

*“What About the Salmon?”
A Critical Analysis of the Pacific Northwest
LNG Project in British Columbia*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the ecological, social, and political implications of the Pacific Northwest liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, which was approved in September 2016 to be built on Lelu Island, British Columbia. The paper situates this LNG project in Canada’s settler colonial history and in recent debates over pipelines in British Columbia. Following a description of the approved project, the paper explores the perspectives of industry leaders, government officials, environmental experts, and First Nation communities. Industry leaders support the development, citing economic growth and a reduction in global carbon emissions as benefits. Government officials largely agree with industry leaders, stating the project would create jobs. They also argue that the project would have limited environmental impacts. However, environmental experts disagree, stating that the project would increase global carbon emissions and have irreversible damages on the local environment. Finally, First Nation communities are divided: some see the project as an economic opportunity while others believe it will result in environmental degradation. However, despite the range of concerns raised by these actors, significant issues have been overlooked. The paper explores these oversights, which include the fact that ‘buried’ colonial epistemologies underlie the debate and that Lelu Island is unceded Indigenous territory. Overall, the research presented in this paper suggests that the project should not precede until (all) members of the affected First Nation communities have been properly consulted.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 27, 2016, the federal government of Canada approved a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project known as the 'Pacific NorthWest LNG' facility. If constructed, the project would include a natural gas liquefaction and export facility on Lelu Island, which is on the central coast of British Columbia near Prince Rupert. It would also involve the construction of a pipeline to move LNG from northeast British Columbia across the province to the facility. The project approval included 190 conditions, which were designed to protect the natural environment as well as the communities located near the project. Despite these legally binding conditions, the government's decision to approve the project was met with mixed reactions: while some industry leaders, government officials, and First Nation communities celebrated the news, many environmentalists and other First Nation communities vocally decried the project and the pipeline. The arguments put forth by both proponents and opponents of the project raise important ecological, social and political questions. In this way, the Pacific NorthWest LNG project could be considered a microcosm of the broader debates that Canadians are having about economic development, environmental degradation, and sovereignty.

Given its relevance, this paper will explore the arguments for and against the Pacific NorthWest LNG project. In order to properly contextualize these arguments, the author will precede these arguments with a discussion of settler colonialism and pipelines in British Columbia. Following this, the author will describe both the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility and the associated Prince Rupert Gas Transmission pipeline. After this, the author will explore the perspectives of industry leaders, government officials, environmentalists, and First Nation communities. Finally, the paper will conclude with a critical analysis of the arguments. In doing this, the author hopes to present a balanced discussion and analysis of the Pacific NorthWest LNG project and its ecological, social, and political implications for Canadians.

BACKGROUND

Settler Colonialism in British Columbia

Prior to the colonization of the territory now known as British Columbia, many Indigenous Nations thrived on the lands and waters for thousands of years. This has been affirmed both by oral histories, which describe how First Nation communities have inhabited the land since time immemorial (White, 2006), as well as by recent archeological findings, which demonstrate that the coast has been inhabited for over twelve thousand years (Pringle, 2015). Over this period of time, the Nations developed rich bodies of traditional ecological knowledge. These bodies of knowledge included not only specific observations and 'facts' about the natural world but also a holistic worldview that emphasized interconnections between human beings and the natural world (Turner, 2005; Berkes, 2008). Significantly, it was this traditional ecological knowledge that allowed the Nations to sustain themselves over millennia.

Beginning the late eighteenth century, European settlers explored and colonized the coast of present-day British Columbia. Along with deadly diseases such as smallpox, which killed thousands of Indigenous people, these settlers introduced worldviews and theories that were unfamiliar to the Indigenous inhabitants they encountered. These included different

epistemological understandings of what nature was and how humans should relate to it (Braun, 1997). It also involved now-defunct theories like Social Darwinism, which was the belief that certain 'races' were evolutionarily superior to others (Hawkins, 1997). This theory was used to justify an assortment of assimilation policies and practices that were introduced in the nineteenth century. One example of these was the Potlatch Ban, which was implemented in 1885 in order to prevent communities from practising their traditional culture (Cole & Chaikin, 1990). Residential schools, which began opening in the late nineteenth century, were another example of the government's attempt to "kill the Indian [...] and save the man" (T.R.C., 2015, p. 137). When combined with the introduction of European diseases and the work of Christian missionaries, who came to save the 'heathens' from 'savagery' (Hare & Barman, 2006), these assimilation policies and practices had devastating cultural, social, and political impacts on all Indigenous communities in present-day British Columbia.

The ultimate goal of this forced assimilation was to remove Indigenous people from their land so that Europeans could settle, develop and profit from it. However, according to the Royal Proclamation of 1763, colonial governments had to extinguish Native rights to the land through treaties prior to settling it (Harris, 2002). For this reason, the Dominion government negotiated the Numbered Treaties, which covered much of the prairie provinces, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the same process did not occur in British Columbia, with the one exception of the Douglas Treaties, which were signed in the 1850s and covered the southern tip of Vancouver Island. Additional treaties were not negotiated due to the geographical distance and chief commissioner of land and works Joseph Trutch's belief that it was unnecessary (Tennant, 1990). This meant that most of the land in British Columbia was unceded territory, an issue that increasingly garnered the attention of Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens through out the twentieth century. In order to resolve this issue, the Government of British Columbia began negotiating modern treaties, also known as comprehensive land agreements, with Indigenous Nations in the 1990s. However, to this day, only eight First Nation communities have signed modern treaties with the Government of British Columbia (BC Treaty Commission, 2015). This effectively means that much of the province, including the land under the approved LNG facility and proposed pipeline, remains unceded.

Pipelines in British Columbia

Over the past decade, industry leaders, government officials, environmentalists and First Nation communities have disagreed about pipeline proposals in British Columbia. One example of this was the proposed Enbridge Northern Gateway pipeline, which would have transported up to 525,000 barrels a day of bitumen from Bruderheim, Alberta to Kitimat, B.C. Enbridge stated that the pipeline would have created up to 3,000 jobs during construction as well as 1,200 long-term positions (Northern Gateway, n.d.; Council of Canadians, 2016a). Despite these economic benefits, many environmentalists and First Nation communities were concerned about the possibility of an oil tanker spill on the coast and protested the pipeline's construction. Though the pipeline was approved by the National Energy Board in December 2013, the Supreme Court of British Columbia overturned the ruling in June 2016, citing a lack of proper consultation with impacted Indigenous communities (Proctor, 2016). This decision serves as a reminder of the importance of meaningful consultation when proposing major projects on Indigenous lands.

The proposed Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline expansion has also been met with mixed reactions. The pipeline, which runs from Edmonton, Alberta to Burnaby, B.C., currently carries 300,000 barrels of oil a day. Kinder Morgan has proposed to expand its capacity to 890,000 barrels a day. This would almost triple the amount of oil passing through the pipeline (Council of Canadians, 2016b). While industry and government proponents argue that the expansion would support economic growth in the country, many environmentalists and First Nation communities are concerned that it would increase the potential for an oil tanker spill. Currently, the proposal is expected to be approved. However, the dispute is ongoing: in October 2016, thirty environmental groups wrote a letter to B.C. premier Christy Clarke, urging the government to reject the proposal (The Globe and Mail, 2016). Like the Northern Gateway proposal, this project highlights the conflicting perspectives on economic development and environmental conservation in British Columbia.

A third example of a disputed pipeline is the Pacific Trails Pipeline. This pipeline, which is currently being reviewed, would carry a billion cubic feet of natural gas per day from Summit Lake to Kitimat, B.C. (Council of Canadians, 2016c). Pipeline proponents argue it would create up to 1,500 jobs during construction and would help transport natural gas, which is a cleaner-burning fuel, to markets in Asia, thereby reducing global carbon emissions. However, opponents argue that the potential for a leak in the pipeline is too great to risk. The most visible opposition to the project is the Unist'ot'en clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, who have camped along the proposed pipeline route in protest since 2009 (McSheffrey, 2015). Considered alongside the Northern Gateway and Trans Mountain proposals, the Pacific Trails Pipeline demonstrates how highly contested the land near the recently approved Pacific NorthWest LNG facility is.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Pacific NorthWest LNG Project

If constructed, the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility would convert natural gas into LNG for export to Asia. The facility would be operated by Petronas and located on Lelu Island, which is on the central coast of British Columbia near Prince Rupert. It would receive roughly 3 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day from northeast British Columbia, and would produce up to 18 million tonnes of LNG per year. According to Petronas, the facility would include a natural gas reception system, three natural gas liquefaction trains, three LNG storage tanks, a marine terminal, two LNG carrier berths, a bridge and access road, and pipeline connections (see Figure 1). The first phase of the facility would be operational by the end of 2018. Natural gas from northeast British Columbia would be transported to the facility via a new pipeline, which would be a separate project known as the Prince Rupert Gas Transmission Project.

Prince Rupert Gas Transmission Project

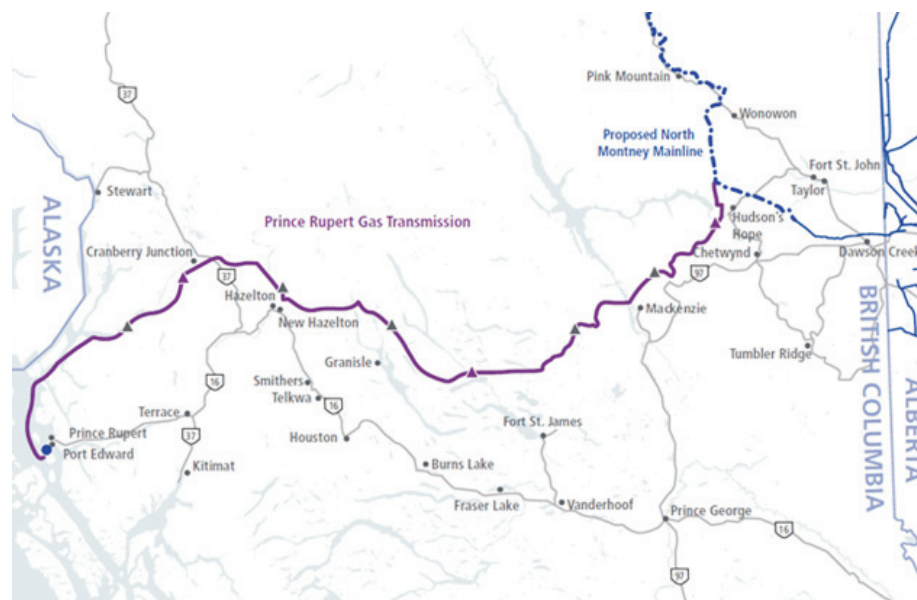
Though this paper is not specifically focusing on the Prince Rupert Gas Transmission Project, it is worth briefly describing for context. The project would involve the construction and operation of a 900 kilometre pipeline from Hudson's Hope, British Columbia to the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility. This pipeline would be both land- and marine-based, with 780 kilometres on land and the remaining 120 kilometres on water (see Figure 2). In addi-

FIGURE 1
Renderings of Pacific NorthWest LNG Facility



Source: Pacific NorthWest LNG, 2016e

FIGURE 2
Proposed Prince Rupert Gas Transmission Route



Source: TransCanada Corporation, 2016c, 2016a

tion to the pipeline, the project would involve the construction and operation of a metering station and three compressor stations. The project received approval from the BC Environmental Assessment Office and the BC Oil and Gas Commission in 2015. It will be constructed if the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility is built (TransCanada Corporation, 2016a).

PROJECT PERSPECTIVES

Industry Leaders

Industry leaders at Petronas fully supported the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility, citing national economic growth and global environmental improvements as positive outcomes of the project. For example, the company stated that the Pacific NorthWest LNG project would create up to 4,500 jobs at its peak including positions for carpenters, electricians, labourers, land surveyors, and engineers. In addition, Petronas reported that the project would create up to 350 long-term jobs for technicians, engineers, administrators, and others (Pacific NorthWest LNG, 2016d). The company also promised to sponsor First Nation and local community members to pursue education and training to work in the facility (Pacific NorthWest LNG, 2016c). Given the historically high rates of unemployment in rural Indigenous communities and the current economic recession that parts of the country are facing, these training and employment opportunities should not be understated (Stuckler, Basu, Suhrcke, Coutts, & McKee, 2009; Wilson & Macdonald, 2010). Indeed, the companies could contribute to economic growth and community development in rural British Columbia.

From an ecological perspective, Petronas argued that the LNG project could be positive as it will help reduce global air pollution and climate change. This argument is based on the fact that the LNG will be exported to Asian countries, where coal is still used to meet much of the growing energy requirements. As a result of coal usage, Petronas reported there are “4,000 deaths per day in China due to air pollution” (Pacific NorthWest LNG, 2016b). In this way, the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility would help Asian countries transition away from coal to a cleaner source of energy. The company also emphasized that LNG produces fewer greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions per unit than other carbon-based energy sources. As GHG emissions contribute to climate change, this means that switching from other carbon energy sources to LNG could reduce global climate change (Pacific NorthWest LNG, 2016a). Finally, industry leaders argued that using LNG could help countries transition to renewable energy sources. Indeed, in a CBC article on the Pacific NorthWest LNG project, the CEO and president of the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, Tim McMillan, stated: “LNG could support the expansion of renewable energy such as solar and wind by complementing their intermittent output” (CBC News, 2016d). For these reasons, Petronas argued that the LNG project would benefit not only the economy but also the environment.

Government Officials

Similar to industry leaders at Petronas, federal and provincial government officials also emphasized the economic and environmental benefits of the Pacific NorthWest LNG facility. When the Environment Minister, Catherine McKenna, announced the federal government’s decision to approve the facility in 2016, several other government officials spoke up and emphasized economic benefits of the project. For example, Natural Resources Minister Jim

Carr announced that the project “represents one of Canada’s largest resource developments” (CBC News, 2016c). He said that when all related developments are considered, the project could involve a total capital investment of \$36 billion (CBC News, 2016c). Alberta Premier Rachel Notley also publicly applauded the decision, stating that the project will help energy producers and contractors in Alberta. Kent Hehr, a Member of Parliament in Calgary, said the project could contribute \$2.4 billion to the country and called it “an exciting day for western Canada” (CBC News, 2016d). Hehr also spoke of the importance of supporting economic growth through international exports, stating:

This is going to open up two markets ... this will create opportunities both in the North American continent as well as in the far east. We have to understand the world economy is becoming increasingly focused on Asian development and we have to get resources to market in a sustainable fashion in the 21st century. (CBC News, 2016d)

In this way, Hehr connected Pacific NorthWest LNG to the government’s broader goal of securing Canada’s role in the increasingly globalized world economy. This is the difference between the economic narratives of industry leaders and government officials: while the former emphasized local economic growth and community development, the latter emphasized national economic growth and global trade.

Government officials also emphasized a different environmental narrative than industry leaders did. While industry leaders focused on the global ecological benefits of LNG, government officials instead emphasized how ecologically safe the new facility would be. In particular, government officials like Catherine McKenna focused on the 190 conditions that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency (CEAA) recommended after reviewing the project. These 190 legally binding conditions focus on GHG emissions, air quality issues, wetlands, fish, marine mammals, migratory birds, terrestrial species, and human health issues. Some of the conditions also relate to monitoring the cumulative environmental impacts of the project and decommissioning the facility (McKenna, 2016). At the press conference announcing the government’s decision, McKenna stated: “I am confident with the 190 legally binding, and scientifically determined conditions, that we will address the most important environmental impacts to ensure this project proceeds in the most sustainable manner possible” (CBC News, 2016b). In this way, government officials like McKenna emphasized the importance of balancing the environmental risks with the economic benefits associated with the project.

Environmental Experts

In contrast to industry leaders and government officials, many environmental experts did not support the government’s decision to approve the Pacific NorthWest LNG project. Their main objections to the project were its carbon emissions and its potentially negative impact on the local environment near Lelu Island. In a letter to Catherine McKenna, 90 climate change scientists and policy experts disagreed with industry leaders’ claim that the project’s LNG exports could reduce global GHG emissions by replacing more carbon-intensive fuel sources like coal. The experts argued that there was no proof that the LNG would actually replace coal, and stated that it would likely displace renewable sources of energy elsewhere. The letter also stated that the GHG emissions associated with ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ activities like fracking, processing, liquefaction, regasification, and transportation all reduce the environmental benefits of LNG over coal. Moreover, the climate scientists

and policy experts argued that the project would increase British Columbia's GHG emissions by up to 22%, making it almost impossible for the province or the country to meet its reduction targets (Harrison et al., 2016; CBC News, 2016b). In short, the environmental experts disagreed with most of the purported ecological benefits that industry leaders promoted.

Environmental experts also expressed concerns about the project's potential impacts on the local environmental and marine species near Lelu Island. When the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency released a draft of the project's assessment in February 2016, hundreds of environmental experts criticized the draft, writing that it misrepresented "the importance of the project area to fish population, especially salmon" (Jang & McCarthy, 2016; Moore et al., 2016, p. 1). The experts also argued that the assessment relied too heavily on science funded by the proponent, and did not thoroughly consider the cumulative effects of multiple project impacts on the local environment (Moore et al., 2016). Likewise, in a separate analysis of the draft, retired federal fisheries biologist Otto Langer warned about the negative impacts the project would have (Langer, 2016). Referencing Langer's report, Green Party of Canada leader Elizabeth May stated that "pile driving, dredging, lights, ship and dock noises, and potential spills will devastate the fish and bird habitat near Lelu Island" (May, 2016, n.p.). Overall, environmental experts who analyzed the late draft agreed that it understated the risks to the local ecosystem and should not be used to make policy decisions. Since the project's approval was announced, these experts' arguments have been widely cited by environmental organizations and political parties (May, 2016; Wilderness Committee, 2016; Smith, 2016).

First Nation Communities

In First Nation communities located across British Columbia, there are a wide range of opinions on the Pacific NorthWest LNG project. Among members of the Lax Kw'alaams First Nation, which has unceded Aboriginal title over Lelu Island (Diewart, 2016), these different opinions also exist. In a series of three votes in May 2015, band members rejected an offer from Petronas of \$1.15 billion for their consent to operate on Lelu Island. At this point, most of the band members, council members, and hereditary chiefs opposed the development because of the negative impacts it could have on the local environment and on the salmon that spawn there (CBC News, 2015a; CBC News, 2015b). In September 2015, members of the Nation began camping on Lelu Island in order to protest and prevent the project from happening (CBC News, 2015c; Trumpener, 2016).

However, in November 2015, a new mayor and band council were elected. Though they initially opposed the project, they changed their mind and offered their support for their project in March 2016. This was done without the consent of most band members (Kelly, 2016). In response, a group of band members, including the former mayor, went to Ottawa in April 2016 to announce that Lax Kw'alaams support for the project was not unanimous, as the new mayor had suggested (Jang B., 2016). Over the summer, community members reported that the Nation was divided and that there was a lot of pressure to support the project for economic reasons (Kelly, 2016).

More recently, in August 2016, band members were once again asked to vote on whether they supported the project. The poll found that 65% of voters were in favour. However, of the approximately 3,700 registered band members, only 812 voted. This means that only 532 members, or 14% of the total membership, voted in favour. Later reports found that

band members living off reserve were not well-informed about the vote and many did not have time to submit a ballot (Berman, 2016a; Berman, 2016b). In this way, even though Lax Kw'alaams band council formally consented to the project, band members remain divided over whether to prioritize short-term economic gains or long-term environmental health.

This tension between economics and the environment reflects the broader division in First Nation communities located across British Columbia. For example, four First Nation communities on the central coast — Kitselas, Metlakatla, Kitsumkalum, and Gitxaala — all supported the project, citing economic development opportunities for their communities as the main reason (Trumpener, 2016). Furthermore, the elected chief of Kitselas First Nation, Joseph Bevan, said the project consultations were well-done and inclusive (Hunter, 2016). However, others disagreed: an alliance of hereditary leaders from several First Nation communities, including the Heiltsuk, Gitxsan, Gitanyow, and Wet'suwet'en Nations called the assessment process "deeply flawed" (The Allied Tribes of Lax Kw'alaams, 2016). They stated that First Nation communities were not meaningfully consulted and the science that the assessment was based on was biased in favour of the company. Wet'suwet'en hereditary chief Na'Moks stated that:

the proponent's research was conducted by hired consultants tasked with trying to come up with justifications for an incredibly foolish decision by the Prince Rupert Port Authority to site a massive industrial development on top of irreplaceable salmon habitat. The work done to date by Petronas' consultants has been rejected by [the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency] at least five times as being flawed, but now CEAA seems to be buying into the deeply flawed justifications for a project that was simply sited in the worst possible place. (The Allied Tribes of Lax Kw'alaams, 2016)

In short, Na'Moks argued that the project's environmental assessment was flawed and should not have been used to justify the project's approval. These disagreements remain unresolved, with Indigenous proponents in favour of the economic benefits associated with the project and opponents upset with the project's potential ecological threats.

Summary

As this section demonstrates, stakeholders in British Columbia are deeply divided over the Pacific NorthWest LNG project. Industry leaders from Petronas and TransCanada support the development, citing economic growth and community development as well as a reduction in global carbon emissions as project benefits. Government officials largely agree with industry leaders, stating that the project would create much needed jobs. They also emphasize that the 190 legally binding conditions would ensure that the project has limited environmental impacts. However, environmental experts largely disagree with industry leaders and government officials. They say that the project would increase, rather than decrease, global carbon emissions and would likely have irreversible damages on the local environment. Finally, First Nation communities are divided: some see the project as an economic opportunity for their communities, while others believe it will result in long-term environmental degradation. However, despite the range of concerns raised by industry leaders, government officials, environmental experts and First Nation communities, some significant issues have been overlooked in the debates. Specifically, no stakeholders have emphasized the fact that 'buried' colonial epistemologies underlie the overall project debate, and that Lelu Island is unceded Indigenous territory. In the next section, I will critically analyze these two oversights.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

‘Buried Epistemologies’

Currently, many Canadians believe that our nation-state is in a ‘post-colonial’ period, in which the horrors of colonialism can be relegated to our history books and museums. However, some Canadians like critical geographer Bruce Braun would disagree. For Braun, colonialism still lingers in ‘buried epistemologies’, which are normalized ways of categorizing and understanding the world around us (Braun, 1997). These epistemologies were introduced by settlers, and continue to shape how we think and act on issues like the Pacific NorthWest LNG project. In particular, Braun argues that the geologists and ethnologists who explored British Columbia in the nineteenth century separated the landscape into two realms: the natural and the cultural. In doing so, they introduced and eventually normalized a particular way of thinking of nature as something that is distinct from human culture (Braun, 1997). Importantly, this is only one of many ways of understanding what ‘nature’ is and how we should relate to it. Indeed, in many coastal Indigenous communities, individuals understand ‘nature’ as something that is interconnected with everything else. The idea of separating it into a discreet realm, as modern society does, is absurd at best and dangerous at worst (V. Brown, Personal communication, July 2015). Braun goes farther, arguing that in modern society, nature has been separated from ‘culture’ and inserted into “the abstract spaces of the market, the nation, and, in recent ecological rhetorics, the biosphere and the global community” (Braun, 1997, p. 3). In doing so, we have narrowed the way we think and talk about ‘nature’ and ‘natural resources’.

Braun’s argument is applicable to the Pacific NorthWest LNG project. As I demonstrated in the previous section, the project is primarily discussed by industry leaders, government officials, and environmentalists in relation to the market, the nation, and the global community. Though these are arguably all important aspects to consider, focusing primarily on these topics silences other perspectives on the project. This is why Tsimshian First Nation member Christine Smith-Martin showed up at the press conference where Catherine McKenna announced the project’s approval with a jar of salmon in her hand, stating: “The salmon that we’re talking about in our community is a very important piece, and you’re not addressing the salmon, what about the salmon?” (Beaumont, 2016). Through this small act of defiance, Smith-Martin highlighted the cultural significance of salmon, which coastal First Nation communities have depended on for millennia and which would be threatened by the project. This is an important piece of the conversation that was marginalized at the press conference amidst narratives of the market, the nation, and the global community. In this way, Smith-Martin’s statement emphasized the importance of considering ‘culture’ in all discussions about ‘nature’, rather than relegating it to a discreet realm. In my opinion, this is an important lesson for all natural resource development projects in British Columbia.

Unceded Territories

Equally important to this is the question of land rights and sovereignty, which often gets overlooked in conversations about natural resources amidst discussions over the nation, the market, and the global community. Indeed, in their study of the Northern Gateway pipeline in British Columbia, Rossiter and Wood argue that in most of the pipeline discussions, the question of sovereignty was silenced and replaced by a neoliberal political discourse. In

doing so, the various actors involved, including the provincial and federal governments, "reinforced the silencing of Aboriginal voices in the debate by ignoring the question of Aboriginal title and focusing exclusively on environmental and economic questions" (Rossiter & Wood, 2016, p. 911). The result is that most of the discussions about the Northern Gateway pipeline overlooked the question of land ownership and authority. Put differently, it silenced the uncomfortable fact that what happens, or does not happen, on unceded Indigenous territories should be decided by the First Nation communities who have Aboriginal title to the territory and not by industry leaders, government officials, or environmentalists.

This point is equally applicable to the Pacific NorthWest LNG project as it is to the Northern Gateway pipeline. In both cases, the development takes place on unceded territories and, in both cases, this important issue has been minimized in discussions. In fact, I could not find a single reference to the fact that Lelu Island is unceded territory in any of the articles I read about the project, even in the more purportedly progressive publications. This is significant, as the Allied Tribes of Lax Kw'alaams, who claim Lelu Island as their traditional territory, have not signed any treaties with the Government of British Columbia or the Government of Canada. Currently, they are in stage two of six in treaty negotiation process, and have not made any progress on the negotiations since 2005 (B.C. Treaty Commission, 2016).

As discussed in the previous section, members of Lax Kw'alaams gave their consent to the project. However, members of the Nation have complained that they were not aware of the vote and therefore did not have time to participate. Indeed, only 532 of the 3,700 band members voted 'yes' to the project (Berman, 2016a). If Lelu Island's unceded status was more emphasized in project discussions, it would be more difficult to ignore the fact that only 14% of the band consented to the project. For this reason, I believe that any discussion over natural resources in British Columbia should be preceded by, and situated within, a broader discussion about land rights and sovereignty. Put differently in the words of Rossiter and Wood: "any development depends on clarification of sovereignty, which depends on resolving the unsettled matter of Aboriginal title and its specific claims" (2016, p. 913).

CONCLUSION

The Pacific NorthWest LNG project raises a number of important ecological, social, and political questions about economic development, environmental degradation, and sovereignty, among other topics. As demonstrated in this paper, there are no simple answers to these questions. Rather, there are a number of important, valid issues raised by each of the actors involved, which need to be thoroughly and respectfully considered. First, as industry leaders and government officials have argued, this project would undoubtedly contribute to economic growth and community development, at least over the next few decades. Considering much of western Canada is in an economic recession and many rural Indigenous communities in British Columbia have struggled with high unemployment rates over the last few decades, this point should not be underemphasized. Many families live in impoverished conditions and this project could economically benefit thousands of them. That being said, there are serious environmental issues associated with the project that need to be considered. Considered globally, this project might help improve the environment as the LNG exports may replace 'dirtier' forms of fuel and help countries transition to a more sustainable economy.

However, as environmentalists have pointed out, there is no proof that this will actually happen. Furthermore, from a national perspective, the ‘upstream’ and ‘downstream’ carbon emissions associated with the project will make meeting out country’s climate commitments very difficult. The project also has the potential to negatively impact the local environment and the salmon that depend on it. In short, the project raises important ecological, social, and political questions about Canada’s present and future.

Overall, the arguments presented by environmentalists and some First Nation communities suggests that the project is problematic for several reasons. First, as environmentalists argued, the potential harm the project could cause to the local environment and the salmon is difficult to justify. Second, recent research and developments in the renewable energy sector suggest that this LNG project is neither the only nor the best way to support economic growth and community development while transitioning to a more sustainable society. If these were truly the goals of industry leaders and government officials, these actors could financially support further research and development of renewable energy sources, rather than relying on LNG. This could provide economic opportunities for rural communities, and help the country transition to greener forms of energy. Given the research presented in this paper, this would be a better solution to these issues than the LNG project.

That being said, there were important issues missing from the overall conversation about the project. This is why the author included the critical analysis on ‘buried epistemologies’ and unceded territories, which raise several points. First, it is important to remember that the ways we think and talk about ‘nature’ are very western. That is, settlers introduced and normalized the division of landscapes into the ‘natural’ and the ‘cultural’. This is not the only way to think about ‘nature’ nor is it necessarily the most sustainable. Rather, nature can be understood in a more holistic way that is informed by coastal traditional ecological knowledge. This epistemological shift would ensure that when ‘nature’ is talked about, individuals also consider how that ‘nature’ is connected to local communities. Second, the fact that Lelu Island is unceded should be emphasized more in project discussions, as it means that (all) band members of Lax Kw’alaams should be deciding whether or not the project takes place instead of the Canadian state. Overall, the arguments presented in this paper suggest that the project should be developed, at least at this point. Rather, all band members of the Allied Tribes of Lax Kw’alaams should be able to engage in meaningful discussions about the project in the context of a larger conversation about land rights and Indigenous sovereignty.

POST SCRIPT

This essay was originally written in November 2016 prior to the provincial general election in British Columbia in May 2017. Along with other energy projects including the Kinder Morgan Trans Mountain pipeline expansion, the Pacific Northwest LNG project was a hotly contested election issue. The Liberal Party, which was in power when the Government of British Columbia originally approved the LNG project, continued to support the project through out the election, citing economic growth as a key project benefit (BC Liberals, 2017). On the other hand, the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Green Party both criticized the project for environmental reasons (Hutchins & McIntyre, 2017). However, the NDP argued they would support LNG projects if they offered training and jobs for local British Columbians, secured partnerships with affected First Nation communities, respected

the natural environment, and provided a fair return to British Columbians (BC NDP, 2017). While the Liberal Party won a total of 43 out of 87 seats, the NDP and Green Party, who together won 44 seats, agreed to work together on key issues (McElroy, 2017). As of June 2017, it is not clear what this agreement means for the future of the Pacific NorthWest LNG project (Hutchins & McIntyre, 2017).

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