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### Résumé de l'article

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# Advancing Radical Food Geographies Praxis through Participatory Film: Reflections from an Indigenous-Settler Food Sovereignty Collaboration

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## Abstract

The academic field of geography is deeply embedded within capitalist and settler colonial logics and has played a major role in suppressing and concealing Indigenous histories along with rights claims, cultures, and practices. While geography's origins are deeply problematic, over the past decades, many scholars and practitioners have offered counter theoretical and practical perspectives and approaches. Radical food geographies praxis is one such example that is rooted in engaged and socially relevant theory, practice, and reflection. In this article, we present reflections from our experience with radical food geographies research praxis through a collaborative food sovereignty, action-oriented project co-developed and co-led by two settler academics, a documentary filmmaker, and the Chief of Batchewana First Nation. From 2018-2022, we embarked on an effort to share stories of Batchewana First Nation's historical and current fishing practices, culture, and governance through the co-creation of a feature length documentary film titled, *Lake Superior Our Helper: Stories from Batchewanaung Anishinabek Fisheries* (<https://www.batchewanaungfish.ca>). To write this paper, we engaged in a process of collective autoethnography that involved documenting our individual reflections on the project and then bringing these perspectives into dialogue. Emerging from this process, we share our insights for an engaged research praxis, focusing on meaningful and authentic relationships and partnership building, participatory film as a tool for collaborative research, and radical food geographies. We present these insights with the aim of improving our own individual and collaborative practice and to share our learnings with other scholars, activists, and community practitioners engaged in similar partnership-based and praxis-oriented geographic research.

## Keywords

Batchewana First Nation, food sovereignty, Indigenous-settler partnerships, participatory film, radical food geographies

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## Introduction

The academic field of geography is deeply embedded within capitalist and settler colonial logics and has played a major role in suppressing and concealing Indigenous<sup>1</sup> histories along with rights claims, cultures, and practices. Even researchers with good intentions tend to reify these dominant logics through failing to disrupt inequitable power dynamics that center settler researchers and their institutions while marginalizing community control and ownership over their information and sovereignty (Schnarch 2004). While geography's origins

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we use the term Indigenous to refer to the original inhabitants of what is now commonly known as Canada. This term includes the diverse people and communities that identify as First Nations, Inuit, and Metis.

are deeply problematic, over the past decades, many scholars and practitioners have offered counter theoretical and practical perspectives and approaches. Radical food geographies praxis is one such example that is rooted in socially relevant theory, practice, and reflection (Hammelmann et al., 2020). Grounded in critical and engaged perspectives, it offers a different trajectory forward and possibilities for greater impact for both research and action.

In this article, we present reflections from our experience with radical food geographies research praxis through a collaborative food sovereignty, action-oriented project co-developed and co-led by two settler academics, a documentary filmmaker, and the Chief of Batchewana First Nation (BFN). From 2018 to 2022, we (the authors) embarked on a project in partnership with BFN community members to share stories surrounding historical and current fishing practices, culture, and governance through the co-creation of a feature length documentary film titled, *Lake Superior Our Helper: Stories from Batchewanaung Anishinabek Fisheries*.<sup>2</sup> Fishing has been an essential element of BFN's sustenance, identity, and livelihood from time immemorial. BFN is located along the eastern shore of Lake Superior (Gichigami in Anishinaabemowin), with territory stretching between Whitefish Island and Pukaskwa (see Figure 1). BFN's land-base was partially recognized through the Robinson Huron Treaty in 1850, but significant tracts of land were subsequently taken as part of the Pennefather Treaty in 1859 (Syrette, Syrette and Corbiere, 1977). Since that time, BFN has reclaimed some of these territories through purchase and court cases.

Today, BFN has a population of about 3,000 people and is officially made up of four reserve communities that include Goulais Bay, Obadjiwan, Rankin, and Whitefish Island and several other communities that were at one time bustling with life but are currently uninhabited. Despite the devastating and ongoing impacts of colonization and the intentional disruption of the BFN's sovereignty and the community's ways of life, they continue to fish and assert their inherent Aboriginal and Treaty rights (Brendan et al., 2012; Coulthard, 2014). Subsistence and commercial fisheries make vital contributions to the community's identity, livelihoods, nutrition, and are an essential part of their food sovereignty - that is, the desire to determine and control their own food systems (Morrison 2011; Levkoe, Lowitt and Nelson 2017). BFN currently operates the largest fishery on the Canadian side of Lake Superior including 27 captains and their crews. While recent court decisions have affirmed BFN's right to fish, the Canadian state (i.e., the Federal Government and the Province of Ontario) continue to assert that the Crown has an underlying title to Indigenous lands.<sup>3</sup> BFN continues to actively exercise their sovereignty by fishing in accordance with their Traditional laws and practices.

This paper presents our collective insights from this participatory documentary film project undertaken with BFN with the aim of improving our individual and collaborative practice and to share our learnings with other scholars, activists, and community practitioners

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<sup>2</sup> More details about the film including the trailer, people involved, and additional resources are available on the website at <https://www.batchewanaungfish.ca>.

<sup>3</sup> Since Canada is a constitutional monarchy, the King serves as head of state as the embodiment of the Crown.

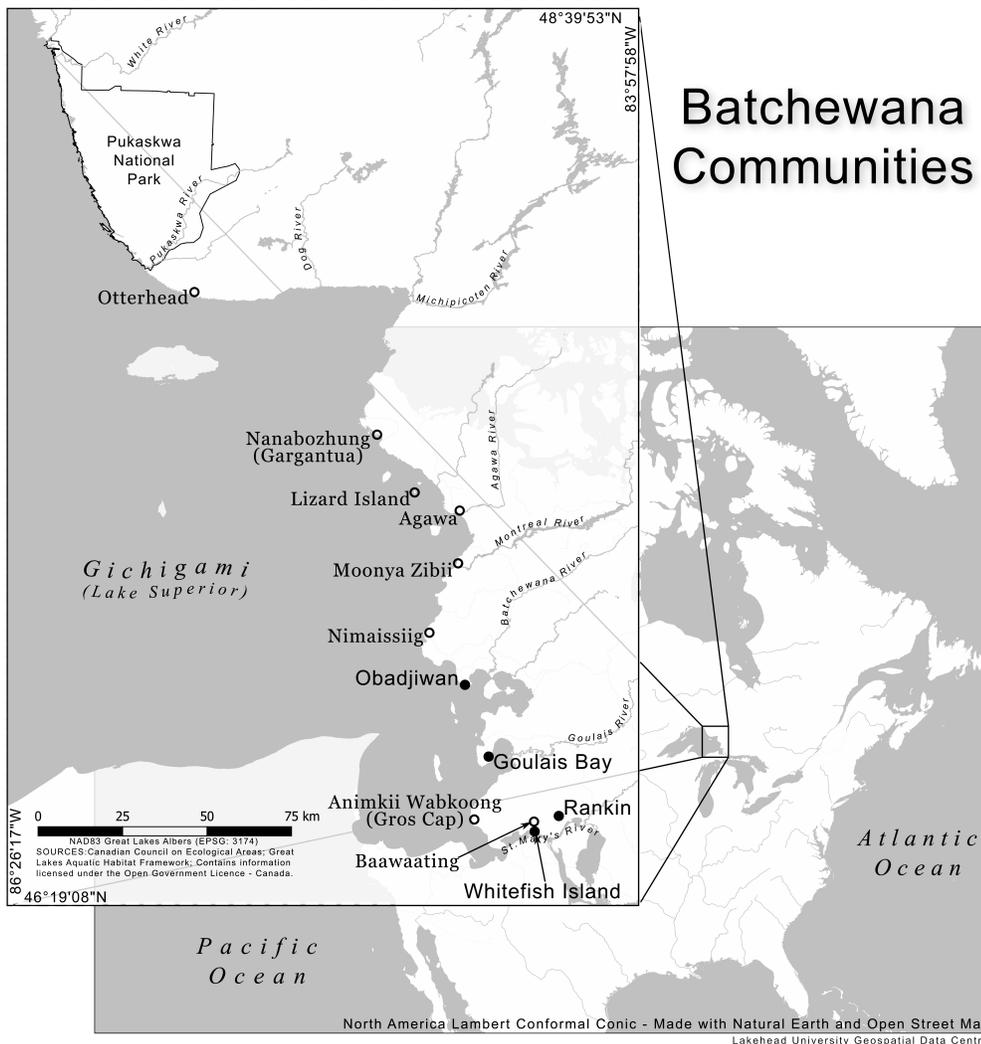
engaged in similar partnership-based and praxis-oriented geographic research.<sup>4</sup> We also reflect on the advancement of radical food geographies praxis as an emerging area of interest for scholar-activists and activist-scholars. Praxis refers to critical and engaged research that integrates theorizing, active resistance to systems of oppressions, ongoing critical inquiry and strategizing for social change. While this paper focuses on reflections from the participatory film project, its context is rooted in an emancipatory politics that centres Indigenous-settler relationships, positionality, power and privilege, land and water, identity and culture, and social justice. To develop this paper, we engaged in a process of collective autoethnography that involved individual reflections and putting our experiences into dialogue (Chang 2013; Lapadat 2017). In what follows, we begin by providing an overview of evolving approaches to praxis in geography. We then discuss our positionalities and provide more background on the project methodology. After a short description of the film, we share the key themes that emerged from our collective autoethnography and discuss the implications for praxis, focusing on our insights for relationships and partnership building, participatory film as a tool for collaborative research, and radical food geographies.

### **Evolving Approaches to Praxis in Geography**

In the broadest sense, the study of geography as a discipline focuses on a range of theories, methods and approaches that study the earth's physical surface and the contextual and interdependent relationships between people and their environments. While geography's histories stretch across time and space, the academic field of study that developed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century has been dominated by European, and more recently, North America perspectives. Reflecting on the history of geography research, Richard Peet (1975, 34) lamented that it was established as a "discipline for scientifically justifying patterns of social and spatial development based on human competition, human selfishness, and human inequality." As a result of its origins and continuing domination by settler researchers and practitioners, geography has been deeply embedded in a history of capitalist logics and ongoing processes of settler colonialism (Coombes et al. 2014; Shaw, Herman and Dobbs 2006). This is evident from early documentation of exploration and mapping that represented North America as uninhabited (*terra nullius*), theories of environmental determinism that promoted Western expansion, along with current research and teaching that (re)write history from a colonial perspective and are complicit in upholding the power relationships that perpetuate misrepresentations, oppressions and ongoing genocide of Indigenous Peoples. This has also been reflected in the constitution of many academic geography departments that remain predominantly male and white (Kobayashi 2006). For many Indigenous communities, geography research is rooted in an ongoing theft and exploitation of land and knowledge and perceived as objectifying and dehumanizing (Shaw, Herman and Dobbs 2006; Smith 1999; Tobias et al. 2013).

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<sup>4</sup> For more on the findings from the study, see Lowitt, Levkoe and Sayers 2023.



**Figure 1.** Map of Batchewana Communities and Territory (Map by Reg Nelson)

Some geographers have responded to these problematic origins by using their scholarship to actively challenge dominant paradigms by pursuing a critical praxis (Blomley 2007; Fuller and Kitchin 2004). As such, there is a growing awareness and attentiveness to diverse ways of knowing, values systems, world views, and epistemologies. In the 1960s, geographers began to engage directly with Marxist theory to establish a more critical approach to the discipline (Fuller and Kitchin 2004; Peet 1977). In the 1980s other social theories were embraced as part of the critical geography approach; these included structuration theory (Dyck and Kearns 2006; Gregory 1994), political economy (Peet and Thrift 1989), and feminism (Moss et al. 2002; Valentine 2008). These approaches have had a profound impact on the field of geography, raising questions about whose knowledge counts and what voices have been ignored and excluded from the discipline. In the 1990s, these approaches were further complemented by critical geographers writing from the perspectives

of postmodernism (Soja 1989), poststructuralism (Doel 1999), and postcolonialism (Blunt and McEwan 2003). Despite these advances, many alternative approaches have been further challenged as continuing to reproduce white, patriarchal ideals while being too far removed from everyday practices and the frontline work of resisting settler colonialism and working for social justice.

Scholars embracing Indigenous perspectives have gone well beyond critiquing dominant approaches to research to establish paradigms rooted in relationality, integration, and praxis while putting control and ownership in the hands of Indigenous people and communities (for example, see McNaughton and Rock 2004; Snarch 2004; Wilson 2008). Core to these approaches is that the researcher is not simply an objective observer of a phenomenon but deeply embedded in all aspects of the research. Here, positionality is essential with a demand for self-reflexivity as a core part of the research process (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, Pessach 2009; Rose 1997). This involves critical self-awareness about how the researcher might play a role in the process of knowledge construction and a recognition of power dynamics within research relationships. Some have proposed that Indigenous and settler alliances within research can be an important tool for reconciliation through building meaningful and decolonizing relationships (Smithers Graeme and Mandaw 2017; Snow 2018). Further, the integration of Indigenous ways of knowing (Chilsa 2011; Wilson 2008) with Western approaches has the potential to contribute to research that has more relevant and impacting results (Martin 2012).

Considering the intersection of geography's counter-narratives and the critical study of food systems (i.e., the elements and processes that bring food from the fields and watersheds to our plates), Hamelman et al. (2020) suggest the embrace of radical food geographies praxis. Radical food geographies praxis focuses on food systems and the dynamics between power and exploitation and reimagining possibilities for more equitable social and ecological futures. They write,

We propose a radical food geography [sic] praxis consisting of three interconnected elements: 1) theoretical engagements with power and structures of oppression both inside and outside the academy; 2) action through academic, social movement, and civil society collaborations; and 3) analysis through a broadly defined geographic lens. Critical to this approach is a praxis that pushes scholars and activists to pursue work that is simultaneously grounded in both theorizing and action related to the intersections of space, place, and spatiality (p. 213).

This approach points to a need for community-engaged, action-oriented research methodologies that put the needs and desires of communities first (Peacock et al. 2020). While there is much diversity in these approaches, at its core, community-based participatory action research is rooted in efforts to build solidarity relationships that challenge power dynamics and involve "praxis, education for liberation for all parties, and the transformation of oppressive conditions" (O'Donnell 2008, 415). This transcends the scholar/activist dichotomy

by recognizing the researcher's positionality and a whole self in relation to their work (Reynolds et al. 2018). Further, it draws on calls to action from critical geographers; for example, in 1974, David Harvey (1974, 24) called for the moral obligation of the geographer that included a social necessity to confront injustice because, "[w]e are human beings struggling, like all other human beings, to control and enhance the social conditions of our own existence."

Radical food geographies also engages directly with civil society organizations and social movements involved with food sovereignty and food justice. For example, Levkoe et al. (2019) proposed the idea of a food sovereignty research praxis that seeks to enhance opportunities for academic scholars to contribute more meaningfully to social movement struggles while centering the interests and abilities of communities to assert control over their food systems. Block and Reynolds (2021) build on work by David Harvey and additional critical geographers to propose a peoples' food justice geography praxis to similarly draw attention to historical and ongoing processes of exclusion in the food system and ways that community-academic collaborations can help address these, often with a focus on dismantling racism and class-based inequalities. Of note, these kinds of community-based, action-oriented research methodologies are necessarily imperfect by design and always in process (Leeuw et al. 2012).

This paper builds on these theoretical, reflective, and action-oriented perspectives through a collaborative project with BFN to share their stories of fishing, self-determination, and food sovereignty using engaged research approaches.

## Methodology

The relationships at the foundation of this project began in 2015. The idea to co-create a documentary film was first suggested by Chief Dean Sayers as a way to capture and share BFN's experiences about the ways that fishing has been a central part of the community's culture, identity, governance, and an ongoing assertion of (food) sovereignty from time immemorial. For each of the authors, this collaboration goes well beyond a stand-alone project but is rooted in a commitment to personal learning, meaningful relationships, truth telling, and social justice. As such, we begin by briefly situating ourselves in this work (see Image 1).

Charles Levkoe is a scholar-activist working in the Department of Health Sciences at Lakehead University on the north shore of Lake Superior, the Traditional Territory of the Fort William First Nation, signatory to the Robinson Superior Treaty of 1850. His engaged research focuses on community-identified needs and uses a food systems lens to better understand the importance of, and connections between social justice, ecological regeneration, regional economies, and active democratic engagement. Charles has been involved in food sovereignty efforts for over 20 years and has worked in the nonprofit sector, co-managed an agroecological farm and directs the Sustainable Food Systems Lab at Lakehead University<sup>5</sup>, a

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<sup>5</sup> More information about the Sustainable Food Systems Lab can be found at <https://foodsystems.lakeheadu.ca/>

hub for academics and community-based practitioners engaged in sustainable food systems research and action.



**Image 1.** The project team. Back (L-R): Charles Levkoe, Chief Dean Sayers, Allan Rahmer. Front (L-R): Kristen Lowitt, Sarah Furlotte.

Kristen Lowitt is a scholar-activist working in the School of Environmental Studies at Queen's University in Kingston. One of her main interests within her broader program of community-engaged food systems research is small-scale fisheries and coastal communities. While she grew up near the Great Lakes she lived away from the region for many years; upon returning to the region more recently, she began learning more about local fisheries and food systems and forming new relationships with Indigenous communities in an aim to contribute to food sovereignty efforts.

Sarah Furlotte is a filmmaker with fifteen years' experience in community-based film and art production. Sarah sees film as the most accessible artistic medium to impart understanding

and compassion, which she hopes will lead to positive social change. She grew up and continues to make her home in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Dean Sayers was first elected as the Chief of BFN in 2003. He grew up in Batchewana village, a small community on the southeast side of Lake Superior, where he worked with his father and brother in the First Nation's commercial fishing community. Chief Sayers' experiences and historical understanding of BFN and its people have been instrumental to the First Nation's success and assertions of sovereignty and jurisdiction over their lands and resources.

### ***Project Background and Methods***

The approaches brought together through this project span radical food geographies, participatory action research, storytelling, and participatory film. Kristen first met Chief Sayers in 2015 while conducting exploratory interviews to learn more about Great Lakes fisheries. Kristen and Charles reconnected with Chief Sayers in 2017 while conducting interviews about small-scale community fisheries across the Lake Superior watershed. Chief Sayers expressed interest in documenting and sharing BFN's story in relation to fisheries in their territory. The relationship was fostered by sharing their collective learnings on the topic of Indigenous fisheries governance through presenting at an international conference and co-writing an article (Lowitt et al. 2020) and book chapter (Lowitt et al. 2019) in collaboration with other academics and practitioners. In 2019, the participatory film project was awarded a Partnership Engage Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council<sup>6</sup>. This particular grant stream is designed for university-community partnerships and focuses on supporting community-driven needs and developing support networks with academics. Furthermore, the funding can be shared directly with community researchers and collaborators to recognize the value of practical experience and knowledge co-creation.

Participatory film is a "collaborative approach to working with a group or community in shaping and creating their own film, in order to open spaces for learning and communication and to enable positive change and transformation" (PV-NET 2008 cited in Roberts and Muñiz 2018). As Roberts and Muñiz (2018) explain, participatory film has a long history in action research as a process for empowerment, often based in Freirean critical pedagogy (e.g., challenging participants to examine structures of power and engage in action for social change as part of a process of self-actualization). Building on this tradition, Indigenous scholars, filmmakers, and scholar-activists are increasingly experimenting with participatory film as a part of decolonizing methodologies aiming to support Indigenous research paradigms, knowledge co-production, and cross-cultural dialogue (Borish et al. 2021; Menzies 2015; Stiegman and Pictou 2010). As Borish et al. (2021) discuss, film has a unique ability to "respect, preserve, and

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<sup>6</sup> More information about the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Engage Grant is available at [https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/partnership\\_engage\\_grants-subventions\\_d\\_engagement\\_partenarial-eng.aspx](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/partnership_engage_grants-subventions_d_engagement_partenarial-eng.aspx)

reinforce” Indigenous identities, lived experiences, and worldviews through storytelling. At the same time, new strategies are emerging for how to effectively integrate film into qualitative research as a way of enriching data collection (Borish et al. 2021; Miller and Allor 2016).

Following significant planning and preparation, several conversations and initial visits to the community, in June 2019, the authors spent a week in BFN conducting filming in the form of qualitative interviews for the project. Charles and Kristen brought their experience with community engagement and participatory action research to developing the interview questions and general narrative of the conversations. Working closely with Chief Sayers and Sarah, they developed a plan that included a thematic overview of the film, who would be interviewed each day, and what sites and activities in the community would be visited. Sarah provided guidance on how film could be used to support storytelling and how a visual approach could enrich qualitative data collection. While a clear plan to follow was developed, during the week of filming the team also remained open to opportunities that might arise - e.g., new places and people to visit.

Overall, there were eleven in-depth interviews held with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, fishers, youth, and community leaders to capture their stories and knowledge about BFN’s fisheries. Narrative interviewing was used as an approach to foreground the storyteller’s perspective rather than imposing a strict agenda or overly structured format (Pink 2004). This approach aligned with Indigenous storytelling traditions and fit well with Sarah’s experience using this type of interviewing as a participatory filmmaker. Sarah and Chief Sayers led the interviews with support from Charles and Kristen. Allan Rahmer, an independent filmmaker also participated in the interviews coordinating the sound. Some community members chose to conduct the interviews in places that were part of their fishing experiences (see Image 2, Image 3, and Image 4). Others told stories and recounted personal experiences using personal photos and artifacts. The team was also invited to participate in and film ceremonies (see Image 5) as well as a weekly fish fry at the Rankin community centre. These activities were expressed as important to the community as a way of embedding this work within ceremony and culture protocols and deepening the relationships among Chief Sayers, Charles, Kristen, Sarah, and the wider community.

The narrative arc of the film follows Chief Sayers throughout BFN’s Traditional territory and in a series of discussions with community members that explore the underlying social and ecological approaches of BFN’s fisheries as well as perspectives about its history, current practice, and future directions (see Image 6). This includes ways that fishing had changed over time, stories that shaped the community, the land and the watershed, conflicts with the state around management and regulation, principles of Indigenous law and governance, as well as the culture and ceremony that are deeply embedded within fishing practices and protocols.

The film took over two years to complete. Sarah did the initial editing by developing a storyboard that was shared with the rest of the team for discussion. As the development progressed, the film’s editing was guided by Sarah’s artistic direction and Chief Sayers’ input on the narrative including how to represent the community’s knowledge in culturally and

historically appropriate and respectful ways. Charles and Kristen reviewed the film at each stage of editing to provide input. The BFN Communications Coordinator, Alex Syrette, who was also a filmmaker, joined some of the editing sessions. The original plan was to share a rough cut of the film with the BFN community in Spring 2020, but this was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic that closed the community to visitors and public events. Instead, the first cut of the film was shared virtually with Chief Sayers for feedback and suggestions. In August 2021, a small in-person screening was held in the community involving the project team and several of the community members featured in the film; overall, these individuals responded extremely positively to the narrative and general feeling of the film and provided some helpful suggestions for the final version. Ultimately the film is owned and controlled by BFN and they will decide how it is shared and distributed. The description of the film is as follows:

Fishing has been an essential element of Batchewana First Nation's sustenance, identity, and livelihood from time immemorial. Lake Superior Our Helper follows Chief Dean Sayers through a series of conversations with community members to reveal the cultural, political, and ecological relationships surrounding their



**Image 2.** Interviewing Vernon Syrette in his home

fisheries. Inviting us on a journey of Lake Superior, the film shares the messages of Elders, youth, fishers, community leaders, and their visions for the future of Batchewana's fisheries. It also documents how fishing has changed over time, conflicts with the state around management and regulation, principles of Indigenous law, and the culture and ceremony that are deeply embedded within fishing practices.<sup>7</sup>

The film is intended to preserve and share BFN's stories, knowledge, and history pertaining to fishing, particularly for younger generations; and, for the public, settler governments, and academics who wish to learn about BFN's perspective about fishing in their territory.

### *Collective Autoethnography*

To write this paper, we used a collective autoethnography that builds on a history of working and learning collaboratively over the course of the project. To document, analyze and share our experiences in this paper, each team member was interviewed by another member of the research team.



**Image 3.** Interviewing Greg Agawa in his garage surrounded by fishing supplies

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<sup>7</sup> This description of the film is available on the website: <https://www.batchewanaungfish.ca>.

The interview involved narrating each individual's personal experience over the course of the research project (Lapadat, 2017). The interviews were guided by five open-ended questions:

1. What has been the most rewarding aspect of the project?
2. What have you found the most challenging?
3. What have you found the most surprising?
4. What characteristics do you think are important to building collaborative relationships?
5. Do you think there are ways we could better learn from and support each other through this work?

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and thematically analyzed to draw out key themes while paying attention to differences across the different accounts. Charles and Kristen led the analysis and writing of the paper, meeting with Sarah and Chief Sayers multiple times to discuss the interpretations presented. All authors edited drafts of the paper and contributed to the final version.



**Image 4.** Interviewing James Agawa in his fish processing facility

## Insights from the Collective Autoethnography

In this section, we share insights from our collective autoethnography focusing on three emergent themes: 1) Accountability to relationships including people, land, and spirit; 2) Navigating our individual and interconnected identities and positionalities; and 3) Listening and being heard, including paying particular attention to different ways of knowing.

### *Accountability to Relationships*

In our collective autoethnography, building and maintaining relationships was consistently expressed as among the most valuable and rewarding aspects of working together as a team. Key themes that emerged from the narratives included building relationships with people, land, and spirit; attending to relationships across generations; and ensuring sufficient support for relationships that can be complicated and messy.

For Chief Sayers, relationships are multigenerational and embedded in connections that reach beyond the present to include all the ancestors that contributed to who we are in this moment. He described this as inherited obligations and responsibilities:

Like many Indigenous nations, we have a tremendous inherited responsibility to look after many jurisdictions. Beyond just fisheries, we also have forestry obligations, land obligations, minerals and resource obligations, water obligations and much more. We have so many things that have to be preserved.



Image 5. Filming ceremonies

For Chief Sayers, these relationships were fostered in the film project through including ceremony that provided a deeper sense of what the BFN fisheries represent. Furthermore, ceremony contributes to the overall impact and value of the project by ensuring that culture and identity were embedded throughout. Chief Sayers explained:

What really makes this work that we are doing special is that we incorporated spirit and ceremony. And that has tremendous value. I think that's going to provide the longevity of the applicability of what we learned and discussed over the course of the entire project and beyond.

Likewise, Sarah described relationships in terms of connecting with land and people, and wanting to do her best to be an authentic person and develop a sense of mutual trust and respect:

I've driven past BFN countless times but being on that land in the context of this project and receiving those stories was really rewarding. I swam in the Lake and felt the water. That water becomes a part of you, it gets inside you. So, to be invited in and spend time in BFN's Traditional territory, some of the most beautiful spots in Ontario, was incredibly rewarding. I feel like I have made some new friends. I really tried to go in with my best foot forward. I do hope I get to breathe in that air again and just be in their presence.



**Image 6.** Interviewing Chief Sayers in the BFN Band Office

Charles echoed the development of relationships to land as a key change he experienced as a result of participating in this project:

I have driven back and forth through BFN territory on my way from Thunder Bay to Toronto when visiting friends and family and had not given it a lot of thought. After spending time in BFN, being so warmly welcomed by the community and learning about their history, culture and current struggles, I now have a much deeper and different connection to that land and the people. This has had a huge impact on me in a very personal way, but also shifts how I understand my relationship to my work as a scholar-activist, as a settler ally and working closely with communities.

Our collective narratives also identified the importance of being attentive to when relationships can be strained and may need more support. Chief Sayers expressed a need for more community capacity to meet the goals of the participatory film project but also the community's research needs more broadly, while at the same time not over-burdening people by asking too much:

We have so many things that we need to capture, restore and preserve for our people and there aren't very many that have had the opportunity of hearing from our Elders, to the extent that I have. I try to spend as much time as I can with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, listening to their stories, but it's really difficult with so many competing demands. There is a balancing act with that too because we don't want to overwhelm people. If there was an ability to have more capacity for us to be better engaged, I think it would be much better. I really hope this project will help do that.

Kristen discussed how relationships can be challenged by institutional norms in academia that do not fully acknowledge the investment of time and energy and of their value and a need to push back against these norms:

As academics we are consistently pressured to produce and publish, which means that relationship-building is often undervalued. I've felt that tension as an emerging scholar who needs to build my resume to keep my job. As academics, we need to do what is right, push back and change these norms within our own institutions. To me, authentic relationships are the most important thing. Everything builds from that. You have to trust yourself and the people you are working with.

Recognizing the different expectations and responsibilities that we each have, Chief Sayers emphasized the importance of cultivating patience:

Being patient with each other is important. Knowing that we're in different places and working within different types of institutions, there are so many things

pulling at us that we need to understand that it's going to take time to get to where we need to be with the project and with each other.

Relationships were at the heart of the participatory film project, with commitments to learning together and ongoing reflexivity as essential for fostering their development. As our narratives also demonstrate, these relationships can extend beyond only people to include land, water, and spirit.

### ***Identities and Positionalities***

Better understanding and navigating our different identities and positionalities emerged as another important theme in our collective narratives. For Kristen and Charles, this was primarily about finding a place as settler Canadians doing research with Indigenous communities. Kristen explained:

I've learned so much through this partnership about myself and doing this work more broadly. Learning about the people in this place and their perspectives and worldview; it's impossible for me to see Lake Superior or the region in the same way ever again. It has further exposed some of the limitations of my upbringing and education as a settler Canadian and as an academic. It has become a process of unlearning my settler colonial education that has made so many of the stories, places, and people I have learned about over the course of this project invisible.

The project prompted Sarah to reflect on how she is navigating her identity, as someone who mainly identifies as a settler but also has Indigenous heritage in her background:

I have known since I was young that I have Indigenous heritage and that has drawn me to this work. I identify as a settler because I grew up in the settler world with the settler worldview. That raises so many questions for me that I will continue to struggle with. Is it okay for me as primarily a settler to be leading this project? I've been working with First Nations communities around Thunder Bay for a long time and I recently asked an Elder: How can I legitimately do this work? They told me it comes down to support and that I should never try to tell people how First Nations think, but that I can work to amplify their voices. That's how I approach my projects - with the attitude, let me give you my hand while you lead the way. I'll hold your hand as you fight this fight.

For Chief Sayers, it was important to enter the project without any static notions about what constitutes "Indigenous" identity. This was a way to begin building trust among the group and for achieving the project's outcomes: "It is essential that people don't come here with a preconceived notion of who we are and try to make us out like some idealized stereotypical Hollywoodized image of an Indigenous group of people." Chief Sayers also clearly expressed a sense of identity that was about more than him as an individual but about the fostering and maintaining a broader identity as part of the BFN community:

We as a people in the eastern Lake Superior area are prepared to take the time and make the investments to ensure that we are able to fulfill our obligations to Creation and the Creator, as far as our inheritance is concerned with regards to the Indigenous fishery. And through the film project, we have had the opportunity to record what this looks like, including our oral history, as it pertains to the exercising of our sovereignty and jurisdiction.

Our collective narratives highlight that we must also understand our individual identities and positionalities in the context of social structures that create power and privilege. For example, Chief Sayer's statement about the importance of BFN articulating their own complex identity as part of the film speaks to the ways that Indigenous identities have been violently suppressed and narrowly defined as part of the settler colonial project. From another perspective, Charles reflected on his own complex entanglement in the settler colonial project alongside his Jewish ancestry and ancestral history of displacement:

Being involved with BFN, getting to know Chief Sayers and being invited into the community and into people's homes and their lives has been an incredible honour. It has also encouraged me to reflect on my own role in this work - in solidarity with the people of BFN but also as complicit in the ongoing project of settler-colonialism. I have been thinking a lot about my Jewish ancestors that faced genocide and were displaced from their land; how they traveled to someone else's land to find safety and security, and what it means to be here, now, in this place. For me, this has been part of a process of reflecting on why I am doing this work and my stake in the outcomes.

As illustrated in this subsection, navigating different identities and positionalities is central to relationship building. This is especially important in the context of Indigenous-settler partnerships which involve bringing together different worldviews, social locations, and degrees of power and privilege.

### ***Listening and Being Heard***

Across our collective narratives, listening and being heard emerged as another important theme operating at multiple levels; this included among the four of us that were part of the research team, with the BFN community, and with the prospective audiences that will eventually view the film. Within our research team, this was partly about finding commonalities across different perspectives. Sarah explained, "You have to actually listen and you have to hear. You can look like you're listening, but have you really understood it? I think that's really important when you're creating a collaborative relationship. And this is especially true in film making."

In the context of building relationships with the broader BFN community, Charles commented,

Too often, academic researchers enter a community with the intention of listening. While they may ask the right questions, record what people say and process it through an analytical framework, the concerns expressed or desires for change rarely come back to benefit the community. To establish authentic and meaningful relationships and to do this work in a good way, we have a responsibility to not just listen to people but to really hear them and work together to understand collective needs and desires and to support communities to make those changes.

The ideas of listening and being heard was also expressed by Chief Sayers in respect to sharing BFN's stories with a wider audience. He noted, "the more opportunities we have to share an Indigenous worldview and Batchewana's unique story, the better." Here, the use of participatory film was especially important; Chief Sayers explained how he saw film as having the potential to go beyond written text in communicating and documenting stories:

I think the more methodologies that we include in our work as far as being able to capture, retain and preserve the Indigenous worldview, the better. And the film that we have been able to make allows us to have our Elders and Knowledge Keeper provide a narrative without interruption. It provides a better illustration of where we are today. And so the video is another way of being able to make sure that our voices, our Elders, and our understandings are preserved and are a part of our future generations' references about what it was, is and will be like for our people.

Similarly, Sarah spoke to the power of film for making voices heard, explaining, "I can't fight their fight because it's not my fight. I am essentially a colonist. But I can definitely lend my equipment and support to that fight by helping to make their voices heard loud and clear." She discussed the potential of film to capture not just words, but much more: "I feel like if you can get the right emotion behind the words that people are using, you can tell stories in such a meaningful way. This can have a major impact on the viewer but also on the people that are sharing their stories."

Kristen reflected a similar sentiment in terms of elevating and making space for other voices in academic research and writing:

As academics, we come to our research with a lot of power. That power is partly in the form of the resources we bring, the training we have acquired and the privilege to be able to spend prolonged periods of time studying particular issues. As community-based researchers, we have an obligation to take direction from the communities we work with and support them to achieve the changes that they identify as important. While we can add a critical perspective and make connections beyond the local context, first and foremost we must listen and hear each other. This is not only about benefiting communities but also about bringing new knowledge and perspectives to our own work.

As expressed in our collective narratives, beyond creating a film, this project has been about understanding ourselves, one another, and bringing together different ways of knowing. Listening was an important part of Kristen, Charles, and Sarah being allies in this work; using film to ensure the community's stories and knowledge can continue to be heard by future generations is also an important goal of our shared praxis.

### **Reflections on our Praxis**

Through the collective autoethnography we explored our experiences working together on a participatory film project that we hope will be of value to other scholars, activists, and community practitioners. Our focus has been on the methodological processes underlying the project through an Indigenous-settler food sovereignty research collaboration. In this section, we further discuss key insights from our collective autoethnography focusing on relationships and partnership building, participatory film as a tool for collaborative research, and radical food geographies.

We acknowledge that praxis in respect to scholarship is a Western concept that emerged in response to shortcomings within research traditions along with a desire to ensure that research is more meaningful and impactful to all those involved. Notwithstanding its shortcomings, and especially in the context of Indigenous-settler collaborations such as ours, we believe praxis is a useful lens for considering how to blend theory, action, and reflection and provide space for engaging different perspectives and putting them into conversation in a productive way. Radical food geographies praxis builds on this long history of critical theory, action and reflection along with the traditions of radical geography and critical food studies. Our experiences in this project support an emerging understanding of radical food geographies praxis as more than a particular technique, tool, or outcome (in our case, a participatory documentary film), but as a process of co-learning and relationship building that can contribute to transformation at the individual, community, and structural levels (Hammelman et al. 2020; Reynolds et al. 2020). In our project, while we have been impacted on an individual level through this work, as expressed in our narratives, we hope that broader change will eventually be spurred by sharing the film, and in particular that the film may help to reinforce BFN's cultural practices, food sovereignty, and governance related to their fisheries.

From our collective experiences, relationships are at the centre of radical food geographies praxis. In Levkoe et al.'s (2019) discussion of a food sovereignty research praxis, humanizing relationships is identified as a core tenet of this work. This involves a process of co-dependence and solidarity among researchers and community members while rejecting instrumentalization. Our collective autoethnography working with BFN suggests that relationships are indeed essential but go beyond only the people involved to include relationships with land, water, and spirit. This emerged clearly across our separate narratives, with Chief Sayers describing responsibilities tied to the land and water and maintained through ceremony. He suggested that relationships are not just about the present but are intricately tied to past generations and carrying forward inherited responsibilities into the future. Sarah

and Charles also expressed how their personal relationships to land and their own histories changed as the project evolved. A more expansive view of relationships that include the land, spirit, as well as past and future generations could enrich radical food geographies praxis by contributing to more complex theories and activities about the spaces and places we inhabit and which comprise food systems. Here, both Western and Indigenous intellectual traditions may serve as sources of inspiration for expanding praxis in this way. For example, we might look to cultural geography scholarship on the “earthlife” nexus exploring the more-than-human geographies that make up our everyday practices and lives (Whatmore 2006). In addition, there is a rich body of work from Indigenous scholars on theories of relationality, emphasizing the interdependencies among people, the land, and spirituality and an ethical engagement in the world based on reciprocity (Asch, Borrows, and Tully 2018; Wilson 2008).

Tied to the development of relationships and partnerships, navigating identities and positionalities through a process of co-learning is another major theme that emerged from our narratives. In the context of Indigenous-settler engagements, one approach to co-learning and knowledge co-production is two-eyed seeing (Etuaptmumk in Mi'kmaw). Developed by Mi'kmaw elder Albert Marshall, two-eyed seeing refers to the spaces of engagement that exist among peoples with different worldviews to bring their perspectives together in search of mutual benefit (Durie 2004; Iwama et al. 2009; Martin 2012; Reid et al. 2020). The pairing of participatory action research and participatory film making alongside an Indigenous worldview in this project is an example of this. Furthermore, combining our reflections about engaging in the participatory documentary film project through the development of this paper was central to this process. Considering our own individual physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual experiences in relationship to one another was a major element of our co-learning. From our collective autoethnography, we found that achieving such integration requires patience, listening, and getting to know each other within and beyond the project's relationships. A shared commitment and responsibility to the research partnership was developed over the course of several years, preceding an application for funding to support this work and extending beyond the immediate objective of creating a feature length film. This resonates with de Leeuw et al.'s (2012, 190) discussion about the potential of “friendship” among Indigenous and settler collaborators as an additional “space wherein critical analysis and reflection about research relationships can more fully occur.”

While we all felt that the project was a success, it was not without its complications. The tensions that surfaced from the COVID-19 pandemic are an example of the challenges we worked through. Most of the filming was completed by 2019 and the original intention was to share a full version of the film with the community shortly afterwards. When infections began to spread rapidly across Ontario in 2020, BFN took precautions by limiting gatherings along with instituting temporary community lockdowns to protect its members. Further, while the film was extremely important to everyone involved, the urgency of the pandemic forced us to focus on different priorities to ensure the health and safety of our communities. This put a strain on our budget for the project, our capacity to continue the work, and our ability to

engage participants and the broader BFN community. While there was a temptation to proceed quickly to keep to our original schedule (e.g., sharing the film virtually or moving ahead without a community screening), we collectively decided to put the project on hold until we could return to the community and share the rough cut of the film with participants in person. While this caused some strain and delays in finalizing the film, it became clear to all of us that we needed to slow down and proceed with due process. By naming these tensions through open conversation and putting our trust in each other and the process, we came to a mutual agreement on how best to move forward.

Relationship-building cannot be extracted from power and politics. We all went into the participatory documentary film project clearly stating our biases and intentions. From the outset, the project was oriented around the intention to support BFN's goals of food sovereignty, expressions of self-governance, assertions of jurisdiction, and resistance to settler colonialism. This explicit intention was important to building trust and for Charles, Kristen, and Sarah to act as allies alongside the community's struggles. Brem-Wilson (2014, 111) has described this approach as "solidarity research" in terms of the "assertion of a convergence between movement and researcher that implicates the latter in the struggles of the former." In this way, there was no pretense that we were acting as objective researchers, but instead we explicitly committed to working in solidarity with BFN and addressing issues they deemed as important. These decisions were based on our own learnings and experiences and what we saw as our responsibility as settlers (and scholar-activists/activist-scholars) in working towards justice and decolonizing the research process.

There were also tensions involved in bringing together team members with different social locations and degrees of power. It has been well documented that university structures can pose a barrier to the formation of relationships with Indigenous communities (de Leeuw, 2012). This was evident in funding limitations, conflicting timelines, and a range of other pressures that each individual had to deal with and directly and indirectly brought with them into the project. Acknowledging and working through these tensions was an essential element of the project's success.

Lastly, central to our research praxis was the use of participatory film as a tool for collaborative research. Film has been described as a medium for expressing stories and voices in a more "authentic" (Walsh 2014) and "embodied" way (Ernwein 2020). In our collective narratives, Sarah expressed a desire to amplify and share the voices of BFN members through filmmaking. Chief Sayers referred to film as providing a "narrative without interruption," especially important for preserving the perspectives of Elders and Knowledge Keepers. However, Walsh (2014) cautions that the power relationships that continue to figure in participatory film cannot be ignored. Specifically, Walsh (2014, 407) critiques what they refer to as the "empowered voice" approach for centering individual emancipation through film and potentially sidelining "other strategies of resistance and survival." In our case, the film was a specific opportunity presented to us by Chief Sayers in which we could contribute as allies. The film is intended as a resource for BFN among a broader set of ongoing strategies they are

employing to assert sovereignty and self-determination in their territory. Further, an attentiveness to power, as embedded in our theoretical framework of food sovereignty, helped us to balance the representation of individual stories and voices in the film with BFN's collective agency as it pertains to fishing.

Overall, film was key to the participatory approach that shaped our project on multiple levels. This included fostering relationships within our project team from project conception through to sharing the final version of the film; among our team and the BFN community through mobilizing stories and participating in ceremony and cultural protocols; and ultimately in co-constructing a film guided by the stories and knowledge of community members and Chief Sayers in tandem with the skills and experiences of Sarah, Charles, and Kristen. Finally, as other qualitative research studies have discussed (see Borish et al., 2021), the use of film also strengthened an engagement with place as a part of our praxis. As a documentary filmmaker, Sarah offered guidance to our team on how the unique attributes of a place - e.g., the sounds, sights, smells of a fishing boat - could spur deeper reflection among participants about fishing and its meanings, thereby also enriching our qualitative data collection (Borish et al., 2021; Pink, 2004).

## Conclusion

For BFN, the fisheries are at once tradition, sustenance, culture, identity, and governance. The fisheries are inseparable from the self-determination of the people and the daily activities, practices, and protocols that keep them deeply engaged with the land, water, and spirit of Lake Superior (gichigami). We share our collective insights from this project with the hope that they will be helpful to other scholars, activists, and community practitioners. Beyond our specific experiences, these contributions to the advancement of radical food geographies aims to challenge the ongoing legacies of colonialism in geographic research and to develop engaged approaches that foreground the experiences and perspectives of communities and unsettle the power dynamics among settler researchers, universities, Indigenous communities, as well as within food systems.

Through a collective autoethnography we have been able to bring our different perspectives through this project into dialogue to share key lessons related to relationships and partnership building, participatory film, and radical food geographies. Specifically, we have drawn attention to the significance of relationships that involve not only people but also land, water, and spirit; navigating identities, positionalities, and power as a part of Indigenous-settler partnerships; and the capacity of participatory film to mobilize storytelling and engage with place as a part of participatory research. While we hope these insights may be helpful to others, this collective auto-ethnography has also enabled us to strengthen our own praxis in support of radical food geographies that rejects instrumentalization of research relationships in favour of solidarity and the pursuit of more ecologically and socially just futures.

Ultimately, it is our hope that the participatory documentary film created through this collaborative project will contribute to reinforce BFN's self-determination and governance of

fisheries in their territory by capturing and communicating for the community and its younger generations the cultural practices, protocols, histories, and knowledge on which BFN's fisheries are based and their food sovereignty is maintained.

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