typical scholarly work [to] transform the affective change of things, challenging our relationship with the ‘objects’ of research” (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2011, p. 98). As one of the major objects of my research is the *material* read through my engagements, I take from these two feminist scholars an ethic of reading, thinking and critiquing said materials with an

affective engagement of care. I consider the theorists whose contributions I carefully read and write with through the research process, in also considering those whose scholarship I am concerned with as matters of care.

2.1.4 Positional Reflexivity

The approach I take to my positionality is informed by feminist theorists who dispel the possibility of objective knowledge and argue that subjectivity itself is fluid and positional (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012; Rose, 1997). Each of the following positions carry particular meaning in the context of carrying out research in the North: southerner, researcher, white settler⁶. I do not assume to understand at any given moment how these intersecting positions are perceived by others for whom this research may be important, but I consider my role in relation to this research as an ongoing, reflexive process. I am the descendent of white settlers of mixed-European heritage who settled in North America and the Caribbean respectively. I mention this in the context on my northern research because it serves as a reminder that positionality is inherently relational. Prior to my research in the NWT, the north-south dichotomy carried different meaning for having spent much of my upbringing between Toronto and Port of Spain (Trinidad and Tobago). Through my engagements I adjusted to hearing references to the ‘south’ with a constant reminder that that no one is talking about the Caribbean. With respect to locality of my research in the subarctic, I adopt north/south frame to refer to the northern/southern parts of Canada respectively.

⁶ There is necessary debate around who should be included/excluded from this identifier. I use Battell Lowman & Barker's (2015) construction of settler in this work: “as an identity mirrors the construction of ‘Indigenous’ in contemporary terms: a broad collective of peoples with commonalities through particular connections to land and place. For Settler people, however, those connections are forged through violence and displacement of Indigenous communities and nations” (p. 2). I consider this term to be unsettling in and of itself, as the settler colonial project insists on naturalizing the existence of settlers on stolen lands. It is not uncomplicated, but like others (Estes & TallBear, 2020) I think its use *can* signify a thoughtful engagement with our relation (as benefactors, accomplices, agents, etc.) to workings of settler colonial control.

To add to the stated identities that I occupy through varying interactions, the specific positions I held through this research are relevant too. These include:

- 1) My quasi-employment status with **Ecology North** – though technically funded through FLEdGE Research, I often presented as an employee with the organization when coordinating on their behalf;
- 2) My master's student-status with the **Institute of Political Economy** – though with all things considered, most northern colleagues and acquaintances who knew me as a student, associated me with Wilfrid Laurier University (the institutional home of the research group I was employed by);
- 3) My researcher-status with the **Gordon Foundation** – which again was at times misinterpreted as an employee or at least a representative of the organization, inherently shaping how my positionality was received by those encountered while I was wearing this hat.

These positions informed my research process, influenced how others encountered me, and afforded me specific opportunities and privileges. Yet, they do not qualify me as an expert on northern food systems. No amount of knowledge gained on this subject should give me that status. However important it has been for me to familiarize myself with the 'local' food through RA positions and the reading that accompanied them, I know my knowledge on these topics only scratches the surface.

2.2 Methodological Approach: Reflexive Analysis of Research Engagements

As I was exploring thesis topics, my supervisor encouraged me to use a case study approach to compare my research engagements, given their divergent methodological approaches, partners and degrees of community-involvement. However, despite their differences, and given their overlapping timelines, the framing and conclusions drawn in each of these engagements continued to shape one another. For a while, I also thought I could bridge these two distinct projects into one, allowing me to focus on their synergies. While I believe a comparative case study approach would reveal important insights, I finally decided that analyzing the differences between the two engagements would not help me fully address

the main questions I had about settler colonialism and food systems work which animate this thesis. Instead, in this document I make the deliberate choice to reflect on the likenesses of these two engagements alongside other practical and theoretical influences. It is these reflections, in their totality, that inform the arguments and conclusions I draw herein on northern food systems research. The next section provides an introduction to each of the two northern projects (each of which I continue to refer to as “research engagements”) that I participated in between 2018 and 2020.

2.2.1 Introduction to two Research Engagements

1) First Engagement: FLEdGE Research

The first case is composed of two RA positions sponsored by FLEdGE Research over two summers leading into the beginning of my MA (2018) and following the completion of my coursework (2019). FLEdGE is a community-based multiyear research grant funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. My positions held with FLEdGE were characterized as preliminary fieldwork and involved being embedded in the ‘community’ for months at a time – affording me the opportunity to become familiar with the landscape of food systems in the city. These two positions based in Yellowknife involved supporting food initiatives with our community partner Ecology North – a territorial non-profit based out of Yellowknife whose goals as an environmental organization include encouraging more local food production. This work overlaps with support I brought to the NWT Food Network (TFN) – a newly incorporated territorial organization centred around food. My Yellowknife-based research engagements also entailed the co-coordination of an annual harvest fair with the Dech̓ta Nàowo department of Yellowknives Dene First Nation (YKDFN), as well as a community supported agricultural food program with the

Yellowknife Farmers Market (YKFM) and two participating community centres (Hope's Haven and the Centre for Northern Families). The nature of these collaborations varies from one to the next, but each share a similar goal of promoting local food systems within the territory, and Yellowknife specifically. These experiences inform my research but the project itself does not emerge from a research priority identified by any of these community partners or affiliated organizations.

2) Second Engagement: Mitacs/the Gordon Foundation

The second case is a research project based on the results of the Gordon Foundation's Northern Policy Hackathon to generate "innovative policy recommendations" for country/traditional food hosted in Nain in 2017. Roughly thirty representatives from communities across the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat participated, producing comprehensive policy recommendations (TGF, 2018) and identifying several research priorities on country/traditional food. One of the research priorities appeared in an internship posting online for an eligible graduate student to complete an economic cost benefit analysis of country/traditional food relative to other food systems in a northern community. The funding for this project was provided by the Gordon Foundation and matched by Mitacs Accelerate program. My thesis supervisor and I responded to their post but proposed to shift the analysis from a cost-based approach to explore and compare the "value" of country/traditional food instead. In our research proposal, we asked:

How can we describe and measure the value of harvesting, processing and sharing (costs as well as benefits) country/traditional foods in economic, nutritional, environmental and socio-cultural terms? How can we compare the value of country/traditional food with food that comes from other provisioning systems (e.g. imported/market-based foods and local food production)? (Stollmeyer & Andrée, 2020)

The research project we proposed also garnered support from representatives of the On the Land Unit of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT)⁷. Based on this, and the fact that I had overlapping work in the territory, the geographic scope of this research project was the NWT. My internship occurred adjacent to the completion of my coursework and FLEdGE engagements; despite having different methods, the research questions similarly fit into the broader efforts to support local food systems in the North.

This research project emerged under the premise that incorporating multiple dimensions of value of country/traditional foods into a singular conceptual framework would offer a more robust and dynamic representation of their significance [See Appendix C.2]. Moving through the various stages of this research project, it was evident to my supervisor and I that the methodology did not match the research question. From the beginning, the framing of the research problem was very much from an outsider, top-down approach yet the methodological steps graduated to collaboration at a community level. What was absent in our proposal was an expression of interest from a community representative for this research of this nature. While we found this research endeavour to be a generative and important one, ultimately the usefulness of the project was lost without research partners to complete it with. We recommended that any project of this nature should be undertaken with a community-based partner lined up from the beginning.

⁷ The project resonated with the findings from the NWT Country Forum, hosted in Yellowknife (Oct 31 to Nov 2, 2017), which emphasized a desire to increase food security by improving access to country foods; the need to find sustainable funding models for community-driven programs and initiatives aimed at sustaining country/traditional foods; in addition to the need for programs, initiatives and research to respond to the needs of communities (Ellis et al., 2018). I had previously held a research assistant position with Wilfrid Laurier University creating a state of knowledge report on a research priority identified in the forum. The forum was one of the early stages of a larger strategy (previously the Country Food Strategy that later became the Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan and the Traditional Knowledge Action Plan).

2.2.2 Description of Sources

This thesis project is the result of a reflexive analysis of these two previous research engagements. It involves thinking through tensions encountered (identified here in as “themes”) and bringing these into dialogue with accounts of similar tensions in the academic literature. My goal is to interpret some of the tensions I experienced and, through that, offer lessons to other researchers. The themes I work through in my analyses include both process- and subject-oriented tensions. This method brings together a combination of primary and secondary findings through the lens of the theoretical framework outlined below. Though many materials were consulted, including the primary sources from my research engagements (scoping interviews for Mitacs and preliminary fieldwork in Yellowknife), the main sources I examine in my reflexive analyses are my research logs, email correspondences, research licenses, draft thesis proposals, and unpublished reports. I also examine relevant policy documents (federal, territorial and municipal legislation, strategies, and reports) alongside my research-related documents. The materials (academic literatures) I consulted within the ‘field’ are also objects of this study, as they influenced my expectations, experiences and reflections.

2.2.3 Introduction to four Academic Literatures

This section introduces the four major academic literatures that I engage with in this thesis. The disconnects between some of this academic literature, particularly concerning if and how they engage with settler colonialism, are also critical to the arguments I make in this thesis. I divide these materials into four categories, each of which I engage with in distinct ways. While there is some overlap with my theoretical influences, these literatures are predominantly consulted as materials. Drawing these into these categories is somewhat

arbitrary, as they are not all mutually exclusive but have clear distinctions. In organizing these literatures into categories, I have been able to bring disparate ideas into conversation with one-another, revealing new considerations for these respective bodies of scholarship.

I assign the name of **northern food systems research** to include literature on food security/sovereignty, local food production, country/traditional food harvesting, and food/climate change in the subarctic and arctic (with emphasis on literature within the NWT). The fields of study are wide ranging – including public health, nutrition, food and agricultural sciences, ecology, human/environmental geography and many others. My read of these research literatures, in part, brought me to the conclusion that settler colonialism has been insufficiently attended to. Through my third chapter I critically engage a small sample of these northern literatures. I draw on other critical engagements with food security/sovereignty (Daigle, 2017; Dawson, 2020; Hiebert & Power, 2016; Loring & Gerlach, 2015; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013), wildlife management (Gombay, 2014; Parlee & Caine, 2018; Sandlos, 2003) and climate change (Belfer et al., 2017; Cameron, 2012) to build my critique. An important note is that my critical review of the literature is not systematic. My representation of these literatures is by no means comprehensive but is instead a pointed portrayal of northern research engagement(s) with colonialism.

There is a historical element to my third, fourth and sixth chapters, so I consult the work of historians or other scholars writing **historical materialisms, environmental, political and cultural history**. These include histories of extractivism (Keeling & Sandlos, 2012; Kuyek, 2019; Peyton & Keeling, 2017), treaty-making (Abel, 1993; Fumoleau, 2004), conservationism (Johnson, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2020; Parlee, Sandlos, et al., 2018; Sandlos, 2008), food (Burnett et al., 2016; Mosby, 2012; Walters, 2012), agrarianism

(Johnston, 2018; Piper & Sandlos, 2007); and Indigenous-State relations (Abele, 2009; Coulthard, 2014; Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014; Nahanni, 1977). I consult these as secondary sources in historicizing food issues, alongside complementary grey literature from sources including the GNWT, the Dene Nation, YKDFN, the TRC and the Berger Inquiry. By situating these histories within a settler colonial lens, I make deliberate attempt to disrupt benign narratives about food. In this attempt, however, there is a risk that I will create a damage-centred narrative (cf: Tuck, 2009). I do not feel it is appropriate for me to overemphasize how traumatic these histories are, and I am intentional about trying to let the violence of the State, Church and other settler colonial actors speak for itself.

I draw from practitioners and researchers' critical engagements with **CBPR methodologies** in my reflexive analysis in the fifth chapter. While many more literatures shape my understanding of this methodology (Brown & Strega, 2015; Castleden et al., 2012; Gaudry, 2015; Kirby et al., 2017; Ochocka & Janzen, 2014; Strand et al., 2003; Whetung & Wakefield, 2019), I am able to make sense of my own challenges in research through the reflexive work on community-based, participatory action, and other forms of community-engaged research (Gallagher, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Kennelly, 2018; Kepkiewicz et al., 2019; Tuck & Del Vecchio, 2018). These reflections, along with other critiques (de Leeuw et al., 2012, 2013) informed my criticisms of CBPR methodologies and guided me through my discomforts in these research engagements. These contributions help me see past my 'failures' in research in drawing attention to the fact that the dilemmas we encounter in research are limitless.

In the sixth chapter of my thesis, I work with literatures on **human/nonhuman relations** by turning to the contributions from Indigenous studies and anthropology

(specifically ontological politics and relational ontologies). The Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers I reference challenge anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism by animating other-than-human beings, in addition to rejecting the division between humans and nature entrenched in the colonial-capitalist worldview. I preference those that are northern-based (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; Cruikshank, 2005; Todd, 2018) but also draw on examples from the Global South – many of which are articulated by non-Indigenous anthropologists (Blaser, 2009; de la Cadena, 2010; Escobar, 2018; Verran, 2013; Viveiros de Castro, 2013). I take seriously the intervention from Dakota scholar Kim TallBear (2012) who responded to the burgeoning attention to human/nonhuman relations at the time: “the academy is now being infiltrated by *non-Indigenous* voices articulating the idea that life/not life is too binary and restrictive” (para. 23). Due to a lack of citational reference to Indigenous scholarship in emerging human/animal studies, she argues later that,

Indigenous thinkers have important contributions to make to conversations in which human societies rethink the range of nonhuman beings with whom we see ourselves in intimate relation and, precisely because of the varied ways in which indigenous peoples relate, our possibilities for being the world...Now that theorists in a range of fields are seeking to dismantle those hierarchies, we should remember that not everyone needs to summon a new analytical framework or needs to renew a commitment to “the vitality of [so-called] things.” Indigenous standpoints that never constructed hierarchies in quite the same way can and should be at the forefront of this new ethnographic and theoretical work. We can converse with the existing work and bring additional insights. (TallBear, 2017, p. 193)

I turn to literature on human/nonhuman relations to provincialize colonial-capitalist logic and deconstruct the equivocal use the concept of sustainability, but do so with some trepidation given the important critiques to settler scholars’ abstraction of Indigenous epistemologies/ontologies (Todd, 2014; Watts, 2013). This means being cautious about who I cite, as well as how I represent Indigenous thought. The influence of Indigenous studies in my thesis exceeds articulations of human/nonhuman relations and are largely the

foundation of my theoretical framework. Now as I develop my framework, I introduce the broader influences Indigenous studies on my research, along with the importance of decolonial and settler colonial studies, Marxist political economy, and political ontology.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

There are several theoretical frames, tools and concepts that have profoundly shaped how I frame and explore my research questions. A significant contribution of my thesis is developing the theoretical framework through which my questions about settler colonialism are taken up. In the following subsections, I situate these theoretical influences in relation to my research process as it has evolved. This includes tracing how my understanding of what it means to ‘contend with settler colonialism’ has shifted over the duration of my studies. I begin with the influences of Indigenous Resurgence and explain how these literatures shaped my understanding of settler colonialism. I follow this with articulations of Research as Colonial, where I describe the colonality of the pursuit of knowledge and the role of academic institutions in serving the settler colonial project (as well as refusals in research to resist this). In Theorizing Settler Colonialism, I introduce the prominent conception of settler colonialism that I carry through this document. In this subsection I also explain the relationship between anti-colonial and anti-capitalist theories upon which I situate my understanding of the global nature of colonial-capitalism. Next, in Decentering Settler Colonialism, I refer to the theoretical influences that urge me to resist a deterministic approach to settler colonialism which are integral to my sixth chapter. Finally, in the subsection, Uncommoning, I introduce a set of theoretical orientations that direct me away from the determinism of a rigid settler colonial frame.

2.3.1 Indigenous Resurgence

Indigenous resurgence literatures have had a profound impact on me and the approach taken through this project. My early encounters with resurgence literatures were in a seminar taught by Dr. Kahente Horn-Miller in the first semester of my coursework. This course transformed how I interact with the dominant representations of Indigenous nations and peoples in both academic and mainstream media, the majority of which I now understand as reinforcing settler colonial legitimacy. The seven of us enrolled in the seminar were tasked with creating our own definition of Indigenous resurgence as we encountered different theorizations and practices of Indigenous resurgence in Canada. Through a process of consensus-based decision-making, we defined it as follows:

Indigenous Resurgence: The collective practice of asserting personhood, defined and strengthened by the past, present and future self, to transcend the imbalance caused by the dysfunctional relationship of settler colonialism. The goal of which is to restore a balanced relationship between Indigenous individual embodiment and community that reaffirms language, teaching, governance, families, space/time, the natural world, body and mind. (Students of INDG 5102F, Carleton University, Ottawa, 2018)

This exercise, along with other teachings Kahente offered, urged us to think carefully about how our language and framings shape and delimit what can be described. In some cases, this meant coming to terms with the limits of the English language to describe the agency of other-than-human-beings, or how a concept like ‘dispossession’ reinforces the colonial way of relating (possessing) land. The impact this course had on me exceeds what is in my thesis, but in relation to my research, these teachings made me think differently about what I had read and written. Before I had the language or knowledge to express why, I moved through many readings with unease as I felt that there was something very troubling with many scholarly representations of people and life in the North. I started to see the influence of resurgence literatures in my research as I became more sensitive to paternalistic, pathologizing or vilifying language, as well as the retrenchment of colonial logic in

research. Though imperfectly, these teachings helped sharpen my tools of analysis and locate how certain portrayals reinforce the legitimacy of the settler State⁸ and undermine the self-determination of peoples and nations that researchers aim/claim to serve.

While there are vital lessons for all researchers in this body of scholarship, as a politic, I am not certain there is a place for settlers to represent Indigenous resurgence in their/our research (L. B. Simpson, 2016). As a result, I do not aim to build on or speak to resurgent politics through this work, but I consider several contributions by Indigenous scholars writing on resurgence as foundational to the questions that animate this thesis. It is through articulations on Indigenous resurgence that I started to develop my understanding of settler colonialism. For instance, Glen Sean Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016) characterize the relation between settler colonial and Indigenous resurgent forces in the following:

Attacking the relationality of Indigenous political orders through the strategic targeting of Indigenous peoples' relationship to land has been a site of intense white supremacy and heteropatriarchy, serving as a mechanism to submit Indigenous lands and labor to the demands of capitalist accumulation and state-formation. Historically, Indigenous peoples have responded to this violence and negation through fierce and loving mobilization. Indigenous resistance and resurgence in response to the dispossessive forces of settler colonization, in both historical and current manifestations, employ measures and tactics designed to protect Indigenous territories and to reconnect Indigenous bodies to land through the practices and forms of knowledge that these practices continuously regenerate. (p. 274)

From this and other theorizations, I understand the possessive, dominating, capitalist, extractivist, ableist, white and heteropatriarchal characteristics of the settler State (Arvin et

⁸ As Abele (2009) argues, "in simple institutional and behavioural terms, 'the state' in northern Canada is easily the most intricate and unusual in the country" (p. 39). I have taken the broad category of multi-level, evolving governmental structures into my conception of 'the State' but specify federal, territorial (NWT), municipal (Yellowknife) when necessary (including Dominion/Crown in historical accounts).

al., 2013; Belcourt & Nixon, 2018; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Morgensen, 2010; A. Simpson, 2014; L. B. Simpson, 2017). These teachings have upended and unsettled my perception of Indigenous-State relations in Canada and demanded that I consider how other agents beyond the State contribute to upholding settler colonial logics of control. Given my position as a graduate student and researcher, for me, this means contending with the role of research in reproducing these logics.

2.3.2 Research as Colonialism and Refusals in Research

In this section, I introduce contributions that bring the attention to the relationship between academic research and colonialism. I describe the colonial character of the pursuit of knowledge and the contention of having an anti-colonial orientation in research. I introduce examples of refusals in research from scholars working to interrupt colonial research tendencies – based on these I name my own research refusals that I carry through this thesis.

When I speak of the colonality of research, I am at once referring to the settler colonial institution as well as the colonial pursuit of knowledge. The colonial commitments of the academy may be better known, for instance, at my home institution we start our meetings and sign off our emails with an acknowledgement that Carleton University sits on the unceded and unsundered territories of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg Nation. In addition to the occupation of stolen lands, the colonality of the Canadian academy takes many forms and, in my experience, confronting the colonial nature of pursuing research within these institutions was not intuitive. David Garneau (2012) describes the colonality of research in this way:

The colonial attitude, including its academic branch, is characterized by a drive to see, to traverse, to know, to translate (to make equivalent), to own and to exploit. It is based on the belief that everything should be accessible,

is ultimately comprehensible, and a potential commodity or resource, or at least something that can be recorded or otherwise saved. (p. 29)

This is how I start to understand knowledge as one of the many *resources* that colonialism seeks to master, extract, or subsume. Of course, there are other pursuits of knowledge within and outside of the Canadian academy that may not fit this colonial characterization, but I am speaking to research as I know it. “Research is just one form of knowing,” Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2014) state, “but in the Western academy, it eclipses all others. In this way, the relationship of research to other human ways of knowing resembles a colonizing formation, acquiring, claiming, absorbing, consuming” (p. 237). Despite my fairly recent occupation as a researcher, coming to terms with the colonial practices of research requires an incredible amount of unlearning and is an ongoing commitment.

I am at once, presented with the contradictions of striving towards an anti-colonial orientation in research as I contend with the colonial approaches that have been employed in the name of research. I learn of some of these *technologies* in Audra Simpson’s (2014) account of the relation between colonialism and anthropology:

In different moments, anthropology has imagined itself to be a voice, and in some disciplinary iterations, *the* voice of the colonized. This modern interlocutory role had a serious material and ideational context; it accorded with the imperatives of Empire and in this, specific technologies of rule that sought to obtain space and resources, to define and know the difference that it constructed in those spaces, and to then govern those within. (p. 95)

Though there are specific histories of anthropology as a tool of imperial and colonial rule, given the methodological influences of this discipline on other social sciences (participant observation, fieldwork, etc.), there are important teachings for the broader academic research community. She continues, “knowing and representing people within those places required more than military might; it required the *methods and modalities of knowing*

[emphasis added]—in particular, categorization, ethnological comparison, linguistic translation, and ethnography” (A. Simpson, 2014, p. 95). This forces me to confront my assumption that *knowing* and *representing* issues that I deem important is inherently good or is enough to bring about the change I hope to see. Tuck and Yang (2014) assert that “as social science researchers, we are trained to believe that research is useful (even if only vaguely useful) and that it can compel needed change (even if the theory of change is somewhat fuzzy, or flawed)” (p. 236). Indeed, underlying premise that “research itself leads to change” (p. 236) is disrupted if we consider who the academy has historically and continues to predominantly serve.

As a graduate student concerned with the colonial nature of the pursuit of knowledge, I recognize that I come to this understanding from a place of privilege. The strongest critiques of the academy have come from those who it has historically excluded, and I am indebted to the contributions made by many whose voices have and continue to be ignored or marginalized. Tuck and Yang (2014) argue, “as an apparatus of settler colonial knowledge [the academy] domesticates, denies, and dominates other forms of knowledge. It too refuses. It sets limits, but disguises itself as limitless” (p. 235). Their contributions lead me to not only be critical of the institution that I am employed through, but also of the ways that I navigate academic/research spaces. Being a researcher concerned with settler colonialism is not only a matter of directing my attention to the ongoing consequences of the settler colonial project but also confronting my complicity in upholding it through this work. I find myself striving for what Tuck and Yang (2012) call *settler harm reduction*, that is “the curricular-pedagogical project of critical consciousness” which they say is an absolute necessity in the revival of “practices and intellectual life

outside of settler ontologies,” but this does not lead to decolonization (pp. 21–22). As I try to understand the limits of what can be achieved within a settler colonial institution, it is an ongoing struggle to know how (or if) these anti-colonial teachings can be applied in a research setting.

Informed by these teachings, I often wonder: how do I present on settler harm reduction in a conference? How much space do I feel comfortable taking up working through my white settler guilt and/or complicity? Do we need more white settler voices presenting on Indigenous ‘issues?’ Can I take up settler colonialism without creating a damage-centred narrative? How do I bring Indigenous thought and philosophy into my research without abstracting and misrepresenting it, or what Pasternak (2017) calls a “case of ‘white-splaining’ Indigenous forms of belonging to the land”? (p. 9). I do not offer concrete answers to these questions through my thesis, but I return to them often as I think and write as part of my practice of positional reflexivity.

I take from these theoretical contributions on settler colonialism within the academy a practice of *refusals* that also have methodological implications. I understand refusals as a method through Simpson’s (2007, 2014) *Ethnographic Refusal*. However, it is the applications of her original theorization by other scholars (Moffit et al., 2015; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Zahara, 2016) that helped me apply this method in my research. The refusals I commit to are inspired by these contributions: Refusal #1: direct my gaze towards the structures of power and away from those in its harm. In this thesis, I am deliberate about bringing the agents of settler colonial processes in as subjects, whether that is the State, the Church or the academy. Refusal #2: resist reproducing damage-centred narratives. I refrain

from overemphasizing victimhood or vulnerability to advance my claims. Refusal #3: I refuse to share stories that are not mine to tell.

This thesis is driven by a strong desire to disrupt what Moffit, Chetwynd and Todd (2015) refer to as the ‘northern research industry’. In their brief, thought-provoking meditations, these three scholars prompted me to locate my own engagements in the complex of academic research in the North, which they point out is still widely “controlled (i.e., proposed, carried out, and managed) by non-Northerners and non-Northern institutions” (Moffit et al., 2015, para. 4). Using Audra Simpson's (2007, 2014) work on ethnographic refusal as a frame, they conclude that, “[as] students complicit in the research industry, we humbly submit that we need a total research industry interruptus...one that ensures the research paradigm is *truly* Northern control” (Moffit et al., 2015, para. 19). I encountered their contribution at a disconcerting moment in my research, following the completion of my engagements in Yellowknife and internship with Mitacs, while uncomfortable with the prospect of producing a thesis on food systems that I remained very distant to. While their piece confirmed many of my anxieties as a southern-based researcher working in the North, it also provided an opening – that is, to consider the ways research has and continues to shape northern food systems. In Moffit’s meditation, they explain that,

Research in the territories began to boom after the Second World War. In the 1960s and early 1970s, the influx of researchers and bureaucrats was intimately tied to the ‘modernizing’ agenda of the federal government and the development agenda of industry and government. Since that time, the Northern research industry has undoubtedly poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the pockets of southern researchers, institutions, and consultants. But what have we, the North, got to show for it? What impact have we, researchers, made? What is our role and our place in this system? (Moffit et al., 2015, para. 5)

Historizing the emergence of the northern research industry in the same era of colonial interventions that I take up through this thesis (State-led agriculture, food programs etc.),

prompted me to consider the role of research as it has interacted with these practices. Though I do so with trepidation, their meditations ignited an idea that I could finish what I had started while centring the concerns and tensions I had felt through my engagements. Their interruption is largely what inspired me to critically examine existing research literatures alongside my own engagements as a way of turning the gaze away from people in the North and towards those of us who have been involved in this research.

2.3.3 Theorizing Settler Colonialism

There are many contributions that could be consulted to theorize settler colonialism, but in this thesis, I work with a fairly limited conceptualization. In this section, I introduce conceptual framing of settler colonialism (compared to other forms of colonialism) and clarify my use of other related terms including colonial-capitalism (within settler colonies).

It is appropriate to cite the contribution by Patrick Wolfe (2006) in conceptualizing the persistence of settler colonies as structures. He writes, “settler colonies were (are) premised on the elimination of native societies. The split tensing reflects a determinate feature of settler colonization. The colonizers come to stay – invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). While there are other important theorizations that I would have liked to consider in this project (Arvin, 2019; Kēhaulani Kauanui, 2016; Lethabo King et al., 2020; Murphy, 2016; Purewal, 2020), the conceptualization of settler colonialism that I have maintained throughout my research is informed by Wolfe and others expanding on his theorization. Coulthard (2014) expands on the characterization of settler colonialism as persistent structure, rather than event, in explaining that there is nothing ‘historical’ about it. Rather, “settler-colonial formations are *territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*” (p. 125). Coulthard (2014) contextualizes this in Canada to explain that “the

means by which the colonial state has sought to eliminate Indigenous peoples in order to gain access to our lands and resources have modified over the last two centuries [but] the *ends* have always remained the same: to shore up continued access to Indigenous peoples' territories for the purposes of state formation, settlement, and capitalist development" (p. 125). He demonstrates that "territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7). Tuck and Yang (2012) emphasize how continued access to land remains central to the settler colonial project, building on Wolfe's concept they add:

Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation. (p. 5)

Considering the centrality of land in any form of food procurement makes these contributions all the more relevant – and this has only been made clearer through the application by other critical food scholars in Canada, despite not having a northern-focus (Cote, 2016; Daigle, 2017; Grey & Patel, 2015; Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2018; Rotz & Kepkiewicz, 2018). Coulthard's work is especially pertinent, for tracing colonial dispossession and Indigenous struggle in the territories that my research is concerned with. Taking his work seriously necessitates contending with settler coloniality of food systems.

I develop a fuller understanding of the logics of the colonial-capitalist 'worldview' (Euro, Western, Modern) in my sixth chapter, largely based on Cristina Rojas' (2016) conceptualizations on 'colonial and capitalist modernity as a universal project'. Rojas (2016) describes the limitations of critiques to *capitalist modernity* that fail to contend with colonialism, as well as the "under-theorization of the conditions of production of things that are not produced as commodities, including nature, human life and communal

conditions of production, and relations of care and reproduction” (pp. 373–374). As Rojas brings colonial discourse into (Marxist) critiques of capitalism, Coulthard (2014) expands on Marx’s theory of primitive accumulation to characterize colonial rule and capitalist accumulation in the settler colonial context of Canada. He draws on common critiques of Marxist theory, including the ‘temporal framing’ that kept primitive accumulation tied to a particular period in time, and the ‘normative developmentalism’ that assumes a modernist view of ‘progress’ in Marx’s *Capital* (Coulthard, 2014, p. 9). However, he also argues that this problematic feature of the ‘inevitability’ and ‘beneficial’ nature of primitive accumulation is redressed through Marx’s later work. Coulthard (2014) highlights the criticisms of Marx’s anti-ecological tendencies and brings forward his own conceptualisation of *grounded normativity* as a more “ecologically-attentive critique of colonial-capitalist accumulation” (p. 14). I take from both scholars that any critique of colonialism or capitalism is incomplete without attending to their interconnectivity⁹.

I understand the concepts of settler colonialism and colonial-capitalism as inherently intertwined but not interchangeable. Tuck and Yang (2012) make the necessary distinction of settler colonies (from external or internal colonies) as the lands remain occupied – rendering any application of postcolonial studies unfit (pp. 4–5). In this thesis I refer to settler colonialism as a particular form of colonial domination in settler states like Canada, the US, New Zealand or Australia and the forces of colonial-capitalism as global.

⁹ The hyphenated colonial-capitalism communicates that “capitalism is inextricably bound up with historical and ongoing colonialism” (Coburn, 2016, p. 289) and can be read through other literatures on settler colonialism in Canada (Collard et al., 2015; Daigle, 2017, 2018; Hall, 2020). I consider the logics of colonial-capitalism to be integral to those Euro, Western, and Modern, and for this reason keep them under one frame (but leave intact in their direct use in cited works). Others refer to “settler colonial capitalism” (Ballantyne, 2014; Rotz, 2017) which would be appropriate for my research in the NWT but not all of those who I cite to describe the character of colonial-capitalism are writing about settler colonies so I leave it open.

From this understanding, we can draw connections in the ways that colonial-capitalism is deployed across contexts that are settler colonial, postcolonial, neocolonial and so on (i.e., the Canadian state's investment in colonial-capitalist extractivism operates on Indigenous territories within the settler colonial borders of Canada, as well as across international borders in the Global South). To develop my argument around the settler coloniality of northern food issues, I refer to colonial-capitalist modes of production, accumulation and dispossession that serve the settler colonial project. In many of these instances, the settler State pursues policies in favour of colonial-capitalist extraction and development, but not all settler colonial policies are necessarily capitalist (Collard & Dempsey, 2020).

2.3.4 Decentring Settler Colonialism

The above sections center settler colonialism, but it is equally important to think critically about the potential consequences of doing just that in contemporary research. In this section, I describe the theoretical influences that urge me to avoid a sort of *settlercoloniocentrism*. While I consider confronting settler colonialism to be absolutely necessary for my research on food systems in the territory, through this thesis I also consider the consequences of this frame. I have come to recognize a narrowmindedness in my approach regarding settler colonialism's impacts on northern food systems. After grappling with what I observed as an unwillingness (or at least insufficient engagement) with the coloniality of contemporary food issues in the North (on the ground, in my reading and in subsequent conversations), I started to second guess my own research and approach to it. I had to ask if my fixation on the intricate and numerous ways that settler colonialism has/continues to permeate through northern food systems is to present these issues as unsurmountable? As I formulated my thesis proposal, I was apprehensive about centring

settler colonialism too profoundly. These apprehensions account for the second question I pose through this thesis – in which I ask about both the possibilities and *limitations* of a settler colonial framework.

My first encounter with such a critical engagement with the settler colonial framing was at the book launch of an edited series entitled *Settler City Limits* at Carleton University Art Gallery (Dorries, Henry, Hugill, McCreary & Tomiak, 2019). The editors and contributing authors resist the dichotomization of spaces as either Indigenous or settler colonial and consider the harms of overrepresenting settler colonial violence as it delimits Indigenous resistance and life outside of it. Despite the differences between their (urban prairie) research sites and my own, their collective rejection of settler colonial determinism disrupted how I had framed my research. Dorries et al.'s (2019) intervention asked me to slow down and revisit some of the conclusions I had previously drawn in my hyper-awareness to settler colonialism. This means questioning if my preoccupation with the colonality of agriculture is to draw boundaries around who practices it, whether I am perpetuating a colonial/Indigenous binary in northern food systems, and if my framing delimits the potential of food system solutions that sit at the intersection of these binaries. These considerations lie at the core of my reflexive analysis articulated in chapter six.

What I characterize as *decentring* settler colonialism is part of approach that I take up both in the subject matter and the process of this thesis. As part of my process, this requires that I reject the binary thinking that prevails in colonial frameworks and challenge the colonial logic of *either/or* (Gombay & Palomino-Schalscha, 2018) by reorienting towards one of *both/and also* (Tuck, 2009). This approach can be extended to the conclusions I had previously drawn in these research engagements that sharply reproduced

the binaries of colonial frameworks. At once, I work to confront what I perceive as colonial in these encounters, while also avoiding the tendency to give way to the totalizing effect of settler colonialism. Just as the lens of settler colonialism offers a productive space to draw conclusions from, it also presents a risk of overemphasizing settler colonial consequences and delimiting the possibilities of overcoming them. I relate this to the cautions of political economic thinkers Gibson-Graham (2006) in their efforts to decentre capitalism's totalizing and essentializing force from their theorizing to allow for alternatives to it. This risk of exaggerating the deterministic nature of settler colonialism's destruction and underplaying the ongoing resistances to it is like to what Gibson-Graham would consider *capitalocentric* in the deterministic presentation of the destructive nature of capitalism.

2.3.5 Uncommoning: Radical Alterity and Ethic of Incommensurability

To try to do away with the dichotomous and deterministic colonial tendencies, though, is not to ignore settler/Indigenous specificity or distinctness in food systems challenges in the NWT. Here, I introduce the theoretical orientations of radical alterity and an ethic of incommensurability to help confront the limits of commoning and inclusive approaches. Through my research engagements, I have often sought to focus on a common struggle felt by a range of actors in local food systems. For example, while working with predominantly settler-run organizations focused on local food production, I tried to approach food systems in the territory with an inclusive vision – wherein country/traditional harvesting practices would also be represented. I refer to this approach as ‘commoning,’ which is loosely based on Marisol de la Cadena's (2015) *Uncommoning Nature*. This ‘commoning’ approach shaped the earliest renditions of my thesis proposal as I strived to represent disparate actors and food practices as sharing the same food system struggles. For reasons that I continue

to reflect on in my thesis, what I proposed in my early renditions was never formulated into a research project. It is because of my shortcomings that I have started to consider the limitations with common visions of food systems.

Several theoretical orientations help me think through the politics of inclusion/commoning in this research. Mario Blaser (2009, 2014) and others' writing on political ontology (de la Cadena, 2010; Escobar, 2018; Verran, 2013) offer theoretical interventions to think through ontological/epistemological differences and the issues of commoning. I turn to political ontology as I extend my focus from the settler colonial disruptions to food systems to include the impacts on the knowledges that sustain them. From these theorists I gain an understanding that 'explaining away' what is divergent between knowledge systems, and only focusing on what is common between them, is a form of epistemological/ontological violence (Naylor et al., 2018; Rojas, 2016). To avoid this, de la Cadena (2010) suggests to first, "recognize that the world is more than one sionatural formation; [and] to interconnect such plurality without making the diverse worlds commensurable" (p. 361). Blaser (2014) encourages embracing *radical alterity*, which he says, "interrupts these forms of saming" (p. 52). The most critical teaching is to accept there are plural ways of knowing. As someone educated within the colonial-capitalist worldview, I do not claim to have access to Other ways of knowing¹⁰, yet from these theorists I take a commitment to embrace difference/what cannot be known to me.

¹⁰ There is an inherent tension in the choice of words to describe what is different from the colonial-capitalist worldview without perpetuating the binaries it creates (modern/nonmodern, Occident/Orient, subject/object, or self/other). Rojas (2016) explains "this difficulty is compounded by the challenge of explaining the existence and agency of alternative worlds in terms of the 'self' and 'other,' or 'inside' and 'outside,' both of which are modern dichotomous distinctions that rely on the nature and culture divide" (p. 377). I employ the capitalized Other with reference to knowledge systems that colonial-capitalism renders invisible; but not with reference to people as per Radcliffe (2019) "the paradox is that Indigenous populations have been

I learn from Tuck and Yang (2012) an *ethic of incommensurability* to explore tensions between different food practices in my thesis. They claim that “opportunities for solidarity lie in what is incommensurable rather than what is common” (p. 28). As an example, they note that within decolonizing and settler social justice efforts, “there are portions of these projects that simply cannot speak to one another, cannot be aligned or allied” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 28). Their intervention disrupted my assumptions about what food systems organizing ought to look like in the NWT, as did other northern-based (Gombay & Palomino-Schalscha, 2018) and critical food researchers’ (Kepkiewicz, 2016, 2017) mapping of an ethic of incommensurability into their scholarship. For instance, Lauren Kepkiewicz (2017) weaves this ethic through food sovereignty discourses to present the possibility that “settler food sovereignty might come into contention with Indigenous food sovereignty” (p. 175). I consider this ethic as having both *practical* and *theoretical* potential. I am trying to bring attention to particularities in food system challenges, while avoiding the colonial tendency making sense of them through dichotomization. I think of my reorientation towards an ethic of incommensurability not as the means to achieving an end but, rather, as the process of articulating a shift in my thinking about these issues and questions of concern over the duration of my master’s studies.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the foundations of my methodological and theoretical approach to my thesis work. Both methodologically and theoretically speaking, I draw from a wide

constituted as Other to *homo oeconomicus* yet their embeddedness within the economic flows, labour processes and forms of accumulation that make the modern world belie any separation” (p. 11).

range of influences. I introduced the two northern research engagements that are the foundation of my thesis through FLEdGE and Mitacs respectively. Though they generated many insights that are part of my thesis, neither progressed to be the community-engaged project I once hoped for. A simple way of explaining this – though I do not continue to compare them as case studies – is that one entailed a high level of community-engagement, but the prospects of a collaborative research project were missing; and the other had a clearly defined research project, but absent was the interest of a community partner. A combination of these obstacles with my strong desire to pursue a theoretically oriented project, brought me to the approach I take in this research. The evolution of my research can be traced through these diverse contributions, starting with influences of CBPR, moving towards a method of doing theory, and practicing positional reflexivity throughout.

Just as the methodological circumstances of my research changed overtime, my theoretical orientations have as well. In my articulation of my theoretical influences, I started to map these shifts over the duration of my project – particularly with the manner in which I approach settler colonialism in my research. The chapters that follow represent this trajectory – beginning with a heavy emphasis on the settler colonial lens in chapters three and four; followed by an attempt to move away from such a deterministic approach in chapters five and six; bringing me to my concluding chapter where I reflect on the possibilities and limitations of my settler colonial framework.

Chapter 3: Critical Review of Northern Food Systems Literature

Through this thesis, I explore what can be learned about northern food system challenges through a settler colonial frame. This research exploration is rooted in two claims: 1) there is an inextricable link between settler colonialism and contemporary food system issues in the North; and 2) that researchers have insufficiently attended to this entanglement. Through this chapter, I work to substantiate the second claim. This allows me to set up that which follows (chapter four), in which I make a case for the role of settler colonialism in shaping food systems in the NWT. This chapter offers a brief introduction to northern food systems, but its main purpose is to critically engage with selected research literatures that motivated the questions I pose through this project. As I explained in the introduction, this thesis work did not start with my arrival in Yellowknife. Rather, it began with the research literatures I was introduced to prior to travelling north. It is with this understanding that I extend my ‘fieldwork’ to include the literatures read throughout my research engagements.

I read a wide range of research literatures to inform my understanding of food systems in the NWT. The literatures I bring into view in this chapter are those at the intersections of food security/sovereignty, local food production, country/traditional food harvesting, and food/climate change in the North (all of which I consider ‘northern food systems research’). This includes (but is not limited to) research from disciplines including public health, nutrition, food and agricultural sciences, human and environmental geography, and ecology. I cannot offer appraisals of the individual impact of any given research project, rather I engage with these matters through the publications that researchers create to tell the stories of their work. I focus on their publications because the research and relationships that exist outside of what is written exceeds what I could ever

know or have access to. However, what is written, as well as what is omitted matters. As long as researchers continue to translate their research into publications, they contribute to collective understandings – and as Cameron (2012) notes, these contributions “have political and intellectual consequences that reach far beyond the literature itself” (p. 108). The frameworks and concepts that researchers utilize to make sense of their research have consequences for the problems they identify, the conclusions they draw and the ensuing research projects and grants.

The leading questions I begin to address through this chapter are: how do researchers in these bodies of scholarship contend with settler colonial processes? If researchers acknowledge the role of colonialism, how is this presented? This is not a meta-analysis of the literatures I have named, nor is it simply a matter of locating whether the language of ‘settler’ or ‘ongoing’ are used in relation to colonialism. Ultimately, I am interested how researchers working in the North translate the complex and ongoing processes of settler colonialism in their writing. Generally, I find that many researchers represent colonialism in historical, decontextualized or passive ways, in both covert and overt references. I begin this critical review of literature by highlighting examples of these representations of colonialism, using this base to establish my argument that researchers should tend to the persistent impacts of settler colonialism as well. I argue that there are dominant narratives across these research literatures that stem from a depoliticized engagement with the settler colonial histories and realities of the NWT. In section 3.2 of this chapter, I structure my critical engagement through three narratives that need interrupting: 1) biomedicalization; 2) (over)harvesting; and 3) emergent agriculture. I support my arguments with the critiques of scholars like Rudolph and McLachlan (2013)

who aim to politicize how northern food crises are described, as well as Dawson (2020) who advocates for building multiple ‘counter-narratives’ that are based in Indigenous foodways. There are other analytical and discursive studies on the representations of Indigenous peoples and colonialism in the media and academia that reveal similar narratives and I refer to these where applicable (Belfer et al., 2017: climate change in Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand; Hiebert & Power, 2016: food security in Nunavut; Loring & Gerlach, 2015: food security in Northern US/Canada). My narrative-based approach is largely driven by the fact that it is very difficult to build a critique around what is omitted. I recall the advice of one of my professors who cautioned me to be careful not to judge another’s work on terms they never set out to accomplish. This is a good reminder to not read too much into what is absent in individual works, remaining cognizant of the difficult choices researchers make about what can and cannot reasonably be covered. With this advice in mind, I do not set out to critique any given work. Rather, I aim to illustrate the impact of the omission of colonialism and/or the depoliticization of settler colonial processes in these works as I have read them.

The approach I take through this chapter is motivated by similar work that interrogates the (limited) engagement with colonialism in climate change research in the North (Belfer et al., 2017; Cameron, 2012; Ford, 2012). I encountered Cameron’s (2012) critique to climate change vulnerability and adaptation research early in my MA and it had a strong influence on my read of northern literatures. Cameron (2012) finds that often, “colonialism fails to appear as a word or concept in these [vulnerability and adaptation] studies, in spite of the fact that the projects are carried out in communities profoundly shaped by colonization” (p. 104). Though climate change is not a central theme in my thesis

work, my understanding of northern food systems is situated in the context of changing climate, as were my early readings. Cameron (2012) argues that failing to address ongoing colonialism, “has profound consequences...for the ways in which the human dimensions of climate change literature frames its research agenda” (p. 104). I identify a similar pattern in many northern food systems research literatures with the manner that problems are conceptualized and responded to. I maintain that researchers should go beyond addressing the “colonial history” as others have argued (Ford, 2012), to address the ongoing settler colonial practices that continue to shape the lives of people in northern Canada.

3.1 (Settler) Colonialism in Northern Food Systems Research

Before analyzing dominant narratives in the subsequent sections, here I provide examples of limited engagements with settler colonialism in northern research. I also draw on other critical colonial discourses to support my claim that settler colonialism should be tended to differently. My initial impression from reading academic papers documenting northern food system studies was that researchers often miss the opportunity to discuss the role of colonialism in shaping food crises. Aside from more recent northern contributions situated in settler colonial frameworks (Burnett et al., 2016; Gombay, 2014, 2017; Levkoe et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2019), none that I could find discuss settler colonialism and food systems specifically in the NWT. I did, however, encounter many critical contributions on related subjects like land-based practices (cf: Ballantyne, 2014; Coulthard, 2014; Irlbacher-Fox, 2014; Johnson, 2018; Todd, 2018) and extractivism (cf: Hall, 2013, 2016; Hoogeveen, 2015; Peyton & Keeling, 2017). This prompted me to ask how researchers working on food systems in the NWT reckon with settler colonialism in their research. Through a more directed read of northern food system literatures, I found

that there are many accounts of colonialism; but overwhelmingly, they are brief, passive, and decontextualized, in both covert (explained through other processes) and overt (explained as historical events) references. Here, I provide a small sample of the research that exemplifies these tendencies.

Covert references to colonialism lead me to believe that researchers engage with settler colonial processes in a highly depoliticized manner. Researchers commonly identify conditions of vulnerability without connecting them to the colonial processes that create such vulnerable food systems. For example,

Indigenous populations are often more vulnerable to climatic changes because of their close relationship with the environment, their reliance on the land and sea for subsistence purposes, the fact that they are more likely to inhabit areas of more severe impact such as coastal regions, often have lower socioeconomic status, are more socially marginalized, and have less access to quality health care services. (Furgal & Seguin, 2006, p. 1968)

Belfer et al. (2017) argue such accounts, “omit critical historical context and therefore promote interpretations that place blame on Indigenous communities,” by constructing an image of such ‘fragile’ and ‘remote’ localities (pp. 66–67). Similarly, researchers often situate northern food issues within a series of *changes* without recognition of their root causes, for instance: “a consensus has emerged that *rapid social change, changing economic conditions, and climate change* [emphasis added] have all contributed to reduced country/traditional food consumption and increasing periods of food insecurity” (Collings et al., 2016, p. 31). These social, economic, and climatic changes, whether directly or indirectly, are all attributable to settler colonialism. As Cameron (2012) reminds us,

Climate change itself, as a number of Indigenous leaders and scholars have made clear, is thoroughly tied to colonial practices, both historically and in the present, insofar as greenhouse gas production over the last two centuries hinged on the dispossession of Indigenous lands and resources. (p. 104)

Alternatively, in other covert examples, I see a desire to politicize the root causes of food insecurity, but it is taken up through the language of marginalization:

The focus was on proximate and distal causes and experiences of food insecurity, acknowledging that the marginalization and challenges of participants must be understood in the context of broader socioeconomic and cultural changes affecting northern Indigenous populations in Canada. (Lardea et al., 2011, p. 13)

This trend is consistent with what Belfer et al. (2017) have identified on climate change reporting in the media where marginalization (economic, social or political) is taken up far more frequently than colonization (pp. 62–63).

The problems identified across these three examples centre the peoples who are affected by colonialism and fail to point to the agents of settler colonialism. Accounts such as these are emblematic of the tendency for researchers to refer to colonial processes passively without naming the forces behind such profound change. This prompts me to ask, with whom does the responsibility and accountability lie? “Vulnerabilities,” as Ribot (2013) reminds us, “do not just fall from the sky,” (p. 1). These passive accounts displace responsibility and do not appear to address what is at the core of many northern food issues.

I have also found that researchers writing about the North tend to relegate colonialism to the past. In more overt references to assimilation and colonization in the northern food systems literatures, these processes are detached from the settler colonial present. This can be read with the reference to *post-colonial* approaches, the “legacies of colonization” (Durkalec et al., 2015), or the “colonial legacy,” as an ongoing socioeconomic challenge (Pearce et al., 2015). There is a deliberate attempt to understand the role that colonialism has *had* in creating northern food crises within these overt examples, but only through its *legacies*:

The third most cited constraint to wildlife harvesting was the lack of knowledge or interest to wildlife harvesting. This may be the greatest barrier to overcome. *Unfortunately, we cannot simply undo the colonial history of the past* [emphasis added]. The legacies of residential schools, community relocations, loss of language, and other profound impacts have left a scar that is far from being healed. (Natcher et al., 2016, p. 1164)

It is common for researchers to identify specific historical colonial events, as in this example, with reference to forced settlement and missionary/residential schooling. This may be the result of attention to the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). While these histories are vital to understanding northern food systems, analyses of colonialism are limited insofar as they ignore colonial impositions and disruptions in the present. Speaking more generally of research in the North, Cameron (2012) finds that,

Prior to the settlement of comprehensive land claims in northern Canada, the concept of colonialism circulated widely in both academic and political spheres, and provided analytical traction for understanding the conditions under which Indigenous peoples struggled to sustain their lives. Today, although references are occasionally made to a “colonial past,” to speak of colonial relations as persistently *present* in the North is to be accused, in some circles, of analytical, political, and ontological misrecognition: colonialism *was*; it is no longer. (p. 106)

In their synthesis of northern food security literatures, Loring and Gerlach (2015) found there is “exceptional detail about environmental and economic dimensions,” and “the downscale impacts of these drivers [as they] are mediated by the social and ecological legacies of colonialism and federal land-claim settlement” (p. 386). Based on their synthesis, they argue that “history matters” (Loring & Gerlach, 2015) – to this point, I would add that it is equally important to give current colonial matters our attention too.

The consequence of historically situated discussions of colonialism is in the omission of how ongoing dispossession, along with other settler colonial practices like conservation restrictions and extractivist development, continue to disrupt harvesting

practices. These historical discussions are ill-suited to challenge contemporary colonial impositions on harvesting if they cannot recognize the colonial continuities from the past to the present. The literatures I characterize as northern food systems research were my introduction to this work and are largely what led me to the conclusion that settler colonialism has insufficiently been attended to. The idea that colonialism is an event of the past does not hold up once presented with the contributions by Indigenous resurgence, decolonization and settler colonial scholars. The influence of these bodies of scholarship brought me to the understanding that depoliticized engagements with colonialism in northern research may reinforce colonial logics and the legitimacy of the settler State. In the next chapter, I take up these historical and contemporary colonial processes in relation to northern food systems. Here, I continue to explore how settler colonialism is translated through three dominant narratives found in these literatures.

3.2 Dominant Narratives in Northern Food Systems Research

3.2.1 Biomedical Narrative

Researchers working on food systems in the North apply a variety of approaches, but in my read, none is more common than the *nutrition transition* (including its derivatives: *dietary/nutrition shift*). This concept is emblematic of what Dawson (2020) refers to as the biomedicalization of Indigenous food systems. This refers to reducing the consequences of historical and ongoing colonial disruptions to technical matters of nutritional/dietary health. I understand that the disciplinary contexts from which this concept emerges should be considered; from a nutritional standpoint, the focus on nutrition and chronic disease may be warranted. However, I am concerned with the manner that researchers from a wider range of disciplines take up this nutrition-based concept and thereby contribute to the

biomedical narrative of Indigenous food systems. Beyond their common reference to the nutrition transition, most northern food systems researchers are proponents of country/traditional foods for Indigenous health. However, Dawson (2020) argues that many researchers emphasize the importance of Indigenous foodways “while holding on to the view of food and nutritional health based in a Eurocentric foodway and associated knowledge,” finding that the “Eurocentric worldview is maintained and Indigenous worldviews are subsumed” (p. 90). Here I highlight a small sample of biomedical narratives in northern literatures.

In tracing citational references of the nutrition transition, I found that many early sources describe this transition without mention of colonialism. For instance, Samson and Pretty (2006) conceptualize the nutrition transition as the “abrupt shift from consumption of wild foods to processed foods,” and examine it alongside the so-called “physical activity transition” (p. 531). In this example the researchers use a medical and environmental lens to explore “how the new junk food diets and lack of exercise are affecting the health of the Innu” (Samson & Pretty, 2006, p. 531). In this representation, the problems are the food choices and behaviours of the people central to their research, ignoring the colonial forces that have created these ‘shifts’. Similar conceptualizations could be read here: “changes in diets, patterns of work and leisure have occurred with industrialization, urbanization, economic development, and the globalization of markets. These changes...are contributing factors in the causality of non-communicable diseases” (Damman et al., 2008, p. 135). As seen in this example, with limited recognition of colonialism, researchers often situate the nutrition transition within the *westernization*, *industrialization*, *modernization*, or *urbanization* of Indigenous diets/lifestyles (Damman et al., 2008; Egeland et al., 2011;

Lamalice et al., 2018). These passive translations of processes of colonialism are uncritically presented as if they are inevitable or natural.

When food system issues are situated within strictly nutritional contexts, this can construct an urgency around the rates of chronic disease. Many sources use the prevalence of diet-related chronic illness as an entry point, for instance Egeland et al. (2011) state:

Poverty and associated food insecurity coupled with a transition away from local nutrient-rich traditional food resources represents a dual nutritional burden on indigenous peoples globally. A nutrition transition is occurring in arctic communities with consequences for increased obesity and diet-sensitive chronic diseases. Food insecurity with associated disturbed eating patterns and reduced diet quality and nutrient intakes has been associated with compromised health status and diet-sensitive chronic diseases. Indigenous peoples experience a disproportionate burden of food insecurity, which has been noted to be higher than that observed among nonindigenous peoples residing in the same country or region. (p. 1746)

The references to rates of chronic illness among Indigenous peoples compared to non-Indigenous Canadians or national/global averages is also a common theme, for instance: “many studies have shown that the prevalence of chronic diseases is disturbingly high among indigenous peoples world-wide” (Damman et al., 2008, p. 135). The problem I see with the emphasis on chronic illness void of their structural causes is that they render the deliberate processes of dispossession, colonization and assimilation into matters of individualized dietary health and nutrition.

Others have argued that depictions of comparative population statistics on chronic illness tend to portray the Indigenous peoples represented in these figures as “complacent in their own plight” (Hiebert & Power, 2016, p. 105). This demonstrates the political consequences of decontextualized accounts of chronic illness and the nutrition transition. Hiebert and Power (2016) find that many popular representations (in this case, mainstream media reporting on food insecurity in Nunavut) refer to disproportionate rates of chronic

illness but ignore how those represented in these statistics are actively working to resolve these issues. The construction of these diet-related issues is directly linked to the corresponding solutions, as Hiebert and Power (2016) conclude,

This depiction of the Inuit then perpetuates an “Inuit as helpless” motif, as it implies the Inuit are unable to solve their own problems and that a settler colonial approach provides the best resolution to such social inequalities by continuing to assimilate the Inuit into Western culture. (p. 119)

In other words, these nutritional problems serve as a justification for further nutritional solutions.

The urgency that researchers create around diet-related chronic illness sets the stage for more interventions without necessarily engaging with the connection between nutrition and colonization. Situating this work in its colonial context would require a reckoning with the fact that past nutritional studies themselves have served the settler colonial project. The histories of colonial research, experimentation and interventions on food/nutrition should be a clear indication of the harms that have been inflicted in the name of ‘helping’ Indigenous communities (Burnett et al., 2015, 2016; Mosby, 2012; Mosby & Galloway, 2017). Walters (2012) describes the use of nutritional studies as ‘disciplinary’ and ‘assimilatory’ tools, as well as their role in exacerbating the nutrition transition. In her historiography of food and nutrition in Canada, she demonstrates that up until the 1970s, nutritional surveys conducted by the federal government and non-Indigenous nutrition students have both “overlooked or dismissed Indigenous foodways as legitimate food and nutrition sources,” and “entrenched state of food insecurity...in non-urban Indigenous communities” (Walters, 2020, p. 307). With reference to Nutrition Canada, Walters (2012) argues that using a “colonial framework that pathologized non-Western foodways,” this federal survey “is best understood as a significant ‘top-down’ study that contributed to a

large body of research and publications on Aboriginal health compiled by non-Aboriginal professionals” (pp. 434, 445). I find that narrow portrayals of health disparities, void of their colonial context, create the conditions for more nutritional interventions without honestly representing their role of colonizing Indigenous health and nutrition as Walters and other historians demonstrate in their work.

The documentation of food choices has a long history in the North but the approaches to food studies have certainly evolved. Loring and Gerlach (2015) point out that researchers have been preoccupied with these shifts in Indigenous peoples’ diets since the early 20th Century, but more politicized accounts (e.g., those that contend with the impact of extractivism and colonialism on Indigenous foodways) coincided with the Berger Inquiry in the 1970s. “While Justice Berger did not use the language of food security in these reports,” they claim, he did advocate for “Aboriginal rights to pursue livelihoods centered on traditional harvests of fish and game and other uses of the land” (Loring & Gerlach, 2015, p. 382). Walters (2012) also recognizes a change in the mid-1970s owed to Indigenous communities’ assertion of their “right to study and monitor nutrition and health on their own terms” (p. 445). I cannot speak to this point (whether or not this demand had been upheld in ensuing research) but there evidently has been a shift towards more collaborative nutritional research since this time (see for instance: Guyot et al., 2006).

The shift in how northern research is carried out in the decades that followed the Berger Inquiry may be observed in the valorization of country/traditional foods, but many accounts still tend to exclude colonialism from their analyses. In this example, researchers remain engrossed in the nutrition shift as a phenomenon but represent the communities they study in paternalistic and pathologizing terms:

Despite the value and importance of country foods, it is clear that younger Inuit, as a group, eat less country food than do their parents or grandparents. Younger people also tend to be pickier about what they eat. Caribou roast, boiled duck, and baked char are highly valued, but fish heads, seal intestines, caribou head, and polar bear feet are less attractive than Pizza Pockets or Hungry Man dinners. Younger Inuit also consume large quantities of prepared meat snacks (beef jerky and associated products), which are some of the most popular items purchased at the stores. Sweetened drinks, especially soda and Kool-Aid, are consumed with equal vigor. (Collings et al., 2016, pp. 34–35)

With many northern researchers fixated on Indigenous peoples' food choices (see: Hopping et al., 2010 examine “socioeconomic indicators and frequency of traditional food, junk food, and fruit”; Samson, 2013 chapter titled “From caribou to chubby chicken”), I am left wondering why they are more willing to problematize what people eat than the colonial efforts to erode/control Indigenous food systems? Though there is a strong consensus on value of country/traditional foods across these literatures, Dawson (2020) has argued that the determinant of said value is largely derived from colonial understandings of health and nutrition. Responding to the widespread embrace of these foods, Dawson (2020) argues, “they are presented in a Eurocentric view of food (e.g., traditional foods have key nutrients), reinforcing the idea of nutritional health as bodily health” (p. 91). Like Dawson, I would hope to see more meaningful engagements with the value of Indigenous food systems that does not reduce the erosion of traditional food systems, assimilatory and genocidal aims to matters of nutrition.

Not all discussions of the nutrition transition ignore colonial processes. It is notable that many nutritionists keep colonialism tied to their analyses of the nutrition transition. However, others citing their work may still extract the concept and remove its colonial context. I observe this in the references to the comprehensive northern food security assessment by the Council of Canadian Academies (Kuhnlein et al., 2014). The centrality

of the ongoing processes of colonialism and dispossession in Kuhnlein et al.'s (2014) conceptual framework on Indigenous food security/sovereignty (p. xviii) is what, in my opinion, separates their contribution from many other accounts of the nutrition transition:

the Panel recognized the significant impact of colonialism, and environmental dispossession, on food security for northern Aboriginal peoples, and considered it a fundamental factor. Aboriginal peoples' struggle with the impacts of colonialism consists in large part of efforts to redress the consequences of being forcibly removed from the land or being denied access to the land to continue traditional cultural activities, as well as the psychological, physical, and financial effects of dispossession. (Kuhnlein et al., 2014, pp. 33–34)

While their assessment perpetuates some of the tendencies I critique herein – as read in agentless depictions of colonialism and calls for increased 'surveillance' on Indigenous food and nutrition (p. 37), it disrupts the biomedical narrative by housing this concept within its colonial context. This context is integral to understanding contemporary food systems in the North. It is thus perplexing that many researchers continue to cite this work without keeping colonialism and dispossession in view. For researchers working outside of nutritional frameworks, I do not understand what this concept of a nutrition transition brings to our research. What I find more pressing, given the recognized value of country/traditional foods (no matter how this is measured) is this question: Why is there such little engagement with the colonial structures that continue to disrupt access to country/traditional food? This question leads me to the second narrative that persists in the omission of the colonial restrictions that harvesters have to navigate in procuring country/traditional food items.

3.2.2 (Over)harvesting Narrative

There is a tendency in northern food systems research literatures to disproportionately assign *responsibility* to Indigenous communities and harvesters for population decline

while neglecting known colonial-capitalist stressors. I come to this understanding based on the critique that insignificant attention and measures have been directed towards resource development and climate change for their role in wildlife disruptions (see also: Parlee, Sandlos, et al., 2018; Sandlos, 2008; Wray & Parlee, 2013). In the North, caribou is one of the most pressing examples, Parlee and Caine (2018) highlight these multiple stresses:

Many factors, such as expansive forest fires, weather events like the freezing-over of food sources, overgrazing on slow to regenerate tundra habitats, and climate change, are considered big picture drivers of population dynamics, with human disturbance, including resource development, being a critical concern to scientists and communities alike. However, it is subsistence harvesting by Indigenous peoples in the North that has been the preoccupation of many governments and publics. Why, despite little evidence of its impact, has Indigenous harvesting become almost the sole focus of wildlife management institutions in northern Canada in the past decade? (p. 4)

While Parlee and co-researchers situate these tendencies with the State, we must also consider the role that researchers have in reproducing concerns about species decline and legitimizing wildlife management. While extractivism and changing climate are intimately connected, based on my read of northern food systems literatures, I have found that the latter is referenced far more frequently – yet the depoliticized manner that climate change stressors are often presented gives me pause. As Loring and Gerlach (2015) note, “while climate change is no doubt a challenge, northern peoples have historically been able to respond effectively to changes in the land and seascapes and to the distribution of fish and game through flexible and adaptive subsistence strategies” (p. 386). Compounding these issues are “governance and management structures [that] can limit people’s options and flexibility in this regard—restrictive land tenure regimes, and hunting and fishing seasons that are increasingly out of sync with changing seasonality and phenology of fish and game” and so on (Loring & Gerlach, 2015, p. 386). Some have noted that the omission of

colonial factors in discussions of climate change devolve responsibility to the communities most affected rather than those contributing to environmental change (Belfer et al., 2017; Callison, 2014; Cameron, 2012). Gombay (2014) portrays the relation between threats of climate change and State conservation as a ‘complex dynamic’ for Northern Indigenous peoples, whom she says,

are faced with the loss of their resource base due to the neo-liberal policies of the state, which are promoting large-scale resource developments while reducing the environmental regulations tempering such development. Yet that very same loss will paradoxically be furthered, due to conservation efforts by those same governments. This combination of pressures will have a direct impact upon Indigenous peoples’ capacities to continue to hunt, fish, trap, and gather. (p. 1)

These accounts are predicated on an understanding that harvesting restrictions and wildlife management are deeply political. It is not enough to point to climate change as a food system challenge without addressing its interaction with other (colonial) forces. When speaking to climatic stressors to wildlife, researchers should be cognizant of both the colonial-capitalist contributors to climate change, as well as the colonial/political-economic consequences of imposing harvesting restrictions.

There is an unevenness in issues of population decline, as many stressors contribute to this problem, but it is mainly Indigenous harvesters and communities who bear the responsibility of the responses. While governments and scientists historically attributed species decline to Indigenous harvesting, much resistance and advocacy from Indigenous communities in the late 20th Century has brought other known disruptions into view (Kendrick & Manseau, 2008). With this shift, Indigenous harvesters have gone from being vilified (Sandlos, 2003) to made vulnerable in these representations, yet the responses to declines have largely remained the same – to impose harvesting restrictions. With popular support for country/traditional foods in northern research, it is puzzling that many

researchers are hesitant to address the colonial origins of the disruptions that Indigenous communities and harvesters face in procuring them. Doing so would require an understanding of the colonial root causes of wildlife disturbance (such as extractivism and environmental change) as they interact with colonial restrictions on harvesting. Instead, whether “explicitly or implicitly”, researchers contribute to a narrative that Indigenous (over)harvesting is a legitimate threat if not for conservation restrictions in place (Parlee, Sandlos, et al., 2018). Here I highlight examples from northern research that perpetuate this narrative in the omission of colonial-capitalist impacts on wildlife (in both the identification of causes and responses to population decline).

This may not represent all northern food systems researchers, but I find enough examples that refer to overharvesting (or overhunting) to raise concern. Given the uneven landscape of how blame and responsibility have been assigned in the past, it is important that researchers rethink how they frame overharvesting knowing that responses tend to disproportionately harm Indigenous harvesters. Many researchers couch overharvesting among other sources of stress but still hold harvesters accountable in the responses they prescribe. For instance, Festa-Bianchet et al. (2011) state that the “ultimate reason for [caribou] decline is habitat alterations by industrial activities. The proximate causes are predation and, to a lesser extent, overharvest” (p. 419). They continue to explain that hunting “is not invariably a cause of decline. Migratory Tundra caribou have declined and recovered in the past, despite aboriginal hunting” (p. 425). Yet, these researchers uncritically present harvesting disruptions as an easy fix compared to other measures: “we treat hunting as a direct influence...although hunting is not the only cause of mortality, we isolate it as an influence because it is, in theory, relatively straightforward to modify and

reverse” (Festa-Bianchet et al., 2011, p. 425). There are underlying assumptions to unpack in this brief statement. For whom is hunting ‘straightforward to modify or reverse?’ There are numerous examples of human-caribou relations across the North that demonstrate that there is nothing *simple* about restrictions (cf: Blaser, 2016; Collard & Dempsey, 2020; Parlee, Wray, et al., 2018; Walsh, 2015). Accounts such as these demonstrate the ease with which researchers conceive of the direct causes of wildlife mortality, but present the indirect, and perhaps, more ‘complicated’ sources of stress almost as insurmountable.

I read in many northern food systems research literatures a more sympathetic account of the compounding consequences of these declines and harvesting restrictions. In this example, these impacts are taken up, but the researchers almost trivialize the anticipated responses from those who these foods are so important to:

If [caribou] stock numbers are falling as suggested, the implications on food security in settings where subsistence hunting is relied upon would be considerable. With fewer animals available, despite “catch quotas” put in place for conservation reasons, over-hunting is a potential issue... Added to this is the finding that substituting one country food, due to reduced availability, with another that may be more available/plentiful poses challenges. There is the issue of skills/knowledge and capacity (including equipment) required to successfully hunt one species versus another. A further issue is that of taste, which has been reported as a reason for Indigenous people often not being willing to actively substitute one species for another in their country food diet. Given these factors, relying on country food sources for food security becomes questionable. (U. King & Furgal, 2014, pp. 5761–5762)

In this excerpt, researchers present the issue of country/traditional food availability, pointedly isolating harvesting as a probable threat. This perpetuates the narrative that harvesting needs to be managed while also reducing significant human-caribou relations to matters of taste/dietary preference.

While these two overharvesting examples differ in how they identify causes for caribou population decline – harvesters are either vilified or made helpless – both

contribute to the narrative that affirms harvesting restrictions over other measures. To me these exemplify what Kuokkanen (2020) has described of conservation policies that “have long sought to save the ecosystems and wildlife from the very people to whom they belong and who have harvested and managed them for generations” (p. 514). In a similar fashion, Parlee, Sandlos and Natcher (2018) recognize the “implicit narrative behind harvest management planning processes,” that is, “that Indigenous peoples are responsible for the decline of the resource, if not their recovery, is compounding this worrying trend in health (for example, increased prevalence of chronic illness)” (p. 11). In the example that Parlee and co-researchers provide, I can also see how the biomedical and overharvesting narratives reinforce each other. It is in the way that researchers unquestioningly affirm State-led harvesting restrictions (that Kuokkanen, Parlee and co-researchers have also identified) that leads me to argue that researchers do not need to explicitly refer to overharvesting as an issue to contribute to this narrative. Rather, this storyline is perpetuated by the ease with which researchers accept or suggest that Indigenous harvesting needs to be managed.

In this section, I have begun to highlight instances where Indigenous communities have challenged claims of overharvesting and the imposition of State-led conservationist restrictions. It would also be appropriate to consider the momentous resistance to colonial-capitalist extractivism that precedes and follows much of this research (as seen in the mobilization against the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline in 1970s or in more recent examples like the Baffinland blockade in Pond Inlet in early 2021). This leads me to ask why these forms of resistance to settler colonial encroachment do not come across in the concerns raised by researchers writing about species decline? I do not mean to represent all forms of

wildlife management and conservation as if they are all the same, but I am concerned with those imposed on Indigenous harvesters by the State. Without a settler colonial lens, researchers may not realize that their affirmations of conservationist practices are part of a long tradition of colonial encroachments and control over Indigenous food systems. I carry these considerations with me through the subsequent chapters of my thesis where I continue to address the impact of colonial conservationist restrictions. The issues of access to country/traditional foods is important context for the next narrative I explore here, as the instability of these food systems lays the groundwork for explorations of alternate food systems, including agricultural ones.

3.2.3 Emergent Agricultural Narrative

There is an emergent research literature that explore the potential for local food production in the North. As a burgeoning field, this literature is limited, as well as quite diverse – representing a variety of methodologies, regions, latitudes, and degrees of community-engagement. What unites them (aside from promoting agricultural-based provisioning in some capacity) is that these research projects are strongly driven by biophysical factors (namely changing climate and other climatic/ecological constraints) or technical advances. There is an underlying narrative of the newness of agricultural practices that presumes agrarianism was not ecologically feasible before the introduction of innovative, adaptive or sustainable technologies/strategies that are being promoted. While the circumstances leading to agricultural pursuits in the present do not necessarily mirror those of the past, the emergent agriculture narrative erases the colonial histories through which agriculture has been introduced in these regions. Though it is hard to find examples that do not mention colonialism at all, few draw the link between agriculture and colonization or other histories

of gardening in the North (cf: Johnston, 2018; Johnston & Andrée, 2019; Simba & Spring, 2017). A settler colonial lens would also ask researchers to reckon with ongoing dispossession as they respond to the State's interest in northern agricultural production.

Many find opportunities in the northern food crises to introduce innovative technologies that circumnavigate the alleged inhospitable climate for conventional agriculture. In this example, the ecological constraints for gardening at higher altitudes (Inuvialuit Settlement Region, NT) account for the lack of agrarianism in the past:

Food production in the north is constrained by biophysical conditions (e.g. cold climate, permafrost, polar nights). Accordingly, locally-produced food has historically occupied a negligible role in the Inuit food system. However, innovative food production techniques and practices (e.g. cold climate greenhouses, community gardening and animal husbandry), may “have the potential to become key elements” in northern food strategies. (Kenny et al., 2018, p. 77)

Coupled with the high costs of food in remote localities, these technological advances are presented as expanding agriculture further than before: “Canada's northern communities are perfect candidates for large-scale aquaponics systems” (Codina-Lucia & Frazao, 2018, Chapter 29). The same techno-optimism could be read in the subarctic (Fort Providence, NT) where researchers state that, “the aquaponics project currently underway is building capacity at a community level in order to promote what is truly possible with regard to growing foods in the North” (Ross & Mason, 2020, p. 32). They add,

Erratic and unpredictable weather patterns as a result of climate change will increase in the future, which becomes problematic for agricultural opportunities and damaging for local food procurement. This is where innovative solutions to growing food locally come into play. Indoor closed systems like aquaponics are not reliant upon environmental conditions. (Ross & Mason, 2020, p. 33)

Here, aquaponics is presented as supplement to traditional harvesting practices and an adaptable technology suited for a changing climate.

Other research projects hinge on the opportunities presented by a changing climate that create more favourable conditions for local food production. For instance, Barbeau et al. (2015) suggest that “warming temperatures in the Canadian arctic and subarctic present an opportunity to investigate the potential for local, more sustainable food production in Aboriginal communities” (p. 5667). On a broader scale, Hannah et al. (2020) explore “the extent to which climate change may create new opportunities to cultivate land in regions not currently cultivated,” in what they refer to as *climate-driven agricultural frontiers* (p. 2). Their conception has parameters that are specific to this moment in time: “areas not currently suitable for any major global commodity but that become suitable in the future due to climate change,” (p. 2) but the language of frontiers concerns me. As with many of the accounts based on changing climate, which range in the degrees to which they recognize the historical and current practices of agriculture in these regions, they present agriculture as emerging. Notable exceptions can be found in those climate-centred literatures that raise the issues of past agricultural projects led by outsiders that have not met the needs or interests of the communities they are situated (Ross & Mason, 2020; Spring, Carter, et al., 2018). Yet, the specific colonial legacies of agriculture in the North are largely left out in these works.

In many cases, the emergent references to agricultural-based provisioning coincides with the renewed interest by the State to pursue a northern agricultural industry. Many explicitly leverage State-led agricultural strategies for their research – both federal (Naumov et al., 2020) and territorial in the case of the NWT (Hannah et al., 2020; Kenny et al., 2018; Ross & Mason, 2020). For instance: Naumov et al. (2020) highlight “regional authorities also launch projects to deal with specific issues such as native agriculture of

Indigenous peoples. In the Northwest Territories recently a pilot project was announced aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous-run agricultural businesses” (p. 10). I would argue that it is vital for those hinging their agricultural pursuits on State interest in agricultural expansion to contend with historical attempts of the State to expand the ‘agricultural frontier’ further north. This part of history is also left out of scoping and comparative analyses of local food production across these regions (Chen & Natcher, 2019 in the Canadian North; Naumov et al., 2020 in the Circumpolar North). For instance, Naumov et al. (2020) claim that “the agricultural frontier during first decades of the twentieth century reached north of the Canadian Prairies, where it expanded up to 55° N in Alberta,” (p. 2) – neglecting the Dominion and Experimental farms of the 20th Century north of 60° (Piper & Sandlos, 2007).

While changing climate, instability of country/traditional food systems and new agricultural technologies are all relevant contexts for agricultural pursuits in the North, I maintain that an overemphasis on these technical and biophysical constraints and opportunities has diminished important colonial context in the ways that agrarianism is discussed in these research literatures. The promises of supplementing land-based harvesting with innovative agricultural technologies are not novel. Walters (2020) recounts the efforts of nutritionists working in the NWT in the 1980s (Schaefer & Steckle, 1980) who she says, “allude to the ‘promise’ of ‘hydroponic arrangements’, but also stress that small-scale kitchen agriculture had recently been successfully carried out in the region” (p. 141). While the specific technologies may evolve, it is important to understand when researchers make recommendations to improve northern food security through innovative agricultural practices, these come in the wake of decades of efforts led by (usually non-

Indigenous) outsiders. In relation to State-led agrarianism, Rudolph and McLachlan (2013) remind us of the *eco-colonial* efforts of the past:

Attempts to convert Indigenous peoples into agriculturalists are thus long-standing...A wide diversity of agricultural approaches have since been introduced across Canada, including domesticated European reindeer, breeding programmes involving muskoxen, wood bison, and cattle, as well as land grants, transportation infrastructure, experimental farms, and land clearance programmes. These arguably all reflect the “eco-colonial” efforts of governments to expand the agricultural frontier into the far north while assimilating Indigenous livelihoods. (p. 1082)

The agricultural efforts and incentives stated above are part of the histories of northern colonization and should not be left out of the analyses of researchers that aim to seize the opportunities of State interests in a northern agricultural sector. My claim is that this history is critical context for agricultural pursuits today – especially for those that hinge on the State’s agricultural agenda. Not only this, there also remains an outstanding question on the role of ongoing dispossession in the renewed interest in cultivating northern territories.

By expanding the boundaries of my geographic scope to include the northernmost regions of the southern provinces, I have been able to locate relevant research featuring histories of colonialism and agrarianism together (Barbeau et al., 2015, 2018; Rudolph & McLachlan, 2013; Spiegelaar et al., 2013; Spiegelaar & Tsuji, 2013). In many of these examples, the previous attempts to develop agriculture in the North are presented as environmentally destructive as they propose more ecologically sustainable approaches that avoid past harms. As read in the following, “historically, conventional agricultural activities were not sustainable in northern Canada, but this does not preclude the viability of other agricultural activities including agroforestry practices, especially under a changing climate” (Barbeau et al., 2018, p. 30). Sustainability is also used with reference to the

challenges of ‘sustaining’ the systems that were put in place through missionary schooling in these examples:

The Euro-Canadian Roman Catholic Mission developed agrarian settlements in remote First Nations of Northern Canada in the early 20th century, forcing nomadic indigenous peoples to settle and displacing traditional aboriginal ways of acquiring food...The Mission was somewhat successful in producing diverse foods within a challenging environment and short growing season, but their departure and subsequent closing of residential schools in the late 20th century ended local agricultural production and left remote First Nations dependent on an unreliable, import-based food system. (Spiegelaar et al., 2013, p. 4058)

European missionaries in northern Canada introduced conventional farming practices (e.g. clear cutting, the use of agrochemicals and the use of greenhouses) in the 1930s to help support residential schools. However, when residential schools closed, much of the conventional agricultural activity in northern Canada discontinued and reliance on imported foods increased. (Barbeau et al., 2018, p. 30)

Even as these researchers appear to be more concerned with the environmental legacies of colonial agrarian efforts in Northern Ontario, they engage in a much more intentional and meaningful manner with these histories than in some examples further north. If anything, this reinforces the myth that agricultural colonization was only a ‘southern’ phenomenon.

Overall, many northern researchers contribute to a narrative of agricultural nascency in the Canadian North. This narrative misrepresents agriculture as an emerging sector that renders invisible a century of State and Church-led interventions including large-scale agricultural experimentation and other interventions driven by the presumed nutrition/food security needs of northern, Indigenous communities. I do not seek to brush over important distinctions between past and present outside-led agricultural endeavours – and these are multiple – but my main claim is that important lessons and context exist through these histories. While many researchers situate their projects with the colonial context that has shaped northern food systems, there is a general lack of engagement with

settler colonial processes. These accounts are unfit to address the concerns of Indigenous dispossession in the present without the context of ongoing colonial disruptions. Hannah et al. (2020) note that GNWT “recently created a new agricultural strategy that promotes development of northern lands,” (p. 12). It is pertinent to ask, on *whose* lands, and what difference ought that make? The colonial circumstances under which agriculture has been practiced within the NWT, in particular, is taken up through the following chapter to build on the anecdotal references to the past practices of agriculture that I have introduced here.

3.3 Conclusion

Constructing counter-narratives of food and well-being based in Indigenous foodways and local ways of knowing can end the sterile colonial narrative and form the foundation of Indigenous food sovereignty.
(Dawson, 2020, p. 92)

While Dawson is primarily countering the biomedical narrative in the work from which this opening quote is drawn, there are many other examples cited in this chapter from various food system literatures that fit the description of *sterile* colonial narratives. Interrupting these narratives might look like what Daigle (2017) offers to Indigenous food sovereignty movements with *resurgent politics*. It involves...

...draw[ing] attention to the multi-scalar spaces and relationships in which colonial-capitalist dispossession is embodied. Embodiment, as framed here, goes beyond the reporting of health disparities that are tied to a shift from a land/water-based diet to a market-based one, and localized manifestations of policymaking. (p. 6)

Instead, she continues, “[it] entails an analysis of how the dispossession of Indigenous foodways is a direct attack on Indigenous ontologies, kinship relations, governance structures, and their political and legal lives” (Daigle, 2017, p. 6). These matters of food are evidently bigger than the foods themselves, or their nutritional profiles. These complexities are hidden or lost in the narratives I have focused on in this chapter.

Interrupting dominant narratives does not look like replacing them with a monolithic alternative, as Dawson (2020) is clear: “local counter-narratives based in local foodways and ways of knowing—guided by Indigenous leaders, Elders, and knowledge keepers—rather than one narrative for all Indigenous Peoples, must be constructed” (p. 92). Similarly, Daigle (2017) pluralizes Indigenous food *sovereignties* to represent the plurality of Indigenous nations and their food systems. More than anything, it matters who is doing this work. While there is no place for building counter-narratives and resurgent politics in my own research, I take from these two scholars the need to push back where I see these dominant narratives persisting and situate my own engagements within a settler colonial context. “Colonial discourses interpolate us all, regardless of our focus of research,” Cameron (2012) argues that there is not...

...a pure, “correct” mode of reckoning with the colonial dimensions of contemporary research, but at the very least scholars must continually interrogate the ways in which their practices risk perpetuating colonial formations, however unwittingly and unintentionally. (p. 111)s

While many researchers working in northern contexts recognize, at least, the destructive role that colonialism *had* in shaping Indigenous food systems, far fewer acknowledge contemporary colonial impacts. An unwillingness by researchers to situate the disruptions to food systems in the processes of ongoing settler colonialism by relegating them to the past, allows them to distance themselves from these workings in the present. However, the work of researchers in the North has long contributed to the settler colonial project. Here, I have highlighted past practices of the northern research industry that have been extremely damaging, but within each are examples of how Indigenous communities have resisted the ways that research had been carried out. This resistance is not inconsequential as it marks a dramatic shift towards more collaborative/community-based models of research (though

still largely southern-led but with greater involvement with those who the research pertains to). I think the accomplishments of these collaborations should be lauded, but I conclude with Cameron's (2012) claim, that "such partnerships do not necessarily release non-Inuit [and non-Indigenous] researchers from their positions as inheritors of colonial systems of knowledge and practice...neither do such partnerships disqualify critical interrogation of the cumulative, broader effects of a literature" (p. 112). For southern-based researchers working in these lands today, we must be attentive to the ways our research can perpetuate colonial legacies and continuities.

Here, I presented some of the ways settler colonialism is entrenched through research, through the concepts and language used to describe northern food systems and shape research agendas. This includes calling into question how concepts like the nutrition transition or frontiers are used to describe food systems in the North, while pushing against dominant narratives that centre colonial conceptions of health/nutrition, wildlife and land-use. I organized my interpretations of northern food systems literatures into three narratives that represent a limited engagement with settler colonial forces in research: the narratives of biomedicalization, (over)harvesting, and emergent agriculture. My claim is that under a settler colonial frame, these narratives do not hold up. In this chapter, I have only begun to introduce these narratives as encountered through my reading. If anything, they leave me with more questions. In the coming chapter, I work to demonstrate the coloniality of these narratives by drawing on historical and contemporary settler colonial practices in the food systems landscape in the NWT. As I do this, I begin to address some of the key questions that these narratives leave out: What role does the continued dispossession of Indigenous territories have in shaping food systems in the territory? How does the State respond to

Indigenous mobilization and resistance to settler colonial encroachments on their territories? Where does authority lie when it comes to making decisions about land, water and wildlife? What is the role of food in processes of settler colonialism, as well as resistance to it?

Chapter 4: Settler Colonial Disruptions to Food Systems in the NWT

Given the weightiness of settler colonialism in this research project, in this chapter I set out to make a strong case for the role of settler colonialism in shaping food system challenges in the NWT. Through this thesis project, I try to dispel the framing of colonialism in settler colonies like Canada as historical events and to understand the persistent nature of these forces in the present day. In order to meditate on the tensions encountered in my research engagements with regards to settler colonialism and food systems, it is necessary to set these in their broader colonial history and to draw out colonial continuities in the present. Historians and other food scholars have chronicled the interwoven histories of colonialism with respect to Indigenous peoples and their changing food systems in Canada, considering the roles of the State¹¹, the Church and industry. As Burnett, Hays and Chambers (2016) explain, “by deploying food as an assimilatory and disciplinary tool, Canadian settler colonialism seeks to make Indigeneity an impossibility through its erasure, elimination and absorption” (para. 3). These scholars show us that food is not only a generative lens to reveal settler colonial histories, but through these histories it becomes evident that food itself has been an important tool of settler colonialism.

Rather than attempting to offer a comprehensive description of the connections between food systems and settler colonialism in the NWT, my intention here to unveil histories relevant to my observations taken up through the subsequent chapter. As Kuokkanen and Sweet (2020) explain, “the disruption of the food systems in Arctic Indigenous communities was a result of processes of colonialism and neoliberal economic

¹¹ I refer to the State when speaking of the Crown, the Dominion, federal, territorial and municipal governments. As a historically situated piece, the shifting role of these distinct levels of government is significant but I am more interested in demonstrating the collective impact of these State apparatuses.

globalization and has far-reaching health, social, and cultural consequences” (p. 83). Mapping out these consequences is a major endeavour, one that could take countless directions and could not reasonably fit into my analysis. Instead, in this chapter I set the stage for my reflexive analysis, where specific experiences necessitate having the colonial historical context explained to make sense of contemporary tensions or contradictions. Wound up in these colonial histories and my reflexive analyses are narratives and language that I have found troubling when I encountered them at various stages in my research (both in literature and ‘on-the-ground’). These include the three narratives (discussed in the previous chapter) that: 1) render complex settler colonial disruptions to Indigenous food systems as individualized biomedical or dietary issues; 2) disproportionately assign responsibility to Indigenous harvesters for species decline while neglecting the impacts of extractivism and climate change; and lastly 3) portray agricultural developments in the territory as a new phenomenon. In this chapter I am trying to tell a different story about food systems in the NWT than the ones I first encountered (as read in these narratives). In painting this partial picture of the coloniality of certain food system relations, I focus on particular experiences with settler colonialism and food within the NWT without losing sight of their likeness to broader colonial relations across the North. As through the rest of this thesis, while the NWT remains the geographical scope, many of the instances I draw on in this chapter are localized to Yellowknife and Denendeh, which is the region that I have experience studying and working in.

As part of my method of research refusals, I try to make clear that with settler colonialism heavy in my analysis, I refrain from making my research subjects those who are most impacted by settler colonialism. Instead, I direct my attention to the agents of

colonialism. I qualify this approach with two main considerations. The first is, quite simply, that stories of Indigenous food systems and ways of life are not mine to tell. There is a long tradition of non-Indigenous academics researching Indigenous peoples and their foodways that I do not intend to replicate. My second consideration is to avoid the tendency of describing colonial encounters without actors (agents, perpetrators). By (re)inserting the settler colonial agents into my analysis as subjects, I hope to disrupt what I perceive as a proliferation of passive retellings of colonialism.

I move through selected thematic (rather than chronological) sites of analysis to coherently account for what are layered and multifaceted histories. Across these themes, there are several periods of time when profound changes occurred that stand out. These include: early treaty-making towards the end of the 19th-Century, the period following the end of the Second World War (referred to as the postwar period hereinafter), the period of immense Indigenous resistance and mobilization against extractivism in the 1960s, followed by the negotiation of modern treaties/comprehensive agreements beginning in the 1970s. With food at the centre of these histories, I do not restrict my analysis to a single agent of colonialism, but rather, bring together some of the roles that various arms of the State, the Church, the extractive sector and settler citizens have in perpetuating colonial relations through food systems. There are a number of instruments of colonialism that could be explored to explain how these different agents exercise control and power over Indigenous peoples and foodways, but here I focus my attention on a small few.

Through this chapter, I am mapping the colonality of the introduction and proliferation of extractivist, conservationist, and agrarian approaches to land use. I show how these approaches are enacted in colonial-capitalist State policy and shape the ways

people have been able to procure foods in territories across the NWT. This chapter has three parts: In the first section (4.1), I discuss the role of extractivism in the periods of early and modern treaty-making. I argue that both periods are marked by State-driven policy and legal instruments to gain and maintain control over land and resources, and subsequently, continue to impede Indigenous rights to hunt and harvest. In section (4.2), I follow by weaving the introduction of conservationism with extractivism in the territory. In tracing the historical conservationist approaches of the State to the contemporary conservation and sustainability agendas, I draw out their colonial and racist underpinnings. To exemplify the settler colonial dynamics of conservation and their relation to extractivism, I focus on the contentious circumstances of caribou declines and (over)harvesting in the territory. In section (4.3), I situate the historical origins of agrarian developments in the territory through trade-post gardens, missionary school gardens, dominion experimental farms and other State-led agrarian efforts beginning in the postwar period. These accounts counter the myth of the nascency of an agricultural sector in the territory today and demonstrate that efforts to develop agricultural food systems in these lands has been pursued for more than a century by settlers, the Church and the State. By representing these three colonial-capitalist approaches to land use through a settler colonial frame, I illustrate the link between the food systems disturbances in the historical contexts of the territory to those in the contemporary.

4.1 Extractivism

Mining is a story of loss. All kinds of loss. Of lives. Of land. Of water. Of livelihoods. Of good governance. Of future possibilities. In Canada, we have created an economy that is dependent on extraction, that creates profits from loss. (Kuyek, 2019, p. 2)

Extractivism is at the core of major transformations to northern economies, livelihoods, lands and waters among other aspects of northern life, and each of these is inextricably bound to past and future food systems in the region. Critical and historical geographers have made a strong case for the connectivity between extractivism and *settler* colonial relations¹² (Cameron, 2015; Peyton & Keeling, 2017). Drawing from various sites of northern resource extraction, Peyton and Keeling (2017) assert that “extractivism [is] at the heart of the Canadian project, producing the extractive subject as a fundamentally Canadian character” (p. 121). Resources, they say, “have always been central to the production of the north as settler colonial space” (Peyton & Keeling, 2017, p. 121). The introduction of resource extraction in these territories, as elsewhere, has profound political, legal, economic, sociocultural, and ecological dimensions, but it is in the ways these interact with food systems that have significance to this thesis.

Any discussion of food systems in the NWT (and the majority of the land Canada occupies) should engage with the ways that treaty agreements and their interpretations interact with harvesting food. Both the early numbered treaties and modern treaties in the territory have significant historical and contemporary importance for past and future generations. The negotiation of modern treaties is often associated with statements about increased “political autonomy” for its signatories with aims to address outstanding obligations from the earlier period of treaty-making (Canadian Polar Commission, 2014; Ford & Smit, 2004; GNWT, 2013). But as Grey and Kuokkanen (2020) remark, “similarities between negotiating co-management agreements and treaty-making in the later

¹² Peyton and Keeling (2017) use Coulthard and other settler colonial scholars’ frame that recognize dispossession and exploitation of land to be central to settler colonial occupation, unlike other forms of colonialism that exercise power from the exploitation of labour.

colonial period are noteworthy,” (p. 925) – indeed, within a settler colonial framework, the commonalities between the two periods are far more evident, despite the temporal and socio-political distance between them. Characterizing the particular ways that treaties impact food systems is not straightforward but generally, they serve to regulate who, how, and when foods may be harvested in a given region. What is of particular interest here, however, is the role that extractivism has had in the treaty-making processes.

4.1.1 Early Treaty-Making

The geographic boundary of present-day NWT sits within two of the early numbered treaties, No. 8 signed in 1899 and No. 11 signed in 1921 (GNWT, 2013). As recounted in a territorial public document on treaties:

Treaty No. 8: The first of the northern treaties covered an area of 324,900 square miles and represents the most geographically extensive treaty activity undertaken. It comprises what is now the northern half of Alberta, the northeast quarter of British Columbia, the northwest corner of Saskatchewan, and the area south of Hay River and Great Slave Lake in the Northwest Territories.

Treaty No. 11: The last of the numbered treaties covers most of the Mackenzie District. *The land in the area was deemed unsuitable for agriculture* [emphasis added], so the federal government was reluctant to conclude treaties. Immediately following the *discovery of oil* [emphasis added] at Fort Norman in 1920, however, the government moved to begin treaty negotiations. (GNWT, 2013, p. 2)

The federal government is the original source of these accounts, but they are presented as matters of *fact* by the territorial government in their document. These accounts signify that the State’s intention in treaty-making has been historically tied to land dispossession for both extractive and agrarian desires. In this short description, we also see the narrative of the infeasibility of agriculture featuring in treaty negotiations, in this case, as a temporary disincentive for the State to further encroach on these lands. But this was not for long, as Peyton and Keeling (2017) explain, the “discovery of valuable mineral resources prompted

hasty [emphasis added] treaty-making by the settler colonial state, a process designed to sever Indigenous people from their lands and territories, in order to gain access to the subsurface” (p. 118). Understanding the State’s colonial-capitalist aims of engaging in treaty negotiations makes the disputed nature of these treaties in the present less surprising.

The consequences of these encroachments are numerous and can be observed through all sorts of disturbances in the territory. Throughout the North, Peyton and Keeling (2017) trace how resource exploration and development were a direct cause to the “dispossession of Indigenous land and territorial sovereignty on the extractive frontier...time and again mineral developments precipitated waves of settler invasion that rapidly displaced Indigenous communities” (p. 118). McCarthy (1995) links the processes of resource extraction and treaty-making with settler violence in the North, explaining that,

A more pressing motivation for the government to make treaty came when hopes of developing the petroleum and other valuable minerals of the area surfaced. In response, the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs recommended that negotiations with the Indians of the Athabasca and Mackenzie be opened in the summer of 1891. No further steps were taken, however, until 1898, when the discovery of gold in the Klondyke made a treaty imperative. Miners flocked into the country, disrupting and destroying Native resources. White trappers spread poisoned bait, which sometimes killed the dogs belonging to the Indians. A treaty was perceived as the only way to control the influx and protect the miners and the Indians from each other. (p. 173)

In this excerpt, we see the political dimensions of extractivism in the establishment of treaties, but we see too, violence perpetuated by settler populations through these processes. The sociocultural dimensions of colonial extractivist transformation are often attributable to the influx of settler peoples. As Kuyek (2019) explains, “the extent of the social impacts of mining on the community will depend on how long the community has hosted a mine and the extent to which the settler population has displaced the original Indigenous population” (p. 72). “Historically, once the mine is up and running,” she says,

“the Indigenous people have been almost entirely displaced or marginalized by the settlers, and the town’s ‘culture’ has come to be that of the people who displaced them” (Kuyek, 2019, p. 72). These accounts dispel the conception of colonialism in the territory (and the rest of the continent for that matter) as a historical past. The change imposed are not only temporal but also structural – exemplified in the ways that settler colonial control is maintained not only by a colonial government, but also by settler citizens carrying out violence and dispossession on Indigenous lands.

Indigenous rights to hunt and harvest are enshrined in treaty agreements among other obligations and restrictions. It is on these grounds that treaties serve as a legal instrument for treaty holders to challenge encroachments by the State. In Denendeh, Abel (1993) cites that “the treaties and game laws of the twentieth century were potentially as destructive to the Dene economy as immigration and agricultural settlement had been to the Native economy in the south” (p. 267). To Abel’s point, I would add the consequences of the latter should not be dismissed. The interaction between treaty and conservation laws over time is critical to understanding food system challenges in the territory. Examples of the encroachments on treaty rights include the introduction of the Migratory Birds Convention Act (an Inter-State agreement between Canada and the United States, 1917), and the NWT Game Act (1920) (Dene Nation, n.d.). Both Acts impede on treaty rights to hunt by imposing restrictions or seasonal limits on harvesting specific species. The Dene Nation cite examples of Dene refusal to accept treaty payments as a means of opposing these Acts for their violation of Dene rights enshrined in Treaty 8. Similar accounts can be read through Fumoleau’s (1975, 2004) recounting of treaty boycotts in Fort Resolution in 1920 (pp. 153–154). These examples demonstrate how treaty-holders have always resisted

the violations of conservationist acts. Calls for the State to uphold treaty rights continue to be integral to many disputes over land, resources and wildlife in present day. The People's Food Policy Project of Canada, for instance, has included upholding rights in treaty agreements as a pillar for Indigenous food sovereignty (Matties, 2016) and many Indigenous food scholars echo these demands (Robin, 2019). Abel (1993) notes that,

Fundamental differences of interpretation brought the Dene to the eventual realization that the Canadian government had intended to clear them off their land through treaties; community spokespeople campaigned persistently to protect their way of life by trying to convince the government to accept the Dene interpretation of the treaties (p. 267).

As per the understanding of the GNWT (2013), 'differential' interpretations and unfulfilled obligations by the federal government in Treaties 8 and 11 led, in part, to the next phase of treaty-making in the early 1970s through the federal Comprehensive Land Claims Policy. Another catalyst for the emergence of modern treaty negotiations was the Supreme Court's 1973 Calder case – a legal dispute between Indigenous treaty-holders and the State in British Columbia (Abele et al., 2019; GNWT, 2013; White, 2019). Since that time, along with the federal government and the respective First Nations governments, the territorial government has become fully involved in negotiations in the NWT (GNWT, 2013).

4.1.2 Modern Treaty-Making

It is difficult to characterize the impact of the negotiations of modern treaty regime beginning in the 1970s as they have led to a series of settled agreements, but some are still ongoing. Additionally, the institutions and governments each modern treaty has or will create vary from one to the next, and even for those that have been negotiated, many uncertainties in their implementation remain unresolved (Abele et al., 2019). The first of these modern treaties settled in the NWT was the Western Arctic Claim, the Inuvialuit Final Agreement of 1984 (GNWT, 2013). The following modern treaties that have also

been settled within Treaty 8 and 11 territories: the Gwich'in Dene's Comprehensive Land-Claim Area, 1992; Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claims, 1993; and Tłı̨chǫ Dene's Land Claim and Self-Government Agreement, 2003 (Coulthard, 2014; GNWT, n.d.) [see Figure 1]. Ongoing, however, are the accompanying self-government agreements for each of these claims. More recently, negotiations have concluded for the Délı̨nę Self-Government Agreement, 2015. At this point in time, the land, resource and self-government negotiations for Acho Dene Koe First Nation, Akaitcho First Nations, Dehcho First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation remain unsettled (GNWT, n.d.).

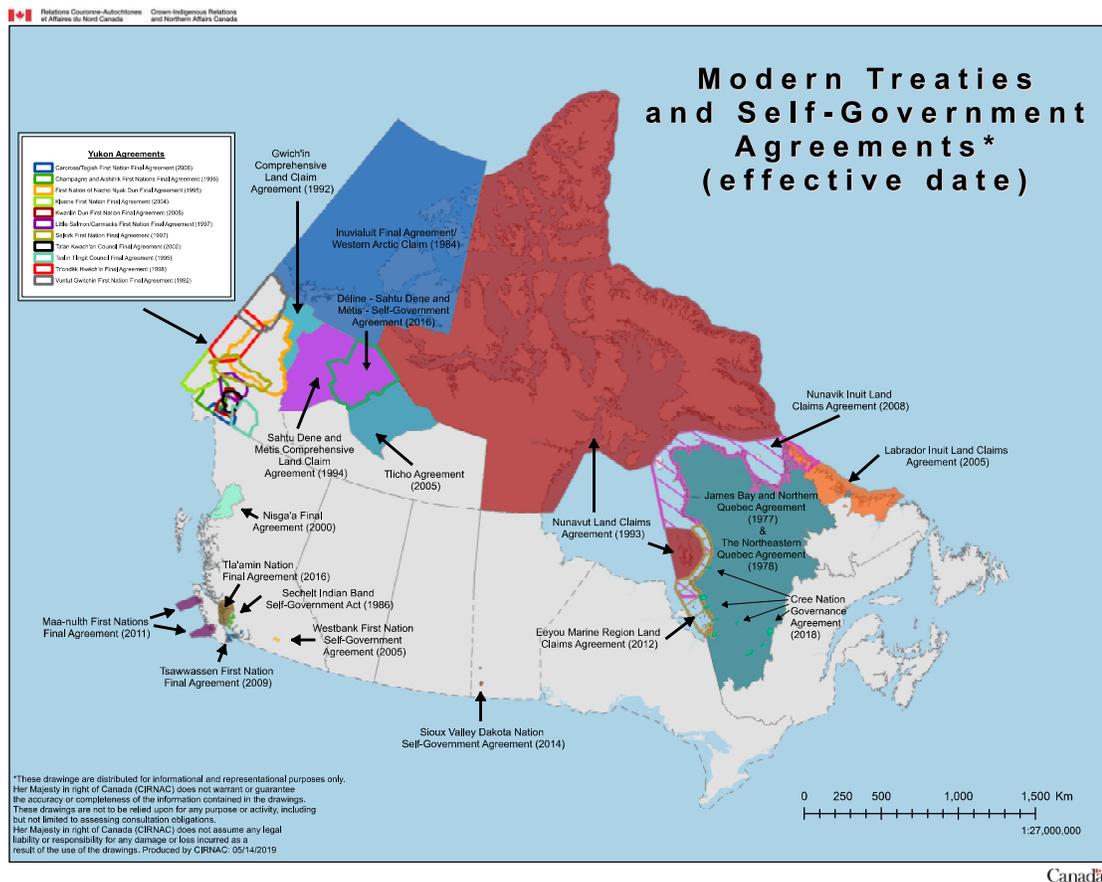


Figure 1 Map of Modern Treaties & Self-Government Agreements (CIRNAC, 2019)

The manner in which these claims feature in the politics of food systems in these unsettled regions of the territory are of particular interest to this thesis. Within a settler colonial lens,

we can see that both early and modern treaty-making (settled and unsettled) have implications for Indigenous and non-Indigenous harvesters, but these are not analogous. Therefore, the possibilities and limitations of these treaties and their ongoing negotiations are inherently subjective. These tensions are outside of the scope of what I explore in this chapter, but the negotiation of unsettled claims will inevitably shape harvesting practices in these territories. Here, I bring into discussion the concerns and critiques of the negotiated claims and their implications for food systems, while remaining cognizant that many elements of these modern treaties are unfolding still. I do not offer an appraisal of the impact of modern treaties; this exceeds what I could speak to and it would also be rather speculative. Instead, the critiques cited presented here are premised on the manner in which the State has tended to their implementation, the institutions these modern treaties have created (thus far), and the fundamental nature of modern treaty-making.

Even as proponents of modern treaties maintain optimism for their possibilities, most are very critical of the role of the State throughout these negotiations. Distinct from those who oppose the underlying premise for renewed treaty-making, proponents predominantly identify the failures in what has not (yet) been realized through these processes. These critiques include, but are not limited to, a lack of implementation plans in some of the first modern treaties¹³, a lack of expertise by respective federal departments to tend to their specific obligations for treaty implementation, a lack of funding (sometimes altogether) and a lack of clarity in the complicated legal language of the lengthy claims (Abele et al., 2019, p. 8; White, 2019). Other critical factors, including shifting federal leadership between Liberal and Conservative governments and changing Indigenous-State

¹³ Within the NWT, this includes Inuvialuit Final Agreement.

relations since the modern treaty regime began in the 1970s, are part of these evolving processes. As a result, Abele, Irlbacher-Fox and Gladstone (2019), contend that “the modern treaties have not become the success stories they hold the potential to be” (p. 8). John B. Zoe (Chief Land Claims Negotiator, Treaty 11 Council/ Tłı̨chǫ Government senior advisor) remarks, “while many modern treaties have been finalized, we now find that Canada has no overarching policy for implementation, which can often end up in disputes,” pointing to the frequency with which modern treaty signatories have had to take the State to court over issues of implementation (Zoe et al., 2019, p. 22). These challenges have also created new organizations, including the Land Claim Agreements Coalition (LCAC), whose advocacy is geared to serve those signatories of modern treaties in their implementation issues with the State (Abele et al., 2019). Zoe, Abele and their co-researchers are as critical as anyone on the State’s actions through early and modern treaty-making processes but are dedicated to fostering stronger treaty relations and policies on the terms of the signatories. For Zoe, the participation of the Tłı̨chǫ Government along with other modern treaty signatories in LCAC, is to establish a policy of implementation, whereby, he argues,

we need to ensure that our *values in relation to lands* [emphasis added] takes into consideration our own narratives and methods of management to ensure that our languages, culture and way of life are captured in implementation. (Zoe et al., 2019, pp. 18–19)

Implementation of modern treaties will have complex implications for food systems, as they inevitably replace pre-existing terms or add new layers of complexity for land and resource use. It is useful to keep in mind the essential elements that Zoe has detailed for the institutions and governance the LCAC hope to establish, as I turn to critiques of the institutions that have been born out of the modern treaty regime so far.

The institutions created through modern treaty-making have received a lot of attention from researchers concerned with their impact on food systems. As mentioned, one motivation for negotiating modern treaties is to settle outstanding obligations by the State under Treaties 8 and 11. However, unlike the hundreds of *specific claims* pending or being negotiated across the country, these are not only matters of financial compensation (White, 2019). *Comprehensive land claims*, on the other hand, include matters of governance, land title and management (White, 2019). Each modern treaty varies in their unique establishments of institutions that regulate land use; creating organizations, boards or corporations that are either Indigenous-led or joint/co-managed¹⁴ (Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014). The reception of these institutions is varied, while some present the NWT as “a world leader in the successful co-management of wildlife resources,” (ACUNS, 2018, p. 13); others acknowledge that “the record of Canadian Arctic co-management institutions is mixed” (Kuhnlein et al., 2014, p. 195). While Walter Bayha (former Chair of the Sahtú Renewable Resources Board/Manager of Lands and Resources, Délı̄ne Land Corporation) (2012) admits, “co-management is a new beast. We haven’t really seen it work to its full potential. The co-management board is a powerful institution, but it faces immense challenges” (p. 25). Concerns for how decisions are made through these institutions about land and wildlife use remain high.

¹⁴ In the NWT these include: “*Wek’èezhii Renewable Resources Board* (www.wrrb.ca), established under the Tłı̄chǫ Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement; *Sahtú Renewable Resources Board* (www.srrb.nt.ca), established under the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement; *Gwich’in Renewable Resources Board* (www.grrb.nt.ca), established under the Gwich’in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement; and the *Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT)* (www.jointsecretariat.ca), established under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement,” (ENR, n.d., p. 1).

The collaborative approach, which is comprised of representatives from both Indigenous and federal/territorial governments, has come under the scrutiny of northern researchers who find the balance of decision-making power to be particularly troublesome (Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014; Nadasdy, 1999, 2012; Todd, 2014). Todd (2014) argues that “State-driven wildlife co-management frameworks...delimit the possibilities of what Indigenous knowledge can describe” as it is “*deconstructed* and *massaged* [emphasis added] to fit into existing scientific-legal discourses employed by the processes of the State” (p. 221). Critics argue that, “due to the political economy of modern treaties and the spatial dynamics of capital accumulation,” the institutions created in the treaty-process are “poorly positioned to represent the interests of Indigenous hunters” (Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014, p. 6). Ironically, while this *collaborative* approach to management aims to bring together distinct forms of knowledge (specifically Indigenous/Western), other exclusions persist in the creation of new institutions. The gendered nature of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous women’s roles in its transmission often go unrecognized (Altamirano-Jimenez & Kermoal, 2016; Todd, 2016). This has warranted strong critiques to the co-management model for the limited representation of women on resource boards across the Territorial North (Kafarowski, 2005; Mills et al., 2013; Natcher, 2013). I am left with little optimism for the potential of the modern treaties if the establishment of these institutions are an indicator of how well they have served modern treaty holders thus far.

Overwhelmingly, critics of the modern treaties see them as falling short of the demands that Indigenous nations and groups have articulated in their resistance to various forms of State encroachment in their territories. As Grey and Kuokkanen (2020) argue,

With its ideological roots in the neoliberal turn and its practical roots in the settler colonial project, co-management has demonstrated particular

efficacy in channeling Indigenous activism and pulling an ‘end run’ around the question of Indigenous rights, including (or especially) rights to land and self-determination. (p. 935)

Juxtaposing this statement to the optimism others hold reveals a tension between modern treaty proponents and opponents. As depicted by Grey and Kuokkanen (2020), while the former position co-management as a “tweakable system...a stepping stone to Indigenous self-determination” (p. 919) the latter see these institutions as inhibiting it. As proponents of the latter position, they argue that “[it] is not merely the practice of co-management, then, but the paradigm itself that is the problem” (p. 925). They conclude:

It cannot be ‘tweaked’ to provide better outcomes for Indigenous peoples. This is the case because co-management is not just an administrative arrangement, but an international rights regime, ratified and enacted (i.e. governed) at the national level through policies and practices, that actively displaces Indigenous rights and Indigenous governance. (Grey & Kuokkanen, 2020, p. 925)

I cannot speak to whether or not the modern treaties are steps towards self-determination, or if they in fact undermine it. What I take from these varied perspectives on the modern treaties is that we ought to remain critical of the State’s intent through the negotiations. I also suggest that these tensions exemplify differences in how colonialism is framed.

Within a (historical) colonial frame, the signing of the early numbered treaties is relegated to the colonial past, and the modern treaties are positioned as a means of rectifying their past harms. Recalling Cameron’s (2012) observation on the diminishing uptake of colonial discourse since the beginning of the modern treaty regime, I maintain that the modern treaties should not signify that colonialism is “no longer” (p. 106). With a settler colonial lens, both periods of treaty-making are colonial insofar as the State continues to exercise a large degree of control over these territories. Rights and land title are integral to the establishment of these agreements, yet political economists Kulchyski

and Bernauer (2014) present modern treaty-making in NWT as “contemporary processes of dispossession and imperialism” (p. 3). Scholars expanding on Marx’s original theorizations of primitive accumulation and dispossession have made clear that these processes are not one-time events, but are ongoing, colonial occurrences (Coulthard, 2014; Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014). They have been critical of the State’s early insistence on including an “extinguishable clause” in these agreements (requiring the surrender of Aboriginal title in the traditional lands for the modern treaty signatories) (Coulthard, 2014; Kulchyski & Bernauer, 2014). Coulthard (2014) contends that the extinguishment of the “broad and undefined rights and title claims of First Nations in exchange for a limited set of rights and benefits” was the main driver for the State to engage in these agreements in the first place (p. 66). Kulchyski and Bernauer (2014) present the “forfeiting [of] legal control over the vast majority of their territories,” as evidence of the continued process of dispossession for northern, Indigenous communities (p. 9). Like many other aspects of these negotiations, persistent advocacy from modern treaty signatories, as well as shifting federal mandates and policy landscapes, have made for an evolving process (Abele et al., 2019; White, 2019).

With revisions to the land claim policy in 1986, the State no longer maintains that extinguishment is a condition for negotiation (White, 2019). Yet, Coulthard (2014) argues that that even without this clause, the State’s intent has remained the same:

...to facilitate the “incorporation” of Indigenous people and territories into the capitalist mode of production and to ensure that alternative “socioeconomic visions” do not threaten the desired functioning of the market economy. (p. 66)

With reference to the ongoing Dene-State negotiations, Coulthard (2014) argues that reaching an agreement would make Dene participation in resource exploration and

development possible, but “in no way would [it] provide the economic and political infrastructure necessary to block or effectively cultivate a nonexploitative alternative to it” (p. 73). These remarks circle back to the fundamental concern of these treaties: who is responsible for decisions about land and resource use? Reflecting on the evolving federal legislation (from the Comprehensive Land Claims Policy and Self-Government to the more recent Indigenous Rights, Recognition and Implementation Framework), Hayden King and Shiri Pasternak (2018) offer their analysis of what these legislative changes offer for Indigenous self-determination. They argue,

...the land claims regime and self-government policies are being broken down and re-packaged; and changes to fiscal relations ultimately focus on accountability and *avoid addressing questions of land and resources* [emphasis added]. Indeed, we find that nearly all of Canada’s proposed changes to its relationship with First Nation peoples neglect issues of land restitution and treaty obligations. (H. King & Pasternak, 2018, p. 27)

Their analysis, though broad in scope, has strong resonance with the limitations of the modern treaties in the NWT. H. King and Pasternak (2018) contend that the federal government “focus[es] on the creation of self-governing First Nations with administrative responsibility for service delivery on limited land bases” (p. 27). This brings them to the conclusion that “decision-making powers are constrained to the local (including any notion of free, prior and informed consent). Provincial, territorial and federal governments will continue to patronize and intervene in the lives and lands of First Nation peoples” (H. King & Pasternak, 2018, p. 27).

Indigenous concerns for the State’s failure to uphold treaty obligations (as observed in their inherent rights to hunt and harvest) and Indigenous resistance to further encroachment over their territories (as observed in extractivist development) were major factors leading to modern treaty-making processes (in the NWT and elsewhere). However,

as with the early treaty regime, the State has its own motivations for treaty-making (then and now). The relationship between the State's extractivist desires and dispossession of Indigenous territories should serve as a reminder that we ought to remain critical of their intentions. There remain important questions about the modern treaties (settled and unsettled), including their institutions and implementation plans. Given the significance of the early and modern treaties on decisions about land and wildlife, these will continue to add layers of complexity to the landscape of food systems in the territory. In this section, I introduced the political/legal consequences of State-led extractivism but left out many other dimensions (ecological, economic, sociocultural). In my sixth chapter, as I take up the issues of gold mining and arsenic contamination in the city of Yellowknife, I expand my analysis to these other impacts of colonial-capitalist extractivism on food systems. In the next section I return to the interaction between treaties and conservationism that I started to introduce as I shift to historicize the State's conservationist aims in the territory.

4.2 Conservationism

Conservation may seem antithetical to the extractivist desires that precipitated the early and modern treaty regimes. Yet, by tracing historical and contemporary implications of conservation policies for hunting and harvesting, the similarities in the foundations of these contrasting approaches are apparent. With regards to disruptions to food systems in the territory – while the aims of extractivism and conservation certainly differ – in practice, both colonial approaches to land use are common in the ways they dispossess. Here I turn to the critical thinkers whose contributions articulate the colonial underpinnings of conservationism and bring the interconnectivity of these colonial practices into view. In this context, both State-led extractivism and conservation operate by restricting harvesting

activities (in varying spatial and temporal settings) or by displacing Indigenous peoples from their territories altogether. On this basis, I demonstrate that conservation has and continues to be integral to the settler colonial project. Conservation regulations and policies are enforced by the State, but many more actors are enlisted to uphold the logics that underpin them. By broadening the scope to consider the workings of agents beyond the State, we can see how conservationist regimes have been reinforced through racist logics and mistruths about country/traditional food overharvesting/population decline that disproportionately impact Indigenous harvesters.

4.2.1 Early Conservation Policy

Conservation policies are as old as the earliest treaties signed in what is now the NWT – in some cases, even older. The State has been exerting control over Indigenous harvesting in these lands as far back as the late-1890s with the passing of the Unorganized Territories Game Preservation Act (Dene Nation, n.d.; Parlee & Caine, 2018). At that time, harvesting restrictions and the criminalization of Indigenous harvesters were carried out by the State without any indication that the species (predominantly caribou) were experiencing declines (Parlee & Caine, 2018). The passing of this Game Act, and ensuing conservation policies of the early 20th Century, such as the Migratory Birds Convention Act, signify some of the earliest disputes between treaty-holders and the State in the NWT. As recounted by the Dene Nation (n.d.), the introduction of the latter in 1916, “ignore[d] aboriginal hunting rights as guaranteed by treaty #8” and “is never referred to in 1921 by Commissioner Conroy in his address to the Dene concerning treaty #11” (para. 37). Nevertheless, this inter-state agreement was passed by the US and Canada in following year (Dene Nation, n.d.) and is still in effect. These early examples are emblematic of the manner in which the

State governed the territory for the majority of the 20th Century – neglecting treaty rights by pursuing conservation regimes even when ecological concerns were unfounded.

State interference in harvesting was, of course, not isolated from other forms of genocide and colonization. It is impossible to disentangle the use of conservationist instruments from the other means of settler colonialism described in this chapter. Burnett et al. (2016) argue that “restrictions imposed by hunting laws were further exacerbated by the increasing imposition of ‘free’ market forces in the North that erected further barriers against pursuing fresh land- and water-based food” (para. 12). In their analysis of State-led food programs (taken up in more detail in the next section 4.3), these researchers argue that these overlapping interferences should be understood as “means used by settlers to secure control over Indigenous peoples’ abilities to eat and practice their cultures” (Burnett et al., 2016, para. 12). Abel (1993) likens these to the implications of agricultural colonization elsewhere in the country, as she argues, “an equally insidious threat to [the Dene] economy had been put in place through the arrival of non-Native trappers and the introduction of game laws” (p. 200). Abel (1993) states that while,

Dene hunters were perfectly willing to accept reasonable conservation measures where they were clearly needed, they were equally unwilling to accept closed seasons in regions where game were plentiful or where food was needed to prevent starvation. Dene protests took the form of simply ignoring the regulations or of more direct or aggressive complaints. Those protests were heard in Ottawa, and the Dene were able to find sufficient numbers of allies to force some compromise. (pp. 267–268)

The cumulative effect of many restrictive conservation policies, combined with extractivist encroachments, can be read through the testimonies presented for the Berger Inquiry for the proposed Mackenzie Valley Pipeline Project in the NWT. For instance, Phoebe Nahanni (former Dene Nation Land Research Director) (1977) writes,

Over the years we have observed the changes and limitations placed on our freedom by white peoples' government, the white peoples' laws, and white peoples' teachings. We did not write the laws that govern us and those that affect our way of life, such as the Migratory Birds Convention Act, Indian Act, Territorial Land Use Regulations, Game Ordinances, etc.: *our silence in the past does not mean consent* [emphasis added]. (pp. 22–23)

Nahanni is referring to over a century of colonial, top-down governance that transformed the territory into what Parlee and Caine (2018) refer to as “a managed space” (p. 5).

Reading both Abel and Nahanni’s statements together brings attention to an often-overlooked period of struggle over hunting rights in the territory that predates the large-scale mobilization of Indigenous extractivist resistance that led to the Berger Inquiry (Johnson, 2018). Johnson (2018) argues that “a narrative that jumps from government-led relocations of subsistence communities to permanent settlements” to the “making of new activist organizations such as the Indian Brotherhood of the Northwest Territories [Dene Nation] (formed in 1969), misses a key site of sovereign struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, before the language of self-determination and indigenous rights was widely used” (p. 65). She lists several motivations the State incited to restrict Indigenous hunting and trapping, among them conservation, in addition to, “pressure from white game hunters” (Johnson, 2018, p. 65). Through these years of struggle, Johnson (2018) examines why the State was staunchly committed to protecting species such as mallards (through enforcement of the Migratory Birds Convention Act) at a time that these animals were not at risk. Sovereignty, Johnson (2018) argues, was at the heart of both small- and large-game hunting restrictions, and the State’s “basis for claiming political authority” (p. 65). Despite these impositions, Indigenous hunters and trappers resisted these impositions by continuing their harvesting

practices (Bayha, 2010) and were often criminalized for this¹⁵. The period of struggle over rights to harvest are representative of the persistent use of conservationist policies by the State as a means of control of the territory (both to their benefit as well as settler citizens). As I recounted in the previous section, the governance in the NWT has been transforming since the time that Nahanni and others delivered their testimonies to the Berger Inquiry. The tensions leading up to it should make clear that the Dene resistance to the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline were not only in opposition to extractivism or conservationism, but an assertion of self-determination against the backdrop of settler colonial encroachment.

4.2.2 Contemporary Conservation

Shifting political processes (such as devolution and land claim negotiations) may impact *how* prohibitive conservation policies are regulated, but I maintain that discriminatory restrictions persist under the guise of both conservation and, in more recent years, ‘sustainability’. With reference to land claim negotiations, Todd and Parlee (2018) portray a shift in the 1980s from the historical approach of the State to “criminalize and deter Aboriginal participation in subsistence practices” (p. 136). The modern treaties inevitably altered the circumstances for land and wildlife governance/management in the NWT, yet Todd and Parlee (2018) argue that even so, “there are still numerous concerns and conflicts between policies and regulatory instruments aimed at natural resource conservation and those aimed at ensuring the continuation of cultural harvesting practices of Aboriginal peoples” (pp. 136–137). The contemporary governance of food systems in the NWT has been described as both *heavily* and *lightly* governed (Johnston & Andrée, 2019). The

¹⁵ See for instance: Johnston’s (2018) comprehensive recounting of Michael Sikyea’s experiences in *The Case of the Million-Dollar Duck: A Hunter, His Treaty, and the Bending of the Settler Contract*.

former is characterized by “many jurisdictional layers...from municipal/community, territorial and federal governments, to various Indigenous authorities, including First Nations leadership, comprehensive and specific land claim agreements...and Indigenous self-government” (Johnston & Andrée, 2019, p. 53). While this may not mirror the top-down ‘managed space’ of early/mid-20th Century, these ‘jurisdictional layers’ should signal a policy-landscape fated for conflict and incommensurability. Sandlos (2008) argues, “it is tempting to draw a sharp distinction between the ‘bad old days’ of autocratic conservation and the more inclusive approaches of the enlightened present such as co-management and the incorporation of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into wildlife management decision-making,” however, he continues, “many conflicts associated with the older colonial conservation regime have survived to the present day” (p. ii). As governance in the territory continues to change, it is important to pay attention to which practices are permitted and prohibited, as well as whose knowledge systems are trusted to make decision about land-use. These tensions are exemplified through the contentious example regarding caribou declines since the mid 20th Century, to which I now turn.

Concerns for caribou represent an incommensurability between colonial conservation and extractivism with Indigenous food systems. The responses to reported caribou herd declines across the North are varied but, in many cases, enforced or voluntary regulations or moratoriums on harvesting (both community and State-led) are common (Parlee & Caine, 2018). Yet researchers maintain, “for those with a clear eye on the past, including historians and Indigenous elders, the *imposition* of harvest limits may seem like history repeating itself” (Parlee & Caine, 2018, p. 5). These tensions are more complicated than differences in opinion on how to respond to declines but point to disagreements in the

methods and knowledges used to reach these conclusions. There has been a historical devaluation and exclusion of Indigenous Knowledges from caribou monitoring. Western scientific methods for monitoring herds have also been called into question, though, these practices and technologies changed overtime (Parlee & Caine, 2018). In their response to declines, settler governments “almost exclusively [focus] on curbing Indigenous subsistence harvesting” without consideration for other known stressors represented through research (Parlee, Sandlos, et al., 2018, p. 1). Researchers that closely studied harvest data of two regions of the NWT conclude “that perceptions of subsistence harvest as a threat to barren-ground caribou sustainability have little foundation” (Parlee, Sandlos, et al., 2018, p. 1) with similar accounts across the North. I do not bring this tension up to make assertions about whether regulations or moratoriums should be in place – rather, I mention it to point to the problems with how blame and responsibility have been assigned.

An overarching concern in this conflict is that Indigenous harvesters and communities are not only some of the most impacted by both caribou herd declines and harvesting regulations – but are similarly the most apt to be able to address these concerns (Kenny & Chan, 2017). Parlee et al. (2018) shift the frame to recognize the failure of many (State authorities, scientists, etc.) to account for the influence of climate change, extractivism, and other forms of capitalist development on caribou populations and habitats. Further, others caution us that the caribou decline issues “cannot be understood through capitalism alone,” pointing to “a wide set of logics, institutions and processes that are currently operating in alignment to keep caribou ‘superexploited’...[including] colonial, anthropocentric and racial logics that devalue caribou and the Indigenous communities whose ways of living are entwined with the species” (Collard & Dempsey,

2020, p. 244). Ultimately, these complex matters of concern for caribou persist through enduring settler colonial processes that continue to add stress (biophysically) to the habitats of caribou and (socio-economically) to Indigenous harvesters – these two key points cannot be forgotten in decision-making about land and resource use.

The historical tendencies of the State to problematize Indigenous harvesting, in part, represent the racist and paternalistic logics underpinning colonial conservation. And it is not only the State that upholds these logics. Racist accounts and misrepresentations of Inuit and Dene harvesting practices made by 20th Century explorers, naturalists and ethnographers have contributed significantly to these narratives (Sandlos, 2003, p. 400). These narratives are premised on baseless assumptions about Indigenous harvesters' use of Western technologies (hunting equipment, firearms), lack of knowledge or protocols around harvesting and other racist tropes that need not repeating (Johnson, 2018; Sandlos, 2003). These inaccurate accounts have been overwhelmingly refuted, as has much of the conservation-based science that portrayed overharvesting as cause for caribou population decline (Parlee & Wray, 2016; Sandlos, 2003; Usher & Wenzel, 1987). Sandlos (2003) suggests that given the “general vilification of Dene and Inuit hunting practices by naturalists and government officials in the early part of the 20th century” was unsubstantiated, “it is likely that the federal government drew at least part of their inspiration from the antilocal prejudices of the wider conservation movement” (p. 402). Racist logics have been attributed to the inception of conservation practices on a global scale (Domínguez & Luoma, 2020; Eichler & Baumeister, 2018). These logics are also central to many animal rights movements – such as with seals, whales or polar bears (Knezevic et al., 2018; Parlee & Caine, 2018) – that brought significant harms to northern

livelihoods¹⁶. Kuokkanen (2020) argues that “conservation is constituted through and deeply predicated on colonialism and its ideologies,” (p. 515) whereby Indigenous harvesting is considered an inherent threat to species survival if not for State intervention.

Kuokkanen (2020) continues,

Such denigration of Indigenous peoples’ harvesting and stewardship practices serves ‘an important legitimating function’ for authorities and conservation officials and justifies the assertion of state control over people and their ecosystems. Imposed state control in turn compromises the ability of Indigenous communities to engage in their livelihoods and to maintain their communities, cultures and traditional territories. (p. 515)

Once we see the colonial nature of conservation, it is also important to link the conservationist approaches of the past to those in the present.

I conclude this section with a note of concern for how colonial conservationism appears to manifest through contemporary *sustainability* efforts relating to harvesting. The dynamics are not new – recounting the impact of the early game laws in Denendeh, Abel (1993) describes that, “southern ideas about conservation sometimes conflicted directly with Dene ideas about game management and sometimes even conflicted with Dene access to food resources” (pp. 200–201). Colonial conservationism assumes a relationship to land and wildlife that is imposed on Indigenous nations whose livelihoods and identities may be rooted in their own human/nonhuman relations. This dynamic has been identified within the politics of sustainability in the present, as Medby (2019) finds that, “what may at first glance seem a unidirectional relation between the Canadian North and south – the latter ‘sustaining’ the former – upon closer observance proves to be one of mutual dependency, where the former sustains the southern ‘stewards’ sense of self” (p. 172).

¹⁶ See for instance, the impact of the seal hunt bans by the European Union on Inuit hunters in Nunavut in (Arnaquq-Baril, 2016) *Angry Inuk*; the link between trade bans and rates of food insecurity (O’Neill, 2018).

The concern I raise here is not with conservation or sustainability per se, but with its part in the enforcement of colonial legal and political systems on Indigenous nations. The meaning of these laws could be read in Bayha's (2012) account of working as a Dene game officer in the Sahtú:

So people would hide who they really are when I was around in my uniform, even though I was Dene. But when I asked them if they knew anything about the Wildlife Act, or the Migratory Birds Convention Act, or the Environmental Protection Act, they would say, “*No, why should I? They’re not my laws. They belong to somebody else*” [emphasis added]. (p. 26)

These impositions define historical State-led conservationist efforts. And, as with the example of caribou conservation, there is an unevenness in which forms of land-use are restricted and whose knowledges are trusted. This dynamic will persist as long the State assumes itself as the authority on land and wildlife decisions. Having traced the historical origins of extractivism and conservation in the territory, I now shift my focus to agrarianism and its colonial establishments over time.

4.3 Agrarianism

Agricultural food systems in the NWT are often distinguished by their relatively small scale compared to those in southern provinces. Whether it is a historical consideration of the limited extent to which northern territories were cultivated and converted for agricultural production, or a contemporary consideration of the evolving climatic and environmental suitability for such forms of northern production, the snapshot of agriculture in the territory is typically contrasted to the south. The narratives of the limited capacity of agriculture in the past or the newness of the agricultural potential in the present, both gloss over the varied histories of and experiences with agriculture across the territory. By overemphasizing this lack compared to southern provinces, these narratives render invisible the intent and attempts of colonial agricultural expansion to the North. They also

sever the experiences of Indigenous Northerners from others impacted by the settler colonial legacies of ‘agricultural colonization’ on local and global scales (Mayes, 2018; Piper & Sandlos, 2007).

The circumstances under which agricultural developments arise in the North bear significant similarities to elsewhere in the country. These developments accompanied increased settlement by non-Indigenous Canadians, were enforced through missionary and residential schooling systems, and supported through State-funded food initiatives, social programs and experimental farms (McCarthy, 1995; Piper & Sandlos, 2007; TRC, 2012). In this section, I draw out the legacies of agriculture in the NWT, maintaining that no matter how slight, they mustn’t be ignored especially given the widening interest in growing food in the North today. It is also my intention to interrogate some of the assumptions of agricultural possibilities and impossibilities, while considering how prominently these assumptions have featured in settler colonial decision-making in the NWT. I argue that the extent to which these colonial actors managed to expand agricultural production matters less than their intent to do so.

4.3.1 The Agricultural Legacy of Trade Post Gardens

Agricultural production has long been associated with the settlement of newcomers to the territory. As Piper and Sandlos (2007) explain, “in the northern reaches of the boreal forest, the harvest of cultivated plants from small gardens provided essential food to people living at the northern trade posts and missions, allowing immigrants to supplement their diets with familiar grains and vegetables” (p. 778). The successful introduction of many crops (potatoes, barley, radishes, carrots, cabbages, peas) were recorded at these early post gardens (p. 778). It appears that the ecological constraints for northern agricultural

production did not entirely outweigh the possibilities. Piper and Sandlos (2007) present the precariousness of gardening in the sub-Arctic as a “delicate balance [of] factors such as favourable microclimates, fertile soils, and the availability of human labor to bring forth a bountiful harvest,” with the “short growing season, limited moisture, and temperature extremes” (p. 778). Many fur traders were able to strike this balance – especially those in the more southern and inland regions of the territory that benefited from access to large freshwater bodies, warmer temperatures and later frosts (Fort Providence for example). These feats were not limited to the subarctic – vegetable gardens were grown with high yields as far north as Aklavik and Fort McPherson (Piper & Sandlos, 2007; TRC, 2012).

The pursuit of agricultural production in this era was a matter of sustenance for fur traders coming north, but these small garden successes were and continue to be, an impetus for those wishing to expand agricultural food systems in the territory. Piper and Sandlos (2007) present early trade post gardens (in conjunction with shrinking availability of arable land in the southern parts of the country) as a source of aspiration for an imagined northern agricultural frontier. This interest in a new agricultural frontier exceeded the boundaries of the NWT and could be observed in the State’s research into the agricultural potential of the northernmost parts of the central and western provinces (such as Peace River District, BC) in addition to the Mackenzie River Valley in the late 19th-Century (Piper & Sandlos, 2007). “The Dominion and provincial governments pursued their northern colonization programs for a variety of reasons,” according to Piper and Sandlos (2007), one of which included: “a broad ideological commitment to the expansion of agrarian civilization as a natural course in the evolution of Canada’s national destiny” (p. 779). Despite much skepticism from northern field agents, the State pressed on with their agenda for northern agricultural

colonization (Piper & Sandlos, 2007). The State's intent to expand agriculture, despite doubts for how fruitful this endeavour would be, suggest that agricultural expansion is not merely a means of food provisioning for settlers in the North. As was the case elsewhere in the country (as well as other settler colonies, see Mayes, 2018), agricultural expansion has always been an important tool of settler colonial occupation.

4.3.2 Residential Schools in the Missionary Period

Agricultural food systems in the territory are also part of the legacies of Church and State-led residential school systems, originating in the missionary period at the same time of confederation of Canada and enduring until the closure of the last day school in the 1990s (TRC, 2012). In the report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (referred to as TRC hereinafter), the authors offer the following concluding remark in their synopsis of northern experiences with residential schools,

While the system was late in coming to the North, its impact was significant, and continues to the present. A far higher percentage of the Aboriginal population in northern Canada attended residential schools than was the case in the rest of Canada. (TRC, 2012, p. 65)

This is an important reminder when contrasting northern realities to those in the remaining parts of the country to keep in mind the relative scale and impact of these colonial systems. The Church-led residential schools of the missionary period in the NWT were few and far between – until the mid-20th Century these were comprised of one Anglican and three Roman Catholic schools (TRC, 2012, p. 57).

Constrained funding shaped the missionary period of residential schooling, both in their scope and operations. The missionary schools at this time were limited to the region of the Mackenzie Valley and until the signing of early treaties obliged the State to provide

schooling and agricultural training¹⁷, they were reluctant to fund them. The TRC (2012) reports crowding and overworked conditions for staff, remarking that the “domestic education the students received was of limited use, since the foods they were taught to prepare often were not available in the North or were very expensive” (p. 63). According to Piper and Sandlos (2007) “children at the schools labored in the gardens to help provide for their own subsistence, a major undertaking in the late nineteenth century when food shortages were widespread in the western sub-Arctic” (p. 778). The gardens that accompanied the schools are exemplary of the Church’s use of food as an instrument of colonialism. As reported by the TRC (2012),

Student labour was needed to operate the schools. In 1882 the Grey Nuns expressed concern over the amount of work the Oblates required of students at schools in the NWT. At both the Anglican and Catholic schools, boys spent a half day gardening, fishing, or woodworking, and the girls prepared meals, cleaned the schools, and made and repaired clothing (p. 58).

Piper and Sandlos (2007) portray a similar scenario in which the Roman Catholic missionary schools established a gendered division of labour through food provisioning whereby, “girls were typically put to work berrying while boys hoed the potato fields or cut hay” (p. 778). It is notable how integral these gendered food provisioning tasks were to the operation of missionary schools – yet some researchers cast doubt on whether it was the intention of the Church to make farmers out of students, as was often the case in the south (Piper & Sandlos, 2007). McCarthy (1995) who studied Roman Catholic missions in Denendeh, found that the Oblates “did not try to induce the Dene to adopt a settled agricultural lifestyle, *though this was ruled out as much by the environment* [emphasis

¹⁷ Written into Treaties 8 & 11 were the following obligations: “the Crown was to pay the salaries of teachers to instruct the Dene” and “agricultural assistance and equipment was to be provided” (GNWT, 2013, p. 7).

added] as by their philosophy” (p. 163, as cited in Piper & Sandlos, 2007). No matter their intent, Piper and Sandlos (2007) argue that forcing students to learn agricultural food provisioning, rather than traditional harvesting practices, “[alienated] Dene children from their heritage and traditional relationships to the land” (p. 779). It is evident in McCarthy’s finding here, how the presumed ecological limitations of northern agriculture feature in the approach by the Church. These missionary gardens, as Piper and Sandlos (2007) see it, “acted as tiny outposts that furthered the ecological and cultural ambition of newcomers to the North” (p. 779). Their legacy then, is not only entwined in the traumas inflicted by colonial residential schooling, but like post gardens, they serve as emblems of agricultural potential in the territory.

These early agricultural developments come to matter in the contemporary era not only for their ecological successes (or failures, depending how you define it) – but also with proponents of agriculture evoking them as evidence of the agricultural potential in the territory. Framing these legacies with a settler colonial lens brings together past and present agricultural endeavors (especially those carried out by the State and settlers/outside to the territory). Recounting agricultural histories through this frame urges us to ask how the gardens of this era be revered – as a source of inspiration, or of cautionary concern? I suggest that this line of questioning should inform how agricultural developments are pursued and promoted in the ensuing periods.

4.3.3 The Postwar Period and Settler Colonial Governance

The colonial transformations in the territory that began in the postwar period were attributable to a complete shift in the approach to which the State governed in the North. As Abele (2009) makes clear,

The Second World War ended forever the minimalist Dominion policies with respect to northern social provision, and it opened a vigorous new phase in the promotion of northern economic development. After the Second World War, the impulse to isolate northern Indigenous peoples—for reasons of protection and for cost containment—came to be seen as neglect. (p. 43)

The role of the State in the NWT had been evolving in the years prior to the postwar period. Abel (1993) notes that this shift began in the first three decades of the 20th-Century as the federal government began to replace the Hudson's Bay Company as the "actual and symbolic non-Native power in the north" (p. 200). The State had also begun subsidizing Church-led missionary schools but the period of "direct missionary control over education in the North" was brought to an end with the creation of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources in the 1950s (TRC, 2012, p. 59). This did not disappear the role of the Church in residential schooling – instead the majority of the State-run schools relied on Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches to manage their residences (TRC, 2012). The expansion of the northern residential school system by Northern Affairs occurred at the same time that many Indian Affairs southern-based residential schools were shutting down¹⁸ (TRC, 2012, p. 60). Abele (2009) argues that the "developmental edge of the state in the postwar period was not a democratic one," and that "measures were planned in the South and then implemented in the North, often by people who may have had...an imperfect grasp of the local impacts of their actions" (p. 44). Evidently, the balance of power with regards to education, was held between the Church and the State without any consultation with the Indigenous peoples whose territories the schools occupy.

¹⁸ At this time, Northern Affairs and Indian Affairs were not housed in the same department of the federal government. This expansion comprised of four large day schools in Chesterfield Inlet (1954), Yellowknife (1958), Inuvik (1959), and Fort Simpson (1960) (TRC, 2012, p. 60).

The renewed residential school system led by the State exceeded the sector of education— as reported by the TRC (2012): “Residential school expansion in the North went hand-in-hand with intensified resource development and speculation, and an enhanced military presence” (p. 60). The agricultural optimism of the earlier half of the century had not been completely extinguished but there were observable shifts in the State’s priorities. Enthusiastic bureaucrats working for the departments of the Interior and Agriculture hoped to circumnavigate the “inherent limitations associated with ranching European livestock in the Far North,” and attempt to domesticate northern wildlife such as caribou and muskox – but these efforts were not fruitful (Piper & Sandlos, 2007, p. 771). Ecological constraints (such as fluctuating number of frost-free days, soil nutrient deficiencies and so on) account for the demise of the “agricultural colonization of the region,” (Piper & Sandlos, 2007, p. 780) but dwindling support by the territorial government in pursuit of resource development played a major role (Johnston, 2018). Despite the federal government’s recommendation for a territorial department designated for agriculture as the experimental farm projects came to a close, no such department was ever created¹⁹. The aspirations of a northern agricultural frontier that had materialized into provisions such as “land grants, transportation infrastructure, dominion and experimental farms and land clearance programs,” but for the most part, did not continue too far into the postwar period (Piper & Sandlos, 2007, p. 779). “The brevity of the northern farmer’s tenure in the boreal woodlands,” Piper and Sandlos (2007) argue, “did not mean that the departing settlers left no mark on the landscape” (p. 780). Contrasted to the impact of

¹⁹ This is true to this day. Despite the GNWT having an ongoing multi-year territorial strategy for commercial agriculture, this sits within the department of Industry, Tourism and Investment.

extractivism in the subarctic, “the ecological transformation of the region through the introduction of European plants” as argued by Piper and Sandlos (2007), “remains limited in scope, confined to a few islands of European colonization²⁰ that more closely replicate the dramatic transformations associated with the process of ecological imperialism further to the south” (p. 781).

These small to larger scale examples of local agricultural production are not the only means by which the State transformed the lives of Northerners through food. “More than any period in Dene history,” as argued by Abel (1993), “the postwar years saw the most widespread and intense pressure to change. There have been significant modifications in the places people live, the foods people eat... the way people support themselves and feed their children” (p. 264). The efforts of the State to intervene in the postwar era, “worked to undermine the foodways of northern Indigenous peoples and impose a southern market-based food economy” (Burnett et al., 2016, para. 1). These authors continue to explain that, across the country, “federal policies and programs around food have functioned to turn Indigenous foodways into settler foodways, and it is through this amalgamation or elimination that settler colonialism operates” (Burnett et al., 2016, para. 3). These State-led processes not only encouraged agricultural production, but also the introduction and distribution of agri-food items from southern markets, as the territory became more accessible through new transportation routes (Johnston, 2018).

Broadening my scope to include impacts of agrarianism, even if not procured locally, brings more settler colonial food systems disruptions into view. Burnett, Hay and

²⁰ Piper and Sandlos (2007) conclude their assessment of agricultural efforts in the with mention of, “the same patchwork of small gardens and marginal animal husbandry operations are spread throughout the region as over a century ago” in the Mackenzie Valley region (p. 780).

Chambers (2016) demonstrate how “state food management initiatives were (*and are*) [emphasis added] intended to replace Indigenous foodways and secure settler control of the Canadian North” (para. 1) through the three government programs: Family Allowances, Food Mail and Nutrition North Canada (NNC). They exemplify how together, “these programs can be viewed as exercises of governance created to sustain hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity in many northern Indigenous communities within the claimed boundaries of Canada” (Burnett et al., 2016, para. 1). The interconnectivity of these initiatives with other forms of colonization are clear when considering that Family Allowance was provided only to parents of school-aged children who were enrolled in the State-led schools (TRC, 2012, p. 60). The TRC (2012) contend that the State was concerned with the population growth among Indigenous Northerners and therefore, used education as means of manipulating children into the “new North” (pp. 59–60). Speaking of a wider number of State initiatives through the postwar period, Abele (2009) argues that they have “reached into the lives of every family and every settlement, with a far more thorough and long-lasting impact than had been felt from mining or mineral exploration” (p. 44). How then, does the settler colonial governance in the postwar period mark the issues around food systems faced in the present?

These troubling accounts of State-led agriculture and other food programs characterize the purposefully aggressive manner in which the State engaged to alter the ways of life of northern Indigenous peoples. Coupled with Church-led colonial efforts in the missionary period, these constitute many of the socioeconomic issues of northern food security observed in the contemporary. Burnett et al. (2016) argue that the “manner that food operates as an extremely useful technology of power, serving literally as a means to

pacify and control ‘inconveniently’ placed Indigenous nations and symbolically as a ‘civilizing’ apparatus whereby settlers can erase Indigeneity” (para. 2). However, these colonial issues are not always presented as such. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, more often, food security crises are premised on a phenomenon that many northern researchers refer to as the ‘nutrition transition’ (Samson & Pretty, 2006). Juxtaposing the nutritional profiles of agri-food market imports to those of country/traditional foods, the latter are revered predominantly for nutrient richness. The colonial legacies of missionary/residential schooling and agricultural experimentation only come to matter in these representations as a set of processes in which diets have shifted to rely on nutrient-poor foods. Beyond the ways that the settler colonial food system issues are conceptualized, these accounts ought to make us skeptical of any outside approach to reimagine or transform the food systems in the territory. These colonial histories matter not only as a cautionary tales, but in a settler colonial context, they bring the contemporary food system interventions into relation with those damaging examples in the past.

4.4 Linkages Between Three Colonial Approaches to Land-Use

Through these complex accounts, I read a subtle, but sometimes overt thread between extractivist, conservationist and agrarian desires of the State. For instance, a clear connection can be observed in the ways that settler citizens who migrated to the NWT to work in the extractive sector, brought with them agricultural practices and kept gardens as part of their sustenance (Johnston, 2018; Piper & Sandlos, 2007). In other cases, agriculture and extractivism are not necessarily complementary. Rather, the shifting priorities of the State can be observed through the presumed feasibility of one over the other. This pattern plays out in the early treaty-making period within which agricultural colonization is ruled

out because of limited ecological feasibility in the territory – resulting in a delay to pursue a treaty until extractable resources are found (GNWT, 2013, p. 2). Later, the agricultural enthusiasm held by Dominion bureaucrats in the early 20th Century that supported agriculture experimentation, was stifled in the resource extractive boom in the postwar period (Johnston, 2018, p. 78). Similarly, the development accompanying capitalist extractivism, such as road building, is considered one of the greatest disincentives for developing local agricultural systems as agri-food items became more available (Johnston, 2018). The emergence of State-led commercial agricultural agenda (led by the territorial government and funded by the federal government) that marks the current period shows this cyclical interaction. This comes in the wake of many mine closures across the territory and the forecasted economic concerns for shifting away from an economy driven by resource extraction.

By tracing the introduction of agricultural and extractivist developments alongside conservationist regimes in the territory, we can see that what is common is the State's intent to gain control over land and resources. These also demonstrate how integral both extractive and agrarian expansion are to the settler colonial State's pursuits of colonial-capitalist modes of production, and how complementary conservation has been to these processes. These differences should not be conflated – as researchers have demonstrated that conservationist processes – “such as resource permitting, legal proceedings and environmental assessment” – cannot be “understood as operating purely in service of capitalism (or an accumulative logic) but are also not outside of accumulation” (Collard & Dempsey, 2020, p. 244). In other words, pursuit of these three modes of land-use are not without their contradictions. For example, forms of agrarian and extractivist development

in the territory may be antithetical to conservationism. Yet, Sandlos (2008) demonstrates that historically, conservation-based restrictions in the territory have scantily been predicated on ecological findings. If they had were, then decision makers would realize how many other ecological stressors (both extractivist and agrarian) need attention. In sum, while these divergent approaches to land-use are not fundamentally alike or always aligned, each have played a part gaining and/or maintaining control of the territory in service of the settler colonial project.

Recounting histories of agrarianism and conservationism in a settler colonial frame also reveals the interplay of hunting and harvesting restrictions with agricultural production and federal food programs in territory. The implications of these two colonial approaches for food systems in the territory are multiple, and I have only skimmed the surface. Despite having taken my analysis across vast temporal and spatial contexts, this is by no means a comprehensive account. Rather than seeing these as a series of inconsequential events that contributed to the so-called *nutrition transition* – these should be read as State interventions that ask Indigenous Northerners “to submit to the surveillance and sovereignty of the settler state and to transform their lives and foodways to more closely resemble those of the settler society” (Burnett et al., 2016, para. 28). I echo what Burnett and their co-authors assert: these multiple programs and policies operate in concert as part of the processes of assimilation and ongoing colonialism that have brought so much harm.

The transformations explored within this chapter are extremely troubling, not only in their historical context but in their legacies too. The accounts of extractive, conservation and agricultural pursuits I have explored here disrupt many of the narratives that have never sat well with me as I have encountered them in the literature – narratives that translate

dramatic changes to the lives of Indigenous peoples and the food systems that sustain them in a highly depoliticized or benign manner. At issue here is the (over)harvesting narrative that downplays the role of extractivism and contamination in contributing to wildlife disruptions and declines, as well as the narrative that reduces northern food insecurity to matters of nutrition. Finally, the narrative that presents agriculture as an emergent strategy for food procurement in the North, renders invisible the colonial legacies of agriculture by the State and Church. Tracing the colonial contexts of extractivist, agricultural, and conservationist priorities, policies and practices in the territory disrupts how we talk about these issues in the present. This has made the link between food systems and settler colonialism more visible. Having mapped the workings of colonialism in northern food systems, in the following chapters, I shift away from such a rigid settler colonial frame and bring in my research engagements through a series of reflexive analyses.

Chapter 5: Dilemmas in Community-Based Participatory Research

In this chapter, I reflect on my efforts to realize a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project with the civil society organizations (CSOs) I was partnered with in Yellowknife. In doing so, I account for my orientation away from CBPR towards a more reflexive and theoretically situated project. I revisit this shift in two parts, one on the evolving framing of my research, and another that is methodologically situated. In this chapter, I aim to speak to aspiring and practicing participatory researchers as the implications my reflections are methodological in nature, but the tensions I work through in this meditation may also resonate with advocates aiming to foster local food systems in the North.

In the first section, I contextualize my research engagements with FLEdGE in Yellowknife by situating them with the efforts of my partnered organizations, the NWT Food Network (referred to as TFN hereinafter) and Ecology North (to a lesser extent). I reflect on the formative role these organizations had in shaping my understanding of ‘local’ food systems in the North. I bring attention to the challenges I had in identifying a community partner, designing a research proposal, and defining the scope of the project with reference to early writings, correspondences and proposals formulated throughout. One of the things I reflect on is the fact that the earliest renditions of my thesis proposals were never formulated as CBPR projects. I bring into this analysis the limitations of what I have described as ‘commoning’ struggles for local food systems – that is to organize disparate actors and interests into one common vision. The shifting priorities and vision of one of my community partners, in part, led me to reconsider whether dwelling on that which is common, rather than different among disparate systems, is even useful at all.

These accounts capture my shifting theoretical and practical orientations towards an ethic of incommensurability.

The second section is where I address the methodological dilemmas I experienced in my efforts to build a CBPR project. Many of these dilemmas, I argue, stem from underlying methodological assumptions in CBPR, including the obfuscation of ‘community’ by academic institutions, the ambiguity of the role of researchers and the issue of who (else) this research serves. I include contributions from researchers reflecting on and critically engaging with CBPR methods that guided me through the tensions encountered in my engagements. The lessons that I draw from their experiences and my own should resonate with other researchers struggling through the ethical dilemmas of research and questioning their roles in visioning futurities. I do not have conclusive recommendations on how CBPR methodologies should (or shouldn’t) be practiced, but I argue in this chapter that we, as researchers, should centre the tensions we encounter in collaboration.

5.1 Aspirations of CBPR

5.1.1 Civil society organizing for comprehensive food systems

During my preliminary fieldwork, I learned of the burgeoning interest in collaborative approaches to promote local food systems throughout the NWT – many that had been supported by my peers and supervisors with FLEdGE and Ecology North. These impressive collaborative efforts led to the development of two notable CSOs adopting *comprehensive* approaches to food systems: first the Yellowknife Food Coalition (YKFC) followed by the NWT Food Network. For instance, Johnston and Andrée (2019) explain that in the creation of a municipal food charter, the YKFC “outlined their vision of a

comprehensive food strategy, touching on agriculture, but also Indigenous practices of hunting, fishing, gathering, all framed from a food systems perspective” (p. 56). A stated principle for a ‘just’ and ‘sustainable’ food system by the YKFC included that, “Indigenous and traditional practices are respected and supported” (Yellowknife Farmers Market, 2015 as cited in Johnston, 2018). Similarly, at the time of their incorporation, TFN’s mission was, “to nurture and promote food systems in the Northwest Territories by building and celebrating a *collaborative* [emphasis added] food culture that honours northern ecosystems and values” [See Figure 2 for a **draft flyer** that I created for TFN in 2018].

**NWT
Food
Network**

Our mission is to nurture and promote food systems in the Northwest Territories by building and celebrating a collaborative food culture that honours northern ecosystems and values.

together, we work to:

- Promote collaboration by connecting our members and building partnership
- Advocate for our members
- Facilitate the sharing of resources
- Support research and promote education
- Foster safe, ecologically sound, culturally appropriate and economically robust food systems

as a member, enjoy:

- Voting Rights at Annual General Meeting
- E-Newsletters
- Listing in Member Directory
- Prioritized Marketing Support
- Free Webinars & Networking Events
- Access to NWT Food Network Technology & Support

Complete the form below to Register as a Member Today!
Membership & Year End Date: December 31st

Facebook NWTfoodnetwork LinkedIn Twitter Google+ NWTfoodnetwork

NAME _____

ORGANIZATION _____

EMAIL _____

TELEPHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

MEMBERSHIP TYPE

Forms of Payment: Cash, Cheque (Made out to "NWT Food Network") or E-transfer

ONE YEAR \$20

THREE YEAR \$50

Figure 2 Draft NWT Food Network Membership Flyer (Stollmeyer, 2018)

Despite the agricultural focus in Network's origins and membership, their mission took a similar approach to that of the Food Charter, which sought to represent multiple food systems alongside one another. These comprehensive visions for food systems are what I consider a commoning approach.

The comprehensive visions of both the YKFC and TFN demonstrated the potential to break the departmental silos of State-led support for food systems (Johnston & Andrée, 2019). While these CSOs brought collaborative approaches to the table, however, their comprehensive food systems approaches did not correspond with efforts by the territorial and municipal governments. The territorial strategies relating to food remain siloed into their respective departments. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI) led the *NWT The Business of Food: A Food Production Plan* that centred commercial agricultural production (GNWT, 2017). Their work was followed by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) *Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan*, which offers support for country/traditional food practices (ENR, 2019). This Action Plan is meant to complement strategies of other GNWT departments given their interconnectivity. Further, while there is recognition of the many impediments that legislation poses on country/traditional food provisioning, the Action Plan doesn't state any intent to alter or remove barriers to harvesting that fall under the jurisdictions of other GNWT departments (ENR, 2019). Evidently, at the territorial level, the support for agricultural food production is not complementary to strategizing to promote country/traditional food provisioning, and vice versa. Similarly, in the first announcement of the City of Yellowknife's food and agriculture strategy, there was a clear agri-centred approach to food systems (City of Yellowknife, 2018b). The municipal government's food policy is examined more closely

in the following chapter, but generally the recognition of country/traditional food provisioning in this strategy appears as more of an afterthought. While these two strategies are exemplary of increasing support for a multitude of local harvesting practices in the territory, the way they partition agriculture and country/traditional food makes a strong a case for the importance of a territorial organization like TFN to try to break silos.

These CSOs largely informed my understanding of the landscape of food work in Yellowknife (and the NWT to a lesser extent). As a result, I brought this ‘silo-breaking’ orientation into my research engagements. Following the lead of my peers with FLEdGE, I continued to incorporate a multiplicity of food practices to the initiatives I brought capacity to over my two summers as a student “RA” in Yellowknife. For instance, when coordinating the annual Fall Harvest Fair, I continued the effort of having more country/traditional food practices celebrated alongside agricultural ones at this event (Burke, 2019; M. Erasmus et al., 2019) [See Appendix B]. In another case, for a local food supper club program, I continued to try to source fish, berries, and other wild harvested foods to complement what was growing in the garden plots of the community centres participating in the program or purchased from vendors selling agri-food items at Yellowknife Farmers Market (YKFM). This latter experience made it apparent how difficult it was, *for me at least*, to access country/traditional foods in Yellowknife, based in my position working with predominantly settler-run CSOs, when factored alongside barriers like arsenic contamination (of berry patches), cost and limited commercial availability of wild harvested foods. Notwithstanding many hiccups pulling them off, these programs represented on a micro-level, what (I imagined) was envisioned for food systems on a territorial scale by TFN and supported by Ecology North and FLEdGE.

The incorporation of TFN took place early in 2018 (Johnston & Andrée, 2019) before I was hired by FLEdGE. This work was largely led by Ecology North who also temporarily housed TFN in their Yellowknife-based office. Accordingly, through my RA positions, I offered support to both of these CSOs, which included creating communications for TFN (designing their website, creating membership flyers, etc.)²¹. I was not involved in the meetings where the mission, vision and other aspects of incorporation were decided on, but I learned of their progression through my peers in FLEdGE and our partners. Aside from a small number of Yellowknife-based members who I knew through Ecology North or the Farmer's Market, my main connection to network members were through infrequent videoconferences (often with limited participation given how busy the summer season is for growers/market vendors). I subsequently developed a stronger understanding of their mission and vision as read through their incorporation documents, than I had from the collective of individuals who formed TFN. When I left Yellowknife to start my coursework in September 2018, I did not feel that I had built the relationships necessary to pursue a CBPR project with TFN but continued to carry their vision of food systems as I began my coursework.

5.1.2 Common visions in food systems research

As a RA with FLEdGE, I was motivated to create a research project relevant to one of my partnered organizations. Based on TFN's vision, I centred *comprehensive* frameworks for food systems in the territory in the early renditions of my thesis proposal developed in anticipation of returning to the North again. I also adopted their vision in my

²¹ The website [www.nwtfootnetwork.ca] is no longer retrievable, but the mission and vision can be read in Figure 2. This is a draft membership flyer I created for the TFN during my RA in Yellowknife, 2018.

conceptualization of *local food systems* (characterizing all food procured within the territory including country/traditional, agricultural, aquatic and non-timber forest-related provisions into one frame but excluding southern imported market-based foods). This kind of framing is also exemplified in a drafted thesis proposal from 2019, where I collapsed into one, the hopes of promoting multiple food sovereignties to include diverse actors in the NWT:

What does meaningful engagement in community-based food systems research look like? What is the role for civil society organizations in fostering *food sovereignties* [emphasis added] in Yellowknife/Northwest Territories? (2019, Jun 3)

The open-endedness of the questions was largely due to my uncertainty of who I was meant to be generating a CBPR project *with* (Ecology North or TFN, if either at all). On the surface, this approach seemed to leave open the possibility of who my partner would be, and the ambiguity of my proposed questions also appeared to complement the burgeoning interest in collaborative food systems (Johnston & Andrée, 2019; Johnston & Williams, 2017). As I reacquainted with my partners in 2019, it was clear there was a need to support the projects I had in previous year (Fall Harvest Fair, supper clubs, etc.) but my partners also hoped I could help get TFN off the ground. With a growing list of tasks for me to support in as an RA, I was not sure if any would develop into a collaborative research project. I was also unsure about how the critical analysis and other teachings from my coursework would relate to this work.

It is interesting to reflect on how I translated these concerns when forced to articulate them. At the time of writing my tentative proposal, I really wondered: how do *I* meaningfully engage in community-based food systems research? And what is the role for *settler organizations* in fostering *Indigenous* food sovereignties in the territory? I am

reminded of these anxieties when reading through the comments I made in my drafts. For instance, I included the following caveat to account for the vagueness of my questions:

As a network of researchers, we are overwhelmingly settlers but I am avoiding framing the civil society organization as a “settler organization” for [presupposing] that NWT Food Network members are non-Indigenous.
(May 29, 2019)

I understood that in CBPR it is necessary to remain open and flexible to research projects changing course, given that the intention is to serve the needs of the ‘community.’ In this sense, the vague research questions posed in draft versions of my thesis proposal were appropriate insofar as they could be fine-tuned to suit the needs of my partner. Most methodological writings on CBPR say as much, but what would be the recommended steps when this fine-tuning starts to bring you into arenas that lose your interest or push you out of your comfort-zone?

My journal entries and correspondences from this period of my research reveal my coming to terms with having different priorities or expectations from those who I hoped to collaborate with. I did not have a firm grasp on how TFN had continued to grow while I was away from Yellowknife and learned that members of the network were planning to revisit their mission and vision to better reflect who they had at the table and what their respective needs were in the short- to long-term. These thoughts represent how *my vision* of the Network (and how it complemented my research interests/curiosities) clashed with the reality of what TFN had become (or had always been).

My inquiry is part of a broader conversation around the role that settler organizations have in supporting Indigenous food sovereignties. However, the interest that I have in asking these questions emerges from my own experiences working with various civil society organizations on food initiatives in the NWT. I brought with me my own assumptions of what this work might look like and must admit that I continue to be surprised by my ignorance. (research log, July 3, 2019)

It was clear through my conversations with some of the members who I worked with that there were important considerations about TFN's structure, membership and governance model that still needed to be ironed out. At this point, I started designing questions that I thought could support their revisioning – thinking through questions of inclusivity, advocacy and representation in food systems given who was 'at the table' [See Figure 3].

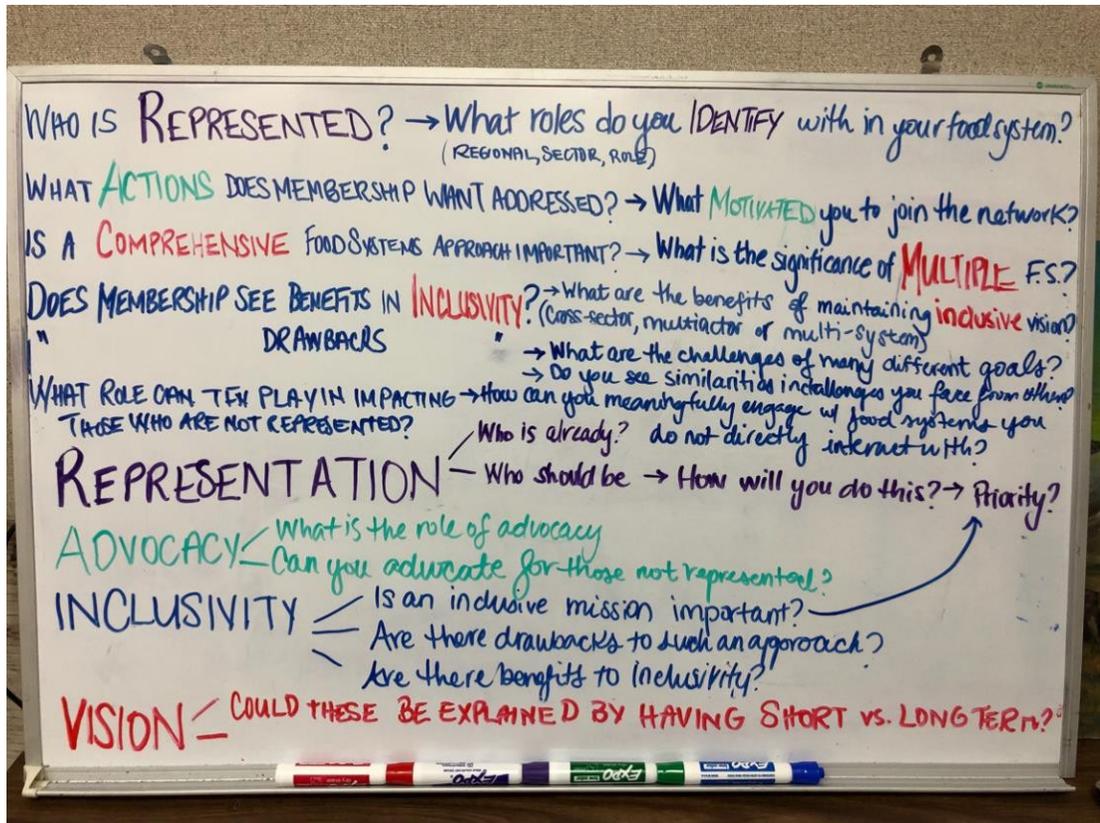


Figure 3 Qs on Inclusivity, Advocacy & Representation TFN (Stollmeyer, 2019)

There were also larger questions still lingering about the nature of the network, ‘as advocacy group, project-oriented or even a trade organization?’ (personal notes, July 2019). One thing was certain: agriculture was at its centre. I was troubled by their moves towards an agricultural focus as I had grown so attached to the comprehensive vision and I felt inclusion of country/traditional provisioning was critical. These correspondences with one of my supervisors locate where I hoped I could pivot to better suit the needs of the

partner but was concerned that there was too much distance between what they needed and what I could offer.

I know we have talked about this a bit before, but generally I observe a (huge) disconnect in what my understanding was of [the Food Network] last summer by sounds of it in conversations [now]...To say that I am barking up the wrong tree may be an understatement, but I do see an opportunity to use this disconnect/tension as informing my research questions.

*I have tried to learn a bit more about what 'revisiting the vision' means, and I admitted to * that I do not feel that the mission statement that was formulated through...the formation of the Food Network, is consistent with the priorities of the network now. I also proposed that I could use this as an opportunity for my thesis research with the goal that this could help the network figure itself out going forward...This feels like a delicate balance, the questions I want to ask might not be as important to the network. (personal correspondence, July 23, 2019 [name omitted to avoid identification])*

These anxieties about not being able to find synergies with my partner were common through my research engagements. In another case, I wrote: “*Can I have my own theoretical and fundamental perspectives and work collaboratively with organizations with whom I do not directly align my views with?*” (research log, July 9, 2019). These remarks seem dramatic reading back on them now, but I include them because they articulate the moment fairly well. I continued to contemplate this tension, aware that my perspective on what were matters of concern were specific to my standpoint. This includes considering what part of my being a southerner/white settler/graduate student concerned with settler colonialism had in shaping what issues ought to be prioritized. Ultimately, I maintained an unrelenting desire to pursue the research that reflected my concerns and felt I had less to offer that would actually help TFN further their goals.

5.1.3 Uncommoning approaches to food systems visioning

As with my early thesis proposal renditions, I often sought to focus on a common struggle felt by a range of actors in local food systems to imagine *inclusive* food system solutions,

ones that did not leave anyone out. The framing of what I considered ‘local’ in northern food systems itself is representative of my blanketing of many diverse food provisioning methods into one frame. I felt it practical in my research to connect the struggles of disparate actors (growers, harvesters, foragers & fishers) given the number of challenges to procuring local food in Yellowknife and in the territory more broadly (contamination, climate change, or over/under regulation of policy). Clearer to me now, is what is lost through this approach. Each of these specific challenges have distinct and disproportionate impacts for different food system actors, and overcoming them may require different, possibly even conflicting, paths forward.

For TFN, the momentum to keep working towards a model with multiple food systems represented did not last. I am reminded in Johnston and Andrée's (2019) work, that since the beginning of the network's formation, there were hesitations on how to appropriately engage across the “heavily and lightly governed aspects...[of] the different forms of food provisioning,” (p. 54). They continue to describe the dilemma for TFN in understanding the role they could play in informing policy, given the existing layered, restrictive regulations for Indigenous harvesting practices: “if there are already so many structures surrounding hunting, is the Network needed (or wanted) to support Indigenous hunters? Could liaisons be an option? If so, who should the Network liaise with?” (Johnston & Andrée, 2019, p. 55). I have long thought of these questions in relation to the research I had envisioned. It just so happened that I reached the stage to carry out my research during this transitional period for TFN as they reoriented towards an agri-centred approach. Along with revisiting their mission and vision, as of early 2020, the NWT Food Network has been renamed the NWT Agri-Food Association (personal correspondence, March

2020). Though I believe many members would still see the value in a comprehensive food approach, I took for granted that this would top other priorities and needs for TFN. From these experiences, I think there are lessons here on commoning and inclusive visions.

Around the same time of their shift towards an agricultural focus, I became more aware of many country/traditional food efforts happening in Denendeh. One of these is run by Dech̓ta Nàowo, the department of YKDFN that I partnered with to organize the annual fair. They offer training through their On-the-Land & Traditional Economies Program for Yellowknives Dene youth to learn land stewardship, greenhouse and gardening skills, trapping, fishing and many other land-based skills (Dech̓ta Nàowo, n.d.). More widely known in academia is the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning, an Indigenous-led land-based post-secondary institution whose collaborative model promotes self-determination (Dechinta, n.d.). Dechinta has been described as a “site of multi-cultural decolonizing praxis where all students learn from the land in a shared space in which Indigenous epistemologies are central” (Wildcat et al., 2014, p. vi). Coulthard describes how incorporating hunting and harvesting into their curriculum allows for “reconnections with students and our traditional territories in order to formulate a critical analysis of our colonial present and its effects in Denendeh and in the North” (L. B. Simpson & Coulthard, 2014). Another example is Dene Nahjo, that came together during Idle-No-More, and whose programming makes connections between land, language and culture (Dene Nahjo, n.d.; Nakehk’o, 2020). One of the founders, Dēneze Nakehk’o (2020) has referred Dene Nahjo as “a sort of colonial support network for all the members,” and explain that they see a role for political advocacy that complements the work of the Dene Nation and other Dene governments and treaty organizations. These examples signal to me that Dene and

other Indigenous leaders are creating spaces to reclaim harvesting practices that exceed what a comprehensive food systems network could offer.

The approach I and my fellow researchers had adopted, of embracing what is common, is further troubled when reorienting towards an ethic of incommensurability (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Instead of pushing aside the unaligned or incomparable differences for the sake of finding common ground, Tuck and Yang (2012) propose an approach of organizing around said differences – presenting this incommensurability as having potential for unsettling. Building off of Tuck and Yang’s ethic, Kepkiewicz (2017) situates the efforts of settler and Indigenous actors in food sovereignty movements and suggests:

Indigenous and settler activists and academics working towards food sovereignty may share common struggles, as in the struggle against corporate appropriation of land, while at the same time holding divergent goals, meaning that there are likely parts of these movements that may not align with one another. (p. 175)

Keeping in mind that Kepkiewicz (2017) is engaging with the issues of settler colonialism in the food sovereignty movement, the conclusions she draws resonate with my concerns for supporting a network of multiple food system actors. I suggest that in these comprehensive food systems formations (like those originally envisioned by TFN), there are bound to be incommensurabilities. This is not a statement about whether or not these can be overcome, but rather an assertion that the tensions and incommensurabilities that arise through collaboration must be tended to.

5.2 Confronting methodological assumptions about CBPR

It may seem odd to have dedicated so much space to reflect on the revisioning of TFN (what we can now refer to as the NWT Agri-Food Association), especially given my limited involvement, but I felt there were important methodological implications here for practicing or aspiring participatory researchers. I write this carefully because the dilemmas

we encounter in research are infinite, as Tuck and Del Vecchio (2019) ask, “is there any part of this thing called research that isn’t a dilemma? Can we separate the dilemma from the rest of it?” (p. 77). If it had not been for the writings of those who reflected through their own encounters with methodological dilemmas (Gallagher, 2018; Johnston, 2018; Kennelly, 2018; Kepkiewicz et al., 2019; Tuck & Del Vecchio, 2018), I would have withdrawn from this research altogether. I have been able to think through some of my own dilemmas as I locate them in these contributions that identify a series of methodological assumptions about CBPR. Here, I reflect on the underlying assumptions about who comprises ‘community,’ and who speaks for it, as well as assumptions of the role of researchers and who we/they represent.

5.2.1 Locating ‘community’ in CBPR

Looking back on these engagements, I realize I should have started with figuring out *who* exactly my research should pertain to. Complicating my lack of clarity on ‘community’ is the fact that I was partnered with organizations with territorial mandates. This dilemma comes down to matters of the scope and scale in relation to my place-based RA positions. My Yellowknife-based engagements were premised on the notion that spending time up North prior to my coursework would inform my understanding of the needs ‘on-the-ground.’ I always thought it overly ambitious to undertake research with a territorial scope, but I was encouraged to think territorially because TFN and Ecology North both strive to expand their reach beyond Yellowknife. This rationale has carried through my research engagements (including the scope of literatures read as I formulate this thesis). However, as I became familiar with the local food issues in Yellowknife, I had to ask if any of these insights were relevant to people and communities living in Inuvialuit Settlement Region,

or even across Denendeh? If Yellowknife was the intended ‘field’ for me, how could I reconcile this with both partnered organizations commitment to representing the territory?

Even if my community partners had a narrower scope of who they aim to impact in their advocacy, there remain outstanding assumptions about community. Through my engagements, I wondered if my anxieties about community stemmed from what researchers have described as doing community-based research ‘in the middle’ (Strand et al., 2003; Tinkler, 2010). On a spectrum of degrees of community-engagement, these ‘mid-level’ collaborations are described as “a level removed from grassroots organizations but still seek to represent the community *democratically* [emphasis added]” (Tinkler, 2010, p. 4). I often compared my community partnerships with CSOs to those of my peers in the FLEdGE network who, in my view, appeared to represent ‘community’ more *authentically* (for instance, Band Councils of First Nations). I now know that this is not a fair assumption to make, and I am perpetuating one of many implicit assumptions made about CBPR. As Kennelly (2018) argues, “this self-professed naïveté emerges directly from the hegemonic notion of participatory research as inherently emancipatory, representative, and democratic” (p. 36). As a result, notions of ‘authentic’ and ‘democratic’ representation of community need to be unpacked as well.

The question of ‘who *represents* community’ is just as important as ‘who *is* community’. I can locate some of the same uncertainties I experienced trying to build a CBPR project in Kepkiewicz, Levkoe and Brynne’s (2019) analysis of community-campus engagements, particularly in questioning for *whom* their research serves. These researchers articulate the challenge of striving to serve community *first* within the political-economic climate that privileges western academic knowledge (Kepkiewicz et al., 2019). While

CBPR aims to mediate the power imbalances often held by academic partners, there is less recognition of the workings of power within ‘community’. Kepkiewicz et al. (2019) reflect on the way that “homogenous understandings of community” in this work led to projects “that [do] not necessarily address power inequities either within or beyond communities” (p. 57). This challenge is further troubled by the fact that, “communities themselves involve tensions and hierarchies and may also privilege western epistemologies and ways of knowing” (Kepkiewicz et al., 2019, p. 58). These tensions resonate with Kennelly’s (2018) analysis of the “neoliberal citizen as a phantom accompaniment” to CBPR projects (see also: rational, independent, autonomous) and the presumed subjectivity of those engaged in the research (p. 35). She argues,

The notion of community participants as unproblematically ‘authentic’ in their perspectives maps onto the rational, liberal individual inasmuch as it strips participants – and researchers – of their embodied and affective embeddedness in historical, political, and social contexts that obscure relations of inequality. In other words, participants are expected to ‘see through’ conditions of systemic marginalization and oppression, rather than reproduce them. (Kennelly, 2018, p. 36)

The representative of community in these research engagements is often presumed to be a “self-directed and responsabilized individual who can move in a straightforward manner from insight to action” (Kennelly, 2018, p. 35). I suggest that in these community-academic relationships, we often take for granted that our partners can ‘speak for’ their communities (whoever that may be). This is not only an impossible burden to place on any given person, but it also assumes a certain positionality of the partner as existing outside of the sorts of power imbalances that are more often attributed to academic institutions.

5.2.2 The role of the researcher in CBPR

Another assumption that needs troubling is around the role of the researcher in these CBPR projects. With ambiguities around what the participatory researcher can or should do, a

vacuum is created whereby the researcher does anything that ‘brings capacity’ to the community partner. This dynamic is exacerbated in partnerships with non-profits whose needs are often shaped by inconsistent funding. In these partnerships, “priorities tend to focus on program delivery with limited capacity and resources to take on research-related projects” (Kepkiewicz et al., 2019, p. 46). A reoccurring theme that carried through my RA positions in Yellowknife was the balancing act of knowing which requests to accept or decline. As a graduate student, I am used to having my feelings of inadequacy met with responses about imposter syndrome, so I appreciate that this accounts for some of my anxieties. I also understood that my role as a RA often meant bringing capacity to day-to-day programs and events that would otherwise be carried out by a permanent employee at the organization, but this makes the prospect of developing a collaborative research project on top of these tasks all the more difficult. These dynamics of participatory RA positions make for tricky negotiations, and I learned through these that it was critical for me to know when to say no. Saying no was most likely to occur when I knew I lacked the skills or experience to meet the needs of my partner, as well as when our interests did not align (or a combination of the two). For instance, with my partner’s expressed interest in branding and marketing for northern-based export-driven food production, I increasingly felt unqualified to support their needs. I understand that my labour and support were hugely appreciated in these engagements, but it was difficult to see how the critical thinking and research skills I had developed through my MA could complement this work. More generally, in community-based research contexts as multidisciplinary as ours, I often felt that the specific role of social science research was misunderstood, or at least carried different meaning for different researchers. In my engagements, I was used to hearing that

the value that social science researchers bring to northern-based research is in our ability to translate into plainer language the research that is carried out by a range of environmental and biological sciences (what some might call ‘hard sciences’). This trope is not only frustrating to social scientists who understand that there are fundamentally different fields of inquiry between these disciplines, but it is not the case that the language we use is any less jargony and inaccessible. Others have found that there is a “general lack of engagement within participatory research literature with social theory and its insights into conditions of marginalization and inequality” (Kennelly, 2018, p. 36). My inclination to critically engage with broad settler colonial structures, I realized, may have been out-of-touch with the approach to research I was being mentored to carry out. I do not want to assume my community partners would not value the application of critical theory in our engagements, but I understand it did not reflect their needs at the time. In the same way that we should avoid presumptions about ‘community’, we should take for granted that participatory researchers can step in to fill any given role if a research project is to be pursued.

5.2.3 Who (else) benefits in CBPR?

While much of the focus in this methodological literature is about realizing partnerships between researcher and community, it does not feel accurate to portray these actors as two sides of a coin. As most community-based researchers detail how their research serves the community, shouldn’t we also make transparent how the research serves ‘ours’? Interrogating who benefits in these academic-community relationships is critical in the current academic climate where Canadian universities seek to reposition themselves in relation to ‘community,’ in an effort to leave behind their ‘ivory tower’ image (Kennelly, 2018). They do so, whether or not they have taken steps to remove the “institutional and

systemic barriers” that Kennelly (2018) considers “antithetical to timelines and ethics” of CBPR (p. 34). Or as de Leeuw et al. (2012) ask, “to what extent can one be ‘community-based’ when one is also expected to fulfill teaching and research obligations at a university base?” (p. 188). As universities aim to prove their relevance by boasting about the multitude CBPR projects they support, they distort the figure of ‘community’ even more. Kennelly (2018) alludes to the varied representations of community that appear on Carleton University’s website, as she argues,

What these initiatives share is little beyond bringing together staff from the university with individuals who work or live outside of the university. The notion of ‘community’ is stretched almost beyond recognition here, but this matters little to the promotional machinery that seeks to position Carleton at the vanguard of ‘regional community development’ (p. 35).

These remarks made about my home institution could easily be made about universities across Canada – and my employer for the Yellowknife-based RA positions Wilfrid Laurier University, is no exception. I recall the predeparture communications training sessions where myself and a room full of graduate students were encouraged to sport Laurier’s branded colour purple in the photos we captured of our research projects in the North. This form of self-promotion that institutions ask of their students/employees to fulfill in exchange for their financial support is a reminder that the beneficiaries of the proposed research exceed those participating ‘on-the-ground’. The symbolic steps that academic institutions have taken to support or endorse community-based research only obfuscated ‘community,’ even further, making the question of whether these projects truly do *serve community* even less clear. I can reflect back on the dozens of mind-maps. I have drawn over the course of my research to keep track of the interconnectedness of my own engagements to partners, peers and supervisors through these webs of research networks. I wonder in webs as tangled as these, who am I accountable too? When the focus of this

work is supporting a vision for food systems, what role should I play in shaping these visions, if at all?

5.3 Conclusion

The answers to the questions I pose above are largely answered through the direction I have taken in this thesis. TFN's revisioning was an important lesson to take a step back and realize that the differing priorities of Network members from my own had more to do with my distance from the impact of our work. My positionality as a southern-based researcher brings me to these issues from a different standpoint than Northerners forging new systems in their communities (growers, producers, business owners, etc.). On paper, the vision of a comprehensive food network that could break governmental silos is very appealing, but the reality was that their membership did not represent the diverse food systems across the territory. This is exemplary of broader issues of inclusivity and representation in civil society organizing and the question of how a network of mostly growers could appropriately advocate for country/traditional food systems. My community-engagements in Yellowknife have undoubtedly had tremendous influence on my research. I quickly realize the value of these experiences when contrasted to the work of other researchers who travel North for a week to complete their focus groups/interviews and leave to never return. Yet, as long as my home remains outside of Yellowknife, no amount of time spent up North will make me feel comfortable pushing my vision on others.

I have formed many friendships and working relationships with colleagues and peers over the summers I spent in Yellowknife (both within/outside of my partnered organizations). The generosity and care I was shown sustained me as I juggled too many projects, and as my research went sideways along with my health. I am grateful for the

relationships these research engagements brought me and I continue to foster them years after leaving Yellowknife. However, when I imagine ‘community’ in relation to my research, I ultimately aim to speak to a smaller network of researchers/friends who I connected with through these engagements and as I write this thesis. In this chapter, I referenced the work of other scholars writing on similar methodological dilemmas, but these are not the only instances where I have had my assumptions challenged and my difficulties validated. It is because of these connections formed with fellow researchers/friends that I know I am not alone in grappling with these methodological dilemmas and disconcerting feelings about my role in our northern-based research. I take after de Leeuw et al. (2012), in their call to attend to “friendship as one among many spaces through which research is constituted, experienced, known, evaluated, and critically interrogated,” and “to emphasize the importance of such relationships” (p. 189).

Though I have detailed the shifting of priorities of my community partner in this chapter, I am less concerned with how they approach their work as I am with how community or participatory researchers manage these relations. My experience with CBPR was shaped by ambiguities around who my research should serve, as well as a disconnection between my research interests and the needs of my community partners. The lessons that I draw from these experiences, though perhaps of interest to NWT Food Network/Agri-Food Association, should resonate with researchers grappling with the ambiguities of community, our roles in research and institutional expectations. There are bound to be many dilemmas in CBPR. My claim is that tensions that arise through collaboration must be tended to. As Gallagher (2018) finds, “there might be tremendous value in staying in the mess, in pondering deeply inside the challenges, in tempering the

race to conclusions, findings and outcomes” (p. 1). I have not pursued a collaborative research project but instead try to embody this claim that it is important to sit with the tensions we encounter in research collaboration. In my next chapter, I continue to meditate on colonial tensions in my research engagements, shifting my focus from methodological lessons to theoretical considerations for researchers.

Chapter 6: Colonial Encounters in Northern Food System Research

In this final substantive chapter, I bring into my analysis the colonial encounters I experienced through my research engagements. I consider these to be a series of encounters with colonial-capitalist logics and tendencies, both practical and theoretical. Having made a strong case for the coloniality of contemporary food system issues, I wish to extend this to explore the coloniality of food systems *research* based on my own experience and the contributions of others writing and working at this intersection. After all, is there anything as colonial than the pursuit of knowledge? Preparing this chapter involves a reflexive analysis of my research engagements that includes thinking through the tensions I encountered, bringing these into conversation with other accounts in the literature, to offer lessons for future research. The literatures I draw on represent a wide range of theoretical contributions from anthropology, environmental history, political economy, geography, Indigenous and decolonial studies. The primary materials discussed in these analyses are derived from my research logs, draft thesis proposals, as well as my NWT research license, objectives and unpublished reports from my two engagements. Accompanying these personal materials are relevant municipal and territorial policy documents that pertain to the tensions I raise concerning my Yellowknife/NWT-based research.

I present my meditations on these colonial encounters through three themes. I begin with the colonial binary compartmentalization as I work through the perils of dichotomous framings in food systems and the consequences they had on the conclusions I have drawn in my various research engagements. I follow this by addressing the colonial epistemic erasure of Other knowledge systems. In this meditation, I consider how the colonial-capitalist episteme is perpetuated through the frame of ‘sustainable’ and ‘sustainability’.

Finally, I analyze issues of arsenic contamination as a colonial equivocation. In this meditation, I demonstrate the asymmetrical legacies of colonial-capitalist extraction and contamination.

This is not a comparison between my two distinct engagements. Rather, it combines the lessons learned from research projects that share similar visions but take up different methods. My intention on reflecting on these tensions thematically, as opposed to on a case-by-case basis, has to do with their overlapping timelines, framings and conclusions, as well as the fact that they shaped one another, through me as the researcher. There exist clear differences between my two research engagements, easily shown in their methodologies, funding sources, and degrees of community-engagement. However, these distinctions are less important to the issues I identify in this thesis. Individualizing these experiences and failing to connect the tensions and lessons to the wider community of research would be, in my opinion, a missed opportunity. Exploring the similarities of these engagements, alongside reflections and criticisms from relevant scholarship, draws out broader revelations about the colonial nature of research.

6.1 COLONIAL BINARY: the perils of dichotomous framings in food systems

As stated in the formulation of my theoretical framework, throughout this thesis I make a deliberate effort to avoid the colonial tendency of processing information into binaries. However, this does not mean that I maintained this orientation throughout my research engagements. It has only become clear to me after much time and reflexivity just how consequential this form of compartmentalization is on many of the conclusions I initially drew, and how prolific these colonial tendencies are in the broader research community. I begin this section by establishing the colonality of this dichotomous way of generating

and organizing knowledge. Then, I articulate how binary thinking shaped my research engagements and the risks I associate with such an approach. My aim here is to reveal the coloniality of the *process* of either/or thinking, as opposed to problematizing the dualisms themselves (my exploration of the violence of prominent colonial dualisms and their incompatibility with Other ways of knowing comes in the following meditation 6.2). I conclude this reflexive analysis of the either/or logics that surfaced in my research by advocating for an approach that breaks with colonial compartmentalization, drawing on thinkers who actively reject dualisms and orient towards messier, more nuanced analyses.

What may seem like a useful method to think through, binary logic is deeply rooted in colonial-capitalist ordering. As Gombay and Palomino-Schalscha (2018) argue,

no matter where the setting, the settler colonial project has, over time, sought to impose its own categorical order on Indigenous peoples and, in the process, define and undermine their lifeways. This has often entailed the adoption by settler colonial states and publics of strategic forms of compartmentalisation, based on binary and exclusionary logics – Indigenous/non-Indigenous; public/private; nature/culture; civilised/savage; rational/irrational; animate/inanimate – that had simplified complexity and helped to make the process of rule intelligible within very specific limits (p. 1).

Many of the dualisms named by these authors ripple through the reading, thinking and writing I have done throughout my research engagements. Of course, not only these – there are plenty of other binaries to add to their list – through my scrawls, journals and papers are the hauntings of either/or colonial logic. Within a northern food systems context, binaries that I can easily pull out of my research include agricultural/traditional harvesting; local/imported foods; or sharing/market-based economies. I know, of course, these categories are not black and white – and that realistically they occupy far more grayness than is captured in these co-constituted binaries. Gombay and Palomino-Schalscha (2018) present the process of compartmentalization as resulting in “exclusionary, oversimplified,

racialised, and technocratic forms of conceiving relationships, not only amongst people, but also between people and the worlds they inhabit” (p. 2). They continue, “such either/ or logics are central to the workings of colonial power, but they deny the intricate realities of living” (Gombay & Palomino-Schalscha, 2018, p. 2). There is rich literature that recognizes the coloniality of dichotomous compartmentalization – a logic strongly associated with colonial-capitalist ways of knowing with its hierarchical, rigid dualisms (Cameron et al., 2014; Himes & Muraca, 2018; Hunt & Holmes, 2015; Stanton, 2014; Tuck, 2009). Gombay and Palomino-Schalscha (2018) argue that the binary thinking in settler colonial contexts, “gives rise to relations and institutions that have sought to bracket out complexity so that what falls within these limits is permitted to be visible and everything outside of them can be disregarded” (p. 1). The cause for concern is not only in the ways that a binary logic misrepresents complex realities, but also the ways this logic stifles critical and imaginative thinking.

6.1.1 Colonial binaries in my research

I spent much of my research engagements problematizing the place of agriculture in efforts to promote food security in the North. This stems from my pre-departure orientation towards northern food systems, where I quickly adapted to the necessity of decentering agriculture from food systems frameworks to be wholly inclusive of other primary food provisioning means (including hunting, fishing, and gathering, along with imported market-based foods). Johnston (2018) juxtaposes the *relatively* small place of agriculture in northern food systems compared to those in the southern provinces and argues that “using an agriculture-centric lens can erase the other activities, outcomes and actors within a food system” (p. 95). Johnston’s (2018) thesis work was foundational to my

understanding of the state of food systems in the NWT and the slight, but burgeoning enthusiasm towards agricultural production (see also: Johnston & Andrée, 2019). A focus on agriculture, however marginal in the NWT food landscape, featured quite heavily in the research projects and food initiatives I was asked to support through my research engagements. These requests ranged from: digging up historical accounts of agriculture in the territorial archives and helping maintain the garden beds for community centres in Yellowknife, to the inclusion of greenhouse food production in a cost-benefit analysis. In any case, the prominence of agriculture in my engagements is a significant departure from what I had prepared for. This disconnection between my early orientation and ensuing research engagements kept me wrestling with the appropriateness of promoting agricultural systems in the territory through my research. I wondered if these concerns are just standard graduate research qualms where we find the literature we are assigned contradicts with the world “out-there” (Massey, 2003), or whether there is something generative to say about the marginal role of agriculture in NWT food systems and its prominence in southern-based research agendas?

My hesitations towards agriculture also had to do with its colonial origins in the NWT. I reflected on how this discomfort came about in my primary research engagement:

Through my research assistantship working with community partners Ecology North and the NWT Food Network, there was great enthusiasm for a historical look at the agricultural potential in the territory. Demystifying the notions that agriculture is not feasible North of 60 is important for a number of actors. As the burgeoning interest in local agricultural production builds, it is exciting for those who are vested to be able to learn from and promote the agricultural successes of the past. However, I wish to complicate how ‘success’ is understood here. I believe that having an anti-colonial and intersectional approach when pulling up the historical and archived agricultural endeavours dramatically transforms these findings. My impressions of the archives (mostly photographs) are still quite fresh in my mind...After the initial excitement of seeing old-fashioned photographs

of an adorable baby next to impressively large cabbages, or the relic of dairy cows thriving in Yellowknife before they died of arsenic poisoning, I started to recognize the number of missionary or residential school gardens. It was not long before I felt haunted by the nameless Dene or Inuvialuit children captured in these photos – how can these images be circulated and represented with any kind of integrity and respect for those photographed? It does not take long to realize the gravity of what kinds of practices (exploitation, assimilation and colonization) that were integral to achieve said successes in these gardens. I am painting this to be very black and white and mean not to overlook the nuance here. I have been met with many reactions to complicate my position (for instance, suggesting that residential school survivors maintained positive memories of gardening). I do not wish to brush over or make assumptions about these experiences that I am so far away from, but based on this distance, I do not feel comfortable playing a role in the reproduction of these images²². (personal notes, 24 April 2019)

These feelings are part of what led me to map settler colonialism in northern food systems in my fourth chapter, to demonstrate that agricultural practices in these lands are far from unproblematic. However, the rigid association that I held of agriculture as inherently colonial (as I maintained through my research engagements and in the focus of the third and fourth chapters of this thesis) may be equally troublesome (cf: Brody, 2001; Kulchyski, 2005). With a fixation on the coloniality of agriculture as I have worked through these problems in my research, I risk perpetuating an Indigenous/colonial binary wherein agriculture exists in opposition to country/traditional food practices. More apparent to me

²² Though I am not the right person to decide if/how these archival images should be represented, I have since encountered examples of archival work that differently represent the residential school era in Canada. Paul Seesequasis, member of the Plains Cree First Nation, curated the Indigenous Archival Photo Project – a project on history, identity and visual reclamation; beginning on social media (see for instance: Seesequasis, 2020); but is also displayed in physical exhibits; as well as in his beautiful book *Blanket Toss Under Midnight Sun* (Seesequasis, 2019). Following the difficult findings of the TRC (2015), his mother, a residential school survivor, inspired him to find different stories to tell about the Indigenous photography in this era. Seesequasis (2019) writes, “I began to search through archives, seeking not residential school photos or other images of colonization but images reflecting a different reality, that of integrity, strength, resourcefulness, hard work, family and play” (p. 1). Though it was not the intention when he started this project on social medias, Seesequasis has managed to make connections with the family members of those photographed, who are often not named, or the archival note is inaccurate (the same NWT archives I reference in this reflection).

now is that the mere presence of agriculture in the North is less of a concern than the conditions under which it is being introduced and promoted, including who is leading these efforts. For food systems scholars directing their energy towards agricultural solutions to resolve complex food insecurity issues in the North, I think it is critical to contend with the legacies of these agri-food practices that I bring into view through the fourth chapter of this thesis. However, I now understand that it is also problematic to present the promotion of agricultural food practices as if they inherently erode country/traditional ones. I see this tension in my own research process as emblematic of the perils of colonial binary logics; and increasingly, I understand how restrictive it is to portray these varied food practices as dichotomous and oppositional.

6.1.2 Perpetuating colonial binaries in comparative food systems research

I can trace colonial either/or tendencies in the way I carried out my research with Mitacs and the Gordon Foundation. My thesis supervisor and I responded to posting about a research opportunity for a graduate student to carry out a cost-benefit analysis of country/traditional food harvesting compared with other food provisioning systems in the North. As stated on the Mitacs website posting:

This research is designed to take one northern community (or more if time permits) and do a cost analysis of bringing food from the south into the community. What are the true costs for a family, or community member, for buying food from the south? This should focus on tangible economic values. This analysis should be done through in-depth research of grocery stores, federal economic policy, and shipping costs. Second, a cost analysis will be done of the economic cost of using northern food systems. This should include *costs for being on the land, creating local food systems (e.g. greenhouses)*, [emphasis added] and equipment needed. This should be done through conversations with northerners, existing literature and conversations with community groups working on building local northern food systems. (Mitacs, 2018)

There are clear binaries expressed in this research project description (i.e., local/imported, northern/southern), though what stood out to me at the time was the integration of agricultural practices such as greenhouse production into a category with country/traditional harvesting. This research framing appeared to me as a change of direction from the original research priority identified at the Northern Policy Hackathon on led by the Gordon Foundation (the partner), which was as follows:

Value of country/traditional food of the Indigenous diet: The second most popular research idea related to recognizing the economic, cultural, and nutritional value of country/traditional food to Indigenous Peoples. It was proposed that *this could also include integrating the cost of switching to store-bought food* [emphasis added]. (Pezzack, 2017, p. 7)

Of interest to my supervisor and I at the time of submitting our proposal was how the values-based research idea from the Hackathon translated into costs-based approach in the internship job posting. With reference to the recorded notes from the Hackathon and through conversations with the partner (the Gordon Foundation), my supervisor and I proposed a valuation research project investigating ways to represent the multifaceted values of country/traditional foods (nutritional, sociocultural, ecological, economic) to allow for a comparison to other valuing systems. While reframing the project to better match the original research priority, we still moved forward with the goal of completing a comparison of some kind, though not an economic cost-benefit analysis specifically. This comparative element remained a central goal for the project – *la raison d’etre* – to represent those multiple forms of value of food too complex to quantify to allow for comparison. Through interviews completed as part of this research project, the enthusiasm and valorization of this work was exhibited by several of my academic interviewees, as it is a highly academic endeavor. However, it became evident that I had taken for granted that

this valuation and comparison work was of particular interest or importance to all Northerners working on food security issues.

In reading these binaries into the existing literature I encountered in this project, I continued to polarize disparate food systems and actors, as if they are oppositional. Perplexed by the inclusion of imported agricultural systems such as greenhouses with those that are land-based, I set out to find in the literature strong examples to portray these practices are fundamentally different. In setting up these practices for comparison, I perpetuated Indigenous/colonial, northern/southern, and traditional/agricultural food system binaries through my research. As the project evolved, I became more wary of the shortfalls of such rigid dichotomous representations for the ways they distorted the interconnectivity of disparate food systems. While also failing to contend with the reality that the food security needs of Northerners are likely met with a combination of foods that are wild harvested, locally grown, as well as, imported and store-bought. In my research journal entries, I can trace where I started to doubt my framing of these issues:

But is it my own outside perspective that affords me the opportunity to observe so critically? It is hard to tell if I am totally out of line. Am I overgeneralizing the tensions between agriculture and traditional food? Between settler and Indigenous organizations? Is the persistence of binary thinking the cause of my troubles? How do I stop such binary thinking?
(personal notes, 10 July 2019)

Trying to assert too staunchly what is colonial and what is Indigenous delimits the potential of food system solutions that sit at their intersection and does little to support self-determined food systems in the North. As Whyte (2017) explains, “Indigenous peoples often describe food injustice as a violation of their collective self-determination over their food systems” (p. 2). An important lesson that this tension left me with is in understanding how overemphasizing the coloniality of agricultural pursuits renders invisible Indigenous-

led agricultural projects (cf: Johnston & Spring, 2021; Ross & Mason, 2020; Simba & Spring, 2017). Even if it is often the case, it should not be assumed that southerners and settlers alone are leading the development of agricultural systems in the territory. Such binaries are unfit to represent these complex systems.

In addition to the agriculture/traditional binary, there are other problematic dichotomies that I encountered in my Mitacs project that resonate with my concerns with either/or logic. It is with the juxtaposition of sharing (see also: traditional, social, subsistence) and market-based (see also: colonial, capitalist) economies in northern communities. Many have presented these two forms of food distribution as antithetical to one-another (Searles, 2016) while other critical scholarship aims to complicate the socio-economic conditions of sharing and commodifying country/traditional food (Gombay, 2009; Harder & Wenzel, 2012). Gombay's (2009) research on Nunavik's Hunter Support Program was premised on the notion that "money gives rise to an economic system that is predicated on, and promotes, impersonal relationships that are transitory, amoral, and calculating" (p. 127). Ultimately, however, Gombay (2009) rejects the "totalizing force" of the commodification of country/traditional food in eroding the sharing economy and suggests that this program both "mimics and breaks with tradition" as cash is incorporated into subsistence (p. 119). Gombay's observation is a lesson that researchers like me should avoid determinism in the conclusions we draw. It has implications for my assumptions that the introduction of new forms of working with the land (agriculture in this case) poses an inherent threat to traditional ways. Notwithstanding valid concerns for the consequences that agriculture has and could cause (ecological, cultural, political or economic), it is not reasonable to ascertain that agriculture *will* lead to the demise of country/traditional

harvesting systems. These findings urge us as researchers to resist the colonial epistemic logic that sees Indigenous systems as fated to fall with the introduction of colonial-capitalist systems.

Many tend to think through such dichotomies as a way of making sense of complex systems and interactions, myself included. Through these examples of binary framings in my research engagements, I have brought attention to some of the pitfalls of dichotomous compartmentalization. However persistent, these colonial either/or logics are continuously being challenged by scholars writing across many disciplines (cf: Clapp, 2014; de la Cadena, 2015). Wolfe (2006) considers the either/or as an “elementary category error,” and urged an approach of *both/and also* in the context of his work on settler colonialism. Tuck (2009) gestures towards this approach as a “way to break the closed circuit of an irreconcilable binary” (p. 420). Other food scholars advocate for *both/and* approaches to teaching food systems and contend that “efforts to promote student adoption of a pluralist perspective are futile if individuals become entrenched in fundamentalist positions, in which food system issues...are framed as incommensurable ‘either/or’ positions” (Valley et al., 2018). I continue to build on this lesson in my third meditation (6.3), but to clarify my understanding of these teachings: when I say we should resist dichotomization, this does not mean erasing difference, neither should embracing plurality be misinterpreted as making common. Taking these approaches into account asks me to think differently about questions posed through my research engagements and consider the limitations of a comparison-based approaches. There is a cost for such forms of compartmentalization that we should avoid as researchers if we are to resist colonial ordering.

6.2 COLONIAL EPISTEMIC ERASURE: perpetuating the colonial-capitalist episteme through ‘sustainability’ frames

What do *sustainable* food systems in the NWT look like? Are there taken-for-granted assumptions that come with the frame of sustainability? Throughout this thesis, I stress that being attentive to the workings of settler colonialism in our research projects has implications not only for *what* we study, but also *how* we reach our findings, and this includes the concepts and terminology that help us reach them. So far, I have made a strong case for the role of settler colonialism in disrupting food systems, but here I shift to expand its implications to the knowledges that sustain them. I am concerned about the use of sustainability in this food systems research that, albeit unknowingly, assumes a colonial-capitalist (Euro, Western, Modern) orientation towards land, water and wildlife. Here I demonstrate how certain language may reinscribe colonial-capitalist ways of knowing, which I consider as a form of epistemological/ontological violence (Naylor et al., 2018; Rojas, 2016). In this meditation, I return to work I contributed to through my research engagements under the banner of sustainability and interrogate the meaning(s) of this concept. I build off the historical account of colonial conservationist aims discussed in my fourth chapter to consider how sustainability is evoked in contemporary food settings in relation to colonial-capitalist forms of land-use.

I meditate on the tendency of colonial epistemic erasure in the following steps. I begin by presenting the epistemic nature of the colonial-capitalist ‘worldview’ in rendering invisible those epistemologies/ontologies that diverge from it. Of the many characteristics attributable to colonial-capitalism, those taken up here include universalism, dualism, and anthropocentrism. Next, I highlight a place-based relational ontology articulated by Dene

thinkers and follow this by taking into consideration the theoretical frames and tools researchers offer to take seriously Indigenous relational ontologies. My research engagements are then brought into my analysis as I contemplate how using a term as seemingly innocuous as *sustainable* may reinforce the epistemic tendencies of colonial-capitalist logic. In examining different applications of ‘sustainability’ in policy analyzed through my research engagements, I articulate how this frame can perpetuate colonial-capitalist orientations towards land, water and wildlife. I argue that colonial-capitalist relation to land as a resource is at the root of these conflicts around conservation and sustainability. The specific texts and thinkers brought into this section compel me to resist epistemic explanations/language to avoid silencing Other knowledges.

6.2.1 Contesting the human/nature divide of the colonial-capitalist episteme

Contesting the colonial-capitalist episteme starts with pushing against universalism, given its epistemic tendency to deny the existence of Other ways of knowing. Departing from the colonial binary of either/or towards both/and also has implications for the ways we as researchers attempt to bring disparate knowledges and systems into view. Doing so is, in part, a rejection of a colonial-capitalist worldview whose “universal logic... eliminates entire life-worlds, declaring them non-credible alternatives” (Rojas, 2016, p. 370). As Radcliffe (2017) argues, “Indigenous knowledge-producing relations with place and other-than-human beings continue to be subject to western science’s harsh reductionism and epistemological patronizing” (p. 442). I move through this section referencing theoretical contributions (many of which are articulated by Indigenous scholars) that I understand to disrupt the essentializing and epistemic nature of colonial-capitalism. My rationale for such an approach is to uncover the colonial underpinnings of the concept of sustainability.

However, I recognize that my attempt to describe the characteristics of a colonial-capitalist logic risks essentializing the distinct and varied accounts conjured up to contest it (Cameron et al., 2014). I have selected these theoretical contributions for the ways they challenge or provincialize coloniality (even as each may not explicitly claim to do this), but their likenesses should not be attributed to Indigeneity²³ or a pan-Indigenous ‘worldview’²⁴. Instead, reading these disparate contributions together should reveal the partiality of colonial-capitalism and the need to reorient towards an appreciation of multiplicity in which ontological difference is taken seriously.

The problematization of the human/nature (or culture/nature) divide is central to most scholarship contesting the epistemic logic of colonial-capitalism. This term speaks to the notorious colonial binary through which an unmeasurable amount of violence is enacted. According to Rojas (2016), the human/nature divide is “based on epistemic and ontological premises,” which create “hierarchical ordering of human and non-human beings, and their exclusion from politics” (p. 371). This division stems from the separation of ‘human’ from all that Euro-Western philosophy and science perceive as ‘nature,’ maintaining the superiority of the former over the latter. The colonial conception of the human relation to nature is one of dehumanization and domination. Of course, human is neither a neutral concept, nor has it always welcomed those who occupy that space today. Rojas (2016) refers to Hobbes’ theorization of the “state of nature,” as underlying an

²³ I do not try to build onto the concept of Indigeneity, but assume an understanding of “indigeneity as a counterpart analytic to settler colonialism” (Kēhaulani Kauanui, 2016, para. 4). However partial my understanding may be, given the centrality of colonialism in this thesis I consider likeness among Indigenous societies as sharing common (but not identical) experiences with Canadian settler colonialism.

²⁴ It is only with reference to the colonial-capitalist ‘worldview’ that I use this concept, given its commitment to universalism. I avoid the assumption that Other ways of knowing constitute disparate views of one common world. Instead I welcome the concept of a *pluriverse* (Blaser & de la Cadena, 2018; de la Cadena, 2010), based off of the Zapatista’s conception of a “world where many worlds fit” (Rojas, 2016, p. 376).

“ontological distinction between nature and culture by locating certain humans closer to nature and depriving their life of value” (p. 371). Geroux (2019) explains that, “as settler colonialism marches forward both conceptually and territorially, it places indigeneity on one side of a culture/nature binary; the binary is of course harmful and toxic, and is itself a distinctively Occidental artifact” (p. 1). Yet, he continues,

at the heart of its ideological artifice is an acknowledgment and recognition of an unbroken humanimal bond. An important aspect of decolonizing work is in seizing or really taking back the conceptualization of that bond, in reoccupying and deploying it in terms that continue to reject all settler binaries. (Geroux, 2019, p. 1)

The violence of this division plays out in the severing of relations between humans and nonhumans (see also: other-than-humans, more-than-humans, animals).

What is common amongst these contributions that articulate “reciprocal relation[s] with other-than-human beings,” is how they “provincialize colonial-modern forms of thinking and decide what counts as knowledge” (Radcliffe, 2017, p. 442). I borrow Escobar’s (2016) flexible conception of *relational ontology* as a common frame for contestations of colonial-capitalist epistemology/ontology. Escobar (2016) builds on Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ framework of *Epistemologies of the South*, which describes the fundamental ontological distance between colonial-capitalist individualism from those “ontological conceptions of being and living” (p. 16). Escobar (2016) adds the dimension of *relational* ontologies that convey “different theoretical fundamentals for those who no longer want to be complicit with the silencing of popular knowledges and experiences by Eurocentric knowledge” (p. 12). Relational ontologies, he says, represent a “dense network of interrelations [where] nothing preexist the relations that constitute it,” (Escobar, 2016, p. 18) and are a helpful umbrella under which diverse ontologies could sit. Here, de la Cadena (2015) relates how relationality exceeds such either/or ways of understanding:

Emphasizing the inherent relationality between local entities (humans and other-than-human beings), the dispute questions the universality of the partition: what is enacted as humans and nature is *not only* enacted as such. John Law calls this the capacity for both/and (rather than either/or). (p. 4)

Endless examples of place-based relations between humans and nonhumans are brought to the fore in contesting the colonial-capitalist episteme. For instance, Cruikshank's (2005) ethnography is situated at the intersection of glaciers (and other nonhumans) with concepts of place, kin and personhood, as these relations are woven through the oral histories that informed her research in the Yukon. Another northern-based example is described by Todd (2014, 2018) in the recognition of the *plural relations* between Paulatuuqmiut and fish, describing the multiple human-fish relations among the Inuvialuit of Paulatuuq, NT. Todd (2014) states that articulations such as these, “challenge the accepted anthropocentrism of contemporary Euro-Western political discourses and offer an alternate view of humans and animals engaged in relationships that transcend dualistic notions of nature/culture and human/animal” (p. 218). These human/nonhuman relational practices exceed what can be comprehended through a colonial-capitalist view.

Many theorizations disrupt colonial-capitalism by expanding who is recognized as agential or animate. Watts (2013) theorizes that “land is alive and thinking and that humans and non-humans derive agency through the extensions of these thoughts” (p. 21). Those who are typically relegated to ‘nature,’ like habitats and ecosystems, are societies composed of the interactions between “female, animals, the spirit world, and the mineral and plant world” (Watts, 2013, p. 21). It is through processes of settler colonialism that the “communication and obligations with other beings of creation is continuously interrupted” (Watts, 2013, p. 24). In bringing attention to how languages come to matter, Kimmerer (2017) presents the philosophical limitations of the English language for it “does not give

us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy...you are either a human or a thing. Our grammar boxes us in by the choice of reducing a nonhuman being to an *it*" (p. 132). Todd (2014) argues, "all Canadians [should] understand the central role of humans and animals, together, as *active agents* [emphasis added] in political and colonial processes in northern Canada" (p. 217). Responding to this call, I turn to a relational ontology²⁵ theorized by Dene thinkers to see how human/nonhuman relations enter the political realm and challenge colonial-capitalism in their representations.

In his work on Indigenous resistance against colonial-capitalism in Denendeh, Yellowknives Dene scholar Coulthard (2014) introduces *grounded normativity* as a "place-based²⁶ foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice" (p. 13). Land is at the centre of what he describes as, "modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (Coulthard, 2014, p. 13). Coulthard and Simpson (2016) expand on the concept of grounded normativity that "houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place" (p. 254). We can see this in former Dene National Chief, Bill Erasmus' conceptualization,

Dene conceive of "land" not in the capitalist sense as a patch of ground legally surveyed, registered, and paid for. For Dene, the land is not property...[it] is understood as what non-Indigenous people would call the ecosystem or all of the life - animate and inanimate - that makes the world

²⁵ While I called grounded normativity a relational ontology, in his book, Coulthard does refer to it as such, but in later work, he describes grounded normativity as a "relational ontology of deep reciprocity between people and place, and including non-human life forms" (Coulthard et al., 2018; L. B. Simpson et al., 2018).

²⁶ I understand the concepts of place and land as related but not interchangeable. I refer to Zoe's explanation of the teachings that come from place-names on the land: "It has been said by our Elders that 'the land is like a book.' The place-names, and their stories on the landscape are related to our traditional activities. The trails leading out to the barren lands provided natural access for harvesting food and medicines. We know that these stories tell us how to live and survive on the land as we have always done" (Zoe et al., 2019, p. 19).

whole: earth, air, water, minerals, insects, animals. The reality that Dene are part of the land will never change. (B. Erasmus, 2009, pp. x–xi)

The importance of place is paramount as it is the site from which the practice, ethics and associated forms of knowledge are derived from (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016). Of particular significance here is the contrast from the colonial-capitalist mode of production, as they explain that grounded normativity “teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner” (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016, p. 254). Coulthard (2014) positions this as “antithetical to capital accumulation,” to which he proposes invigorating Indigenous political-economic alternatives that break dependence from capitalist markets and create “self-sufficiency through the localized and sustainable production²⁷ of core foods and life materials” (p. 172).

It is clear through the theorization of grounded normativity that it rejects the colonial-capitalist logic, but in practice it is subjected to discriminatory settler colonial policy and governance. Coulthard (2014) relates grounded normativity to the Dene Nation’s historical resistance to capitalist extractivism, gesturing to their economic model (the “revitalization of a bush mode of production”) at the time of their formation in the 1970s (pp. 171–172). Such a model could be read through Nahanni’s (1977) testimony for the Berger Inquiry, as she explained,

Our way of life is very ancient and enriching. Our economy is based on hunting, trapping, and fishing. Long before any non-Dene ever set foot on our land, our ancestors lived and learned from each other, from the land, and other beings on the land - the animals, birds, and insects. The mysteries

²⁷ While Coulthard uses the language of sustainability, through this section I maintain that such usage should not be assumed to mean the same thing as uses of the sustainability by the settler State, given his ecological anti-colonial-capitalist commitments (as read in his formulation of grounded normativity).

of nature reveal themselves more and more through our experience on the land. (p. 21)

As an alternative to colonial-capitalism, Coulthard (2014) proposes a “mix of subsistence-based activities with more contemporary economic ventures,” through reinvigoration of the practices Nahanni described above with others like hide-tanning and carving (p. 171). Coulthard’s alternative mode of production has strong implications for fostering local food systems, yet the majority of the harvesting activities Coulthard describes continue to be impeded by settler colonial laws embedded in conservationist regimes and sustainability frameworks. While I have drawn from a wide number of Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers to characterize the logic of colonial-capitalism, I move through the following subsections with grounded normativity and other Dene theorizations about land, water and wildlife at the centre of my analysis. These articulations represent the relational ontology that I continue to juxtapose to territorial State policy.

6.2.2 Ontological politics, epistemic disconcertment & uncontrolled equivocation

Here, I turn to contributions from scholars contesting the human/nature divide who offer tools and concepts for thinking through the politics of ontological difference. As I draw out the colonial-capitalist underpinnings of different uses of sustainability in northern food systems, these theoretical tools offer insights into the ways that different knowledge systems are mediated through politics around wildlife and land. In this subsection, I engage with the concepts of radical alterity, epistemic disconcertment, and uncontrolled equivocation expressed by theorists writing on ontological politics.

Blaser (2009) offers *political ontology* as a new frame of analysis to observe the “power-laden negotiations involved in bringing into being the entities that make up a particular world or ontology” (p. 11). Political ontology transcends the limits of both

political economy/ecology, while keeping the concerns for power/conflict but focusing on how different ontologies “strive to sustain their existence as they interact and mingle with each other” (Blaser, 2009, p. 11). Radcliffe (2017) describes this work as discussions of “indigenous life-ways and ontologies as hybridized with or deliberately resisting colonial-modern knowledges, thereby repositioning indigenous embodiments and subjectivities in a complex analytical terrain” (p. 442). By these definitions, we can see ontological politics playing out in northern contexts in Indigenous-State conflicts, negotiations and collaborations around land, water and wildlife. Many identify the common misinterpretations and challenges that come with the incorporation of complex Indigenous human-animal relations into settler policy paradigms (Blaser, 2009; Nadasdy, 2003).

Such examples could be observed in the GNWT’s 1997 implementation of a framework for incorporating Traditional Knowledge²⁸ into their policies, and the co-management model born out of the modern treaty negotiations. Both exemplify the tendency to incorporate Indigenous Knowledges only to corroborate (western) scientific knowledge that informs State policy. Todd (2014) and others present the problem of “incorporating complex and dynamic Indigenous human-animal relationships... whereby Indigenous ‘traditional ecological knowledge’ (TEK) is presumed to be an interchangeable analog for science or ecology” (Cruikshank, 2012; Nadasdy, 2003). As opposed to offering “alternative ways of thinking about the natural world and relationships among entities,” (Cruikshank, 2012, p. 240) Indigenous Knowledges are often only presented to corroborate (or invalidate) what science describes (see also: Belfer et al., 2017; Roux et al., 2019). The

²⁸ Traditional Knowledge as per GNWT Policy 53.03, otherwise I use the term Indigenous Knowledge(s) to avoid delimiting what these knowledges describe (over terms like Traditional Ecological Knowledge).

disproportionate distribution of political power between the State and Indigenous nations makes these collaborative models ill-suited to mediate tensions between them, or adequately represent Indigenous nations over the State. An ontological political framing of these interactions reveals that Indigenous Knowledges are “complexly and fluidly situated at the intersection of dominant ways of knowing and Other forms of caring for humans and other-than-humans” (Radcliffe, 2017, p. 442). As I have previously argued, treaty-making driven by the State’s extractivist desires and conservationist policies are integral to the dispossession of Indigenous nations to maintain control of their land. I would add that this is not only a concern of power, but of fundamentally different ways of relating to nonhumans. It is on this basis that I argue that colonial-capitalist orientation to land (as a resource) is at the root of these conflicts for failing to perceive relational ontologies.

Theorists of ontological politics offer strong critiques to the manner that colonial-capitalist institutions and knowledge systems (mis)interpret ontological differences as *cultural* (Blaser, 2014; de la Cadena, 2010; Verran, 2013). In rejecting such an epistemic explanation, Blaser (2014) moves to an ontological frame in an effort to “take others and their differences seriously” (p. 52). He explains the dangers of overemphasizing cultural *difference*, as it is a “function of the modernist ontological assumption that there is one reality or world out there and multiple perspectives or cultural representations of it” (Blaser, 2014, p. 52). This may occur when colonial-capitalist policy frameworks are presented as needing ‘cultural appropriateness’ with respect to Indigenous practices but keep all other colonial structures in place. Blaser (2014) suggests embracing *radical alterity*, which entails challenging, at an ontological level, the colonial and Eurocentric forms of categorizing the world, which can help to take other ontologies seriously. Verran

(2011) describes the epistemic error of explaining “‘others’ knowledges away” (p. 142). Of similar function to radical alterity, she offers *epistemic disconcertment* as a tool of interruption to avoid explaining away ontological differences, and instead, arrive to “an understanding of different worlds” (Verran, 2013, p. 145). These epistemic errors, in part, delimit what Indigenous knowledges can describe rather than embracing their differences.

Speaking to this tension, Viveiros de Castro (2013) offers the term *equivocation* to demonstrate where common language is misinterpreted as sameness. Blaser (2009) explains an *uncontrolled* equivocation where “misunderstandings happen not because there are different perspectives on the world but rather because they are unaware that different worlds are being enacted (and assumed) by each of them” (p. 11). “As mode of communication,” de la Cadena (2010) describes “equivocations emerge when different perspectival positions—views from different worlds, rather than perspectives about the same world—use homonymical terms to refer to things that are not the same” (pp. 350–351). The equivocations that de la Cadena offers as examples are ‘land’ and ‘environment.’ I take after her work in this next subsection with the concept of sustainability. Equivocal meanings of sustainability are not the problem per se, but an uncontrolled equivocation occurs when different applications of sustainability are interpreted as if they are common. Like many, I have grown skeptical of this term based on how it is applied and who is utilizing it. Shilling’s (2018) introductory remarks to a collection of works on Indigenous environmental sustainability captures several concerns of mine:

Few modern concepts are as talked about, debated, and misconstrued as sustainability – to the point that the word’s trendy, buzzword status has earned it the label “sustainababble” from critics skeptical of the evangelistic aura that often surrounds it. That goofy made-up term is not entirely off beam. Review the literature, as well as the many programs and agencies that feature “sustainability” in their name or description – from the most

uncompromising environmental group to the World Trade Organization – you may find it hard to say what it is or isn't, who supports it and who doesn't (sometimes making for odd bedfellows), who benefits and who misses out, how or even if it can be realized, or why we're doing the sustainability thing in the first place. (Shilling, 2018, p. 3)

I would add that it is not *only* the inconsistent use of the concept sustainability that matters to this thesis on settler colonialism as much as how I see the colonial-capitalist episteme perpetuated (with/without intention) through its use. The ambiguity and mixed applications of this concept by many different users creates the conditions for such an uncontrolled equivocation. Moving forward, I take from the theorizations of epistemic disconcertment and radical alterity is that is necessary to centre what is equivocal, or incommensurable, amongst different applications of sustainability, rather than assuming they are common.

6.2.3 Sustaining the human/nature divide in 'sustainable' territorial policy

Examining sustainability in the contexts it was used in northern and food systems research can take many directions – to do so exhaustively does not bring me closer to the questions posed in my thesis. Many have taken this concept to task (cf: Buttel, 2006; Gad et al., 2019). For example, in their collection on *The Politics of Sustainability in the Arctic*, the editors position sustainability as a *political concept*. They claim,

Sustainability as a concept entails radically different futures depending on what it is that should be sustained. The difficulties involved in prioritizing or combining the sustainability of a community, of Indigenous ways of life, of the global climate, and of a prospective nation state highlights the political character of the concept of sustainability and also why it is worth analysing. (Gad et al., 2019, p. 1)

The multiple applications of sustainability stated here resonate with my read of northern-based research literatures and is what gives me pause.

Though I have skirted around the term through my research and writing, I have been proximate to projects centered on sustainability in food systems throughout my

engagements. Examples include my FLEdGE RA positions for the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food System. For that work, the following goals were included in the research license for my 2018 RA: “to work with and support local groups (Ecology North and the Yellowknife Farmers Market) to identify community-based strategies to promote and implement local food production and develop a *sustainable* food system,” and “to develop relationships with Yellowknife Aboriginal communities to determine how their food systems (including country foods) can be part of the broader discussion of *sustainability* [emphasis added] in Yellowknife” (Spring, Stollmeyer, et al., 2018) [See Appendix A.2].

Outside of my FLEdGE engagements, I also contributed to ENR’s Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan (at which time it was the Country Food Strategy) and analyzed this territorial strategy among other food policies in my research with the Gordon Foundation [See Appendix 3]. Looking back on these engagements now, I can’t help but wonder what the meaning of sustainability is in these varying contexts (if not defined), and if they are at all similar. I wonder, what are the unintended consequences of evoking the concept of sustainability in these documents and the relationships they are part of?

Interrogating the meaning(s) of sustainable in food systems work invites those of us researching under its frame to consider the equivocations that occur with its use and what efforts we are aligning with. Based on the popularity and ambiguity of this term, in the section which follows I sharpen my focus onto territorial policy instruments to help uncover how they challenge/perpetuate colonial-capitalist logic and their complementarity to relational ontologies (particularly grounded normativity). Through this analysis I demonstrate how sustainability is used in exploitative, extractive or dominating forms of land-use, in anthropocentric policymaking and in entrenching the human/nature divide.

6.2.4 Sustainability as an uncontrolled equivocation

While I cannot claim to understand the layers of settler colonial laws that inhibit grounded normativity in their entirety, I came to understand the complexity of the web of overlapping and conflicting entitlements, rights and policies in an environmental scan completed for the Gordon Foundation. In an effort to capture how country/traditional food harvesting was impacted by these political barriers, it was apparent to me that the State made it extremely difficult. In our final report, my supervisor (Peter Andrée) and I stated the following:

The relevant territorial legislation concerning country/traditional food provisioning result in food-related mandates in the departments of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR); Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI); Health and Social Services (HSS); Executive and Indigenous Affairs; and Lands. The relationship between these legislative acts and country/traditional food provisioning are explicit in some cases (where the legislation directly controls the access to country/traditional foods). Notably, in the following, when Acts directly interact with harvesting activities they are predominantly prohibitive. In other cases, the Acts are relevant for their contribution to *sustaining* [emphasis added] the lands from which country/traditional foods are derived, thus indirectly influencing non-human animal populations, habitats, etc. (Stollmeyer & Andrée, 2020, p. 13)

What is described still resonates, but I am unable to read this excerpt (derived from GNWT sources) without questioning the use of ‘sustaining,’ and whose vision of sustainability prevails? The uncontrolled equivocation is a helpful tool to consider disparate assumptions that are carried with the sustainability label slapped onto our projects or targeted outcomes. Here, I focus my attention on two of these territorial policy instruments to think through these questions.

Increasingly, efforts led by territorial government (not only ENR) have adopted sustainability frameworks. For instance, in the GNWT Land Use and Sustainability Framework, sustainability appears in a myriad of ways – ecological, social, cultural and

economic (GNWT, 2014). This framework aptly captures the tensions of sustaining these multiple conflicting forms of land-use but proceeds to claim to pursue them all together:

The framework acknowledges the interrelationship between social, cultural, environmental and economic interests and that progress is needed in all areas in order to truly achieve sustainability. Land use decisions are challenging in that many diverse and sometimes conflicting interests must be taken into account. Whenever decisions relating to land use are made, trade-offs and compromises occur. The framework is about balance: making sure one of these elements is not achieved at the expense of another. By applying the principles, and balancing land interests, the GNWT will promote cultural diversity, environmental stewardship and sustainable economic development. (GNWT, 2014, p. 11)

This framework is exemplary of the tendency of the State to subsume Indigenous Knowledges and values into their decision-making processes and visions, while continuing to exert control over the territory. This tendency is evident in the preamble of the framework where “Land is life – it sustains and nourishes us spiritually, culturally, physically, economically and socially,” is followed by a reminder of the territorial government’s “new role as a land owner and responsible land manager,” as part of devolution (pp. 2–3). Tensions exist in the inclusion of principles such as “land-management decision-making recognizes and respects Aboriginal and Treaty rights,” while also claiming that the “GNWT has the responsibility for ensuring that decisions regarding land use, planning and management reflect the interests and priorities of all residents of the NWT” (pp. 3–5). Frequent reference to culture (“NWT cultural values”) is reminiscent of Blaser’s (2009) critique of the epistemic tendency of misinterpreting ontological difference as cultural. The framework, as described by the Premier at the time, “sets out the principles and interests the GNWT will bring to the table when working with our partners to *unlock our natural resources’ vast potential and achieve environmental sustainability to create prosperity* [emphasis added] for our people” (para. 4). The language and priorities of this

framework signal that capitalist extractivist and conservationist land-use remain central and the political power over these decisions is still disproportionately held by the territorial government. The State's use of a term as ambiguous as sustainability (whether as ecological, economic or social, if specified at all) should bring pause to those concerned about the colonial tendencies of the overrepresentation and underrepresentation of Indigenous harvesting and extractivism respectively.

The disparate uses of the term sustainable across and within the policy documents included in my scan of territorial laws pertaining to food is also of concern. Though conservation is often the official language appearing in acts such as the Wildlife, Water, or Lands Acts, the terminology appearing in plain language reports often is swapped for sustainable (ENR, 2014, 2018; GNWT, 2016). As I have argued, there is a strong link between conservationist approaches to land-use and maintaining settler colonial control. It is on this basis, that we can see that colonial conservationist approaches, despite their dissimilarity to extractive/exploitative land practices – are often more closely aligned with a colonial-capitalist understanding of nonhuman agency. Those exerting control to protect, preserve, or conserve animal species, land and water, may perpetuate an anthropocentrism which cannot recognize these more-than-human entities as agential and excludes them as agents in political realm. Turning to the Wildlife Act, there are several priorities stated in the plain language summary that epitomize this perpetuation of anthropocentrism:

- the value of wildlife as a natural resource to people in the NWT;
- the need for conservation and management of wildlife and habitat for future generations;
- that habitat protection is needed to conserve wildlife
- Aboriginal and treaty rights including the right to harvest wildlife;
- the rights and processes set out treaties and land claim agreements;
- the commitment of the Government of the Northwest Territories (NWT) to conservation of wildlife;

- the importance of working together to conserve and manage wildlife;
- that all people in the NWT have a responsibility to help look after wildlife and habitat. (GNWT, 2018, p. 4)

These priorities demonstrate a controlling relationship with nonhumans (who are also reduced to the status of natural resources for human use). Further, the significance of Aboriginal and treaty rights to hunt and harvest are stated, but the State maintains authority over wildlife decisions (see also: Bayha, 2012). The State's assertion of authority can be read through accompanying territorial documents that outline the respective roles of different government bodies. While ENR is responsible for the enforcement of the regulations under this Act, the department claims that "the primary role of the [co-management] boards is to integrate the interests of land claim beneficiaries in wildlife and environmental management into the ministerial decision-making process of the federal and territorial governments" (ENR, n.d., p. 4). However, they claim that, "under all agreements...[ENR] retains ultimate authority for the management of wildlife," (ENR, n.d., p. 2). While the aims of conservation and sustainability are not inherently alike, both can be invoked by State authorities to restrict how Indigenous harvesters maintain their food systems.

I focus my attention pointedly on these two territorial policy instruments as they exemplify many of the criticisms that have been made of joint or State-led land, water and wildlife governance, but I do not mean to single them out. Many other federal or territorial strategies, policies and acts could have brought me to similar conclusions. The State can take advantage of the ambiguity of the concepts of sustainability and conservation while sustaining colonial-capitalist forms of land-use, just by another name. Of course, it is not only the State who uses the language of sustainability – within a northern food systems

context, it can be read in the communications and writings of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, Indigenous governments, extractive industries, civil society organizations and so on. The overlapping use of this concept makes it difficult to critique. It also makes any political tensions between its different users less visible. Sustainability can appear to communicate sameness even when the priorities amongst its different users are dissimilar or conflicting. It is clear to me that if its users tended to be more forthright about what they seek to sustain, the term might be less problematic. As de la Cadena (2010) notes, “equivocations cannot be ‘corrected,’ let alone avoided; they can however be controlled. This requires paying attention to the process of translation itself—the terms and the respective differences” (p. 351). To understand sustainability as an uncontrolled equivocation, is to be confronted with an incommensurability in conceptions of land (in this case, between relational ontologies and the colonial-capitalist orientation).

The theorizations presented in this section ask me to let go of universal understandings of humans/nonhumans and hierarchal ordering. I also take the commitment to taking relational ontologies seriously – though I cannot assume to have access to Other ways of knowing, I see that I must first resist subsuming their distinctness into colonial-capitalist frames. “Though not easy by any means,” Todd (2014) writes, “it is possible to hold different understandings in addressing northern human-animal relations across cosmologies, legal orders, and political frameworks” (p. 225). My analysis of policies here does not bring me to a simple policy recommendation, but I argue that a much more radical shift in how and whose knowledges are valued (or privileged) in the governance of land, water and wildlife is needed to disrupt colonial-capitalism in the territory. These matters evidently exceed how we write and frame our research. But as researchers interested in

challenging colonial-capitalist logic, this teaches us to be wary of the concepts we evoke and the equivocations that occur with their use.

6.3 COLONIAL EQUIVOCATION: asymmetrical legacies of colonial-capitalist extraction and contamination

How do we embrace plurality in food systems research? I have established in the preceding sections the risks of colonial divisions but resisting dualistic approaches to food systems research should not ignore distinctness in the challenges individuals and communities face procuring local foods in the territory. I do not want to make generalizations about the disparate experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors but wish to bring *place* into these matters to consider differences between those whose ancestral territories are occupied and those who have settled, migrated, or visited them. Here, I consider arsenic contamination in Yellowknife as an example of a central challenge for food provisioning. It is true that anyone harvesting foods in the city of Yellowknife is forced to reckon with the risks of arsenic concentration in their foods (whether hunted, gathered, fished, or grown). In framing my research, I have often used this as an entry point to connect the struggles of diverse actors. However, the source of contamination (Giant Mine) is also stated to be “one of the principal causes of changes to the YKDFN’s way of life, altering the land use patterns of the membership” (YKDFN Land & Environment, 2012, p. 2). What I clarify through this section is that while arsenic contamination is a risk for any harvester, grower, fisher, etc. in Yellowknife, contending with the legacies of Giant Mine reveals the unevenness in how and whom has been (and continues to be) impacted. Many who have brought attention to the shortcomings of multiple levels of government to responsibly and respectfully engage with arsenic contamination have articulated that these are issues of

particular concern and consequence for the Yellowknives Dene and their ancestors (Keeling & Sandlos, 2012; O'Reilly, 2015). I echo their claims and build onto their contributions detailing territorial and federal government mismanagement with encounters from my research engagements at a municipal level.

The concept of environmental racism comes to mind as a helpful frame to understanding the disproportionateness of health impacts for the Yellowknives Dene. This concept emerges from environmental justice scholarship by those arguing that environmental inequality “must be analyzed alongside more structural forms of racism that are embedded in the historical expansion of colonialism and capitalism” (Keeling & Sandlos, 2009, p. 121; cf: Pulido, 1996, 2017). I clarify that my argument is not based on an assumption of who is most *vulnerable* to arsenic contamination (either by spatial proximity, harvesting methods, or specific plant/animal species). Rather, I ground this argument on the basis that arsenic pollution is a manufactured problem of settler colonial governance and colonial-capitalist extractivism – and for the Yellowknives Dene the harms are not only about contamination. I frame this reflexive analysis with Kepkiewicz’s (2017) concept of a *colonial equivocation* to challenge my previous claims (as read in draft thesis proposals and coursework papers), that arsenic is a ‘common’ problem. In my thesis, I have argued that the impacts of extractivism for food systems tends to be neglected by the State and that researchers have a role in either perpetuating or disrupting this tendency. Based on the time I spent living in Yellowknife, it is important for me to address how extractivism and contamination shaped the food system issues I have come to understand. This section contributes to the existing research literature with a territorial/federal focus (Keeling & Sandlos, 2012; O'Reilly, 2015) by highlighting the shortcomings of the municipal

government in handling issues of arsenic in their recent urban food efforts. It is also an opportunity to elevate the work being led by YKDFN in their newly articulated demands to the State for a formal apology, compensation, as well as nation-to-nation negotiation (Zingle, 2020, 2021). Contained in these subsections, are also many lessons from my RA positions in Yellowknife that helped me understand how integral place-based knowledge and leadership are in food systems work.

6.3.1 Issues of arsenic contamination as a colonial equivocation

Gold extraction in Yellowknife and its impact on people and the food systems that sustain them are particularly grave. They are also emblematic of the risks of extractivism and contamination across the North. While there are specificities and extremities to this case that strictly pertain to Yellowknife, unfortunately the forces that have led to such profound change and loss are not exclusive to this place. As Kuyek (2019) puts it,

Mining is the ultimate expression of the violence of colonialism. Pillaging the earth for minerals and gems in order to build our industrial and unequal society, mining takes place on lands that are being stolen from Indigenous people both directly and indirectly through a flawed treaty negotiation, interpretation, and enforcement process. Dispossessed by the Canadian state of their lands and resources, many Indigenous people are deeply impoverished and forced to take what jobs and revenues the corporate masters are willing to share. After the minerals and gems are gone, the land remains despoiled, home to toxic wastes that will have to be managed forever. (pp. 2–3)

Bringing into view the ways that resource development has shaped what is now known as Yellowknife exceeds this work – for the establishment of the city itself is as a gold mining settlement (Abele, 2009). Keeling and Sandlos (2012) report that many Dene Elders consider the mines to be the “central agent of colonialism in the Yellowknife region, a progenitor of social, economic and ecological changes that dramatically altered the Yellowknives’ way of life based on hunting and trapping” (p. 14). Engaging with food

systems in Yellowknife necessitates confronting the problem of arsenic and the legacies of mining, including the colonial-capitalist forces that have created these issues.

Thinking of the ways that issues of arsenic enter the realm of local food systems, I turn back to Kepkiewicz' (2017) use an ethic of incommensurability in her discussion of food sovereignty movements. In acknowledging that "all people's food systems in Canada are affected by colonial dispossession," Kepkiewicz (2017) argues that it is important not to position Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors as "analogous victims of colonialism, without attention to the specific character of the settler colonial project" (pp. 173–174). This type of *colonial equivocation* she continues, "creates space for settlers to avoid confronting our/their complicity" (Kepkiewicz, 2017, p. 174). Kepkiewicz (2017) argues that settler colonialism must be understood as "a distinct but intersecting structure of oppression" (p. 175). I find it useful to think of the legacies of arsenic as a colonial equivocation, for it brings into consideration that while there is increased exposure to arsenic for all residents of Yellowknife (past, present and future), these are incommensurable with the impact of arsenic legacy for the Yellowknives Dene. Through this understanding, I can reflect on how my approach towards arsenic has shifted over time in reorienting towards an ethic of incommensurability. Instead of thinking of arsenic as a shared experience for anyone in Yellowknife, the colonial historical account of gold mining in the city brings attention to the asymmetrical nature of the impacts of colonial-capitalist extractivism and governance.

6.3.2 Encountering arsenic in my research engagements

Before I begin, I think it is important to bring my relation to the issues of arsenic into view. It is not lost on me that I am hardly in a position to critique other (municipal) efforts given

that I have also written about extractivism and food systems at length without having worked with members of YKDFN as project partners. In my research log, between my two summers working in Yellowknife, I can situate some of my early anxieties about doing research in Chief Drygeese Territory without my own *research relations* with YKDFN:

[During] the stages of my preliminary fieldwork, in addition to supporting the efforts by Ecology North, Yellowknife Farmers Market and other initiatives on local food production throughout the city, one objective [see Appendix A] was to include country foods as part of the broader discussion of food system sustainability in Yellowknife...Despite working closely with staff from Dechıta Nàowo, [YKDFN] the extent of this relationship was narrowly focused on the planning and execution of the Fall Harvest Fair. The Fair brought together many of the food system actors who contribute to nurturing food systems in Yellowknife but my engagements with my collaborators wrapped up quickly after the fair...leaving Yellowknife to promptly begin my coursework. I reflect now as time has passed, if [staying] longer in Yellowknife following the fair would have allowed for nurturing this relationship. My impression is that YKDFN has many ongoing, successful food related projects, through Dechıta Nàowo...that include building and maintaining greenhouses and gardens, and cultural camps that allow for transfer of knowledge on country food harvesting activities. It is not known to me, based on our interactions, how and if there is any interest in collaborating with organizations such as the NWT Food Network or otherwise for engagements in food systems advocacy. (personal notes, April 28, 2019)

I continued to work with Dechıta Nàowo and other YKDFN members to coordinate the Fall Harvest Fair (FHF) again that year, but my role in these collaborations was as a representative of Ecology North (neither as a graduate student/researcher). I hardly considered that these events would shape my understanding of local food systems, or that there would be a place for them in my thesis. Yet, coordinating the FHF was a huge learning curve that left me with many important lessons, in this case these are in recognizing the place-based knowledge of arsenic and the tensions of promoting inclusive food systems.

While waters and soils containing high concentrations of arsenic *tend* to be communicated officially through hazard signs [see Figure 4] and mapping infographics

[see Figure 5] they have not always been. Instead, the legacies and the risks of living and harvesting in arsenic contaminated regions are part of the place-based social fabric less known to outsiders (like myself) and are communicated through casual jokes and cautionary remarks. For instance, in 2018, the FHF was hosted at the Wiiliideh site, the YKDFN cultural site along the Yellowknife River, just over 11 km up the Ingraham Trail from the city. Even though shifting the location of the FHF from Ndilo (the site it had been hosted for several years previous) was a major endeavour for us as organizers, the new location opened up many exciting opportunities. Wiiliideh is a central gathering spot for both YKDFN communities (Ndilo and Dettah) and in the summer without the ice road access over Great Slave Lake, the distance between them is twice as far. At this time, I knew whenever I drove up the Ingraham Trail to camp and hike to seize the opportunity to harvest berries and other plants without worrying about arsenic contamination and was ecstatic that this new location could lend itself to wild harvesting demos at the fair given the proximity to the forest. Except – the Wiiliideh site is also steps away from Giant Mine! – luckily, my co-coordinators were quick to point out my misstep before I promoted this idea more widely.



Figure 4 Arsenic Hazard Sign Rat Lake, Yellowknife, NT (Stollmeyer, 2019)

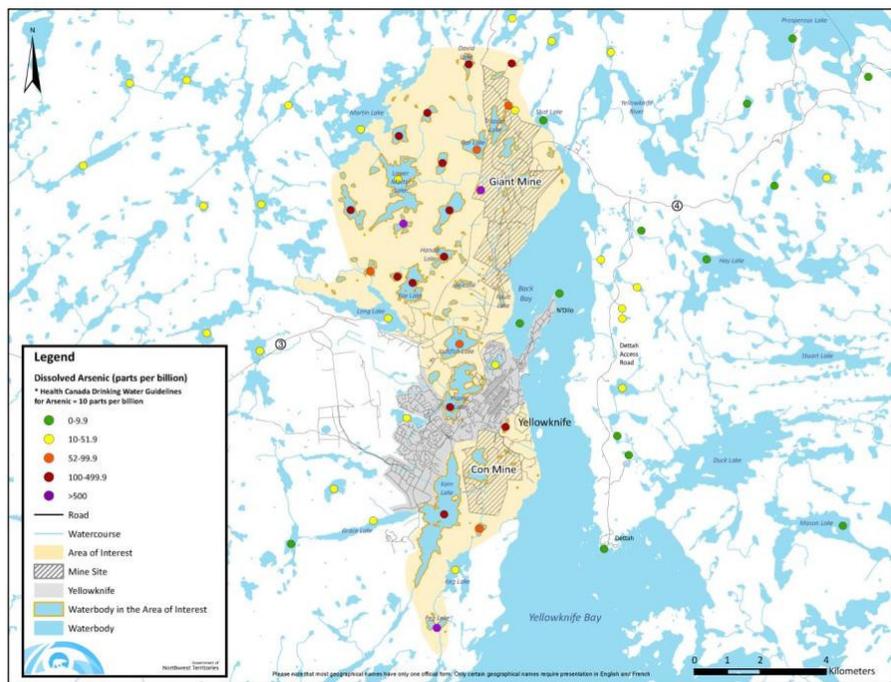


Figure 5 Map of Arsenic Concentrations Measured in Yellowknife (HSS, 2019)

This urge that I had to include wild harvesting at the fair was something I adopted from previous Ecology North organizers who hoped to embrace multiple food systems expanding on its community gardening origins. In an effort to be as inclusive as possible, until it was brought to my attention, I failed to consider that having Dene medical and food practices showcased at the event for a wider public was not necessarily wanted, for the reasonable concern that more (outsider, non-Dene) people harvesting would add stress to these plant species. This lesson has helped me take a step back from my determination to practice so-called inclusivity without having the foundations and relationships to do so well. These day-to-day reminders of arsenic, though perhaps mundane, reveal how asymmetrical the issues of arsenic are in local food efforts. The threat of arsenic on the traditional food systems of the Yellowknives Dene (as shown in the contamination of their cultural site) is compounded by the threat of outsiders overharvesting what can be safely harvested. It would be difficult to find comparable concerns when it comes to featuring agricultural practices at the FHF. The concept of a colonial equivocation draws to mind that the issue of arsenic is analogous.

6.3.3 Colonial-capitalist histories and oversight of mining in Yellowknife

The history of gold mining in Yellowknife is representative of settler colonial decision-making that has long favoured colonial-capitalist extractivism over the health and wellbeing of the land and people. There is vital research being carried out across the affected sites to ascertain how severe these risks are for human health, determining concentrate amounts of arsenic in different lakes and soils, and among various plant and animal species (Chan et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2015; Tanamal et al., 2020). Even with new insights generated from these and other studies, arsenic in Yellowknife remains a

contentious issue. There are significant tensions regarding accountability (or lack thereof), risk communication and safe consumption (the actual presence of arsenic trioxide need not debating since it has been made widely known, but there is less awareness and consensus on the risks of harvesting from certain sites and species²⁹). More generally, issues of arsenic arise through the political tensions and turmoil of gold mining in the city, entangled in the settler colonial politics of dispossession, labour disputes, the receivership of the mining company, and more recently, the political mobilization of YKDFN with renewed demands to the State. From my short months spent living and working in Yellowknife, it is difficult to represent the nuances of the highly politicized issues of mining and arsenic contamination but based on my encounters I suggest the following: 1) Through persistent advocacy by Yellowknives Dene and civil society organizations (such as Alternatives North, Ecology North) have brought heightened awareness to the devastating impacts of arsenic contamination, these risks *tend* to be disregarded, downplayed or negated in different contexts by multiple levels of settler colonial government. 2) No initiatives around food systems in Yellowknife are worth pursuing without contending with arsenic and that this requires meaningful engagement with YKDFN.

There are now over 237,000 tons of arsenic trioxide stored underground in Yellowknife. On the surface there were ninety-five hectares of contaminated mine tailings...This is enough arsenic to kill everyone on the

²⁹ The research on the arsenic contamination among snowshoe hares is a notable example of the debate on severity of contaminant risks. Wildlife toxicology researchers discovered elevated levels of arsenic in a small sample of these mammals nearby Giant Mine (Amuno et al., 2018). Researchers presented their initial sample findings for the territorial government expecting public health would determine the risk for consumption. While the official statement from public health discouraged all harvesting of traditional or local foods around contaminated sites; a spokesperson for ENR asked to speak on the matter of snowshoe hare contaminants claimed that, “since the study was designed to detect arsenic concentrations in bones and teeth rather than the muscle/meat that humans typically consume” (cited in Fenn, 2017). This contention around the dismissal of this study came up in a casual conversation about arsenic I had with an acquaintance who lived in Ndilo; she refuted this claim based on the fact that many do harvest the whole animal, bones included – making clear that these findings on the snowshoe hare’s bones are vital for human health and risk communication.

planet, and would wipe out the Mackenzie River system if there were a major leak” (Kuyek, 2019, p. 256).

I am neither a geologist, biologist, nor a soil scientist, so as much as these figures of the unprecedented amounts of arsenic trioxide being buried underground should shock me – I am not able to make sense of how this affects the health of those proximate to it. What concerns me, as a food systems researcher in the social sciences, has less to do with the actual concentrations and more to do with how arsenic contamination from mining activities has shaped people’s relationships to harvesting, and how these crises are addressed. There are powerful accounts articulating the experiences for many Yellowknives Dene with Giant Mine (for instance: Yellowknives Dene, 2005³⁰) as well as the oversight of the mine over the course of time (Evans et al., 2020; Keeling & Sandlos, 2012; O’Reilly, 2015). Wohlgemuth (2012) cites an early study issued by the federal government in 1998³¹ that found the concentrations of arsenic found in berries in the city and mines were vastly greater compared to nearby sites. Wohlgemuth (2012) learns from former YKDFN chief Fred Sangris that “local people go at least 20 miles from Yellowknife to fish, even if the fish will be given to their dogs” (p. 38). He continues to elaborate,

Many Aboriginal people will no longer pick berries or other plants on Latham Island, and an annual berry picking event at N’dilo school now usually occurs on Burwash Landing or further from Yellowknife. Many people will not eat the berries that grow in their yards. Soil for the new community garden built on the N’dilo school grounds was sourced from outside of Yellowknife to be sure that it was not contaminated with arsenic. (Wohlgemuth, 2012, p. 38)

³⁰ As per the request of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation Council as is stated in this Traditional Knowledge report, I am not going to extract or cite any of the details outlined within but mention it only with a strong recommendation that this should be read fully in its own terms.

³¹ Conducted with berry species: blueberries, cranberries, raspberries, rose hips, cloudberry, gooseberries in 1998-99 Northern Contaminants Program by Davey (1999). *Arsenic Levels in Berries and Soils from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation Traditional Territory*, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, pp. 81-85.

The legacy of this mine in Yellowknife is not only observed in the hundreds of thousands of tonnes of arsenic that remain stored underground. While these represent the environmental *effects* of the mining operation, the environmental *legacies*³² live through the repercussions starting as early as the prospecting days of the early 20th Century to the ongoing (and perhaps, never-ending) processes of monitoring and remediation.

Despite the fact that Giant Mine is one of the largest environmental liabilities in the country, settler colonial governments have continuously mishandled contamination and risk communication. YKDFN Land & Environment (2012), in their environmental assessment for the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, state that “these matters are complicated by a distinct lack of trust and historically poor communication. When these issues are combined, the necessity for independent monitoring and oversight is readily apparent” (p. 2). There are many ways to recount this poor communication but perhaps none as sensitive as the loss of a child to arsenic poisoning. This is a tragedy that the federal government failed to prevent. Keeling and Sandlos (2012) demonstrate that the threat of arsenic was known to the government in the 1950s, so it is not merely a matter of naïveté. The mining corporation had installed pollution control measures to prevent arsenic emissions nearby at Con Mine two years prior, but no such measure were in place for Giant Mine when the arsenic poisoning occurred (Keeling & Sandlos, 2012). The communications of these risks were inadequate when a Yellowknives Dene child consumed melted snow at Latham Island and passed away within two years of arsenic poisoning (Evans et al., 2020; Keeling & Sandlos, 2012). Contributors to a recent

³² This distinction is made by Horowitz et al., (2018) recognizing that the environmental effects of mining are more widely known than the environmental legacies (limited regulation, or post-mining monitoring).

report documenting the oversight of the mine account for the fallibility of the approach to governing in the territory at this time of this tragedy:

Over the decades, Yellowknives Dene members have pointed out many problems with Canada's methods of communication in the spring of 1951. For example, as was likely known to the network of Government field staff established in the Northwest Territories by 1950, few Yellowknives Dene read English or subscribed to newspapers at the time. After more than half a century of experience in nation-to-nation politics with the Yellowknives Dene and other Indigenous groups around Great Slave Lake with whom they shared a Treaty relationship, the Federal Government could also have been reasonably expected to understand the importance of formal, face-to-face diplomacy in important matters. Moreover, even had the Yellowknives Dene been able to receive the message inserted into the local paper in 1951, it failed to flag the broader issues of contamination of lands, animals, plants, berries, or advise on fish consumption from Yellowknife Bay (Evans et al., 2020, p. 18).

This account makes clear that the government knew of arsenic concerns, enough to issue these warnings, but failed to make them known to those who would be impacted. O'Reilly (2015) attests to the fact that arsenic pollution was a controversial issue prior to the mine's closure as he lays out evidence of a "lax federal regulatory regime for air and water pollution" in the NWT (p. 347). Multiple levels of government failed to hold the mining company accountable for pollution, as O'Reilly (2015) recounts that despite...

the very serious environmental issues posed by the underground arsenic, governments at all levels seemed more intent on propping up the failing finances of Royal Oak and squeezing just a few more years out of a mine that was clearly in decline rather than addressing the issue of who would pay the potentially massive costs of remediation after closure (p. 351).

To limit financial liability, "the territorial government agreed that the site would only be remediated to an 'industrial' standard for arsenic and hydrocarbon spills and that the underground arsenic would be frozen in place forever," in their cooperative agreement with the federal government following the closure of the mine in 2005 (O'Reilly, 2015, p. 358). The perpetual exclusion of YKFDN from these decision-making processes is of particular

concern given that it is their traditional territories that the mine and contaminants reside in.

The expectations of the YKFDN contrast sharply with those of the State, as read here:

Future research must continue, with a goal to find a solution that does not just account for managing the risk, but resolving it. The Yellowknives Dene is fortunate that we still have elders who remember this area before there was a mine here, before the land was destroyed. The goal must always be to return that land to the same way it was. (YKDFN Land & Environment, 2012, p. 1)

Persistent push-back against the State's approach to dealing with these matters has been necessary every step of the way. O'Reilly argues that "the public's exclusion from meaningful consultation about Giant Mine might have continued indefinitely," but YKDFN and other concerned residents (himself included) eventually "found a powerful ally in the city government" (p. 358). O'Reilly (2015) mentions, much to his surprise, Alternatives North and the City of Yellowknife were assigned equal roles/responsibilities to those of YKDFN in the Giant Mine Oversight Body. This last note about the role of the municipal government joining YKDFN and civil society to hold accountable the federal and territorial bodies is notable. As critical as their support was, it does not mean that municipal government has consistently practiced meaningful engagement with YKDFN nor have they remained vigilant of the issues of arsenic that fall under their domain. Now that I have described the federal and territorial governments' mishandling of arsenic, I shift to an example at the municipal level told through my research engagements in Yellowknife.

6.3.4 Accounting for arsenic in municipal food strategies

In July 2019, the municipal government put out a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a Food and Urban Agriculture Study, the primary goal of which was to "work with the community to develop a strategy to direct urban agriculture efforts within the City" (City of Yellowknife, 2018b). The City (2018b) indicated that they were searching for qualified

consultants to carry out a comprehensive study, requiring a high degree of community consultation, policy and regulation amendments, and directives for different stakeholders and governments. Despite having outlined fairly comprehensive deliverables, there was no mention of arsenic contamination. Among the responding bidders was a joint proposal from the organizations I was working with, Ecology North and NWT Food Network – one of three bids that were Yellowknife-based (the fourth was Vancouver-based) (City of Yellowknife, 2018a). I assisted these collaborators to put together their submission. My involvement was limited to administrative support – compiling letters of recommendation, CVs and other components. The collaborators involved in the joint proposal aptly pointed out to the City that a failure to mention the history of arsenic contamination was concerning given its implications for urban agriculture and wild harvesting (Ecology North & NWT Food Network, 2018). Ecology North in particular is well positioned to bring the concerns of arsenic to the fore given the organization’s origins as a collective of volunteers responding to arsenic pollution in Yellowknife in 1971 (Ecology North, n.d.). Stating that the prescribed timeline and budget were a constraint to more comprehensive testing, their joint submission proposed an analysis of existing soil quality data to generate a state of knowledge on arsenic, health and agricultural viability (Ecology North & NWT Food Network, 2018). They also proposed a historical retelling of the city’s food system changes alongside the history of arsenic contamination to bring these two interconnected issues into view and offer insights on their combined impact on local food efforts today. I was disappointed to learn months after I left Yellowknife to start my coursework that they were not successful in their bid and the study was awarded to the only out-of-territory submission (Urban Food Strategies).

I continued to follow the developments of this study – mostly from afar, scouring through any reports shared online, but also in conversations with Northerners involved in local food efforts when I returned to Yellowknife for a second summer. Though there is more here to unpack about the importance of Northerners leading northern-based research, I will not speak to the overall reception of the study but focus here on the issue of arsenic and the lack of engagement with YKDFN. While arsenic and the associated concerns are *considered* in the final food and agriculture strategy (GROW V.30), their omission from the original drafted strategy put forward by Urban Food Strategies is notable. This draft (GROW V.20) was completed by the consultant prior to any community engagement; it was shared online for comments and presented to participants invited to an open house to receive their feedback. There are two concerns expressed by in participant feedback (that can be read in their engagement summary notes) that interest me:

2. **Acknowledge arsenic.** There are concerns that the potential challenges associated with arsenic contamination were not addressed in GROW. Many participants felt that the issue should be dealt with head-on and that people should be supported in determining if the soil they have is suitable for growing food plants.

8. **Lack of connection to Indigenous community.** Creating an inclusive strategy that meaningfully connects to the Indigenous history and community in Yellowknife is noted as very important. (Urban Food Strategies, 2019, pp. 1–2)

Though inclusion of arsenic in the actions of their ten-year strategy does, at the very least, introduce an opportunity – limited are the actionable steps for the City to proceed with. In Action 2.2.3., there are recommendations to *consider* making soil testing and interpreting results more accessible, restoring poor quality/contaminated soils, and *complementing* the ongoing work of the Health Effect Monitoring Program (Urban Food Strategies & City of Yellowknife, 2019, p. 20). While the strategy reads that “finding ways to restore land as

well as safely manage food crops is central to [this] Goal,” the recommendations are predominantly about how the City can support/leverage existing efforts and assets (Urban Food Strategies & City of Yellowknife, 2019, p. 19). The only other mention of arsenic is in Action 3.1.1., as a possible topic for a workshop (Urban Food Strategies & City of Yellowknife, 2019). While arsenic was *acknowledged* at the request of participants who offered feedback, I would argue that this work has not generated any new information on arsenic in Yellowknife that was not already known, nor has its advanced efforts to contend with arsenic contamination for safe harvest. For the latter of these two concerns, in my read of the final strategy and the summary of engagement notes, I cannot see how the lack of engagement with Indigenous members of the community has been redressed. Aside from a territorial land acknowledgment, there are several suggestions to include Indigenous medicinal and food practices in educational/promotional programs and public signage (pp. 22–25, 35). However, their inclusion seems like an afterthought given that the RFP and initial drafts of the strategy have been largely agri-centric and included YKDFN only to mention that one of the existing community gardens sits in Ndilo. Based on these public documents, I think it is fair to say this municipal strategy falls short in its engagements with community members and YKDFN in particular.

6.3.5 Meaningful engagement with legacies of arsenic

These efforts are emblematic of the concerns I raised with the politics of inclusion with regards to a territorial food network in my previous chapter. There may be an intent to include Indigenous harvesting practices, but the efforts have limited (or no) participation of Yellowknives Dene or other Indigenous groups in the territory. In making claims about the unevenness of who is most impacted by arsenic in Yellowknife, I have resisted a

vulnerabilities-based approach whereby YKDFN is most affected only because of higher exposure to contaminants from harvesting practices or proximity to the sites. Rather, historicizing these issues within a settler colonial context reveals that the persistent issues of arsenic exceed concerns of contamination and are themselves the manifestation of State and industry-led colonial-capitalism in the ancestral lands of the Yellowknives Dene (and the dispossession, occupation and loss that follows). Therefore, the necessity of engaging meaningfully with YKDFN through the development and remediation of Giant Mine as well as around local food/arsenic issues, should not be based on their vulnerability but rather be based on obligation. These shortcomings of the State are all too common in the northern research industry, and I do not exclude my own thesis work from this. While this section has centred the persistent failings of multiple levels of government, I weaved through these accounts, the limitations of my own research engagements in Yellowknife.

I am compelled to address the issues of arsenic in my food systems research but with unease on how to meaningfully raise these in my thesis without engagement with YKDFN members as research partners. These feelings have been renewed as I witness the recent mobilization of YKDFN through demonstrations and communications to share their story and gain support on their demands to the federal government (YKDFN, n.d.). These demands include, but are not limited to, a formal apology, compensation, a formal role in the remediation, as well as nation-to-nation negotiation (request for rights and recognition table with Crown-Indigenous Relations) (Blake, 2020; Zingle, 2020, 2021). I have defaulted to accounts directly from YKDFN in addition to their co-researchers and allies, and as I conclude this section, I turn to these collaborative efforts again as they relate to (or exceed) what Ecology North/NWT Food Network had proposed in their bid. In a

partnership between the YKDFN, Alternatives North and the Toxic Legacies Project, the arsenic buried underground has been presented as a “monster...that community members must guard and keep in place, so it does not emerge to harm people and the land” (Sandlos et al., 2019, p. 37). The researchers include several accounts from YKDFN Elders outlining what should be included in commemorative material of Giant Mine:

YKDFN Elders frequently returned to the impacts of the arsenic pollution on community health, not only due to direct exposure, but also because people feared formerly reliable sources of food (especially fish and berries) and water. The Elders at one point suggested that the whole history of the mine could be etched in words and pictures into the granite rocks at the site, commemorating difficult issues such as the death of Dene children due to arsenic pollution in the 1950s and even the Giant Mine strike in the early 1990s. Any historical account of the mine should also, according to the Elders, acknowledge that their communities have for decades been paying for clean water to be trucked from outside, substituting for a resource that was freely available in vast quantities prior to the advent of the mine. The Elders also insisted that commemorative material at the mine should acknowledge the community’s long-standing belief that it was one of their own, Liza Crookedhand, who showed prospectors where to find gold in the area, a sharing of knowledge for which she was given a mere stovepipe. (Sandlos et al., 2019, p. 37)

These accounts bring into view many dimensions of extractivist legacies – political, economic, ecological, as well as food/water security – all of which are of critical importance. Whether as part of the ongoing remediation efforts or new food initiatives, this should signal that there is more to account for than the arsenic buried beneath the ground. I maintain that arsenic pollution is a story of State-failure to uphold treaty obligations to YKDFN. As long as arsenic needs to be kept frozen beneath the ground, it continues to be a site of dispossession of the traditional territories to the Yellowknives Dene, their ancestors and future generations.

6.4 Conclusion

In exploring the impacts of settler colonialism on northern food systems in this thesis, I have worked to confront how research is implicated in these processes. Through my two engagements, I have been encouraged to reflect and compare their different methods, framings and levels of community-involvement. While a comparison of these disparate approaches to research would be extremely fruitful, I have maintained that this style of case study comparison does not bring me closer to answers to the questions posed herein. Instead, I have used a reflexive approach where tensions in both engagements are taken up alongside theoretical/practical influences that have shaped (and reshaped) the conclusions I have drawn. In this chapter, I demonstrated how the logics of colonial-capitalism manifest in research through three colonial tendencies and accompanied each with theoretical or practical lessons to challenge these tendencies.

The first is the reorientation towards plurality whereby research problems and findings need not be contained in either/or logics but can be imagined through a both/and also approach that resists colonial dichotomies. This lesson is in response to the colonial binary compartmentalization that I carried through my research engagements. I considered if my framing ignored or delimited the potential of food system solutions that sit at the intersection of these binaries in my hyper-awareness to settler colonialism. As I portrayed agriculture as colonial (thus as inherently bad) I rendered invisible the interest and practice of agriculture by Indigenous communities across the territory. Similarly, as I portrayed commodification as a colonial-capitalist relation to food (coding the commodification of country/traditional foods inherently wrong), I ignored various forms of sharing/commodification that exist across the North. These examples demonstrate my

tendency to reproduce an colonial/Indigenous binary under a settler colonial framework and delimit Indigenous self-determined food systems in my early work as an MA student. Reading settler colonialism into many of the tensions in food systems was perhaps not my problem but approaching these issues with such polarity was. This lesson is to avoid a settler colonial determinism and embrace the plurality and nuance that exists outside of colonial binaries.

The second lesson is to welcome epistemic disconcertment in our understandings if we are to challenge the universalizing, anthropocentric and dichotomous colonial ordering that render invisible knowledges and ways of living and being that diverge from it. In my meditation on colonial epistemic erasure, I expanded the implications of settler colonial disruptions to food systems to account for the ways it erases the knowledges that sustain them. I drew from others contesting the epistemic nature of colonial-capitalism to demonstrate the partiality of this ‘worldview’ and the need to reorient towards an appreciation of difference and multiplicity. I described relational ontologies (grounded normativity) and the theoretical tools of ontological politics that allow for ontological difference to be taken seriously. The purpose of these steps was to revisit applications of ‘sustainability’ in my research engagements to present this concept as an uncontrolled equivocation. I demonstrated how an uncontrolled equivocation occurs in its use given the inconsistent and often unspecified use of this term by many different actors. What causes the most concern is how this concept is used to perpetuate colonial-capitalist orientations towards land, water and wildlife (with reference to territorial policy). I do not offer an alternate concept to sustainability but urge other researchers to be cognizant of the equivocations that occur with its use and the efforts we align with under its banner.

The final lesson is to be attentive to asymmetrical impacts of settler colonialism, by bringing place and specificity into the manner in which we challenge colonial-capitalism. I presented arsenic in Yellowknife as a colonial equivocation to argue that while everyone in the city is affected by contamination, this issue reveals in an unevenness in who feels the consequences of colonial-capitalist extractivism. The consequences are not only measured in arsenic concentrations but include the economic, sociopolitical and ecological dimensions of resource extraction beginning in the early prospecting days. By situating the issues of arsenic in their colonial histories and continuities, I argue that there is more to this story than contamination and that it is a continuous site of dispossession for the Yellowknives Dene. There is a lesson here for how to meaningfully engage with such issues: to resist the colonial equivocation that positions all residents as analogous victims of arsenic contamination and to respect the authority of those whose traditional territories carry the arsenic buried underground. Different actors have their own responsibilities in responding to these issues (including federal, territorial and municipal governments, civil society organizations, researchers, etc.) but any food system efforts in these territories should be led with the demands of YKDFN centred. My meditations on colonial encounters in research reveal that even with settler colonialism heavy in my analysis, I perpetuated many colonial tendencies in the process. This may not be surprising if we take seriously Tuck and Yang's (2014) claim that "social science knowledge is settler colonial knowledge" (p. 245). They continue, "it also refuses (refuses the agency, personhood, and theories of the researched), and it also set limits (limits the epistemologies of the colonized/colonizable/to-be-colonized) and hides its own refusals and limits in order to appear limitless" (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 245). There are limits to the extent that we can

challenge settler colonialism within the academic institutions that host these projects. Here I tried, at least, to disrupt some of the colonial tendencies of my own research, past and present. I do not assume that by taking settler colonial forces up in my analysis that I am able to escape the coloniality of research. I have taken this opportunity to sit with and meditate on these colonial encounters. It is my hope that through these three meditations that I have offered a set of tools and frames for other researchers to think with.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Through this thesis, I worked to demonstrate that major food systems stressors in the NWT, such as extractivism and contamination, changing climate, and restrictive policy, are inextricably linked to processes of settler colonialism. I have premised my research on the notion that insufficient attention to the particular ways that colonialism is intertwined with the contemporary challenges Northerners face in procuring local foods delimits how these challenges are addressed. Researchers working in northern contexts usually recognize the disruptive role colonialism *had* in shaping food systems, but often absent from their analyses are the *ongoing* realities of colonial forces. A major concern for me in this work is not only this inattention to (settler) colonialism in northern food systems research, but also researchers' limited consideration for the role their research may play in (re)entrenching colonial logics. Considering that I come to this understanding within the context of doing northern-based research, I decided to take stock of this issue by turning my gaze inward on my own research engagements.

Though I have not pursued a CBPR project, my research experiences are borne out of a genuine desire and attempt to practice community-engaged research. With both of my research engagements – some elements of this methodology were present – but neither were formulated into a collaborative project. Though my FLEdGE engagements had a high degree of community engagement and 'action', my partnered organizations and I never came together to create a research project. My internship with Mitacs had a clearly laid out research project, but I did not work with a community partner to develop it. The hiccups and dilemmas I experienced in my efforts to collaborate raised many critical methodological questions for me. This questioning led me to realize that falling short in

building a CBPR project is less to do with my failures, or those of my community partners, but more to do with fundamental concerns with the methodology itself. In many ways, I understand how this methodology and its variations are very practical attempts to challenge the (past or ongoing) colonial tendencies of research (whether or not this is explicitly named) (Castleden et al., 2012; Koster et al., 2012). I maintain that such aims – to overcome power imbalances, establish relationships and value knowledge outside the academy (Koster et al., 2012; Ochocka & Janzen, 2014) – are all extremely important and should be prioritized in any research setting, and not only in CBPR. However, the intention to do so should not be assumed to achieve said aims.

While colonial histories may create the conditions for more community-engaged research projects in the North, CBPR practitioners and researchers often do not tend to colonial forces in their research. As others have noted, there is fairly limited application of both critical and colonial discourses in CBPR (including contending with the ongoing role of dispossession) (de Leeuw et al., 2012; Kennelly, 2018; Richmond et al., 2021). There is something to be said about the role that community-partners are meant to have in shaping research agendas in CBPR – perhaps it is not always their priority to engage with colonial forces in research? Yet, as I pointed to in my third chapter, researchers do engage with colonialism in their publications one way or another (whether overtly or covertly). My contention is that representations that treat colonialism only as an event of the past are unfit to respond to colonial continuities in the present. My research inquiry stems from this tension, therefore, the motivations for my research are both methodological and theoretical.

Through a reflexive analysis of the tensions I encountered in FLEdGE and Mitacs supported research, I have brought discourses of settler colonialism into dialogue with the

materials I consulted in my research as well as with personal reflections and research documents. I resisted a comparative approach to analyze these two distinct engagements and instead considered what can be learned about the colonial nature of research from examples that share similar goals but adopted different methods. In an effort to exemplify how the logics of colonial-capitalism manifest in our research, I reflected through a series of colonial tendencies encountered in my research engagements. These are perpetrated through colonial binary thinking, colonial epistemic erasure (and uncontrolled equivocation), as well as colonial equivocations. I worked through these meditations with the understanding that the very premise of the pursuit of knowledge sits within colonial legacies as well. To accompanying each of these three tendencies, I offered theoretical or practical lessons to disrupt them.

The first lesson is to resist colonial compartmentalization by reorientating towards plurality. In practice this requires avoiding sorting research problems and findings through either/or logics and approaching them with both/and also. The second lesson is to challenge the universalism, anthropocentrism and dichotomization of the colonial-capitalist worldview that renders invisible ways of living and being that diverge from it. In practice, this requires accepting equivocal understandings and to resist subsuming the distinctness between knowledges into common frames. The final lesson is to be attentive to asymmetrical workings of settler colonialism with place-based specificity. Colonial-capitalism threatens all food systems, but these impacts are not uniform. This is not about retrenching Indigenous/non-Indigenous binaries, but rather to respect the authority of those whose traditional territories are central to the research. Working through these meditations brought both the opportunities and limitations of a settler colonial framework into view.

7.1 Possibilities and Limitations of a Settler Colonial Framework

Through my thesis, I explored what a settler colonial frame offers to understanding food systems challenges in the NWT. I applied this frame in my critical review of literature and mapping of colonialism (in the third and fourth chapters respectively). Then, in the chapters that follow, but particularly in the sixth chapter, I tried to decentre settler colonialism in my analysis. I maintain that there are both possibilities and limitations to using the frame of settler colonialism. In this section, I highlight some of my key takeaways.

The first possibility of a settler colonial frame is that it links the ongoing colonial disruptions to food systems to those of the past. As Kanaka Maoli scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (2016) asserts, “understanding settler colonialism as a structure exposes the fact that colonialism cannot be relegated to the past, even though the past-present should be historicized” (para. 9). In my fourth chapter, I examined the role of colonialism in shaping food systems in the NWT through extractivist, conservationist and agrarian efforts predominantly led by the State and the Church. By mapping these three distinct yet often complementary colonial-capitalist forms of land-use in the territory, I found what is common between them is the State’s intent to gain control over the land and resource. The accounts in this chapter dispel the possibility that colonialism is something of the past and demonstrate how contemporary food systems are impacted by colonial legacies and continuities like continued dispossession, the changing climate, contamination, and restrictive policy. Besides the colonial institutions (State or Church) directly responsible for the attempts to colonize and assimilate Indigenous nations, the persistent occupation of these lands relies on many more – that includes researchers and their academic institutions.

The second possibility of the settler colonial framework is that it asks us to consider who else is recruited to maintain settler colonial control over Indigenous territories. Based on Wolfe's (2006) conceptual understanding of settler colonialism as structure, as opposed to an event, I revisited literature I read through my research engagements using this framing as a lens in my third chapter. With this exploration, I recounted some of the ways research is directly involved in these processes of colonialism (such as food, nutritional and agricultural experimentation) but I extended this to consider how researchers participate in less direct ways. It is not only in what these literatures miss without a settler colonial frame, but I am also concerned that many researchers reproduce harmful narratives about people and life in the North (albeit unintentionally). I found many passive references to colonization, along with mention of similar but less political changes such as urbanization, westernization, modernization and industrialization. The harm I associate with these depoliticized representations and interpretations of settler colonialism is with the ways that researchers translate colonial processes into ahistorical and/or benign narratives.

There are three narratives that I contested with use of the settler colonial framing. With the narrative of the nutrition shift, there is a tendency to pathologize Indigenous health in addition to other paternalistic representations that problematize people's food choices. In this narrative, the historical destruction to Indigenous food systems and the use of a food as a tool of colonization are reduced to matters of nutrition. The overharvesting narrative, by contrast, relies on racist and dishonest portrayals of Indigenous harvesters. By legitimizing State-led impositions on hunting and harvesting, researchers also devalue Indigenous Knowledges and protocols around harvesting. Finally, by erasing the history of agricultural colonization in the North, many contemporary food systems researchers

present agriculture in the North as a new phenomenon. This frontiers narrative (though far less pervasive than the previous two) overemphasizes the biophysical and technological possibilities and often ignores the sociocultural and political implications of the context which agriculture is being pursued. I see these narratives as exemplary of how a wider number of actors (in this case researchers) can reinforce colonial logics and legitimize settler colonial disruptions to food systems.

Taking the role of research in the settler colonial project seriously, I took steps to revisit my own research materials to consider how I have reproduced colonial logics in my research. These steps lead me to identify some of the limitations of a settler colonial frame. Though I gestured to some risks associated with a settler colonial framework in my second chapter outlining my methodological and theoretical approach, more limitations of this framework come up in my sixth chapter. I began writing this thesis apprehensive about the dichotomization and determinism that may come with a settler colonial frame. I see this determinism manifesting in several ways: in entrenching a colonial/Indigenous binary, presenting settler colonialism as totalizing, and erasing the persistent resistance to it.

I can see now that the main limitation of settler colonialism, as a theoretical concept, is with the implied colonial/Indigenous binary. One example that stands out in my research is with my rigid association of agriculture with colonialism, therefore demarcating who practices it. Not only is the overemphasis of the coloniality of agriculture unhelpful for imagining Indigenous self-determined food systems, but it is also out of touch with the reality that Northern communities are likely to meet their food security needs with a range of sources (including country/traditional, locally produced, and market-imported). I see the tendency to only associate agricultural practices in the North with colonialism as a product

of the dichotomist colonial logic, which fails to account for the possibilities that sit at the intersection of the colonial/Indigenous binary. Recognizing the limitations of the colonial toolkit I brought to this project, I have come to advocate an alternate approach to the either/or logic to embrace plurality (or a both/and also) in food systems. While this applies to problematic binaries in food system framing, it is important to consider the pervasiveness of the settler/Indigenous binary that comes with a settler colonial frame.

In my meditation on colonial binaries, I demonstrated that the colonial/Indigenous binary is a colonial invention. These oppositional categories are created and maintained through colonizing categorical apparatuses (one glaring example of this in the Canadian context is the Indian Act). In my thesis also I referred to theorists who describe both ‘settler’ and ‘Indigeneity’ as analytics³³. These theorists and others demonstrate how these co-constituted analytics can be operationalized in settler colonial discourses to describe differing and/or oppositional relations to colonial processes. While many find the binary useful to think through colonial relations (as do I), it cannot be understood as a complete representation of our realities. I turn back to the contributions of those who directed me towards a both/and also approach, Gombay & Palomino-Schalscha (2018) state,

the co-constitutive co-presence of Indigenous and settler colonial persons and institutions, shot full of power, has profoundly affected the lifeways of all: valourising and devalourising ways of being and knowing; reconfiguring the shape and meaning of territories; and defining the terms by which people may be seen by others and may know themselves. These

³³ See Battell Lowman and Barker’s (2015) on *settler* as it “voices relationships to structures and processes in Canada today, to the histories of our peoples on this land, to Indigenous peoples, and to our own day-to-day choices and actions...[it] turns us toward uncomfortable realisations, difficult subjects, and potential complicity in systems of dispossession and violence...[it] represents a tool, a way of understanding and choosing to act differently. A tool we can use to confront the fundamental problems and injustices in Canada today...It is *analytical* [emphasis added], personal, and uncomfortable. It can be an identity that we claim or deny, but that we inevitably live and embody” (p. 2); and Kēhaulani Kauanui’s (2016) on Indigeneity “as a counterpart analytic to settler colonialism” (para. 4).

entanglements are of crucial importance for understanding not only what is now, but what was, and what could be. (p. 2)

While these scholars bring attention to the messy entanglements between what is ‘colonial’ and ‘Indigenous,’ other interventions are needed on who is excluded.

Even as it may be a useful analytic, as with other colonial binaries, we must understand that exclusions and erasure occur within this dichotomous frame. My contribution to complicating colonial binaries is contained to discussions about food systems and the knowledges that sustain them, but not necessarily identity. Hunt and Holmes (2015) make this connection,

Indigenous people, people of color and White settler allies working from decolonial and/or intersectional frameworks, have emphasized the importance of embracing a “both/and” conceptual and political stance for understanding contexts, spaces, identities, and multiple forms of interlocking oppressions and violence as a way of resisting the “either/or” dichotomous thinking of colonial Euro-Western paradigms. (p. 160)

I take from Hunt and Holmes that we ought to be more attentive to the workings of power, privilege and oppression that exceed what can be described through these binaries. I began this work with the recognition that the settler State is not only *possessive, dominating, capitalist, extractivist* but is also ableist, white and heteropatriarchal (Arvin et al., 2013; Belcourt & Nixon, 2018; Coulthard & Simpson, 2016; Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha, 2018; Morgensen, 2010; Zaragocin, 2019), but I only tended to the former characteristics. A more meaningful recognition would require tending to the ways that immigration-status, disability, sexuality, gender, and experiences with racialization interact with settler and Indigenous identities³⁴. It is possible to work with settler colonial framings without

³⁴ This would also include confronting the exclusion of Black people from conceptions of Indigeneity. Many scholars are forging important connections with regards to Canada & US settler state’s anti-Black and anti-Indigenous violence (Lethabo King et al., 2020; Maynard, 2017; Maynard & Simpson, 2020; L. B. Simpson

perpetuating such exclusions and that includes understanding the limits of the settler/Indigenous analytic.

Another limitation can be observed with the assumption that the introduction of colonial-capitalist forms of land use inherently erodes Indigenous ones. This is not to say that agricultural, extractivist and conservationist interventions do not pose threats to Indigenous land-based practices, but these threats should not overshadow ongoing resistance, mimicry and resurgence. Though I kept my focus on these colonial-capitalist practices, Indigenous communities and nations have continued to push back against these encroachments – whether that means continuing to practice their enshrined treaty rights to hunt and harvest despite impositions of the Migratory Birds Convention Act (Bayha, 2010; Johnson, 2018) or to change terms by which contaminated soils and lands are remediated on their traditional territories (YKDFN, n.d.; YKDFN Land & Environment, 2012). To present settler colonialism in totalizing terms is to present it as unsurmountable and I think we should resist this line of thinking. To build onto Gibson-Graham’s critique of capitalism/*capitalocentrism*, speaking of colonialism should not assume a kind of *settlercolonioentrism*.

There are many reasons that I took up settler colonialism in my thesis, even as I tried not to adhere to it too profoundly. As part of the method of refusals, I committed to directing my gaze at the structures of power and away from those in its harm (cf: Harp et al., 2019). And as an iterative process, I continued to reconsider what matters I could appropriately represent in my thesis. I tried to find suitable ways to provide critical context

et al., 2018; Ware & Dias, 2020) – such efforts dissolve pervasive binaries, but do not subsume distinct experiences into one; what L.B. Simpson (2016) refers to as *constellations of co-resistance*.

for the extractivist, conservationist and agricultural developments in the territory, without presupposing what these colonial histories necessarily mean for the present (except for recognizing that they do matter). In an attempt to be consistent in my practice of refusals, I worry that my framing has reduced these complex histories to damage-centred narratives.

I continue to think about my contradiction of taking up discourses of colonialism while trying to avoid writing about Indigeneity. Simpson (2007) begins her foundational work on ethnographic refusal by stating: “to speak of Indigeneity is to speak of colonialism and anthropology, as these are means through which Indigenous people have been known and sometimes are still known” (p. 67). Since I am deliberate about what I do and do not speak to in this thesis (including Indigeneity), I have to ask: is to speak of colonialism (and anthropology) to speak of Indigeneity? Returning to Simpson’s work as I consider the limitations of the settler colonial framework has helped me understand the partiality of my approach. As Kēhaulani Kauanui (2016) argues, “any meaningful engagement with theories of settler colonialism—whether Wolfe’s or others’—necessarily needs to tend to the question of indigeneity” (p. 4). In her thought-provoking piece, Kēhaulani Kauanui (2016) interrupts the widespread citational reference to Wolfe’s “a structure, not an event,” noting how frequently this sentence is cited without meaningful engagement with his other work (or his intellectual engagements with Indigenous studies scholarship)³⁵. She concludes, “Settler Colonial Studies does not, should not, and cannot replace Indigenous Studies” (Kēhaulani Kauanui, 2016, para. 4). As much as Indigenous studies scholarship has informed my thinking, in my avoidance of the topic of Indigeneity in my thesis, I worry

³⁵I learned of a similar critique (shared by Dr. Max Liboiron on twitter) in Tiffany Lethabo King's (2021) analysis of Joanne Barker’s blogs articulating the problem with the framing of settler colonialism.

I have underrepresented the critical resistance to settler colonialism. I understand now that what I provided here is only a partial account of these complex histories and continuities.

Many of these limitations were right in front of me when I began this work but perhaps, I only superficially understood them. I was aware of these critiques to deterministic settler colonial framings (Dorries et al., 2019) but I did not consistently do as I intended – to *decentre* these forces in my analysis. I wanted to avoid an approach that only served to articulate settler colonialism’s harms and lose sight of the resistances to it that have always existed and will never cease. Though I make references to specific examples of Indigenous resistance and resurgence in my thesis, these are often only to give context to the settler colonial processes in my focus. I consider now how my analysis may have differed with a more careful read of: Wolfe’s work on settler colonialism; of necessary critiques to his work – including the way it has been taken up by predominantly white settler scholars (Kēhaulani Kauanui, 2016; Lethabo King, 2021); as well as other scholars writing on settler colonialism from different standpoints (Arvin, 2019; Lethabo King et al., 2020; Murphy, 2016; Purewal, 2020)³⁶. These other contributions, I am sure, would dramatically change the approach taken and conclusions drawn in this research. Thus, my experience with one particular conception of settler colonialism should not be representative of this topic of study but should be understood as *an* approach among many.

I maintain that researchers should confront the enduring nature of settler colonialism in their work (as opposed to ignoring or historicizing it) but contending with

³⁶ This list of resources originates from discussions I observed on Twitter beginning with a call out for other resources to read on settler colonialism besides the work of Patrick Wolfe (see <https://twitter.com/mumblingsriot/status/1250640976097378309?s=20>)

colonialism should not completely define the issues taken up. There are many merits of this framing that provide important context for working on food systems in the North but there is more than one way to interpret how colonial issues matter, and naming settler colonialism at work is not the only way to define the challenges of the past or present. By bringing these disparate and overlapping areas of research into conversation within a distinct framework, *different* insights are gained. I understand that my claim that food system challenges and colonialism are inextricably linked is not novel. I also understand that it has consequences for the questions I have posed, and the conclusions drawn from them. My aim in this research is not to prove this with evidence ‘out there’ but rather, to demonstrate that linking together these processes generates **an** understanding of northern food systems.

Ultimately, I argue that southern-based settler researchers, like myself, must be more attentive to how our research can reinforce harmful colonial narratives in the North and work to disrupt these colonial continuities. I think the most critical implication of the settler colonial frame is for researchers to locate themselves within the colonial workings of power. The structural framing of settler colonialism removes the perceived distance between the wrongdoings of research in the past from the present – this is not to say that there are necessarily alike, but we cannot treat the present as postcolonial. I return to Cameron’s (2012) quote that “colonial discourses interpolate us all, regardless of our focus of research” (p.111). Being attentive to (settler) colonialism is not only about the subjects we take up but requires a sincere engagement with the ways that research and researchers are implicated in the settler colonial project.

In this thesis, I urge fellow researchers to consider how we may entrench colonial-capitalist ways of knowing. The contributions from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars have compelled me to contest colonial-capitalist logic but also demonstrate where missteps, misrepresentations and harms occur in that process. I maintain that researchers should be attentive to Other ways of knowing to challenge the colonial-capitalist episteme, but to do so with caution. Todd (2014) takes issue with the approach taken by many non-Indigenous researchers to characterize the cosmologies of northern people's including the human-animal or human-environmental relation. Watts (2013) observes how Euro-Western scholars attempt to abstract Indigenous cosmologies into the epistemological/ontology framework despite their incompatibility. She claims that without disrupting this divide, interpretations of Indigenous ways of knowing "creates spaces for colonial practices to occur" (Watts, 2013, p. 28). Nahanni (1977) states that, "intricate values of our way of life are most appreciated by those who speak our [Dene] languages. To the non-Dene such ways of recounting events may be subject to bias, error, misunderstanding, and misinterpretation" (p. 21). However, like many other researchers, I turned to these contributions in my effort to provincialize the colonial-capitalist worldview.

As part of my process, I dedicated careful attention to these and other critiques on the manner in which many non-Indigenous researchers take up the thought and philosophies of Indigenous thinkers into our scholarship and how this disrupts and/or entrenches existing dynamics of power. However, this does not preclude the possibility that I have done so without error. As much as I see research as a space to explore disparate ways of knowing (as I attempted in my thesis), research is not a neutral space – we cannot lose sight of the preexisting power dynamics and the extractive nature of research.

7.2 Emerging Issues for Future Research

One pressing concern that arises with the settler colonial frame that I have not adequately tended to in my thesis is the contention with land access and unsettled land claims in the regions that my research engagements took place. These regions include the ongoing negotiations with Acho Dene Koe First Nation, Akaitcho First Nations, Dehcho First Nations and the Northwest Territory Métis Nation (GNWT, n.d.). This issue of land is in part, what ignited my interest in exploring tensions in fostering food systems in this research. In the end, however, I tended to those tensions that pertain to the role of research rather than civil society organizations and other actors ‘on-the-ground’. Given its relevance to my thesis questions, I conclude with the recommendation that approaching this tension through research would benefit from the application of a settler colonial framework.

As the majority of the tracts of arable land in NWT lie in the South Slave and Deh Cho, farming is out of the question, on anything other than presently owned titled/private land or lands within municipalities designated for such use. This state of affairs, couple with the lack of adopted agriculture policy leaves the infant industry stuck at the crawling stage. (TFA, 1995, p. 11)

The quote cited above is from a report published by the Territorial Farmers Association (TFA) which I have, until now, intentionally avoided mentioning in my thesis. The contentiousness of limited access to land to develop agriculture in the territory as read in this quote (and the report more generally) does not represent thoughtful engagement with the colonial circumstances that have led to the current “land freeze” (p. 11). By positioning unsettled land claims as the “real death knell to further agricultural industry development”

(TFA, 1995, p. 11), the author/s³⁷ of this report allude to the idea these lands *should* otherwise be cultivated. For those who wish to pursue larger scale agricultural, unsettled claims are undoubtedly a hinderance, but I think this simple narrative should be resisted.

These issues around land access and land claims are exemplary of the fact that the aims of different food system actors (growers, harvesters, State-actors, etc.) may be in contention with one another. The unsettled land claims also present food system challenges for the First Nations whose negotiations are still ongoing (Johnston & Spring, 2021). This resonates with consideration raised by critical food scholars with regards to the question of land in food sovereignty movements (Kepkiewicz & Dale, 2018; McMichael, 2015). Many have reminded us that settler colonial occupation and control of land is a direct hinderance to Indigenous food sovereignty and that the redistribution of land is at the heart of the possibilities for food sovereignty and self-determination. If my exploration of settler colonialism and food systems in this thesis taught me anything, it is to avoid deterministic and dichotomous portrayals. As with my representation of the negotiated modern treaties, I avoided being overly prescriptive about their future potential given that many details of settlement and implementation are ongoing. In the same vein, I mention the unsettled claims here without presuming how their settlement will impact different food practices, but only to suggest that as these negotiations ensue, contending with the settler colonial context through which these issues emerge is vital.

³⁷ No authors are named in this report (aside from the TFA) which is partly why I am hesitant to cite it in my thesis. It may have been appropriate to include it with other publications in my critical review of literature in chapter three, but I directly my focus solely at academic research and left out grey/community literature.

7.3 Contribution

This thesis has both methodological and theoretical implications. Methodologically speaking, my practice of reflexively ‘doing’ theory disrupts some taken for granted assumptions about methodological steps taken in more conventional research projects (including CBPR). While CBPR involves a high degree of reflexivity, based on the teachings from critical and feminist social sciences (Bingham, 2003; Crang, 2003; Massey, 2003; Pryke et al., 2003; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2012; Whatmore, 2003), my thesis challenges what are conventionally considered the ‘field’ and ‘materials,’ in addition to problematizing the notion that ‘writing up’ is somehow transparent and objective. Through critical engagement with my own research to support ‘local food systems’ (including the reading, writing and thinking I have done throughout), I confronted many tensions and incommensurabilities. I urge researchers to contend with these tensions, as I (and others) consider this to be a generative space in and of itself (Gallagher, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2012). The lessons that I draw from critical CBPR literature and my own experiences may resonate with researchers questioning their role in community-engaged research, encountering ambiguities around ‘community’ and contending with limitations of challenging the colonial-capitalist episteme in institutional research settings. I cannot offer insights on best practices for CBPR given my reorientation to a more theoretically situated thesis – but I do hope the theorists and theoretical tools that I chose to ‘think with’ are a valuable contribution for other researchers to not only ‘use’ but to actively think through.

While my research draws influence from many theoretical contributions, the findings pertain to a narrower scope. As the problem of this research is the challenge of supporting local food efforts in a specific territory, the research that has aimed to do so is

also the object of study. Therefore, it is predominantly northern food systems research that I aim to speak to through this project (which includes northern-based research on food security/sovereignty, local food production, country/traditional food harvesting, and food/climate change). I consider my NWT-based contribution to be complementary to other critical food scholarship situated in settler colonial framings elsewhere in Canada (Cote, 2016; Daigle, 2017; Delormier et al., 2017; Grey & Patel, 2015; Kepkiewicz & Rotz, 2018; Levkoe et al., 2019; Ray et al., 2019). While I recommend that northern food systems researchers also adopt settler colonial framings, I do so with the caveat that there are also limitations with this approach (including reaching deterministic, dichotomous, damage-centred and exclusionary ends). Therefore, the possibilities and limitations of a settler colonial framework I articulated in this concluding chapter has implications for those who also find use in Patrick Wolfe's conception. Finally, I do not mean to suggest that settler colonial discourses and challenges to colonial-capitalism are uncommon in the North. Northern and Indigenous scholars are leading this work. These include contributions on land-based learning and harvesting, co-resistance and self-determination (Ballantyne, 2014; Bayha, 2010; Coulthard, 2014; Dragon Smith, 2021; Irlbacher-Fox, 2014; Kuokkanen, 2011, 2019; Todd, 2018; Wildcat et al., 2014; Zoe, 2018). I think northern food systems researchers ought to take their contributions into account. If I learned anything through this work, it is that the frameworks and theories we think through shape our approaches and conclusions in research. I conclude my thesis recalling the advice from Cameron, Puig de la Bellacasa and other feminist thinkers: that in our research we ought to be mindful of who we *think with*, as this can be an affective engagement of care.

Appendices

Appendix A

A.1 Northwest Territories Scientific Research License No. 16321

	Licence No. 16321 File No. 12 410 1037 June 05, 2018
2018	
Northwest Territories Scientific Research Licence	
<i>Issued by:</i>	Aurora Research Institute – Aurora College Inuvik, Northwest Territories
<i>Issued to:</i>	Dr. Andrew Spring Wilfrid Laurier University Department of Geography 75 University Ave W Waterloo, ON N2L 3C5 Canada Phone: (226) 772-3127 Fax: (519) 725-1342 Email: aspring@wlu.ca
<i>Affiliation:</i>	Wilfrid Laurier University
<i>Funding:</i>	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
<i>Team Members:</i>	Molly Stollmeyer; Craig Scott; Carla Johnston; Peter Andree
<i>Title:</i>	Community-based food systems research in Yellowknife, NT
<i>Objectives:</i>	To support the implementation of the Yellowknife Food Charter and related local food activities in Yellowknife.
<i>Dates of data collection:</i>	June 4, 2018 to August 31, 2018
<i>Location:</i>	Yellowknife, NT
Licence No.16321 expires on December 31, 2018 Issued in the Town of Inuvik on June 05, 2018	
* original signed *	
<hr/> Pippa Seccombe-Hett Vice President, Research Aurora Research Institute	

A.2 Notification of Multi-Year Research Renewal



Aurora Research Institute - Aurora College

PO Box 1450 Inuvik NT X0E 0T0

Phone: 867-777-3298 **Fax:** 867-777-4264 **E-mail:** licence@nwtresearch.com

June 05, 2018

Notification of Multi-Year Research Renewal

I would like to inform you that Scientific Research Licence No. 16321 has been renewed by:

Dr. Andrew Spring
Wilfrid Laurier University
Department of Geography
75 University Ave W
Waterloo, ON
N2L 3C5 Canada
Phone: (226) 772-3127
Fax: (519) 725-1342
Email: aspring@wlu.ca

to conduct the following study:

Community-based food systems research in Yellowknife, NT

This is year 3 of a 3 year project.

Please contact the researcher if you would like more information.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

This licence has been issued for the scientific research application No.3933.

The objectives of this research is to support the implementation of the Yellowknife Food Charter and related local food activities in Yellowknife.

Specific objectives are:

- 1) to work with and support local groups (Ecology North and the Yellowknife Farmers Market) to identify community-based strategies to promote and implement local food production and develop a sustainable food system;
- 2) to support on-going educational and training initiatives on local food production throughout Yellowknife that can be used as models for other communities; and,
- 3) to develop relationships with Yellowknife Aboriginal communities to determine how their food systems (including country foods) can be part of the broader discussion of sustainability in Yellowknife.

Barriers to food security as well as community-based strategies to overcome these barriers will be identified and explored through a Community-Based and Participatory Action Research (CBPAR) methodology and used to engage with community members. This will ensure the research is community driven and that it responds to the needs of the community stakeholders. Workshops and community events will be held to establish the research questions at the intersection of climate change and access to country food, growing food and other food system-related questions that are important to the community. The community priorities from these workshops will be the basis for semi-structured interviews/focus groups to be conducted with community members.

Local involvement is key to the Community Based Participatory Action Research methodology being used in this study. Through community engagement, workshops and events, we hope to empower the community to generate enhanced dialogue and to take action with regards to building a more sustainable food system in Yellowknife. Building on the existing network of community partners, Ecology North and the Yellowknife Farmers Market, the research team look to enhance local involvement of many stakeholders (including food producers, businesses and Aboriginal groups) to contribute to defining key questions and priorities involving strengthening the local food system.

This project is based on community outreach and participation. Community members will be invited to all activities and

results workshops. Outreach will be done through ongoing posts on the Ecology North and/ or Yellowknife Farmers Market Newsletters, website and Facebook pages. Webpages will also be added to the Nourishing communities' website (nourishingcommunities.ca) and the upcoming Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council of Canada Partnership page hosted by the Laurier Centre for Sustainable Food Systems. Resulting material from this work will be synthesized into an accessible and visually appealing posters and plain language documents and distributed throughout the community.

The fieldwork for this study will be conducted from June 4, 2018 to August 31, 2018.

Sincerely,

Jonathon Michel,
Manager, Scientific Services

DISTRIBUTION
Akaitcho Territory Government
Aurora College - Yellowknife/North Slave Campus
City of Yellowknife
North Slave Métis Alliance
Northwest Territory Métis Nation
Wek'èezhii Renewable Resources Board
Yellowknives Dene First Nation

Appendix B

B.1 Promotional Material for Fall Harvest Fair 2018

JOIN US AT THE 10TH ANNUAL

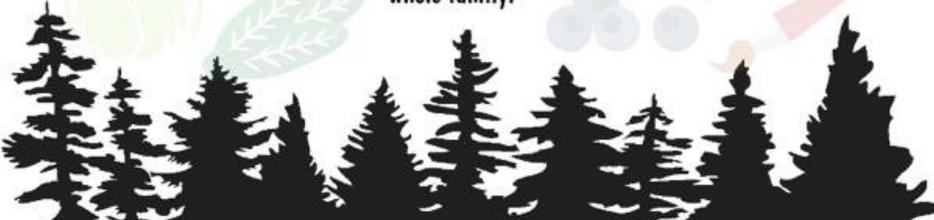
FALL HARVEST FAIR

2018

VEGGIE SHOW-OFF
3:00 PM DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS!

COMMUNITY FEAST + LOCAL HARVEST POTLUCK
BRING SOMETHING TO SHARE!

Join us for a community celebration of food!
Workshops, storytelling, prizes and fun for the whole family!



Yellowknives Dene First Nation Wiiliideh Site
(Across the Highway from Yellowknife River Territorial Park Day Use Area)

SATURDAY
AUGUST 25

1:00PM-
6:00PM

For more information contact Ecology North
867-873-6019 | molly@ecologynorth.ca



B.2 Media Advisory for Fall Harvest Fair 2019



MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

11th ANNUAL FALL HARVEST FAIR

(YELLOWKNIFE) - Members of the Yellowknife media are invited to attend the 11th annual Fall Harvest Fair, happening from 1PM-5PM on Saturday, August 24th, 2019 outside of the Ndilo Gymnasium.

Over the years, this event has expanded to include new collaborations, locations and activities, while maintaining its traditions of celebrating local food and the harvest season together. Once again, Ecology North and the Yellowknives Dene First Nation's Dechita Naowo have co-coordinated this event with the continued support of the Yellowknife Community Garden Collective, Wilfrid Laurier University, FLEdGE Research and ITI – North Slave.

At the heart of the fair, is the promotion of local food systems and the joy of bringing people together around food to share and learn from one another! There will be various harvest-related stations with workshops, demonstrations and activities for the whole family to participate in! This year's workshops will feature wild harvesting, garden produce preservation and beekeeping as well as a garden and greenhouse tour, crafts, painting, live music and other kids' activities!

As a free community event, all are welcome to join, and we encourage you bring a submission for the annual Veggie Show Off Competition for the chance to take one of the harvest-themed prizes! We will have a community feast of bison burgers complemented by a local harvest potluck – all growers and harvesters are encouraged to bring a dish to share! This year, we hope to see a wide variety of harvesting practices showcased throughout the fair as we continue to encourage local food harvesting and production within the territory!

Finally, we are pleased to announce that the City of Yellowknife is partnering with us to present Music in the Park – originally scheduled for Thursday evening but due to poor weather, they are bringing their live performance to the Fall Harvest Fair. Don't miss the opportunity to listen to Grace Clark's set while enjoying the potluck and community feast!

We welcome you to join us in Ndilo on August 24th for photo and interview opportunities.

For more information, please contact:

Ecology North
Molly Stollmeyer
867-873-6019 molly@ecologynorth.ca

PO Box 1684 Yellowknife, NT X1A 2P3
p. 867-873-6019 | f. 867-873-6149 | admin@ecologynorth.ca | www.ecologynorth.ca

Appendix C

See Full Report Attached (following References)

C.1 Certification of Intuitional Ethics Clearance (CUREB)



Office of Research Ethics
503 Robertson Hall | 1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6
613-520-2600 Ext: 2517
ethics@carleton.ca

CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE

This document is an administrative clearance corresponding to approved protocol #4876 from the **Wilfrid Laurier University Research Ethics Board**. The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) has granted administrative clearance for the research project described below and research may now proceed. CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

Ethics Protocol Clearance ID: Project # 110871

Research Team: **Peter Andree (Primary Investigator)**
Andrew Spring (Co-Investigator)

Project Title: Food Security in the Northwest Territories

Funding Source (If applicable):

Awards File No	Title	Status	
110792	Comparing the value of country foods with other food provisioning systems in Indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories	Active	A. CORIS Awards

Effective: **April 29, 2019**

Expires: **April 29, 2020**

Restrictions:

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.

3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. A closure request must be sent to CUREB-A when the research is complete or terminated.
5. During the course of the study, if you encounter an adverse event, material incidental finding, protocol deviation or other unanticipated problem, you must complete and submit a Report of Adverse Events and Unanticipated Problems Form, found here: <https://carleton.ca/researchethics/forms-and-templates/>

Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the suspension or termination of the research project.

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please contact the Research Compliance Coordinators, at ethics@carleton.ca, if you have any questions.

CLEARED BY:

Date: April 29, 2019

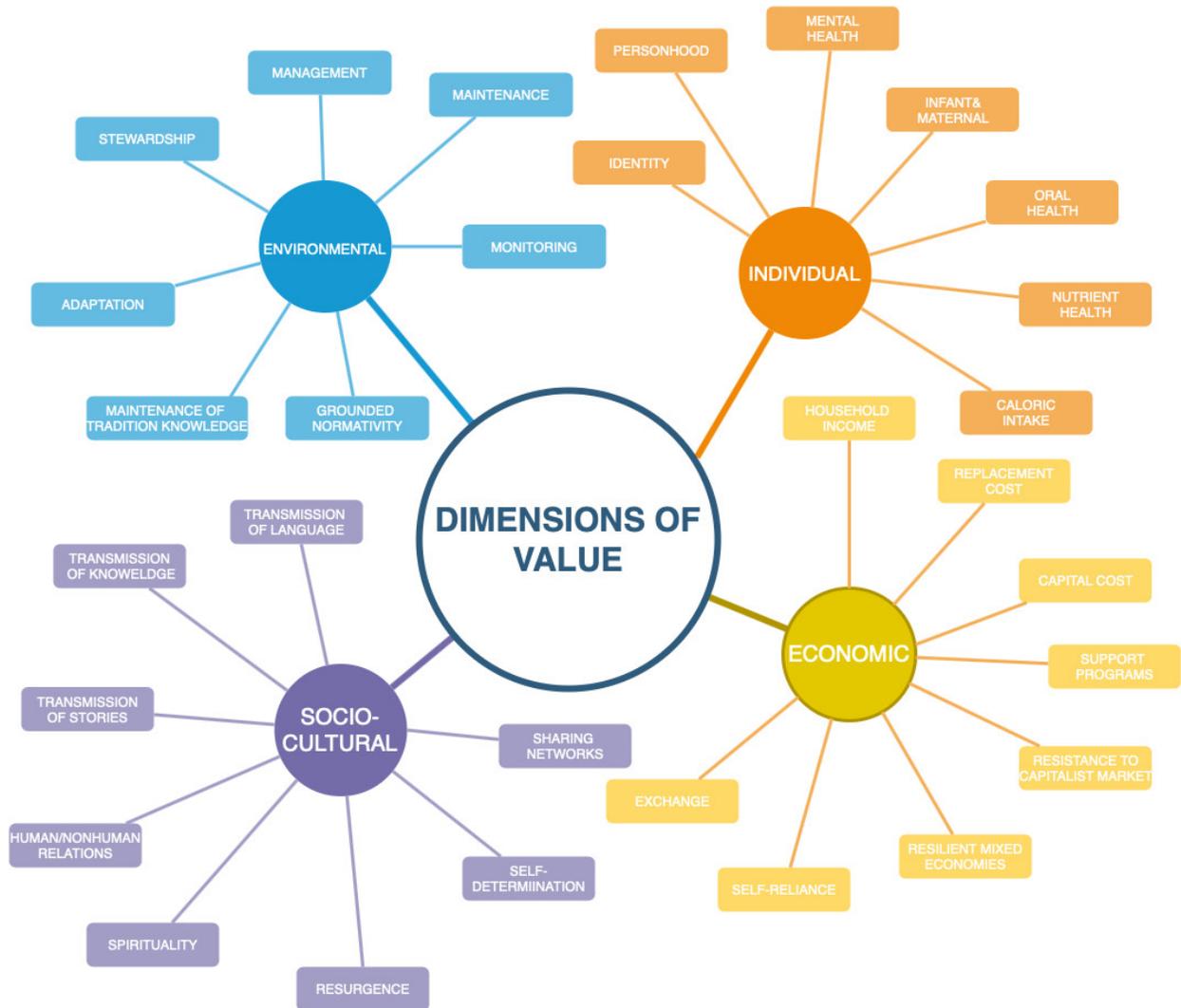


Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A



Natasha Artemeva, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-A

C.2 Conceptual Framework Dimensions of Value (Stollmeyer & Andrée, 2020)



C.3 The Gordon Foundation/Mitacs Project Interview Questions

Food Security in the Northwest Territories

PI: Andrew Spring, Geography & Env. Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University

RA: Molly Stollmeyer, Institute of Political Economy, Carleton University

Thesis Supervisor: Peter Andrée, Political Science, Carleton University

Exploring the value of country foods and other food provisioning systems (Note: the interviews will be semi-structured, guided by the following open-ended questions, designed to draw on the expertise of the individuals in question).

1. Do you think it is important to find ways to measure and compare the value of different types of food provisioning systems (e.g. country foods, imported market-based food, locally-produced food)? Why or why not?
2. From your experience, what values associated with different types of food need to be taken into consideration in any such comparisons? (economic, environmental, socio-cultural, nutritional?)
3. What do you see as the drawbacks or challenges associated with trying to make such comparisons?
4. How should community representatives be involved in research that sets out to measure and compare these different types of foods?
5. Do you know of specific communities or community-based organizations that you think we should talk to about our planned research? Are you familiar with current research projects that are working on these issues?

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MITACS ACCELERATE REPORT

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Tables: 2

Molly Stollmeyer | Peter Andrée
molly.stollmeyer@carleton.ca | peter.andree@carleton.ca

Executive Summary

The guiding questions for this exploration come from the results of the Gordon Foundation's Northern Policy Hackathon centred on policy and challenges related to country/traditional food. taken Building off of a research priority identified in the Hackathon, the research questions we posed were as follows:

- How can we describe and measure the value of harvesting, processing and sharing (costs as well as benefits) country foods in economic, nutritional, environmental and socio-cultural terms?
- How can we compare the value of country food with food that comes from other provisioning systems (e.g. imported/market-based foods and local food production)?

Through a combination of primary and secondary research methods, while drawing from northern-based scholarship more broadly, we have applied our findings to the context of country/traditional food systems in Northwest Territories.

Measuring Value

The significance of country/traditional foods needs not debating but the approach to representing this value, or if it can be measured at all, is an ongoing challenge that researchers grapple with. Approaches to the economic valuation of country/traditional foods typically favour a costs-based approach, rather than one that centres values more broadly. The narrow focus on economic dimensions of value invites a rich discussion on the tendencies to privilege what is quantifiable and the associated risks of misrepresentation or devaluation. Through this research, we have located many researchers who have presented the special, often relational qualities associated with country/traditional food systems and find that assigning economic/monetary value to them to be ultimately misleading, culturally inappropriate or inadequate.

Limitations of Economic Valuation

The perils of misrepresenting country/traditional foods with economic measures fits into a broader discussion on the commodification of these food provisioning systems. The majority of the literature we have consulted in our exploration of economic value and commodification have noted the prohibitory legislation that impacts country/traditional food provisioning. The complex discussions around commodification cannot be held without considering the embedded laws throughout the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat, in the form of treaties, land claims, food safety rules, and wildlife, hunting and fishing regulations which serve to prohibit, delimit or control the distribution of food throughout the territory.

Environmental Scan of Territorial Legislation

In our report, we have provided a snapshot of the political landscape for harvesting, procuring and sharing country/traditional foods in the NWT by exploring relevant territorial legislation and programs to understand these could better serve Northerners and allow these food systems to flourish. We have found that at the territorial level, recognition of the many impediments that legislation poses on country/traditional food provisioning, and an understanding of the profound significance of harvesting activities for individuals and communities in the NWT, as well as a considerable amount of energy and funding being directed towards fostering strong country/traditional food systems.

Multifaceted Dimensions of Value

We have found that there are numerous possibilities for representing the value of country/traditional foods (health, nutritional, cultural, economic, ecological and so on) but these findings exist in silos, fractured across different disciplines, regions and timeframes. These silos present one factor that motivates efforts to incorporate multiple dimensions of value of foods into a singular conceptual framework that will offer a robust and dynamic representation, and which can enable comparisons among different food provisioning systems. Beyond misrepresentation, we have found that the criteria through which we represent value has economic impacts on who benefits from support systems that are created to increase food security and the sustain harvesting practices.

Conceptual Framework

We have taken the suggestions from interviewees and located various dimensions of value associated with country/traditional foods or their provisioning activities as read in literature to be read alongside economic dimensions in our conceptual framework. In the conceptual framework we have created, the dimensions of value attributed to food provisioning systems are organized through four general constructs (individual, environmental, economic, and socio-cultural) with multiple dimensions of value clustered within each. Our conceptual framework demonstrates that there are numerous, overlapping values that could have significance in the valuation of country/traditional foods and their provisioning systems. With respect to the divergent perspectives between colonial-capitalist and Indigenous worldviews, there is an intentionality to leaving these categories fluid, avoiding being overly prescriptive or categorical, as the selection of these categories of values is a value-laden process itself. This has led us to the conclusion that any exercise to ascertain the comparative ‘value’ of food systems depends on who is doing the valuing, and the ends to be served by that process. In the case of this particular project, those ends are ambiguous.

Reflection & Recommendation

This research project has emerged under the premise that incorporating multiple dimensions of value of country/traditional foods into a singular conceptual framework will offer a more robust and dynamic representation of their significance. Moving through the various stages of this research project, it was evident to us that the methodology did not match the research question. From the beginning, the framing of the research problem was very much from an outsider, top-down approach yet the methodological steps graduated to collaboration at a community level. What was absent in our proposal was an expression of interest from a community representative for this research of this nature. Recognizing this oversight does not mean the research question is not valid, that the results of the Hackathon should not be pursued, or that the research we undertook does not yield some useful insights, but it raises enough concerns for us to suggest a ‘pause’ and rethink this entire project and how it is best pursued.

Our recommendation is that any project of this nature needs to be undertaken with a community-based partner lined up from the beginning. As we see it, the framing of a research problem and the formulation of research questions, however early in the research process, significantly shape the proceeding stages and will have profound influence on who/what is consulted, and what is discovered. The participation of an appropriate and interested community-based partner with whom the research terms are set and completed with is crucial. The framing of the research should be considered contextual to that locale and partnership.

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Article I. Introduction

Framing the Research Question

The guiding questions for this exploration come from the results of the Gordon Foundation's Northern Policy Hackathon centred on policy and challenges related to country/traditional food (referred to as the Hackathon here on out) hosted in Nain in 2017. The results of the Hackathon included policy recommendations that recognize a need for a collaborative approach at multiple levels, including national, territorial, regional and Indigenous governance (TGF, 2018). Representatives from communities across the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat connected to country/traditional food were invited to participate, including "hunters, Elders, nutritionists, as well as representatives from government, and the not-profit sector" (TGF, 2018, p. 2). The Hackathon, and others like it, are described by the organizers as "events that bring together northerners to discuss policy issues and create tangible, actionable solutions" (TGF, 2019). For this particular event, the organizers disclose that the results represent a "pan-northern understanding of the importance of country/traditional food" (TGF, 2018, p. 3). Beyond the comprehensive policy recommendations published through the Hackathon, priorities for research relating to country/traditional food were also identified. The research priority that has been taken up in through this research project is based on the following conclusion,

Value of country/traditional food of the Indigenous diet: The second most popular research idea related to recognizing the economic, cultural, and nutritional value of country foods to Indigenous Peoples. It was proposed that this could also include integrating the cost of switching to store-bought food (Pezzack, 2017, p.7).

Through a partnership between the Gordon Foundation and Mitacs, this research priority first appeared in a posting in search of an eligible graduate student to complete an economic cost benefit analysis of country/traditional food relative to other food provisioning systems in a northern community. Our preliminary research in the proposal writing process led us to reorient the framing of the research to an exploration into ways to describe and measure the value of harvesting, processing and sharing country/traditional foods in economic, nutritional, environmental and socio-cultural terms. Through our proposal, we aimed at shifting the analysis from the cost-based approach that appeared in the original posting, to the values of country/traditional food instead. In our research proposal, we asked: **How can we describe and measure the value of harvesting, processing and sharing (costs as well as benefits) country foods in economic, nutritional, environmental and socio-cultural terms? How can we compare the value of country food with food that comes from other provisioning systems (e.g. imported/market-based foods and local food production)?**

The funding for this project was provided by the Gordon Foundation and matched by Mitacs through their Accelerate program. Molly Stollmeyer (the intern) completed this research project under the supervision of Dr. Peter Andrée (Political Science, Carleton University) and Dr. Andrew Spring (Geography & Environmental Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University) – all of whom are connected through a sustainable food systems research network called FLEdGE (Food: Locally Embedded, Globally Engaged) funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. The research project garnered support from partners working with the On the Land Unit of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR), Government of the Northwest

Territories (GNWT). The context for this research project resonated with the findings from the NWT Country Forum, hosted in Yellowknife (Oct 31 to Nov 2, 2017), which emphasized a desire to increase food security by improving access to country/traditional foods; the need to find sustainable funding models for community-driven programs and initiatives aimed at sustaining country/traditional foods; in addition to the need for programs, initiatives and research to respond to the needs of communities (Ellis, Dutton, & Fresque-Baxter, 2018). The intern previously held a research assistant position creating a ‘state of knowledge’ report on a research priority identified in the forum. The forum was one of the early stages of a larger strategy (previously the Country Food Strategy that later became the Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan and the Traditional Knowledge Action Plan) led by this department of the GNWT. The relevant outcomes from these developing action plans are taken up in this report. This research project also occurred adjacent to their intern’s completion of their coursework for their MA in Political Economy at Carleton University, and the completion of a community-engaged research assistantship with a non-profit partner in Yellowknife (Ecology North). The intern’s engagements as a graduate student and food systems research assistant in Yellowknife have had considerable influence on the development of this research project by informing the framing of the research, providing relevant literature to review and steering the focus of the research to the NWT.

Methodological Steps

The completion of this research project involved a combination of primary and secondary research methods. The first step of this project was to perform a **systematic review of research** that has set out to measure the value of country/traditional foods in economic, environmental, socio-cultural or nutritional terms, as well as other relevant research on the social economies of food and Indigenous food sovereignty. The second step of this project was to undertake an **environmental scan** of legislation with implications for the harvest and provisioning of country/traditional food within the territory, in addition to ongoing strategies with aims to foster country/traditional food systems. Several **scoping interviews** followed, to help draft a **conceptual framework** and identify potential community partners with an interest in co-developing a **proposed community-based pilot** (depending on interest in the previous stage). We anticipated that through these earlier steps, our research project would wrap up with a community to collaborate with on the development of the conceptual framework, but our findings did not give rise to this possibility (these shortcomings will be explored in fuller detail in the discussion section of this report). The conceptual framework that we have formulated through this research was largely informed by the scoping interviews and the literature reviewed; we also sought inspiration from other related conceptual frameworks as seen in food systems research.

From the onset of this research project, consultation with other academic researchers and representatives of local governments has played a significant role in its formulation. The scoping interviews that were carried out throughout this process have influenced the framing of the research question, the approach based on values rather than costs, the selection of literature consulted, the values, tensions, and challenges to be cognizant of, and finally, the conclusions drawn. Interviewees were invited to participate via email and were recruited based on having specific knowledge relevant to the study. For academic researchers this included having expertise in northern food systems, northern economies or food system valuation; and for representatives of relevant stakeholder organizations and/or government, this included being situated in NWT and having knowledge of and/or experience with country/traditional food systems. Various methods were used in identifying suitable interviewees, including learning from researchers or project

partners (at the Gordon Foundation, FLEdGE Research and GNWT), and general snowballing. This resulted in five scoping interviews lasting between 30-60 minutes, conducted via phone or in person, based on the preference of the interviewee. Several additional prospective interviewees expressed initial interest in participating but for reasons that include, limited or conflicting availability, as well as disinterest in the research questions, these interviews were not completed. Interviewees were asked five open-ended questions concerning the value of country/traditional foods, the significance of measuring their value, the associated challenges with such a task and recommendations on community participation in this process (see **Appendix 1** for listed questions). It is important to note that the information gained through these interviews informed the various deliverables included in this report, and notably, has shed light on issues associated with the final stages of this research project and the aspiration of co-developing a community-based pilot project.

Defining the North and Geographical Parameters

Maintaining the same spatial boundaries of the Hackathon in this context, the Canadian North is comprised of the Northern Territories of Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the Inuit Regions beyond them, Nunavik (northern Quebec) and Nunatsiavut (in Labrador). The spatial parameters of the literature review privilege research from the geographical boundaries of the NWT, however, due to the diversity of landscapes within the territory and the limited examples of country/traditional food valuation, the scope has been widened to the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat with valuable insights to be gained across this region. Based off the pan-northern approach of the Hackathon, we do not focus on one particular community but draw on literature based in respective First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities within this broad region. While there are many commonalities in food systems challenges faced across the Canadian North, the governance structures, policy and regulation vary significantly (TGF, 2018), and for this reason the environmental scan is more narrowly focus on the NWT.

Key Terms

Country or traditional food are terms used to refer to all food that is harvested from the land (Kuhnlein et al., 2014). These terms are often used interchangeably with wild or subsistence-based food, and include foods derived from the flesh, bone, organs, and other parts of marine mammals and water fowl, land mammals, and fish, and foods derived from various plants including berries, leaves, stems, etc. (Searles, 2016). Excluded from this conceptualization are the locally produced foods by means of agriculture as the latter carry significantly different symbolic, cultural, social and political meaning and value in this context. Our choice to use **country/traditional food** follows its use in the Canadian Council of Academies' Expert Panel on the State of Knowledge of Food Security in Northern Canada and subsequently in the Northern Policy Hackathon Recommendations. The joined-up term is used broadly to respect that *traditional food* is used more often in First Nations and Métis research contexts, and *country food* is used more frequently among Inuit (Kuhnlein et al. 2014, p. 76).

Both food *security* and food *sovereignty* are contested terms that are often juxtaposed in food systems literature (Clapp, 2014). We avoid those definitions that privilege agri-food systems and borrow Grey and Patel's (2015) general conception of **food sovereignty** as "a group of people making their own decisions about their food system" (p.431). Rather than polarizing these two terms, we consider food sovereignty as a "precondition for **food security** to exist" (Patel, 2009, p. 669). These definitions are intentionally open-ended and flexible to not presume or exclude any food provisioning systems – a combination of market-based, subsistence-based and agriculturally

grown foods may satisfy a northern community's food security needs, and what is important (from the perspective of food sovereignty) is that the community has the control over them. Morrison (2011) defines **Indigenous food sovereignty** as "present day strategies that enable and support the ability of Indigenous communities to sustain traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, farming and distribution practices, the way we have done for thousands of years prior to contact with the first European settlers" (p.97). Based on this, Morrison (2011) explains that it is a new concept for age-old practices, which we presume include country/traditional food harvesting and sharing activities.

The **sharing economy** (see also: subsistence, informal, traditional or social) is comprised of local, land-based activities and exchange that is neither completely driven by "self-sufficiency nor capital accumulation but rather a continuous flow of goods and services" (Natcher, 2009). Kuokkanen (2011) explains that "at the center of [this] economic activity is not the exchange for profit or competition but the sustenance of individuals, families, and the community" (p. 219). Many researchers characterize northern, Indigenous communities as having **mixed economies**, in which a sharing economy and market-based economy exists simultaneously (Abele, 2009; Harnum et al., 2014).

Article II. Review of Existing Literature

The contents of this literature review can be broadly categorized into the following: Economic Valuation Studies (approaches to measuring social economic activity), Limitations to Valuation Studies (beyond economic valuation), and Literature on Commodification (complications, contentions and resistance). Overall, the existing literature is rich with qualitative and quantitative research from a range of disciplines that demonstrate the favourable benefits of country/traditional food and provisioning activities. The significance of country/traditional foods needs not debating but the approach to representing this value, or if it can be measured at all, is an ongoing challenge the researchers grapple with in the next section. There is a strong consensus that country/traditional foods have valuable benefits to individual and community health, as well as economic, social and cultural wellbeing. It is evident that there are numerous possibilities for representing the value of country/traditional foods (health, nutritional, cultural, economic, ecological and so on) but these findings exist in silos, fractured across different disciplines, regions and timeframes. The existence of these silos is one factor that motivates efforts to incorporate multiple dimensions of value of foods into a singular conceptual framework that will offer a robust and dynamic representation, and which can enable comparisons among different food provisioning systems. The multifaceted value of food is described in the literature consulted here is drawn out comprehensively in the Conceptual Framework section of this report.

Economic Valuation Studies

As a starting point, attempts to capture economic value of country/traditional foods are explored here to learn from previous research on the challenges and limitations of these approaches. The narrow focus on economic valuation invites a rich discussion on the tendencies to privilege what is quantifiable and the associated risks of misrepresentation or devaluation. The literature on economic valuation also brings forward broader concerns associated with treating foods only as commodities. Since the 1990s, researchers have alluded to the controversial nature of calculating the value of subsistence activities (Reimer et al., 1997), and many have cited issues with representing the value of country/traditional food in economic terms (Chatwood et al., 2017; Condon, Collings, & Wenzel, 1995; Natcher, 2009; Nuttall et al., 2005). Based on the associated risks and difficulties with informal valuation, many disparate approaches have been observed within a Canadian context that make temporal or spatial comparisons a challenge. For this project it was helpful to try to distinguish how these approaches vary.

Predominantly, approaches to the economic valuation of country/traditional foods favour a costs-based approach, rather than one that centres values more broadly. There appear to be considerably more examples of attempts that capture the costs associated with subsistence activities (under which country/traditional food provisioning activities would fall) than those examples that attempt to capture the value of country/traditional food items themselves. In the Conference Board of Canada's *Innovation and Traditional Resource-Based Economies Study*, researchers drew on the existing country/traditional food valuation studies at the time (Clinton, Vail, & Knötsch, 2002). This includes a summary on the two prevailing cost-based approaches existent in the literature based on the work of Reimer et al. (1997). The methodologies of these two cost-based approaches, Capital Cost and Replacement Cost, are compared below in **Table 1** (which is reproduced directly from Clinton et al. 2002). The researchers present the caveat that the findings of these two approaches will be drastically different (Clinton et al., 2002). The percentage of which diets are made up of country/traditional foods has limited relevancy to our study given the date of the data collection (1997), however, the conclusions that are motivated by this figure

are pertinent to this research project. Clinton et al. (2002) stress the importance of recognizing the value of country/traditional food harvesting by policy makers, and they justify this claim with by citing territorial government documents where this wish is expressed. As cited in Clinton et al. (2002), the following is stated by the Economic Framework, Wildlife Sector, GNWT:

The subsistence food harvest has met local needs for countless years. It is important to support and encourage subsistence use instead of relying on costly imported products. A means must be developed of assigning appropriate value to the non-monetary benefits of wildlife (p. 30).

Table 1: Methods of Economic Valuation (Capital/Replacement Cost Calculation)

Box F	
<i>Calculating the Value of Subsistence Production</i>	
Capital Cost Calculation	Replacement Cost Calculation
<p>This method seeks to ascertain the cost of producing a pound of meat (for example) by adding all the costs associated with the four factors of production:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital: What equipment was used? What is the cost of this equipment? And what is the rate of depreciation of the equipment? • Labour: How much labour was involved? This would include preparation time, time used to fix equipment, time spent sitting and waiting while on the hunt, and time processing the kill. Then, on top of that, a value would have to be given to this labour, as well as a value on the skills and knowledge of the hunter. • Land: Is there a cost (rent) for the land? In many cases there is not, but this is not necessarily a given. Licensing for hunting on certain lands would be included here. • Entrepreneurship or profits: What is an acceptable profit margin for these activities? <p>It is understandable that this method suffers from a need for too much data; data that most often does not exist, and must be estimated.</p>	<p>This method attempts to find the cost to the hunter, if they should have to purchase their exact catch from the marketplace (store bought). Data requirements for this methodology are less than the capital cost calculation, but does require an accurate tabulation of harvest numbers. This can be fairly accurate when looking at large game such as caribou, moose, walrus or seal, but is more difficult for smaller game such as birds and rodents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For each species, one must determine the average edible content of that animal. For example, how much edible meat can we assume is contained within a 250-pound deer? • Nutritional values and comparisons must be made. How much beef is needed to equal the nutritional content of one pound of moose meat? And, is beef the closest comparison to moose? It is not necessarily clear which domestic animal is most appropriate for comparison purposes. <p>What price should be used in the conversion? That is, should country foods be priced according to the price of comparable meat in the wholesale market? In a local grocery store? Or a southern market?</p>
<p>All of the above options have been studied, and provide remarkably different results. What is undeniable is the volume of country food produced. In determining its importance, whether its value is \$100 or \$1000 per person does not take away from the fact that country food is consumed everyday, and constitutes as much as 80 per cent of some Aboriginal people's diet. The attempt to give this food a dollar value is, in many ways, an academic exercise, but perhaps necessary for policy makers to formulate sound arguments to garner support and recognition for traditional Aboriginal harvesting as an important and valued pursuit.</p>	
<p>Source: Bill Reimer and Chris Trott, et al., <i>Economic Integration and Isolation of First Nation Communities - Report I: An Exploratory Review</i>, for The Canadian Rural Restructuring Foundation, Concordia University, Montreal, December 1997.</p>	

[Source: (Clinton et al., 2002, p. 30)]

Drawing on Clinton et al. (2002) as well as other researchers who have assessed the value of country/traditional foods using primarily economic approaches, the next section is dedicated to exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the two approaches summarized in Table 1. These strengths and weaknesses are, in most cases, identified by those who use the approaches (academics and/or policymakers) users. This discussion is followed by additional commentary by northern researchers speaking more broadly to the issues associated with reducing the value of subsistence activities to their associated costs.

(a) Replacement Cost Approaches to Valuation

Usher's (1976) study *Evaluating Country Food in the Northern Native Economy* is one of the first and few of its kind in the NWT (carried out in Banks Island and the Mackenzie Delta). This approach uses a replacement value of what it would cost a household to purchase in market-setting if not produced for themselves (Usher, Duhaime, & Searles, 2002). Serving as a foundational and credible source for other northern-based scholarship, particularly in justifying the significance and scale of subsistence-based food provisioning, Usher (1976) offers his findings with disclaimers on how to represent these conclusions. Usher (1976) commented on the challenge of applying economists' "sophisticated means of measuring volume and value of production and exchange" for circumstances where exchange occurs outside of the market system without cash income (p. 106). He adds that, "it is evident that the problem of imputing values to country produce in the North is not analogous to imputing value to home garden produce in the South" (Usher, 1976, p. 118). He echoes what others before him have claimed on the issues with assigning monetary value, "to attempt to find 'the correct' price for these goods [country produce] is illusory" (Palmer, 1976 as cited in Usher, 1976, p. 118). He admits that "country food has nutritional, social and cultural values which cannot be replaced by any substitute and cannot be measured by market criteria or evaluated in cash" (Usher, 1976 p.118). Finally, Usher (1976) justifies his methodology claiming that, "substitution costs provide the most appropriate measure of value and their use is, therefore, recommended, but with the caution that they cannot serve to measure the value of the activity or environment which produces the country food" (p.105). This seminal research emerged in response to the limitations of relying solely on formal goods (with numerical data) to measure economic activity in northern communities. Exploring the possibilities for capturing these values, Usher (1976) admits that the tendency of measuring activity in northern mixed economies have "failed to comprehend the duality which exists" by ignoring production that does not enter the marketplace or arbitrarily assigning cash equivalents (p. 106). Usher (1976) explains the biases present in those approaches that privilege that which is quantifiable, leading to the undervaluation of subsistence activity.

What are some of the difficulties of pursuing the replacement cost approach? Reimer et al. (1997) stress that once harvesters have extensively recorded quantities of country/traditional foods harvested over specific periods, and once these are translated into standardized edible weights, the difficulty comes with the conversion of figures into dollar amounts. At this stage, Reimer et al. (1997) ask, "which domestic animal equivalent is most appropriate to convert the wild animal for purposes of comparison: chicken for partridge? turkey for geese? beef for moose or caribou? lamb for seal?" (p.23). They name several other issues in this approach including the underreporting of harvest quantities and the indecision of what price to choose for conversion – local or southern grocers, retail or wholesale prices, and so on (Reimer et al., 1997). Other replacement-based estimations of country/traditional food value in specific regions are common in northern literature,

but it is often not shown how researchers came to this value. For instance, Hicks, Jull and Dahl (2000) estimated the replacement value for all country/traditional foods in Nunavut was between \$30,000 to \$35,000 annually. We see these same values cited across multiple research contexts (Clinton et al., 2002; Kuokkanen, 2011a; Natcher, 2009; Vail & Clinton, 2001). While these quantitative findings are reproduced routinely, those using them continue to caution that there is a great “risk of misrepresenting and devaluing the cultural significance of subsistence activities” (Natcher, 2009, p. 87). Despite the stated concerns of undervaluing country/traditional foods with a replacement-based approach, it is clear that having the measurable data has provided a strong foundation for the recognition of the unparalleled value of country/traditional foods. We will now consider another economic form of valuation

(b) Capital Costs Approach to Valuation

The capital cost approaches to economic valuation are commonly based on the cost of the food provisioning activities. Unlike foods sold in markets, without an exchange value, this approach considers multiple quantifiable inputs. For country/traditional foods, Clinton et al. (2002) outline some of the major capital costs for harvesting, these include transportation (snowmobiles, sleds, all-terrain vehicles, boats, etc.), supplies (firearms, traps, nets), shelter (tents, cabins), and other specialized equipment (clothing, technology, heaters, etc.) (p.44). Operating costs should also be factored into such an approach – including fuel, ammunition and maintenance of vehicles/equipment (Clinton et al., 2002, p .44). As noted in **Table 1**, the labour involved is a necessary input of country/traditional food provisioning. Reimer et al. (1997) suggest that this is the most difficult of the costs to calculate, stressing the challenges in assigning a wage to the many varied activities that are comprised. They include, “preparation of the equipment, travel time, stalking time, time for the hunt, butchering and preparing the carcass and skins” (Reimer et al., 1997). Clinton et al. (2002) tack on to this list labour that is necessary to learn the skills and knowledge to provide the food should also factor into the valuation. In the absence of paid labour for harvesting practices, this cost could be estimated by the amount of income lost when not participating in wage economy. These circumstances highlight the complicated nature of determining value through a capital costs-based approach. Researchers have shown that where both the social (or subsistence/traditional) and formal (or market/wage) economies are concerned, comparisons become complicated by the interdependency of the economic activity in both realms (Harnum et al., 2014; Kenny, Fillion, Maclean, Wesche, & Man, 2018; Kenny, Wesche, Fillion, MacLean, & Chan, 2018; Natcher, 2009). Harnum et al.’s (2014) cautionary remark to avoid drawing too sharp of a distinction between the two economies further complicates the capital costs approach to valuation. The interconnectivity of social and formal economies is evident in cases where market-based food items are purchased in order to practice country/traditional food harvesting practices; or in the way that employment in the wage economy is necessary to afford the capital inputs (Lysenko & Schott, 2019).

Cost-based approaches to valuing market-based foods are far more common in food systems research. Often researchers, or community members involved, aspire to incorporate capital costs to country/traditional food for comparison, but as Clinton et al. (2002) suggest, the data required for such an approach is both onerous to collect (for researchers and harvesters) or nonexistent. As a result, food costing procurement studies frequently cite shortcomings, limitations and challenges with satisfying these criteria exhaustively with time and resources being insufficient. Extensive food costing research in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, NT, managed to

include commercially-available country/traditional foods (where applicable) as well as the cost of harvesting equipment in their studies (Kenny, Fillion, et al., 2018). According to Kenny et al. (2018) the community representatives involved in their research recommended, “that the importance of country food...to the Inuvialuit diet be recognized, including the possibility of comparing the cost of purchasing market foods and harvesting country food” (p.3). The researchers were able to include the costs of commercially-available country/traditional food items and harvesting equipment, but were unable to report on cost of (non-commercial) harvest items (Kenny, Fillion, et al., 2018).

Other comparable studies in the northern provinces reveal similar challenges. Pal, Haman and Robidoux (2013) performed a study in a fly-in community in Northern Ontario to find an estimate on the costs associated with procuring food from the land. Pal et al. (2013) explain that they “simply [measured] what costs hunters accrue getting on the land...to provide perspective about the financial merit/burden of such practices. These costs must however be considered within the larger context of labour and time involved in food procurement” (p. 142). Years later, building off of Pal et al.’s (2013) initial capital cost estimates, a follow-up study revealed that despite the high costs and skills associated with harvesting activities, the estimates were comparable to market-based food prices (Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2018). A caveat presented by the researchers for this study is that while equipment costs were factored in to their approach, they could not account for time and labour necessary in the procurement (Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2018). Leibovitch Randazzo and Robidoux (2018) explain that, “asking hunters and or family members to conduct these tasks is not possible without providing proper financial compensation that was not available with the funds for this project” (p.16). The researchers recommend “estimating total costs [with] more focus... placed on the hunter’s and food preparer’s time” as these factors were beyond the scope of their study (Leibovitch Randazzo & Robidoux, 2018, p. 16). However extensive, these capital cost approaches to valuing country/traditional food procurement are consistent in stating the need for more comprehensive valuation studies while recognizing that such an approach is often outside of the scope of what can be accomplished in one study.

Limitations of Valuation Studies

Considering what constitutes economic activity and what is precluded is an important question. How are the harvesting practices that men and women may traditionally perform considered in the process of calculating or measuring value? Reimer et al. (1997) acknowledged this as one of many issues for both the capital and replacement-based approaches to food costing. The researchers found that,

most harvesting studies have focused on the hunting, fishing, and trapping activities of men, overlooking the fact that women also undertake these activities and that much of the small game and fish is produced by women. There are no current estimates about how much women contribute to the diet of Northern hunters (Reimer et al., 1997, p. 25).

Application of a gendered lens while consulting subsequent valuation research reveals that the tendency to overlook women’s roles in country/traditional food provisioning has prevailed. This is a symptom of a much larger issue in broader northern based scholarship and has had considerable focus in more recent years (Bodenhorn, 1990; Parlee & Wray, 2016; Todd, 2016). Some have

noted that traditionally male (non-capitalist, subsistence) labour is typically treated as ‘work’ (Hall, 2016), while women’s subsistence-labour on the other hand, is obscured when reduced to “traditional culture,” losing its status as work (Irlbacher-Fox, 2009). Hall (2016) recognizes this “obfuscation of Indigenous women’s subsistence-labour” as a product of the “settler capitalist-patriarchal evaluation of the (feminised) *quality* of this labour” (p. 102) [emphasis in original]. Kuokkanen (2011b) accounts for the exclusion of Indigenous women from subsistence, or the making of their work in subsistence unseen with the influence of “deeply patriarchal” colonial ideologies (p. 225). The issues articulated in these findings are not inconsequential, when considering the material, financial contributions that can be made available for pursuing traditional hunting exercises (e.g. Harvester Support Programs) (Gombay, 2009). Recognizing the high costs associated with these (“male”) subsistence-activities and foregoing wage-based work, we can see that the de-valorization and marginalization women’s subsistence-labour excludes them from such a program.

Other considerations include the limitations of focusing on the value of animals/plants as food items and excluding other uses detracts from the overall value of those harvesting activities. It is not possible to extract the particular value of the harvesting activity that yields food, versus other processes (e.g. tanning, sewing or beading moose hide). It would appear that many researchers grappling with the attempts to measure the value of country/traditional food provisioning have not completely overlooked other benefits but have not been able to provide tangible solutions to capturing other forms of value. For instance, Reimer et al. (1997) found through their case studies in Nunavut, they did not have a mean to represent the significance of “relationships and exchanges between kin and neighbours with respect to goods and services” (p. 25). They continue, “without such information, it is extremely difficult to assess the relative impact of these relations and networks on the lives of those in the communities,” yet they conclude that despite the “difficulty of identifying and obtaining comparable data on these issues, its importance warrants the effort.” (Reimer et al., 1997, p. 25). The economic approaches to valuation present possibilities for capturing value but the limitations presented here demonstrate the incompleteness of such approaches. In the following section, we will explore what the literature on the commodification of country/traditional foods brings to this discussion. Maintaining the position that there are consequences to relying only on economics in considering the value of country/traditional foods, the contributions from these scholars have brought many other dimensions of value to our consideration.

Literature on Commodification

The commodification of country/traditional food, as observed in country food markets, has a long history in other regions in the Circumpolar North (see: Greenland; Marquardt & Caulfield, 1996). While examples of formal markets of exchange for country/traditional foods are less common in the northern Canadian context, researchers have contemplated the role they could play in ensuring food security, particularly in larger settlements for households lacking harvesters or sharing networks (Duhaime, Chabot, & Gaudreault, 2002; Ford, Macdonald, Huet, Statham, & MacRury, 2016). Others share a concern of creating export-oriented markets without increasing overall availability and/or eliminating access from those who would rely on sharing (Kenny, Wesche, et al., 2018). There is a tendency in food systems research to characterize the resistance to commodifying certain country/traditional food sources as a “cultural” preference. We suggest here that reducing differences between Indigenous and capitalist ways of relating to food as cultural is what Verran (2011) considers the epistemic nature of explaining ‘other’ knowledges away (p. 142).

Similarly, Blaser (2014) explains the dangers of overemphasizing cultural *difference*, as “a function of the modernist ontological assumption that there is one reality or world out there and multiple perspectives or cultural representations of it” (p. 52). Grey and Patel (2015) find that the cosmology of capitalism is at odds with Indigenous cosmologies. Todd (2014) describes the significance of “animals-as-sentient-beings” within northern Indigenous legal orders and cosmologies (p. 218). Examples of these relations can be observed in research across the North, (see NWT examples: Todd’s (2014) research with Paulatuuq human-fish relations, or Walsh’s (2015) research with Tlicho Dene who identify as Caribou People). A kincentric view, conceptualized by Salmón (2000) refers to the “manner in which indigenous people view themselves as part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins” (p. 1332). These experiences point to Grey and Patel’s (2015) interpretation of Salmón’s kin-like formulation to understand how commodification of non-human relatives could be more appropriately described as “enslavement” than an abstraction (p. 5). It is based off of this relationality to non-humans that many researchers argue that assigning economic or monetary value to country/traditional foods is ultimately misleading, culturally inappropriate or inadequate (Kuokkanen, 2011; Natcher, 2009).

While remaining cognizant of the tensions around commodification, the diverse perspectives on commodifying country/traditional food has generated a rich discussion on the relationships between capitalist and social economies. There is a burgeoning field of research that analyzes the complexities of the introduction of cash to the sharing economy and its implications (see: Nunavik, QC, Gombay, 2009; Clyde River, NU, Harder & Wenzel, 2012; Iqaluit, NU, Searles, 2016). Searles (2016) finds that at the centre of the ongoing debate is the connection between Inuit identity and sharing country/traditional food, he concludes that “To be Inuk is to share, and to share is to be Inuk” (p. 209). Searles (2016) explains in some cases, “the gift of life that the animal or fish provides the Inuit hunter or fisher cannot be hoarded or sold for profit; it must be shared freely with others. To do otherwise is to risk shame and loss of status—even one’s identity as an Inuk” (p. 209). Shifting perceptions across Inuit Nunangat reveal the degrees to which individual communities are willing to introduce programs that may “threaten core values, traditions, and identities” (Searles, 2016, p. 195). Gombay’s (2009) research on the Nunavik’s Hunter Support Program was premised on the notion that “money gives rise to an economic system that is predicated on, and promotes, impersonal relationships that are transitory, amoral, and calculating” (p. 127). Ultimately, Gombay (2009) rejects the “totalizing force” of commodifying country/traditional food in eroding the sharing economy and suggests that this program both “mimics and breaks with tradition” as cash is incorporated into subsistence (p. 119). It should not be assumed that the findings in specific case studies in Inuit Nunangat can be extrapolated to any other northern Indigenous community, but I take from these insights a desire to build on the critical scholarship that complicates socio-economic conditions of sharing and commodifying country/traditional food (Harder & Wenzel, 2012).

The position taken through this research project is neither to completely refute the potential that could be observed by commodifying country/traditional foods nor does it recommend commodification outright. Our decision to make space for this brief discussion country/traditional food commodification in our study on the valuation and comparison of food provisioning systems can be accounted for on several grounds. At the most basic level, the expression of value in economic or monetary terms effectively treats country/traditional food items/activities as commodities (even when there is resistance to commodification). Next, whether harvester support programs are considered to be commodification or not, the process of assigning monetary value occurs when determining the financial supports that will be available to harvesters in exchange for

their contributions to the sharing economy. Finally, where there is interest in commodifying country/traditional foods as expressed above, then a method of assigning monetary value to the items or the activities would be necessary. There are many factors that would determine the appropriateness of commodifying country/traditional foods and it should not be portrayed as a black and white issue. The exploration into the diverse opinions on commodification here, however fruitful, will have place-based specificities. Further, discussions on commodification cannot be had without considering the embedded laws throughout the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat, in the form of treaties, land claims, food safety rules, and wildlife, hunting and fishing regulations, many of which prohibit the commercial sale of country/traditional foods (Burke, 2005; Chan et al., 2006; Spring, Carter, & Blay-Palmer, 2018). The multiple layers of legislation that impact country/traditional food practices across the Canadian North indicate that many discussions on commodification are still primarily hypothetical or theoretical. Food systems researchers suggest that removal or alteration of these regulations may have major repercussions for Indigenous food sovereignty (Grey & Patel, 2015). The relevancy of commodification to our study on country/traditional food valuation is multifaceted, but it also brings our exploration back to the policy implications that were central to the Hackathon where the ideas for this research project originated.

Concluding Remarks

Through our exploration of existing methods of economic valuation and their limitations, we have been able to draw the several conclusions. First and foremost, there is a need to take country/traditional foods seriously – no matter the approach taken to represent their value, the research consulted have held a shared understanding that these foods and harvesting activities are important. The perils of misrepresenting country/traditional foods with economic measures directed us to a broader discussion on the commodification of these food provisioning systems. Some of the literature we have consulted in our exploration of economic value and commodification have hinted at the existing policy barriers to harvesting and provisioning. It is through the analysis of the complexities of country/traditional food commodification in particular, that we have begun to point to some of the ways that country/traditional food harvesting practices are subject to policing and control. In our literature review, we have pointed to the shortcomings of economic valuation that is absent of considerations of gender or harvesting activities beyond food provisioning. These demonstrate to us that the criteria through which we represent value has economic impacts on who benefits from support systems that are created to increase food security and the sustain harvesting practices.

We bear in mind what these criticisms of economic valuation have brought to our understanding of country/traditional food systems we shift gears to consider the policy relevancy of our research questions. To understand the ways that policies and programs could better serve northerners and foster country/traditional food provisioning, it is important to have grasp on the existing legislation/policy that prevents these systems from flourishing. We aim not to replicate the results and findings that were brought out in the Hackathon but hope to build on these by focusing our attention to the territorial policy barriers and programs that impact country/traditional food harvesting. Given the pan-northern approach taken through the Hackathon, to be inclusive of participants from across the North, their focus was directed to Federal policies. In an attempt to pick up where the policy recommendations from the Hackathon left off, the next section will narrow the focus to territorial government policy in the NWT.

Article III. Environmental Scan

This section provides a snapshot of the political landscape for harvesting, procuring and sharing country/traditional foods in the NWT. This landscape demonstrates a puzzling over-regulation and under-regulation of food policies (Johnston & Andrée, 2019) wrapped up in the form of treaties, land claims, food safety, and wildlife, hunting and fishing regulations which serve to prohibit, delimit or control the distribution of food throughout the territory. Through this brief scan of relevant territorial policy, there are important distinctions made within the legislation based on the intended use of country/traditional food items that resonates with our findings in the literature review. Namely, whether or not, an item will be sold or shared will fall under completely different forms of regulation. Our intention in considering relevant legislation and programs is to situate our analysis of valuing country/traditional food provisioning systems in the broader context that these systems operate in. Beyond these overwhelming constraints, this scan also features developing strategies aimed at fostering greater country/traditional food provisioning in the NWT.

Territorial Legislation

Federal legislation has implications on country/traditional food provisioning in the jurisdictions of the following departments: Fisheries and Oceans; Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Natural Resources, Industry and the Environment. As shown in the Hackathon's Policy Recommendations, there is a strong need for coordination due to overlapping, layering and complementary legislation at various levels and sectors of government. The relevant territorial legislation concerning country/traditional food provisioning result in food-related mandates in the departments of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR); Industry, Tourism and Investment (ITI); Health and Social Services (HSS); Executive and Indigenous Affairs; and Lands. The relationship between these legislative acts and country/traditional food provisioning are explicit in some cases (where the legislation directly controls the access to country/traditional foods). Notably, in the following, when acts directly interact with harvesting activities they are predominantly prohibitive. In other cases, the acts are relevant for their contribution to sustaining the lands from which country/traditional foods are derived, thus indirectly influencing non-human animal populations, habitats, etc. The territorial acts listed below often correspond with, or are complementary to, Federal and municipal legislation within the NWT:

- *Agricultural Products Marketing Act*: This act includes rules & regulations for commercial agricultural-grown foods/goods. While it does not directly interact with country/traditional food systems, it is considered to be a useful guide to developing commercial country/traditional food markets (GNWT, 2018). There exists no country/traditional food marketing act at present, but this is where the processes to value and compare country/traditional foods would be of great need.
- *Environmental Protection Act*: The regulations included in this act may impact country/traditional food provisioning activities as it outlines environmental protections bylaws, permits and licensing and regulates the discharge of contaminants and unsightly land (GNWT, 2017).
- *Forest Protection Act*: This act is meant to ensure safe and responsible use of forests and will in many cases limit access and harvest of forest-based food sources (GNWT, 2010).

- *Freshwater Fish Marketing Act*: The commercial harvest of freshwater fish is controlled through this act by administering fishing licenses to sell fish (GNWT, 2011). This act is only consequential for fishing for profit.
- *Lands Act*: Under this act, the protection, control and use of surface land is regulated; zoning, leasing and sale processes may limit the access of country/traditional foods in designated areas (GNWT, 2016).
- *Public Health Act*: The safety regulations through this act apply to country/traditional foods in particularly when they are harvested to be sold. This would have implications on food establishments, for the processing and storage of country/traditional foods to control disease and enforce sanitation (GNWT, 2019a). Country/traditional foods harvested for non-commercial does not fall under the legislation of the Public Health Act.
- *Reindeer Act*: The management of reindeer herding and harvesting in the territory through this act includes licensing regulations which may limit individual access to reindeer (GNWT, 2014).
- *Species at Risk (NWT) Act*: Directly complementary to the Federal Species at Risk Act, this applies to country/traditional food harvesting within the territory with concerns for species at risk – namely limits to harvesting designated species (ENR, 2009).
- *Territorial Parks Act*: Under this act, designated regions of the NWT are protected by rules & regulations that may limit or prohibit the harvest of country/traditional foods within; or limit access to designated regions in the park(s) (GNWT, 2019b).
- *Water Act*: This act can be attributed to the maintenance of country/traditional food systems through sustainable management of water systems. It concerns the maintenance of water rather than having specific implications for harvesting fish and other freshwater species (ENR, 2014).
- *Wildlife Act*: This act and its many sub-sections directly impact access to country/traditional foods through hunting rules & regulations (ENR, 2018). In its current phase, this act applies to vertebrates, other than fish, that are naturally found wild, including big and small game, furbearers, birds, reptiles and amphibians (ENR, n.d.). The main instruments of the wildlife management in regions with settled land claims have been established through wildlife management or renewable resource boards¹; and in non-settlement regions, the co-management system includes input from Indigenous organizations. These consultation processes are based on land claim/self-government agreements, Aboriginal and treaty rights, as well as case law (ENR, n.d., p. 1). While ENR is responsible for the enforcement of the regulations under the *Wildlife Act*, the department claims that “the primary role of the [co-management] boards is to integrate the interests of land claim beneficiaries in wildlife and environmental management into the ministerial decision-making process of the federal and territorial governments,” (ENR, n.d., p. 4).

The acts considered here do not exhaustively account for ways that the territorial legislation impacts country/traditional food provisioning activities but should point to the multifaceted nature of country/traditional food policy.

¹ These include: “*Wek’èzhii Renewable Resources Board* (www.wrrb.ca), established under the Tłı̨chǫ Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement; *Sahtú Renewable Resources Board* (www.srrb.nt.ca), established under the Sahtú Dene and Métis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement; *Gwich’in Renewable Resources Board* (www.grrb.nt.ca), established under the Gwich’in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement; and the *Wildlife Management Advisory Council (NWT)* (www.jointsecretariat.ca), established under the Inuvialuit Final Agreement,” (ENR, n.d., p. 1).

Territorial Strategies

We would now like to consider how the territorial government (in this case, ENR) are engaging in efforts to overcome some of the barriers to country/traditional food harvesting. ENR has recently (Aug 2019) shared the draft of their Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan [previously Country Food Strategy] for public review. The Action Plan is informed by regional meetings held by ENR with Indigenous governments, co-management partners, community open houses, advisory group workshop and schools across the territory. The following five objectives have been presented through the draft, with several specific action items, corresponding deliverable dates and indicators within each:

- Promote and support opportunities for mentorship, learning and training related to on the land activities for interested residents;
- Support communities, organizations and other partners in pursuing sustainable livelihoods programs and service by reducing administrative burden;
- Strengthen communication about existing programs and increase promotion of sustainable livelihoods at multiple levels;
- Create and support opportunities for program development; and
- Ensure programs run effectively, efficiently and support the people who need them; and ensure accountability in Action Plan implementation (ENR, 2019, p. 8).

It is encouraging to see the devaluation of women's roles in country/traditional food provisioning is given focus through this action plan. As a key theme, ENR relays "that more support for on the land programs for women is needed, as they are often forgotten. *Women are the backbones of being on the land and process the food,*" (2019, p.14) [emphasis added]. ENR has demonstrated through this draft that their intention is not to develop programs and implement them across the territory, but rather, to provide resources and support to community-led or identified efforts where needed. ENR (2019) suggests that the action plans listed here will have outcomes that would support aspects of country/traditional food provisioning in the territory:

- GNWT 2030 Climate Change Strategic Framework 2019-2023 Action Plan
- Working Together: An Action Plan to Reduce and Eliminate Poverty in the NWT (2015)
- GNWT Knowledge Agenda Action Plan 2019-2024
- NWT Economic Opportunities Strategy: Connecting Business and Communities to Economic Opportunities
- Strong Cultures, Strong Territory; GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework 2015-2025
- NWT Aboriginal Languages Framework – A Shared Responsibility (pp. 6-7).

This Action Plan is meant to complement strategies from other GNWT departments, recognizing the interconnectivity and overlapping boundaries between departments. However, it is not explicitly clear through the summary of engagement for the Action Plan, if there is any intent to alter or remove barriers to harvesting under the jurisdictions of other GNWT departments. This Action Plan could serve as an indication that, at a territorial level, that there is recognition of the many impediments that legislation poses on country/traditional food provisioning, and an understanding of the profound significance of harvesting activities for individuals and communities in the NWT, as well as a considerable amount of energy and funding being directed towards fostering strong country/traditional food systems.

Northern Indigenous Economic Development Board Recommendations

Another notable engagement that has emerged adjacent to the ENR’s Sustainable Livelihoods Action Plan was developed by the Northern Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB). The aim of NIEDB is to provide guidance to government bodies - predominantly Federal but included in their recommendations are territorial/provincial legislation as well. NIEDB have published *Recommendations on Northern Sustainable Food Systems* based on a roundtable event (2018) and further internal and external research. NIEDB have taken up the Northern Policy Recommendations from the Gordon Foundation’s Country Food Policy Hackathon and built on these. The significance of these recommendations for our research project, is that they bring the messy political realities of harvesting country/traditional foods in conversation with other food provisioning systems. Their recommendations are summarized in **Table 2** below, which also demonstrates the corresponding sectors or jurisdictions implicated through the policies or programs promoted.

Table 2: NIEDB Recommendations on Northern Sustainable Food Systems

Theme	Policy/ Program Tool	Sector and/or Jurisdiction and status
1: Traditional Foods*	1A: Country/Traditional Foods Policy Framework and Act	NEW Federal/Territorial/Provincial (FTP) Legislation/Policy
	1B: Country/Traditional Food Management and Marketing Board	NEW Federal Policy/Program
	1C: Wild Foods Inspection Act	NEW Federal Legislation
	1D: Hunter Support Programs	Existing regional programs extended
2: Local Food Production	2A: Climate Change and Adaptation Program (formerly Health Canada now Indigenous Services Canada)	Enhance existing federal program
	2B: Northern Integrated Commercial Fisheries	Implement proposed federal program – co-developed with National Indigenous Fisheries Institute conducting review
3: Federal Subsidy and Support Programs	3A: Nutrition North	Revise existing federal program (under review – consultation completed 2016)
	3B: Poverty reduction measures	NEW Federal Policy/Program
	3C: Community-Owned Market Food Supports	NEW Federal Policy/Program
4: Infrastructure Investment	4A: Northern Infrastructure Fund	Existing federal program with delays/deferrals on total funding commitment
5: Project Funding Coordination and Promotion	5A: Single Window Facilitated Funding Finder (F3)	NEW FTP Program
	5B: Innovative Food Solutions Sharing Network	NEW Federal Program

[Source: (NIEDB, 2019, p. 8)]

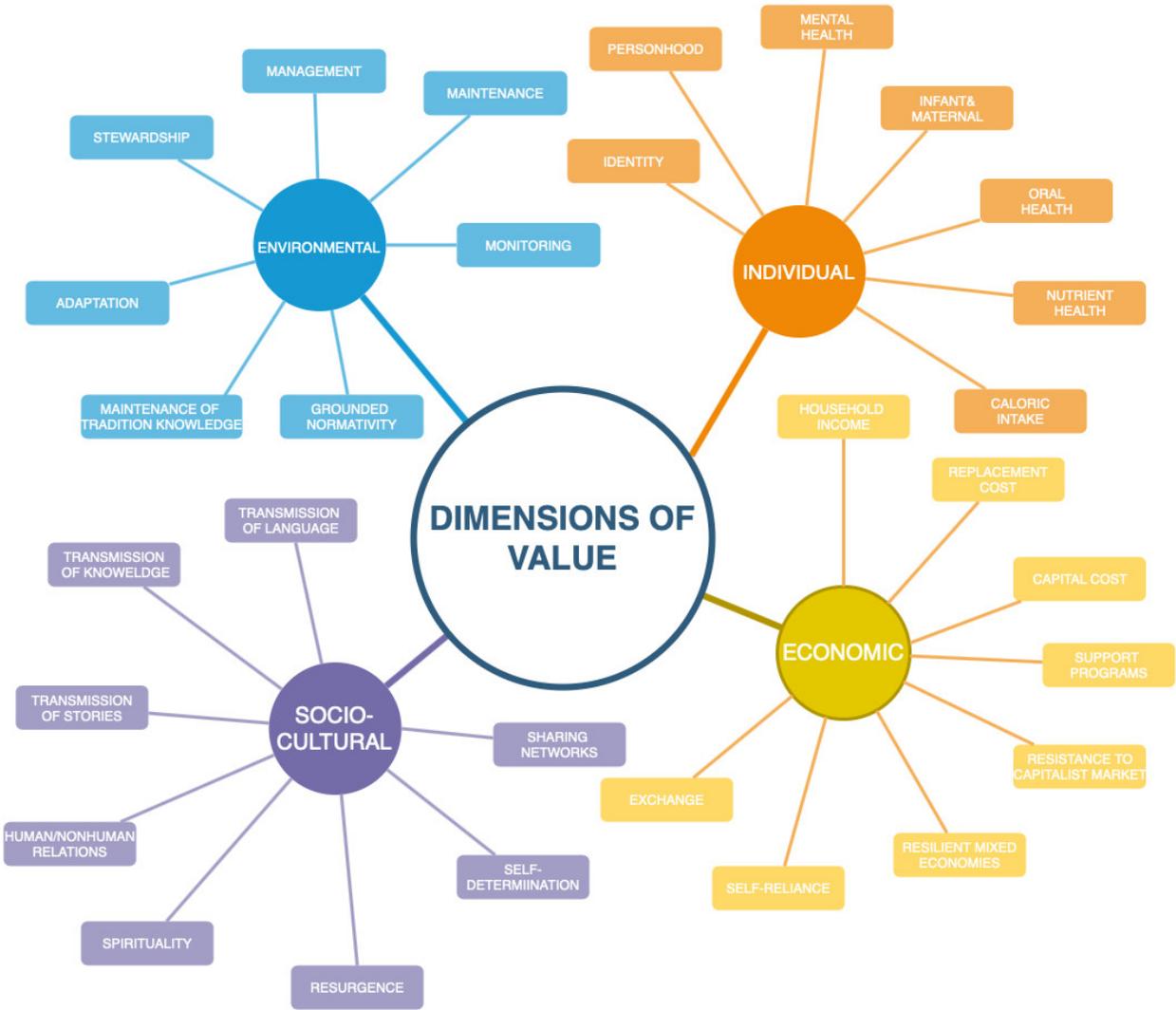
Strong themes present through these recommendations include the need for Indigenous-led programs and institutions, removal or alteration of restrictive policies and administrative barriers to funding, a link between food security and economic development and finally, integrated approaches in support of various food systems. Here, if we consider the three forms of food

systems compared through this report – traditional/country, agricultural, and market-based, there are recommendations that would have implications for each of them, rather than a singular focus or claim of superiority of one system over another. This should not be interpreted as an *either/or* problem but as Eve Tuck (2009) has reminded us to frame this as *both/and also*. Together, with the Hackathon’s recommendations, these recent engagements by ENR and NIEDB show the growing recognition of the policy barriers that impede on country/traditional food harvesting. In each of these reports or engagements, there is some suggestion that commercial selling of these food items, while having many barriers, would also show some promise with regards to food security.

Article IV. Conceptual Framework

Through the earlier stages of this research project, in seeking strategies to describe and measure the value of harvesting, processing and sharing country/traditional foods, we have explored the dominant economic approaches as seen in existing research. The literature and interviewees consulted throughout have led us to a common theme: country/traditional foods and their provisioning activities carry significant value that economic/monetary representation alone, fails to capture. Departing from the perils of economic valuation, we have taken the suggestions from interviewees and located varied dimensions of value associated with country/traditional foods or provisioning activities as read in literature to be read alongside economic dimensions in our conceptual framework. In **Figure 1**, the dimensions of value attributed to food provisioning systems are illustrated in a diagram that is organized through the following four constructs: individual, environmental, economic, and socio-cultural. The dimensions of value that are clustered within each of these constructs will be expanded on throughout this section.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Multidimensions of Value



Keeping in mind the diversity of the landscapes within the territory, it was beneficial to keep the spatial parameters wide to include relevant insights from research in the Territorial North and Inuit Nunangat (as per Northern Policy Hackathon). Based on this pan-northern conceptual framework, the applicability of each of the articulated values will certainly vary among individuals, communities, regions and so on. The dimensions of value shown in our conceptual framework were conceived with country/traditional food harvesting in mind. Given the centrality of country/traditional foods in the earlier stages of this research – exploring the difficulties measuring their value and the legislative policy implications on their commodification and harvesting, we have privileged these food provisioning systems in our conceptual framework. Additionally, in the corresponding elaboration of each value that follows, we explicitly take up country/traditional foods and their provisioning activities. It was important for us to include those dimensions of value that are specific to country/traditional foods in our conceptual framework, as we, and others researching these food provisioning systems have found, there are particular benefits of country/traditional foods that do not exist in alternate provisioning systems.

Expansion on the Constructs and Dimensions of Value

(a) Individual

Identity/Personhood: Walsh (2015) uses foodways “as a component to theories of personhood” to understand Dene attitudes toward caribou (p. 227) “Personhood,” he writes, “does not rely solely on an embodied existence, but is relational and derives from the relationships between being (Walsh, 2015, p. 232) (cf: “Caribou People” Bali & Kofinas, 2014).

Mental Health: Cunsolo Willox et al. (2012) explore the link between mental health with respect to land-based practices as they are disrupted by climate change ; they found that “changes and variability in climate, snow, ice, and travel conditions, as well as alterations to hunting and foraging, are also impacting health and well-being, physically, mentally, and emotionally” (p. 543). One participant explained, “I think going on the land is the healthiest thing you’ll ever get. That’s where your health is, out there,” (p. 543).

Infant/Maternal Health: Researchers have demonstrated how infant oral health serves as an indicator of the value of country/traditional foods (and maternal health more broadly). They found that, “the drastic changes in maternal diet including the diminished consumption of country foods, and the influence of processed, high sugar, high sodium food, the low prevalence of breastfeeding, as well as an overall lack of education on infant feeding practices have shaped the “culture” of unhealthy infant feeding in the community,” (Cidro, Martens, Zahayko, & Lawrence, 2018, p. 33). These findings are contextualized with the acknowledgement that the shift away from country/traditional foods alone cannot be solely attributed to decreased infant oral health but that “the larger influence of colonization...has disrupted the cultural continuity that mitigated negative health outcomes” (p. 34).

Nutrient/Caloric Intake: Food systems researchers in the North have long recognized the nutritional superiority of country/traditional foods compared to most accessible market-based alternatives. In some cases (particularly in those more remote and fly-in communities) country/traditional foods may also be more accessible than store-bought items (Kuhnlein et al., 2014; NIEDB, 2019).

(b) Environmental

Land Stewardship (see also: **Maintenance, Management, Monitoring**): Country/traditional food harvesting fits into the larger processes of Indigenous stewardship of the land (Turner, Berkes, Stephenson, & Dick, 2013). The continuance of land stewardship, maintenance, management or monitoring is a valuable dimension of harvesting activities that is lost with alternate food provision methods.

Adaptation to Climate Change: There is a strong link between continued country/traditional food harvesting and climate change adaptability (Fawcett, Pearce, Notaina, Ford, & Collings, 2018).

Place-Based Grounded Normativity: an ethical framework that “houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place...[and] teaches us how to live our lives in relation to other people and nonhuman life forms in a profoundly nonauthoritarian, nondominating, nonexploitive manner (Coulthard & Simpson, 2016, p. 254; cf: Coulthard, 2014)

(c) Economic (Individual/Household)

Income: As observed through Circumpolar examples of country food markets, a dimension of value can be measured by the income generated to sell harvested foods (NIEDB, 2019).

Capital Cost: The high costs associated with harvesting and being on the land could be attributed to the value of country/traditional foods – equipment, fuel, food, etc. (Lysenko & Schott, 2019).

Replacement Cost: The replacement cost of a market-based food alternative is a dimension to be factored into the value of country/traditional foods as shown through the earlier work of Usher (1987), Reimer et al. (1997) and Clinton et al. (2002).

Harvester Support Program: Gombay's (2009) socio-economic exploration into Nunavik's Hunter Support Programs demonstrates that the commercialization of country/traditional foods can still be avoided with income generated for country/traditional food harvesters. Sandlos (2012) echoes that “hunters have taken control of cash exchange systems as a means to affirm the social value of food sharing” (p. 218).

Exchange: Researchers have found that “food exchanges are economically important because of the nutritional value of the items exchanged, but they also carry political and economic meaning. Individuals who give are held in higher esteem than those who only receive” (Collings, Marten, Pearce, & Young, 2016).

Economic (Collective)

Resilient mixed economies: The co-existence of social and formal economies is regarded as an indicator of healthy communities – the continuance of traditional practices demonstrate how adaptable and persistent Indigenous economies are (Gombay, 2009; Harnum et al. 2014).

Self-reliant communities: Flourishing country/traditional food provisioning in a community is an important part of reducing the reliance on outside sources of food and economic activity (NIEDB, 2019).

Resistance to Capitalist Markets: Grey and Patel (2015) characterize traditional food harvesting “a day-to-day mode of resistance informed by the demands, in this case, of a long history of anticolonial struggle (p. 11).

Self-determination (see also: Resurgence & Revitalization): The revitalization of country/traditional food harvesting practices is positioned as self-determination by critical and Indigenous food scholars (Daigle, 2017; Grey & Patel, 2015; Matties, 2016). Self-determination, as Daigle (2017) explains is “grounded in everyday practices of resurgence that are based on

Indigenous ontologies and respectful and reciprocal relationships with the human and non-human world,” and “resurgence of Indigenous foodways figures into larger processes of decolonization and self-determination (p. 2). Researchers have characterized “revitalizing traditional food systems as acts of sustainable self-determination” (Delormier, Horn-Miller, McComber, & Marquis, 2017).

(d) Socio-Cultural

Sharing Networks: Collings, Wenzel, and Condon, (1998) suggest that historically, “these cultural values and social practices thus were an important means for maintaining community cohesion” (p.302). Researchers explore what it means to have “strong” sharing networks in communities and the relationship to varying levels of food insecurity; with regards to access sharing networks are increasingly important in households with harvesters (Collings et al., 2016).

Spirituality: The spiritual importance of harvesting country/traditional foods has been eluded to by research collaborators in the Sahtú (Harnum et al., 2014; cf: NIEDB, 2019).

Human/Nonhuman Relations: Hunting and harvesting is part of maintaining a relationship between human and non-humans. Watts (2013) explains that, “habitats and ecosystems are better understood as societies from an Indigenous point of view; meaning that they have ethical structures, inter-species treaties and agreements, and further their ability to interpret, understand and implement. Non-human beings are active members of society. Not only are they active, they also directly influence how humans organize themselves into that society” (p. 24). This has been the subject a wide body of scholarship in the North; for example, Blaser (2018) describes that for the Innu in Labrador, caribou, “have full person-hood and will of their own” meaning that “hunting is not mainly about outsmarting ‘animals’ but rather about enticing these fully volitional beings and their leader to be generous with their bodies” (p. 48) (cf: Human-Caribou Parlee & Wray, 2016; Human-Fish Todd, 2018).

Transmission of Traditional Knowledge (Land Skills, Language & Stories): Kuhnlein et al. (2014) explain the context food-specific aspects of traditional knowledge, “including knowledge about plant and animal wildlife species; when, where, and what to harvest; food storing methods; and the moral and social rules and social institutions that govern how food is prepared, shared, and consumed” (p.69). The shift from country/traditional food harvesting to alternative provisioning activities has had the unmeasurable consequence of disrupting the transmission of traditional knowledge between generations. The processes of harvesting country/traditional foods are completed intertwined with knowledge, stories and place-names of the land. Intergeneration transmission of knowledge has been the focus of many northern researchers, concerned with food security and climate change adaptability (Fawcett et al., 2018; Martens, 2018; Pearce, Ford, Willox, & Smit, 2015; Pearce et al., 2011; Wesche, O’Hare-Gordon, Robidoux, & Mason, 2016).

Article V. Discussion

Tensions and Limitations of this Research

The conceptual framework demonstrates that there are numerous, overlapping values that could have significance in the valuation of country/traditional foods and their provisioning systems. The collection of values listed above are drawn out of discussions and representations of country/traditional foods in research findings and sorted into these few categories. With respect to the divergent perspectives between colonial-capitalist and Indigenous worldviews, there is an intentionality to leaving these categories fluid, avoiding being overly prescriptive or categorical, as the selection of these categories of values is a value-laden process itself. Ruff (2019) explains that defining constructs of value is itself a “social process entangled with moral and ethical” considerations (p.19; cf: Espeland & Stevens, 1998; Young & Williams, 2010). For instance, drawing too sharp of a distinction between the individual versus community health, or the environment and culture; humans and animals, etc., has been heavily criticized in Indigenous scholarship. There are strong critiques to those attempts by (usually Western) academics to morph or abstract Indigenous worldviews into colonial-capitalist frameworks, despite their incompatibility (Todd, 2014; Watts, 2013). It is challenging to know what to make of these tensions as categorization seems to betray the very essence of this project, which aims to capture subjective value, yet the fluidity presents a problem for the attempts to quantify or measure value. That leads us to the conclusion that any exercise to ascertain the comparative ‘value’ of food systems depends on who is doing the valuing, and the ends to be served by that process. In the case of this particular project, those ends are ambiguous.

Who does this research serve?

This research project has emerged under the premise that incorporating multiple dimensions of value of country/traditional foods into a singular conceptual framework will offer a more robust and dynamic representation of their significance. As initially proposed, there was intention of being able to create a conceptual framework that is sensitive to community perspectives through collaboration. In this case, the constructions of value outlined here could have served as placeholders, in an effort to avoid the problem of having the researcher be overly prescriptive. The aims for community-engagement in this research project were intended to create meaningful, action-based research through a subsequent pilot project where we test and refine the conceptual framework with a specific community. However, we have come to realize that this intention was void of a major oversight. This oversight became more apparent over the course of the research and was heard very clearly in several of our ‘scoping’ interviews with food system stakeholders. The question we encountered in doing interviews was: who is this research important to, and who would a conceptual framework or a multidimensional representation of value of country/traditional food serve? We could provide no simple answer to these questions. In fact, it was the disparateness of the answers we gave to this question (e.g. “this is a follow-up to the Gordon Foundation-sponsored Hackathon” or “this will contribute to academic and policy discourse on food systems in GNWT and beyond, including whether and how they should be supported financially”) that illuminated the oversight of this research project.

The general feeling we developed after moving through the various stages of this research project is that the methodology did not match the research question. From the beginning, the framing of the research problem was very much from an outsider, top-down approach (both the original research question outlined in the call for proposals, as well as the research questions

proposed in our submission), yet the methodological steps proposed graduated to an eventual bottom-up kind of solution (community-based conceptual tool). What was absent in our proposal was an expression of interest to collaborate from a community or community representative for this research of this nature. We held the assumption that through this research project, based on the scoping interviews and our research networks in the North, we would connect with a community with whom we could collaborate. We also anticipated that there would be willingness or interest in our research project from participants from the Northern Policy Hackathon. Neither of these assumptions proved correct, likely because we moved forward without a community-based partner from the outset. Recognizing this oversight does not mean the research question is not valid, that the results of the Hackathon should not be pursued, or that the research we undertook does not yield some useful insights, but it raises enough concerns for us to suggest a ‘pause’ and rethink this entire project and how it is best pursued.

Building on the above points, it is also important to recognize that there was an institutional partner with an interest in this project –, the GNWT – and that raises another set of potential complications. From the outset, we identified keen interest and support from our territorial government partners, whose validation and input we had sought out through the development of our proposal. In continuing to ask who this research serves, we can see that the findings we intended to generate could suit the interests and needs of government policy-makers, and that this can raise important questions at the community level: What does the translation of people’s values of country/traditional foods and the systems that sustain them into metrics or abstract representations lead to, and who does this exercise serve? How might this research influence policy at a territorial or region-wide level, when the answers to the questions asked might differ enormously from one community to another? Considering what seems to be a strong consensus on the importance of country/traditional food from communities, collaborative and multidisciplinary research, government and community organizations, one could ask why measurability and comparability among food systems is so important? However flawed or limited, how much more convincing have qualitative accounts of the importance of country/traditional food been reinforced with complementary quantitative data? Those who describe themselves as *quantitatively inclined* might find this endeavour to be valuable, just as those working in sectors of government that do privilege what is quantifiable may too. Recall in the country/traditional food valuation work of Clinton et al. (2002) as seen in **Table 1**, they conclude,

The attempt to give this food a dollar value is, in many ways, an academic exercise, but perhaps necessary for policy makers to formulate sound arguments to garner support and recognition for traditional Aboriginal harvesting as an important and valued pursuit (p. 30).

Beyond this, at what point have these major endeavors of measuring value of country/traditional foods and subsistence activities sprung up? Simply based on the literature consulted in the formulation of this research project, there are a few conclusions that could be drawn to answer this question. For instance, secure access to country/traditional foods is hindered to a great extent by resource extraction. Usher et al. (2002) point out that many attempts to measure the value of country/traditional food emerged in the 1970s with the enactment of environmental assessment legislation (p. 188). The researchers imply that at this time, an assessment of the social/economic impact of projects of resource extractivism and their consequences for harvesting became a necessity both for ongoing/new projects and retrospectively in some cases (Usher et al., 2002). We

do not have complete answers to these questions but anticipate that contextualizing the periods and conditions that were in place at the time of these valuation studies could reveal a great deal.

Recommendation for Future Research

We conclude our research project with one main recommendation for further research. While we have found this research endeavour to be a generative and important one, the usefulness of such a project is lost without research partners to complete it with. Our recommendation is that any project of this nature needs to be undertaken with a community-based partner lined up from the beginning. As we see it, the framing of a research problem and the formulation of research questions, however early in the research process, significantly shape the proceeding stages and will have profound influence on who and what is consulted, as well as what is discovered. The participation of an appropriate and interested community-based partner with whom the research terms are set and completed with is crucial. The framing of the research should be considered contextual to that locale and partnership.

Article VI. Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Food Security in the Northwest Territories

Principal Investigators: Andrew Spring, Geography & Env. Studies, Wilfrid Laurier University

Research Assistant: Molly Stollmeyer, Institute of Political Economy, Carleton University

Thesis Supervisor: Peter Andrée, Political Science, Carleton University

Exploring the value of country foods and other food provisioning systems (Note: the interviews will be semi-structured, guided by the following open-ended questions, designed to draw on the expertise of the individuals in question).

1. Do you think it is important to find ways to measure and compare the value of different types of food provisioning systems (e.g. country foods, imported market-based food, locally-produced food)? Why or why not?
2. From your experience, what values associated with different types of food need to be taken into consideration in any such comparisons? (economic, environmental, socio-cultural, nutritional?)
3. What do you see as the drawbacks or challenges associated with trying to make such comparisons?
4. How should community representatives be involved in research that sets out to measure and compare these different types of foods?
5. Do you know of specific communities or community-based organizations that you think we should talk to about our planned research? Are you familiar with current research projects that are working on these issues?

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