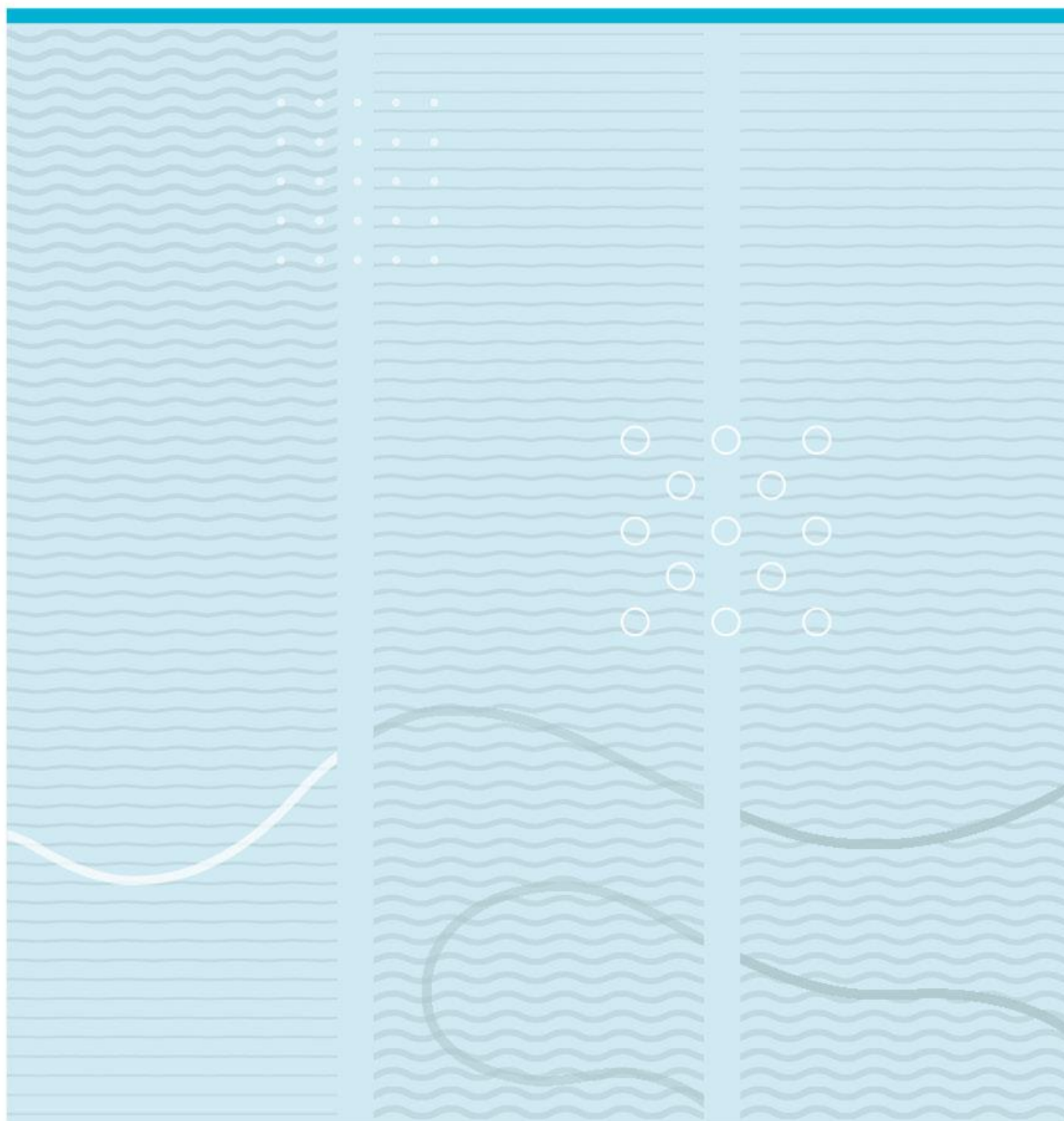


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“The Black Serpent”: Wet’suwet’en Perspectives on the Coastal GasLink Pipeline



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This thesis is worth 45 study points

Abstract

In 2018, Coastal GasLink (CGL) began construction on a 690km pipeline, of which a large proportion would go through unceded Wet'suwet'en territory. This extractive mega-project cuts through the heart of the territory, leaving severe ecological damage and cultural consequences for the Wet'suwet'en people, who, like all First Nations, have been subjected to oppression and violence since the arrival of settlers on Turtle Island. The purpose of this thesis is, through perspective of Wet'suwet'en Nation members, to understand the how the imposition of the CGL pipeline effects the lives of the Wet'suwet'en people and to understand how the ecological damage caused by the pipeline affects Wet'suwet'en ways of life and being. In order for an understanding that stems from Wet'suwet'en perspective five semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with Wet'suwet'en members. This thesis takes a decolonial lens, using Walter D. Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano's theories on coloniality as well as Aileen Moreton-Robison's theory on white possessive logics as the theoretical underpinnings through which to conduct this study. To analyse the rich data and insights collected from these interviews Braun and Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis has been used. This resulted in the generation of three main themes; "Economic Smallpox", "We have been thrown way back into the past" and "They are...injecting their poison into Mother Earth's veins". Each theme is further organised into subsequent subthemes. This paper argues that both CGL and the Canadian governments are complicit in the perpetuation of the epistemic destruction of Wet'suwet'en knowledge as well as the entrenchment of the oppressive Western hegemonic systems which maintain coloniality. Furthermore, this paper finds that the Canadian government is using the CGL pipeline to continue its historic denial of Wet'suwet'en sovereignty a policy underpinned by white possessiveness. Finally, this paper argues that the destruction of Wet'suwet'en territory is an epistemological and cosmological violence against the nation as the land, air and water is at the very core of the Wet'suwet'en people and their identity.

Key words: coloniality, Indigenous sovereignty, Wet'suwet'en, land rights, extractivism

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Dedicated to the Wet'suwet'en participants of this thesis for their incredible insight and all members of the Wet'suwet'en Nation who are being oppressed daily by Coastal GasLink and the Canadian Nation-State

Glossary

Coastal GasLink (CGL)	A subsidiary of Trans-Canada Energy, who is constructing and will build the Coastal GasLink pipeline (TC Energy, 2016, p.2), a portion of which runs through Wet'suwet'en territory
First Nations	Indigenous Nations to Turtle Island who's ethnicity is distinct from Metis or Inuit (Indigenous Foundations UBC, n.d.)
Extractive Mega-Project (EMP)	Any large-scale project involving the removal of large quantities of natural or raw materials e.g. oil or wood (Svampa, 2019, p.20)
Turtle Island	The Indigenous name for the land mass of North America, a name stemming from the stories of many Indigenous nations that the land was formed by a turtle "swimming in an endless ocean" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.162)
Wet'suwet'en	A First Nation who's unceded territory lies in British Columbia, Canada (Office of the Wet'suwet'en, n.d.)

Witsuwit'en Terms¹

Anuc'nu'at'en	Wet'suwet'en law
Balhats	The feast hall, where all major decisions and laws are made
Denii ne'aas	Feast, or “people coming together”, also known in Chinook as Potlatch, this is where authority is validated
D̄ini ze'	Male hereditary chief, each house has a hereditary chief who is the spokesperson for said house
Ts'akë ze'	Female hereditary chief, each house has a hereditary chief who is the spokesperson for said house
Wedzin Kwa	The Witsuwit'en name for Morice River, meaning “blue-green pure”, a sacred headwater for the Wet'suwet'en
Yintah	The unceded Wet'suwet'en territory

¹ Witsuwit'en is the mother tongue of the Wet'suwet'en Nation, all definitions are taken from Office of the Wet'suwet'en, n.d. and Gidimt'en Checkpoint, n.d. b

Abbreviations

B.C.	The province of British Columbia
CGL	Coastal GasLink
C-IRG	Community-Industry Response Group
EMP	Extractive Mega-Project
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
IBA	Impact-Benefit Agreement
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ILO C169	Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No.169)
LNG	Liquified Natural Gas
MMIWG	Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Federal police force)
TA	Thematic Analysis
TC Energy	Trans Canada Energy
UNDRIP	The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007

1. Introduction

Settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure, not an event
(Patrick Wolfe, 2006)

Societies that dominate nature also dominate people
(Murray Bookchin, 1982)

Colonial dispossession and its legacy are something which Indigenous populations within *so-called Canada*, and indeed globally, must deal with every day (Youdelis, 2016, p.1374). Previously colonial dispossession manifested as the violent removal of Indigenous peoples from their land and assimilation techniques, such as “kill the Indian, save the man” (Simonson & Nadeau, 2016), which followed. In contemporary society, colonial dispossession primarily comes in the form of capitalist Western ventures that appropriate Indigenous territories (Youdelis, 2016, p.1374) under the guise of “development”. The consequential colonial trauma, which not only encompasses dispossession but also the “systematic destruction of Indigenous culture”, ways of life and ways of knowing, is recognised as the primary cause of the health disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Panofsky et al., 2023, p.335). This distinct psychological trauma, which has aptly been named a “soul wound” by Duran & Duran (1995), is understood to be both generational and collective (Panofsky et al., 2023, p.334).

Colonisation inflicted upon Indigenous peoples in so-called Canada has come in a plethora of forms over the past 300 years, which, in addition to violent land dispossession, includes, the forced imposition of the federal reserve and band system, forced renouncement of Indigenous status and the “Sixties Scoop” resulting in children being forced into Indian Residential Schools (Panofsky et al., 2023, p.335).

1.1 Purpose of the Research and Research Questions

This study will analyse the personal effect of the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline on Wet’suwet’en people, the consistent denial of Wet’suwet’en sovereignty by the Canadian government and the ongoing colonial dispossession of Indigenous land in so-called Canada. The primary research question of this thesis is *How is the CGL Pipeline perceived by the Wet’suwet’en community?* Here I aim to draw upon theories of coloniality (Quijano (2007); Mignolo (2000,

2011)) and white possessive logics (Moreton-Robinson (2015)) to explore the perception of those involved and amplify their voice. To support my primary research question and to aid in the analysis process, three additional sub-questions will guide this thesis:

- How does forced extractive mega-projects (EMPs) interfere with the Nations culture, traditions, and ways of knowing?
- How are the impacts of the CGL pipeline felt on a personal level by members of the Wet'suwet'en community?
- What is the nation's perception of the impact of EMPs on the air, land and water? And how is this impact felt by the community?

The purpose of my research is to examine how extractive mega-projects (EMPs) (Svampa, 2019, p.20) and the imposition of “development” effects the lives of Indigenous communities and how the destructive impacts on the air, land and water by EMPs is perceived by, and effects First Nation communities. This research project is specifically centred around the Wet'suwet'en Nation in the context of the current CGL pipeline, that is being built on their *Yintah* (unceded territory). I am aware that my data, analysis and findings are specific to the Wet'suwet'en community and cannot be extrapolated to include all Indigenous peoples or all First Nations. There are, however, many Indigenous peoples in similar conflicts in which their land is being taken and their sovereignty is being denied (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.129). This is a globally pertinent issue, one that is under acknowledged due to the dominant faction of society having primary control on media outlets and knowledge production that silences the subaltern voices (Dhillon, 2022, p.2). It is vital to promote the empowerment and amplification of Indigenous voices, a point emphasised by one of the project's participants, who states, “we have been silenced as Indigenous people” (Participant 4).

The case between CGL and the Wet'suwet'en people has been chosen as it is a contemporaneous situation in which Wet'suwet'en human rights are being violated daily, with minimal international coverage, and one that I passionately believe must be supported and fought for. Furthermore, EMPs destroy land and vastly add to the worlds carbon footprint thus it is not only an issue limited to those in the immediate surroundings of the project, but something that everyone should be discussing and aiming to fight against. Despite the trauma inflicted by colonisers and white settlers in Canada on the Wet'suwet'en Nation, a tremendous amount of resilience has been shown by the Nation, who are a strong component of the Indigenous

sovereignty, Indigenous rights and land protection movements within so-called Canada (Smart, 2021).

1.2 Definitions

Before proceeding, it is vital to provide some definitions of reoccurring key-terms and clarification of how they will be used within this thesis.

Within this paper I will refer to the country of Canada as “**so-called Canada**” in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en nation and other Indigenous peoples whose lands were dispossessed illegally. Some participants referred to “so-called Canada”, as have Wet’suwet’en leaders in public statements, in order to show they do not accept the Canadian state’s sovereign authority over Indigenous land.

Moreover, this thesis will be looked at through a decolonial lens. Thus, it is important to set out what is meant by **decolonization** and **decoloniality**. This distinction is ever more pertinent as “decolonization” has become a buzzword in today’s Euro-American societies, often without an explanation of how the term is being used (Tlostanova et al, 2019, p.290). Furthermore, Tlostanova et al (2019) point out that the terms use within social media is often removed and “detached from the reality of decolonial struggles” for Indigenous peoples and those in the Global South (p.290). This thesis defines decoloniality as an academic, epistemic, cultural, and political movement that aims for the emancipation from coloniality and the “world norms” that have been imposed by Western-centric modernity and dominance, as well as the removal of the structures and systems that maintain these limitations (Tlostanova et al., 2019, p.290).

Furthermore, the term **Western** when used with the context of this thesis refers to Western Civilisation as explained by Mignolo (2011, p.xiv). Mignolo explains Western civilisation, centring around Western Europe was “conceived in the period between the Renaissance and Enlightenment” (p.xiv). The term Western expands to white “settler-states” most prominently America and is now understood as centre of power rather than a geographical space (2011, p.xiv).

Additionally, this thesis aligns itself with Byrd and Rothberg’s use of **subaltern** and **subalternity** (Byrd & Rothberg, 2011). They denote that “subalternity” is used to portray power dynamics but does not reduce communities to the same place, tradition, or movement (p.8). Thus, subaltern will be used to refer to communities or peoples who are dominated within the dynamics of coloniser/colonised or oppressor/oppressed.

1.3 Outlining Methodology and Ethical Considerations

Literature on holistic Indigenous research methodologies guided the design of my methodology with a specific onus on Māori academic Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2012) and Cree scholar Shawn Wilson's *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008). Both scholars aided me in my attempt to produce a holistic study that aims to promote Indigenous epistememes (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.6). Although my final result was not as in keeping with Indigenous research methodologies as first hoped, I believe with more time and resources this aim would have come into fruition. Furthermore, these authors showed me the vital methodological approaches to ensure I was researching *with* participants rather than *on* participants, thus allowing for a more collaborative and inductive process. Approaching the research with notions of accountability, reciprocity and responsibility in mind (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.126), I aimed to ensure my research did not silence Indigenous voices, specifically those of the Wet'suwet'en people I spoke with.

With my research question in mind – How is Coastal GasLink Pipeline perceived by the Wet'suwet'en community? – I have conducted five semi-structured and in-depth interviews with members of the Wet'suwet'en nation. In accordance with ethical principles of social research, full and free consent was received by the participants prior to the interviews, which were conducted remotely via Zoom and recorded. The original aim was to conduct the interviews in person, however due to both time constraints and other limitations this was not possible. Four of the participants have been kept anonymous, and one, Chief Na'Moks, is named, with his consent, due to his "public status" and the subsequent difficulty it would be to maintain his anonymity. Chief Na'Moks is hereditary chief of the Tsa K'en yex house, Tsayu clan of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. Despite its impersonal nature I have decided to keep my participants written as "Participant 1", "Participant 2", "Participant 3" and "Participant 4". My methodology will be discussed in-depth in *Chapter 4*.

Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was used to analysis the data. Three main themes have thus been induced, each containing two to three sub-themes. I was aware of my positionality as a non-Indigenous student researcher and an outsider, thus consistently reflected on whether I was using participants voices in an appropriate way and in the way they intended their words to be used, aiming to mitigate misrepresentation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014, p.7).

This project was approved by The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) now called Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research (SIKT).

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis is divided into six chapters. *Chapter One*, the current chapter, presents the purpose and aims of this thesis, and lays out the research questions. It aims to prepare the reader for the chapters ahead by providing a short synopsis of the methodology and ethical principles, as well as establishing the context in which the research took place. The first part of the context gives a broader view of both the international framework for the protection of Indigenous peoples and treatment of Indigenous peoples by so-called Canada. The second half turns to the specific conflict between the Wet'suwet'en nation and CGL.

Chapter 2 is a thematic literature review that presents and engages with topics and authors relevant to this thesis. It is curated thematically starting with a wider scope and ending with literature specific to the CGL-Wet'suwet'en conflict. The topics are as follows; Questioning ILO 169 and UNDRIP; Ecocide and capitalist extractivism; Development rhetoric legitimizing colonial dispossession; Indigenous resistance movements to extractivism; and; Wet'suwet'en and CGL Conflict. The literature review will end by establishing the scholarly lacune that my research aims to fill.

Chapter 3 gives a thorough presentation of the theoretical framework, approached through a decolonial lens, used during this thesis to analysis the interviews.

Chapter 4 provides a rigorous understanding of the methodology of this research, including my positionality as a student researcher, the ethical principles that were vital in this study, limitations encountered, as well as a detailed account of the participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis.

Chapter 5 is the presentation of the analysis which is split into three main themes; "Economic Smallpox", "We have been thrown way back into the past" and "They are... injecting their poison into Mother Earth veins". These themes are further analysed through the theoretical lens presented in Chapter 3.

The final chapter, *Chapter 6*, concludes the thesis and lays out areas for further research.

1.5 Introductory Context

1.5.1 Indigenous Rights International Framework

Which communities constitute as Indigenous peoples has been a contentious topic with different definitions being set forth, many of them with problematic pit falls. The World Bank states that "Indigenous peoples are inextricably linked to the lands on which they live and the natural resources on which they depend" (The World Bank, 2005, p.2). As pointed out by Julia Bello-Bravo

(2019) this adds an overly spatial element to indigeneity, perhaps gifting a way of “withdrawing or annulling Indigenous status” to anyone who may have moved away from their original territories or to another community either voluntary or involuntary (p.112). With these problems in mind, this thesis will be working off the definition of UN Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, José Martínez-Cobo (1982):

[I]ndigenous peoples are such population groups as we are, who from old-age time have inhabited the lands where we live, who are aware of having a character of our own, with social traditions and means of expression that are linked to the country inherited from our ancestors, with a language of our own, and having certain essential and unique characteristics which confer upon us the strong conviction of belonging to a people, who have an identity in ourselves and should thus be regarded by others. (p. 5)

For centuries Indigenous peoples across the world have experienced a plethora of different forces of violence and exploitation (Mittal, 2021, p.122). Today colonial power dynamics have become enshrined in our histories and socio-economic and legal systems created by settler powers (Youdelis, 2016, p.1375). Thus, measures are now being taken in order to redress and protect Indigenous peoples as well as their individual and collective rights. International law, since its origination, has been “quintessentially Eurocentric” (Pulitano, 2012, p.4) and a source of subordination and domination of Indigenous peoples (Gómez Isa, 2019, p.7). It has been predominantly hegemonic and often upheld Western interests, however since the 1970s international law, specifically human rights law has opened up a space for Indigenous voices to have an input in the international arena (Gómez Isa, 2019, p.8).

There are two main international protection instruments specific to Indigenous rights; International Labour Organization convention 169 (ILO, C169) (1989), an update of the International Labour Organization convention 107 (ILO, C107) (1957), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) (2007). ILO C169 is the most extensive legally binding international document on Indigenous rights, however it has not been ratified by Canada. Additionally, UNDRIP was originally rejected by Canada, later to be ratified by the states in 2010 (Hanson, n.d. b). UNDRIP has, in many ways, been seen as a great step forward in the fight for Indigenous Rights, including, as it does, articles concerning self-determination and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). However, UNDRIP is often perceived as not going far enough to protect the rights of Indigenous people. Furthermore, UN declarations are merely persuasive rather than binding, thus UNDRIP arguably has little authority (Burger, 2019, p.29).

1.5.2 Settler Impact on Turtle Island

The dominion of Canada was created via the procurement of Indigenous land based on the Christian doctrine of discovery (Eichler & Baumeister, 2022 p.81). This doctrine, created through Papal Bulls, considered land belonging to, and occupied by, Indigenous people as *terra nullis*, “nobody’s land”, as Indigenous peoples, being non-Christian, were seen as not-human (ICTInc, 2023). Thus, legitimised colonisation in the name of God (Tomchuk, 2023).

1876 saw the culmination of oppressive and assimilatory policies inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government through the *Indian Act* (Hanson, n.d. a). This restrictive and life-changing piece of legislation imposed personal and cultural restraints on Indigenous peoples and was the lasting source of much tragedy to impacted communities, trauma which still reverberates today (Elias et al., 2012, p.1560). With regards to this thesis, it is important to note that through the Indian Act, both the creation of reserves and the band system came into being. Many nations were broken into “bands” which was defined as a “body of Indians whose...lands have been set apart or money is held by the crown” and are governed under the band-system (Statistics Canada, 2021). Here a European style of governance was imposed upon each band, aiming to undermine the traditional governance system specific to each Nation. The Indian Act band chief system was considered by many as incompatible with Indigenous way of life and contradictory to Indigenous needs and values. Through this system a three-year election cycle was created, later changed to a two-year cycle, which hindered the ability of chiefs and councils to make any long-term decisions (ICTInc, 2015).

Not only did the Act further shift power towards colonisers by establishing the band system, but so too did it create a compulsory residential school system. Residential schools were a comprehensive system put in place by the federal government which, under the guise of “education”, set up a large number of Christian schools with the primary objective of assimilating and indoctrinating Indigenous children into the Euro-Christian ways of life (Hanson et al, 2020). Children were, primarily forcibly, removed from their parents and sent to schools where it was, under the threat of often brutal punishment, forbidden to acknowledge or practice their culture and traditions (Hanson et al, 2020). Following residential school, the “Sixties scoop” occurred in the 1960s, which was a mass removal of Indigenous children from their communities, Nations and families, majoritively without consent, to be placed into the Canadian child welfare system. Studies have suggested that the high rate of suicide, substance abuse and other conditions within Indigenous communities are a direct result of the mass trauma felt from the Residential school system and other assimilation policies (Elias et al, 2012, p.1560).

Another aspect of Canada's history that is relevant to this thesis is the creation of the RCMP in 1873. Historically and contemporarily, the RCMP have served as “agents of colonialism” (Lajtman, 2020, p.1). Despite objections to the contrary, it is understood by many that the RCMP’s birth came not from the necessity to protect the Indigenous nations but the desire to contain and control them. Graybill (2004) writes that the efforts of Indigenous communities to preserve their ways of life was seen as a threat to Euro-Canadian sensibilities and their aims of development and expansion. Thus, in order to eliminate this threat, “mounted constabularies” were used “to pacify [I]ndigenous peoples” (p.83).

1.5.3 Wet’suwet’en Nation

The 22,000 km² of land belonging to the Wet’suwet’en nation lies in the West of Turtle Island, in what is now called British Columbia (B.C.), Canada. Fig.1, shows how the Wet’suwet’en Nation House and Clan system is structured and the Chiefs that represent each house.

Prior to settler contact the Wet’suwet’en Nation was solely governed through the Hereditary

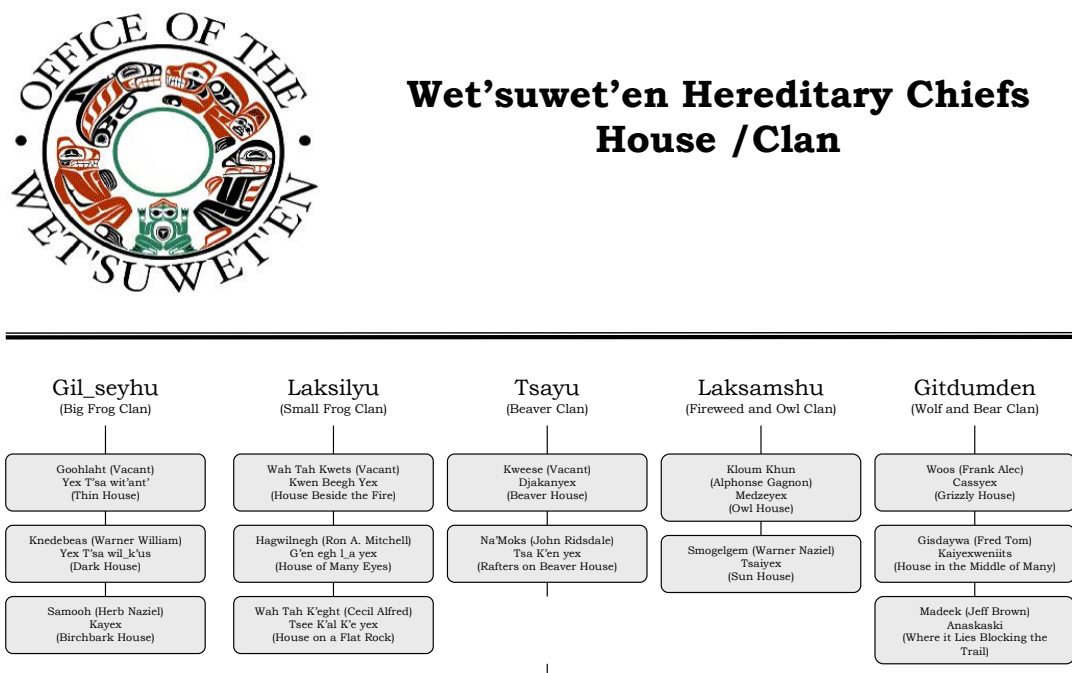


Figure 1: Wet’suwet’en Nation Structure (Office of the Wet’suwet’en, n.d.)

governance system. Throughout the lifetime of a future chief, they would be tutored “to be a wise, strong and responsible leader” (Office of Wet’suwet’en, n.d.) before finally receiving their high ranking *Dini ze’* or *Ts’ake ze’* name. Prior to this they would spend seven months out on the Yintah for the “boy to man ceremony” (Chief Na’Moks, 2023), here “they would learn the ways of the animal world” (Office of Wet’suwet’en, n.d.). This exposure of the prospective chief to the animal

and natural world ensures she or he “had the utmost respect” for both the animal and the human world (Office of Wet’suwet’en, n.d.). This tradition is no longer practice, with Chief Na’Moks saying “I am one of the last, and probably will be the last, Hereditary Chief that will ever do the boy to man ceremony” (Chief Na’Moks, 2023).

Today Wet’suwet’en traditional governance continues despite the concerted efforts of the settlers and the Canadian government to eradicate this vital aspect of who Wet’suwet’en people are. The feast hall and feasting are at the core of the governance and is where all major decisions take place. “The feast... validates authority according to Wet’suwet’en law (*Anuc’nu’at’en*) and provides a format to exercise that authority” (Office of Wet’suwet’en, n.d.). Wet’suwet’en culture, tradition and people have a strong spiritual connection with, and physical reliance on, their Yintah, holding that “we start from the ground up, we do not have that ‘superior being’ thought (like many Western cultures)... We start with the land, the air, the water, the animals, the plants, what is there first” (Chief Na’Moks, 2023).

December 1997 was a groundbreaking month in the fight for Indigenous rights in B.C., in which the Supreme court of Canada issued its “first definitive statement on the content of Aboriginal Title in Canada” (Hurley, 2000) in the seminal *Delgamuukw v B.C.* ruling. Through this decision it was both legally and constitutionally recognised that the Wet’suwet’en Nation had never ceded, nor signed over their lands to the crown and so-called Canada, thus the Hereditary governance system have full jurisdiction on their territory. Furthermore, the decision described “the scope of protection afforded [under] Aboriginal title under section 35(1) of the Constitution Act, 1982” (Hurley, 2000) as a property right, in addition to how Aboriginal title can be proved and outlines the “justification test for infringements of Aboriginal Title” (Hurley, 2000). The *Delgamuukw-Gisday’wa* decision was the culmination of a legal battle lasting more than 10-years in which the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en people fought for Aboriginal title (Hurley, 2000).

Despite it being nationally recognised, through the *Delgamuukw-Gisday’wa* decision, that the Wet’suwet’en never ceded nor signed over their land, Chief Na’Moks, informed me this year, on the 25th anniversary of the decision, was the first time he had heard a Supreme Court Judge use the term “unceded lands” during a trial concerning Wet’suwet’en people since 1997 (Chief Na’Moks, 2023). This latent recognition indicates that despite this monumental win there is still a clear reluctance of B.C. and Canada to recognise Wet’suwet’en legal claim to their own land.

1.5.4 CGL Pipeline: Consultation “efforts”

In 2012 Coastal GasLink (CGL), a subsidiary of TransCanada Energy Corporations (TC Energy) submitted their first proposal for a multibillion-dollar pipeline spanning 670 kilometers and

running straight through the heart of Wet'suwet'en territory (Proctor, 2020). The pipeline ends at a new export terminal, LNG Canada, which is owned by a consortium of transnational multi-billion-dollar oil corporations, namely Shell, PetroChina, Petronas, KOGAS and Mitsubishi (LNG Canada, n.d). The liquified natural gas (LNG) transported to LNG Canada is primarily for a non-domestic Asian market.

In line with Canadian law both the Crown and the corporation must consult “in good faith” (Haida Nation v B.C., 2004) with the Wet'suwet'en Nation's chosen representatives when planning projects on their land. Furthermore, it is prudent, due to the Canadian ratification of UNDRIP, to gain FPIC from Indigenous nations affected by a project, prior to construction. CGL claim they have received consent due to the signing of impact-benefit agreements (IBAs) with the Wet'suwet'en elected band councils, however no consent was received from the Hereditary Chiefs and traditional governance system who are opposed to the pipeline. In Wet'suwet'en law, and indeed Canadian law due to the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa decision, the Hereditary Chiefs and governance system have full jurisdiction on the Yintah, and the Indian Act-made band council have say solely concerning activities which occur on reserve. Much outrage has ensued as a result of negotiations primarily occurring with band chiefs. Five out of the six bands have given consent to the EMP, despite the proposed pipeline route solely going through the territory and not the reserves. Despite the lack of consent from Wet'suwet'en Hereditary chiefs, CGLs website says, “we have the utmost respect” for Indigenous people and their systems of governance and that they have “strived to engage with all the groups along the pipeline” (CGL, n.d.). Moreover, in October 2022 a CGL press release stated, “our work is lawful, authorised and permitted and has the unprecedented support of local and Indigenous communities” (CGL, 2021). This is in contradiction to the vocal opposition of hereditary governance to the project, with Chief Woos, Cassyex house, publicly stating, the people are “here to protect our Yintah” which includes protecting it from development companies and extraction (Chief Woos in Kestler-D'Amours, 2020).

1.5.5 CGL Pipeline: Construction and subsequent environmental damage

Despite the lack of legitimate consent, construction of the pipeline in Wet'suwet'en territory began in 2018. During this time multiple man-camps have been built to sustain the CGL workers and swathes of trees have been cleared to make accesses roads for vehicles and machinery. The creation of these access roads have created manifold issues. Prominent among them is the indirect effect they have had on the Caribou, a provincially blue-listed (at risk) species, living on Wet'suwet'en territory. These roads have served as a corridor for wolves to move through the

territory aiding in the population reduction of Caribou, which was once thriving, to just thirty-three (Simmons, 2023b).

Despite alternative route options given to CGL by Wet'suwet'en representatives the original pipeline route, which included tunneling under Wedzin Kwa, has been adhered to. Wedzin Kwa is one of the sacred head waters of the Wet'suwet'en nation whose pristine water is used for drinking, ceremonies and home to a fish population which feeds the Nation and other communities along the Skeena River (Morin, 2022). Wedzin Kwa means "blue, green, pure" and is known for its unbelievable beauty and clarity (Chief Na'Moks, 2023). Despite recommendations from B.C. Environmental Assessment Office, the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition and the Office of Wet'suwet'en Fisheries and Wildlife Department, amongst others, that the vibrations would likely cause great damage to the eggs of these at-risk species, tunneling under Wedzin Kwa began during Chinook and Sockeye salmon spawning season, also blue-listed species in B.C. (Simmons, 2022a). Furthermore, sediment from the construction was displaced into the water stream, which further endangers fish populations. Although not admitting to all their perceived oversights, CGL has confessed to not completing full habitat surveys of blue and red-listed (endangered) species and other ecological communities, a vital step in creating procedures to minimise ecological damage (Simmons, 2022a). Furthermore, in the first half of 2023, CGL reported two spills of clay lubricant into Wedzin Kwa which has resulted in this source of drinking water to turn brown (Simmons, 2023c). Upon seeing the current damage in Wet'suwet'en territory, during a monitoring flight, Sleydo' (Molly Wickham), wing chief of the Gidimt'en clan, recently said, "[this is] heartbreaking", adding that it is a reminder of "why we've been fighting so hard" (Sleydo' in Ligeti, 2023) against this pipeline. Wedzin Kwa is seen as a mother or grandmother to nation according to Sleydo'. The following two photos taken by journalist Matt Simmons for the Narwhal, during a fly over with Wet'suwet'en representatives, shows the extent of destruction the CGL construction has caused on the Yintah.



Figure 2: Ts'ellkay Kwa cleared for construction (Simmons, 2023c)



Figure 3: Sediment flowing into Wedzin Kwa due to CGL activities (Gidimt'en Checkpoint, n.d. a)

The pipeline also lies just 1km away from the Unist’ot’en healing center, which is a “culturally-safe healing programme centered on the healing properties of the land” (Unist’ot’en Camp, 2017) focusing on helping those struggling with effects of generational colonial trauma (Brown & Bracken, 2020). There have been “significant disruptions” (Cox, 2020) for the healing center due to the pipeline construction and parts of the program, such as the excursions to the Kweese War Trail, can no longer take place. These visits aimed to help residents reconnect with their ancestors through visiting the cultural site, however the Kweese War trail has now been cleared for the pipeline despite many requests from Hereditary chiefs to move the route in order to preserve this important cultural site (Cox, 2020).

In 2018 a court ordered land injunction was enacted which restricts anybody, except CGL workers, coming within a certain distance of construction sites. This has resulted in great conflict as it has prevented the office of Wet’suwet’en from conducting their own environmental inspections and monitoring the construction, which is part of the hereditary Chiefs roles as caretakers of the Yintah. Multiple Chiefs have been denied access to sites due to the injunction with Chief Dsta’hyl, wing chief of Likhts’amisyu clan, being arrested for criminal contempt when trying to monitor the land (Simmons, 2023c).

It is also important to note that the long-term effects of the pipeline will not only impact the Wet’suwet’en people and other Nations whose land it crosses, but people both locally, nationally, and indeed internationally due to the carbon footprint emitted. It has been estimated, that when running at full capacity, LNG Canada will produce 13 megatons of carbon emissions annually. This amounts to more than 20 percent of B.C.’s total emissions in 2020 (Hughes, 2020). Thus, the Wet’suwet’en are not just fighting for their people and Mother Earth, but also for all future generations.

1.5.6 All Out for Wedzin Kwa

In an unprecedented response to Indigenous, environmental and allied movements opposition to industry activities, the RCMP created a new branch in 2017. At surface level the Community-Industry Response Group (C-IRG) may seem to have been created to protect both parties, however their consequent actions have indicated that the branch solely provides industry protection against community protesters. In the last five years since its creation, over fifty million dollars have been spent on the voluntary unit, with approximately half going to policing the CGL pipeline construction. This has gone into “protecting” the Teal-Jones Lumber Company against Fairy Creek protestors, safeguarding CGL against Wet’suwet’en Land defenders and to fortify the construction of the TransMountain pipeline (Hosgood, 2023).

“The Wet’suwet’en people, under the governance of their hereditary chiefs are standing in the way of the largest fracking project in Canadian history” (Gidimt’en Checkpoint, n.d. b.). In response to CGL and other EMPs on Wet’suwet’en territory, reoccupation camps have arisen, namely the Gidimt’en Checkpoint and the Unist’ot’en Camp. The Unist’ot’en Camp, which also holds the Unist’ot’en healing centre, is a “non-violent occupation of Unceded Unist’ot’en territory” (Unist’ot’en Camp, n.d.). Gidimt’en Checkpoint aims to control access to Cas Yikh House territory within Gidimt’en Clan territory. It lies on road leading to the Unist’ot’en Camp showing solidarity for the Unist’ot’en efforts at reconnecting with and reoccupying their land. All five clans ratified the creation of the Gidimt’en Checkpoint in their *balhats* at the end of 2018. Both camps have been subject to raids and consistent intimidation and violence from the RCMP and CGL. C-IRG officers were granted lethal overwatch in 2019, which essentially gives them permission to shoot to kill if they feel it is necessary (Dhillon & Parrish, 2019). One such raid involved the arrest of two Unist’ot’en Matriarchs while they were performing a ceremony for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) (Gidimt’en Checkpoint, n.d. b).

The most publicised raid, due to video footage, occurred at Gidimt’en in November 2021. Here heavily militarized C-IRG officials invaded Gidimt’en Territory with dogs and vehicles, arresting 30 unarmed land defenders at gun point over two days. One cabin, with five land defenders, was broken into with an axe by C-IRG. Later it was believed that one cabin was burned and bulldozed (Gidimt’en Access Point, 2021, November 24; Simmons, 2022b). The arrested Wet’suwet’en and allies were transported to Prince George where they were kept in jail throughout the weekend, then released, some 300 kilometres from Wet’suwet’en territory (Simmons, 2022b). This, amongst other raids on Wet’suwet’en territory by the RCMP and CGL, sparked the #ShutDownCanada Movement in early 2020 (Gidimt’en Checkpoint, n.d. b). People from all over Canada stood in solidarity with the Wet’suwet’en Nation blockading railway lines and protesting outside government buildings.

During the process of my interviews another large raid at Gidimt’en Checkpoint occurred involving multiple RCMP vehicles, allegedly in search of a suspected stolen power saw. The raid culminated in the arrest of five land defenders. As of March 2023, there has been nearly 100 arrests of Wet’suwet’en land defenders and allies by RCMP according to an RCMP media spokesman (Simmons, 2023a).

2. Literature Review

Outline

This literature review is curated thematically, with the final subchapter discussing the research gaps that this thesis aims to address. The first section is a dialogue between international framework for Indigenous rights, scholars and myself, and is distinct from the context chapter which solely seeks to provide a brief description of the international framework. Section two engages with literature on the inextricable entanglement of Ecocide and mega-extractivism. The third section explores how the rhetoric surrounding development is used as a tool to legitimise Indigenous land dispossession. Following on from this, section four concentrates on the literature of Indigenous resistance to extractivism and related activist movements. The final section looks at academic literature that has already been written on the current CGL-Wet'suwet'en conflict.

2.1 Questioning ILO 169 and UNDRIP

The emergence of Indigenous Rights instruments, namely UNDRIP and ILO C169, have sparked debates as to whether such protective instruments go far enough to forward Indigenous rights and equality. Questions have arisen about their potentially arbitrary nature and semantic vagaries, which may allow states to “get away” with imperialistic development under the guise of promoting the rights of Indigenous peoples while following international guidelines. According to Larsen (2020), the ambiguous language used in the ILO C169 has corresponded to a wide range of interpretation when it comes to state implementation (p.96). The primary cause of this is through vague phrases such as “where...necessary” or the explicit claim that there is flexibility, through Article 34, within this convention:

The nature and scope of the measures to be taken to give effect to this Convention shall be determined in a flexible manner, having regard to the condition's characteristic of each country (ILO, C169, art.34, 1989)

Given such ambiguity we must question the desire to push for further ratification of the convention, when perhaps a call for more rigid legislation, centred around consent and allowing for full self-determination of Indigenous peoples, would be more effective. However, it is pointed out by Julian Burger (2019) that the lack of convention ratification (24 out 187 member states) indicates a more comprehensive legally binding document in Indigenous rights seems unlikely to gain traction (p.23).

Additionally, Burger (2019) highlights UNDRIPs inefficacy in reducing rates of violence against Indigenous people, pointing out that since its adoption by the UN General Assembly, there has been “no let-up in conflicts arising from governmental or corporate activities on [I]ndigenous lands” (p.24). This assertion and the overall inadequacy of UNDRIP in fortifying Indigenous land rights is emphasised by ongoing conflicts between Indigenous communities and corporate entities. The Agua Zarca dam project in Honduras is one such example. The dam, proposed to be built on the Gualcarque River, held sacred by the Lenca people, faced resistance by Indigenous communities and allies, culminating in the assassination of Lenca activist and leader Berta Cáceres and other land defenders during the conflict (Pearce, 2017). Likewise in India, the Dangaria Kondhs, have consistently had to resist and fight against bauxite mining activities on the Niyamgiri Mountains, an area which holds great spiritual and cultural significance (Temper & Martinez-Alier, 2013, p.85). These instances of violent conflict brought on by corporate adventurism on ancestral land highlight the failures of UNDRIP, which does not explicitly mention non-state actors, nor the obligation of the state to put limitations or legislative criterion on corporations when it comes to EMPs. EMPs are arguably “the source of the most violent confrontations” regarding Indigenous communities (Burger, 2019, p.28) thus, Burger concludes that although UNDRIP is directed at states, it is also important for corporations to recognise their obligations in the protection of Indigenous rights. Although theoretically Burger’s point is valid, in practicality, it is optimistic to hope all companies involving EMPs will realise or want to fulfil such obligations. I would like to add the importance of states creating parameters in which the extractive industry must operate and sanctions that will be given if Indigenous rights and said parameters are not upheld. Thus, with the onus on the state in mind, the relationship between state, corporations and Indigenous communities is a large gap missing within UNDRIP that must be reconciled within international framework.

2.2 Ecocide and Capitalist Extractivism

The effects of climate change are becoming increasingly more evident to those in the Global North, in recent years we have seen destructive floods, devastating forest fires and temperatures that have surpassed all records. The impact of anthropogenic climatic changes has, however, been keenly felt by Indigenous populations and other communities in the Global South for centuries (Dunlap & Brock, 2022, p.2) compounded by the effects felt by ecocide and human-induced ecological degradation (Peluso & Watts, 2001). The neologism “Ecocide” was coined during the

Vietnam war to condemn the U.S. military programme, Operation Ranch Hand², and the potential environmental damage and consequential human health problems herbicidal warfare could cause (Short, 2016, p.38). Recently, however, ecocide has been academically linked to conflicts between colonial extractivism and Indigenous peoples. While there are manifold definitions of ecocide, the definition provided by environmental lawyer Poly Higgins is the most salient to the literature I have explored:

1. acts or omissions committed in times of peace or conflict by any senior person within the course of State, corporate or any other entity's activity which cause, contribute to, or may be expected to cause or contribute to serious ecological, climate or cultural loss or damage to or destruction of ecosystem(s) of a given territory(ies), such that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants has been or will be severely diminished.
 2. To establish seriousness, impact(s) must be widespread, long-term or severe.
- (Higgins, 2010, p.63)

Alternatively, Dunlap and Brock (2022) succinctly define ecocide as the “deliberate destruction and degradation of ecosystems, which has cumulative climatic effects” (p.2). The term, Ecocide, has begun to make its way into Human Rights and International Law discourse, with many advocates pushing for ecocide to be enshrined in international law.

Ecocide, however, is not a novel phenomenon specific to the climate crisis but has been intrinsic to the colonisation and repression of Indigenous communities since settlers came to their territories (Dunlap & Brock, 2022, p.4). Contemporaneously, the practise is now widely associated amongst scholars with the use of Indigenous traditional territory by Western corporations, enterprises, and states (Crook et al., 2018, p.299). The altering of, and often consequential destruction of Indigenous territories or land, can “have ecocidal and genocidal consequences for vulnerable Indigenous people who are materially and spiritually dependent upon (their) endangered environments” (Crook et al. 2018, p.299-300).

Martin Crook, Damien Short and Nigel South's paper *Ecocide, Genocide, Capitalism and Colonialism: Consequences for Indigenous Peoples and Glocal Ecosystems Environments* (2018) is vital in the small cannon of this emerging field. According to Crook et al. although international law has addressed many of the most extreme crimes of colonialism through the coinage of the term *genocide* and the introduction of the Rome Statute (1998), the Western lens in which international

² The U.S. military operation to use herbicidal warfare, most commonly Agent Orange, to defoliate the area the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong were fighting in, between 1962 and 1972 (Short, 2016, p.38).

law is written has resulted in many aspects and modes of genocide being overlooked. Ecocide can be a “powerful tool” to deal with many of the effects of colonialism that have been neglected (p.298). This research project aligns itself with the thoughts of Crook et al., adding that acknowledging wilful destruction of nature as damaging to the essence of some cultures is taking a step away from Eurocentricity and choosing to acknowledge other epistemologies. The intrinsic interconnectedness of ecocide and genocide is commonly referred to as the “Genocide-Ecocide Nexus” (Short, 2016, p.38). Through the recognition and understanding of the “relationship and inseparability of Indigenous peoples and their land” (Dunlap, 2018, p.557) we can see ecological damage as a mode of cultural genocide. This occurs consistently and in a myriad of ways, thus, deserves its own title and definition within international law, with Short (2016) arguing that ecocide is the missing fifth crime against humanity (p.48). Furthermore, Crook et al. (2018) discuss how the onus on genocide, and the historical omission of ecocide “reflects the distribution and control of knowledge and power” between the West and the Global South and subaltern (p.300). This strongly links to the ideas of epistemicide from both Santos (2008) and Battiste (2013) which will be further discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Despite the vast variety of Indigenous communities and epistemologies, we can say that, in general, Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding nature and the earth result in protective and preservationist behaviours, especially when we compare this to the capitalist commodification of nature and ecological domination that has emerged from Western epistemologies and interests (Goyes et al., 2021, p.965). In their research Goyes et al. (2021) interview four Indigenous communities in Colombia to explore the “structural, systemic and invisible factors” which facilitate the “extinction of Indigenous cultures” through ecocide (p.965). Goyes et al. (2021) state that “both Indigenous *relationships with* nature and Indigenous *representations of* nature are in danger of being damaged or lost for various reasons” (p.965). Goyes et al. explain how looking at injustices and ongoing oppression of Indigenous communities is finally entering other academic fields, not just those of education and law. For instance, the recent use of a political economy approach by Lynch et al (2018) examines how “the victimisation of Indigenous peoples is a ‘normal’ outcome of the capitalist treadmill” (Goyes et al., 2021, p.967). The researchers explore different ways that the “over-exploitation of land, water and wildlife” (Goyes et al., 2021, p.969) destroy and alter connections between people, their history, their lands, and their cultures. This has detrimental consequences for “Indigenous peoples who are materially and spiritually dependent upon endangered environments” (Goyes et al., 2021, p.969), which Goyes et al. conclude constitutes ecocide.

2.3 Development Rhetoric Legitimising Colonial Dispossession

Extractive ventures often entrench themselves in “development” based rhetoric, frequently being proposed as “essential to poverty-reduction and sustainable energy and food futures” (Copeland, 2023, p.1). This appears a vital endeavour when, at the end of 2022, according to the World Bank, over 700 million people worldwide were living below the poverty line (World Bank group, 2022, p.xiii). This rhetoric, however, seems to be obscuring or at least aiming to diminish the true issues created by EMPs. According to Borras et al. (2018), resource extraction and land grabbing results in a plethora of social and climate injustices, including those surrounding “agrarian, food, labour [and] environment” (p.1228). Maristella Svampa (2019) characterises EMPs as the third and present stage of the capitalist development project (p.20). Svampa (2015) states that those corporations and enterprises which partake in “developmental neo-extractivism” can be characterised by their “focus on exportation, and tendency for monoproduction or monoculture” (p.66). Prime examples of this are mining, oil or gas exploitation and large-scale deforestation. Later, Svampa (2019) added “the intensive occupation of territories, land grabbing, and the destructive appropriation of nature for export” to her defining characteristics of neo-extractivism (p.20). These two quotes are vital to the definition as they show both purpose and means of neo-extractivism. EMPs are often framed within the language of prosperity, employment, and improvement of local infrastructure that projects will bring to local communities. This rhetoric has been heard by Indigenous peoples across the world from countless governments and corporations (Dossa, 2007, p.889). Anne Spice (2018), a Tlingit, Deisheetan clan scholar, discusses the idea of “Critical infrastructure” as mode of legitimising land grabbing, which is a prime example of development rhetoric legitimising EMPs and colonial dispossession.

Public safety Canada (PSC) describes critical infrastructure as:

processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets, and services essential to the health, safety, security or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government... Disruptions of critical infrastructure could result in catastrophic loss of life, adverse economic effects, and significant harm to public confidence (PSC, 2018).

Many pipelines, such as the CGL pipeline, have been dubbed critical infrastructure by the Canadian government, a dubious characterisation especially when we consider that the CGL pipeline product will be used for non-domestic markets. Furthermore in 2015 the Canadian government passed Bill

C-51, which redefined what activities were classified as endangering the “security of Canada” to include “interference with... the economic or financial stability of Canada” and “interference with critical infrastructure” (Bill C-51, House of Commons of Canada, 2015). This illustrates how development discourse not only legitimises land dispossession by framing it within the aegis of “critical infrastructure”, but concomitantly criminalises and illegalises resistance and opposition to said dispossession.

Spice (2018) conducted a study to explore the epistemological differences surrounding the term “critical infrastructure” between the settlers and Indigenous communities. In an interview Spice conducted with Freda Huson, the Unis’ot’en Camp Spokesman, Freda states “what we’re doing here is protecting *our* critical infrastructure” (Huson, in Spice, 2018, p.40) going on to explain the salmon run, the berry bushes, which both sustain the people, and the bears is their critical infrastructure. She concludes by explaining;

...that whole cycle [the salmon, berry and bears chain] and system is our critical infrastructure, and that’s what we’re trying to protect, an infrastructure that we depend on. And industry and government are pushing these projects that would destroy that critical infrastructure, most important to our people (Huson in Spice, 2018, p.41).

Here we can observe the stark contrast between conflicting views of critical infrastructure, the governments capitalistic idea of critical infrastructure is intrinsically in conflict with the systems and values which Indigenous communities thrive on, live by, and use for their survival (Spice, 2018, p.41). It is vital to consider and understand this difference, especially when exploring the disregard for Indigenous ways of knowing and traditions by governments and corporations during EMPs. Perhaps we may consider the creation of this term “critical infrastructure”, with the current definition and classification of oil and gas pipelines and extraction as a way to bypass FPIC as is written under UNDRIP. Overturning the narrative of “critical infrastructure” to one with a more holistic view that is inclusive of subaltern, specifically Indigenous, epistemologies, is vital to overturning the recurrent cycle of colonial dispossession.

2.4 Indigenous Resistance Movements to Extractivism

Much has been written about Indigenous resistance, particularly in regard to the protection of land and territories from EMPs. In the sub-section I will engage with the literature regarding Latin American Indigenous resistance movements. The turn to EMPs or the third stage in capitalist developmental has seen a strengthening of movements fighting for their ancestral Indigenous

lands as well as an increase in their visibility and solidarity to their causes (Svampa, 2015, p.68).

Svampa (2015) coins these forms of conflicts “social-environmental conflicts”, describing them as:

those linked to the access and control of natural resources and territory, which suppose divergent interests and values between opposing parties, in the context of a great asymmetry of power (p.68).

This will be the definition used throughout this thesis when referring to social-environmental conflicts as the three dimensions chosen by Svampa to define this term are all integral to the CGL Wet’suwet’en conflict. The ideas of “development”, “democracy”, “environment” and “nature” are juxtaposed between both parties within social-environmental conflicts, and the importance of each element are at odds. Although in this paper Svampa is discussing the struggles of Indigenous communities in Latin America, the experiences are shared by a large proportion of Indigenous communities fighting EMPs. The crux of social-environmental conflicts in Latin America have many overlapping and intertwined factors with similar conflicts involving Indigenous peoples in so-called Canada. Thus, exploration of Latin American resistance is relevant to further discuss with regards to this thesis.

In his paper *Politicizing Water: Rescaling Resistance to Extractive Development in Guatemala* (2023), Nicholas Copeland describes the unifying quality water has had in Latin American resistance to EMPs. According to Copeland “water pollution and disruption of hydrological systems are unavoidable dimension of land grabs and resource extraction” (p.1) a development reflected in many social-environmental conflicts around the world, e.g. in Cochabamba, Bolivia (Assies, 2003). Water holds strong power and cultural and spiritual importance for many Indigenous peoples, in addition to being vital to their survival. This is something that will be discussed in regard to the Wet’suwet’en Nation versus CGL subsequently in this thesis. Copeland, points out that water has an unparalleled ability to mobilise collective action on a multitude of levels (p.1). In Latin America, water has become the crux of resistance, uniting many communities and NGOs in the fight against EMPs and capitalist development. However, he does state that “opposition to extractivism is not reducible to water” (p.4) and the issues vary surrounding water depending on the industry. Nonetheless water has become an inseparable element to land defenders with a variety of motivations within Latin America. Copeland (2023) uses the term “the defence of territory” (DT) as an umbrella term for “a range of local and national organisations that oppose extractivist development” (p.1), specifically in Guatemala. DT uses the central focus of water to spark a further discussion about the violence and extreme negative impacts

mass agro-ventures and the extractivism industry is having on Indigenous communities (Copeland, 2023, p.6). This movement has included the use of Indigenous epistemologies to show the significance of water and water rights, aiming for a collective reframing of water rights in congruence with Indigenous identity and ideas of collective territory (Perera, 2015, p.198). The importance of water can be voiced and approached from many different angles both through the spiritual nature water holds and the tangible need for clean water to survive. Even if industry or the government have a disregard for communities cultural, traditional and spiritual relationship with water, they cannot overlook the fact that the community need clean drinking water and uncontaminated water for agriculture, thus forcing engagement in the issue.

2.5 Wet'suwet'en and CGL Conflict

As a recent and ongoing conflict, there is a reasonably low number of academic literature written about the social-environmental conflict between CGL and the Canadian government, and the Wet'suwet'en. In this section I will engage with some of the extant articles and literature that have been written on the conflict.

In her paper *Decolonizing Authority: The Conflict on Wet'suwet'en Territory* Avigail Eisenberg (2022) discusses which parties and actors have legitimate authority over development on Indigenous territories and decisions pertaining to Indigenous nations, which she states is “a tension at the heart of struggles over decolonization today” (p.41). Eisenberg challenges the decision of both the federal and provincial governments to outsource its “consultation partners”, choosing actors affiliated with large corporations involved in the project to consult with First Nation communities (p.50). Many Human Rights organisations, including the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), have criticised so-called Canada and B.C. for not engaging in the proper consultation measures nor gaining FPIC prior to commencement on pipeline construction. Consultation “in good faith” (*Haida Nation v B.C.*, 2004) and in the “honour of the crown” (DOJ Canada, 2018, p.8) is codified in Canadian law in reference to consulting with Indigenous nations about projects that will affect their community, which seems impossible to maintain when outsourcing consultation to private actors. Instead of following this line, however, Eisenberg frames the issue of consultation and authority as the need to respect “the plurality of interests within the Wet'suwet'en community” (p.51). She places this conundrum in two theoretical frameworks: “Liberal postcolonial statism” (p.50) and “Relational pluralism” (p.52). Although her line of questioning and exploration is logical, who holds authority should not be up for debate. As previously discussed, the hereditary governance system holds total jurisdiction on issues concerning the territory, as legally enshrined through the *Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa* decision. Thus, the most

pertinent issues do not lie with *who* holds authority but the systems and structures that are in place to allow the dismissal and abrogation of this authority.

Michael Louma (2022) discusses similar issues surrounding authority in his paper *Collective Self-Determination, Territory and the Wet'suwet'en: What Justifies the Political Authority of Historic Indigenous Governments over Land and People*. Louma discusses two main questions. The first asks what are the “moral considerations” (p.21) which allow a collective group to own or control a part of land or territory? The second asking on what grounds can someone have the authority to “speak on behalf of the Wet'suwet'en” especially when making binding decisions? Although, to some extent, there is importance in the questions Louma possess, it seems that these questions are attempting to place Wet'suwet'en law and hereditary system in a Western “democratic” framework that ultimately are incompatible³.

2.6 Research Gap

Due to the contemporary and ongoing nature of the Wet'suwet'en-CGL socio-environmental conflict little research literature has been published about the conflict. Furthermore, even less academic research, if any, has been conducted on the effects of the pipeline felt by the community and the perceptions of the Wet'suwet'en people on the project and conflict. Wet'suwet'en perspective and the impacts created by the pipeline have been expressed in narrative and journalistic forms, however it is pertinent to analyse this socio-environmental conflict through a decolonial lens that also centres the voices of the community within academia.

The struggles of Indigenous peoples against EMP developments, is becoming more prominent within the fields of human rights, multiculturalism and environmentalism. Increasing awareness of socio-environmental conflicts have been predominantly led by Latin American scholarship, perhaps due to the high number of conflicts that occur within that area and the strong traditions of Indigenous resistance movements. There are many parallels between socio-environmental conflicts in Latin America and other areas of the world with Indigenous populations, however, from my understanding, less literature has been written on Indigenous peoples outside of Latin America. Thus, there is space to explore the theories and literature written about such struggles that Indigenous communities and land defenders are facing in Latin America, within a First Nation and Canadian context.

³ This viewpoint comes from my understanding and insights during the interviews, however as an outsider I may be incorrect in asserting this opinion.

3. Theoretical Framework

Outline

In this section I will set forth the theoretical framework I have used to analyse the five interviews I have conducted with members of the Wet'suwet'en nation. I use a decolonial lens in order to conduct my analysis, using primarily decolonial Latin American and Indigenous scholars. When choosing the most relevant theories through which to analyse my data, the onus was not only put on the theory and its content, but the author themselves. The journey of decolonizing academia involves an active choice to steer away from white, European, male scholars and allowing the voices of scholars from subaltern communities to be heard (Gopal, 2021, p.877). Moreover, Indigenous scholars have far more understanding of the issues this thesis discusses than the dominant European scholars.

3.1 Coloniality

The idea of “coloniality” was first presented by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano to represent the perspective and response from the subaltern to the imposition of a homogenous neoliberal modernity (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.107). Coloniality is the control of knowledge and its access, which builds and maintains the systemic distribution of power (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p.23), it is the pedestal on which Western civilisations have been built and “the hidden agenda of modernity” (Mignolo, 2011, p.2). Both Quijano and Mignolo state that modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same coin viewed from opposing perspectives. The West sees “modernity” and the colonised see “coloniality”, thus Mignolo writes “modernity/coloniality” with the solidus (/) representing both the unification and division of the two terms, the solidus is “an invisible dwelling place” (Mignolo, 2011, p.xxi). Additionally, we must realise that modernity was born from colonialism, it did not coincide with it, nor did it emerge after it, “coloniality is constitutive and not derivative of modernity” (Mignolo, 2012, p.vix). The logic of coloniality and its justifications have changed over time, beginning with “salvation”, the process of saving the souls of “primitive” beings through Christianity. From here it moved to “progress”, which involved control of non-European bodies and souls through Foucauldian bio-politics⁴. The third stage is “development”, which continues today. Here we must note that these stages are not linear and over-lap in a multitude of

⁴ Foucault's bio-politics refers to the control of populations and the state using polices and apparatus for the regulation and administration of human life, see Foucault (2010)

ways. The “development” stage stems from the take-over of marketisation and large corporations, coinciding with the beginning of the technological revolution, with the plurality of diverse subaltern identities, cultures and modalities of being subsumed by marketisation and populations forced into the homogenous role of the consumer. This stage is indivisible from the next stage, modernity (Mignolo, 2011, p.13-14). Furthermore, modernity/coloniality is not spatially nor temporally confined and Eurocentricity is not a question of geography, they are both based off epistemological hegemony (Mignolo, 2011, p.19). Quijano holds that coloniality is the “most general form of domination in the world today” (Quijano, 2007, p.170).

3.1.1 Epistemic Hegemony and Epistemicide

Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008) defines “epistemological diversity” as “knowledge systems underlying the practices of different social groups across the globe” (p.ix). Whilst “epistemological diversity of the world is immense” (p.ix), Western “science” and “reason” has dominant hegemonic reign over “the truth”. The creation of “universal truths” and the “normalization of dominant Eurodescendant epistemologies” (Dhillon, 2022, p.3) is at the crux of coloniality. This domination is detrimental to the well-being of humans and to all life on the planet. Western epistemic hegemony occurred through the repression of ways of knowing that derived from the colonies, or that were in opposition to Western thought. We may classify Western thought, originally, as Christian thought and theology, later secularised, becoming science and reason. All other perspectives, systems and expressions were deemed “primitive” or “supernatural”; silenced, disvalued, and belittled by the singular Western truth. Following this repression came the process of imposition, as colonisers beliefs, icons, thought and ways of knowing were foisted on to the colonised. A constant form of oppression and control over the subaltern was thus systematised (Quijano, 2007, p.169), a methodical delocalisation of knowledge (Mignolo, 2000, p.22) with the aim of imposing an infallible “universal knowledge” or “truth”. This control of epistemologies and the forced subalternation of “other” forms of knowing maintains a hierarchy, not only of knowledge, but also of power. For instance, residential schools enforced the idea that peoples Indigenous to Turtle Island were not “advanced enough” to “present their own epistemic credentials” nor to question European epistemes (Alcoff, 2007, p.81).

Not only can we look at Western supremacy of knowledge as an organisational feature of coloniality, but also as a face of cultural eradication. Santos postulates that suppression of knowledge is another aspect of genocide, which he names “epistemicide”, a dynamic at the core of the neoliberal capitalist structure used to justify development discourses. This “strategic use of

hegemonic concepts” (Santos, 2008, p.xxiv) reasserts the superior-inferior power dynamic created by colonialisation.

Unfortunately, the thought of the West as an epistemological saviour is accepted with relative consensus in mainstream Western culture. This is exemplified by Alcoff when quoting leading liberal thinker Arthur Schlesinger who states: “whatever the particular crimes of Europe, that continent is also the source - the *unique* source - of those liberating ideas...to which most of the world today aspires” (Schlesinger 1992, p.127 in Alcoff, 2007, p.85). Concomitantly to external subordination this also creates an internal psychological subordination for subaltern populations. The acceptance of Western epistemic superiority by the subaltern creates a process of alienation “to their own temporal reality” (Alcoff, 2007, p.85). Not only has epistemic hegemony created a “universal” knowledge system, but also a “universal history”, which ignores essential parts of non-white Euro-American history. The creation of a “universal history”, according to Mignolo (2012), has taken away “the dignity...from millions of people” (p.x). Mignolo’s decolonization project, through the delocalisation of knowledges, aims to restore this dignity.

By looking at Western epistemological hegemony through the concept of the coloniality of power (constituting the structures and organising systems that justify such hierarchies), we can see how it has become “almost impossible to evaluate alternative claims” (Alcoff, 2007, p.86).

3.1.2 The Colonial Matrix of Power

The coloniality of power, a key aspect within coloniality, symbolises the systems which disseminate Western epistemologies and morals, and in doing so, perpetuates and maintain imperialistic structures and power imbalances (Alcoff, 2007, p.83). This offers us a tool to analyse how colonised communities are subjugated and oppressed, not only through the tangible theft of land and resources but also through the forced conformity to Eurocentric epistemological homogeneity. Mignolo (2011), using the metaphor of a “four-headed and two-legged monster”, draws upon Quijano’s original theory of “*patrón colonial de poder*” or the “colonial matrix of power” (p.3) to describe the way in which coloniality is created and sustained. The four heads are intercalated spheres of control and management by colonial powers; control of the economy; control of authority; control of gender and sexuality; and control of knowledge and subjectivity (p.8). The two legs or pillars supporting control are the patriarchal and racial foundations of knowledge through which the “world order” is legitimised (p.8). The control of nature is often considered to fall under the bracket of “the control of economy”, however this diminishment of the importance of nature, by not giving it a separate domain, is intrinsically colonial ideology. Thus, Mignolo (2011) states we *could* consider the commodification of nature or the control of nature as

the fifth head of the monster (p.10). In this thesis the control of nature *will* be considered the fifth component. This idea will be revisited in depth in the following sub-chapter.

In addition to the creation of the idea of “race” and new social identities by homogenizing whole swathes of peoples (Quijano, 2007, p.171), the idea of biological superiority, introduced under European colonisation, is sustained under the colonial matrix of power. For instance, under the “new world order” one is no longer seen as *Wet’suwet’en* or *Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh*⁵ but under the blanket term of “Indigenous” or, previously, “Indian”, who were seen as inferior to white settlers. These discriminations imported by settlers were later codified as race and ethnicity. Mi’kmaq scholar Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) state that this categorisation reduces Indigenous peoples to “small groups of racially and culturally defined and marginalised individuals drowning in a sea of settlers” (p.123). The coloniality of power, which holds and maintains racial hierarchy, is often sustained by ideology and violence, necessary for these categorisations (Quijano, 2007, p.168).

It is important to note that despite covering multiple aspects of coloniality Quijano’s comments on gender may be considered inadequate and problematic. María Lugones (2008), criticises Quijano’s work on coloniality and further builds upon it by adding an alternate angle, the “coloniality of gender”. Lugones aims to create a way to understand colonialism through gender, and not singularly on the grounds of race, knowledge, and economy. Lugones posits that gender binaries and heterosexualism, concepts created and disseminated by European colonisers, operate to alienate inferiorised Indigenous women from their own culture and traditions. Analogous to the modes in which the construction of race was supplanted into the culture of colonised peoples and consequently maintained, Eurocentric gender hierarchy is maintained by Western hegemony of knowledge and through the coloniality of power (p.12).

The coloniality of power and the colonial matrix of power symbolises and names the structures and “organizing assumptions” (Alcoff, 2007, p.86) that allow for the justification of hierarchies, in addition to delegitimising alternate claims and eliminating ways in which we may evaluate such claims. Furthermore, it is used to legitimise the “subalternation of knowledges and the subjugation of people” (Mignolo, 2000, p.16). The rhetoric of modernity obscures the modes of coloniality and the colonial matrix of power which is, in itself, the plinth in which modernity stands on. It is the “very foundational structure of Western civilization” (Mignolo, 2011, p.16).

⁵ The *Sḵw̓x̓wú7mesh Úxwumixw* is a First Nation in B.C.

3.1.3 Control of Nature

As previously touched upon, Mignolo (2011) suggested that the commodification and control of nature perhaps deserves its own distinct node within the colonial matrix of power, rather than being reduced to a part of economic control. Additionally, coloniality of nature need not only be discussed as the control of nature but also its management (p.10). Through colonialism settlers have supplanted and disseminated the Eurocentric notion of nature being outside of humans and something to be dominated and exploited. The industrial revolution was key to this thought as it transformed and commodified the very idea of nature to “natural resources”, needed for daily survival and key to development (Mignolo, 2011, p.13). Nature thus became “natural resources”, an externality solely to be exploited for the colonisers benefit (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.4). All ideas or systems of knowledge that contradicted this were ignored, quelled, and devalued. Mignolo (2011) discusses the Aymara⁶ and Quechua⁷ idea of “Pachamama” which may roughly be seen as today’s idea of “Mother Earth”. Here “culture” and “nature” are inseparable, thus, unlike the dominant view within Western culture, nature is not “outside the human”, but as a “more-than-human phenomena” (p.11). Aymara and Quechua people are not separate *from*, nor superior *to* nature, but are rather *in* nature.

This is not solely specific to these Latin American Indigenous communities. Potlotek scholar, Marie Battiste (2013), describes Indigenous knowledge as embodying “a way of life, an intimacy and (a) directness with nature” (p.160). Further, she explains that the knowledge of a First Nation community is directly linked to a place, land, and the “relationships within that place” (p.160). Sustaining relationships with their territory and protecting their environments is vital to the nation’s culture, tradition, knowledge, and way of life (p.159). First Nation communities explore the “inner space” of nature which “provides an implicit order of reality and its sources to comprehend life, residing in various outcomes” and promotes well-being (p.160). Contrastingly, settlers only look at the “outer space” of nature, which is what we can tangibly take from the land, the physical resources it gives us. In this sense land and nature is a commodity (p.160).

Ecocentric ways of knowing have been disregarded as primitive by dominant Western epistemologies and societies. The capitalist economy and society brought into colonised societies puts “growth before life and individual success before communal well-being” (Mignolo, 2012,

⁶ An Indigenous people from the Andes and Altiplano regions of South America.

⁷ An Indigenous people mainly originating from the area now called Peru.

p.xi). With this in mind, development projects, that have destructive outcomes for the land, often come above the communities which rely on said land. Nature is recognised as tangible "capital" (Shiva, 2019, p.7), the exploitation of which takes precedence over the rights of subaltern peoples. Through the "universal" scientific narrative, nature is seen as an "unconditionally available natural resource" (Santos, 2008, p.xxxv) there to be exploited by whomever has the power to take it. According to Tuck and Yang (2012), "the disruption of Indigenous relationship to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence" (p.5), that is not merely confined to the settlers' arrival but "is reasserted each day of occupation" (p.5).

Eurocentric epistemologies are used as a weapon to instil and root hierarchies of power such as "subject-object dualism" (Ranauta, 2020, p.356), which places humans superior to nature and other living beings. According to Acker, Kaltmeier and Tittor (2016) this dualism creates a humanity-nature binary that allows for the possessor of reason to be separate and external to nature (p.7). This not only provides a justificatory narrative to the commodification and objectification of nature but also places Indigenous bodies (who do not possess "reason") in the "nature" side of the binary, thus establishing an ideological basis for their objectification (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p.4). Furthermore, "Eurocentrism has made itself the default position of what counts as being legitimate knowledge and practice" (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p.4). Here both nature and Indigenous bodies (or any non-white bodies) are classified as uncivilised and primitive (Ranauta, 2020, p.356) allowing for objectification and subjugation by the dominant capitalist world system.

3.2 White Possession

The concept and categorisation of race was created as a form of exclusion and has contemporarily created conditions under which Indigenous peoples live and must experience the interrelationship between race and state (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.xi). Nation-states, like so-called Canada, require regulatory mechanisms which reproduce and reaffirm "possessiveness through a process of perpetual Indigenous dispossession in order to maintain the state as a white possession" (Moreton-Robison, 2015, p.xi). Aileen Moreton-Robison (2015), a Goenpul⁸ scholar, believes the concept of "possessive logics" is used as a "mode of rationalisation" for white nation-states "excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-states ownership, control, and domination" (p.xii). The "patriarchal whiteness" of such logics diminishes Indigenous land and property rights in order to promote white accumulation of property and assets. Possession,

⁸ Goenopul are one of the three Australian Aboriginal peoples that make up the Quandamooka Nation, whose lands lie in what is now called Queensland, Australia

and specifically possession of lands, is ultimately conflated with power and rights. The idea of the “right to land” in this formulation is therefore a tool in which those in power can subjugate the subaltern (p.132).

Morton-Robinson (2015) holds, despite many other Indigenous scholars placing onus on culture rather than race, that race matters in all people’s lives, and for Indigenous peoples it has become a “mark of inferiority” (p.xiii). For Morton-Robinson no matter in which state⁹, Indigenous peoples are always “overrepresented as...lacking, dysfunctional, alcoholic, violent, needy and lazy” (p.xiii). She claims, “for Indigenous people, white possession is not unmarked, unnamed, or invisible; it is hypervisible” (p.xiii). This is where the impulses to dehumanise Indigenous people stem from. Furthermore, the existence of Western supremacy and hegemony is predicated on the possession of Indigenous lands in order to perpetually build capitalist economies. The West, specifically in Moreton-Robinson’s formulations, white people, are the creators of “dominant images in the world” (Dyer, 2017, p.9), but do not seem to have the insight that they have created such images in their likeness. Thus, they believe all people *should* think, act and feel like them, whilst also believing that they are thinking and acting for *all* people (Dyer, 2017, p.9). Adding to this, such states put forward a mirage that Western supremacy and racism against Indigenous peoples is something of the past. They have managed to break free of this past demeanour through new legislative rules that negate racism (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.76).

Despite Moreton-Robinson’s (2015) scholarship lying in the Quandamooka context, she clearly states that her questions and theories are relevant to any Indigenous peoples who have been colonised by the British and whose ancestral land was seen as *terra nullius* (p.xx). There is a nontangible link between white possession and the denial of true Indigenous sovereignty. Through the assertion of sovereignty by state governments, they reiterate their possessive nature and in rejecting Indigenous land title and rights, perpetual accumulation is made possible (p.76). Indigenous calls for sovereignty question and challenge the very “conceptualisations of state sovereignty” (p.127), thus we can see why Western settler governments would fight so hard to deny Indigenous sovereignty. Even if the “Aboriginal Title” is given, settler governments still use legislation and power to avoid the actualisation of true sovereignty and self-determination for Indigenous peoples. Moreton-Robinson draws upon Foucault’s understanding of “state” who writes “the State is, and must be...the integrity, the superiority and the purity of the race” (Foucault, 2003, p.81). Drawing upon this Moreton-Robinson (2015) holds that “whiteness operates through the racialised application of disciplinary knowledges and regulatory mechanisms, which function

⁹ Here she is referring to colonized white western states, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, USA and Hawai’i

together to preclude recognition of Indigenous sovereignty” (p.129). Through these mechanisms white possession is rationalised. Moreover, it shows the undeniable fear held by the white patriarch of its own dispossession.

4. Methodology

Outline

In this following chapter I will discuss the methodology I have employed in order to answer my research questions¹⁰. I begin by giving an overview of my research design before discussing my participant recruitment and data collection process. This sub-chapter will have specific onus on difficulties and challenges I faced when trying to find participants for this project. Next, I will discuss the steps taken when conducting my data analysis. I decided to approach my analysis through the lens of reflexive thematic analysis (TA) with direction from Braun and Clarke's 2006 book, *Thematic Analysis: A practice guide*. The following sub-chapter will discuss positionality, a vital component for my research given my status as a white European “outsider” interviewing members of a community both historically and contemporarily oppressed. Building upon this I will discuss my epistemological foundations. Moving on, I explore the ethical guidelines which are meant to keep researcher and participants out of harm. However, I take a stance that these guidelines can often produce or exacerbate a power dynamic between researcher and participants which can become problematic. Furthermore, I explore how the ethical guidelines can hinder the empowerment some participants may feel when partaking in research. Finally, I end this chapter by briefly setting forth the limitations that I have faced during this project and what that means for my results.

4.1 Participant Recruitment and Data Collection

In this research project I have employed qualitative semi-structured interviews in the belief that this method of informal interviewing will help the participant to feel comfortable when discussing emotive topics, which my thesis inevitably covers. I produced an interview guide which established topics that should be covered, suggested questions, and prompts for the interview. There was, however, no need to follow the order of said topics. I took this approach to allow space for interviewees to share their narrative and direct the course of the interview. I conducted in-depth interviews (Bryman, 2012, p.213) which ranged from 40 minutes to 3 hours. These interviews took place via Zoom. I decided to interview participants solely from the Wet'suwet'en nation in order to focus my project on their experience, despite multiple nations being affected by the CGL pipeline.

¹⁰ Found in section 1.1

My largest difficulty throughout this thesis process was finding participants. I initially contacted *the Office of Wet'suwet'en* through their reception email as my first point of contact within the Wet'suwet'en nation. I also contacted ten of the twenty First Nation Bands who have consented to the CGL pipeline construction through their office pages. In addition, during my initial contacting round, I also emailed the Gidimt'en Checkpoint Yintah Access and the Unist'ot'en Camp¹¹. My initial attempts at contacting participants yielded little as I received very few responses. However, the Gidimt'en Checkpoint responded with the personal emails of three high ranking nation members. Through this I was able to contact and speak to Chief Na'Moks, Dini ze' of Tsa K'en Yex house, Tsayu Clan. He has previously been the Wet'suwet'en spokesperson and sits at one of the highest-ranking positions within the hereditary governance structure of the Nation. Chief Na'Moks is the only interviewee whose personal information is not anonymised due to his "public figure" position. He consented to the use of his personal details.

Following further research and my interview with Chief Na'Moks I realised that members of the First Nation Bands that I had originally contacted did not fall into my criteria for interview participants as the proposed route of the pipeline does not cross any of their band reservation land. Thus, I did not follow up my primary emails regarding these First Nation Bands.

After my dearth of responses from more "official" streams of contact such as administration teams, I began to contact individuals whose details could be found on the official nation page (Office of Wet'suwet'en). Furthermore, I turned to social media where I found one "public" Facebook group named "Wet'suwet'en Proud and Strong", on which I could see the content and posts on the pages. Here I decided to contact those members who were most active and vocal on the groups with the hope that they or their acquaintances would be interested in participating. Through a process my snowball sampling began (Bryman, 2012, p.202).

After my first interview with Chief Na'Moks I realised the importance of allowing space for participants to share stories and narratives, especially as oral history holds great weight in Wet'suwet'en culture. Furthermore, allowing for the interviewee to steer the direction of the interview helped to diminish hierarchical power relations between the researcher and the participant. Here it was important to establish a dialogue and to avoid an interview that felt interrogatory. This gave my research elements of participatory research, although, I would have liked to incorporate more elements of participatory researcher into my design and execution, something I will further discuss in the section 4.6. According to Mattias De Backer (2022) "participatory research introduces an alternative relationship between researcher and research

¹¹ See section 1.5.5 for descriptions of the Unist'ot'en Camp and Gidimt'en Checkpoint

subject” (p.715). The dynamic is no longer the participant as a subject of the researcher, but the two studying together. This ultimately reduces the perceived “power gap” between the two actors, with the aim of strengthening the dynamics between them (p.715).

In addition, throughout this process I realised the necessity to avoid essentialising the power dynamics between researcher and participants. Each participant is different and have “different access to knowledge and power” (Lund et al., 2016, p.289). For instance, when speaking with Chief Na’Moks, who has great authority, knowledge and power, the dynamic was very different than speaking with Participant 3 who has only recently began to reconnect with their heritage and Indigeneity. These distinctions were important to be aware of, during the interviews and when analysing the data.

4.2 Data Analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Despite the plethora of analytic approaches one may take during qualitative research reflexive TA was, in my opinion, the clear choice for this research project. In reading of both Wilson (2008) and Smith (2012) I gained greater understanding of the importance of holistic and reflexive thought in Indigenous Methodologies. Wilson (2008) points out that “Indigenous epistemology is all about ideas developing through the formation of relationships” (p.8). This does not solely mean relationships in a tangible sense, with human (participants) and non-human (land, nature, animals) elements that are part of the research but also creating a relationship between researcher and the data. This, I believe, can be achieved through reflexive TA.

I have followed the guidelines for reflexive TA provided by Braun and Clarke (2021), who define reflexivity as a process that “involves the practice of critical reflection on your role as researcher, and your research practice” (p.47). Reflexive TA takes a non-positivist approach where subjectivity is valued in order to critically approach, in an in-depth manner, the data collected (p.47-51). “Researcher subjectivity is the primary tool for reflexive [TA]” (p.52), thus, subjectivity is viewed as valuable and essential. This in some senses divorces us, at least slightly, from the mainstream scientific epistemologies which value objectivity and reason. This “opening up” of epistemological bases is vital when conducting research in Indigenous spaces. Storytelling is an essential part of First Nations history and culture. In First Nation tradition it is important for “storytellers to impart their own life and experience into the telling” (Wilson, 2008, p.32). Furthermore, the listener (or reader) will bring their life and experiences into their understanding of what is being told. For Wilson (2008), researchers must take the role of storytellers, as research in Indigenous spaces “requires the holistic use and transmission of information” (p.32).

Braun and Clarke (2021) lay out six phases of reflexive TA; 1) Familiarizing yourself with the dataset; 2) Coding; 3) Generating initial themes; 4) Developing and reviewing themes; 5) Refining, defining and naming themes; 6) Writing up (p.89-90). We must note that this holistic process is not linear, one must move back and forth between phases. Phase one implies a full critical immersion in the data set. Here whilst transcribing the interviews, itself an act of familiarization, I attempted to identify and take note of any recurring themes, words, or viewpoints. Following each transcription, I created a mind-map identifying topics or themes that came up and the interconnectedness between them. With these mind-maps in mind, I began phase two, in which, through the re-reading of my transcripts, identifying key quotes and placing them into codes, 52 codes were generated. From here I realised many of my codes were similar and could be collated into one, subsequently my codes were reduced to 27. Phase three involved the creating of initial themes. Here I was aware of the need to avoid “bucket themes” and aimed toward the creation of initial “candidate themes”. Bucket themes are defined, by Braun and Clarke (2021), as a “topic summary” (p.389); here the researcher puts all related information into one theme or even more simply, puts the answers to an individual question into one theme. This is done regardless of whether “there is shared meaning and a central organising concept that unifies the data” (p.389). Contrastingly, candidate themes constitute “an initial clustering of codes and a potential theme” (p.389), this theme must then be considered further before accepting it. Once dividing codes into themes, I further divide them into sub-themes before embarking on phase five. During this phase I wrote a definition for each theme and sub-theme prior to the naming process. I felt it important that each theme and sub-theme were named by a quote from my participants, as my thesis revolves around the Wet’suwet’en perspectives, thus, in order to place onus on the participants opinions, I felt it apt to have each theme named by them. Additionally, a quote helps to show what story the theme is telling, which is a key element for Braun and Clarke. Figures 4, 5 and 6 show the final decisions in themes and sub themes.

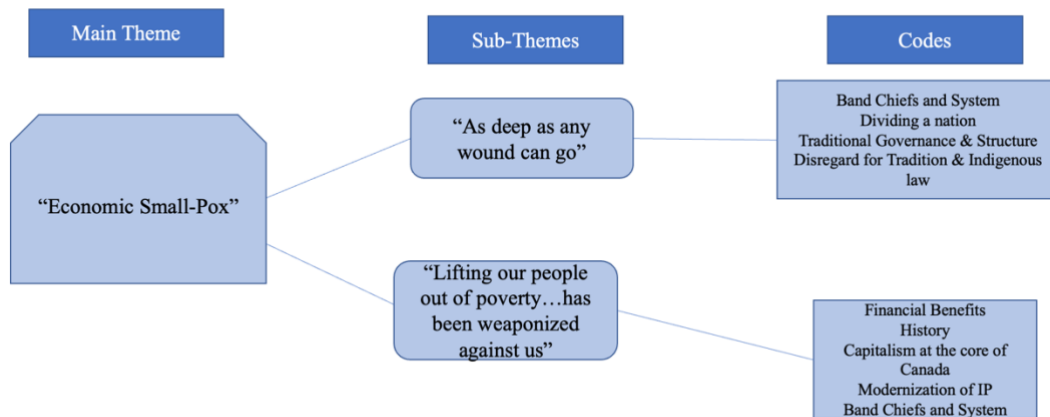


Figure 4: Theme 1, sub-themes and codes

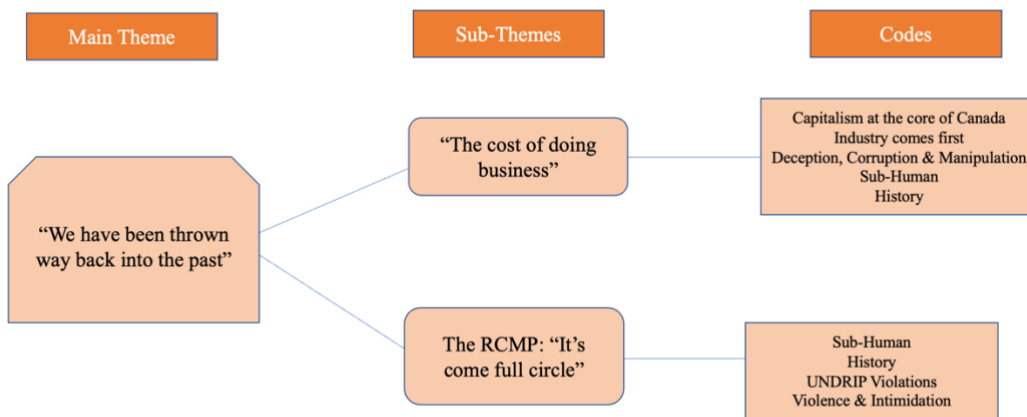


Figure 5: Theme 2, sub-themes and codes

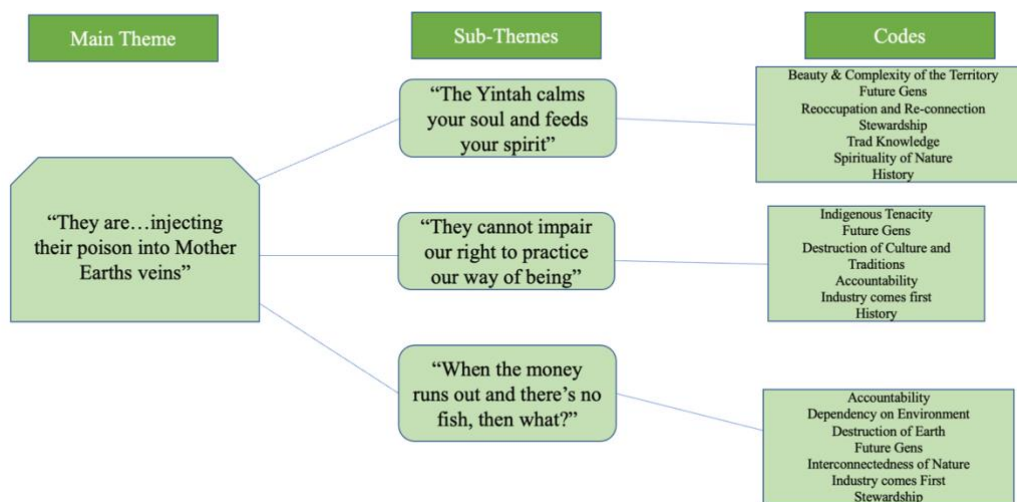


Figure 6: Theme 3, sub-themes and codes

4.3 Positionality

As a researcher aiming to explore and investigate a world in which I am, in many aspects, detached from and alien to, being aware of positionality and its effects on research is fundamental to this research project. “Our (the researchers) consciousness is always the medium through which research occurs” (Stanley & Wise, 1983, p.157), it is impossible to look at anything, be it data, literature or events with total neutrality and objectivity. One’s perspective and positionality are always the lens through which analysis and understanding occurs. One’s “ontological and epistemological beliefs influence... research” (Holmes, 2020, p.1) especially when research revolves around the social world. Thus, positionality is a fundamental foundation stone of this research project.

When I began my research, I was acutely aware and concerned about my fixed positionality (Holmes, 2020, p.2), that is as a white European student researcher conducting research in an Indigenous community. I was, however, more worried about this as a presentation rather than the effect it has on my own epistemological and ontological beliefs. The juxtaposition of discussing the perpetual cycle of colonialism alongside my background and upbringing was not lost on me and had the potential to bring many roadblocks to my research. Smith (2012) points out that “[f]rom the vantage point of the colonised... the term “research” is intrinsically linked to European imperialism and colonialism”, deeming it as “one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p.1). She repeatedly puts heavy onus on the past wrongs and violations committed by European researchers on Indigenous communities and peoples. Moreover, she emphasises the reluctance of some communities to invite non-Indigenous research into their community and the desire to promote Indigenous researchers and academics instead of those from more privileged backgrounds (p.175). Thus, being a non-Indigenous researcher myself, could highly influence the information that the participants decided to share with me. In addition, my status as an “outsider” (Farahani, 2010, p.115) could have acted as a hinderance to gain participants willing to be interviewed in my research project.

Furthermore, throughout my research I realised the importance of reflecting on other parts of my positionality. My epistemological background, and the dominance of science, reason and colonial scholarship in my education was vital for me to be aware of throughout my field work and research. This is especially pertinent due to the “epistimicide” (Santos, 2008, p.ix), destruction of ways of knowing and ways of understanding, that Indigenous peoples throughout the world have endured. As previously mentioned, Battiste (2013), succinctly describes the polarity between the importance of nature to Indigenous knowledge, and the Western construction of knowledge.

Western dominant thought views only the “outer space” of nature, what one can see and use, thus nature and land are seen as a commodity and a resource (p.160). Although I do not see nature as a commodity or resource, I must be aware that I have never been taught nor trained to look at the “inner space”. These divergent epistemological foundations may structure a lack of understanding of the deeper connections and relationships Indigenous peoples share with nature and will, thus invariably affect the analysis of my data.

Not only is it important to understand that my positionality has affected my data collection and analysis but that it has also affected the design, methods and every decision I made leading up to my chosen topic. Thus, it must be taken into mind that this complex web of interactions will be reflected in the final product of this research paper.

Finally, it must be remembered that positionality is not only about acknowledgement but also allowance (Holmes, 2020, p.2). Thus, throughout this project I have aimed to consistently reflect on my positionality, trying to understand how it is affecting my research and analysis, but also accepting that there is no neutral lens with which one can view the world, and allowing my own “lens” and views to aid my analysis.

4.4 Epistemological and Ontological Foundations

When embarking on decolonial research it is important to keep in mind the modes in which modern academic culture, Western science and Western methodologies have been used as tools within colonialism and aided in the perpetuation of colonial dynamics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014, p.2). I have aimed, to the best of my abilities, to follow Denzin and Lincoln’s (2014) criteria for research in Indigenous spaces, which is as follows:

It must be ethical, performative, healing, transformative, decolonizing and participatory. It must be committed to dialogue, community, self-determination, and cultural autonomy. It must meet people’s perceived needs. It must resist efforts to confine inquiry to a single paradigm or interpretive strategy. It must be unruly, disruptive, critical, and dedicated to the goals of justice and equity (p.3).

In addition, Indigenous ontology rejects the nature/culture divide and stems from human-non-human-spiritual interconnectedness in which reciprocity between humans and nature is vital (Fisher, 2022, p.18). Many Indigenous ontologies as explained by Fisher (2022) also reject a linear notion of time as well as the foundational principal of Western thought that movement forward toward modernity is “movement towards a better future” (p.19).

With Denzin and Lincoln's list of criteria and Indigenous ontological foundations in mind, I turn to my epistemological foundations for this research project. Western research is often administered through positivist epistemological traditions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2014, p.8), which often includes the "value free", "objective" research which aims to test a theory (Bryman, 2012, p.28). Ontologically, I reject the notion of "universality" and the "objectivity" of Western science, identifying the inherent coloniality of both principles. Thus, I am removing myself from a positivist framework, instead turning toward an interpretivist approach. Interpretivism divorces itself from the "natural science" approach and allows the researcher to embrace subjective meaning and differences in understanding (Bryman, 2012, p.30).

4.5 Ethical Principles

"Ethical issues arise at a variety of stages in social research" (Bryman, 2012, p.130) and they do not always involve issues you predicted prior to the research journey. According to Diener and Crandall (1978 in Bryman, 2012, p.135), there are four main areas of ethics in social research: no harm to participants, informed consent, invasion of privacy, and a lack of deception¹². Whether harm could occur to participants was a foundational principle within my project as I was disclosing personal details and political, social and cultural views about a contemporary conflict occurring around them. Harm, however, does not solely apply to external factors, in fact, power dynamics that are created in any research which involves human participants can result in various degrees of harm to all parties involved (Connor et al., 2018, p.400). Thus, ethical boards, rules and constraints have been put in place to protect researchers, participants and institutions involved. However, it is becoming ever more evident that these ethical rules may no longer have the participants best interests at the core and can be seen as "a risk management exercise at the behest of the host institution or funding body" (Tolich & Fitzgerald, 2006, p.72). Additionally, a key part of social research should be the empowerment of participants, however, much of the framework that currently guides our research ethics fails to empower the individuals and communities which research revolves around (Connor et al., 2018, p.401). Many of the bureaucratic steps of research could hinder, to some extent, the ways in which empowerment can be achieved through research. The withholding of empowerment due to normative ethical guidelines became apparent during my research. Participant 2, Participant 3 and Chief Na'Moks all stated that they felt no need to be

¹² The Norwegian national ethical guidelines for social sciences and humanities (NESH) can be found here: <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/guidelines-for-research-ethics-in-the-social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/>

anonymised and were happy for their name and details to be used. Participant 3 went as far as requesting their identity and name to be used saying:

it does lessen my enthusiasm to contribute knowing, “all identifying information will be anonymized in the final paper so you will not be recognizable in the publication”. This is just my ego talking of course... (Participant 3, in an email on 27/01/2023).

As Participant 3 had previously been openly vocal about their opinions surrounding the CGL pipeline, he found it unnecessary and even against his interests to be anonymised. Perhaps diminishing the “empowerment” he may feel from participating in this study. In addition, the lack of discussion or compromise around anonymisation of the participants between myself, the researcher, and those being anonymised may have set up unwanted power dynamics where cooperation and input from the participant was not valued nor recognised. Collaboration and reciprocity are vital when conducting research such as mine. When researching in an Indigenous space, and *with* members of Indigenous communities it is essential to note the silencing of Indigenous voices within academia (Kuokkanen, 2007, p.80) thus strive for research to aid in self-determination (Denzin & Lincoln, 2014, p.3). Here self-determination is not only a political and legislative aim but one of social justice based on the “psychological, social, cultural and economic” grounds (Smith, 2012, p.120).

Although it can be seen as a “bureaucratic requirement to be met as a tick-a-box exercise” (Connor et al. 2018, p.404), as a student researcher, anonymisation was an important aspect of my Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) ethical recommendations. If I had greater time, I would have entered into a dialogue with NSD to see if participants who wanted to be identified could be, however time constraints did not allow for this. In addition, my original NSD application clearly stated I would be anonymising my participants as I believed this was vital to protect them from unforeseen circumstances and in compliance with both NSD and NESH ethics standards. The idea that this would be undesirable to my participants or reduce the empowering effects that may occur during research participation, was not a development I had thought of at this point. Nor did I originally reflect on the power dynamics created when allowing my voice to be heard and named but not affording the same privilege to participants. Thus, after the original application was accepted, the time afforded to this thesis would not have been sufficient to reapply with this change.

Despite this it was not possible to keep Chief Na’Moks anonymity, nor was it necessary. As a prominent figure head of the Nation and a spokesperson for the Wet’suwet’en, he would be easily identifiable through the content of his interview. Subsequently, with his consent, I have used his

name and personal details within this thesis. Once again, it is problematic that this privilege was afforded to someone of authority, but not to other participants.

The second ethical principle that was at the forefront of my mind throughout the initial stages of my research was “informed consent”. According to Bryman (2012) informed consent means that prospective participants must “be given as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study” (p.138). Thus, supplying an informed consent letter with an appropriate amount of information, as well as contact details for any additional questions, was crucial. Recorded or written consent were received by every participant. In addition, both “informed consent” and “no harm” principles encompass the idea of non-coercion and ensuring that participants know the voluntary nature of the research, understanding they can withdraw at any moment. This information was included in my “letter of informed consent”. Once again, however, the principle of informed consent can be considered as a potential hindrance, especially in research which aims for a balanced and trusting relationship between the researcher and participants. The signing of the letter of informed consent often comes at the beginning of the communication with participants, as it did for me. This bureaucratic start can often set a precedent and places a power dynamic between researcher and participants, that the researcher must work hard to diminish. This is even more pertinent due to the history of non-Indigenous scholars researching Indigenous communities, the negative connotations that surround research within Indigenous spaces and its inherent links to “imperialism and colonial practices” (Smith, 2012, p.2).

Another ethical dilemma I was faced with was related to the hierarchy within the Wet’suwet’en governance system. After my first interview with Chief Na’Moks, I hoped that a snowball effect would be triggered. However, after asking Chief Na’Moks if he could provide me with details of anyone that may be willing to participate, I learnt due to the hereditary structure this would not be possible. As a hereditary chief, the highest-ranking level within the Wet’suwet’en nation, even asking people if they are willing to participate or giving me their contact details would seem more like an order or compulsory action rather than something voluntary. This would go against the principle of voluntary participation.

“It is not possible to identify in all circumstances whether harm is likely” (Bryman, 2012, p.138), harm may occur due to unforeseen or unknown circumstances, however all possible measures to reduce harm must be taken. Thus, the ethical aspect and protection of participants and myself has been one that I have taken into careful consideration within this research project. I have aimed to be clear and transparent with the participants about the aims, purpose and developments

within this research project, giving all participants full access to their data and the right to withdraw their participation and data at any time with no given reason.

4.6 Limitations

Like every research project, mine holds certain limitations which must not be overlooked but held in consideration.

Due to the current court injunction on Wet'suwet'en territory potentially stopping me from entering territory land as well as time factors¹³ and the physical distance between myself and participants, I chose to conduct my interviews online via the medium of Zoom rather than in person interviews. Thankfully we live in time where online video-conference software is advanced and comes with clarity of picture and sound, thus the limitations are minimised. In addition, in the post-pandemic world people seem far more comfortable speaking online via video, thus I do not believe that using this medium reduced the connection and understanding between myself and the interviewee to any great effect. Although conducting walking interviews on Wet'suwet'en territory would have added another dimension to this research. Perhaps if this was the case participants would have felt more comfortable and I would have been able to better understand some of the answers which revolved around the Yintah.

If this project was longer and I was a more experienced researcher, I would have liked to conduct this research involving "peer research methodologies" which uses members of the community as co-authors and co-researchers. Goyes et al. (2021) explains that peer research methodologies can be used as a way to "empower vulnerable groups" (p.968), to gain a better understanding of an issue from the perspectives of those involved and to gain more in-depth information, as members of a community often may feel more comfortable speaking to other community members instead of outsider researchers (p.968).

I decided to focus on the Wet'suwet'en nation as an extremely vocal nation in regard to the CGL pipeline, in addition to a significant proportion (192 km) running through their unceded territory. However, the Wet'suwet'en Nation is not the only community effected by the pipeline, thus perhaps choosing just one nation narrowed my range of perceptions. Furthermore, by choosing the most vocal nation in opposition to the pipeline there was already a pre-conception of what people's thoughts may be, however, it was important to start every interview with an open mind as of course not everyone within the nation is in agreement. With this in mind, I realise this project

¹³ This is not only the fact that the time given to this thesis is much shorter than a bigger research project but also that, by the time I had three participants confirmed it was the end of January 2023.

cannot be extrapolated to represent the views of all the members of the Wet'suwet'en nation nor all First Nations involved in the CGL pipeline or other such EMPs.

5. Data Findings and Analysis

Outline

With consideration of my research questions and using my theoretical framework as a lens, I analysed five interviews I held with members of the Wet'suwet'en Nation. I have developed three main themes; all the names of the themes are direct quotes taken from the participants¹⁴. Each theme is further divided into sub-themes.

The first theme, "Economic Smallpox" (Participant 3, 14 February 2023), explores how industry (CGL) and the settler governments (federal and provincial) have employed strategies to weaken and divide the Wet'suwet'en community.

The second theme, "We have been thrown way back into the past" (Participant 5, 30 March 2023), delves into the deception by CGL and the Canadian and B.C. governments, shedding light on the colonial oppression and the sub-human treatment of the nation.

The final theme, "They are...injecting their poison into Mother Earths veins" (Participant 4, 26 February 2003), highlights the profound significance of nature and the land to the Wet'suwet'en people, as well as the disregard shown by CGL and the settler government towards both Mother Earth and the Wet'suwet'en connection with her.

5.1 "Economic Smallpox"

It's gone off like a dirty bomb. The impacts are happening slowly, bit by bit over time, we are just crumbling.
Participant 3

Colonialism is an ongoing and pervasive phenomenon, manifesting both systematically and in the everyday actions of colonisers, including individuals of settler descent (Coulthard, 2014, p.7) actualised as coloniality (Mignolo, 2011, p.2). The approach to consultation by the governments and the corporations involved in EMPs both reconstruct and entrench coloniser-colonised power dynamics under the guise of inclusion (Youdelis, 2016, p.1384). This has been evident in the CGL pipeline "consultation" process, which occurred with an inappropriate level of Wet'suwet'en governance and did not genuinely constitute consent. Titled "Economic Smallpox", this section

¹⁴ The titles will be repeated many times thus, I will only put the reference for these once in the outline

highlights industry's deceptive promises of economic benefits to the Wet'suwet'en while inflicting lasting harm, drawing parallels to historical smallpox as a form of biological warfare against Indigenous populations (Smith, 2002, p.271)¹⁵. One participant explained why we should draw parallels between the genocidal act of smallpox introduction by settlers, to the acts of CGL and both the B.C. and the Canadian governments:

if you understand how smallpox effected our people back in 100 years ago or more with spreading diseases with blankets that we thought were help make us better actually made us worst. Money has done the same thing, these impact benefit agreements that were negotiated with the wrong level of government, our band office instead of our hereditary chief's office. It's gone off like a dirty bomb. The impacts are happening slowly, bit by bit over time, we are just crumbling. (Participant 3)

Consultation primarily involved band chiefs rather than the Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs, a point unanimously emphasised by all five participants as the wrong level of governance for consultation. As explained by Chief Na'Moks (Participant 1, January 10 2023), the pipeline does not intersect with any reserve land, which falls under the jurisdiction of the band system, however, roughly 190km of the pipeline traverses traditional Wet'suwet'en territory. One participant succinctly articulated why consulting with the band chiefs was inappropriate: "the band chiefs are tied just strictly to the reserve and the hereditary chiefs traditionally manage the entire territory. The Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa court case confirmed that too." (Participant 2). Confirming this, Participant 3 said, "We have the hereditary system, which everybody agreed after the Delgamuukw decision, that they were the rightful decision-makers on anything affecting the territory".

The sentiment of dysfunctionality stemming from pipeline proposals is widely shared among participants. The consultation methods employed by CGL, B.C., and the federal government have inflicted substantial harm on the Wet'suwet'en nation. Such methods undermine Wet'suwet'en sovereignty, disregarded Indigenous rights, and have created a perception that industry and settler governments are deliberately using the Indian Act band system to fabricate the appearance of genuine consent, in order to legitimise the pipeline. This strategic manipulation of authority aligns with the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2012, p.8) wherein control is

¹⁵ The history of smallpox being used as a biological weapon against Indigenous populations is widely contested, however I have included this contested history as it is referred to by a participant as a metaphor for the current CGL conflict.

purposefully shifted from the hereditary governance to a Western-imposed structure. By entrusting authority to the Canada-backed elected band council members, the power is taken away from the Wet'suwet'en people and their traditions as per the Indian Act's original intent to "erase Indigenous law and governance" in the late 1800s (Wikler, 2020, para.2).

Without specifically discussing the Wet'suwet'en-CGL conflict, Youdelis (2016) remarks, "consultation is not just a discourse of settler colonial power but produces a mechanism which deny First Nations voice and political agency" (p.1377). This is compounded by one participant, when discussing how the hereditary governance system works, "[we] have been silenced as Indigenous people and they (the hereditary chiefs) are our advocates" (Participant 4). The Wet'suwet'en community is further silenced by bypassing the hereditary chiefs and going through the band system.

The absence of legal action against CGL reinforces the dominance of settler power, despite the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa decision affirming that the Wet'suwet'en Nation never ceded their land, granting their traditional governance full jurisdiction. CGL's choice to engage with elected Band chiefs not only underscores their authority but also reflects their epistemic dismissal and irreverence of Wet'suwet'en knowledge and tradition. The historical context of the band system's introduction reveals its goal of eradicating traditional Indigenous governance and imposing assimilation, driven by settlers' fear of the unknown (ICTInc, 2015). This contemporaneous dismissal indicates ongoing trends of defenestration are still institutionally prevalent within the settler government, betraying a historically-bound unwillingness to educate themselves about Indigenous hierarchical structures, and a concomitant perpetration of the imposition of Western ways of being. This imposition of Western-democratic/modern governance relegates the Wet'suwet'en hereditary system to the past. Quijano (2000) argues that this forced homogenization allows Euro-Americans to establish a "new temporal perspective of history" (p.541), rendering the colonised culture "historical" or "primitive". The imposition of a settler governance system portrays Indigenous peoples as primitive and inferior to white settlers. Consulting through the band system, as done by CGL and the Canadian government, reinforces this historical narrative and perpetuates the colonial-created dynamic of inferiority/superiority.

During my conversations with Wet'suwet'en Nation members, some participants vehemently labelled it as an ongoing colonial practice, with one participant stating, "the problem that I see is that there is still a colonial attitude in all the governments (federal and provincial)" (Participant 2). Alluding to the topic of consulting band chiefs as opposed to hereditary chiefs, he added:

the issue of colonialism is still alive and well, in both the provincial and the federal system. They're doing a lot of arm waving trying to claim that isn't the case but when you get right down to it, that attitude is still right there. It is better to try seeking forgiveness in the future rather than consult properly.

Furthermore, Participant 5 labelled the consultation decision as a “well-educated tactic”:

It was a well-educated tactic ... It was a very government driven tactic... they knew they could play the divide and concur. I do not think that it was inclusive, I do not think it was fair, and I also recognise that the government of Canada really played a bigger role in this than most people perceive. They know that reserves only have jurisdiction on federal land, they know this, but yet they gave them the power to consult about crown land, and the power to consult on fee-simple land, it was mind blowing cause they knew. They knew that they could use this tactic.

The utilisation of the “modernized” Indian Act Band system within the Wet'suwet'en nation serves to deny sovereignty to the Wet'suwet'en people while allowing CGL to maintain its power. Consistent with Moreton-Robinson's (2015) theory, using the Band system for consultation serves as a “regulatory mechanism” (p.xi), employed by CGL and sanctioned by Canada to assert their “possessiveness through a process of perpetual Indigenous dispossession” (p.xi). This is achieved through the denial of sovereignty and the granting of inadequate and meagre concessions.

5.1.1 “As deep as any wound can go”

Ancestors had this vision of a black snake that was going to come across the territory and poison the hearts and minds of our people... It just fits my understanding of what this pipeline is doing. It's poisoned the hearts and minds of our people
Participant 3

Two participants emphasised the intangible division caused by the pipeline. It not only physically divides the Yintah but also creates internal factions based on support for or opposition against the pipeline. This division has fragmented clans, houses, and families, weakening them intentionally, seen as a colonial weapon to disunify the nation, reduce pipeline opposition,

undermine land defenders, and gain leader support. The emotional impact of broken relationships due to the pipeline was particularly evident, as Participant 5 expressed: “We have families that don’t talk, and we have family members that don’t talk to each other anymore. We have lifelong relationships with people that you can’t even sit in the same room with”. The acrimony is seemingly impenetrable and “so many people are suffering living amongst [such] animosity” (Participant 5) due to the loss of friendships, family, and support systems. Due to the deliberate actions of industry, traditionally strong relationships breakdown. Despite lacking significant levels of exposure, an overwhelming feeling pervaded: this purposeful weakening of Wet’suwet’en unity by CGL “really needs to be highlighted” (Participant 5).

Additionally, the conflict has led to the breakdown of not only families and houses but the entire governance structure. Conversations revealed that the animosity has made it challenging for hereditary chiefs to convene and make collective decisions, as Participant 5 pointed out: “Most of them cannot sit together. So, when we need to make decisions for our nation, it does not get done because this pipeline has created such a divide... there’s so much hate and animosity.” This discordance exacerbates the transfer of power to CGL, as it erodes the structural foundations of governance and collective decision-making among the Wet’suwet’en people and chiefs, reflecting another dimension of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011, p.16). Participants overwhelmingly opine that the strength of the Wet’suwet’en people lies in their unity as a nation, a sentiment that resonates with the concept of collective rights central to the Indigenous rights movement and the inclusive nature of the feast, *denii ne’ass*. *Denii ne’ass* directly translates to the “people coming together” (office of the Wet’suwet’en, n.d.), and is where authority is exercised, and decisions are made. “[O]ur house of parliament is our feast hall, all decisions are made there” (Chief Na’Moks), which is open to all not just those in authority positions. Comparatively in the modern capitalist West, the smallest unit and what appears to be the most important unit is the individual, not the collective (Mignolo, 2012, p.xi). Thus, once again we see the dominant factions of society (the Western settlers and here CGL) aiming to break down Indigenous epistemologies and ways of being, in turn maintaining the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011, p.8).

While numerous EMPs have been proposed and completed within Wet’suwet’en territory, this pipeline appears to have inflicted more psychological and social harm than any other. “The nation as a whole, I have never seen it so divided” (Participant 5).

One participant discussed this as a “black serpent [that] has poisoned the hearts and minds of our people” (Participant 3). The notion of the black serpent is sourced from a prophecy in Diné tradition, an allegorical tale of a destructive black snake which aims to bring sickness and decimation to communities and their land. Dallas Goldtooth states the snake was to “cast a shadow

upon our hearts and our spirits, of negativity, of disfunction and unhealthiness” (Goldtooth in Bioneers, 2017, 0.33). Goldtooth links the prophecy to the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAP) as a manifestation of the black serpent representing “the sickness of capitalism” (Goldtooth in Bioneers, 2017, 1.11), which aims to profit from land destruction. In contrast, the CGL pipeline not only physically harms the land but also creates a psychic effect; sowing discord, enmity and mistrust, creating division within the Wet’suwet’en community. This anger, hatred and damage to relationships is “as deep as any wound can go” (Participant 3). Those who I have spoken to are also aware that they are not immune to such canker with participant 3 stating “I am just as much poisoned by it as anybody. I think I strive to keep an open mind... but it hasn’t changed my opinion”.

Due, in part, to Delgamuukw-Gisday’wa, Wet’suwet’en history has been “preserved better than most” (Participant 3) First Nations, which Participant 3 believes should strengthen their community. Despite this, CGL has still managed to produce animosity, reduced functionality, and is eroding the essence of their collective identity - impacting “our soul and our people” (Participant 3).

Participant 3 felt the consequence will be hard felt for a long time to come:

We are going to be left with these damaged relationships, people still not supporting the hereditary chief system, not wanting to heal as a people. We are just angry at one and other. It's going to take a lot of healing to get back to where we should be.

The aforementioned divide is exacerbated by the clash between the two governance systems, the hereditary system, and the colonially imposed band system. With band chiefs signing impact-benefit agreements (IBAs), most financial benefits go to residents on reserves, where the pipeline doesn't pass through, potentially shielding them from the full extent of interpersonal, cultural, and geographical degradation. This disparity between those on reserves and those living on the territory can be significant, as one participant who grew up on the territory mentioned:

I have never personally been educated about the needs and the wants of those that have grown up on reserves through multiple generations. I don’t understand and do not agree with dependence just because I was raised an off reserve Indigenous person with a very independent and direct way of thinking (Participant 5).

The settlers, through the Indian Act, forcibly divided the Wet’suwet’en community, making it easier for Euro-Canadians to exert cultural control and erase Wet’suwet’en traditions. The

hereditary system was marginalised as “primitive” by Western standards, reinforcing the notion of Indigenous inferiority. By imposing a governance system mirroring their own, colonisers maintain power and perpetuate the colonised’s subalternity in the ongoing epistemic struggle. As explained by Quijano (2000), history, as decided by Western dominance, is an “evolutionary continuum” in which Europe sees “itself as the mirror of the future of all the other societies and cultures” (p.176), and something all colonised nations should aspire to (p.176). Giving a temporal dimension to Wet’suwet’en culture (naming it primitive) not only maintains power hierarchy, but also places Wet’suwet’en people as “less than” Euro-Canadians. Participant 5 shows the effect Western epistemic imposition has had within the Wet’suwet’en community and how that is manifesting in the current conflict:

I don’t understand why they would disregard those of their own community and their own nation and the concerns of our territories for those who use them. And this is going to sound very awful, but most of the people on reserve don’t use their territories as they should because that culture aspect has been taken away from them, and the teaching aspect has been hindered. (Participant 5).

The loss of culture, Western governance imposition, and resulting divisions are exploited by industry and Canada for perceived “consent”, deepening the divide. Alternatively, this growing rift may be a by-product of their capitalist pursuits, as one participant stated, “I don’t think they know or even care about the wreckage they are creating in the long term for our people” (Participant 3). This reflects capitalism's core ethos: prioritising capital over the well-being of communities especially subaltern communities (Mignolo, 2012, p.xi).

5.1.2 “Lift[ing] our people out of poverty...has been weaponized against us”

Trying to help lift their own people out of poverty and give them a leg up for a change, has been weaponised against us. It has been another colonial tool that is dividing us and making us weaker instead of strengthening us and making us more united as we once were

Participant 3

CGL has utilised financial benefits, or the promise thereof, as leverage to secure consent. This tactic is particularly effective due to the generational poverty¹⁶ prevalent in First Nations communities, including the Wet'suwet'en community, stemming from the arrival of settlers on Turtle Island and the establishment of so-called Canada.

Given the awareness of these socio-economic conditions by both industry and the Canadian government, offering financial incentives in exchange for pipeline acceptance can be seen as “economic blackmail” (Participant 3). A cognizant strategy rooted in colonialism. Participant 3 said “[t]hey are getting what they need from us by offering economic advantages, just enough of them, to get the “yes” they need”. Both Mignolo (2011) and Quijano (2000) posit that the control of economy by Western powers is vital to maintain coloniality and the dominance of power.

In the IBAs negotiated between CGL and various bands, promises of employment and funding for community infrastructure were included. However, transparency regarding these agreements from both CGL and the band chiefs has been limited. One participant attended a meeting in Vancouver, revealing that these documents were confidential, allowing only vague information to be shared with the audience. This lack of transparency has reinforced the perception that the band system is rooted in Western ideologies, prioritising economic growth over the land, air, and water, which are “the very core” of Wet'suwet'en identity (Chief Na'Moks). Tuck and Yang (2012) opine that altering and manipulating the relationship of the Wet'suwet'en people with their land denotes an epistemic and cosmological violence (p.5), which is reasserted every day through coloniality.

When questioned about any positive aspects of the CGL pipeline, two participants saw no benefits, at least none that directly affected them. One participant further commented, “I see what the community perceives as positive and I see what reserves perceive as positive, but I personally don't see anything positive that directly affects my livelihood or improves my quality of life” (Participant 5). However, when posed with the same question, the other three participants named economic benefits as a positive whilst highlighting their temporary nature. Some individuals are experiencing what participant 2 described as “the worst of both worlds,” receiving no economic assistance, whether in the form of community grants or jobs, and simultaneously enduring the tangible destructive effects of the pipeline, such as “not meeting their food fish needs” (Participant 2). This situation mirrors how capitalism and Western powers gained control of the economy, where, as noted by Mignolo (2011), human lives became “dispensable and irrelevant to the primary goal of increased production and accumulated benefits” (p.184). Under the guise of modernity, development, and economic prosperity,

¹⁶ In 2018 24.4% of First Nations living off reserve were living in poverty, compared to the national rate of 11% (the data for First Nations living on reserve was not available) (National Advisory Council on Poverty, 2021, p.16-19)

those who will not benefit and will struggle to meet their basic needs, like food fish, are essentially considered expendable.

One participant discussed the disposability of their people within CGLs employment ranking, “I bet you the people from this area will be the first ones to be laid off” (Participant 2). This prediction is already coming to fruition, as Chief Na’Moks recounted instances where young men employed by CGL believed they had secure, long-term employment, leading them to make significant investments, primarily in vehicles. However, they were later laid off, unable to repay their debts, resulting in profound psychological distress, including “attempted suicides... [and] a rise in substance abuse within some of our nations” (Chief Na’Moks). This situation reflects the humanity-nature binary, as described by Acker, Kaltmeier, and Tittor (2016), which places nature outside the realm of reason and allows it to be objectified (p.7). Through a colonial perspective, Indigenous bodies are categorised as part of “nature” in the binary due to their “primitive” knowledge and perceived lack of reason (Haluza-DeLay et al. 2009, p.4), legitimising their objectification and disposability.

The economic coercion of bands into signing IBAs with CGL exemplify the economic control wielded by dominant Canadian factions. They employ positive rhetoric of modernity and prosperity to mask subjugation. Participant 3 explained that bands were pitted against each other and those experiencing high poverty rates were offered economic relief they could not refuse. Subsequently, CGL and the Canadian government approached other bands, emphasising that not supporting the pipeline would mean missing out on opportunities obtained by those who signed: “[i]t builds on itself from there, and they pick them off one by one” (Participant 3). Consent of these bands must be gained and IBAs negotiated to show a mirage of fair development and business practices. This tactic has been perceived as “another colonial tool that is dividing us and making us weaker” (Participant 3). Adam Olsen, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for the B.C. Green Party and member of the Tsartlip First Nation, accused the government of “exploiting divisions in our communities created by the Indian Act” and “leveraging [those] divisions to protect corporate interests” (Adam Olsen in Szeto & Kujata, 2021). This again echoes Mignolo’s claim that modernity/coloniality values economic growth above life and personal success before communal welfare (Mignolo, 2012, p.xi).

The promise of economic prosperity, or at least economic relief, has also clouded the long-term impacts of the pipeline to both some Wet’suwet’en nation members and the broader public. One participant stated, “[when the] construction jobs are going to be gone, we are going to go back to trying to figure out what's next” (Participant 3), this is backed up by a second participant’s lasting remarks:

I feel a little bit of hostility towards the vision of "this has helped our people, the money they have given us has helped, our nation", but in reality, it has not helped anybody, but that's just my perception of it (Participant 5).

The pipeline is a permanent structure, and the damage it has inflicted on nature, tradition, culture, and relationships will be immeasurable and, in some instances, irreparable.

Theme 1: Summary

CGL's consultation "efforts", steeped in colonial attitudes and tactics, have left a trail of destruction. Consulting with the wrong governance level has been seen as a strategy to deny Wet'suwet'en sovereignty and sow internal divisions, ensuring power remains with CGL and the Canadian government. This exacerbates pre-existing divisions stemming from colonial policies and attempts to erode Wet'suwet'en culture. Such denial of sovereignty is routed in "white possessive logic" which reaffirms domination and control (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.xii).

The lack of transparency of IBAs, temporary employment, and unequal benefits underscore the disposability of the Wet'suwet'en people in CGL's eyes. Human disposability is central to capitalist economic growth and control, a cornerstone of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011, p.184). This disposability is not confined to CGL but extends to the Canadian government and the RCMP, who have treated the Wet'suwet'en people as "not human" (Participant 5), stripping them of dignity, a fundamental aspect of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011, p.214). This will be explored further in the following theme.

5.2 "We have been thrown way back into the past"

[W]hen industry has more of a say in our land than us, there is no security for us, cause its quite evident by the violence we face every day.

Chief Na'Moks

[This] is colonialism at its worst. It's such a big step backwards!

Participant 3

The illegal European occupation¹⁷ of Turtle Island in the 1600s led to violence, mistreatment, and oppression of Indigenous peoples in so-called Canada. This historic disregard for culture, which has never completely disappeared, is now resurfacing for the Wet'suwet'en community. Chief Na'Moks succinctly posited, "it constantly reminds me of when they (the settlers) came to our territory and they see it, they take it...there (was) no consequences" further adding "we have the lowest form of human rights according to industry and government right now". This perpetuates "white possessive logics" which, as Moreton-Robinson (2015) suggests, is used to legitimise the state's desire to own, control, and dominate (p.xii). Moreton-Robinson argues that ongoing violent dispossession of Indigenous people by white Western governments mirrors their fear of losing sovereignty over the land they colonised and seized (p.xxiii).

The continued colonial oppression of the Wet'suwet'en people by provincial and federal governments becomes increasingly evident in the conflict with CGL, as exemplified in the treatment of the community by the RCMP and the prioritisation of CGL and corporate interests over the rights of the Wet'suwet'en nation. Hierarchies that prioritise industry and capital accumulation over the subaltern and their collective rights are justified through Western epistemes, perpetuating coloniality (Mignolo, 2011, p.184). Exemplifying this, Chief Na'Moks recounted the arrests and removals of land defenders from Gidimt'en camp, two more participants later shared similar experiences:

We've had our cousins arrested and they took them to jail in dog kennels, not a RCMP vehicle but dog kennels. They lock them up. They did it on a Thursday and of course you cannot get to court until Monday. So, you get locked up all weekend. They removed all their clothing. And then in three cases they put them back in the dog kennels to hall them to court and then they stand in front of a judge in their underwear...industry can do this and have people stand in front of a judge in their underwear, in shackles, to get sentenced, and basically forced to sign an agreement that you will not go on the territory or impede [CGL construction] and then you will be released...They will bring them to a court five or six hour drive away, and have them do that. So, it will be removal [from our land]...That is the normal procedure with us (Chief Na'Moks).

¹⁷ The use of illegal occupation rather than settler colonisation stems from Morton-Robinson discussing the term "Settler-colonisation", which she states, implies some form of legitimacy, and infers validity to the actions of the West, thus she finds "illegal occupation" a more relevant term (Moreton-Robinson in Epstein, 2015)

The dehumanising actions by the RCMP against Indigenous land defenders reflect the colonial belief that Indigenous bodies, due to their perceived "primitiveness," are excluded from the category of "humanity" and instead placed within "nature" in a humanity-nature binary, thus facilitating their objectification (Haluzá-DeLay et al., 2009, p.4) and disposability by colonial settlers. This colonial mindset has re-emerged or persisted during the CGL-Wet'suwet'en conflict; thus, it feels like "we have been thrown way back into the past" (Participant 5), through violence, sub-human treatment and the removal of their dignity, a key aspect of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011, p.214).

5.2.1 "We are the cost of doing business"

My father is a Second World War veteran, he would roll over in his grave knowing what I go through on a daily basis, fighting a government he risked his life for, just for an industry. That is not right, that is not human.
(Chief Na'Moks)

As previously stated, in a capitalist society, economic "growth [comes] before life" (Mignolo, 2012, p.xi), with capital accumulation taking precedence. The ongoing CGL-Wet'suwet'en conflict underscores the Canadian government's consistent alignment with industry. Special exemptions favour the company, while federal and provincial authorities hesitate to address pipeline construction violations effectively. As a result, the Wet'suwet'en people's rights and humanity receive neither support from CGL nor protection from the Canadian government. The enduring media portrayal of Indigenous people as violent, lazy, and dysfunctional (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.xiii) often contributes to the justification of this sub-human treatment of the Wet'suwet'en community. Regarding CGLs activities in Wet'suwet'en territory, Chief Na'Moks said, "The UN has sent Canada three letters". Despite being directed to issue a cease and desist to CGL, Canada did not respond to these letters. This, according to Chief Na'Moks, exemplifies Canada's disregard for Wet'suwet'en people and all Indigenous peoples: "They say they respect us and yet they are not respecting us enough to even respond to [those] letters. I will constantly fight...until Indigenous people... are put above industry" (Chief Na'Moks). The Wet'suwet'en people are not only fighting against their own subordination to industry but also the subordination of other creatures: "it really hurts us to see that money or profit goes before the people or even the other creatures that we share this world with" (Participant 4).

One participant felt that “corporations and their proponents are just furthering their own interests and First Nations are an obstacle to that” (Participant 3), and the Canadian government seems to legitimise it. One such proponent is The Royal Bank of Canada (RBC), a large financial backer in the CGL pipeline. So-called Canada's support of industry is, in some ways, reflected by their reluctance to originally adopt UNDRIP and their lack of ratification of ILO 169.

While there are numerous examples showcasing CGL's power within Canada and the government's commitment to building the pipeline, I will only discuss the ones emphasised by participants. A significant portion of the pipeline construction occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which CGL workers received “the same exemption as doctors and nurses...they were listed as essential workers” (Chief Na'Moks). During the nationwide lockdown, man camps operated on the Yintah, raising the risk of COVID-19 outbreaks in the community. Chief Na'Moks mentioned that an Italy-based security firm contracted with CGL worked on a two-week shift basis, with the flexibility to fly back and forth to Italy for shift changes. This illustrates the significant influence that CGL and the energy industry wield in Canada. “That’s what we are up against. That’s how serious British Columbia and Canada are on getting this built...They call it essential, when it’s not essential. It’s just a business, that’s all it is” (Chief Na'Moks). This sentiment was reiterated by the *UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises*, in which they stated that the presence of security firms and man-camps exacerbates the “fear of a [COVID-19] outbreak in communities with limited health facilities and resources to deal with the pandemic” (Yeophantong et al., 2023, p.4).

Over the past four years since construction began, numerous environmental violations have resulted in significant damage to the Yintah and its inhabitants. A particular focus has been on the impact on the fish population, especially the Salmon in Wedzin Kwa, which are essential to Wet'suwet'en life and culture. Participant 4 emphasised this, stating: “our Indigenous people are fish people, we have a lot of respect for fish, we have our rituals where we give back to the land to make sure fish return so they can feed us next season”. Sockeye and Chinook Salmon, both blue-listed species in B.C., are suffering from sediment contamination caused by construction. This includes the smothering of their eggs as construction commenced during salmon spawning season, despite recommendations to avoid this period. Despite the considerable harm and degradation, CGL claim that they are taking all necessary precautions to protect the watershed and the environment. Participant 2, who works within the fishery industry, stated:

although they are saying that they are living up to their permit requirements, I think there’s so many issues with the permitting system and inspections, that they are getting away with

lots. Right now, the Oil and Gas Commission¹⁸ issued permits, but they don't appear to be very committed to monitoring any activity, and they give the company loads of notice if they are doing an inspection.

He later added that CGL are:

playing pretty loose with their permit conditions, and personally I don't trust they're doing anywhere near what they could be doing [to minimise ecological damage] ... I think their track record to date shows they're really not doing a very good job (Participant 2).

Additionally, the land injunction prevents Wet'suwet'en members, authorities, and chiefs from conducting site checks and community inspections, including accessing pipeline sites. To enter one of the pipeline sites, "you have to make an appointment [which] gives them time to cover-up their wrong doings, and if you try to get in quicker you will be arrested" (Participant 2). Wet'suwet'en people see humans as caretakers of the planet, "here to look after the world" (Chief Na'Moks). Chief Na'Moks said, when speaking of his role as Hereditary Chief said:

We start with the land, the air, the water, the animals, the plants, what is there first. Our duty is to look after that. Our duty is to the land before who we are in our lifetime. The name I carry is thousands of years old...and the duty has not changed since then.

This is a task which involves checking on and monitoring activities on the Yintah, which the land injunction hinders. Later he added "when we try to come in and monitor that's when they say we are trespassing, well how can you trespass on your own land?" (Chief Na'Moks). There is a lack of respect for the Anuc'nu'at'en and the roles of the hereditary chiefs as caretakers of the Yintah. As Quijano (2000) noted, the repression of "knowledge production" and "the models of the production of meaning" is essential for colonial dominance (p.541). This repression not only imposes Eurocentric beliefs but also disregards "other" epistememes. In the Wet'suwet'en context, their connection with nature and associated knowledge are suppressed, along with their governance methods that differ from Western models. The active role of Chiefs in caretaking, incompatible with Eurocentric modern governance, is hindered. CGL and the government disregard the

¹⁸ The B.C. Oil and Gas Commission is a regulatory body of the Crown that oversees the oil and gas industry operating and working in B.C. (Gov. B.C., n.d.)

Delgamuukw decision¹⁹, which affirmed Wet'suwet'en sovereignty over their unceded land. This reluctance to recognise full Indigenous sovereignty, as noted by Moreton-Robinson, is rooted in the fear that Indigenous sovereignty challenges existing state structures and institutions. It suggests a concern within the Canadian government about losing their own hegemonic power and facing dispossession (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.127).

The absence of monitoring is also evident to those not directly engaged in monitoring processes. As Participant 3 pointed out, "not only is there no environmental monitoring by First Nations (due to the injunction), but I don't think there is enough provincial monitoring either," adding "[they seem] to be doing everything to shut us out [of the land and the procedures]". This underscores the Western perspective that nature is merely a commodity to be exploited for human benefit, as dictated by those in positions of power (Mignolo, 2011, p.13).

During pipeline construction, both TC and CGL have received small fines for their environmental violations from various provincial departments. However, these fines, approximately \$25,000 each, are considered insignificant for multi-billion-dollar companies. All five participants expressed outrage at these inadequate fines, describing them as "penny change," "chump change," and "couch change." Chief Na'Moks likened it to "paying for a cup of coffee" for a company of this magnitude. The federal and provincial governments' eagerness to complete this project is reflected in their minimal monitoring efforts and the subsequent negligible penalties for environmental infractions. This reflects the modernity/coloniality coin (Mignolo, 2000, p.125), where the discourse of development and progress is presented as a positive and closely tied to EMPs, the third stage of development (Svampa, 2019, p.20). From the dominant Western viewpoint, pushing the pipeline through without regard for its consequences is seen as positive. However, from the subaltern perspective, articulated by those interviewed, the lack of monitoring and consequences for CGL's inadequate ecological protection is viewed as abhorrent, clear coloniality, and an abuse of power. The hierarchy of "subject-object dualism," which separates nature from humans (Ranauta, 2020, p.356), is perceived as a Eurocentric tool to justify CGL's insufficient monitoring and the lack of accountability. This contrasts with Indigenous epistememes emphasising the connection between nature and the spirit (Battiste, 2013, p.160).

Speaking about the exemptions Canada grants to the industry and CGL under the veneer of "development", Participant 3 pointed out "they (large EMP corporations) influence the government...they have got a lot of pull. They can influence media and the general public". Participant 2 explained that CGL will even be warned and given "loads of notice if they (a

¹⁹ Discussed in Chapter 1.5.2

governing body) are going to do an inspection". This allows CGL to camouflage any environmental issues they have caused and cover any infractions of their permits that may have occurred.

The impacts of the project extend beyond the construction phase. The presence of large CGL man-camps, resembling towns, within the community has received limited attention in Canadian media coverage of the EMP. One participant mentioned a terrible incident near the man camps: "when [the man camps] first opened, we had a woman who went missing on Buck Flats Road, her name was Lauren" (Participant 4). While these events cannot be decisively linked, the Canadian National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) reported a link between man camps for EMPs and increased violence against Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG, 2019, p.593). They also noted a rise in sex industry activity near man camps, this must be noted as Indigenous women, despite being only 4% of the population, make up 52% of sexually trafficked women in Canada (Roudometkina & Wakeford, 2018, p.3). The Western gender hierarchy, perpetuated through epistemic hegemony and colonial power dynamics, continues to marginalise women "in every aspect of life" (Lugones, 2008, p.7). Indigenous women's vulnerability increases near man-camps, yet they are still placed on Indigenous land. This reflects a persisting mindset that categorises Indigenous communities, particularly women, as separate from humanity, as observed by Haluza-Delay et al. (2009, p.4).

Not only has sub-human treatment of the Wet'suwet'en people involved regulations and structures which exacerbated risks to the Wet'suwet'en community but also through specific treatment of individuals. One participant narrated another story about such treatment of land defenders:

When they closed the roads off, before last winter, they had a couple of land defenders that actually walked out because they weren't letting anybody in. I would go and make soup and chilly and I would sit at the end of the blockade in my pickup truck and keep it all warm, so that when they were done their ten-mile walk, they would have something warm, cause we were not allowed to go past [the injunction line] to pick them up...The sickening thing of it all, is an RCMP vehicle followed them in, behind them as they walked, in the dead of winter. (Participant 5)

The actions of the RCMP underscore the deeply ingrained perception that the Wet'suwet'en people are regarded as inferior to other Canadians. If the RCMP considered them equals, they would not have left them to walk 16 km in -10 degrees Celsius weather. This perception of inferiority has been ingrained through various means, primarily through the ongoing continuum of

modernity/coloniality. Quijano (2007) describes the Western conception of “world” history to be an “evolutionary continuum from the primitive to the civilized...the savage to the rational” (p.176). The current end point is modern Western society. First Nation communities are seen as less far along the “evolutionary continuum” thus inferior to Euro-Canadians. Moreton-Robinson (2015) adds to this saying not only are Indigenous people seen as less than white Western settlers, but they are seen as “part of the landscape and thus not human” (p.29). The land exists to be claimed and conquered, and thus by extension so do Indigenous people (p.29).

5.2.2 RCMP: “It’s come full circle”

I see it being necessary for the government to push their agenda, that's it. I think...back to the very first development of RCMP officers that were hired and trained to keep the Indians in place. I see this as just being an updated and new version of that. [C-IRG] were only created and unified to keep the Indigenous people in place.
(Participant 5)

They haven't shot anybody yet (laughs), that's about the only good thing I will say about them!
(Participant 2)

The RCMP was “formulated to help get the natives into the residential schools and to enforce everything they were trying to do to get the natives out of the way while the settlers were moved across the country” (Participant 3). The participants strongly believe that C-IRG, akin to the historical creation of the RCMP, is primarily focused on safeguarding industry interests, advancing the government's agenda, and perpetuating the colonial system. Participant 4 stated “the RCMP was originally created for colonialism reasons and that is still the case, the C-IRG group is a colonial system”. According to Moreton-Robinson (2015), the devaluation of true Indigenous sovereignty is not solely due to knowledge control but also involves the use of “regulatory mechanisms” (p.129). The establishment of C-IRG, mirroring the original role of the RCMP, aligns with possessive logics that justify maintaining land ownership and dominating Indigenous peoples by the Canadian nation-

state (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.30). Maintaining this power will allow for the maintenance of coloniality. Participant 2 said, “It’s a colonial system and it’s working quite well for them”.

One participant pointed out that he “think[s] any Wet’suwet’en is probably being monitored” by the RCMP (Participant 2) which he saw as an intimidation technique.

I know even myself when I'm driving through town, you see cops turn around and follow you. And you think "oh geez why are they doing that?". So, there’s a level of intimidation, that they make it real obvious that they are monitoring you. (Participant 2)

Many participants corroborated this:

When I tried to go down on to the territory, I tried going hunting with the huntress camp and we were followed by CGL vehicles, we were followed by the RCMP asking what we were doing on the territory... so when I’m going out on the territory now, I have to ask for permission from the RCMP and CGL if I can hunt on or harvest off my own territory and be harassed and be followed. That's impending on UNDRIP, that's impeding on anybody’s human rights to live in a peaceful way... That’s not right! That’s not freedom! (Participant 4).

When going out to the Yintah, Participant 5 has encountered similar experiences while engaging in hunting, harvesting, and even sitting in her car outside 7-11:

I look up and there’s an RCMP officer taking my picture, while I'm sitting in 7-11 in the parking lot. He comes over from the hotel and is standing blatantly right in front of me, takes my picture, goes to the back of my truck, takes my picture. I rolled down the window and said "well you could of at least asked me to smile"... There was quite a bit here when things were really starting to heat up, that they would sit at the corner of my road... I think over this last year or so they have kind of realised that I am just out there minding my own business. They have toned that down a little bit, to where they will make note of me when I drive by (Participant 5).

However, Participant 5 didn't perceive the RCMP's actions as an intimidation tactic but rather attributed them to her family history (due to her family starting a blockade against Canfor logging on their territory) and her frequent presence on the Yintah. This situation highlights the disregard

for the significance of land use in hunting and berry picking for the Wet'suwet'en, which is being devalued by Eurocentric notions that such forms of feeding oneself is primitive and the shift towards mass food production. This suppression of traditional knowledge and sustenance methods constitutes another form of cultural eradication and epistemicide (Santos, 2008, p.xxiv). Moreover, the use of intimidation tactics by the RCMP and the Canadian government, even on territory where they lack jurisdiction according to the Delgamuukw decision, serves as a "regulatory mechanism" to reinforce white possessiveness and perpetuate Indigenous dispossession (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.xi). In this regard, one participant said, "I am a law-abiding citizen, and I would like to be able to move within my country unmolested. And not feel harassed and not racially profiled." (Participant 5).

The court-ordered and RCMP-enforced land injunction has placed significant hardships on the Wet'suwet'en people, essentially restricting them from being on their own land and monitoring activities. Chief Na'Moks explained that each time he goes to monitor construction he is threatened, thus exemplifying the disregard for the Wet'suwet'en relationship to Mother Nature and their Yintah:

I simply tell them then, the injunction, I am not breaking [it], I am not impeding your work area. I will stay ten meters away, but they won't allow me to use a vehicle so it's usually a five-kilometre walk, but along with not impeding their equipment, I can't go and monitor our land. That is our law, but they keep threatening to arrest me. (Chief Na'Moks)

As previously discussed, Battiste (2013) opines that First Nation communities have direct link to place and land, which is where knowledge stems from (p.160). The protection of nature and land is fundamental to the Wet'suwet'en way of life, knowledge, and culture. The imposition of the court-ordered injunction and the aggressive prevention of Wet'suwet'en authorities from monitoring construction are legitimised by the coloniality of power.

On the 25th anniversary of the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa decision, five land defenders were brought before a judge for alleged breaches of the court-issued land injunction. This unfortunate timing underscores Canada's reluctance to fully embrace Indigenous rights and acknowledge "Aboriginal Title," revealing the pervasive systemic coloniality within the country. Additionally, this reflects the white possessive logics of settler-Canada through their refusal to recognise Indigenous sovereignty, and their "excessive desire" to own, control, and dominate (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.xii). I was informed that "the injunction is only supposed to be a temporary

measure” (Chief Na’Moks) however there has been “no time limit” (Chief Na’Moks) put on the injunction which has now been in place for four and a half years.

The physical violence inflicted on Wet’suwet’en land defenders, particularly in the Unis’ot’en and Gidimt’en camps, has deeply affected the project’s participants, even those not directly involved in the raids. Speaking about RCMP’s treatment of their people, one participant stated:

It’s a disgusting, disgusting abuse of power...it kind of feels like my great-grandfather’s generation, from the late 1800s, and you are having to deal with these new RCMP mandated "keep the Indians in the one spot", "keep the Indians on the reserve". It feels like we have been thrown way back into the past, and, what we [as human beings] are doing to each other, I don’t understand it. It’s really hard. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 was referring to a raid on Gidimt’en camp which occurred the day before our interview, on March 29th 2023, in which multiple RCMP vehicles with armed C-IRG members, entered Gidimt’en camp in search of a “suspected stolen power-saw” (Participant 5). She added, “[t]hey [swept] the whole camp, they terrorise[ed] the children that live there, and they live in peace. There was really no justification for that, it was a disgusting, gross abuse of power” (Participant 5). Here the RCMP and C-IRG are being used as an “authorizing authority” (Mbembe, 2001, p.25), a legitimate structure created through Western rationalisation, to control and maintain the hierarchy created through the colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2000, p.565), sustaining fixed hierarchies by violence (Quijano, 2007, p.173). In fact, C-IRG now have “lethal overwatch...which means they have a sniper up there somewhere and means they can and will shoot you” (Participant 2).

Participant 4 discussed in detail the military incursion on Gidimt’en in November 2021, saying it “really disheartened” her, especially because the camp primarily comprised women and children. Participant 4 labelled the RCMP as “militants” and drew parallels to the Standing Rock conflict²⁰ “where they were being completely physically, emotionally, and mentally abused at this

²⁰ The Standing Rock Conflict also known as the Dakota Accesses Pipeline Protests (DAPL). DAPL was proposed to be built through the land of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe who were operating as a sovereign nation at the time. The Standing Rocks Sioux Tribe and their allies organised many protests and acts of land defense, which was meet with violence by the American law enforcement and the private security firms hired by the pipeline. Hundreds of people were arrested (Native Knowledge 360, n.d.).

peaceful protest” (Participant 4). In our conversation when discussing one of the women at Gidimt’en camp, her emotions truly came through:

Just watching how one of the ladies was holding up an Eagle feather saying this is for you too. That speaks louder than words, that they are not just fighting for themselves, it’s for humans as a species. That was completely bypassed, they weren’t looked at like they were humans, they were looked at like they weren’t the same species, like they weren’t important. Just like how the species that are out there right now are unimportant (to them) ...it should never have to happen that way. Just because of money, it isn’t right... not being looked at the same species, being treated like animals (Participant 4).

Participant 4’s words reflect the views of many Indigenous scholars, like Haluza-Delay et al. and Moreton-Robinson, who argue that Western settlers often see Indigenous bodies as part of nature, subject to control and objectification (Haluza-Delay et al., 2009, p.4; Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.29). This flawed belief in biological and racial superiority upholds the colonial power structure (Quijano, 2007, p.171). Moreover, it’s not solely racial hierarchies but also gender hierarchies that come into play, justifying violence against Indigenous women. As Participant 3 mentioned, the RCMP feel justified to “strap on a military GI Joe gear and go in there and arrest/harass some Indian women conduct ceremony”.

Due to contrasting narratives, sighting incidents of violence, and destruction of RCMP and CGL vehicles, Participant 3 was “conflicted by some of the incidents that have happened up there”. “Hereditary chiefs are claiming they are unaware of that, and that these are not our people, that we do not condone these actions, but they happen anyway” (Participant 3). He added, “if it wasn’t our people then it’s their people, and if it was their people then that’s a false flag event... That blows my mind, that a company and their workers would go to that extent” (Participant 3). Despite this ambiguity around certain events, he disdainfully states that RCMP are supposed “to serve us and protect us and keep us all safe... [but are] choose[ing] to arrest peaceful protestors and they do it in a very violent way” (Participant 3).

All these events discussed by participants reflect a disregard for the lives of Wet’suwet’en people and a commitment by the Canadian government to coloniality.

Theme 2: Summary

The stories shared by the project’s participants illustrate the persistent methods of coloniality employed by so-called Canada and its ongoing efforts to maintain power. This is concordant with

the white possessive logics held by the Canadian government and their subsequent continual dispossession of Indigenous land, culture and ways of life. Moreover, they underscore the subconscious perception that Indigenous people are seen as "part of the landscape and not fully human" (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.29). This perception has resulted in the mistreatment of the Wet'suwet'en people at the hands of the RCMP in the CGL-Wet'suwet'en socio-environmental conflict, with frequent raids, intimidation tactics, and arrests of land defenders and their allies.

Numerous exemptions have been granted to CGL, either with the approval or lack of objection from federal and provincial governments. These exemptions have increased health risks for the Wet'suwet'en community, heightened safety concerns, especially for women and girls, and raised the risk of severe ecological damage. The risks on the environment hold an enormous weight for the Wet'suwet'en nation as the land, air and water of the Yintah is at the core of their nation. The Wet'suwet'en people's deep connection with nature and Mother Earth has been undermined by the dominant Eurocentric view that considers nature as a resource and commodity for human benefit. This perspective, along with the control of nature, as discussed by Mignolo (2011) within the colonial matrix of power (p.10), will be further explored in the following theme.

5.3 "They are...injecting their poison into Mother Earths veins"

It's such an important thing to really highlight amongst all of the animosity and the hostility in this area...there is harm being done out there and are we able to save it? (Participant 5)

The Wet'suwet'en are "people of the river and earth" (Chief Na'Moks), whose "very core...[is] the land, air and water" (Chief Na'Moks). Therefore, the destruction of the Yintah is a direct violence toward the Wet'suwet'en people causing ecocidal results, as nature is "the very core of [their] culture and [their] language" (Chief Na'Moks). Tuck and Yang (2012) state it is a violence that is exerted and reaffirmed every day through consistent land destruction (p.5). This form of violence transcends physicality and is "epistemic, ontological [and] cosmological" (p.5). Battiste (2013) emphasises that the "inner space" of nature, integral to First Nation people, underpins their understanding of life and well-being. All knowledge derives from their own land, like the Wet'suwet'en Yintah, making culture, knowledge, and nature inseparable. The destruction of land in EMPs leads to epistemicidal consequences and cultural loss, akin to historical cultural devastation experienced by peoples indigenous to Turtle Island. Participant 5 emotively shared how her house, G'en Egh La Yex has "no intact territories left" mainly due to logging, describing this as

“realising you have nothing left...I know many of the other house groups can say the same” (Participant 5). Evidently, this is one of the reasons the Wet’suwet’en people and their allies are fighting so hard against CGL. Speaking specifically about the affected Yintah Participant 5 said:

it’s just wonderful out there. Its highly impacted unfortunately. So, I think even with the pipeline now, you know we are looking at more than a seventy percent impact rate and ratio that there is not much left for protection out there.

The pipeline construction, especially in areas like Wedzin Kwa and other water sources, has resulted in severe environmental damage, impacting both the cultural and physical aspects of these locations. Drilling activities under Wedzin Kwa, for example, have not only posed threats to fish populations but have also compromised the once-pristine drinking water, making it murky and undrinkable. Chief Na’Moks noted that it now takes much longer for Wedzin Kwa to become clear after the spring melt due to the construction’s damage: “we have seen it take another two or three weeks to clear up because of the damage that is happening up there” (Chief Na’Moks).

This drilling can be seen as a form of "external colonialism," (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.4), where nature is dominated solely for the purpose of generating wealth and “feed the appetites of the colonizers” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.4) without considering its epistemic and cultural significance to the Wet’suwet’en people. Despite ongoing issues and sediment spills, there has been minimal action from the federal and provincial governments. Participants expressed astonishment at the lack of awareness among non-Indigenous communities regarding the downstream effects of water pollution, emphasising that their water flows throughout North and South B.C.. Chief Na’Moks highlighted the gravity of the situation, underlining the need for urgent action:

they’re poisoning the water that their spouses and children survive on for an elected position. Doesn't that get you to the core, your very spouses and children is who you're hurting. And no one is being held accountable. We're being criminalised.

The devastation of Wedzin Kwa has far-reaching consequences, affecting not only people and fish but also the entire ecosystem. Participant 4 emphasised that Wedzin Kwa sustains various creatures, including bears, moose, and others reliant on this water source. It is considered "a vein of Mother Earth" due to its purity, and extractive industries are seen as “not happy unless they’re actually injecting their poison into her veins” (Participant 4). It seems unimportant to CGL that “Wedzin Kwa carries a lot of history with [the Wet’suwet’en] people” (Participant 4). This is in part

due to Western epistemic dominance has creating a “universal history” or at the very least a “universal understanding” of what history is essential and must be preserved. The creation of a “universal history” neglects the dignity of many communities, as noted by Mignolo (2012, p.x). CGL and the Canadian governments appear to prioritise their perception of nature as a resource and means for Western “advancement” over understanding its significance to Indigenous communities.

The essence of the fight lies in protecting the land and water. One participant emphasised the importance of safeguarding water, while another clarified that the opposition is not against CGL but against land destruction. The settler powers justifications for controlling nature are rooted in hegemonic anthropocentric beliefs, where nature is viewed as a resource separate from humanity (Mignolo, 2011, p.11). The Wet’suwet’en people's struggle encompasses both the battle against nature's destruction and the domination of nature, integral components of the coloniality of power Mignolo (2011, p.10). As postulated by Mignolo (2011), the control of nature can be seen as the fifth dimension of the colonial matrix of power (p.10).

5.3.1 “The Yintah feeds the soul and calms the spirit”

There’s a different connection out on the land, that’s where our ancestors roamed, and they say when you carry a callous heart because of survival mechanisms you can’t be guided in a good way by your ancestors... When you’re out on the land, your heart gets soft, and you are being guided. You don’t feel alone when you’re out on the territory.
(Participant 4)

The Wet’suwet’en Yintah, as expressed by all participants, is a place of unbelievable beauty and immense cultural and spiritual importance. As said by Chief Na’Moks “we weren’t born on reserves, we were born on the territory...there are not many places left on this planet like our territory” (Chief Na’Moks).

Two participants openly discussed their prior disconnection from the Yintah and their culture, highlighting the significant impact of reconnection over the past two decades. These stories underscore the profound influence the Yintah holds for Wet’suwet’en people and the significance of cultural reconnection. For instance, Participant 3 explained that their upbringing off-reserve had affected their knowledge and awareness of their culture, “it was just out of my world so to speak”

(Participant 3). He stated that, he would still feel the effect of the Yintah before fully embracing Wet'suwet'en culture:

it often happened when I was in high elevation areas or had a beautiful view of the valley or something. That was the closest I felt to having any type of connection to a higher being so to speak. I definitely felt soothing, and I would look forward to those, especially if I was alone. I would take as much time as I could to reflect and enjoy nature and calm my spirit.
(Participant 3).

Once embracing this reconnection Participant 3 said they “know it was definitely something missing in my youth, that I was never introduced to really embrace how our land feeds our souls.” Later he added “in just the past few years, I have embraced my own First Nation heritage and I maybe shied away from it most of my life until now. Now I embrace it, I am proud of it.”

(Participant 3). Many participants attribute this disconnection to the assimilation process, notably the sixties scoop and residential schools. These traumatic experiences have created a rift between many Wet'suwet'en people and their culture, making it challenging to preserve and pass on traditions, language, and heritage. One participant shared a poignant example of her grandmother's reluctance to teach or speak to her grandson in their mother tongue, because “it was a very painful thing [for her to speak Witsuwet'in]” (Participant 5) due to her time in residential school. The ongoing construction of the CGL pipeline continues the historical pattern of distancing and eradicating Indigenous culture, making it challenging for people to reconnect with their heritage, as experienced by Participant 3. How can one reconnect with the Yintah if the Yintah is destroyed? This allows for the maintenance of epistemic hegemony and power domination by Western actors, and the continued subalternation of the Wet'suwet'en people (Mignolo, 2000, p.16).

Participant 4 shared a different story about their reconnection with the land, that was once strong as a child, as her father was a hereditary Chief she spent “a lot of quality time and...had a lot of reliance on the land”. Furthermore, she explained this was extremely important as “our ancestors carry their stories as well on the land, so we have a very spiritual connection to that land” (Participant 4). However due to different reasons she “got disconnected from the land” (Participant 4) to later reconnect to the territory and help others do the same. Here she explained her role in helping others reconnect with their land and culture and the importance this holds:

I worked with children who were in care, to reconnect them to their culture, to their community and to their hereditary chiefs and extended family... We held collective camps

where we would have men's hunting camps to bridge the gap between the Indigenous men and the land. We also did women's camps and because of the impact of residential schools' majority of our people were disconnected from the land spiritually...since this consistent trauma that's been happening with our people, our people have been caring broken spirits because they are no longer connected to the land...there's a lot of generations after us that have absolutely no connection to the language or the culture because they adapted to this new world, this new colonial world (Participant 4).

Participant 4 added, "you have to isolate them, take them away from society in general. For them to really connect." This has been made increasingly difficult due to CGL activities occurring deep within the territory. The Unis'ot'en healing centre, has been instrumental in helping those with generational trauma, personal trauma, addictions, and other mental health conditions, however it is being highly impacted by the construction. One participant said about the challenges Unis'ot'en Healing lodge/centre is facing:

They are trying to heal our people. But it makes it very challenging, especially when there's a lot of CGL workers out there. You try to take them away from society, but society has moved out there. There are man-camps out there and it makes it very hard for our people to heal. (Participant 4)

Requests were made to divert the pipeline away from the healing centre, and alternative routes were suggested during meetings with Wet'suwet'en representatives. However, CGL disregarded these requests and proceeded with their original route. This demonstrates a clear lack of respect and dismissal of Wet'suwet'en land-based healing practices and the diverse epistemologies held outside of Eurocentric perspectives.

The healing methods at the Unis'ot'en camp are often viewed in "binary opposition" (Battiste, 2005, p.2) to Western scientific reasoning, thus seen as invaluable and invalid. It can be speculated that the Canadian authorities' fear of dispossession and loss of power, a common concern in settler states, may have played a role in CGL and the government ignoring the advice of Wet'suwet'en representatives (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.138). This disregard allows them to assert their authority and deny sovereignty to the Wet'suwet'en nation and its Chiefs (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.xxiii).

Participant 3 elaborated on why reconnection is so important and why it helps one to ground themselves:

To heal from whatever, it is that is lost and being on our land it really is good for the soul, like for me. When you reconnect with your ancestor's land and understand how they looked after one and other and really relied on the land to help them, it helps centre yourself and really helps you get a better sense of yourself. That sense of belonging, that sense of your history, your family's history, your people's history, it's all tied to the land...I think there's a lot of strength in that understanding and it helps in that healing process.

Some participants have always had a deep bond with the land and their Wet'suwet'en culture. Consequently, they exhibit an emotional reaction and recognise that future generations may not have the opportunity to develop the same connection they cherish. Moreover, they are also aware of what they themselves are losing in this process. One participant said:

it's very emotional, connecting to places that hold the teaching of my grandmother, that hold the teachings of my great grandfather, and being able to take that knowledge and give it to my son and my nieces and my nephews, it's very hard to see the changes around (Participant 5).

Despite contrary claims, CGL and the Canadian government have shown little interest in understanding the deep emotional connection that the Wet'suwet'en nation has with their land, which is currently being destroyed. Their pursuit of progress and modernity/coloniality is prioritised over the well-being of the Wet'suwet'en people, who are often regarded as an integral part of the landscape (Quijano, 2000, p.555; Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.29). Indigenous land-based knowledge systems are dismissed as archaic and incapable of contributing to progress; instead, they are seen as perpetuating the past and "frozen in time" (Battiste, 2005, p.1). Consequently, the irreparable harm done to the Yintah is deemed acceptable.

5.3.2 "They cannot impair our right to practice our way of being"

"There are not many places left on this planet that are like our territory. And every day its being destroyed...You know they removed, in a straight line, 197 km worth of timber and a minimum of 100m wide in a lot of places 300m wide. And that's simply gone. And for what? For what? The creeks, the rivers, the salmons, the berries, our

medicines, our burial sites. They've all been bulldozed. We weren't born on the reserves; we were born on the territories. So, our people are buried out there. They simply bulldoze them. (Chief Na'Moks)

The CGL pipeline constrains Wet'suwet'en teaching practices, as Wet'suwet'en teaching is related to the land and knowledge is passed down orally. Participants shared their personal encounters with land-based teachings, underscoring their profound significance. Participant 5 said, “[m]y own experiences would be the teachings of being out on the Yintah with my grandmother...the stories they would tell you”. These experiences frequently include a deep connection in which Mother Earth communicates with the people. For instance, “when you see the buttercups first in bloom that tells you the trout is spawning in the creek and that it is readying for harvest” (Participant 5) or “High flying bird, good weather, low flying, hey there’s a storm coming” (Chief Na'Moks). Chief Na'Moks explained:

That is how we govern ourselves, the stories...every one of our stories and legends they all have a moral to it, and the moral is how we adapt to the land, the air, the water. If we can't look after what is there, it can't look after us.

Considering this, land destruction not only erases Wet'suwet'en knowledge and its transmission but also enables dominant forces to retain control over knowledge generation, upholding the power hierarchy established through colonisation (Mignolo, 2011, p.8).

Fish, specifically salmon, is not only seen as a form of sustenance but has a highly important communal aspect which “tends to be overlooked” (Participant 2). Explicating further, Participant 2 said:

“It (harvesting, processing, and preparing the fish) is quite an enjoyable time when that occurs. You have people travelling from all over the country to work on fish. If there isn't any fish, then you're losing [that]...it's a lot of work, but it's also quite an enjoyable process, and you're working with a lot of your relatives, and learning things and producing something the family needs.”

Additionally due to small fish runs, which is in part a direct impact of EMPs, “young people aren't getting trained up in the skills they need to fish. So, when there is a good run going through, many

of them are trying to fish but they don't know how” (Participant 2). This is worsening due to the current EMP. From a Western perspective, fish is merely seen as a food source, and nature is considered a replaceable resource, even by artificial means like fish farming. This highlights the profound contrast between Western and Wet'suwet'en perspectives on nature, as well as the Western powers' apparent lack of interest in comprehending these perspectives. Furthermore, some Wet'suwet'en individuals, distanced from their culture due to the Canadian assimilation policy, also adopt this viewpoint, overlooking the sense of community. “The community aspect of it that is also being taken away” (Participant 4).

These important cultural aspects are being lost not only due to the construction and subsequent destruction, but also by the presence of RCMP and CGL employees. Participant 5 recounted an incident where the RCMP obstructed her from engaging in her customary way of life; “I go out and I pick my berries...I go out to the lake. I expect to be able to use my territories unmolested and peacefully and behave and act accordingly. But that’s not possible anymore”.

Participant 4 said she can no longer hunt on her land unencumbered:

when you belong to a clan you have permission to hunt and harvest off that land...[now] I have to ask for permission from the RCMP and CGL...and be harassed and be followed. That's impeding on UNDRIP, that's impeding on anybody’s human rights to live in a peaceful way.

Thus, Euro-Canadians are perpetuating the “universality” of Eurocentric epistemologies by suppressing Indigenous epistemologies (Santos, 2008, p.ix) and additionally now, controlling the unsuppressed parts of Wet’suwet’en life. Participant 4's account of needing permission from both the RCMP and CGL to hunt demonstrates the systematic "control of authority" (Mignolo, 2011, p.8) and the enduring power exerted by dominant settler authorities over the Wet'suwet'en community.

5.3.3 “When the money runs out and there’s no fish, then what?”

you're helping yourself and your current generation in the short term, what are leaving for you children and their children. We don't know how bad it could get, but we are not leaving anything better for them, that's for sure.

(Participant 3)

The effects of the pipeline will not only be for today’s generation, but for many generations in the future. Additionally, said effects will not be limited solely to the Wet’suwet’en community, however the effects they are enduring are deep and multi-layered.

For the Wet’suwet’en the fish population diminishing as a consequence of CGLs activity, is extremely detrimental to their community and way of life. As stated by Participant 2, “if the fish is impacted, [the band chiefs] will be in a real predicament.” He added:

To some people minds [the financial benefits] justifies what's going on, but when the money runs out and there is no fish, then what? Then we will be in even a bigger predicament than before...There’s still a lot of people in local communities that are really not having that much benefit from those jobs. So, they're having the worst of both worlds, they're getting impacted, their still not meeting their food fish needs, and it is only going to get worse in the future.

The depletion of fish is already occurring with sediment from the construction smothering eggs and causing the water to become contaminated, the vibrations from the drills causing damage to eggs and “blocking salmons access to the spawning grounds” (Participant 2). However, the future is unclear and there may be larger disturbances to come, “when their pipeline gets uncovered and blows up or something and all their sediment gets into the stream, smothers all the eggs downstream, then it will be a very vast impact” (Participant 2). “What's left is at risk, if these pipelines are going to rupture and pollute our waters” (Participant 3). As per Moreton-Robinson (2015), white settler possessive logics drive an insatiable desire to assert control, power, domination, and ownership by nation-states (p.xii), often disregarding the Indigenous people who become integrated into the landscape (p.29).

It is not only the Wet’suwet’en community and territory that will be affected by the lasting effects of this pipeline, as one participant said, “as for the community outside of the Indigenous

aspect, I'm not sure they quite understand the repercussions" (Participant 5). The focus of industry and the Canadian government on short-term gains, driven by capital and the pursuit of modernity/coloniality, appears to limit their capacity for forward-thinking. Yet, it's not just the construction itself but also the long-term operation of the pipeline that poses grave consequences, contributing to the global climate crisis. As Participant 2 aptly put it:

[i]n the long term there adding to greenhouse gases, and eventually that's going to, well its already becoming an issue, but can you imagine what it's going to be like in the future...I remember at one point they were thinking that the emissions from that plant (LNG Canada) could also cause acid rain

Participant 3 added the product will "eventually get burned and pollute the atmosphere. That was the other side of it that I felt had a larger impact". Commenting on the wider ecological effects, Chief Na'Moks said "you know, if you think about the environmental crises that are happening all over this planet, more people should be doing this. Then we wouldn't be in this mess". EMPs with severe environmental consequences are a global issue. Therefore, Wet'suwet'en land defenders and their supporters are not only challenging CGL but also serving as a model for others to protest and resist both existing and future EMPs.

Theme 3: Summary

Wet'suwet'en culture and history emphasise respect and care for the land and its creatures, driving the importance of reoccupation and land defence. Chief Na'Moks stresses "the animals, the plants, the water, they don't have a voice. We are supposed to be their voice. And we are supposed to be strong and decent. If we are silent, who's going to protect it." The pipeline's construction, with little regard for minimising environmental impact, has already caused irreparable damage and will continue to harm both the environment and Wet'suwet'en culture.

The Wet'suwet'en people maintain a deep connection with Mother Earth and derive their knowledge from the Yintah. However, this connection has been disregarded and epistemes repressed by white Western settlers who prioritise environmental domination and nature's commodification. Placing the interests of modernity/coloniality and capital accumulation over the Wet'suwet'en people. This disruption to the relationship of Indigenous peoples and nature, is central to so-called Canada reinforcing their ongoing occupation (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p.5).

6. Concluding Remarks

The aim of this thesis was to explore and analysis, through interviews, the Wet'suwet'en perspectives, on the CGL pipeline and further understand the impacts the EMP is having on the community. The main research question leading the study is How is the CGL pipeline perceived by the Wet'suwet'en community? In this regard, the subsequent three sub-questions were taken into consideration throughout: How does forced EMPs interfere with the Nations culture, traditions, and ways of knowing; How are the impacts of the CGL pipeline felt on a personal level by members of the Wet'suwet'en community; and, What is the nation's perception of the impact of EMPs on the air land and water? How is this impact felt by the community? Through the application of the theory of coloniality, primarily Mignolos understanding of the concept, augmented by Indigenous scholars' views on the control of nature, and Moreton-Robinsons theory of white possessive logics, this thesis analysed the perceptions set forth in five interviews with members of the Wet'suwet'en nation.

Through the application of reflexive thematic analysis three main themes were drawn from the interview material, which allowed for systematic and comprehensive exploration of the perspectives set forth throughout the project's interviews. These were; "Economic Smallpox", "We have been thrown way back into the past" and "They are...injecting their poison into Mother Earth veins". These themes represent three distinct categories of impacts that were presented by the participants. "Economic smallpox" explores capitalist industry's weaponization of historical and continual assimilation techniques used by the settler government, the generational trauma inflicted on First Nations and the resultant socio-economic volatility the communities often find themselves in. I have argued that the impact-benefit agreements negotiated with the band governance system was a way of manipulating control of authority by CGL thus creating the mirage of consent. This compounds the epistemic destruction of Wet'suwet'en knowledge and systems by promoting the use of an imposed governance system based on Western hegemonic "democratic" practices. The hereditary governance system is considered primitive and archaic, by white Western standards, thus has no ability to allow for "progression" (Quijano, 2007, p176), consequently the Eurocentric band system is used. This, in turn, allows coloniality to flourish (Mignolo, 2011, p.8). I argue, in line with Moreton-Robinsons (2015) theory, that the denial of Wet'suwet'en sovereignty, which would involve full jurisdiction by the hereditary chiefs, is used to maintain regulatory mechanisms and reaffirm white possessiveness (p.xi). In this regard, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples becomes perpetual, and is not limited to land, but also dispossession of rights, epistemes, culture,

history and more. These actions have resulted in rampant animosity and the creation of schisms with the nation.

The focus then turns to the Canadian governments in “We have been thrown way back into the past”. Here I argue that contemporary actions, embodied by RCMP violence and the general failure to regulate CGL indicates there has been no true progress in the treatment of First Nations, which is underpinned by so-called Canadas investment in white possessive logics (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.67) and their consistent maintain of the colonial matrix of power (Mignolo, 2011, p.8). It is clear through interviews with the participants that economic prosperity for the nation-state and industry is being put above the lives of the Wet’suwet’en people. Mignolo (2012) states this is at the core of coloniality (p.xi). CGL have received exemptions that have led to both severe ecological damage and endangered the lives of Wet’suwet’en people. I have argued that this was enabled through a justificatory narrative of Indigenous people being part of the landscape and nature. (Moreton-Robinson, 2015, p.29) Through subject-object dualism a binary between human beings and nature is created. Indigenous peoples are categorised as part of the nature binary (Haluza-DeLay et al., 2009, p.4), thus, effects on them are perceived as unimportant and collateral. Furthermore, both the perception of the Wet’suwet’en as landscape and the socially constructed racial hierarchy which maintains the colonial matrix of power, allows for the legitimization of the violent and intimidatory treatment of the community by the RCMP. It is vital to educate and create awareness of the continuing Wet’suwet’en struggle against EMPs and the violence they are being subjected to the Canadian state. The tenacity of the Wet’suwet’en people to continue to fight for their Yintah, Mother Earth and their way of being is inspiring. Chief Na’Moks showed his pride for his people by saying, “but you know what, we are not going anywhere. That's home and we are telling the truth...I am very proud of our people.”

“They are...injecting their poison into Mother Earth veins” has particular focus on the final sub-question, in which I argue that the vast impact on the Yintah is perceived as an act of violence, epistemically, physically, and spiritually against the Wet’suwet’en people and their Yintah. Through the recounting of stories from the participants I have strived to convey the importance of the land, air and water to the Wet’suwet’en people and the communal onus put on reconnection to aid healing from generational colonial trauma. With this relationship in mind, drawing from Mignolo’s theory, I have argued the environmental impacts caused by the pipeline are a result of Western epistemic hegemony and aid in further destruction of Wet’suwet’en ways of knowing and being. Additionally, the presence of construction results in even more aspects of Wet’suwet’en life coming under Euro-Canadian control, removing any form of sovereignty and self-determination held by the Wet’suwet’en. Here, Western possession and domination is reaffirmed (Moreton-

Robinson, 2015, p.xx). Furthermore, I assert such violence without accountability or repercussions allows for the consistent reassertion of occupation and racial hierarchy (Tuck and Yang, 2012, p.5). Finally, I have argued that the advancement of the economy and the perpetuation of modernity/coloniality has been put above future Wet'suwet'en generations. As a direct consequence of CGLs construction future generations have the potential to lose many cultural practices, such as fishing and processing fish, and will no longer be able to connect with the land and their ancestors, thus continuing the erasure of Wet'suwet'en ways of life, and sustaining coloniality.

Through this analysis I have aimed to show the sustained colonial oppression of the Wet'suwet'en nation by CGL, which is also true of other First Nations and EMPs, however this analysis cannot be directly extrapolated to such conflicts. Additionally, this thesis shows the subhuman treatment the Wet'suwet'en people have been subjected to, and how ingrained EMP conflicts have become in their lives: "we have been in this fight for a long time, but I had more hair when I started" (Chief Na'Moks).

Through the direction of the participants, this thesis hopes to aid in educating people about, and bringing awareness to, the Wet'suwet'en-CGL conflict and the lack of protection afforded to Indigenous peoples by the Canadian government. Furthermore, participants indicated that awareness should not solely be directed at non-Indigenous communities, but also turn inward to their own community and

hold a mirror up...so we can see ourselves and see how deeply we have been impacted...This awareness can lead to a path of healing...[we must] recognise the damage that has occurred and is continuing to occur, for what it is, and accept the responsibility to build a healing path from this with intention (Participant 3).

Part of this dissent within the nation stems from the internalization of Western hegemonic concepts and the subsequent inferiorisation of Wet'suwet'en epistemes. This however would be an area for deeper study that this thesis did not have the scope to fully explore.

The field of ecocide (which is briefly touched upon within this thesis) is an area which would complement my research and one I believe the data collected may be useful for. A deeper conversation with participants may lead to further understanding whether they view CGLs actions as constituting ecocide and thus evaluate if it should be internationally recognised as such. Moreover, further research into the nation-states roles in facilitating and encouraging EMPs on Indigenous land will help to shed further light on the continuous dispossession of Indigenous land and sovereignty.

The daily lives of many Wet'suwet'en people, due to CGL activity, are being adversely affected, and "it should never have to happen that way" (Participant 4). However, the Wet'suwet'en nation will continue to protect Mother Earth and her creatures, and fight against the imposition of EMPs. As stated by Chief Na'Moks:

We're simply a speed bump [to CGL]. But they have never run into a speed bump as big as the Wet'suwet'en. Ever! We are not afraid to be who we are. We are not afraid to speak up, we are not afraid to tell the truth.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Letter of Informed Consent

Are you interested in taking part in the research project “Ecological impact, Development, and First Nations Communities”?

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project in which the main purpose is to investigate how mega-extractive development on First Nations land effects and is perceived by the community. The case that will be the focus of this project is the communities affected by the project, and development of, the Coastal GasLink pipeline. In this letter I will give you information about the purpose and process of the project and what your participation will involve if you decide to participate in the project.

Purpose of the project

This is a Masters thesis project as a part of masters “Human Rights and Multiculturalism” at the University of South-Eastern Norway. The data collected throughout the research will only be used by me and shall only be used in affiliation with this research project.

The main purpose of this project is to see how large development projects on Indigenous territory perceived by the community. I will look at how development on First Nation territory impacts the community and individuals.

Who is responsible for the research project?

The University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Sciences is the institution responsible for the project.

I, Cara Rocks, am the student/researcher responsible, and Åsne Håndlykken-Luz is the supervisor responsible.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are being asked to participate in this study a member of the Wet’suwet’en Nation. I am interviewing members of communities living in the area of the current route of the CoastalGas link pipeline.

What does participation involve for you?

The methods used in this research project will be audio/voice recordings, written notes and participant observation.

I have prepared some questions related to the impact of the CoastalGas Link pipeline and other extractive projects within your community, however these questions are only a guide and do not have to be strictly followed. The interview time will be approximately 20 to 40 minutes, and with your permission the interview will be audio/voice recorded. The recording of the interview is not

compulsory. At the end of the project, you will receive a copy of the final work in whichever form you prefer (printed copy or digital copy or both).

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw. If you would like to participate or have any other questions about this research project, please contact Cara Rocks via email: cararocks@gmail.com or phone: +47 461 27 315.

The study was notified to the Research Data Protection Officer, NSD – Norwegian Center for Research Data.

Your personal privacy- how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act)

- Both I (Cara Rocks) the researcher/student and the project supervisor, Åsne Håndlykken-Luz will have access
- I will be replacing your name and contact details with a code. The list of names, contact details and respective codes will be stored separately from the rest of the collected data
- All data will be stored on USN safe a remote, encrypted and password protected server

All identifying information will be anonymized in the final paper so you will not be recognizable in the publication.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end May 2023. The data will be stored until December 2023. After this all data will be anonymized and deleted.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- Access the personal data that is being processed about you
- Request that your personal data is deleted
- Request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- Receive a copy of your personal data
- Send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based only on your consent. Based on an agreement with USN, Data Protection Services has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have any further questions about the project, or would like to exercise your rights, please contact:

- University of South-Eastern Norway (USN): Researcher: Cara Rocks (cararocks@ymail.com , +47 461 27 315) or Supervisor: Åsne Håndlykken-Luz (asne.handlykken-luz@usn.no)
- USN Data Protection Officer: Paal Are Solberg (personvernombud@usn.no)
- Norwegian Data Protection Services, by email: (personverntjenester@sikt.no) or by telephone: +47 532 11 500

Yours Sincerely,

Cara Rocks
Student Researcher, USN

Consent to Participate in the Study

You can give written or verbal consent at the time of the interview

If you are happy to give consent in writing, you can check the boxes below and sign the form.

You are in no way obligated to tick all the boxes.

I have received and understood information about the project “Development, Ecocide and First Nation Communities” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- to participate in an interview
- to audio/voice recording to be taken of my interview
- for the storage of my data until December 2023

I willing to participate and give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. May 2023

(Signed by participant, date)

OR

- Consent recorded by audio (at time of interview)

Annex 2: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Warm up question: What is your definition of ... “natural healing”, “land defender” ... *(this warm question will depend on the known background of the interviewee (e.g. from health center, gidimt'en yintah access) and will aim to be something that they have knowledge on and won't find too hard to answer)*

OR

Warm up question: Can you tell me a bit about yourself? *Name, age, occupation, how it is to live in this territory etc.*

Topic: Relationship with the nature and land of territory

Question 1)

Can you share your story about your relationship with the land and nature?

- What is the role of community with “stewardship” of territory.... How do you understand development... positive/negative...

Potential prompt/probing qs: Both personal and community relationship? Also wildlife?

Question 2)

Would you be willing/open to educate me about some of your experiences of ways of passing on knowledge within your culture and nation?

Potential prompt/probing qs: Personal favorites? Is there any which are particularly based in practices in nature or land?

Question 3)

Would you consider yourself an active member within your community/nation? How?

Potential prompt/probing qs:

Topic: Wedzin Kwa

Question 4)

How is Wedzin Kwa important to you?

Potential prompt/probing qs: As a land defender why have you chosen Wedzin Kwa as your main focus?

Question 5)

How is Wedzin Kwa important to your community?

Potential prompt/probing qs:

Topic: Healing Centre

Question 6)

Have you ever or people you know ever had anything to do with the healing center?

Potential prompt/probing qs: Do you know much about the healing center and what it does? How is the healing center important in your community?

Question 7) (*depends on previous answer as weather to ask*)

Could you educate me on some of the ways the healing center uses the land/nature for healing?

Topic: General ecologically damaging projects/land encroachment

Question 8)

Has there been many extractive projects or proposed projects from the Canadian government or corporations in your nation's territory throughout your lifetime? Can you tell me a bit about them?

Question 9)

How do you feel about extractive projects occurring within your territory such as oil extraction or logging?

Potential prompt/probing qs: Do you feel there are benefits within this practice? Do you feel this is an encroachment on your land? Do you feel the negative impacts are vast?

Topic: Costal Gaslink pipeline

Question 10)

In your perception/opinion has the costal gaslink pipeline brought any positive benefits to your community?

Potential prompt/probing qs: Have they fulfilled some/any of their proposed promises?

Question 11)

In your perception/opinion what are the negative impacts of the CGL pipeline?

Question 12)

Do you have an opinion on the consultation process?

Potential prompt/probing qs: Band chiefs vs traditional chiefs

Question 13)

How do you feel the treatment of your peoples/community has been by the RCMP since the start of the CGL pipeline project?

Question 14)

How have your rights been affected by the CGL pipeline and the rights of your community?

Potential prompt/probing qs: Do you feel your rights have been respected in any/some ways? Do you feel your rights have been violated in any/some ways?

Topic: Moving forward with this project

Question 15)

In your opinion how can I/How do you think I can direct or use this project to benefit your community and indigenous peoples who are having projects such as CGL pipeline happening within their territory or lands?

Question 16)

Is there anything else you would like to share with me? Or any questions you have for me?