Fractured alliance: state-corporate actions and fossil fuel resistance in Northwest British Columbia, Canada

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Abstract

The northwest region of British Columbia, Canada has been at the center of multiple fossil fuel projects over the past decade as corporations have sought access to the coastline in order to export their products. Analyzing the dynamics of how and why groups and communities responded to two specific fossil fuel projects, we address the question: why did the "unlikely alliance" formed at the local level in northwest B.C. to resist the Enbridge oil pipeline project fracture just a few years later in the case of the LNG Canada/Coastal GasLink Liquefied Natural Gas project and pipeline project? We argue that the fracturing arose in part because of historic vulnerabilities of the resource periphery, and the legacy of settler colonial governance but also because state and corporate actors used their powers to increase the financial incentives for communities to support LNG projects, to change the discourse on fossil fuels by promoting the concept of LNG as "clean" energy, deflecting attention from the fracking of natural gas, and to isolate environmental organizations by casting them as "outsiders." The findings contribute to the literature by analyzing the reasons not only for the formation but also for the fragility and fracturing of alliances in contemporary energy politics.

Keywords: Local opposition to fossil fuel (oil and natural gas) projects; alliances; corporate and state actions; clean energy; resource periphery; pipeline fatigue; northwest British Columbia, Canada

Résumé

La région nord-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique, au Canada, a été au centre de plusieurs projets de combustibles fossiles au cours de la dernière décennie. Les multinationales ont cherché à accéder au littoral afin d'exporter leurs produits. Nous analysons la dynamique de comment et pourquoi les groupes et les communautés ont répondu à deux projets particuliers de combustibles fossiles. Nous abordons la question suivante: pourquoi «l'alliance improbable» formée au niveau local dans le nord-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique pour résister au projet d'oléoduc d'Enbridge s'est-elle dissipée quelques années plus tard dans le cas du projet de gaz naturel liquéfié 'LNG Canada/Coastal GasLink'? Nous soutenons que la fracture est survenue en raison de vulnérabilités historiques à la frontière des ressources Canadien et de l'héritage de la gouvernance coloniale. En outre, les acteurs étatiques et corporatifs ont utilisé leurs pouvoirs pour augmenter les incitations financières pour les communautés à soutenir les projets de GNL. Ils ont changé le discours sur les combustibles fossiles en promouvant le concept du GNL comme énergie «propre», isolant les organisations environnementales en les fustigeant comme des «étrangers». Les résultats contribuent à comprendre les raisons de la cohérence des coalitions environnementales, et aussi pourquoi elles deviennent fragiles compte tenu de l'économie politique contemporaine de l'énergie et des puissants acteurs impliqués.

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Mots clés: Opposition locale aux projets de combustibles fossiles (pétrole et gaz naturel); alliances; actions des entreprises et de l'État; énergie propre; périphérie des ressources; fatigue des pipelines; nord-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique, Canada

Resumen

The northwest region of British Columbia, Canada has been at the center of multiple fossil fuel projects over the past decade as corporations have sought access to the coastline in order to export their products. Analyzing the dynamics of how and why groups and communities responded to two specific fossil fuel projects, we address the question: why did the "unlikely alliance" formed at the local level in northwest B.C. to resist the Enbridge oil pipeline project fracture just a few years later in the case of the LNG Canada/Coastal GasLink liquefied natural gas project and pipeline project? We argue that the fracturing arose in part because of historic vulnerabilities of the resource periphery and the legacy of settler colonial governance but also because state and corporate actors used their powers to increase the financial incentives for communities to support LNG projects, to change the discourse on fossil fuels by promoting the concept of LNG as "clean" energy, and to isolate environmental organizations by casting them as "outsiders." The findings contribute to the literature by analyzing the reasons not only for the formation but also for the fragility and fracturing of alliances in contemporary energy politics.

Keywords: Local opposition to fossil fuel (oil and natural gas) projects; alliances; corporate and state actions; clean energy; resource periphery; northwest British Columbia, Canada

1. Introduction

The northwest region of British Columbia (B.C.), Canada has been at the center of multiple fossil fuel projects over the past decade and a half, as oil and gas exporters have sought access to the coastline for export. This sparsely populated, remote area has seen: a major oil pipeline, Enbridge's Northern Gateway Oil Pipeline project proposed and then cancelled; challenges to the oil tanker moratorium on the coastline of the region; and up to seventeen natural gas and liquified natural gas (LNG) projects either in operation or under consideration at the same time (Northwest Institute 2019). These latter projects culminated in the announcement of a final investment decision in October 2018, by a joint venture corporation with Shell as the majority owner, to proceed with its LNG Canada project, a terminal for liquefying and exporting natural gas, and the largest private sector investment in Canadian history. At the time, B.C. Premier Horgan, flanked by Prime Minister Trudeau and elected Haisla First Nation leader Crystal Smith, hailed the announcement as a "spectacular day for all British Columbians" (Morgan 2018).

Just over a year later, the Coastal GasLink pipeline being constructed by TC Energy to supply the LNG Canada terminal brought Canada to what Prime Minister Trudeau described as a "critical moment for our country and for our future" (Berthiaume 2020). The cause of this "critical moment" was Indigenous-led blockades of railways, roads and ports across the country in support of the Hereditary Chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en First Nation opposing the Coastal GasLink pipeline slated to run through their territory in northwest B.C.

In this article, we analyze the dynamics of how groups and communities within the northwest B.C. region have responded to the fossil fuel projects that have been visited upon them. We focus on two large projects, the Enbridge Northern Gateway Oil pipeline (hereafter Enbridge) and the Shell/TC Energy LNG Canada terminal/Coastal GasLink (hereafter LNG/CGL) project. These two projects differ in the product being transported and shipped: diluted bitumen in the first case and unconventionally sourced natural gas and LNG in the second. Going beyond differences in fossil fuel product, we focus on the factors explaining how alliances have formed and fractured. Specifically, we address the question: why, at the local level in northwest B.C., did the broad alliance formed to resist the Enbridge project fracture just a few years later in the case of the LNG/CGL project?

An interdisciplinary political ecology lens provides an avenue to answer the research question by highlighting the complex "relationship between society and its natural environment" (Bridge *et al.* 2015: 5), the role of power dynamics, the construction of environmental discourses (Hajer 1993, 1995), and by bringing "politics and political economy concerns into analyses of environmental issues" (Hopke 2016: 382). In answering this question, we contribute to the literature by analyzing the reasons not only for the formation, but also for the fragility and fracturing of alliances in contemporary energy politics and how the nexus of state and corporate power has been central to this fracture.

We argue that the broad-based alliance contesting one form of fossil fuel project did not carry over into an alliance against another, despite the short time period involved, as a result of both historic and new forces. The socio-economic vulnerabilities of the region and the legacy of settler colonial governance meant that underlying tensions were not resolved. They were capable of resurfacing at any moment and these deep-seated, historic, contextual factors explain in part why the alliance formed against Enbridge was necessarily a fragile one. New forces in the LNG/CGL case, in the form of a state-corporate nexus, sought to fracture the oppositional alliance. State and corporate actors used their powers to increase the financial incentives for communities to support the project, to change the discourse on fossil fuels by promoting the concept of LNG as "clean" energy, and to isolate environmental organizations by casting them as "outsiders." This introduced a new dynamic.

We construct our argument in the following way. In the next section, we provide an overview of the two historic contextual factors identified above, namely, the socio-economic vulnerability of the region and the contested realm of Indigenous governance resulting from (on-going) settler colonialism. This section also provides details of the two major fossil fuel projects on which we focus, Enbridge and LNG/CGL. Details of the evidence utilized in the analysis, including over 40 interviews conducted with residents of the northwest B.C. region over the last five years, are described. The purpose of Section 3 is to demonstrate the formation of an unlikely alliance of Indigenous-environmental, labor-environmental, and rural-environmental peoples and organizations formed in the northwest B.C. region to oppose Enbridge and the fracturing of this alliance when confronted by the LNG/CGL project. In this comparative empirical analysis, we pay particular attention to, and extend, Grossman's (2005, 2017) concept of "unlikely alliances" and we place our study within the context of other research on resistance to fossil fuel development (see, for example, Estes 2019; Powell 2018).[2] The main argument, developed in Section 4, examines why and how such a fracturing occurred. We show that the provincial government and corporations implemented a set of actions constituting a "state-corporate nexus" which were part of, and facilitated the emergence of, new alliances supporting the LNG project and led to a divided region. The final section concludes with the implications for local resistance to fossil fuel projects both in the region and beyond.

2. Fossil-fuel projects in the northwest British Columbia region

This section provides the context for analysis in the remainder of the article. Firstly, we present the characterization of the northwest B.C. region as a resource periphery with a complex governance structure. This informs a discussion of the dynamics of the alliances formed and fractured in the region. Secondly, the two specific fossil fuel projects, the Enbridge and LNG/CGL projects, are described. Finally, we outline the empirical approach and data collection methods used.

The northwest British Columbia region: a resource periphery with complex settler and Indigenous governance

Resource peripheries are generally defined in terms of remoteness from core regions, with their economies dominated by primary industries including mining, oil and gas, fishing and logging (Hayter, Barnes and Bradshaw 2003). Such industries focus on the extraction of resources, primarily for export, and typically have few linkages to other parts of the local economy leading to limited economic diversification and considerable cyclical instability. Resource industries tend to be capital intensive, with corporate control residing outside of the region and increasingly in foreign countries. Hayter, Barnes and Bradshaw (2003: 17) also note "the sometimes-crushing asymmetrical relations" between resource peripheries and cores. The northwest region of B.C. exhibits these features of a resource periphery.

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[2] As a result, we refer to a broad alliance against Enbridge while allowing for this to include a number of distinguishable more specific alliances.

The northwest B.C. region is a vast area, remote and sparsely populated with a high proportion of Indigenous peoples, compared to the southern part of the province (Figure 1). Many of these characteristics are shared across northern B.C., although the population has fluctuated more in the northwest region than the northeast region where the natural gas extraction occurs. To be more specific, the northwest B.C. region is well-represented by two Statistics Canada defined economic regions, the North Coast and Nechako (economic regions 6 and 7 in Figure 1); these two economic regions combined cover 316,265 square kilometers with a population of 94,000, thereby accounting for 34 percent of the provincial total land area but less than 2 percent of the population (in 2016). The northwest region has a high Indigenous population: 39 percent of the population in the North Coast economic region and 20 percent of the Nechako economic region self-identify as Indigenous, compared to 6 percent for the province as a whole.[3] As an indicator of remoteness, it is a 1,400 km and a 16-hour drive from Vancouver, the largest city in the province, to Kitimat on the coast of the northwest region with the length of the trip in part due to the road system which requires travelling north to Prince George and then west to Kitimat.

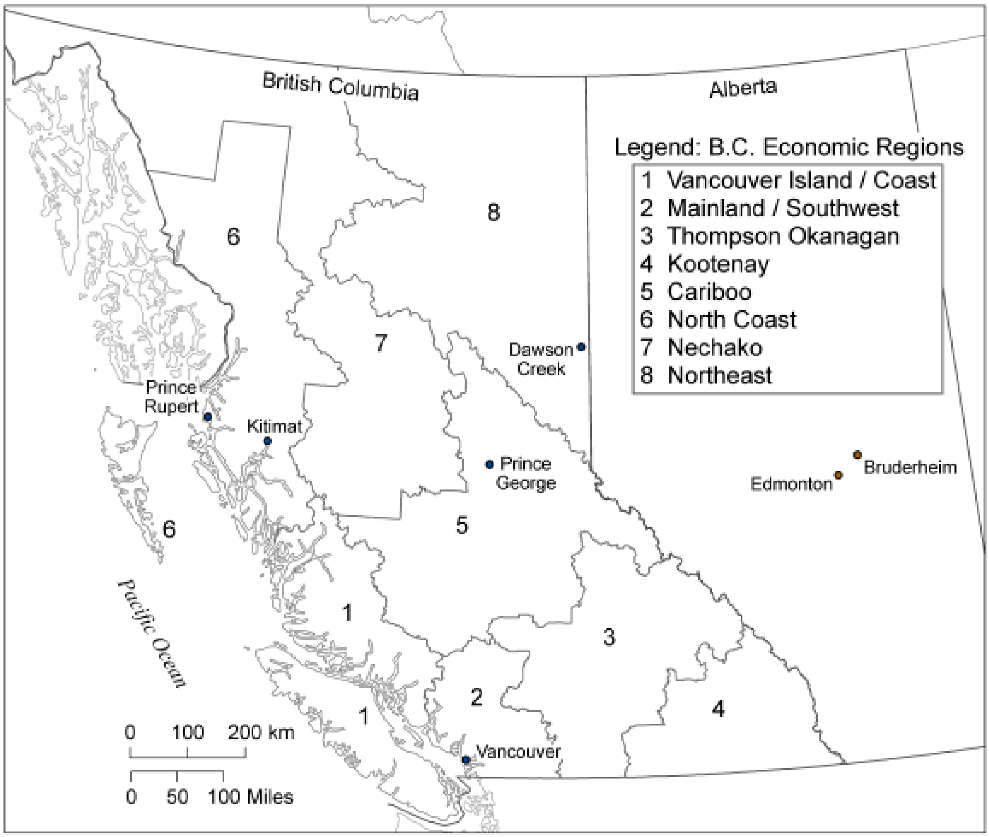
British Columbia
Alberta
Legend: B.C. Economic Regions
1 Vancouver Island / Coast
2 Mainland / Southwest
3 Thompson Okanagan
4 Kootenay
5 Cariboo
6 North Coast
7 Nechako
8 Northeast
Dawson Creek
Prince Rupert
Kitimat
Prince George
Edmonton
Bruderheim
Vancouver
Pacific Ocean
0 100 200 km
0 50 100 Miles
1
2
3
4
5
6
6
7
8
1

Figure 1: British Columbia. Source: Map created by Nancy Alexander from Data BC and Atlas of Canada.

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[3] Statistics in the paragraph are from Statistics Canada. Census Profile, 2016 Census.

In addition to remoteness, the economy of northern B.C. is concentrated in primary industries, including fishing, mining and fossil fuel extraction, but particularly forestry. With few linkages between the primary and other sectors, production and employment are subject to booms and busts arising from fluctuations in commodity prices. Changes in the relative importance of these different primary sectors over time can be observed in the exports from the province, with a decline in the value of forestry and fish product exports and increase in mining products (MacPhail and Bowles 2016). Despite the decline in the importance of forestry, the northern region remains dominated by primary industries (forestry, fishing, mining, oil and gas): in 2019 the share of employment in these primary industries in northern B.C. was 8.4 percent compared to 1.8 percent for the province as a whole.[4] The resource periphery varies across northern B.C., with mining, fishing, and forestry being relatively more important in the northwest and gas extraction in the northeast. As described below, the corporations involved in the oil and gas industry are large, multinational corporations with headquarters outside of the region and often Canada.

Alongside the capitalist resource economy, there is an important sharing economy particularly related to salmon fishing which contributes not only to food security but is also a highly valued cultural practice. A market economy in eco-tourism and guiding is likewise an important contributor to peoples' livelihoods and wellbeing.

Despite abundant natural resources, the economy of northwest B.C. is particularly vulnerable. Unemployment rates in the region are higher than the provincial unemployment rates and exhibit greater fluctuation (B.C. Statistics. Labour Market Statistics). High social vulnerabilities are evident based upon a variety of indicators such as the higher rates of suicide, higher rates of child poverty, lower education levels, as well as lower life expectancy and higher rates of infant mortality, relative to the province (see First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition 2021). These factors all influence the responses to resource projects and represent "economic constraints" (Garavan 2007: 849) on collective organizing against them.[5]

Governance in northern B.C. has been described as "hyperfractionalized" (Young 2016, adopting Dupre's 1968 concept) given multiple institutions of municipal/local government, forestry, health and electoral districts with overlapping geographical boundaries and different responsibilities. Furthermore, since the vast majority of the land mass of B.C. was never surrendered or signed over by Treaty, there are on-going land claims and jurisdictional disputes and contestations between settler institutions and Indigenous nations.[6] Within Indigenous communities, too, the legacies of colonialism have had profound effects and have resulted in further complexities related to resource issues.

Governance in Indigenous communities must be seen in the context of the long run policies of the Canadian settler colonial state to impose its system of government on communities and to eradicate pre-colonial Indigenous governance systems. The Indian Act of 1867 was designed to assimilate and regulate the lives of Indigenous populations moved onto reserves.[7] The elected Band Councils now in operation are part of this colonial legacy. However, Hereditary Chiefs, representing the pre-colonial Indigenous governance system, continue to assert their rights to land, and the responsibility for its stewardship, often over far greater areas than the limited reserves set up under the jurisdiction of the Band Councils. Despite efforts to dismantle the pre-colonial system, the Hereditary system of government has survived and increasingly asserted its legitimacy through court challenges which have expanded Aboriginal rights and title.[8]

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[4] Statistics calculated for northern B.C. defined as the Northeast, North Coast, Nechako, and Cariboo economic regions (economic regions 5 through 8 in Figure 1). Data are from British Columbia. Statistics. Labour market statistics.

[5] In the context of Ireland, Garavan (2007: 849) describes the economic constraints on environmental movements as follows: "The long Irish experience of relative poverty and emigration has resulted in widespread support for policies of economic growth and industrial development." Northwest B.C. shares some of these characteristics – out-migration and relative poverty – although not to the same extent as Ireland.

[6] See McCreary and Turner (2018) for an example of "contested jurisdiction" in the context of the CGL pipeline.

[7] See Venne (1981) for the origins of, and amendments to, the Act.

[8] Three landmark Canadian Supreme Court cases, all originated in northern and central interior B.C., and have progressively expanded the recognition of Aboriginal title. The Calder, 1973, Delgamuukw, 1997 and Tŝilhqot'in 2014 decisions are critical in this.

The co-existence of the two systems of Indigenous authority, Band Councils and Hereditary Chiefs, has the potential to complicate decision-making given their possible different responsibilities, jurisdictions, and memberships. Generalization on the relationship between the two systems is not possible and the two systems may be cooperative with Hereditary Chiefs, for example, also serving as elected Band Council Chiefs (see Hoffman 2019 for the example of Wet'suwet'en leader Alfred Joseph in combining these roles). It is not, therefore, a given that conflict between the two systems will arise. However, due to what McDonald (2016: 155-156) calls "a deleterious misfit between the traditional First Nations social organization and the imposed Indian band system", a potential for conflict is present especially when Indigenous communities are confronted with large resource development projects such as those associated with fossil fuels.[9]

The potential for conflict is especially strong in the context where the "duty to consult", arising from the Canadian Constitution (1982, Section 35), has been delegated by the Crown to private corporations which typically seek to negotiate confidential impact benefit agreements with Band Councils directly affected by their projects to seek their support. These agreements have been seen as examples as "consent by contract" (Scott 2020: 272) and problematic as indicators of community consent. The legacy of colonialism therefore leaves ample scope for what Frost (2019) has termed strategies of "divide and conquer."

The projects: Enbridge and LNG/CGL projects in northwest British Columbia

With the onset of the global commodities boom in the early 2000s, there was unprecedented interest in fossil fuel development in northwest B.C. with oil and gas extraction sites to the east converging on coastal locations to build export facilities, in close proximity to the towns of Prince Rupert or Kitimat in northwest B.C.[10] Since 2016, there have been some project cancellations and consolidation among projects, with some of the corporate proponents joining other corporations and projects in joint venture arrangements.[11] Of these, the LNG/CGL project is moving ahead and under construction. The Enbridge and LNG/CGL projects are briefly reviewed below.

Enbridge Inc., an "energy delivery" company based in Calgary, Alberta and operating across North America, proposed the Northern Gateway oil pipeline (hereafter the Enbridge project) in the mid-2000s and submitted its application to the National Energy Board (NEB) in 2010. The Enbridge project consisted of two pipelines stretching 1,150 kilometers (715 miles) from an inland terminal in Bruderheim, Alberta to a coastal terminal in Kitimat, B.C. (Figure 1). One pipeline would carry on average 525,000 barrels of bitumen oil per day westward to the proposed Kitimat terminal for loading on to an estimated 220 tankers per year, for export to the U.S. and Asia. The second pipeline would carry an average 193,000 barrels of imported condensate per day eastward (used to thin the bitumen for transportation by pipeline). The proposed Kitimat terminal was to be comprised of two tanker berths, three condensate storage tanks and sixteen oil storage tanks (Canada. Impact Assessment Agency of Canada. 2014).

The federal Joint Review Panel (established by the NEB and Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency) recommended the project with 209 conditions in December 2013, and the then Prime Minister Harper approved the project in June 2014. Legal challenges from Indigenous and community groups resulted in the Federal Court of Appeal overturning the government's approval. Then in January 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau cancelled the project citing the environmental risks of transporting oil through the Douglas Channel and the "views of Indigenous communities and those of other Canadians, as represented to the panel, as well as the orders of the Federal Court of Appeal" (Canada. Natural Resources Canada. Northern Gateway Pipelines Project).

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[9] See McDonald (2016: 137) for discussion of the fundamental contradictions that all Indigenous communities are confronted with when mega-projects are proposed.

[10] See LNG in Northern BC (n.d). for a map, produced in 2016, of proposed pipelines and terminals.

[11] For example, Woodside Energy indicated that it is not pursuing the Grassy Point LNG project and is joining Chevron in the Kitimat LNG project; Petronas is not proceeding with the Pacific Northwest LNG project proposed for Lelu Island and is joining the LNG Canada project; and Nexen Energy (a CNOOC company) is not proceeding with the Aurora LNG project on Digby Island (B.C. Oil and Gas Commission. Major Projects List).

The LNG project had a different outcome. Five foreign-owned corporations, Shell, Petronas, PetroChina, Mitsubishi, and Korean Gas Corporation have formed a joint-venture company to advance the LNG Canada project, the construction and operation of a terminal in Kitimat, to liquefy the unconventionally sourced natural gas for export to Asia. The natural gas destined for the terminal will be extracted in northeast B.C. through a hydraulic fracturing/fracking process.[12]

The terminal will consist of liquefaction and storage facilities, two transfer pipelines, supporting infrastructure, and a marine terminal. At full capacity, LNG Canada will liquefy and ship about 350 tankers per year from the port. The project was approved by the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission in 2014, and received an Environmental Assessment Certificate in June 2015 and an export license from the NEB in 2016.[13] Costing around CAN $40 billion (approximately US $30 billion),[14] LNG Canada refers to a peak of 4,500 workers during the construction phase and between 300 and 450 people being employed in the operational phase (LNG Canada 2018).[15]

TC Energy (formerly Trans Canada), an energy pipeline, storage, and power-generation company headquartered in Calgary, Alberta, was selected by LNG Canada in 2012 to construct and operate the pipeline to transport the natural gas to the terminal in Kitimat. TC Energy's CGL pipeline is intended to transport natural gas approximately 670 kilometers (416 miles) from its site of extraction near Dawson Creek in northeast B.C. (Figure 1), to the LNG Canada Export Terminal near Kitimat. The company estimates that "2,000 to 2,500 short-term jobs will be created …. And approximately 16 to 35 permanent field positions for operations and maintenance" (Coastal GasLink. Project Benefits).

Construction of the CGL pipeline is underway. The project received a conditional Environmental Assessment Certificate from the province in October 2014 and permits from the B.C. Oil and Gas Commission in 2016. TC Energy delayed the start of construction until after LNG Canada made its final investment decision and was given a five-year extension by the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office in October 2019 (Coastal GasLink. About).

The empirical approach

To address the research question, this article integrates data from interviews conducted with residents of northwest B.C. about fossil fuel pipelines and export facilities with information from government documents, corporate documents, media articles, and academic literature. The academic literature informs the analysis of grassroots alliances and their dynamics and the nature of corporate and state actions in the fossil fuel sector. The impacts of corporate and state actions on community responses in northwest B.C. are analyzed in light of the specific socio-economic-political context of the northwest B.C. region as described in the earlier part of this section.

Over 40 interviews were conducted with municipal government leaders, Indigenous leaders and individuals, and local members of (primarily environmental) NGOs located in northwest B.C., over the period 2013 to 2018.[16] Interviews in 2013 focused on community opposition to the Enbridge pipeline (see Bowles and Veltmeyer 2014, 2016). Interviews in 2015 and 2016 examined the contestation of social license for resource extraction in the region with particular attention to the 2014 plebiscite in the district of Kitimat regarding the Enbridge pipeline (see Bowles and MacPhail 2017). As corporate proposals for natural gas pipeline and liquefaction facilities emerged after 2015, an additional 17 interviews were undertaken with both previous and new interview participants. Our motivation was to understand new elements of controversy over project proposals, and the dynamics of opposition to them.

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[12] In 2016, 85 percent of gas production in B.C. was unconventionally sourced (B.C. Oil and Gas Commission 2017: 8)

[13] Information in this paragraph is drawn from B.C. Oil and Gas Commission and LNG Canada websites.

[14] Dollar amounts are expressed in Canadian dollars and US dollar amounts approximated based on the Bank of Canada annual average exchange rate in 2019 which is CAN $1=US $0.7536.

[15] Even if local workers are hired into only a fraction of these jobs, the employment promises are significant, given that the total number of people employed in the District Municipality of Kitimat was just under 3,700, in 2016 (for employment data see Statistics Canada. Census Profile, 2016 Census).

[16] The research proceeded in three stages and at each stage, the project received approval from the University of Northern British Columbia Research Ethics Board.

The interviews provide some diversity of opinion among municipal government leaders and grassroots NGOs on the LNG/CGL project. Information on the divisions between Indigenous communities on the project is drawn primarily from Indigenous nations' websites and statements in the media, or in the case of the Haisla Nation, statements also on the LNG Canada website. Information about the key actions taken by the provincial B.C. government and the LNG Canada corporation are derived primarily from their respective websites, along with statements in reputable newspapers.

As researchers we were confronted with a number of challenges and some interview requests were declined. As settlers living in northern B.C. but outside of the northwest region, we are cognizant of our "outsider" status on several levels. We do not presume to judge the positions taken by nations, communities and groups in favor of, or in opposition to, particular projects; our intention rather is to help us to understand energy politics in the region and the ways in which state and corporate actions have shaped them.

3. Shifting alliances in the northwest British Columbia region

Introduction and the meaning of an alliance

Alliances, coalitions or networks among individuals and/or groups are frequently formed to support or oppose resource and energy projects. Analyses often point to their complex and heterogeneous memberships and scales.[17] Hochstetler (2011), for example, distinguishes between blocking and enabling coalitions and points to the variety of actors and motives which are found in each; she argues that "both coalitions vary internally, but they tend to be able to unify on whether to build particular projects" (p. 356).

Blocking alliances vary in scale, with some focused on the local context with others working at trans-local or international scales (for a local alliance based in the Yukon, Canada, see Neville and Weinthal 2016; for linkages between local alliances and global movements see Estes 2019; see also Klein 2014).

While members of an alliance share a common interest or desired outcome, the composition of alliances varies in terms of identities, class, and means of livelihood even at the local level. Estes' (2019) analysis of the Indigenous alliance formed to resist the Dakota Access Pipeline at Standing Rock in the U.S. and to protect water explains how seven Indigenous nations were brought together, bridged "tribal councils and Indigenous grassroots movements" (p. 45), had the support from over 90 Indigenous nations, had "meaningful solidarities" with non-Indigenous peoples (p. 7), and had "allies from across the globe" (p. 57). Grossman (2005, 2017) focuses on the alliances between Indigenous peoples and settlers in the U.S. formed in the context of environmental conflicts. He states, "(e)nvironmental alliances began to bring together Native Americans and rural white resource users in areas of the country where no one would have predicted or even imagined them" (2005: 21). The inability to predict such alliances gives rise to the notion that the alliance is unlikely, arising from members' different identities, historical relationships to land, and previous conflicts over resource use. Yet, the alliance is facilitated by a shared "perception of the landscape's sacredness or cultural significance…as opposed to merely an economic view of natural resources" (2005: 36) and by a common or "outside" threat. While Grossman (2005, 2017) has stressed the alliances between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it is also possible to extend the notion of an unlikely (in the sense of difficult to predict) alliance to co-operation between other groups which have not always been on the same side in disputes over resource use, for example, between labor and environmental organizations that are "often seen as political opponents most prominently discussed in the form of the 'jobs vs. environment' dilemma" (Soder, Niedermoser and Theine 2018: 520).

Analyses of alliances opposing fossil fuel projects advance multiple insights into contemporary energy debates. For example, Estes (2019) focuses upon Indigenous resistance and possibilities for the future; Grossman's (2017) place-based factors contribute an understanding of the formation and longevity of alliances; and in the context of the Navajo Nation Desert Rock coal-generated electricity proposed project, Powell indicates that the proposed project "produced transformed subjects of energy activism, new visions of development, fresh interpretations of sovereignty, alternative values of surrounding expertise…." (2018: 5). Bosworth's (2018) analysis of Standing Rock points to the problematic nature of alliances.

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[17] The terms alliance and coalition are often used interchangeably in the social movement literature (see, for example, Van Dyke and McCammon 2010) and we make no sharp distinctions here.

Given the prominence of alliances opposing fossil fuel projects, analyses have often sought to explain why they form. But examples from other resource projects have also questioned why alliances are *not* formed or how they change over time. In this respect, Hochstelter (2011: 349) points to the role that an "anticipatory state" may play to "pre-empt mobilization by proactively responding to the concerns blocking coalitions are likely to raise." Baletti (2016: 43) has noted how the "new political configuration" of post-neoliberalism in Brazil redrew the nature of politics leading to splits between previous allies. Both examples remind us of the agency of the state in shaping the conditions under which alliances form and change.

In this article we focus on the dynamics of why the broad "unlikely alliance" formed at the local level to oppose one fossil fuel project fractured in the case of another. The alliance is "unlikely" in the sense that it brought together a diverse set of groups which are not all typically expected to work together and, following Grossman (2017), included Indigenous-settler alliances in northwest B.C. where most of the land remains unceded Indigenous territories. As a first step, we detail the existence of such an unlikely alliance in the northwest B.C. region when confronted with the Enbridge project compared with the fracturing alliances that characterize the LNG/CGL project. In Section 4, we analyze the causes of this fracturing, highlighting the power and actions of corporations and the state.

Unlikely alliances resisting the Enbridge project

There is a recent history of Indigenous challenges to resource projects and of alliances being formed between First Nations and settler and environmental groups in northwest B.C., as the campaigns against offshore fish farming and the Kemano II project (an expansion of a hydroelectricity plant, proposed in the 1980s but cancelled in 1995; Bowles and Wilson 2016) both demonstrate. Opposition to the Enbridge project did not therefore come out of nowhere; but the breadth of the resistance to Enbridge was unique.

The unlikely alliance which developed to oppose the Enbridge project was comprised of First Nations, ranchers, landowners, as well as labor and environmental organizations.[18] There was extensive Indigenous-led and inter-Indigenous cooperation. The Yinka Dene Alliance and St'át'imc Nation-led Save the Fraser Declaration were good examples. As the Declaration spread, it attracted support from over 130 First Nations. The following Solidarity Accord brought other non-Indigenous groups into the opposition and included "some of Canada and BC's most powerful unions (such as Unifor and the BC Teachers Federation), as well as a host of local leaders from tourism businesses, municipal government, health and conservation organizations" (Yinka Dene Alliance 2013).

Within the region, Indigenous and settler communities found new avenues to discover commonalities and sense of place. For example, a member with Douglas Channel Watch (DCW), a local environmental group, recalled in ways echoing Grossman's (2017) "sense of place" argument, that at the Enbridge hearings, "the Aboriginal people got to hear about how much place this means to us, the newcomers, I think that was the first time that they'd ever really heard emotion like that from us, about how we love this place. And then we got to hear about things that I wasn't aware of …. So it was really an eye-opener for us too" (Interview 201309).

Douglas Channel Watch, which took on Enbridge in a plebiscite campaign over the pipeline held in Kitimat in 2014, highlighted the risks to rivers and the ocean of oil spills but it also argued that there would be few jobs for local workers and that the project would involve the export of unrefined product, thereby further limiting employment benefits and, in effect, shipping jobs overseas. For these reasons, environmental and labor interests coincided, broadening the alliance against the pipeline. DCW won its plebiscite in Kitimat (Bowles and MacPhail 2017).

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[18] For a more detailed account, see Bowles and Veltmeyer (2016: 261-263) who identify eight major arguments against the project contributing to the formation of the unlikely alliance. On Indigenous opposition to Enbridge, see for example, Wood and Rossiter (2017).

Other examples of the breadth of the opposition can be found in the Skeena Watershed Conservation Coalition, a local grassroots organization, formed by "loggers and ranchers and miners and drillers and welders and farmers, and First Nations, because that's what our community is" (Interview 201307) joining the opposition, as did the Friends of Wild Salmon with its locally based coalition of Indigenous groups, commercial and recreational fishers and guiders all of whom felt threatened by the damage that a potential bitumen pipeline spill would cause. As a Hereditary Chief in the region told us: "I want to send them [Enbridge] a Christmas card every year cause they helped unite us like nothing else. We were getting together but it was Enbridge that really got us together. From the coast to the tar sands, farmers, fishermen, loggers, hunters, trappers, outfitters, all of it. And if it wasn't for Enbridge, I don't think we would've got together like that" (Interview 201513).

What was remarkable therefore about the opposition to the Enbridge project was the range of actors that were brought together in common cause opposing the pipeline, albeit for a variety of reasons. These alliances did not, however, survive the arrival of LNG in the region.

Fractured alliances in the LNG context

Divisions among First Nations regarding LNG development became apparent during the First Nations LNG Summits held across northern B.C. in the early 2010s. While the Summits were intended to develop a common approach, the difficulties of doing so were illustrated when some speakers from the northwest were enthusiastic about the potential for LNG, while others from the northeast were more circumspect about the upstream environmental impacts (Richardson 2013). However, as Atleo (2021) argues, it is important that the different positions of Indigenous people regarding carbon projects be understood in the context of the complex conditions and struggles for Indigenous self-determination.[19] In the context of the Trans Mountain oil pipeline being constructed in B.C., for example, Atleo (2021: 369) advances an analysis of "Indigenous ambivalence" highlighting that "within the constraints of settler colonialism, environmental politics, and neoliberal capitalism, options for Indigenous communities are tremendously limited."

As LNG projects progressed, divisions within the northwest became evident. The Haida Nation opposed LNG development with President Peter Lantin arguing that "there are many good reasons to oppose these projects and few to support them …These projects will further pollute the Earth and no good will come of them" (Council of the Haida Nation 2016).

Divisions within and between Indigenous communities were laid bare in the LNG/CGL project.[20] The elected officials of the Haisla First Nation, on whose traditional territory the LNG Canada project is located, have fully supported it. The groundwork was laid by the former Chief Councillor, Ellis Ross, who is now a Member of the Provincial Legislature (MLA) for B.C. Crystal Smith, the current elected Chief Councillor of the Haisla Band Council, states: "We support it 100 per cent…. We've lived in our territory for thousands of years. We have the support of our community because we're holding LNG Canada to the high environmental standard they've agreed to. This agreement honours our traditions." (LNG Canada. News. 2019a)

All 20 elected Band Councils along the CGL pipeline route have signed agreements with the company indicating their support for the project. This includes five Band Councils located in Wet'suwet'en traditional territory (the sixth lies outside of the immediate pipeline route and so was not consulted by the company). However, five Hereditary Wet'suwet'en Chiefs opposed the construction of the pipeline, and ordered the company from its territory in January 2020 in accordance with their traditional laws and authority.

The different positions taken by Indigenous communities has also meant a fracturing of the alliance between some Indigenous communities and environmental groups. Haisla Chief Councillor Crystal Smith, for example, lambasted the Sierra Club of B.C. for its opposition to the LNG Canada facility:

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[19] Reflecting on the change in position of Chief Frank T'Seleie in the context of the Mackenzie Valley Pipeline, Atleo (2021: 365) highlights his interest in the analysis of both "change *and continuity* in Indigenous-settler relations generally and in Indigenous community governance and political economies specifically." (italics in the original).

[20] Divisions within communities were also evident with other projects. For an example from the Petronas Pacific Northwest LNG project see Jang (2017).

> Before the Sierra Club writes any more about LNG in BC, I invite them to spend time with the many First Nations who support LNG development…. Environmental groups should remember to take into account Aboriginal rights and title, the relationship we have to the land and water resources, and our interest in building a future for our people. (Haisla Nation. n.d.)

These fractures were experienced by local environmental groups and activists. As one long-time local campaigner in the northwest explained, "at one time, we were welcomed into the communities. That's no longer the case for many of us …. We are now *persona non grata* because our aims no longer align with many of the First Nations communities in terms of their goals" (Interview 201804). This placed many local environmental groups in a difficult position. They continued to work with Indigenous groups on a wide range of issues including forestry, fisheries, conservation and habitat but were finding that divisions over LNG projects threatened some of that cooperation. As a result, some decided not to take a position directly opposing LNG and instead adopted a strategy of challenging company claims and questioning the standards being used in projects.

The broad alliance which had been formed in opposition to the Enbridge project therefore fractured when it came to LNG projects, and new actors and alliances supporting the LNG/CGL project emerged. For example, the First Nations LNG Alliance is "supportive of, sustainable and responsible LNG development in BC" (First Nations LNG Alliance. Our Mandate). The North Matters, originating in Kitimat, is focused on building support for natural gas projects in Kitimat and across northern B.C. It has argued that the economic benefits of the LNG/CGL project are critical to the economic prosperity of the region, and has linked with Resource Works, based in Vancouver. Resource Works is building alliances among some of the actors supporting natural gas development as indicated by the presence of mayors in northern B.C. and the First Nations LNG Alliance on its Advisory Council. Northern Mayors have also been active in acting in concert in support of the industry and the LNG/CGL project (Cozicar 2018).

The contrast between the breadth and unity of the opposition in the Enbridge case and its fracturing in the LNG/CGL case is stark, occurring just a few years apart. The projects concern two types of fossil fuels with different costs and benefits as a result. This is summed up by Kitimat Mayor Germuth, when he argues that: "the environmental risks are much, much, much smaller with a natural gas pipeline and an LNG facility. Both for land and sea based potential environmental impacts are just so much smaller. Also, of course with LNG Canada if we're comparing it to the Enbridge project, the number of jobs and investment in Kitimat is much larger with an LNG facility" (Interview 201811).

At one level, this risk-benefit analysis provides the reason for the different responses to the two projects. But to stop at this level would miss important strategies and dynamics which have been evident in enhancing the economic benefits and minimizing the environmental risks associated with the LNG/CGL project. As Hopke (2016) has argued, an analysis of politics and political economy is also needed. This is very much in evidence in northwest B.C. where we analyze the roles played and strategies adopted by corporations and governments, the changing storyline, and the impacts of the timing of the two projects. It is these dynamics that we analyze in the remainder of the article.

4. State and corporate actions fracturing the alliance

The intertwined actions of the state and corporations are analyzed to explain how and why the broad alliance to resist the Enbridge project fractured and why new alliances to support the LNG/CGL project emerged at the local level in northwest B.C.

Provincial government actions to support the industry and LNG/CGL

Over the last decade, the provincial government has advanced an economic strategy linking expansion of the natural gas industry to jobs, exports and economic growth (see, for example, British Columbia Ministry of Energy and Mines 2012). The provincial government's desire to become an "LNG-province" bears comparison with the concept of "petro-provinces" in Canada (Carter 2021) in that it refers to an economy narrowly based on fossil fuels, the active involvement of governments in supporting their development and the influence on fossil fuel corporations on the policy and regulatory environment, given their vested interests.

The provincial Liberal governments have been strong advocates, with Premier Clark, at one-point, promising that "shipping natural gas overseas means creating 100,000 new jobs for B.C. families, and $100-billion of revenue for our prosperity fund that will make B.C. debt-free in 15 years" (Bitonti and Bailey 2013). Fossil fuel corporations have also lobbied the provincial government extensively (Graham, Daub and Carroll 2017) and there have been changes to the fiscal framework by the current provincial NDP government illustrating its strong support for the natural gas industry as well. While the role of the state has been much debated (Loftus 2020), its role in this case is quite clear; as one local environmental organizer commented: "the provincial government was the biggest cheerleader for LNG. I mean we've never seen anything like that before where the Premier and the government are out there every single day cheerleading for the industry" (Interview 201808).

While the federal Conservative government promoted the Enbridge project as being in the "national interest", the provincial Liberal government was closer to agnostic fearing that B.C. would not gain a "fair share" of the tax and royalty revenues since the province was simply the transportation corridor rather than the producer. There has never been any doubt, however, that successive provincial governments have been strong backers of LNG projects in general. This includes supporting LNG/CGL.

The provincial government facilitated the LNG Canada project through tax breaks and subsidies. It incorporated a tax credit for LNG by amending the Income Tax Act which enables corporations to reduce their corporate income tax (Woo 2019). The government also negotiated an agreement with LNG Canada providing them with a subsidized electricity rate, exemptions from the carbon tax above the threshold of $30 per ton, and deferred payments on the provincial sales tax. Apart from the reduced corporate income tax, the value of these subsidies and tax breaks is estimated to be between CAN $111 million and $132 million (US $84 million and $99 million) per year for 20 years (Lee 2019).[21]

Provincial governments acted to increase the economic benefits to First Nations and settler communities in northwest B.C. in a number of ways. First, between 2008 and 2019, the provincial government, in its own words, took a "comprehensive approach to partnering with First Nations on liquefied natural gas (LNG) opportunities, which also includes development of skills training and environmental stewardship projects with First Nations" (British Columbia. Natural Gas Benefits Agreements); and in the agreements, it is stated that the province "is committed to developing a liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry in British Columbia." It signed over 60 agreements with First Nations (Band Councils) related to natural gas pipelines and LNG terminals committing to the transfer of provincial government revenue to individual First Nations conditional on projects proceeding.[22]

Such agreements help understand these First Nations' (Band Councils') support for the LNG/CGL project given the economic vulnerability of Indigenous communities. Despite the financial agreements negotiated with many First Nations (Band Councils) for this and other natural gas and LNG projects, support has not been universal and there has been criticism of the processes by which agreements have been obtained. For example, Haida President Peter Lantin argued that "the money being thrown around by LNG companies and the Provincial government to garner support from Indigenous Nations is nothing but hush money" (Council of the Haida Nation 2016).

In addition to financial agreements with First Nations, the provincial government implemented financial agreements with groups of northern municipalities (British Columbia. Office of the Premier 2018a). Two provincial government–local government agreements illustrate the nature of the financial arrangements and motivations. The *Peace River Agreement* between the provincial government and eight Peace River local governments in the northeast of the province, signed in 2015 by the provincial Liberals, committed the provincial government to providing CAN $1.1 billion (US $0.8 billion) over 20 years (British Columbia.

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[21] In addition, the federal government provided a subsidy of CAN $275 million (US $207 million) plus the value of the exemption from tariffs on steel (CBC 2019 and McCarthy, Jang and Hunter 2018).

[22] For a list and details of these Agreements see British Columbia, Natural Gas Benefit Agreements.

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing 2018). In a less formal way than the *Peace River Agreement*, the provincial government allocates revenues to assist local governments in the northwest B.C. region, recently through the Northwest BC Resource Benefits Alliance (RBA) comprised of 21 local governments in northwest BC. The B.C. government allocated CAN $300,000 (US $226,000) to the RBA in 2018 to support economic development in the northwest region and committed to CAN $100 million (US $75 million) to four northwest regional districts in 2019 (British Columbia. Office of the Premier 2018a). These agreements explicitly recognize the infrastructure and social costs of natural gas projects and thus, the financial transfers offset some of these costs. This strengthens local government support for projects.

Corporate actions to gain community acceptance

Corporations seek to obtain First Nations and local community acceptance for their resource projects using consultation and engagement strategies, as well as donations. As extensively discussed in the social license to operate literature, such actions to obtain local support for resource extraction projects are undertaken to reduce business risk and improve profitability (Thomson and Boutilier 2011; Tollefson and Panikkar 2020; Owen 2016).

LNG Canada's strategy to engage with First Nations in the early stages of the project may reflect having learned from the mistakes of others. LNG Canada states: "Many proposed energy projects have been quashed because their proponents couldn't answer the right questions to the satisfaction of affected First Nations, weren't clear in their commitment to the environment, failed to honour traditions or failed in their commitment to share project benefits. LNG Canada succeeded where those projects failed." (LNG Canada. News. 2019b)

Whether there is an implicit reference to Enbridge in this statement is unknown, but others have made the comparison with respect to LNG Canada's interaction with local communities. For example, a community member who does not support the LNG/CGL project, ruefully acknowledges that "where Enbridge seemed to stumble in, these guys came in with the cruise ship model of how to gain social license and multiple, multiple layers of, you know, making themselves look good" (Interview 201803). Another argued that:

> Enbridge came in with, for lack of a better term, an Albertan attitude where they thought they could just roll in and do what they want. Well, they got a lot of backlash and in the end the project was killed. The LNG industry, they saw what was going on and some companies were better than others. I'd say LNG Canada was probably the slickest. (Interview 201808)

Corporate owners of LNG Canada undertook early engagement with the Haisla First Nation, developing agreements about the benefits of participation, which have led to its acceptance by leaders of the Haisla Band Council. Brenda Duncan, current Deputy Chief Councillor with the Haisla Nation, has stated that: "when LNG Canada first engaged with us, it was the first time ever that we were seen as partners — that we were treated as partners. And we are now participants in our own economy. It means a lot" (Robinson 2018). Haisla Chief Crystal Smith argues that the LNG Canada project has the potential to offer the community "independence" and provide employment (Smith 2019).[23]

TC Energy signed agreements with twenty First Nations Band Councils along the Coastal GasLink route. The promised economic benefits of the Coastal GasLink project to First Nations are unknown since the details of the benefit agreements are not publicly available, although TC Energy also states that the "(CAN) $620 million (US $467 million) in contract work has been awarded to Indigenous businesses" with additional contract and employment opportunities becoming available for construction (Coastal GasLink. Project Benefits). In return, the First Nations signatories are required to meet certain conditions, as noted for the agreements with the provincial government; and for one case, a media report states that the agreement includes the stipulation that the Band leadership "will 'take all reasonable actions' to dissuade its members from doing anything that could 'impede, hinder, frustrate, delay, stop or interfere with the project, the project's contractors, any authorizations or any approval process'" (Bellrichard 2019). In this case, the Band Council is therefore being asked to silence any criticism of the project in return for economic benefits.[24]

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[23] The possibility of achieving independence through resource extraction projects is a strategy and aspiration found among Indigenous communities in many places. See Wanvik and Caine (2017) who argue that, in the context of engagement with extractive industries in the Albertan oil sands, some Indigenous communities have been empowered. For two detailed accounts of this relationship in the U.S. context, see Powell (2018) and Estes (2019).

While agreements were reached in many instances, this practice hides the fact that the "duty to consult" with Indigenous groups is the responsibility of the Crown but has been problematically delegated to private corporations. It also hides the conflicts embedded in the complex Indigenous governance system, noted in Section 2. Coastal GasLink secured agreements with First Nation Band Councils along the pipeline route but not with the Hereditary Chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en, whose title to the land has not been extinguished (as the 1997 Delgamuukw case confirmed) and includes land through which part of the pipeline would run. The Hereditary Chiefs were consulted early on in the pipeline proposal by the company but they rejected the proposed route, and the project does not have their consent. The company preferred to stress its agreements with the Band Councils and sought a court injunction when a Wet'suwet'en checkpoint on road access to their territory was set up, which affected pipeline construction. An injunction was granted and enforced in 2020 by a militarized police response by the state (see Bellrichard and Barrera 2020). It was this feature of the state-corporate nexus which led to blockades across the country and brought Canada to its "critical moment." The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs subsequently entered into (on-going) discussions of rights and title with the federal and provincial governments and launched legal challenges against the pipeline.

Another part of the "cruise ship" model used by LNG Canada was financial contributions to local community projects and organizations including a variety of social and training activities in Kitimat and nearby towns amounting to CAN $2.3 million (US $1.7 million) since 2012, and sponsoring community events such as access to swimming pools, river cleanup, subsidized children's summer camps, science camps, golf tournaments, summer BBQs, an ice-skating show, and a Canucks alumni hockey game. [25]

The LNG Canada engagement and donations to the district of Kitimat would appear to have gained it local support. This is perhaps best illustrated by the appearance of "Kitimat Supports LNG" signs displayed throughout the community as part of The North Matters pro-industry campaign. The relatively quick formation of a pro-LNG grassroots group relied on a successful corporate social responsibility strategy combined with people's identification with the resource periphery economy and the vulnerability that it entails.

State-corporate reframing of natural gas as "clean" energy

The environmental impacts of natural gas and LNG are different from those associated with the transportation of diluted bitumen. In opposing the Enbridge project, arguments were made about climate change impacts, and some of the Indigenous alliances were aimed at shutting down the Tar Sands. However, there was also a broad swathe of opposition in the region based on the potential local environmental impacts of bitumen spills in rivers and the ocean. This proved powerful in rallying support against the project; threats, especially to wild salmon, proved a strong foundation for the unlikely alliances.

With respect to the local environmental impacts of natural gas, there are multiple impacts of fracking)in the northeast B.C. region including concerns about total water usage, use of unlicensed dams, limited capacity for wastewater disposal and leaks from containment ponds (British Columbia. Scientific Hydraulic Fracturing Review Panel 2019). Adverse health impacts arising from the release of carcinogenic toxins such as benzene have been highlighted by health care professionals, including the retired Chief Medical Health Officer for Northern B.C. (Open Letter 2020). The Unist'ot'en (a Wet'suwet'en clan at the forefront of resistance) have rejected the CGL project in part because of the pipeline's disturbance of their pristine environment. Concerns have also been raised about the LNG Canada project's impacts on the local airshed by, among others, the Kitimat Terrace Clean Air Coalition.

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[24] See also Pasternak (2020) for the problematic implications of impact benefit agreements for Indigenous rights.

[25] Information in this paragraph and the one below is taken from our interviews and LNG Canada. Community & Social Investment.

These local impacts are important, but climate change has also risen in public consciousness in the region. As one environmental organization's leader noted, "when people talk climate change now, they're seeing it" as a result of several years of devastating forest fires, droughts and fishery closures (Interview 201806).

The climate change impacts of natural gas, especially when accounting for methane escape at source and the impacts of re-gasification, are the subject of continuing scientific debate (see Hmiel *et al.* 2020) and it has been argued that methane emissions from northeastern B.C.'s oil and gas industries have been underestimated (Atherton *et al*. 2017). Critics have reasoned that the project will make it impossible for B.C. to meet its climate change commitments. Sierra Club BC's forest and climate campaigner Jens Wieting, for example, stated that:

> If LNG Canada goes ahead, it alone could account for more than three quarters of B.C.'s allowable emissions in 2050….No matter what government is in power, exporting liquefied fracked gas to Asia will make it impossible for BC to meet our legislated climate targets; the math simply doesn't add up. (Sierra Club BC 2018)[26]

The strategy of the provincial government and LNG Canada, however, has been to promote natural gas and LNG as a "clean" energy source capable of being a "transition fuel" in the context of climate change and to assert that LNG exports will lead to a reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions as natural gas replaces coal use in China.[27] The CBC reports that the former provincial Premier, Christy Clark, indicated that "The B.C. government will redefine natural gas as a clean energy source – but only if it's used to generate power for liquefied natural gas in northern B.C." (CBC 2012). Taking a more nuanced position, the current Premier, John Horgan, argues that the LNG Canada project will contribute to a "cleaner economy" (British Columbia. Office of the Premier. 2018b).

LNG Canada argues that its project will enable "the energy transition locally and globally" and that by replacing coal use in China, LNG would reduce emissions equivalent to 80% of the cars on the road in Canada or 100% of BC's annual emissions (LNG Canada. About). LNG Canada's Director of Corporate Affairs, Susannah Pierce, states:

> Over the short term as we transition to more robust renewable energy technology, you'll need a transitional step, and that's why natural gas is important…… I don't accept the 'all or nothing' argument that we can't allow the use of any more fossil fuels. We need a thoughtful transition that considers all of the impacts and unintended consequences of transitioning too quickly to renewables. (LNG Canada. News. 2019a)

The provincial government and LNG corporations therefore share a common discourse of natural gas as clean energy and have met the conditions set out by Hajer (1993: 47-48) for a discourse coalition; and specifically, that the clean energy discourse dominates the energy policy discussions and affected institutional practices. In the context of B.C., Dusyk (2016) outlines the clean energy discourse (from 2007-2014) analyzing a number of "rhetorical gambit[s]" (2016: 93) which redefined what constituted clean energy and which introduced LNG as part of the clean energy "storyline." Dusyk (2016: 79), referring to Hajer's concept of the storyline, argues that "by simplifying, storylines help to facilitate agreement between actors while simultaneously helping to rationalize a specific approach to a problem." This is exactly the impact that it had in northwest B.C. Focusing on LNG as clean energy also shifts attention away from ecological and human health adverse impacts of the extraction of the fracked gas. The state's actions facilitated corporate success through this discourse and this "manufacturing of consent" for LNG (and implicitly fracked gas) is strikingly similar to state-capital discourse strategy regarding fracking in western Pennsylvania, as argued by Hudgins and Poole (2014).

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[26] See also McGlade and Ekins (2015: 187) who estimate that "globally, a third of oil reserves, half of gas reserves and over 80 per cent of current coal reserves should remain unused from 2010 to 2050 in order to meet the [Paris] target of 2°C." They further argue that this requires that approximately 74 percent of Canada's oil and 24 per cent of its gas would need to remain unburned by 2050 (p. 189).

[27] Whether LNG will replace coal or block the expansion of the use of renewable energy has been contested. See Meyer (2020).

The complicated science behind measuring and comparing emissions levels from the life-cycles of LNG and coal production and the complicated politics and economics of assessing how LNG shipped from one part of the globe will affect coal production in another, was drowned out by the simplicity of the industry and government storyline. As one environmental group trying to raise these points noted, "[former Premier] Christy Clark was going out there every day and telling the public … it's clean LNG on every podium she speaks at … when I say something, I'm lucky if I can get the local newspaper to pick it up" (Interview 201808). Another local environmental group member said that "the big picture is climate change for all of us … but even within the group, there are varying ideas on how that would work best and whether or not LNG is still worth doing in the interim" (Interview 201803). Even within local environmental groups the storyline caused fractures.

The storyline hinged not on only the definitional gymnastics over what constituted clean energy documented by Dusyk (2016), it also required recasting the climate challenge as global rather than provincial in scale. It has been argued that local environmental groups may have narrow horizons and concerns which inhibit working with national-level organizations that have broader agendas (see, for example, Garavan 2007). However, in this case, it is the industry and the government which is bringing in the global scale perspective to advance its own agenda and B.C./Canada are not alone in adopting this strategy. By recasting the problem as one of addressing global rather than B.C.'s emissions targets, the industry has built support within the region. Kitimat Mayor Germuth states: "the best thing that we can do to really help Mother Nature on a global scale is to give them our natural gas as that transitional fuel until we all get to that point where you can have solar and all the renewables. It is the cleanest burning, non-renewable out there" (Interview 201811)

Weakening local civil society opposition

Related to the state-corporate reframing of natural as a clean energy are state and corporate strategies used to discredit environmental activists, casting them in the role of "outsiders" holding back legitimate development in the region. As Matejova, Parker, and Dauvergne (2018: 147) have argued, there is a global trend of states "labelling foreign-funded NGOs as the enemies of the state … [This] can help states undermine the legitimacy and public support for domestic NGOs, as well as justify new laws to restrict foreign ties and foreign funding." Further, as Grossman (2017: 51-2) has argued in the context of unlikely alliances in the U.S., "it is often easy for corporations to portray 'Big Green' urban-based environmental groups as 'outsiders' who do not care about rural jobs or people … (when the real outsiders are the corporations themselves)."[28]

Naming environmentalists as outsiders, radicals, and anti-growth is not new. In the context of the Enbridge project, then Minister of Natural Resources Joe Oliver, wrote an open letter denouncing

> …environmental and other radical groups that would seek to block this opportunity to diversify our trade. Their goal is to stop any major project no matter what the cost to Canadian families in lost jobs and economic growth … These groups threaten to hijack our regulatory system to achieve their radical ideological agenda ...They use funding from foreign special interest groups to undermine Canada's national economic interest. (Globe and Mail 2012).

The "foreign funded radical" rhetoric did make an impact at the time of the Enbridge project. As a campaigner for ForestEthics (as Stand.earth was then named) noted at the time, "it was definitely a meme that stuck for a while and it definitely was a challenge" (Interview 201306). However, at the local level, the grassroots environmental group DCW was able to successfully contrast its local, grassroots credentials in its campaign against the outsider Enbridge (Bowles and MacPhail 2017).

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[28] See also Hudgins and Poole (2014) for analysis of the discrediting of scholarly work that is critical of unconventional natural gas extraction and more generally, the power of the state and capital to silence dissenting views and to "discipline populations."

The strategy of naming environmentalists as outsiders and radicals went into overdrive in the case of the LNG/CGL.[29] Extra-regional environmental groups were challenged by local, pro-project groups in their knowledge and concern for the North (see Johnston 2018). Environmental organizations which accepted U.S. funding were particularly targeted with the foreign-funded radical label.[30] Spurred by the writings of Vivian Krause, groups like Resource Works promulgated the idea that U.S. groups fund environmental organizations resisting fossil fuel projects so that Canadian fossil fuels can only be exported to the U.S. at heavily discounted prices (see Anton 2018 for this argument). Ellis Ross, the MLA for the region and prominent proponent, also used this line of attack in a meeting concerning the LNG Canada project where, at a meeting in Kitimat organized by the company, according to an opponent present, he "put out his conspiracy theories about we're all radically foreign funded groups … it was out there publicly and putting down groups" (Interview 201801).

The foreign-funded, radical naming strategy had a silencing effect. As one long-time local environmentalist noted: "it's hard, like when you have people you know, you've known for 15 or 20 years saying these things about you. Repeating this foreign funded radical stuff, its hard" (Interview 201808).

The pervasiveness of the foreign-funded discourse and related silencing impacts is also reported by other interviewees. Mike Sawyer, an environmental consultant based in Smithers, B.C., had launched a legal challenge to the CGL project on the grounds that it was not reviewed appropriately. He received threatening phone calls accusing him of "working for a foreign interest to undermine the Canadian economy" (Interview 201810). Sawyer received more support from groups in the southern part of the province than in the north, "because their political context is entirely different than someone who has an established NGO in Terrace or Kitimat or wherever" (Interview 201810). Local opponents of LNG projects have felt intimidated by pro-industry supporters. One local activist reported that "there's a feeling out there in the community of anger toward environmentalists"; and another stated, "it's a very fearful place to be right now to state an opinion." (Interviews 201803, 201806).

The ability of environmental groups to find common cause with community members and organizations more focused on employment concerns that had been forged to good effect in the Enbridge project evaporated in the case of the LNG/CGL project. Now, environmental NGOs reported that "the community is really split, really split" (Interview 201809). Commenting on their role in the Enbridge opposition, one local activist remarked that "working with the Enbridge project and seeing the effect that one could have there, gives you a sense of do-able power" (Interview 201801). By the time of the LNG projects, however, another environmental group member reported hearing from community members that they would not be part of the LNG discussion because "that has become a political act in and of itself and people will hate us for it" (Interview 201806). The fact that opposing LNG was viewed as "political" also shows the success of the strategy of "depoliticizing" energy policy by casting LNG as clean. As Kenis and Lievens (2014) have argued, storylines which pit humans against CO_2 lead to political demobilization, and to pressure for "consensus, usually around managerial and technocratic solutions that remain within the parameters of what currently exists" (p. 531).

In addition to facing the charge of being foreign-funded radicals, environmental organizations were also challenged by mobilizing in an economically vulnerable, resource periphery, a contextual factor noted in section 2. Resource projects are perceived and welcomed as a way to escape from unemployment and poverty. Opposing all fossil fuel projects becomes increasingly difficult in these conditions. For example, with reference to Prince Rupert, one environmental group member stated that people "were hungry, desperate. Their economy, their community had changed so much, so many people leaving so they were desperate" (Interview 201803). Thus, as another environmental organization's leader stated, "when we talk about mayors and communities making a decision about this project, they didn't have a choice, not really" (Interview 201806). As a result, people were not speaking out because "nobody wants their friends and neighbors and family members to lose their homes" (Interview 201806). Another noted, with respect to Kitimat, "their community has not been doing that well economically and they see this as their savior and I don't blame them, you know" (Interview 201808).

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[29] This strategy has been pursued even more deliberately and extensively by Alberta Premier Kenney in defense of that province's fossil fuel sector.

[30] Ironically, two of the principal targets are Tides Canada and Stand.earth, both of whom are partners in the Province's Great Bear Rainforest initiative and celebrated as such on the government's own website (British Columbia. Great Bear Rainforest).

Having effectively mobilized opposition against the Enbridge project, perhaps ironically, this indicates that it may have become more difficult to mobilize against subsequent fossil fuel projects since communities cannot continue to say "No" to projects when employment is at stake; as one environmentalist noted "some of the reason that people could more easily say no to Enbridge was because LNG was on the horizon" and "we can't say no to everything ... that's a real common phrase I've heard over and over. And this one [LNG Canada], at least it's clean" (Interview 201803). In other words, the "least bad" fossil fuel project is prone to receive significant support in a vulnerable resource-dependent region such as northwest B.C.

Finally, local environmental activists' responses were constrained by the timing and scale of the LNG activity. In terms of timing, they were focused on oil, and "didn't want to jeopardize the Enbridge campaign" (Interview 201801) and while they focused on the Enbridge project, it "gave industry an opportunity to make inroads into some of the First Nations communities that we did not" (Interview 201804). Whether by intention or unintended consequence, the provincial government strategy of letting "the market" decide which LNG projects would proceed, unleashed a scale of activity in the northwest which severely challenged local organizations' capacity to respond to them all; an example of what Garavan (2007: 849) terms the "demographic constraint." The leader of one organization indicated "we had some something like 14 proposals just in the north, each coming with a pipeline and compressor stations and community consultation meetings" (Interview 201806). A member of another organization made a similar point in stating that "we had no choice but to put our energy into fighting what we saw were the most ill-conceived projects" and for them this was the separate Petronas Pacific Northwest LNG project proposed for Lelu Island (see footnote 11) (Interview 201808). The number of proposed projects meant that organizations experienced "pipeline fatigue", burn-out, and exhaustion from trying to be experts in reviewing proposals and from trying to find or pay for consultants to contribute analyses (Interviews 201803, 201807, 201809).

5. Conclusion

In this article we have analyzed how the broad alliance which emerged in northwest B.C. in opposition to the Enbridge project fractured with the arrival of LNG projects. While there are differences between the fossil fuel products themselves which give rise to different benefit-cost assessments, we have argued that this fracturing was also the result of four actions pursued by the state and by corporations. We have seen how corporate and government strategies and expenditures have sought to garner local support for projects. We have seen how the climate change storyline has been adapted and how environmental groups have been targeted as outsiders and isolated. The state-corporate nexus has exercised its power in the support of the LNG/CGL project. In acting systematically in the early stages of project development to secure First Nations' (Band Councils) support and to advance the clean energy storyline, state and corporate actors behaved, in Hochstetler's (2011) terms, in pre-emptive and anticipatory ways. The unlikely alliance which proved powerful in the anti-Enbridge campaign became fractured. The impacts of corporate and state actions in creating divisions need to be viewed in the context of people's livelihood needs, Indigenous communities' struggles against colonialization, and hopes felt across the resource periphery. The imperatives of economic development in resource peripheries make "least bad" projects supportable in many communities.

While some of these factors are context-specific, others have broader implications for opposition to fossil fuel development and energy politics beyond the region. Our analysis has shown how and why alliances can be fractured by changes in political dynamics and corporate strategy. Perhaps the issue with the most widespread applicability from our study is how the discourse of clean energy transformed the debate in the region; it was a factor mentioned by many interviewees, and apparent in public documents and press reports. What constitutes clean energy is a matter of science and of politics, and it is clear that the state-corporate framing of LNG as clean energy has been a powerful factor in garnering support for the LNG/CGL project in the region. By making global CO_2 reduction the focus point, rather than its local or provincial impacts, it has depoliticized debate and made the acceptance of "least bad" energy projects possible, even desirable, at the local level. The clean energy discourse made the trade-off between jobs and the environment disappear. While the "dirty oil" of the Enbridge project was rejected in the region since it posed local (and global) environmental threats and offered only limited jobs, the clean energy label given LNG offered jobs and a contribution to a global climate solution and, as a result, received local support. In an economically vulnerable, resource periphery such a storyline proved compelling for many people and the earlier broad alliance against oil dissipated. The clean energy discourse is, of course, now widespread. It has been used to promote clean coal and natural gas in Australia and elsewhere, and it appears at the UN as a Sustainable Development Goal (Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy). At the local level this translates as pressures, although some would say opportunities, to support fossil fuel projects because of, not despite, climate change.

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